

TEACHING WHERE (AND WHO) WE ARE:
EMPLACING CURRICULUM THROUGH STORIES OF LIVING

By

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ABSTRACT

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Schools are pivotal social institutions for the present and future of the communities that they serve. Students attend schools in order to learn to better their lives and the lives of all that surround them. Within schools, teachers are central to this learning. While there are many inputs that structure work in classrooms, it is teachers who are the orchestrators of what students do. Increasingly, though, the work of teachers is strongly influenced by curriculum standards and accountability systems created by external authorities. The results are displacing: teachers and their students are positioned to grow disconnected from the communities in which they work and live.

Although teachers are positioned as displacing agents in this educational setup, they have been strongly shaped by particular places. Indeed, all people possess a living course of learning experiences—a living curriculum—that has *taken place*. Learning is inherently embedded in a social context. As place is constructed by one's relationships to one's social surroundings (social, political, cultural, ecological, etc.), learning is a product of place. Across a lifetime, then, people undergo a course of learning in places. A segment of this living curriculum that a teacher possesses is a teaching curriculum, which is a living course that is specific to learning to teach. Experiences in various places, from the schools in a teacher's youth to the school at which a teacher teaches in the present, shape this teaching curriculum. Experiences outside of schools also influence it. Even if asked to teach a displacing content curriculum, a teacher has experienced a course of learning in places.

In this study, I examine how three teachers are emplaced in their lives and in their teaching. Each is a public school teacher in a different region of the U.S., and each teaches at a different grade level and in a different subject area. In a chapter on each teacher, I first story the teacher's living curriculum, and then, narrowing my focus, story the teacher's teaching curriculum. I pay particular attention to the ways in which these curricula intersect and, ultimately, shape the teacher's work in school, with students. I worked closely and collaboratively with each teacher, across a series of interviews, and I participated in the teachers' lives at school and away from it. Stories that the teachers shared, alongside the stories of my experiences with the teachers, structure the stories that I tell here.

I find that each teacher in this study underwent a process of rooting in the places where they live and teach. Although they possess different living curricula, especially up to the points at which they began teaching, they all became, and continue to be, rooted in their current communities. Comparing those processes of rooting to their work as teachers, I find strong parallels between their lived experiences and their purposes in teaching. As they became rooted in their adult lives, they began to help their students learn to cultivate roots. Theorizing "rooted teaching," I argue that teachers who are rooted in their home and school communities teach their students about forming roots in their own places. This teaching not only teaches students to be active and productive citizens, it is an act of citizenship on the part of the teachers. At a time when schools increasingly displace students, I posit that rooted teaching serves students and their communities.

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My favorite poet rock star, Bruce Springsteen, introduces his band at concerts by exclaiming, “you’ve got to have *help!*” We all need a band in our lives—and especially when doing things like writing a dissertation.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	
DISPLACED LEARNING: STUDENTS, TEACHERS, SCHOOLS AND THE QUESTION OF WHERE.....	1
CHAPTER ONE	
THE PLACE OF CURRICULUM AND THE CURRICULUM OF PLACE.....	12
CHAPTER TWO	
METHOD/OLOGY: STUDYING EXPERIENCE THROUGH STORY.....	41
CHAPTER THREE	
TOMMY'S CITIZENSHIP: TEACHING AS AN ACT OF AND FOR BALANCE.....	71
CHAPTER FOUR	
ROSIE'S MOTHERING: FOSTERING FAMILY INSIDE THE CLASSROOM AND OUT.....	104
CHAPTER FIVE	
DAN'S STORYTELLING: BUILDING COMMUNITY AS THE FOG LIFTS.....	136
CHAPTER SIX	
THE CITIZENSHIP OF ROOTED TEACHERS.....	180
CONCLUSION	
EMPLACING TEACHING AND LEARNING.....	212
APPENDIX	
PARTICIPANT EMAIL QUESTIONNAIRE.....	225
REFERENCES.....	227

INTRODUCTION

DISPLACED LEARNING:

STUDENTS, TEACHERS, SCHOOLS AND THE QUESTION OF WHERE

A few weeks into my student teaching experience in Lebanon, New Hampshire, my mentor teacher, Bill, and I got into a disagreement during class. I was teaching a lesson about the New England colonies when a student asked me which states comprise present-day New England. I responded, “Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, and New York.” Bill, a life-long New Englander, interrupted from the side of the classroom, half-chuckling and half-grumbling. The students and I turned and looked at Bill: “spoken by a guy from Michigan! New York is NOT part of New England.”

I challenged what Bill said. I like to think that I felt comfortable tugging and pulling with Bill during class, as a part of class, but I imagine that a good part of me didn’t want to appear like I didn’t know what I was talking about. I had driven many times through upstate New York, between Michigan and New Hampshire, and observed what was along the side of the road: upstate New York looks like Vermont and New Hampshire. Bill laughed at this and retorted by saying that New York State is fundamentally different from the New England states. He then talked about town structures, regional affiliation, and history, including the Hartford Convention of 1815 (which considered New England’s secession from the United States), and other reasons for a boundary that clearly delineates New York as separate from New England.

My disagreement with Bill wasn't just about facts. It was also about the differences between his life experiences and mine. Viewed in a certain way, his 50-plus years of living, both in schools and out, is one large curriculum in what New England *is*, as well as what it means to live in New England. From his experiences, Bill simply knew that New England didn't include New York. As he pointed out, I didn't know New England in any deep, embodied sense like he did. The majority of my life had been lived outside of New England. I mostly knew of it from reading history books and watching sports on television, not from talking to my neighbors or walking to school or eating locally (all of which, and much more, taught Bill about New England).

But even though Bill had his lived truths, I had mine. To be sure, I listened to Bill, and since then I rarely think and speak of New England as including New York; my lived truths about New England now include this interaction with Bill in our classroom. But what I learned on those drives across upstate New York still resonates with me. What I felt there as I looked out across the landscape was similar to what I felt in Vermont and New Hampshire. Yes, history and much of present-day living separate New York from New England, but my life history—my living curriculum—also connects them in at least one aesthetic respect.

My disagreement with Bill over New England's state composition serves as a useful entry into this study. Succinctly, it raises the main topics that I discuss: curriculum, place, and teaching. All people, through mere living, undergo a course of learning experiences. This is a life course, a curriculum vitae.¹ The experiences of this course, what I call a *living*

¹ In academia, a *curriculum vitae* is a document that details one's education, research, teaching, and service over a professional lifetime. A curriculum vitae, in the sense that I use

curriculum, shape who we are. The course (and, thus, each of us) is always in a process of becoming. As with a course that a runner might follow, one's living curriculum occurs in and across places. It takes place. Our relationships to our surroundings in these places, which are also always becoming, shape our experiences and the meaning we make of them. That is, we know who we are—what we believe, what we value, what we desire, and so forth—in relation to our surroundings. Our places structure our identities, realities, and possibilities.

Place is a common but complex term. I use it to refer to one's relationships with surroundings. Thus, *a* place is constructed through a person's interaction (in the past, present, and future) with other living beings, the land, natural and human-made structures, cultures, histories, and so forth. In everyday discourse, when used as a noun, *place* connotes a position or location. As a verb, *to place* refers to the positioning or locating of something, and its past participle, *placed*, indicates that something has been positioned or located. While the word *place* does not necessarily have quality statements attached to it (e.g., it is inherently good or bad), the related words *emplace* and *displace* do. To *emplace* is to put something "in place," which implies that there is a fitting, healthy position or location for that thing. To *displace* is to do the opposite, to move the thing "out of place," which implies the loss of its fitting, healthy position. Emplacing allows for and ensures high quality whereas displacing inhibits high quality. A plant in a garden that is overrun by an aggressive weed is displaced. But a plant that is surrounded by healthy plants and able to grow from established roots is emplaced. Emplacing cultivates roots; displacing stunts roots, or uproots.

it here, is much more. It is a life of lived experiences, which unfold across all realms of living.

While all people can be placed, emplaced, and displaced, I am interested particularly in the work of teachers (and thus students and schools) in relation to their places. Teaching, as the story above raises for both Bill and me, is shaped by a teacher's living curriculum (in all its places). Teachers learn to teach through what I call a teaching curriculum, which is a lived course of learning how to be a teacher. The make-up of it is personal to each teacher but it is constructed socially. This course of learning to teach is a segment of the larger life course. It takes place in the schools of one's youth, as a student, as well as in the schools of pre-service and in-service teaching, as a teacher. It also takes place in the life experiences across many places that inform one's life in school. Indeed, teachers' lived truths across the times and places of our lives, in and out of schools, determine who we are as teachers. These truths shape our experiences with students. At the same time, students live in our classrooms (as well as outside of them) with their own living curricula. They are, at once, shaped and placed just like the teachers with whom they interact every single school day.

Thus, classrooms are daily sites of important interaction among teachers and students. The learning relationships that are placed there, in the pedagogical moment, are shaped by the lives that teachers and students have led into the classroom and will lead out of it. Where (and who) these learning agents are, and where (and who) they have been and will be, are key determinants in the learning that transpires. Therefore, it is imperative that we take up the question of *where* in schools and how it is central to the work of teachers and students. This is a question that is concerned with the past, present, and future. It is also concerned with individuals as they relate to their larger communities. But this question of where is addressed less commonly in today's schools.

The Place Of Place In U.S. Schooling

In *The World Is Flat* (2007), Thomas Friedman argues that new and emerging forms of digital technology are rapidly connecting people from different geographic places in ways in which the world has never seen. The result is that individuals from almost anywhere can compete, alongside everyone else, in a world economy that has been flattened. One implication of this is that distance becomes largely irrelevant. With the proper technology, a person in Malaysia can compete alongside a person in Mexico. It is as if the heights and depths of land and sea have been leveled, and then compressed. People, seemingly, are not rooted in the uneven earth that surrounds them. Another implication of this flat world is that people are more visibly connected to each other. Globalization is not a new concept, but digital technology makes it easier to comprehend. In a matter of seconds, a person anywhere in the world, with internet access, can communicate with a friend anywhere else who also has internet access. If I want, almost instantly, I can look up the weather in Madrid, Melbourne, and Moscow.

But as Americans (and certainly other groups of people), through digital technology, become more interconnected with people in different places across the earth, they are losing connections with the people with whom they live nearest (Putnam, 2000). There is a tradeoff occurring: one's physical surroundings are becoming less important as one's cyberspace is developed. In this sense, people are losing relationships to their many *landed* surroundings. They are increasingly becoming displaced from their "land community" (Leopold, 1966). While the causes of this displacement are likely found across many, if not all, aspects of daily living, one of the most important causes lies within the displacing work

of schools (Gruenewald & Smith, 2007; Smith & Sobel, 2010a; Theobald, 2006). Through abstracted standards and non-local content curricula, schools teach students to be people from anywhere and nowhere (Noddings, 2002). Instead of teaching students about living where they are, they teach students to leave where they are, psychologically and physically (Berry, 1990). Local land, community, and culture, the points at which people are directly connected to each other, are marginalized despite the natural reality that, as Orr (1994) eloquently argues, “we are of the earth; our flesh is grass” (p. 204). Schools, by and large, serve to disconnect students from where they live and learn. Increasingly, teachers are asked, or, coercively, required, to teach a highly scripted content curriculum that overlooks the inherent diversity of learners and their places (Gruenewald & Smith, 2007; Smith & Sobel, 2010). This furthers a curriculum of “placelessness.” Not only does schooling look beyond the specific contexts in which students live, but also it subverts them, by teaching students outright contempt for the earth (Bigelow, 1996). The message is that one’s places do not matter. Schools are displacing agencies.

This displacement is contrary to integrated living and learning, what Jardine (2003) asserts “has to do with keeping things in place, nested in the deep communities of relations that make them whole, healthy, and sane” (p. 198). Schools and teachers are charged with the task of grounding students in their homes, tending to the wholeness of a student’s life (Dewey, 1902/1959). Pedagogical work, then, teaches students to love, understand, and make better the tangible places and communities that they inhabit. Schooling is *for* place. This charge, however, is largely unrealized in many U.S. schools. Discussing the impact of food consumers losing connections to the places from which the food they consume comes, Berry (1989/2009) argues that there is “a remarkable obliviousness to the causes and

effects, the possibilities and the purposes, of the life of the body in this world” (p. 230).
Schooling that displaces achieves the same problematic ends.

In the last two decades, the rise of place-based educational theory has begun to respond to this growing problem. Place-based education, or place-conscious education, seeks to challenge and reorient many of the ways in which schools connect to, shape, and are shaped by the communities in which they are embedded. At the center of these efforts is the goal of education for current and future sustainability. Pedagogical attention to place, however, is hardly an easy undertaking. Nel Noddings explains the stakes:

at the beginning of the twenty-first century, policymakers are promoting globalization and a strong global economy. Schools are urged to adopt “world-class” standards and to produce graduates who will maintain the status of the United States as an economic leader. Where does a love of place fit into this picture? Should schools teach for an understanding and love of place or should they now offer curricula designed to transcend place? (2003, p. 119)

There is a decision to be made here, a problem to be reconciled, about the displacing tradition of schools and the grounded, particular life contexts of students. Mindful of the problem of schooling that displaces students, and informed by the call for place-conscious learning, I turn to investigate the living and teaching of three teachers in their particular places.

Studying Curriculum And Place In The Lives And Work Of Teachers

In Chapter One, I investigate the topics of curriculum and place in their respective literatures, as well as in the small segment of literature that considers them in tandem. Seeking to broaden traditional conceptions of curriculum that are prominent in schools, I frame curriculum as a living course of learning, across the times and places of a person's life, including those of school. I then move into a discussion of place, which I argue is a central but often-overlooked aspect of curriculum. Simply stated, people learn in particular settings. I conclude the chapter looking at the relationship between curriculum and place and posit that we cannot think about one without the other.

Attuned to the relationship between curriculum and place, Chapter Two outlines the methodology and methods of this study. I begin with a discussion about the importance of how one approaches research. I then situate my approach to this particular study, which draws heavily from the strand of narrative inquiry work set forth by Clandinin and Connelly (2000). I also explain my commitments to intimate research that seeks to collaborate closely and deeply with participants. I then detail my criteria for finding the three participating teachers and briefly introduce them, noting my connection to each teacher. I conclude the chapter with discussion of my research methods. While I seek to make clear what I did with the teachers to generate the field texts that structure my analysis and conclusions, I also intend for this discussion to provide helpful context to my interactions with the teachers.

After Chapter Two, each of the ensuing three chapters focuses on an individual teacher. In each chapter, I seek to tell a story—each teacher's story—and my approach is intentionally novelistic. Chapter Three takes the reader to Dorchester, Massachusetts, and the places of Tommy Allen, a white, male, high school English teacher. Teaching for over a

decade in a school continually deemed failing, his students are almost entirely non-white and poor. They are society's most marginalized. I story how, in many respects, Tommy's life is quite different from his students' lives, and yet he operated on the margins, much like them, through the first half of his life. Not until he began teaching in Dorchester, and then when he moved there, did he establish strong ties to a particular community and find a sense of life balance. I show that this balance positions him to teach his students to work through their margins toward a life balance.

Chapter Four takes the reader to Mobile, Alabama, and the places of Rosie Baker, a black, female, elementary school teacher. In her sixth year of teaching gifted education, after three years of grade-level classroom teaching, Rosie is comfortably rooted in suburban Mobile in all aspects of her life. I story how she came to this time and place, beginning with her childhood in urban Mobile. From an early age, she sought family-like relationships from a number of different communities, including pediatric cancer survivors and their supporters, peers and teachers at the schools she attended, and fellow parishioners at her church. After earning her teaching degree, she taught in a school with a student population that was entirely black and overwhelmingly poor. After three years, particularly as she became frustrated with standardized testing and its impact on her students and her teaching, she sought a new teaching context. Now, she teaches in a predominantly white, middle-class setting with a commitment to fostering family in her classroom.

Chapter Five takes the reader to Mid-Michigan, and the places of Dan Torres, a Filipino American, male, social studies middle school teacher. For over two decades, Dan has lived in Lansing and taught in the nearby community of Parker. At the current time,

and in both places, he is “cranking”—that is, happy and living meaningfully. I story how life has not always been that way for Dan. He struggled through a departed father when he was young, difficult schooling during high school and college, and a divorce with his first wife. But he emerged from those experiences. He is happily re-married and the lives of his four children are central to his living. The city of Lansing, where he lives, is central to his life too. Having “survived the fog,” his teaching is structured around stories of his survival and it focuses on his students being able to survive their fog.

Following the participant chapters, Chapter Six looks at these three teachers’ stories of living and teaching collectively. It considers how Dan, Rosie, and Tommy can help us think about who teachers are and the differences that they make in the lives of their students. In bringing their stories together, I seek to engage scholarship focused on the question, as Nieto (2003a) asks, “what keeps teachers going?” These three teachers are not only going after many years in the classroom but going strongly. I posit that their living curriculum, rooted in the places where they live and teach, is central to why they continue to teach. Additionally, their living curriculum is central to what they do in their teaching. As each underwent a process of rooting in their current contexts, I argue that they are working to help students become rooted. I conclude Chapter Six by asserting that these teachers, from different places, grade levels, and subject areas, with different living and teaching curricula, are teaching for citizenship and, in the process, teaching as an act of citizenship. I raise the importance of such teaching/citizenship, especially as schools are positioned to displace students from the communities that they inhabit.

Finally, expanding my focus, in the concluding section, I offer recommendations for various aspects of schooling based on this study. I consider how teacher education could

be well-served to attend to the different life paths of teachers. I also suggest that discussions of teacher quality could be informed by keeping in mind teachers' living curricula alongside of their teaching curricula. Returning to the problem of displaced schooling that I raise in this introduction, I close with consideration of how students, teachers, and schools can benefit from an emplaced environment of learning that attends to an integrated curriculum (Jardine, 2000). Such a curriculum approaches schooling as an act of living, learning to be in communion with our surroundings for the betterment of the whole.

If schools are going to continue to be pivotal social institutions for the present and future of the communities that they serve, they must be re-rooted in their places. They must find ways to educate students about local living within an interconnected, global world. Students must be positioned to learn that bettering their lives and the lives of all that surround them starts with the communities in which they are embedded. It is teachers who are an essential element in this work in schools that has important implications far beyond school walls. Thus, here, we dwell in three teachers' stories of curriculum and place, living and teaching.

CHAPTER ONE

THE PLACE OF CURRICULUM AND THE CURRICULUM OF PLACE

The living place, the learner's extended family, the clan and tribe provided the context and source for teaching. In this way, every situation provided a potential opportunity for learning, and basic education was not separated from the natural, social, or spiritual aspects of everyday life. Living and learning were fully integrated.

—Gregory Cajete (1994)²

Introduction

As a college sophomore, my university considered closing its education department. A small department with one tenured faculty member, it lacked an academic major and held little clout in campus politics. But if the department was closed, it would have had a major impact on students. The department's introductory course on contemporary issues in education was one of the most popular and highly-enrolled courses on campus, even though it was not required. Personally, since I aspired to be a teacher, no education department would mean no opportunity for me to gain my teaching licensure as a student there. At a rally in support of saving the education department, on the steps of the university's administration building, an adjunct education professor spoke to the student crowd. I vividly remember him saying that "education is not preparation for life but life itself." His point was that our present-lives, not merely our future-lives (or the lives of the children who would be taught by graduates of the department's teacher education

² This quote is taken from Cajete's overview of the Tribal foundations of American Indian Education.

program), were implicated in the threat to close down the department. With our and others' lives involved, we had a right to make our concerns known.

The professor was paraphrasing John Dewey. At the beginning of the second article of "My Pedagogic Creed" (1897/1959), Dewey writes,

I believe that the school is primarily a social institution. Education being a social process, the school is simply that form of community life in which all those agencies are concentrated that will be most effective in bringing the child to share in the inherited resources of the race, and to use his own powers for social ends. (p. 22)

Dewey highlights the unique position and power of the school in the work of social progress. The health of the community, its sustainability, is tied to the work of the school. Dewey then continues, "I believe that education, therefore, is a process of living and not a preparation for future living." Life is lived in schools.³ In going to school, students are not extracted from the/ir world. Thus, the work of teachers and schools must be approached as *in* the world, not as an entry to it. The school's curriculum, what students learn inside the school's walls, needs to focus on the social contours of students' lives in the present and not solely in the future. In this sense, Dewey argues that schooling is living. Schools are places for students to grow individually and socially, and the learning that accompanies this growth, across all students, is significant to societal progress. Therefore, schools must teach a curriculum appropriate to the needs of students and their communities.

³ Although Dewey writes of "education," here, he is specifically taking up education in the context of schooling.

In this chapter, I discuss my conceptions of *curriculum* and *place* and the relationship between the two. Examining some of the literature bases on these two subjects, as well as some of the writing that has been done about their relationship, I argue that curriculum is placed and that place is a curriculum. I begin by considering how there are many conceptions of curriculum, and I offer the simple notion that curriculum is a lived course of learning. I then suggest that curriculum, given its many definitions, is in need of preceding adjectives that situate its meaning. For me, then, the most basic form of curriculum is a “living curriculum.” From there, all other curricula emerge. I then turn to place. Like curriculum, place is a term used widely and I seek to situate it as, generally speaking, one’s relationship with many lived surroundings. This definition reflects the idea that place is exceedingly complex despite its ubiquity in everyday discourse. However, I contextualize my conception of place by grounding it in the earth, arguing that one’s relationship to the earth is a fundamental component of one’s place (or sense of place).

With these notions of curriculum and place *in place*, I examine the deep relationship between the two. Curriculum is fundamentally placed as life is lived amid a particular set of relationships. Thus, I say that place is a curriculum while noting, at the same time, that educative experiences are placed. I conclude the chapter by returning to Dewey, highlighting the importance of thinking about curriculum and place with respect to schools and social progress.

Curriculum

The English word *curriculum* is derived from the Latin word of the same spelling. The root of the word is *currere*, which means “to run,” and its English derivatives are words

such as *current* (“running water”) and *recur* (“happen again” or “rerun”). Building off of *currere*, a general translation of *curriculum* is “race course,” which indicates running in a particular direction. Literally, a person runs a particular course. Contemporary usage of *curriculum* in English tends to conjure notions of metaphorical running, in the context of learning. No longer an overt physical act, it is typically seen as a course of various learning experiences through which a person journeys (or “runs”).

As a word, curriculum is used in many different social contexts. However, it is central to talk about schooling. Teachers, administrators, parents, policy-makers, and researchers speak of curriculum and combine it with adjectives like rigorous, child-centered, rigid, common, core, Common Core, watered-down, and others. Ironically, and troublingly, the one group involved in schooling that speaks of curriculum the least is students. While curriculum is often at the center of educational dialogue, it rarely is defined, whether an adjective is attached to it or not.

Nearly a century ago, Franklin Bobbitt wrote that curriculum is “that *series of things which children and youth must do and experience* by way of developing abilities to do the things well that make up the affairs of adult life; and to be in all respects what adults should be” (italics original; 1918, p. 42). Although considerable debate from curriculum scholars about what curriculum is has ensued, it is my sense that this definition holds strong as the implied definition of most school-related people talking about curriculum. At the same time, many comprehensive surveys of curriculum show that curriculum in American schools has been and continues to be conceived of in various ways (e.g., Flinders & Thornton, 2004; Jackson, 1992; Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 2008). In everyday parlance, curriculum is content-based or process-oriented; it is composed of outcomes,

standards, goals. In the academy, for example, it is planned or intended, enacted or implemented, implicit or null (Wilson, 2005). What is less commonly heard, though, is that curriculum is personal, storied, and lived.

I understand curriculum to include, but extend far beyond the walls and efforts of, schools, to be what William Schubert (2006) calls the “BIG CURRICULUM.” Curriculum is a life of education, one’s running or movement through life experiences, learning all the while, and this notion builds, in addition to John Dewey, on the work of Ted Aoki (1986/2005, 1993/2005, 1996/2005), Jean Clandinin and Michael Connelly (1987, 1992, 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 1988; Clandinin, 1985, 1989), and William Pinar and Madeleine Grumet (1976).

A school-based living curriculum.

In “The Child and the Curriculum” (1902/1959), Dewey wrote of two educational sects in early twentieth-century schooling. The first “fixes its attention upon the importance of the subject-matter of the curriculum as compared with the contents of the child’s own experience” (p. 94). The child, or student, is immature and a course of academic subject matter learning will bring her or him to maturity. In the second sect, “the child is the starting point, the center, and the end.” No outside standards are sought for the child other than that individual growth is maximized. The goal is self-realization with little regard for social surroundings. With these sects defined, Dewey works to challenge both, arguing that the curriculum (the first sect) and the child (the second sect) exist in relation to the other. They are on a spectrum and one cannot be emphasized without the other. The best schooling, then, provides for individual growth amid social participation, and it is the work of the teacher to facilitate experiences along these lines, “to transform the

material; to psychologize it—that is...to take it and to develop it within the range and scope of the child’s life” (p. 110).

Ted Aoki conceives of a similar situation in classrooms. For Aoki (1986/2005), there are two worlds of curriculum, and teaching exists between them. There is the world of “curriculum-as-plan,” which is a scripted program of learning for students in the classroom, and there is the world of “curriculum-as-lived,” which is the experience of living in the classroom with students. Writing about Miss O, a grade 5 teacher in Canada, Aoki argues that teaching is “indwelling” between these two worlds. Both of these worlds make claims on the teacher, demanding her attention and effort. One world cannot be foregone for the other; rather, they must be negotiated in relation to each other. Miss O “knows that indwelling in the zone between curriculum-as-plan and curriculum-as-lived experience is not so much a matter of overcoming the tensionality but more a matter of dwelling aright within it” (p. 163). Instead of fleeing the tension, it is to be embraced.

By studying this “Zone of Between,” Aoki contends, we can develop a deeper understanding of who teachers are and what teachers do. While it is easy and common to look singularly at the implementation of curriculum-as-plan, such an investigation severely limits our understanding of teachers and teaching. We need to see the logics of the two curriculum worlds and the dialectic between them. Aoki does not use the word *dialogic* but it might be said that the Zone of Between creates a dialogic between the logics of each world. In recognizing this dialogic, then, it is clear that tension pervades it. School life “means living simultaneously with limitations and with openness,” but also acknowledging that “this openness harbours within it risks and possibilities as we quest for a change from the is to the not yet” (p. 164). Thus, students and teachers are indwelling in the tension

between “is” and “not yet.” I would add, thinking narratively, that they are also dwelling between these stages and a third stage: “was.” Aoki’s indwelling, then, is synonymous with becoming. Learning is a process of becoming, the context of which is constant tensionality.

Aoki is mindful, though, that indwelling inherently plays out in particular spaces. He writes:

In Miss O’s indwelling in the Zone of Between we see the teacher’s dwelling place as a sanctified clearing where the teacher and students gather—somewhat like the place before the hearth at home—an extraordinarily unique and precious place dedicated to ventures devoted to a leading out, an authentic “e(out)/ducere(lead),” from the “is” to new possibilities yet unknown. (p. 164)

Classrooms, through the learning interactions of teachers and students, are meaningful places of lived experience.

In later writings (1993/2005, 1996/2005), Aoki’s conception of the world of curriculum-as-lived takes on more nuance. His notion of “lived curriculum” offers an escape from traditional notions of curriculum (what he calls the “C&I landscape” or the “arboreal landscape”⁴) that are tied tightly to curriculum-as-plan (1993/2005). These traditional notions refer to *the* curriculum: teaching *the* curriculum; implementing *the* curriculum; maintaining fidelity to *the* curriculum. Curriculum is already made, not living.

⁴ Aoki challenges traditional conceptions of curriculum that put forth a singular curriculum that is “a master curriculum planned under an authority, authorizing sameness and homogeneity throughout the province” (1996/2005, p. 417). Such a singular curriculum, he contends, is like a tree that dominates an entire landscape. “The lone tree casts its benign shadow over the landscape such that ‘teaching’ becomes ‘implementation’ and ‘instruction’ becomes in-structuring students in the image of the given” (pp. 417-418).

But a lived curriculum, which is rooted in students' authentic experiences of learning, provides a pathway to a new curricular landscape (the "C&C landscape") that is "textured by a multiplicity of lines moving from between to between, is ever open, knowing no beginning and no end, resisting enframing" (p. 207). This landscape embodies the curriculum-as-plan and curriculum-as-lived. Curriculum is not pre-made but *in-the-making*, through the betweenness, tensionality of living.

Still wrestling with *the* curriculum (i.e., "Why is it that we seem to be caught up in a singular meaning of the word *curriculum*?"; italics original; 1996/2005, p. 417), Aoki later reworked "lived curriculum" into "live(d) curriculum." He writes, "the word *experience* is a hybrid, including the notions of 'past experiences' (*lived* experiences) and 'ongoing experiences' (*live* or *living* experiences)" (italics original; p. 418). From this place of thought that is marked by a process of becoming, I emerge excited by the term "living curriculum." It is the best representation for me of how I understand curriculum. *Living* signals learning in process, always subject to change as circumstances change. At the same time, it emphasizes how life is lived, experienced, by people.

A life-based living curriculum.

Although Dewey and others wrote about curriculum prior, the curriculum field was born in the 1920s, on the heels of Bobbitt's book *The Curriculum* (Pinar, 1978/2004). In the ensuing half century, curriculum was a classroom-based concept. However, in the 1970s, some curriculum scholars began to frame curriculum with respect to lived experience, which takes places inside and out of the classroom.⁵

⁵ I frequently use the adjectives *lived* and *living* to modify words like *experience*. In this respect, these adjective speaks to immediate, embodied, intuitive aspects of life, as opposed

William Pinar and Madeleine Grumet (1976), in launching the *currere* movement in curriculum work, proposed the idea of a “poor curriculum,” a curriculum that is “stripped of its distractions” (p. vii). Extending back to curriculum’s Latin roots, *currere* emphasizes the individual’s running of a life course. But more than that, it dwells in the individual’s unique experiences of that course. *Currere* is not simply an idea but also a method of study. It is a way to strip the curriculum. Pinar summarizes its purpose as: “I don’t know, and I must study, and search. I must be open to my experience, open to others’, and be willing to abandon what I think in the face of what I see” (p. viii). *Currere* is marked by tension and a need for action.

Currere emphasizes that life is lived and experienced, and it makes fluid the walls of classrooms and schools. Biography—or, more precisely, autobiography—is essential to it as it requires study of one’s lived experiences. I am influenced by *currere*, but I also find that it can lose sight of social living (and learning), especially with respect to schools. Informed by the thoughts of Dewey and Aoki that I outline above, *currere* dwells in the experiences and story of the individual. Psychoanalysis is one of its main tools. But its relationship to the social is always, for me, in question. In *currere*, I see Dewey’s sect of educational thought that focuses solely on the child, as well as Aoki’s curriculum-as-lived. I struggle to see the betweenness, the indwelling, that locates curriculum amid the individual and the social. In doing this, the importance of schools can be obscured, failing to see them as pivotal places of individual and social learning.

to the reflective, discursive aspects of life. While it is, in some sense, obvious that experience is lived (or living), I assert that it is particularly important to draw attention to this fact. In focusing on what is lived, we better understand the significance of how experience is lived and what it means for future living.

In the 1980s, a decade after the rise of *currere*, another movement in the field of curriculum arose that centered on lived experience in all places of life but also maintained an emphasis on schooling (and particularly teaching). Within this movement, I focus on the work of Jean Clandinin and Michael Connelly (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988), who write about “personal curriculum” and “personal practical knowledge.”⁶ Like *currere*, this notion of curriculum that Clandinin and Connelly offer is a course of lived, meaningful experiences. It has a past, present, and future, and it is directional, moving through and across places. But the experiences that make up one’s curriculum are personal, while still overtly situated in a social context. Dewey’s work on experience (1916; 1934; 1938) informs this conception of curriculum. For Dewey, learning is linked to experience, and in every experience there are two aspects: continuity and interaction. First, all experiences exist in a continuum of experience. Thus, for a given experience, there are prior experiences that influence it and, in turn, it influences future experiences. Dewey writes that “every experience both takes up something from those which have gone before and modifies in some way the quality of those which come after” (1938, p. 35). Second, all experiences are interactive as they happen amid the interplay of personal and social conditions. Personal conditions, or “internal conditions,” as Dewey calls them, are specific to the individual. One’s preference for a certain kind of food is a personal condition. However, personal conditions stand in relation to social conditions, what Dewey calls “objective” or “environing” conditions. While a person might prefer a certain kind of food, this is in relation to the kinds of food that have been, are, and will be available. These social

⁶ The journal *Curriculum Inquiry* ran a multi-year series of articles in the 1980s on personal practical knowledge and Clandinin and Connelly served as the editors of, and contributed articles to, that series.

conditions surround the person and an experience takes place in the interaction of these with personal conditions.

Building on this framework, Dewey writes that individuals “live in a series of situations” (1938, p.43). These situations are the context of the continuity and interaction of experiences. In fact, situations, continuity, and interaction are inseparable. While Dewey lumps together interaction and situation, calling them inseparable, I am interested in distinguishing between the two. For me, a situation connotes surroundings. It is a setting in which life is lived, and interaction is one’s relational engagement with those surroundings. This point is not to declare interaction and situation disconnected—indeed, they are deeply connected—but rather to acknowledge the importance of how situation and interaction (and continuity) influence each other.

In their earlier work, Connelly & Clandinin (1988; Clandinin & Connelly, 1994) follow Dewey’s notion of experience closely: an experience involves continuity and interaction and it happens in a situation. Curriculum, then, is a string of experiences. In their later work (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), although curriculum remains the same, the elements of experience shift. They offer the “three dimensional narrative inquiry space,” which includes the dimensions of continuity and interaction. But “situation” is pulled from the contextual overlay of those dimensions in the form of a third dimension called place. Continuity (forward and backward in time) and interaction (inward to the personal and outward to the social) are seen as directional while place is contextual (the site of the experience).

The three dimensional narrative inquiry space is not solely specific to schools but, in their work on curriculum, Clandinin and Connelly focus on teachers. As human beings,

teachers have personal curricula made up of “personal practical knowledge” that shape who they are and what they do. Thus, their teaching in classrooms is informed by their personal curricula (from both inside and out of schools). What they plan for is constructed out of their experiences. What unfolds in classrooms, then, with a teacher’s personal curriculum and the students’ personal curricula, amounts to Aoki’s C&C landscape, where there is a multiplicity of interactive experiences that create a situation of learning.

Living, schooling, and teaching curricula.

What Connelly and Clandinin call *personal curriculum*, I call *living curriculum*. I seek to highlight the importance of the many aspects of one’s life for what one does as a teacher, and then locate these aspects as ongoing, in process. This living curriculum is what a person learns over the course of her or his life. It is as broad as I can conceive; it includes one’s educative experiences in the past, present, and future, and extends across various lived places, including but not limited to schools. I posit that one’s learning at one time, and in one particular place, is interactive with the other aspects of one’s life. This learning is perpetually in Aoki’s Zone of Between, existing amid life’s realities and possibilities. Living, then, is inherently educative and curricular.

For me, *curriculum* means *living curriculum*. Because of many other conceptions of curriculum,⁷ I look for modifying adjectives to describe how life is lived and, particularly,

⁷ Much of the talk of curriculum in and about schools refers to curriculum-as-plan. Other terms for this notion include the modifying adjectives: overt, explicit, written, or intended (Wilson, 2005). Whatever the term, the idea is akin to Bobbitt’s early conception of curriculum: an educational authority lays out a course of learning for the students. Even though curriculum, in this sense, is externally imposed, the student still experiences it, lives it. What teachers actually teach is sometimes called the implemented curriculum (Snyder, Bolin & Zumwalt, 1992), while what students actually learn is sometimes called the received curriculum (Wilson, 2005). As *received* positions students as passive and conjures

how life is lived in school. While I am interested in curriculum across the times and places of lives, my focus on curriculum is grounded in the work of schools, or a *schooling curriculum*—that is, students’ living courses of learning *at or in relation to* school. Much of students’ daily lives takes place in schools and, therefore, much of their learning takes place in schools or in other, related places (e.g., on a school field trip, in a school sporting competition, doing “homework,” and so forth). Indeed, schools are significant social institutions for individuals and their communities, both historically in the U.S. (e.g., Cremin, 1980, 1988) as well as at the present time (Darling-Hammond, 2010). They are legally, but also culturally, charged with the mission of caring for and teaching students as they develop from young children to adults (Noddings, 1992, 2003). Further, what happens in schools interacts with and shapes the other elements of society (Nespor, 1997), and one need not look for too long in a newspaper to find impassioned debate about the impacts of schools and what students are learning there. As most all youth in the U.S. spend so much directed time in schools, I posit that work focused on living curriculum cannot overlook learning in schools. Indeed, schools are some of students’ most educative places. At the same time, schools are institutions central to the (re)formation of society.

As the people in schools who work most closely with students—hundreds if not thousands of students over the course of a teaching career—and who have a major impact on students’ schooling curricula (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005), I focus, in this study, on teachers. I am interested in their *teaching curricula*. In schools, this term would

notions of Freire’s “banking method” of education (2000), what students learn might also be called the learned curriculum. Part of what is learned (and experienced) by students includes the hidden curriculum (Jackson, 1990) and the implicit curriculum (Eisner, 1985). These refer to student experiences that are not intended but lived nonetheless. What students do not learn is the null curriculum, which, Eisner (1985) notes, seems strange, but experience is shaped by what is present as much as what is not.

probably be taken as synonymous with curriculum-as-plan, or what the teacher is going to teach. However, I do not think of it in this respect. A teaching curriculum is a living course of learning through which a teacher learns to teach. It is a component of a living curriculum, but its focus is the learning-to-teach process. Much of a teacher's teaching curriculum happens during what Feiman-Nemser (2001) calls the "professional learning continuum" of teachers, which includes pre-service teacher education, induction, and professional development, but I extend learning to teach further, across time and place. The teaching curriculum includes Lortie's "apprenticeship of observation" (1975), which takes place for students through their many years of schooling. But it also takes place outside of school, for students and teachers, through everyday living (Dalton, 2004; Mitchell & Weber, 1999; Weber & Mitchell, 1995). Indeed, following Britzman (2003), all aspects of a teacher's biography shape a teacher's teaching curriculum. Thus, one's teaching curriculum is a part of one's living curriculum. And, I posit that both shape and are shaped by one's work as a teacher: shaping students' schooling curricula. The concept of place is central to these curricula (living, schooling, and teaching). I will momentarily move away from curriculum, here, in order to consider place specifically, but then I will make my way back to the important relationship between the two.

Place

Place, like curriculum, but even more so, is an everyday word that is meaningful in all sorts of contexts. The word *place*, as a verb, signals a process of positioning. *I will place the cup on the table.* As a noun, it usually connotes a location or a position. *The place beyond the forest is beautiful; I finished in second place.* While these forms of place make up

many of its most common usages, there is much more to place. The philosopher Edward Casey writes that “place is not one kind of thing: it can be psychical as well as physical, and doubtless also cultural and historical and social” (1996, p. 31). Informed by Casey, I consider place to reflect a person’s lived relationships with physical and social surroundings. Thus, place is conceived individually but constructed socially through interaction with surroundings. Many people who live in the same city—for example, Pittsburgh—might refer to Pittsburgh as a place (location) in which they all live. However, each person likely has a different lived experience of Pittsburgh. It is that lived experience that constructs the place of Pittsburgh for that person and signals the place it holds in the person’s overall life narrative and identity. Thus, place is central to *who* people are, in addition to *where* they are.

As Entrikin (1991) writes, “place presents itself to us as a condition of human experience. As agents in the world we are always ‘in place,’ much as we are always ‘in culture’” (p. 1). But place is often overlooked in everyday living. Place is something lived but not directly scrutinized; it is *commonplace* (Casey, 1993). Geertz echoes this: “something that is a dimension of everyone’s existence, the intensity of where we are, passes by anonymous and unremarked. It goes without saying” (1996, p. 259). And yet academics and authors across many fields write effusively about, and in relation to, place, making it a focus of thought and inquiry (Adams, Hoelscher & Till, 2001; Ardoin, 2006; Feld & Basso, 1996). The variety of ideas shared by writers show that place is an interdisciplinary concept, not anchored in one particular segment of life, but present in all aspects of life.

The geographer George Demko suggests that “when we give ourselves to a place, we put it on, the surroundings included, as if it were our very own clothing” (Demko, Agel, & Boe, 1992, p. 14). This notion begins with place as a location, but hints toward place as a living relationship. Demko calls this “sense of place,” and he argues that “civilization, as we know it, is the poorer when we lose the sense of place...[which is] central to our very comprehension of the world” (p. 17). Included in this sense of place is the notion that places are not static. “All places change. They change in themselves and they change relative to other places, and they may cause change in other places” (p. 14). Just as humans are connected to other humans in a social network, so too are places. Thus, alongside everyday living, places are dynamic, constantly in flux, as the factors that constitute them are shifting.

While Demko touches on place as relational, his focus is on place as a location. This perspective, which is often taken up in the geography content curriculum of schools (Schmidt, 2008), is quite traditional. The work of critical geography over the past few decades has sought to move beyond location, focusing on the concepts of space and place (Cresswell, 2004). One strand of critical geography suggests that a feeling of “here” is the result of a person attaching meaning to a space (Helfenbein, 2006). In this work, *space* is the area in which people live and move. *Place*, then, “is the transformation of space through investments; it is space filled with meaning for those who spend time in it” (Helfenbein, 2006, p. 2). Thus, place is space made meaningful by people. Space is *placed* in context, in relation to other spaces, people, and ideas. Indeed, it is only through the interaction of these that place is possible.

While critical geography focuses on the turning of spaces into places, Casey (1996) asks, “what if the very idea of space is posterior to that of place, perhaps even derived from it?” (p. 16). Casey contends that since humans understand the world through perception, the contexts in which humans exist place them prior to any conception of space. “We come to the world—we come into it and keep returning to it—as already placed there. Places are not added to sensations any more than they are imposed on spaces. Both sensations and spaces are themselves emplaced from the very first moment, and at every subsequent moment as well” (p. 18). This means that humans live locally, in the places in which they find themselves. As a result, they are “not only *in* places but *of* them” (p. 19). More than earthlings, Casey argues that humans are *placelings*. By definition, then, place acknowledges diversity, as one place (and one human) is inherently different from another, and yet places (and humans) are interconnected in a larger whole. By developing a strong understanding of one’s place, Casey contends that other places are better understood and humans (and their places) are provided the opportunity to be brought together more closely. He writes,

Standing in this place thanks to the absolute here of my body, I understand what is true of other places over *there* precisely because of what I comprehend to be the case for this place under and around me. This does not mean that I understand what is true of *all* places, but my grasp of one place does allow me to grasp what holds, for the most part, in other places...
(p. 45)

Thus, local knowledge derived from a particular place serves one’s connection to other places.

Surveying the literature on place, David Gruenewald⁸ (2003b) recognizes Casey's focus on perception as well as other dimensions of place. The five dimensions that he outlines are: perceptual, sociological, ideological, political, and ecological. These dimensions are interrelated and they connect to a host of different traditions including philosophy, geography, anthropology, and indigenous thought. Instead of trying to fix an essential notion of place, Gruenewald seeks to show that each dimension "is in its own way an expression of the fundamental idea that places are pedagogical" (p. 623). Of Gruenewald's five dimensions, three are the most salient to me. The perceptual dimension, rooted in phenomenological thought, shows that "places are the ground of direct human experience" (p. 623). The body, and all bodies, are set in close connection to the natural world. But at the same time, the sociological dimension casts place as a social construct. Although it might be counterintuitive to consider what is natural as socially constructed, Gruenewald (2003b) argues that "it is people and cultures that invest places—ecosystems, oak trees, nature itself—with meaning" (p. 626). Thus, people are placemakers. For the ecological dimension, Gruenewald looks to Wendell Berry, who "advances a bioregional understanding of place," (p. 634) one that is rooted in what Berry (1993) calls "local life." Under this dimension, Gruenewald also notes the rise of ecofeminism, which seeks "to recognize how dominant cultural patterns destroy diversity in particular places and to take the political action needed to conserve diverse cultures and ecosystems" (2003b, p. 635).

In this work (2003b), Gruenewald lays out a "multidisciplinary framework for place-conscious education." Elsewhere (2003a), he conceives of a "critical pedagogy of place,"

⁸ Recently, Gruenewald changed his last name to Greenwood and now publishes under that name.

and across his work, he calls attention to the displacement of place in schools, and the need for schools to be (re)emplaced. When a person is emplaced, he or she is positioned in a life context that is natural and life-sustaining. The person's health and growth is prioritized and it does not come at the expense of others' health and growth. But when a person is displaced, he or she is disconnected from such a life context. The person is made to flee. In thinking about emplacement and displacement, I often focus on the metaphor of a garden and, in particular, the life-giving roots of the plants within it. A garden is a community of life. The individual living organisms thrive as the entire community thrives, and vice versa. Each plant's roots, which allow it to live and grow, work their way through the community's soil. Properly cared for, the plants become emplaced, with their deep rootedness, in the garden. Emplacement (and displacement) involves the cultivation (and stunting or uprooting) of roots.

While Gruenewald largely dwells in a theory of place-conscious education (or "place-based," as it is also called), laying out the importance and purposes of people and other living beings to be and live emplaced, Smith and Sobel (2010a, 2010b) examine place- and community-conscious education by detailing ongoing pedagogical efforts that take place in schools. They find that students who are rooted in their local places, with developed senses of place, are more connected to others (and other places), both near and far, and better citizens of their communities. This connection and citizenship is grounded in the land under foot.

A landed conception of place.

Writing about the history of indigenous knowledge, American Indian scholar Vine Deloria offers, "while tribal peoples did not have a detailed conception of the whole planet

in the sense that Western scientists presently do, they did have a very accurate knowledge of the lands they inhabited, and the plants, animals, and other life-forms that shared their environment” (2001, p. 21). Deloria goes on to describe how American Indian knowledge was predicated on the idea of respect for surroundings, particularly the land under one’s feet, which sustained life. There was an integrity to all living relationships and humans saw themselves set within a system of life, not as the controller of all life. Human actions were understood to have far-ranging impacts. Therefore, it was important for all relationships to be complete: “completing the relationship focuses the individual’s attention on the results of his or her actions. Thus, the Indian people were concerned about the products of what they did, and they sought to anticipate and consider all possible effects of their actions” (p. 23). Sustainability, over the time of generations, was a focal point of living.

Not only was place important to indigenous knowledge, it *was* indigenous knowledge. “The key to understanding Indian knowledge of the world is to remember that the emphasis was on the particular, not on general laws and explanations of how things worked” (p. 22). Although writing of indigenous knowledge in the past tense, Deloria quickly moves to call for American Indian education and American education in general—both in a perceived state of crisis—to learn from this knowledge. Cajete (1994), Grande (2004), and Wildcat (2009) write from similar stances. Wildcat links this educational crisis to the crisis of climate change. His solution to both is singular: we need to pay attention to “indigenous realism,” which starts from the premise that “our human knowledge of reality must always be approached with humility” (p. 9). Wildcat argues that indigenous peoples possess “place-shaped knowledges” that can bring about “a rethinking of our diverse

human cultural development as shaped by places” (p. 11). Understanding knowledge in one place, then, serves all places, all living beings.

For these American Indian scholars, place and education are interwoven. Embedded in this understanding of life, and the world, is a rooting in the physical earth. People live in relation to the land and their knowledge is *landed*. Mother Earth is alive and people live in relationship with her. Thus, in the words of the title of Basso’s book about place and the Western Apache, “wisdom sits in places” (1996).

Many of the ideas of indigenous realism, particularly the importance of a committed relationship to land, are found in other writings about place (e.g., hooks, 2009; Snyder, 1990; Stegner, 1992; Thoreau, 1854/1981). These writings are all marked by a human’s lived responsibility to care for the earth. But, more than that, they assert the unity of humans and the earth in one, interrelated community. For Aldo Leopold, this is a “land ethic,” which “enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals” (1966, p. 219). Thus, humans live in an intimate relationship with the land, possessing a feeling of deep connectedness to a larger whole in an “I-Thou” relationship (Knapp, 2005). They are cultivators and conservationists of the land, and not mere consumers of it. This land ethic, then, requires place to be considered not just as a living relationship with other people and man-made structures, but also, perhaps even foremost, with the land.

As I read this literature on the intimate relationship between humans and land, I find the deepest connections in the extensive writings of the farmer and writer Wendell Berry (1977, 1981, 1990, 1993, 2010; Prakash, 1994). Berry writes, “no matter how urban our life, our bodies live by farming; we come from the earth and return to it, and so we live

in agriculture as we live in flesh. While we live our bodies are moving particles of the earth, joined inextricably both to the soil and to the bodies of other living creatures" (1977, p. 97). Elsewhere, Berry (2010) takes up place as the relational point at which our lives interact with the land. He writes of "the difficulty of separating my work from my life, and the place from either" (p. 2). All are wrapped up into one, integrated relationship. Speaking about his collection of many writings over many years, Berry offers that "[it] originates in part in actual experience of an actual place: its topography, weather, plants, and animals; its language, voices, and stories" (p. 4). This definition of place focuses on the relationship of people with their surrounding environments. For me, it locates the sometimes-ungrounded ideas about place *in the earth* with a land-based conception of place. Berry's list of elements of "an actual place" stem from inhabited land and participation in its local communities and cultures. Meaning that transforms this land into a place comes through one's relationship to the land and those that live upon it.⁹ As Berry reflects on the relationship of his writing to his farm in Kentucky, he offers, "[what] I have written here, I suppose, must somehow belong here and must be different from any [writing] I might have written in any other place" (2010, p. 4). What he writes—indeed who he is—is a product of where he is. Place matters unquestionably in the shaping of lives.

One feature of Berry's conception of place is that he is suspicious of what he calls "global thinking."¹⁰ He writes: "properly speaking, global thinking is not possible. Those

⁹ Similarly, Orr (1992) writes of place as a source of "food, water, livelihood, energy, materials, friends, recreation, or sacred inspiration" (p. 126). The groundedness of these aspects of place lead Orr to argue that "place, by definition, is specific" (p. 127).

¹⁰ It is important to note that Berry's definition of *global* is different from definitions put forward by global education scholars. For example, Graham Pike writes: "Global education

who have ‘thought globally’ (and among them the most successful have been imperial governments and multinational corporations) have done so by means of simplifications too extreme and oppressive to merit the name of thought” (1993, p. 19). Since people live locally, any form of world-scale action must involve the work of localities coming together. One local, or entity, cannot act internationally by itself since humans have a finite capacity to interact with land, people, and cultures. Life and living, Berry contends, is made up of many relationships at local scales that are all interdependent on each other. For any problem, then, “a good solution in one pattern preserves the integrity of the pattern that contains it” (1981, p. 7). Thus, good local living is the best form of good global living (1993).

Gruenewald (2003b) notes that Berry’s “bioregionalism” has come under attack from social justice advocates who say that solely local living dwells too deeply in one place, while greater injustice exists elsewhere. Berry, however, in condemning his conception of global thought, does not promote isolationism. “A good solution [to any problem] acts within the larger pattern the way a healthy organ acts within the body. But it must be understood that a healthy organ does not—as the mechanistic or industrial mind would like to say—‘give’ health to the body, is not exploited for the body’s health, but is *a part* of its health” (1981, p. 3). Injustice in one place, in one pattern, mars all patterns. Thus, “solving for pattern” is critical for the sustainability of all living beings and communities as

is a tapestry in the making: it weaves together the separate threads, such as economy, environment, society and technology, by which we currently make sense of the world. It is needed to help us fully realize our interdependence with all life forms, to understand that, ultimately, survival in isolation is neither desirable nor possible” (2000, p. 218). Berry also advocates for the importance of understanding interconnectedness; his definition of global assumes an international scale that fails to have a rooting in local places and a commitment to the sustainability of those places.

they are fundamentally interconnected. Pattern, then, requires recognition of diversity—“which exists and is pleasant but also...is necessary and we need more of it” (1990, p. 114).

Pattern is predicated on an understanding of and commitment to a unified whole.

A landed conception of place acknowledges that a place is both a location on the earth and a living relationship with it. It also recognizes that places and people are interconnected with other places and people. People inhabit places alongside of constructing them, and this *takes place* throughout people’s lives. At this point, we return to curriculum, emphasizing the deep connections between curriculum and place.

Curriculum And Place

I conceive of curriculum (or, a living curriculum) as a person’s living course of learning. I conceive of place as a person’s living relationships with surroundings. As life is not lived in abstract space, curriculum is always placed. These places of a curriculum are in flux, changing with new lived experiences, but they are never detached from that curriculum. Thus, curriculum and place are intricately enmeshed; they are integrated.

Two decades ago, Pinar wrote, “place as a concept is largely absent in the curriculum literature, predictably so” (1991, p. 165). Since the rise of the field in the first half of the twentieth century, Pinar contends that curriculum has mostly been considered in the abstract. It has often looked beyond particularity, which is a hallmark of place. Pinar and Grumet’s “poor curriculum” (1976) and Clandinin and Connelly’s “personal curriculum” (1988) were, in some sense, exceptions to this tradition, but they did not overtly locate the importance of place. Kincheloe and Pinar (1991) eventually sought to bring place to the forefront. “Curriculum theory,” they argued, “cannot advance if it

abstracts itself from time, history, place, and human intention” (p. 20). Thus, they worked “toward a curriculum theory of place,” in which they focused particularly on the American South. This work has spawned deeper investigations of curriculum and place in the South (e.g., Casemore, 2008; Ng-A-Fook, 2007; Whitlock, 2007), but it has not been taken up with respect to other regions of the United States, and place is cast, foremost, regionally. Perhaps this is not surprising, though, as Kincheloe and Pinar argue that “southerners are wary of individuals without place” (1991, p. 13).

But place is an issue in all places, and for all people. Whether people find themselves emplaced or displaced—or, more likely, in some tensionality in between—place is present. The question is: how is place shaping life, and in turn, how is life shaping place? Although the curriculum literature is sparse with respect to work about place, there seems to be growing talk about place with respect to curriculum.

One scholar that has been writing about curriculum and place for over two decades is David Jardine. Jardine writes about curriculum integration, which “has to do with keeping things in place, nested in the deep communities of relations that make them whole, healthy, and sane” (Jardine, LaGrange, & Everest, 2003, p. 198). He is concerned with the “integrated curriculum,” which is an attempt to ground education in our relationships with the earth. The voices of all living beings are interwoven into one whole life. Education is “an ecological and spiritual matter, involving images of our place and the place of our children on ‘this precious Earth’” (Jardine, 1998, p. 73).

For Jardine, what students learn and what teachers teach must be earthen. Their work in classrooms must serve the sustainability of all; it must cultivate oneness, integrity. For this reason, he is wary of contemporary ways of schooling that are grounded in student

learning of displacing academic content. “The disassembling of curriculum into disparate disciplines is all too akin to the ecologically disastrous and life-threatening disassembling of our Earth” (2006, p. 172). An integrated curriculum is not void of academic content; rather, the academic content is determined in relation to where (and who) the students and teachers are. Jardine explains this point by telling a story of his teaching: he asked his teacher education students to consider how a sheet of paper could be used in teaching any curricular topics. Initial responses involved writing on the paper, folding it, and reading what is printed on it. But possibilities opened up when a student suggested looking at how paper is made. This led to the idea that studying trees would be “on topic.” Jardine writes,

Once this shift of focus occurred, what began was a giddy onrush of sun and soil and water and logging and chainsaws and gasoline and refineries. That is to say, because of this serendipitous “turn,” of attention, suddenly and unexpectedly, *everything* came to be co-present with this paper, everything seemed to nestle around it. (italics original; 1998, p. 69)

Relevant relationships abounded as nothing seemed disconnected. The students came to the realization that “*every* object is a unique center around which all others can be gathered *while at the same time* that very object rests on the periphery of all others, proximal to some, distant to others” (italics original; p. 70).

There is a form of placelessness in this realization. If everything is tied to everything else, then what matters? But Jardine reminds us, like Berry and Casey above, that we are of the earth. Made from the earth, we stand upon it, and ultimately return to it. Our lives are unique centers where we are, and yet they are also on the margins of all other lives. As we lead our lives from our centers, our places, it is critical that we recognize our

relationships with our surroundings. For Jardine, then, this is the work of education. The schooling curriculum is to be rooted humbly in our relationships with our surroundings.

In *No Place But Here* (1996), Garret Keizer provides insight into his work as a teacher mindful of where he teaches. He writes of his first years teaching in the Northeast Kingdom of Vermont. His story begins with his introduction to Vermont and the community in which he teaches. Although he had purposefully departed the heavy industry of New Jersey for a more rural setting, his new hometown featured a furniture mill. This made his move “a bit like carrying coals to Newcastle” (p. 2). That is, Vermont wasn’t necessarily so different from New Jersey, as tough, smelly, unsung factory work is not specific to one place. And yet, Keizer goes on to frame his story:

Rurality is my context more than my subject, though to some extent it must be both. I write my essay on teaching in a rural community not as a soldier would write about making war in a desert—where lack of water and cover define the very strategy—but as a lover might write about his affair in a village, where the mountains and verandas have determined the moods and the occasions of love, but have made the loving itself little different than it is elsewhere. At least this is what I suppose—as I say, I have taught no place but here. (p. 3)

Although the book is foremost about place, and specifically teaching in a particular place, this paragraph is as close as Keizer gets to defining the concept of place. There is a subtle distinction made between place as “defin[ing]” and “determin[ing].” With the former, place is a matter of fact, preceding human action. The limits of what is possible are set. But with the latter, place is made in the interaction of people and their environments, which means

place is inherently subjective and constructed. Keizer sides with place as determiner, arguing that place is woven into living, or vice versa; it is not the mere boundary that encloses life.

It is common to hear the idiom, “good teaching is good teaching,” as the point is made that the work of good teaching is important everywhere, regardless of context. Keizer recognizes that embedded in this saying is the idea that a good teacher understands and accounts for her particular context (i.e., her students, courses, school, community, local culture, personal beliefs and so on), as a part of her good teaching. In this respect, Keizer’s book isn’t about teaching; it’s about teaching “here.” Whether it is recognized or not, I posit that all teaching—and, indeed, all learning—is placed in the sense that Keizer’s is. If not mountains and verandas, some particular environmental aspects, physical and social, set the “moods and occasions” of the teaching—and of the learning.

Conclusion

Keizer’s book is a story about the relationship between curriculum, place, and schooling: it’s about what his students learn living and going to school in the Northeast Kingdom of Vermont; and, it’s about what he has learned living and teaching there. It shows how living, learning, and teaching are inherently placed. It shows how his teaching is shaped by the particularities of where and who he teaches. And it shows how his past, present, and future—his narrative life history, including the places in which that history is set—are intertwined with his teaching.

In this chapter, I have laid out a conception of curriculum that is interested in learning and living far beyond the place of school. And yet, returning to Dewey

(1897/1959), school is a critical place to attend to learning and living. At the present time, over a century after Dewey's "insist[ence] upon the school as the primary and most effective interest of social progress and reform" (p. 31), schools are still a central institution to the communities (and the whole community) they inhabit. It is schools, as charged by the National Council for the Social Studies, that are "to help young people make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world" (NCSS, 2010, p. 3). And, standing at the point of this charge, are teachers. In the ensuing chapters, I take up a study of how three teachers—shaped by their living curricula, rooted in particular relationships with their surroundings—carry out their important work.

CHAPTER TWO

METHOD/OLOGY: STUDYING EXPERIENCE THROUGH STORY

All you can write is what you see.

—Woody Guthrie, New York City, 1940¹¹

Introduction

For the past five years, I have taught “methods” courses comprised of college seniors who are studying to be social studies teachers. The aim in these courses is for students to become acquainted with, and enact in their classrooms, different teaching methods. When we gather on the first day of the class, however, I raise what I feel is a critical distinction about the framing of the course. Our course, I say, is about social studies methods *and* methodologies. The distinction is essential to how I approach teaching the course.

A method is a manner of doing something. In a classroom, lecture is often a method of instruction. An essay is often a method of assessment. Writing out a lesson plan is often a method of preparing to teach. These and so many other methods structure life in classrooms. What gets overlooked in focusing on methods, though, are the assumptions embedded in them. Use of lecture can assume that the teacher is all-knowing and the students are all-lacking. Use of an essay can assume that student knowledge is best demonstrated or utilized through formal, argumentative writing. Use of a lesson plan can

¹¹ Noted at the bottom of the original lyrics to “This Land Is Your Land.”

assume that the teacher can know how the class will unfold. The point is not to argue for the eviction of methods from classrooms; rather, the point is to contextualize methods with thought about their usage. This contextualized thought is methodology. My students typically want to talk about methods, not methodology, because they are not eager to make the hard decisions required by methodology. They want to learn how, not think about why, to lecture, but my goal is for them to consider both. For this reason, I insert a forward slash in the chapter's title, constructing "method/ology," in order to give some pause to reading of the term.

In this chapter, I seek to make clear my actions and purposes, my methods and methodologies, in this study. I begin with a discussion of the general act of researching. I then move into the particular methodologies of this study. The second half of the chapter focuses on the methods I used to carry out the study. In describing these methods, I introduce the study's participants and begin to tell a story of my research with them. This chapter serves to map out the landscape for the stories that follow in the ensuing chapters.

Research As Pedagogical And Curricular

In *Researching Lived Experience* (1997), Max van Manen positions research as an act of pedagogy. "One does not pursue research for the sake of research" (p. 1), he writes. Rather, one does research because of a prior interest. For van Manen, this interest is pedagogy, which he defines broadly as "the activity of teaching, parenting, educating, or generally living with children, that requires constant practical acting in concrete situations and relations" (p. 2). I, too, approach research pedagogically, although my interest in

pedagogy tends to be a bit narrower than van Manen's, focusing largely on school-related pedagogy.

To this notion of research-as-pedagogy, I would add research-as-curriculum. Pedagogy is about the activity of educating. Curriculum, as I outline in Chapter One, is about learning through and from lived experiences. The two practices are intertwined. While I see research-as-curriculum implicit in van Manen's work, I seek to highlight it here. This research is phenomenological and hermeneutic as it focuses on the lived meanings of people's experiences. It approaches people as unique individuals and it dwells in the specific experiences of their lives. Thus, the job of the researcher is to take what is implicit (embodied) in the participant's life and make it explicit (discursive). From such a research stance, van Manen writes,

to do research is always to question the way we experience the world, to want to know the world in which we live as human beings. And since to *know* the world is profoundly to *be* in the world in a certain way, the act of researching—questioning—theorizing is the intentional act of attaching ourselves to the world, to become more fully part of it, or better, to *become* the world. (italics original; 1997, p. 5)

Such research is a caring act by an actor who asks questions and seeks to answer them. The purpose is to cultivate integrity: lives living more completely.

Committed to this line of interpretive work, Garman (2007) posits that research in its written form often features three types of "essential texts": experiential, theoretic, and discursive. Experiential text "is based on stories that focus on the self in social context" (p. 6). Building on the work of Maxine Greene, Garman argues that experiential text has an

inherent gap in what we think of as reality. While we focus on “what happened,” we cannot ignore that we interpret “what happened *when, why, and/or how*” (italics added; p. 6).

Therefore, imagination is required to bridge this gap in order for the text to have significance on our actions and educational futures. Theoretic text is an author’s work at interpreting experiential text through reflection and at a distance. Using reason—what van Manen calls “a broadened notion of rationality” (1997, p. 16)—an author makes meaning of these stories of living. Citing Elliot Eisner’s work, Garman describes theoretic text as persuasive writing, in which an author constructs an interpretation. The third text, discursive text, is generated by “immersing ourselves in multiple discourses” (2007, p. 8). An author brings relevant scholarly discourses to the phenomenon and interpretation of it in an effort to reach intellectual depth. “The discursive text serves to enhance the author’s persuasive ideas and to legitimize the insights of theoretic text. In addition, the discursive text provides the public space of intellectual dialogue and, as such, keeps the dangers of solipsism at bay” (p. 8). These three texts, as central components of interpretive research, are woven throughout my study.

Garman’s three essential texts, what I call *writing texts*, refer to types of writing. They build on “preliminary texts,” and Garman notes a line of scholars from various fields who have taken up discussion of what constitutes a text. Little is said, though, about the creation and usage of these preliminary texts. Clandinin and Connelly (2000), however, focus closely on them, what they call *field texts*.

Field Texts As Representations Of Experience

What many researchers refer to as *data*, I call *field*. Field texts are informational texts that are records of experience. They take many forms and are generated in a particular context, and they overtly signal how the products of research are always emplaced. Field texts do not exist independent of the researcher and the participant; rather, they exist as products of a collaboration between the two. Geertz writes,

in short, anthropological writings are themselves interpretations, and second and third order ones to boot. (By definition, only a “native” makes first order ones: it’s *his* culture). They are, thus, fictions; fictions, in the sense that they are “something made,” “something fashioned”—the original meaning of *fictio*—not that they are false, unfactual, or merely “as if” thought experiments. (1973, p. 15)

With Geertz’s insight, I approach field texts as made. This process of making field texts does not follow a simple formula, and it is certainly subject to issues of (mis)representation (Britzman, 2000; Fine, Weiss, & Wong, 2002), but it is marked by inherent collaboration. Thus, as Harding (1987) argues, a researcher does not partake in the work of documenting field texts that pre-exist “elsewhere.” Instead, the researcher collaborates with the participant to make field texts. This collaboration means that field texts are shaped within both the continuity and interaction of living. As a result, field texts, and research in general, are always in process, never having clear, natural beginnings or endings. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) call this “being in the midst,” asserting that a researcher must acknowledge that the time, space, and context of a study are boundaries in need of seeing

and understanding.¹² Thus, what is learned from the research is structured by, and specific to, the lived relationship of researcher and participant.

I entered this work with the conviction that the study participants possessed deep embodied knowledge and it was my privilege to care for that knowledge. We, the participants and I, were all knowers, having many lived experiences and stories to tell. We each had our own living curricula. For this reason, during the study, I sought to interact with the participants as dialogic partners, and I focused on hearing their stories of living. I brought an initial framing of topics and questions to our relationships—indeed, I was the impetus for the study—but our interactions over the study dictated the course of our shared experience and the content of the various field texts generated. This research relationship, then, necessitated that I engage in communication and collaboration with each participant to a degree that allowed for us to connect on a substantive level, one that was deeper than a simple researcher/researched dynamic. With a narrative inquiry focus, it was imperative that I build close, collaborative relationships with the study participants.

In this study, I sought to investigate how truths are constructed through lived experience, and how they inform current and future experience, particularly with respect to teaching. I wanted to immerse myself in the personal, living curricula of a small group of teachers and, following van Manen, question how their living in different places, and at different times, shaped their teaching. Through various methods focused on storytelling, I experienced the teachers' living and teaching. In my re-presentation of these stories, I constructed a story about how lived experience shapes the work of teaching.

¹² Along similar lines, Geertz writes of “being here” and “being there,” with the former being the place of a scholarly life, and the latter simply being a “postcard experience” in the field (1988).

Hearing And Learning From Stories

I conducted this study with a commitment to a narrative inquiry methodology, specifically the line of narrative research developed by Clandinin and Connelly (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994, 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 1988). Building on Dewey's framing of experience that I discuss in Chapter One, Clandinin and Connelly write that:

narrative inquiry is a way of understanding experience. It is a *collaboration* between researcher and participants, over *time*, in a *place* or series of places, and in *social interaction* with milieus. An inquirer enters this matrix in the midst and progresses in this same spirit, concluding the inquiry still in the midst of living and telling, reliving and retelling, the stories of the experiences that make up people's lives, both individual and social. Simply stated...narrative inquiry is stories lived and told. (italics added; 2000, p. 20)

Thus, narrative inquiry is concerned with collaborative investigation of "lived experience" through the telling of stories with particular attention to time, place, and interaction. Clandinin and Connelly call the site of this research the "three dimensional narrative inquiry space" (2000). Narrative links together experiences in the past, present, and future, and this continuity over time is directional, always moving with new knowledge from one understanding of the world to another. Any aspect of this experiential narrative (like the present) is always situated in relation to the other aspects (like the past and future). For this reason, I am interested in the experiential range of teachers' narratives; that is, their pasts, presents, and futures.

But I am also interested in teachers' places, across their lives but particularly within their schools. Experiences are situated by a second dimension: place. They *take place*, in particular settings, and for a teacher, a prominent setting is the school. An experience is contextualized by surroundings and different surroundings shape different experiences. This closely relates to a third dimension: interaction. An experience is marked not only by surroundings but by interaction with those surroundings. Thus, I am interested in teachers' relationships with their surroundings. For this reason, the schools and the classrooms of the teachers are central sites to the study. Likewise, the teachers' relationships with their students and colleagues, the people who coexist with them at school, are central to the study.

My method for making sense of these placed narratives of interaction in the lives of teachers is through story. Umphrey (2007) writes, "ask someone to tell you the most important thing he or she has learned, and you will be told a story. Deep learning always takes the form of a story" (p. 15). For Clandinin and Connelly, to live is to tell stories, and the way to study experience, then, is to attend carefully to stories. Although experience cannot be translated perfectly into words, stories of experience offer glimpses of living. Through storytelling, one reaffirms, modifies, and creates stories, and "stories such as these, lived and told, educate the self and others, including the young and those, such as researchers, who are new to their communities" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994, p. 415). Looking across these stories, at teachers' living curricula, I examined the narrative arcs of how place matters in the teachers' lives, then extended that examination to the teachers' pedagogical imaginings. In the research phases, it was my task as the researcher to elicit these stories, hear them, interact with them, and, eventually, incorporate them into the

stories that I told about the ways in which teachers' living curricula are placed. As I worked with the participants' stories, it was imperative that I access their depth and richness, moving into their inherent complexity.

Thus, narrative inquiry is both deeply personal and deeply social. With the study's participants, I wanted to engage both of these aspects. Given the richness and complexity of lived experience, though, I looked to dwell in a small number of real lives. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) write, "in the grand narrative, the universal case is of prime interest. In narrative thinking, the person in context is of prime interest" (p. 32).

Foregrounding Participant Diversity And Engagement

Any research study, simply by its design, foregrounds some issues and backgrounds others. Entering this study I emphasized the importance of participant diversity, with respect to where they live and what they teach. I also emphasized the engagement level of the participants, seeking to have them work with me as collaborators.

Participant diversity: Region.

I wanted each participant to be a K-12 teacher in a distinct region of the United States. Concerned with how place shapes teachers' lived experiences, I approached the participants first by the regions in which they live and teach. Following Demko and colleagues (1992), a region is a classification of geographic space. It is one geographic area made up of smaller geographic areas. The link across these smaller areas is a set of commonalities. Comparatively, regions feature distinct landforms, climates, cultures, and histories. And yet, any of these features of a region are entirely dependent on other regions. Indeed, regions are constructions, made by humans, and lacking definitive

boundaries. For this reason, one might speak of the American Southwest as separate from the American West, and yet another might easily include the Southwest in the West.

Regions are an important part of the past, present, and future of the U.S. (Ayers, Limerick, Nissenbaum, & Onuf, 1996). Although popular narratives in the U.S. associate regions with American history and, thus, consider them nostalgically (as if they're being lost in the present), Ayers and Onuf argue that American regions are clearly not disappearing. "Americans refuse to let regional identity die, because it offers something that appears to be hard to find in a mass society: a form of identity that promises to transcend ethnic boundaries, to unite people across generations" (p. 3). Regions, therefore, are complex and evolving places, especially amid (re)emerging global, national, and local discourses (Wilson, 1998).

I selected three regions—the Northeast, the Midwest, and the South—and specifically three metropolitan areas—Boston, Massachusetts; Lansing, Michigan; and Mobile, Alabama—for several reasons. Each of these areas has a compelling set of physical and human characteristics. Like their larger regions, over time, the different waves of people who have come to these areas have built communities and cultures that are specific to their surroundings and shared values. While the three areas do possess the commonality that each is located in the United States, thus tying them to the powerful hegemonic narratives of the nation-state, regional differences are present in many aspects of living. For example, Boston's schools have a holiday for Patriot's Day, while Mobile's schools have holidays for Confederate Memorial Day and Jefferson Davis' Birthday. Lansing's schools do not have a holiday for any of these days. Similarly, these regions

feature multiple school district structures.¹³ Differences such as these, with respect to schools but also the larger communities, serve to create unique regional narratives for each area (and these, of course, are in addition to the unique narratives of sub-regional areas, narrowing all the way to small groups and, ultimately, individuals). Comparatively, these three areas are distinct and offer a collection of unique locales. Thus, as place is marked by difference and diversity, these three areas, in relationship to each other, offer both elements to my study. And yet, it is important to emphasize, they are also interrelated parts of larger wholes (e.g., the United States or the earth). Research, to some degree, always situates the unique within larger, more common frames of being.

While it is important to my study that these areas are similar and different in compelling ways, they also cannot stand apart from me as the researcher. All three regions/areas are significant in my life. As I describe below, each holds particular personal meaning that is derived from my living curriculum. I have experienced these areas differently, and the ways in which each is meaningful and compelling to me is unique, but I lump them all together as some of my most meaningful places. Many of the stories that I tell about my life are about these geographic locations and my communities rooted there. As a group, compared to other regions/areas, they particularly interest me. Following a narrative inquiry approach, in which the life of the researcher is unavoidably implicated in the research, I started with my stories in order to consider meaningfully the stories told by the study's participants.

¹³ Schools in Massachusetts and Michigan typically have city boundaries for school districts while schools in Alabama typically have county boundaries for school districts.

My own living curriculum served as an important interpretive lens throughout the study, one that allowed for a relationship of depth and intimacy with these regions/areas and the participants who lived there. Prior to the study, I possessed, to varying degrees, a literacy of some of the cultural traditions and norms in each place. Periods of my life had been lived in each place and my resulting experiences brought some level of understanding about local terminology, discourses, geography, history, and so forth. For example, in each place, over the course of years, I had read a local newspaper periodically (if not daily), gaining some sense of pertinent local issues. This lived knowledge provided important context for hearing and interpreting the stories of the participants, which were structured by some of that same context.

Participant diversity: Interdisciplinary and intergraded.

Interested in K-12 schooling as a whole, I wanted participants across grade levels and subject areas. With only three participants, I was not able to extend into all grades and subjects (and, of course, I could not have participants from all regions/areas in the U.S.), but I was able to court some diversity in these areas, and this diversity helped me stretch my research focus to implicate different parts of K-12 whole. Although this approach is not common in the scholarship—schooling researchers often focus in elementary or secondary education and/or in subject areas like math, literacy, science, and social studies—it stems from meaningful aspects of my teaching and research up to this point in my career, and it shapes the work that I seek to do in the future.

By looking at teachers across the grade level and subject area spectra, I was interested in considering the relationships among the different parts of the schooling system. Although schooling is often cleaved by grade level and subject area, the aims of

schools extend across all aspects of the school. Rather than root myself in one place of schooling (e.g., social studies education or middle school education), as with my participants' regional identities, I wanted to enter different places and consider their contexts. I also wanted to consider the relationships among these contexts since grade levels and subject areas exist in relation to each other. Interested in the integrity, or wholeness, of schooling, an interdisciplinary and intergraded group of participants highlights the act of teaching *in* the places of schooling as well as *across* them.

Participant engagement.

Beyond diverse teaching contexts, I sought participants who would be willing to engage deeply in the research effort. Although I was conducting the study, I wanted the participants to see and feel the research project as an act of pedagogical inquiry, for both themselves and me. Certainly this inquiry was initiated by me: it was taking place under the auspices of my dissertation effort and none of the participants had this same academic motivation. Likely, none of the participants would have engaged in similar study without my impetus. While this motivation gap is customary for much research, it makes explicit large ethical considerations that encompass this work (Fine, Weiss, & Wong, 2002).

Before my participants agreed to participate, I highlighted the ways in which I viewed their involvement in the study as an opportunity for educational exploration of their teaching selves. I noted how the study's procedures would ask participants to explore the ways in which they make sense of the surrounding world and their experiences and places within it. They would share stories of their living and teaching and, in the process, have an opportunity to rethink their personal curriculum. Leaning on Clandinin & Connelly's notion that "educational researchers are, first, educators" (2000, p. xxii), I

sought for the research process to be a meaningful learning experience—for the participants and for myself—that could have social significance for future living and teaching, not just my professional career.

I planned for the participants to devote ample time, thought, and action to this study—a large commitment on their parts. It was essential that I find people who would be committed through the phases of the project. More importantly, though, I wanted to work with people with whom I would be able to connect deeply. I purposefully sought out people with whom I was previously acquainted in some manner. Thus, we would already have a relationship, which would facilitate our ability to work closely and collaboratively. Although not to the degree of Laura’s work (2010), in which she studies her own family, I valued an “intimate” inquiry. As Laura writes, such inquiry emphasizes:

a familiar and significant relationship that would exist even if the research did not... “Intimate” inquiry is grounded in the idea that the fastest way to get to the “truth,” that is the reality that a person constructs, is to delve close to the sources of the quandary—to ask the simplest questions and pay scrupulous attention to what the individual thinks that he or she is up to—and in light of the person’s social surrounds, to interpret (to the best of our ability) what these meanings tell us. (p. 280)

I would enter the participants’ living contexts. In doing so, we would establish a mutual context that recognized who both of us were and made transparent our close collaboration. This proximity, I felt, would not only be a decided benefit for my research but also a requirement as I sought to hear, learn, and share in the stories of each participant’s life.

Participants

The three participants in this study were Dan Torres, Rosie Baker, and Tommy Allen. These names are all pseudonyms. Many of the names of people, locations, and so forth are pseudonyms. I have disguised these names according to contemporary research conventions, but I do not change all names. As you have already read, Boston, Lansing, and Mobile have all been named. These are “real” locations and I purposefully do not conceal them. As this is a study about curriculum and place, I do not want to shy away from particularity. The names of Boston, Lansing, and Mobile matter. Each connotes a host of ideas and meanings. To conceal their names is to displace them. With these few names (and some others) that are placed in this study, I feel the names that are concealed still stand in relation to their geographic areas.

Through the study’s methods below, and then through the ensuing chapters, I dwell in the lives and stories of Dan, Rosie, and Tommy. While their lives are explicit in what follows, my life, for the most part, is implicit. Therefore, before describing them, I provide a brief description of my life, which is intended to situate me in relation to the participants. Then, I offer a brief description of each teacher so as to locate her or him with respect to the study’s participant criteria above.

Mark.

A resident of State College, Pennsylvania, I am a doctoral student in education at Michigan State University (MSU). While I write my dissertation, I teach social studies teacher education courses at Penn State University (PSU). A white male, now in my thirties, I was born in the mid-sized city of Lansing, Michigan, and grew up in “Mid-Michigan,” in a suburb of Lansing. After attending Dartmouth College in New Hampshire, I taught social

studies at a public high school in Framingham, Massachusetts, twenty miles west of Boston. While living in Massachusetts, I married my wife, Erica, a white female, who was born and grew up in Mobile, Alabama. Each year that we lived in Massachusetts, Erica and I traveled to Mid-Michigan to see my immediate family at Thanksgiving, and to Mobile, to see Erica's immediate family over the December holidays. In 2007, we moved to East Lansing as I enrolled at MSU. Three years later, after completing my MSU coursework, we moved to State College as Erica accepted an assistant professorship at PSU.

Dan.

A resident of Lansing, Michigan, Dan is an eighth grade social studies public school teacher in Parker, a suburb of Lansing. A Filipino American male, he was born in the Philippines but raised predominantly in Stella, a small city in southeast Michigan. He settled in Lansing after earning his bachelor's degree at MSU. He is in his forties and has been teaching at the same school for over two decades. Divorced and re-married, he has two daughters and two sons, one of each under five years old, and one of each over 17.

I met Dan five years ago, in my first year of graduate school at MSU. Dan served as a mentor teacher for teaching interns, some of whom I taught in the lab section of a teaching methods course. In my second and third year at MSU, I worked with Dan, along with a small group of MSU professors and graduate students, to create some new, innovative experiences for teaching interns. In addition to taking my students out to observe Dan's teaching, Dan came into my classroom on multiple occasions, and worked with my students.

Rosie.

A resident of unincorporated Mobile County, Alabama, Rosie teaches gifted education at a public elementary school that is five miles from her house. A black female, she was born and raised in the City of Mobile, in a neighborhood known as The Loop. After attending college in central Alabama, Rosie returned to live in Mobile City. She taught in the nearby city of Prichard before moving to her current school, which is just south of Mobile City's boundaries. In her thirties, she has taught for nine years, the last six at her current school. Rosie is married, and at the end of this study, she learned that she was pregnant. In the time since, she has given birth to her first child.

I met Rosie through my wife, Erica. They attended the same high school in The Loop, where they became friends, sharing some of the same classes and participating together in the school's band. Although both left Mobile for college, they remained friends, and saw each other when they were back home from school. In 2003, shortly after Erica and I began dating, I met Rosie during my first visit to Mobile, where she was living and teaching after college. At the time, I was working as a tutor with elementary and middle school students and Rosie and I connected over discussions about education. In the ensuing years, I continued to see Rosie when I was back in Mobile with Erica.

Tommy.

A resident of Boston, Massachusetts, and specifically a neighborhood called Dorchester, Tommy teaches English at a public high school near his home. A white male, he was born in France, but the majority of his youth was spent in Maine. After being expelled during his senior year of high school, Tommy drifted for years across the U.S. and Europe, before moving to Boston and, eventually, Dorchester. He is in his forties and has taught for

over a decade, all of the years at the same school. Tommy is married and he does not have children.

I met Tommy in the summer of 2005 at a summer enrichment program for high school students from under-resourced backgrounds. Tommy and I co-taught the humanities component of the three-week program. Although we had not met previously, we learned that we lived within a few miles of each other. In the weeks leading up to the summer program, we met a few times to plan the unit that we would teach. As we talked during these planning sessions, and then during the program, we joked about “random acts of fortuity,” like our mutual interests in soccer and poetry, which were coincidences that provided common ground.

Project Phases

I implemented a two-phase study plan, the parts of which I named Pre-Place and Place. As these names connote, the project centered around the places where the teachers live and teach. I named the phases from my perspective, as I was going to visit their places. These phases were specific to the individual participants, unfolding as I worked with them.¹⁴

Pre-Place Phase.

The Pre-Place Phase began with a questionnaire. I emailed a document with questions and the participants typed in their answers, saved the document, and emailed it back to me. The questionnaire provided some basic personal and professional background

¹⁴ For example, at one moment, I had already visited Rosie and Mobile, I was in Boston with Tommy, and Dan was in the Pre-Place phase.

information (see Appendix). It also featured a series of questions designed for participants to describe various aspects of their living and teaching situations. The intent of this questionnaire was to give me a baseline of information about each participant that would inform my Place Phase visit.

After reading the questionnaires and reflecting on them, I then interviewed each participant with a call. Rosie and I conducted an audio Skype call while my calls with Dan and Tommy took place over the phone.¹⁵ The calls were opportunities for me to dialogue with the participants about their questionnaire answers. I asked clarifying and follow-up questions, and encouraged concrete and richly detailed stories about their lived experiences and the places in which they currently live and teach. At the conclusion of these calls, which preceded the Place Phase by several days, I spoke with the participants about the logistics of my upcoming visit.¹⁶ In all three cases, this seemingly mundane discussion of logistics yielded anecdotes, stories, and interesting particularities about each person.

Place Phase.

In the Place Phase, I traveled to where each participant lives and teaches. In a five-week stretch, I visited Rosie in Mobile, then Tommy in Boston, then Dan in Lansing. I spent roughly a week in each place. I stayed nights with family or friends in each place, but I

¹⁵ These calls generally lasted an hour and fifteen minutes.

¹⁶ I inquired about the kind of attire that I needed at school and away from it. I found out if I should bring a lunch to school or plan to buy it in the school cafeteria. I finished each call by asking if I should be mindful of anything else or bring anything in particular. To this, Tommy told me to bring my soccer cleats in order to participate in his team's practice.

spent almost entirely the remainder of my time with the participants.¹⁷ I attended all school-related activities as well as most of the teachers' "life-related" activities. In the morning, on school days, I met the teachers at home and then rode to school with them, or I was picked up on the way, or I met them at school before the first bell. Then I spent the day, afternoon, and, in many cases, the evening with them. Prior to these visits, I told the participants that I would participate in any activities of theirs as long as both of us saw no problems related to it. As a result, Rosie invited me to, and I attended, a funeral of one of her former campers who had died of cancer immediately prior to my visit; with Tommy and his wife, I attended a charity fundraiser; with Dan and his daughter, I went used-car-shopping. Others of these life activities in which I participated are raised in the ensuing chapters.

At school, I made a point of participating in the life of each teacher's classroom to the degree that it seemed like it would not interfere with planned activities. I was mindful that I could not walk into the classroom and merely observe without fundamentally altering the learning context (Angrosino & Mays de Pérez, 2000; Hatch, 2002). Therefore, I sought to achieve observation goals—i.e., seeing the teacher *living* in the classroom: interacting with students, telling stories, executing various teaching actions, etc.—through participation. I entered each school ready to teach and not planning to take observation notes or act like a wallflower.¹⁸

¹⁷ While I suspect that each participant and her/his family would have invited me to stay in their homes, I made it clear at the onset that I would stay with family or friends because I wanted the participants to have at least some time when I was not present.

¹⁸ During the Pre-Place call, each teacher had briefed me about their teaching plans and how I might be useful to them as an adult in the classroom.

In Rosie's classroom, I taught a 20-minute lesson on Rome and Latin each of the days that she had students. I also served as a teacher's aide while students worked on a big, ongoing invention project. In Tommy's classroom, which featured much small group work, I circulated among groups, usually settling down to work closely with one or two groups in each class. In Dan's classroom, I participated largely as a teacher's aide.¹⁹ In each case, I did not humor the teacher or myself by thinking that I would be able to offer transformative teaching. But, as a teacher, and as a person who particularly cared about these teachers with whom I was working, I hoped to be of pedagogical use to the degree that I could.

I conducted two formal interviews during each visit. One interview took place at school, in the teachers' classrooms.²⁰ The other interview took place away from school, at the participants' homes, even though I made clear that I was open to conducting it anywhere but school.²¹ Interestingly, during all three interviews at home, family members or friends of the participants, or both, were also in the houses.²² These nearby people did

¹⁹ However, in order for Dan to take his ill son home from school on one day, I taught one of his classes (with a school administrator in the room for legal coverage).

²⁰ Dan's interview was during his 45-minute prep period, on two consecutive days. Both days we sat across from each other at a table where students sit during class. Tommy's and Rosie's interviews took place at their teacher desks. Tommy's was during his 90-minute prep period, while Rosie's was immediately following the dismissal of students for the day.

²¹ With Dan and Rosie, we sat at their dining room tables. Dan's interview, as with his interview at school, was on two different days, one on a weekend afternoon and the other on a weekday night. Rosie's was in the early evening of a weekday. With Tommy, we sat in front of his fire place, looking at a fire that he had made. The interview took place on a Friday evening.

²² As I talked with Rosie, her husband, Rick, worked in another room. As I talked with Dan for the first part, his wife, Laura, and three of his children talked and played in their family room. At the start of our discussion, his oldest child, Sarah, arrived home with two friends,

not participate in the interviews but, in each participant's case, their presence contextualized the stories that the participants told about the importance of these people in their lives.

The events of each visit determined the flow of these interviews.²³ Together, I planned for these interviews to be my organizing field texts. While I would have many research experiences with the participants, these were the most structured experiences during the Place visit. And yet, the interviews themselves were a mixture of structured and unstructured discussion, what some researchers call *semi-structured* (Fontana & Frey, 2000). As I describe below, in each interview, I had certain specified intentions, one of which was to allow space for our conversations to move in, and even court, unforeseen directions.

My intent with the interview away from school was to dwell in each participant's living curriculum. This included drawing specific attention to the times and places of lived experiences. Influenced by Clandinin and Connelly's use of *annals* that visually represent and mark important life experiences (1994, 2000), I asked the participants to construct a

one of whom Dan had taught several years prior. Not only did Dan introduce me to Sarah and her friends, he told a story about the friend whom he had taught. During the second part of our interview, Dan's two youngest children slept upstairs while Laura and her parents talked and watched television in the family room. The interview had followed "family night," which is a weekly meal that Dan cooks for his immediate family and Laura's parents. Somewhat similar to Dan's family night, Tommy and his wife, Penelope, have friends over weekly on Friday nights. They play ping pong, throw darts, listen to music, and talk. The interview took place as break from that gathering.

²³ For each Place Phase visit, I made a basic itinerary based on our discussion of logistics at the end of the Pre-Place phone call. I emailed the itineraries to the participants and asked them to alter or add to them as they felt was appropriate. As my time in each place was devoted entirely to the participants, I wanted my itinerary to fit their schedules. Therefore, I noted some of the research methods that I wanted to carry out while we were together, and they then placed them at the best times.

table of contents for an autobiography that they would write, using a pencil and a blank sheet of paper. With these lists, I asked them to tell me about what they had created. Then, I asked them to annotate the list with key words that represented some of the stories that they would likely tell within each chapter.²⁴ The discussions from this point forward played out differently as the participants told some of these stories.

During this storytelling, on the whole, I spoke very little. I asked clarifying questions at some points, and, at other points, I took the participants back to a detail and asked them to expand on the story. However, I listened with attention as the participants opened up and narrated their lives. I was audio-recording the interviews and I knew that I would write reflective notes later, so I chose to take no notes throughout the interview. My work was to hear the participants' stories of lived experience.

With the school interview, I was also looking to hear their stories of lived experience, but with a specific focus on their work as teachers. I began each interview asking about the curricula of their classes. I then asked the teachers to tell me stories of their teaching, which I prompted with questions or topics.²⁵ I also listed a number of major, national topics or events and I asked the teachers to describe their classrooms around the times of these.²⁶ Similarly, I asked each participant about some topics local to

²⁴ All three participants noted these stories rather quickly, although Dan surprised me by writing down twenty stories in a matter of a few minutes.

²⁵ I asked them to tell me a story about one powerful moment in their teaching career. I also asked them to tell me a story about their first year of teaching.

²⁶ For example, I brought up: September 11, 2001; Hurricane Katrina; the election of President Obama; the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico; and the killing of Osama bin Laden.

where they live.²⁷ The teachers' stories that emerged from these topics and events directed much of the interview. As with the home interview, I audio-recorded and chose not to take any notes, but my participation was intentionally active (Holstein & Gubrium, 2002), as I was not relying on an organizing tool (like the autobiography chapter list in the home interview).

The final component of the school interview involved use of the words of Woody Guthrie's "This Land Is Your Land." I asked the teachers to read, either aloud or silently, the lyrics/stanzas and annotate the text in any ways that they saw fit. I used this particular text because it is a popular national text that is rich with ideas and images.²⁸ After the participants finished marking the text, I asked them to speak about the annotations that they made. In doing this, I came to understand some of the ways in which they made sense of the text, and I was able to see what words, ideas, and images most resonated with each of them. They told some stories that were either tangential to the text or about their prior interactions with it.²⁹ We finished by my asking how they might use the text in their teaching. Through this research activity, I wanted to explore how an alternative text on national identity intersected with their locally-lived identities. As you will see in Chapter Five, the text turned out to feature prominently in my discussions with Dan.

²⁷ For example, I asked: Rosie about Mobile's annual Mardi Gras celebration; Tommy about a recent shooting that took place near his school; Dan about several incidents in his school district that were reported by the local news.

²⁸ In another study that I conducted, I used this text and activity and found both generative.

²⁹ All three participants were familiar with some of the stanzas but none knew of all of them.

In addition to the these interviews, as well as my “living” with the participants,³⁰ my Place visits featured several other methodological strategies. Near the end of each visit, I gave each teacher a copy of a poem called “I Write America” (Simmons, 2003). The poem comes from *Def Poetry Jam*, a nine-poet show on Broadway in New York City in 2002. Concluding the show’s first act, the nine performers each share a personal stanza that begins with the words, “I write America,” or some variation of them. I asked the teachers to read the poem at some point when I was not present and then write a personal contribution to the poem and share it with me over email.³¹ As with the analysis of “This Land Is Your Land,” even though each of the teachers in this study lived and taught in distinct regions, I sought to consider their lives/places in relation to national identity. The participants’ writings of their own stanzas also positioned them to write poetry, which was a form of writing different from other writing features of the study. These poems proved to be powerful statements by the participants and I begin Chapters Three, Four, and Five with them.

Additionally, at some point during my visit, I sought to take each participant out for a “thank you” dinner at restaurant chosen by the participant.³² My main goal was to treat the participant to a nice meal and show my appreciation of her or his time and effort

³⁰ “Living” in the sense that I spent almost the entire time with them, save staying the nights at their homes.

³¹ This research activity emerged from earlier research that I conducted about the teaching of patriotism and nationalism.

³² Rosie and Rick took me to a small Jamaican restaurant next to a shopping strip, where they had frequented for years and where Rosie once threw a surprise birthday party for Rick. Dan and Laura took me to a Chinese-American restaurant near their house that had recently opened. Neither of them had been there and they wanted to try it out. Instead of treating Tommy and Penelope to a meal, they invited me to join them at a fundraising dinner for which they were given three free tickets.

throughout the course of the study.³³ I also figured that it would be a nice space for general conversation.

I planned for one other activity during my Place visits. Calling it “Place/s Day,” I asked the participants to carve out half to a full day of their schedule during which they could take me to some of the personally meaningful places where they lived. I wanted to visit some of the local settings where they ascribed particular lived meaning. As we “toured” these places, I was eager to dialogue about why they were meaningful and hear stories of the lived experiences that created that meaning. Like the thank you dinner, I did not take notes or audio-record the discussions. Rather, I accompanied the participant, and later I wrote reflective notes and mapped our path. Place/s Day unfolded differently with each of the teachers. With Rosie, we had a full day of visiting her places.³⁴ With Dan, we drove past some of his places and then revisited them in discussion later in my visit.³⁵ With Tommy, Place/s Day never materialized; he only noted and talked about a few of his places en route to his various activities.³⁶

³³ Each participant also received a stipend of one hundred dollars at the conclusion of the study.

³⁴ I spent an entire Saturday with Rosie and Rick. Rosie asked if Rick could come along since he had not been to some of the places. We met in the morning at a favorite coffee shop of Rosie’s, and then she drove us to a handful of different places, including two restaurants, two parks, two book stores, and a candy shop. At the end of the day, we returned to the coffee shop, where I asked her to sketch a map of where we had gone.

³⁵ Place/s Day with Dan was on a Sunday afternoon and it unfolded under unexpected circumstances. Dan’s oldest daughter, Sarah, needed to look for a used car and her schedule aligned with Dan’s only on Sunday afternoon. Thus, Sarah joined us on a Place/s drive through Lansing, and I joined them in the search for a car.

³⁶ Tommy’s Place/s Day never materialized because of his busy schedule. Deep in the midst of coaching and playing soccer, he simply didn’t have much un-scheduled time while I was there.

Field Text Analysis

As I detailed above, following Clandinin and Connelly (2000), field texts are the data of a study in that they are created in the “field” of the study. They are close to experience and they can possess descriptive and recording qualities. A “research text,” then, is more distant, reflective, and interpretive.³⁷ It seeks to question the meaning of field texts, inquiring about the relationship between a particular field text and its larger contexts.

The participants and I generated a variety of field texts from several research methods. In sum, the methods included my reflective journaling; a questionnaire; interviews (i.e., long-distance and in-person), all of which I audio-recorded and transcribed; textual analysis and discussion; my observation of and participation in the teachers’ lives, including in the teachers’ classrooms and during Place/s Day; and poetry writing. The field texts generated from these methods included: detailed journal notes; questionnaire answers; audio and transcribed recordings of interviews; autobiographical chapter lists; annotated sheets of “This Land Is Your Land”; poems; and, in the case of Rosie, a map of her Place/s Day. I also collected various documents that factored into our discussions (e.g., local newspapers from during my visits).

In my reflective journal, which I maintained throughout the entire study, I wrote notes related to all aspects of the research process. The writings in this journal ranged from notes I typed about my initial emails with prospective participants; to late evenings during the Place visits when I storied the events of the day (often with my initial analyses);

³⁷ Clandinin and Connelly’s “research text” is comparable to a mix of Garman’s “theoretic” and “discursive” texts (2007).

to notes that I wrote as I transcribed interviews; and, even, to my writing of the preliminary drafts of the “participant chapters.” In this sense, these writings ranged from field texts to research texts.

The audio recordings of the interviews were field texts. The transcriptions, coupled with my handwritten notes, existed in the tension between field texts and research texts. I transcribed all of the interview audio-recordings. This process was deliberate, as I worked my way chronologically through Rosie’s recordings, and then Tommy’s, followed by Dan’s. In doing this, I was particularly mindful of my need to re-hear our conversations. Although the participants’ words, stories, and thoughts are shared here in print form, I am attentive to the fact that most of these were articulated in spoken form. Inevitably, something is lost in the transmediation of their words. A pained pause in the middle of a spoken story can hardly be done justice in written form. However, my close attention to how the participants spoke, I believe, can help me better represent what they said, when it appears in written form.

Immediately prior to transcribing the participants’ interviews, I read through my reflective journal parts that pertained to them. From reading my written words, coupled with my immediate mental analyses that I made during my Place Phase visits and had thought about since, I created a list of big themes to keep in mind as I transcribed. For Rosie, I listed: “mothering,” “Mother James,” and “Prichard.” For Tommy, I listed: “becoming a citizen,” “happenstance,” and “happiness.” For Dan, I listed: “storyteller,” “Landing in Lansing,” and “it gets better.”

Then, as I transcribed each participant’s interviews, which happened a minimum of one month after that participant’s Place Phase visit, I re-entered their lives and our shared

time and place. Having experientially *read* these interviews initially when they took place, both in the moment, and later in the day when I reflected in my journal, I re-read them aurally through my headphones, as well as through my memory, when I listened to the recordings. Attached to this second read was my work of turning the sounds into written text. While I transcribed, I kept detailed notes, some of which I organized under my big, pre-transcription themes. By the end of transcribing each participant's interviews, I had several pages of handwritten notes to re-visit later.

With all of the interviews transcribed, I noted interesting similarities and differences across the participants. For example, they all told memorable stories about former students. And they all spoke minimally about their immediate families when they were young. But they represented three very different paths to teaching, and their schooling experiences ranged from loving high school to never graduating from it. With these ideas in mind, I was ready to read the interviews a third time—as transcripts—and begin to make sense of the field texts en masse. I dug back into their individual cases.

I began with Tommy because his talk of “becoming a citizen” was the clearest organizing narrative of the three, for me, at that point. I read through hard copies of all of the transcripts, annotating them liberally. I noted the many stories that he told and pulled out main points, topics, and ideas. I read most mindful of *his* individual themes but I kept a list of notes for themes that spanned the participants. After a full read of Tommy's interviews, I began to write analytically about the most salient stories and themes. As I did this, my story about Tommy began to take shape. I then outlined a chapter devoted to him that focused on his living curriculum first, and then moved to his teaching curriculum.

Once I had a draft chapter for Tommy, I moved to Rosie and followed the same process for her. With a draft chapter for Rosie, I did the same for Dan.

With draft chapters for all three of the participants, then, I zoomed out from their individual stories in order to consider them as a group. Chapter Six takes up this work, as I look at the differences and similarities across the participants, examining how these are relevant to thinking about the teaching and emplacement of teachers writ large.

Conclusion

As human beings, we share our lived experiences through story. As researchers, one of the ways we can make sense of lived experience is by attending to participants' stories of living and faithfully representing those stories in the stories that we tell. Working collaboratively and closely with Dan, Rosie, and Tommy, I invited their stories of living and, particularly, teaching. I also walked into the midst of their lived stories in the time that I spent with them at and beyond school. In the three ensuing chapters, I tell a story of these rich lives, which shows the deep ties between a teacher's many curricular places of living and the focused places of teaching at school and in the classroom.

CHAPTER THREE

TOMMY'S CITIZENSHIP:

TEACHING AS AN ACT OF AND FOR BALANCE

I write America thinking about Balance.

*If Education is the great equalizer in the Equation of Democracy,
Why are our urban schools so unstable?*

*Standardized tests, graduation rates, disciplinary logs, attendance percentages are like
steel cables tethered to our schools. Built by well-intended minds, anchored with hope
and research, they only provide the illusion of possible stability.*

*The foundation underneath is incomplete.
The cables are fastened to the wrong anchors.
They will never be strong enough to balance the effects of poor Nutrition, Poverty,
Violence and the attendant Apathy they spawn.
These are the Unseen.
Will we continue to pay them so little attention?*

*The obstinate dance our steel intentions require
can only be performed by the most determined children.
A resolve born from a place of mystery within inspires them
to rise despite any obstacle.
And there are many, who do rise,
but what about the children who have yet to find their Balance?*

*So, today I write America about this because it is important and so
She may listen and hear.*

—Tommy Allen, High School English Teacher, New England, 2011

In the two previous chapters, I discussed my framing for this study. In Chapter One, I looked at the theoretical lenses of curriculum and place, and I considered the importance of looking at those concepts in relation to each other. In Chapter Two, I looked at the

methodological lens of narrative inquiry, which focuses on hearing and telling stories. I then detailed how I carried out my narrative inquiry with the three participants of this study: Dan, Rosie, and Tommy.

In this chapter and the next two, I tell three stories of the living and teaching of these participants. Each chapter dwells in one participant's story, which is intertwined with the story of my lived experience with the participant. I organize each chapter into four sections: introduction, living curriculum, teaching curriculum, and conclusion. Each introduction seeks to bring the reader into salient points of the teacher's life and work. In the bulk of each chapter, then, I story the participant's living and teaching curricula. While the former unfolds as a "life story," the latter features more analysis that positions the teacher's teaching in the context of the life story. There is still, though, a central commitment to each teacher's stories of teaching. Each conclusion, then, serves as a place for me to revisit key experiences in the teacher's life and work—considering continuity, interaction, and place—while also raise some of the loose ends that I do not seek to tie.

Committed to stories, these chapters are written as stories. They seek to dwell in the immediacy of each participant's life. Thus, these chapters are deeply placed in the lives of the participants. For this reason, when I offer analysis about the teacher's lives, I do not engage scholarly or other outside texts. I foreground the participant's life. Returning to Garman's (2007) notions of "essential texts," these participant chapters are a combination of experiential and theoretic text. I immerse myself in the participants storied experiences and my experience of hearing and thinking about their stories. After these chapters, in Chapter Six, I weave in discursive text as I consider how various scholarly discourses can interact with the participants' stories.

Here, I begin with Tommy. I then move to Rosie and, finally, Dan.

Introduction

Prior to spending a week with Tommy Allen, a teacher in an urban school in Boston, Massachusetts, he told me a story about a student, Felipe. At the beginning of the school year, Felipe had transferred to Tommy's school and was placed in one of Tommy's classes. Felipe had a relative who worked at the school and he came there because his mom was in and out of the hospital and his father was not in the picture. Tommy recalled that when Felipe arrived in his classroom, he was "clearly depressed, unhappy, and a little overweight." In the ensuing weeks, Felipe was playing video games every night until four in the morning and then coming into class and putting his head down to sleep. When Tommy would prod him to participate in the class, Felipe would respond in anger: "what the fuck are you bothering me for? I'm not bothering you." This kind of action was repeated over and over as the school year unfolded.

"Eventually," Tommy said, "Felipe started coming around because I wouldn't let up on him." Then, in March, Felipe wanted to play soccer. As the school's varsity soccer coach, Tommy made it clear that Felipe needed to be at practice every single day. A bit surprisingly to Tommy, Felipe made that commitment. And, as the soccer season picked up, he became more invested in Tommy's classroom. "Now," Tommy said enthusiastically, "he's the first kid in my classroom in the morning and he's trying—and he's doing much better." Having finished the story, he reflected: "those are the constants that keep me coming back [to school each day] ...there's not a lot of them [but] they happen every week, every year."

Tommy wrote his poem above “thinking about Balance.” Schools, he says, struggle with balance, as do people and particularly students. Schools and all their features—“cables,” he calls them—“will never be strong enough to balance the effects of poor Nutrition, Poverty, Violence and the attendant Apathy they spawn.” That is, at least as long as this imbalance is “Unseen.” Save major change, only “the most determined children,” who possess “a resolve born from a place of mystery within” can overcome—“rise” above or beyond—the obstacles that shape the landscape of their lives. “But,” Tommy wonders, “what about the children who have yet to find their Balance?”

By the middle of soccer season, Felipe might not have found his Balance. He had many obstacles: an absent father, an ill mother, a school change, depression, a daily dependence on video games. He hadn’t previously had the determination to overcome these things. But by committing to soccer, and then Tommy’s class, perhaps he was on the way to his Balance.

Many of Tommy’s stories about teaching track along a similar arc. A student, like Felipe, undergoes a personal transformation that begins in extreme difficulty and moves, even if slightly (although some times much more), toward Balance. In these stories, Tommy is in the picture but he is not the main character: the students are. But these stories parallel Tommy’s life story. He has overcome many obstacles in his life, albeit ones unique to—or placed by—his circumstances. Relative to his students, he grew up amid considerable privilege, both racial and socioeconomic. The obstacles of nutrition, poverty, and violence were not concerns for him—and yet apathy was. Lacking the support that he needed, he wandered through the first half of his life displaced, searching for a meaningful

connection to others. He sought his Balance, but he didn't achieve it until he settled in Boston, made a series of lasting friendships, and then started to teach in Dorchester.

In this chapter focusing on Tommy, a white male in his late forties who has a gruffness to his voice, as if it's worn, I story Tommy's living curriculum and then shift to consider his teaching curriculum, focusing on the place of his teaching—Room 317 of Atlantic High School—across his teaching career, during which he has learned to be a teacher. Throughout, I focus on the intersection of his living and teaching curricula, his search for Balance, and consider how place shapes and re-defines this purpose. Although the first half of his life was spent living on the fringes of various communities, he now finds himself—a teacher and coach—firmly rooted in a meaningful community and purposefully contributing to the betterment of the most marginalized within it. He has intentionally become a citizen in this community, and at school he pursues his students' Balance as a way of pursuing his own.

Tommy's Living Curriculum: Youth Transience Until Becoming A Citizen

When I asked Tommy to tell me about the chapters of his autobiography if he were to write one, he made sure that I wanted an autobiography and not a memoir. "Maybe it's the English teacher in me but there's a distinct difference." Memoir, he says, is configured around a central conflict, usually a tragedy, that somebody has to overcome. When I give him the option of choosing autobiography or memoir, he chooses the former thinking that much of the same content would appear in both. But, if he were to write a memoir, "the central thing would be education because it's the closest thing to me, to the progression of [my] experience."

Tommy's progression, or continuity, of experience began with wide geographic swings. Born in France, he spent his childhood in two distinct regions of the United States, first in the South and then in the Northeast. Living in suburbia in East Texas, he was active in his neighborhood with other kids near his age, particularly through sports. "Wiffle ball integrated me into the community." But, of all the places he has lived, he is the least fond of Texas. Speaking in the present about his experience there, he said simply, "beauty lacks." Despite "some fond memories of occasional forays out into the woods and meadows," he lived in a neighborhood with little aesthetic diversity. It was a subdivision with many houses, all of which looked similar. Even if he couldn't name it as such at the time, he felt where he lived was ugly. It wasn't natural; everything was manmade. He felt disconnected, displaced.

When he was a third grader, Tommy's father, a hospital executive, accepted a management position at a small hospital in Maine. The family moved there. If he only felt like an outsider in Texas, Tommy embodied an outsider in Maine. The landscape that he encountered in Maine resonated with him powerfully, in a way that has significantly shaped his life—I think of Henry David Thoreau saying "I went to the woods" when Tommy talks about Maine—but to his school peers he was a kid from somewhere else. He spoke differently than everyone else. "I learned how to fight as a result of having a southern accent...[I fought] constantly. It was little kid fighting, but it was fighting." An outsider with his peers, he was also an outsider in his family. "I grew up with the cocktail thing—physicians and people coming over and all that kind of stuff—and I was like, 'this sucks.'" Everyone in his family was an achiever, which was defined in relation to the amount of money one makes (or would make), and that was expected of Tommy. The family's implicit

mantra was, “if you have the ability, the intellect, then you should go out and make money.” But such an aspiration did not jibe with his sensibility about himself and the world.

At age 14, Tommy began skiing. Not only was he good at it—he skied competitively at state, regional, and, ultimately, national levels—it was a strong determinant of his identity. At 16, after competing in a prominent event called the Junior Olympics, he joined a national developmental team and began to focus on one particular form of skiing called Nordic Combined, which involves both ski jumping and cross-country skiing. Tommy said, “it’s an individual sport and it defined me as a person for a long time.” Skiing was a stabilizing counter to his lack of roots in other aspects of his life. In Nordic Combined, displacement wasn’t such a bad thing.

Indicative of his familial distance, Tommy attended high school at a private boarding school in New Hampshire, a couple hours from his home in Maine. Each January, he would leave school and go to the U.S. Olympic training facility in Lake Placid, NY. He would train rigorously with coaches who had him on a detailed workout regimen. The trajectory of his skiing career changed, though, in his senior year of high school. Just several weeks prior to his graduation, he was kicked out of the school permanently for disruptive behavior. Although the expulsion was the school’s mistake—unbeknownst to him at the time, his mother returned to the school and was told that it was a mistake that he was kicked out—it altered his plans for college. Up to that point, he was going to enroll at a university near Lake Placid and continue to train for skiing. Without a high school diploma, though, the university wouldn’t allow him to matriculate. Even his skiing future, now, was uncertain.

After being kicked out of school, Tommy went west to Berkeley, California, where he spent the summer working for a classmate’s father who ran a construction company. He

worked on homes being built out of redwood. Although the labor was largely unskilled—"I was basically carrying stuff around and nailing stuff in and doing some framing that I couldn't screw up"—he became familiar with operating power tools and doing woodworking, which is a favorite hobby of his today. In some respects, his construction work was as far removed from school as possible. In one sense this was good, but it didn't provide long-term promise. With the end of summer, he returned to Maine to an uncertain future. His father gave him a choice: Tommy could attend a small college in New Hampshire, which would accept him without a high school diploma, or he could live and work in Lake Placid while ski-training and his father would subsidize his expenses.

Interestingly, Tommy chose college. Either way, his family was going to support his efforts, and he could ski in both situations, but he chose the option that involved school. There was, perhaps, something more to his life than wild pursuit of skiing. Perhaps, too, his exit from high school left him with a need to alter his schooling experience. But mindful of his present-day commitment to balance, I see college as an opportunity for him to bring stability to his future. He could find a community, a place, that would hold promise for his long-term future. That, though, did not happen.

He intended to ski for the college's intercollegiate team but differences with his coach about training for Nordic Combined led him to quit the ski team. His coach was an "old-time" ski coach, demanding that skiers build endurance through running, not skiing. When the coach dismissed Tommy's workout regimen developed in Lake Placid, Tommy told him "fuck you" and left the team. What had been his anchor, his identity, was now a void. Uncertain about what would be next, he went with several classmates down to New York City for the first time in his life. Sitting in the back seat of a packed Subaru with

headphones over his ears, he listened to an album called “Rain Dogs” by the singer and musician Tom Waits. The album was made in New York City and focused on urban life there. As the city became visible, Tommy had a powerful experience of connecting what he was seeing and hearing; he thought, “this is what New York sounds like.” With his friends, he went to concerts across the city and experimented with drugs. In the heart of the city, he had discovered a feeling of community that he had previously lacked. It was a transient experience, but it was thrilling. “From that moment on,” he says, “it was a wrap for me on the skiing tip.”

He wasn’t done skiing, but he was done skiing competitively. Training for national championships and the Olympics, in the past what had brought him pleasure, was over despite his feeling of regret at times over the next decade about his decision to go to college instead of Lake Placid. But after his failed college experience in New Hampshire, he enrolled at the University of Maine, seeking a new collegiate opportunity. As with the previous experience, it didn’t work out.

On holiday break from the university, when nobody else was in the room, Tommy turned to his father. They had been dressing the family’s Christmas tree and he wanted to talk with his father alone. Tommy was a miserable student and he wanted to drop out. Upon sharing this news, his father barked at him, “well what do you want to do, boy?” After being kicked out of high school and leaving his first college, going to school just wasn’t working for him. To his father’s query, he responded, “ah, the thing that makes me happy is skiing. I think I want to go to Colorado.” Tommy’s father considered what he said and then responded, “okay, I’ll give you a thousand bucks—and that includes the plane ticket. I don’t want you to ask me for money ever again.” Three weeks later, Tommy was living in Vail.

He was “pursuing happiness.” He was in search of new pleasures, experiences akin to the thrill of his first visit to New York City. In Vail he found work at a restaurant and then at a ski shop, which brought him a free ski pass to a mountain. He began skiing Alpine—downhill skiing—as opposed to Nordic Combined. Grinning at me as he recalls this time, Tommy says, “huge air, people were videotaping, it was awesome.” He was having fun in the moment and that was all that mattered to him.

Then, “I kind of fell a little in love with a Swedish girl.” She had been traveling in the U.S. and had stopped for some time in Vail, where Tommy had been for two years. With no long-term ties to anyone or anything, Tommy found possibility with this woman. The two set off for more travel in the U.S. Then they went to Europe and spent the better part of a year backpacking around the continent. They didn’t have a specific plan but they had each other’s companionship. They worked a variety of temporary jobs, lived frugally, and moved around when it felt right. They stayed, when possible, with relatives or friends, sometimes for stretches as long as a month or two. Much of the time, though, they camped in a tent, going to bed late and rising early so as to avoid notice. They carried everything they needed on their backs. Then, exhausted by travel, they settled in her hometown of Gothenburg, Sweden, before ultimately returning to the U.S., to Boston, so that she could study to be an actress. There, for the third time, Tommy enrolled in college.

To this point, Tommy’s life was characterized by movement and few emplacing roots: his family picking up and settling in multiple places; his attending different schools; his skiing, competitively and for fun; his travel around America and Europe. His skiing event, Nordic Combined, was a fitting metaphor for his uprootedness. Not only did he compete individually, he soared and traversed large tracts of land in the process. In all of

this movement, his identity was highly individualized and transient. He had a strong disconnect with his family and he didn't view his purpose in life to be to make money. Only in his last years did he have a sustained, mutually-dependent relationship with another person. He was always on the margins of any communities, lacking roots in any particular geographic locations. He was an outsider, which he both suffered from and enjoyed.

Tommy's move to Boston maintained his status as an outsider but it marked the end of his frequent, one-direction travels. His life interactions shifted from an inward focus to an outward focus. Although he separated from the Swedish woman with whom he had spent his last years, his arrival in Boston began a process of growing roots, creating emplacement, what he referred to as "becoming a citizen." While he went to school, earning a bachelor's degree in English and then a master's degree in fine arts, he worked as a bike messenger in order to support himself. Although living a student's life of liminality, through bike messaging, he cultivated a community of friends that surrounds him to this day. He became familiar with Boston and neighboring Cambridge as he crisscrossed the area on his bike. He played soccer with his fellow bike messengers and he hung out almost exclusively at a bar called The Deluxe, "which is a tiny joint, like a railroad car, but where messengers and artists and kids would hang. People would show their art or their photographs and it would change every week." Tommy and his friends embraced the idea that they were outsiders of a sort in relation to the bustling *insider-citizens* of the city, but they had carved out their own space in the city.

Through his friends at The Deluxe, Tommy met Penelope, with whom he fell in love and eventually married. When they met, Tommy was 34 years old and he had "never had a real job other than traveling around, being a waiter, bartender, or whatever." The arrival of

Penelope, who was born and raised in New York City but living in Boston, brought a change in outlook. Even though Penelope also valued life as an outsider, Tommy felt that he “needed to be reputable because I wanted to build a life.” This meant doing things like asking Penelope’s father for her hand in marriage, even if it felt uncomfortable, and paying taxes.

Tommy stopped working as a bike messenger and began a short stint “living my perceived idea of a struggling writer of fiction.” Not having a steady income flow but needing it to pay off student loans, he worked briefly as an assistant to a friend who was a handyman. This wasn’t a long term solution, though, and friends tried to suggest other possibilities. Then, by sheer “happenstance,” as Tommy described it, he was talked into entering a teaching program. He was riding his bike toward Penelope’s apartment, the wrong way down a one-way street, and the owner of The Deluxe approached him in his car. Both slowed down, and in a quick conversation, the bar owner’s girlfriend, riding in the passenger’s seat, suggested to Tommy that he think about entering the teaching program in which she was enrolled. It was a master’s degree program in education through a local university. Participants took a series of teaching courses while working full-time at a local high school. In one full year, participants could earn their teaching degree. The program was about to begin for the year, so Tommy’s time was limited if he wanted to apply, but his friend thought he would likely be a good candidate for admission.

Tommy took down the relevant information and then biked on to Penelope’s apartment where she quickly approved of the idea. The next day, Tommy set in motion the process that had him walking into Atlantic High School, in Dorchester, a few days later for an interview. He was then admitted to the program and he spent the year earning his

master's degree in education while teaching at Atlantic High. In the spring of that year, the school offered him a full-time position as an English teacher, which he accepted. Now, twelve years later, despite multiple changes in the school's structure, Tommy is one of four people from his cohort who continue to teach at the school.

For this time period, on his list of autobiography chapter titles, Tommy wrote that he was "trying to become a citizen," and he underlined the last word. He had sought to become "reputable" as Penelope came into his life, but with his entry into teaching, he was committed to becoming a citizen. This meant contributing to the larger society around him in meaningful, productive ways. Interaction with his surroundings was no longer a movement inward; it was now also an expansion outward. Paying taxes was a part of this, but it extended far beyond general civic duties. As a teacher, he would work as a citizen. To be sure, though, he would be an *outsider-citizen*, contributing to the larger whole in the ways (e.g., teaching) and settings (e.g., Dorchester) that he felt fit him best.

After years of teaching in Dorchester but living outside of the neighborhood, Tommy and Penelope bought a home in Dorchester. They had lived most recently in Beacon Hill, a prominent and largely affluent neighborhood near the city's downtown. While Penelope was lukewarm about the move, Tommy was committed to seeing it happen, even as it was difficult to find a reasonably-priced home to buy. Reminiscent of his upbringing amid cocktail parties, he said, "I never liked living in Beacon Hill...it was just something that rubbed me the wrong way." Also, they had been living in an apartment and he was ready for his own home. "I wanted to have a woodshop; I wanted a lawn; I wanted space." For the youthfully transient Tommy, these wants amount to a sizable development, a detailed vision for his future, which was set in Dorchester.

Calling Dorchester a neighborhood in Boston is somewhat misleading. Like New York City, Boston is divided into geographical sections, but there is not an equivalent to New York City's *boroughs*, except for "neighborhoods." Neighborhoods, though, typically connote a rather small area of street blocks and corners. But Dorchester, as Tommy said, is to Boston as Queens is to New York City. It's a neighborhood with many neighborhoods. Of Dorchester, Tommy wrote, "it is the largest geographical neighborhood in Boston and has a rich and storied history. There are pockets of very beautiful areas within the borders of what is considered Dorchester, but there are also very poor and violent areas. The latter being predominant. It is considered one of the more dangerous parts of the city." Tommy had not lived, at least for an extended duration of time, in a comparable place.

Tommy's house is near his school, with a few busy streets and a "T" (subway) station in between. Where Tommy's home is located, the area is old and beautiful. In the earlier days of the city, elites from Beacon Hill would summer in the large Victorian homes that now comprise the neighborhood. While population patterns have changed, many of the homes are still standing and in decent-to-good condition. Tommy's house, though, was in "shambles" when they bought it. Freshly painted a deep purple when I visited it, Tommy and Penelope have put significant work into repairing it, which he says he loves doing. The house has many rooms across four stories and both its front and back yards are bounded by a fence. Importantly, the fence, which serves to disconnect the yard from neighbors' yards, is the feature he dislikes most about the home. When I first arrived at his house, Tommy took me on a tour: wood floors, tall ceilings, built-in bookcases with numerous books, rooms tucked into corners. After circling the living areas of the first floor, we peeked in on bedrooms on the second floor and an attic room on the third floor. The top

floor is one whole, undivided space but it features a chimney running through the center of it. On the side opposite the chimney from the entryway, there is a drum set that belongs to Penelope.

As Tommy pointed out areas of the house where work projects had been finished, were ongoing, and were planned, we walked back down to the basement, which is primarily Tommy's space. It is his woodshop, complete with an assortment of tools and a multitude of wood scraps donated by friends or found in scrap heaps. There is a giant rug, something that he rescued from his school's trash pile, that spans much of the floor and features a map of the United States. The place also doubles as a game area with a dartboard in one corner.³⁸ As we ascended the basement stairs and walked out into the backyard, we passed the cats that share the house with Tommy and Penelope. Then outside, we encountered a neighborhood cat, one of several, that visits frequently to get food scraps from Penelope on the back steps. Despite living in the city, the backyard is a nice grassy patch that features a shed.³⁹ Smaller than its immediate neighbors, some of which are undergoing major reconstruction projects, the house still fits in with its peers. Tommy said they live "in a relatively safe neighborhood where the majority of the people live in single family homes in which they have a mortgage." And he noted, "this is not true of all of Dorchester."

When I asked him why he wanted to move to Dorchester in particular, he responded in the present tense: "I want to live in a place that's multicultural. I want to live in a place

³⁸ Later in the week, when a group of his friends congregated at the house for their weekly Friday get-together, we threw darts, talked, and listened to music there.

³⁹ Inside the shed, among other things, is a ping pong table that is wheeled out in the summer when friends are over.

that's real, not one that's full of people that are transient and wealthy. I want to live in a place where there's some real shit going on." While he never said it, I sense that this rationale for living in Dorchester mirrors his rationale for teaching in Dorchester. It's a complicated environment, a place of *real* living, comprised of largely social outsiders, and that's where he wants to be. At the same time, Tommy was mindful of where in Dorchester he and Penelope chose to live. "I don't live in the hood. I live next to it, but not in it, cause I don't want to live in it—but I want to live in that community." *The hood*, an ambiguous reference to which Tommy at one point noted "whatever that means," is where violence is more acute, as well as poverty. It's where multiple families cram into less-than-desirable, rented living spaces. It's where most of his students—almost entirely students of color—live. And, it's where Tommy's school is located.

Included in his reasons for moving to Dorchester is the proximity of his school and students. For years, like the majority of his colleagues, he drove into Dorchester for school and left when school was out for the day. He didn't have a deep sense of the setting where he taught and his students lived. That is changing now as his daily actions, related to school and not, all take place in Dorchester. He reflected on this: "I like the fact I live in the community that the majority of the students I teach live in as well." There seems to be a sense that he's a better teacher of his students now that he lives in Dorchester, although this wasn't the stated reason for moving there. He moved to Dorchester to root himself, to become a citizen.

Tommy talks about the process of "becoming a citizen," which he pinpoints to the time when he began teaching. While I see that as a pivotal moment in his citizenship, I also identify a second, later stage that seems equally pivotal: his move to Dorchester. Still

interested in this move after he had talked at length about it, I asked him to tell me a story related to it. “There was a very old, weird, almost completely circular, tied with yellow plastic, metal rocker chair that was left in the backyard,” he says. “It was like the third day we’d been here. I had had a soccer game and I had come back [home]...I had a couple of beers inside and then I walked out [into the backyard] and it was dark.” In the back of the yard, near the boundary fence, “I sat in the chair and I looked up at the house and I was like, ‘I win! This is awesome.’” After a pause, he adds, “and I’ve always felt that way. I love this place.” Interestingly, in the process of rooting himself in a community, he felt that he *personally* won.

Tommy’s life in Boston brought a reversal of many of the themes of his early life. He changed his perspective about what happiness was for him. Individual thrill-seeking gave way to a desire for social contentment, and he found his Balance. His purposes were re-defined, cast in a social light, and teaching had much to do with this (and I speak to this below). He came to love where he lived and those who lived around him. Gone was the constant flight from one location to another. With that lack of movement, he began to root in a community—as he said, he became a citizen—and that is central to his identity today.

Tommy’s Teaching Curriculum: Teaching For Balance, Citizenship

Mindful of his living curriculum, I turn to Tommy’s work as a teacher, examining how his life experiences shape his professional actions. A transient-turned-citizen, I consider how many of Tommy’s vivid stories of teaching and coaching center on his students “find[ing] their Balance,” which is a central theme in his own life. In doing this work, Tommy is on the margins of mainstream society with students who have been made

outsiders by the circumstances of their lives. This commitment to others is the content of his teaching more than any subject-specific set of standards. Who he teaches, and where he teaches them, defines the curriculum of his classroom, as does his own living curriculum. I begin with descriptions of his teaching setting and then move to explore his stories about teaching.

Atlantic High School and its Room 317.

Atlantic High School, is a stately three-story brick building in one of the more violent areas of Dorchester. Reminiscent of 1930s American architecture, it sits box-like, embedded in a small neighborhood, and it looks down and out on to a large grassy space that is divided up into various sporting fields. A walking path extends from the front corner of the school's parking lot across the playground, passing by a long, aged set of concrete bleachers, which may very well have been built during the Great Depression by the Works Progress Administration. Although bus lines run near the school, the closest T station is a sizable walk beyond the school, in the direction of Tommy's house. A few blocks in another direction of the school, there is a big and busy intersection of two main streets.

Tommy wrote, "I would describe the school as an old facility that lacks many of the amenities a functioning school should have in 2011." An impressive structure, both inside and out it conjures a feeling of a 'gem of yesteryear.' Mammoth, largely barren hallways line the interior. The colors are drab and few recent photos, posters, or signs adorn the walls. At the main entrance there is a guard post with a metal detector. Although I always passed through these doors at times when few students were around, my sense is that the security setup, with the metal detector crammed into one end of the wide entryway, is not exhaustive. Despite a benign dreariness inside, the building can be a haven. According to

Tommy in his Pre-Place questionnaire, “the surrounding area immediately around the school is dangerous. For example, last week a 17 year old kid was murdered 100 yards or so from the school. Executed by a gunshot to the head at point blank range.” While not an everyday occurrence, such violence is not foreign to the school and neighboring community.

Atlantic High School’s school structure has undergone significant changes in the last decade. At the time of my visit, yet another change was in the works. These changes involve teacher and student movement, both within the school and to other schools. They also include multiple alterations of the school’s content curriculum, moving from one general focus to another, and then to another. As a teacher amid all of these changes, Tommy speaks to a high level of frustration with school and district leaders who call for the changes. The result of this constant upheaval, in Tommy’s opinion, has largely served to stunt student progress and break-up successful faculty partnerships. For example, an excellent block of ninth grade teachers, including Tommy, at one point was fragmented by a new wave of changes. In the shuffle, only Tommy remained of the four colleagues, and years of collaboration and resulting student success were abruptly cast aside. A departed teacher from this block was shifted to one of the highest achieving public schools in the city and another was moved to a nearby charter school that had been touted as flourishing. In Tommy’s estimation, great teachers were being sent from a school deemed to be struggling to schools that were already seen as successful.

On my second day at Tommy’s school, a math-teaching colleague of Tommy’s, Billy, dropped by Tommy’s classroom during his prep period. Small in stature but possessing a booming Boston accent, Billy is a veteran teacher, having taught at Atlantic High School for

twelve years and many more years before that in another part of the city. In addition to coaching the school's varsity soccer team with Tommy as his assistant (until Tommy took over the job when Billy stepped down), Billy has been a mentor to Tommy and it is clear that Tommy reveres him. As the three of us talked about changes in the school in his tenure there, Billy shared some staggering numbers. There had been six principals in a twelve-year span. In the past eight years, 200 different teachers had come through the school. In one year alone, there were eight different science teachers for one position.

Although the teaching staff is balanced with respect to gender and racially diverse, transience, as detailed in Billy's numbers, is a theme. The school's current administrators, Tommy assessed, "are a combination of youth at the front end of their career, and a few who are retiring this year or will be soon." At another point, Tommy said, "The principal is a very nice guy but in way over his head. And the assistant principal is completely incompetent, to put it lightly."

The school's students are lost in the endless shuffle. And, all of this school turmoil compounds the turmoil of many of the students' lives. When I asked Tommy to describe his school's student population, he wrote, "98% of students are eligible for free or reduced price lunch, which is another way of saying they are at or below what is considered the poverty line in this country." The same percentage of students is non-white, with the two largest groups being Black (two-thirds) and Hispanic (just under one-third). Some of the most marginalized students in the public education system (in Boston and across the United States), they face extreme instability in their school.

Although Tommy has taught in various classrooms in his school, his current room, 317, is a comfortable space and, with its door closed, it separates Tommy and his students

from some of the school's turmoil. I wrote the following notes after my first day at Atlantic High:

When we entered the room for the first time, I looked around, taking it in, finding it romantically nice in, probably, a sentimental and ignorant way—i.e., it was not an amazing educational setting but I liked it—and Tommy straightened the tables, picked up some papers, straightened chairs. He then ran to make some copies while I looked around.

The door is virtually in the stairwell, as you have to pass through the hallway-ending doors to get to it. It is a corner room of the school, and looking out the large, rectangular windows (which don't have screens; Tommy had opened two of them to get in air), I can see the soccer field and the rest of the sporting fields. Directly beneath is the front parking lot, and later, students in the room will come over to the windows and shout hellos down to friends until Tommy closes the windows. As he closed them, Tommy shouts down to one student, "what are you doing down there?"—and this is after the bell has rung.

The room is large and spacious. The ceilings must be 13-15 feet high. The room, like the rest of the place, looks worn. It has seen many people, many events. There are wood floors. The tables are arranged in an "E," with the open end at the front of the classroom. The room is not tidy, but the emptiness of the room does not make it feel like a sty. Around the room there are various shelves and cabinets, none in good condition, and these hold different books related to Tommy's teaching. The school's book sets are

out in the open, accessible to all. There is a tiny TV mounted in the back of the room. There seems to be something hanging from the ceiling that might be an LCD projector mount, but there is no projector there. And, there is no screen in the room that would signal projector usage. There is an old whiteboard that spans the front wall. A newer white board overlaps about half of the old whiteboard. Tommy's desk is in the front, non-window side of the room. There is a rickety, locking cabinet outside his desk and an old computer/printer next to his desk. I don't know if they work; he has a Mac laptop that he uses periodically during the class.

Along the walls there are various posters and other visuals, although the space is not overwhelmed or used entirely. In the front window corner there is a picture of Bob Marley. In the back, on the door to the adjacent room, there is a picture of Spike Lee, and a caption that endorses libraries. There are two small sheets of pictures of writers and "great Americans" in the back window corner. They all appear to be black. I recognize Frederick Douglass, Langston Hughes, and others. Up high on the back and non-window walls, there are movie posters for *Of Mice and Men*, *Freedom Writers*, *The Grapes of Wrath*, and others...There are many English-related postings. Things about "who/whom," "can/may," etc. rules. Posters with reading strategies. Lower, on the back and non-window walls, there are bulletin boards that say something like "Products and Writings." Stapled to the wall are about 40 essays written by students, dated March 22 [i.e., about 8 weeks prior], and they are all about the American Dream.

At the time of my visit, Tommy was teaching three block sections of ninth grade English, a course that he had taught a number of times in his teaching career. At the beginning of the year, the rosters for these classes were around 30 students each, but there was sizable change between then and May. Over the days that I was in his room, he averaged between 14 and 18 students per class. With a core of 6 or 8 in each class who were present each day, the remaining students showed up only once or twice during my visit.

When I asked him to speak about the curriculum of his ninth grade course, Tommy said, “generally, the class is literature-based with a focus on story structure, figurative language, diction, syntax, tone, mood, characterization, setting and various types of written products.” Literature includes a unit on short stories written by diverse writers across diverse times and places, plays like *Raisin in the Sun*, novellas such as *Of Mice and Men*, and narratives such as *Black Boy*.

As he described his course to me, I understood how what he had up on his classroom walls contextualized his teaching and his students’ learning—except, though, for the *Freedom Writers* (2007) movie poster. Having seen the film, I wondered about the poster’s place in Tommy’s classroom. The film depicts a white, affluent, female teacher in a struggling urban school. Tommy’s biography features all of these characteristics except for his gender. But the film tells a “miracle story” about a teacher who overcomes all odds to save her incredibly marginalized students, working independently from the bumbling teachers and corrupt administrators that surround her. While Tommy certainly talks of working independently and experiencing frustration with those who surround him at

times, and his students are similarly marginalized, Tommy is not a savior in his stories of teaching; he is a member of a community looking to help students improve their lives.

Tommy's learning to teach.

Prior to my Place visit, I had asked Tommy if his reasons for teaching at the present time are the same as they were when he entered the field [in 2000]. He wrote, "they remain the same. The reasons evolve and have taken on a certain complexity over the past eleven years but the essence is still the same: To try and make a difference in the lives of kids who struggle with poverty and the attendant misery it spawns. I also like the work because it is hard and each day is different, which is important to me."

At the present, Tommy thinks of his classroom as his fiefdom, but this was not always the case. In some of the prior years, the organizational structure was far from a row of classrooms with closed doors. But that structure has given way. Now, "there are 45 fiefdoms in this dysfunctional country. But in my fiefdom, everybody's fed well and shit's running right. When they come in and try to screw it up, I resist as much as I possibly can and I go back to what works for my fiefdom." But recognizing problems inherent in this approach, Tommy added, "that's ultimately not what you want in a system or a school. You want the whole thing being in community."

Despite a "wonderful" year of teaching during his teaching certification internship, his second year at Atlantic High, and first as a solo classroom teacher, was a "trial by fire." He lacked "backup" in the form of support from a mentor teacher but, more importantly, he lacked institutional support from the school. His classes were large, some as big as 35 students, and he had only 32 seats in his room. He talked about his experience in the second person, "completely on your own. And if you complained, it was perceived by

everybody else as a sign of inability or weakness.” He was determined not to complain, despite a number of trying events.

On his first day of school that year, an announcement was made from the office that first period would be extended for a total of three hours for attendance-records purposes. On top of this, a gratuitous error with his class roster had posited two times as many students in his first period class. He needed to extend his 50-minute lesson plan to three hours, and he had to do so with 60-plus students and half as many seats. In the second hour of the period, a student stabbed another student with a pencil, and Tommy took the bleeding student into the hall so that someone else could take him to the nurse. When Tommy reentered the room, another student had lit a marijuana joint. Imagining and dreading this scene as Tommy described it, I asked him if he ever considered quitting teaching. He responded, “that’s never really an option.” Surprised at not even a hint of possibility, I asked if it wasn’t an option for financial reasons: perhaps he just needed a paycheck. “No, I guess it’s a philosophical thing,” he replied. “If you’re going to walk away from something, you walk away on your own terms, not because you got your ass whooped.” At hearing this, I thought of his three instances of enrolling in college after being expelled from high school.

As he taught deeper into his first year, Tommy received and began to believe some important advice from a colleague: “if you’re consistently here and present and prepared every day, whatever behavior is happening will eventually wear down a little bit.” After a while, not only did he like the daily teaching challenges, “I began to kind of embrace the difficulty.” He had a student named Derrick in a class of 35. He was a “skinny, little kid but everyone was afraid of him because he purportedly carried a gun.” Derrick would walk

into class each day, constantly talking. It was always negative and usually directed at Tommy. After days of the same actions from Derrick and mounting frustration, Tommy said to Derrick in the middle of class, “you know what, Derrick? You’re not angry at us as a class, and you’re not angry at me, you’re doing this because you don’t like yourself. You’re angry because you don’t like yourself.” Derrick collapsed, as if Tommy had unveiled his great vulnerability. Although Tommy wasn’t carrying out a plan of action, with his momentary comment, “all of [Derrick’s] behavior and all of that anger was finally understandable to him.” From that point on, Derrick was no longer angry and disruptive in class. Tommy remembers, “he stopped fighting. And even better, he started participating.”

A big moment for the student (Derrick), it was also a big moment for Tommy. It brought a realization about what he was trying to do in the classroom. He had learned that he needed to be present constantly, both physically and mentally, as well as prepared. But he identified that he also was “using strategies to tag the psychology behind behavior, instead of just reacting to the behavior.” In talking about Derrick, I heard Tommy talking about himself. I envisioned Tommy the teacher addressing Tommy the aimless wanderer. The wanderer, like Derrick, didn’t like himself but he couldn’t name it.

Although I read Tommy’s interaction with Derrick in deeply personal terms, Tommy spoke little about overtly sharing his personal stories with students and I did not experience him telling any of those stories in the classroom. As with Derrick, he may have been living out his stories in the classroom. but he was not overtly sharing them. This was somewhat surprising to me. Although he is an avid reader and writer of stories outside of school, in my days in Room 317, Tommy did not tell one personal story to the class. The closest he got to that was his brief description of his team’s soccer game the previous

evening went when a student asked about it. The content curriculum of his classes, though, is wrapped in stories. As an English teacher, his students are constantly reading and analyzing stories. They are also writing stories.

But Tommy was quick to tell me stories about his teaching. When I interviewed him in his classroom, I asked him to share any stories that came to mind about various prompts that I provided him. I began by asking for him to share one powerful experience from his twelve years teaching at Atlantic High. After thinking for 15 seconds, he responded, “okay, I had a student who was in my sophomore class, my honors class, and her behavior was really strange.” The student, Jayla, would be kind and open toward him and then, as if a switch had been flipped, she would turn nasty—toward him, specifically. In previous years Jayla had been an “A student,” but in Tommy’s class she was earning mediocre grades. The situation, though, seemed larger than a change in grades. At moments when she was calm, Tommy began speaking with her, attempting to understand why she was undergoing such drastic mood changes. “It was me telling her that it’s really important to get things that are bothering you out into some arena, [to create] some sense of openness.” Unable to get beyond “I don’t know” responses, Tommy reached out to other staff in the building, asking them to speak with Jayla and help her address her anger.

Tommy soon learned that Jayla’s home life was horrific. She was repeatedly being raped by her uncle who was living in the same home-space. Additionally, her mother was a drug addict, which meant that she was taking care of her two younger siblings almost exclusively. From the point at which Jayla shared what was happening to her, drastic life changes ensued. She and her siblings were removed from their household. Jayla entered a local program that allowed for her to live on her own in a subsidized apartment while her

siblings went into foster care. She continued going to school and found a supportive teacher in Tommy. He nominated her for a summer program aimed at providing urban and under-resourced participants powerful experiences in natural settings. The program also paired participants with a local adult mentor intended to become a large influence in their lives. Tommy also worked with Jayla to apply for a scholarship that provides full coverage of tuition and expenses for four years of college. Jayla was one of the recipients, and with the scholarship, as Tommy explained, “she went to a good local university, where she struggled mightily, but because of her experience here, using the resources that were available—counseling, the summer program, et cetera—she knew how to use those support systems and was able to graduate.” Jayla now works in Boston, and every year she comes back to Atlantic High to visit, even though Tommy is one of the few people that remains from her time there.

After Tommy told me this story about Jayla, I asked how the various staff at the school, including him, were able to help Jayla. He said, “there were enough adults that had maybe proven to her that they weren’t going to take advantage of her and they weren’t going to leave. And they weren’t going to take ‘I don’t know’ for her answer to a clear problem.” While Tommy was an important character in this story, I was struck by how it was about a community of people, the staff at his school and later local support services, working for and with Jayla to better her life. It is not a story of Tommy saving a life, but it is a story of him contributing to making a student’s life better. When he tells her that it’s important to get what’s bothering her out into “some arena,” and when he says that “I don’t know” is not an acceptable answer, I hear the wisdom of his living curriculum talking. Again, I hear him speaking words that his younger self needed to hear.

Indeed, Tommy's story about Jayla is reminiscent of his own life's story. Although he did not experience the same life obstacles as Jayla, and his basic needs as a person were not threatened to the degree that Jayla's were, he did, like her, live a powerful transformation that led toward finding a balance of life's circumstances. In telling me Jayla's story, he was re-telling his story. The big difference, though, is that he is a participant in helping Jayla find her Balance.

Tommy told other, similar stories about students and his teaching, although he never directly connected them to his own life. In the middle of Jayla's story, he paused and took a brief tangent: "I've found a phrase that really works—it resonates with these kids—and I just kind of stumbled on it in happenstance one of my first years." He was teaching "a big, huge, white kid...that had real behavior issues." The student would be seen by other students sleeping on park benches before school. Tommy had forged a connection with him, and "I turned to him one day in the hallway and I said, 'you know, it's not always going to be this hard.' And just the look on his face was if I had stunned him." Again, there is a striking similarity to Tommy's lived experience. Life was hard when he was younger, but it got better.

I didn't ask Tommy how this student's life unfolded after that moment. He quickly moved back to Jayla because it was something that he had said to her, and it resonated with her. Tommy's actions toward both students, regardless of the outcomes, show a concerted work on his part to teach students, particularly those facing mammoth challenges, about making it to a better time and place of life. As Tommy must have thought numerous times in his own life—when he was kicked out of high school, for example—he told his students they had to persevere, that it was worth the difficulty of confronting their obstacles.

These stories that Tommy told about his teaching center on his involvement in helping students improve their lives. His teaching might be characterized as 'Balance work,' aimed at working with students so they can find a stability to live meaningful lives. His coaching is similar to his teaching in this respect. The content of his coaching is soccer: how to pass, shoot, play as a team, face an opponent's strategy, and so forth. These are the mechanics of soccer, just like the mechanics of reading and writing in his English class. But the purpose of this coaching, like his teaching, far exceeds any curriculum specific to this content. What happens on the field is framed in the larger context of his players' lives. Lessons from practices and games are lessons about the process of maturation from childhood to adulthood, resilience in the midst of adversity, success and failure individually and communally, and so on.

At the behest of Billy, his teaching colleague and former fellow soccer coach, Tommy told one particular soccer story. It was about a student, Ship, and it took place several years back, when Billy was the head varsity coach and Tommy was his assistant. Ship was a big kid, nicknamed for his size, who bugged Billy and Tommy to let him play on the team. Eventually, the coaches agreed despite some reluctance. Ship hadn't played much soccer and was known for being a major disturbance in school. When Ship stepped on to the field during practice, a younger student from the junior varsity team accidentally ran into him. The younger player did not intend for this to happen but Ship reacted angrily. Billy and Tommy stepped in and explained to Ship that the collision wasn't on purpose. Ship redirected his ire from the player to the coaches. He started swinging his fists. The coaches managed to talk Ship into settling down and leaving practice. But as he walked toward the parking lot, he shouted out that he would be coming back with weapons. Although Ship did

not return, Billy and Tommy wrote up an incident report with the school and the police. The report resulted in a court hearing at which Billy testified and spoke to how it was clear that Ship's needs were not being met. A judge ordered money to be appropriated for testing and, later, medication for Ship. The result was that Ship turned his life around. Although he didn't continue playing soccer, years later, Ship came back to the school and thanked the coaches for saving his life. He was certain that he would have killed somebody soon if he had not received the medications that the court mandated.

Ship's story mirrors Jayla's. Although Tommy plays less of a direct role in Ship's story, they both are about students' lives changing dramatically with the aid of adults at the school and within the community's support system.⁴⁰ Tommy tells these stories with pride, even when he is quick to point out that these are not everyday stories. But they signal his most important work. And importantly, they are often framed by a context larger than his classroom.

This is Tommy's citizenship, and it is founded on his lived experiences over the course of his life. As a teacher, he is working for the benefit of a larger community. He is working to help his students improve their lives. While these stories are of individual students, the community is invoked in supporting the students toward success. Tommy is working with other teachers, coaches, guidance counselors, and people beyond the school to support students. But the community is also invoked by having its members improve their lives. Further, Tommy is not just acting as a citizen, he is teaching citizenship to his

⁴⁰ I'm curious as to why Billy was adamant that Tommy tell this story. I don't believe it was to stroke Billy's ego—there were no signs of Billy investing in that kind of exercise. Perhaps it was that Billy felt Tommy would do the story justice, as Billy repeatedly commented about Tommy's "superior" intelligence and eloquence.

students. Evidenced by Jayla and Ship's returns to the school years later to thank their teachers, the students are becoming citizens. This student citizenship is directly linked to Tommy's citizenship. In Tommy's case, as well as his students', there is a two-step process: find Balance, then act as a citizen.

Tommy is adamant that he is not interested in teaching elsewhere than Atlantic High. Certainly not in suburbia, which he feels warrants too much attention in education circles, and not in a rural setting, which would pull him away from where he lives (and wants to stay). If he were to hit a certain level of frustration at his school, he might consider teaching at another school in Boston, but he does not hope or plan for that. Last year, he did consider the possibility of enrolling in a Ph.D. program in education, but none of the programs that he looked into allowed for him to continue teaching full-time and pursue a line of study specific to his interests and future at Atlantic High.

Conclusion

It is clear to me that Tommy has a deep commitment to his students and his school. His school is not touted as a high-flying, academic success. It is plagued by constant structural and personnel change, a student population deeply impoverished, a parental community with little political and educational clout, and real and daily safety concerns. The school and its students are outsiders, confined to the margins of society. All of these characteristics are reasons why Tommy loves where he teaches and where he lives. He sees himself as an outsider, too, albeit in some ways that are different from his students' outsider status. Dorchester has provided him a place to find Balance and become a citizen, the kind of citizen who is embedded in a community and working to better it.

On the day that I arrived in Boston for my Place visit with Tommy, he had a fight break out in his classroom. A female student had, as he said, “pestered” another and he had to step in to physically remove her from his classroom. In fact, he carried her from his third-floor classroom down to the main office below. Minutes later, she left the school in handcuffs with the police. Tommy told me this story as we drove to his house after he coached a soccer game, and I asked him how the student would react to him the next time she was back at school. “We’ll be cool,” he said, “she’s just angry with the world.” Resilient in his own life, having found his Balance, he is resilient with his students.

I return to the movie poster for *Freedom Writers* that adorns his classroom wall. Why is it there for all who enter to see? I don’t know the story of its posting. Perhaps someone else put it up there and he shrugged, or maybe he ignored it. Perhaps a student, maybe seeing herself in the picture, brought it in, thinking Tommy would like it, and asked that it be put up. In which case, how could he not post it? But perhaps Tommy posted it—purposefully. It could have been a point of connection with students, or a chance to talk about the American Dream, about which his students wrote essays. It could also be a constant challenge to himself. Despite being an outsider-citizen, he is an outsider among his students. He has personal Balance and he also benefits from society’s configuration of privilege. Whatever the context surrounding that poster, it is a reminder that Tommy’s Balance, his citizenship, is contested daily.

CHAPTER FOUR

ROSIE'S MOTHERING: FOSTERING FAMILY INSIDE THE CLASSROOM AND OUT

*I write America for the ones I will mother
Who won't be just black or white
But, who won't want to be an "other".
Their parents chose to love
And to rise above
What is less understood.
They looked beyond the skin
To the heart of a friend
And saw their future.
They envisioned the complexion and hair texture
Every feature
The beauty of two races creating one.
I write to multi-racial America.*

—Rosie Baker, Elementary Gifted Education Teacher, The South, 2011

Introduction

Rosie Baker wrote the poem above during the week that I visited her elementary school classroom in Mobile County, AL. In these words, Rosie focused on her yet-to-be-born children “who won’t be just black or white.” Rosie, a black woman, is married to Rick Baker, a white male. She thinks that their future children won’t want to have to identify as “other.” As part of her job as an elementary gifted education teacher, Rosie handles a large amount of paperwork that her students (and their families) must complete in order to apply for the program. Some of this paperwork includes “state forms,” on which parents must indicate their child’s race. For parents whose children have a mixed racial

background, the option is to select one singular race (like “black” or “white) or “other.”

That some of her future students’ parents have to make this tough decision—with an inaccurate, limiting outcome either way—bothers Rosie. “They should have a choice that is a fair choice.” But Rosie is not just bothered as a teacher. She is bothered as a future parent. Some day, she and Rick will need to negotiate the same problem on these or similar forms, and her future children will need to negotiate the same problem in their daily living. She wants them to have a fair choice.

When I read Rosie’s poem for the first time, I thought it pertained to her multiracial students and their interracial parents since she so often speaks about teaching in a language of mothering. I interpreted the line, “the ones I will mother,” as referring to the *students* she will teach in the future. But then in speaking about the poem, I realized her intent. She said she had considered writing about her gifted education students—how they are sometimes “others” and how misconceptions about them abound—but then she decided, “I want to do something more personal...My husband and I will have kids sooner rather than later.”

In the fourth line of the poem, Rosie moves from first person to third person. The subject is “their future children,” even though “their” is a form of *our*, referring to Rosie and Rick. Such a rhetorical move is intriguing; it signals a change from the nearby and subjective toward the distant and objective. A larger, societal point is being made, perhaps, but seemingly without the passion of the personal. *They* “chose to love / And to rise above / What is less understood.” Despite living in a society that is not necessarily accepting of interracial relationships, they chose to love each other, marry, and live their lives together. “They looked beyond the skin / To the heart of a friend / And saw their future.” In such

action, they sought to distance themselves from the lingering racism of a society that hasn't moved beyond skin color, including miscegenation. They were friends in love—why should their skin colors prevent their friendship and love, especially when, together, the future was brighter?

Maintaining the storyline from the distant third person, Rosie notes that the parents of the “other[ed]” children—she and Rick—thought about the ramifications of their union. They considered “every feature” of their future children, particularly “envision[ing] the complexion and hair texture,” and foresaw “The beauty of two races creating one.” Their children would be beautiful, not just in physical appearance but also in societal chemistry. Then, returning to the passion of her first person, Rosie closes: “I write to multi-racial America.” A simple, powerful statement, I read the possibility of double meaning in this ultimate line. Perhaps “multi-racial” is an adjective that describes “America.” She might be *sharing* her sentiment with an America that is comprised of peoples of many different races. Perhaps, though, “multi-racial” is a verb in the infinitive form, indicating that her writing is action. With these words, she might be *making* America racially mixed.

Rosie's poem raises two central themes of her life: familial relations, particularly with respect to the mothering of children, and race. While the former was explicit throughout my research with her, the latter was implicit. And yet the two themes are deeply intertwined in her life experiences. This chapter explores the complicated relationship of family and race in Rosie's living and teaching curricula. In the first section I tell a story of Rosie's life, in which I track the development of her notion of family from her birth to the present. In the second section of this chapter, I tell a story of Rosie's life as a teacher, including her focus on creating family in her classroom. The reader will note that

in both stories I tell, family is an explicit theme. With a broad conception of family, Rosie is active in various families as she (re)defines who comprises her family. Largely implicit in these two stories, though, is the issue of race, which is buried in the unspoken context. Her living and her teaching is shaped by these themes.

Rosie's Living Curriculum: (Re)Defining Family And Home

At the present moment, Rosie is in her early thirties, married, teaching, and living in South Mobile. She is pregnant, awaiting the birth of her first child.⁴¹ Of modest height and a slender build, she speaks softly in conversation, smiling and laughing often. Her “Southern accent” is easily distinguishable from my “Midwestern accent.” Even though she has taught elementary school for nine years, she is routinely assumed to be a college student by people she meets in the public, non-school sphere. Gentle outside of the classroom, inside it she is a powerful presence as she regulates the activities of her students.

Rosie was born in Mobile. She says she has “strong ties” to the city and that it has always been “home” for her. But the scale of home does not reduce solely to Mobile. When I asked Rosie if she would identify strongly with being a “Mobilian”—i.e., the term commonly used to represent a person from Mobile—she said that she would. But, “I think more specifically than a Mobilian, I would probably say that I’m from The Loop, which is a specific area in Mobile.” She grew up in The Loop, the boundaries for which are not starkly defined but it’s location is near the city’s center. Porous boundaries reflect the diversity that defined the area during her childhood. The Loop possessed “all of these different

⁴¹ She shared this news with me via email, after my Place visit.

groups, just all mixed into one. You had the kids whose mom and dad made sure that everything was paid for, because they could...And then you had the kids who, as soon as the bell for lunch rang, ran across campus to get to the cafeteria because that was their meal that day. You had the entire spectrum.”

Perhaps the biggest reason why Rosie marks The Loop as *home* is because Mother James lived there. At the time of Rosie’s birth, her parents had recently divorced. As a result, she grew up with her mother and two sisters, apart from her father. Because her mother worked full-time, Rosie spent much of her childhood at Mother James’ house. In describing Mother James, Rosie did not specify to me her race but she did make clear that Mother James was not biologically related to her. A mother of 16 children, Mother James looked after the children of women in the community who worked or went to school during the day. “I lived at her house more than my own home when I was really little,” Rosie said. When she was old enough to attend school, she went to Mother James’ house after the school day ended. And she was not alone. “Anyone who wanted to drop their kid off at Mother James’ [house] could. So there were always two, three, or four kids,” and this was in addition to any number of Mother James’ biological children.

Rosie recalls that each child at Mother James’ house—those there for the day as well as the ones to whom she gave birth—thought that she or he was Mother James’ favorite. The children would debate the issue, each certain of her or his own exceptionality, and this included Rosie. “I really think I was the favorite,” she says now. “I don’t even know that there’s anything that can be said to convince me otherwise.” When I asked Rosie why she possessed this certainty, she replied that Mother James “would always speak highly of me while I was standing in front of her, whether she knew I was there or not.” Rosie then

shared a more recent story, which took place at a 60th-year wedding anniversary party for Mother James and her husband. Mother James' youngest child, while giving a celebratory speech that thanked the guests for attending, said, "there's someone in the audience who is here and my mom loved her. Mom loved her like she loved one of us [children]. And she loved her more than everybody else, I think." Hearing this, Rosie thought, "that must be me, I'm her favorite." Then, Mother James' husband shouted out "where's Ro-Ro?", his nickname for Rosie. Mother James followed, "Rosie, stand up so everybody knows who you are."

Mother James was the most prominent adult in Rosie's childhood life, which caused a young Rosie to sometimes refer to her as "mom." Mother James, though, would quickly correct her: "no, no, no. I'm not your mom. Your mom's coming [to pick you up]." But looking back, Rosie calls Mother James a "definitive mother" and credits her for teaching Rosie what it means to be a mother. Talking about her vision of the *ideal* mom, Rosie said, "with mom is where you are most cherished and most loved. You are disciplined. She finds the best in you and she corrects the worst in you. She points you in the direction you're supposed to go. And you don't doubt her love at all." Mother James was *this* mom for Rosie. Mother James was a disciplinarian, giving correction when it was warranted, but she also was caring and endlessly patient. And when Rosie thinks about this mothering multiplied out across all of the children for whom Mother James cared, she calls it an "ultimate love and sacrifice." Reflecting with awe, she said, "I don't know how you spread your love so equally that your kids think that you love them more than everyone else."

When she was four years old, Rosie was diagnosed with cancer in her nervous system. Shortly after her fifth birthday, she underwent major surgery that removed a

bundle of cancerous tissue that was located behind her lungs. The surgery also targeted and fixed a heart murmur. With a timely diagnosis and the necessary surgical response, Rosie's cancer was quickly and effectively halted. The process was certainly life-threatening, but it did not play out over a number of years, as is the case with many cancer treatments. While Rosie had a series of doctor's visits in the years after her surgery, they were largely "check-ins" aimed at making sure that all signs remained positive.

As a result of her cancer, Rosie entered a new community that was starkly different from her previous experiences with her family and Mother James. There were the people at the hospital, during and beyond her treatment: patients, families, advocates, doctors, nurses, and other medical professionals. Since cancer afflicts a diversity of people across many different characteristics (such as age, geographic location, gender, and so forth), Rosie met a variety of people. And not only did these people come from different backgrounds, their experiences with cancer were quite varied since cancer afflicts people differently given its many types and the uniqueness of each person's body. After Rosie's successful treatment, this community opened up further in the form of a camp for youth who were battling or had survived cancer. Each year, during one week in June, Rosie attended Camp Golden at a campground in southern Alabama. She was a camper for her first ten years there until she was eligible to be a "counselor in training" and, eventually, a counselor. Today, after 24 years, she remains involved as one of the camp planners.

Camp, for a young Rosie, "was this separate life that I had." It was an intense experience, and she loved it. She met other youth and adults who became recurring figures in her life, and she learned skills like horseback riding, which had not been a part of her life previously. "Two weeks before camp [each year], I had my bags packed and everything

was ready to go. When I would get home, I would sleep and then call friends from camp and we would stay on the phone for a week or so.” Then she would turn back to the particulars of non-Camp life until the following June.

Although Camp was a separate world for camper Rosie, it became more integrated into daily life for counselor Rosie. Especially as she thought about becoming a teacher, she realized “I am to that 8-year-old what my counselors were to me.” She started thinking about the need “to give [campers] the normalcy that they don’t find at school or at home cause no one else can identify.” Rosie followed up this comment by saying, “I definitely can’t identify to some degree because my treatment was so quick and so easy—some of them have had such a difficult time—but there are some people that can [identify].” She found that she was able to connect well with campers, particularly “in situations that they are not always comfortable in...I will look for the kids who are timid or don’t want to get on the bus [to camp] because they’re so scared and try to really coax them in and get to know them.” She is committed to making Camp a welcoming community for all campers.

Unlike Camp, school and church were significant daily places for Rosie throughout her childhood. She was a student in the Mobile County Public School System (MCPSS), a large and extensive district that spanned the urban, suburban, and rural areas of the county. Rosie enjoyed school and excelled at it. She recalls how in elementary school, after usually finishing her week’s work by Tuesday, her teachers would ask her to teach her peers during the remaining days of the week. Although her elementary school had a gifted education program and she was tested for it, she did not enter gifted education until later in her schooling. She attended a magnet middle school in downtown Mobile that was

focused on performing arts. In high school, she attended a prestigious public high school, where she entered into and participated in the gifted education program.

Similar to her experience with her Camp community, through school, Rosie met and befriended a variety of youth her age. Because of the nature of her magnet middle school and the academic lure of her high school (as well as its vast zone from which it pulled students), she attended school with students from across Mobile County. Her high school featured the academically-rigorous International Baccalaureate (IB) program and all county students were eligible to apply for it. As Rosie's closest friends participated in gifted education and IB, she was interacting with people from different geographic, intellectual, and experiential backgrounds.

During these schooling years, Rosie became active in her church community, which opened her to yet another community from across the county. When she was very young, her maternal grandmother had worked at a local church, cleaning it and taking care of babies in the nursery. As a result, her grandmother began worshiping there, and Rosie, her mom, and her sisters did as well. But when Rosie was seven, some of the parishioners at the church founded a new church, and they asked her grandmother to make the move with them. Rosie and the rest of her family moved to Spring Church as well. The church was not located in The Loop but it was not far away either. Although she did not speak in depth about the racial composition of Spring, the congregation was predominantly white. Over the next two decades, Rosie was an active member of Spring, even as all the other members of her family gradually left it. She attended and later worked at "children's church." As a teen and an adult, she worked in the church's nursery during services. She also participated in the youth and young adult groups.

During her high school years, Rosie participated in the “Spring Church Bus Ministry.” A group from the church—which was located near Interstate 65 in a bustling area of Mobile—would board a bus and drive 15 minutes north on I-65, leaving behind the bustle, to Prichard. Prichard, as Rosie described it, was a place “of huge poverty.” It was:

high in crime and low in money...just this other, other world. The street signs were off the streets—and this is of course before the days of GPS—because if you take the street signs down, the police don’t go in at nighttime because they can’t find their way in, around, and they can’t find their way back out. So it was just like this crazy danger zone where we did bus ministry.

In her description of Prichard, Rosie omitted the nearly-all-black racial composition of the city.

Children from Prichard were invited to board the Spring bus. They would then go to Mobile, to the church, for an “incredible service.” After the service, sometimes the bus would go to a nearby mall or movie theater, places that the Prichard children rarely, if ever, frequented. Rosie summarized that the church group would “love on [the participants], give them candy and junk, and then drive them back home.” Reflecting on her experience with the bus ministry, she said, “I think that is where I learned that people’s concept of the hardest thing is different. That the hardest thing that you’ll ever deal with is the hardest thing *for you*, but it might be a cakewalk for someone else.” Rosie added that it “was a time in my life when it was just incredible to realize that these kids are going through some very tough stuff.” She had survived cancer and lived in a family split by divorce, but she experienced a different kind of “tough” through the bus ministry.

Rosie stopped participating in the bus ministry when she left Mobile after graduating from high school. She attended a small, private, liberal arts college in central Alabama, a several-hour drive from Mobile. She studied elementary and early childhood education and her hope was to become a kindergarten teacher. In addition to her course work, she worked in an after school program at a nearby private school. She babysat often, particularly for one family with whom she became very close. In the summers after her junior and senior years, instead of returning to Mobile for a full summer, Rosie worked at a children's camp in the Catskill Mountains of New York. Many of the children and the staff at the camp were from different countries, which Rosie said gave her a "taste of the world."

But after her second summer at the New York camp, which followed her graduation from college, Rosie returned to Mobile. She completed what she called her "last limbo move," and now she would "be home for as long as I want that to be home." I asked Rosie why she came back to Mobile and she said, "I don't think I thought of it much...I don't think I even considered living anywhere else for my adult life." At another point in our interviews, while talking about her "strong ties" to Mobile, she said that her feeling after college was, "I'm ready to go back, I'm ready to be back in Mobile." She then referenced a friend's article, published in a local monthly magazine, "about how Mobile leaves its mark on people. They go and live in other places but there's nothing quite like being back in Mobile." Even though her friend who wrote the article had moved away from Mobile, calling himself an "expatriate," Rosie noted that "a lot of Mobilians will move back to Mobile after years of being some place else."

Rosie's move back to Mobile signified a return to where she was rooted. As we talked, I raised the metaphor that it was almost like, if she were a rubber band, her time at

college and at the camp in New York were moments when the rubber band was stretched, but then it retracted to its regular position with her return to Mobile. Her past was located in Mobile and she had no reason not to see her future there, especially as the people and communities to which she was closest were in Mobile.

Rosie once again began attending Spring Church regularly and there she rekindled her friendship with Rick Baker. A white male from Mobile, Rick met Rosie at Spring when both were in high school, even though they were from different parts of the city. Rosie lived in The Loop; Rick lived in the southern, suburban part of the city, known as South Mobile. The two had different schooling backgrounds as well: he went to private schools while she attended public schools. And, Rick was two years younger, so, as Rosie remembers, “we didn’t really hang out in the same group” as teens. But when Rosie returned to Mobile after college, they quickly became close friends and, after a few years, married.

In addition to meeting Rick at Spring, she met two married couples that she said became her “extended ‘family.’” She was 13 years old when she first met the Pinckneys. They had a daughter who was ten years older than Rosie but working with her on a church project. In the ensuing years, Rosie spent considerable time over at the Pinckney’s house and, in the process, the Pinckneys became “like second-nature parents to me...There are surgeries that my mom has no idea that I’ve had and I’ve just gone to [the Pinckney’s] house and let them take care of me.” Like the Pinckneys, Rosie met the Hendricksons at Spring, and “they’ve been kind of surrogate parents to both Rick and me.” The Hendricksons were a married couple with four children, the oldest of which was the same age as Rosie. The Hendricksons were the leaders of the young adult group at Spring to

which both Rosie and Rick belonged. They hosted Rosie and Rick's wedding reception at their house and paid the majority of their wedding expenses. "They have been extremely supportive of us individually and of us when we got married. They're definitely invited to any [events and celebrations] that we have and it's the other way around." Rosie said, even, that Mr. Hendrickson frequently jokes that she is his "adopted daughter." When I asked Rosie why she thought she became so close with the Hendricksons, she responded, "gosh, I don't know. It was just a complete connection." But she then noted the Hendricksons' roles as leaders of Spring's young adult group, especially at a time when no one from Rosie's blood-related family was attending the church.

When I asked why Rosie referred to the Pinckneys and the Hendricksons as "extended 'family,'" with *family* in quotation marks, she said it was because they "are not really blood-related." I then mentioned Mother James' name, wondering why she hadn't noted this same distinction with respect to her. Rosie responded with a smile, "Mother James surpasses everything for me. You know, she's just—I've never thought about the fact that she's not really related to me." Rosie then made a distinction: "[Mother James] was always there, whereas with these extended family, I've added them along as I've grown older."

In recent years, many of the important places of Rosie's life have shifted to South Mobile. After teaching in Prichard for three years, she moved to Violet Elementary, near the city's southern boundary. After being married for a couple years, Rosie and Rick decided to leave Spring Church for another church, which is near Violet. And, with these other moves, they bought a house in a new subdivision in South Mobile. Given that her house, church, and school are all located in South Mobile, Rosie does not venture back to

The Loop very often. In this sense, while Rosie remains a Mobilian, what that moniker means for her has evolved. For example, Rosie and Rick's expected child will grow up a Mobilian, but likely with strong ties to South Mobile, not the Loop.

As Rosie's living curriculum shows, family is a central topic in her life. In all the spaces of her life, there is family. She speaks about her immediate family, her camp family, her church family, her extended family, and her school family. Siblings are family. Friends are family. Teaching colleagues and students, as I will describe below, are family. This is a dynamic notion of family; family is not limited to biological relations, which fix a person foremost to blood relatives. Rather, family is constructed for Rosie through lived experience. The people central to her daily living become family. To this point in her life, family has always been in process, becoming.

This becoming, though, has not been a journey that Rosie navigated with her immediate family. Indeed, when I look across the transcripts of our conversations, Rosie's biological mother and sisters are minor characters in her stories. Her varied experiences brought her into new communities (and families) by herself, largely without her immediate family. The few experiences with her family that she talked about show her in opposition to relatives. For example, when talking about Mobile's Mardi Gras celebration, which is one of the city's biggest community events each year, she said, "I had to go to Mardi Gras because my family loves Mardi Gras, which is so funny because I hated it."

Rosie's familial progression through the families of her living curriculum served to redefine her home. One aspect of the notion of home is that it is a place where one returns. In her youth, influential markers of home for Rosie were Mobile, Mother James, Camp, church, and school. When she graduated from college, Rosie returned "home for as long as

I want that to be home.” She returned to these markers, but as an adult. Over the ensuing years, Mobile shifted for her from The Loop to South Mobile. Instead of Mother James mothering her, she came to mother her students in the vein of Mother James (as I will describe below). No longer a camper, she was a counselor and then a director. No longer an attendee of children’s church, she was a leader of it. No longer an acquaintance of Rick Baker’s, they were married. No longer a student, she was a teacher.

Rosie’s Teaching Curriculum: From Miss Leonard To Mrs. Baker

As Rosie told me about her work as a Camp counselor, she moved in and out of talking about her present-day teaching. “Every new kid who comes into school, as soon as I see them, I go up to them and talk to them and say, ‘hey, I’m Mrs. Baker, you have to be my friend. You know, you just have to. There’s no way you can come here and not be my friend.’” She views campers, who are also often timid about the new experience in front of them, similarly. She coaxes them on to the Camp bus, or a horse, or the dance floor. This approach to children symbolizes how the act of teaching for Rosie is not bounded by her classroom and school as much as it is by her life. She wants people to feel welcome, a part of something larger than themselves, a member of a family.

In her third year of teaching, Rosie’s principal from when she was an elementary student visited the school in which Rosie was teaching. Although she did not know that Rosie taught there, the principal greeted her by name when they saw each other. “Oh my gosh,” Rosie remembers thinking after the principal’s greeting, “she knows who I am! It’s been forever.” After learning that Rosie was teaching in the school, the principal commented, “why Rosie Leonard, I knew you’d end up teaching.” Rosie credits the

educators of her past for “propelling me forward into a future career in education.” From a young age, she had always said that she wanted to be a teacher, and her teachers recognized and nurtured this passion, giving her small teaching opportunities as an elementary student, both in her own classroom and in the classrooms of grades younger than hers. When I asked how she, even at that early age, knew that she wanted to be a teacher, she said, “as mystical as it sounds, I felt I was destined to be a teacher.” Later, in her high school years, her experiences at Children’s Church and at Camp, both educational settings, added to her desire to teach.

I asked Rosie about her purposes in teaching. In her early days, she aimed to “help my students grow...as individuals and contributors in society.” As her teaching responsibilities and contexts changed in the ensuing years, she came to think of her teaching as “helping students adapt to their changing environments.” Speaking about the present moment of her teaching, she added, “my greatest passion is to help [students] realize that everyone has differences, strengths, and desirable qualities.” Across these teaching purposes, Rosie noted her two teaching selves: Miss Leonard and Mrs. Baker. She talked about recently “having to go Miss Leonard on [one student]” in order to “straighten this thing out.” Miss Leonard is Rosie in her early years of teaching; “this nice Mrs. Baker gal” is Rosie as she currently teaches. Clearly the change is marked by when she married Rick and took his surname. However, it is also marked by the move from her first teaching setting to her second.

Barnes Elementary School in Prichard.

After college, when Rosie moved back to Mobile as a certified teacher in the State of Alabama, she began teaching at Barnes Elementary School, part of the county’s public

school system. During her senior year of college, she had attended a teaching job fair in Mobile. While she met representatives from different schools across the county, “I just really loved one of the principals and I found out that her school was in Prichard.” The school was Barnes. Rosie did not set out to teach in Prichard; rather, “it was pure coincidence that [this principal’s] school was in Prichard.” Across Mobile County, Prichard had a reputation as “such a tough area.” Rosie said that for “most people, when they hear about teaching in Prichard, it’s fear,” meaning that they were afraid for Rosie teaching there. “But with my background of working there for four years in high school [with the Spring Church Bus Ministry], [fear] didn’t even come into play. I was like, ‘yeah, let’s do it.’” As a follow-up question to these statements, I asked Rosie if she had been excited about teaching in Prichard specifically because it was regarded to be a “tough area.” She responded, “probably not—I grew up in an area that was not Prichard but not very high on the socioeconomic ladder and so I don’t think it was a factor.” Rosie was at Barnes foremost because of the principal.

Although she taught in Prichard, Rosie lived in Mobile. Each morning she drove the same direction as the Spring Church bus to the school. Not only was Barnes located in Prichard, but also many of the students at the school lived in the two neighborhoods where the Spring bus would stop. Most of the kids that participated in the bus ministry while Rosie was in high school were older when she began teaching there, but there was one student at Barnes who Rosie instantly recognized from it. When she left the bus ministry, Roosevelt was five years old. When she began at Barnes, he was “this huge fourth grader.” Roosevelt came up to Rosie and said, “you came on the Spring Church bus, didn’t you?” From that point forward, Roosevelt was protective of Rosie. “Don’t mess with her,” he

would say to other students, “I know her.” This made Rosie laugh—“I can take care of myself, it’s okay”—but it pleased her to think that the bus ministry had such a positive impact on him.

As Rosie talked about her teaching experience in Prichard, I asked her to tell me a story about one powerful moment from her time at Barnes. “I think about all the craziness that happened,” she responded immediately. She then began describing one morning from her third year at the school. Like every morning, she had arrived around 6:15am, one of the first people in the building. On her way to make copies, she heard a woman yelling at the locked front door of the school. As she approached the door, she saw a grandmother—“I just remember the wildness in her eyes”—and her grandson. The latter was a student at the school but Rosie did not know him. “Where’s that kid?” the grandmother shouted. “I am going to find that kid as soon as he gets off the bus and I am going to whip him. You can call Prichard [i.e., the police]. You can call whoever you want...He did something to my baby on the bus.” Rosie, knowing that buses filled with students would be arriving shortly, tried to get the woman and her grandson to come into the office and wait to speak with the principal, who was yet to arrive. The grandmother refused; she wanted her grandson to point out the student when he exited the bus. In a moment when the grandmother turned her back, Rosie instructed the grandson, “do not tell her who [that student] is, do you understand? You are not allowed to say who he is.” The principal arrived shortly thereafter and was able to de-escalate the situation without the grandmother acting on her threat. But that instance, for Rosie, reflected the “craziness” of Barnes.⁴²

⁴² As a follow-up to the story of the grandmother and the “craziness” of Barnes, Rosie explained how at another point a car had crashed through the wall of her classroom. Over

Rosie's description of Prichard, both when she talked about the Spring Church Bus Ministry and her teaching at Barnes Elementary, focused on the high level of poverty in the community. She referred to Prichard as low on the "socioeconomic ladder" and talked about attendant issues like high crime. Interestingly, though, she did not speak about the racial make-up of Prichard until I asked, "Prichard's African American community is huge, isn't it?" According to data from the 2000 U.S. Census, Prichard's population was 85% black, 14% white, and 1% a combination of other single-race categories and "two-or-more races." According to the 2010 U.S. Census, the numbers are similar: 86%, 13%, and 1%, respectively. Although I was not aware of these particular statistics at the time of the interview, my understanding was that the community was predominantly black. Rosie affirmed my understanding: "Yes, but it wasn't always that way. A generation ago it was the opposite...I've heard people my mom's age talk about how Prichard was mostly white."

In the three years that Rosie taught at Barnes, the racial make-up of the student population, which averaged 509 students per year, was 100% black (NCES, 2011). I asked Rosie if she thought the issue of race impacted daily life at Barnes. "Sometimes the parents didn't understand the push for something better...When you have one group only and one mindset only," she said, "it stunts *it*, where there isn't a whole lot of growth" (*italics added*). She did not specify what she meant by *it*, but I interpret that she could have been referring to the progress of society, the community, the school, student learning, and other possibilities. She continued, "there isn't an understanding of growth or the understanding of growing pains. So I think that's where race played a factor—that you don't realize a need

a weekend, there had been a car chase and one of the cars ended up barreling through her classroom wall. The inside shelving was destroyed and the foundation of the room was cracked. As a result, Rosie and her students had to move out of their classroom for months while it was repaired.

for even the outside world...You don't understand the need for other experiences." She returned to this idea, adding, "just the experience of interaction with someone who is not in your own home community can just grow you exponentially." This wisdom was a product of Rosie's living curriculum. Through Camp, school, and church, Rosie had repeatedly grown in her interaction with new communities.

Her first two years at Barnes were in a third grade classroom, which was the oldest grade in the range of grades that she wanted to teach. She reflected, "I loved the independence of those kids that were still very dependent on us." But then going into her third year, her principal asked her to move to fifth grade. There was an opening and the principal said she "needed someone strong there." Rosie made the move because that was what was needed, but she did not enjoy the year as much as the previous ones. One reason was that she knew her students would move to a new school for sixth grade: "I really like to see them a year or two after they've left my classroom." But the main reason she disliked fifth grade was the emphasis on testing. "The students were making huge gains but because they weren't meeting the state requirements, they were seen as unsuccessful." Rosie then added, "that was heartbreaking." One of her fifth graders had begun the year at a second-grade reading level. Over the course of the year in Rosie's classroom, the student rose to a fourth-grade reading level. But when Barnes' scores were reviewed, this student—along with many of her peers—"wasn't considered a success." As a result of this experience, Rosie sought a new teaching context. "I really kind of fell out of love with regular education and I wanted to get back to teaching so my students just could learn. And teaching without the pressures—just teaching for the fact of learning and to grow kids and to help them grow as individuals."

So Rosie began looking for a new school in Mobile at which to teach. Beyond the woes of her year of teaching fifth grade, I asked her if the “craziness” of Barnes also played into her decision to leave the school. “Maybe not,” she responded. “I think every school has its craziness, and so you leave one known craziness for the unknown craziness.”

Gifted education in South Mobile.

Rosie was granted an interview at Violet Elementary School. Violet is located in South Mobile, which is a largely suburban area of Mobile that comprises neighborhoods in and beyond the southern part of City, including unincorporated parts of Mobile County. These parts, beyond the boundaries of the city, tend to be rural and sparsely populated. The population of South Mobile is predominantly white and it possesses a wide socioeconomic range. Violet in South Mobile was certainly a different teaching context than Barnes in Prichard.

At the end of one school day, Rosie left Barnes and drove to Violet for her interview. Although the school was less than 15 miles from where she grew up, she had not been to it prior. After having “a very comfortable interview” with the principal, Rosie left thinking, “okay, I’m here—this is definitely a school that I could see myself fitting very well with.” When she was offered the job of gifted education teacher for grades 3-5 in the ensuing days, she accepted it. “My personality type is well suited for some schools and not so much for others,” Rosie reflected. “Finding the right place to teach is a lot like finding the right place to live—since so much of your life is given to that school.” Drawing this connection between school and home, after Rosie and Rick married, they settled in South Mobile, near Violet.

Violet's gifted education program did not have a full enrollment, so Rosie's duties included working one day a week at other elementary schools and teaching (at Violet) classes of students who were integrated from the different schools. In her six years at Violet, Rosie has taught gifted students from three additional elementary schools. At the time of my visit, the majority of her students were from Violet with a fraction in each class from Fields Elementary, a school in a small city south of Mobile.

In prior years, she had also taught students from two rural schools in the unincorporated community of Lawson, also south of Mobile. Interestingly, when I asked Rosie to describe these other schools, she drew comparisons to Barnes Elementary and Prichard. The first time she walked into Fields, it felt like "I had walked into an inner-city school—and I had taught in an inner-city school in Prichard." According to NCES, 86% of Fields current students are eligible for free and/or reduced lunch, while 58% percent of students are black and 37% are white. She later described Fields as "kind of wild," with students who "grow up a lot on their own in their community, or so it seems."

Describing the two schools in Lawson, Rosie said that the surrounding communities were isolated, which she compared to Prichard. She then noted that while Prichard is mostly black and Lawson mostly white, "Prichard's [socioeconomic status is] lower but Lawson is not very many rungs higher." She then added that the Lawson schools were "laid back" and "really kind" but there was not an efficiency to the schools' operations like there is at Violet, which is very important to her.

Rosie speaks about Violet differently. While she spends time in the other schools, and teaches students from them, Violet is *her* school. She is there four days a week. Her classroom and all of her teaching materials are there. She is identified by the district as a

Violet teacher and she participates as a faculty member there alongside all of the other teachers. In this respect, in her teaching career, she has had two *home* schools: Barnes and Violet. Considering the two, she offered, “at Barnes I had to be a tougher teacher. I had to be very strict and very stern, whereas I can allow my students a little more room at Violet just because of the nature of the schools.” Unlike Barnes, where over 90% of students qualified for free and/or reduced lunch, just over 50% of students at Violet qualify, and the racial composition of Violet is 83% white, 11% black, and 7% a mixture of the remaining categories. According to these socioeconomic and racial metrics, Violet’s student population is more diverse than Barnes’ student population. Looking across the past nine years in all of her schools, Rosie offered that “teaching at the different schools has given me such an appreciation for how diverse our county is.”

As the lone gifted education teacher at Violet (and Fields), Rosie teaches many of her students for three consecutive years, from third through fifth grade. She sees each grade level for a full day once a week. The scripted curriculum, which is developed at the county level, for the three grade levels is the same, changing every year so that students do not have repeated content and themes. As a result of this three-year process, Rosie becomes very close with her students and their families. Not only is she the students’ teacher, she becomes an advocate for them in their regular grade-level classroom. This is especially true, she said, for gifted students who excel in some areas but struggle in others. Rosie noted that “teachers don’t mean to have this perception but they think a gifted student is someone who is highly motivated, who does really well on all of their assignments...That can be a gifted student but it’s not necessarily the typical gifted student.” Thus, Rosie sees

her role as a gifted education teacher extending in her school beyond the walls of her classroom.

During my week with Rosie, she frequently talked to her students' parents on her cell phone, both during and outside of school hours. And, at other points, she spoke to how she will plan assignments, classroom activities, and field trips with input from some parents. These facts speak to a close connection that Rosie nurtures with her students and their families. In fact, as Mother James became an impromptu family member of Rosie's, she becomes something similar for her students. Certainly a three-year period with most students (although some do come in after third grade) aids this development. But this also fits with Rosie's method of interaction with her students. "They [i.e., her students] know almost all of my stories," she said. "I use as much of my personal life as possible to wrap them into whatever it is that they need to be wrapped into. They love it. They love knowing about the Mrs. Baker that's not in the classroom. I'll exploit myself."

In turn, Rosie learns much about her students when they're not in the classroom. For example, one of her female students had a sister who was going to get married. Rosie's student, though, was prevented from attending the ceremony because of the family's religious beliefs. This was difficult for the student; she wanted to attend the ceremony. Rosie remembers, "we spent several weeks in a row talking about what [the student] was going to be a part of and how she could still be a part of the wedding but not get to go to the ceremony." They also talked about how the student's life was going to change with her sister moving out of her home.

Rosie told me a number of stories about her teaching, but one she told me twice. In our first interview, before I visited Mobile, she described a moment when one of her

students shared with the class that his mom tried to commit suicide. The context for Rosie sharing this story was a discussion about how she strives to help her students adapt to their changing environments. Rosie recalled how another student responded by asking, “do you really think you should have told us that?” Rosie then talked with the students about “how you support someone who’s going through something that’s difficult,” but she shared with me that “I was not prepared to talk about [the situation] with the entire class,” even though she was aware of it prior. Then, during our interview at school, I asked Rosie to tell me a powerful story from her time at Violet. After thinking for some seconds, she said, “there is one experience that I [already] told you about.” I asked her to re-tell the story:

Rosie: We were actually over on that carpet [in the corner of the classroom] and that was a very small group of students. Their class, I only had boys. So it had to have been their fourth grade year. I only had boys and there were 7 or 8 of them. I don’t remember what we were talking about—we were probably reading a book and discussing just whatever when it came to the book—and just out of the blue, he said, “I think a hard time was when my mom went crazy and she tried to kill herself. We had to put her away and so I went to go live with my grandmother.” And the entire class just stopped and watched him. One of the kids said, “wow, that was probably more than you should have said there.”

Mark: One of the kids actually said that?

Rosie: Yeah, he was just shocked. He was like, “I can’t believe you just said

all of that.” And I told him, “well, you know, it’s very good that he wanted to share that with us.” And then we talked about, “how do you talk to someone when they’ve shared more than you expected them to?” It ended up being a very productive conversation, and validating his feelings about that being a very tough thing to live through. And how it’s a great thing that he had a grandma who could step in and take care of him and his little brother. The opportunity having arisen to share that was very good. And, you know, we just talked through it as best as we could. The kids didn’t look at him stranger after they realized that, “wow, he’s just shared something big that I never expected.”

Mark: Do you recall if he seemed to think at some point, “oh, wait, I shouldn’t have said that?”

Rosie: No. He just threw it out there. Even when that kid said, “that’s a little more than you probably could have told us,” he was just like, “this is it, this is just the way it is.”

Mark: Was your initial reaction like the kids’ [reaction], like, “whoa, why’d you share that?”

Rosie: I was just shocked that he would. I was completely, cause I knew his back-story and I was not at all prepared that he would say that much. And I just thought, “where’d that come from? Wow! I can’t believe that. I can’t believe that he’s actually telling us this.”

Mark: Was that moment referenced at all in the class ever again?

Rosie: I don't remember, I don't remember.

Mark: Why do you think it stands out for you so much?

Rosie: I want my students, I want them to feel safe with me and comfortable with me in that they can be who they are. And sometimes I tell them, "I have to put you back in check. You are who you are and you're wonderful but sometimes I have to correct you." But also that they feel they can tell me anything. And, you know, let me in on their world, and let me know what's bothering them. And really that I'm not just their teacher who's here but someone who really cares about them. And I want our classroom to be a safe zone, where, "if someone does something to you, I'm going to back you up, I'm going to help you. And that you have emotional support here." And so, working so hard to try to help my students feel safe, just really, it's a fist pump. It's like, "wow, that happened! That's awesome! That's really cool."

Rosie's statement that she wants her students to understand that she's "not just their teacher who's here but someone who really cares about them" is central to her work as a teacher. I hear Mother James in these words, particularly as she talks of putting students "back in check" while also recognizing that they are wonderful. This instance is an example of her cultivating a family in her classroom. Indeed, the language of family, and particularly of mothering, infuses her teaching and her talk about teaching.

She often spoke about Violet as a family school. Not only are parents supportively-involved in their children's education, the staff of the school is close and caring. As an

example, Rosie described how the staff had pulled together to support and comfort one of the classroom teachers whose husband was in need of a lung transplant by staging multiple fundraisers for the family. Interestingly, Rosie attributed much of this family atmosphere to the principal, whom she characterized as having “not a mothering personality but a mentoring personality.” Rosie juxtaposed Violet’s principal with a teaching friend’s principal at another school who was upset that a teacher was missing school in order to undergo cancer treatment. For Rosie, particularly given her life history, such action from a school’s leader was unfathomable.

During my week in her classroom, Rosie often talked about babies. Some of her students had baby siblings. Multiple teachers at the school either were pregnant or had recently given birth. And, often, she referred to her students as “my sweet babies,” both directly to them and to me. Additionally, as Rosie explained a task to students that required them to think about their personal interests, she told them that she likes to study babies in her free time.

In this context of family and mothering, I began to see that Rosie brings Mother James to her classroom, that she interacts with students like Mother James interacted with her. She is stern and correcting, but she is also caring, liable to give a hug at any moment. She offers an assessment of her teaching: “when it comes to my classroom, I have to set boundaries, I have to teach kids about responsibilities, I have to expect of them because they haven’t learned to have those responsibilities on their own. They haven’t learned to meet expectations, necessarily.” At another point she says, “I expect a lot out of them. I think they can be responsible for a whole lot, that we do them a disservice when we don’t make them responsible for a whole lot.” Then, she concludes, “I’m strict but I’m not bad.”

This, I imagine, is the firm imprint of Mother James. Although she never made the direct connection, how she described Mother James is how she described her teaching self. In my limited time in her classroom, I saw her embody her description of the ideal mother that Mother James set out for her.

At the end of my visit, on a Saturday while having coffee at a favorite shop of hers called Carpe Diem, Rosie asked me a lone, reflective question about my time spent with her that week. She wondered if I noticed her favoring any students in the classroom more than others. She made no connection to Mother James, but in this question she was striving to live up to the standard that Mother James set for her. With “ultimate love and sacrifice,” it was Mother James who made each child feel favored. Whether it was true or not, the children at Mother James’ house, including Rosie, felt like they, individually, were the favorite. In this light, Rosie’s “stern” and “strict” treatment of her students—but also her hugs with them—made sense to me. She, like Mother James, was her students’ mother (but not their mom).

Although Rosie feels she was destined to teach, she is not necessarily set on teaching for the rest of her working career. When I inquired about this, she said that she would like to become a midwife, working with women about to deliver babies. In fact, as recently as last year she looked into what it would take for her to gain the necessary certification in order to switch occupations. While it is hard for me to tell how likely such a jump would be, it is interesting to consider why the move is enticing for her. Committed to the act of mothering, working as midwife would place Rosie at the earliest stages of life. While teaching is concerned with the development of the child, midwifery is focused on the human’s birth. When she studied to become a teacher, Rosie was interested in

kindergarten, the earliest phase of formal public schooling. Although she currently enjoys teaching her upper elementary students, working as a midwife would take her beyond the limits of a schoolteacher. However, we also had this conversation at a point when Rosie was not pregnant. I wonder, now, how her pregnancy may or may not change her desire to be a midwife.

Conclusion

Whereas the topic of family was central to the living and teaching stories that Rosie told me, she seldom made explicit the topic of race in those stories. Indeed, outside of her poem (from the beginning of the chapter), she rarely engaged, or even mentioned, race. And she never overtly engaged the topic of racism.

The absence of race surprises me. Given the racial history of the United States, race is difficult to extricate from any person's life. On top of this, Rosie is a black woman and she is married to a white man. She and Rick live in a main city in a state that was a prominent site a half-century ago of the Civil Rights Movement—and at the present time, Alabama has become a national focus after it passed some of the strictest immigration legislation in the country. In the past decade, Rosie has taught in schools that are largely, and some entirely, racially isolated. And yet, race was not explicit in her storytelling.

Perhaps, though, this should not be surprising to me. I am a white male from the U.S. north writing about her, a black female from the U.S. south. With respect to race, gender, region—as well as research—my identity is tied to a history of oppressing, hers to a history of being oppressed. Regardless of any commitment I make to living and working for social justice for all living beings, I cannot simply step out of these legacies; nor can she.

Or can she? As Rosie's poem clearly shows, race *is* a significant issue in her life. Family and mothering are explicitly central to her living (and teaching) and she will soon give birth to a child who will have both black and white ancestry. This child, in a society not fully ready for her or him, will be an "other." Thus, family for Rosie is intertwined with race. But she writes about her ability, with Rick, to "rise above" race and, I implicitly read, racism. In her poem, but also in her marrying and mothering, she is confronting race(ism). Indeed, what is most near to her—her family—is the very tool for challenging the limitations of race(ism). Raising a multiracial family is a direct challenge to the limitations of race and the traditional workings of racism.

Rosie's stance with respect to race might be called "post-racial." Such a description is tenuous, though, because "post" indicates *moving beyond*, which for me stands in contrast to *rising above*. In our last interview, Rosie spoke about several incidents that took place in her school during the school year: the suicide of a father, a parental fight at a youth baseball game attended by a number of students, and the death of a teacher's husband. In each of these instances, the school's counselor chose to close-off student discussion about what happened. Students were simply not supposed to talk about it, and no action was taken by the school to help students process what happened. Rosie expressed frustration with how these events were handled by the school. "[Students] don't know how to cope with loss or major tragedies if we don't teach them how to cope with those things." She then added, "it doesn't help our kids at all for them to just not talk about it." This latter comment, juxtaposed with Rosie's omission of race in her stories, strikes me. I wonder about the impact on Rosie and those around her when she doesn't talk about race. What are the implications for her life? What are the implications for her students' lives?

While talking about Rick's impact on her life, Rosie raised two questions that she said she often thinks about: "Who am I?" and "How odd are we?" She said, "when you talk about a marriage, it sometimes changes you. Sometimes you have an influence on the person, but it even more magnifies the person that you are." Mindful of the second question, she reflected on how she and Rick embark on "odd" activities that might be unlike a typical couple: they spend a great deal of time in bookstores, they like to browse flea markets, and, in general, they spend a good amount of time together, be it watching DVDs, reading, or attending church. This "odd" description struck me as odd. What, really, is a normal couple? And why would it be odd for couples to do these things? While I wondered about what she meant with these questions, I figured that part of her sentiment might involve the fact that she and Rick are an interracial couple. But Rosie did not speak to that. I wonder if what Rosie said about her student who shared with the class that his mother attempted suicide has ramifications for her own life: "sometimes kids don't realize how difficult their story is."

CHAPTER FIVE

DAN'S STORYTELLING: BUILDING COMMUNITY AS THE FOG LIFTS

*I hope America can live up to...
The promise and dreams of US democracy
The responsibility of protecting
Mother Earth always
I hope America embraces...
Moms and Dads who model respect,
compassion, and understanding
Teachers who teach
I hope America...
Learns from its mistakes
Prosper
I "heart" America
I believe America can have a better tomorrow*

—Dan Torres, Middle School Social Studies Teacher, The Midwest, 2011

Introduction

Below are two vignettes from my time with Dan Torres, a middle school social studies teacher. The context for each vignette is a research interview. In the first, we are sitting across from each other at a student table in Dan's classroom. In the second, we are sitting across from each other at the dining table in Dan's house. In both, he is working on an activity that I raised.

Vignette One. Dan had a copy of Woody Guthrie's poem/song "This Land Is Your Land" in front of him. I had asked him to read through and

annotate the lyrics, marking up the text in any way that he saw fit. In Guthrie's fifth stanza, Dan circled one word. The stanza reads:

When the sun came shining, then I was strolling
In wheat fields waving, and dust clouds rolling;
The voice was chanting as the fog was lifting:
This land was made for you and me.

The word that he circled was *fog*. Referring to this annotation, he said, "from a teacher's perspective, I think one of the most important things I can impart on my students is—" and then he paused. He was considering how to articulate his thought. Then he continued: "how will you deal with the fog?" My sense is that he didn't initially mean to frame it as a question but such a phrasing best captured his feeling. A person, perhaps, cannot survive the fog with another's ideas; one must answer the question authentically. But, for Dan, there is an essential point in this process of dealing with the fog: "there's nothing wrong with getting lost or falling down as long as you get back up, as long as you find yourself again." This is one of Dan's central messages in teaching: sometimes life is foggy and just needs to be survived until the fog lifts.

Vignette Two. With a blank sheet of paper, Dan began writing down titles. I had asked him to list the titles of the chapters of his autobiography, were he to write one. After less than five minutes, he had scribbled out a list of seven. I then asked him to annotate the list by noting some of the stories that he would likely share in each chapter. Again, in less than 5 minutes, he

was finished. There were twenty stories total. Not only was it “pretty easy” to construct the list, he added, “I’m looking at this and I’m like, ‘man, this is pretty complete,’ too.” Thinking about how such a task might not be easy for many people, I wondered why Dan not only found it easy but also why he was able to make it “pretty complete.” He explained: “I incorporate a lot of these into the stories I tell in my classroom. As soon as you said ‘stories,’ it was like [an open] floodgate.” Looking back over his list, he said, “the only one that I don’t elaborate on is ‘partying at MSU.’” But, he noted, even that story, in a distilled form, gets incorporated into his story about ‘academic probation.’ “If I wasn’t a teacher,” he offered, “I think this list would be different looking because all of these I talk about, or have formally crafted into a story, for my classes.”

In this chapter I focus on Dan Torres. In his mid-40s, Dan lives in Lansing, the capital city of Michigan. He is married and has four children, who range from toddler to college-aged. For the past two decades, he has taught middle school social studies in Parker, Michigan, a suburban community outside of Lansing. Dan describes himself as “very energetic, very lively, and bubbly.” His energy matches the youthful spirit of his students who are over three decades younger. He talks rapidly, in bursts, and his expressive face and moving limbs speak as much as his talk. Inside his classroom, as well as outside of school, Dan is constantly in motion, mentally and physically. He is a pinball, bouncing up, over, down, across the terrain of his life. While he says that his lack of a full head of hair indicates that he’s an old-timer, it’s hard to take such a statement seriously given the speed at which he lives. Indeed, he sleeps only a few hours each night; instead of

wasting hours in bed when his body doesn't need it, he takes up storytelling activities such as typing out his latest idea for a screenplay or planning for a book about parenting.

At the present moment, Dan's motion in all aspects of his life is fervent with no deceleration in sight. He is excited about his marriage, his kids, his community, his teaching, his storytelling—in short, his living. But the rapid pace of his living hasn't always been this way. Only in recent years has Dan flourished “as the fog was lifting.” This flourishing is intimately tied to his family, his life in Lansing, and his teaching.

As Dan welcomed me into his life through this study, I quickly learned that stories are an explicit, essential element of living for him. Not only does he tell stories about his living, like any human, but also he approaches daily living as an opportunity to create and share his stories. In this sense, perhaps different from many humans, Dan is a self-described storyteller. Further, I learned that stories are the foundation of his teaching. His life experiences, in the form of stories, overtly structure his classroom's curriculum. He made it through the fog and he uses his lived stories to teach students about doing the same.

Dan's Living Curriculum: Surviving The Fog, “Cranking” As It Lifts

Dan was born in the Philippines. At the age of 22 months, his parents and he moved to Maryland in order for his mother to finish her medical residency at a hospital in Washington, D.C. Despite his young age and the short span of time that he lived in Maryland (two years), he reflected, “I really do feel there were some pretty epic things that happened there.” The first major change came when his father “took off,” leaving his mother and him in a tough situation.

Dan has three vivid memories of his father in Maryland. The first two involve his father hitting him. Both times, they were laying down on a bed in a dark room. A light was on in an adjacent room, from which a sliver of light crept through the nearly-closed adjoining door. "I remember him looking at the crack in the door and then I think he just punched me in the gut." When this happened the second time, Dan remembers seeing his father's glance at the door and thinking, "oh, is this going to happen again?" In sharp contrast to this horrific scene of a father physically abusing his two-year old son is Dan's third memory. He was in his mother's arms, crying, and he reached out to his father. Dan remembers his father then "taking me from my mom to calm me down." Upon sharing this memory, Dan chuckled ironically, commenting, "that was a very nice scene."

After struggling to find work in the first six months in Maryland, Dan's father left the family, talking about looking for work in Detroit. A year prior, Dan's maternal uncle, who was a surgeon, had moved to Detroit in order to start a practice in Michigan. But instead of going to Detroit, Dan's father severed ties with his wife and child. An FBI all-points-bulletin was put out for his father, as there was some speculation about his involvement in "foul play," but nothing materialized. Later, Dan learned that his father had gone to Tokyo where he had a mistress. "My dad was a dirtball, he really was. He was a chauvinist, abusive." He fathered a number of other children, all of whom Dan has never met.

As Dan grew older, he heard from his father periodically but they had no relationship. His father would come to the U.S. for short periods of time and call Dan. He would say that he was sick and needed money for treatment. Dan's paternal aunt, who remained very close to Dan's mother, warned him that these calls were attempts to get money in order to feed a gambling habit. When Dan graduated from high school, his father

came to the U.S. wanting to spend time with him. Dan, having not seen his father since he was two years old, was interested to “meet” him. The two met up in Seattle and spent a week together. Of this experience, Dan reflected, “we had a very nice visit but I could tell right away that him leaving might have been the best thing that ever happened to me.” His father passed away “maybe 10-15 years ago.”

For Dan, the story of his father is “a terrible soap opera.” But, he marks it as a blessing. Now, as a father himself, he has a model in his father that he actively avoids as a parent. He is spurred on to be a caring, known father to his children like the one he never had. But his father’s departure also led to the second major change in his life in Maryland. Shortly after his father left, Dan’s maternal grandparents and his maternal aunt moved to Maryland from the Philippines. While his mom spent long hours at the hospital, his grandparents and aunt cared for him. “My earliest memories are in D.C. with those people...They started to raise me all the way through high school.”

At the age of four, the entire family (consisting of Dan, his mom, his maternal grandparents, and his maternal aunt) moved from Maryland to Michigan. His mother was a pediatrician looking for a place to practice medicine, and she decided to move near relatives in and around Detroit, including her surgeon brother. After living in different apartments for a year or two, the family moved to the small city of Stella, where Dan’s mother began her pediatric practice. Stella is in the southeast corner of Michigan, 70 miles southwest of Detroit. Predominantly white, its Filipino population was extremely small when Dan’s family moved there in the late 1960s.

Reflecting about growing up in Stella, Dan said, “I had one of the best childhoods a guy could ever have... I have so many cool memories that really point out the beautiful

ignorance of childhood.” Although he was his mother’s lone child, and he did not grow up with any brothers and sisters, he was “very tight” with his cousins. He was also very close with the familial elders who lived with him. He remembers “play[ing] GI Joes” with his grandfather and he recalls his first dog, Jumbo.

Despite the distance between Stella and any sizable Filipino communities, Dan said that he grew up immersed in a Filipino “lifestyle.” All of the people he lived with were from the Philippines and had lived the majority of their lives there. On top of that, he frequently saw his other Filipino relatives who lived in Michigan. He remembered, “my household was very, very Filipino and my network of social life outside of my school friends was Filipino.” As he grew older and associated with non-Filipinos more, his relationship to Filipino culture changed. “When I got on my own, starting in college, that part of my life just kind of dropped off.” Speaking about the present time, Dan said, “I don’t hang out with Filipinos. At the same time, I recognize my heritage, but it’s not a priority in my line of thinking.”

In his early elementary school years, after seeing a movie about two paramedics, Dan decided that he wanted to be a fireman. Then, “after I got a little older, maybe upper elementary, I very much wanted to become a doctor.” He was starting to learn about his mother’s work as a pediatrician, especially as he helped out at her summer camps for youth who suffered from asthma. But, his desire to become a doctor waned as he saw “how my mom pulled off all of these long hours...I thought, ‘I want to be home, I don’t’ want to be coming in late at night.’” As if that realization wasn’t enough, Dan told me that his aspirations to be a doctor “came to a screeching halt my sophomore year in high school when I realized, ‘I’m not very good in math and I’m not very good in science, and I don’t

really like studying.” That sophomore year marked the lone year that he did not attend a public school in Stella.

Dan’s sophomore year took place at Hemingway, a private boarding school in a northern suburb of Detroit, a two-hour drive from Stella. “I did not want to go to Hemingway but my mom had completely lost faith in public school systems.” As a result, Dan’s mom forced him to go to Hemingway. He spent one year there, which he called “nothing more than a testament of survival.” During the first semester, “I cried every night, called home every night, and the worst part about it was, at Hemingway, you don’t have roommates.” Each student had a separate dormitory room, which limited Dan’s ability to process his experiences with peers at the school. He didn’t have his cousins or his friends from Stella to work through the difficulties of his new setting. “I think that would have been the time when I needed a roommate. I missed my friends, I missed my family. It was horrible.”

At Hemingway, Dan struggled with depression. It was most intense in his first semester there, and it lessened some during his second semester when he competed for the school’s wrestling team. He was a good wrestler and his participation inserted him into a group of other students. But his greatest relief came at the end of the year when his mother gave him a choice of staying at Hemingway or returning to Stella and its public high school. His response was immediate: “YEEAAH, I’m coming home.” He returned to Stella and, most importantly to him at the time, his friends and family. Although school had been difficult to that point, he finished out his junior and senior years in Stella and then set off for college at Michigan State University (MSU).

In his first two years at MSU, Dan's social purposes for college trumped his academic ones. He was there, foremost, to meet new people and party. He quickly developed a new friend group, and the structure of this group was different from his prior friendships. "I had a lot more friends in college that I was tighter with than I did in high school—significantly more." After his sophomore year, he was forced to consider his academic purposes. With a grade-point-average of 2.1, he received a letter from the Dean's office that stipulated that he must maintain a 3.0 GPA for the remainder of his undergraduate courses. If he failed to maintain such a standing, Dan recalled, "I would be terminated from the university without the opportunity to reapply." He was officially on academic probation.

Going into college, Dan was unsure what kind of professional career he might pursue through his studies. "I had no idea what I wanted to be, and I had no interest [in determining a future occupation]." Initially he declared psychology as his major "to get my mom off my back." If he went undeclared, which was an option for incoming freshman, she would not pay his tuition. He stayed a psychology major for six quarters until the summer session of his sophomore year when he moved to the College of Veterinary Medicine. "I'm not sure exactly how that occurred but I was in the College of Vet for one term." He shadowed a veterinarian during that time, and despite having "an amazing experience," he concluded that the field was not for him after witnessing the euthanizing of a number of cats and dogs. Dan completed the term but was uncertain about where to turn next, even though he was at the point "when you have to start making firm decisions about what your major is going to be." Dan recounted how the next steps unfolded:

So here I am, it's like Welcome Week of junior year, and I have no idea what I want to be. And somebody said there's a new interdisciplinary program coming out of Baker Hall and you could combine several majors into an interdisciplinary kind of thing. I'm like, "oh, that's what I need, a little variety." So I spoke to the advisor at Baker Hall and I narrowed it down to three majors: health studies, international relations, and social science teaching. The first thing I asked was, "what is this social science teaching?" And they were like, "you would be a middle school or high school social studies teacher." And in the back of my mind, I thought, "ok, I'm not doing that. That's the last thing I want to do is be a teacher. Who would be stupid enough to be a teacher. Why would I ever go back to that environment?"

But these other two, international relations and health studies, they didn't interest me all that much either. And then, *it* happened. I looked at the coursework. For international relations and health studies, there were classes that I had to take but I had already fulfilled that requirement. In other words, I would be wasting credit; it wouldn't go to anything. Where the social science teaching curriculum, every single class went towards my graduation, and so nothing would be wasted. So I thought, "I know, I'll sign up for social science teaching. I know that I don't want to be a teacher but all of these classes will go toward fulfilling graduation requirements. And it will give me three months...to stall and figure out what I want to be in life and then come winter quarter, I'll change my major."

That's how I got into the College of Education. My very first class that fall term was educational psychology and I loved it. And so I thought I would stay on for another term, and in that term I actually had a couple classes—one of them was an observation of teaching class—and I loved it. I started to realize that I really like teaching and it kind of comes easy to me. And the rest is history. It's unbelievable. It's the most amazing stroke of good luck I've ever had in my life because I literally accidentally fell into teaching. The best accident I've ever had.

Dan maintained the mandated 3.0 in MSU's teacher education program as his accident turned into a blessing. At the end of the program, he completed his student teaching practicum and began substitute teaching until he found a permanent teaching job in Parker Intermediate Public Schools.

After graduating from MSU, Dan married a woman, Jill, that he had begun dating in college. Without feeling a pull toward another geographic area, the couple decided to live in Lansing, next door to East Lansing and MSU. Although Dan had not lived in Lansing by that point, he had a growing knowledge of the city. As an MSU student, with his fishing pole firmly secured under his arm, he would bike from the campus to some of Lansing's many fishing spots. His fellow students thought such behavior was "weird," especially as he often set out late at night "because that's when the fishing is best." A byproduct of such excursions, though, was that he came to know different parts of the city.

One of the first places in which Dan and Jill lived in Lansing was Reo Town. Immediately south of the city's downtown, and at the confluence of the Grand and Red Cedar Rivers, Reo Town was one of the centers of Michigan's automobile industry until the

mid 1970s. But in the wake of the car industry's departure, the area deteriorated. It became, as Dan described it, a red-light area that was overrun by prostitution and illegal drugs. The first house that they rented was in the heart of this area. Dan learned that the house's prior tenants had operated a drug and prostitution ring out of the house. The renting contract featured a number of stipulations that forbade illicit activities. Throughout the time they lived at the house, cars would pull into the driveway and then leave after a matter of minutes when a prostitute or a drug dealer didn't emerge from the house.

After living in Reo Town, Dan and Jill also lived on the west side of Lansing, in an area of the city quite different from Reo Town. There they gave birth to two children, first Sarah, and then Paul two years later. By this time Dan was several years into teaching in Parker, and as the kids grew older, they began to attend a nearby elementary school. However, after six years of marriage, Dan and Jill separated. "There wasn't anything monumental," Dan said. "No one cheated on the other. No one was abusive to the other. She just fell out of love—I think that's something that we both would mutually agree upon." Jill filed for divorce, and two years after the separation, it was finalized.

But the divorce was devastating for Dan. In a soft, pained voice, he recalled to me, "I begged for it not to happen." He had kept asking, "What can I do for this not to happen?" Through the separation and divorce, he entered a multi-year spell of depression, about which he said, "I think it probably fell in the realms of clinical [but] I never saw anyone for it, I never took any medication." He found it difficult to sleep, and yet it was also difficult to get out of bed. He described "one of the lowest moments" of his life, when, at 2am, "I just

remember facing the wall, curled up in bed...writing invisibly on the wall,
'please__come__back.'

Dan's children and his students were the two groups that saw him through "that entire period of hell." He called them his "life buoys" that kept him "afloat." Although "I didn't come into work crying [and] I was still a bubbly person," Dan said, "Paul and Sarah for sure knew just how bad I was emotionally. I don't think my students knew, but at the same time, *they knew*." At one point during this period, a counselor at his school sought him out and said to him, "I've got to tell you that [your students] are just aching with you, Dan...you just need to know that. You just need to keep floating." One way in which he floated was to undertake special activities with Sarah and Paul. He decided that he would take his kids to "a different national something—a monument, a park—each year." While they visited national parks like Mammoth Cave and the Great Smoky Mountains, Dan's most vivid memory recalls their trip to Acadia National Park, an island in the Atlantic Ocean, off the coast of Maine. It was a camping trip, and Dan called it "powerful," "amazing," and "special." After the trip, "for literally like a year, there probably wasn't a week that went by when Paul or Sarah said, 'man, I miss Maine.'" Dan always replied, "I do too."

During a separate conversation, when Dan and I were driving through Lansing, we pulled up to a red light two blocks from the capitol building. He pointed out my passenger window at the City Rescue Mission of Lansing. The City Rescue Mission's purpose, according to its website, is "to meet physical needs to bring those with spiritual needs to Jesus Christ. Our ministries reach out to men, women, and children in the capital area, and we provide food, shelter, and clothing to those who are homeless or low income." Dan

explained that he started volunteering there when he got divorced and that it helped him understand that he had much for which to be thankful.

Dan also began playing in multiple volleyball leagues across Mid-Michigan, and this introduced him to a new group of people. One of the people he met through volleyball was a woman named Laura. In due time, they were competing together in volleyball tournaments, and then they began dating. Laura was from Mid-Michigan and younger than Dan. They realized that she was in eighth grade when he began substitute teaching after college. Then, five years beyond his divorce, Dan and Laura married. Dan had gone “to hell and back” and he said that Laura “saved my life in a lot of ways.” Although he had been managing the depression tied to his separation and divorce, it was Laura who lifted him out of it. And, with her, he was excited to be able to grow his family, something that he felt had become impossible with his divorce.

He had bought a small house on the east side of Lansing during his separation with Jill. After he and Laura married, she moved into the house. However, as he held shared custody of Sarah and Paul, and then as Laura became pregnant with their first child, Kevin, the family needed more space. They moved to a new home, about a mile away, and Laura also gave birth to their second child, Kara. Dan and his family have lived in that house since, and he is effusive with praise for their fit with the surrounding neighborhood and, indeed, the city.

As Dan describes it, Lansing has survived the fog. Since the early 1980s, he has seen the city’s transformation. “It was just kind of a pit really, even into the 1990s.” As he drove me around Lansing, he talked about formerly high rates of crime, prostitution, and illegal drugs. He pointed out multiple red-light areas in the city in addition to where he lived in

Reo Town. But in the time that he's lived in Lansing, he said that the community has "started to take the neighborhood back." Signs "protesting the local vices" became commonplace as groups of residents demanded greater police presence. And some of the abandoned buildings were razed or renovated. Reflecting on these changes, Dan said that he thinks Lansing is "one of the most improved cities in the entire nation over the last twenty years." And yet, "I feel like I'm one of the few people in the world that loves Lansing." He talked about a friend living in Santa Barbara, California, who trumpets how great life is there. But Dan tells him, "I don't long for anything else but here." In fact, he added, "I long for this place when I'm on vacation."

Why is Lansing so important to Dan? Lansing is "such an underdog city," he said. He likened it to Miller beer. When he buys beer at the store, he often looks for Miller, even though friends make fun of him for buying it since Miller is not generally regarded as a good brand of beer. He doesn't particularly love the taste, but that's not the point. It's cheap, which is partially the point. But most importantly for Dan, Miller represents the gritty, hard-nosed, working class. It's not fancy, which is a virtue in his mind. "Miller," he says, "is like Lansing," which is one of the best complements he can pay the beer.

But even more important, Lansing is like...Dan. "Part of why I like Lansing so much is because it's a lot like me. It's just this, almost like, underachieving kind of thing that's got a lot to offer. You know, and it just kind of took time for it to develop. I think that's what happened to me, more or less." Lansing, like Dan, is the "little guy," and as Dan exhorted, "don't count the little guy out."

Like Lansing, Dan has survived the fog. To be sure, there are still foggy days for him, and he knows there will continue to be foggy days in the future, but he has reached a point

in which he feels his life's fog has lifted. He survived his father's departure and his upbringing without a father. He survived the struggles of his schooling in high school and college. He survived the ravages of his divorce and the related depression. The result of this survival is what Dan labeled as "cranking with creativity," a kind of living that he had not experienced prior. He is a loving husband and father. He is actively involved in the very different stages of his children's lives. He is "on such a mission" with his teaching, feeling "much more purposeful" in the classroom and with his students than at the start of his career. In addition to teaching his middle schoolers, he is also teaching pre-service teachers from MSU as he increasingly works more closely with MSU's teacher education program. He is also developing a series of workshops for schools and businesses about pedagogy and public speaking. And he has become a member of the National Storyteller's Network and a participant at gatherings of the Network's local chapter. Various storytelling projects, including a second screenplay and a book on parenting, are in the works. There are a host of other activities as well, including playing volleyball, fishing Lansing's rivers at night, teaching Sunday School at his church, and cooking.

This flurry of activity energizes Dan. He is excited about the future of his life in all these different directions. And yet it doesn't come without some concern. Sarah, his oldest child, worries that he's doing too much. If he keeps it up, she thinks he might be heading quickly toward a heart attack. While he noted Sarah's concern, he was too excited about his various projects, having too much fun with them, to feel that they were detrimental to him.

At the time of my visit, Sarah was a freshman in college, Paul a junior in high school, Kevin a five-year-old, and Kara a two-year-old. Dan excitedly introduced me to all of his children, as well as Laura (and her parents, who come over to their house every Thursday

for “Family Night,” for which Dan is always the esteemed chef). I was eager to meet these pivotal people in Dan’s life, but I learned that I was not the only person who knew about them. Dan’s students, another group of pivotal people in his life, know his immediate family in detail.

Dan’s Teaching Curriculum: Teaching Through Story About The Fog And Its Lifting

Dan has survived the fog and his students know it. In fact, they know in some form much of Dan’s life story that I told above. While they might not know it as a full story, over the course of the school year, they hear the individual stories and details as they pertain to Dan’s curriculum-as-plan for the class. As I argue below, this is a storytelling pedagogy, which features story as the basis for learning in his classroom. The stories articulate Dan’s general teaching purposes—helping students consider how to survive the fog, and as the fog lifts, helping them better their lives and the surrounding community. Included in this learning about community is a curriculum about Lansing, a place familiar to Dan but not his students. Of course, two decades into teaching, Dan has developed these purposes and grown into a teacher different from who he was when he graduated from MSU. As with the rest of his life, his storytelling pedagogy took some time to develop.

Living in Lansing, teaching in Parker.

Fresh out of MSU, Dan worked various teaching jobs as he looked for permanent teaching employment. He substitute taught across the Lansing area, in both high schools and middle schools, and eventually he became a regular substitute teacher in Parker. Parker was a fast-growing, suburban community, and Dan enjoyed the people in its secondary schools. When a job opened up in Parker Intermediate Public Schools’ (PIPS)

alternative education program, Dan applied and was hired for the job. Then, a year and a half later, a position opened up in social studies at Parker Intermediate Middle School (PIMS), for which Dan was hired. At the time, Dan was more interested in teaching high school, but he quickly grew to love middle school (and in the time since, he has turned down three opportunities to move to Parker's high school). For the past twenty years, Dan has taught eighth graders, except for a brief stint in seventh grade social studies.

Additionally, Dan has taught drug and sex education classes. He currently teaches four sections of eighth grade social studies and one section of a course called "Decisions," which is an elective class for eighth graders that focuses on developing healthy life skills. The eighth grade at PIMS is structured in two different disciplinary teams, which means that Dan teaches half of the grade's students in his social studies classes. In Decisions, he teaches a mix of his students and the other social studies teacher's students.

Parker is a suburb of Lansing. According to the 2010 U.S. Census, the population of Parker is just over 15,000 residents, of which 80% are white, 11% Asian, 5% black, and 4% multiracial. The Hispanic population, which can fit under any race, is less than 5%. Median household income is over \$50,000. Comparatively, the city of Lansing has 114,000 residents, of which 61% are white, 24% black, 6% multiracial, and 4% Asian. In Lansing, Dan is one of less than a hundred Pacific Islanders, who, as a group, are less than .1% of the resident population. The Hispanic population is 13% and the median household income is \$35,000.

By various business metrics, Parker's schools are well regarded. Parker ranks highly on national lists of top education towns and places to raise a family. PIMS' student population reflects Parker's resident population. According to recent data from the

National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), of PIMS' students, 86% are white, 7% are black, 5% are Asian/Pacific Islander, and 2% are Hispanic. Just over 10% of students qualify for free and/or reduced lunch. These statistics about PIMS' population do not reflect Lansing's population. The Lansing School District, as a whole, is more racially diverse with a larger percentage of students who qualify for free and/or reduced lunch. The reputation of Lansing's public schools, generally, is not as esteemed as Parker's.

I hold Parker and Lansing in comparison because both are significant in Dan's life. For the duration of Dan's tenure at PIMS, he has lived in Lansing. In fact, at the onset, he was eager not to live in Parker. For one, housing prices in Lansing were far cheaper than Parker. And there was his growing love for Lansing as a city. But, two additional reasons, both having to do with his teaching, supported living in Lansing. First, he did not want to live in the district where he taught because of the proximity that he would have to his students outside of school. He thought, "I want to be able to go out into the front yard in my boxer shorts to get the paper and not have to worry about, 'oh my God, Mr. Torres is out in the yard in his boxer shorts.'" Similarly, he did not want to run into his students and their families at a convenience store with a six-pack of beer in his hand. His second reason for living outside of Parker involved his children. "I had the idea that I never, never wanted my own children to be in the district I teach in." Dan worried about the attendant pressure his children would feel as the children of Mr. Torres. Framing his thinking at the time, he said, "you know how, when you're young, the last thing you want at a party is for your mom or dad to show up? It was that kind of mentality."

But Dan's thinking changed. As Sarah and Paul entered, and made their way through, elementary school, Dan became frustrated with his kids' schooling. He felt Sarah

and Paul were not getting the high quality of education that Parker's schools offered. As a result, "I did a complete 180 [degree change] in terms of my philosophy about the kids being in the same district." Michigan law featured "Schools of Choice," which made it possible for schools to accept non-local residents, so Sarah and Paul enrolled in Parker in their sixth and fourth grade years, respectively.

Two years later, both kids attended PIMS. And, with Sarah entering eighth grade, Dan was one of two possible social studies teachers for her. With the school's endorsement, Dan left it up to Sarah to choose if she wanted him as her teacher. When I asked Dan if he had any concern about teaching Sarah, he responded, "I'm sure that I did but nothing that ever made me think twice about it." Sarah chose Dan's classroom, as did Paul a year later (when Dan taught seventh grade social studies), and Dan could not overstate the significance of this for him as a father. Although he tried to approach Sarah and Paul as regular students in his classroom, their choice of him as their teacher was "about the greatest gift a child could ever give a parent...[It will] keep me happy for a lifetime."

Although Sarah and Paul had the daily lived experience of Lansing and Parker, the vast majority of Dan's students through the years have not. Parker is their living and schooling context; Lansing is certainly *in the area* but it is not lived by the students in substantive ways. He described how he often has mentioned in class upcoming events in Lansing (like the annual chili cook-off run by the local utility or one of the festivals in Old Town, a revitalized area on the north side of Lansing) but his students usually express minimal interest in attending (but presumably they would attend similar events in Parker).

For Dan, there is a stereotype about Lansing that his students implicitly learn living in Parker. Generally speaking, he said “people look at Lansing as the hood, the ghetto.” They don’t learn about “what Lansing has to offer.” Dan noted the existence of social differences along racial and economic lines as a cause for fear by some people living in Lansing’s suburbs. To illustrate his students’ perceptions about Lansing, Dan told a story from some years back:

I get this phone call from a former student of mine. I had her as an eighth grader. She calls me up and she’s like a senior or junior in high school. She’s crying, she’s really scared, and what happened is she went with friends of hers to a party in Lansing and they left her. So here she was, in Lansing, freaking out because she’s in Lansing, she’s so scared, she’s in the hood, and I’m like, “well, where exactly are you?” ...She’s like, “I’m at this Quality Dairy.” “Which Quality Dairy are you at? Do you know a street?” She’s like, “well, I’m across from a Kentucky Fried Chicken.” I’m like, “are you on the corner of Robin and Saginaw?” “Yeah, I think this is Robin.” And I’m like [laughing], “honey, that’s a great part of town.” But she was so scared because she had seen clientele that she’s not used to seeing walking in and out of a Quality Dairy. I’m like, “honey, you’re in the St. Gerrard area, that’s a really nice area. You don’t have to worry about anything.”

When fears about Lansing, like the student’s fear above, arise in Dan’s classes, he challenges them. “I’m like, ‘the worst part of Lansing now is not that bad at all. I don’t know of any place in Lansing where I would feel afraid at one in the morning.’” He talks about fishing in different spots of the city, in the early hours of the morning, and how police

officers will check up on him. He usually asks the officers if he should be worried about his safety and they frequently reply along the lines of “no, this neighborhood’s great.” But Dan doesn’t just react to fears about Lansing. He purposefully talks and teaches about the city. “I do a pretty consistent ‘rah-rah’ about Lansing.”

Lansing is not a part of Dan’s content curriculum standards, but it is certainly part of his classroom curriculum, even if it is sometimes implicit. For example, at the beginning of a unit that he teaches about 19th Century social reforms in America, he wears an “I love Lansing” shirt to school. He bought the shirt because the proceeds went toward a program in Lansing called Complete Streets. He explains Complete Streets to his class: “when a street is being worked on—like, for example, if you have to tear up the street in order to put in a sewer line—it will be fixed so that there is a bike lane, so that there is a rumble pad for visually-impaired, inclines for wheelchairs” and sidewalks are either made or widened in the process. He then connects that concept of community improvement to various reforms in 19th Century America. While Lansing is not the overt focus of Dan’s teaching in this example, it is a purposeful part of it.

Given Dan’s affinity for Lansing, I asked him if he ever thought about leaving PIMS in order to teach in Lansing. The answer was a quick “no.” I then proposed a hypothetical situation: what if the Lansing School District courted him to teach in one of its nearby schools? He still didn’t think he would leave PIMS, “and it’s only because, I guess, my heart is in Parker.” Had I asked him twenty years ago, “when I didn’t have any allegiance to any district,” it might be a different story. But after his time in Parker, “I’m crazy about the community...I can’t really imagine a better community to teach for.” In fact, with two decades past in Parker, he thinks he might be only halfway through his tenure there. He’d

be able to retire after nine more years, but “no way I’m retiring in nine years. Maybe in 20 years or so, I’d think about it.” At that point, he joked, maybe he’d retire, move to northern Michigan, to a small community on the shore of Lake Michigan, “and teach up there.”

Learning to teach: Dan’s school stories.

Dan may have found his way into teaching by accident, but it didn’t take long for him to feel that he landed in the right spot. “I think I felt comfortable almost immediately in front of a classroom.” This was a bit surprising since he had never particularly loved school as a student. But “once in, I realized that it came easy to me and that I loved it.” This is not to say, though, that Dan’s teaching hasn’t included moments of fog.

The opening vignette of this chapter storied Dan’s circling of *fog* in Woody Guthrie’s “This Land Is Your Land” lyrics. Dan circled another word in Guthrie’s sixth stanza, which reads:

One bright sunny morning in the shadow of the steeple
By the relief office I saw my people—
As they stood hungry, I stood there wondering if
This land was made for you and me.

Dan circled *if*. Gathering his thoughts for what he wanted to say about this annotation, he murmured, “the big *if*—the *if* question.” I italicize *if* in his speech because Dan emphasized the word in a way that suggested it could stand importantly with little or no surrounding context. After several moments of silence, he said, “I think my role as a social studies teacher is to try to create good citizens that make decisions that are helpful for themselves, each other, and the planet.” Implying that good citizenship is tied to asking questions, he said, “this whole ‘what if’ thing...is a good way to question lots of things.” He gave a few

examples: “What if President Lincoln had never been shot? What if the Confederacy had won? What if Jamestown failed?” Then, moving to the content of another realm of social studies teaching, he said, “what if you stop teasing that kid?” Dan read Guthrie’s lyric as an inquiry about how people’s lives could be better. The *if* signals inquiry, and it opens the opportunity for meaningful, positive change. “*If* is a pretty powerful word. It’s a word that I think can also uncover improvements all the way around.”

If *if* was so important to Dan’s pedagogical thinking, I wondered if it was also important to his growth as a teacher. Does he ask *what if* about his teaching? “Yes,” he replied. “Sometimes it’s like, ‘well, what if I had not reacted so harshly toward that student?’” He suggested other kinds of ‘teaching what ifs’ (e.g., “what if I had only woken up two hours earlier so I could grade those papers?”) but they are not as compelling for him as his self-critique about his interactions with his students. He told me two stories along these lines.

Some years back, he had a student named Liz who had been diagnosed with a severe form of Asperger’s Syndrome. While Dan knew of Liz’s diagnosis during his year teaching her, he was not prepared to teach her effectively. “I knew nothing about Asperger’s. I’d heard of it but I really knew very little about it.” His goal was to be patient and understanding with Liz, but that was his goal with any student. The result was that he felt like he was “running into a brick wall.” It was a frustrating year for him and he was certain the same was true for Liz. Eventually, the year ended and Liz moved beyond Dan’s classroom. He didn’t feel great about his year with her but he felt that there wasn’t too much that he could do. But the following year, a professional development presentation for the school’s faculty and staff was devoted to working with students with Asperger’s

syndrome. “I was like, ‘oh my gosh, if I only knew then what I know now.’ I could see immediately—I was playing it all in slow-motion replay—how bad the interaction was because I didn’t know about Asperger’s.” Dan couldn’t go back and alter his year with Liz, which makes him feel uneasy to this day. But, he could take that feeling of “what if” and keep it with him as he taught current and future students.

His second story tracked along similar lines, with a similar lesson learned, but with a more palatable ending. “This one young man that I had, he and I never got along and I think it got to the point where I don’t think I was ever happy to see him and he wasn’t ever happy to see me.” This student’s name was Tom. Dan routinely had to speak to Tom out in the hallway during class. Tom was not only disrespectful to Dan, he was also mean to his peers. While Dan considers himself to be “an empathic guy” with “a tremendous amount of patience and understanding,” he struggled with Tom. “There were times when frustration got the better of me.” He paused and reflected to me, “man, if I could have only handled that a little better, with a little more empathy, maybe a little more patience.” But, like with Liz, it was just “one of these situations where, ‘yep, probably could have handled it a little bit better that year—but oh well.’”

Several years later, though, when Tom was a senior in high school, Dan ran into him at a high school volleyball game. “So we’re sitting there in the stands and I remember thinking, ‘this is an awkward moment.’ But, I said, ‘hey, Tom, how’s it going?’” Although Dan was “not expecting to do anything” with this brief hello, the two began talking cordially. The cordial talk continued. At all of the remaining volleyball matches that season (Tom’s sister played on the team alongside of Dan’s daughter), the two talked. Dan, then, saw Tom in other settings, including at a community park in Lansing, and had similarly nice

conversations. Reflecting on these interactions, Dan said, “I got lucky. It turned out okay, [even though] I still think I could have handled him better [as a student].” Seeing that Tom had changed (or “grown up,” as Dan framed it) years beyond his classroom was meaningful to Dan. He didn’t see that change while Tom was his student, but he felt good knowing that that change took place. He could interact with current and future students with a knowledge about all the other inputs and opportunities in students’ lives outside of his classroom. Even his students didn’t survive the fog in his classroom, they could still survive it later, or elsewhere.

The stories of Liz and Tom are largely set beyond the years in which Dan taught them. They are about Dan considering how he could have been a better teacher of them. They show his frustration while teaching the students, but more emphasized is his thinking, in both cases, that takes place in the years after the students had left his classroom. This is a central theme for Dan: his students are important to him well beyond the time and place of his classroom. Indeed, the majority of Dan’s stories about his teaching experiences that he told me are not set in his classroom. They take place over years, extending well into the students’ lives after eighth grade. However, he told me one story that was set in his classroom and took place within one school day. Although he did not raise it as a “what if” story, it clearly is: “It’s a teaching moment that I wish I could have back.”

For Dan, the school day on September 11, 2001 (9/11) began during his second hour period. Since he had a first hour prep period, the class was his first of the day. It was early in the school year and he was starting to teach his students his process for grading tests. A teacher knocked on his door and said, “there’s something going on in New York

City. There's some sort of rocket attack." Not knowing what to make of the teacher's message, Dan closed the door and continued with class. But then his classroom phone rang. It was another teacher who said, "Dan, my son just witnessed a second plane fly into the World Trade Center." When Dan expressed his confusion about what was happening, the teacher told him to turn on the television. Dan turned on the television, "—and *that* is the moment I wish I could have over."

Shortly after turning on the television, a replay of the second plane crashing into the towers was shown, and one of Dan's students reacted, "whoaaa, neat!" After ten seconds or so, it registered with Dan and his students that what they were watching was real, not a clip from a movie. "That's when [the classroom] got very subdued. From there we witnessed this absolute chaos and the constant replaying of [the crashes]." Second hour ended, and when his third hour class arrived, Dan felt it was important for him to talk to the class about the known facts. "I remember, I was standing up there, and the TV's behind me, and the towers are a-blazing and I'm talking, talking, talking and [the students] are looking over me. All of a sudden, I saw...their eyes got really big and it caused me to turn around. That's when, as I'm turning around, the first tower is already halfway falling." Dan then punctuated this moment to me: "this is live!" A student asked, "did that building just fall down?" Dan's knee-jerk reaction was, "no—cause buildings don't fall down." Then Dan looked at the TV and he muttered, "did it?"

There was "bedlam on television" in the following moments as he and his students struggled to comprehend what they had seen. A short time later, they watched the second tower fall. As with second period, Dan wishes he had the opportunity to re-visit that third period and turn off the television. "I wish I could turn back the hands of time so that they

don't say, 'yeah, I remember where I was at—I was in Mr. Torres' classroom when I saw that." While third period was traumatic, the scariest period of the day was fifth. With no air conditioning on a hot day, the classroom windows were open. The television broadcasts were reporting confusion about whether all aircrafts had been located, and Dan and his students could hear the sound, through the open windows, of airplanes above the school. The students were unnerved by the sound of the airplanes, and then "one kid literally put several things together and said the thing that I wish I could have muzzled: 'well, aren't we a target because we've got the anthrax thing over here?'" The student was referring to the lone anthrax lab in the United States, which is in Lansing. "That's the last thing you want anyone to say under those circumstances," Dan said to me. Dan responded instinctively: "We're fine...those planes are just flying around to wait their turn to land at Capital City airport." But Dan didn't know that: "hell, I don't know what it was—I was a little scared myself." It wasn't until the following day that he learned that all non-military planes had been grounded by that point. But fifth hour "was the most fearful of all of the classes just because of the sound of the planes and the comment made by the young man."

Not able to take retroactive action for 9/11 in his classroom, Dan became more attuned to regulating visual images that surrounded future "breaking news." Several years later, he left the television off as the news media broadcasted from a flooded New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina passed through the city. "I didn't show any images—I purposely didn't show that body under the bridge floating because of 9/11." He had determined that he and his students would be better off without the mediation of television news.

Dan's "what if" stories point to his efforts to achieve his main goal in teaching: "the most important thing that I can do is help people become better people." In his social

studies classes, this involves his students learning the course's U.S. history subject matter, study skills for current and future learning, and knowledge of current events. But more important than these "three main focuses" is that Dan's students learn about their roles as members of the communities they inhabit. He routinely makes this point to his classes: "you are going to be future parents. You will determine whether sexism stays the same or decreases, whether racism stays the same or decreases—or increases, for that matter—whether we continue to trash Planet Earth or whether we're going to give her a break." While Dan does not dismiss social studies subject matter, he views his students mastery of it as of secondary importance. His primary focus, reminiscent of his own life, is to teach his students about bettering themselves and, in turn, bettering their communities.

Dan's starting point for this teaching begins with his relationships with his students. He seeks to establish close connections with them, which, in turn, he hopes will enable them to make their own connections with the surrounding world. Through the course of a year, not only does Dan come to know his students extremely well, but also his students come to know him extremely well. An underlying point seems to be that if students are going to become good citizens who work for the benefit of their various communities, then they must feel welcomed in Dan's classroom community.

His commitment to fostering community through his teaching dates back to his first year at PIMS, when he taught all of the sections of eighth grade social studies and every single eighth grader except for one. The lone student that he did not have in his classroom, and Dan remembers her vividly, was Candace Patterson. Instead of taking eighth grade social studies, she attended a special education class designed for her. However, on a weekly basis that year, Candace would run up to Dan in the hallways and say, "Mr. Torres, I

wish I had you as a teacher!" Although he didn't teach Candace, she helped him realize that he was privileged to get to know and teach every other student in the eighth grade. He recognized that this teaching extended beyond the parameters of eighth grade social studies. Indeed, he was influencing the lives of the entire community's youth. He was an important figure in the formation of the community's future. All of the students would walk through his classroom door, get to know him and learn from him, on their way through Parker Intermediate Public Schools. He was teaching people, not merely social studies content; he was a part of a community schooling project. With this long-term vision about his teaching, Dan's personal connections with his students had him invested in them well beyond the time and place of his classroom.

One of Dan's students from his first year at PIMS was Aaron. Dan told me about Aaron when I asked him to tell me a powerful story from his years of teaching. When Aaron was in Dan's class, "he had the entire world stacked against him." He was a big kid whose face was disfigured. With one leg considerably shorter than the other, he walked with a limp. His family was one of the poorest in the district and "it showed in his clothing, hygiene, and support." In class he was highly unmotivated and sluggish. "But he and I always had a good relationship. I feel pretty good about the fact that he smiled more in my class than I ever saw him smile in the hallway." Nevertheless, Dan noted that if he were to drop out of school, no one would be the least bit surprised.

Four years later, Dan attended the high school graduation of his first class. He was filled with pride because of the accomplishments of all of his former students, but he was particularly thrilled when Aaron walked across the stage. "He made it!" Dan said, embodying his excitement from that day. "It was an unbelievably proud moment for me."

Although Dan hasn't seen Aaron since, he's learned that Aaron is a mechanic and owns his own auto shop in Lansing. Ending with this scene, years beyond when Aaron sat in his classroom, Dan remarked, "so he made it: that's about as good as it gets right there." The story mirrors the arc of the story that Dan tells about his own life. Aaron, like Dan, had survived the fog.

On top of this parallel, it's interesting to me that Dan's story about Aaron dates back to his early days of teaching at PIMS. I have no doubt that Dan's entire tenure at PIMS has been filled with memorable moments, and yet Dan took me to the time when he was the most green as a teacher. Maybe there is something to be said here about the heightened emotion of early-career teaching, when all the aspects of the job are negotiated for the first time. And yet, the story extends into his years as a teacher, taking place in Dan's fifth year at PIMS (when Aaron graduated) and then some time later with the news of Aaron's current work. Dan's story needs years in order for it to be told. To tell a similar but more recent story would be difficult. The marker of Aaron's graduation also resonates with me as I think about how Dan told me that he most loves teaching eighth graders and college seniors (as pre-service teachers), both of whom are on the precipice of big schooling/life change.

At another point, I asked Dan if he remembered any of his former students' names from his time teaching in alternative education, which took place prior to his arrival at PIMS. He did, and one particularly stood out: Alex Ware. While Dan remembers Alex as a student in his alternative education classroom, Alex's name came to mind because of a visit to PIMS years later. Dan was well into his teaching at PIMS, and on one day he was eating lunch when a message was sent from the office: "Dan, there's this guy that really wants to

see you and we're really kind of worried about this." When Dan learned that it was Alex, he excitedly asked for him to be sent down to the lunch room. Alex showed up, "all disheveled and rough looking." Dan gave him a hug and asked, "what's up?" Alex told him that he had just been released from prison. Dan wasn't surprised by this, as Alex had been involved with drugs in his student days. Dan asked Alex, "are you ready?", which I interpret to mean "are you ready to live meaningfully, beyond prison?" The two talked until Dan's next class, and they parted with Dan saying, "don't ever go back," and Alex shrugging, "I know." Alex was still in the fog.

I asked Dan if he was surprised that Alex visited him, especially after getting out of prison. "No, not at all," he responded. Dan chalked it up to Alex's nature; he was the type of kid who walked into class and always had a joke he wanted to tell to Dan. But I thought there was more to it. I said, "it seems you want to be in touch with [any of your students] and you want them to come back to visit." I noted how Dan's classroom, in addition to being covered with student work, has some wall areas devoted to senior portraits of his former students and various newspaper clippings about their extracurricular exploits. He responded that although "they're all crying at the end of the [eighth grade] year and they're all giving me hugs," very few come back into his life as former students.

But some do come back, especially when they are in need. Each year Dan makes a pact with his students. He says to them, "if you ever get the notion of wanting to drop out of school, call me. I'll buy you lunch or dinner, your choice, but we can't go to a super fancy restaurant because I can't afford that. I'll take you anywhere else; give me two hours to try to talk you out of it." While this pact applies to the present year, his eye is more focused on his students' years beyond his classroom. Two of his former students have taken him up on

this pact. Both ultimately decided to drop out, but Dan was able to talk them through the decision. In this context, Dan's story above about his former student contacting him while lost in Lansing is not surprising. Likewise, it is not surprising that Alex would return to see Dan upon release from prison. Dan makes clear to his students that he is there for them, especially after they leave PIMS. These moments of interaction with former students are examples of Dan's teaching in ways that are not customarily considered in discussions about the parameters of teaching. They show that Dan's students are not just the ones who are currently enrolled in his classes. Seemingly, it's not what happens in the classroom that matters as much as what happens beyond, after it. The student's story—past, present, but particularly future—is cherished by Dan.

A storytelling pedagogy: Dan's schooling stories.

Dan's teaching focus is clear: "I put a pretty high priority on the message of, 'do the best you can to yourself, to your fellow people, and to the planet. Everything else will follow.'" This end goal is served by a particular pedagogical mean: storytelling. As a teacher, he wasn't always a storyteller. "I think what it evolved out of is the fact that I have so many thoughts that go through my head, and here I am teaching, and all of a sudden something is brought up...and the next thing I know I'm telling a story. I learned very quickly that my kids would love when I do that." In his early years of teaching, this amounted to class periods in which the lesson plans were skipped in favor of a series of stories. Dan knew that his students tried to get him on storytelling tangents, but he also knew that his students enjoyed his stories. He "started to realize that there's some powerful potential here." Over the last 15 years, as he gained more experience teaching, his classroom storytelling "developed into this very conscientious, purposeful [method]."

Tracking the change in his lesson preparation, he reflected, “the majority of my stories now are very carefully planned.” The stories structure “my connecting with students and [my] helping them connect with the subject matter...each of them has a lesson, a moral.”

Like all teachers, Dan has many “school stories” from his time spent teaching. In the previous section, the stories about Liz, Tom, Candace, Aaron, and Alex are “school stories,” and they are just some of the ones he told me. They undoubtedly come from a trove of lived teaching experience that is overflowing with stories. But, unlike some teachers, Dan has a full repertoire of “schooling stories.” These are stories that he tells purposefully in his teaching. School stories are about lived experiences in school; schooling stories are about pedagogy. Schooling stories are texts used to facilitate learning. Dan tells these stories as part of his storytelling pedagogy.

Dan’s stories are intimate because they are about his life. In the schooling stories that he shared with me and that I heard him tell in his classroom, he was almost always a character. Further, he tells the stories from the first person, giving them a deeply personal feel. But the content of the stories are also deeply personal. Dan’s students know much about his wife and children based on their repeated appearances in his stories. And they know much about him: his students know about his father’s departure, his academic probation at MSU, and his struggle through divorce. All of these stories allow Dan to make points about surviving the fog of life.

In addition to the intimacy of Dan’s stories, he is adept at telling them. He builds the plot lines dramatically, foreshadowing key moments, circling back to established knowledge, raising suspense. He weaves humor, often times of a self-effacing nature, into the events. He courts sad, gruesome, scary, and controversial details, and yet he often

cycles through to an uplifting, hopeful, moral outcome. After all, these stories are not intended solely to be entertaining; they are meant to be educative.

The stories also serve as a method for building community, both inside the classroom and out. Inside, the stories are texts that connect Dan to the students. Beyond the initial telling of a story, the stories are re-visited and re-told. They become common texts; knowledge of them marks one's acceptance in the group. They structure the collective memory of the class. But the stories also elicit other stories. On several occasions when I observed Dan tell a story, a period of student talk ensued in which students told their stories that came to mind while hearing Dan's. This storytelling call-and-response seemingly further established the classroom community by, importantly, adding new, student voices to the community's collection of stories.

On my last day in Dan's classroom, I experienced his storytelling work to build community at multiple levels. It was the day before the eighth grade's big class field trip to Cedar Point, an amusement park located in Ohio, about four hours from Parker. For years PIMS students and Dan had been going on this day trip. It was always something to which students looked forward, as well as Dan. In the days leading up to the trip, Dan mentioned many times how he would tell some of his Cedar Point stories on Thursday, the day before the trip. When Thursday came, in each of the social studies classes, Dan gave the students a brief quiz and then he said, "clear your desks," which is his cue that it is time for a story or a set of stories that will fill the rest of the class period. In each class he asked, "are you ready for Torres' Cedar Point tips?" With eager listeners, he used his "tips" as an avenue to share his stories. (Dan's Cedar Point stories unfolded differently in each of the classes but the content of the stories and the messages behind them were the same.) Tip 1: if you love

roller coasters, sit in the very back of the train. Then he told a story about how once he was waiting in line for the back of the train on “Raptor.” But instead of boarding the train, Cedar Point employees washed it down and then sent it for an empty run. A person in the front of the train had vomited during the previous run. He asked the class, “what if I had been in the back seat on that run?” As students realized the direction that the vomit might travel, Dan impersonated a rider in the back of the train, with his hands waving and his mouth open, screaming. Dan’s open mouth, with the imaginary vomit traveling to the back of the train, was impetus for many students to laugh and others to squeal from the disgusting thought. “So remember Tip #1—the back of the train is fun, but there could be a pukefest.”

Tip #2 involved wearing appropriate clothing. Dan told a detailed, vivid story about a rider who put her cell phone in her bra because she didn’t have any pockets in her clothing. During the ride, the cell phone came loose and struck another rider. Dan, waiting in line for the ride but still far from the platform, saw paramedics rush to the train once it pulled into the station. He wondered about what had happened but he learned, later, from some PIMS students that were on that train, that the person was hit in the face by the cell phone and bleeding profusely. Tip #3 involved Dan’s warning that students better be on time for the 6am departure from the school. Once he had pulled into the parking lot just as the buses were about to depart. Other tips and stories followed, including his ideas about what and where students should eat at the park—and, with a story about a student getting sick on the ride home, why they should consider his advice.

In these Cedar Point stories, which consumed the bulk of each class period, it was clear to me that Dan was doing much more than simply telling some stories. My field notes that I wrote after school speak to Dan's purposes:

Dan's stories were (en)gross(ing) and performative...It's fascinating to think about these stories, how they got kids excited. How they sucked kids into this Parker ritual, teaching them some of the tradition but also preparing them for what's to come. Perhaps he calmed some nerves. Perhaps he scared some. But this supremely built up the event. I suspect that Dan's kids are in a different spot than the other eighth grade teacher's kids, who had a substitute teacher today.

In these stories, I saw Dan building community on many levels. Community in his classroom. Community at PIMS. Community in Parker. I saw him teaching about the concept of community, and specifically what it means to be a member of a community. And he did this in a gripping manner—speaking in the first person, with sound effects and considerable physical movement, even drawing diagrams on the board. The moment was meaningful and dramatic, and its context had little to do with the subject matter of his U.S. history course (although it had everything to do with his work as a social studies teacher).

Dan's Cedar Point tips were schooling stories that featured his school stories. Even though the experiences took place away from PIMS, they unfolded in the context of school. Dan's story of 9/11 is also both a school story and a schooling story, but it is set in his classroom. Each year, on or near the anniversary of 9/11, he takes his current students through that day as it unfolded in his classroom. He says that telling the story is a way for him to commemorate what happened to the nation. He seeks to situate 9/11 in recent

American history, linking it to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as the ideas/practices of homeland security and racial profiling. He is increasingly aware that his students, who live in an era marked by 9/11, were very young in 2001 and soon will not have been born when it took place. Thus, his purpose is to share his lived experience of the event: "I hope it's more than any textbook could ever give them." He intends for students to understand that there was a strong sense of uncertainty on that day, across the country and world, but also specifically in his classroom.

While Dan experienced 9/11 at school, many of his schooling stories are from non-school parts of his life. They come from his lived experience over the course of his life. But, interestingly, Dan noted that he has realized that his stories as a father are different from his stories as a teacher. When Sarah was in sixth and seventh grade, prior to having her dad as her teacher in eighth grade, some of her friends who had Dan as a teacher mentioned stories that he told in class. Some of these stories were foreign to her and she questioned him, "how come you don't tell us [i.e., she and Paul] stories like you tell the classes?" This stunned Dan and made him "really sad." After all, "when I tell stories, I really feel like I'm giving a gift, and so why shouldn't I do that for my own kids?" But he noted that stories he tells at home are "not under the parameters of a 53-minute class, right after attendance, with a connection to a lesson that I'm trying to make."

In my week with Dan, he described many of his schooling stories, formally in interviews and informally during casual conversation. I also experienced some of his schooling stories simply by spending a week in his classroom. The reflections that I wrote after each school day are littered with notes about Dan's different stories that he told and I share only some of them here. However, one story that he told during class stands out to

me the most. Dan calls it “the Smoking story” and he tells it in Decisions, his elective class. In past years, he told it at the end of a unit about nicotine. Last year, though, several students suggested that he tell the story at the beginning of the unit so there is more time to think about it and ask questions.

After taking attendance and making a few announcements at the start of class, Dan told his students to clear their desks. He then explained that he was going to do something very controversial but he noted that he had the support of the school’s administrators in doing it. He proceeded to tell a story about his nicotine addiction: how he started smoking in college; how he quit “cold turkey” after less than three years; how he developed smoking-induced asthma; how he had a “near death” experience when he was alone with Sarah and Paul, when they were young, and he didn’t have a working inhaler; how he’s been cigarette free for over twenty years and yet he craves them every single day. As with the other stories that I heard him tell, this story was dramatic, funny at points, and filled with markers along the way (that served to give students a breather, remind them of important points, and then re-engage them). This story, though, was presented more methodically than the others. It was purposeful throughout all its minutes. After bringing the story to the present day, Dan acknowledged how wonderful it is that he is healthy. But, he tacked on, if he develops lung cancer, he’ll know why. He reiterated this bleak possibility and a student told him to stop because she was starting to cry. He then ended the story saying, “it doesn’t ever have to happen to any of you.”

Dan’s telling of the Smoking story was an example of his storytelling pedagogy in action. His life experience served as the text for teaching about the addictive nature of nicotine. The message was clear: he survived the fog, to this point at least, but his students

can avoid it. He had no problem leveraging what he had learned—and how he had learned it—in order to teach his students.

While I suspect he approaches the majority of his schooling stories in this way, he told me about two that are noticeably different from the rest. There is one particular lesson from the Decisions class that Dan dreads and it is because of his storytelling pedagogy. He calls it the “date rape lesson” and in the past he’s received many concerned emails and calls from parents about it. As a result of parental concern, he now reminds his students in the days prior to “tell your folks that the date rape lesson is going to be next week.” The lesson consists of two stories that Dan tells. Prior to explaining them to me, he said, “I love storytelling [but] it’s weird, I dread that day.” The first story involves a 14-year old girl that he taught in PIPS’ alternative education program. She was pregnant when she entered the program. Eight months prior, she had gone to a party and had so much to drink that she passed out. A few weeks after the party, she was late for her period and her mother took her to the doctor. When she learned that she was pregnant, she told her mother and the doctor that she couldn’t be, that she’d never had sex before. The only thing that she could point to was that she had passed out at the party. As a result of the pregnancy, the girl’s parents, who Dan referred to as “high-powered,” disowned her, calling her a “slut” and saying, “you’re no longer a daughter in our eyes.” By the time she entered Dan’s classroom, she was living with a friend and hoping to emancipate herself from her parents.

Dan then tells a second story, which he called “roughest.” A former student of his, who was a sophomore in high school at the time of the story, came to see him after school. Before she could say anything, she began sobbing and she struggled to explain to Dan that

she thought she had been raped. Dan asked, “what do you mean by ‘I think?’ Were you taken advantage of?” She said “no.” She and her boyfriend had planned a romantic evening while his parents were going to be away. They had talked about having sex for the first time that night. But, as the night progressed, she began to have second thoughts. Dan said, “the boyfriend gave her all the lines—‘if you love me you would,’ ‘come on, baby, don’t you trust me?’—that sort of thing, all that shit.” He remembered wanting her to build a case of rape as she talked about what happened, but then when he asked her if she ever told her boyfriend “no,” she said that she did not. She said, “I just laid there and took it.” When telling this story to his class, he asks at this point: “is this rape? Cause in a court of law, it’s not rape. She never said ‘no.’” And, there was planning and preparation for the event.

After telling me about the date rape lesson, Dan reiterated, “I dread those stories.” I asked why he tells them if he dreads them. “I think they’re both really good examples of how date rape occurs,” he responded. “I think it makes it unique that that one girl comes from a very high-powered environment of wealth, just to be cast out like that. And the other girl, just to be unsure.” I then asked if similar messages could be taught through a different medium, one that he would not dread. “I’m sure I could find something to do the same thing. I tell those stories, though, probably for the same reason I tell all the other stories. It’s just—those really hurt to tell.”

For Dan not to tell those stories, he seemingly would have to become a different teacher, a different person. His pedagogy is to tell the powerful stories of his life in order to teach his students. In a way, how could he not tell those stories? And yet, I found it hard to understand his logic. If the medium invokes dread, change it, I thought. While I had not sensed, and he had not spoken to, pain or dread related to any other stories he tells, these

two stories stood out to me as different. I commented, “it seems like it puts you in a sacrificial spot. Almost like you endure the pain for the story to be heard.” He found some truth in the idea of sacrifice, but he said, “the sacrificial pain that I feel really is for sure offset by the love that I feel for my students.” Not only are those stories “the best way to get the message across” to his students, his telling of them is an act of love.

Conclusion

This chapter begins with the “I Write America” poem that Dan wrote after my week with him in Mid-Michigan. When I read the poem, I see it succinctly addressing the contours of his life. In the first section, he has concern for his political and ecological communities. In the second section, he advocates for acceptance and understanding of his two strongest identities: *good* parent and *good* teacher. In the third section, he tells the story of his living curriculum: he is prospering after learning from mistakes. The fourth section, the conclusion, diverges from the poem’s pattern. No longer does he hope. Rather, he asserts his love for America and his optimism for the future.

But as I’ve read Dan’s poem many times now, I can’t help but translate “America” as “my students.” This is not to say that Dan doesn’t hope and “heart” America. Rather, in saying “America,” I see him specifically writing about his students. In this annotated version, his purposes in teaching (both in general and in the area of social studies) are there. His belief that the health of communities, big and small, depends on the future actions of his students is there. His message that life is foggy but survivable and thrive-able is there. And his optimism, which is a hallmark of his schooling stories, is the concluding point.

But optimism doesn't always feature certainty. In the final minutes of our last interview, as Dan and I sat at his dining table and his young kids slept upstairs, he said, "so are you ready for the last chapter?" I wasn't entirely sure what Dan meant but I said I was. Dan then talked at length about our visit, noting how he had enjoyed our many conversations and how he had so much to think about. "Your visit really makes me feel good about who I am as a teacher," he said to me. "You know, I feel like I'm on the right track." After these sentiments, he said with slight hesitation, "but I keep asking myself, 'is Mark really getting what he needs—not to write a dissertation, but to discover something?'" He returned to the discourse of story: "I've been thinking, 'well how am I going to prepare...[a] last chapter ending where Mark will have this epiphany?" He paused and said, "you know what, I don't think that's going to happen."

Although Dan didn't know this in any formal way, I was mindful that my time with him (and the other participants in my study) would never capture the whole story. Not only was that impossible, I knew, but also the moment I left the Place visit, Dan's life would carry on. While my writing about Dan would be a story, it would not be *the* story, and it would end without *the* ending. I held off on sharing these ideas of mine and I simply asked, "Why do you need to do that?" In other words, why did Dan need to "write" a last chapter? This exchange ensued:

Dan: I don't [need to write a last chapter]. I guess I've just been so intrigued by this week that I've been—it's almost like, I guess I'm expecting the puzzle to be completed. And it's not [going to be]. But that's okay.

Mark: Can I frame it a similar way?

Dan: Yeah.

Mark: You're a storyteller. I'm wondering if you're not wanting to give the punch-line or finish the story but you're kind of like, "I'm not sure what it is."

Dan: And sometimes that's the best way to finish the story.

CHAPTER SIX

THE CITIZENSHIP OF ROOTED TEACHING

*Here, let me break it down for you, so you know what I say is true:
Teachers make a goddamn difference! Now what about you?*

—Taylor Mali, New York City, 2002⁴³

I love that poem.

—Rosie, Mobile, 2011

Introduction

Dan Torres has taught for over two decades at one school. Tommy Allen has taught for over one decade at one school. Rosie Baker has taught for almost a decade, at two schools, with the last six years at her current school. None of these teachers appear to be leaving their schools, or the teaching profession, any time soon. Rosie talked briefly about the possibility of becoming a midwife, but she wasn't actively pursuing that occupational change. Tommy talked about his interest to enter a Ph.D. program in education, but only with the condition that he could continue teaching at Atlantic High. Finding no such opportunity when he investigated the possibility last year, he decided it wasn't going to happen. Dan, envisioning a teaching career of over 40 years, sees no end in sight. Maybe in twenty years, he said, he might retire, move to northern Michigan, and teach there.

⁴³ These are the final lines from his poem, "What Teachers Make" (Mali, 2002).

While some teachers stay in the teaching profession for their entire working careers, many do not (Aud, Hussar, Kena, Bianco, Frohlich, Kemp, & Tahan, 2011; Ingersoll, 2001). There is significant teacher attrition, particularly for beginning teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2003). Those teachers that do stay in the profession tend to teach in contexts where there is considerable support, adequate-to-good compensation, needed resources, and other teaching essentials (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Nieto, 2003a). When such essentials do not exist, many teachers leave the profession or become “voluntary movers,” looking for a teaching context that does provide these features (Moore Johnson & Birkeland, 2003). With many different possible teaching contexts, it is pivotal that teachers are well-prepared as they enter the field (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Feiman-Nemser, 2003).

Why have Dan, Rosie, and Tommy not only stayed in the teaching profession but also thrived in it? In the three previous chapters, I dwelled in each teacher’s living and teaching curricula. In this chapter, I consider what we might learn from these teachers as a group. I begin by looking at who they are, noting some of the prominent differences and similarities across their curricula, and exploring why these courses of living and learning can inform discussion about the work of teachers. Then, I consider why we see three teachers who are deeply committed to teaching in their particular contexts, while many other teachers struggle and, in some cases, wonder whether they should even continue in their school or the profession itself. In doing this, focusing on the intersection of curriculum and place, I argue that these teachers are emplaced in their living and teaching, possessing deep, life-giving roots. Further, I contend that their work as “rooted teachers” gives students the desire and ability to find roots in their own lives. I conclude by asserting

that this work of rooted teaching is an act of citizenship, for both students and their communities, but also for the teachers themselves, and their communities. Indeed, this citizenship is one of the powerful ways in which teachers make “a goddamn difference.”

Who *These* Teachers Are

Recent statistics published by the U.S. Department of Education show that the U.S. had 98,706 public elementary and secondary schools in the 2008-09 school year (Aud, et al, 2011). In these schools, there were 49.3 million students and 3.4 million full-time teachers. Of these teachers, 8% of them left teaching at the end of the school year while 7.6% of them moved to another school. These are mammoth numbers and, spread out across all the states and counties of the U.S., they speak to a vast system of public education. Dan, Rosie, and Tommy are three people in three schools who teach a small fraction of the country’s students. And yet, I posit that their stories provide much to think about with respect to the entire public education system, not just the teaching and learning of particular people in particular places.

Differences across living and teaching curricula.

These three teachers are different in a number of ways. First, many elements of their lived curricula are certainly different. Tommy is a white, male, high school English teacher in Dorchester, Massachusetts, which is an urban, multiracial community in Boston. He is in his forties and, with his wife, he lives in a middle class enclave of Dorchester, which is near his school. Rosie is a black, female, elementary school gifted education teacher in Mobile County, Alabama. She is in her thirties and expecting her first child. With her husband, she lives on the southern edge of Mobile City, near her school, in a middle class,

suburban area. Dan is a Filipino American, male, middle school social studies teacher in Parker, Michigan, an affluent suburb of Michigan's capital city, Lansing. He is in his forties and, with his wife and four children, he lives in a working-to-middle class neighborhood in Lansing.

In these brief descriptions we see a number of differences across the three teachers. They have different races and/or ethnic backgrounds. They teach different subjects in different grade levels. They live and teach in different regions of the U.S. The dynamic between where they live and teach is different for each of them. That is, Tommy lives and teaches in a large city (and he grew up in a suburban context), Rosie lives and teaches in a suburban area (and she grew up in a mid-sized city), and Dan lives in a mid-sized city and teaches in a suburban area (and he grew up in a small city). The two men are in their forties, although Dan has been teaching for 23 years, while Tommy has been teaching for eleven. Rosie, a female, is in her thirties and she has been teaching for nine years. All three are married. Tommy has no children, Rosie is expecting her first, and Dan has four children (two with his wife and two with his ex-wife). These are three individuals, all teachers, on different life courses.

To be sure, all people lead unique lives. One's living curriculum is experienced by no one else. However, in popular narratives about who teachers are, that basic fact is often forgotten (Dalton, 2004; Weber & Mitchell, 1995). But Britzman (2003) reminds us that we cannot lose sight of this fact. Writing about how teachers learn to teach, she says, "to understand the process whereby experience becomes meaningful requires that we situate ourselves in history and recognize as critical the relationships and intersections—both given and possible—of biography and social structure" (p. 232). Teachers' biographies, in

all their messy contexts, are essential to the work that they do in classrooms (Nieto, 2003a).

Some of the stark differences among Dan, Rosie, and Tommy are quite salient. One trope about teachers is that they uniformly love their own schooling experiences.⁴⁴ That was largely true for Rosie. She loved her public, K-12 schools at all levels, as well as her collegiate experience at a small, private university. For Dan and Tommy, though, school was not a pleasurable place. Dan's time in school—particularly high school, when he attended two different schools, one public and one private—saw the advent of depression and loneliness. When he made it to college, at a large, public university, life outside of the classroom was far more interesting than life inside of it, until he teetered on the verge of academic expulsion.

For Tommy, his schooling experiences were even worse than Dan's. Like Dan, he went to school in different places, but Tommy had to negotiate having a Texan accent on the playground of a school in Maine. In high school, each winter, Tommy left his regular private school in New Hampshire in order to train for skiing in Lake Placid, New York. As skiing was the most important aspect of his life at that time, school stood in stark contrast to his time in Lake Placid. At the end of his senior year in high school, Tommy was kicked out of the school, thus failing to graduate and earn his diploma. His plans to attend college and ski were thwarted. Over a number of ensuing years, he attended three different colleges before graduating from the third.

⁴⁴ An occasional exception to this trope is the notion that some teachers hate their schooling experiences, and so they enter the profession in order to provide different experiences for their students.

By the time each of these teachers stepped into a classroom as a teacher, they had had some positive school experiences, and once they had committed to teaching, all three teachers earned master's degrees in education while they taught. But their schooling paths were anything but uniform. Dan's and Tommy's schooling careers do not fit the notion that teachers go into teaching because they loved their schooling. Here are two teachers who disliked or hated school, and yet they're over a decade (or two) into and enjoying their teaching careers.

As these teachers' living curricula are different, so too are their teaching curricula. Despite a changing teacher education landscape (Grossman & Loeb, 2008; Zeichner, 2003), many teachers in schools today have earned their teaching credentials through traditional teacher education programs at colleges and universities. In these programs, an undergraduate student typically works through the required course framework, which culminates with a student teaching internship or field experience. Dan and Rosie are products of such a system. Rosie hardly referenced her teacher education experience but Dan talked about how it provided the context that turned him into a teacher.

At first Dan scoffed at the prospect of becoming a teacher: "who would be stupid enough to be a teacher? Why would I ever go back to that environment?" The only reason he considered teaching was that the MSU major associated with it did not require him to complete additional coursework and pay for the associated credits. But once in his teacher education program, he realized that he enjoyed the work and he felt that he was naturally good at it, particularly as a teacher in a classroom. Teacher education became, for him, "the best accident ever."

Rosie, unlike Dan, knew from a young age that she wanted to enter teaching. When she started college and her teacher education program, she had no apprehension or doubt: she was going to be a kindergarten teacher. Her first teaching job set her at third grade, and then fifth grade, and after three years, she looked for a new set of circumstances. Similar to what Flores (2006) found with novice teachers, Rosie struggled initially, but then settled into her work as a teacher when she moved to a new school, and moved from general grade-level teaching to gifted education.

Tommy came to teaching later in life than Dan or Rosie, and he did not do it through a traditional teacher education program. In fact, he already had his bachelor's degree and his master's degree in fine arts. He was simply looking for work that could help him pay off his schooling loans and support him while he worked as a writer, when he, by "happenstance" (as he termed it), was talked into enrolling in a teacher certification program by a friend. A crash course of classes about education and pedagogy, coupled with a year-long teaching internship, left him credentialed to teach. He then got a job teaching at the school where he interned. Although the initial weeks were incredibly challenging—akin to what Lortie (1975) terms "sink-or-swim"—he came to embrace the difficulty as he followed a colleague's advice that simply showing up each day and being prepared to teach would help him survive.

Feiman-Nemser (2001), noting "the lack of connective tissue" between teacher preparation, induction, and professional development programs, writes that "the need for a continuum of serious and sustained professional learning opportunities for teachers is clear" (p. 1049). The "professional learning continuum" for which she calls is not apparent across the teaching curricula of Dan, Rosie, and Tommy. But, the diverse experiences of

these teachers show that many elements are in need of consideration. Teaching “clicks” at different moments and in different contexts for each of these teachers.

Similarities across living and teaching curricula.

While there are important differences across these teachers’ lives, there are also notable similarities. One point is obvious but important: these three teachers are extremely busy people. Like so many teachers, they each put in many hours related to their classroom teaching, both at school and at home. But in addition to the demands of their job as teachers, they take on numerous school- and non-school-related activities. Tommy, for example, coaches Atlantic High School’s soccer team. My week with him fell in the middle of soccer season, and during it, his team played games on three separate days and practiced on two others. During his daily prep period, he was on the phone multiple times setting up bus pick-ups, rescheduling rainouts, and dealing with other soccer-related matters. Outside of school, Tommy plays on three different adult soccer teams. After his full week of coaching soccer while I was there, he was a player in games on both days of the weekend.

While Tommy coaches after school, Dan and Rosie tutor students after school (and Dan coached volleyball in prior years). Both Dan and Rosie tutor former students weekly, and they do so on multiple days each week. Both tutor at their homes and often they transport the students that they tutor. Dan and Rosie also take on additional school-related duties. Rosie manages her school’s website. Dan facilitates an after-school group that was, when I visited, preparing for a public presentation at the local mall about the community’s groundwater. Away from school, both Dan and Rosie are active in their church communities, including teaching in the youth programs. Additionally, as I noted in their chapters, Rosie works at a camp for youth impacted by cancer, and Dan has taken up a

number of storytelling projects as well as work with pre-service teachers. The teaching and living realities of these teachers contradict the popular narrative that teachers do not work the type of long hours and lead the type of complicated lives of other high-status professions such as doctors and lawyers.⁴⁵

As a teacher educator and former teacher, the busy-at-school part of these teachers' lives is not surprising to me. But I was taken aback with their activities outside of classroom teaching. In the weeks that I spent with them, each had little to no "down time" during their days and nights. When I taught high school social studies, I felt as though I needed all the down time that I could get, away from school. I believed in the importance of "teacher shape," which had to do with being able to stand, move, and talk the entire school day, for five days straight, for the entire school year. But I needed my nights, weekends, and vacations to recover. On most weekdays, my life activities were structured by the opening and closing bells of the school day. I would go home at night and continue to plan or grade, but I could at least relax in my home while doing that. Dan, Rosie, and Tommy, though, reformed my conception of teacher shape to place it in the context of what might be called "teacher life shape." Each, I found, was constantly in motion, tapping into a seemingly endless reservoir of energy. Additionally, their activity was marked by the fact that they are each extremely good at the many things in their lives that they do. Looking across their living curricula, they are highly competent and skilled people in many different areas.

⁴⁵ This narrative stems from a variety of sources: the history of teachers' struggle to be seen as professionals (Clifford & Guthrie, 1988; Herbst, 1989); the feminization of teaching (Grumet, 1988); teacher portrayal in popular culture (Dalton, 2004; Weber & Mitchell, 1995); even people's lived schooling experience (Jackson, 1990; Lortie, 1975).

Another similarity across their living curricula involves their relationships with their families, both in their youth and at the present time. In my Place Phase visits, I experienced how their immediate families are vital to their lives.⁴⁶ Prior to and during the my visits, the teachers spoke often about the people who make up their immediate families and their relationships with them. But in addition to hearing stories about these people, I met all of them and spent time with them. I was welcomed into the homes of the teachers, which allowed me to interact with all of their family members and see the teachers interacting with them.

That teachers have important family lives is not surprising. Teachers are members of families just like other professionals. Even though, as Grumet (1988) argues, teachers (and particularly those that are mothers) are asked to check their familial knowledge and practices at the classroom door, their lived experiences with their families shape who they are with their students. Of the three teachers in this study, the most obvious example of this is Dan, who uses many stories about his family in his teaching, to the point that he just calls his family members by their first names and students know immediately who he is talking about. But present-day immediate families are not the only familial influences on teachers. Their families across their lives have a significant impact on their biography (Britzman, 2003).

Given this familial backdrop, it is interesting to me that all three teachers spoke little about their immediate families when they were young. Dan spoke about his the most, in relation to his father and his father's departure from his family. He recalled separate,

⁴⁶ Dan's immediate family consists of his wife, Laura, and his four children: Sarah, Paul, Kevin, and Kara. For Rosie, Rick, her husband, is her immediate family, and Tommy's wife, Penelope, is his immediate family.

intimate moments, when his father punched him and comforted him. He spoke about how the void created by his father's absence was filled by his maternal grandparents and aunt, when they moved to the U.S. from the Philippines. But he did not speak much more deeply than laying out his familial contours. He noted that he was close with his cousins, who also lived in Michigan, but he never told any stories about them. As Dan self-identifies as a storyteller, and he tells many stories about his life, the general absence of his original immediate family in his stories indicates a disconnect.

Rosie and Tommy spoke about their families when they were young even less than Dan. For Tommy, family simply didn't occupy much space in his life, or at least that's how he stories his experiences now. He told me few stories from his youth, and in none of those does his immediate family figure intimately. His family members were present in the sense that he lived with them in Texas or Maine, but they weren't characters, as much as pieces of the setting. He talked about his disdain for the cocktail parties that his parents would host. And he told a story about how his father gave him \$1000 prior to his departure from the family to Colorado. There is no sense of human intimacy in Tommy's stories until after he leaves his original immediate family.

Like Tommy, Rosie spoke minimally about her immediate family when she was young. As I describe in her chapter, she had a strong intimacy at that age with Mother James, but not her biological mother. She noted how she grew up with her mother and two sisters (one full and one half-maternal), which she contrasted with her father and her half-paternal siblings, whom she did not know well. On her autobiography chapter list, she wrote "in the middle or am I," in reference to her relationship to all of her siblings, but she spoke in no detail about any of them. Her stories from that time focus on Mother James and

her time at camp, school, and church. Indeed, twice when she did reference her immediate family members, it was to show her distance from them (e.g., how she hated Mardi Gras while they loved it; how she went to church while the others stopped attending).

I wonder what influence this seeming lack of importance of Dan, Rosie, and Tommy's immediate families, when they were young, has on their work as teachers today. From my visit with each teacher, I learned that their teaching contexts—at the classroom and/or school level—are sites for the establishment of a kind of family. These families are not immediate, in the sense that there is no connection through blood or marriage (with the exception of Dan teaching his children, Sarah and Paul), but they are immediate in that, during the school year, the teachers interact closely each day with students, teachers, and other school personnel. While this is mostly implicit for Tommy, both Dan and Rosie spoke regularly, and taught accordingly, about treating others at school, and particularly students, as family; their language of teaching was a familial language. In the case of all three, and especially Dan and Rosie, the classroom is an environment of intimacy that bears some resemblance to a home.

Good teaching involves meaningful relationships. In order for students to learn authentically, teachers must develop close relationships with them. Where, though, do teachers learn to develop meaningful relationships? The stories of these teachers indicate that they did not learn to develop such relationships with family members in their youth. While not all teachers have similar childhood experiences, I wonder if there might be a link between teachers' familial experiences in their youth and their *familial* work in their classrooms and schools. Is it possible that we, as teachers, are trying to reclaim something that we never had, or revisit something that we did once have, by spending our days

around other people's children? Unlike most professions, teaching locates teachers within the worlds of youth. While adults (e.g., other school personnel and parents) also inhabit those worlds, they are on the periphery of them. A teacher spends far more time at school each day interacting with youth than adults. Perhaps this work allows us to avoid, to some degree, the adult world. At the same time, perhaps working with youth, who can be more eager than adults to connect in caring ways, allows us to cultivate meaningful relationships that we need on deeply personal levels. This is not to say that teachers do not have meaningful relationships with adults—Dan, Rosie, and Tommy show otherwise. However, teachers' daily work focuses foremost on relationships with students.

A last important similarity across these teachers involves *what*, or rather *who*, they teach. Most U.S. schools are divided by grade levels and subject areas. For example, third grade is separated from fourth grade and science is separated from math. This practice segregates students into groups and it divides the work that they do. At the younger ages, grade level is a major determinant; as students get older, subject area becomes equally, if not more, important. Thus, the content knowledge to be learned in schools is organized according to grade and subject (even though the lines of grades and subjects do not easily divide content knowledge).

This "graded" and "subjected" structure of schools positions teachers as graded and subjected. They teach somewhere between (pre)kindergarten and twelfth grade, in elementary school, or middle school, or high school. Likewise, they teach one or more subjects. Thus, teachers identify and are identified with teaching grade levels and/or subjects. Subtly, the weight of the work of a teacher is placed on teaching the content knowledge that has been linked to a grade and a subject. This means that the weight is not

overtly placed on teaching the particular students who dwell in the classroom with the teacher. In other words, the purpose is to teach appropriate content knowledge, not people.

Dan (eighth grade social studies), Rosie (third, fourth, and fifth grades gifted education), and Tommy (ninth grade English) are graded and subjected. To be sure, they teach a host of content knowledge. But their stories show them as teachers who do more than that; they are teachers who, foremost, care for students. These teachers care about who their students are, what they know, why they know what they know, and what they need to learn. In none of their stories did they focus on a powerful teaching moment that centered around teaching disciplinary content. Their powerful moments involved students struggling through personal tragedy, fear, or hardship; the context for these powerful moments was teaching about individual and community growth, and academic content was folded into that goal.

These stories also show teachers who care deeply about their students, well beyond the time and place of a shared classroom. Surprisingly to me, many of the stories the teachers told me focused on former students. When I asked for stories about teaching, I heard about the lives of students, with a particular focus on these lives after they left the teacher's classroom for the year. I learned, for example, that one of Rosie's frustrations as a general education fifth grade teacher at her first school was that she would not see her former students in the school's hallways, because they would leave her classroom and immediately go to middle school. For good reason, much talk and research about teaching focuses on the teacher at work with students in the classroom. The emphasis is on the

pedagogical moment: what is the teacher doing, and why, and how? What are the students doing, and why, and how? How can student learning be assessed *now*?

But Dan, Rosie, and Tommy's stories were often not consumed with the pedagogical moment. They were consumed with the living curriculum of their students. All three told stories that took their former students many years beyond schooling. All three talked of their connections that they maintain with former students. They get calls about achievements and graduation at higher levels. They are frequently visited by former students, and the impact of those visits are seen around their classrooms, and in their classroom stories. In fact, the majority of their stories about former students hardly focused on the time when teacher and student shared the same classroom. Rather, the stories focused on the students' lives beyond the classrooms. Teaching, in this context, is not bounded by grade or subject. It is not fixed solely to one moment or space in a student's life. Teaching is relational and alive. It continues well beyond the end of particular school years.

As they focus on their students in the pedagogical moment, they are certainly still teaching content. That content, though, is leveraged toward student growth, which, importantly, cannot be considered in a moment. But the content is there, in two forms. There is the academic content of the course, and there is also the lived experience of the teachers. Regarding the latter, they are undoubtedly teaching themselves and their story/stories. Dan and Rosie speak quickly to this fact. Their students "know all [their]

stories.” For Tommy, his lived experience is much more implicit in his teaching.⁴⁷ But, as is evident in his stories of Derrick, Felipe, Jayla, and Ship, his story is present.

What these teachers know, then, is their students. They also know pedagogy and academic content, but they have an intimate understanding of who their students are that allows them to utilize their pedagogical and content knowledge.

Why *These* Teachers Keep Going

In *What Keeps Teachers Going?* (2003a), Sonia Nieto writes of her extended collaboration with seven urban teachers in Boston. While getting to know, and working with, these teachers intimately, she constructed a list of the main reasons why the teachers in this group continued to teach, despite difficult circumstances that included teaching marginalized students in under-resourced schools. They “kept going” because of their autobiographies, love for teaching, feelings of hope and possibility, anger about the educational system, intellectual stimulation working with colleagues and students, engagement in democratic practices, and belief in their ability to shape the future. Looking across Dan, Rosie, and Tommy’s teaching, some of these reasons are salient to their work. As I have tried to show across all of the chapters, their teaching is a product of their biographies. Dan and Rosie “love” teaching; Tommy “like[s]” it.⁴⁸ As evident in all three of their “I write America” poems, hope is fundamental to their lives (and therefore their

⁴⁷ Tommy did not speak about his students knowing much about him outside of the classroom, and I did not see him offer any stories in the classroom about his life outside of school.

⁴⁸ One who attends very closely to the words he chooses, I think Tommy would use the word *love* sparingly about most anything.

teaching), and it is tied to their beliefs that their actions with students can shape the future. And in those poems, as well as in some of their stories, anger about the educational system is implied, if not outright explicit: frustration with high-stakes standardized testing, educational policies, school and district leadership, to name a few causes for anger.

Writing about a similar topic—how school leaders can keep good teachers—Darling-Hammond (2003) offers four criteria that influence teachers' decisions to stay at their schools, move to others, or leave teaching outright: salaries, working conditions, preparation, and mentor support. The presence of these criteria in the stories of the teachers varied. None of them spoke about their salaries in great detail, although Dan and Tommy indicated that they could comfortably live on their pay. Although Rosie did not speak to this, my sense is that she would agree. Working conditions, in various forms, were discussed frequently, and the teachers' feelings ranged from sizable frustration for Tommy and Rosie (at her first school), to great content for Dan and Rosie (at her second school).⁴⁹ Formal teacher preparation, through their certification programs, was raised, but with little specifics. Dan spoke to it the most, crediting it with helping him realize his "best accident ever." Interestingly, mentoring support from colleagues and school leaders was almost entirely absent from their stories. Tommy talked about his informal mentoring by Billy,

⁴⁹ The frustration of Rosie and Tommy, similar to Nieto's teachers (2003a), is tied to their urban schools and the difficult circumstances of schooling in those settings. Alternatively, the content of Dan and Rosie is tied to their suburban schools, which do not feature many of those difficult circumstances.

with whom he coached soccer, but none of the teachers spoke of important mentoring relationships with other teachers.⁵⁰

Following Darling-Hammond and Nieto, the attrition of teachers has a major impact on student learning. The best teachers tend to be experienced teachers, and when teachers leave, new, often inexperienced, teachers replace them. There is also a high financial cost to teacher attrition: schools and districts save significant amounts of money, which could be spent on other important aspects of schooling, when teachers stay at their schools. Importantly, the impact of these two costs is most severe in the places where students are the most marginalized, since teachers leave struggling schools at a significantly higher rate.⁵¹

Dan, Rosie, and Tommy are fascinating teachers, given this backdrop. Despite very different teaching contexts, each has stayed in teaching for a number of years, and there is only one lateral school move between them. Further, their teaching contexts plot differently on the landscape of teacher attrition. Consider the following questions:

1. Why has Tommy stayed at Atlantic High School?
2. Why did Rosie leave Barnes Elementary School but stay at Violet Elementary School?
3. Why does Dan hope to teach twenty more years at Parker Intermediate Middle School?

⁵⁰ Rosie did speak very highly of her second school's principal, who has been very supportive. Also, a lack of mentoring relationships does not mean that the teachers did not have meaningful personal relationships with other teachers.

⁵¹ These struggling schools often have high percentages of students of color and poor students, like Tommy's school and Rosie's first school (see also: Moore Johnson & Birkeland, 2003).

Despite Atlantic High having many of the indicators attached to teacher attrition, Tommy has stayed put, and he is adamant about not wanting to teach elsewhere, particularly in schools where such indicators do not exist. Rosie left Barnes Elementary, which had many of the attrition indicators, after three years of teaching. She moved to Violet Elementary, where those same indicators were significantly less, comparatively, and she has enjoyed remaining there for the past six years. Dan, over two decades at Parker Intermediate Middle, wants to teach nowhere else, even in Lansing, the city that he loves. In Parker, the attrition indicators are not an issue. Based on the research literature, Tommy's teaching tenure is the most surprising of the three.

But as Nieto (2003a) points out, one's biography can be a powerful reason for staying put, which is quite likely the biggest reason why Tommy continues to teach at Atlantic High. Tommy said that he seeks to "make a difference in the lives of kids who struggle with poverty and the attendant misery it spawns." At Atlantic High, this means that he teaches students who are almost entirely of a different racial/ethnic background. This is interesting, in light of what Nieto writes:

even though most teachers enter the profession for noble reasons and with great enthusiasm, many of those in urban schools know little about their students and find it hard to reach them. Thus, despite their good intentions, many teachers who work with students of racial and cultural backgrounds different from their own have limited experience in teaching them and become frustrated and angry at the conditions in which they must work.
(2003b, p. 15)

All three teachers are racial/ethnic minorities in comparison to their student populations. At Rosie's first school, which was urban and entirely black, she was not a minority; her second school, though, is suburban and predominantly white. While there was certainly more context that surrounded her move from school to school, this reversal of the trend is curious.

Since Dan has not strongly identified with his Filipino background in over three decades, and since his school is not similar to the urban schools that Nieto is talking about, it is hard to see his situation as a reversal of the trend. But Tommy's situation is also a reversal, and it is curious as well. What stands out to me the most in Nieto's statement is that the teachers that she is characterizing often "know little about their students and find it hard to reach them." While I don't doubt this, I do think there is something in Tommy's story that makes his continued teaching at Atlantic High particularly salient. In fact, I believe what makes Tommy stay at Atlantic High has strong parallels with what makes Dan and Rosie stay at their respective schools: all three teachers are emplaced where they live and teach. That is, the relationships they have cultivated with their surroundings have added significant quality to their lives. They are parts of meaningful and life-giving communities. Revisiting the metaphor of a thriving plant in a well-tended garden, these teachers have established deep, durable roots.

Living And Teaching Roots

During the Second World War, the French writer Simone Weil wrote, "to be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognized need of the human soul" (1952, p. 43). Her topic of focus with these words centered on the impact of colonialism on strong and

weak peoples alike, specifically through military conquest. The historical pasts of the weak, she argued, were being destroyed by the wealth, education, and scientific might of the strong, and this act created a self-propagating *uprootedness* that had inflicted virtually all people, from strong to weak. Weil wrote, “a human being has roots by virtue of his [sic] real, active, and natural participation in the life of a community, which preserves in living shape certain particular treasures of the past and certain particular expectations of the future” (p. 43). Without such roots, that human is “severed from the universe surrounding him” (p. 46); that human is uprooted.

Following Weil’s conception of uprootedness, Tommy, in the first half of his life, had no “real, active, and natural participation in the life of a community.” At a young age, he had already lived in three distinctly different parts of the world: France, Texas, and Maine. After his family settled in Maine, he still lived out of state while he attended school and skied. He felt alienated by his upbringing, which afforded him privileged opportunities with schooling and skiing, but did not ground him in any communities. Through his late teens and twenties, he traveled in the U.S. and Europe, until he moved to Boston. Up to this point, he had been transient across physical places, but he had no deep sense of place attached to where he had lived, or to the people who lived around him. In each geographic location, he lacked relationships with supportive and affirming communities. He was displaced, uprooted. But after arriving in Boston, he began to establish roots. He formed meaningful relationships with Penelope, his bike-messenger friends, and his students and teaching colleagues. With his teaching in Dorchester, and then his move there, he not only wanted to be a citizen—which could be framed as a longing for a deep, rooted sense of place—but a citizen *in that place*. He became emplaced in Dorchester.

Unlike Tommy, Rosie was rooted in the first half of her life. But like Tommy, her family did not strongly define her *relationships of place*. First with Mother James, and then through the people and surroundings she met through camp, school, and church, Rosie had developed roots in and around The Loop, a racially- and socioeconomically-diverse neighborhood of Mobile. But after going to college, and then returning to Mobile to teach in Prichard, which was an entirely black community, Rosie re-rooted herself in another part of Mobile. Her hallmarks of place—home, church, school—all shifted southward for her. This shift coincided with her marriage to Rick, who was from South Mobile. While Mobile has always been where she has been emplaced, on a more micro level, Rosie uprooted herself from urban Mobile to suburban Mobile. Like Tommy, she established roots in a community different from the one in which she grew up. Also like Tommy, she settled into teaching at a school where the majority of her students were not of her race.

Similar to Rosie, Dan was rooted in the first half of his life but then re-rooted himself as an adult. Born in the Philippines, he grew up immersed in Filipino culture in a non-Filipino geographic area. His earliest relationships were with his extended family that lived in southeast Michigan. As he grew older and made friends, he did not seek out others with Filipino heritage. After he graduated from MSU, Dan said that he “landed in Lansing,” where he had no Filipino ties. He has lived in Lansing ever since, and during this time, he has become devoted to his surroundings. His open advocacy for the “awesomeness” of Lansing is a marker of his emplacement. Through these Lansing years, though, Dan has taught in a separate community, Parker. While both Lansing and Parker are in Mid-Michigan and interdependent with each other, the human and social make-ups of the

communities are different. Dan's love for living in Lansing and love for teaching in Parker show roots in two separate geographic communities.

All three teachers underwent a processes of rooting in their lives. Notably, all three became emplaced in the regions where they spent the bulk of their youth, but in communities different from the ones in which they grew up. Across these three life stories of becoming emplaced, the issues of race and class are present in different ways. Tommy chooses to root himself, in both teaching and living, in racially- and socioeconomically-diverse Dorchester. White and raised upper-middle-class, he is different from most of his students, who are almost entirely non-white and poor. He is mindful that his societal positioning and his personal history are different from his students' lives, but he is drawn to teach these particular students who are different from him. Indeed, he told me he would never teach in the suburbs, in a setting similar to his upbringing. He feels, despite his race and class differences with his students, that he can be a positive influence in their lives as they face their realities situated by societal racism and classism.

By living and teaching in Dorchester, Tommy chose to live and teach in a community where whites are not the racial majority. Rosie, in her process of re-rooting from urban to suburban Mobile, similarly chose to live and teach where blacks are a racial minority. Unlike Tommy, though, Rosie never spoke of moving to South Mobile in order to teach a particular student population. But she moved from teaching at Barnes in Prichard, where the student population was racially and socioeconomically comparable to Tommy's students, to teaching, predominantly, at Violet, in South Mobile, where the population was more diverse but majority white and middle class. In moving to South Mobile, she was moving closer to her husband's roots.

While Rosie and Tommy sought out their particular communities in which they now teach, Dan sought to teach where he could get a full-time job and he has stayed there, in Parker, ever since. Like Rosie and Tommy, he is a racial minority in his school. But unlike them, he does not live in the same community as his school. Dan lives in a more diverse community, racially and socioeconomically, than his students. He is mindful that his students tend to have a different set of lived experiences than they would living in Lansing, and he teaches accordingly, making Lansing part of his curriculum.

All three teachers love the communities in which they live. They are embedded in many different activities there, work and non-work alike, and they do not seek other living circumstances. Part of each teacher's living roots are teaching roots. At school, like in life, they are rooted in their teaching circumstances. Even though frustrations exist for each, to different degrees, they like where they teach. They feel as though they are able to teach effectively, and none of them is searching for a better work context. Over time, each has become a fixture in the school's community and all three had both teaching colleagues and school administrators speak highly of their teaching. Thus, each has Weil's "real, active, and natural participation in the life of a community," both at school and in their larger lives. It is this rootedness of their teaching and living curricula that I raise as "what keeps these teachers going." These teachers like what they do and where they do it.

The implications of this rootedness are important. Weil writes further, "whoever is uprooted himself uproots others. Whoever is rooted in himself doesn't uproot others" (p. 48). As rooted teachers, not only do I see Dan, Rosie, and Tommy not uprooting their students, I see them working to root their students. For Dan, it's helping his students understand the fog and consider how to navigate it. For Rosie, it's welcoming students into

a classroom family in which she hugs *and* corrects them. For Tommy, it's helping his students find their "Balance." In each case, these are pedagogies that seek to empower students as members of their communities. These are acts toward students developing their senses of place and learning how they can become grounded in their surroundings.

But this is a tricky premise. For some of the teachers' students, their lives are filled with struggle and tragedy. Attempting to put down roots within that hardship might quickly seem disastrous and an act to perpetuate hardship. This is not the work of rooting, though, that I see these teachers conducting. In Tommy's story about Jayla—who goes from an abusive, drug-plagued home-life; to living as a high school senior on her own with the support of the state; to a fully-paid college education—Tommy is not working to condemn Jayla to a life of misery. Rather, he is seeking to help her understand the surrounding circumstances that structure her life and work and to change them in her favor. There is some degree of reckoning that must take place in this process of understanding; that is, Jayla had to make sense of how her life circumstances allowed for her uncle to rape her repeatedly, for her mother to suffer from a drug addiction, and so forth. Tommy was quick to show that he did not save Jayla, that he worked alongside many people, in the school and beyond it, and with her, to help her move beyond her horrific home-life. This teaching is an example of how Tommy, having lived through his own uprootedness, teaches for his students to understand what it means to be rooted.

Across all three teachers' stories, such examples of "teaching for rootedness" are frequent. Rosie's story about her student whose mother attempted suicide shows a teacher working on personal and communal levels. She is supporting the student, hearing his need to share what he knows, and helping him process his lived experience that has produced

this knowledge. At the same time she is working with the larger class to help them support the student. When one student wonders if too much was shared, she not only validates the sharing, but helps the class work through how the students can be supportive in that instance, as well as future instances when a surprising confession ensues. This is an example of Rosie cultivating a family in the classroom, with an eye set on the community beyond it.

Dan's story about his student recently getting out of jail and coming to see him at school, years after he taught the student, is an indicator of his role as a community worker. He is there to see his students through the fog, which is why he creates the pact with students that he'll take them out for a meal and conversation, if they're ever considering dropping out of school. While a few have taken him up on this, many circle back to Dan, in his classroom or outside of it, in their years beyond middle school, and even while lost in Lansing.

The living and teaching stories of Dan, Rosie, and Tommy show that they are rooted teachers who, through their teaching (in many forms), seek to root their students. Why do they do this? I find Weil's argument compelling: an act of being rooted is to root others. Rooted living, and thus rooted teaching, leads to rooted student learning. Returning to Nieto's statement that new urban teachers often "know little about their students and find it hard to reach them," all three of these teachers, urban and suburban, know their students intimately. Some of this knowledge, I posit, is directly related to the teachers' knowledge of where they live and teach. Their developed sense of place leads to better understanding their students' senses of place. Both Rosie and Tommy live where they teach. They walk the same streets, frequent the same restaurants, as their students. While Dan doesn't live

in Parker, he's now taught there for over two decades, and seen two of his children work their way through the school system there. All three teachers know where they teach, which helps them know who they teach.

To be sure, good teachers do not always live near their students. I recall some of my best teachers living over an hour away from the community where I went to school. And when I taught high school students, some of my colleagues lived up to 90 miles away from our school, in very different communities than the one surrounding our school. But to teach students deeply about place, and particularly the places in which they live, I speculate, based on what I have learned from Dan, Rosie, and Tommy, that teachers are well-served to have deep senses of the places in which their students live. This understanding of the importance of place in student learning is imperative to good teaching. Such teaching, and such living, in students' places is a genuine act of citizenship that can't go unnoticed.

Rooted Teaching As An Act Of Citizenship

The topic of citizenship in the content curriculum of public schooling is often seen as the domain of social studies education. After all, the stated purpose of social studies—according to the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS), the main organization in the U.S. of social studies teachers, teacher educators, and researchers—is “to help young people make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world” (NCSS, 2011, p. 3). In short, social studies teachers work to create effective citizens.

Dan was the lone social studies teacher in this study, and this purpose was a frequent thread through his stories and talk about teaching. He sets out to teach his students to be effective citizens. As one example, he teaches so that his students from Parker have an understanding of Lansing as a community, one beyond any of its stereotypes. Such an understanding allows his students to engage effectively in the civic life of Parker and beyond. But Rosie and Tommy, who are not steeped in a social studies background, also teach citizenship. It might not be the central purpose of their curricula-as-plan, or professional organizations in gifted and English education, but they are teaching citizenship alongside of their social studies colleagues.

I posit that knowing how to support someone who has undergone a traumatic experience (like Rosie's student whose mother attempted suicide) is important civic knowledge. Likewise, knowing that current circumstances do not have to remain the same (like Tommy's students, Jayla and Ship) is also important civic knowledge. Civic knowledge certainly includes a content base of information that is relevant to carrying out the duties of civic life (e.g., having an understanding of how governmental processes work), but it also includes learning about life as a citizen. Learning to care for the public good is not something that a student can fully internalize from mastering a content curriculum (although the student does need to learn conceptions of the public good); rather, it must, to some degree, be learned through lived experience. Furthermore, merely telling students to be participatory citizens is not enough. They must live out experiences of how active citizenship makes a difference in one's life and the lives of others. This is what I see Rosie and Tommy teaching (as well as Dan).

At the beginning of this study, I asked the teachers if their reasons for teaching are the same today as they were when they first began teaching. All three spoke to maintaining their reasons but with more nuance after their years in the classroom. They all said that they have enjoyed the work of teaching throughout their careers. Dan and Rosie expressed their love for teaching; Tommy said that teaching “is hard and each day is different,” which are two reasons why he enjoys it so much. But each also spoke to enjoyment derived from aspects of teaching beyond the personal. Dan said that he enjoys “serving the community...by helping people become better people.” Nearly echoing Dan’s focus, Rosie said that she began teaching in order to “help my students grow...as individuals and contributors in society,” which includes helping students understand that all people have “strengths and desirable qualities.” Tommy, focusing on his particular students in Dorchester, said that his main reason in teaching has always been “to try to make a difference in the lives of kids who struggle with poverty and the attendant misery it spawns.” These reasons point to the communal and personal work of these teachers. These are three teachers deeply committed to improving the lives of their students and, in turn, the lives of their students’ communities. But this “communal work,” which is about the lives of students, is also “personal work.” Improving the lives and communities of the students is an act to improve each teacher’s life and her or his communities. Thus, this teaching for student citizenship is itself an important act of citizenship.

David Orr (1992) writes that “citizenship places common interests over self-interest” (p. 77). To this, I would add that citizenship entails recognizing one’s self-interest in common interests. In a healthy, justice-oriented, sustainable community, the welfare of all participants is central to the survival of the community. One citizen’s, or one group of

citizens', self-interest cannot trump the basic needs of other citizens in the community.

Elsewhere, Orr (1994) talks of cheap citizenship and real citizenship. Cheap citizenship is founded on the idea of a lottery, that outcomes are not tied to one's actions, but the mere result of luck. There is little sense of a just and healthy community beyond the individual, and the resources that surround individuals are viewed as fair game for one to seize.

Contrasting this approach is real citizenship, in which citizens "pay their bills, exercise foresight, assign costs and benefits fairly, work hard at maintaining their communities, and are willing to sacrifice when necessary and consider doing so a privilege" (p. 124).

The work of these three teachers is marked by Orr's real citizenship. It features Westheimer & Kahne's (2004) three types of good citizenship: personally responsible, participatory, and justice-oriented. Importantly, though, the teachers' work as citizens is rooted in the schools. They are working to make their students personally responsible citizens who participate in the civic life of their communities. Less overt, but present nonetheless, is framing this citizenship as an act of social justice, in which all members of the community are valued. I think of Tommy: even though he fails to attend his neighborhood association's meetings (which he doesn't want to attend), he makes a point to talk with his neighbors to learn what transpired. Perhaps he is hardly any of Westheimer & Kahne's good citizens since he misses out on these meetings. And yet, I see all three "good citizen" types in his work at Atlantic High, with his students, where he helps them confront the injustice that marks their lives.

All teachers—regardless of their grade, subject, school's location, sense of place, living curriculum, and so forth—teach about citizenship (Ayers & Ayers, 2011; Noddings, 2003). Citizenship education is not simply the domain of social studies teachers. Some of

the content knowledge attached to citizenship might be, but the skills of citizenship are ideally developed through lived experience across one's schooling curriculum (as well as across one's living curriculum). Dan, Rosie, and Tommy give us insight into how three very different teachers, in different places, work as citizens to teach their students about the importance of roots and their communities. As rooted people, they root others. As citizen-teachers, they teach their students to be citizens.

Conclusion

Near the end of our Place/s Day, I was walking with Rosie and her husband, Rick, on a forest trail at a municipal park near their house. During a wide-ranging conversation, Rosie said that she would never be voted "teacher of the year" at her school. The award is handed out at the end of each school year and it is voted on by the school's teachers. Her reasoning was simple: the other teachers in the school do not fully understand her work as the school's lone gifted education teacher. Then, scaling out the issue, she likened it to how society-at-large doesn't understand the work of teachers. Although the teachers at her school are proximate on a daily basis to Rosie's teaching—just like how most people have spent many hours in a classroom with teachers—they just don't understand. Her comment reminded me of Taylor Mali's poem (2002), "What Teachers Make," a poem that she said she knew and appreciated.

In the poem, which is briefly excerpted at the beginning of this chapter, Mali, who was a teacher, tells a presumably autobiographical story about a dinner party that he attended. During polite conversation, a lawyer mocks the work of teachers. Then the lawyer directly asks Mali, "what do you make?" Mali retorts by unleashing a litany of

reasons why he makes so much more than money. A quick search on YouTube will bring many renditions of Mali performing the poem. In the versions that I've seen, he starts slowly through the lawyer's initial comments. The tone is painful and grinding. But with his retort to the lawyer's question, his convictions cascade like a waterfall. The tempo is rapid, escalating, and aggressive. By the middle of the poem, the audiences are in full support of Mali, as if he is charging toward a finish line and they want to join his cause. He finishes: "Teachers make a goddamn difference! Now what about you?"

The most important difference that I see Dan, Rosie, and Tommy making is that of working to root their students as citizens. Teaching is inherently about the social aspect of citizenship: living interactively and collaboratively with the people that surround us. But it is also inherently about the ecological aspect of citizenship: living humbly and sustainably, where we are, with *all* that surrounds us. At a time when Mali's lawyer still scoffs at teachers, but also at a time when education increasingly is flattened (Darling-Hammond, 2010), how might we learn and build from the work of existing teachers like Dan, Rosie, and Tommy to counter the notion of cheap citizenship that is quickly spreading?

CONCLUSION

EMPLACING TEACHING AND LEARNING

In the final minutes of the last period that I spent in Dan's classroom, he performed a magic trick for his students. He had, apparently, been talking about the trick for weeks and his 6th period students were clamoring for it the entire time that I was in his classroom. After calling for all materials to be put away, he grabbed a deck of cards and had the class gather around him in the center of the room. Before commencing the trick, he asked, "what is the purpose of magic?" One student said "fun" and another said "entertainment." Dan responded affirmatively to each. And then he added that magic involves "drama...and wonder!" He then shuffled the cards a few times. He had multiple students cut the deck, and then he made piles with the cards. After a series of other moves, he asked a student to pick a card, show it to the class while hiding it from him, then resubmit it to the pile. "Remember that card," he warned. He then paused: "what, again, is the purpose of magic?" Fun. Entertainment. Drama. Wonder.

Then, after several more shuffles and cuts, he asked a different student to pick a card and, like before, show it to all but Dan, and then resubmit it. "Remember that card." After a quick breath: "what is the purpose of magic?" The usual answers followed. Having started slowly, methodically, Dan's actions at this point became frantic. His voice was louder and the pace of his words swift. He was moving around, making sure that students could see the proceedings. Students in the back began to stand on chairs. One student ascended a table. "Magic is about fun, right?" "Yes!" students shouted. "It's about

entertainment, drama, and wonder, right?” Yessss! Then the school bell rang, ending the day. It was his cue. He explained that he would now overturn two particular cards. “Do you remember the two secret cards?” Yes! “And do you remember the purpose of magic?” Yes!

When he overturned the two cards, there was a silent moment. The cards were not the same as the secret cards. Then, before any students could speak, Dan offered a series of questions: “Did you have fun? Were you entertained? Was it dramatic? Were you wondering? That’s magic!”

Following Dan’s notion, this study has been magic for me. I had fun. I was entertained. I often felt like I was in the middle of (a) drama. I was filled with wonder, both in the senses of awe and perplexity. There were a host of other experiences and feelings too. What Dan was pointing to with his students is that the significance of magic is not the final outcome. It is not that the revealed cards match the concealed cards. It is the process along the way, the fun, the entertainment, the drama, and the wonder that make the experience meaningful. This study was certainly a meaningful experience for me. And, in the preceding chapters, I best try to capture it so that it might be of worth, of meaning, to others.

In Chapter One, I began with curriculum. Reduced in most aspects of schooling to a content course that students must navigate—what Aoki (1986/2005) calls, “curriculum-as-plan”—I sought to re-frame curriculum as a living course of learning, which takes place in and out of schools. Not only do schools need to recognize that students learn beyond their walls, they need to direct learning inside their walls mindful of this fact. Thus, as Dewey (1897/1959) writes, schooling becomes living, not solely preparation for future living.

While the living curricula of students is important, so is the living curricula of teachers. I posit that teachers' living curricula shape who they are in the classroom, as teachers of their students. One aspect of teachers' living curricula is their teaching curricula, which is how they learn to teach. As with student learning, this kind of teacher learning takes place in all times and places of living, not solely during the pedagogical moment of a classroom.

In the second half of Chapter One, I considered how the conception of place is central to this notion of living and teaching curricula. Although place is often used in everyday discourse to signal location or position, I offer that we need to take seriously place as a living relationship. *Sensed or conceived*, it is a person's relationships with her/his surroundings. What is significant about place is constructed in the individual's interaction with the social. Meaning is made through experience. It is important to note, I argue, that such experience takes place with our feet on the ground. That is, place is not just an abstraction. It is lived on land. It is landed. Thus the landed sites of a person's living course of learning, her or his living curriculum, are central to who that person is and how she or he makes sense of the world. Wendell Berry writes that people who don't know where they are do not know who they are (Stegner, 1992). If we do not consider "the where" of teachers, across the times and places of their lives, we cannot know who they are in the classroom, teaching their students.

With this framework focusing on the place of curriculum and the curriculum of place, Chapter Two details my methodological commitments and the methods by which I carried out this study. Interested in what we can learn from the particularities of lived experience, I worked intimately with three teachers. Despite the inevitable limits of research, I sought to engage with the teachers foremost as collaborators. I was entering

into their “midsts,” studying their lived experiences, and the meaning that they make out of them. I was attuned to their stories as the closest representations of their realities. In hearing their stories, and then telling them, though, I was mindful that I was mediating the stories, ultimately writing my own versions of their stories. My criteria for choosing the teachers was two-fold: first, as a group, they needed to live and teach in different regions of the U.S. and teach across the grade and subject spectra of public schooling; second, they needed to be people with whom I could work intimately (and thus all three were people who already held significance in my living curriculum). These criteria allowed me to consider teaching across regional areas, grades, and subject areas.

Chapters Three, Four, and Five present the living and teaching stories of the three participants. In the first half of each chapter, I story the teachers’ living curricula, paying specific attention to the times and places of the teachers’ experiences. In the second half of each chapter, I story the teachers’ teaching curricula in light of their living curricula. In doing this, I focus particularly on how the teachers’ stories of teaching are contextualized by their stories of living.

Chapter Three focuses on Tommy Allen, a white, male, high school English teacher in Dorchester, Massachusetts. Transient in his youth, and disconnected from his upper-middle-class family, he struggled to connect meaningfully with people at and away from school. Skiing was his best counter to his uprootedness. After being expelled from his high school, and then leaving two different colleges, he traveled around the U.S. and Europe, “pursing happiness.” When he moved to Boston and enrolled at a third college, he began to enter a community, the likes of which he had not previously experienced. He developed and sustained friendships, met the woman he eventually married, and found his way into

teaching at a school with a socially-marginalized student population. Through all of this, he found that he desired to “become a citizen.” After a handful of years teaching at his school, he moved close to his school and his students, an act that symbolized his rootedness.

Rosie Baker is the focus of Chapter Four. A black, female, elementary gifted education teacher in suburban Mobile, Alabama, she grew up rooted in a diverse community in urban Mobile. Although her ties to her immediate family were loose, she developed a close relationship with the woman who watched her each day, as her mother worked. Growing older, she developed important new relationships in the other areas of her life. After surviving cancer, she became embedded at a camp for youth whose lives were marked by cancer. And, she established close ties with people from her school and church communities. Always wanting to teach, she took her first teaching job in Prichard, a nearly-all-black community on the northern boundary of Mobile. After three tough years, she looked for a new teaching position, which materialized in gifted education in suburban South Mobile. At the same time, she married her husband and they eventually moved their home and church to South Mobile, where they have lived happily for several years.

In Chapter Five, I story the living and teaching of Dan Torres, a Filipino American, male, social studies teacher in Parker, Michigan. Although he was born in the Philippines, the bulk of his childhood took place in southeast Michigan, in a home with his mother, and her parents and sister. After struggling through two different high schools, Dan attended college and faced academic probation there. Then, by accident, he found himself en route to a degree in social studies teaching, which turned around his academic career and propelled him into something that he quickly realized he loved. Upon graduation, he settled in Lansing and began teaching in the nearby community of Parker. Two different

communities with respect to racial and socioeconomic make-up, he liked operating in both. After marrying and having two children, he endured a difficult divorce, one that he struggled to live through, until the time at which he met the woman who became his second wife. At the present time, after the birth of his third and fourth children, he is happily rooted living in Lansing and teaching in Parker.

As Chapters Three, Four, and Five take up the stories of Tommy, Rosie, and Dan separately, Chapter Six looks across them. I move from dwelling in the deeply personal of each teacher's life, to considering how the teachers' stories, as a collection, speak to teaching at the present moment in the U.S. First, I look at who these three teachers are, noting some of their differences and similarities, as a way of challenging who we think teachers are, writ large. I then focus on the fact that these three teachers, who teach in different circumstances, all have, in Nieto's (2003a) words, kept going. After considering how some of the research on teacher retention speaks to these three teachers, I consider an element about these teachers that is not seen in the literature: each teacher is rooted in their living and teaching. The results of this rootedness, which I use the teachers' stories to support, are that the teachers teach their students about roots. As rooted people, and specifically rooted teachers, they give tools to their students for their future rooting.

On my way to this teachers-rooting-students argument, I note that each teacher's stories about teaching frequently transcend time and place. Rather than dwelling in particular pedagogical moments, their stories often engage the lives of former students well beyond the times and places of their classrooms. From this, I argue that these teachers foremost teach students, not particular content associated with grade levels and subject areas. Their teaching is about relationships with students, and their students' living

curricula are squarely in their pedagogical focus. I conclude Chapter Six by asserting that this teaching by these three teachers is not only teaching students about citizenship, but it is also an act of citizenship by the teachers.

In this concluding section of my study, I circle back to the problem raised in the introduction: American public education suffers from displaced learning that results in uprootedness. Overtaken by standardization and high stakes assessment, the landscapes of students' lives have been flattened into a placeless "anywhere," or worse, as Noddings (2002) fears, "nowhere." I raise the recommendations below as a call for a reversal of this placeless schooling curriculum.

Paths To And Through Teaching

The landscape of teacher education is changing (Grossman & Loeb, 2008; Zeichner, 2003). Teachers find their ways into classrooms through a variety of paths. In this study, the three teachers show that there is no formula or straight-forward identification process for who becomes a teacher. Rosie was committed to teaching from her earliest days as a student. Dan mocked the idea of becoming a teacher until he found himself by accident in his teacher education program. Tommy came to teaching, at a friend's suggestion, after struggling as a writer and at a loss for what else to do. He entered an intensive master's degree program in education. Dan and Rosie entered at younger ages, through more traditional, undergraduate programs. Looking across the three of them, we see very different paths up to, and through, these programs. These paths serve as a reminder that we should be cautious when thinking of teacher education students and teachers as being cut from a particular trajectory and series of life experiences. While this may seem like an

obvious point, it is important to remember that all three of these teachers, years down the road from their entry into teacher education, are dedicated, hard-working, long-term teachers.

Teacher educators, myself included, need to remember this multi-path reality, as all of our students walk into our classrooms. We need to conceive of the deciding-to-teach process that leads students into teacher education in complex ways, remembering that all of our students have unique living and teaching curricula, which structure myriad reasons for teaching. While teaching these pre-service teachers, and mindful that teachers' living shapes their teaching, we need to help our students critically read their living and teaching curricula. They need places (at different times) in their teacher education curricula to make sense of how their living is impacting their teaching. And they need to develop skills so as to be able to continue to reflect on these connections as their experiences in the classroom grow numerous beyond their teacher education programs. Likewise, induction and professional development programs—indeed, all aspects of a “professional learning continuum” (Feiman-Nemser, 2001)—also need to provide places for teachers to continue to reflect on how their living experiences place their teaching.

Teacher Quality

Wilson (2011) notes that teacher quality cannot be considered solely in relation to individual teachers. Teachers' surrounding contexts are major factors in their effectiveness. Therefore, in addition to recruiting promising teachers, adequately preparing them, retaining and rewarding successful teachers, and providing helpful professional development opportunities, “we also need to invest in working conditions,

because teacher quality is fundamentally tied to school climate and a school's resources to support a professional learning environment" (p. 64). Teachers with good working conditions are better teachers. As I argue that teachers who are rooted work to root their students, this important point about working conditions can be extended to teachers' living circumstances outside of schools. Of course, stepping over school boundary lines moves the discussion into many other social realms. Teachers, like all people, need adequate compensation, housing, health care, and other considerations. These implicate much more than educational policy, but they are all tied to teachers living rooted lives. In the same way that a well-fed student stands a better chance of learning, a well-rooted teacher stands a better chance of being a quality teacher.

Quality teaching, among many considerations, requires attention to place. It helps students make sense of their surroundings and act for the betterment of them. In this sense, it helps students become rooted. This form of teaching, as I have argued, is an act of citizenship by teachers. But in order for teachers to root their students, they must know who and where their students are. They must have intimate knowledge of their students, and a detailed knowledge of their students' surroundings. They must have a strong sense of why place matters in any learning endeavor. Teacher education must take up this goal of addressing the importance of place in education. It must help pre-service teachers consider how the particularities of pedagogical settings, including their students' lived experiences, shape learning in their classrooms. While teacher education can help teachers develop a knowledge of the importance of place and the skills toward learning about their students and the communities where they teach, teachers must enact this learning *during* their teaching. Therefore, induction and professional development programs need to assist

teachers in studying their teaching contexts. School structures need to support this study as well.

Emplacing Learning By Teaching An Integrated Curriculum

Thomas Friedman (2007) might be right that the world is flat. The work of schools and teachers, though, cannot be flat. I am talking about a different conception of flat than Friedman, but there is a link. If we think about a student sitting in a classroom *anywhere*, when she looks out the window, she does not see a flat world. Whatever she chooses to focus on, it is filled with life, constructed by her lived experiences. When she brings her attention back inside the classroom, that place is certainly not flat either. The people, objects, and ideas that surround her are also filled with life, constructed out of her lived experiences. She is undeniably *somewhere*.

Schools and teachers cannot lose sight of what surrounds them. Relationships of place are too often pushed to the background so that issues of universality can abstractly cover all schools. Instead of focusing on the people in the classroom, the emphasis is re-directed toward what all the teachers and students should do or be able to do. Thus, the content and skill curricula are standardized, as is assessment and evaluation. All eighth grade social studies teachers, for example, increasingly need to be teaching in the same unit, about the same topic, on the same day, regardless of where the teacher is teaching—as well as regardless of who the teacher is and who the students are. Instruction becomes an issue of coverage, not authenticity.

This is not an argument against standards but it is an argument against standardization. Standards need not displace and uproot students. While they may be

written in the abstract and made to stretch across students in different locations, it is teaching that places standards within students' learning contexts. Standards do not impose a structure on students. They provide considerations for shaping student learning. Standardization, though, does impose a structure, and it is a structure set on displacing students from their living relationships. Students are taught to know and do the same things, regardless of context. In this sense, their worlds are flattened. They leave the dynamic landscapes on which they live their lives for a rootless arena of competition. Therefore, standardizing accountability systems need to be interrogated for their displacement of students and teachers. Social justice in education cannot be framed strictly based on all students having equal opportunities to score well on content and skill tests. It must also include students learning to be productive, collaborative members of communities and working for the betterment and sustainability of all aspects of those communities. Words like "accountability" and "measurement" must be repositioned by the concepts of citizenship and community.

The people who generate content curricula for teachers and schools can do much to serve this change. Such curricula need to focus on emplacing learning, which validates students' lived experiences. But the ultimate curriculum workers, teachers and students themselves, need to be supported in emplacing their own learning. Students must be seen as active participants in their communities. Their *present* must be in view as well as their *future*. And to do this, their *past* and their *place* must be implicated. At the same time, teachers must be seen as professionals who facilitate student learning. Certainly, they must be prepared adequately for such work, and they need support as they teach in order to develop their effectiveness, but their roots in the classroom must be honored. Outside

authorities should be in dialogue with teachers, but they should not replace them as the facilitators of student learning. In this sense, as opposed to flattening student learning, it must become *inflated*—in/flat/ed—filled with the breath of real lives. Such learning is emplaced. We must remember the integrity of any and every curriculum.

What might it mean for all of us involved in schooling, or education—indeed all people—to hear Jardine’s point:

It is precisely the localized diversity of living systems that gives them their sustainability and health and wholeness. It is precisely the multiplicity and diversity of an integrated approach to the curriculum that makes it whole, healthy, and sustainable, allowing multiple “ways in,” multiple portals or opportunities for exploration and understanding to arise. Such a curriculum recognizes the rich multiplicity of interconnectedness inherent in any thing and the rich multiplicity inherent in the range of students’ interests and experiences. (2006, p. 175)

APPENDIX

Participant Email Questionnaire

Where you live

- Current place of living:
- Former places of living (if applicable):
- Why do you live where you currently live?
- What might a tourist/realtor brochure say about the place where you live?
- What are some of your favorite aspects of the place in which you live, and why?

Professional Background

- Years teaching:
- Current place of teaching:
- Years at current place of teaching:
- Current subject(s)/grade(s) taught:
- Former places of teaching (if applicable):
- Former subject(s)/grade(s) taught (if applicable):
- Institution(s) of higher education attended:
- Field(s) of undergraduate study:
- Field(s) of graduate study (if applicable):
- Why did you begin teaching at your current school?
- Why did you decide on teaching as a profession?
- Have your reasons for why you are a teacher changed since you first got into teaching? If so, what are your current reasons for working as a teacher?

Where you teach

- Do you consider the school in which you teach to be a part of the same place in which you live? Why/not?
- Would any of your students likely say that they live and go to school in different places?
- Would the majority of your teaching colleagues at school likely say that they live and work in the same place?
- How would you describe your school to someone who has never been to it? [e.g. How would you describe its different groups of people (i.e. students, teachers, administrators, etc.)? How would you describe its surrounding community (or communities)? How would you describe its curriculum (across all levels, subjects; i.e. the entire schooling curriculum)?]
- How would you describe the curricula of the courses that you teach?

Miscellaneous

- From what source(s) do you get the majority of your “news?”
- How do the concepts of “place” and “community” compare for you? Are they synonymous? If not, what makes them distinct from each other?
- To what extent do you make local topics—i.e. related to the place(s) where you live and/or teach—part of your lessons and units that you teach?
- Is there anything that you would like to add about where you live and teach that the questions above do not ask about?

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