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First Year Teacher in Appalachia: Place, Identity, Tensions

Michael Renee Lane

Dissertation submitted
to the College of Applied Human Sciences
at West Virginia University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education in
Curriculum & Instruction

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ABSTRACT

First Year Teacher in Appalachia: Place, Identity, Tensions

Michael Renee Lane

This study centers on one first-year Social Studies teacher who is beginning her teaching career in a rural middle school in central Appalachia. Grounded in sociocultural theory, this qualitative study focuses understanding how the focal teacher discursively constructs her teaching identity including how she makes use of sociocultural resources, social practices, and the discourses she draws from as she describes her experiences. Data is drawn from a five-month interpretive qualitative case study that included semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and the focal teacher's personal journals. Data analysis indicated that place is crucial in shaping teachers' beliefs and practices—including their conceptions of race and how this is handled in classrooms and how place deeply impacts professional identity development. This study suggests that teacher education programs need to purposefully provide educators with courses that prepare teachers to handle highly politicized topics in their classrooms—such as race and gender. Further, pre-service teachers need to have guidance in understanding the backgrounds and perspectives they bring to teaching including being pushed to challenge deficit perspectives, engage in discussions regarding race, poverty, rurality, and become trauma responsive/informed in the context of rural education. Finally, social media has emerged as a key place in early-career teachers' identity development. This being the case, pre-service and early-career teachers need to learn to intentionally use social media in local contexts. This study also points to the importance of induction programs for new teachers in order to assist in bridging their teacher education preparation with real-world teaching.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

This study takes place in a rural community in central Appalachia. Place necessarily informs identity; thus, Appalachia becomes a key piece of identity development for people who reside in the region. Just as the region has been constructed, so have the identities and spaces of the people who reside here. The discourses that circulate about Appalachia often sit in juxtaposition to one another: the region is either romanticized or positioned as “other.”

Appalachia is often described as a culturally rich region with a history and heritage that is deeply rooted in its people and the land—most narratives point to the region’s rich tradition of music, arts, storytelling, and other forms of cultural expression (Satterwhite, 2005). On the other hand, Appalachia has faced numerous economic and social challenges including poverty, environmental degradation, and a history of exploitation by outside interests; these challenges have contributed to negative stereotypes and perceptions about the region (House, 2016).

This dissertation follows a first-year teacher in Appalachia who is beginning her teaching career in the middle of a global pandemic, on the heels of two teacher strikes, and as public education is on rocky ground. Through interviews, her personal journal, and classroom observations, I work to trace how she discursively constructs herself as a teacher including how she makes use of sociocultural resources, social practices, and the discourses she draws from to describe her experience in this particular place at this particular moment.

Research Question

This case study specifically focuses on one social studies teacher in a large middle school in central Appalachia: Evergreen Middle School in Foothill County (pseudonym). I chose to follow one teacher’s first-year of teaching in order to glean a more in-depth look at the triumphs and struggles that new teachers face. Further, I was interested in how new teachers view

themselves, the teaching profession, and the influences they encounter daily. With these aspects in mind, the following questions guide this study:

How does an early-career teacher in Appalachia discursively construct herself as a teacher?

Sub-question 1: How does she make use of sociocultural resources and social practices?

Sub-question 2: What discourses does she draw from to describe her experiences?

To address these questions, I draw data from interviews, personal journals, and observations of her classroom. My focal teacher grew up in a neighboring county and attended college in the community where she is completing her first year of teaching. While she did not grow up in the community where she is teaching, the communities are very similar in many ways. Her personal experiences in public schools are very similar to those of her students.

A central piece to teachers' professional identities are their constructed visions of what their teaching will look like. In this sense, visioning is a direct link to early-career teachers' practice of forming a professional identity. These visions are formed in the midst of activity in a social context and often take a "twisting path" that is gradually built and continually modified (Smagorinsky et al., 2003), vision is at the center of how early-career teachers begin to form and shape their professional identities—this vision informs their understanding, practice, disposition, and the tools they take up or reject. In other words, the shaping of a vision is socially constructed and, therefore, necessarily relies on interaction. For this study, Hammerness's (2001, 2003) vision framework will be used to carefully attend to how the focal teacher of the study constructs her professional identity through the way she narrates her vision of herself.

Complex Identities in Appalachia

This study is set in central Appalachia in a small, rural community. Identity and place are necessarily bound together and mutually inform one another—as one is constructed, changed, shaped—so is the other. For this reason, it is important to understand how the Appalachian region has been socially constructed across time, as place and identity emerge as central strands of this study’s findings.

Appalachia: A Socially Constructed Region

Appalachia is a social construction that has been used for many purposes since its beginning (Catte, 2018; Gaventa, 1982; Shaprio, 1978; Smith et al., 2010; Webb-Sunderhaus & Donehower, 2015). Shaprio (1978) attributes the “discovery” of the region to Will Wallace Harney. Harney’s work was overwhelmingly written through a lens of “otherness” and sparked a literary movement focusing on Appalachia: local-color writing. Through his exotic descriptions of Appalachia, Harney set in motion a movement of writing that focused on Appalachia as a place of wonder and difference (Shaprio, 1978, p. 4-5). The narratives of these writers painted a picture of Appalachia that has been perpetuated ever since. Over time, the authoritative image of Appalachia has been shaped into one grounded in hegemonic masculinity and racial homogeneity (Anglin, 2002; Bell & York, 2010; Catte, 2018; Shaprio, 1978). This image of Appalachia has been sharpened and continually constructed through representations in media and literature and has, in turn, become the long-perpetuated, historical discourse defining the region. A key historical moment that stands out as pushing forward this idea of Appalachia are images from John F. Kennedy’s presidential campaign that illustrated Appalachian residents as white, poor, and backward (Baird, 2014). Recently, these images have resurfaced in a powerful way with the publication of J.D. Vance’s *Hillbilly Elegy*—the book touted as an inside look at the

region. Unfortunately, it is merely a perpetuation of the same images that have been circulating for decades. Pushing against his portrayal, scholars have started naming this pervasive social stereotypical image of someone living in Appalachia: white, heterosexual, hyper-masculine, grieving for loss of coal opportunities, etc. (Anglin, 2002; Catte, 2018; Scott, 2009; Smith, 2004). Further, these scholars argue that in allowing these images to become the discourse describing the region and its people, we begin to see “dominant images conceal us from more complex realities” (Satterwhite, as cited in Smith et al., 2010, p. 69).

In ignoring race, scholars have essentially “whitewashed” the region. The narrative of Appalachia has historically centered the Scots Irish, and have claimed “nativism”—an idea that White Appalachians have a right to the land due to a native-ness that specifically erases Indigenous peoples who were genocidally removed from Appalachia (Smith, 2004). As a result, “some would-be Appalachians do not recognize themselves in these all-white depictions and thus do not identify as Appalachian” (Webb-Sunderhaus & Donehower, 2015, p. 4). Further, in the region we see issues facing citizens of color rarely included: this has led to exclusion of these communities from historical narratives, erasure of business owners of color, a lack of representation in media and popular culture, and we are seeing communities displaced from the region through economic and political forces (Anglin, 2004; Gaventa, 2018; Nardella, 2022). The perpetuation of a single narrative to define a region is reminiscent of Gaventa’s (1982) discussion about power and relationships. In this instance, those who are ascribed power and who are the creators and those perpetuating this authoritative discourse are privileged with the task of defining for everyone who and what people from Appalachia are—and always have been.

In schools, like in the broader social context, whiteness is the center and Blackness becomes compartmentalized and, thus, minimized, silenced, and ignored. White teachers continue to be conditioned in teacher preparation programs to be “color blind,” teach multicultural units (often lasting a few days or up to a week), and to celebrate a small handful of Black historical icons (Milner, 2007; Sleeter, 2005; 2017). There is a deafening silence being created by well-intentioned white teachers. In a personal email, Christine Sleeter pointed out that she most often sees curriculum not handling race at all; instead, she mainly sees teachers avoiding it altogether (personal communication, April 17, 2018). Further, she notes that educational approaches to address racism usually adopt the theoretical perspective that assumes with more information, white people will abandon racist ideas and behaviors (Sleeter, 2005). Additionally, Sleeter points out that white teachers learning about racism are usually highly resistant to the discomfort of these conversations and fatigued from talking about race. Studies show little improvement regarding multicultural education post-professional development (Sleeter, 2005; 2017). Given the cultural discourse of erasing race in the region, as well as the colorblind cultural discourse in schools, young white teachers are situated in a position of overcoming their own personal cultural understandings of raced-talk along with pressure within communities and schools to minimize raced-talk in schools. Recently in the state where this study takes place, the Republican-dominated Senate moved to pass a bill that would restrict how race is discussed in the classroom including banning teachers from discussing racial privilege.

My Reflexive Positioning in Appalachia

Places are constructions that are rooted in people’s memories. These roots can stem from peoples’ childhood experiences with the place, histories of the place (both local and global), and from local lore (Cresswell, 2015; Tuan, 1979)--my own childhood memories stand as a testament

to these notions. These memories and portrayals of Appalachia don't just live neatly in compartmentalized sections in people's minds; instead, they grow, thrive, strengthen and become a part of people's identities. These cultural ideals ultimately act as guides for how people in cultures reflexively position themselves (Moghaddam, 1999, p. 80). Reflexive positioning--the changing and shifting of positioning based on social and self-identification--cannot be considered in isolation, removed from the culture and discourse from which people are operating; instead, a discussion regarding positioning requires the inclusion of culture and place (Moghaddam, 1999, p. 80).

When I first began this study, I did not intend for Appalachia to become a main character of the study; however, I have learned that it is impossible to silence the power that this region has when it comes to shaping identities and fostering beliefs. In short, it became impossible to conduct this study without always acknowledging the impact of Appalachia and its histories that have brought us to this time and place. For this reason, it is important to lay out my positionality and perspectives of Appalachia—to highlight my status as a life-long resident of the region, as my own experiences shape my identity and will, therefore, be at work in the background shaping this research. Before I begin, I think it's important to tease out a bit of my own nuanced terminology usage: I have never called myself an Appalachian. In fact, that word is newish in my vocabulary--I use it in academic writing only. I honestly don't think it will ever be part of the terminology that I use to define myself; actually, I am pretty sure I don't know anyone who *does* use that term outside of academic circles. I call myself a wanna-be farmer, a shabby gardener, a teacher, a mentor. Just not an Appalachian. I will use the term for this study, though, since this is an academic study and that's where the word lives in my world.

My own identity as an Appalachian has been a bumpy road with many twists and turns: I used to resist this identification at every turn and dreamed of one day moving away so that I wouldn't be identified as a part of this place that is continually defined by so many harmful stereotypes. Like the focal teacher of this study, I have lived in rural communities in Appalachia my entire life. All of the communities where I have lived are varying degrees of rural—a nuance that I think can only be understood by those who live in rural places: the area where I live has plenty of things to do, a lot of outdoor recreational opportunities, small businesses are thriving, and we are just minutes from a major highway that connects to an interstate. While the area where I live boasts plenty of activities and opportunities for recreation and shopping, the same is not true when it comes to professional development opportunities for teachers in the area. When completing coursework ahead of this research, it would typically take me around an hour and half to get to the university for face-to-face courses. Many of my colleagues have told me that traveling that distance—which is time away from their families—really stopped them from taking in-person classes for their graduate courses. In place of in-person classes, many people I know have opted to continue their education online (and sometimes this has led to a vast decrease in quality depending on where they decided to enroll).

Unfortunately, even online courses are not the easiest to access for everyone in my community: we lack infrastructure to provide internet to large pockets of the county. In fact, we have just been able to get internet access at our house; this dissertation has largely been completed at the public library or in my office at school after-hours so that I could have access to the internet as I worked. While we may lack wide-spread broadband internet access, what we are able to access allows residents to engage with discourses that are not readily available—a theme that will emerge as a central piece of this dissertation. The Internet has opened up connections,

relationships, and has the ability for people to share experiences outside of their local communities; thus, helping push forward ideas of inclusivity, change, and critical thinking.

Memories and feelings are strange and slippery things. I recognize that my associations with Appalachia are sometimes romantic and ideal--almost a caricature. I'm not entirely sure when my view of Appalachia changed, but I think it happened slowly and with maturity. I came to respect and better understand the nuances of the region, a region full of beauty, strength, tragedy, and turmoil. I write all of this as a White, cis-gendered woman in Appalachia who hasn't had to live paycheck to paycheck. I have not faced the adversities that many of my friends and neighbors have faced: race-based discrimination, hatred for who they love, and deep poverty. Like most in the region, addiction has closely touched my life (but my sister is rocking sobriety and has been clean for many years thanks to a supportive family who had the means to mobilize to help as soon as she shared her struggle). I've been one of the lucky ones. My memories are warm. My love for Appalachia will become more and more clear as I continue to introduce you to my study. I have strong ties to the region and can't picture myself anywhere else. This being the case, I can think of no other place to ground my research. Like me, my focal teacher has lived her entire life in small Appalachian communities and we have very similar stories to tell about growing up and living here. Many of these stories will unfold throughout this study, as they shape who she is as a young adult and a first-year teacher.

Teaching in Appalachia

Being a first-year teacher is a twisted and complicated process that becomes even more tangled by unforeseen aspects of teaching, the first few years described as "trial by fire" (Britzman, 1991). The obstacles of living and teaching in Appalachia only add to this--poor internet access, limited stores, lack of recreational opportunities, etc. These obstacles create

stress and uncertainty for teachers with many years of experience—but they are much heavier problems for new teachers—specifically those who might not be from the region and not know how to handle some of these situations. To add to the stress of living in a rural area, early-career teachers also struggle to bridge the gap between college and the school where they are employed, can have a hard time breaking free of rote teaching practices that they experienced as a student, and struggle to enact teaching practices learned in their teacher education programs.

Complicating each of these aspects is the vision that early-career teachers enter the field carrying. This vision is carefully crafted over time and is ever-changing—the shape and form of the vision shifting as new teachers find their footing and struggle to meet demands. This vision that is often “tacit and unarticulated” (Hammerness, 2003, p, 45) becomes another challenge, as new teachers often hold themselves to high standards—images of their former teachers and professors who seem to instruct and manage a classroom with complete fluidity and ease. Images of teachers in movies and television shows—for me, Mr. Feeney from *Boy Meets World* and John Keating, Robin Williams’ character from *Dead Poets Society*. These images of a teacher are fictionalized—an ideal—even the images that new teachers hold of their past teachers get muddled and shaped into something that likely wasn’t reality. Earlier, I wrote that memories are strange and slippery; much like my vision of my childhood in Appalachia, images of teachers become caricatures that are impossible to embody—they are strange and slippery.

Further complicating the landscape of teaching in Appalachia are the interruptions to education over the past few years. In 2018 and again in 2019, teachers in the state where this study takes place went on strike in order to fight to preserve what little remains of public education. Each strike closed schools for a length of time and left behind waves of tension and frustration among teachers; although, the loudest anger came from families who didn’t

understand the threats to their students' education. Of course, 2020 brought about an entirely new problem: a global pandemic that ravaged our communities. Experiencing the pandemic is not unique to Appalachia; however, it seems that the mountains that we call home became silent barriers against COVID-19. Our relative isolation seemed to be a thin protective veil that held strong for a while; however, once pierced, the virus took off and stormed through our small towns. One of the most endearing aspects of life in the mountains became one of our biggest downfalls: our closeness, desire to gather and be in the company of one another, and tight-knit communities perhaps created the perfect storm for the virus to spread rapidly.

COVID-19 in Appalachia

Teaching and learning has taken a drastic turn in the past two and a half years: I think most would agree that COVID-19 has forever changed the landscape of education. Beginning in Spring of 2020, schooling was turned on its head and everyone involved had to rethink and strategize how to best instruct students from a distance. I was a classroom teacher at that time and it was one of the most stressful and challenging stretches of time in my career. Expectations and protocols were constantly changing, public opinion was continually shifting (either abundantly praising or vilifying public schools), and the brunt of care-taking was falling to school systems: schools became responsible for feeding students (my county was providing three meals a day to all school-aged children), delivering educational materials (both physical materials and virtual teaching), meeting students social-emotional needs, providing internet to families, and on and on.

When school began in Fall 2020, each county in the state had to have a plan of action in place to handle COVID. That being said, it felt that most counties (mine included) began making reactionary decisions and putting systems into place at the last minute—even after having the

entire summer to plan for the inevitable outbreaks, cancellations, and mass quarantines.

Technology became my county's major push: we began using Schoology as a learning management system and Apple products were distributed to teachers and students. The plan for Apple products was in place before the Spring 2020 cancellation and Schoology was in the works before the end of that year as well. However, training for these did not happen until just before the school year started—leaving many teachers in a scramble to figure out their new technology and learn how to use a new platform that was not always user-friendly. To say that tensions were high would be a vast understatement. Plans to handle COVID-19 were often changing and were always unclear. These tensions led to many teachers leaving their positions during the school year or at the end of the year—the stress was just unbearable.

The beginning of the 2021 - 2022 school year was just as tumultuous. Less than a week before school started, the school board voted to require folks to wear masks in school buildings and on buses. This was a decision that was much to the chagrin of some community members. Posts about county decisions on social media platforms saw heavy traffic and comment sections became hostile. Social media was flooded with cries about “freedom” and “choice”—no regard for concern about protecting one another (especially unvaccinated children) from this virus. Instead, adults made masking and mitigation efforts into a political stance and it came out loud and clear—one group even going as far as organizing a protest. While events around town were being canceled since my county had the highest spread rate in the state, people were arguing back and forth about “living in fear” vs. “being respectful to one another.” It was a constant battle—school board meetings even ending abruptly due to threats; police presence became necessary at future meetings to control the crowd.

I am happy to say that by the end of this study, things have seemingly settled. The school where this study takes place has seen a steady rise in student attendance and teacher attendance has also improved since quarantines and closures have become less common. Our active COVID-19 cases have also declined and those who do test positive for the virus seem to have a much easier time recovering. While things seem to have improved in that area, teachers are still adjusting to student behavior post-COVID and it's been a constant struggle to settle back into "doing school." At the beginning of this section, I mentioned that COVID-19 has changed the landscape of education—and I think that part of the struggle is for teachers to make the shift from pre-COVID teaching methods to "living with"-COVID teaching methods; in other words, rethinking what it means to teach and to learn. In short, COVID-19 changed things and it has been difficult for many to adapt.

Teacher Retention and Attrition in Appalachia

Appalachian counties are now facing an ever-growing problem: recruiting and retaining educators. COVID-19 caused many younger teachers to leave the field and created a wave of teachers opting to retire early—only intensifying the struggle to attract and retain teachers in rural places. In addition to COVID-19, the cause of the massive teacher shortage in the region can be traced back to several factors: current funding formulas that make it difficult for rural schools to offer competitive teacher salaries; counties struggling to provide the school and classroom resources that new teachers might expect; higher poverty rates in rural areas mean that students and families are struggling, and teachers feeling ill-prepared to support students facing these challenges; the distance from more urban amenities (such as airports, concert venues, and specialized medical care) can cause aspiring teachers to worry about being isolated (Brenner, Azano, & Downey, 2021, p. 15). "In addition to struggling with geographic remoteness, new

teachers, particularly those who did not grow up in a rural community, might also be influenced by popular media representations of rural communities as backward, out of touch, and dull” (Brenner, Azano, & Downey, 2021, p. 15).

Every year there seems to be fewer and fewer teachers to fill schools’ vacancies; in fact, two classrooms in the school where this study takes place were without a teacher until mid-November. The students in those classrooms were taught by a mixture of day-to-day subs and teachers covering during their planning periods until a long-term substitute could be hired. Importantly, these classrooms were the remaining vacant classrooms after filling *eight* other classrooms with long-term substitute teachers. In other words, the school year started with ten open positions in our building. Unfortunately, this is not just a trend in the county where this study takes place. At the start of the 2021-2022 school year, the state had approximately 1,000 teacher vacancies in public schools. The teacher shortage is not unique to this state—the crisis mirrors the teacher shortages nationally (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019).

I am hopeful that by completing this research, I will be able to add to the conversation about teacher attrition and retention—specifically in Appalachia, where this study is located. Retaining teachers is going to continue to be a battle in the state where this study takes place--just as it is across the nation.

Chapter 2: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

“New teachers have two jobs--they have to teach and they have to learn to teach.”
(Feiman-Nemeser, 2001, p. 1026)

Place and Identity

The concept of place and identity are both central to this study, so it is important to begin by laying out the nuances of each—including piecing together definitions that will be used throughout this study. Instead of two distinct sections for each concept, this section will weave together literature to illustrate that place and identity are mutually informing concepts—as one is constructed, so is the other. Defining place can become very tangled and abstract; for this study, I think of place as a social construction that is both shaped by those constructing it while at the same time shaping those involved in its construction (Greenwood, 2013). In addition, places are borne out of a need, named by those constructing it (sometimes those on the “inside” and sometimes “outsiders”), and places function as a way of understanding the world—in other words, place is necessarily tied to identity and identities are necessarily shaped by place (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005; Greenwood, 2013).

Place can be generally considered as any location with attached meaning: “[places] are all spaces which people have made meaningful. They are all spaces people are attached to in one way or another” (Cresswell, 2015, p. 12). The meaning that is ascribed to specific places allows for the construction of the place; thus, places are only constructed through relations and interactions within the place. These interactions function to forge the place’s identity. However, the identity formation of a place is not in isolation, as people work to name and shape the place, the place also names and shapes the individuals—a coproduction of identity. Importantly, this identity is not static or fixed; instead, the meaning or identity of a place (and the people constructing the place) is always-already changing and evolving (Escobar, 2001; Massey, 2004).

For this study, the Internet, specifically social media, will emerge as a key location that has allowed for globalizing practices to become a piece of my focal teacher's identity building process. While the Internet and social media platforms may feel like "placeless" places, these translocal networks actually work to thicken interdependencies among places and times (Nespor, 2008). Importantly, these online places allow for a broadening of focus—removing the narrowness of only considering "the local" and, in turn, losing grasp of the larger focus and outside forces (Nespor, 2008).

Teaching in Rural Contexts

Localism plays an important role in teacher labor markets. Studies have found that teachers strongly prefer to teach close to their hometowns, tend to work in schools that serve students with similar characteristics to the students where the teachers themselves are from, and prefer to work with colleagues with whom they share characteristics (Cannata, 2010; Engel & Cannata, 2015). In particular, new teachers tend to choose to teach in districts that are close to their families and home and are familiar to them (Cannata, 2010). Important to note is that the geographically local nature of teacher labor markets does not just stem from decisions made by teachers; when hiring, schools and districts tend to engage in hiring practices that reinforce the highly localized nature of teacher labor markets: principals default to looking for "teachers who understand the types of students that they serve, teachers who are committed to staying at the school, and teachers who 'fit' the school" (Engel & Cannata, 2015, p. 87).

Despite the challenges faced by teachers in rural places, many choose to remain for a variety of reasons. Rural teachers tend to have greater autonomy in the classroom, smaller class sizes, and the opportunity to extend beyond the classroom to do things like coach sports teams or lead clubs/organizations (Brenner, 2021). Importantly, teaching in a small, rural school provides

teachers with the ability to form strong relationships with their students both in school settings and outside of school—this key relational aspect also extends to students’ families and the larger community (Brenner, 2021; Davis, 2002). Finally, professional relationships and leadership opportunities are more readily available in rural schools (Seelig & McCabe, 2021).

Of course, choosing to teach in a rural school comes with its own set of unique challenges. Rural schools are often located in communities that struggle with resources due to high rates of poverty; given the place-based nature of economic and social inequalities, rural schools often suffer from funding and staffing issues that lead to fewer educational opportunities for rural students (Seelig & McCabe, 2021; Tieken & Montgomery, 2021). Teachers are often not prepared for teaching in rural places; this lack of preparation often leads to teachers deciding to leave rural schools—citing a lack of professional learning opportunities, scant resources, and isolation and visibility issues within communities (Walker-Gibbs et al., 2018).

Early-Career Teacher Development

The following sections unpack the nuances of a teacher’s beliefs and practices. Each section is written through the lens of an early-career teacher’s development and, therefore, includes literature focused on early-career teacher development throughout. In this section, I give a brief overview of the challenges that face early-career teachers. I then move to discussing literature that points to the importance of induction programs and mentoring to support new teachers as they begin their transition from their college preparation programs to their first teaching experiences.

Entering the professional world of education comes with many challenges. The first few years of teaching are an intense marathon of identity formation, learning the culture of the school and community, while simultaneously working through the innumerable demands and

expectations placed on teachers. These beginning years are formative and often influence whether or not teachers remain in the field (Feiman-Nemeser, 2001). As I noted in Chapter 1, being an early-career teacher in Appalachia often brings along its own set of challenges. These factors, along with other obstacles, tend to push young teachers to leave the field at alarmingly high rates: many early-career teachers leave the field in the first five years (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003; Ingersoll, 2003). In recent years, teachers in the state where this study is located have experienced additional challenges: a global pandemic, two teacher strikes, and legislation that is moving further and further away from supporting public education. Anecdotally, I can note that the district where this study takes place has seen an incredible increase in teachers of all stages leaving the profession over the past few years--the teacher shortage is far worse than it's ever been.

Importantly, learning to teach does not occur in a vacuum; instead, this process happens slowly and over time in nuanced places that bring along their own set of histories, rituals, norms, and expectations. This learning often begins with childhood dreams and children “playing school.” This idea of what teaching means often leads young adults to college campuses where a more focused vision of teaching is honed—a vision that is often shifted and changed, as teaching might not be exactly what they expected. Once graduated, young professionals enter the teaching field and their status again evolves: they become both teacher and a learner, members of a large community of professionals who are forever adapting to shifts and changes. In these moments of change, new teachers’ visions often become twisted and complicated by unforeseen aspects of teaching—leading new teachers to experience a “trial by fire” (Britzman, 1991). In Chapter 1, I wrote that memories are strange and slippery; much like my vision of my childhood in Appalachia, images of teachers can also become caricatures that are impossible to embody. This

study seeks to better understand how a first-year teacher in Appalachia discursively constructs her teaching identity through her visions of teaching and learning. For this study, I draw from sociocultural theory to understand that place, identities, teaching, and learning are socially constructed events—an ebb and flow of change, shaping, and reshaping that is recursive and continual.

Beliefs and Practices

The purpose of this study is to consider how a first-year teacher in Appalachia constructs herself as a teacher through the things she says, the discourses she draws from, and the resources and social practices she takes up or rejects. A teacher's beliefs and the practices they choose to enact are necessarily bound together with their identity. The following sections will illustrate this close relationship while also working to illustrate the nuances between the two. While this study will focus on teacher beliefs and practices, these two pieces are actually part of a triad that also includes a teacher's knowledge of teaching and learning. I will not address literature regarding teacher knowledge since it is not within the scope of this study.

Teacher Beliefs

The term “beliefs” is an oversimplified word that is used to encompass a vast construct, as beliefs “travel in disguise and often under alias” (Pajares, 1992, p. 309). Pajares went on to list several of these aliases—many of which are phrases present in the discourses surrounding teaching: attitudes, values, opinions, ideology, perceptions, dispositions, etc. In short, this one term is used “to collapse knowledge, assumptions, and dispositions about teaching” (Dunn et. al., 2018, p. 45). Like identities, beliefs are made up of pieces of the past, present, and visions of what the future can hold—and these ideas have the power to form and shape the decisions that teachers make, the identity that teachers form, and the way one moves forward with practice.

All teachers hold beliefs, and beliefs about teaching and learning have the capacity to strongly influence the vision that teachers hold about the kind of teacher someone is or hopes to become (Beijaard & Meijer, 2017; Pajares, 1992). Like identity, beliefs stem from many sources including educational experiences during K-12 and college, cultural influences, and discourses surrounding teaching and learning. Important to early-career teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning—including the vision they hold of themselves—is the understanding that early-career teachers do not enter their teacher education programs as blank slates or empty vessels to be filled; instead, they bring with them thousands of hours in a school as a K-12 student, which leads them to generate a vision of what they perceive teaching to be (Cancino et al., 2020; Good & Lavigne, 2018; Smagorinsky & Barnes, 2014). These thousands of hours have been termed apprenticeship-of-observation (Lortie, 1975). These years of one-sided observations--in addition to the myths and ideals perpetuated by the cultures in which they participate--lead future teachers to enter into their teacher education programs with a fairly concrete conceptualization of what it looks like and sounds like to be a teacher (Botha, 2020; Gray, 2020; Lortie, 1975; Palmer et al., 2009).

This predetermined concept of what teaching is can often act as a filter for knowledge and experiences encountered in teacher education programs and “may also function as barriers to change by limiting the ideas that teacher education students are able and willing to entertain” (Feiman-Nemser, 2001, p. 1016). While these images can serve as a starting point for forming their beliefs and vision of what their teaching will look like, pre-service and early-career teachers are not yet positioned to access a broader range of discourses surrounding teaching and learning. This limitation can stifle their ability to build a new vision of teaching and learning; thus, making it harder for new ideas and revisioning to occur. In this moment, the new teacher's vision can

often become so complicated by unforeseen forces, disillusionment and frustration are often experienced as the gap between vision and reality becomes seemingly too large to bridge (Hammerness, 2003). In this case, teachers tend to resort to conservative, traditional teaching practices to “fall back on when they are uncertain about how to proceed pedagogically” (Smagorinsky & Barnes, 2014). Importantly, the purpose of holding beliefs is to work toward making sense of the world; thus, beliefs are often difficult to change—the process often complex and personal (Beijaard & Meijer, 2017). However, while beliefs may be difficult to change—it is not impossible because beliefs are never static; instead, beliefs are always in flux and can change or reshape according to their purposes in relation to power, control, status, or sometimes shift to make the world a better place (Gee, 2012). Almost functioning as interchangeable concepts, a teacher’s beliefs and vision are tightly woven together—often impossible to distinguish between the two. This being the case, visioning can become the first step in addressing many obstacles that new teachers might face including adjusting or reshaping one’s beliefs (and, therefore, vision) that has been shaped by years and years of observation (Hammerness et al., 2005).

Teacher Practice: The “Doing” of Beliefs

A teacher’s practice is an incredibly nuanced concept—often considered the “doing” of beliefs (Clandinin, 1989; Grossman et al., 2009). At its most basic level, teaching practice involves translating content knowledge into student learning (Shulman, 1987). However, it is a far more complex concept, as teaching practice is heavily influenced by context (Smagorinsky et al., 2003) including local discourse communities (Grossman et al., 1999) and is socially constructed (Lampert, 2010)--both of these aspects leave a teacher’s practice open to take many different forms.

Importantly, this study positions teacher practice as situated within a broader context—and this positioning will become key as the focal teacher of this study works to enact certain practices in a rural school in Appalachia. This contextual underpinning includes engagement with others and historically produced cultural artifacts and meanings—the history of the region, community, school, and even cultural perceptions of specific subject areas come into play to impact teacher practice (or, as this study will show, the practices teachers *feel* they can enact) (Scribner & Cole, 1981). The practices a teacher chooses to take up both structure the activity while also reinforcing or reproducing cultural norms. For example, teacher practice can reproduce conservative teaching traditions where students are considered “empty vessels” to fill with knowledge through rote, traditional teaching methods. Alternatively, when teachers feel supported to deviate from status quo teaching, students can be immersed in a culture of teaching and learning that puts them at the forefront of their learning and pushes them to deeper modes of inquiry.

Learning to become a teacher—to take up the practice of teaching—means that teachers must necessarily grapple with the socially constructed definitions of what it means to be a teacher: “learning the practice of teaching...is learning ‘what teachers do’ in common...it involves adopting the identity of a teacher, being accepted as a teacher, and taking on the common values, language, and tools of teaching” (Lampert, 2010, p. 29). This constructed view of teaching includes the visions that pre-service and early-career teachers hold about teaching based on their own experiences with education, the images and ideals that are put forth by the media, and the discourses that are perpetuated on social media platforms, their experiences during field placements, their communities ideas about education, the school’s culture and climate, their experiences outside of school, etc. (Barnes & Smagorinsky, 2016; Thompson et al.,

2013). These influences are termed critical pedagogical discourses (CPDs) and create “threads of internalized dialogue that constitute teachers’ narratives about their current and future selves” (Thompson et al., 2013, p. 579). As such, CPDs guide teachers’ beliefs and, in turn, influence teaching practices. Teachers’ “threads of internalized dialogue” are continually shaped and reshaped by interactions with others and by socially constructed meanings that can stem from the various sources just listed. Beliefs formed from these lived experiences in these particular settings form and shape the stories that teachers tell and the stories that influence their teaching practice (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996). For early-career teachers, these beliefs are often complex and contradictory (Dunn et. al., 2018) and that can lead to tensions when trying to enact teaching practices learned during teacher education programs (Ensor, 2001; Kennedy, 1999; Thompson et al., 2013). Importantly, and as interviews and observations for this study will show, CPDs often “reflect what individuals believe ‘should have been done’ even if they cannot or will not translate these discourses into action” (Thompson et al., 2013, p. 579).

Anecdotally, it can be said that people’s actions don’t always follow their beliefs--sometimes the decision to abandon one’s beliefs is a conscious decision and sometimes this is done without even realizing. This is not to say that when this mismatch occurs that beliefs are always abandoned. Rather, this mismatch can create an often unnamed and perhaps even unnoticed pocket of tension for teachers—or it can be noticed and rectified, behavior that is more likely to occur among experienced teachers or those comfortable with pivoting their teaching practices. In educational research, this is often described as a problem of enactment (Kennedy, 1999). The problem of enactment is one of the primary obstacles that novice teachers face (Darling-Hammond, 2006); in response to this obstacle, early-career teachers often abandon their ambitious ideals as they are overwhelmed with day-to-day classroom challenges (Thompson et

al., 2013). Ambitious teaching practices are those that “focus on supporting student learning across ethnic, racial, class, and gender categories” (Thompson et. al., 2013). Enacting ambitious teaching practices is often complicated by encounters with mentors and/or colleagues who are not familiar with these teaching practices and this leads to a struggle to enact these concepts (Kennedy, 1999); thus, early-career teachers often abandon their ambitious plans and fall back on the conservative practices they observed as K-12 students (Ensor, 2001).

Supporting Early-Career Teachers: Mentoring and Formal Induction Programs

New teacher induction programs are designed to support and guide newly hired teachers during their first year in the profession. The purpose of these programs is to provide early-career teachers with the necessary knowledge, skills, and support in order to feel confident in their new role. Unfortunately, formal induction programs are not always offered by school systems—and this leaves new teachers on their own to learn about the nuances of the school (where to locate copiers, how to request items for their classroom, how to contact the office, etc), how to structure their classroom (classroom management, routines, procedures, etc), and how to build learning experiences for their students (Flores & Day, 2006; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011).

When school systems—or individual schools—offer induction programs, the overall goal is to improve the performance and retention of beginning teachers by giving new teachers a local guide (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). For programs to be successful, researchers have identified specific objectives that these programs should encompass: teacher development, socialization into the profession, assessment, and support in refining practice (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Ganser, 2002; Martin et al., 2015). Induction programs are not often regulated and can take many forms—sometimes a single meeting to review procedures and policies and sometimes programs are

structured to occur over time and cover topics relevant in the moment (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). These varied structures lead to varied outcomes and successes.

In place of—or sometimes alongside—formal induction programs, it is common for schools to provide mentors for new teachers. Just like induction programs, these can take various forms: “a single meeting between mentor and mentee at the beginning of a school year to a highly structured program involving frequent meetings over a couple of years between mentors and mentees who are both provided with release time from their normal teaching loads (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011, p, 203-204). Unfortunately, some studies show that the mentor approach can sometimes leave new teachers wishing for more support to meet their individual needs, as mentors are often busy with their own teaching and challenges (Kauffman et al., 2002; Martin et al., 2015).

Recently, research has been shifting to look at how teachers often seek out informal, collegial interactions that are often more relevant and functional for new teachers (Marz & Kelchtermans, 2020; Thomas et al., 2019). Termed a “distributed mentorship,” many early-career teachers find that their assigned mentor is just one piece of a broader network of teachers who lend support (Marz & Kelchtermans, 2020). This web of support can include people from all facets of the new teacher’s experience: senior teachers in the same academic department, collaborative teams, colleagues who become close friends, academic coaches, administrators, etc. (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Marz & Kelchtermans, 2020; Thomas et al., 2019). Missing in the literature is how social media is beginning to provide this support for teachers; a piece of this study will briefly touch on this idea, however this is an open avenue for further research.

Theoretical Framework

In this section, I will unpack the theoretical traditions that inform my study. To accomplish this, I look at research from two different bodies of literature: I open this section by pairing together two bodies of research: Vygotsky and Bakhtin's theoretical work about language and meaning. Vygotsky (1978) centered his work on social-psychological theories of human development and Bakhtin put forth a theory of language and the dialogical nature of thought (Roth, 2012). Little research integrates these two theories (Roth, 2013); this study will work to fill this gap in the literature as I pair together the two in order to examine how a first-year teacher in Appalachia discursively constructs her identity.

Sociocultural Theory: Weaving Together Vygotsky and Bakhtin

The focus of this research is to better understand how a first-year teacher in Appalachia constructs her teaching identity and the pieces of her background and context that influence this construction. Since my study focuses on how my focal teacher interacts in different contexts as she constructs her identity, I necessarily situate this study within sociocultural theory. Grounded in Vygotsky's (1978) research, sociocultural theory provides a framework for looking at the nuances of human interactions that form understandings, practices, beliefs, and identities. Specifically, Enciso and Ryan (2011) defined the theory by breaking it into three strands:

(a) thought is mediated by social, historical relations and activities, (b) the potential to learn is optimal within situations where a problem makes use of and extends the language, knowledge, motivation and relationships already available to learners, and (c) language and other sign systems are historically and culturally developed through social interaction but become available for individuals as a form of inner control over immediate and future activity. (p. 133)

In other words, sociocultural theory emphasizes social interactions and cultural context in shaping individuals' understanding and behavior. Further, sociocultural theory puts forward the

idea that these interactions are all socially constructed and, therefore, necessarily rely on interaction with other individuals such as family, teachers, peers, and members of various discourse communities (Gee, 2012). As such, this study operates on the concept that all human interaction is a mutual construction as one engages with various discourses, historical spaces and rituals, and cultural structures: in other words, what people think, the way they act, and what they believe are always shaped by cultural, historical, and social structures that are reflected in tools such as literature, art, media, and language (Wertsch et al, 1993). Following sociocultural theory, it is necessary for this study to attend to the focal teacher's personal histories and the histories of the region to better understand how she constructs her identity, builds visions of teaching and learning, and to understand the reality of what she is able to (or feels she is able to) enact in her classroom; in other words, "we must recognize the complex interactions among past, present, and future" (Sheilds, 2007, p. 18).

Just as an individual's understandings, practices, beliefs, and identities are socially constructed, language is also necessarily dependent on social interaction and meaning-making and is responsive to those interactions (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 84). To continue to bring together Vygotsky's and Bakhtin's research, this study will follow the understanding of dialogism and verbal discourse as socially constructed events. As humans, our existence is an event: the world addresses us as we address the world. We address the world through utterances: a word, phrase, sound, artistic representation, movement, etc.; regardless of the type of utterance, they are always a response to another (Holquist, 2002). Since every utterance is a response to another, this string of utterances forms a chain of discourse where the meaning of each utterance necessarily relies on available social meanings, norms, and a collective understanding among those participating (Bakhtin, 1981). This chain that Bakhtin called "addressivity," is unavoidable, as we are always

informed by *something* and we enact those multiple voices in different situations. This multivoicedness—heteroglossia—is shaped by time, space, and those present in the dialogic exchange and simultaneously works to shape the event and how those within the event react and respond.

Bakhtin established two categories of discourses that “clash, pushing and pulling us in opposite directions” (Sydnor, 2017, p. 219): authoritative discourses and internally persuasive discourses. Authoritative discourses are those that strive to “determine the very basis of our ideological interrelations with the world, the very basis of our behavior (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 342). These discourses are typically associated with large institutions (governments and systems of power). Importantly, these discourses do not allow for being internally persuaded; instead, authoritative discourses are often taken up without question—these give the illusion of being “the truth” since they are so deeply ingrained in our culture and our history. In contrast, internally persuasive discourses are open to dialogue and invite multiple voices and perspectives to be heard: “the internally persuasive word is half-ours and half-someone else’s” (Matusov & von Duyke, 2010, p. 175). Further, internally persuasive dialogues are grounded in a dialogic relationship between the speaker and the listener—in this exchange, the chain of discourse that forms is necessarily reliant on multiple speakers to form and shape the context and meaning of the words or ideas exchanged (Matusov & von Duyke, 2010). While these are two separate, distinct discourses, it is important to remember that each of these utterances contains echoes of one another and influence how teachers working within certain structures and constraints are able to carry out their practices and beliefs—the two discourses forming a “convergence or divergence of perspectives” (Rogers, Marshall, & Tyson, 2006, p. 205).

An important aspect of building a vision of teaching and learning stems from the mediated agency that teachers experience as they draw from cultural tools to shape their vision: “what individuals believe, and how individuals think and act is always shaped by cultural, historical, and social structures that are reflected in mediational tools...” (Lasky, 2005, p. 900). Mediated agency provides a more nuanced look at the cultural, historical, and institutionally situated-ness of what an individual feels they are able to do in a given context (Wertsch & Rupert, 1993, p, 230). In other words, place and the resources offered and valued by those who structure that place heavily influence teachers’ agency. Adding to the concept of place and resources as mediators of agency, a teacher’s vision can serve as a tool to guide them through restrictive climates: “although there may be a gap between a teacher’s vision and their practice, those teachers who harness a sense of agency act upon their vision and persist in the face of perceived obstacles” (Vaughn & Faircloth, 2011, p. 159). However, it is important to remember that a strong vision does not necessarily erase the gap that can exist between a teacher’s vision and practice (Hammerness, 2001). Vaughn and Faircloth (2011) go on to suggest that to bridge this gap, “teachers must develop a sense of agency (the ability to act on their vision), negotiating obstacles in order to achieve their goals...” (p. 159).

Just as social contexts are socially constructed, so too are identities. For this study, I draw from sociocultural understandings of identity as intersubjective, emerging from discourse, and as a product of teachers’ participation in social practices (Solari & Ortega, 2022). In other words, identities both mediate and are mediated by the social practices and texts that individuals read, write, and talk about (Lewis & del Valle, 2009; McCarthy & Moje, 2002; Solari & Ortega, 2022). In this study, mediating tools such as social media, images, language, classroom decorations, etc. will emerge as important aspects that shape the focal teacher’s actions and are

directly linked to cultural, historical, and institutional contexts (Solari & Ortega, 2002). Viewing these mediated tools as pieces that simultaneously shape and are shaped by my focal teacher “requires the understanding of teacher professional identity construction as dialogic, relational, socio-historically situated, and dynamic process in which meanings about the teaching profession and about oneself as a teacher are discursively constructed” (Solari & Ortega, 2002, p. 627).

Professional Identity

Identity building is a complex, dynamic construct that develops over time as individuals strive to make sense of who they are (Phinney, 2008) in several domains of life at different rates and for different purposes within each domain (Bartlett, 2005; Wortham, 2006). Identity is not something that is built quickly or is static; identities are continually being changed as an individual encounters new situations, has new understandings, or builds new knowledge: identity is “the social positioning of self and other” (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). Additionally, it is quite possible for an individual to have built or developed different identities within different domains.

Learning to teach involves constructing a professional identity. This construction is forged in the midst of relationships and social interactions (Moje & Luke, 2009; Smagorinsky et al., 2004), is discontinuous and/or non-linear (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011), and is on-going (Golden, 2017; Oswald & Perold, 2015). For teachers, school culture, state policy, and district context work together to shape professional identity (Lasky, 2005; Vahasantanen, 2014). For early-career teachers, the same factors are at work. However, their malleable identities are also heavily shaped by their own apprenticeship of observation, ideas and concepts imparted through the teacher education program they completed (often setting up the two-worlds tension), and by the ambitious practices they aspire to enact--often setting up early-career teachers to have an

overwhelming start to their career, as these aspects are often at odds with one another (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011; Anagnostopoulos et al., 2007; Feiman-Nemser & Buchmann, 1985; Kennedy, 1999; Thompson et al., 2013). In other words, beginning teachers combine parts of their past with pieces of their present in order to create the vision of the teacher they hope to become (Hammerness, 2001; Vetter et al., 2016): these pieces come together as threads of internalized dialogue that constitute teachers' narratives about their current and future selves" (Thompson et al., 2013, p. 579).

Continually shifting with time and context, teacher identities tend to be characterized in three ways: the multiplicity of identity, the discontinuity of identity, and the social nature of identity (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011). This understanding of identities pushes on previous notions of teacher identity as fixed and defined according to a set of assets required for the profession (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011; Lipponen & Kumpulainen, 2011; Moje & Luke, 2009; Solari & Ortega, 2022; Vahasantanen, 2014). Instead of a defined "teacher identity," these three categories suggest that identity is dialogic. It is fragmented according to the multiple social worlds in which people participate and is formed and shaped as a shared experience that is necessarily reliant upon other participants, historical constructs, and nuances brought to social situations in order to co-construct oneself (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011; Holquist, 2002; Solari & Ortega, 2022).

Table 1: Three Categories of Identity (drawn from Akkerman & Meijer, 2001)	
Multiplicity of Identity	Identities are complex and often contextual. In other words, professional identities are just one facet of a teacher's identity (Sutherland et al., 2010)--teachers often have multiple sub-identities (Beijaard et al., 2000; Day et al., 2007). These sub-identities are necessarily reliant upon social contexts for development (Cole, 1996; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Grossman et al., 1999)
Discontinuity of Identity	Identity changes from moment to moment according to the type of situation and context of that moment--parts of a teacher's identity can be altered and change course as the teacher enters into different contexts (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011); aspects of identity never "stop"--but strands of identity are sometimes foregrounded and backgrounded. Identity is an ongoing process of interpretation and re-interpretation of experiences (Beijaard et al., 2004; Gee, 1990; Rodgers & Scott, 2008).
Social Nature of Identity	Identities are formed in collaboration with others. Early-career teachers rely on personal histories to form the beginnings of their professional identities (Flores & Day, 2006). Collaborative exchanges, relationships, and communicative contexts all play a major role in shaping and reshaping teacher identities (Alsup, 2006; Cohen, 2010; Rodgers & Scott, 2008).

To bring these strands together, I look to Bakhtin's (1981) work. It is understood that the self is composed of multiple I-positions as people speak with multiple voices. Further, "an I-position can be considered as a 'voiced' position, that is, a speaking personality bringing forward a specific viewpoint and story" (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011, p. 311). In other words, when someone speaks, the context of the situation will often shape the "voice" that is embodied--and this is continually shifting and changing resulting in an identity that is continuously re(constructed) and negotiated.

This dialogic understanding of identity can be helpful in this study to better understand the multiple voices and tensions that my focal teacher faces as an early-career teacher in Appalachia: "the presence of multiple, possibly conflicting I-positions, can be helpful in understanding teacher identity, especially when teachers face dilemmas or tensions throughout their work" (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011, p. 311). Following Akkerman and Meijer's (2011)

work, I will consider teacher identity in a dialogical sense: “simultaneously unitary and multiple, continuous and discontinuous, and individual and social” (p. 315). In this study, my focal teacher takes up practices that are both sanctioned and unsanctioned in the school setting where the study takes place—she strives to have a Pinterest/Instagram-worthy classroom and looks to social media for these models that are not available locally because her vision pushes against the status quo of the school and community. Importantly, these practices become tools that my focal teacher attempts to use to enact her visioned identity (Finders, 1997; Moje, 2000).

Importantly, this study will rely on the focal teacher’s narrative construction of herself and her experiences in order to consider how she discursively constructs herself through use of sociocultural resources, social practices, and the discourses she draws from to describe her experiences. For this reason, considering identity as a narrative construction makes most sense for this study, as identities are constructed through the stories that people tell about themselves and their experiences (Moje & Luke, 2009; Wortham, 2004). This understanding of identities necessarily points to the social construction and situation of identities (Wortham, 2001); in other words, “identities are reifications of activity and experience” (Moje & Luke, 2009, p. 427). Additionally, and important to this study, identities are the stories that others tell about us: “...identity as socially mediated or constructed could mean that one sees identity less as an interpretation of the person who has the identity and more dependent on other people’s recognitions of a person” (Moje & Luke, 2009, p. 418). The idea of identity being both within someone and imposed upon someone will become a prominent theme that emerges in the data of this study: the focal teacher of this study finds herself continually “identified” by Appalachia—she is continually addressed by discourses that circulate by the region and must choose how she will respond.

Drawing from the dialogic nature of speech, identity can be conceptualized in two ways: the storytelling self (narration) and as an enactment between the narrator and the audience (Wortham, 2001, p. 138). Regardless of how identity is conceptualized, the narrative is necessarily shaped as a result of interaction (Wortham, 2001). Central to my work will be tracing chains of discourse--including my focal teacher's internalized dialogue. To accomplish this, I will lean heavily on understanding about dialogue put forth by Bakhtin. His work is an important aspect of my study, as he viewed the "self" as dialogic--a relation, an event with a structure (Holquist, 2002).

Existence, like language, is a shared event. It is always a border incident on the gradient both joining and separating the immediate reality of my own living particularity (a uniqueness that presents itself as only for me) with the reality of the system that precedes me in existence (that is always-already-there) and which is intertwined with everyone and everything else. (Holquist, 2002, p. 28)

In other words, Bakhtin positions existence as a shared experience that is reliant upon other participants, historical constructs, and the nuances brought to social situations in order to co-construct oneself. This study will focus on how a first year teacher in Appalachia discursively constructs herself as a teacher while in the midst of a pandemic, on the heels of multiple teacher strikes, and while facing a significant teacher shortage. Further, I will consider how she makes use of sociocultural resources and social practices in this construction and the discourses she draws from to describe her experiences. Sociocultural theory provides a useful framework for this study, as it takes into consideration the intersection of identity, place, and social practices and how those aspects not only structure but are structured by those involved. Social practices are simultaneously culturally and historically produced; consequently, the texts and practices associated with these activities are also culturally and historically produced and given meaning through the practices and those participating (Street, 1995). The next section will add on a layer

to my study: teacher visioning. In this section, I will weave together how my focal teacher's identity, beliefs, and practices (all of which have been socially constructed) come together to form her vision of teaching and of herself in that context.

Teacher Visioning

In a framework put forth by Hammerness, Darling-Hammond, and Bransford (2005), five components considered important to teacher development were defined and laid out under the umbrella of learning to teach within a community: understandings about teaching (knowledge, methods, purposes, and forms of the discipline, understanding learning and development); dispositions about how to use this knowledge (reflection upon practice, inquiry stance, persistence); practices that allow for agency (how to engage in instructional activities: debates, explanations, feedback, etc); and use of tools to support efforts (theoretical tools such as learning theory, practical tools such as running records to analyze reading, etc). At the core, Hammerness et al. place Vision—images of the possible that are used to guide and inspire practice (p. 385).

For this study, I have foregrounded their concept of vision, as I see this as a direct link to early-career teachers' practice of forming a professional identity. In bringing forward this particular aspect of their framework, I am able to more carefully attend to how my focal teacher constructs her professional identity through the way she narrates her vision of herself in the past, present, and in the future. Vision is at the center of how early-career teachers begin to form and shape their professional identities—this vision informs their understanding, practice, disposition, and the tools they take up or reject. Further, visioning “is the first step toward addressing the apprenticeship of observation and the process of enactment” (Hammerness et al., 2005, p. 386) and I would argue that visioning is also a solid first step in addressing other obstacles first-year teachers face. When a new teacher's vision becomes complicated by unforeseen forces,

disillusionment and frustration often are fostered as the gap between their vision and reality becomes too large to bridge (Hammerness, 2003).

To fully unpack my focal teacher's vision of herself as a teacher, I will use Hammerness' (2001, 2003) framework specific to teacher visioning as a key tool for analysis. Visioning serves as a starting point for teachers: it's an ongoing, reflective process (Vaughn et al., 2021) that provides a tool for teachers to link their beliefs with their practices (Duffy, 2002). Visions, like identities and beliefs, are socially constructed, built over time, and change shape according to context and new experiences (Greene, 1998; Vaughn & Kuby, 2019; Vetter et al., 2016). Teachers use their visions to make decisions that are grounded in place and context that will provide instruction that best fits their students, classrooms, and community (Vaughn & Faircloth, 2013).

Hammerness (2001, 2003) proposes that teachers' visions vary across three dimensions: focus, range, and distance (p. 45). The *focus* of a vision is the area of interest within the vision—the clarity of the vision can vary from blurred to sharply defined. Important to this aspect of vision is considering what images, ideals, or activities are being described by the teacher the most. *Range* is the field of vision—narrow to broad—and can span from specific students in the class to a broad view of the school as a whole or even the community. Finally, *Distance* refers to the measure of how close or far the gap is between current reality and the ideals of the vision.

Table 2: Hammerness' (2001, 2003) Framework–Three Dimensions of Teacher Visions		
Dimension	Definition	Examples
Focus	The center or the areas of interest of the vision. Also includes the level of clarity of the vision: the vision can be sharply defined or blurry.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Images • Ideals • Interactions
Range	The scope or extent of the vision.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Narrow <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Individual classroom ◦ Particular group of students • Broad <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Community ◦ School as a whole
Distance	How close or far the vision is relative to what the teacher is currently doing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Close to current practices • Distant to daily practices

In using this framework, I am able to trace my focal teacher's vision of herself as a teacher and the sociocultural resources, social practices, and discourses she draws from to construct her teaching identity. This framework allows me to look at specific, nuanced moments of her teaching practices and beliefs in order to tease out the vision she has of herself as a teacher, how that vision floats in and out of focus, and the distance she notices between what she hoped to enact and what occurred in reality—remembering that each of these events form, shape, and thicken her identity. In using Hammerness's framework, I will be able to map out the “constellations” of my focal teacher's visions of teaching and of herself in a clear, concise way: “Examining the focus, range, and distance of teachers' visions provides a means of understanding the way teachers feel about their teaching, their students and their school; the changes they make or do not make in their classrooms; and even the decisions they make regarding their futures as teachers” (Hammerness, 2001, p. 147).

Summary: Bringing Together Literature and Theory

As a driving lens of this study, sociocultural theory has provided me with the necessary underpinning to unpack the “constellations” of my focal teacher’s visions of teaching and learning (Hammerness, 2001, 2003). This study will show that my focal teacher’s visions follow what is described in literature. Her visions are formed and shaped by the discourses she participates in as well as those that she resists: she is guided by her personal experiences with education, her former teachers and mentors, the context of the school and community where she currently teaches, social media, film and television—all while striving to resist the discourses that push against what she wants for her own teaching, her classroom, and her identity.

Importantly, viewing identity through a sociocultural and dialogic lens “implies understanding that a teacher’s professional identity is formed by a set of meanings in constant process of reconstruction as a consequence of his or her participation in different contexts and social practices” (Solari & Ortega, 2022, p. 633). Utilizing a narrative strategy for analyzing my focal teacher’s professional identity allows me to bring together her many experiences—including moments where she struggles with enactment and faces problems relating to the two-worlds pitfall—to create an understanding of how she is making use of sociocultural resources and social practices as well as the discourses she draws from as she describes her experiences. Further, a narrative approach allows for some insight about the identity she builds for past versions of herself, her current view of self, and the teacher she sees herself being in the future (Moje & Luke, 2002).

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter is a detailed explanation of the methodology of this research study. In order to answer my study's "how" questions, I built a qualitative case study that focuses on a first year teacher's discursive construction of her identity through use of sociocultural resources, social practices, and discourses she draws from to describe her experiences. In order to focus on my focal teacher's lived realities and experiences as she interacts with others, I chose to situate this study within the qualitative paradigm—the type of research that focuses on “lives, stories, behavior, but also about organization functioning, social movements, or interactional relationships” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 17). Further, a qualitative approach made the most sense, since “qualitative researchers seek to make sense of personal narratives and the ways in which they intersect” (Glesne, 2003, p. 1).

The first part of this chapter will lay out my understandings of an interpretive case study including my own ontological and epistemological assumptions. I then discuss my positionality as a researcher and what that could mean for this study. Then I introduce the focal teacher, Maggie (pseudonym), a first-year teacher at a large middle school in Appalachia. From there I move to a description of the nested contexts of the study: school, county, and state. Finally, I outline the data collection methods and describe the data analysis process.

Interpretive Case Study

It is important for a researcher to make explicit their ontological and epistemological assumptions ahead of conducting research (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). For this research, my beliefs directly informed my theoretical perspectives delineated in Chapter 2—and those theories directly align with the ontological belief that tends to accompany qualitative research: “reality is socially constructed, complex, and ever changing” (Glesne, 2003, p. 6). Meaning is socially constructed

rather than fixed in the bounds of someone's mind—the world is mediated by artifacts, language, and the participants who work to give meaning to those aspects through chains of discourse and interaction (Gee, 2012, Bakhtin, 1981). Even though existence is a shared experience, it is still reliant upon other participants, historical constructs, and the nuances brought to social situations in order to co-construct oneself (Holquist, 2002). With these theoretical constructs driving this research, the epistemological stance that orients my research is constructivism: “the key philosophical assumption upon which all types of qualitative research are based is the view that reality is constructed by individuals interacting with their social worlds” (Merriam, 1998, p. 22). Human beings construct their perceptions of the world, knowledge, is subjective, and multiple realities exist--no reality is more “right” or “real” than another (Glesne, 2006; Grbich, 2013; Merriam, 1998).

Since I am a member of multiple communities that all work in some way to inform the outcome of this study (former teacher, faculty member at the school where the research was conducted, lifelong resident of Appalachia, academic coach), I recognize that my presence in both my focal teacher's classroom and during our one-on-one interviews certainly altered the dynamics and social interactions of each context. I will go into greater detail to lay out how these aspects may have impacted my study in the next section where I define and lay out the nuances of my positionality as a researcher. As an interpretative researcher, it is important to keep these varying memberships in mind as I consider data—analytic memos emerged as a useful site for reflection and consideration of these aspects.

Researcher Positionality

This research is my first major step into the educational research community. Just as beginning teachers combine parts of their past with pieces of their present to create the image of

the teacher they hope to become, I followed a similar trajectory as a beginning researcher: I combined parts of my past with the vision I have of myself as a qualitative researcher to begin to form and shape my researcher identity. As a beginning researcher, it was important that I kept in the forefront of my mind who I was and how others saw me throughout the research process (Bourke, 2014). This became even more important as this research took shape as an interpretive case study; as an interpretive researcher, I was directly involved in the process of meaning-making: framing the research questions, determining the methods, and interacting with my focal teacher (Creswell, 1998). In this sense, self-awareness became an even more important piece of the research process.

I entered into this research as a former middle school ELA teacher with 13 years of experience. As an ELA teacher, I mentored beginning teachers in my school and hosted several pre-service teachers as they completed their student teaching. The year prior to this study beginning, I took on a new role at my school: I became an academic coach. In this position, I work mainly with new teachers: we lesson plan together, set and monitor goals, do some co-teaching, and learn the “ins and outs” of day-to-day life as a teacher—I also am a listening ear as new teachers (and sometimes veteran teachers) share their struggles and vent their frustrations. I understand that the role I’m in is sometimes perceived as semi-administrative by teachers—from their perception, the observations I conduct *could* be influential as I meet and work with administration in the building. To help ease teachers’ worries, I work to build relationships and reassurances that the things we discuss and goals we set together are confidential and are not shared with anyone. To build this trust and reassurance, I follow a few steps: I always discuss what the teacher would like me to observe or what data I will gather while in their classroom, I schedule the day and time for the observation (no surprise visits—unless agreed upon), and we

plan a time to debrief following an observation so that the time spent is meaningful and will be beneficial for the teacher. In other words, I don't want a teacher to feel like there are ever any surprises—and I want our time spent together to be fully teacher-driven.

In conducting this research, there were certainly times when my researcher position became blurred—most often overlapping with my academic coaching position, as my focal teacher is a new teacher. Prior to beginning research, I participated in ethical training (CITI) that covered topics such as protecting human subjects, consent topics, vulnerable populations, etc. This course helped me to think through ways in which Maggie may be vulnerable—including her vulnerability as a new, inexperienced teacher positioned against my perceived position of power. To keep my two roles as distinct and separate as possible, I tried to make it very clear to Maggie which “hat” I would be wearing during an interaction—whether I was messaging her as a coach or researcher, visiting her classroom as a coach or researcher, asking a question as a coach or researcher, etc. We mainly communicated to set up observations and interviews via email or texting. I would always start with an opening such as: I'm emailing as a coach—or—I'm emailing as a researcher.

My process for working with teachers became a bit skewed with Maggie due to the nature of our interactions. Instead of agreed upon topics for observation, my time spent in her classroom was very “general.” She and I did not discuss things to watch or observe—instead, I let her know that I would be working to capture a full picture of her teaching, her students, and the overall classroom environment. She decided which class period I would observe and then, together, we came up with a schedule of days that would be best for me to visit her classroom. Following each observation, we would meet to debrief and talk about the observation. In these debrief sessions, we met as a teacher and a coach—we did not discuss research during these times.

I let her lead the discussions: she brought up any concerns, we talked about certain events that occurred while I was in her classroom, and we worked through any obstacles—all typical things that I discuss with a teacher during a coaching session.

I recognize that as I conducted this research, I did so with multiple positionalities present (former teacher, academic coach, Appalachian, researcher). However, I don't see this as a disadvantage: my years of classroom experience and knowledge were on my side when conducting observations and that made things visible to me that others may have missed. In this research, my focal teacher had an image of me and I formed an image of her. When beginning this project, I knew that I would follow Glesne's (1999) methods: "to avoid making assumptions, I will need to listen carefully and probe thoroughly. To avoid making misinterpretations, I intend to seek feedback on the actual transcripts" (p. 108)--and I followed through with this plan as I gathered and analyzed data. While my positioning could have presented as a limitation, sharing experiences, our shared membership as residents of Appalachia, and our shared histories became affordances in my study; Glesne (1999) points out that there is a connection between rapport and subjectivity: being accepted and trusted is key for a researcher (p. 111).

Research Contexts

This research follows a first-year teacher in Appalachia. It's important to detail the positioning of this study and tease out the characteristics of the study's place before delving into the nuances of the research design. This section will work to portray the state, district, and the school where the research is located.

State, County, and School Data

It is important to note a key factor before moving forward with a portrayal of the district and school: the condition of education in the state as a whole. The following statistics come from

a database provided by the state department of education that tracks a variety of data. The data on this site is “live”--it is continually updated as enrollments, assessments, and other indicators change. Of course, data for past years is now permanent, but the 2021-2022 data is continually updating and changing. I only make this distinction in the interest of transparency: the data reported on this table may not be the final data reported for that school year.

Table 3: Demographic Data (drawn from a state demographic data website--June 27, 2022)			
	State Data	Foothill County Data	Evergreen Middle School Data
Enrollment			
• 2019-2020	2% drop	3,700 students	800 students
• 2020-2021	4% drop	3,700 students	800 students
• 2021-2022	1% drop	3,900 students	800 students
Racial Diversity (2021-2022)			
• White	89% of students	97% of students	95% of students
• Hispanic or Latino	2% of students	1% of students	2% of students
• Black or African American	4% of students	< 1% of students	1% of students
• Multi-Racial	4% of students	1% of students	1% of students
Attendance			
• 2020-2021	95%	98%	98%
Special Education (2021-2022)			
• Students with IEPs	10% of students	15% of students	14% of students
Socio-Economic Status			

• 2021-2022	50% Non-Low SES; 50% Low SES	47% Non-Low SES; 53% Low SES	49% Non-Low SES; 51% Low SES
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An important note with this data, Covid-19 played a major role in the data reported for the 2020-2021 school year. Many school districts had altered school days, continuous closures, and wide-spread Covid-19 in the communities the schools serve. These factors affected enrollment, as many families chose to pull their students from the school system in favor of homeschooling. Anecdotally, I can say that the county where this research is situated is beginning to see a return of these students into the public school system, a trend that, I'm sure, is state-wide. Regardless of the pandemic, enrollment in the state's public schools has steadily declined. In 2014-2015, there were 280,000 students enrolled; by 2021-2022, only 250,000 were enrolled: a decrease over time of 30,000 students. Racial diversity and Special Education data is only available for the current year, so I am unable to trace the trends. Socio-economic data and attendance rates have generally remained static across the years reported.

Notably the state has experienced a loss of student enrollment over the last several years, and teacher retention and attrition is experiencing the same trend: at the start of the 2021-2022 school year, the state had approximately 1,000 teacher vacancies in public schools. The teacher shortage issue is not unique to this state—the teacher shortage crisis mirrors the national teacher shortage (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). Rural districts have higher than average attrition rates: 8% compared to town schools that average 6% (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019); rural schools also have some of the highest rates of teacher turnover, 15% (Goldring et al., 2014; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Ingersoll et al., 2014). Further, and important to this study, up to 44% of new teachers left the field within the first three years to five years of teaching (Ingersoll et al., 2018). Border counties in the state tend to see a greater number of teachers leaving the state to teach. In contrast, rural counties face the issue of

geographic isolation: these districts are often unable to partner with colleges and universities to fill vacancies, struggle to attract young teachers to their communities, and reliance on graduates to return to their hometown has recently faltered (McHenry-Sorber & Campbell, 2019).

School District

Foothill County is located in the center of the state where this research takes place. The population of the county is 24,000 people with a median household income of \$44,000—19% of the population considered to be living in poverty (U.S Census Bureau, 2022). Approximately 4,000 students attend Foothill County Schools; the county employs around 240 teachers. The county has 10 public schools—ranging from elementary schools to a technical center where students (both high school students and adults) can graduate fully certified in a trade. In recent years, the county has put greater emphasis on career and technical education, partnering with an agency promoted by the state department of education to transform the middle school and eventually the high school to being fully project-based. With a change of leadership at the district level, this move to fully project-based schools has somewhat fizzled—but remains an ever-present talking point and is still a direction the county seems to be taking.

Foothill County is a school district that is located in the interior part of the state; in other words, this is not a border county. This is an important distinction to point out, as border counties tend to struggle most with teacher retention. While I don't have concrete numbers from the county, anecdotally, I can report that the number of teachers in the county sharply decreased: I have never witnessed teacher shortages like I have this school year. In the next section I will elaborate more about these shortages in the school where this study was conducted; but, these shortages were not unique to my school—the high school and elementary schools were in the same bind throughout the entire school year. One key factor to retain teachers is a strong

induction program (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). It is important to note, Foothill County does not have a formal induction program for new teachers. Instead, the county provides a mentoring program for all new teachers—and the parameters of this mentoring program are very lenient. New teachers are all assigned a mentor (typically a colleague in the same department) to conduct two observations per semester and keep a running log of the meetings they have. Other than two observations a semester, there are no other stipulations about what mentors and mentees do—it is a very vague and underdeveloped program. An important note: the state where this study takes place requires counties to offer a program like this. I only point that out because Foothill County’s mentoring program seems to merely be “checking a box.”

District response to COVID-19

During the 2020-2021 school year, in-person schooling in Foothill County teetered between open and closed while the number of cases fluctuated in the community. This year (2021-2022), the board of education decided that closing was not in students’ best interest. Instead, we relied on masking to help see us through the newest chapter of the pandemic. Community response to masking was really mixed—with the loudest voices being those who oppose masking due to a variety of reasons (the majority of reasons were opinion-based). Regardless, our board of education held to requiring masks when the district was identified as “red” or “orange” on the map of Covid-19 cases that was maintained by the state department of health.

While we were able to be in schools and did not face any Covid-related closures, the district chose to offer virtual learning to interested families—families both in the county and from around the state. This decision can be noted in the data reported regarding enrollment. County enrollment had seen a downward trend until this school year when students from all over the

state were enrolled as Foothill County students in order to take part in the county’s virtual school offering. These classes were offered through the state (not taught by local teachers) and were monitored by a virtual facilitator hired by the county—she checked in with students and made sure requirements were being met. This offer led to a sharp rise in enrollment numbers—and that equates to more money coming to the county from both the state and federal levels; thus, I suspect this decision to enroll students from all over the state was financially driven.

Evergreen Middle School

Table 4: Evergreen Middle School Data —Developed from a state demographic data website (June 27, 2022)	
Students Currently Enrolled	800
Racial Diversity	
• White	95%
• Hispanic or Latino	2%
• Black or African American	1%
• Multi-Racial	1%
Attendance	
• Regular Attendance	90%
• Chronic Absenteeism	40%
Special Education Services	
• Students with IEPs	14%
Socio-Economic Status	
• Low SES	51%

There are approximately 800 students in sixth through eighth grade that attend Evergreen Middle School in 2021-2022. This number has increased greatly from last year but is still noticeably lower than usual. The Covid-19 pandemic has created unique tensions for school

districts in the region regarding school attendance and enrollment, as families have opted to remove their students from public schooling in favor of homeschooling. Data reported regarding absences is also of special note. Typically, the number of students identified as chronically absent is much lower; in order to be considered chronically absent, a student must miss 10 unexcused absences. This number is abnormally inflated due to quarantine requirements. Of the 800 students enrolled, 14% qualify for special education services (this percentage includes gifted students)--a much higher percentage than that of the overall state average. This number has dropped from previous years, as students were not able to be identified as easily during the last two year's pandemic situation. Additionally, several students lost their special education status when their families opted to homeschool last year. The ramifications of staffing for the school population dip is yet to be known. Finally, Evergreen Middle School is designated a Title 1 school, as a large percentage of students qualify for federal Free or Reduced Lunch (drawn from a state demographic data website, 2022).

Participant Selection: Intensity Sampling

The purpose of this study is to trace how a first-year teacher in Appalachia discursively constructs herself as a teacher while working through the innumerable obstacles that teachers face daily. Maggie, the focal teacher of this study, was selected by intensity sampling, a purposeful sampling strategy defined by Patton (2002) to use when information-rich cases are necessary for studying a phenomenon in depth. Intensity sampling is a more nuanced form of purposeful sampling where "one seeks excellent or rich examples of the phenomenon of interest, but not highly unusual cases" (Patton, 2002, p. 234). When utilizing intensity sampling, some prior information and considerable judgment is necessary to determine the nature of the situation under study (Patton, 2002).

The focal teacher in this study, Maggie, fit the main parameters of this study: she was just beginning her first year of teaching in a school in Appalachia. I met Maggie for the first time in July before the start of the school year. We were both attending a conference with our school to work on some planning for the upcoming school year. Immediately, she struck me as a very confident and enthusiastic early-career teacher: she did not shy away from sharing her thoughts, jumped in to help her team plan for the upcoming school year, and she seemed to fit in flawlessly with her new colleagues. For these reasons, I started to think Maggie could be the right fit for this study—I needed a participant who would be open and willing to share personal experiences and stories.

When the school year was getting underway and teachers were back in the building, I stopped in to visit her to re-introduce myself and offer support as part of my position as an academic coach. Over the course of that week, I talked with her several times and realized that she would be the perfect fit for this research: she was very willing to share her thoughts and showed an openness and vulnerability that can be rare in teachers. When I stopped in to formally ask Maggie if she would be willing to be my focal teacher, she immediately said yes.

Overview of Maggie

Growing Up in Appalachia

Maggie was a student in the public school system from the time she was in kindergarten until she graduated high school. She attended schools that are very typical of those in the state: small and close-knit. She described how her family has lived in the same county that they have lived in for generations, a very small town that has a population of less than 3,000 people. Maggie shared that she often struggled with the realization that she did not have the same opportunities as people from larger areas: she and her friends had to travel at least 45 minutes

away to the next county to watch a movie in a theater, her family had to go 30 minutes from home for groceries, and, as a student, she and her peers did not have the opportunity to take advanced-level classes—specifically she noted that when she got to college many of her friends had taken dual-credit, AP courses, or had taken college courses as high school students.

She also shared that as she started getting older, she became more aware of stereotypes and negative things that are said about Appalachia: being called hillbillies and rednecks, not smart enough, rampant drug use/abuse, etc. At the same time, she told me that she can now look back on her childhood and growing up here and say that she appreciates it: she has made her best friends here, her family is here, she is connected to the culture and understands it better. In addition to the struggles with a lack of opportunity and stereotyping, she pointed out the overwhelming urge that young people have to leave the state; she shared that so many people she went to high school with had planned to leave the state. She went on to say that her appreciation for the childhood that she had and hope for the future is what is keeping her here.

Maggie chose to remain in the state and attend college at a small liberal arts college in the next county over from where she grew up—about 45 minutes away from her home. She enrolled in the college's four-year education program and ultimately graduated with a Bachelor's degree in Secondary Education with a minor in History. She completed her student teaching at the high school where she graduated during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic. While she appreciated being able to live at home during such a time of crisis, completing her student teaching left her with a looming sense of loss: loss of relationships with students and loss of a genuine student teaching experience.

First-Year Teacher

Maggie's teaching journey began the summer before school began at a week-long training session that included almost all faculty and administration from the school. When she first arrived at the training, she remembers feeling really nervous and unsure of herself; she wasn't sure how her colleagues would receive a brand new teacher--would they listen to her ideas or shut her down; would they value her as a member of the team? Luckily Maggie reported that she had a great experience: she left the training feeling like a valued member of her new teaching team. In fact, she said that her new colleagues and the way they pulled her right in is one of the main reasons she loves the school so much.

Maggie started her first year of teaching in the same school and even the same classroom as her very first classroom observation experience in college. She quickly perceived that college didn't prepare her for the nitty-gritty, moment-to-moment parts of teaching. While her first few weeks were tough, she started to discover little tricks and teaching strategies that work with each group of students and how to best manage her classes. Maggie is full of energy and ideas and wants to see her students having fun in her class while they are learning. Unfortunately, her desire for students to have fun created the age-old struggle for many first-year teachers: finding the balance between a relaxed, fun classroom and managing discipline and behavior.

Of particular importance to Maggie was the outward appearance of her classroom. Repeatedly she would say that she wanted her classroom to be warm, cozy, and inviting to students. As a teenager, she started a Pinterest board and began to curate her ideal space--she continued adding to her ideas through college and still maintains that board on Pinterest. In addition, she drew her inspiration from Instagram and other social media outlets. Inclusivity and comfort emerged as the two major themes driving her classroom decoration; this push ultimately

manifested itself in many ways—and will be a major theme that I discuss in greater detail in Chapter 4.

Data Collection

I collected data during the first semester of the 2021-2022 school year. I chose to collect data during this time in an attempt to capture the experience of a first year teacher as she took her initial steps in constructing herself as a teacher. For this research, interviews, classroom observations, and her personal journal make up the bulk of my data sources. I used the multiple data sources as sites to mine rich data: “rich data leads to ‘thick’ writing and descriptions” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 23). Gathering rich data helped to give me solid material for developing a more significant analysis: “rich data are detailed, focused, and full. They reveal participants’ views, feelings, intentions, and actions as well as the contexts and structures of their lives” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 23).

Table 5: Data Corpus		
Data Type	Number of Collections	Average Length of Data
Interviews	4 Semi-structured Interviews	60 minutes
Observations	6 Classroom Observations	60 minutes per observation (the length of one class period)
Journals	28 Journal Entries	Average of 1 page per entry

Semi-Structured Interviews and Transcripts

Interviewing was necessary for this research, as conducting interviews allowed me to look for moments when Maggie took up the language of others or talked about what others tend to talk about—in other words, interviewing allowed me to notice the discourses she drew from as she constructed herself (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 338). Further, interviews with Maggie allowed me

better understand the internally persuasive discourses that are interwoven with her own words and inform her “ways to mean” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 346). Interviewing also set up a perfect scenario for Maggie to embark on storytelling and narration to describe her experiences, concerns, and hesitations as a new teacher (Moje & Luke, 2009; Wortham, 2004).

The interviews I conducted with Maggie were developed through a constructivist lens: I kept in mind that interviews are dialogical performances, meaning making acts, and produce co-constructed knowledge (Koro-Ljungberg, 2008). In developing the semi-structured interviews I was careful in crafting questions that would lead to storytelling and narration of her experiences (Brinkmann & Kvale 2015; Moje & Luke, 2009; Patton, 2002; Wortham, 2001) and build rapport (Charmaz, 2014; Lichtman, 2006; Seidman, 2006). Through use of semi-structured interview questions, I was able to guide Maggie in sharing her experiences. When interviewing, I would prompt with a question, listen as she responded, and then would follow up with inquiring prompts such as “Tell me more...” or “Can you say more about...” Listening to her narration and allowing her storytelling to direct the interviews was important for this research, as I wanted to allow her to construct herself and her teaching identity through her own words.

During the first semester of the school year, from August 26th through November 16th, I completed four interviews with Maggie. Each interview, while slated for an hour, lasted nearly an hour and a half, as Maggie was very talkative and open, her willingness to tell stories a major asset to this study. I made sure that each interview was “themed” in order to gather focused data during each interview session: the first interview focused on Maggie’s experience as a K-12 student; the second interview guided her through discussion of her teacher education experience; the third interview was a conversation about how her teaching experience is going; and the final

interview focused on the discourses she draws from as she constructs herself as a teacher. All interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed (described in the next paragraph).

Table 6: Interviews			
Date	Topic	Purpose	Length
08/26/2021	K-12 Experience and Growing up in [state redacted]	To account for her range of experiences as a student in K-12 and as a young person in the state.	1:07:55
09/09/2021	Teacher Education Experience	To account for her range of experiences in teacher education.	1:17:59
09/16/2021	Current Teaching Experience	To account for the range of teaching experiences, expectations, and obstacles she is encountering as a first-year teacher.	1:19:38
11/16/2021	Expectations/ Vision for the Year	To account for the discourses that have guided her visions of teaching and what it means to be a teacher.	1:17:18

Following interviews, I would transcribe and code using in vivo coding in order to honor Maggie’s own words (Charmaz, 2006; Saldana, 2013). During the first round of coding, I was able to process the stories Maggie told me and consider how her experiences have shaped her as a young adult and as a new teacher. I would use the time between interviews to follow up with her informally to ask for clarification when needed—this typically took place via text. This initial round of coding also allowed me to chunk the interview transcript into categories: I looked for materials she was accessing and moments she interacted with others, activities she was participating in or perpetuating in her classroom, words and phrases she consistently used to describe herself or her experiences, and roles and relationships that seemed relevant to her teaching (Gee & Green, 1998). The initial coding—Phase 1—will be further described when I explain my data analysis process in the next section.

Member checking is informal testing of information that provides a way for the researcher to ensure the accurate portrayal of participant voices through allowing participants to respond or correct the accuracy and interpretation of data (Lincoln & Guba, 1986; Stake, 1995). For this research, after each interview I sent my focal teacher screenshots of my interview analysis via text message. I followed up by asking open-ended questions to clarify something she said, verify or deny my analysis of a statement, or to ask a follow-up question. When sending these texts, I always began by saying: “this is a dissertation question”—and then sent a message after the picture and question to let her know that she could take her time getting back to me, we could talk in person if that would be easier, or she could respond via email if typing instead of texting would be quicker. I tried to be accommodating and only sent her post-interview follow-ups about pieces that I felt were of utmost importance to respect her time. The following is an example of a screenshot that I sent for clarification and follow-up questioning (the bold was my question, the rest her answer, and the yellow highlighting was part of my coding process):

Figure 1

Would you say this is getting closer to your vision of what teaching would be like?

This is a tough question. I feel that I have learned so much about teaching in the past year of my life. I realized that I was and still am very influenced by social media. The reality is that teaching is messy. It is not perfect, and it never will be perfect. Lessons fail. Lessons fail a lot. Lessons fail for many reasons. And there may be lessons in a row that fail. As an educator we must find what

Example of Follow-Up Message with Maggie

Along with this screenshot, I texted asking her if she thought social media made her think teaching would be different and if social media failed to make the realities of teaching clear. She chose to reply via text.

Classroom Observations and Field Notes

To capture Maggie's use of sociocultural resources and the social practices she enacted in her classroom, I relied on classroom observations. Field notes and observations are a key aspect of my study: what is observed and documented are essential pieces of data used for writing broader accounts of Maggie's life, actions, and moments of meaning making (Emerson et al., 2011, p. 15). In order to create an accurate picture of Maggie, I worked to write as "lushly" as possible: "as a writing strategy, description calls for concrete details rather than abstract generalizations, for sensory imagery rather than evaluative labels, and for immediacy through details presented at close range" (Emerson et al., 2011, p. 58).

For field notes, I used a word document and typed notes. For organizational purposes, my note taking was arranged in time-stamped segments. I have found that longer time intervals don't feel as organized to me when trying to record rich notes, so I moved to a new timestamp as I felt that the events in the classroom switched, conversations switched, or as new topics of interest emerged. I worked to record what I saw, heard, and noticed—I tried to be both literal (what I'm literally seeing happen) and attend to my own positioning as I am taking notes (was I considered a teacher, authority figure, or allowed access to unsanctioned practices typically hidden from teachers). At the end of each class, I spent as much time as I could recording a memo of the experience. These notes, memos, and jottings were written through my many lenses as a researcher.

Table 7: Observations	
Number of Observations	6 classroom observations
Length of Observations	One class period: approximately 50 minutes
Notes Taken	General observational notes including what the teacher was doing/saying, what students were doing/saying, appearance of the room, how students interacted with each other/with teacher.

Maggie and I decided to situate my observations in one class for consistency; I was sure to let students know that I was there working on my dissertation research and would be in the classroom often to observe their teacher. My presence did not seem to alter or disturb students much at all. The class she selected for observation was chosen because she considered it her most difficult class of the day. I had already been in this class several times observing, filming her teaching, and modeling some instructional practices as part of my position as an academic coach. Maggie suggested this class since those students already knew me, were comfortable with me being in their class, and seemed to take very little notice of me when I was present. This is an aspect where my position at the school became blurred with this study, but I don't see this as a limitation or negative impact on the study. Instead, these close observations (and interviews) only brought Maggie and I closer and allowed her to open up to me even more—this strengthened her trust in me as both a researcher and an academic coach at the school.

Documents and Artifacts (Personal Journal and Photographs/Screenshots)

Early in the school year, Maggie casually mentioned a personal journal that she had started at the beginning of the school year. She wanted to document her first year as a teacher so that she could look back on it in years to come and see how much she had grown. I told her that I thought that was a beautiful idea and I wish I had done that when I first started teaching. Much to

my surprise, she felt comfortable with me reading her journal entries and even asked me if I would like to use her journal in my study. She told me I was welcome to borrow it and said I could scan the pages. This became an unexpected piece of data in this study that has proven to be very valuable. I did not have a set schedule to scan her entries—usually she would let me know that she had written in it several times and ask if I wanted to scan it. I would then scan and return on the same day.

In total, I have 28 journal entries that are approximately one full page to a page in a half long. Maggie is a very descriptive writer and her journal entries tend to detail the emotions and experiences she was having: moments of excitement as a first year teacher, struggles she was facing at that particular moment, her short- and long-term visions, etc.

Table 8: Documents and Artifacts	
Personal Journal	
Number of Entries	28 journal entries
Average Length of Entries	1-1.5 pages
General Topics	Moments of excitement, worries, struggles, difficulty of being a first year teacher, etc.
Pictures of Maggie’s Classroom	
Number of Photos	9 photographs: different areas of her classroom—including her “people posters,” book shelves, her teacher desk, etc.

In addition to Maggie’s journal, I also took digital photographs of her classroom, have screenshots of YouTube accounts she follows, and have photos of assignments and activities she created and completed with her students. The photographs of her classroom include her bulletin board, posters on her wall, and seating arrangement.

Each document and artifact that I collected helps to bring together a complete picture of who Maggie is as a young adult and beginning teacher. Her journal provides a candid look into her internally persuasive dialogue, photos of her classroom reinforce the vision she has of herself as a new teacher in 2021, and the assignments and activities she creates demonstrate the value she puts on collaborative learning as well as the resources she draws from as she crafts her teaching beliefs and practices.

Analytic memos

As I was first teasing out my data sources, I had lumped memos in with field notes. However, I have made this a distinct section after considering how important these are to my study--and how they differ from field notes: field notes differ from analytic memos in that field notes contain researcher subjectivities (Saldana, 2013). In the moment of observing, it was certainly harder to keep those subjectivities in check, as I would find myself sometimes slipping into teacher or academic coach mode and my notes would become less subjective and more focused on aspects for mentoring. However, through writing analytic memos, I had a chance to address those lenses and reflect on how they may be shaping my study. In addition, analytic memos became reflections on my coding processes and choices, how my study began taking shape, and patterns, categories, subcategories that I noticed emerging (Saldana, 2016, p. 44). I see these memos as different from observational notes or memos, as they are specific, intentional “brain dumps” that focus heavily on data and analysis. Saldana goes on to point out that these memos serve many purposes in a study: they help track the evolution of a study and can even be woven into the final written report (p. 45). In these memos, I tried to not just summarize the data; instead, I followed Saldana’s suggestion and used them to document “future directions,

unanswered questions, frustrations with the analysis, insightful connections, and anything about the researched and researcher...” (p. 45).

Data Analysis

In this section, I explain my data analysis process. Data analysis is not a linear process. I reviewed the data, re-reviewed the data, revised my initial research questions after a third data review, conducted member-checking to verify what I thought I was understanding or when I needed further clarification, and then revisited data again...and again. Throughout the data review process, I kept in mind that Maggie has constructed her visions and her identity across time and in various places. As an interpretive researcher, my identity and understandings have been constructed in the very same way. We both came to this research (as a participant and a researcher) with different—yet similar—experiences that have shaped us and brought us to this point. My job as a researcher and interpreter has been to pull together these pieces into a purposeful story—I have pieced together Maggie’s chains of discourses and her utterances all while taking note of the things that she says—as well as the things that she is notably *not* saying.

Data analysis for this research happened in two phases: Phase 1 used Gee and Green’s (1998) MASS framework and Phase 2 layered on Hammerness’s (2001, 2003) framework of teacher visioning that I described in detail in Chapter 2. During the first phase, I used the MASS framework to break down my data into easier to manage categories. I selected this framework because it directly addresses my research questions that seek to understand how Maggie discursively constructs herself as a teacher—specifically looking at how she makes use of sociocultural resources, social practices, and the discourses she draws from to describe those experiences. During Phase 2, I layered Hammerness’s framework on top of the coding I had completed during Phase 1. I foregrounded specific moments that stood out as key pieces of

Maggie's vision and her identity building and added to that coding Hammerness's three visioning categories: focus, range, and distance. In layering these categories, I was able to construct "constellations" to create a more nuanced look at Maggie's identity development as an early-career teacher.

The following section is broken into two parts: Phase 1 that describes in greater detail Gee and Green's (1998) MASS framework and Phase 2 that shows an example of the layering process with Hammerness's (2001, 2003) framework. In each section, I describe my analytical process, how the strand relates to this study, and share an example of data and analysis.

Phase 1: MASS (Materials, Activity, Semiotics, and Sociocultural) Analysis Process

This study relies on an early-career teacher's narrative of herself and experiences in order to consider how she discursively constructs herself through use of sociocultural resources, social practices, and the discourses she draws from to describe her experiences. To tease out these nuanced elements that work to form her identity, I recognize that each utterance is neither contextually neutral or isolated (Bakhtin, 1981). Instead, every decision that Maggie makes, resources that she draws from, phrases that she uses, and communities she participates in are all in response to her own critical pedagogical discourses—those "threads of internalized dialogue that constitute teachers' narratives about their current and future teaching selves" (Thompson et al., 2013, p. 579).

In order to better understand how Maggie makes use of sociocultural resources, social practices, and the discourses she draws from as she describes her experiences, I utilized an analytical approach that examines the intersection of materials, activities, semiotics, and sociocultural aspects of discursive interactions. Specifically, using Gee and Green's (1998) MASS analysis provided me with an analytical framework to better tease out the ways in which

Maggie interacts with various components as she shapes herself as a teacher. An important note before I delve into describing each element, Gee and Green present these aspects as separate categories for heuristic purposes; however, they cannot be separated. For analysis, it's impossible to consider all aspects simultaneously; this being the case, I followed Gee and Green's note to foreground particular aspects while backgrounding others in particular moments.

When stepping into a more structured data analysis process, I drew from Gee and Green's (1998) MASS framework to guide me through coding. I used their questions as prompts to help me notice important moments and patterns emerging from the data. For this first round of structured coding, I relied on their definitions and questions to guide my work. As I began to get deeper into analysis, it became more useful to my study to refine their questions and shape them into questions specific to my research focus. I used their questions and definitions of each aspect to craft more nuanced questions to ask of my data.

The following subsections break down the four aspects of the MASS framework and show their relationship to this study. In each section, I will briefly describe the category, talk about what constitutes the category, and share an example from an interview transcript along with a sample analysis of that coded excerpt. For simplicity and continuity, I chose to pull pieces from Interview #1 when Maggie and I talked about growing up in Appalachia. These pieces will be developed in more detail in Chapter 4.

Materials

In Gee and Green's (1998) framework, the first aspect they lay out, materials, refers to the resources that are present during an interaction. Specifically, materials can be a variety of things—both physical and abstract that inform how participants in a given situation interact. In a

school setting the materials could be considered: textbooks, worksheets, activities, those involved in the activity, room decorations, the location of the activity (considering both time and space), etc. For this study, Materials emerged as a key aspect of their framework, as Maggie often would place heavy emphasis on items, symbols, and the value of these materials in the vision of herself that she hoped to project. This piece of the framework allowed me to focus on those specific materials and how she either took up or rejected their meaning—or perceived meaning—in her personal experiences growing up and as a new teacher.

Table 9: Data Analysis Questions Using the MASS Framework—Materials			
Definition	Adapted Questions	Data Sample	Sample Analysis
“The <i>material aspect</i> consists of actors, place (space), time, and objects present (or referred to) during interaction” (Gee & Green, 1998, p. 134).	<p>What meaning and value does Maggie attach to places, time, objects, artifacts, and institutions relevant in this situation?</p> <p>How is Maggie interacting with members of different communities?</p>	<p>“...when two of my friends started driving, that was when we got more freedom to go and do things.” (Interview #1)</p> <p>“I look everywhere else and I'm like, “Why could I not have been in New York City or Los Angeles or Pittsburgh or even [named the town where the study takes place—redacted] because we don't have resources?”...I grew up, got into technology, got on Facebook and Instagram and Twitter and saw the other opportunities that other people had. That's what made me jealous.” (Interview #1)</p> <p>“My college roommates came into college with over 20 credit hours. I came in with six. And they said, ‘Yeah, we had dual credit and AP.’ We didn't have that. We can't even pass a levy. We didn't</p>	<p>–Drivers license serves as a tangible piece of independence</p> <p>–Perception that people in other places have more opportunities than she did in her small town; perceives those opportunities as better than what she experienced</p> <p>–Social media: emerged as a major point of connection for Maggie. In this instance, social media served as a window to the things that other kids her age had.</p> <p>–Importantly, she named the materials that she <i>didn't</i> have—</p>

		<p>even have pencils with erasers. We didn't have technology—just a computer lab.” (Interview #1)</p> <p>“...they're doing all these things and they have all these courses and these kids have more money and they can do this and they can do that and they have the target and they have the movie theater.” (Interview #1)</p> <p>“To do anything fun we had to leave the county. We had an IGA for a while, we had a Food Fresh for a while, maybe 10 years ago. Now we have a Shop and Save... They closed our coffee shop a few years ago. But we still have a McDonalds, Subway, and Hardees.” (Interview #1)</p>	<p>not just the things that she did have access to.</p> <p>–Repetition of “we didn't have”: she heavily relies on noting deficits.</p> <p>–Naming of specific stores that her town once had but have since left or were replaced</p> <p>–Naming stores/fast food stops that remain</p> <p>–Both of these instances of naming were done to illustrate how little her town has</p>
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In our first interview, Maggie talked about two specific moments when materials impacted her early identity formation: getting a driver's license and the material items that she *didn't* have access to that she discovered other kids her age had. Getting a driver's license represented freedom and ability to get to neighboring counties or towns that provided the things she and her friends wanted to do: malls, stores, movie theaters, etc. In other words, she was able to seek out the things that she found she was missing out on in her own county. Social media emerged as a major point of connection for Maggie from the time she was a teenager through her adulthood and as a first year teacher. This connection was a point of access to envisioning the materials she did not have access to as a teenager. Further, her use of social media began to allow her form and shape her vision of what it means to be a teacher—and how that appears on the

outside. Overall, most of what Maggie described framed her childhood as a place of lack—she didn’t often have what she wanted.

Activity

The second aspect they lay out, activity, refers to the chain of events that unfold during an encounter. Much like Bakhtin’s (1981) theory of discourse and chains of dialogue, chains of events are always interconnected and are both informed by and inform the participant(s) identities. Often borne of the place’s history and rituals attached to that location, activities can often be performed in a rote, robotic manner—in other words, activities performed just because “this is how we have always done things.” For this study, activity emerges as a way to look at the triumphs, struggles, obstacles Maggie has faced; this piece of the framework allowed me to focus on specific moments where Maggie interacted or reacted to certain situations, other people’s expectations, and some tough decisions she found herself making.

Table 10: Data Analysis Questions Using the MASS Framework–Activity			
Definition	Adapted Questions	Data Sample	Sample Analysis
“The <i>activity aspect</i> refers to the specific social activity or interconnected chains of activity (events) in which the participants are engaging; activities (events) are, in turn, made up of a sequence of actions” (Gee & Green, 1998, p. 134).	How is Maggie choosing to spend time in situations? How does Maggie react to activities and sub-activities in given situations?	“To do anything fun we had to leave the county...” (Interview #1) “To get groceries we had to drive 30 minutes each way to get to every county surrounding us. Walmart, the mall—both 45 minutes away. The movie theater is 30-45 minutes away. So this is why we were bored because we couldn’t drive to do anything fun. Everything was so far away...And one of my friends, one of my best friends, left—went out of state and has no desire to be back here. My	–Activity of traveling for daily necessities caused boredom and resentment about place from Maggie and her friends. –Activity of traveling out of the community informed by perception that the local community had

		<p>other two really good friends that I've been best friends with forever, they are staying here.” (Interview #1)</p> <p>“There are times I felt trapped by my family and by my community to stay in [state redacted]...I think we are being set up to fail in [state]. That is because we don't have resources, we don't have money, we don't have opportunities...They're trying to get people to come to the state, but they're not benefitting the [people from the state] that are already here. They're not providing things for young [people from the state] to stay here.” (Interview #1)</p> <p>“I appreciate it here much more now when I think about it. I have made my best friends here. My family is here and I feel connected. I feel welcomed. I feel part of this culture and I understand this culture more. I understand how we got to this point. So, yes, I can be frustrated and mad at it, but I think I have to appreciate more of where we're heading. I think I have more hope for the state. Having hope that we can get ourselves into a place where our current generations and future generations don't feel so bad about where they come from.” (Interview #1)</p>	<p>little to offer young people.</p> <p>--Activity of young people making the decision to leave or stay</p> <p>--Activity of feeling trapped and set up to fail in the state: this piece relates to causes of out-migration of young people. She lists reasons from her perspective.</p> <p>--Activity of hope and appreciation for the state and where it's heading: first time seeing her point to positives instead of just deficits.</p>
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In this example, I selected the adapted question: How is Maggie choosing to spend time in situations? In the data sample, Maggie frames the activity of traveling to other counties as a *need* due to the lack of community resources within her own hometown. Such activity as long

drives to access needed resources—like grocery stores—shaped her perception of her community as lacking. The specific statement, “Everything was so far away” (Interview #1) then led to a discussion about both herself and her friend's hopes of moving out of the state. This example also reinforces her viewpoint of the state as a place lacking many things—this theme will be further developed in later sections through more examples.

Semiotics

The third piece of the framework, semiotics, refers to the signs and symbols present in an encounter—along with their interpretations. There are multiple facets to a sign: the signifier (such as a word or sign), the signified (the concept or meaning the sign represents), and the referent (what the sign is referring to). Semiotics, much like the other pieces of this framework, often are informed by history and place—and that emerges as a key piece of data in this research. For this study, semiotics emerge as a major data source, as Maggie often refers to cultural models and symbols in relation to Appalachia.

Table 11: Data Analysis Questions Using the MASS Framework–Semiotics			
Definition	Adapted Questions	Data Sample	Sample Analysis
“The <i>semiotic aspect</i> refers to situated meanings and cultural models connected to various ‘sign systems’ such as language, gestures, images, or other symbolic systems” (Gee & Green, 1998, p, 134).	<p>What situated meanings of words or phrases does Maggie construct?</p> <p>What discourses that are being produced or reproduced does Maggie seem to take</p>	<p>“People from here always say they can't amount to more. People I knew said, “Well, I'm from [state redacted] I can't do any better. I'll just do what my parents are doing. I can't do any better than going down to the coal mines. I can't do any better than graduating high school and working on the family farm. I can't do any</p>	<p>– “...can’t amount to more.” because you’re from a certain place, you are literally worth less “can’t amount to more” than someone from another place</p> <p>–Repeating pattern of “I can’t do any better” to frame the activities of: pursuing parent activities, coal mining, farming, not pursuing higher education. Framing these activities as low-status.</p>

	up, reject, or transform?	<p>better than this. And it's terrible.” (Interview #1)</p> <p>“I love the people in my life, but before I went to college I was so very closed off from what I understood about the world because everything I ever needed to know was in 343 square miles. And I'm not that person anymore.” (Interview #1)</p>	<p>- Causal relationship between home state within central Appalachia and low status activities/employment and lack of options.</p> <p>–Maggie rejects the discourse that anyone from Appalachia is worth less or is destined to a particular occupation.</p> <p>– “I’m not that person anymore” points to the idea that once she left her hometown she was able to have a more open mind about things–she “got out” of her hometown and, therefore, was able to grow as a person. She transcended the ways of thinking that were circulated in her hometown.</p> <p>–Overall, language that points to a deficit narrative of the state/region.</p>
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In this data sample, I selected data that corresponds with the adapted question: What discourses that are being produced or reproduced does Maggie seem to take up, reject, or transform? Often Maggie would refer to the ways in which people from Appalachia are described by media or outsiders. In these examples, discourses about Appalachia circulate around her and address her indirectly, but she never points to a moment where she was directly addressed by these discourses. In other words, she never explicitly shares a time that she was directly defined by one of the stereotypes she shares. However, she does feel indirectly addressed, so she feels the need to respond. Further, she adopts language that continues to push her framing of the state in a deficit perspective: she repeats several times “I can’t do any

better...” as she voices people from the state. Following this, she notes that these people would just work in “lesser” jobs: coal mining, work on the family farm, etc.

Sociocultural

The final aspect of Gee and Green’s (1998) framework, sociocultural, refers to roles and relationships, cultural knowledge, identities, etc. A key facet of this study, the sociocultural strand of the framework was often foregrounded. This piece of the framework helped me focus on the specific moments when Maggie discussed her experiences with K-12 schooling, growing up in Appalachia, and as a first year teacher through the lenses of culture, communities, and place.

Table 12: Data Analysis Questions Using the MASS Framework–Sociocultural			
Definition	Adapted Questions	Data Sample	Sample Analysis
<p>“The <i>sociocultural aspect</i> refers to the personal, social, and cultural knowledge, feelings, and identities (cognition, affect, and identity are all equally important here) relevant in the interaction, including sociocultural knowledge about sign systems, activities, and the material world” (Gee & Green, 1998, p. 134).</p>	<p>What roles and relationships (past, present, and visioned/future) are important to Maggie?</p> <p>What social and cultural knowledge seem to be important to the situation?</p> <p>How is Maggie’s identity constructed through interactions among members?</p> <p>How is Maggie’s identity transformed by</p>	<p>“When you get older, you start hearing things about Appalachia that are negative like all of the stereotypes: you’re a bunch of hillbillies; you don’t know anything; you’re not smart; you’re all meth heads; just a bunch of rednecks; you’re good for nothing.” (Interview #1)</p> <p>“You look at the media and it’s just one thing after another. We have an opioid epidemic, but they just opened a new national park. And, it’s like, what are our</p>	<p>–Voicing the stereotypes that are perpetuated about Appalachian people</p> <p>–Showing her rejection of this value that is attached to the region</p> <p>–Pushing back on these ascribed meanings</p> <p>–Noting what she perceives as the state’s priorities: bringing in money. She sets up the juxtaposition–tourism and money vs. taking necessary steps to help those who are trapped in the cycle of opioid (and other) addiction. I don’t think she is saying that</p>

	<p>the actions of the event?</p>	<p>priorities? It seems like money. We bring in money from tourism, so I guess that's what the government wants to focus on. Not helping people." (Interview #1)</p> <p>"The Appalachian lifestyle can just make us close-minded. And there's always been this idea that the mountains are closing us in—you can't go out because we are trapped in. And that's not true. Didn't we become a state because we didn't agree with what was happening in the rest of the country? Didn't we cause the largest labor union rise in the United States history? We can do it. But...then things happen like we get a TV show called Buckwild on MTV. Then there is a girl from Appalachia on 16 and Pregnant. The White family and their drama is blown up and mocked. We have the Hatfields and McCoys. And then, of course, Baby Dog." (Interview #1)</p>	<p>tourism isn't important—just that priorities seem out of order. One of the two seems to get the most attention and the attention might need to lie elsewhere for the future of the people in the state.</p> <p>—She rejects the narrative that people in the state are close-minded and stuck: cites why the state was formed and the uprise of labor unions—but then she counters it with the idea that the media keeps this sentiment alive—tv shows and sensationalized personalities that continue the narrative that the state is full of all of the stereotypes she lists prior.</p>
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In this example, I selected the adapted question: How is Maggie's identity constructed through interactions among members? In the data sample, Maggie talks about her experience with hearing negative stereotypes about her home state as she grew up: "When you get older, you start hearing things about Appalachia that are negative like all of the stereotypes: you're a bunch of hillbillies; you don't know anything; you're not smart; you're all meth heads; just a bunch of rednecks." (Interview #1) Here, Maggie is describing the ascription of labels—terms like redneck, hillbillies, meth heads, etc. These terms and labels are ascribed to the region to symbolize a lack of morals, community exceptionality, lack of education, etc. In her naming of these stereotypes, Maggie is careful to voice them as someone else who imposes these names on people from the region. Her voicing points to the notion that these are not the values and definitions she takes up or wants for herself or the state—she is rejecting this naming.

Phase 2: Visioning

In Chapter 2, I described Hammerness's (2001, 2003) framework for teasing out the nuances of a teacher's vision. In this framework, Hammerness uses three categories to create what she termed a "constellation" of vision: focus, range, and distance. As a reminder to my reader, focus is the area of interest within the vision—the clarity of the vision can vary from blurry to sharply defined with specificity; range is the field of vision—narrow to broad; and distance refers to the measure of how close or far the gap is between current reality and the ideals of the teacher's vision.

I chose to use this framework for my second round of coding in order to further tease out—at a very granular level—the nuances of Maggie's experiences. Once I had coded to pull forward the ways in which Maggie discursively named her experiences, I applied the lens of visions for a more detailed analysis with a specific eye to how those pieces worked to build

Maggie’s vision of herself. This allowed me to further break down and analyze how she was discussing these moments including how clear her vision was and where she was in the process of enacting this vision.

In this section, each table will use the same data sample from the previous subsection and will remind my reader of the analysis work I did with that sample. To each table, I have added three new columns: focus, range, and distance. These sections will display how I layered on Hammerness’s (2001, 2003) framework to delve even deeper into data. As I mentioned in the last subsection, these bits of data and analytical samples are just that—samples that will be further developed in Chapter 4.

Materials and Visioning

In this constellation, Maggie’s vision is very sharply focused on a narrow aspect of growing up in Appalachia and she is very close to this material aspect. For this example, I layered Hammerness’s three categories, focus, range and distance, onto a previously shown example: Maggie’s discussion about growing up in a small town with very limited resources.

Table 13: Vision #1: Relationship to Appalachia—Materials and Visioning Data Analysis – Layering Visioning Framework (Hammerness, 2001, 2003)			
Data Sample	Focus	Range	Distance
<p>“...when two of my friends started driving, that was when we got more freedom to go and do things.” (Interview #1)</p> <p>“I look everywhere else and I’m like, “Why could I not have been in New York City or Los Angeles or Pittsburgh or even</p>	<p>Sharp:</p> <p>In these examples, Maggie’s focus is sharply centered on all of the things that other kids her age were able to access and she perceived as lacking in her hometown. Maggie specifically names things like stores, restaurants, college</p>	<p>Narrow:</p> <p>Maggie’s conversation about the specific places and things lacking in her hometown point to a very narrow focus on the things that she <i>didn’t</i> have growing up. Her vision of her</p>	<p>Close:</p> <p>Maggie very closely felt (and still speaks passionately about) the lack of opportunity she and her friends had growing up. This is a very close and upsetting piece of her childhood that she speaks to with</p>

<p>[named the town where the study takes place—redacted] because we don't have resources?"...I grew up, got into technology, got on Facebook and Instagram and Twitter and saw the other opportunities that other people had. That's what made me jealous.” (Interview #1)</p> <p>“My college roommates came into college with over 20 credit hours. I came in with six. And they said, ‘Yeah, we had dual credit and AP.’ We didn't have that. We can’t even pass a levy. We didn’t even have pencils with erasers. We didn’t have technology—just a computer lab.” (Interview #1)</p> <p>“...they're doing all these things and they have all these courses and these kids have more money and they can do this and they can do that and they have the target and they have the movie theater.” (Interview #1)</p> <p>“To do anything fun we had to leave the county. We had an IGA for a while, we had a Food Fresh for a while, maybe 10 years ago.</p>	<p>coursework, and forms of entertainment that were missing from her childhood experience. She also specifically talks about the acquisition of a driver’s license that opened up travel and gave her a sense of independence and connectivity.</p>	<p>childhood is seemingly viewed through a deficit lens.</p>	<p>clarity—specifically naming what she didn’t have and the modes in which she discovered this lack of opportunity: social media.</p>
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Now we have a Shop and Save...They closed our coffee shop a few years ago. But we still have a McDonalds, Subway, and Hardees.” (Interview #1)			
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After layering on the categories of visioning, I was able to construct a constellation to describe Maggie’s vision of this category: sharp, narrow, and close. Maggie’s focus for this sample piece of data is very sharp—she specifically names the material that allowed her and her friends to find a little bit of freedom: a driver’s license. In naming this specific object, her focus was very narrow—a license means more opportunity and she spoke about this with clarity and a closeness that could only come from a first-hand experience—an experience that is not so far removed for her, as she would have experienced this milestone just a few years ago at this point.

Activity and Visioning

In this constellation, Maggie’s vision is again sharp, narrow, and close. This sample of visioning analysis is layered on top of work previously done that focused on activity—in this case, the necessity for Maggie and her friends and family to drive long distances for basic necessities and entertainment. For Maggie and her friends, this disconnect and lack of opportunity led to boredom and, ultimately, consideration of moving out of the state.

Table 14: Vision #1: Relationship to Appalachia—Activity and Visioning Data Analysis – Layering Visioning Framework (Hammerness, 2001, 2003)			
Data Sample	Focus	Range	Distance
“To do anything fun we had to leave the county...” (Interview #1)	Sharp: In this example, Maggie elaborates on	Narrow: Maggie’s discussion in	Close: Lack of opportunity

<p>“To get groceries we had to drive 30 minutes each way to get to every county surrounding us. Walmart, the mall—both 45 minutes away. The movie theater is 30-45 minutes away. So this is why we were bored because we couldn’t drive to do anything fun. Everything was so far away...And one of my friends, one of my best friends, left—went out of state and has no desire to be back here. My other two really good friends that I’ve been best friends with forever, they are staying here.” (Interview #1)</p> <p>“There are times I felt trapped by my family and by my community to stay in [state redacted]...I think we are being set up to fail in [state redacted]. That is because we don’t have resources, we don’t have money, we don’t have opportunities...They’re trying to get people to come to the state, but they’re not benefitting the [people from the state] that are already here. They’re not providing things for young [people from the state] to stay here.” (Interview #1)</p> <p>“I appreciate it here much more now when I think about it. I have made my best friends here. My family is here and I feel connected. I feel welcomed. I feel part of this culture and I understand this culture more. I understand how we got to this point. So, yes, I</p>	<p>three aspects of growing up in Appalachia: the distance (measured in time) to get to stores, the feeling of being trapped in the state (trapped by several forces), and the hope she has for the state. Overall, her conversation about these aspects is very sharply defined and specifically discussed—she names the reasons for her frustrations and elaborates on the pieces she feels are lacking in the region. While her discussion about why she has hope for the state gets a bit fuzzy, she is still able to point to strong connections and understanding of the culture as concrete reasons why she, personally, appreciates where she comes from.</p>	<p>these parts of our interview all lead directly to her points about young people and their decisions to stay or leave the state. She points to these specific examples all rooted in deficits of the region as a key reason for people wanting to move away.</p>	<p>emerges as a key theme in this portion of our interview: Maggie feels very close to this issue—as this is something she has grappled with herself (and is still questioning).</p>
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can be frustrated and mad at it, but I think I have to appreciate more of where we're heading. I think I have more hope for the state. Having hope that we can get ourselves into a place where our current generations and future generations don't feel so bad about where they come from.” (Interview #1)			
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Another topic close to Maggie, this piece of data is very sharply defined and covers a narrow topic: the distance to experience opportunities like other teenagers. These data samples point to a struggle that Maggie noted throughout interviews: the decision to stay in the state or leave—following the pattern of out-migration the state is seeing. Much like the previous sample, this one is also still very close to Maggie, as she is still working through her own decision as an early-career teacher whether she wants to remain in this state or move away so that she can experience other things—often noting the deficits of the region as reasons to leave.

Semiotics and Visioning

In this constellation, Maggie’s visions seem to shift: her visions are now very blurry, broad, and far away from her own reality. This sample of visioning is layered on top of data that shows Maggie discussing the narrative of the state that perpetuates the idea that people from here “can’t amount to much.” In this example, Maggie is sharing a deficit narrative of the region that is often voiced—and during the interview, she takes up that voice herself. As will be discussed in Chapter 4, this blurry, broad, distant vision of Appalachia is nonetheless present in informing her own pedagogical decisions, her use of classroom materials, and curriculum.

Table 15: Vision #1: Relationship to Appalachia—Semiotics and Visioning Data Analysis – Layering Visioning Framework (Hammerness, 2001, 2003)			
Data Sample	Focus	Range	Distance

<p>“People from here always say they can't amount to more. People I knew said, “Well, I'm from [state redacted] I can't do any better. I'll just do what my parents are doing. I can't do any better than going down to the coal mines. I can't do any better than graduating high school and working on the family farm. I can't do any better than this. And it's terrible.” (Interview #1)</p> <p>“I love the people in my life, but before I went to college I was so very closed off from what I understood about the world because everything I ever needed to know was in 343 square miles. And I'm not that person anymore.” (Interview #1)</p>	<p>Blurry:</p> <p>When discussing people's trajectory in the state, Maggie spoke in a blurry and somewhat abstract way: she voiced other people and how she says they talk about their futures. She repeated the phrase “I cant...” several times seemingly creating a deficit narrative that she assume people in the state take up. Further, in her personal reflection where she states “I am not that person anymore,” she does not elaborate about what she means here—instead, it is assumed she is talking about larger worldly concepts since she notes “I was so very closed off from what I understood about the world...”</p>	<p>Broad:</p> <p>Maggie speaks broadly about people from Appalachia in this statement. She uses phrases like “people from here always say” in a very general sense. She also is very broad in her statement about what she understood about the world—implying certain topics that were narrowly viewed in her hometown.</p>	<p>Far Away:</p> <p>While Maggie said that people she knows have said these things, she still distances herself from this narrative. She voices other people and then goes on to say “it's terrible.” Presumably, she is implying that it's terrible that people from the region are viewed in this way.</p>
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While this topic is close to Maggie in the sense that she is from the region, she distances herself from this narrative as she voices other people making these comments. Further, her vision is both blurry and broad. Instead of speaking narrowly as she had in the previous examples, she is now talking about the region as a whole and her discussion is very blurry. While she names specific instances of people she has known making these comments, she is very abstract in her

remarks—never really addressing the issues directly or giving commentary about the implications of the deficit perspectives about Appalachia.

Sociocultural and Visioning

In the final constellation example, Maggie’s visions were again blurry, broad, and far away. When coded and analyzed using Gee and Green’s (1998) framework, this piece of data documented Maggie’s rejection of the values that are placed on the region by outsiders: harmful stereotypes that are continually perpetuated. She specifically named several examples during one interview, discussing how exhausting these ascribed meanings become.

Table 16: Vision #1: Relationship to Appalachia—Sociocultural and Visioning Data Analysis – Layering Visioning Framework (Hammerness, 2001, 2003)			
Data Sample	Focus	Range	Distance
<p>“When you get older, you start hearing things about Appalachia that are negative like all of the stereotypes: you're a bunch of hillbillies; you don't know anything; you're not smart; you're all meth heads; just a bunch of rednecks; you're good for nothing.” (Interview #1)</p> <p>“You look at the media and it's just one thing after another. We have an opioid epidemic, but they just opened a new national park. And, it's like, what are our priorities? It seems like money. We bring in money from</p>	<p>Sharp:</p> <p>Maggie spoke specifically and with direct language about the way people from Appalachia are often described, her perceived priorities of the state government, and the mind-set of those in the state. She specifically lays out her perception of how Appalachia is portrayed in the media—from how the government wants to spin the state to how personalities and TV shows work to define the region.</p>	<p>Broad:</p> <p>In this piece of our interview, Maggie speaks broadly about the region and the issues that follow the people who live here: stereotypes, the opioid crisis, and the perceived mind-set of those who live here.</p>	<p>Far Away:</p> <p>Maggie feels very close to the stereotypes, the decisions of the government, and the media's perpetuation of what it means to be from Appalachia—but at the same time, she speaks in a general sense and takes up the voice of someone else several times. Her comments remain very general and surface-level—often using the term “they” and the general term “we” when describing things happening in the state—distancing herself from the issues and the outcomes of decisions.</p>

<p>tourism, so I guess that's what the government wants to focus on. Not helping people." (Interview #1)</p> <p>"The Appalachian lifestyle can just make us close-minded. And there's always been this idea that the mountains are closing us in—you can't go out because we are trapped in. And that's not true. Didn't we become a state because we didn't agree with what was happening in the rest of the country? Didn't we cause the largest labor union rise in the United States history? We can do it. But...then things happen like we get a TV show called Buckwild on MTV. Then there is a girl from Appalachia on 16 and Pregnant. The White family and their drama is blown up and mocked. We have the Hatfields and McCoys. And then, of course, Baby Dog." (Interview #1)</p>			
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Upon layering Hammerness's visioning framework to this data sample, it became clear that Maggie was once again far away when speaking broadly about Appalachia: her comments were all very general and surface-level—almost just parroting back things that she has heard but never digging into the nuances of these stereotypes. Her vision wavers between sharp and blurry,

as she can specifically recall these names and indicates how hurtful these stereotypes can be—but she never does describe her place in this perpetuation or how she might be part of the solution as a teacher.

Ethical Considerations

Limitations of Time

Data collection took place during the first semester of the school year. I collected data as I was able throughout the semester. Data collection primarily took place in the bounded space of a classroom and school settings. These are practical decisions that, of course, impacted the data that was collected. A longer study to trace the growth of a first-year teacher's visioning of self would provide a more thorough picture of how that growth or evolution takes place.

Chapter 4: Findings

This chapter provides a more in-depth look at the findings of this study that I constructed through the analysis process. As a reminder, this study seeks to understand how an early-career teacher in Appalachia discursively constructs visions of herself as a teacher, the sociocultural resources and social practices she makes use of, and the discourses she draws from as she describes her experiences.

This chapter is divided into three sections that follow the major themes built through my data analysis: Maggie's relationship to Appalachia, her desire to create a perfect classroom, and the self-censorship she felt while making decisions about the outward appearance of her classroom and her teaching practices. I made use of Hammerness's (2003) description of visions as constellations—each defining the focus, range, and distance of Maggie's vision. Breaking Maggie's visions down into nuanced constellations allowed me to take a fine-grained look at the discourses she takes up or rejects, the voices she draws from as she constructs her identity, and the ways she describes her experiences—including words and phrases she borrows from others, ideas she perpetuates, and discourses that address her.

Vision 1: Maggie's Relationship to Appalachia

Focus	Range	Distance
Sharp	Narrow	Close

When describing her relationship with Appalachia, Maggie's vision takes a distinct path: Sharp, Narrow, and Close. Her vision often takes a stance of critique—she critiques both the cultural and economic discourses of Appalachia in a way that is sometimes messy, as it seems that she is often in the midst of participating in the very discourses that she is pushing against. When describing her experiences, her vision of the consequences of living here is very sharp and

focused—she speaks with clarity and directness. Her range is narrow, as she tends to focus on the economic depression of the state and the resources that were lacking when she was growing up and continue to be missing. Finally, she is very close to this issue—as this is something she is still watching unfold in her hometown, the community where she teaches, and the state and region as a whole. The following section will break her vision into two categories: a critique of cultural discourses and her critique of economic discourses.

A Critique of Cultural Discourses: “I understand this culture more. I understand how we got to this point.”

The prevailing image of Appalachia is continually constructed through representations in media and literature and has, in turn, become the long-perpetuated, historical and authoritative discourse defining the region. Popular culture relies heavily on images of hillbillies and rednecks—savage, uneducated members of society. Over time, this archetype has led to lingering images, perceptions, and opinions of Appalachia (Catte, 2018; Shaprio, 1978). Maggie begins her critique of Appalachian cultural discourse by noting her place in this discourse:

I love the people in my life, but before I went to college I was so very closed off from what I understood about the world because everything I ever needed to know was in 343 square miles. And I'm not that person anymore. (Interview #1)

She acknowledges that prior to attending college (a small college in the next town over), she had a limited understanding of the world due to her small range of experiences—a lack of experience that restricted her ability to cultivate a wider worldview. She ends this piece by noting that she is not the same person she was before: she evolved and grew as an individual—because she was able to “get out” of her small town. In this case, Maggie is critiquing her small-town’s deficits, their insular ideologies, that restricted her understanding of the world. In making this statement, she is distinguishing herself from the people who were “left behind” in her hometown—she is both

being supported by and participating in the circulating neoliberal discourse to help create this distinction.

The words and phrases Maggie uses when describing the culture of Appalachia are often borrowed from other people—almost “sound bytes” she may have heard on television or on social media. She notes the oppressive stereotypes that have defined the area—a tiring side-effect of neoliberal discourse:

When you get older, you start hearing things about Appalachia that are negative like all of the stereotypes: you're a bunch of hillbillies; you don't know anything; you're not smart; you're all meth heads; just a bunch of rednecks; you're good for nothing. And you just get tired of it. And, you look at the media and it's just one thing after another. (Interview #1)

This discourse of Appalachia relies on blaming individuals and culture and abdicating governmental and corporate responsibility. In this example, Maggie listed several stereotypes that circulate about Appalachia—but, it is important to note that she did not say that these descriptions or words are attached to her, specifically. Instead, she names them—and in that naming—shows that she has a connection to them, as these descriptions circulate closely around her. She is distanced from these stereotypes in that she does not specifically point out an instance when she has been directly impacted by these words; however, in this naming, she is showing that she has felt addressed by these terms, as they are part of the authoritative discourse of the region.

Repetition becomes a noticeable pattern in the way Maggie speaks about Appalachia. Her words almost become lyrical and poetic as she repeats phrases to make her point about how she perceives the opportunities and outlooks for people in her home state:

People from here always say they can't amount to more. People I knew said, “Well, I'm from [State] I can't do any better. I'll just do what my parents are doing. I can't do any better than going down to the coal mines. I can't do any better than graduating high

school and working on the family farm. I can't do any better than this. And it's terrible. (Interview #1)

Oh well, you're from this county. Well, you're destined to go down into the mines. Your destiny is to do this, you're destined to do that. You can't get out of this little town because you weren't given what you needed to get out. (Interview #1)

In both of these examples, Maggie repeats phrases that continue to reaffirm the deficit perspective and perceptions circulated and perpetuated by residents of the state: “I can’t do any better...” and the idea of destiny determining someone’s outcome leading them to not be able to “get out.” In both examples, she not only repeats phrases, but she also brings forward the neoliberal concept that *real* life happens in places other than rural locations, small farms, and in places that offer careers outside of those considered “trades.” Specifically, she puts forth the idea that since someone is from a particular place, they are literally worth *less* than someone from another place. Her repetition of the phrase “I can’t do any better” further also sets up a neoliberal framing that positions the people she voiced in her example as taking up lower-status jobs: coal mining, farming, not pursuing higher education—thus, reflecting the authoritative discourse that people from Appalachia are destined to take up a particular occupation and have a particular outcome.

Finally, Maggie’s critique of the cultural discourse of Appalachia led her to discussing the future of the state. She began by noting that while Appalachians are perceived as being closed-minded, history has shown otherwise—Appalachians have actually been very forward thinking throughout history:

The Appalachian lifestyle can just make us close-minded. And there's always been this idea that the mountains are closing us in—you can't go out because we are trapped in. And that's not true. Didn't we become a state because we didn't agree with what was happening in the rest of the country? Didn't we cause the largest labor union rise in the United States history? We can do it. But...then things happen like we get a TV show called “Buckwild” on MTV. Then there is a girl from Appalachia on “16 and Pregnant.”

The White family and their drama is blown up and mocked. We have the Hatfields and McCoys. And then, of course, Baby Dog. (Interview #1)

She ends by bringing it back around to juxtapose that forward thinking by showing the clash that media has created in this discourse: the TV shows and personalities mentioned are very stereotypical, often comedic and exaggerated portrayals of Appalachia.

Maggie goes on to note her feelings about the state and why she has chosen to remain here—she shows a sharp sense of connection that is grounded in an interactional, relational connection to the state through her friends and family:

I appreciate it here much more now when I think about it. I have made my best friends here. My family is here and I feel connected. I feel welcomed. I feel part of this culture and I understand this culture more. I understand how we got to this point. So, yes, I can be frustrated and mad at it, but I think I have to appreciate more of where we're heading. I think I have more hope for the state. Having hope that we can get ourselves into a place where our current generations and future generations don't feel so bad about where they come from. (Interview #1)

This sample—like the previous one—brings forward her nuanced understanding of the state's history and how that has shaped current events: "I understand how we got to this point." She draws from her own study of historical events to note that "we can do it"—her acknowledgement of the rise of labor unions and the historical events that led to the formation of the state points to the roots of the region being ones of strength, resilience, and refusing to be pushed over. Her use of the word "we" places herself in this collective that will be here to change things for the future. This moment of critique is suggestive of her views of people drawing together and staying connected in order to rebuild the state; in other words, she considers the people of the state as the ones with potential for radicalism. She mentions future generations, a nod to the state's young people as the source of her hope. As a young teacher, this points to a sociopolitical element in her purpose as an educator—she could be one to help prepare this generation of future leaders.

A Critique of Economic Discourses: “I think we are being set up to fail...”

One theme that runs heavily through Maggie’s narration about Appalachia is her struggles as a young person living in the state. In the midst of feeling isolated, Maggie found social media to be a major point of connection. Social media ended up serving as a window to economic affordances that young people in other places had that Maggie did not have the chance to experience:

I look everywhere else and I'm like, “Why could I not have been in New York City or Los Angeles or Pittsburgh or even [named the town where the study takes place—redacted] because we don't have resources?”...I grew up, got into technology, got on Facebook and Instagram and Twitter and saw the other opportunities that other people had. That's what made me jealous. (Interview #1)

In this case, social media (Facebook, Youtube, Instagram, and Twitter) became both a source of knowledge and frustration for Maggie. She was able to see more clearly the things that were not available to her—continuing to build the economic deficit perspective of her hometown. Not only does social media open these ideas to Maggie, but she specifically revoices her younger self wishing that she could have lived in another place for greater opportunities—including listing the town where this study takes place, a neighboring town to where she grew up.

In our first interview, Maggie spoke specifically about the lack of economic and educational resources she experienced when she was younger:

We are in rural [State]. To do anything fun we had to leave the county. We had an IGA [grocery store] for a while, we had a Food Fresh [grocery store] for a while, maybe 10 years ago, give or take. We now have a Shop and Save [grocery store]. Basically, we have nothing. They closed our one coffee shop a few years ago. We have McDonald's, a Subway, and Hardees...To get groceries we had to drive 30 minutes each way to get to every county surrounding us. Walmart, the mall—both 45 minutes away. The movie theater is 30-45 minutes away. So this is why we were bored because we couldn't drive to do anything fun. Everything was so far away. (Interview #1)

In this examples, Maggie is defining her community—her place—in the state by what it *does not* have or what it *does not* offer: “Basically we have nothing...everything was so far away.” She

measures her frustration by the blocks of time it took to get to restaurants, stores, and entertainment—everything located at least a half-hour away from her. It can be inferred that Maggie’s hometown is facing a depressed economy that simply can’t sustain small, local businesses—in her examples listed, she names the corporate chain stores that have opened and closed in her community as well as a coffee shop that was likely locally owned. Her litany of closed businesses reflects her desire for a community with a variety of local businesses, and her disappointment in the reality of “not even a Walmart”: a community, from her perspective, defined by economic deficits. Her identification of these closed businesses reflects her own participation in neoliberal discourse. She is specifically naming corporate businesses that are absent in her community; in doing this, she is equating these businesses with success—and indicating that her community is, therefore, not successful. Additionally, this notation also indicates a loss of connection for her; her hometown has basic needs covered, but the locally owned businesses have disappeared that work to create that connection.

Maggie uses these deficits to frame her struggle to decide whether to remain in the state to teach or to leave, reflecting on-going patterns of out-migration from rural areas (Vazzana & Rudi-Poloshka, 2019). This pattern is of particular importance when thinking about the out-migration from rural areas of young adults, in particular. Maggie stated that prior to having a driver’s license: “That’s why half of the time we were bored...” Of course, she is talking about how she and her friends couldn’t drive anywhere prior to having a license, but this also brings up an important factor that young people consider when determining whether they want to remain in rural areas: the lack of amenities in the area including stores, restaurants, entertainment, airports, healthcare facilities, etc. Maggie went on to explain that “...when two of my friends started driving, that was when we got more freedom to go and do things.” (Interview #1). In this

instance, a driver's license became a tangible piece of independence for Maggie; she finally felt like she could experience things outside of what she had available in her hometown.

Maggie went on to describe why she thinks this out-migration is happening:

I think we're being set up to fail in [State]. And that is because we don't have resources, we don't have money, we don't have opportunities. But, they want us, you know, to stay here. Well, engineers, software designers, anything that requires high technology, anything that requires art, music, movies, whatever—they have to leave. And so, they're creating this cycle. (Interview #1)

What Maggie is describing here is commonly known in literature as “brain drain”; in a general sense, “brain drain” is when rural areas experience loss of educated, highly trained people; those who remain typically have less education, training, and earn lower incomes (Niccolai et al., 2022; Petrin et al., 2014; Vazzana & Rudi-Poloshka, 2019). Teachers in rural communities report the availability of community resources as a factor in deciding to remain in the community (Seelig & McCabe, 2021). Importantly, this example contains a “slippery” *they*: Maggie talks about being set up to fail by an anonymous “they”—she never does define who these people are, but it can be inferred that she is talking about the government or organizations that have been working to keep young people in the state. In this sense, she is setting up an us/them binary: *they* want *us* to stay. However, in her next sentence, the “they” shifts and becomes a pronoun referring to the people who she claims to not have a choice but to leave to pursue their careers: artists, musicians, engineers, people in the technology field (people who are seemingly educated)—setting up a different us/them binary: the *us* being those of us “left here” and *they* as those who “left for better opportunities.”

Addressivity runs through each of these examples. “People from here always say...”, “You’re destined...”, and “We don’t have...” Maggie does not seem to feel directly addressed by the circulating discourses about Appalachia that seemingly pin people into certain careers or a

particular outcome; however, she does feel indirectly addressed by these assertions. In feeling indirectly addressed, she finds it necessary to add her voice to the chain of discourse. In the last example, she does find herself directly addressed—and that comes through as she talks about feeling set up to fail in the state. In this instance, she feels directly impacted by the decisions and actions of those in power.

Bringing Together the Critiques

For young teachers considering where to settle and find their first teaching job, place plays a large role: “recruitment and retention possibilities are influenced by place attributes as, more than other professions, the teacher labor market is highly localized” (McHenry-Sorber & Campbell, 2019, p. 4). In other words, choosing to move to a place that has limited opportunities is often an unfavorable decision for young teachers. As noted in Chapter 1, those that do choose to move to rural districts to teach often leave the field within their first few years of teaching (Ingersoll et al., 2014; Lochmiller et al., 2016). Maggie’s own insecurities and indecision about her future in the state follows this literature.

Maggie’s professional identity is informed by her decision to stay in the state. She knows the kind of teacher she wants to become and the things she values; however, she has also experienced a first year of teaching in a community and state where those ideas may not be supported—and where she lacks models to help her build this aspect of her identity. Her decision to remain has stifled the identity that she held in her visions. Further, as a life-long resident of the state, Maggie has the knowledge of the state’s history that enables her to be able to critically examine contemporary visions for the state, and she has the knowledge to resist particular materials—such as the media—that continually perpetuates a demeaning rhetoric. She finds herself continually addressed—and, thus, addressing—these discourses. She positions herself as

identifying with the culture—and has, in turn, become more and more tired of dodging identities that are being imposed upon her.

Each of these strands can be applied to teaching and identity building in a larger sense. Place will always play a role in where new teachers choose to settle. Young people always feel the pull to “leave home” and seek experiences outside of what they have always known. However, many factors go into deciding whether to leave or stay—financial stability, job opportunities, homesickness, and influences from friends and family at the forefront of this decision making. These factors often have a strong influence on young people and lead them to stay closer to home. As a reminder, place necessarily influences identity. Every region can claim a stereotype—and typically those are not created in a way that honors or embraces the culture. These discourses circulate and people must address them—even if the response is silence.

Vision 2: Creating the Perfect Classroom

“I know the kind of vision I’m going for. You know, I’ve looked at a lot on Pinterest, Instagram, and YouTube.” (Interview #4)

In the examples that follow, Maggie articulated the development of her vision of herself as a teacher. In the first constellation, data samples point to Maggie’s use of social media to create a sharp, narrow, and close vision of what she imagined for the outward appearance of her first classroom. The second constellation details Maggie’s beliefs about creating a comfortable classroom for her students; she has a very sharp and close vision as she draws from her own experiences as a student and her beliefs about teaching to craft this vision. Finally, the third constellation outlines Maggie’s desire for close relationships with her students as a way to resist a lifeless classroom. Her vision for this is blurry and distant—she struggles with balancing close relationships with classroom management, creating a blurry vision. In each of these sections, Maggie is the process of constructing a teacher identity. She is beginning to see how teachers act,

establishing herself as an accepted teacher, and starting to take on (and sometimes resisting) the values, language, and tools of teaching (Lampert, 2010).

Each of these subsections point to the practice of teaching—the “doing” of beliefs—as described in Chapter 2. Maggie had to work through several nuanced aspects of teaching delineated by Lampert (2010): she had to work through the social construction of what it means to be a teacher—the visions that she had created as an early-career teacher about teaching, the images and ideals put forth by media, and, to complicate everything, the real-world nature of every-day teaching. Finally, Maggie found herself drifting farther and farther away from her vision of teaching as she unconsciously minimized her visions when overwhelmed with unforeseen obstacles; instead of being able to carry out her hopes for her first year of teaching, she found herself becoming more and more frustrated—and even burn out—as she was unable to enact the practices she desired (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Thompson et al., 2013; Zimmerman, 2017).

Constellation #1: Social Media as a Guide for Classroom Appearance – “I would just spend hours perusing the Internet for classroom stuff.”

Focus	Range	Distance
Sharp	Narrow	Close

Throughout this section, Maggie’s decisions for her classroom appearance—the outward face of teaching—tend to follow her personal beliefs about what makes a welcoming, inviting classroom. Further, it becomes clear that Maggie was working to actively resist a lifeless classroom. In this section Maggie's beliefs as a teacher come through as she creates her space: beliefs about teaching and learning have the power to influence the kind of teacher someone hopes to become (Beijaard & Meijer, 2017; Pajares, 1992) and, in Maggie’s case, she hoped to

become a teacher that students considered friendly, warm, and accepting—and relied on her classroom environment to help communicate those beliefs. Importantly, Maggie’s beliefs up to this point had been shaped by her observational apprenticeship as a student and by her limited experience as a student teacher. In these sections, however, Maggie’s beliefs are primarily shaped by social media and the discourse community she participates in as she searches for models of classrooms that mirror what she wants for her own space. Maggie was not yet positioned to access a broader range of discourses surrounding teaching and learning (Smagorinsky & Barnes, 2014) and this limitation led her to seek examples of her vision through social media platforms in an effort to resist falling back on a traditional, “cold” classroom appearance.

As we talked during interviews, it became clear that Maggie had a very sharp, narrow, and close vision about what she wants her classroom to look like—and what she *doesn’t* want. Her vision has been sharpened over time, from her K-12 experience through her present-day first teaching position, to a specific “look” that she hopes to curate for her classroom. She uses direct and specific words to define what she wants and what she will be fighting against: not “cheugy” (recently out of style), neutral, safe, comfortable, professional.

I started building a huge classroom Pinterest Board. And in this Pinterest board, I pin everything from classroom decorations to lessons. I have 188 pins in there, and the last thing I pinned was two days ago. (Interview #4)

So before TikTok was a thing, I followed teachers on Instagram. That's how I found these [the people posters] and that is really where it started. As a teenager, I was really into the YouTube world. That was really popular. And so I fell down the rabbit hole of teachers and then I went to find their social media. (Interview #4)

And I don't know if you know the term cheugy is. Classroom decor that you find is always cheugy. And I was like, I cannot have a teal and black classroom with the posters that have not changed in the past 20 years. I want to do it myself. I'm gonna make it how I want to, because I'm basically going to live in my classroom for five days a week. (Interview #4)

In the first two examples, Maggie discussed her use of social media—specifically Pinterest, a social media platform that allows users to create a visual “pin” board of ideas, and Instagram, a social media platform where users can share aspects of their lives through photographs. Maggie began to build the vision of herself as a future teacher while she was still in high school. Through use of social media, coupled with her many years of observational apprenticeship (Lortie, 1975), Maggie was able to begin building a view of teaching that she hoped to one day enact including saving images of teacher outfits, bulletin board ideas, thematic decorations, classroom arrangements. Social media became an outlet for her that opened up a different understanding of what classrooms could look like and the different forms that teaching could take. Importantly, she was always considering what her future space would “say” to students—what might be communicated through her decorations and the atmosphere that she would create. In the last interview sample, Maggie explains her rejection of the “traditional” look of a classroom—one that she calls “cheugy,” a mocking word used to describe things popular 10-15 years ago that people continue to consider “in style.” In other words, she wants a fresh, stylish classroom that follows trends that are currently found on social media.

In addition to Pinterest and Instagram, Maggie is also a regular user of YouTube—a practice also stemming from her childhood: “As a teenager, I was really into the YouTube world. That was really popular” (Interview #4). As a teenager, she followed several teacher-creators and watched how they organized their classrooms and the things they would buy. As a college student (and currently), she accessed YouTube and watched similar videos: “I would watch because I’m nosy. I think also part of it is, I’m new, and I wanted to know what my classroom could look like” (Interview #4). In addition, she mentioned watching teacher haul videos, day-in-the-life videos, advice videos, and videos about classroom cleaning/purging. Her description of

the types of teaching videos that she regularly accesses points to her idea of what it means to be a teacher: teachers have rooms that look a certain way, they buy certain things, and they behave in particular ways. Missing from her social media activity are any videos that she might watch about the practice of teaching, the focus of her vision to resist a lifeless classroom. Rather, her time spent on social media tended to lie in the outward experience of teaching—what she believes a classroom can communicate and what teaching *looks like*.

An important moment that will be discussed in greater detail in Vision #3 was when Maggie spoke of her decision to buy her “people posters.”

Figure 2



Example of Maggie's "People Posters"

The “people posters” (as Maggie calls them) are digital images made into posters purchased from Teachers Pay Teachers, an online retail website where teachers can sell materials they have created. The images are in a minimalistic style and feature influential people and a quote. Maggie first discovered these posters on Instagram, where they had become very popular among content creators that she followed. Maggie had debated back and forth with herself to consider

whether or not to purchase the posters; she ultimately decided to get them because she wanted to use them during her student teaching as part of a social justice unit. Her mention and description of this use was very vague, but she became far more excited when she described their popularity on Instagram:

There was a frenzy of everybody. They're all over on Instagram and every teacher had to have these. I kept seeing all these just awesome walls and people like doing amazing things like they would cover the whole wall. I also really like the aesthetic of them and it was a non-cheugy poster where students could look up and see real people and not just words. They see what has actually been said. They are all primary sources. (Interview #4)

Maggie felt swept up in the Insta-classroom community discourse of—this is what teachers are doing now and what looks good, trendy/, and is valued. The voices of the “frenzied” teachers strongly influenced her desire for and value of the decoration. Further, she specifically said that she could see students looking at them and reading what she said. In this vision, she not only pictured her perfectly decorated classroom, but also was able to envision the positive reaction that her future students would have to these posters. While this piece of her vision is sharp and close, it becomes blurred when putting the posters to use in her classroom—this will be further discussed in Vision #3 when we unpack Maggie’s self-censoring.

Constellation #2: Comfortable Classroom – “They are comfortable here and that’s when they are willing to learn.”

Focus	Range	Distance
Sharp	Narrow	Close

As I described in Chapter 2, beginning teachers draw from their past experiences in order to create the image of the teacher they hope to become; these pieces come together as threads of internalized dialogue that work to constitute teachers’ narratives about their current and future selves (Thompson et al., 2013, p. 579). Maggie began building her vision of an ideal classroom

while she was still an elementary student. These images and ideals of classrooms that Maggie experienced early in her educational career serve as building blocks for her vision of her future classroom and herself as a teacher. Early-career teachers bring thousands of hours of observation with them when taking their first tentative steps as a new teacher; these hours have accumulated over the course of their years in classrooms as students, an apprenticeship of observation (Cancino et al., 2020; Good & Lavigne, 2018; Lortie, 1975; Smagorinsky & Barnes, 2014).

While she wasn't consciously seeing herself as a future teacher, she already knew what she valued in an educational space and what she wanted to avoid—adding to her internal dialogue that would one day shape her professional identity. In Interview #1, Maggie discussed a negative experience she had as a young student; thus, the beginning of her unconscious repertoire of what *not* to do as a teacher. She described a particular classroom as a “cold” classroom: the teacher was impersonal and not welcoming at all. During this interview, Maggie voiced the teacher:

“We're going to do this, and then we're going to do this. Then we're going to do this.” Boom. “Here are your expectations.” Boom. “You are quiet unless you are spoken to.” Boom. “When we read silently, you are to be silent.” Boom, boom, boom. (Interview #1)

For Maggie, this experience created a clear, close, specific image of what she did *not* want for her own classroom. She is able to very quickly and easily recall details from this classroom that she wants to push against as a teacher. Her focus is very narrow and close, as she has honed this vision into focusing on her own classroom and she actively works to resist this image of teaching and learning, social media often serving as a guide or model.

Important to Maggie is what her room says about her as a teacher and a person; as the first constellation reveals, Maggie relies on material decorations as a form of discourse to communicate her personality and beliefs. At one point, Maggie specifically states that her room:

“...says that I’m a very welcoming and open person” (Interview #4). She went on to say that it’s important to make a room cozy—but also safe:

I mean, you have to make the classroom cozy. That’s why I put so much work into my classroom. Because if you think back to the structures that you were taught as an education student, the first one is physical needs. Then the safety. And safety to me is not just your physical safety. It is the emotional safety in the classroom. And so when kids walk in here, the lights are off, they see the warm colors, they meet me. They are comfortable here and that’s when they are willing to learn. (Interview #4)

She described wanting students to feel safe and welcomed in her classroom space and she was doing that by creating a room that visually tells students that they are safe and welcome. In contrast, she uses a very vivid image to say what she doesn’t want for her classroom: a “prison-like” environment similar to what she sees from some of her colleagues. Key in her decisions about what her classroom will communicate are concepts she learned in her teacher education program; specifically, she mentioned Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs. She leans heavily into the safety aspect of this hierarchy and noted that: “safety to me is not just your physical safety. It is the emotional safety in the classroom” (Interview #4).

Safety continues to be a driving factor in Maggie’s decision making when creating a classroom space for her students—but in the following sample, the term “safety” shifts from meaning mental safety to physical safety:

When I developed what I had in my first classroom, I thought, “Okay, I have to tackle the safety needs first. Physical needs next—are they fed? Do they have enough sleep, you know, are they hungry?” So I allowed water and food in my classroom. I don’t have an issue with that. Is it a safe classroom? Do I have a key? Do I have curtains? Can I execute this safety plan? Is it warm and inviting? Do the kids feel safe in here? You know, trying to check all those boxes one by one by one. (Interview #2)

Important, as always, are the basic needs of students: Maggie began this statement by sharing that she wanted her students to feel mentally safe—ensuring that they have food, water, and are rested. She then shifts the meaning of the word safety to focusing on students’ physical safety in her classroom—a strong comment on the current state of schooling in America. As a

first-year teacher, Maggie is forced (by necessity) into considering how she would handle a situation that may put her students' lives in danger: she made sure that she had safety measures in her classroom such as curtains to cover windows, a key for her room, and her own ability to follow the school's safety plan. While her primary focus has seemingly been on the outward appearance of her classroom and steps to make sure that students feel comfortable and mentally safe in her classroom, Maggie has had to consider these important aspects as well—something that new teachers in years past may not have considered, a very specific aspect of being a new teacher at this time in history.

Constellation #3: Resisting a Lifeless Classroom through Relationships – “I need my students to know that I’m going to be there if they need me.”

Focus	Range	Distance
Blurry	Narrow	Far Away

A similar experience for many first-time teachers, Maggie's initial steps into her professional career were difficult—but Maggie had additional and unique struggles: the start of the 2021-2022 school year was still under the cloud of Covid-19. The local Board of Education determined that schools were safe to open (masking required) and students could return to in-person schooling—after a year's worth of virtual instruction resulting in a loss of socialization, maturation, and academic growth.

Maggie's priorities in her first year were to build strong relationships with her students, to make them feel welcome, and to have a cozy classroom. Unfortunately for Maggie, her vision was blurry and far away from her actual practice. In the following samples, the focus of her vision will come in and out of focus; ultimately, settling on blurry. Further, her vision is out of

reach—far away—as she struggles to find the balance between strong relationships with students and classroom management.

The importance of strong relationships to Maggie came up early in interviews; in Interview #1 Maggie stated that when she was a young student, she was able to clearly feel the difference in “warm” versus “cold” classrooms:

The room that I felt the most afraid in was the room where the teacher knew very little about me: knew my name, knew where I was supposed to sit, but didn't know anything else. Versus getting into a place where I was comfortable, where we could talk to each other, where these expectations were outlined. But that teacher knew more than just my name and where I was supposed to sit. So when those teachers built those relationships—very key, very, very important. (Interview #1)

In this example, Maggie describes two different classrooms—one where the teacher knew very little about her and a second version where the teacher took time to build a relationship. This is a formative moment for Maggie, as she draws from these early experiences as she sculpts her teacher identity and as she constructs her ideal classroom—these memories formed a sharp vision of what Maggie wanted and didn't want for her own classroom.

As interviews and observations continued, it became clear that Maggie's sharp focus on relationship building and being welcoming to students was seemingly an attempt to have good classroom management (and caused the vision to become blurred): Maggie made the all-too-common mistake of thinking that her warm approach with students would be returned and students would naturally follow directions and procedures. In making this choice, she found herself being very lenient with students—she voiced her students: “Oh well, she's, you know, very relaxed and she likes us and she talks to me, so I can get away with anything” (Interview #3). Here it seems like she is noting the tension that has been building: there is a difference in how she treats students and how they see her. She wanted to give them a lot of freedom and not take disciplinary action so they would like her—and, in turn, behave in her class—but then students

ended up viewing her as a push-over. While Maggie notices this, calling herself a “push-over” and a “softie,” she still said that: “I know deep down, they’re just doing the best that they can...they are just being kids” (Interview #3). The idea of wanting her students to be comfortable comes up in her personal journal:

Comfortable in that moment was overwhelming. The battle felt constantly uphill. I never got more than a few words out of my mouth: ‘listen’, ‘be quiet y’all’, ‘that’s enough’. Broken record. SO when she said, ‘Comfortable,’ I didn’t think safety, I thought disrespectful. I learned ‘comfortable’ was *safety*. My room has been a safe haven for my students...However, this comfortability leads to a multitude of behavior issues. Finding that balance is going to be a work in progress and it will be a partnership between me and my students. (Personal Journal, August 23-25)

In this example, Maggie blurs the meaning of the word “comfortable.” She strives to have a classroom environment where students feel welcome and valued; however, she started to consider the word “comfortable” in a negative way—students are way too comfortable and are beginning to take advantage of her desire to be liked. This comfort, she said, turned into disrespect. Maggie also points out during Interview #3 that she had noticed her behavior management style as very different from everyone else’s in the building—including administration:

My philosophy is really different, I think, than a lot of the teachers here. I think even sometimes from administrators. Sometimes I feel like they don’t think the things I do are how they would handle a situation. I handle situations a certain way, but if it was somebody else, I know things totally would have gone another way. I have not even written up anyone this year. (Interview #3)

She went on to share that she had not written anyone up at that point in the school year—it is a cultural norm in the school where this study takes place—a long-standing expectation—for teachers to write students up and call home when needed. Through classroom observations, I witnessed several instances where I, personally, would have written up students for blatant disrespect. In fact, I later talked with Maggie (outside of this study) about this process. Once again, an example of her desire for her relationship with students to carry over to classroom management: “I am too

nice. I try to be preventative and a listener, and it has come back to bite me time and time again” (Personal Journal, September 13).

Bringing Together the Constellations

These constellations all fit together to define one major aspect of this study: identity development. Through use of social media and drawing from her previous experiences as a student, Maggie has been able to structure a fairly concrete vision of what she sees for herself as a teacher. In this vision, she has curated a defined picture of what teaching looks like on the outset and how she wants to function relationally to students. Place also emerges as a factor of these constellations, as Maggie finds herself seeking an outlet for images and videos to help define who she wants to become: she draws heavily from social media accounts to shape her ideal vision of herself as a teacher. She finds her “place” on social media and creates a comfortable atmosphere for herself as she decides which creators she wants to follow and which creators to scroll past.

In a larger sense, this speaks to the ever-growing importance of social media in young teachers’ lives. Largely, social media accounts are carefully curated photos or brief videos of teachers’ experiences that point to a neat, tidy participation in the discourse of what it means to be a teacher. In reality—certainly the reality for teacher-creators—the realistic daily life of a teacher can be messy, emotional, and draining. However, these are not the aspects that are often displayed. Further, social media can only show a very small sliver of enactment which could lead teachers (if not thinking critically) to a very blurred vision of what it looks like and means to be a teacher.

Vision 3: Self-Censorship – “I’m afraid of saying the wrong thing.”

Focus	Range	Distance
Blurry	Narrow	Far Away

As a first year teacher, Maggie had an undeveloped vision of how politics shaped her teacher identity and where she stands in the political nature of teaching. Specifically, this section will deal with her struggles to grapple with representations of race in her classroom. As a reminder, Maggie is from a predominantly white, rural area of the state where this study takes place, and the community where she teaches has a very similar demographic makeup: Evergreen Middle School’s student population is 95% white and faculty is 100% white.

She created an ideal vision of her classroom, inspired by other teachers on Instagram, in which posters of famous people with an inspiring/motivational quote from that person would be displayed around the room. In her desire to join this community of teachers who displayed these posters, her vision was very specific yet distant. In her much closer, specific community, the teachers around her did not intentionally use any imagery in their classroom that celebrated people of color or LGBTQ people. So, without local, concrete visions, and with specific knowledge of her students’ political ideologies, she did not use all her posters. When asked which she opted to not put on the wall, she mentioned her back-and-forth consideration to include President Barack Obama, First Lady Michelle Obama, or anyone relating to or a quote relating to organizations like Black Lives Matter, and anything that specifically mentioned LGBTQ identities.

The examples in this section primarily center around Maggie’s struggle to utilize the posters in her classroom. Her decision making is guided by two considerations, each connected to her under preparation conceptually and practically to facilitating learning about race within a

predominantly white context: her fear of local community and student backlash, and her own unresolved thoughts on the role of political “neutrality” in the classroom countered with a desire for historical accuracy and racial representations and bringing explicit discussions of race into her classroom. Unlike the previous sections, this one will not be broken into separate constellations since the focus is primarily around her use of the posters. For Maggie, her vision regarding the posters is very blurry, narrow, and far away. She has a borrowed vision from social media accounts, but struggles to translate that to her own vision—out of fear and uncertainty grounded in place. While she attempts to implement the use of the posters, her steps toward this are nervous and this keeps her vision far out of reach.

Maggie’s excitement about the posters was described in an earlier constellation—she went so far as to describe teachers’ reactions to them as a “frenzy”—a frenzy that she also participated in when purchasing these materials. Maggie’s decision to purchase these posters stemmed from a few factors. She was compelled to make this purchase by the teaching community that she draws from as she constructs her own teaching identity; however, she justified this purchase and display by pointing out that students would be able to look up at her wall, see people of color and LGBTQ+ people, and read “primary-source” materials at the same time (each poster contains a quote from the famous person featured). After completing the purchase and considering how she would use the posters in her classroom, Maggie came upon an unforeseen conflict that blurred her vision of the posters in her classroom:

Then there are the posters I bought. I have tons of these and there's so many more I could get. I'm like, I would really love to put up certain ones that I know are going to resonate with at least one student. But I can't out of fear of other students seeing it. So I tried to pick neutral ones that could apply to everyone. (Interview #3)

Maggie’s conflict seemingly stems from her desire for “neutrality” and her perceived inability to display “certain ones” in her classroom. In this case, it seems that “neutral” for Maggie is a

coded way of saying that the posters should reflect Whiteness—a self-imposed limit that would maintain comfort for both herself and for her White students. She notes that some posters would resonate with “at least one student,” but she is not willing to sacrifice the comfort of the majority to represent a small number of students. Additionally, in using the phrase “certain ones,” she does not specifically mark the characteristics of the people on the posters she opted to not display; however, in the next sample, Maggie comes a bit closer to defining who was left off of her wall and why:

I think I've chosen 30-32 posters to put up. That was probably the hardest thing I had to do, pick the people who went up, because I had to find the balance of— What are these kids going to understand? What terminology are these students going to understand? Who will they know? And taking into account the rural aspect, I was extremely selective. I mean, I spent hours and hours and hours going through each one. I put them all in a folder and went back over them so many times. Sometimes removing them if they were a little too political. (Interview #4)

In this data sample, Maggie elaborated on her process she used to select posters. She shares a series of questions that guided her decision-making: each question “safe” and crafted in a way that moves her selection process from eliminating “certain ones,” as described in a prior interview, to eliminating posters based on vocabulary students may not understand and people they may not recognize. Her rationale for using those questions becomes a bit more clear when she notes that she also took into account the “rural aspect” in her selective process. In pointing out the “rural aspect” of her students, she is again coding her words: she is once again saying that she wants to preserve the comfort of her White students—reinforcing what she previously said about her fear of displaying posters that might only resonate with one student. In making this statement, Maggie is not only centering White experiences, but she is also distancing herself from her students’ conservative political views. She referred to her students’ conservatism as a “rural aspect”—even though she is from the same rural community. This lamination of rurality as

bound together with Whiteness and conservatism is at work to normalize these ideologies, suggesting a relationship that cannot be changed, challenged, or altered in any way.

As an added layer of pressure, Maggie's self-censorship coincided with the state legislative session in which the state's legislators in both chambers were proposing legislation to ban "critical race theory" and "anti-racist pedagogy," similar to bills proposed around the country. Stories of teachers being fired or publicly ostracized for doing things that Maggie seemed to want to do in her classroom were ever-present on social media:

In [this state], the legislators want to decide, make choices, on what they want our students to learn and stuff and that's just sad. You know? I want these kids to have the best information they can about the past. And even about current events; I want them to have accurate information and real information. (Interview #3)

In other words, she wanted to push against the current political movements to erase or minimize realities of history—including the realities that race has played in American history. Her concerns about this are place-based and specific; however, she does not elaborate about her role in ensuring that students receive an accurate and complete view of history. In fact, her beliefs seem to contrast what she is willing to do as a teacher:

Every day I hear students talk and I know they're just repeating what they hear. They don't understand. There's still so much they are figuring out—they're young. They just live in this politically charged world and they bring it in here. And I can't. They are not free thinking and they are not finding their own information. I'm not crossing that border with them this year. It's just not my place to do. They're too young to understand. And when you live in this part of the United States, it just makes things a whole lot tougher. (Interview #3)

You have to be very aware, so I don't want to touch it. I'm afraid of saying the wrong thing. "Oh, my teacher said this," and then I get that angry phone call and then it becomes a big deal and really it's not a big deal, right? I mean, it's not necessarily that I'm uncomfortable having these conversations. It's more of I don't know exactly what to say to make it as neutral as possible. (Interview #3)

Her hesitation comes out in these samples, as she notes that she isn't sure that she wants to be the one who dives into touchy topics with students. It seems that she is fearful or even feels

unprepared to have these conversations—likely feelings that stem from the pressures of the political opinions in the county and state: “...but when you live in this part of the world, this part of the United States, it just makes things a lot tougher” (Interview #3). Her undeveloped, blurry vision fits with what literature presents—few teachers (early-career or not) have a nuanced understanding of how their racial identity impacts their teaching practices (Sleeter, 2005; Utt & Tochluk, 2020). Sleeter (2005) points out that “to attempt to bridge the gap between white teachers and students of color, teacher education programs have added coursework, field experiences, and other activities” (Sleeter, 2005, p. 243). However, when asked about coursework during her teacher education program, Maggie shared that “the only thing that comes to mind is talking about laws/discrimination” (text messaging 9/28/2022). Certainly, the lack of coursework and the current political discourse surrounding what Maggie terms “touchy subjects” adds to her trepidation as a first year teacher when it comes to addressing race and other politically-charged topics.

In addition to Maggie not being prepared for these topics during her teacher education program, she has also lacked the opportunity to have close, critical relationships with colleagues who would help her recognize “damaging enactments of microaggressions, privilege, emotional reactions, or unexamined issues in the classroom and on campus” (Utt & Tochluk, 2020, p. 142). While this was not her driving reason to use social media as a platform for furthering her understanding of these topics, she did stumble upon influencers who worked to enact anti-racist and inclusive practices.

Summary

The three constellations that I constructed from the data show different facets of Maggie’s beginning steps in becoming a teacher: her relationship to place that informs her

identity (Relationship to Appalachia), her vision of wanting to create a perfect classroom—driven by voices from her past and those she presently follows on social media (Creating the Perfect Classroom), and struggles she faced as she tried to enact particular practices (Self-Censorship). In each of these constellations, place shapes her perception of the practices she is able to enact in her classroom, informs her professional identity, and leaves her longing for different models of teaching—social media stepping in to fill a void.

Not only did this study reflect the importance of place and how it can be deeply influential for new teachers, it also demonstrated the need for more research for deeper understanding of how young teachers are using social media as a model for identity development. In particular, how do these teachers see themselves through teachers on social media—and what happens when those visions are not locally available? Additionally, a study across multiple school years would be useful in showing how new teachers' identities change and shift as they grow into their professional selves.

Chapter 5

For this study, I have worked to understand how a first-year teacher in Appalachia discursively constructs herself as a teacher—including how she makes use of sociocultural resources, social practices, and the discourses she draws from as she describes her experiences. In order to better understand how Maggie is building her professional identity, I layered Hammerness's (2001, 2003) vision framework on top of the Gee and Green's (1998) MASS framework. In layering the two, I was able to construct Maggie's vision constellations—while also conducting discourse analysis to consider the ways she is talking about place, sociocultural resources, social practices, and her own experiences—all of which come together to shape her beliefs, practices, and identity.

Hammerness (2001, 2003) used the concepts of teacher visions and the constellations the visions built to help explain the assumptions that teachers make: how they enact teaching practices, changes they may make, and whether or not they choose to remain in the field. In this study, I used the vision framework in a different way: instead of focusing on several teachers' overall visions for their teaching, I zoomed in on one teacher and conceptualized a nuanced, fine-grained view of her vision—broken down into small, granular segments. These strands speak to her identity development and small moments drawn from her experiences in Appalachia as well as in her teaching that illustrate who she wants to be as a teacher, where she locates herself within a larger community of teachers, and the voices she draws from as she crafts her identity.

In constructing the three major visions with sub-constellations (Relationship to Appalachia, Creating the Perfect Classroom, and Self-Censorship), I was able to build a picture of Maggie that shows the discourses she draws from as she works to construct her identity. The

constellations point to moments when she is very clear and close to her vision and moments when she is still very blurry and far away. These moments of blurred or sharp, focused visions point to the “firmness” of her identity—places where she feels very confident and solidified in her identity and moments where her identity may still be in the early stages of formation. Further, the nuanced look at her vision constellations illustrate moments when she is taking on multiple identities, her identity shifts, and that her identity is always being formed in collaboration with others (Akkerman & Meijer, 2001).

The following sections will discuss the major themes that I constructed using the findings of this study. In order to better visualize how Maggie’s experiences growing up in Appalachia are key in shaping her beliefs, practices, and identity, I found it helpful to build a diagram to more easily visualize each aspect and its impact:

Figure 3

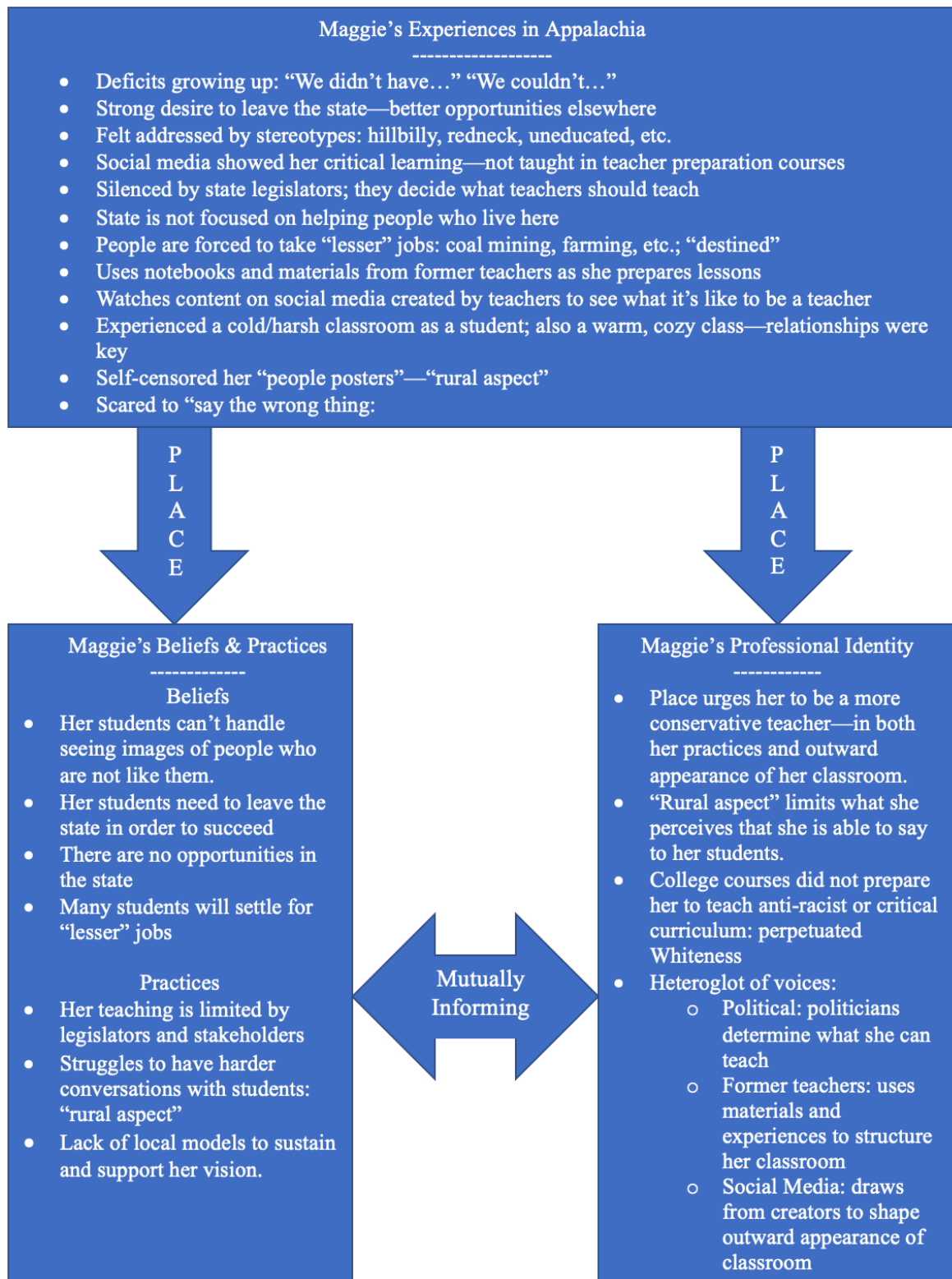


Diagram of Experiences, Practices, Beliefs, and Identity

The next two sections will work to unpack the pieces that I pulled forward as key in Maggie's identity development: how Maggie's experiences in Appalachia necessarily informed her beliefs and practices and her identity—and how those two are mutually informing. Through the findings, I discuss ways that Maggie is continually building and reshaping her identity according to place, context, and her past experiences. In other words, the constructed themes show that identity is dialogic—fragmented according to the multiple social worlds in which people participate, is formed and shaped from past experience, and is necessarily reliant upon other participants, historical constructs, and nuances of social situations (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011; Holquist, 2002; Solari & Ortega, 2022). Specifically, the findings include how her identity has been shaped as an Appalachian—including the tensions she feels, the ways she is constructing her professional identity, and the discourse communities she is drawing from to use as models for the identity she sees herself one day taking up. Following the discussion of these themes, I detail the implications of this study's findings on teacher education and induction programs and first-year teacher support.

Place-Shaping Beliefs & Practices

Places are social constructions borne out of a need, named by those who construct it (sometimes the construction is by “insiders” and sometimes “outsiders”), and places function as a way of understanding the world—in other words, place is necessarily tied to identity and identities are necessarily shaped by place (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005; Cresswell, 2015; Greenwood, 2013). This study weaves together place and identity and how those strands intersect to inform how a teacher builds their beliefs over time from experiences—drawing from the past, present, and the teacher's visions of what the future could hold (Beijaard & Meijer, 2017; Hammerness, 2001; Pajares, 1992). These influences, known in literature as Critical Pedagogical Discourses

construct a view of teaching—that includes the teacher’s visions—that, in turn, sculpt the teacher’s “threads of internalized discourse that constitute teachers’ narratives about their current and future selves” (Thompson et al., 2013, p. 579). For Maggie, her beliefs grew from her own experience growing up in a small Appalachian community, the discourses that indirectly address her that circulate about Appalachia, and the discourse communities she participated in on social media as a way to see what other people experience or have available to them. CPDs are always actively filtering and processing information—teachers can either reject or take up what they are seeing and hearing. In this sense, the voices that mean the most to teachers are the ones that are “kept” and that are drawn upon to determine new ways of thinking they may want to consider. These strands that teachers filter and process intersect to shape their beliefs about place, their students, and their teaching.

A primary aspect that underscores Maggie’s beliefs and practices is Whiteness. Maggie had the most energy during interviews when describing her excitement about the “people posters” she purchased for her classroom. While she had a very clear vision curated from images she saw on social media, this quickly became clouded when faced with using the posters in her classroom. Her vision quickly became blurred—and largely dismantled—when she realized that she was unwilling to confront her own comfort in her classroom—comfort that stemmed from her own Whiteness. In this instance, Maggie had an unintended outcome that many teachers face: perpetuating Whiteness as the norm in educational places. Discomfort, neutrality, and colorblindness are all ways that teachers describe their handling of race in classrooms (Sleeter, 2005). Many teachers find themselves drawing from sociocultural practices that stem directly from discourses of which they are not part—and also find themselves lacking local models to secure their visions of classrooms like what they see on social media that place race, gender, and

social class at the forefront. Instead, teachers feel compelled to live within the discourse of the state, community, and the school: in this case, err on the side of conservatism and don't disrupt the "rural aspect" of students and their families.

Circulating around teachers are many discourses including anti-CRT legislation, post-pandemic discourses, social media: all of these are "translocal networks" that reshape their sense of race and the possibilities that they perceive as possible for them (Nespor, 2008). Many people see place as the geographical location where they grew up—and the communities where they currently live— but place looms larger. For many young teachers, one of those places is social media. Social media opens teachers up to seeing other discourses, other classrooms, other "ways of doing" that they have not experienced before—social media can seem placeless on the outset, but these are, in fact, places that are necessarily bound by their own political and social norms. Social media sites are, like all other places, constructions built and reified by those who inhabit the space—be it content creators or those interacting with the content by sharing, commenting, and "liking" it. The political and social ideas teachers see on social media are all things that many teachers want for their classrooms, but many find themselves living in a different sociopolitical context. Classrooms—schools—are political spaces, decorations are political choices, and the things she does and says in her class have political underpinnings. She realizes that she can't make the same choices of the people she follows on social media....and that is the very essence of the power of the intersection of place and politics—and how identities are necessarily shaped by place.

Place—Shaping Professional Identity

Throughout the data collection period, Maggie shared anecdotes and narrative stories that all point to her construction of what she perceives it looks like to be a teacher—more specifically,

she shared what she sees as her ideal vision of herself as a future and current teacher. Drawing from her own one-sided observations as a student and the carefully curated view of teaching found on social media, Maggie entered into her first year of teaching with a sharp vision of what it looks like and sounds like to be a teacher (Botha, 2020; Gray, 2020; Lortie, 1975; Palmer et al., 2009). Her vision was built as she drew from the heteroglot of voices from her past and present: her former teachers, professors, content creators on social media, and state legislators (Bakhtin, 1981).

As an early-career teacher begins to structure their vision of themselves as a teacher, they may draw heavily from several primary influences: their past teachers, their experiences as a student, and social media teachers/content creators. From their former teachers and their own experience as a student, they may determine how to structure their classes and their teaching, how to interact with students, and what the outward appearance of their classroom might say about them. A newer aspect of identity development is now emerging: for early-career teachers, a key piece of identity building now stems from content consumed on social media and the creators they follow—identities shaped in relative isolation where context may be unknown and socio-political influences at odds. While these places offer a look into possibilities previously not considered, replicating practices can often be impossible for some teachers and often are superficial and lack pedagogical underpinnings.

Finally, a leading voice informing how early-career teachers shape their beliefs, practices, and teaching identity is that of political leaders in their community and state. Teachers living in “red states” who wish to build a classroom of inclusivity and acceptance often find themselves at odds with the discourses coming from their state and local legislators. These clashes can create a very disconnected, blurry—and even dismantled vision—and ultimately lead a new teacher’s

identity formation down a path of giving way to “status quo” which most often means replicating and perpetuating conservative, sometimes damaging practices and ideologies. These authoritative discourses can hold enactment at bay, often leading teachers to default to self-censorship and outright avoidance of discussions of race, gender, or sexuality—all highly politicized topics that can bring about backlash.

Across the country, we have seen a heavy uptick of anti-CRT laws being debated that would legally shut down conversations about race and anti-trans and anti-LGBTQ bills that take away the rights—including healthcare—of some of our most at-risk students. For teachers living in states where these conversations are taking place, the perception at the local level is that silence is the best way to not receive negative backlash—backlash that could be as harsh as losing your job. This is a clear example of what happens when the state and local intersect with an additional layer of social media driving teachers to want to push against these harmful narratives.

Bringing Together the Strands

Place emerged as a perceived limitation for Maggie as she worked to build her professional identity: she continually experienced her vision of teaching blurring as she felt constrained in the things she wanted to teach and the way she wanted to decorate her classroom. In these moments, she experienced discontinuity of identity—in order to fit the context of the school, community, and state, she altered moments of her identity in order to better fit with the culture: one that perpetuates Whiteness as center. Maggie’s students’ rurality, which mirrors her own rurality, emerged as a perceived limitation for her as she attempted to enact certain practices. These clashes led Maggie to defaulting to deficits that stem from place: she wasn’t taught certain things during her teacher preparation courses, her students can’t handle certain topics, and politicians don’t want a certain kind of education for her students.

Both of the themes that I constructed show a clear clash of beliefs and practices that led Maggie to entering her first year of teaching with trepidation, a desire to please stakeholders in her community: administration, families, legislators, and her students. She was not secure in her vision—she struggled with enactment because she did not have the support or close-range models for the kind of teacher she hoped to become. Over and over this led her to question whether or not she was going to stay in the state, at the school, or even in the teaching field. She continually felt defeated, like an outsider, and as if she was forced to work within a system that she did not fit in.

Implications for Teacher Education and Early-Career Teacher Support

Teacher Education

Teacher education programs in the United States have undergone many transformations since their conceptions. However, one marker has remained a mainstay: the programs are predominantly populated by white, middle-class women. This places teacher education programs in a position of perpetuating the idea that Whiteness is always the “norm”—is the center—and, in turn, whitewashes education. This issue is recursive, as “in general, teacher education programs attempt to prepare their predominately White cohorts to teach racially and ethnically diverse students through a course or two (often a foundations course) on multicultural education, culturally responsive pedagogy, teaching English language learners, or social justice teaching” (Sleeter, 2017, p. 156). This continues the cycle of merely brushing over topics of social justice without deeply engaging in the concepts (Philip et al., 2018). This is perhaps due to resistance and feelings of fatigue reported by white teachers learning about racism (Sleeter, 2005, p. 244).

In particular, race is under-theorized in teacher education (Kavanaugh, 2017; Milner et al., 2013). “CRT offers conceptual tools for interrogating how race and racism have been

institutionalized and are maintained...[CRT] provides a helpful lens for analyzing the Whiteness of teacher education and conceptualizing how it might be addressed” (Sleeter, 2017, p. 157). In response to this, I propose that teacher education programs implement a course that works to specifically introduce critical theory to early-career teachers. Courses that introduce future teachers to justice-focused pedagogies do not often engage novices in viewing teaching through lenses that bring questions of race, equity, or power to the foreground (Kavanaugh, 2017). It would also be important for this line of work to continue to be threaded throughout students’ coursework—not replicating the “box” that these issues are often placed in and studied in isolation. To address the isolation of these topics, including a course that specifically focuses on social justice through education could work to bring together some of the strands and allow teachers to see how they could use the methods they are learning in their own teaching.

Finally, I propose that teacher preparation programs push to add a course offering that would guide pre-service teachers to better understand the backgrounds and perspectives they bring to teaching. Places are conceptual—ECTs concepts of place are based on where they came from and what they perceive other places to be like—concepts of place can be informed by material realities, but still perception of place and Whiteness can lead teachers to make certain assumptions about their students, their families, and the communities where they ultimately teach. Teacher education programs are a time for teachers to begin to reflect about their past experiences and how those are at work in shaping their current vision of themselves as a teacher—how these place-based experiences are shaping their perception of the field, their future classrooms, and their beliefs and practices. Within the scope of this course, future teachers could be pushed to challenge deficit perspectives, engage in discussions regarding race, poverty,

rurality, and become trauma responsive/trauma informed in the context of rural education (Foote et al., 2013; Gay, 2002; Matsko & Hammerness, 2013).

Social media is a place—and a powerful place in today’s society. Social media literacy is lacking; in place of this, teacher education programs offer “teaching with technology” courses that are student-centered and practice-based. In place or—in addition to—it is important to consider how social media is included in a young teacher’s apprenticeship. Teachers at all levels have noticed the inadequate professional development offered by their districts; as a result, teachers have found informal learning opportunities through use of social media (Colwell & Hutchison, 2018; Parsons et al., 2019). In this search for meaningful connections and learning, teachers find themselves “borrowing” from content creators—often “borrowing” with a propensity for gravitating toward “cute” activities and with little to no critical reflection (Gallagher et al., 2019). This lack of critical reflection can be a slippery slope that leads well-intentioned teachers to enacting problematic lessons/activities with their students—students adopting “Indian names” at Thanksgiving while wearing construction paper headdresses as one example. Gallagher, Swalwell, and Bellows (2019) have proposed a checklist to help guide teachers to “pin with pause”; their checklist leads teachers to consider the purpose, reliability, and considering the perspective of the assignment. For pre-service teachers, a useful exercise could be to apply this checklist to activities/lessons they have “pinned” to use in their future classrooms. This could push new teachers into taking a more critical approach to vetting activities and lessons they find online.

New Teacher Induction

New teacher induction programs are designed to support and guide newly hired teachers during their first year in the profession. When schools implement these programs, they take

many different forms: induction programs are most often one-time meetings or trainings that are centered on local norms and expectations. New teachers find themselves participating in a fast-paced orientation—while their mind may be on other issues like preparing their room, planning for the first days of school, and thinking through their curriculum.

In place of these quick, overwhelming trainings, I propose a series of new teacher mini-trainings or meetings throughout the school year. In other words, involve new teachers in a prolonged induction process that is supportive during their entire first year of teaching. As much as possible, new teachers' needs can guide these meetings so that support is relevant and tailored to what the group needs. Of course, new teachers don't always know what kind of support they need, so many meetings will need to be planned in advance to help address common needs.

Following the findings of this study, it would be a benefit for early-career teachers to work to develop their visions of teaching in a supportive atmosphere. New teachers could work to determine their vision—to make it “concrete”—find what is still “fuzzy,” and work on ways to sharpen the vision. What is missing? What steps need to be taken to get closer to your vision? In addition to working through sharpening visions, new teachers could also work through steps to take when their vision is inevitably compromised; instead of abandoning altogether, work together to navigate the tensions and determine next steps for enactment.

Future Studies

This study took a path of inquiry that opened up understandings about the way that one early-career teacher constructs her identity through place, sociocultural resources, and materials. In particular, this study foregrounded the role that place plays in how a teacher develops their beliefs, practices, and identity. This study was bound by time; it took place over just over a semester of schooling—around five months. During those five months, Maggie experienced

growth, developed new understandings, and took her initial steps into developing her teacher identity. Of course, this growth and development as a teacher continued throughout the entire school year and as Maggie reflected on her practices over the summer.

Importantly, identities are not fixed; they are always changing shape as people have new experiences and participate in different contexts. Maggie returned to the same school the year after this study—and returned with confidence, an even greater passion for teaching, and a stronger sense of who she wants to be (and how she wants to be seen) as a teacher. Her classroom for the new school year featured nearly triple the number of “people posters” and she included many that she did not feel comfortable displaying during her first year. In addition, she transformed an entire bulletin board in her classroom into a display for students needing help—it is decorated with posters with Pride Flags, “You Matter” posters, and it features may hotlines that young adults may need to access: suicide hotline, a specific hotline for LGBTQ teenagers, a hotline for transgendered students, etc. Instead of censoring herself due to her students’ “rural aspect,” she decided she was going to step closer to the vision she had for herself when she first began.

I started this section with an update about Maggie’s shift of beliefs, practices, and identity because it directly leads to the first suggestion I have for a future study: a multi-year look at how an early-career teacher’s identity shifts and changes in a rural teaching context. It was not within the scope of this study to formally interview Maggie to see what specifically changed for her, but that would be a perfect follow-up study.

Following this same idea, a thorough study of induction programs and how place and identity are built into those programs would be a good next step for research. When building this study, I was not able to find research about place-based induction programs, in particular. This

could have an added layer of considering how to use visioning with new teachers as part of the induction process—a process that extends over the school year instead of a one-time meeting.

Finally, further research is needed about how to best accommodate a new generation of teachers. Right now, new teachers entering the field are part of GenZ. Specifically, new teachers entering the field have grown up with social media at their fingertips. This study has shown that social media platforms can become a key piece of identity development. With this in mind, research that takes a focused look at social media and identity development—specifically as used by new teachers in rural places—would be a good next step for future studies.

Conclusion

This research study is one example of an early-career teacher's identity development. In developing her identity, she also further developed her beliefs about teaching and how she would (or would not) enact those beliefs as teaching practices. Place emerged as a strong voice in determining the path that Maggie's first year of teaching would take: she felt stifled by decisions made by state legislators, felt that her local context featured a strong "rural aspect"—Whiteness—that could not be challenged, and experienced self-censorship when attempting to replicate an outward appearance of teaching that she curated from social media. This is important, ongoing work that I plan to continue to pursue. I will continue to draw from the voices of researchers that came before me in order to forge new paths forward with the contexts of rurality and place as my focus.

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