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COMPOSING A LIFE AS A TEACHER: THE ROLE OF CONVERSATION AND COMMUNITY IN TEACHERS' FORMATION OF THEIR IDENTITY AS PROFESSIONALS

By

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ABSTRACT

COMPOSING A LIFE AS A TEACHER:
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IN TEACHERS' FORMATION OF THEIR IDENTITY AS PROFESSIONALS

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This study employed ethnographic and sociolinguistic theory and techniques to describe and understand how, through conversation and participation in a year-long study group, six first and second year teachers constructed their professional identities. It examined how they worked to bring together, reconcile, and transform their images and understandings about teachers, learners, learning, subject matter and themselves.

Two broad questions shaped this study: (1) How can teacher educators learn more about the ways in which novices shape their identities as teachers in the early years of their careers? and (2) How might we helpfully intervene during these early years to reduce their feelings of isolation and support their continued learning and growth as professionals, especially by means of conversation, personal narrative, and a sense of community with other new teachers?

To explore these questions, I formed the Learning Community Sharing Circle. This study group provided a setting for members to share narratives and engage in conversation about their teaching experiences. I collected the following data: (1) audiotapes of the groups' meetings; (2) field notes of

meetings; (3) participants' journals; (4) individual interviews; and (5) documents from the Learning Community archives.

My analysis showed that for these novices, constructing a professional identity involved revisiting the question: "Who am I?" in relation to others in their professional worlds: their students, other teachers, and students' parents. With students, the novices had to negotiate among four dimensions of the teacher role; to be at once an authority and in authority while remaining a "humane person," and to be a nurturing caretaker of individual students and their individual needs, while balancing the competing needs of the whole group. With other teachers, the novices had to find ways to respond to three main tensions: being accepted by colleagues while still establishing themselves as autonomous; gaining recognition from colleagues without compromising their own precepts; and to reconcile their ideal image of teachers with the images they saw other teachers enacting. With parents, they had to confront their own memories of how "ideal" parents interacted with teachers, and make choices about the kind of relationship they wanted to establish and maintain with their students' parents.

To my parents
Alice and Ira Harris

My first and most cherished community,
my wisest and most inspirational teachers

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As this dissertation is about the contribution of community and conversation to teachers' identity formation, it seems fitting to begin it by thanking the people in my various communities who have so influenced my personal and professional identities.

I owe much to the bright young women who participated in this study. At a busy time in their personal lives and challenging point in their professional careers, they traveled quite a distance to join in the monthly Sharing Circle conversations. They opened their teaching lives to me and to one other through the narratives they told of their experiences, willingly sharing their joys and triumphs, their fears and frustrations. I was always impressed with their sensitivity to one another, their good humor, and the thoughtfulness and dedication with which they pursued their goal to become outstanding teachers. The children who pass through their classrooms will be fortunate to have such caring and capable teachers.

The members of my dissertation committee--both individually and collectively--have supported my intellectual growth tremendously. I was honored that Dr. Susan Florio-Ruane agreed to direct this dissertation. I first had the opportunity to work with her as part of a graduate assistantship in the Learning Community program. As the director of this program, she provided skilled leadership that brought teacher candidates, faculty members, and

graduate students together in productive ways and enabled them to envision and enact a new kind of teacher education. This dissertation was possible because of her work, her guidance, and her vision. Through our oral and written conversations about this study, Dr. Florio-Ruane has taught me not only about teaching and teacher education, but also about what it means to do the kind of quality research that benefits teachers and students. In a myriad of significant ways, she has influenced my identity, my "becoming" as a teacher educator, and has my deepest respect and appreciation.

Dr. Christopher Clark inspired me to see the possibilities and promise of educational research through his course, and helped me better to articulate my ideas about what"good teachers" know and are able to do. Dr. Patricia Edwards was my strongest advocate during my time in graduate school. She believed in me, encouraged me, and has taught me much about how to achieve seemingly impossible goals. Dr Helen Featherstone and Dr. Cheryl Rosaen asked helpful questions, always made time to listen and to talk to me, and influenced my development more than they know. They always made me feel strong and centered and capable. Dr. Featherstone is responsible for helping me to find my writing "voice." Dr. Rosaen has shown through her example that there is no need to compromise, that one can be an excellent teacher, researcher, and colleague at one and the same time.

A number of other faculty and staff have significantly contributed to my intellectual growth and the quality of my life at Michigan State University. I wish to thank in particular Dr. Sharon Feiman-Nemser, and Dr. Deborah Ball, two warm and caring teachers who inspired my growth as a

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Although I had been told that doing a dissertation can be a lonely and often miserable experience, I did not find it so, primarily because of the friends who have supported and encouraged me throughout my time in graduate school. All remarkable human beings--talented, caring, and thoughtful--they have also been wonderful friends, even over time and great distance. I thank them deeply for their patience, understanding, and good humor, and offer them in return my affection, respect, and appreciation. In particular, I would like to recognize the sister of my soul, Shireen Kumar, BJ Namba, Jeremy Price, Peggy Rittenhouse (& Co.), Terry Stein, Michelle Parker, Judy Winn, Helene Anthony, Lisa Brandt, Becky Bodenner, Katia Goldfarb, Jaime Grinberg, Diane Tanner, and Tammy Lantz.

It is largely because of Dr. Kelvin Young, my former teacher, mentor, and dear friend, that I pursued this degree. In fact, if not for him, I would have left the field of education while still a teacher candidate, disillusioned about schools and teaching as a career. He believed in me more than anyone else ever has, convinced me always to strive for excellence, and taught me to find and value the goodness in others. He is one of the best teachers and finest people I know, and this dissertation is done in his honor.

Finally, mahalo nui to my parents, Ira and Alice Harris. They are the most difficult to thank in this context, as words are inadequate to convey the strength of my love and depth of my gratitude to them. They have supported me--emotionally, intellectually, spiritually and financially--in this and every other endeavor I have undertaken. They have taught me by their own example the value of seeking new experiences, new knowledge, new challenges. All that I have accomplished and will in the future achieve is due to their love and support.

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Composing A Life As A Teacher

Each of us lives, learns, and teaches a story
that represents ourselves and though we do not
entirely govern what happens to us, we create
what we make of what does happen.
We each construct the meaning of our story,
which gives our lives their essential shape.
As the authors of our personal story we select
what belongs to the story and what lies outside.
(Diamond, 1992, pp. 74-75)

Introduction

In her book Composing A Life, Mary Catherine Bateson (1990), suggests that a commonly held assumption--that people's lives progress in single and unwavering lines toward specific goals--is rarely true for most people. She argues instead that we craft our lives, just as painters or poets or musicians craft their works of art, by bringing together various elements and experiences, shaping them to fit our visions, and forming them into a coherent whole. Much like skilled novelists, we create and use narratives, and it is through these narratives that we are able to incorporate even seemingly unconnected "bits and pieces" into a cohesive life story. And, since the process of composing a life is ongoing, and requires a "continual reimagining of the future and reinterpretation of the past to give meaning to the present" (Bateson, 1990, p. 29), our narratives, and thus our life stories are ever-evolving. As Polkinghorne (1988) so eloquently explains:

> We are in the middle of our stories and cannot be sure how they will end; we are constantly having to revise the plot as new events are added to our lives. Self, then, is not a static thing nor a substance, but a configuring of personal events into a historical unity which includes not only what one has been but also anticipations of what one will become. (p. 150)

In Bateson's view, the process of composing a life is, in many ways, more like creating a patchwork quilt from a jumble of fabrics than sculpting a statue from a single piece of wood. You select certain fabrics from the bits and pieces of materials you have on hand, and then begin to create a design, sometimes simple, sometimes intricate, depending on your vision of what the quilt should look like. As your design takes shape, you find yourself revising it along the way, you look for new materials to add, or discard ones that you thought might work but don't. Some people prefer making orderly patterns, others prefer to make up the design as they go. Just as the crafting of a quilt was traditionally a social affair, an occasion when people (usually women) came together to sew and share stories, the construction of the quilt of one's life does not occur in isolation but rather in communication with other people. The quilts that emerge from interactions with others, like those from the sewing circles, reflect the contributions of many, yet are also each inevitably unique.

As a teacher educator, I find Bateson's perspective compellingly relevant to the field of education. Viewing learning to teach as an evolving process of "composing a life as a teacher" fits well with current constructivist thought, with the portrayal of teachers as lifelong learners (Dewey, 1916/1966), and reflective practictioners (Schon, 1987). It helps capture the complex and individual nature of the process as well. We can see how each novice brings bits of her *past*, her autobiographical history, her own experiences in schools, her preservice program experiences, and combines them with pieces of her *present*, like the particular school context in which she works, along with her visions of the *future*, e.g., the kind of teacher she'd like to become, or the kind of classroom she hopes to create, in order to construct a coherent sense of who she is and what she is doing in her professional work. Though in some cases

teachers' "bits and pieces" may come from similar fabrics, or are fashioned after established patterns, the way in which each individual shapes, arranges, and actually stitches these pieces together is intensely unique. And, just as quilts are created in the social setting of a quilting circle, a teacher's professional identity is constructed through interaction, conversation, and engagement with meaningful others in various personal and professional settings. Unlike a quilt, however, a teacher's professional identity is never fully "finished"--it is always changing and developing--always "under construction."

Why This Study?

Although there has been a great deal of research done on beginning teachers, we actually know surprisingly little about how they make sense of their early teaching experiences, about how they compose their lives or construct their professional identities. Until quite recently, in fact, few researchers even acknowledged that beginning teachers play an active role in their own socialization into the profession (Goodman, 1987). Instead, as Zeichner and Tabachnick (1985) note, it was "conventional to think of beginning teachers as vulnerable and unformed....Willingly or unwillingly, beginning teachers (were) seen to be cajoled and molded into shapes acceptable within their schools" (p. 1). Moreover, as Nias (1989) has observed, "few attempts have been made to portray the subjective reality of teaching from the standpoint of, or in the words of, teachers themselves" (p. 19).

If we were to begin our studies of learning to teach from the perspective that beginners do actively participate in their own socialization (as advocated by Goodman, 1987; Etheridge, 1989; and Hoffman et al, 1986), and that they have important insights to share with us about their early

teaching experiences (as advocated by Goodson and Cole, 1994), then it is possible that our understanding of the complex process of learning to teach would be both broadened and deepened, thus allowing us to design more educative preparation and in-service experiences for beginning teachers. One way to approach such a study, the approach I have taken in the study reported here, begins with the following questions: (1) How can we learn more about the ways in which novices shape their new identities as teachers? and (2) How might we helpfully intervene during these early years, to reduce their feelings of isolation and give them the support they need to continue learning and growing as professionals?

Seeking answers to these questions is important, for we know that the early years in the field are often considered to be the most critical--and the most formative--ones in a teacher's career (Grant & Zeichner, 1981). These first several years are often the most difficult as well (Feiman-Nemser, 1983), so difficult, in fact, that many teachers (nearly 50%) actually leave the profession within the first five or six years (Huling-Austin, 1985). Of those who remain, many soon find themselves teaching in ways that conflict with their initial intentions and goals, or settling for less than exemplary practices (Bullough, 1987). This outcome results, in part, from lack of attention by schools and educators to the need for dialogue and support in the critical early years of negotiating an identity as a teacher. In constructing an identity as a teacher, novices inevitably will need to readjust some goals and expectations, but they should not have to compromise their goals for themselves and their teaching practices to the point that they find themselves moving away from their visions altogether.

As teacher educators, I believe that we want the graduates of our teacher preparation programs to do more than merely "survive" their first

years of teaching. We must, then, find ways to support them as they begin to develop their professional identities, so that they are able to become more like the kind of teachers they envision themselves to be. To do this well, we must have a better understanding of how novices bring together the pieces of their teaching lives--their own biographies as learners, their pre-service preparation experiences, the particular contexts in which they live and work--for it is this process that ultimately shapes the visions that guide their practices and defines their sense of "self-as-teacher."

This dissertation study grew from my interest in learning more about how beginners experience the process of learning to teach, and my belief that such knowledge might enable me, in my role as a teacher educator, to play a more significant role in teachers' early professional development. My purpose was to describe and understand how, through conversation within a year-long study group, six novice teachers constructed their professional identities. Before describing the study's design and my subsequent analysis, however, I want first to define and briefly to explore the concepts of identity and identity formation, community, conversation and narrative, as these serve to ground and give meaning to both the study's design and the report that follows.

Identity and Our Ever-Evolving Selves

It is common for people to talk about identity formation as an individual and private phenomenon, something that occurs in set stages or at certain ages, and which we arrive with at birth and "fully achieve" in young adulthood through solitary and quiet reflection. It is common, too, for people to talk about having "an" identity, a singular, fixed sense of self that they carry with them at all times, with all people. We hear people talk about

professional identity formation in much the same way--consider, for example, the notion of developing an identity as "A Teacher." People often think that good teachers are "born not made," that one's identity as a teacher is further "achieved" as one progresses on one's own through a relatively set series of stages (Fuller, 1969, Burden, 1990), and that "teachers are teachers," that they "assume" the same role whether they are with students, colleagues, administrators or parents.

In this paper, I will present and work from another perspective. I will suggest instead that there is strong evidence to show that both our personal and professional identities are socially constructed through talk, interaction and engagement with others; that we are each "many selves" (Steinem, 1992, p. 323) and that our identities, as human beings and as teachers, grow from and are always bound to our connection with significant others and particular social contexts. As Josselson (1987) observes:

> From its earliest roots, identity emerges from what is separated out from others but continues to exist in connection with them. Identity fuses into a creative, emergent whole the sense of who one was (with whom) and the sense of who one will be (with whom). (1987, p. 21)

Furthermore, I will also work from the perspective that just as our personal identities are not fully achieved in young adulthood, neither are our professional identities fully achieved upon receipt of a credential or completion of a stage of initial preparation. In this view, I am supported by McAdams (1993), who has observed that

> The adult life span does not take on a smooth, consistent course. Nor does it develop through a series of constantly repeating cycles, stages, phases, or seasons. Instead, there are likely to be periods of relative stability in which commitments are lived out, interspersed with periods of relative change, in which the person may go through another moratorium. (p. 95)

I turn now to a more in-depth consideration of the notion of identity, and the role that interaction and connection with others plays in the formation and reformation of people's personal and professional sense of themselves.

The Role of Conversation and Community in Identity Formation

The notion that by means of conversation and involvement within caring groups or "communities" we learn about ourselves and others is not new. However, it is largely unexamined in teacher education and its implications remain unexplicated. In the early 1900s, social psychologists Charles Cooley and George Herbert Mead articulated theories of social and intellectual development that came to be known as symbolic interactionism. According to these theories, each person's sense of self, his or her personal identity, arises only through interaction with other selves who share membership in a common group or "community." In Mead's words:

> The self cannot arise in experience except as there are others there. The other is essential to the appearance of the self...There must be organized activity for the development of the self. There must be situations where the individual can get the attitude of the members of the group. There is then a self in a situation which involves society in relation to the individual. (Mead, in Miller, 1982, pp. 156; 162)

These group situations, or "community," as I use the term here, refer to more than simply a place on a map or a group of people living in close proximity. Stemming from the Latin word "communis" (Oxford English Dictionary), "community" is a group of people who feel the sense of fellowship and connectedness that comes from holding shared beliefs, experiences, and values. As Dewey (1916) points out:

> There is more than a verbal tie between the words common, community, and communication. Men live in a community in virtue of the things which they have in common. What they must have in common in order to form a community or society are aims, beliefs,

> aspirations, knowledge--a common understanding--like-mindedness as the sociologists say. (p. 4)

A number of educators have been interested in the power of community to shape and support individuals' learning. Joseph Schwab, an educator who has written extensively on the role of community in teaching and learning, describes "community" as a "state or condition of persons, of internalized propensities, of tendencies to feel and act in certain ways with other people" (Schwab, 1976, p. 11). Similarly, Bruffee (1984), describes community as a group of "knowledgeable peers" who accept and are guided by the same code of values and assumptions about life.

Using these definitions, we can see that a group of people who live or work in close proximity to one another may (or may not) become a community, depending on the degree to which they hold (or come to hold) shared values and beliefs. Similarly, people living quite some distance apart may form or become members of a community (for example, an educational, or religious community, or an "invisible college") in virtue of their deeply held propensities that value certain forms of thought and action. But what distinguishes a community from a group of people who merely happen to find themselves sharing common beliefs or experiences? How does a community come to be? What qualities create and unite this state or condition of persons, and how is community related to learning and teaching? According to Schwab, the following characteristics are essential to the creation and maintenance of a community:

> There is collaboration--shared and dovetailed apportionings of the learning tasks. There are individual services to the group and group recognition of such services...In addition to shared words and acts, there are emotions and occasions for emotion which are basic to community...shared vicissitudes; group triumphs over vicissitudes; defeats; celebrations of such victories; mutual support in moments of defeat; shared pleasures and interludes of gaiety and play. (1975, p. 32)

At the heart of any community is "the sense of shared membership with others and a feeling of belonging to something larger than one's self and a readiness and ability to contribute to a joint enterprise..." (Florio, 1981). A group can become a community, then, if there is a degree of intimacy and perceived connection with the members that is manifested through certain rituals, events, and interactions that take place over a period of time. In this way, even strangers who initially may appear to have little in common with one another can become a "community," if they are able to come together--either in face-to-face interaction or over time and distance through reading and writing--either to build upon common interests and/or experiences, or to create common interests and experiences through the sharing of tasks, experiences, and feelings.

A vital element in the coming together process actually involves conflict and dissent. Community members must learn to negotiate across differences, for communities, however like-minded their constituents, are neither without internal conflict or contact with other communities whose views and values differ from theirs. Furthermore, communities do not spontaneously appear but are rather "constructed" and maintained through constant interaction, guided by a mutual sense of connection and care among members (therapeutic support groups, sports teams, and classrooms are just a few examples of the many kinds of communities that can be constructed).

Once constructed, communities can be powerful sites for members' collective as well as individual growth and development. Indeed, Schwab argues that it is through sharing, collaborating, negotiating, and communicating with others within and across such "learning communities" that an individual's sense of self--his or her very identity--is developed. He explains:

> Identity, in brief, is not discovered by introspection but created through involvement with others--involvement in problems, involvement with the elements of culture. Individuality takes form only in continuous interplay with the persons and situations in which it comes to be...Even 'experience' as a form of learning becomes experience only as it is shared and given meaning by transactions with fellow human beings. (1976, p. 5; 1)

Our membership in a community thus fosters two seemingly paradoxical qualities: a sense of belonging to a common culture, of being like others in our group, as well as a sense of our own uniqueness and individuality.

Like Schwab, Charles Cooley and G. H. Mead saw group membership as critical to the development of the self (Nias, 1989). In Cooley's view, it is through our membership and interaction within groups or communities that we learn to see ourselves as we think that others see us, that we, in effect, are able to see ourselves as objects. Extending Cooley's ideas, Mead explained that although we cannot experience ourselves directly, because of our interaction with other significant selves who share membership in a common group, we learn to view ourselves from their perspective. This in turn helps us gain a clearer sense of who we are. Lacking such interaction, a person would have no self, for selves exist only as there are other selves with whom to relate (Mead, 1934). Without interaction with others, we would not be able to reflect upon, or learn from, or even recognize our experiences. As Mead (1934) states:

> ...the human self arises through its ability to take the attitude of the group to which he belongs--because he can talk to himself in terms of the community to which he belongs and lay upon himself the responsibilities that belong to the community; because he can recognize his own duties as over against others--that is what constitutes the self as such. (p. 32)

Our interaction with significant others in our community, in other words, allows us to be both a subject and object unto ourselves. In Mead's terms, each of us can be both a "me," and an "I." The "I" is the intentionally active subject or agency of our self (our ego, if you prefer), before we engage in social interaction. The "me" (or alter ego) is the residual accumulation of this subject as it is appears in our memory (Gill, 1994). Our "I" can observe and reflect upon our "me" (although by the time our "I" is conscious of our "me," it is no longer "I"). As Mead (1934) notes, "The 'I' of this moment is present in the 'me' of the next moment...I cannot turn round quick enough to catch myself" (p. 174).

Situational and Substantial Selves

Because in reality we carry on different relationships with different people, and we in effect all belong to multiple communities, Mead (1934) puts forth the notion that we can actually have multiple situational selves, meaning that we can be different selves in and to different groups. The attitudes we take, the responsibilities we take on, the standards by which we define and judge ourselves can vary according to the group we happen to be in at any one time. Mead does not, however, see as incompatible the idea that each individual also has an inner "substantial" (Nias, 1989) or "core" (Woods, 1984) self: an individual self-structure that is relatively stable even across different communities. The substantial self that each person develops through interaction within differing groups actually incorporates from across the various groups what he or she selects as the most highly prized and fitting attitudes, values, and qualities. In time, these most salient attitudes and beliefs about "the kind of person I am" become deeply internalized and fairly resistant to alteration (Nias, 1989).

Identity as Discourses

Echoing and extending the work of Mead and Schwab, language researcher James Gee (1990) has further contributed to our understanding of identity and the role of communities in identity formation. He also asserts that individuals craft their identities through their membership and participation in multiple communities within a culture. Gee describes these communities as "Discourses."[1] For Gee, a "Discourse" is both a way of speaking (or reading or writing) and a way of being, an *ideology* that constitutes one way of being oneself with others. He explains that our identities are acquired through membership in both primary and secondary Discourses. Of these Gee (1990) says,

> Each Discourse is tied to a particular social identity within a particular social group and to certain social settings and institutions. Each is a *form of life*, a way of being in the world, a way of being a 'person like us,' in terms of action, interaction, values, thought and language, whether this is people in our family, classroom, school, local drinking group, church, nation, ethnic group, sewing circle, business, job site, profession, gender, club, peer group, gang, and so on through a very long list. (p. 175)

Gee (1989) explains that becoming a member of a Discourse and adopting its language and values and ways of being is much like acquiring an "identity kit" (p. 1), complete with instructions for how to act and think, including how to dress, walk, talk and approach the world. To be a member of a Discourse, one must take up certain roles in very specific ways, else one won't be recognized as belonging to that Discourse. In the beginning, when a person is first learning a new Discourse, he or she may not fully understand the way it

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[1]Gee (1990) distinguishes between "Discourse" (with a capital "D") and "discourse" (with a small "d"). He uses "discourse" when refering to connected instances of language (such as conversation, jokes, or stories) and "Discourses" when talking about the "ways of being in the world"(p. 142) which allow one to be recognized within a particular group, club, social network, sub-culture, etc. as belonging, or having membership within that group. He suggests that we think of a "Discourse" as a kind of "identity kit" complete with instructions on how to talk, dress, act, and interact (p. 142).

"works," but, Gee (1990) explains, you "...watch what's done, go along with the group as if you know what you're doing when you don't, and eventually you can do it on your own, even with something of your own style" (p. *xvi*).

According to Gee (1990), we become members of different Discourses either through learning or acquisition, or some combination of the two processes. Acquisition, in his view, is a subconscious process that involves observation of models in the group, trial and error, and practice within a natural setting. Most people, for example, acquire (rather than learn) their first language. Learning, on the other hand, is a process that involves conscious knowledge gained either from someone's teaching or reflection on one's own experiences. When we learn something, we also attain "meta-knowledge," an awareness or understanding of what we have learned.

Viewed in Gee's terms, constructing an identity as a teacher means learning and acquiring a particular Teacher Discourse, or, more accurately, learning and acquiring multiple Teacher Discourses. Denyer & Florio-Ruane (1995) observe that preservice candidates' initial learning about teaching, acquired through their apprenticeship of observation as students (Lortie, 1975), constitutes their primary Teacher Discourse. Candidates' experiences in a teacher education program may either reinforce that primary Teacher Discourse, or may introduce them to one or more alternative, or secondary Teacher Discourses.

Unfortunately, no matter how much or how well students learn a secondary Teacher Discourse, it is not possible for them to "master" it (i.e., become fully fluent) without some opportunity to combine learning with acquisition. It is essential that people serve "apprenticeships" into "social practices through scaffolded and supported interaction with people who have already mastered the Discourse" (Gee, 1990, p. 147). Building on Gee's work,

Denyer and Florio-Ruane (1995) note that an optimal teacher education curriculum:

> provides opportunities for both learning and acquisition--learning by means of formal instruction and acquisition by means of guided practice with authentic activities reminiscent of the rich and supportive contexts in which primary acquisition occured. (p. 4)

Graduates of teacher education programs need, as novice teachers, chances to connect with other members of secondary Teacher Discourses, to understand and "try out" group-sanctioned ways of acting, talking, and feeling as a teacher.

While being a member of a particular Discourse provides us with an ideology, a set of beliefs and values that determine both the way we *view* the world and subsequently *act* in the world, we never belong to only one Discourse community. Gee (1990) notes:

> Each of us is a member of many Discourses, and each Discourse represents one of our ever multiple identities. These Discourses need not, and often do not, represent consistent and compatible values. There are conflicts among them, and each of us lives and breathes these conflicts as we act out our various Discourses. (p. *xix*)

Like everyone else then, a beginning teacher is a member of many Discourses. She may belong (in addition to her primary Teacher Discourse) to several possibly competing Teacher Discourses within and across her school, district, or professional affiliations. She will be a member of a particular family Discourse in a certain community group Discourse. She belongs to several peer group Discourses, perhaps a church or sports group Discourse, among many others. Communicating and forming relationships with people, within and across these different Discourses, contributes to a teacher's ever-evolving professional identity.

The Importance of Conversation and Personal Narrative

Of all of the ways that people can communicate within and across different communities or Discourses, the most universal seems to be conversation, and within conversation, the sharing of personal narratives or stories of personal experience, in and through which tellers locate themselves in relation to others and express different aspects of "who they are" (Rosen, 1985; Witherell, 1991; Josselson & Lieblich, 1993). Human beings, as McAdams (1993) reminds us, are storytellers by nature; indeed, "there has probably never been a human society in which people did not tell stories" (Wells, 1986, p. 194). The forming of personal narratives or "stories" does more than help us communicate with one another, however; it is a basic activity of people (Bruner, 1986; Barthes, 1977), a way in which we "engage to understand and to share our experiences in the world" (Gomez and Tabachnick, 1992, p. 130). Our lives and our stories are connected, intertwined, like threads of the same fabric, rather than separate phenomena, in that each forms and informs the other. In his discussion of this hermeneutic perspective, Widdershoven (1993) has observed that "We not only live our lives in such a way that we can tell stories about our experiences and actions. We also, in telling these stories, change the meaning of our experiences and actions" (p. 7). Constructing personal narratives helps us to organize and make sense of our lives, and in the process, helps us make sense of who we are, have been, and might become. As Dyson and Genishi (1994) explain:

> Stories help us construct our selves, who used to be one way and now are another; stories help us to make sense of, evaluate, and integrate the tensions inherent in our experience: the past with the present, the fictional with the 'real,' the official with the unofficial, the personal with the professional, the canonical with the different or unexpected. Stories help us transform the present and shape the

> future for (others) and ourselves so that it will be richer or better than the past. (p. 24)

Telling Our Own and Hearing Others' Stories

Through the telling and hearing of stories, either orally in face to face interactions, or over time and distance through writing and reading, people learn about themselves and others. The telling of stories is important, as Helen Featherstone (1992) explains, because:

> In telling stories we create a space outside of the relentless stream of experience and demands. We represent both our understandings and the contexts which have created them, streamlining a series of lived events, selecting salient details to highlight. (p. 3)

Telling a story to someone else puts us in touch with what we know and are coming to know, while at the same time, lets us step back from that knowing in order to reflect upon it, to "look over our own shoulder," so to speak. But telling stories does more than simply help us understand and reflect upon our lives. The personal narratives we tell ourselves and others actually come to structure how we perceive information and experiences, and ultimately determine the way we organize and make sense of our world, thus shaping our personal and professional identities, our very "becoming" (Bruner, 1987).

Having opportunities to hear (or read) the stories of others is important to our identity formation as well. In listening to another's story, we step into their lives for a time (Coles, 1989), we share their feelings and experiences and insights. We learn and grow by trying to understand what the story means to the teller and what it could mean to us. Equally important is the opportunity to talk with others about the stories told and heard, to make use of the stories as occasions to learn something new about oneself and others. Like all learning, this "storysharing" experience is inherently

social in nature. "The stories we create influence the stories of other people, those stories give rise to still others, and soon we find meaning and connection within a web of story making and story living" (McAdams, 1993, p. 37).

While I have mentioned telling and listening to personal narratives as two different facets of the storysharing process, it is important to realize that in reality the two processes are integrally linked; both speaker and listener work together in sharing a story, in that the speaker must become the listener, and the listener the speaker (Scollon, 1988; Bakhtin, 1986). Tannen (1989) explains this well when she states:

> Conversation is not simply a matter of two (or more) people alternately taking the role of speaker and listener, but rather that both speaking and listening include elements and traces of the other. Listening, in this view, is an active not a passive enterprise, requiring interpretation comparable to that required in speaking, and speaking entails simultaneously projecting the act of listening. (p. 12)

The Importance of Language and Conversation

Implicit thus far in my discussion of the role that community and the sharing of personal narratives play in identity formation has been the importance of language and conversation. For Mead, Schwab, and Gee, language is at the heart of the development of the community and in turn, the development of the self. It is through language that we are able to create shared meanings, to communicate with one another. This communication, Tannen (1989) tells us, is what "...makes a collection of individuals into a community, unites individuals in relationships" (p. 29). It is through language, especially the crafting of personal narratives, that people construct and constitute their worlds (Gill, 1993), and through language that each of us

can be both an "I" and a "me." Schwab (1975) captures the importance of language for the development of self and community well when he states:

> All of us belong to a first community...Our beginning personness, as children, consists first of a world perceived and felt significances that we have made from things seen. It is when another--adult or child--signals recognition that we have such a world, seeks to know it, and tries to give us a glimpse of his (sic) private world, that one-to-one community begins. This is done in one and only one way--through speech, by talk: questions to us about our world of perception and feeling; responses to our questions which convey comprehension and sharing of our inner world; then the other answers questions of ours about their world. (pp. 31-32)

As we grow older, our world expands beyond that first community, and we become members of multiple communities or Discourses, in both personal and professional settings. Our opportunities for participating in conversations with significant others thus expands as well, and the stories we hear, tell, and co-construct in these conversations continually help shape and reshape our personal and professional identities.

Conversation and Storysharing for Teachers

There has been a growing interest recently in studying the role that conversation can play in developing teachers' professional identities. In some cases, educators have created teacher "conversation groups," to give teachers an opportunity to share personal narratives in supportive group settings.[2] While there is much still to learn about the possiblities and limitations of these groups, and of conversation in general as a medium for growth (Florio-Ruane and deTar, 1995), they initially appear to offer promising insights for both the teachers and teacher educators alike. Maxine Greene (1978) has suggested that for participants in these settings,

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[2]See, for example, Featherstone (1992); Florio-Ruane & deTar (1995); Gomez & Tabachnick (1992); McConaghy (1991); Short et al., (1992).

conversation may serve to "open pathways to expanded landscapes, richer ways of being human--unique and in the 'we-relation' at one and the same time" (p. 34). June McConaghy (1991), a researcher and teacher educator who conducted a recent teacher study group learned that the participants' stories acted as a transformative experience in their teaching lives. For the teachers in Nias' (1989) study, peer conversation in a group setting enabled them to construct a shared reality in which they could "...seek and find, through interactions with others, confirmation of their selves" (p. 208).

So Few Opportunities for Conversation

Because participating in storysharing and conversation within and across Discourses is so central to developing a sense of one*self* as a teacher, it is unfortunate that novice teachers (and indeed teachers in general), have so few opportunities to share stories or to engage in sustained conversations with others--within a caring community--about their learning and about their teaching. As Lightfoot (1983) has observed, "feelings of isolation fill the daily experiences of teachers" (p. 251), as almost without exception, teachers work in settings where the actual structure of the school building precludes much interaction among adults; most teachers in fact live their school lives behind the closed doors of their individual classrooms (Lortie, 1975; Goodlad, 1984). Even more powerful than the physical walls, however, are the "invisible walls," the "culture of teaching" which values autonomy and privacy, and solving problems on one's own (Britzman, 1986). Given this kind of culture, most teachers, especially beginners, resist admitting difficulty or failure, asking for help, or expressing uncertainties about their practices in fear that they will be seen as weak, ineffective, or unknowledgeable (Merseth, 1990). The result, according to Lieberman & Miller (1984), is that:

> Once graduated from a preparation program, teachers find themselves alone in the classroom with a group of students without a peer or supervisor in sight. The neophyte teacher is left with degree in hand, high expectations internalized, a fistful of untried methodologies, and few adults with whom to share, grow, and learn. (p. 4)

What is it about the culture of teaching that fosters such an individualistic reality? One contributing element of school culture involves the expected norms of privacy and non-interference (Lortie, 1975; Little, 1990; Hargreaves, 1992). As Lieberman and Miller (1984) explain:

> The rule of privacy governs peer interactions in schools. It is alright to talk about the news, the weather, sports, and sex. It is alright to complain in general about the school and the students. However, it is not acceptable to discuss instruction and what happens in classrooms as colleagues....The lack of peer support and interaction makes it difficult to develop a clear sense of the quality of one's own teaching....There is no safe place to air one's uncertainties and to get the kind of feedback necessary to reduce the anxiety about being a good teacher, or at least an adequate one. (pp. 11; 13-14)

Richert (1992) reminds us as well that "in addition to norms of the profession, the demands on teachers' time preclude much reciprocal conversation among colleagues; teachers are too busy to listen to themselves let alone listen to one another" (p. 193). In most schools, while there are multiple opportunities for teachers to interact with one another, there are few occasions--either during or after the school day--for teachers to actually talk substantively about teaching and learning (Feiman-Nemser & Floden, 1986). Whether new or experienced, teachers juggle enormous demands and responsibilities--they must attend meetings and workshops, write reports, evaluate and design curriculum, be on lunch duty, supervise the production of plays and newspapers and more--in addition to their primary job of teaching students in their classrooms something worthwhile (Wigginton, 1975).

For any novice, assuming the responsiblities of a "real" teacher, while exciting, is an incredibly challenging experience, since in addition to coping with the multiple demands of the job, she is simultaneously engaged in the process of constructing a new image or identity for herself as "a teacher." And despite all her contact with others over the school day, she remains isolated from the very conversation and storysharing so important to this identity work. As she attempts to bring together, reconcile, and transform past and evolving understandings--about teachers and teaching, about learners and learning, about subject matter, and about herself, she must find a way to make sense of all the "bits and pieces" of her teaching life, her past experiences as a learner, her experiences in a particular teacher education program, and her experiences in the particular school context in which she works--and she must do so all alone.

Given the emotional as well as intellectual complexity of the "becoming" process, and the fact that most novices face it in virtual isolation (Featherstone, 1992), it is no wonder that for the majority of beginning teachers, the first years in charge of a classroom are lonely, difficult, and often traumatic ones (Veenman, 1984; Ryan, 1980). In fact, this characterization is so widely accepted that "researchers, support personnel, administrators, and even beginning teachers work with an assumption that the first year is a perpetual struggle to make it, often against incredible odds and obstacles" (Theissen and Mullen, 1992, p. 5).

Identity Formation and Adult Development

Adding another layer to the already complex process of becoming a teacher is the fact that these novices are at a point when they are also making many other life-changing transitions (Zumwalt, 1982; Featherstone, 1988). As

young adults, they are trying to establish themselves (in their own and in others' minds) as responsible and independent adults; and they are trying to forge new, adult-adult relationships with their own parents. It seems especially important, then, in thinking about beginning teachers' identity construction, to situate and understand their experiences in relation to their development as adults. This requires a shift in our thinking about teachers and learning to teach, for as Raphael (1985) points out, "The teaching profession, as it is traditionally construed, is 'flat.' It deals inadequately with the developmental processes of adulthood, with aging, with the passage of time in a person's life" (p. 97).

Unfortunately, much of the extant literature on adult development is not as useful as we might wish in helping us make this shift. Traditionally, theories of adult development, such as those proposed by Erikson (1968), or Levinson (1978), have been based largely on studies of males, and have attempted to identify a series of linear and somewhat predictible stages and/or phases through which people progress. I believe this research is problematic as a source for helping us learn about learning to teach, for several reasons. First, given that most current theories of adult development are based primarily on studies of men, and that women's lives do not necessarily correspond to these male-based theories,

> women (not the theories) [are] typically seen as deficient...Kohlberg repeatedly has found that women remain stages below men in their development by their intense attachments, concerns for relationships, and context-based decisions...Erikson (1968) sees women's focus on intimacy as a developmental impediment to identity formation. (Gallos, 1989, p. 118)

Since teaching remains a field dominated by women,[3] it behooves us to seek theories that do not begin from the assumption that women's development is deficient. Second, current thinking has called into question the notion that people's lives--whether male or female--progress in a simple, linear, stage-like way. Both Bateson (1990) and McAdams (1993), for example, suggest that this assumption is not (and maybe never was) true for most people. Instead, they would argue, "the landscape through which we move is in constant flux" (Bateson, 1990, p. 6), and we constantly write and rewrite the narrative of our lives. Attempts to link teacher development to set stages of adult development may fail to capture the complexity and contextually-bound nature of the process.

Some of the recent work on women's development, however, may change the way that both women's--and ultimately men's--development is understood because it takes into account the multiple and inextricably linked dimensions of our personal and professional lives. This broader perspective on adult development may ultimately be quite pertinent to our inquiry into learning to teach. Interestingly, these new studies are generating theories that connect closely to some of the work by Mead, Schwab, and Gee, in that they view development as tied to an understanding of the self in relation to others (Gallos, 1989; Attanucci, 1988). Like Mead et al, proponents of this approach believe identity is formed through interactions and relationships with significant others (Josselson, 1987; Gilligan, 1982). Their work places increased emphasis, however, on individuals' negotiation and resolution of issues involving attachment and connection (rather than separation), *inter*dependence (as well as independence), caring and communion

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[3]For example, approximately 83% of all elementary teachers, and 49% of all secondary teachers are women (Feiman-Nemser & Floden, 1983).

(Noddings, 1984; Chodorow, 1978; Gilligan, 1988). This work promises to be of value to teacher educators, as it further supports our growing understanding that teachers' identities are formed through their interactions and relationships to others in home, school and community contexts.

This Study

This study began as an exploration of the two questions posed earlier, namely: (1) How can we learn more about the ways in which beginners shape their identities as teachers in the early years of their careers? and (2) How can we helpfully intervene during these early years to reduce their feelings of isolation and support their continued learning and growth as professionals, especially by means of conversation, personal narrative, and a sense of community with other new teachers?

As a novice teacher educator trying to learn more about teachers' learning and experiences across the career cycle, these questions were, and continue to be, of particular interest to me. In my work during the period of 1989-1993 as a course and field instructor in the Learning Community Teacher Education Program,[4] I had the opportunity to work with teacher candidates

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[4]The Learning Community Program was an innovative teacher education program at Michigan State University. Grounded in the work of John Dewey and Joseph Schwab, its goal was to "prepare teachers to teach school subjects effectively, while also focusing on the development of personal and social responsibility among students" (Florio-Ruane, 1989). The program was organized around common themes, and articulated in a set of "propensities," or internal dispositions toward particular kinds of thought and action. (These propensities are described in the Learning Community Program Handbook located in Appendix A, and will also be discussed at several points throughout this text.) Teacher candidates moved through a two-year sequence of carefully orchestrated, coherent set of course and field work experiences in small (20-25 student) cohort groups. A group of interdisciplinary faculty who shared common understandings of the programs' conceptual framework and goals worked closely with the cohort group in multiple contexts over the two year period. The faculty explicitly sought to foster a sense of community and collegiality through the development of shared values among members and engagement in shared activities, both academic and non-academic in nature. See Bryk et al (1993) for a review of these and other key components of communal organizations. See Florio (1981) for a discussion of the Learning Community Program philosophy. See also H.

over a two-year period, beginning with their first term in the program, and often seeing them through to graduation. The structure of this program differed significantly from many traditional preparation programs, where instructors typically work with a group of students in one course, for one term. Instead, instructors had extended contact with students over two years in both the classroom and the field. This engendered different kinds of relationships between instructors and students. Over the two years that teacher candidates were in the Learning Community Program, I got to know many of them well. I became more intrigued with knowing what happened to them after they took on their first teaching positions. As each group of students graduated and left to find teaching jobs, I would wonder: What kinds of experiences will they have? What kinds of learning experiences will they create for children? Which of their program experiences will they take with them? What kind of teacher will they become? In many ways, working with students at the preservice level has always felt to me like picking up a really good book, starting to read it somewhere in the middle, and then stopping, putting it down--just at what seems like the most exciting part--never finding out what happens next. Discovering some answers to these questions was one part of what I hoped this study could accomplish. Also important to me, however, was to create a situation where I could listen to and learn from our graduates' experiences, in order to understand how I (and other teacher educators) could help future teacher candidates better prepare for, and learn from, their early experiences in the classroom.

In order to research the questions posed above, I created a Beginning Teachers' Literacy Sharing Circle. The Sharing Circle met over one school

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Barnes (1987) for a brief description of, and rationale for, Michigan State University's alternative teacher education programs.

year. It was designed to provide an occasion for novice teachers to come together, to develop a community in which they could share and reflect on their own and others' learning through the telling of personal narratives in conversation. Composed of six recent graduates of the Learning Community Teacher Education Program, this conversation group met monthly over one school year to read, write, tell, and listen to their own and others' personal teaching narratives. By participating in and documenting the Sharing Circle in field notes and audiotapes, I pursued the following questions:

(1) What happens when a group of novice teachers, all graduates from the same teacher education program, are given an opportunity to meet regularly over a school year to read, tell, listen to, and talk about their own and others' experiences with learning to teach?

(2) How do they represent their experiences in personal narratives, and what do they learn by telling and hearing these narratives?

(3) How might membership in this particular community, and participation in the group's conversations support the teachers' construction of their professional identities?

By documenting and analyzing the Sharing Circle experience, I hoped to have an opportunity to study both the group's conversations over time, and the role that membership in such a group might play in promoting and sustaining a culture for teaching that supports reflecting on one's teaching and learning within a caring community. Just as important, the Sharing Circle also afforded an opportunity to learn more about how each participant engaged in bringing together the pieces of her personal and professional life in order to construct her unique identity as a teacher.

In sum, I anticipated that the Sharing Circle would function to some extent as a kind of "support group" (McConaghy, 1991; Short et al., 1992),

where participants could validate each others' concerns and values while giving and receiving encouragement and empathy. Yet its main purpose lay in its potential to create opportunities for the six young women to have conversations, listen to, narrate, and co-narrate vignettes about their experiences with students, teachers, parents, administrators and other faculty members. Through this experience, I anticipated and hoped to analyze the possibility that the participants would: (1) articulate and explore conflicts between differing teacher discourses; (2) experiment with alternative ways of orienting themselves to the teacher role (akin to "trying on" different ways of enacting the role); (3) negotiate among the various tensions involved in learning a new role toward some shared understanding of the implications that different ideologies would have for their teaching practice; and (4) discover, broaden and develop their capabilities as teachers by having multiple opportunities to get opinions and responses from "significant others."

Before presenting my analyses of the Sharing Circle experience, I will first present some additional information about the Sharing Circle as a setting for conversation, narrative, and the negotiation of professional identity. The next chapter traces the formation of the Sharing Circle, introduces its participants, and describes the context in which the meetings took place, as well as summarizes the methods of data collection and analysis that I employed.

CHAPTER TWO

The Sharing Circle As A Setting For Conversation, Narrative, And The Negotiation Of Professional Identity

It's so nice to be able to get back with people who thought like you thought, believed like you believe and just almost like touch ground with your beliefs, like 'Yes, what I'm doing is okay.' Even though everyone else in the school might be looking at me like I'm strange, what I'm doing is okay and it is right, and I can keep trying it.
(Amy Roberts, Interview Transcript, 6/93)[5]

Introduction

For Amy Roberts, one of the novice teachers participating in this study, the opportunity to meet with a small group of graduates from her teacher education program to "just talk about things" (A. Roberts, Interview Transcript, 6/93), was a chance to reconnect not only with peers but also with ideas about teaching and learning that she strongly valued. As students in the Learning Community Program, Amy and her peers had become junior members, or "apprentices" (Gee, 1990), of this particular Teacher Discourse community, and through their relationships and interactions with other members of this community over the two years, they began to take on particular ways of thinking and talking about students, teaching, and learning. Generally, however, students' connection to faculty and peers from the Learning Community ended with completion of the program. As is typical of of beginning teachers, most had little or no contact with university faculty or former classmates after graduation, except for a small number who planned to attend graduate classes (Grant & Zeichner, 1981).[6]

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[5] Pseudonyms are used for the Sharing Circle members throughout this text.
[6] Grant & Zeichner (1981) claim that such contact is typically solicited by neither the teachers nor the university faculty.

Upon graduation, the Learning Community students, like other teacher education graduates, disperse. And to the extent that the Learning Community program constituted a discourse community, they also lose direct contact with its members. The field makes it difficult for them to sustain community over time and distance (through contact with peers and professors), so they lose a community experience which was formative in their professional identity work. They move as individuals to different locations across the state, assume their first teaching positions and begin a whole host of new life challenges, taking with them nascent and often tentative understandings of the Teacher Discourse learned in their preparation program. Struggling to design a professional identity on their own and in relative isolation, they often find that these fragile understandings unravel quickly, despite their best intentions.

This study, as mentioned in the preceding chapter, attempted to intervene during the period of transition from university to the "real world" of the classroom to offer graduates an interim experience of contact with other Learning Community graduates in their first years of teaching. By establishing the Learning Community Sharing Circle, I hoped to *extend*--for one group of novice teachers--membership in the Teacher Discourse community to which they had belonged during their two-year teacher preparation program. I hoped to create a conversational setting in which these novices could come together (not as students this time but as young professionals), to read, write about, listen to, and tell narratives of their experiences as beginning teachers, and in so doing, think through different teacher ideologies and what these could mean for them and their teaching. I also hoped to study their conversations to learn more about (1) their potential

usefulness in teacher development and (2) the nature and content of the conversational identity work participants undertook within them.

In this chapter, I will describe the way in which the Sharing Circle was formed, introduce the members of the group, explain the context in which the Sharing Circle met, and summarize the methods of data collection and analysis that I employed.

Recruiting The Participants

Six novices, three first-year and three second-year teachers, all recent graduates of the Learning Community Teacher Education program, were invited to participate in this study. I made the decision to include teachers with varying degrees of experience for two reasons. First, I was aware that few studies of beginning teachers have actually followed them past the first year in the classroom. Goodman (1987), Cole (1990) and other researchers have argued that we need to pay better attention to teachers' experiences through the first two or three years of their induction period, since many changes and adjustments take place after the first year. Second, I surmised that adding another dimension to the conversations, by including teachers with two differing years of experience, might provide additional, potentially valuable information about how teachers' orientations toward teaching might evolve over time.

I began recruiting the Sharing Circle participants several months before initiating the study. I first obtained lists of names and phone numbers of recent Learning Community graduates from the university. I called those people who were within a two-hour driving distance of the college, described the study and asked if they would be interested in participating. I also recruited members while attending a small, informal reunion organized by several former graduates of the Learning Community program. From the list

of interested participants, I selected six. My choice of partipants was determined by several factors: First, I wanted the group's members to represent a variety of settings, both in terms of grade level and in school type (urban, suburban, and rural). Second, I wanted to find teachers who were working in schools or districts that supported (with resources and/or through staff development activities) approaches to teaching literacy and other subject areas similar to those they had learned about while in their preparation program (e.g., constructivist in orientation, literature-based, "workshop" or process-oriented). I also hoped to recruit participants from districts or schools known to favor more traditional grouping and instructional practices. I hoped that such variety would add richness and complexity to the group's discussions, and might helpfully illuminate the interplay between the novices' developing images of teaching, students, and themselves and aspects of their school contexts. Finally, since I saw the evolution of the group's sense of community as something that needed to develop over time, I wanted people who were willing to make a commitment to remain with the group for its duration over the school year.

The six novices who ultimately participated in this study were, in many ways, typical not only of the students enrolled in the Learning Community Program, but also of beginning teachers in the United States today. Efforts to recruit and retain a more diverse teaching cadre notwithstanding (see Cazden and Mehan, 1989), these teachers, like most, were young (in their early twenties), white, female, mono-lingual, and from middle to lower-middle class backgrounds (Zeichner, 1993; Florio-Ruane & deTar, 1995; Brookhart & Freeman, 1992).[7] Since this remains a typical

[7]Of the few male graduates of the program, only one was available to participate, and I elected not to include him, thinking that his presence might complicate the group dynamics in

pattern in teacher education (despite the need for a more diverse force), it is important to look at ways to improve their preparation and inservice experiences, so they will be able to work successfully with the diverse learners ultimately entrusted to their care. And, while it would no doubt be the case that novice teachers from other linguistic, racial or gender backgrounds would similarly benefit from membership in a group such as this, their issues might be different during the induction period (Lawson, 1992) and were beyond the scope of this inaugural study.

In keeping with most "typical" beginning teachers, whose entry to the profession coincides with their entry to adulthood (Zumwalt, 1982), the participants in this study were confronting a host of complex and life-changing personal transitions, including "...living on their own for the first time, getting engaged or married, moving to a new apartment...(leaving) behind a network of friends and (moving) into a world of strangers" (Featherstone, 1988, p. 2). One of the young women in this study had just married, two had recently become engaged, and two of the three single women were in the midst of either beginning or ending personal relationships. Four had temporarily moved back home with their parents (after living in dormitories or apartments at college) in order to be closer to their workplace. None of them had children of their own at the time of the study. All but one of the participants found jobs in schools where they were the only new teacher in the building,[8] thus they joined faculties where most of the other teachers had been in the profession--and even in the same school

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ways that might compound my analysis. The language research suggests the conversational dynamics would be different with a mixed gender group (see, for example, Aries, 1976).

[8]Coincidentally, another new teacher (also from the Learning Community Program) was hired to teach in the same school that year.

building--for many years, and who were older than the novices by at least ten years, with the range between ten and thirty years.

The young women participating in this study had more in common than mere demographics; they all expressed a sincere desire to be outstanding teachers, the kind of teachers who could make a positive difference in children's lives. They were all optimistic and deeply committed to helping children become successful learners. They had embraced to varying degrees the propensities articulated in the Learning Community Program (See Appendix A for a list of these propensities), and held in common some ideas about what constituted "good" teaching. Among these ideas were generating a child-centered curriculum, using cooperative learning and process-oriented approaches to teaching literacy and mathematics, and respecting students' differences. Of course, along with their similarities, each novice was also unique in many ways. Both upon entry to teaching and as they assumed their first jobs, participants experienced and expressed different perspectives on the nature and function of the school, the needs and characteristics of learners, the role of parent involvement in schooling, and the place of school colleagues in helping them find professional identities. These differences introduced opportunities for debate and negotiation in what otherwise might have been talk marked by strong consensus and shared assumptions. As the analysis will show, both conflict and consensus are the essence of community and conversation (see Florio-Ruane & deTar, 1995; and Burbules, 1993 for examples).

Table 1 summarizes the participants' teaching experiences upon entry to the group. Following Table 1, I describe participants' characteristics in brief sketches. Taken together, the Table and sketches reveal differences in group members' experience by highlighting the degree to which their current

teaching assignments resembled either their student teaching placement or their own schooling experience as children in terms of size, location and socio-economic status. Participants will be reintroduced later in this text as well.

Table 1

Learning Community Sharing Circle Members[9]

NAME[10]	YEAR(S) TEACHING	GRADE	SCHOOL	DISTRICT[11]
Valerie Brooks**	1	5th	Glendale	(S) Woodlake
Christine Matthews	2	3rd	Morriston	(U) Great Lakes
Lauren Moffett**	1	6th-7th	Moore	(R) Cedarville
Amy Roberts*	1	3rd/4th	Greenview	(R) Amberton
Nina Scott	2	1st	Hill	(R) Terrytown
Claire Young**	2	2nd	Highland Heights	(U) Jefferson

The Sharing Circle Teachers

Valerie Brooks: Valerie Brooks was starting her first year of teaching in a fifth grade classroom at Glendale Elementary, a small school located in a quiet, suburban neighborhood mixing lower, middle, and upper income students. The student population there was fairly diverse; drawing children from a large trailer park, a nearby domestic shelter, children of university students

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[9]Participants' names, schools, and districts are pseudonyms.
[10](*) refers to members whose teaching assignments closely resembled their home experiences; (**) refers to members whose teaching assignments closely resembled their student teaching experiences.
[11]Codes: (U)=urban; (R)=rural; (S)=suburban

(some of whom spoke English as a second language), as well as some children from a more affluent section of the neighborhood.

Val had completed both a semester-long field placement during her junior year, and her student teaching as a senior in a fifth-grade classroom at Glendale. Drawn to the school in part because it differed from the elementary school she had attended as a child (a large school in a well-to-do suburb of a large city), Val vigorously pursued, and was later appointed to a fifth grade position in the very classroom in which she had student taught. For Val, getting a teaching job was "definitely a dream come true"(Journal Entry, 11/15/92). She had "always" wanted to be a teacher, though commented that it was only when she began teaching that she began to enjoy learning for the first time in her life (Interview Transcript, 6/15/93).

Christine Matthews: The oldest of three children, Christine grew up in a middle-class, suburban area near a large city. For Christine, teaching was a way of giving children choices and opportunities for a "better life" (Interview, 7/10/93). Christine was the only member of the group who was married at the time of the study. She had married a few weeks after her graduation from college, thus was beginning her second year of marriage as well as her second year of teaching. Juggling the roles of new wife and teacher was understandably challenging sometimes, and Christine worked hard to devote enough time to her husband as well as to her students and school-related work (Interview Transcript, 7/10/93). Nevertheless, Christine participated eagerly on school-wide curriculum committees, became a member of several professional organizations, and attended a number of courses and workshops on her own time.

Christine had done her student teaching in a fifth grade classroom in a small school located in an affluent suburb. At the time of this study,

Christine was beginning her second year as a third grade teacher at Morriston Elementary, a large school in a working-class, mid-sized, urban area. The contrast between this school and the setting in which she had done her student teaching was dramatic.

Lauren Moffett: After sending out "about a million applications, to over two hundred districts" (Taped Journal Entry, 6/93) for a teaching job, Lauren was thrilled to be offered a position teaching English and Social Studies to 6th-7th graders at Moore Middle School. The job was exactly what she had wanted, not only in terms of subject matter, but also because the school was experimenting with team teaching and integrated "block" courses (e.g., double-periods in which to teach English and Social Studies, or Science and Mathematics), two innovations that she supported. Lauren felt quite confident in taking on the position, having done her student teaching in those subject areas at a middle school in an urban setting. The Cedarville district was the only one of the six districts which had a formalized induction program in place; Lauren was assigned a mentor in the school, and was also required to attend monthly meetings for all first year teachers in the district. She reported that these meetings were helpful primarily as occasions to share concerns and gain emotional support. Another new teacher (who was also from her cohort in the Learning Community Program) was hired at the same time and they talked together often about their teaching. Well-supported at school, Lauren was also supported at home by her mother, who had taught middle/high school for many years before becoming an assistant principal.

Amy Roberts: Amy began her teaching career in an interesting situation; she was hired to teach a third/fourth grade (split) class in the very elementary school she had attended as a child, where her younger sister still went, and where she found herself working with people who had been her former

teachers. The school was very much a neighborhood school, and most of its students were white, from middle to lower-middle-income backgrounds. Amy noted that the area, including the school, had changed little since she herself had been a student (Interview Transcript, 6/93). She moved home with her family, who lived within walking distance of the school. Her father worked as a principal in a nearby district.

Amy had done her student teaching in a suburban second grade classroom. She believed herself to be "a second-third type person," but was excited about the challenge of working with a combination class of third/fourth graders, thinking that the situation had possibilities for peer teaching and interesting kinds of integration across subject matter areas and grade levels.

Nina Scott: Nina Scott was beginning her second year in a first-grade teaching position at Hill Elementary, a neighborhood school located in a small, rural town. She had applied, along with almost 900 other teachers for one of three openings in the entire district. Nina had been hired, the superintendent later explained to her, because he had been so impressed by the way she had talked about her student teaching experience, which had been in a third grade classroom in an urban school. He had also been impressed by the numerous examples of the third graders' learning that she had included in her teaching portfolio.

Nina commuted 45-minutes twice a day from her hometown of Alton Lake, a mid-sized urban area. She chose to make the long drive rather than move into an apartment near school in order to live closer to her family and fiance. Due to frequent illnesses, the result of a serious disease, Nina had to miss three of our eight meetings.

Claire Young: Although Claire was entering her second year of teaching, she felt she was beginning, in her words, "from scratch," having moved to a new grade level in a different school in a different district from her first year position. Her first job had been to teach 3rd graders in a small rural school (the school's only new hire in years). It had been a positive experience, for although she claimed that the other teachers in that school often ridiculed her for using a whole language approach, they also didn't interfere with her, and Claire had a lot of freedom in making instructional choices. She told me proudly that by the end of the year, her students had written and published over 600 books. (Interview Transcript, 6/93). She was initially "pink-slipped,"[12] at the end of the year, despite the efforts of numerous parents, who had turned up at a school board meeting and petitioned for her to be retained. Although her contract was eventually renewed, Claire instead accepted a position in a 2nd grade classroom in a large urban school in Jefferson, believing that teaching a new grade level at a new school would be a good learning experience for her. Another part of her rationale for moving was a hope that she might find like-minded colleagues at the new school. In addition to her second grade teaching position, Claire was a volunteer coach in an after-school sports program at the high school as well.

The Meeting Context and My Role as Group Facilitator

The group met eight times over the 1993 school year, six times at my home, two times at nearby restaurants. My decision to hold the meetings in

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[12]In many districts in Michigan, non-tenured first and second year teachers are routinely given "pink-slips" or notice at the end of a school year that their contracts have not been renewed. They are then often "recalled" to their positions in the summer, once the details of the district's budget, results of school millages, or attendance projections are complete. The practice was a source of great anxiety for the beginning teachers in this study and was often a topic of discussion in our meetings.

such informal, non-school-like settings was predicated on my belief that meaningful conversation would most likely occur in a natural context, for example, over a shared meal, in the intimacy of a comfortable living room. In this decision, I was influenced by my earlier participation (as a Learning Community staff member) in a project to design a teacher education curriculum that encouraged and supported conversation as means of learning to teach literacy. We had found particularly helpful Nancie Atwell's (1985) article "Writing and Reading From the Inside Out," in which she describes the rich conversations she and her family had over the dining room table (Florio-Ruane et al., 1990). Just as quilting circles of earlier times were held in women's homes, sharing a home-cooked meal at my house seemed likely to evoke a feeling of intimacy and domesticity, thus creating a social climate more conducive to the sharing of personal narratives than would a school-like setting. I also elected to meet in a non-school-like setting in order to create distance between my former role as one of the participants' course and field instructors and my current role as member and participant-observer in the Sharing Circle. This was important, Rosen (1988) would explain, because "...narrative surfaces easily and inevitably and without inhibition [only] when the conversation is among intimates and no obvious and fateful judgments turn on the encounter [for]...oppressive power muffles and distorts it" (p. 75).

Although I set the date and time of the initial meeting, the group members themselves took responsibility for negotiating dates for all subsequent meetings. The meetings lasted between two and one-half and four hours, and were informal and very loosely structured. Group members generally arrived at approximately the same time, and spent five or ten minutes greeting each another, getting something to drink, and getting settled

around the living room. The talk during this time was general (e.g., about the weather, the traffic, the dogs who were milling around, about the snacks on the table, or about an outfit someone was wearing). There was usually a gradual transition into a brief "catch up" session in which we updated each other on any important news since the previous meeting. I was usually circulating between the living room and kitchen (a distance of only a few yards) finishing the meal preparation and placing the food out for them to serve themselves, buffet style.

Other scholars, (e.g., Florio-Ruane, 1994; McConaghy, 1991), have used the occasion of dinner meetings to foster teacher dialogue, though each study differed in research design and intent. How and what was recorded in these meetings related to the researchers' particular interests. June McConaghy (1991), who for somewhat different purposes than mine conducted a study group of experienced teachers around the event of dinner, turned on the tape recorder after the meal was completed to signal to the group members that "...the focus of the conversation was to shift from stories which centered on their personal lives to ones that related more specifically to their classroom lives" (p. 76). I was interested in learning about the interconnections between the participants' personal and professional narratives and the ways in which they would introduce topics and orchestrate the conversation over the course of the meeting. I discovered at the first meeting that they did not make clear demarkations between the personal and professional--their narratives of their lives in and out of school were like threads in the same fabric, identifiable as separate strands, but closely interwoven--and that if I waited until after the meal to audiotape (which I did the first evening), I could miss some interesting and possibly valuable segments of conversation.

This observation fits with one made by Gallos (1989), who, after a review of the literature on women's development noted that "the boundaries between professional work and everything else in life are more permeable for women" (p. 126). In the first meeting, for example, I missed recording a vignette in which Val explained how after a weekend visit to a friend in Chicago, she had decided she needed to take her entire class there to see the aquarium. She generated support for the idea at her school and managed to get community funding to rent a bus to take the whole class (and many of her students' parents) on the trip. Val's narrative about this "school-related" experience emerged in the context of group members sharing personal vignettes about the ways in which each had spent a recent three-day weekend. Again, because of the way in which the novices wove together the telling of personal and profesional vignettes, I began (after the first meeting) taping our talk soon after group members arrived and settled.

My role in the group (besides taping the conversations), was that of host, facilitator, and participant observer. I provided the dinner and other refreshments, the place to meet, and took responsibilty for organizing and reminding members of meeting dates. I consciously tried to facilitate rather than direct the conversations, a role I will discuss in more detail later in this text.

Data Collection and Analysis: An Overview

Because I wanted to conduct a descriptive analysis of this discourse group and its members' joint identity work, I designed a study using theory and method drawn from qualitative research on teacher talk and reasoning (e.g. Clark & Peterson, 1986)). In addition to audiotaping the group's conversations, I wrote fieldnotes of my participant observation shortly after

each meeting. I kept notes of any telephone conversations I had with the participants each month (typically we spoke once or twice between meetings), collected and copied any entries that participants had made in the personal journals I had provided for them, and copied notes, or letters, we had exchanged. I also collected samples of any lesson ideas or other materials they brought to the meetings to share with each other. At the end of the school year, I conducted individual de-briefing interviews with each participant.[13] Additionally, I copied from the Learning Community Archives materials that pertained to the teacher education program and journals and other papers that the participants had written while students in the program.

My analysis of the data was ongoing, using qualitative methods (Schatzman & Strauss, 1973) to frame working hypotheses, which were tested and revised throughout the study and on the basis of comparison from one meeting to another as well as across different kinds of data. As the analysis which follows will show, although I began with, and focused most intensely on, the audiotapes of the meetings, I concurrently worked to cross check and "triangulate" (Gordon, 1980) inferences generated by my analysis of the tapes with my other data sources.

I began listening to the tapes of each Sharing Circle meeting with two broad questions in mind: First, what kinds of stories will they share about their students and their teaching, with whom and in what ways? And second, building on Harold Rosen's (1985) question, "What does the narrator learn in the art of narrating?" (p. 35), I asked: "What do they seem to be learning through the narrating and co-narrating of their experiences in the group setting? In order to answer these questions, I listened to each tape and prepared a catalog of the turn-taking and topics of talk. I next transcribed the

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[13]See Appendix B for a copy of the interview protocol used.

conversations.[14] I read each transcript numerous times in its entirety, referring as well to my fieldnotes of the meetings. As I read the transcripts and field notes, I identified for closer study vignettes or conversational segments that seemed significant and pertinent to my initial research questions, coding them according to topic and noting the emergence of particular themes or recurring issues.

After coding the transcipts, I began to categorize the data in order to begin framing working hypotheses. The categories that I developed came from a combination of three sources. One source was the readings that I had done on (a) teaching and learning to teach (especially the literature on beginning teachers and their induction year experiences[15]); and (b) identity and identity formation (especially the work of Mead, 1934), women's development (e.g., Gilligan, 1982; Gallos, 1989); James Gee's (1989; 1990) work on discourses and literacy, and ultimately, Goffman's (1961) concept of "role set." A second source of literature was suggested by my initial research questions (for example, How would participants represent their experiences through narrative? What stories would they tell?) These questions led me to research on oral personal naratives of teaching such as that undertaken by McConaghy (1991) and also general theoretical work on narratives such as Rosen's (1985). A third source that I relied on when forming categories emerged from my examination of the data themselves and the patterns I observed in them (e.g., I noted that the novices frequently referred to the

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[14]See Appendix C for a sample of a section of the transcripts and a list of the transcription conventions used.

[15]The literature on beginning teachers and induction fell into two fairly distinct categories, one focusing primarily on identifying problems or perceived inadequacies of new teachers (e.g., Veenman, 1984, Kagan, 1992); the other looking at novices from a more constructivist perspective (e.g., Britzman, 1991; Goodman, 1987; Grossman, 1992). I read widely in both of these categories.

other teachers with whom they worked, and "Other Teachers" thus became a general category).

The general categories that emerged from my analysis reflected these three sources. I began by accepting Mead and Gee's premise that people have multiple identities or selves which are intricately tied to relationships with significant others within specific contexts. In Mead's (1934) terms:

> We carry on a whole series of different relationships to different people. We are one thing to one man and another thing to another...We divide ourselves up in all sorts of different selves with reference to our acquaintances...There are all kinds of selves answering to all kinds of different social reactions. It is the social process itself that is responsible for the appearance of the self...What we have here is a situation in which there can be different selves, and it is dependent upon the set of social reactions that is involved as to which self we are going to be. (pp. 142-143)

Recognizing that interactions and relationships with different people would highlight different aspects of the novice teachers' identity formation, I used Goffman's (1961) concept of "role set" to generate a list of people ("role-others") whom teachers would likely encounter in the enactment of their teacher role. For Goffman (1961), an individual enacts a role through a series of face-to-face interactions with relevant audiences, whom he refers to as "role others." Together, all of the various "role others" for an individual in a particular role form a "role set." In my study, for example, the set of roles referred to by participants in their conversations included students, parents, administrators, school and district-level staff members, university personnel, and teachers' friends and family members. Goffman further explains that the norms relating an individual performer of a role to his role others "...will have a special and non-conflictual relation to one another" (p. 86). Put another way, different relationships are created between an individual and and his or her role others. The relationship (and the norms which influence

it) between a teacher and student will thus be different than the relationship between the same teacher and that student's parent. Goffman labels these different relationships "role sectors." Teacher-student is one role sector of the teacher role. Teacher-parent, teacher-principal, teacher-fellow teacher are among some of the other role sectors of the teacher role. Goffman would contend that an examination of an individual's enactment of the teacher role would necessarily include a consideration of multiple role sectors.

Much of the literature on teaching and learning to teach confirms the presence of students, parents, other teachers, and administrators as significant members of teachers' social worlds (i.e., Lortie, 1975; Feiman-Nemser and Floden, 1986; and Nias, 1989, to name just a few). While this dissertation does not examine all of these in detail, they form the novice teachers' "role set," from which I have selected three sets of relationships or "role sectors" for special attention: the novices' interactions with students, students' parents, and the other teachers within their schools. I focused on these three role sectors because they were among the most compelling (and most frequent) in the Sharing Circle narratives. While the novices certainly had contact with other people within the teacher role-set (e.g., principals, district-level personnel, school support staff), they did not often talk about their interactions with these people in the Sharing Circle setting. The novices' interactions with principals, for instance, were rarely discussed in the group. When the topic of principals came up, it was usually brief and in passing, e.g., "My principal said he liked my bulletin boards" (Amy Roberts, Interview Transcript, 6/93), and elicited little uptake from other members.

For the novices in this study, then, constructing a professional identity involved revisiting the question "Who are we?" with three sets of significant

audiences, all of whom were connected to the novice and to one another in a complex web of relationships, as illustrated in Figure 1 below.

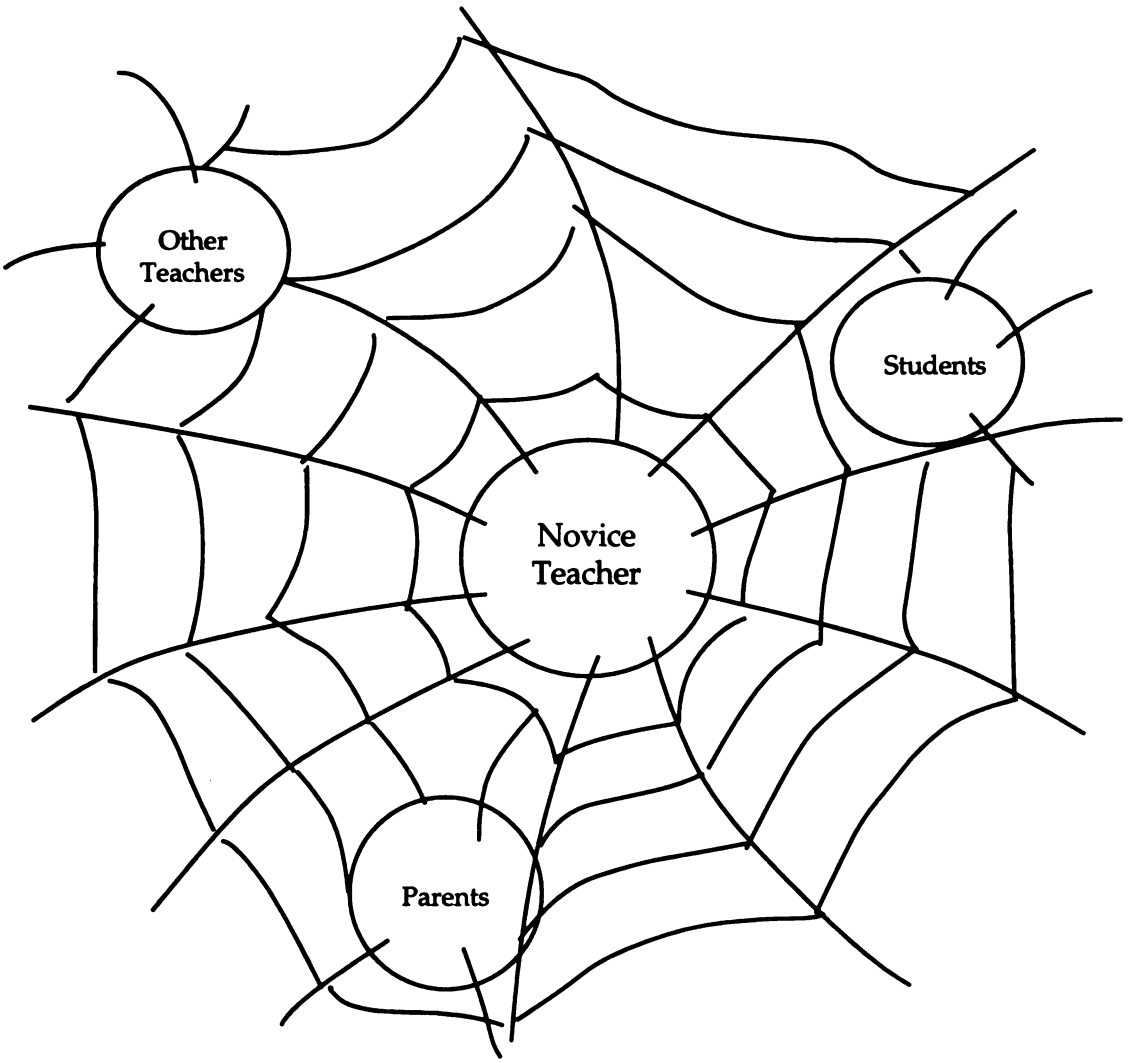

Figure 1. Constructing a Teacher Identity Through Relationships With Significant Others: Three Important Role Sectors (based on Goffman, 1961)

Analysis of Student/"Other Teacher"/Parent Data

Once I identified these three important role sectors, I further analyzed, coded and grouped the data into subcategories; asking myself questions such as: How often did they refer to students, to other teachers, or to parents? What did they say about their interactions or relationships with each of these sets of people? In what context and for what purpose did the topic of students/other teachers/parents get brought to the conversational floor? Were there similar themes or patterns in their talk about people within each group? What things did they seem to agree upon? What things did they disagree or argue about? Did their talk about members of the three categories change over time? Questions such as these helped me to think about how the novices' situational selves (Mead, 1934) shaped, and were shaped by their interactions within the three sets of relationships.

After noting every instance where the novices talked about the three groups of people, I then began to chunk the segments of talk that seemed to fit together, experimenting with alternative ways to categorize the talk, and looking for disconfirming as well as confirming evidence for each of the sub-categories. I counted "segments" as sections of talk around one topic or issue. In a given section of talk, for example, the novices might talk about one issue or topic. This was counted as one segment (e.g., how to organize their reading instruction so as to have sufficient time to meet with and talk to all students about the novel they were reading). I eventually generated sets of sub-categories with which to code the conversational data, for example, with the "Other Teacher" data, I generated the set of sub-categories summarized in the table below.

Table 2
Categories and Frequencies of Novices' Talk About Colleagues

Categories of Novices' Talk About Other Teachers (OT)	Nov '92	Nov '92	Dec '92	Jan '93	Feb '93	Mar '93	Apr '93	June '93
OT talk about students in negative ways	1	1	1	1	1	2	--	1
OT described as mean, overly strict, not acting in best interests of students.	5	1	--	2	1	2	2	2
OT described as negative about teaching as a career	--	1	--	1	--	--	2	1
OT questions/challenges a novice's curriculum, pedagogy or decision	1	3	--	1	1	--	1	2
OT described as a positive model, good teacher	--	1	--	--	--	--	1	1
OT gives novice help, advice, support in response to novice's request	1	3	1	--	1	1	--	2

The numbers in the table represent each instance in a segment of conversation where novices referred to other teachers in one of those ways. In other words, I did not count each novice's individual reference to the other teachers as a segment, but instead counted the entire episode in which they discussed other teachers as one segment, wanting to view the comments holistically and in context. For example, in the segment of talk below, taken from the January Sharing Circle meeting, before Lauren's comment about eating lunch with other teachers who were negative, the novices were comparing how much time they each had for lunch. After Lauren's comment about she and Duane sitting in the lunchroom, the topic of conversation shifted to a focus on Duane, a fellow Learning Community graduate. Within the segment of talk when they discussed other teachers' negativity, I did not count Lauren as having labeled other teachers as negative two or three times and Amy and Val as labeling them as such once each;

rather, I counted their comments together as one segment of the novices' talk in which they labeled the other teachers as negative.

> Lauren: I eat lunch with some teachers who are **so** negative! And its like, **God**, how can you be a teacher?
>
> Val: [Mmmhmm]
>
> Amy: [I know!]
>
> Lauren: I mean they're **so** down on the kids, they're so down on the [schools]--
>
> Val: [the system--]
>
> Lauren: Everything! They're **so** negative! It's like, "Why can't you be a little bit more--like, **hopeful?**"
>
> Val: Yeah, [that's--]
>
> Lauren: [And Duane] and I just sit there. And we're just sitting there looking at each other going "Oh boy....."

From that point, I next tried to find themes or patterns that wove through and connected the various sub-categories. For example, I identified the novices' need for acceptance along with their need for autonomy as one tension within the narratives about other teachers. Several of the sub-categories seemed to support the presence of this tension.

I describe the themes and patterns that emerged from my analysis of the data in the three chapters that follow: Chapter Three focuses on the novices' talk about students, Chapter Four on the novices' talk about other teachers, and Chapter Five describes the novices' talk about parents. Separately, they offer a closer look at three "squares" in the quilt the novices are designing for their teacher identities. Taken together, they show the complexity, pattern, texture, and artistry involved in composing a life as a teacher. Before moving to these three chapters, however, I would first like to

describe the nature of the talk in the Sharing Circle in a general sense, to provide a context for the narratives and analysis of those narratives that follow.

The General Nature of the Sharing Circle Conversation

In addition to considering what the novices talked about, I was also interested in how they talked together. I knew that conversational involvement was essential to building community over time in the group, and that a sense of community was critical to the identity-building process. Since members had only a loosely structured agenda and modest facilitation from me, they were called upon to create, in and through talk, a sense of common purpose and an ongoing agenda. The very openness of the group's agenda gave them the freedom (with its concomitant responsibility) to negotiate the topics and direction of the evening's conversation. Even at the very first meeting, I was struck by the degree to which members were engaged in the conversations. I noted many elements described by Tannen (1988; 1989) as involvement strategies; overlapping speech, repetition of words and phrases, the presence of personal narratives and constructed dialogue, humor, and backchannel communication in the form of nods, murmurs of assent, or other response-cries, etc. Tannen (1989) argues that these are the linguistic ways participants create and sustain conversational involvement.

Similarly, I noted participants offering a large amount of narrative talk and linking their narratives to one another's. In her studies of a pre-service teacher book club, Florio-Ruane (in preparation) notes a high proportion of narrative talk within meetings. She finds that personal narrative, including individually told complete and partial ones as well as co-narrations and parallel or coordinating ones comprise anywhere from one-fourth to three-

fourths of the conversational turns within the six two-hour book club conversations she studied. Florio-Ruane and deTar (1995) describe these cycles as "narrative rounds," explaining that these rounds allow speakers to exchange turns seamlessly, as they can introduce their comments as a way to build on a previous speaker's comments. Like the young teacher candidates in her book club study group, the novices in the Sharing Circle exchanged turns "...by weaving one's vignette into the emergent fabric of Club conversation such that leadership over the conversation's direction seemed to move from one speaker to another" (p. 6). In this way, the conversations were very much jointly-constructed and produced (Bakhtin, 1986).

Following Florio-Ruane and deTar (1995), I compared and contrasted the Sharing Circle conversation with studies of conversation in other informal women's groups. I noted some similarities between the novices' talk and that described by Kalcik (1975) in her analysis of the Women's Movement consciousness-raising "rap" groups. These similarities were mostly connected to the politeness of the talk and the supportive nature of the group setting. Like Kalcik, I noticed that group members were very supportive of one another's comments, both "linguistically (comments during and after another woman's story to show interest, and stories told by others to show how similar their experiences were) and paralinguistically, in the form of sympathetic noises, facial expressions, and gestures" (1975, p. 5). Also like her, I noticed that the group members did not gossip about, or directly criticize each other, even when members were absent from the group.

My subsequent data analysis will illustrate that unlike the women in the "rap" groups, however, the Sharing Circle members rarely offered a narrative in an attempt to "top" a previous narrator, nor were they as reticent to disagree or challenge one another, as were the women studied by Kalcik.

In fact, the novice teachers "sparred" with each other's ideas frequently, but still managed to maintain a supportive and polite tone. Their talk closely resembled that described by Burbules (1993), as an inclusive-divergent dialogue. This kind of dialogue, according to Burbules:

> has two characteristics: a generally cooperative, tolerant spirit, and a direction toward mutual understanding. It does not necessarily aim toward agreement or the reconciliation of differences...Partners in the dialogue proceed interactively, cooperatively, not toward a specific common goal, but in a process of mutual engagement directed toward shared understanding. (1993, pp. 112; 115)

Through this kind of dialogue, over many Sharing Circle meetings, the sense of belonging to a community of Learning Community teachers began to build. I turn now to a brief consideration of several other elements that contributed to the building of our community.

The Building of Community

The group members lived far apart from one another and all but one commuted long distances (between one and two hours each direction) to attend the meetings. Additionally, members reported spending many hours outside of school preparing for their teaching. For these reasons, I decided it would be most practical to convene the group approximately once a month over the school year.[16] I was initially worried that having so much time between meetings would make it difficult to foster a sense of community among the group members. Without a sense of "community," there could be no fruitful conversation (Schwab, 1976). However, it became apparent early on that the participants themselves took on this task; they employed a number of strategies that helped forge a sense of connection among members,

[16]The group met monthly December through June, but twice in November and not at all in May to accomodate individual and school schedules.

a feeling of belonging, an "us-ness." I briefly describe below several of the most powerful of these strategies.

First, in their conversations, the novices shared both narratives of all sorts, both personal and professional. The sharing of important personal life events--someone's wedding plans, an illness or death in the family, an argument with a loved one, an impending move to a new house--elicted sympathy, supportive laughter, friendly teasing, the giving of advice, and a whole range of emotions that together helped build a feeling of connection among the group members. This sense of connection made the Sharing Circle a "safe" place, a place in which it was acceptable to share personal or professional vicissitudes, successes, and satisfactions. While they did not always agree on what to make of an experience shared in the group, as Val observed in her interview, members of the Sharing Circle did not judge each other nor call into question each other's professional competence or commitment to teaching

> You feel like you can come and spill your guts and not have anyone second guess you or critique you or think you're a bad teacher... it's like the people here know--it's not that other people don't want to understand, its just that they can't understand as well, furthermore some of them don't really have an interest. It makes a difference, you know, that the people here don't write you off like 'Oh yeah, that's a teacher, that's 5th grade, oh that's easy'...Because it's not easy...People here know that...You don't have to stand up for yourself here. (Val Brooks, Interview Transcript, 6/15/93)

Schwab (1976), would tell us that such an accepting climate is essential in a community that fosters educative conversation, because members need to feel that they can trust, depend on, give and receive help from others. In addition, there must be opportunities to share ideas and intellectual challenges for mutual growth to occur.

Another strategy that helped contribute to a sense of belonging and attachment among group members was that participants sought, or created opportunities to be physically close during the meetings. At the first meeting, the novices sat in chairs and on the couch in my small living room until near the end of the session when I brought out several items to distribute (e.g., journals, stamped envelopes, copies of books, etc.). They then moved onto the floor and sat closely together around me. At each subsequent meeting, someone brought some physical item to share, a move which caused the group members to gather closely around that person to see the item. At one meeting, for instance, Christine spontaneously taught the group a way of folding paper to make special booklets for their students' reading responses. At other times, Val shared photographs of her students, Claire and Nina shared some of their students' published writing, and Amy and Karen brought in curriculum project materials for the others in the group.

The novices' physical proximity and alignment fit with Deborah Tannen's (1994) recent work on conversational involvement and gender. She has noted that numerous studies across age, gender and culture show that females tend to orient to other females by moving closely together, facing and anchoring their gaze on one another and touching. These elements help create emergent coherence in women's conversation.

A third strategy the novices used in their conversations which helped create a sense of community was to frequently refer to instructors, courses, or experiences from their teacher education program. Because they had been in different cohort groups, one year apart, the first and second year teachers had not had identical experiences while in the program. However, they still used a kind of "shorthand" form of speech when referring to experiences from their program, taking for granted that the others would know what they

meant by "doing a Learning Community cooperative learning thing," or teaching a "Deborah Ball[17] math lesson." Amy, for example, announced to the group at the first meeting in November: "I find, everytime I read aloud--not chapter books but picture books--that I'm talking like this (speaks with accentuated expression), and I get this little Jenny[18] accent!" The group members laughed and chimed in unison: "Jenny! Yea Jenny!" before moving on to the next topic. These references to instructors and experiences from their teacher education program were brief and sporadic, but provided moments of harmonious connection among group members.

Organization of the Remainder of the Text

Having provided a brief overview of the novices' interactions within the Sharing Circle setting, I now turn to a closer examination of the novices' conversations about their interactions with each of the three significant groups in their professional life: their students, colleagues, and students' parents. Following that, I will discuss connections across the three chapters, and the implications they have both for the novices' profesional identity work and for teacher educators interested in improving the experience of learning to teach.

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[17]D. Ball is the name of the professor from whom they took a mathematics "methods" course in their teacher education program.

[18]Amy refers here to one of their Learning Community literacy instructors who introduced them to children's literature through the reading and close examination of picture books.

CHAPTER THREE

Who We Are With Our Students

I love the way Herb Kohl talks about the open classroom. I dream of a classroom just full of activity, conversation, experiments, research, reading, writing and creating. My writing workshop is a time like Kohl's loose afternoons. The children are relaxed, come to me openly to ask for help and clarification, and work on their own projects. We need some reminders, but for the most part we are all working, helping each other and enjoying the classroom and discovering new things.

(Claire Young, Journal Entry, 1/13/93)

Introduction

Novice teachers have entered elementary schools many times in their lives, as students and as teacher candidates. After almost fifteen years and more than 12,000 hours of classroom observation (Featherstone, 1988), the world of school appears very familiar to them. And yet, walking into schools in their new position as "teacher," full of anticipation, high hopes, great anxiety, and with many contradictory images and beliefs about what it means to carry out the role of "teacher," there is much about students and teaching and learning that is new and suddenly unfamiliar. In making sense of this new world of school, the novices' images and beliefs serve as "filters" (Weinstein, 1989), or "frames" (Barnes, 1992), coloring and shaping their emerging understandings and sense of themselves as teachers. In Clark's (1992) words,

> What a teacher knows and believes about teaching, about learning, about curriculum, and about herself and her students are quite important to professional development. Our beliefs and personal theories set boundaries or frames around what we see and how we interpret experience....(p. 78)

A novice teacher's images and beliefs--how she wants her classroom to function, what and how her students will learn, and how "good" teachers conduct themselves with children--shape the way that she interprets her experiences in schools. These experiences, in turn, lead her to revise and recreate her images and beliefs and thus her emerging teacher identity. Claire Young's image of a "Herb Kohl-like" classroom, described in the quote at the beginning of this chapter, is an example of this dialectic process. Because Claire's own actions and those of her students during the writing workshop period so closely fit with her conception of what takes place in an "ideal" classroom, the experience contributed to her sense of herself as a successful teacher, and further refined her image of how classrooms can (and should) operate for teachers and children.

Much has been written about novices' entering theories about teaching and learning, and the way in which these theories were formed through their "apprenticeship-of-observation" as students (Lortie, 1975; Cole, 1990). Much has been written as well about the influence (or, in some cases, the lack of influence) that teacher education programs have on novices' beliefs or theories of teaching (Zeichner, Tabachnick, & Densmore, 1987; Weinstein, 1990; Feiman-Nemser, 1983; Goodman, 1985). Relatively little has been written, however, about the relationships between teachers' pre-teaching experiences (both as students and as teacher candidates) and their "substantial selves" (Nias, 1989) during their first years in the classroom.

As discussed previously in Chapter One, each of us has, in addition to our multiple, ever-changing situational selves, a relatively stable substantial self that consists of a core of deeply embedded attitudes, beliefs, and values that constitute our conception of the kind of human being we are. What a novice teacher takes, and makes, of her pre-teaching experiences depends

largely on her substantial self, for it serves as the screen through which all experiences are filtered. Lortie (1975), and Nias (1989), contend that many people, especially women, are motivated to choose teaching as a career because they enjoy and care about children. Teaching offers them a way to confirm highly valued aspects of their substantial selves, e.g., it allows them to see reflected in students' eyes the fact that they are warm, empathetic, caring people. The novice may thus embrace aspects of her teacher preparation experiences that involve caring for students, for instance, and reject other aspects of the program that do not "fit" with her conception of who she wants to be with students. Since a teacher's substantial self, like her situational selves, is socially constructed through interactions with significant others, it is useful to examine closely these interactions.

Among the Sharing Circle participants' interactions with significant others, their daily exchanges and relationships with students appeared to be central to their identity formation. Most of their personal narratives connected in some way to their experiences with students. Other studies of teachers' professional growth (e.g., those conducted by Lortie, 1975; and Nias, 1989), reported similar findings about the role that students play in teachers' identity formation, regardless of the teachers' gender or length of service. Nias (1989) notes:

> In particular, pupils can validate their teachers' professional competence or make them feel technically inadequate. Indeed, so great is children's capacity to affirm or destroy a teacher's self-image and self-esteem that they emerge time and time again from the interviews as the critical 'reality definers' (Riseborough, 1985) for all members of the profession, not just for the probationers...All in all, their capacity to shape, confirm and destroy individuals' future careers, by moulding [Br. sp.] the latter's view of their own characteristics, capabilities and aspirations, has probably so far been underestimated. (pp. 55-56)

Because student/teacher interactions serve an important function in teachers' identity formation, and because such interactions formed the basis of many of the narratives told in the Sharing Circle, I examined the novices' talk of their experiences with students. In this chapter, I will describe this talk and discuss how the Sharing Circle teachers attempted to articulate and reconcile their images of them*selves* and their roles as "a teacher" in relation to their students. We will see how, in their personal narratives during the Sharing Circle conversations, they sought to resolve three interrelated questions: (1) "Who do I *want* to be with my students?" (2) "Who do I think I *can* be with my students?" and (3) "Who am I *becoming* with my students?"

It is important to examine these narratives of their "ideal" teacher selves, rather than simply dismiss them as representative of novices' "unrealistic idealism" for two reasons. First, if we truly believe that learning to teach is an ongoing process of becoming, then understanding who the novices hope to be may give us a glimpse of the kinds of teachers they may one day in fact become, and what support they might need during this developmental process. Second, these ideal images of self-as-teacher may propel novices forward, sustain them through difficult times, foster their growth as professionals. Novelist Robert Stone (1988), maintains in this regard that:

> Though we are only what we are, we have the amazing ability to extend, to transcend...The fact is that we absolutely require the elevated image of ourselves which we indulge. If we did not idealize ourselves, if we only accepted the reality of ourselves as we are most of the time, we would never be capable of the extensions of ourselves that are required of us. (p. 74)

As the analyses in this chapter show, in paying attention to these idealized images of self, the novices worked very hard to define themselves

in certain ways and to project particular images of themselves as teachers in their talk with their Sharing Circle peers. As Stubbs (1982), reminds us,

> ...language is an activity motivated by users' needs to make things known in particular ways for particular purposes and to establish and maintain common understandings with other conversants; the form of a particular text is always determined as much by the conversants' need to function in these situations as it is by whatever they wish to describe. (p. 10)

It is critical, then, to examine not only *what* the novices said about their experiences with children, but also *how* and *why* they shared their narratives in the particular ways that they did. I will consider these issues in my discussion of the novices' conversation about their interactions with students, and the role that such conversation plays in their ongoing identity work.

The Multiple Roles of the Classroom Teacher

Goffman (1961) reminds us that when entering any position, "...the incumbent finds that he must take on the whole array of action encompassed by the corresponding role..."(p. 87). This is certainly true of teaching, and the novices discovered that there was much to do and to think about as they began enacting their images of teaching. For example, they needed to: establish and maintain classroom environments supportive of students' learning, develop relationships with and among students, and attend to the diverse intellectual, social, and emotional needs of twenty (or more) children. In carrying out these tasks, the teacher's role (which from a student perspective appeared so straightforward, and so one-dimensional), is revealed as highly complex and multi-faceted. My analysis of the Sharing Circle participants' conversations about their interactions with students showed

that they were well-aware of, and struggled hard to manage, the myriad, complex and often conflicting demands of the teacher role.

As I analyzed the transcripts of their conversations, I noted that the novices' talk highlighted different dimensions of the teacher role. Four dimensions that seemed salient in the narratives they told about themselves in interaction specifically with their students were: (1) the need to be an authority (both in terms of subject matter and classroom management); (2) the desire to be perceived as a humane person (someone "friend-like," and a co-learner); (3) the desire to be a nurturing caregiver (someone warm and giving and understanding of individual differences) and (4) the need to be a realist (by preparing students for the "real world" and recognizing that they cannot simultaneously meet all students' needs. These four dimensions are represented by circles in Figure 2 below. The relationships between the dimensions are depicted by arrows: arrows with solid lines indicate dimensions that are congruent with one another, arrows with broken lines indicate dimensions that are seemingly contradictory to one another. A more detailed description of the dimensions, and an explanation of how they were derived from the data is provided in the section following Figure 2. Although I separate these in order to describe them, in reality, they are closely connected and are all woven into the fabric of the teacher role, entwining in multiple ways, sometimes showing up as foreground, sometimes as background. I include several examples of how these dimensions overlapped in the novices' talk of their experiences with students later in this chapter.

Myself As Teacher

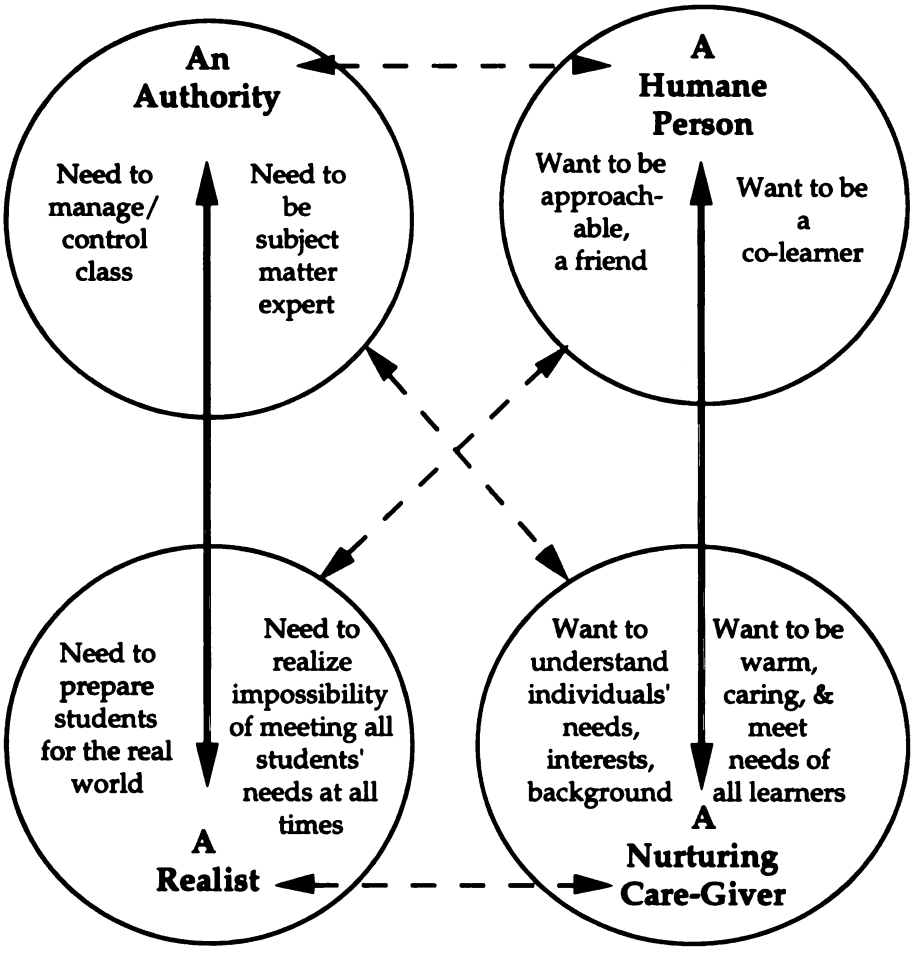

Figure 2. Four Dimensions of the Teacher Role with Students

The Teacher As An Authority

In managing the social and intellectual life of her classroom and its inhabitants, a teacher needs to show herself as "in authority" and "an authority" (Florio-Ruane, 1989). One definition of authority, according to Webster's Dictionary (1990), refers to the power or right to command. A teacher is *in* authority in virtue of her role; as the leader of the class, she is responsible for organizing and managing the actions and experiences of all

class members. But classroom teachers are not only *in* authority, they are also expected to be *an* authority as well. A second piece of the authority dimension of a teacher's role, then, involves showing oneself as an "expert," someone knowledgeable about subject matter and about how to help students transform that subject matter. This aspect of the teacher's role closely connects to how she uses her power as *an* authority, for as Buchmann (1984), notes: "Deficiencies in the depth and assurance of teachers' content knowledge can act as conceptual and behavioral traps" (p. 45) that lead teachers to focus less on student learning and more on procedures, management and outward forms of behavior.

The authority dimension of the teacher role is often assumed to be problematic for beginning teachers. Indeed, novices are typically portrayed as being "obsessed" with managing or controlling students' classroom behavior (Ryan, 1974; Veenman, 1984). There are some educationists who contend that such a focus is appropriate for beginning teachers (i.e., Kagan, 1992; Berliner, 1988). Many others, though, challenge this portrayal of beginners and the appropriateness of authority as the central concern for new teachers (i.e., Grossman, 1992; Goodman, 1987), since if taken to extremes, a search for social (or curricular) authority mitigates against learning through dialogue or joint exploration/construction of knowledge. In the view of these educationists, beginners can, and often do, exhibit classroom concerns that go beyond issues of being *in* authority. This does not mean that they abdicate their role as classroom leader, but rather that they subsume issues relating to management and control under larger concerns relating to student learning. That novice teachers can successfully accomplish this has critical implications for teacher-student interactions. Florio-Ruane (1989), explains:

> Learners who are subordinates cannot participate in many of the activities and forms of discourse that would lead to genuine education. Thus beginning teachers need to learn to temper their tremendous authority not only because they like children and want to be liked in return, but because they want to teach well. (p. 7)

The six beginners in this study were unanimous in their desire not to be seen by students as an "authority figure," preferring instead to be seen as "kind of like a friend." Although they were aware of the need to establish themselves as classroom leaders, they sometimes spoke as if they were in awe of, and even a little surprised by, their new-found power over children. In our first meeting, for instance, Lauren and Val reflected on this new aspect of their role:

> Lauren: And you catch them doing something and they're like, so shocked, because they never thought you would catch them doing that.
>
> Val: Isn't it wild? It's almost like you're--you feel like you're a parent. Like remember when you were younger and you thought your mom had eyes in the back of her head? I think most kids think, "She saw me." And I'm like, "You bet I did!"
>
> Lauren: Like this kid, Mason, he had like a piece of paper and he was going like this (holds arm up in throwing position) and I said, "Mason, put it down." He's like, "Oh my God, how did she do that?" I caught him right before he was ready to fling it. (Sharing Circle Transcript, 11/2/92)

Most of the time, however, when they spoke of having to wield their power over students, it was with some sense of discomfort and discontent. Second year participant Christine, for example, spoke poignantly about her difficult first year when she felt she focused primarily on managing her class. Like the Five Towns teachers described by Lortie (1975), neither she nor the other novices found satisfaction in merely "managing" children's behavior.

> Christine: Last year I had so many behavior problems--it's like that's all I did. I didn't feel like I taught anything. All I did was put out fires and try to get the kids to sit in their seats, you know? It was awful, so frustrating! I had a kid who would jump up and say, "I'm going to hit

> somebody, I'm going out of control," scream, and run out of the room. It was so hard. (Sharing Circle Transcript, 11/2/92)

As we will see at several points in this chapter, the novices tried, through the narrating and co-narrating of their experiences with children, to find ways to exert their authority in a manner that did not compromise their students' or their own view of themselves as caring and friendly people.

The Teacher As A Humane Person

At the same time that they were attending to the Teacher-as-Authority dimension of their role, the novices in this study also wanted students to see them as "humane" people. By this, they meant several different things. First, in contrast to being *in* authority, they wanted to be seen as approachable and understanding, as human beings who understood students' feelings, perspectives, knew the music they liked or cartoons they watched, and even sometimes used their language. In their interactions with students, the novices did not want to be seen as a dictator (a phrase they used interchangably with authority figure), but rather wanted to be "on their level," to talk casually, laugh and even joke with them. They often reported being pleased by students' responses to their use of "cool" words like "awesome" or "sweet" during classroom discussions. Lauren, for example, talked proudly about her interactions with students during a writing project:

> We were doing essays on movie personalities and um, we were brainstorming ideas for people who they may want to write about, "Cindy Crawford," and people like that. And one of the kids, he's like the class clown, he goes, "Pat" And I said, "Well, but we don't know if Pat is a man or a woman." You know, Pat, the person on Saturday Night Live? And they were just going, "**You** know who Pat is?" (Group members laughed.) And they were just so--they couldn't believe that I knew, and that I caught on right away that we don't know if Pat is a man or a woman--and they were just **dying**! They were

> going:"Miss Moffett knows who Pat is!" (Sharing Circle Transcript, 1/23/93)

For the novices, being a Humane Person, someone on the students' level (i.e., like a friend), and with whom students could relate also involved bringing people (or stories of people) in their "outside" lives into the classroom. Just as the novices claimed they wanted to get to know their learners, so too did they want their students to know a bit about them as people. Toward this end, each of the novices had brought guests to class, or had at least told students stories about people in their lives. Christine, for example, had her husband read her students' papers and write messages back to them, while Lauren brought her fiancee in to talk to her students during career week. The others also had family members and friends (Amy even brought her dogs) into their classrooms to meet and interact with their students.

The desire to be seen as an equal, or "kind of like a friend," to students was always tempered, however, by their need to exert authority over them. Sometimes they struggled to balance these two competing dimensions of their role, as illustrated by Amy's comment below:

> I think, I know I'm more friends with my kids. Sometimes they'll do things that aren't really appropriate to a teacher. Sometimes I wonder if that's something wrong I'm doing. You know, maybe it's okay this year, because I really got across that I was the teacher most of the time, but next year, I've got to back off a little on doing the buddy-buddy type thing. The other day, I was playing tag with them outside, we were the only class outside, but still--you know--I'm sure almost that not another teacher in the school would play tag with their kids outside. But I, you know, I wasn't running around hog wild. I was just kinda playing **walk** tag, you know. (Amy Roberts, Interview Transcript, 6/93)

A second aspect of being a "Humane Person" in their teacher role called for them to show students that they were learners as well as teachers. In contrast to being *an* authority, or subject matter expert, the humane teacher

is willing to represent herself to students as someone who doesn't know all there is to know, or have all the answers about content material. The novices were strong advocates of the teacher-as-learner perspective, perhaps because it had been a central theme in their teacher education program, perhaps because they felt it might make them seem to students more approachable and empathetic, or even perhaps because it helped them feel less worried about the gaps in their subject matter expertise.

The Teacher As A Nurturing Caregiver"

Nias (1989), has observed that "...we generally prefer to work in environments in which our substantial selves are confirmed, both by the ways in which work requires us to speak and act, and by those with whom we interact" (p. 43). She notes that this is especially true for people who are idealistic. As I mentioned earlier, many people are attracted to teaching as a career because it (potentially) allows them to have confirmed the sense of themselves as empathetic, caring people who are dedicated to helping children, and thus "changing the world" (Lauren Moffet, Interview Transcript, 6/93) through what they do in their classrooms. This particular aspect of the teacher's role (as the novices defined it) was so important to them that they were even willing to disregard advice or admonitions from more experienced colleagues about how to interact with children. Nina's comment below exemplifies this sentiment well:

> Nina: I value encouraging kids, being very open and loving with them. In fact, one second grader this year wanted to come back to see me but he was too shy to come alone, so his mom brought him down. He said "Do you know what I'll always remember about you, Miss Scott?" I'm thinking, Oh no! (Nina laughs) "What's he going to say?" He goes, 'You gave me a hug almost every day.' Other teachers tell me I'm too warm. But I think it's good to show people--you know, kids say 'Oh I love you.' They write down "I love you Ms. Scott"--and people

> have told me, you know, you gotta be careful nowadays, and don't say it back," but--if you were a six-year old and you said "I love you," how would you feel if they said, 'oh how nice' or don't really respond back? So I tell kids I love them too. And people say, you know, "Oh when you hug kids, pull them to the side so they're not--so their head isn't in your front," and I felt, I guess, I don't really think about that and I just hope I never get in trouble. (Interview Transcript, 6/93)

It is interesting to note here that when the teachers thought of themselves as Nurturing Caregivers, they were usually thinking of the relationships they had established, or ones they hoped to establish in the future, with individual children. By looking through the Learning Community archive materials (e.g., program entry surveys, papers they wrote for classes, etc.), I was able to see that the novices' desire to help and care for individual students was long-standing. As juniors in the program, they believed they would be good teachers in part because they cared about children and were committed to helping every individual succeed. As beginning teachers, this belief about the importance of enabling individuals to be successful learners was still in evidence. In a paper completed for one of her literacy methods courses while still a pre-service teacher, Claire noted that the highlight of the ten-week field component of the course had been her experience helping one student with his writing. She believed that she had helped the first grade student discover his ability to write about his experiences:

> This was a very special experience for me because I like to think that no matter where Earl is right now that maybe in some small way I helped him realize the power of his own ideas and writing. (Claire Young, TE 312D Reflection Paper, 6/8/90)

Several years later, writing as a second-year novice teacher, Claire was still committed to helping individual learners succeed:

> Success isn't 100% on a worksheet (or doesn't by any means start that way). Success is having a student realize that you are human too and

> respect you and be eager to share their special qualities with you--to be comfortable talking about learning and coming to a point where you can use the children's curiosity to teach them important lessons for life. (Claire Young, Journal Entry, 1/13/93)

The Teacher As A Realist

Just as the novices' desire to be seen as a Humane Person was tempered by their need to exercise authority for the running of their classrooms, so too was their desire to be Nurturing Caregivers tempered by another dimension of the teacher role. Whereas the Nurturing Caregiver aspect of their teaching selves attempted to meet the needs of all learners, another dimension of the role required them to be Realists, to recognize that they were unlikely to be able to meet the needs of all their students at all times. Moreover, they reluctantly acknowledged that within their classroom communities (just as in other communities) it was sometimes necessary to sacrifice an individual's needs for the good of the whole group.

In this dimension of their role as teacher, the novices also felt pressure to prepare students for the "real world." In other words, while they may not have liked or even believed in certain practices (i.e., giving tests or grades), they sometimes felt they needed to do so in order to prepare students for the teachers and experiences they would encounter later in their schooling career. While group members agreed with one another on the need to prepare students for future life experiences, they nevertheless were uncomfortable with the implications this had for their own teaching. At our final meeting of the year, for instance, they discussed the dilemma of whether they should have to give students grades for skills like handwriting and spelling.

> Amy: I **hate** having to give a grade for handwriting. I think that's terrible.

Val: Me too!

Nina: I think, if they know how to make all their letters, they can get an A. It might be sloppy but if they can make all their letters, they get an A.

Claire: Really, in today's technology, handwriting's gonna be--

Val: [Gone]

Claire: [Obsolete]

Amy: Pretty soon, because everything's gonna be going on computer.

Claire: And a lot of the grammar and spelling and stuff like that, it's still very important. I mean, for entering things in computers and stuff. But for a lot of the kids, I mean, I think the best thing is, if they're not a good speller, get them using that word processor as soon as possible.

Lauren: Well, I did have a couple of people in my classes that, you know, they, their punctuation is fine. It's just spelling, and I've told them to get those little hand things. You push on the keys and it'll tell you the right spelling. And some of the teachers are like, "Well, that's cheating, isn't it?" You know, "Why are you having them do that? They have to learn to spell sometime."

Val: I have one of those in my desk.

Amy: It's teaching them to find a resource, the way I look at it. But then, there's still the grades. (Sharing Circle Transcripts, 6/6/93)

In wrestling with questions of if, when, and why the teaching or grading of certain skills was necessary, it was clear that the novices saw their own actions as having far-reaching consequences for their students. Possessing this awareness further complicated the ways in which they defined and enacted their teacher role with students, "upping the ante" for the curricular and pedagogical decisions they made about teaching the students in their classrooms. In other words, the novices believed that there was a great deal at stake with each decision they made about what and how to teach and

to evaluate students. They could not only think about what students currently needed to know, they had to also consider what students would need to know or be able to do in the future.

Synthesizing The Four Dimensions

Every teacher must find a way to accommodate these differing dimensions of the teacher role with students. The Sharing Circle participants seemed aware of this need, and responded by operating from a kind of "script" for themselves. If I were to try to capture their collective awareness, it would sound like this:

> As a teacher, I am unfailingly kind, nurturing, and empathetic. I am a 'real person' to my students, sort of like a friend who can joke and laugh with them; someone who understands what it's like to think, feel, and *be* a student. I can--and do--learn a lot from students, and I want my students to see me as a co-learner. On the other hand, I have to be an authority figure; I need students to look up to me, respond to and respect me as someone who has control of the classroom and all class members. I want to appear confident, and competent, know all the answers--like I know what I'm teaching.

In the sections that follow, I will present selected vignettes which illustrate how these four dimensions of the teacher role with students interacted and then "played out" in the novices' conversations during the Sharing Circle meetings. Working from Figure 2, I will discuss sets of the dimensions, beginning from Teacher as Authority and moving clockwise around the four circles. I will thus begin by first examining the tensions between two contrasting dimensions of their teacher role, the Teacher as Authority and as Humane Person. Second, I examine the close links and overlapping elements between two similar dimensions of the role (Teacher as Humane Person and as Nurturing Caregiver). Third, I once more look at tensions between two contrasting dimensions of their role (this time between

Teacher as Nurturing Caregiver and as Realist). Finally, I discuss the similarities and connections between Teacher as Realist and as Authority. In my presentation of the novices' conversations, I will highlight the ways in which they sought to balance (or at least attend to) the multiple demands of their role as they worked to construct their teacher identities.

Balancing Simultaneous Needs: To Be In Authority While Projecting Oneself as a Humane Person

Because the extant literature on beginning teachers so often portrays them as being preoccupied with issues of management and control, I expected this concern to be reflected in Sharing Circle participants' personal narratives. In fact, though, there were relatively few instances when the novices narrated or co-narrated vignettes that centered primarily on issues of management or classroom control (usually not more than once per meeting). Even when these issues did surface, the group members had norms about how such issues were treated in their talk, as will be seen in my presentation of the two vignettes below.

The first vignette is taken from our second Sharing Circle meeting, held at the end of November. The three first-year teachers, Val, Amy, and Lauren, and one second-year teacher, Claire, were present when the issue of teacher authority was raised early in the meeting. Val and Amy did most of the talking during this segment of the conversation. Val reported to the group that she found herself "struggling" at times to keep her fifth graders on task, thus initiating the topic of classroom management. She described a reward system that another teacher she knew utilized. In presenting the scheme to the group for their reaction, Val sounded uncharacteristically hesitant and tentative; she paused often and repeated words, almost as if she

anticipated a negative reaction from the group. In recounting her friend's management system, Val seemed to be trying to convince herself, as well as her peers, that it was an acceptable thing for a teacher to do.

> Val: I was just learning about something, again, from this friend of mine last night, and I'd, I'd sort of like to start something similar to this I think. She calls them "coop points," short for cooperative points, and um, she said, what she does is brainstorm at the beginning of the year all these things the kids would like as, as rewards, she has, um, 4th grade. So she was saying, um, sort of like "if you do this, then I will give you this," kind of thing.

Amy voiced her reaction to this plan in a forthright, challenging manner, stating loudly and emphatically that such a system constituted "Bribery!" That she was willing to risk what Goffman (1961) would label a "face-threatening act" in response to Val's suggestion was perhaps indicative of the degree to which she opposed the idea of that kind of reward system. It was perhaps also indicative of the degree to which participants saw the group as a "safe" arena for debating pedagogical decisions relating to their own practices. It may have been easier for Amy to be so critical of the reward system Val described because it was not actually Val's idea, but belonged instead to an anonymous "friend," someone no one but Val knew, someone from outside the group. Amy may also have taken Val's tentativeness and uncharacteristic uncertainty to mean that Val was not yet enamored of, or committed to, implementing the plan. Amy was then free to be more critical of the plan than if Val had presented it as something she was eager to try.

When Val concurred with Amy and admitted that the plan was "in essence" a form of bribery, she acted in such a way as to allow the restoration of face in order to maintain the conversation. By acknowledging the correctness of Amy's assessment (thus defusing Amy's challenge), she not only preserved her own self image--what Goffman (1967), might call her

"positive face"--but also acknowledged the legitimacy of that challenge, thus saving Amy's face too. Val then tried to defuse the challenge even further. She explained the way the management plan worked, this time framing it as something her friend used "every once in a while." She also took care to present this system as something that was not unilaterally designed by the teacher but actually negotiated between the teacher and her students, an element that might make the system seem less teacher-controlled or authoritarian to the other group members.

> Val: Yeah, in essence. And um, so the kids came up with a list, and then she took it home and came back the next day and said, "Well, ok, I don't think that having recess for an hour is reasonable, because"--and explained it, but I do agree with a pop, an ice cream, extra computer time, extra reading time--all these different things that she drew up, and every once in awhile, when the kids are in cooperative groups, she'll say, like, um, "Okay, you're doing a good job, Joe, put ten more points on your card for cooperative, for coop points," and um, so the kids all have to keep track of it, and she can take them away as well, so if a group isn't working real well, she can go, "Okay this whole group gets ten taken off," then what she'll do is she'll list it--she listed how much each reward was worth, and she said like the rewards I have to buy are worth 500 points. (Val laughs) But it was just sort of neat--like some kind of reward system, cause in my class, to be honest, I really haven't come up with a whole lot like that.

When the group members nodded and provided backchannel communication indicating that they had not "come up with a lot like that" either, Val was compelled to clarify that she had, though, done things for her students (i.e., given them treats), not in a structured way, nor in exchange for "good behavior," but just to be "humane," and show students that she cared for them.

> Val: Sometimes--like the other week--I just did a Learning Community thing, I took in doughnut holes and milk and juice, just for a treat in the morning, cause I remember (looks at Deb) when you guys did that for us, and we were like "Wow!" And you know, for the MEAP test I took in food--fruit and stuff, but as far as earning star points or something like that, I haven't done anything.

> Claire: And kids do like that. Sometimes we--you have to sit and talk with them too though, about why you're working in cooperative groups too. But sometimes--kids just like stickers--you forget that it means a lot to them.

There was some discussion as Claire offered the middle-ground position that it was important to explain to students the purpose and value of an activity, to talk and relate to them as human beings ("friend-to-friend-like"), but it was also important to recognize that youngsters occasionally enjoy getting stickers or other rewards. Val nodded while Claire spoke, then went on to say that she was also concerned about some of her students who "never" turned in their homework. Val wondered if she could use the same incentive system to both encourage students to turn in homework and to improve their classroom behavior. She tried once more to elicit support from the group for her idea by asking if they had a similar problem.

Although the other members claimed they had no difficulty getting students to return homework assignments, they were very willing to spend time helping Val consider solutions to her problem. Amy, for instance, suggested to Val that she give her students homework "passes" after they turned in a certain number of assignments. After much discussion, Val still seemed to favor her original plan to give students "points" toward a reward for turning in their work. At this juncture, Amy tried more directly to persuade Val to find an alternative to an external reward system, posing and then answering the question, "So, what **else** could you do?"

> Amy: I don't know. I suppose the only other thing would be to make such a big deal about it, like, take someone whose notes are real good, and just show it off for three minutes, say, "Oh look at so and so's," you know, and hopefully, jar somebody.

> Val: Yeah, that's good. Yeah, I guess I've really got to sit down and plan the whole thing out.

Although agreeing that Amy's idea was a good one, Val did not sound totally convinced of its efficacy. Val diplomatically commented that she needed to think through her reward plan more carefully. Echoing this diplomacy, Amy allowed that planning things out was important, and added that she too needed to be focused and more purposeful about what she did in her classroom.

> Amy: You know, there's so many little things like--that I find I skip, that I should do, that I don't think of till it's too late. You know? I don't, I don't hold up somebody's writing enough, and I'm not doing Author's Chair for them to get feedback as much as I should, you know?...I have to do that a little more. I was real good at the beginning of the year, now, it's, it's starting to taper off.

The focus of the conversation shifted soon after Amy's comment to a consideration of how the group members organized and used "Author's Chair" as an occasion for students to share and discuss their writing. There was no more discussion of managing or rewarding student behavior until more than two hours later. Val and Lauren had left, and Amy mentioned that in response to students' requests, she had let them watch a videotape of a currently popular children's movie in class. She told Claire and me:

> Amy: I have a very hard time saying no to my kids 'cause they're so good. I was thinking, like I haven't done anything like what Val was saying with incentives and rewards, nothing like that...I just thought, you know, I have done so little as far as rewards and certificates and things, so I thought, okay, I'll let them watch the movie on Friday. Then maybe I can use it to do something with different perspectives and fairytales, 'cause I have Jan Brett's book of Beauty and the Beast that's not quite the same as the movie...and all the Cinderella stuff from Eliot[19] (Sharing Circle Transcript, 11/22/92)

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[19]Here Amy refers to materials she developed on fairytales while in one of her literacy courses in the teacher education program.

In this first segment of the novices' conversation, we can hear them working hard to resolve the question of if (and when) doing "nice" things for students is simply part of what is done by a Humane Person, or if (and when) it is a way of using one's authority to control students' actions. In the excerpt taken from later the same evening, it is interesting to note traces of the earlier talk resurfacing. This is but one example of how topics and ideas in their conversations "echo forward," potentially to shape and inform the on-going dialogue about their past and current teaching practices.

The issue of managing student behavior emerged again in other meetings, but came up most strikingly between the same two participants (Amy and Val) several months later. In the January Sharing Circle meeting, Val shared with the group that she'd had a difficult week with her class and was particularly frustrated by some students' behavior. She asked if Lauren's middle school students chronically misbehaved too, a question to which Lauren responded:

> Lauren: I have a few kids who are sarcastic, but for the most part, they know what to do and they're fine--
>
> Val: Lauren, I'm climbing the walls somedays. I mean, I've been more than a few times close to just screaming "**Aaahhh**!"

When Val turned to Amy and asked the same question, Amy reiterated and extended Lauren's comment about students, noting that hers also knew when it was okay to "goof around" and when they needed to "pull back." She then described a recent incident with a student as evidence.

> Amy: Like this one kid, I was really mad--well not really mad, but upset--and this just always goes to show, you should always ask the kids what they are thinking. You know how we learned about not jumping to conclusions? Well, we had a one-room schoolhouse day--when we studied Michigan history--and we have a one-room schoolhouse day where we all dressed up, and we wore old dresses, and

we played the game "Thread the Needle"[20] and all those kinds of things.

Val: Oh my lord, that sounds cool!

Amy: Well, the week before that, we went on a field trip to a one-room schoolhouse and they told the kids all about it and the guide there kind of got off on the punishment part. Not in a mean way, but she had kids stand with their noses against the chalkboard, and stand in the corner with a dunce cap and she hit a ruler on their arms and things like that. They all thought that was really funny, you know, that's the part they liked the best about the whole field trip--the punishment. And um, so then about four days later, here we are, doing our one-room schoolhouse day in our classroom, and we drank from homemade paper cups with a dipper, and that kind of thing. Well the night before, the kids are going home, "Goodbye, goodbye, goodbye"--and then one of the boys said "Goodbye witch." "**Whoa**!" I said "What was that for?" and he said, "Well, you're going to be a witch tomorrow, aren't you?" You know, thinking back to the punishment-and here--I--you know, I came so close to just jumping on him, and here he was making a **joke**. I'm really glad I asked him, because I couldn't believe that he called me a witch--to my face.

While Amy was relieved to discover that her student was making a joke when he called her a "witch," she was still taken aback by what felt like a challenge to her authority. Needing to decide how to respond to him, she chose to balance her need to assert her authority over the student with her desire to respond to him as a Humane Person, by talking to him in a friendly, almost joking tone. This choice not only lessened the value of his confrontational act, it allowed her to retain her friendliness and approachableness while also keeping her authority intact. Amy's tale led Val to point out that they (the novices) were simultaneously privileged and disadvantaged by the fact that they were closer to students in age than other

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[20]Amy explained later that her source for the game was Jesse Stuart's (1949) The Thread That Runs So True, one of the books they had read in their social foundations class in the Learning Community Program. The book is an autobiographical account of Stuart's experiences teaching in a one-room schoolhouse in rural Kentucky.

teachers. Their respective ages, she felt, influenced the kinds of interactions they tended to have with students:

> Val: Like I find myself--like I really joke around with my students sometimes, and I think--I don't know, but I think--some of the older teachers don't joke with them so much. Do you ever feel that? Like maybe they push the limits more with us?

In this conversation, we can see the novices working to reconcile, or at least accommodate, two conflicting dimensions of the teacher role (being in authority and being humane). Val's final comment above helps us to understand that the process of attending to these two dimensions of the teacher role involves constant evaluation and renegotiation of one's stance.

Teacher as An Authority On Subject Matter, or Teacher as Co-Learner?

In their interactions with children, the novices wanted to appear confident and competent about what they were teaching, but at the same time, they also wanted to present themselves to students as people still open to and interested in learning. The two vignettes below illustrate how the novices talked about this inherent tension, and how their talk about being An Authority versus being a Co-Learner changed over the school year.

During our second meeting in late November, one topic of the conversation was how the members were doing their mathematics instruction. Three of the novices, Amy, Claire, and Val mentioned that they were concerned about the mathematics texts used at their schools, by the lack of manipulatives that were available at the school, and mostly, by the kind of instuction they felt they were providing for the students.[21] They felt they were not adequately challenging some students, perhaps confusing others by the way they presented and explained concepts such as regrouping and

[21]Because of the departmentalization at the middle school, Lauren did not teach mathematics, and Nina and Christine did not share this as a particular instructional concern.

compensation, and overall, not making mathematics interesting enough for students.

Amy, who had so far experimented with several ways to make her instruction meaningful (e.g., math "journals" and centers) recounted her most recent attempt: a project in which she had students apply their knowledge of basic operations through the writing and illustrating of "stories" that included two-digit addition or multiplication problems. Just as things were going well and the students were "into" the lesson, she realized she had explained and modeled a problem for them incorrectly.

> Amy: I told them I don't want a basic story problem, it has to be a **story**, with a problem in the story.
>
> Val: Ohhh.
>
> Amy: And oh, they got **so** into it, because all the boys all of a sudden thought of "stole"--stole is a good action word, you know, "So and so was walking through the mall," and all the details about how they stole so many--baseball cards--and then they went back the next day and stole so many more baseball cards and how many baseball cards they had then, and then how the police caught them, so I mean there was story things in them too.
>
> Val: Well that's neat.
>
> Amy: But then, all of a sudden, I was explaining the directions--I'm so glad we're only on 5s, cause I'm only letting them go up to 2 through 5--and um, cause then I was like um, you have to say, like for 2 X 4, you have to say like 2 groups of 4, you can't say, well they found 2 and then they found 4--cause that would only be six, you know, and then we had--I had to really think about that, and I hadn't thought about it until the last second. "Oh, we have to say two **groups** of 4."

The uncomfortable experience of making an error in front of the students was one that resonated with the other group members. They nodded and murmured their assent as she spoke. Val captured the group's mood by explaining that she sometimes felt like an imposter:

> Val: I've done that before at the last second--"Oh yeah, " or you know, when you're teaching, they think of you as such an authority figure, and oh "**you're the teacher**, you **know**," and then when you're up there, you're like "Yeah, right, I feel real--like real certain right now." (whole group laughs)
>
> Claire: I know!

In Amy's case, the discomfort she felt was compounded by the fact that it was a student who called to her attention the errors she had made while writing on the chalkboard.

> Amy: And also, you know what I did? Even then, after I remembered, one of the girls had to correct me cause I said, um, what was it? It was like 2 X 3 or, 3 x 3, I think, it was, and the one that I was doing on the board was wrong.

To show her empathy for Amy's situation, Val commented that she also made mistakes on the board, "lots of times." We should note here that Val was attempting to assist Amy with her narrative, and that she did not literally mean that she made errors "lots of times" but rather, that she made errors "occasionally," or "sometimes." Again, the others in the group nodded and agreed, commenting "Yup," and "Right."

> Amy: So, so, they saw, they stole, or whatever they did, 3 elephants. And then I remembered the group thing, okay, so "No, we can't do that, it has to be 3 groups of--" so the next sentence I wrote 3 groups of 3 elephants, and she's like: "No, you can't do that because you already have a first group in the first group so it's only 2 more groups, well, that kind of confused me--they saw 3 elephants, then they saw 2 more groups of 3 elephants--it doesn't look like 3 X 3 but it really is--and she figured it out--I was oblivious to it--but that's cause all of a sudden I remembered "**Ah,** you got to do it groups, instead of--it was so easy with addition but then multiplication was harder.

Later in the school year, when the group met in mid-April, it was interesting to note the change in their stance toward being An Authority. They appeared less worried about having students think that they did not

know the content being discussed, and more comfortable showing students that they did not always have all the answers. It might be that they had successfully established themselves as an authority in enough other ways, at enough other times, and so no longer had to prove themselves as competent. Or, it might be that they had found the consequences of showing students they were not infallible were less negative than they'd anticipated. In any event, by the point in April when Lauren described a social studies activity her students had recently completed, there had been movement away from the idea that the teacher had to be a subject matter expert and toward the view that the teacher was a subject matter leader and co-learner. They had begun to recognize that sometimes teacher expertise takes the form of helping students frame and solve problems rather than always having the answer or asking only known-answer questions (Denyer & Florio-Ruane, 1995). Lauren began by telling the group about the activity:

> Lauren: What we were doing, we were doing stuff like Mohammed and Buddhism and Hinduism and all that kind of stuff and so what I had them do was pick one person from the chapter that we read and they had to imagine that they were back in time and interviewing this person.
>
> Val: Oh cool!
>
> Lauren: And they had to use the information from the textbook, like, you know, when you were born or what was your life like. Whatever information was given from the book, that's what they made their questions from. And then, with partners, they acted out the interviews...everyone was **so** into it, so I'm like, "Cool!"

The conversation turned to a discussion of how much they themselves were learning about subject matter through their preparation for teaching. There was a general consensus that they had learned what Lauren deemed an "incredible" amount of information over the year. Sometimes, though, they found it was difficult to know where to begin learning about a topic when

their background information on it was limited. It was hard for them to know "where to start" with a topic when their own memories of how and what they had learned about it were fuzzy and incomplete. Lauren shared with the group that she dealt with this by doing a great deal of research and additional reading.

> Lauren: I'm reading books all the time. Like on different people, different religions. I didn't even know some of these religions even existed--I try to learn all this stuff too.
>
> Val: So true--
>
> Lauren: And then here I am teaching about them.
>
> Claire: I remember some of that from humanities class, Karma and Nirvana--
>
> Val: And there's a god of this and a god of that, and this one comes out of the belly button, and that one--
>
> Lauren: I don't know. To me, it doesn't--it's not so much that I need to know everything about everything, I just need to know where to find the answers if I need them. You know what I mean? Like if students have questions and I don't know the answer, I tell them, and if I can point them to a place where the answers might be then I think I'm doing a good job. Funny thing is, they think I know all the answers.
>
> Val: Yeah, that is pretty funny--
>
> Claire: Especially when it's one of those times you don't. (Sharing Circle Transcript, 4/93)

In the above exchange, we can see that although the novices were aware that they lacked some of the subject matter knowledge that they needed to be able to teach well; they were still able to see themselves as competent and legitimate teachers. In order for this to happen, they had to redefine what it meant to be a good teacher (not as someone who "knew all the answers" but as someone who sought out background information and then helped students learn to discover information for themselves).

The Close Connections Between Being A Humane Person and Being A Nurturing Care-giver

The two dimensions of the teacher role with students, being a Humane Person and being a Nurturing Caregiver were closely linked and sometimes overlapped. The difference was that in the first case, they were responding to students "kind of like a friend," and in the second case, "kind of like a parent" (Val Brooks, Interview Transcript, 6/93). While there were differences between these two different dimensions, there were also similarities: Both involved treating students with care and affection, both personified aspects of their substantial selves. The occasions when these two dimensions came together were most evident during the telling of what I came to call "Great Moments Stories."[22] In the vignette below, taken from the April Sharing Circle meeting, Claire, Lauren and Val were describing one of the ways in which they thought teachers ideally interacted with students. Drawing on memories of "good teachers" they'd had as children, they agreed that it was important to talk to students about life outside the classroom, to connect subject matter to personal events:

> Val: I tell them things, like what I did over the weekend, and, and like we were talking about electricity and stuff the other day and I brought up when I went up north over spring break and there was no electricity.

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[22]I identified a subset of frequently occuring student vignettes as "Great Moment Stories." They were present in every meeting, and were often short, upbeat snapshots of a successful interaction with a student. Lortie (1975) saw these types of stories as examples of craft pride, and noted that they often had similar plots, featuring the teacher as helper and a happy ending. An example of a such a story is excerpted here: "I got a little note the other day from one of the girls in another class, 'Mrs. Roberts I like you because you help me'....And it just made my day, because I think, the first day she was in for lunch bunch (detention)...she said: 'I can't do this. I can't do that.' I didn't know if it was because I was a new teacher. That first week, she was doing this thing: 'I can't read. I can't do this. I can't do anything...'And I sat there for a long time working with this girl. And now, when she comes in, she works real independently--if she has a question, she asks me and I help her, but it's not anything like it was that first day. I struggled so with her...(Amy Roberts, Sharing Circle Transcript, 11/2/92)

Lauren: I tell a lot of personal type stories, too.

Claire: Yeah.

Lauren: Like I mean obviously they have to be related to what we're learning about

Val: right, yeah.

Lauren: I just don't go off and start telling stories.

Val: Right. No, but, you know, if something, if we're talking about something that I know about or have experience in, I tell a lot of stories.

Lauren: I do too. It's like, we just finished our unit on ancient Rome and I had been there this summer. And we spent two full hours <u>just talking</u> about what I did and you know, and they were like completely--

Claire: [Awestruck!]

Val: [Yeah.]

Lauren: <u>"Tell me more, tell me more!"</u> At the end of the hour, they said "Please can we do this again tomorrow?"

Val: Yes. They sit so still when you tell them those things.

Claire: I had a third grade teacher in school who had been all around the country, the world actually. And she had taken slides. That was our favorite part of the day. Every so many weeks she'd show them to us. And she'd just talk to us....You know, she just, the <u>way</u> she told about where she'd been--and she read <u>all</u> the Laura Ingalls Wilder books to us. And she had been out to her house and visited it, and she told us all about it, and we could ask her anything.

Val: Cool.

Claire: She had slides of that. It was just, it was the **best.** You were just like in a trance.

Val: Uh huh. It is pretty neat, isn't it, when you got like **all** their attention. They're all focused, you know, and they <u>want</u> to learn, they <u>want</u> to know more. It's pretty cool. Those are the great moments.

The view of teachers as people who tell stories to students in the way they have described incorporates elements of being both friend-like and parent-like. The two dimensions overlap as the teacher enacts her role as a human being sharing her knowledge and experiences in a friendly, accessible way, connecting to all learners in the class through "just talk" and conversation. The novices appeared most satisfied with their job and themselves when they were able to achieve this blending of the two dimensions.

Striking a Balance Between the Teacher as Nurturing Caregiver and the Teacher as A Realist

In their narratives about students, the novices seemed especially concerned about how to meet the varied social, emotional, and intellectual needs of the children in their classrooms. From the novices' perspective, a good teacher was one who cared about and worked successfully with students of all cultural, social, intellectual, or linguistic backgrounds. They took pride in the fact that they were committed to helping all students, and wove references about their successful encounters with students into their personal narratives. At our first meeting, for example, Val told of staying late at school for a number of days to help several of her lower-achieving students gather materials and create a project for a science fair. The students' enthusiasm and pride in the resulting project contributed to her sense of herself as a caring and nurturing teacher. Similarly, at our last meeting, Nina spoke of how others in her school, the principal, the Chapter I specialist, and a child's parent had praised her for her success in "mainstreaming" Mandy, a child who had serious emotional problems into Nina's classroom. The fact that Nina had seen so much growth in Mandy, and that she had succeeded with

her in spite of the principal and specialist's warning that Mandy could only function in a special education classroom contributed significantly to her sense of herself as a caring and competent teacher.

However, because the novices' sense of self-as-teacher was so integrally linked to their experiences with students, when they encountered students whose needs they felt they could not meet, their perception of themselves as competent, fair, and nurturing, indeed their very sense of who they *were* as teachers was seriously threatened. Nias (1989) has observed it is not unusual for people to have to change their view of themselves when taking on a new or first job--it is still, though, a difficult and often painful undertaking.

The narratives that the novices shared about not meeting students' needs were sometimes over general issues such as how to accommodate students who were reading either significantly above, or significantly below grade level. More often, however, the narratives centered around how to work successfully with students categorized by the school system as having "special needs." They had in their classes a large number of such students. This label covered children who were receiving special education services, but consisted primarily of those labeled emotionally-impaired (EI), or Learning Disabled (LD). They also had a large percentage of students labeled as having Attention Deficit Disorder, along with a range of other needs including students who had been sexually and/or physically abused, students who were suicidal, one with school phobia, ones who were grieving the death or disappearance of a parent.

Some of the novices' experiences with their "special needs" students challenged their notion of themselves as kind and caring people and as good teachers who were able to meet all children's needs. These experiences also brought to the surface many concomitant tensions, for example, whether to

attend to a child's immediate needs, or to act instead based on what was in the child's long-term interests; or whether to focus on meeting the needs of an individual child or instead meet the needs of a larger group of students.

Over the course of the Sharing Circle meetings, the novices shared narratives of many different students, but each also had one student in particular whom they talked about regularly, one student whom they most worried about, thought about, even dreamed about. Sometimes the stories of these children laid bare the novices' feelings of having failed, of being powerless to "make a difference" in the child's life. Despite the depth of her caring and concern, despite many attempted interventions, Christine, for instance, had to admit that she "just didn't know what to do" to help Reggie, her third grader whose "school phobia" caused him to pull his hair out of his head in handfuls, vomit frequently, and put his head down on his desk and cry for long periods of time. On other occasions, the novices' narratives of these "special needs" students centered on a particular child's growth or most recent accomplishment, an event that affirmed their own sense of self and reaffirmed their commitment to continue teaching. In the telling of these different narratives around the issue of "special needs" students, the novices' revealed their understanding of the complexity of the teacher's role and demonstrated their willingness to wrestle with complicated problems of practice.

The vignette below is illustrative of how the novices talked about their experiences with special needs students to other members of the Sharing Circle. At the June meeting, Claire initiated the topic in response to a comment by Val, that as a result of their behavior, some children exerted great power over their parents and teachers. Claire brought up Ben, one of the students she had talked about in previous meetings. In her view, Ben,

who was frequently in trouble at school, and constantly "yelled at at home," had no power at all.

> Claire: That's why when you, when you said "It's amazing how much power kids have," I was thinking, at the same time, how powerless they are. Like this kid, you know, he's kinda powerless in a way.
>
> Amy: Yeah.
>
> Val: He's been slotted into--does he get yelled at in your room or--
>
> Claire: I don't. Or I try not to. But the music teacher does, and he really does--when other kids are really trying to do their writing or their other work, he will disturb them a lot just by, like hitting them or teasing them.

Claire went on to remind them that Ben was the student whose father had died soon after getting divorced from his mother. Claire thought that he was having a difficult time adjusting to his new home situation. She explained that while she could empathize with and accept some of his behavior--the crying, yelling, or constantly wrapping his sweatshirt around his head--there was a point at which tolerating his classroom behavior made it impossible to also attend to the other students' needs.

> Claire: And the kids are constantly coming up to me. Ben's done this. Ben's done that. A lot of them are genuine. They don't want him there, bugging them. But I feel so sorry for the kid at the same time.
>
> Val: Sure.
>
> Claire: Cause he's extremely intelligent, very intelligent. I just, sometimes I feel like he's not being challenged enough in my room, but, I don't know.
>
> Deb: He's had two incredible losses. If you think of the divorce and the death--
>
> Claire: Yes, and he writes and he talks about his mother, and says very mature things. He's been to see the counselor. He said he wished he was dead, that he wants to just die.

The group members were upset to hear that a second grade child was so unhappy, and talked about how helpless that made them feel. Lauren also had a student who talked about committing suicide, and she was reasonably certain (and quite concerned) that he wasn't "just giving her a line." She said that while Shane sometimes went out with the older high school students, he seemed primarily to be a real loner.

> Claire: That is so sad. The weight of the world--these children--the world is on their shoulders sometimes.
>
> Val: Is there anyone close to him? He has no friends his own age?

Val's question elicted further talk of Shane and Ben's particular situations, and if (and how) they as teachers could help them. After some discussion, Val identified a key dilemma facing them all: How to strike a reasonable balance between being a Nurturing Caregiver and a Realist:

> Val: And the thing that I tussle with and go back and forth is it's how much slack do you give those kids? Like I think sometimes I give too much. Cause you <u>really</u> empathize a lot with the problems that they're having, and what they're going through, and so you're like, you know, you don't get on them quite as much to turn the assignments in and do these things in class. Yet on the other hand, you're doing them a disservice by not making them buckle down and do these dumb things. So I just, well, they're not dumb things. If they were dumb, you shouldn't have given them. But do you know what I mean? Like they seem dumb compared to the trauma they're dealing with--
>
> Claire: Cause you think of the real world.
>
> Val: Yeah. I think, well, okay, I'm empathizing for this situation and he's, he's going through this at home and this is happening and this is happening and that's happening. But on the other hand, I mean, there are certain things that you really need to do and it's just, I don't know. I tussle with that, back and forth. Cause I'm worried about next year. I'm worried about what's gonna happen in the future, you know, that they're just gonna be in a corner and people are gonna not put up with that garbage and some teacher will just say, "Too bad. It's gotta be done or you flunk."

The novices then went on to talk about how they worried in general about what would happen to their students in ensuing years. Claire, for example, worried that without a writing workshop like hers, Ben would be lose his main outlet for expressing his feelings. They moved into a critique of the practice of medicating children who "acted out" in the classroom, but here too, the Nurturing Caregiver and Realist aspects of their teaching selves were at odds; they hated that what they called "drugging" students had become the "answer to everything now," claiming that it seemed wrong to "give kids pills" for being overactive. Still, they confessed that medication did seem to help many of their students who had been categorized as having an attention deficit disorder. Moreover, it made the novices' job much easier, and allowed them more easily to focus on all of the students in their class, not just one or two.

The novices also discovered that sometimes, the realist dimension of the teaching role required being honest with themselves about their ability to be a "good" teacher for all students. Painful as it was for them to recognize, the reality was that they could not always (sincerely) be a Nurturing Caregiver to all students--not because of some external circumstance, as in the example above--but because of their *own* personal capacities. For example, if they did not like a particular child, they could not be as genuinely warm and caring toward him or her as they would like to be. The discussion of this issue came up only near the third hour of our final meeting, when Nina asked the group for help, saying that she was worried about the fact that for the only time in her experience, she did not much care for a student in her room. This was the first time that any of the participants had initiated this topic, and even though they felt quite comfortable with one another by this point, it was still difficult for Nina to admit to these feelings. Amy noted later (in our exit

interview) how surprised she felt when Nina raised this issue in the group, noting that it was something teachers (especially Learning Community teachers) never discussed.

> When she said that, I thought, 'Oh how good of her,' because I would have never said that if I had a child like that in my room. And I would never say that about a child even now to just anyone. You know? Because it's like geez, you're a teacher and you don't like a kid--that's kinda bad! (Amy Roberts, Interview Transcript, 6/93)

When Nina presented her situation to the group, she tried to give numerous reasons why Tim was a difficult child to like:

> Nina: The other day, for example, Thursday was our field day, and Tim went in the bathroom and just whizzed all over.
>
> Lauren: Oh my God.
>
> Amy: And what happened?
>
> Nina: Well the speech teacher heard like the little boys screaming, so she's like, you know, yelling into the bathroom, "Come out, come out!"
>
> Claire: Come out, come out wherever you are!

When the group members laughed and were inclined to dismiss Tim's act as merely mischievous, Nina provided further examples of his classroom actions: Tim often lied to her and to his parents, and he frequently bothered other children, sometimes doing very hurtful and dangerous things to them. She described, for instance, an example where he had tried to burn another child's hands with boiling water. Even though Nina believed there were reasons for her feelings toward Tim, she was still uncomfortable about it, so much so that she had even talked to the school counselor about her attitude toward Tim:

> Nina: He just, he's always tattling. He's just a baby. He's so, he just drives me nuts. And I was talking to the counselor and of course, he's trying to analyze. "Now why is it you don't like him?" And I'm like, "Gary, I just don't. " You know, and I feel **terrible** saying I don't like him. Okay, it's not that I don't **like** him.
>
> Val: He just drives you crazy.
>
> Nina: Yes, and I know I'm just trying to make myself feel better. I just, our personalities don't, I don't know. He just drives me nuts.

After Claire and Val agreed that this kind of situation was bound to happen once in a while, Lauren then volunteered that she too had a student who "drove her crazy" sometimes.

> Lauren: He ended up, he's on a half day schedule now because he just had so many problems and, so many teachers complained. He only goes to school half days, so he's not in my class anymore. I cannot tell you what a difference it has made. I used to dread 6th hour, going, oh Brandon's gonna be here. You know, I'd dread it every day. And now he's not in there, and I just love that class. It is so great. Because I spent 80% of my time concentrating only on him and ignoring the others. Because he was such, he was just--Brandon.

Convinced that "good teachers" didn't have these feelings (e.g., dreading having a student in class) Nina said she had also gone to another teacher in the building to share her problem.

> Nina: One second grade teacher, who I so like to trust, I went to her, she's been teaching, like she just got her 30 year pin, you know, or whatever. And she said, "Make an extra effort to be nice to him. Go out of your way." So I tried that. And you know, Tim's a bright kid and everything but I still just--don't really care for him.

Having found no solution, Nina asked the others how they would handle the situation. Lauren reported that she finally had to accept that she needed to treat Brandon differently than she might ideally prefer.

> Lauren: He could not function in the classroom. Like he would, we did a lot of things in groups, and I got to the point where I couldn't put him in a group with a female because he would say obscene things to the girls all the time, or touch them inappropriately. And then he

knew that I wouldn't put him in with girls, so he would cause trouble and try and get all the boys in trouble, in his group. You know what I mean? Like, saying things to them so that they're about ready to get into a fight. And he just couldn't function in the classroom at all, with other kids. So I just put him out in the hall and I had him work independently.

Claire: Did you get help from his parents?

Lauren: No. Zero. Mom isn't at home. Dad isn't home. They do try, but they have absolutely no control over him. None at all. And he's done, I mean, we've worked with, the assistant principal worked really hard with him. He, we have a mentor program and he was Brandon's mentor and like they would do things and, you know, there would be rewards if he got through one day without a referral. But, I mean, he would get at least one referral every single day. He'd go and pick on 6th graders and like especially the Special Ed 6th graders, like push them around and say things to them. Awful things, "Oh you retard." Stuff like that.

Val: Kids can be so cruel sometimes.

Claire: There's lot of kids that'll do that.

After further discussing how challenging it was to attend to students like Brandon without neglecting the rest of the class, the group reached consensus that some compromise of ideals was necessary; sometimes, they needed to accept that they couldn't succeed with all students, given the way current classrooms were structured. Lauren and Claire together suggested an explanation that seemed to absolve both teachers and students of blame. They suggested that the problem wasn't necessarily the students' fault; some students simply had a harder time adjusting to approaches that were open-ended and centered on group work. Nor was it the teachers' fault, they had many students to attend to simultaneously, and had to make decisions about what to do based on what helped the largest number of students. In their view, the school system was responsible for providing more alternatives for

students (e.g., much smaller classes) and more support for teachers (e.g., full-time aides for some students).

The Connection Between Teacher as Realist and Teacher as An Authority

As the conversation from the June meeting (described above) continued, it eventually developed into a debate about how to "manage" Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) students. There were still some aspects of the Nurturing Caregiver dimension present in their talk, but overall, the emphasis shifted and seemed to focus more explicitly on the link between the Realist and Authority dimensions of the teacher role. It began when Val mentioned that one of her ADD students was "totally clueless," citing as evidence that her work didn't get home, notes and progress reports didn't get home, she was unorganized and her desk was "a disaster." The group's response to her comments were swift and oppositional. I joked that my desk was a disaster. Nina commented that *her* ADD student "was not like that at all," she worked hard, always had her writing folder organized, always remembered to bring something to share. Claire and Amy agreed that their students generally functioned well in the class. Val restated that her main concern was how to help these students be successful in small group situations.

It was Lauren who was able to speak with the most authority to this issue, because of the composition of her class. In the excerpt below, Lauren repeatedly and explicitly states that children who have been labeled as having an attention deficit can function well in cooperative group situations, provided that the teacher gives clear instructions, structures the task appropriately, and communicates clear expectations to students.

Lauren: If your groups are structured then you can still do it. Because, I don't know how to explain what I'm trying to say. Cause like the group that I have were hand picked kids. We have all the kids in 6th grade that are on medication for ADD. Plus we have other kids mixed in. So we've got, you know,

Val: They really did put all the ADD kids in your room?

Lauren: In our class, yeah. It's split up between another teacher and myself and then we switch those kids in the afternoon. Like she teaches the science and math. I teach the English and social studies. And then we switch. And they're, the group work for me has worked out fine, with all those kids. Just as long as your group work is very--

Amy: Very structured?

Lauren: Very specific. You know, you give them the instructions. They have, you know, first you do this, then you do this, this, this. And if you get done early, you do this, or this. You know what I mean? So if you make sure that they know what to do and what their job is, then they'll do fine, more than fine. But if you just say--

Claire: "work together"

Lauren: "This is the assignment, go do it," they won't do it.

Amy: And there's nothing wrong with going over and seeing what someone else, or what another group is doing, but then sometimes they can lose their focus.

Lauren: Well, that's like one of the things that we were learning in doing in group work. Okay, you're in your groups, talking with your groups. As of right now, you can't talk to anybody else besides the people in your group. And be very specific about that. Then it works fine. Then the only people they can talk to are people in their group.

Val: And do they get involved with the group? Because my Chip is always playing with things in his lap and playing with paper clips. Then he has to use the restroom. Then he has to get a drink of water. And he, you know, he doesn't get involved...My other kids get frustrated. "Oh, Chip's in my group." And they'll say, "We don't want you to work with us, Chip, because you mess up and you get us in trouble. And you don't do the work."

The novices work hard in this conversation to balance issues of management and student control with realistic goals for their learners, and for their own instruction. They have recognized that compromise is sometimes necessary, for example, when Amy noted that although she wants students to be able to move around the room freely, it might serve to distract some students from their work, so she has chosen not to permit it. On other occasions, the compromises made are different, as Amy explains in her telling of her experiences with Andy. Because she felt strongly that her overriding goal (to include Andy in a small group project), is worth the management struggle she knows she will have, Amy decides to go ahead and require him and his group members to work together.

> Amy: Andy--he just cannot handle whenever he gets mad. I love him to death. Andy's actually one of my favorite kids, but whenever he loses control, whenever he gets angry, he does not handle it in an appropriate manner. He, you know, is punching at the air or kicking something or yelling swear words real loud. And telling me I'm not fair. And this that and the other thing. And he cannot work with groups because he just gets in too many arguments with the other kids. And so sometimes, you know, I've just been real torn about this all year. Sometimes, if it's a short group activity, I'll let him go off and do it by himself. Because usually he's pretty good about going off and doing it by himself, on his own. I never say, "Why don't you go do it on your own?" But that's what he wants to do, because he's really intelligent also. And he'll go do it by himself. But, you know, sometimes when you're doing like a long project, like we did this huge fairy tale thing where they wrote their own play of a fairy tale from a different country and stuff and we acted them out. You know, I really, this was like a two-week project. I wanted him working with this group but oh, I just had to pull teeth to get him to sit there with his group and not call someone a name or hurt them. And I let them pick their own groups, so he should have been okay. And he wanted to be with these kids but it just was hard for us all.

Broadening The Contexts of Teachers' Formation of a Professional Identity

Mining the novices' conversations about their interactions and relationships with students, and examining how, in their dialogue, they

managed to negotiate among the four dimensions of the teacher role is an important part of understanding how novice teachers form a professional identity. Such a task may remind those of us "outsiders" how complex and demanding this identity work actually is. However, neither the novices' work nor ours is complete, for there are still other arenas in which the novices must construct their identities as teachers. Having examined what generally constitutes the center of teachers' practice (their interactions with students within the circle of their individual classrooms), we now move outward into the wider contexts of school and community, beginning with an analysis in Chapter Four of the Sharing Circle participants' narratives about their interactions and relationships with colleagues. The analysis of those narratives (as well as the subsequent ones about the novices' experiences with students' parents), will help us continue to broaden our understanding of the complexities involved in crafting a teacher identity and the role that participation in a community such as the Sharing Circle may play in these novices' identity formation process.

CHAPTER FOUR

Who We Are With The Other Teachers in Our Schools

The other teachers in my school--you know, they don't belittle you or anything, but sometimes its real apparent in the stories you tell that you're obviously a new teacher. If something really funny happened, or something that might not happen to a teacher who's been teaching all those years, you sort of felt like: 'Well, do I say it or not?

(Valerie Brooks, Interview, 6/15/93)

Introduction: Working with Other Teachers, Conflicts and Tensions

Just as these novice teachers are constructing new identities for themselves as they enact the teacher role with their students, so too are they having to establish new collegial roles and identities and ways of relating as they interact with teachers, administrators, instructional aides, and other adults in their school communities. These different aspects of role enactment with the different role others each constitutes a different teacher Discourse. As beginners, they come into school situations where cultures and norms of interacting have already been established by others. Along with other school personnel, "veteran teachers have established traditions and perceptions that the novice must accept, reject, modify, or accomodate" (Schempp et al.,1993, p. 464). In fact, as Bullough, Knowles, and Crow (1992), point out "a central part of negotiating a teaching role is the negotiation of a place within the school and wider professional community" (p. 190). How each novice comes to learn about these traditions, how she makes decisions about which to accept and which to reject, how she goes about negotiating issues of status, authority and control through her interactions and relationships with colleagues has much to do with who she is, and who she is trying to become. If we want to

understand how novices construct their professional identities, then, it is *as* critical to examine their talk of their experiences with colleagues as it is to consider their classroom experiences with students.

Based on my anyalsis of the Sharing Circle transcripts, it was clear that the most talked-about group of adults in the Circle conversations were the other teachers with whom they worked. The topic of other teachers was raised forty-nine times over the school year, whereas other adults--principals, school counselors, secretaries and support staff--together were the topic of conversation less than a dozen times. After the students, other teachers were the group that novices interacted with most frequently in their schools. For the first time in their lives, these novices found themselves interacting with teachers--not as students, not as student teachers--but as colleagues. But the teachers in question are not equal colleagues, for significant power and status differences exist between them by virtue of age, years in the profession, experience, and even formal hierarchy.

Although newcomers to the hierarchical and bureaucratic world of public school teaching, their extended experience as pupils assured that these novices were nevertheless quite aware of the micro politics that influence school life. They recognized, for example, that as the newest and youngest staff members, they had the least status (and thus the least power) in their buildings. Being "the new kid on the block"[23] meant going along with other teachers' decisions, having to participate in events or act in certain ways simply "to make good rapport"[24] with colleagues. The novices were able to joke about being assigned the least desirable classrooms, the highest number of "special needs" students, or about being given the worst textbooks or other

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[23]Quote by Val (Sharing Circle Meeting Transcript, 4/16/93).
[24]Quote by Amy (Sharing Circle Meeting Transcript, 11/2/92).

materials, accepting this as an inevitable part of "paying their dues" as inductees to the profession.

While Val laughingly noted, "I'm definitely the baby in my school" (Sharing Circle Meeting, 11/2/92), her choice of words was quite apt. In many ways, all of the teachers in this study were "the babies" in their schools, for in all but one case, they were the only new hires in their schools, were younger than their colleagues by at least twelve years (and sometimes over thirty years), and came into situations where the majority of the faculty had been together for a number of years. Many of the other teachers in their buildings were the same age as the novices' own parents, a reality which complicated the already challenging task of establishing themselves as autonomous adults, and set parameters on what they considered to be respectful and suitably deferential ways to interact with their colleagues.

Significant tensions arose for the novices as a result of their interactions and relationships with the other teachers in their schools, tensions centering around issues of independence, acceptance, gaining recognition as knowledgeable professionals, and their reconciliation of competing images of how teachers interact with one another. Such tensions are neither discrete nor do they occur in isolation from one another. Rather, they overlap and interconnect in a variety of complicated ways. As the novices sought to manage[25] these tensions, they were continually faced with a fundamental choice: To withdraw from the situation causing the tension, to remain silent, to find some position of compromise from which to speak, or to stand up for their beliefs by "speaking out."

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[25]See Lampert (1985) for a more detailed discussion of how and why much of teachers' work involves "managing" rather than "solving" dilemmas.

The Sharing Circle provided a forum in which to air and reconcile these tensions, gave them an opportunity to critique and explore differing Teacher Discourses, and helped them clarify and construct their own emerging ideology. Talk about "other teachers" served another important purpose: It contributed to the sense of community within the group by creating an awareness that group members shared a common vision of teaching that was different from that of their school colleagues, or as Mead (1934) would explain, it gave the novices a "them" to rally around to oppose, thus strengthening their sense of having an "us."

In this chapter, I will first identify and highlight some of the tensions and themes that are reflected in the novices' collective talk of their experiences with their school colleagues. Second, I will recount the ways in which their choice of action (i.e., to withdraw, remain silent, compromise, or speak up), played out in their particular school settings, and the potential implications resulting from the taking of any one action. Next, I will draw from four vignettes, which were located and categorized according to the process described previously in Chapter Two, to illustrate the tensions and the actions the novices took in response to the tensions. The three interconnected tensions are represented in Figure 3 below.

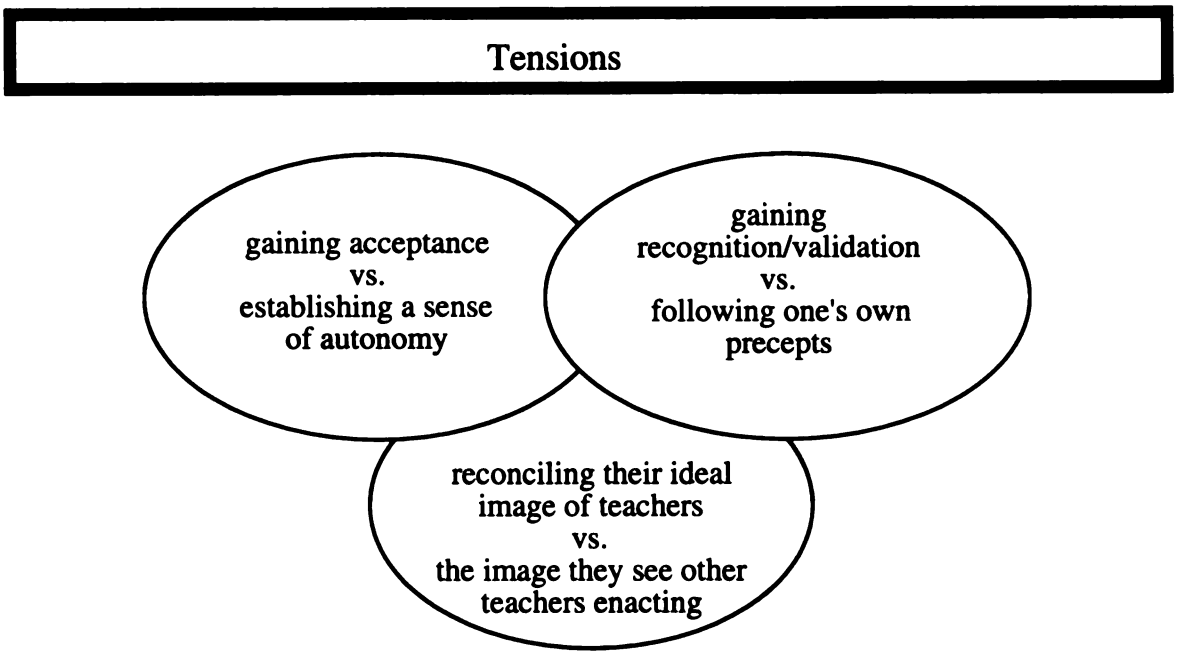

Figure 3. Novices' Relationships With Other Teachers: Emerging Tensions And Actions Taken

In the final section of this chapter, I will consider how the narrating and co-narrating of these kinds of vignettes contributed to the formation of the Sharing Circle community, and to the ongoing construction of the novices' professional identity with colleagues.

Gaining Acceptance-vs-Establishing A Sense of Autonomy

One major tension stems from what Gee (1990), Gallos (1989), and Tannen (1989) identify as two basic but conflicting human needs, to be at once involved and accepted by others while maintaining one's distance and sense of individuality. Gee (1990) explains the tension this way:

> First, we all need to get close to each other, to have a sense of community, to feel we are not alone in the world; we need to feel accepted and involved, to achieve rapport with others. But, second, we also need to keep our distance from one another, to preserve our independence and protect our privacy; so that others do not impose on us or engulf us. (p. 97)

He goes on to explain how this tension creates a kind of double bind, that in trying to serve these contradictory but simultaneous needs,

> whatever we do to serve one need necessarily causes a certain tension and risks violating the other. But we cannot step out of this process altogether. If we try to withdraw by not communicating at all, we violate our need, and the need of others, for involvement. (p. 98)

In the Sharing Circle conversations, we will see the novices' desire to gain acceptance from, and feel connected to, the teachers in their buildings. Being accepted by their school colleagues was important, for it enabled them to feel a sense of belonging and connection with others. At the same time, the novices also wanted to be considered as autonomous, capable of working successfully on their own. One element of establishing themselves as autonomous involved portraying themselves as different from their colleagues. Spurred on by the often striking sense of dissonance they felt existed between their beliefs and images and those of the "Other Teachers"[26] with whom they worked--differences due not only to specific curricular or pedagogical preferences, but to fundamentally incompatible beliefs about the nature of knowledge and learning, about students' and teachers' roles, about students as learners and human beings, and about the goals of classroom instruction--the novices looked for opportunities to show that they didn't need or want to be like their co-workers.

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[26]The term "Other Teachers," as used by the novices here has less to do with their colleagues' age or status than with their dispositions toward students and teaching. The "otherness" then, is a function of their (perceived) different orientations toward teaching.

Finding ways to accommodate this particular tension did not happen easily, nor could it be achieved without consequence. Wanting to be seen in other teachers' eyes as independent and capable of functioning alone meant that the novices were less willing (or felt less able) to seek support or assistance from their colleagues. They worried that voicing uncertainty about their teaching practices would lead their colleagues to question their ability (and suitability) to teach. They often felt obligated to solve problems and make decisions entirely on their own. As Val explained to me in one of our conversations:

> Sometimes it's real apparent...in the stories you tell that you're a new teacher....
> So you always feel like: "Well, do I say that or not?"....Will they second guess you or critique you or think you're a bad teacher or bad--like "what the heck is she teaching for?" kind of thing. (Interview, 6/15/93)

And so, within their schools, each novice struggled alone with difficult questions and doubts about her choices and actions, about her competence, about whether she was acting as a "good teacher" should. In the early part of the school year, one of Claire's journal entries reflected this fear:

> I'm so confused about the American school system sometimes. I wonder if it is what is best for our children and if what I am doing is really good for the development of my children--then I think, if I'm thinking this, why am I at the school teaching? Do I say the right things? Do I do the right things? Am I supportive and nurturing enough for their growing minds? I wonder if I see enough into the children and recognize and know enough about them? (Journal entry, 12/3/92)

The fact that most beginning teachers feel lonely and isolated has been well-documented (Feiman-Nemser, 1983; Little, 1990). Christine explained the feeling poignantly when she said: "You're standing there with twenty-six kids or human bodies, but you still feel totally alone" (Interview, 7/15/93). One of Christine's subsequent comments suggests that feelings of isolation may be

even more intense for novices coming from a teacher preparation program that emphasized collegiality and conversation, and ways of teaching different from status quo practice in schools.

> You know, that first year, there's so many things you don't know...and the other teachers try to scare you off by telling you these horrible tales, which you don't listen to. It's difficult coming out of the kind of community where you were used to being able to talk about the kinds of things you were planning and how things were going--sharing materials--to a situation where you're totally on your own. You don't have the materials, you don't have the money to purchase the things that you need, and you're not with a whole staff of people to bounce all your ideas off of. (Interview, 7/15/93)

Feeling lonely and isolated has consequences for the kinds of choices that novices make about their role and about their practices (Olson & Osborne, 1991). They may give up potentially promising practices because they initally don't seem to work smoothly (Zumwalt, 1982). Conversely, they may adopt less than exemplary practices because those are what seem to "work" in the moment (Feiman-Nemser, 1983). By experiencing the formation of a professional identity as an individual endeavor rather than as a socially-constructed process, failures, as well as successes, are seen as belonging only to the individual, and so novices may leave teaching (as so many do) after the first year or so, disappointed and disillusioned with themselves and their apparent inability to teach. Those that stay may foreclose on opportunities to belong and be involved with others, thus denying themselves a chance to fufill one of their basic human needs.

Desire for Recognition/Validation -vs- Following Own Precepts

Another tension arises from the novices' need for recognition and validation from the teachers in their schools. Their desire to be seen as bona fide teachers, to be respected as knowledgeable professionals, makes them

more vulnerable to external pressure to conform (or to at least demonstrate overt compliance) to existing mores. In a multitude of small ways, not taking students outside for a 10-minute recess on a beautiful fall day because it is "frowned upon, highly, highly" by other teachers (Amy Roberts, Sharing Circle Transcript, 11/22/92), and in a multitude of larger ways, "having to move students through" the mathematics textbook at warp speed (Val Brooks, Sharing Circle Transcript, 11/22/92), there is pressure to do what they believe the other teachers expect them to do. Even when the novices are inclined to think they are doing educationally sound things with children, there are always the lingering doubts. Val, for instance, spoke at our second meeting held in late November, of trying to go beyond the textbook lessons in mathematics, of trying to devise problems that related to students' lives and having students keep mathematics "journals" to record their thoughts and problem-solving strategies. Although she believed she had a strong rationale for her approach, Val nevertheless felt compelled to be at the same point in the text as the other 5th grade teacher in the building.

> Val: I think though because of throwing in those extra problems and doing them in math notebooks, and stuff, I feel pressured, that I'm behind. Like I **know** where the other 5th grade teacher is and I'm behind, **way behind,** where she is.

Amy and Claire participated fully in this conversation, indicating that they shared Val's feelings. Both nodded their heads and gave responses to show their agreement:

> Amy: Mmnhum.
>
> Claire: Yup. I **hate** that feeling. And people always stop and come in and say *"**Where** are **you**?"*
>
> Val: Yeah--I just feel **really** stressed, really stressed.

Claire: It's so **weird**--what they do.

Val: I've gotta catch up. (Sharing Circle Transcript, 11/22/92)

With her comment about "people" (meaning the other teachers in her school), "always" coming in and asking what page in the textbook she is on, Claire reveals that she (like Val), is aware that her colleagues have certain assumptions about what constitutes appropriate mathematics instruction, and that this requires moving through the textbook at a particular speed and in a particular sequence. Claire feels she is being watched (almost spied on, actually), and then judged by her peers accordingly. Whether any of the teachers in Claire's school actually asked her that question in those specific words is not the issue here.

Indeed, Tannen (1989) would remind us that it is probable that no teacher ever asked that question of Claire in those exact words. What is significant, however, about Claire's use of constructed dialogue in this instance is that it effectively and efficiently communicates her empathy for Val's experience, her incredulity that her school colleagues actually think it is important to move through the mathematics text in regimental fashion, and her indignation that other teachers think it is acceptable to check up on a co-worker in such a way (as if she were merely a student teacher, and not a fellow professional). Claire's emphatic use of the word "weird" to describe this particular teacher behavior is also telling. By naming her colleagues' behavior as weird (as in "bizarre," or "not normal")[27] Claire is, in effect, trying to convince Val (as well as herself) that they should not get "stressed out," or be swayed from the instructional stance they have taken. It is as if she is saying, "We know that this isn't what teachers should do. We know

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[27] As defined by Webster's New World Dictionary (1990).

that teachers should make decisions about how and when to use the textbook based on their students' needs, not based on what some teacher down the hallway is doing." The paradox here is that even though the novices believe they (and not their colleagues) are in the right, they cannot simply disregard their colleagues' opinions; they still want their colleagues to respect them. Val's final comment hints at this paradox; although she believes she is right to add problem-solving activities to her math curriculum, she still feels compelled to "catch up" with her co-workers. And, despite her brave talk, Claire too still has doubts, as this topic comes up again later, in one of her journal entries.

> I hate the pressure of having to stay 'caught up' and worrying that I have to cover this and this for standard tests. Sometimes I feel guilty when we're talking and in groups and loud and I look in the other rooms and they are all at their desks, quiet and looking so attentive. I don't know why I feel this way. I know the facts. I know that conversation and working together are crucial. I guess I get scared that the other students may be learning something that we're not or should be. (Claire Young, Journal Entry, 1/13/93)

Even toward the end of the school year, the feeling of needing to conform to co-workers' expectations for textbook coverage exists. In our interview at the end of the school year, Amy talks of having feelings similar to Claire and Val's, only in her case, she felt pressure because she was ahead, rather than behind her colleagues in the mathematics textbook.

> Amy: They were still doing multiplication and division or whatever we were doing that's taught in your head. But when they see that I'm on the last chapter in the book, they're like: "Oh, what are you doing?" "Oh, she has those good kids" or, you know, things like that. Or maybe they're thinking that I'm, I feel like they're thinking I didn't cover it enough or they didn't learn it. You know, you just kind of get these little impressions along the way.
>
> Deb: It must feel funny to have to make excuses for doing a good job.
>
> Amy: Right.

Deb: I mean, usually it's the opposite.

Amy: I don't want to offend anyone, you know.

Deb: Right. (Amy Roberts, Interview Transcript, 6/93)

In this segment, we see that Amy felt her colleagues were not only interrogating her (the phrase, "what are you doing?" being, in this case, quite threatening), but also like they were talking about her in a dismissive way to each other, giving an excuse for her having moved on to more difficult concepts in the textbook because she had the "good kids."

While the novices considered themselves to be real teachers, earning recognition from the other teachers in their schools still seemed a necessary source of legitimization. It was apparent, even from our first Sharing Circle meeting, that the novices were very sensitive to their colleagues' implicit and explicit evaluations of them and their teaching. The novices took very much to heart other teachers' veiled criticism, open derision, or even simple questions about their practices. For example, during that first gathering, as we were setting dates for the subsequent meetings, Christine excitedly suggested to the group members that they share their unit plans or ideas for lessons with one another. Val readily agreed with her suggestion, adding that they could even share plans they had used the year before, during their student teaching experiences. Christine went on to tell the group how she had shown Barbara (her fellow third grade teacher at Morrisville), a unit plan she had developed while in her science methods course with Dr. Cheney. She had shown Barbara the plan because she thought it would fit in well with their required curriculum.

> Christine:-It's so funny, 'cause we spent so much time doing all those units--like my lesson plans now--you just don't write out those objectives like you did then-- I pulled out this file from last year when I

did like this whole nutrition unit with all this--I set it up just like Dr. Cheney taught us to and everything--

Val: Mmmhmm--

Amy: I remember that!

Christine: And Barb's looking at me, and I told her: "Barb! Look at all this stuff" and she's cracking up, she's like: "You can tell **you're** a 1st year teacher," (pronouced in a condescending tone of voice) and I'm like: "But Barb, this is **great**", and she's like: "I don't think I ever wrote anything like this in my life!" And she starts laughing. Yeah I was laughing at myself, going, "Yeah, this year, I guess I won't be doing that."

It was evident that while Christine recognized that writing lesson plans as a teacher was different from writing them as a methods course student (in that "real" plans were less detailed and less rigidly formatted), she still expected that Barb would be impressed with her unit and that perhaps they would be able to use some of the activities with their current students. Christine was not prepared, however, to have her plans dismissed so easily. She responded to Barb by laughing and agreeing that she wouldn't be writing such detailed lesson plans in the future. Christine's laughter, in this case, may be seen as an attempt to "save face" (her own and Barb's), in response to Barb's openly face-threatening act (Goffman, 1967).

Ironically, Christine might have received a much more positive response had she merely showed Barb an outline of the unit plan. What one has to do in order to demonstrate competence in and win recognition for lesson planning thus may be quite different depending on the personnel involved. A senior teacher's expectations might be much different than a university-based field instructor's. After offering her unit plans and having them rejected once, it is reasonable to assume that Christine would be more cautious about offering them to a colleague again, at least in that particular

format. The fact that she did so--quite eagerly--to the Sharing Circle group members makes me think that she was confident that her peers would respond more positively to her plans.

Reconciling Their Ideal Image of Teachers With The Image They See Other Teachers Enact

A third tension that the novices struggled with came about because the images that they held about the ways that teachers talk about students and teaching clashed so dramatically with the reality they saw in other teachers' enactments of the role. As we saw in Chapter Three, a critical theme in these beginners' conception of themselves as teachers was their stance toward students. Being the kind of teachers who treat students with respect and care was more than simply a goal for them, it was one of the central defining characteristics of who they were--or who they were trying to be--as teachers. If they cared so much about how they talk *to* students, it makes sense that they would also care deeply about the ways in which they (and other teachers) talked *about* students. Hearing their colleagues frequently making fun of, or talking disparagingly about particular children was thus quite upsetting (as well as disillusioning) to them. The tension, then, arose as they struggled to to respond to the Other Teachers' enactment of their role, particularly in terms of the stance toward students that the Other Teachers seemed to take. In taking any of the four actions identified earlier, they risked losing something of value. For example, to withdraw from all interactions where they would hear colleagues speaking (besides being impossible) would eliminate their chances to feel like they "belonged" within the school, and would lessen the chance to gain respect and recognition from colleagues. To remain silent could result in the feeling that they were being untrue to their

precepts and conscience, and being hypocritical by pretending to go along with the Other Teacher Discourse. By either saying something to the Other Teachers as a compromise, or in speaking out, they risked alienating themselves from their colleagues and thus a potential source of emotional, moral, or intellectual support.

This tension was complicated further by the fact that when talking to the Other Teachers about issues relating to students, curriculum, or pedagogy, they felt compelled to be (and indeed truly wanted to be) polite and respectful to their elder and more experienced colleagues, and worried that to question or talk out against other teachers could be regarded as rude or disrespectful.

Novices' Responses to These Tensions

Developing an awareness of these and other tensions is important for experienced teachers and teacher educators alike, for such an awareness may help us to recognize the complexities involved in negotiating one's way as a teacher with colleagues. In order to understand and appreciate this difficult process, it is necessary to take a closer look at the novices' conversations about their interactions and experiences with their school colleagues, and the ways in which they chose to respond to the resulting tensions. First, however, I briefly describe the arena in which the tensions typically surfaced and where the novices' actions usually occured. Next, I present my analyses of four selected vignettes from four different Sharing Circle meetings. I selected these particular vignettes for several reasons; they were quite representative of the way in which the "other teacher" topic surfaced and was dealt with in all of the meetings, and they allow us to see how the novices dealt with the interlocking tensions over the course of the entire school year. I will present each vignette separately, then turn to a brief discussion of how the group's

conversation in these instances contributed to the construction of their professional identities.

Where the Tensions Surfaced and Where The Novices' Actions Occured

Although each of the Sharing Circle teachers taught in a self-contained classroom, there were several different contexts in which they interacted with the other teachers in their buildings: At grade level and whole school staff meetings, during school inservices and teacher planning days--as well as in more informal contexts, in the offices, hallways, out on the playgrounds during recess periods, and of course, the infamous teachers' lounge.

The teachers' lounge (also referred to as the lunchroom, or staffroom), was the most frequent arena where teachers met and interacted. It served as a gathering place, where teachers from different grade levels could talk, before, during, and after school, relatively undisturbed by children or administrators. Although the settings in which the Sharing Circle teachers worked differed considerably--two were in large urban schools, three in small to mid-sized rural schools, one was in a small suburban school, at both the elementary and middle school levels--their stories about staffroom talk were strikingly similar. Early in the school year, all of the novices, with the exception of Val, stated explicitly that they had come to "dread" going to the staffroom during lunchtime. These teachers, like the novices that Nias (1989) studied, were quite uncomfortable with both the nature and content of the staffroom talk, and most particularly by the ways in which students were portrayed and discussed. Despite the novices' dislike of the staffroom, all felt obligated to put in an appearance for at least part of the lunch period. Not to do so, Amy explained, was to risk being seen as "a snob or something."[28]

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[28] source: phone conversation with Amy, December, 1992.

That the novices in this study initially expected the daily gatherings in their school staffrooms to be occasions to connect with their co-workers, to talk with them about substantive issues relating to teaching and learning is not surprising, as they had only recently moved from a university setting where, surrounded by student colleagues, they always had peers to talk to; and where, as participants in a teacher preparation program that viewed conversation about teaching as an important part of learning, there had been multiple opportunities to talk with classmates, professors and field instructors about the practice of teaching. As teacher candidates, they had been encouraged by their course and field instructors to share their teaching mistakes as well as their successes, to focus on what children could (rather than could not) do, and to maintain an optimistic view of what teachers could accomplish with all learners.

When confronted in the staffroom with what seemed to them a very different kind of "Teacher Discourse"--one in which teachers talked and behaved toward the job and toward students in openly negative ways--the novices felt disillusioned. Such an attitude conflicted with their beliefs about how teachers are supposed to think, talk, act, and behave in the performance of the teacher role.

It is interesting that for these novices, the teachers' lounge was a place to avoid when possible and endure when necessary, because for many teachers, they are instead:

> ...places of relaxation and relief where social, humorous, morale-boosting behavior relieves some of the stresses and eases some of the pains of the school day. For the classroom teacher, there is a compensating form of solidarity to be found here. (Hargreaves, 1992, p. 221)

In other words, there was conversation about teaching in the staffroom, but its topics, norms for speaking, and certainly its functions differed from what the novices had been used to in their teacher education seminars. It is much more a place to "vent" and "let off steam," than a place to have professional discussions of practice. As Hammersley (1984) reminds us, staffroom talk is a socially constructed event; it sounds like it does because of its particular context and purpose. This talk, as it is constructed, must conform to some basic rules, it must allow all members to participate, and it must allow participants to maintain what Goffman (1967) calls "positive face." Just as two strangers on a plane find themselves talking about the weather, or complaining about the airline food, teachers in staffrooms must negotiate topics that are safe (e.g., not threatening to their sense of self worth), shared, and non-personal. Complaining about their job or about students (Hammersley, 1984) fits these criteria. Hargreaves (1992) notes:

> Subjects are avoided and opinions are withheld which might expose differences in professional approach, or which might make teachers vulnerable to invidiously comparative appraisal by others. So, in these staffrooms, educational theory, long-term plans, discussions about basic purposes and underlying assumptions are virtually absent features of teacher talk. Sharing is confined instead to stories, tips and news--to things that will not intrude upon or challenge the autonomous judgment of the classroom-isolated teacher. (p. 221)

Thus the kinds of topics and issues that the novices expected or most hoped to hear their colleagues discussing (e.g., a lesson that went spectacularly, or one that failed miserably) are the very topics least likely to surface in the staffroom context (though they may surface elsewhere, e.g., in grade level meetings). I raise this issue in order to provide some context for the vignettes described below. It is important to understand that these vignettes are not intended to be read as cases of good teachers vs. villainous teachers. Rather, they should be regarded as a lens through which to view the

tensions and choices faced by one group of novice teachers attempting to construct a sense of themselves in relation to their school colleagues.

Vignette One: "The Teachers in My School Are So Goddarned Negative!"

In this first vignette, we will see all three tensions weave through the novices' discussion of their interactions with their school colleagues: Their desire for belonging and attachment, their need to be respected as a professional, and the clash between their images of teachers and the reality they see colleagues enacting in the school lunchroom. The subject of "other teachers" and their staffroom talk first came up during the inital Sharing Circle meeting,[29] about an hour and a half into the conversation. The group members had been discussing their homework policies, when Val asked the others what they did about children who regularly failed to complete their homework. Lauren described the "Homework Cafe," an in-school, lunchtime study hall that her colleagues had created to address the problem. Amy's narrative followed Lauren's, in keeping with an established structure for turn-taking via narrative rounds described earlier. Amy told about "the Lunch Bunch," a similar kind of study hall that the teachers in her school had instituted as an intervention for students who misbehaved during class, or failed to complete their in-class work or homework assignments. Amy explained that each of the five third grade teachers was responsible for supervising the students one day a week during the after-lunch recess period. She took pains in her narrative to indicate her hesitation about this program, to assure her peers that it was not something she used much, and to explain her rationale for participating in the program:

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[29] This meeting was held on November 2, 1992.

> Amy: I noticed, um, I somehow got Friday, cause I--someone else set this up--but that was a stupidest thing I could've done, because you can do it for homework or for behavior problems, so, but Friday, I got all these wild kids, just **wild** kids. And I never--I hardly, hardly **ever** keep any of **my** kids in, I more did it , not cause I thought I would need it, but because I wanted to make good rapport with the other teachers!

The other group members nodded at Amy's last sentence, providing backchannel support with affirmative murmurs and comments. They too, it seemed, felt the need to do things in order to achieve a sense of "rapport" or be accepted by other teachers. Amy then used this opening as a segue into the topic of her colleagues' lunchroom conversations:

> Amy: I'm like, oh well, I might as well take a day--I usually go back (to the room) **anyway**, cause the teachers in my school are so **goddarned neg-a-tive**! I was telling you (Deb) about this, and-- I usually eat lunch, and then as **soon** as I'm done I go back to my room anyway, so it doesn't bother me, **at all**, to get out. The 3rd grade, I haven't noticed it with any other grade, but for some reason the 3rd grade teachers are like: *"These are the worst kids we've ever had--yeh yehnah nah nah"* (said in high-pitched, nasal voice).

All of the group members laughed and nodded their heads in response to Amy's comment, especially to the dialogue she includes and her tone of voice[30] when reporting the teachers' comments. Faced daily with a difficult situation--not wanting to remain in the company of teachers whose ideology appeared so at odds with her own--Amy deals with the situation by simply leaving the scene, thus withdrawing from the interaction and the source of tension. She could have chosen not to go to the staffroom at all, but worried that the teachers would think she was a "snob." In the interest of "making good rapport" with colleagues once again, Amy handled the dilemma in the best way she knew how, by putting in an appearance for a short time, then

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[30] Amy's use of a high-pitched, "witch-like" voice (with accompanying facial grimaces) set a precedent for the group members' constructed dialogue. Subsequently, whenever one of the novices supplied "Other Teacher" dialogue, they used a similar tone of voice and facial expressions. I have used italics throughout the text to denote this speech.

leaving quickly. This strategic action preserved her standing with the other teachers (it may even have elicited their empathy, e.g., "The dedicated new teacher uses her lunchtime to prepare for the afternoon's lessons"), and kept her from having to listen to, or participate in, talk that violated her beliefs about how teachers conduct themselves. On the other hand, by not challenging the teachers or speaking up for her beliefs, Amy has not resolved the conflict in her own mind, and can be left feeling that she has compromised her principles, thus demonstrating the complexity and open-endedness of this identity work.

Two of the group members then added comments to echo Amy's narrative and confirm that they shared her perspective:

> Christine: Yeah, I'd **much rather** be with the kids, especially the older kids. If I had to choose--
>
> Lauren: Yeah! I know, me too.

At this point, Val asked Christine about her student teaching experience, which had been with "older" students, fifth graders like Val was currently teaching, and the conversation shifted to a review of where the various members had done their student teaching. Several minutes later, the conversation briefly touched on the "other teacher" issue once more when Amy commented that she was going to take a "student teacher" in her classroom for the spring semester. She clarified her use of the term "student teacher," following the outbursts of surprise by the group, explaining that the person (a student from a nearby university) was actually more of a participant observer than student teacher in the class. Amy explained that while she initially felt it was too soon in her career to take a student teacher, she had changed her mind and decided to accept the pre-service teacher after talking to the other teachers in the lounge.

Amy: I was like, um--kind of disappointed when I heard this--this is more of what made me take one--she said "Well, they come in and run all your dittoes for you--"

Val: Be your gopher--

Amy: I'm like, gee, that's a lot of good experience for this poor kid that's a freshman--it's kind of like their first teaching experience in the classroom thing. So I'm like, sure, I'll take one and I'll have them doing more than just--like running dittoes!

Val: That may be a blessing for her.

Deb: Very much so! Especially because you remember what it feels like to want to have experiences with kids rather than be in the workroom running dittoes.

This segment is interesting, following as it does the discussion of the lunch room talk. In both instances, the novices are allying themselves not with their co-workers but with students and student teachers. In both instances, they express disappointment at their colleagues' actions and attitudes. Val was very engaged in helping to construct this conversation, as shown by her comment, "Be your gopher," offered as a completion to Amy's incomplete utterance (Coulthard, 1985). Amy's explanation of her thinking, that "gee, that's a lot of good experience for this poor kid..." was intended--and understood as--sarcasm. Her use of sarcasm here was more effective in connecting her to the group members than if she had simply said "I think it is terrible that they use student teachers as clerks."

The conversation next shifted back to the Lunch Bunch plan again, with Val commenting that the teachers in her school probably would not want to give up their lunch period to supervise children. The group, led by Val and Amy, warmed to the topic of how many children need extra help and support outside of the classroom setting, and the references to other teachers in their schools went temporarily underground. Three points are interesting

to note here: first, that the subject of other teachers, and their negativity toward students (including student teachers), arises only in the context of another topic (e.g., what goes on at their schools during lunchtime). Second, although there is consensus about the topic, and all group members actively participate in the conversation, they do not dwell on this seemingly shared issue but rather shift quickly to other topics. In part, the novices may feel uncomfortable talking at length about the other teachers, people older and with more seniority, because they feel it is impolite and disrespectful. It may also be, however, that the novices do not want to talk about their peers in ways reminiscent of the staffroom talk of students. Third, there were relatively few (approximately three) occasions during the meetings when the novices spoke about the "Other Teachers" as exemplary teachers or good role models. The Sharing Circle narratives did suggest, however, that the novices viewed the other teachers as willing to listen and offer help or advice if such assistance was solicited by the novices.

Vignette Two: "How Can You Be a Teacher?"

In this second vignette, taken from the fourth Sharing Circle meeting held in January, we see that once again, the topic of other teachers' negative talk surfaces indirectly, in the context of other topics, and is taken up briefly but intensely by all members of the group. In fact, the particular phrases and language used, as well as the message conveyed, bear a striking resemblance to those aired in the first meeting. The tension caused by their perception of the fundamental conflict between the image they hold of teachers, and the way they believe the other teachers are enacting the role is central in this segment of the conversation on this evening.

About an hour and twenty minutes into the conversation, the three first year teachers (Amy, Val, and Lauren) were describing how much they enjoyed the informal occasions when they were able to "just talk" with their students. Lauren used the time before assemblies, Val used recess time, and Amy told how she had begun having students eat with her in their classroom. Her comment about eating lunch with students served to surface the topic of negative staffroom talk once more:

> Lauren: I eat lunch with some teachers who are **so** negative! And its like, **God**, how can you be a teacher?
>
> Val: [Mmmhmm]
>
> Amy: [I know!]
>
> Lauren: I mean they're **so** down on the kids, they're so down on the [schools]--
>
> Val: [the system--]
>
> Lauren: Everything! They're **so** negative! It's like, "Why can't you be a little bit more--like, **hopeful?"**
>
> Val: Yeah, [that's--]
>
> Lauren: [And Duane] and I just sit there. And we're just sitting there looking at each other going "Oh boy....."

As in the first vignette, the group members seemed to be in agreement about how much they disliked the negative ways that the teachers in their schools talked about students. In the novices' view, teachers are supposed to be positive, they are supposed to believe in students and students' abilities, they are supposed to be teaching because they are hopeful that they can make a positive difference in children's lives. Lauren's rhetorical question, "How can you be a teacher?" (posed as if one of her school colleagues were in the room), is almost plaintive in tone. With this question, she was not simply

talking about her colleagues, but was making a generalization about the contradictory reality that people who (in her view) don't act as teachers should, nevertheless play that role.

In this accounting of staffroom talk, we also learned about how Lauren coped with the situation at her school. Unlike Amy, who coped with the tension by leaving the staffroom as soon as possible after finishing her lunch, Lauren sat with Duane, the other new teacher in the building (who was actually a peer from her teacher education program), and stayed silent. Schempp, Sparkes & Templin (1993) have concluded that remaining silent is a coping strategy that many novices use in order to demonstrate to colleagues their willingness to fit in to the school culture. I see it also as a way of not alienating their co-workers (a move which might jeopardize their chance to form attachments or to be respected as a professional), but still resisting the dominant school culture. For Lauren, in this instance, staying silent was not quite the same as being silenced, for she had a compatriot nearby who shared her feelings about the other teachers' actions. Still, like Amy in the first vignette, this coping strategy requires that Lauren compromise herself to some degree by not questioning or challenging the other teachers' viewpoints.

Vignette Three: "I Kind of Try To Keep the Peace"

I stated earlier that the novices very much wanted validation from their co-workers that they were doing a good job with their teaching, yet they did not want to have to compromise their principles about what constituted good teaching in order to get this validation. There were many instances over the school year where the novices felt their ideas, skills, or classroom accomplishments were not recognized or valued by their co-workers. I have

chosen to share a lengthy segment of one conversation that took place at the second Sharing Circle meeting, held right before the Thanksgiving holiday. I selected this segment because I believe it is especially illustrative of how the novices' desire for validation interweaves with the other two tensions in their talk. It also strikingly portrays the mixed feelings that the new teachers have, their desire to be recognized as competent, their disappointment when such recognition is not given, and the actions that they took in response to this tension. On this evening, Amy and Claire remained to talk after the meeting had officially adjourned and the other group members attending had left. Claire was describing an upcoming "reunion" that her students were attending with three other second grade classes.

> Claire: Yeah, but we're going to have--there's two 2nd grades in the building I'm at, and there's two 2nd grades in a different town, so we're all going to get together--we're not going to really teach anything, we're just going to watch a movie, and let all the 2nd graders be together again, because they all, in 1st grade they were all in the same school--
>
> Amy: Well that's kind of neat.
>
> Claire: I think they'll like it. They're all going to eat lunch together.
>
> Amy: That's neat!
>
> Deb: So is the other 2nd grade teacher in your building, has she been there awhile, or is she new too?
>
> Claire: About seven years, oh she's **neat**. She's the one that's doing the writing. And she's really pushing--like she was so mad that they got basal readers in cause last year they were up for new language arts and reading, or maybe just reading equipment and books, and she was one--she just recently went back and got her master's degree, so she knows all the new things and she's always trying to do the newer things, so she's really nice to have next door. Really nice. She'd be neat to bring to a meeting like this sometime.
>
> Deb: You could.
>
> Claire: She'd love it too.

In this segment of the conversation, Claire clearly distinguished between teachers who would enjoy and fit into our meetings, teachers "like us" and other teachers. Teachers "like us" were people who are interested in learning about and trying "newer" ways of teaching. Amy and Claire see themselves (and the other Circle members) as involved in this process; as all had tried to establish literature-based, process-oriented language programs. Both Amy and Claire had well-developed writing workshops, used literature discussion groups, and made extensive use of reading response logs and journals. Both used the basal readers mandated by their schools, but used them as supplementary materials rather than as the foundation for their reading instruction.

With the topic of "teachers like us" on the table, Amy was reminded of a comment made by one of her colleagues, a teacher "not like us."

> Amy: That reminds me of something one of the other teachers said to me this week, she said something about: *"Whole language is fine, but, these kids, they don't, if they don't have the skills, well then, they're not going to know how to look up --look a word up in the dictionary, and if they can't read it they're not going to know how to pronouce it."* And I started thinking, I was like, "**Man**, I don't think **I** even remember all those long and short syllables, those little signals any more," I just kind of--

With her last comment, that even she (a literate adult) may not have memorized "all those little signals," Amy was responding to her colleague's observation that "whole language is fine, but" a comment that Amy perceived as a challenge to her competence as a language arts teacher. She interpreted her co-worker's comment as meaning "whole language is **not** fine, because it doesn't teach children important and functionally useful skills" (The word "but" in the teacher's inital comment taking on large significance here). Amy seemed to be testing out a supposition in her talk to

Claire and me, that it isn't really important for children to learn those types of skills, and that perhaps the other teacher was wrong. Claire picked up on the theme of meaningless skills instruction by offering her own experience to show her understanding of Amy's point.

> Claire: Oh the phonics my school has is pathetic--I can't (laughs)--I can't figure some of it out for the life of me--and I do try to do some things with sounds, just every once in a while we'll practice the sounds the different words make--but I--there's no way that I could keep up, with all that stuff like signals.

Claire then continued, building on the topic by providing another example, an explanation of how the phonics program attempts to make students remember particular sounds using pnemonic devices, similar to something Val had referred to in her math text earlier in the evening.

> Claire: and this is another one like that math problem, all those different things you have to think about. What they do is they give you a picture of a tire, like, this is for the letter "S." You have a picture of the tire, the air is leaking out of the tire, what sound does that make?
>
> Amy: SSssssssss
>
> Claire: --and that's how you're supposed to know what letter S makes. (Amy and Claire laugh).
>
> Amy: Tuh--tuh-tuhtt?
>
> Claire: I know, you're going "ttt?" "Air?" What is it? And then there's a car in the picture too--for hubcap!
>
> Amy: (laughingly) HUBCAP!
>
> Claire: Hubcap. Yeah, I know, I went in the first day and I was looking at those up on the wall and I was like, **why** is there a picture of a tire in front? For "T," no for "F" there's a goose, and it's mad, and it's supposed to be going, "Ffffuuuh."
>
> Amy: Oh please! (lots of laughter)
>
> Claire: and then there's a boat, going down a river really fast, and you're supposed to know that that's going "NNNNNN" for ["N."]

Amy: [God, those are so illogical.]

Deb: [It's more complicated to] memorize the pnemonics than to just remember the sounds.

Claire: and then there's a picture of an old-fashioned beater, and that's "Lllllll," for "L."

Deb: It doesn't even make that noise in reality; besides, how many kids have seen an old-fashioned egg beater?

Amy; That's so funny! It's ridiculous!

It is interesting to note here how freely the conversants exaggerated the sounds and how critical they were of the method. (Somehow, it is much safer to be critical of a technique than of a colleague.) The exaggeration served a somewhat rhetorical function, in that by demonstrating how ridiculous such skills instruction is, their own approach (i.e., not teaching isolated skills) is made to seem the more reasonable one. Being critical of this particular approach to the teaching of phonics may also serve as a defense mechanism, temporarily shielding them from their own uncertainty about their own knowledge of and preparation for teaching important reading (or other) skills.

As the conversation continued, I suggested that perhaps one problem lay in the fact that other teachers may not have realized that as whole language teachers, Amy and Claire did teach skills, (attempting here to lay groundwork to then suggest that they need to teach other teachers, and not just their students, about the whole language approach). Before I could go on, Amy returned to the topic of how ridiculous certain skills instruction is, this time providing an example of something that happened recently in her classroom.

Deb: But that comment, you know, about--it just shows that so many teachers, and other people, not just teachers-- just don't really understand what whole language is, because of course kids would learn

skills in whole language, of course they'd learn how to use the dictionary, and how to look up things in an encyclopedia, and alphabetize, and they'd learn about sounds--

Amy: I think what she was talking about was those little stupid--you know like the long, the long line over the "A" that makes you say "aayyee."

Deb: The pronunciation guides?

Amy: Yeah, but I'm like, is that really **so** important? I mean, when's the last time I've done that? When's the last time I said, "Oh, I think I want to use this word that I don't know today?" You know, and most people, if they can read, they can figure out by what's next to it if it's supposed to be short or long. One thing that I've come across is, my science major friend has corrected me cause I taught my kids that platelets (pronounced with a short "a" sound), platelets make your blood clot, and um--

Claire: Platelets (pronounced with a long "a" sound).

Amy: Platelets (short "a" sound), platelets," (long "a" sound). It's platelets, but I said platelets (short a sound), so they learned wrong, I didn't find out till afterwards, but you know, I mean how often does that happen?

Claire: You learn the word just by being exposed to it a lot, like I learned about it because my grandpa had leukemia, and I, you know, I learned about blood that way, but otherwise--

Amy: Here I am teaching it, and if I had had any question in my head, I would have gone and looked it up, but I just thought it was platelets, you know, that's how I read it, and I didn't even think that it might be platelets. It doesn't look like it, so I didn't even go bother to look it up anyway, if I'd had a question in my mind, I would've gone and looked it up. But I didn't. I just said, "Oh these are platelets," They just--

Deb: And even though you're not saying it the right way, you know what it means.

Amy: Yeah. I mean really what I wanted them to know is there's something in your blood that makes it clot so you don't bleed to death. That's I guess the most important thing, I don't care if they remember "Play-tel-ettes," or "Plaah-tel-ettes" but that there's something there that makes your blood clot, that's not blood. So, I don't know.

In talking this situation through, and with Claire and I both showing that we understood and agreed with her position, Amy seemed relatively confident that in her teaching, she was focusing on the the most important things: Whether or not the students undestood the main concepts of her lessons. Still, she was not yet comfortable defending her position to her colleagues:

> Amy: But I find that I'm kind of chicken when teachers say those kinds of things, I always just say, "Well, there's pluses and minuses to both systems, right?" I always cop out like that, I'm not quite to the point where I feel comfortable, just saying, "Well, I totally disagree with you" or something like that.
>
> Claire: It's hard too, because that's the way we were brought up, and they say, "See, **you** can read, you can write."
>
> Deb: Right, that's an argument they can always use.
>
> Claire: Yup.
>
> Deb: And you might not be able to change their mind by just saying I don't agree with you.
>
> Amy: And you might just make an enemy, there too.
>
> Deb: Mmmmm.
>
> Amy: I usually just find some middle of the road thing, you know, "Oh, there's good and bad, there's pluses and minuses." I kind of try to keep the peace, with what I'm doing in my room anyway, so-- but then some of them don't care. One 2nd grade teacher just makes me so--she makes me feel so good because she comes down, she asks me questions, she asks my advice, and she is truly interested in what I have to say. And I find myself asking her things before I'll go and ask someone else, cause she really listens to me, where other people are kind of like, "Oh that's all fine and dandy, but you've got the good kids anyway." That's their excuse for anything that I'm doing right now. We just traced, traced our bodies and then we put all of our organs in it and our bones, and you know, it was neat, cause it was all actual kid size, cause they each traced their own body with their partner and everything, and um, somebody came by and saw it, and then, they were talking about it, and I heard them out in the hall, and she was saying: *"Oh well, **she's** got all*

the good kids anyway. " **That's** their excuse for **everything**. But, we'll see what they say next year.

Deb: That's right.

Amy: Cause I keep telling the other 3rd grade teachers that I'll take my share next year.

Claire: That's exactly what they said to me last year, *"Just wait till next year,"* they said. *"These 2nd graders are going to come.."* and I, they always said I had all the--that I had the good class. And **that's** why we got to read and write all these books and posters and plays and things like that. It couldn't be that much more difficult with one group than another.

By listening carefully to the language that Amy used in the last segment of this vignette, we are given a new lens through which to view the novices' experiences with their colleagues. Amy uses terms like "chicken out," and "cop out," to describe her decision not to openly disagree with her co-workers, and phrases like "keep the peace" and "make an enemy" when describing the consequences of her actions. We can hear reflected in terms like these her fear of alienating her more experienced co-workers, her own disappointment with herself for not speaking up, and her lack of clear certainty about what she knows and believes about the best way to be sure students learn reading skills. It clearly bothers her that her colleagues do not demonstrate respect for her professional ability, they explicitly refuse to concede that her science and health lesson on body parts and systems was well-taught, instead citing its success as due to student factors.

Still, Amy does (in this instance) seem to be conscious of why and how she responds to Other Teachers in the particular way that she does, and what the consequences of that response are. By finding a compromise position from which to speak, Amy managed to reduce some of the tension surfaced

in this interaction with her co-worker, without making the other teacher an "enemy."

Vignette Four: On "Being Able To Stand Up To Another Teacher in the Building"

At the final Sharing Circle meeting, held at the end of the school year in June, the topic of teachers' negativity in the staffroom surfaced again. The group members were somewhat nostalgically recalling some of their experiences in the Learning Community Program, focusing specifically on how much they valued having professors who had listened to them and believed in them. They linked the topic of their preparation experiences with their school staffroom experiences by highlighting the differences between the two. While in their teacher education program, even in the company of professors or others whom they considered older, more experienced, or more knowledgeable, they felt they had been able to be active contributors.

> Val: I mean, we had so much conversation in there and it wasn't like us sitting back and-
>
> Claire: Yeah, like they were the full source of information. Cause that wasn't the way it was. Although they knew it all (laughter) but, but they listened to us.
>
> Amy: They listened to us.
>
> Claire: Yeah, (looking at Deb) you listened and then you went from there.
>
> Lauren: Yeah, and I was like okay, [I really--]
>
> Amy: [--such a positive experience]
>
> Val: [it was nothing but great]
>
> Lauren: And it's so much to talk to people who believe like you believe. Like I just get so frustrated in the lunchroom. I know I said it

> before, but , they're **always** complaining, and sometimes I agree. Sometimes there are these kids that you know they're just stinkers. And other times, you know, you're like, I had them for, cause we switch classes, and I'm like, they're **not** bad. You know?

By raising the issue of her colleagues and their staffroom talk at this point in the conversation, Lauren effectively communicated how diametrically opposed she perceived herself (and the members of the Learning Community Program) to be from the other teachers in her school. In her view, they were clearly not people who believed what she believed, although she did concede, for the first time, that in a few cases, the teachers might be correct in their assessment of students. Nina echoed this concession to other teachers, and made a point to emphasize that she considered her colleague, Brenda, to be a great teacher, even though she believed Brenda was wrong in her diagnosis of Mandy, one of Nina's special needs students. For the better part of the school year, Brenda had been urging Nina to have Mandy placed in a special education classroom for emotionally impaired (EI) students, a move that Nina vehemently opposed.

> Nina: I know. Like Brenda's a great teacher. She was on the interviewing team. But she says **day** after **day**, she goes, "You gotta get Mandy in the EI room!" And I, I finally say, I said, "I don't think that's the best place for her."

Nina went on to explain how the teachers at her school were as negative and likely to condemn students as being beyond redemption as the teachers at Lauren's school. In fact, she implied, her colleagues sought out (and were almost delighted to find) confirmation that their former students had met with misfortune.

> Nina: And they sit in the lunchroom and they'll look through the Terrytown Shopping Guide, and you know where they flip to? They flip to the part that says who got arrested for what. *"Oh, I used to have*

so and so and I always knew he'd end up... " {said in a high pitched voice}--I mean, and it's [such--]

Amy: [Oh **no**!]

Nina: and I think, oh-my-gosh. **You** guys are really looking at the positive. {She now switches back to the high pitched, mocking voice} *"Oh, did you know, do you remember the Bradley kids? Well, the one has a baby now and she's unmarried and the kid's **huge**"* and I mean,

Claire: (nods her head) Yup, yup, that's **exactly** what they do.

Amy: [Mmmmhmmmm.]

Nina: [You always] You know, // I talk about Mandy a lot, too, but I don't know.

Val: She has a smile on her face every time she does though.

Nina's use of details and constructed dialogue, such as the name of the newspaper, and the instance of the Bradley twins, were successful here as involvement devices, as evidenced by Claire's assertion "that's exactly what they do," as well as Amy and Val's subsequent contributions. Tannen (1989) explains how this works:

> The invoking of details--specific, concrete, familiar--makes it possible for an individual to recall and a hearer to recreate a scene in which people (in this case teachers and students) are in relation to each other and to objects in the world. (p. 166)

It wasn't that the teachers at Claire's school ever made those exact comments--we can't know if they did--but that Nina's example is taken as highly representative of the kinds of comments the "Other Teachers" were likely to make. Claire was thus responding to Nina's intended meaning, that Other Teachers seemed to delight in confirming that they always knew "these kids would come to no good." Nina tried to point out that there were different ways for teachers to talk about students; she for example, talked about Mandy frequently, not in a negative way, but out of concern for her well-being. Val

understood how Nina's talk about Mandy was different, because Nina having a smile on her face meant she enjoyed and appreciated Mandy. Having made the point to her peers that she objected strongly to her colleagues' ways of talking about students, Nina went on to share her response to her colleague Brenda. In the dialogue Nina constructed here, she included what she "actually" said to Brenda, and what she wished she had said:

> Nina: I mean, I don't know. And finally I, I don't know if you'd call it standing up to her, exactly, but I said: "Well, I believe that the EI room would be a very bad choice for her." Well, you know, that... and she's like: *"Look at how she disturbs the kids and disturbs the learning"* and I **feel** like saying well, if you could come in and just see how well the children have adapted themselves to her behavior. You know, **they're** more adaptable than **you** are. But I didn't say that. But I don't know...I don't know.
>
> Val: It was just a whole different mode of thinking. When I think about before I was in the program, I don't even know what I thought anything was. And then, it is just really neat to have a mindset.
>
> Lauren: Have your propensities that you believe in. (all talking together)
>
> Nina: and being able to actually stand up to another teacher in the building-- it's not actually like a competition or anything but you've gotta find a way to say it, you know.

With Nina's final comment serving as a kind of closure on the topic, the group members went on to talk about other things, their plans for pursuing masters degrees at different institutions, their decisions to apply for jobs in other districts, etc. In this instance, I heard the novices speaking with more authority, with a clearer sense of who they are and what they believe in. Nina and Lauren were now able to separate the talk from the person, recognizing that teachers aren't necessarily bad teachers (and may even be good ones), even though they may hold and express different conceptions of students. For Lauren, the recognition that she has a clear set of beliefs to draw

upon makes her more sure of who she is. For Nina, accepting the responsibility to speak up on Mandy's behalf helped her find a way to negotiate between the alternatives of withdrawl, silence, compromise, and standing up for her beliefs.

The conversation between Nina and Brenda about Mandy's placement occurred near the end of the school year, which was toward the end of Nina's second year of teaching. It is difficult to know whether Nina would have risked standing up to her older, more experienced colleague at an earlier point in the school year. According to Nina's narrative, Brenda had been urging her to move Mandy into a special education room for most of the school year. While Nina had only recently spoken out against this, she had clearly not capitulated to Brenda's request, even before she felt ready to speak out. If Brenda had tried to force the issue earlier, Nina might have spoken out then too, as her concern for Mandy might have overridden her fear of the consequences of speaking out. Somehow, as Nina pointed out above, "you've gotta find a way to say it."

Looking Across the Vignettes

In each of the Sharing Circle conversations described above, the novice teachers worked hard to set themselves apart from their colleagues, and both implicitly and explicitly stated to the other Circle members that they did not want to be like, or ever become like those "other" teachers. In their desire to craft and maintain an identity that stood in opposition to the "traditional teacher" identity, these particular teachers challenged the stereotypic view that novices are desperate to adopt ways of talking, teaching, and being that will enable them to fit in to their school cultures (Ryan, 1980). Like many of the "proactive" novices recently described by Goodman (1987; 1988), Zeichner

and Tabachnick (1985) and Nias (1989), these novices struggled to establish themselves as independent and autonomous.

While some teacher educators, including myself, might be pleased to learn that graduates of our programs are committed, not merely to "fit into" the system, but to craft an identity for themselves, there are also reasons to consider this situation cautiously, and with a degree of serious concern. It is important to ask not only what the novices gained, but also what they lost because of this perspective. How often did they foreclose on opportunities to gain support and assistance from more experienced teachers as a result of this commitment? It is also important to think about the ways that novice teacher/experienced teacher relationships may influence the efficacy of staff development efforts such as mentoring programs. Would it be possible to create a situation where novices and their more experienced teachers could work together (even in cases where they belong to different Discourses) to the mutual benefit of both? I will take up these questions in depth in Chapter Six. For now, though, I would like to consider the function that narrating and co-narrating vignettes such as the four presented above played in the novices' development of a sense of community between group members, and the development of a professional identity.

Building a Sense of Community by Creating an "Us-vs-Them" Situation

In her book, Storytelling Rights, Amy Shuman (1986) reminds us that

> conversational narrative demands that we focus on context as well as on text, and on the relationship between narrative and event--not as a matter of referentiality but as a matter of relationships between speakers and listeners and, correspondingly, between the story world and the storytelling situation. (p. 193)

This reminder was very much on my mind as I listened to the tapes of the Sharing Circle meetings and reviewed the transcripts of our conversations. I was curious about the fact that the portrayal of the "Other Teachers" was so consistent, not only among all the group members, who taught in such different settings, but also across the duration of the Sharing Circle. It was intriguing as well to consider what it was *about* the topic of "Other Teachers" that made it so compelling to the novice teachers. Was it simply that it served as a common reference point? Was the category of "Other Teachers" merely a symbol to represent the kind of teacher they did not want to become? What was it about the group setting that might help account for the "Other Teacher" narratives being told in the way they were?

I came to realize that the "Other Teachers" as a conversational topic actually served several important purposes, not only for individual novices but for the entire group as well. Talking about other teachers, teachers "not like us," paradoxically helped the novices develop a sense of solidarity, of being teachers "like us." In other words, by providing the group members with a "them" to oppose, the topic forged a stronger sense of there being an "us," of belonging to a community. This works, Mead (1968) believes, because "the readiest way of arousing an emotional appreciation of a common issue is to fight together for that issue" (p. 360). Gee (1990) also offers an explanation that is helpful here; he asserts that any Discourse-defined way of speaking, thinking, and being is partly defined in opposition to other, ultimately opposing Discourses. In other words, one's position as a Learning Community "kind of teacher" is partly defined by its points of opposition to a "Traditional Teacher," or other kind of Teacher Discourse.

Distancing themselves from the Other Teacher Discourse whenever possible in their conversations helped the participants to actually construct an

alternative Teacher Discourse. For example, highlighting the differences between their pedagogical preferences and those of the Other Teachers helped them clarify, in very concrete terms, the kind of teachers they hoped to be. In a segment from the April Sharing Circle meeting, for example, Val describes some of the differences between herself and a fellow fifth grade teacher:

> Val: I can tell you I joke around more than the other fifth grade teacher does. But I'm comparing--like we have **completely** different teaching styles. Like her room is so organized and so neat. And like she does all her bulletin boards and they're all done with like **teacher** stuff. And then you look at **mine** and I've got garbage hanging all over it and all over the classroom, you know, the **kids** have done it. And you know, she teaches in rows. She has rows all year long, I mean, if you can believe it. Which I can't even stand because I trip over the desks.

Val's intention here was to show the group members how different she and her colleague are, without seeming to brag about her own approach (thus her use of words like "garbage"). She wanted to create a picture that showed that students in her room have ownership and freedom, they decorate the room and bulletin boards, and they needn't sit in rows. Instead of being regimented and organized, she has stuff ("garbage") everywhere, all made by students. In both words and tone, Val went on to imply that she would never have her students sit in rows (facing the teacher who would be lecturing at the front of the room), besides being a ridiculous way to teach she would "trip" over desks as she circulated around the room.

> Val: And I like, she has some positive teaching methods and some that I would love to learn--like I think she teaches math beautifully and her experience is obviously a million years more than mine. But she's like a drill sergeant. I mean, she would **not** let the kids open their valentines in school. Some things I really strongly disagree with and but yet, being the new person on the block you sort of tend to go with her ideas. Now, thank goodness she wasn't in my classroom because my kids did open their valentines. But the room mother was like pleading with her and I guess she still wouldn't let them.

Claire: What was the reasoning behind that?

Val: Because they really get into them, they get really noisy. And then sometimes, they really like to read them, they giggle and see who they're from. Takes a lot of time.

Lauren: Noise does not bother me.

Val: I'm like, it **totally** doesn't bother me. Now her room door is shut all the time and it's really, and it's so quiet and like some of those kids--I feel like they're in a Nazi concentration camp.

Claire: When my room is so quiet I'm like worried.

Lauren: Yeah, like "What's going on?"

Val: Yeah. Like mine are always jumping up and down or whatever. And so we are completely different. So like, like the kids would **never** dare like ask to do some of the things in that room and so it's just, and I'm not saying that I'm right and she's wrong. Even though it might sound like it right now.

Lauren: It's different.

Val: It is completely different.

Interacting With Other Teachers: A New Challenge

Looking across the various examples and instances described in these novices' conversation about their interaction with their co-workers, I am struck once again by the monumental task novices take on as they seek membership to our profession. While negotiating an identity for themselves with students, they must also make choices every day about how they will conduct themselves with their colleagues. This task involves navigating through a web of complex tensions and making difficult choices about how to manage, rather than solve them. This chapter described four of the actions that the novices took in response to these complex tensions: withdrawl,

remaining silent, finding a position of compromise, or speaking up for their beliefs.

I think of the many times I have wondered about the graduates of our teacher education program--all the times I asked myself, "Will they be successful with their students? Will they be able to create the kind of classroom life they envision?" Perhaps I never realized that some of the most difficult challenges they face, their biggest "battles," to use one of Claire's words, lie not inside of the classroom as much outside it, in their relationships with other teachers.

It is not surprising that through their interactions and relationships with other teachers, the novices discovered a new dimension of what it means to enact the teacher role. Like many teacher education programs, the Learning Community Program sought to prepare teacher candidates to work effectively with children. Its curriculum focused primarily on what could happen within the classroom, and in the teacher-student dyad. The negotiation of a professional identity with Other Teachers (and well as with Parents, as we will see in the upcoming chapter), broadened the circle of contexts in which the novices did their identity work, and moved them beyond their initial preparation for teaching.

CHAPTER FIVE

Who We Are With Our Students' Parents

I felt very confident, actually, after I had the conferences with the parents; they had a lot of good things to say to me, and I felt I had a lot of good things to say to them, and it was really a very positive experience...they really made me feel good, they said, you know, "You're my son's, you're my daughter's, favorite teacher" and I was proud. That was a good feeling. I also felt like I had some good suggestions to give to the parents....

(Lauren Moffett, Interview, 6/18/93)

Introduction

In the two previous chapters, I described a number of conversations in which the novice teachers shared personal narratives about their interactions and relationships with significant others in their school world, namely their students and colleagues. In this chapter, I turn to another important constituency within the teachers' school worlds, the parents[31] of their students. Although their interactions with parents were less frequent and their relationships less intense than those with students and colleagues, the novices often brought the topic of parents into the Sharing Circle conversations, especially early in the school year (during the first three Sharing Circle meetings). It is important to look at this talk, for as Lauren's comment above suggests, the novices' interactions with parents have the potential to influence their perceptions of themselves in their role as teacher. Moreover, because teachers (like everyone else), are different selves with different people in different social settings (Mead, 1934), an examination of

[31] I use the term "parent" throughout this chapter, intending the label to include step and foster parents, grandparents, other relatives, or any person in the role of primary caregiver to a child.

the novices' interactions with parents serves to highlight yet another dimension of their emerging teacher identities.

Whereas novices' interactions with students called on them to define themselves around issues of authority and equity; and interactions with other teachers called on them to "manage" inherent tensions and conflicts around issues like independance and autonomy; their interactions with parents called on them to enact the teacher role in other ways: they needed to project an image of themselves as competent professionals, knowledgeable about curriculum and pedagogy as these relate to particular children. In their teacher role, the novices also needed to find ways to communicate with and involve parents (almost all of whom were older than them) in their children's school experiences.

The notion that parents and teachers should communicate frequently, and that parents should be involved in their children's education is deeply embedded in the fabric of public school ideology; and in fact, there is substantial support for this belief in the literature. Numerous studies indicate that students in schools with a high level of parent involvement show higher academic achievement, better attendance, and better in-school behavior than students in schools with low parent involvement (Comer, 1980; Epstein, 1987; Henderson, 1987).

Unfortunately, however, there are varied interpretations and understandings about what parent involvement entails. For a new teacher who is just beginning to find her way with parents, the rhetoric of "parent involvement" and the prevailing assumptions about different kinds of parents and their ability to support children's learning make the negotiation of a parent-oriented teacher identity a challenging task.

In this chapter, I will describe some of these prevailing assumptions and misconceptions about parents, as they apply to my analysis of the novices' talk about their experiences with parents. I begin with a brief overview of the kinds of background experiences and expectations the novices may bring to their practice, and I consider how these experiences may shape their sense of what parent-teacher relationships could, or should look like. Next, I present a model of three general types of relationships among parents and teachers suggested by the current research on school and family relations and by my analysis of the novices' conversations about parents. I use this model as a lens through which to view the stances taken by the novices in their narratives about their experiences with parents. I then present three segments of conversation from the Sharing Circle meetings to illustrate how these stances in turn shape the kind of teacher they are trying to be with students' parents. Finally, I will examine how the novices' talk about their experiences with parents is both related to and different from their talk about their experiences with students and colleagues.

Novices' Prior Personal and Programmatic Experiences With Parents

Before we examine the novices' conversation and personal narratives about parents, it is pertinent to consider their previous experience with parent-teacher interactions. Not being parents themselves at the time of this study, the novices had two main sources of information to draw upon in order to craft their identities with parents: their recollections of how their own parents and teachers interacted during the time they themselves were students, and their pre-service course and field experiences. Each of these sources of information is summarized below.

Personal Experiences

As beginning teachers intent on establishing productive working relationships with students' parents, these novices drew on their memories[32] of how their *own* parents and former teachers had interacted and communicated. These memories--how their own parents interacted with teachers and the kinds of relationships their parents had with the school system in general--naturally influenced the implicit expectations or assumptions they held about how "good" teachers and "good" parents conduct themselves with one another. It is important to note here that in addition to being from white, mono-lingual, middle-income families, all were from "intact" two-parent families; and four of the six had family members who worked closely with schools: Christine's mother worked as a teacher's aide, Amy's father and Lauren's mother were principals, and Claire's father was a secondary school teacher. Based on interviews with the participants at the end of the year, and on comments made during the Sharing Circle meetings (e.g., "As a child, I would never have challenged an adult"), the novices considered themselves to have been "good" students, a trait common to teachers studied by Lortie (1975) as well.

Programmatic Experiences

In contrast to the many opportunities they had, over a great many years, to observe and participate in student-teacher interactions--both as students and as teacher candidates--the novices' experiences, as either participants in or observers of, teacher-parent interactions were more limited.

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[32]Like "stories," memories are not objective, factual accounts. They therefore reveal issues unresolved, wishes unfufilled, and have dramatic content and structure just as other stories of experience do. As Bruner (1983) has observed, we *reconstruct* rather than *recover* our past.

The novices were not unusual in this regard; indeed, many educators have observed that most teachers' previous schooling and teacher education experiences are too limited to prepare them adequately to communicate or work with the diverse range of parents they are likely to encounter (Edwards, in preparation; Hitz & Roper, 1986).

Typical of preservice programs, the one these novices attended offered no methods coursework dealing explicitly with issues like communicating or developing relationships with parents. However, while juniors, they had all taken from the same instructor a social foundations course entitled "School and Community." This course was aimed at helping them explore multiple ways of thinking about the complex relationships between schools and society. One section of the course focused specifically on investigating relationships "...among schools, communities, and families and examine[d] various interactions which may influence teacher and pupil behavior" (Young, 1990, p. 1). A main theme of the course--to develop teacher candidates' understandings and build appreciation for students' diverse social, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds--was a thread that wove through and was reinforced in their entire teacher education program. Several of their other courses touched on issues of culture and diversity as well; for example, courses in a four-term literacy sequence dealt with linguistic differences among school children and problems of helping the transition from home to school be a process respectful of those differences and one that might build upon all students' prior learning and background (Singer, 1990). The program did not attempt to teach students "about" particular groups per se, an approach which has been shown to reinforce stereotyping (Sleeter, 1991; Zeichner, 1993) but rather sought to develop sensitivity toward and a disposition to learn about students' backgrounds, and to foster a propensity

that advocated treating all students and their families with care, genuineness and empathy (Learning Community Handbook, 1989).

While in the program, teacher candidates spent three semesters in elementary and/or middle schools as part of their field practicum, in addition to a semester-long student teaching experience. These experiences gave the teacher candidates some opportunity to observe actual parent-teacher interactions first hand. All were able to see, for example, how, when, and for what purpose cooperating teachers communicated with parents via notes, newletters, and telephone calls. In addition, a few had attended an "Open House" orientation event for parents, and all had participated, albeit in a limited way, in some parent-teacher conferences. This participation usually involved listening to their cooperating teachers conduct the conference and offering a few of their own observations of the child being discussed. Some of the novices had been allowed to lead several conferences under their cooperating teachers' supervision. During their student teaching semester, two of the novices, Amy and Claire, worked with cooperating teachers who invited parents into the classroom once a week to assist with activities at instructional "centers."

These various events are typical of "parent involvement" activities in most American schools; they are taken-for-granted, institutionally-sanctioned means for teachers and parents to communicate. Although such activities are the norm in most schools, they have been criticized for a number of reasons. According to Sara Lawrence Lightfoot (1978), these activities allow schools to maintain an image of working together with parents without actually allowing chances for in-depth conversation or potentially threatening interactions. She observes that:

> Parent-Teacher Association meetings and open house rituals at the beginning of the school year are contrived occasions that symbolically reaffirm the idealized parent-school relationship but rarely provide the chance for authentic interaction. (p. 28)

Other critics maintain that many of these "traditional," school-based modes of interacting and communicating with parents are problematic for a variety of reasons. First, due to changes in family structures and work schedules (Nieto, 1992), many parents have difficulty attending meetings or volunteering to "help out" in classrooms during the school day (David, 1993). Second, teachers' common practice of writing or telephoning parents only when a child is experiencing some type of difficulty may serve to alienate parents from school (Burns, 1993). Third, if parents do not attend school functions or respond to requests from teachers in particular ways, teachers may assume that parents do not value education or their child's success in school (Davies, 1989; Flores, 1991). This assumption may or may not be accurate, but it is rarely investigated further or validated by the teacher.

Nieto (1992) notes, "That the behaviors of middle-class parents of any race or ethnic group tend to be different from those of poor parents is amply documented" (p. 193). This creates a problem, Lareau (1989) suggests, particularly because parents of poor children often do not have the same cultural capital at their disposal as middle and upper-middle class parents. This means, for example, that middle-class parents are more likely to work in jobs that have a degree of autonomy and flexibility, making it easier for them to rearrange their schedules to attend daytime conferences or school events, while poor or working-class parents are less likely to be able to rearrange their work schedules to allow for such participation. Then, when the poor parents do not show up at the school, teachers typically and often erroneously

conclude that these parents simply do not care about their children's education (Flores et al., 1991).

In sum, it is true that the Sharing Circle participants had some course-related experience while still teacher candidates that connected to working with parents. But such academic learning, even when backed up by field experience, cannot adequately approximate the challenges of working as a full-time teacher among diverse youngsters and their families.

On Working with Parents

Given the novices' previous personal and programmatic experiences with parent-teacher interactions, one might easily assume that the ways in which they oriented to the teacher role with parents would be similar to them. However, analysis of the narratives told by the Sharing Circle participants about their interactions with parents showed this not to be the case. While it was true that, as a group, their narratives about parents did show that they were all considering different aspects of teaching than were considered in their stories of interactions with students or colleagues, not all Sharing Circle members held the same orientation to the teacher role with parents. This stands in contrast to the relatively high degree of consensus members seemed to share when discussing their interactions with pupils and the other teachers with whom they worked.

Each of these different ways of enacting the teacher role was bound up with a particular stance toward parents, each suggested different ways of talking to and about parents, and each had implications for the images they held of themselves as teachers. In effect, the different ways of orienting to the teacher role with parents represented different ideologies. To the extent that these different ideologies each involved a particular "set of values and

viewpoints" (Gee, 1990, p. 144) about the possible relationships between parents and teachers, we could consider them different types of Parent-Teacher Discourses. My analysis of the parent data, and the literature on parent-teacher interactions, identified three general ways of orienting to the parent teacher relationship, or three "categories" of Parent-Teacher Discourses, which I am describe here as "Co-Caregivers," "Associates," and "Adversaries." Embedded within each of these categories are different beliefs about parents and teachers, the kind of relationship they should cultivate and the norms pertaining to the ways that they could (or should) interact and communicate with one another. As Gee (1990) reminds us:

> Each and every Discourse makes of us, while we are in it, a certain sort of person; each and every Discourse 'calls forth' certain ways of viewing the world, ways of communicating to others, ways of valuing and thinking about the world and our fellow human beings....(p. 191)

An Overview of the Three Types of Parent-Teacher Discourses

I identified one category of Parent-Teacher Discourses as the "Co-Caregiver Discourse." A parent or a teacher ascribing to this ideology holds the perspective that parents and teachers are "co-caregivers," connected by a common interest in a given child's welfare, and committed to maintaining a close and cooperative relationship. Burns (1993) believes that when teachers and parents view one another this way, "education becomes a shared venture, characterized by mutual respect and trust in which the importance and influence of each partner is recognized" (p. 9). A Co-Caregiver teacher would believe that parents usually make decisions with their child's well-being in mind, even if she (the teacher) disagreed with the parents' methods or decisions. In other words, Co-caregiver parents and teachers would not

necessarily have to concur at all times, but they would have to respect each other's judgment and singular expertise.

I labeled a second Parent-Teacher Discourse as the "Associates Discourse." Members of this Discourse seek to create and maintain a polite, business-like relationship with their school or home counterparts. These parents and teachers see themselves and each other as both making worthwhile contributions to the education of the child, but do not expect to develop a close, intimate relationship with one another. The attitude of members of this Discourse might be represented by the phrase: "You do your job, I'll do mine." Most traditional forms of communication between home and school (i. e., report cards and parent-teacher conferences), are designed to support this view of parent-teacher relationships and maintain the boundaries between home and school. Teachers in this Parent-Teacher Discourse would expect to notify a parent if his/her child was in trouble or experiencing a problem; the parent would accept the responsibility to attend to the problem quickly and efficiently. Members of this Discourse would perceive little need for other contact between parents and teachers beyond the traditional events of conferences and PTA meetings, the occasional holiday performance, and weekly or monthly newsletter.

I called the third Parent-Teacher Discourse the "Adversaries Discourse." Members of this Discourse tend to view their home or school counterpart as a potential "adversary," or what Waller (1932) calls a "natural enemy." The relationship that the parties establish is characterized by mutual distrust and disrespect, and may be either confrontational or defensive (or both). From an Adversarial teacher's perspective, a parent who often challenges her authority, works against her (or fails to support her or respond to her requests), or seems not to have what the teacher believes is the child's

best interests at heart may be considered an adversary. Similarly, an Adversarial parent might see a teacher as an enemy if the teacher appeared unresponsive to his or her concerns, made the parent feel devalued, treated his/her child in a disrespectful way, or used materials or teaching approaches that the parent found problematic. There is some evidence that parents and teachers who do not share common racial, cultural, and socio-economic backgrounds are more likely to ascribe adversarial motives to their school or home counterpart (i.e., Flores, et al, 1991; Lareau, 1989).

These three categories of Parent-Teacher Discourses are shown as concentric circles in Figure 4 below. The Co-Caregiver Discourse is represented by the center circle, implying a close, intimate relationship between parent and teacher. As the circles become farther from the center, the parent-teacher relationship becomes less tightly connected and more distant.

In the text following Figure 4, I will present narratives in which experiences with parents are the focus of the group's conversation. The three narratives do not correspond to each of the three categories shown in Figure 4 separately, because the novices' tellings were rarely so simple or self-contained. I selected them instead because they illustrate nicely: (1) the varying ways group members talked to and about parents, depending on their membership in a given Parent-Teacher Discourse; (2) the fact that participants could belong to (or move between) multiple, even conflicting Discourses simultaneously; (3) The Sharing Circle participants attempts through their conversations together to make sense of (or make peace with), the kinds of relationships they were establishing with parents; and (4) the ways in which novices' interactions with parents shaped the evolving images they held of themselves as teachers.

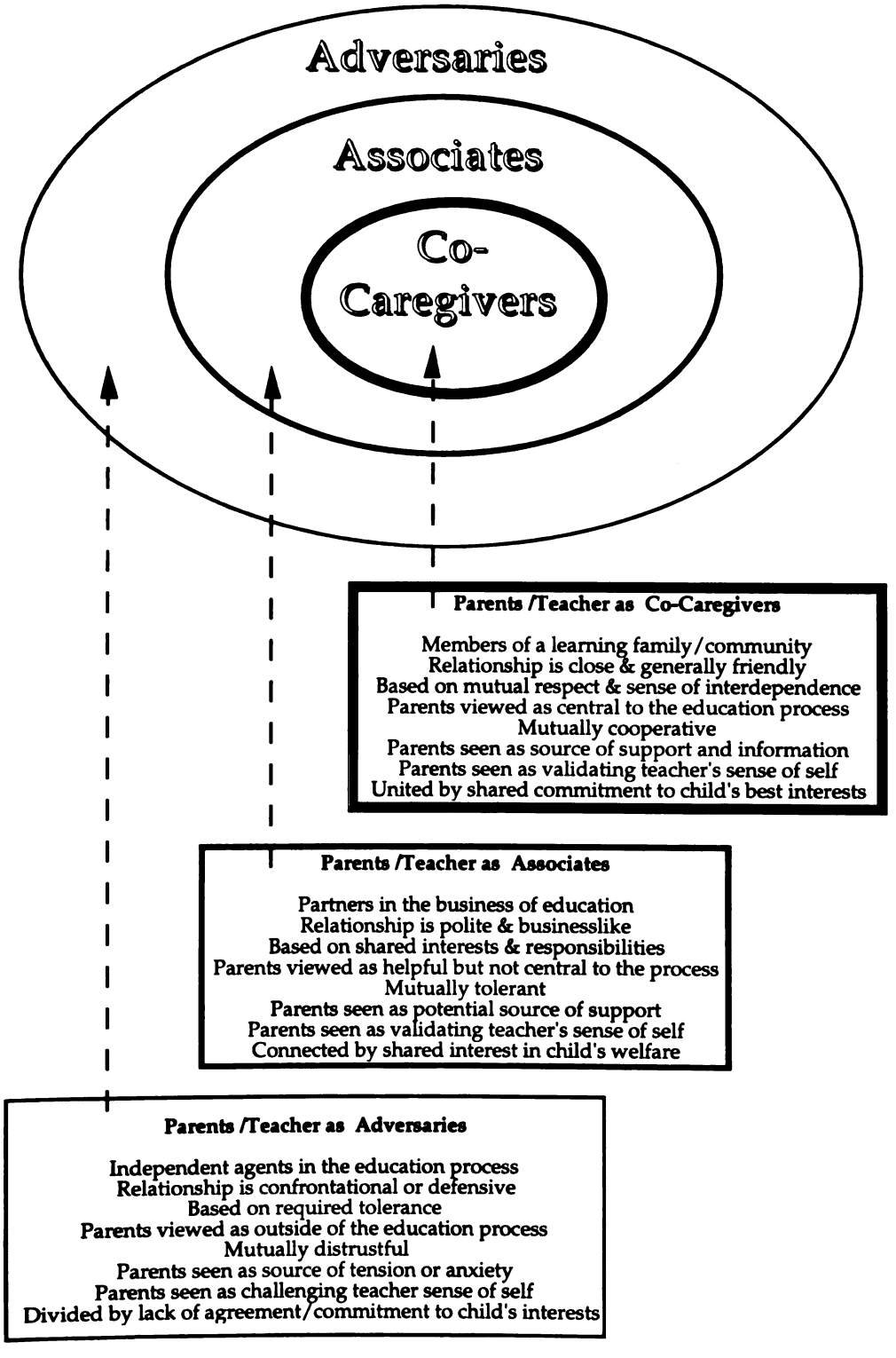

Figure 4. Three Categories of Parent-Teacher Discourses

Locating Oneself Initially in a Parent-Teacher Discourse

Parents and teachers bring to their encounters with one another expectations and attitudes about their own and each other's role, and about the kind of relationship they hope to develop. These preconceptions are based on their past experiences as students and on previous encounters with other parents or teachers. Teachers may also acquire expectations about what parents can or should do, based on their interactions with other teachers in their schools, and from their teacher preparation experiences. Typically, teachers expect parents to demonstrate their participation in their child's education in particular ways, for example, reading to and with children, taking them to the library, helping them with homework, and attending school social functions and conferences (Becker & Epstein, 1982).

Despite the kind of Parent-Teacher Discourse community to which the novices initially hoped (or expected) to belong, their membership in a given Parent-Teacher Discourse varied according to the dialectical interaction between themselves and individual parents. In a some instances, both the novices and the parents started as (potential) members of the same Parent-Teacher Discourse. Often, though, the two parties found themselves communicating across differing Discourses. Vignette One presents a conversation in which a parent does not conform to one novice's initial expectations for their relationship. As she shares this experience in the Sharing Circle, other group members become involved in trying to interpret "what happened," and thus have an opportunity to listen to and articulate for themselves differing views of Parent-Teacher relationships.

Since the Parent-Teacher Discourses are jointly constructed, sometimes in the process of interacting with one another, one or both of the parties were able to move to the other's Discourse. For example, in Vignette Two, we will

hear Claire, (who with Co-Caregivers), describe an interaction with an angry parent (who was operating from the Adversaries Discourse). Claire brought to that encounter very positive feelings about parents, in part based on her experiences the year before when a group of her students' parents had petitioned the school board to keep her position. Her initial Discourse-defined position (Gee, 1990), allowed her to interact with the angry parent in a way that enabled them to establish a "middle ground" relationship.

Finally, in Vignette Three, we will see that regardless of the category of Parent-Teacher Discourse to which the novices most often belonged, they still struggled at times to find the most appropriate way to interact with parents, especially when reporting the social or educational problems experienced by a particular child. Taken together, an examination of these three vignettes will help us to develop an understanding of how these novices approached the question, "Who are we with our students' parents?"

Participants' Conflicting Orientations Toward Parent-Teacher Relationships

The first segment of conversation about parents occured during the group's first meeting in early November. All three first-year teachers, Amy, Val, and Lauren, and one of the second-year teachers, Christine, were present at this meeting. The conversation, which had begun with group members sharing personal narratives of individual students and activities scheduled at their schools (as a way of orienting one another to the school situation in which each was teaching), moved into a comparison of resources (or lack of resources) available at their respective schools, and finally evolved into a debate about whether poor and working-class parents "cared" as much about their children as middle-upper class parents.

In this instance, we will see how Amy and Lauren, who tell narratives locating themselves in the Co-Caregiver Discourse, come into conflict with Val, whose narratives locate her in the Adversaries Discourse, and alternately with Christine, who moves between the two Discourses. I was unable to determine whether the novices took the particular stances they did based solely on the parents they had encountered in their teaching careers thus far, but suspect that they were probably also influenced by other teachers at their schools, and their own background experiences.

Involvement in this conversation was high, all participants contributed to the discussion enthusiastically, and their talk was marked by rapid turn-taking and a great deal of overlapping speech. I left the group for several minutes as this topic began to gel in order to remove the dinner from the oven. I had finished setting the dinner entrees on the table, and rejoined the group just as Val, who was teaching fifth grade in a suburban school that draws many of its students from a nearby low-income trailer park, told the group that she had been spending a lot of her own money to purchase school supplies like notebooks and markers that her students could not afford.

It seemed important to Val that she convey through this narrative a picture of herself as someone who is devoted to the most needy of her students. The way in which she framed her narrative allowed her to present herself to her Learning Community peers as a caring and giving person, as well as to affirm those aspects of her substantial self. She noted, for instance, that she was most drawn to her low-income students, feeling that they (more than the children of doctors and lawyers), needed her support and affection.

> Val: Like I went out and bought all the notebooks. I've gone out and bought markers and stuff, just because, some of the kids--I don't know where yours are from, but some of the kids like, don't have <u>any</u> of that stuff. These students, I mean, they--some of them--its such a mix, I

mean, its like real life. It's really neat, like we've got like parents who are doctors and lawyers and all that kind of stuff, but the other ones like live in the trailer park and come to school and they smell, and they're dirty, and you know, you want to love them to pieces. I mean, they just have **nothing.**

Although there were nods and backchannel responses to Val's comment about buying school supplies, no one in the group responded directly to her observation that the students from the trailer park were ill-kempt. After a moment of silence, Christine commented on Val's students being from diverse backgrounds:

Christine: So you have a real mix.

Val: It's a **big** mix!

Amy, who had done her student teaching the year before in another school in Val's current district, attempted to join the conversation here by stating, "I didn't notice that at all." Val, however, continued to try to advance the theme she had begun to build moments earlier, namely, her observation that low-income students were not well-cared for by their parents, this time offering a story about the father of one of her students, complete with constructed dialogue, to illustrate and emphasize her point. This strategy proved successful for Val; it served to heighten the active participation of her listeners (Tannen, 1989), and kept them focused on her narrative, as evidenced by their questions and responses. Note also Val's use of repetition; she repeated and confirmed Amy's question, as well as her own constructed dialogue of the parent's comment.

Amy: I didn't notice that in my school at all...

Val: I don't know, you just feel for those kids that just--their parents aren't there, you know. You go home, and they're not there. I have kids who are <u>alone</u> till 10:00 at night! I had this one, this one man come in, "Hey, is Nicky here?" This guy is like a grandpa's age, but he's

Nicky's dad. I'm like, "No, he's not here." He's like, "Well, maybe he went over to Sam's Steakhouse to have the buffet."

Lauren: **[What?]** By himself?

Christine: [What?]

Amy: This was after school?

Val: This was after school! At like seven o'clock! Sam's is <u>across</u> Central Boulevard no less! "Maybe he went over to Sam's Steakhouse to have the buffet." I mean, he said it **just like THAT!** I had to chuckle later on.

Listening to the conversation thus far, it seemed that Val had made an assumption that this parent (who was so different from her own middle-class parents) belonged to the Adversaries Discourse, because he failed to act in ways that she believed demonstrated his commitment to the child's best interests. This fits with a finding by Flores, et al., (1991), that both novice and veteran teachers often form perceptions about parents based on incomplete understandings of the parents' social or cultural background and socio-economic circumstances.

With her brief remark, "I mean, he said it just like that!" and her tone of voice, Val not only conveyed her own incredulity at what this parent considered acceptable behavior for Nicky, but also managed to imply that Nicky's father was fufilling his parental role in a less than ideal manner, citing as evidence the fact that he did not know where his ten year-old son was at that time of night, and that he allowed the boy to cross a wide, highly trafficked street in order to eat alone at a restaurant. Val seemed to believe that this incident proved her point that low income parents "aren't there for" their children.[33] Amy, however, offered a counter example to advance her

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[33]There are, of course, other ways that a teacher could interpret the parent's actions. For example, in his study of native Hawaiian parents, D'Amato (1986) found that it is considered

belief that low income parents care just as much as other parents about their children. She drew on her past observations of children in her student teaching site who received Aid to Families with Dependent Children (her "AFCD kids"), noting that they were well-groomed and seemed very cared for (and cared about) by their parents.

> Amy: But I was going to say, at Shady Pines (where she had her student teaching experience), like even all my AFCD kids, they came in with nice clothes--
>
> Val: Did they?
>
> Lauren: //I know--
>
> Amy: //And, one mom curled her little girl's hair, <u>every</u> morning, you know. I shouldn't classify like that, because that's not true always, but it just seemed like <u>even</u> the kids whose moms didn't care about helping them with their school work still <u>cared</u> about them. This school I work in now--

With her comment, "I shouldn't classify like that, because that's not true always," Amy tried to convey to Val (albeit politely) that while she (Amy) recognized that her own conclusions might sometimes be faulty, so too might Val's. Amy took care to couch this warning in such a way that the friendly and generally congenial tone of the conversation was maintained; she used an "I" statement instead of saying to Val "<u>You</u> shouldn't classify like that," perhaps to soften the blow. Still, Amy directly challenged Val's position, arguing that they as teachers should not make assumptions about <u>all</u> parents based solely on the parents' social class. Lauren, who also worked in a school with a socio-economically diverse population, started to join in here

---

desirable for children to take responsibility for caring for themselves; parents encourage and expect that even very young children will dress, feed, and get themselves from place to place, either on foot or on a city bus. Children take pride in being self-sufficient and parents believe that fostering independence will best prepare children to move comfortably in the world. It might be *possible* that Nicky's father was operating from a similar belief system.

in support of Amy's position. She quickly lost the floor to Val, though, who had picked up on Amy's point that not all "poor" parents help their children with schoolwork. Val suggested that as teachers, they needed to be aware of the past education experiences and reading level of the students' parents, so that their letters home could be written at an appropriate level. Val worked hard here to present herself as someone who was willing to adjust her own practices based on parent needs. But her comment also revealed an assumption that low income parents are less educated than others, and thus perhaps less capable of helping children with their schoolwork.

Lauren: Part of my group of kids are rural, and so poor too /and--

Val: /And that really makes you think twice, though. Because you send home these letters that you type up and you do this and you do that, and you really have to write for the common person, like, like, not the college level reading ability, or the high school--I really think I have to bring it down sometimes.

Christine: That's true. That's what I find interesting in the school I'm teaching in--it's um, I mean it's very much blue collar, you know, working parents, and it's just funny cause on their emergency card, there's a place for mother and father and then there's a place where they can circle how many years of education they have, and it says like. 9, 10--

Val: Oh yeah, we have that!

Christine:--or 11; or 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, you know, for people and it's really interesting, you know, last year I only had three parents past grade 10--

Val: Oh wow!

Christine: --and one father that had any college education at all, and this year I've got, I think a few more than that. But that's kind of interesting when you see on their form--I mean, not that I memorize it--I don't, but when you see on there that Ted's mother only has a 9th grade education--it makes you think and kind of be more prepared, even. I try to look at it sort of before conferences,

Val: Sure--

Christine's next contribution served as an interesting kind of bridge between the two positions that had been taken. By agreeing with Val that teachers need to be aware of the educational background of parents, Christine offered support for Val's previous point, but her next comment showed that she clearly supported Amy's perspective as well.

> Christine: just so I know where they're coming from. And it doesn't always mean--like I found last year--it doesn't always mean they don't care about education because they haven't had one, I had these parents who told me, "We only made it to the 9th grade, we want more for our children," you know, or "We have Encyclopedia Britannica at home, she belongs to book clubs, we make sure she does everything." And sometimes I'm afraid they're pushing her a little too hard, and I talked to the 4th grade teacher and she said, the little girl's like, pressured. But they were just wonderful, you know--so supportive, came on all the field trips--the dad would come on the field trips, the mom would make cookies--all the time, but they were really neat, and tried to help with her homework even though they all spoke mostly Spanish, and they were real conscious of that.

Lauren, who had tried to join the conversation several times in support of Amy's position, suggested another possible explanation for parents seeming not to care about their children. Her idea elicted nods and murmurs of assent from the other three teachers.

> Lauren: Sometimes they have so many problems in their own [lives--]
>
> Val: [When] they're using drugs and alcohol and addicted to prescription drugs, and the kids know it-

Christine next offered another explanation, that parents may simply hold different expectations of teachers and schooling, based on *their* own experiences as students:

> Christine: A lot of them went through this elementary school, and their idea of education is different. They say, "That's not the way I was taught, the way I was taught was the right way!" And, you know, like

> last year I had a parent come in, irate, "Why are you teaching my child **why** to multiply? All he needs to know is, memorize it, just memorize it, he doesn't need to know what he's doing. You're trying to show him with blocks and that's not the way I learned it!" And I told him what I wanted John to know, and why, and what we were doing in class, and that yes he had to memorize them, but yes, he had to understand **why** we were doing this in the first place too.
>
> Amy: Yeah.

Up until this point, Christine had sided with Amy and Lauren in the way she talked about her students' parents--she had tried to present herself as a Co-Caregiver, as non-judgmental about parents' educational and economic backgrounds, and as someone who is supportive of--and supported by--low income, or working class parents. In the face of the one parent's challenge of her mathematics instruction, she suddenly appears to make a shift, from Co-Caregiver to the Adversaries Discourse. Her subsequent comments now contradict her own earlier perspective.

> Christine: I guess--that bugs me after awhile--that attitude they have, like "look where I am." And I'm thinking, "Yeah, **look** where you are"--but I, I'd never say that.
>
> Val: It's a real eye-opener when you get insights into these families like a real welfare family. (Sharing Circle Transcript, 11/02/92)

Val's assumption here that low income families are necessarily "welfare families" is telling, and her comment about "these families" indicates her conception of them as "others." Again, typical of many other teachers (particularly those from the dominant culture), who themselves did not experience home/school expectations as discontinuous, Christine and Val locate this student and his father's problems with school as rooted in their home experiences (Paine, 1990; Flores, et al., 1991; Nieto, 1992).

What could account for Christine's shift to a contradictory position? I could surmise that when the parent approached her from the Adversaries Discourse and directly challenged her professional competence (e.g., like John's father challenging the way she teaches mathematics), she was more likely to respond from the Adversaries Discourse herself. This would help to explain how Christine, usually so sensitive to and understanding of others, might feel justified in devaluing the parent's complaint. By locating herself in the Adversaries Discourse, she was able to rationalize her dismissal of the parent's concern as legitimate, or educationally sound.

We could also look to her own experiences as a white, middle-class student, knowing that like all beginners, she brings ideas about teaching and learning that shape her practice (Paine, 1990). In a debriefing interview held at the end of the school year, for instance, she spoke passionately about her belief in the value of education:

> My parents had always taught me that school is very important, and your education is your key to the future, and the more education you have, the more experiences you have in life, the more fufilling your life will be. (Interview, 6/28/93)

Christine was very much drawing on her own parents as models for her expectations of her students' parents. When students' parents acted in ways like her own parents, i.e., that Christine believed demonstrated a commitment to education (like the Spanish-speaking parents), she was more likely to view them as supportive and caring about their child's welfare, and thus remained in the Co-Caregiver Discourse. Much as she wanted to present herself to her peers as friendly and supportive of parents, when they exhibited a "what was good enough for me is good enough for my kid," attitude toward education (and thus devalued what Christine was trying to accomplish) she

found herself at odds with them, and adjusted her stance toward them accordingly.

Toward the end of the exchange, Amy and Lauren were beginning to make movements that indicated they were ready to serve themselves dinner, which I had laid out on the table prior to Val's opening comment about buying school supplies for her students. Although I was aware of this, I still made a move to refocus the conversation back to the issue of parents, hoping that they would continue to discuss the issues raised by Christine and Val. Instead of asking a direct question, or expressing my own thoughts on these issues (either of which might have been successful in pushing the discussion forward), I used the somewhat "teacher-ish" technique of putting out to the group what I thought was a fairly open-ended statement, namely, "You'll have an interesting time meeting parents with conferences coming up." Rather than serving as a conversation starter, this comment instead seemed to function as a kind of closure on the topic, shutting down the discussion of parents for the time being. Group members moved to serve themselves dinner, and began talking about other issues.

As I examine this interchange now I am left with mixed reactions and many unanswered questions. On the one hand, this conversation gave the novices an opportunity to "try on" a particular Discourse and begin to articulate their position in regards to one category of parents. It gave them a chance to hear and critique other positions as well. This is important, for in order to learn more about who they want to be with parents, they need to find out who they don't want to be as well. The conversation also provided a forum in which to give and receive feedback from people whose opinion they valued in the process of grappling with a difficult issue.

It may be that the norms for maintaining a friendly conversation dictated that the talk stop when it did, as the topic was clearly controversial and the novices seemed to have reached an impasse. On the other hand, I wonder about the consequences of the talk stopping at when it did, and what I could have done to move the conversation to a more educative conclusion. I revisit this question in Chapter Six when I critique my role in the Sharing Circle conversations.

Handling Challenges From Parents: "We Ended Up Becoming Pretty Good Friends"

The father who complained to Christine about her mathematics instruction was not the first--nor the only--parent to challenge one of the novices in this group. Indeed, early in the school year, several of the novices described instances when parents had approached them in a confrontational manner about issues of curriculum or pedagogy. However, complaints or challenges from Adversarial parents did not necessarily lead the novices to respond in kind. Sometimes the novice adjusted her Discourse location in response to parents (as we saw with Christine in the example above), but at other times, the novice remained in her initially chosen Discourse, and gave meaning to the parents' actions based on that stance. (Of course, the same situation holds true for parents.) Examing how the novice framed her narrative to the group and how she reported responding to parents' challenges offers interesting insights about the Parent-Teacher Discourse from which she wanted to belong.

When the novice oriented toward Co-Caregivers, she was more likely to present herself to the group as accepting and understanding of the parent's perspective, whatever it might be. Amy for instance, had some complaints

from parents when she described her reading program at her school's Open House because she had decided to supplement the school's required basal program by using novels and literature circles. Amy puts on a brave front here in representing the parents' concerns:

> Amy: I had a lot of parents--problems with parents at the beginning of the year. "How are you going to handle this? This is your first year of teaching, nah, nah, nah, nah." You know what I mean? Just, I think, being a split class and not knowing, and all that and they were just worried and making sure--they're real worried about the kids not getting the "skills" that they need for that grade, that they're going to be missing something....(Sharing Circle Transcript, 11/02/92)[34]

It was important for Amy to frame the parents' concern as legitimate for two reasons. First, since she was trying to work from the Co-Caregiver Discourse, it behooved her to count in the parents' favor their expressed concern about whether she (the teacher) was meeting a given child's needs. In Amy's portrayal of the complaints quoted above, the parents were "just worried" and trying to make sure their children were learning what they needed to know; a legitimate position for a parent to take. Second, the fact that Amy was sharing this narrative among a group of fellow teachers influenced the telling; she wanted to show herself to people she valued as a confident and competent, "Learning Community" kind of teacher.

As I listened to the other novices' also tell of challenges from parents, I noted how hard they too worked to show one another that they took these challenges in stride. In keeping with the identity they were trying to establish as Co-Caregivers, this makes a great deal of sense. If you want to show that you have empathy and value parents' opinions and feedback, then it is

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[34]It is interesting to note that the parents' criticism of Amy's instruction was very similar to the challenge she reported from other teachers in her school. Her feelings about the challenges from these two sources, and her response to the parties involved differed quite a bit.

necessary to value their concerns, even when those concerns are expressed in the form of criticism.

The way, then, that each novice interpreted parent challenges seemed to depend very much on the Discourse she began from. Complaints were not perceived as quite as threatening (or even threatening at all) if the teacher was in the Co-Caregiver Discourse, as she then assumed that the parents were motivated to complain out of concern for their child. Similarly, when the novice was operating from the Adversaries Discourse, parent complaints were perceived as threatening to the teacher's sense of competence, and indicative of some problem or deficit in understanding on the parents' part. In other words, the same speech act (e.g., a parent complaint) might have different elocutionary force or prelocutionary effect depending on the set of role relationships in which it is embedded.

In order better to understand how parent challenges were interpreted by the novices and how they influenced their sense of self-as-teacher, I will present below my analysis of an excerpt from the second Sharing Circle meeting. At the time of this meeting, the teachers had just completed the Fall parent-teacher conferences. For Amy, Val, and Lauren, it was the first time they had planned and conducted conferences entirely on their own; for the others in the group, their second time. As we waited for the other Sharing Circle members to arrive, Amy, Claire, and Val were catching up on recent events at one another's schools. Claire initiated the discussion of parent-teacher conferences by explaining that her school had given the teachers release time to hold the meetings. She went on to state that she had enjoyed her meetings with parents (unlike her school colleagues, who complained about having to hold conferences) even though one of the parents had approached her from an adversarial position.

Claire: It seems like most teachers act like you should **DREAD** parent teacher conferences, and I just, it's never been--I've only had one, kind of strong encounter with a parent--

Deb: What happened?

Claire: Remember I told you, about that? It was a new student, and the mom was really upset that ten to twelve worksheets a day weren't coming home?

Deb: Oh yeah, right, right.

Val: Oh---

Claire: Her philosophy was [that--]

Amy: [Busy hands?] (Amy laughs)

Claire: No, her philosophy was, that she didn't want her son to be, having to be around the 70% of kids who couldn't work up to the level that he could, and that you only hang around those as good as you or better, otherwise you grow stagnant--

In her recounting of their conversation, it was apparent that the parent was quite confrontational and critical of Claire's approach to teaching. In fact, Claire went on to tell the group that the parent had actually taken her son out of her classroom and placed him in a private (Catholic) school. After a brief deviation from this narrative in which Val and Amy described some of their experiences with parents during conferences, all of which were reportedly very positive, I turned the conversation back to Claire's experience with Billy's mother.

Deb: So did the rest of your conferences go well, Claire?

Claire: Yup. That lady had approached me earlier, that's when our conversation was, and then she came in for conferences and she was standing there--and I said, "Well, you look like you're just about ready to burst to tell me something, and she said: "Oh I am, I decided to take Billy out of this school. This school just doesn't offer enough for him, and blah, blah, blah." So okay. I said "Good," and I said: "I just want

the best for Billy, and I know if you're going to feel better about another school--"

Val:--good for you.

Claire: --"then so is Billy."

Amy: Right--

If Claire had been operating from the Adversaries Discourse instead of the Co-Caregiver Discourse, Claire's response (to the parent and to the group) would have been quite different. She might instead have reacted defensively to Billy's mother, and further escalated the confrontation. But because Claire was in the Co-Caregiver Discourse, she assumed that the parent had a right (and responsibility) to make decisions based on what she (the parent) believed was best for Billy. Claire's response to the parent "Good, I just want the best for Billy," actually connected them via a shared sense of commitment to Billy's welfare. In this instance, it was the parent who shifted her Discourse-based position, moving from the Adversaries Discourse to the Associates Discourse. Although Claire noted that they "ended up becoming pretty good friends," the parent could not move to the Co-Caregiver Discourse because she did not respect Claire's judgment or believe that Claire was acting in Billy's best interests. In fact, Claire noted, Bobby's mother was quite critical, especially of her Writer's Workshop approach to the teaching of writing.

Claire: 'Cause she **really** nailed me--I mean, I felt bad, she thought that my writing workshop was "Billy working on an art degree, instead of learning about his writing," and--which is--"My son is NOT here for an art degree"--and--

Deb: And even seeing some of the stories, and stuff, didn't change her mind?

Claire: Well see, he was real new to it too, he'd only been there about three weeks, and the other kids had about six weeks on him, (group

makes sympathetic noises)--and so I was struggling with that in the beginning, they're just finally getting to the point where they're taking charge of it, just a little bit, and coming up with more creative ideas, and so Billy was at that point, he was moving along a little faster, because he was watching all the kids around him, but he was still just kind of testing the water--

Val: Yup.

Claire: --and seeing what he could do--so she did--she looked at his book, but his book wasn't, it wasn't that great, and another thing she was concerned about was his neatness. She brought me in all his 1st grade papers, and said, "look at this, you're not demanding enough of him, he has to be neater."

Val: Oh jeez,

Claire: And I said, "This is a rough draft," I said, "it has to be written neatly, you know, before it gets turned in, but this is just him getting his ideas out" but she didn't really agree with that, so--

Val: No--

Amy: Well, perhaps it's just as well,

Claire: [and I can understand, you know, how she felt]

Deb: [maybe she would have never been] happy, so it might have been hard on the child, no matter what. (Sharing Circle Transcript, 11-22-92)

In her telling of this interaction with the parent, Claire portrays the parent's concerns as legitimate and understandable. She takes care to ensure that the other group members also see the parent in the same light, commenting that it made sense for the parent to complain, since Billy's notebook "wasn't that great." I do wonder whether Claire would have responded in the same way had the parent challenged her over a different subject area or pedogical approach. My sense, based on other narratives she told about her interactions with parents is that she would have still tried to

work from the Co-Caregiver Discourse. It is true, though, that Claire was very secure in her beliefs about the value of Writer's Workshop, and in her own ability to help children progress as writers. Moreover, she had weathered initial complaints from parents the year before for the same thing, and had ultimately been vindicated when the parents, pleased at their children's progress in writing had petitioned the school board to keep Claire's position after budget cuts.

Talking to Parents: "Just Don't Joke Around"

The final piece of conversation I have selected to present was taken from the third Sharing Circle meeting, held right before the Christmas vacation. The conversation about parents on this night was focused around one central issue, the novices' efforts to figure out how to effectively and appropriately interact with students' parents. What I found compelling about this example was that it captured so vividly how complex the task of forming a teacher identity with parents is for these young teachers; how despite their best intentions to establish good relationships with parents, there is much to learn about interacting professionally with them.

Whether attempting to locate themselves in either the Co-Caregiver or Associate Discourse, there was still much to discover about what that Discourse involved. For example, just as they had to learn subtle distinctions between joking with friends and joking with students, so too did they need to learn that relating to their students' parents was not the same as relating to their students, friends, colleagues or employers, nor even like relating to their own parents. Instead, they had to "invent" a new way of being with one category of people. These conversations were a primary context in which they confronted issues of equity, and had to examine their beliefs and experiences

in regards to their own and others' family background including race, class, and gender.

Moreover, through their conversations, they worked to discover what felt like an "appropriate" voice and tone for talking to parents given the particular Parent-Teacher Discourse from which they were working. They also struggled in their conversations together to discover answers to questions like: Who can or should I be in relation to my students' parents? Am I like a friend, an authority figure, an ally? Should I appear serious and businesslike? Should I joke and be friendly? How should I act when I talk with them so that they will like and respect me? Finding answers to these questions seemed especially salient when the novices were faced with bringing up to parents "difficult" or personal subjects, such as a child's hygiene needs or problem behavior, or issues relating to the family's background.

All six members of the group were present at the December meeting, though Lauren had a severe case of laryngitis and was under doctor's orders not to speak. Her verbal contributions to the group were thus fairly limited on this night, though she did participate in the conversations through body language and whispered phrases of assent. The group had finished eating dinner, and were sitting close together on the floor, where they had moved in order to help Christine tie ribbons to the ornaments her students had made as Christmas gifts. The group had been talking for over two hours about a wide range of personal and professional topics, for example, Nina's upcoming wedding and possible move to a position in a new school, news of former classmates from their teacher education program who were teaching nearby, lessons they have been teaching, and updates on students since they last met. The conversation moved fluidly and seamlessly from one topic to another,

lingering at some points, and on some subjects, longer than others. In between topics, the talk had what Florio-Ruane and deTar (1995) have described elsewhere as a kind of "roaming, spontaneous quality," in that group members "floated" various topics, some of which were picked up for further discussion.

The topic of parents had surfaced several times throughout the night; Amy had mentioned that some of her students' parents were planning the class Christmas party, Val mentioned that she got frequent calls from parents asking for clarification on assignments, and Nina mentioned having parents come into her classroom to help with a Christmas art project. The topic of parents only really took hold, however, as an outgrowth of their discussion on special needs students. Lauren and Val had been sharing their observations that some of their students, who were supposed to take Ritalin for Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) disliked taking the medication, saying that perhaps it upset their stomachs. The comment about upset stomachs led Nina to share a with the group her concerns and reservations about contacting the mother of one of her students. Nina, one of the second year teachers who located herself in the Co-Caregiver Discourse, and had enjoyed positive relationships with students' parents the previous year, was, nevertheless quite hesitant to call the child's mother, not because she wasn't convinced that she needed to talk to the parent, nor because she feared the parent wouldn't be receptive to her message, but because she was worried about how to explain what seemed a very personal problem. She told the group:

> Nina: You haven't heard about a little girl that I know--who was tested at UM as a matter of fact--and is on adrenaline, and the kids noticed one day that her tongue was <u>really</u> white, and I thought that was a sign of some sort of infection or something or so, this was like last week and

> I thought, well, maybe I will get in contact with her mom and let her know, because her mom is really up with all the child's health anyway. Then lately I have been noticing she has **really really bad** breath, I mean **terribly bad** breath. When she talks to me it is just like **"Eouuuuoooh!"** and you try not to be rude and not say anything and I hadn't yet, but then I was telling my mom and dad about it one night and they said well that is a sign of stomach problems or something you know. So the mom was--well we had our open house last night, and the mom was there and no one else was around, but I **could** not bring myself to say: "Your child's breath reeks, you know, and what are you going to do about it?"--you know, you are not going to say it like that.

I believe that Nina's concern with finding exactly the right way to talk to the parent stemmed from her desire to enlist the parent as a Co-Caregiver, rather than mere politeness or professionalism, or even fear of the parent "turning" on her. She began from a position of respect for the parent, assuming that the child's mother would want to be given information about her child's health, and noting that the mother was generally "up" on the child's health. Her effort to find a good way, and an opportune time to convey the news to the parent again seemed to stem from respect for the parent. There was some laughter in response to Nina's mock comment to the parent, and Amy and Val nodded their heads in agreement when Nina added that "You are (meaning, of course, she is) not going to say it like that."

At this point I posed a question to Christine (since I recalled that Christine had faced a similar situation with a child which she had related to me on another occasion), thinking that Christine might be able to help Nina think of a way to broach the topic with the girl's mother. Lauren, though, turned the floor back to Nina by asking her what she intended to do.

> Deb: Christine, remember you had a kid who smelled and you had to talk to her mom and kind of say "Well the other kids are teasing her," it was really bad like this too?
>
> Christine: Yeah--

Lauren: (whispers) What are you going to do?

Nina: So I don't know. I don't know how to say it. Maybe I will just bring it up like I am really concerned about Tina because the kids have been teasing her about her white tongue and I know that is a symptom of an infection or something is not right and on top of that, her breath is, she smells like she is sick.

Christine: Oh no!

Nina: Her breath knocks me out every time I talk to her.

Nina used this occasion to test out one way of framing and explaining the problem to the student's parent; in a sense, she was rehearsing her approach, using her peers as a sounding board. Val ratified Nina's concern by reiterating how difficult it can be to tell a parent unpleasant news, noting that she herself often "chickened out," in these situations, despite her best intentions. She named her student Jeff as an example, explaining that she found it difficult to find the right way to tell Jeff's parents about his classroom behavior.

Val: That's like sometimes--I have all these intentions of saying things to Jeff's parents and then I chicken out. I 'm like, am I <u>really</u> going to tell them that he had his fingers in his ears and his eyes were like all goog-e-ly? Sometimes you think-- oh my god, I just, like I would just <u>love</u> to videotape my class all day--that would be really scary--but then say to them "This is your son at school."

Whether they feared offending or embarrassing the parent, like Nina, or whether they feared the parent would blame them for a child's behavior, like Val, it seems logical that as newcomers to the Parent-Oriented Teacher Discourses, they would struggle to find the "right" words and the "right" way to frame a problem to present to students' parents, and that they would choose to remain silent rather than say the "wrong" thing, out of fear for the consequences.

This became very clear after Christine shared a vignette that vividly captured the pain caused by saying the wrong thing to a parent. Christine, another second year teacher who had enjoyed positive relations with parents the previous year, began an extended speaking turn, opening with the statement: "Here is a blooper that I cried about and now I can sort of laugh about it." This immediately got the group's full attention, signaling to them that a story of some kind was to follow, and all group members looked attentively at her as she began to describe the experience of taking one of her students, William, on a recent field trip. She explained that although William spent the majority of every school day in a special education classroom, joining her class for only twenty or thirty minutes each day, she had chosen to include him on a recent class excursion, with disastrous results. In telling this story, it isn't only *what* she said but also *how* she said it that made it so compelling to her peers.[35] Her intonation, repetition of phrases (e.g., "she never said anything,") and use of details, helped create a vivid image of the situation for her listeners. Also, as Tannen (1989) explains, by "giving voice to the speech" of William, her colleague, Judy, and "everybody" at her school, she "create[d] a play peopled by characters who take on life and breath" (p. 103), which drew the other group members into her narrative. I reproduce much of this narrative here, to better convey the intensity with which she spoke:

> Christine: ...and I took him on a field trip and I had to restrain him during the performance of Johnny Appleseed, I mean, he's yelling **"This is boring !"** and there's like 400 other people in this theater and he was running up and down and I had to give him his medicine, and there was a mom sitting on the other side and I got my arms around him and one leg on his leg, just to get him to sit in the chair, and he is practically standing on his head.

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[35] In fact, six months later, at the final debriefing interviews, this was one of the narratives all members remarked upon as being memorable.

Christine went on to tell us that she had spoken to the special education teacher, who said she "had just had it with William too." Much of Christine's constructed dialogue portrayed the special education teacher as a more experienced colleague, who, having worked with the child since kindergarten was in a good position to give advice. She apparently said that William's behavior was worse than she had ever seen, and suggested that Christine call William's mother, noting that it was time to up-grade the dosage of his medication.

> Christine: She didn't tell me too much about the family situation, but she said, you know, "Why don't you call Mrs. Moss and let her know what went on?" So I did, and I first started out with a positive thing and told her how much time William was spending on crosswords so she wouldn't be shocked, you know, by him spending too much time in my room, and I made the mistake--I was trying to make light of the situation or add some humor to the conversation and this is just a lesson for everybody--don't do this when you don't know the kind of situation, I made the 'nice' joke that "Boy, a strait jacket would have been helpful!"

It is understandable that Christine might have tried to add humor to the situation or "joke" with the parent in order to soften the impact of what she feared would be bad news to the parent; friends often use that strategy when giving bad news. Again, Christine's comment to the parent was shaped in part by the fact that she was in the Co-Caregiver Discourse, believed that the parent had the right and responsibility to know what was happening with William at school, and thought that she could enlist the parent's help. Had she been in the Adversaries Discourse, it is unlikely that she would have tried to "joke" with the parent; instead, she would probably have recited the child's transgressions and demanded, "So what are you going to do about it?" Unfortunately, Christine's attempt at humor backfired, as it turned out there was a history of mental illness and institutionalization in the family. The parent, however, "never said a thing," about this situation or responded to

Christine's comment during their lengthy phone conversation. Christine had thus had no idea how deeply she had offended the parent until a colleague told her this weeks later.

> Christine: We went on to talk for 25 minutes and she never said a thing. Two weeks later she needs conference time and she calls the special ed teacher and says "Well you better just know that I am going to come in there," and she had never met me and I had never met her, and the rest of our conversation was just fine. She never said anything.
>
> Deb: She said to you, 'I have two older daughters and--'?
>
> Christine: No, she never said that, she never said **anything**. I just said you know, I said, "gosh I really could have used a strait jacket to hold him all together." And she never said anything. Never said anything, and the rest of the conversation went on fine. I laughed when I said it, okay? And so two weeks later she calls Judy back... [and] Judy...told her about William's behavior...And she went on a big tirade about me and she was just going to come into conferences and basically blow my head off and that her son was never, ever to be sent to my room again...

The special education teacher then said that there was nothing Christine could do to rectify the situation, and to just "lay low," not contact the parent and beware of her impending visit to the school.

> William comes to my room sometimes and I am real nice to him and we get along fine. Come to find out this week, he has been ditching his medicine for the last three months, so I am hoping, so Judy--the only contact with his mom is that she writes notes and she is the one that gets along with them, cause I talked to my principal too and I think I'm just out of luck, this lady is known all over the district, her daughters have gone to Great Lakes schools, caused terror, stolen things, and they are both in institutions right now. Every one knows the Moss family, and they're going "Don't worry about it you have offended her but you know--" and I am like, "Oh, great."

Despite the fact that Christine had said she could "sort of laugh" about the Mrs. Moss incident now, she was still clearly upset by it and was quite agitated as she spoke. The other group members showed their involvement in the telling of the story through their body language (e.g., learning toward

her, many facial expressions depicting sympathy and concern), and backchannel communication, and except for when I asked her to clarify a statement she had made, no one interrupted her narrative. When Christine finally paused, Amy and Val asked questions to encourage her to continue.

> Amy: What happened?
>
> Christine: Oh, I totally cried and cried because I was so scared, I was just petrified that this lady was going to come in and blow my head off and she is not going to know I didn't know when I made the joke and you know, but she is not going to accept it...So never make jokes like that, if a parent makes it, that is just fine, like I had a parent say to me: 'Yeah, we would really like to have some of those handcuffs for Skyler' and I just laughed and said 'Yes,' but I am not going to say anything like that obviously.
>
> Deb: It was just a fluke that.
>
> Christine: It was just too close to home for her and I had no clue, I will never make jokes like that again.

Christine was determined that her peers learn from her mistake. She repeatedly warned them not to make certain kinds of jokes when talking to parents, framing this as a rule that they should follow at all times. Claire then echoed Christine's point that a teacher can't always know about parents' home situations, agreeing that knowing such information before speaking to parents can be helpful. Val cautioned them that sometimes they can know "too much" about personal home situations, which could also make it difficult to know what to say to them. Before Val could finish her sentence about "some families," Nina quickly jumped into the conversation, and tried to persuade Val that as teachers, they could offer useful suggestions to parents.

> Nina: Last year I had this little boy who is very against authority and for the punishment, this was in first grade mind you, the parents would make him go up and write his ABC's over and over, you know, **what** a way to turn a kid off to writing and reading. And you know, I

> just looked at her, and she goes, "We have made him stay up there for three hours at a time and we would go up and sure enough he would have five or six pages of ABC's" and I just looked at her and I didn't handle it that day, but later I said, "You know, let's brainstorm some ways that you can discipline this child" and I just kind of approached it like that.

Nina's response to the parent was indicative of the Co- Caregiver Discourse in which she had located herself. We can hear her talking about working collaboratively with parents in order to benefit students, as in this example, when she framed her response as "Let's see what we can do together" to solve the problem.

> Nina: I much prefer to know the parents and get them involved, and like, people always ask me, "Gosh, aren't you nervous having all those parents coming in and out of your room and I said "No," because an open door is much more--and you don't get as many questions or get accused for things because they know what is going on. I just had one tell me today--cause we had our open house last night--and she said, "Well, my older daughter is in junior high and she had a band concert and I didn't feel like I was missing out on anything by not coming to open house because I know what was going on." Last year I had five or six volunteers, I can't remember, but seven signed up this year.
>
> Deb: What kinds of things do they do?
>
> Nina: Everything from art projects to just working with the kids. Acting as an aide while I am teaching the lesson, reading with the kids, anything like that. We read <u>The Gingerbread Boy</u> and made gingerbread houses out of candy, you know, and gingerbread boys out of paper bags and punched them and then sewed them and stuffed them. We wrote a gingerbread poem and they helped with the making of the houses and all....(Sharing Circle Transcript, 12-17-92)

Nina went on to describe in more detail how the parent volunteers had participated in the "gingerbread activities," and her conviction that having such parent involvement was an valuable piece of maintaining good relationships with parents. The group members responded with their own narratives of occasions when parents had come into the classroom to assist

with classroom activities. What intrigued me about this interchange was the fact that the novices seemed to seize on the talk as an opportunity to learn from (and teach) one another about how to establish themselves as particular kinds of teachers in their interactions with parents. They shared specific strategies and skills, but more than that, they seemed to try to generate "rules" or templates to guide them in their future interactions with parents.

Learning From These Conversations

The novices' conversations about parents, just as their conversations about students and colleagues highlighted for me, once again, how complex and multifacted the process of composing a professional teacher identity truly is. Just as the novices had to negotiate a "teacher self" within their individual classrooms and schools, they also had to negotiate a "teacher self" in each interaction with students' parents. This process required them to reflect upon and often reconstruct their intial conceptions of how "good" teachers and parents communicate and work with one another.

Each of these last three chapters has focused on one group of "role others" in the novices' role set, and has examined how the novices' interactions and relationships with each shape, and are shaped by their emerging sense of themselves as teachers. At this point, I would like turn to Chapter Six, in which I will consider how these interactions, and the sharing of narratives about these interactions in the Circle, when taken together, contributed to the professional identity that the novices constructed over the school year.

CHAPTER SIX

Looking Back, Looking Ahead: Compromise and Promise

"Learning to teach is not a mere matter of applying decontextualized skills or of mirroring predetermined images; it is a time when one's past, present, and future are set in dynamic tension. Learning to teach--like teaching itself--is always the process of becoming; a time of formation and transformation, of scrutiny into what one is doing, and who one can become."
(Britzman, 1986, p. 8)

Introduction: Belonging and Becoming

In the study reported here, I have attempted to describe and understand how, through participation and conversation in the Learning Community Sharing Circle, six novice teachers began constructing their professional identities. I explored how the Circle members used conversation and narrative to help them articulate, explore, and ultimately transform some of their images and understandings about teachers, learners, learning, subject matter and themselves. My purpose throughout the study was two-fold. First, I wanted to learn more about the ways in which novices shape their identities as teachers in the early years of their careers. Second, I wanted to learn how, as teacher educators, we might helpfully intervene during these early years to reduce novices' feelings of isolation and support their continued learning and growth as professionals, especially by means of conversation, personal narrative, and a sense of community with other new teachers. Three specific questions guided this study:

(1) What happens when a group of novices meet regularly over a school year to read, tell, listen to, and talk about their own and others' experiences with learning to teach?

(2) How do they represent their experiences in personal narratives, and what do they learn by telling and hearing these narratives?

(3) How might membership in this particular community, and participation in the group's conversations support the teachers' construction of their professional identities?

In this final chapter, I look back at the Sharing Circle experience, using the three questions above to consider what the participants (both the novices and myself) learned--about teaching, about ourselves, and about constructing a teacher identity--through our membership and conversation in the group. I begin by discussing some of the findings I saw as significant in relation to my three research questions. I next discuss some of the limitations of this study and some questions it has raised for me. I then look ahead, suggesting how these findings might inform the future of teacher education.

What Happens When Novices Meet to Share Narratives of Their Teaching, and What Do They Learn Through This Sharing?

At the onset of this study, I was curious to find out how the novices would represent their beginning teaching experiences to one another. What would they talk about? What kinds of narratives would they tell and what might they learn from telling and listening to these narratives? What could I as a teacher educator learn from studying these narratives? As might be expected, I found that the novices' conversations covered a wide range of topics related to both personal and professional issues. An analysis of the conversations showed that personal narratives were an integral part of them. A common theme linking these narratives was the importance of novices' relationships with others to their construction of professional identity. Across the meetings, the narratives that participants told centered primarily

around their interactions with others, instantiating what Mead (1934), Schwab (1975), Gee (1990), Goffman (1967), and Gilligan (1988), have argued: that identity is formed not in isolation, but socially constructed through interaction with, and in relationship to, significant others. For these novices, constructing a professional identity involved finding some resolution to the question, "Who am I?" as they engaged people significant in their professional worlds. My focus in this work was on three groups of significant others: their students, other teachers, and parents.

Forming relationships with each of these groups required connecting and communicating with them, sometimes in ways that were new, unfamiliar, and at times even uncomfortable. Out of the three groups, the novices appeared most prepared to establish productive relationships with students. This makes sense, as their teacher education program focused intensely on helping them think about how to establish "learning communities" with students in their future classrooms. Their long apprenticeship of observation (Lortie, 1975) and other work-related experiences (e.g., serving as camp counselors, etc.) may have contributed to the degree of comfort they expressed about the relationships they constructed with students over the school year. Positive relationships with individual students appeared to play an important role in confirming aspects of their "substantial selves" (Nias, 1989), by allowing them to define themselves as caring and nurturing people.

The novices found it challenging to form relationships as "equals" with colleagues more senior in age as well as experience, especially when these colleagues appeared to hold teaching ideologies inconsistent with the novices' own. The novices' narratives and conversation illuminated and provided a setting in which to work on reconciling several tensions in their

relationships with colleagues. For example, they spoke of not wanting to "become like" those "Other Teachers," but still sought and valued their colleagues' approval. Also challenging for the novices was learning to interact with parents, especially in cases when parents' cultural or social class background differed considerably from their own. The emphasis in their teacher education program on learning to understand and value difference (whether cultural or ideological), appealed to them. They wanted to present themselves to one another as non-judgmental and accepting of different kinds of parents. Yet their actual interactions with people different from themselves sometimes were a source of difficulty. In general, reconciling their substantial (ideal) selves with their situational selves was more difficult when they engaged other adults whose values or styles of behavior toward children differed from their own.

My analysis of the Sharing Circle conversations also showed that through the narratives they told, participants sought to deepen a shared vision of teaching and a connection to one another as professionals or colleagues. During their teacher education program they acquired (and still now shared), a common set of values and beliefs about teaching. These were drawn upon and amplified in the Sharing Circle. I refer here not only to their beliefs about curriculum and pedagogy, but also to their beliefs about the nature of knowledge, about learning, about the value of certain curricular or instructional innovations, and about how "good" teachers conduct themselves in classrooms with students. We saw in Chapter Four, for example, how the novices' disillusionment with the values and beliefs often expressed by their school colleagues served further to deepen the sense of consonance they felt with one another.

Evidencing their entering stock of shared knowledge, the novices reported that they felt they could "just talk together," without having to worry about being misunderstood. They did not need to preface their narratives or "always explain" their ideas to one another. As Val said of the group: "You feel like you can come and spill your guts and not have anyone second guess you or critique you or think you're a bad teacher" (Val Brooks, Interview Transcript, 6/93). Or, as Amy stated:

> You could skip over so many things because you all believed the same way...I could just assume that here and it was so nice to be able to get back with people who thought like you thought, believed like you believe, and just almost like touch ground with your beliefs. (Amy Roberts, Interview Transcript, 6/93)

By constructing narratives which linked them, through a shared vision of what it meant to teach and to "be" a teacher, the novices were able to remain connected to a Teacher Discourse community which had been formative in the early stages of their professional identity work. This helped them develop some confidence that their ideas about teaching were valid and worth putting into practice. In this way, the shared vision they constructed functioned almost like training wheels on a bicycle, helping the novices feel balanced and safe and free to explore further aspects of their teacher identities.

The narratives they told about conflict and dissent with others outside of the group as well as the narratives which sparked conflict and dissent within the group, informed their professional development as teachers. Conflict (if accompanied by negotiation across differences or attempts at resolution) encouraged the articulation and examination of their own and others' beliefs, and even contributed to the building of community. Though the novices wanted to keep the interchanges at a friendly and cooperative level--employing humor or other devices to maintain conversational

norms), or even backing away from the conflict if the conversation became too uncomfortable--they did demonstrate that they are capable of engaging in debate and (polite) argument about complex issues connected to the practice of teaching.

It was important for the novices to discover that it was "okay" to disagree with another teacher about an educational issues, and to be in a position where they had to take, and defend a stance different from someone else. As I have mentioned at several points in this text, open discussion of pedagogical or ideological difference is generally not considered part of the "culture of teaching" (Feiman-Nemser & Floden, 1986), and these young women had few places in which to engage in this form of discourse. This is unfortunate, for as Burbules (1993) has suggested, there is much to be gained by engaging in this form of discourse. It gives speakers and listeners a chance to generate new information, learn more persuasive ways of presenting a case or position, and gain a clearer, more thoughtful understanding of the multiple dimensions of an issue. All these benefits are useful and appropriate for novice teachers, who are called upon daily to wrestle with difficult issues and defend their position to students, colleagues, parents, and administrators.

As the facilitator of the Sharing Circle group, this was a valuable lesson for me as well. I had tried to make the Circle a "safe" arena where novices would feel supported and respected and free to express their ideas. I had not, however, fully exploited the potential of conflict as a means of helping novices think harder about teaching. From my study of the Sharing Circle conversations, I was also able to learn more about areas in which the novices felt least and most confident about themselves, through an analysis of the topics least and most likely to prompt debate. Whereas narratives of Other

Teachers were likely to promote agreement among participants, narratives relating to some student issues (for example, how and if teachers can accommodate "special needs" students in the "regular" classroom, were likely to promote dissent. I had not realized the extent to which novices' success or failure with these students affected their sense of themselves as successful teachers. This information is potentially valuable for teacher educators designing a curriculum for beginning teachers, as I will discuss in more detail later in this chapter.

Another issue prompting dissent had to do with connecting with parents' who did not conform to teachers' views of how parents should support their children's learning. The conversation around this issue forced the novices to confront their own and other teachers' preconceptions about parents. It also brought them face-to-face with the limits of their own experiences with people from racial, social class or cultural backgrounds different from their own. The novices' had strong and sometimes ambivalent feelings about this issue, since interactions with these parents influenced who the novices *wanted* to be, and who they *found* themselves becoming with parents. Here again, this information may help teacher educators concerned with redesigning teacher education curriculum.

How Did Membership in the Sharing Circle Support the Formation of Participants' Professional Identity?

I initially hoped that this study would allow me to explore how membership in the Sharing Circle and participation in the group's conversations could support the novices' construction of their professional identities. I have since come to believe that joining in the Sharing Circle community through conversation and storysharing contributed to the

novices' sense of *belonging* to a Teacher Discourse, and shaped their professional identities (their *becoming*) in several significant ways. Before highlighting these, it is pertinent to revisit Schwab's (1975) description of characteristics essential to the formation and maintainance of community, as these elements were present in the Sharing Circle:

> There is collaboration--shared and dovetailed apportionings of the learning tasks. There are individual services to the group and group recognition of such services...In addition to shared words and acts, there are emotions and occasions for emotion which are basic to community...shared vicissitudes; group triumphs over vicissitudes; defeats; celebrations of such victories; mutual support in moments of defeat; shared pleasures and interludes of gaiety and play. (1975, p. 32)

The Sharing Circle was a setting in which novices could give and receive help, as well as a place to share professional joys and disappointments. Current school structures and the "culture of teaching" (Feiman-Nemser & Floden, 1986) mitigate against teachers sharing much in this way. And while in the future, it is likely that other forms of dialogue (e.g., electronic mail[36] and teacher-authored research may change this culture, there are currently few extended opportunities for teachers to engage in dialogue and conversation about the problems of practice. Moreover, as we saw in Chapter Four, since it was important for the novices to be seen by their colleagues as competent professionals, they were understandably reluctant to approach their colleagues to air concerns or seek assistance for problems.

The Sharing Circle provided a valuable occasion for the participants to voice freely and have ratified their concerns and frustrations about students, schools, or their difficulties communicating with parents or peers, without fear that they would be judged incompetent or unprepared to be a teacher.

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[36]See Merseth (1990) for an interesting discussion of the possibilities of connecting teachers in community through the use of electronic media.

There were numerous occasions when they sought help from and gave help to one another, whether over personal problems, e.g., "My husband tells me I'm spending too much time on my work, but I have to bring their papers home to read," (Christine Matthews, Sharing Circle Transcript, 12/92), or practical, e.g., how to structure their literature circles so as to hear every group's discussion. As beginners, novices seldom have a chance to give another teacher advice; they are usually placed in situations where they are only on the receiving end, as in mentor-novice relationships. Olson (1991) has observed that although experienced teachers often have valuable suggestions for novices, "their competence could also magnify the novices' sense of inadequacy" (p. 26). Having a chance to give help and advice, and knowing such help and advice was appreciated was thus a powerful experience for these novices, bolstering their sense of themselves as capable, resourceful teachers.

Through their collaborative effort to narrate and co-narrate vignettes of teaching events, they were able to solve problems and even "rehearse" ways of speaking to parents, students, teachers, as we can see below in the brief excerpt from the first Sharing Circle meeting:

> Christine: Do you think I'm crazy if I call this girl's mom now and say, 'Well, I'm not a doctor, but now I've seen her on regular medication, time-release medication, and without it, and I think we have more than enough documentation for the doctor?'
>
> Lauren: Well, you could also tell her (the child's mother) that it's affecting how the other kids see her. That the other kids are getting angry with her. (Interview Transcript, 11-02-92)

These interchanges gave them a chance to "...get the attitude of the members of the group" (Mead, in Miller, 1982, p. 162), a process essential to the development of their teaching "self." As Claire also noted,

> Once you talk about it with the group like this, it's easier sometimes to go and talk about it with the principal or someone who you're going to have to talk to, have to talk to about it. And it was just, a lot of times it's just emotionally relieving, too, just to get it off your chest. (Claire Young, Interview Transcript, 6/93)

Belonging to the Sharing Circle also gave these six young women a place to share and be recognized for their successes. Again, sadly, the power relations and culture of teaching often mitigate against such joyful sharing. Novices new to a building, younger in age, or lower in status may fear that their colleagues will view them as "bragging" if they talk too much about their successes. Amy, for instance, told me in our debriefing interview that she thought her colleagues might think she was trying to make them "look bad," when she displayed in the hallway a very successful science project her students had completed. Novices may especially worry that they'll be seen as "bragging" in cases when their successes are the result of pedogogical practices (e.g., writer's workshop, cooperative groupwork, literature circles) that stand in contrast to more traditional practices (e.g., spelling bees, ability grouping, commercial reading programs). The chance to be recognized by their Learning Community peers for their accomplishments thus contributed in a positive way to the novices' growing sense of themselves as "real" (as opposed to student) teachers.

The chance to be "in community" over time helps new teachers in their identity work in several additional ways. First, since the experience of acquiring a professional identity is not like bounded or discrete (in the way that acquiring a diploma or a teaching certificate can be) but rather complex and always in process of evolution, teachers need multiple occasions to assess and articulate where they are in the ongoing process, to "take stock" of who they are becoming, so to speak. To do this, they need to be in situations where

they can see themselves as others would see them. Bryk, Lee, & Holland (1993), explain it this way:

> personal growth and self-awareness emerge not from isolated independent behavior but rather from sustained participation in a social life marked by open communication, honesty, caring, and respect. (p. 315)

Second, since part of composing a professional identity as a teacher involves making adjustments (moving from the teacher you are, to the teacher you envision becoming) novices need to feel supported in making changes. Even when the change is desired, making a choice toward growth and away from regression (Olson, 1991), involves some risk and fear of failure. Here again, being "in community" can make a tremendous difference, for membership in a caring community can actually empower individuals and give them courage to explore the unknown. Schwab (1975) notes:

> Discovered capabilities continue to develop through experiences: problems met, attacked, solved. Capabilities are tested by affecting others by means of them and perceiving their reception by these others. Courage to explore the unknown (new varieties of experiences) accrues from others' recognitions of abilities so far acquired and from witness of the successful adventures of others. (p. 37)

I saw evidence of the novices' movement toward growth choices often, for example, when Nina took the risk to "stand up to" her colleague Brenda over the placement of a child with "special needs." Nina envisioned herself as the kind of teacher who would fight for and protect her students and their best interests, and with validation from her Learning Community peers, she was able to enact her vision.

A third and central aspect of developing a teacher identity involves what Bill Ayers (1993) calls "naming" oneself as a teacher. He argues that it is important for teachers to come to label, to define themselves as teachers. My

initial response to this point was to say, "But of course, how could teachers not name themselves as such?" It turns out, however, that in many cases, teachers do not actually identify themselves as teachers. Nias' (1989), for example, found that many of the teachers in her study taught for years before they felt able (or willing) to call themselves "teacher." I had been intrigued at the first Sharing Circle meeting by a vignette begun by Amy, in which she described an event at a class party when one of her students asked if their "real teacher" was coming back. Val chimed in and spoke as if she were Amy, talking to the student, saying "I'm you're teacher!" (Sharing Circle Transcript, 11/2/92). The vignette was one all participants resonated to, and they all excitedly joined in its creation. Clearly, being named "teacher" by one's students was of great importance to them.

At other points in their daily working life, the novices relied on students, students' parents, other teachers, even myself to name them as teachers, to give them validity and establish their identity. But by having a chance to present themselves in interaction with children, other teachers, and parents in narratives told to other Sharing Circle members other teachers (people whose opinion they valued), the novices were, in effect, having a chance to name themselves as teachers. In the debriefing interviews held at the end of the year, each one of the six expressed a belief that although she had things to work on and improve, she thought she was a "pretty good teacher." Lauren, for example, told me:

> Everyone told me, 'You're going to hate the first year' but I didn't....I was very happy about it. I feel I accomplished alot, that I did a good job, that I'm a good teacher. There were some things that I would change for next year, but there are a lot of things that I am going to continue doing." (Lauren Moffett, Interview Transcript, 6/93)

Finally, the Sharing Circle was an arena in which the novices could identify, discuss, "try on" and critique alternative Teacher Discourses (and thus alternative teacher identities) for themselves. I believe that this opportunity was especially important for these novices, because the Teacher Discourse community in which they had served apprenticeships while still teacher candidates, often stood in contrast to the Teacher Discourse Community they encountered in their workplaces.

The chance to think through the implications that the different ideologies would have for their practice may help them to be able to make more informed decisions in the future. Gee (1990) believes that having a chance to think about one's own (or others') Discourses in a reflective and critical way can produce "meta-knowledge" or insight about what one knows and can do. Members of Secondary or non-dominant Discourses (e.g., the Learning Community Discourse) need to possess meta-knowledge if they are successfully to resist, manipulate, or negotiate their way through the dominant Discourse. As more and more teacher education program exhort their students to "teach against the grain" (Cochran-Smith, 1991; Goodman, 1987) of traditional practice, such conversational opportunities become more critical.

Limitations of the Study and New Questions to Explore

While this study answered some of my initial questions, it raised a number of new ones in their place. These questions fall into two general categories, one set having to do with the membership of conversational "study" groups, the other set having to do with facilitating such groups.

While the Circle members' shared background as graduates of the Learning Community Program functioned in a positive way by giving them

them what Amy called a common "base" from which to begin building community within the group; it also was a limitation of this study. Even though the novices were from different cohort groups and did not all know one another beforehand, they still had much in common by virtue of their teacher education experience. I do not know if they would have constituted a discourse community or as readily negotiated common conversational ground had they not had this previous experience. This raises the question of whether and how other "Sharing Circles" (made up of members lacking such history) could be formed. What kind of common interests and experiences would members need to have in order to sustain an intimate, extended conversation about their identities as teachers? Could novices from different teacher education programs (and thus different Teacher Discourses) constitute a successful group? If one formed a group composed of experienced as well as novice teachers (in an attempt to help members build bridges between differing Discourses), would beginners still reap the same benefits as in an all-novice group? Although similar studies indicate that when teachers at different career stages do come together over a common interest (i.e., those who want to explore the teaching of mathematics in a particular way,[37] or who have an interest in exploring the genre of teacher autobiography through reading and writing[38] ; or who had an a deeply-felt commitment to working with "diverse" students),[39] a sense of community can be created, I am still left with questions, for example, how strong must this common interest be? Conversely, how much "difference" must there be in members'

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[37]See Featherstone (1993) for a description of the Investigating Mathematics Teaching (IMT) Study Group.

[38]There exists a rich literature of "teacher stories," written by, among others, teachers like Vivian Paley (1990), Herbert Kohl (1984), and James Herndon (1971). This literature is a potentially rich source of material for a beginning teacher study group.

[39]See Florio-Ruane (1994) for a description of such a study group comprised of preservice teachers.

beliefs or experiences so as to push the group forward without being detrimental?

A second category of questions that this study raised for me has to do with my role as facilitator. What must I (or other facilitators of such groups) learn in order better to foster members' growth? How much intervention is helpful, and how much responsiblity should participants assume for negotiating and renegotiating the agenda and course of the conversation? I raise these questions in part to critique my role in the Sharing Circle. At the beginning of this study, I felt strongly that I wanted members to "control" the conversation, and thus worked hard to limit my authority as group leader. I wanted the novices to feel free to initiate topics and move the conversation in directions they thought would be most helpful to them. However, as I studied the transcripts of their conversations, I noted that I had missed several (if not more) opportunities to encourage members to explore important issues. For example, at our December meeting, Christine reported that she had run into a fellow Learning Community student at the mall. This student, Rikki Parks had taken a job teaching in an inner city school. She had painted a vivid picture for Christine of the challenges and dangers of working in such an envionment. Christine relayed this picture to the group, telling a chilling story of the children's school lives and the disciplinary tactics used by school staff to control students' behavior. Christine then added that Rikki had gone to a jeweler to have her engagement ring made too small so that it couldn't be removed from her finger.

Listening to this narrative, I had anticipated (and hoped) that the group would seize the opportunity to discuss teaching in inner city schools, and examine more closely issues relating to discipline and equity. Several of the group members, however, were more intrigued by the news that Rikki was

engaged, and shifted the conversation in that direction. By the time they finished talking about the resolution of what had been (when they knew her) a stormy relationship to her fiancee and her upcoming wedding, the teachable moment had passed. As someone with more years of classroom experience in settings similar to Rikki's, (a "more knowlegeable other"), I could have intervened, and directed the conversation back to a discussion of Rikki's teaching experiences, but instead remained silent and thus let a potentially educative moment slip by. I am not entirely sure, even now, whether I should have taken a more directive role in shaping the group's discussion in this instance. Before implementing another "Sharing Circle" group, though, I feel it would be helpful to think more about what might be gained (and what would be lost) by making the facilitator's role a more directive one. Speculating on the educative moments missed--and capitalized upon--in this largely peer-led group raises a further set of implications and unanswered questions about this work. To what extent can peer dialogue be a workable form of education for beginners, and for experienced teachers?

I believe that this study can inform how we think about working with new teachers (both at the preparation levels and after their entry into schools), in that it places conversation and storysharing at the center of the learning to teach curriculum. This idea is important for several reasons. First, it adds to other studies which have investigated the possibilities and limitations of conversation-based teacher learning (see for example, Florio-Ruane et al., 1990), and suggests that this alternative to more didactic forms of teacher education is worth further exploration. Second, it supports the view that teachers (even novice teachers) do play an active role in their own socialization and professional growth (Goodman, 1987; Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1985). Third, it suggests that novices are capable of participating

in their own professional development. To continue past efforts to identify and "remediate" novices' deficiencies may offer less promise than offering them support and encouragement to control their own growth and development as teachers (Clark, 1995).

Final Thoughts: Looking Beyond This Study

Harold Rosen (1988) has observed that "in the end stories about the past are also about the future" (p. 86). For the novices in this study, the narratives heard and told in the Sharing Circle have indeed become stories about their past, as they have since successfully navigated through the induction years, and are now beginning their fourth and fifth years in the profession. Christine has recently taken a temporary leave from the field for personal reasons, but the other four are still teaching. In my recent conversations with them, they told me that they still love their work, and believe they are doing it well. If Rosen is correct, and stories have the power to transcend time, then I would like to believe that the Sharing Circle experience may continue, in some way, to inform their teaching identities in the years to come.

I would also like to believe that this "story" of the Sharing Circle might encourage teacher educators to look for ways further to extend future teachers' preparation experiences beyond their time in our teacher education programs. For we share a responsibility with school and district personnel to see that novices' introduction to the profession is both educative and humane, and that their transition from teacher candidate to full-time teacher is accomplished in ways that engender "...self-esteem, competence, collegiality, and professional stature" (Colbert and Wolff, 1992, p. 193). To accomplish this goal, we must begin in earnest to restructure the teacher

induction experience as it now exists. Current staff development efforts, including mentoring programs, are not yet adequate to address all of novices' needs, nor do they take advantage of novices' potential actively to control their own professional development. Among other things, we need to find ways to reduce the feelings of isolation that novices' typically experience; give them the social and intellectual tools to do more than merely "survive" their first teaching jobs; and provide them multiple forms of support so they will be able to use these transition years as a time for continued learning, self-discovery, and professional growth.

If we are to accomplish this, we must continue to learn more about novices' early teaching experiences. We must pay close attention to what they are attempting to learn, and to the ways in which they bring together their images, understandings, and experiences in pursuit of a professional identity. Only when we understand these things will we be able to design experiences that will better promote and support novices' learning.

Through this dissertation, I have attempted to develop a deeper understanding, and ideally, an appreciation for, the intricate and complex process of composing a life as a teacher. Though there is still much work to be done in this area, this study joins a growing body of literature showing beginning teachers as dedicated, caring people who work hard to construct lives for themselves as the kind of teachers who make a difference in the school lives of children. Further exploration of the kinds of conversations and communities most conducive to teachers' continued growth and development can only benefit us all, teachers, teacher educators, and the children for whom we all work.

APPENDICES

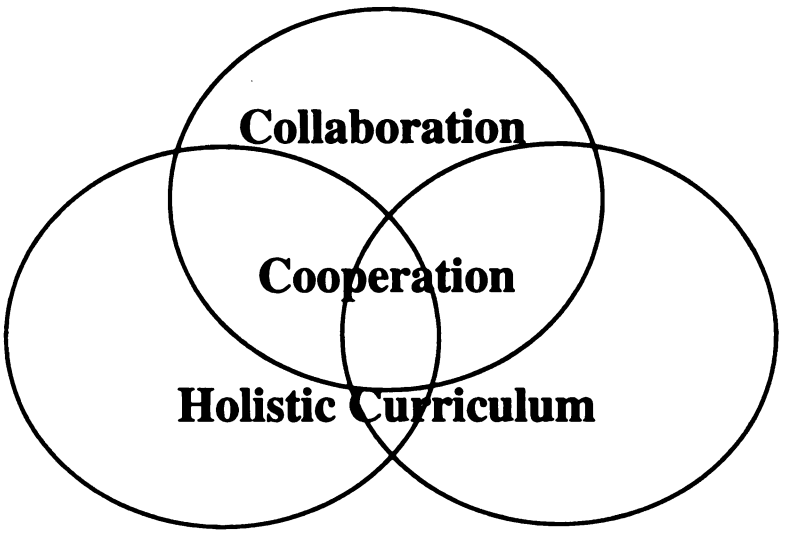
APPENDIX A

Learning Community Program Handbook

APPENDIX A

Learning Community Program Handbook

Learning Community



An Alternative Teacher Education Program

College of Education

Michigan State University

Susan Florio-Ruane
Coordinator
1990-91

Updated September 1990

Learning Community Program
A Teacher Education Program
Emphasizing Personal and Social Responsibility

The Learning Community Program prepares teachers to teach school subjects effectively while also focusing on the development of personal and social responsibility among students. We believe that in order for individuals to gain a sense of their own efficacy, they must not only acquire the knowledge and skills necessary for taking independent action in the world, but they must also learn to value collaboration and cooperation in groups, to give and receive help. Human efficacy requires engagement with the community in which one lives. The Learning Community Program is committed to the view that there is no genuine personal growth that does not have social consequences, just as there can be no collective social decisions that do not affect individuals.

Much can be done to increase the sense of community within classrooms. However, if schools and classrooms are to become learning communities, teachers must be skilled in fostering cooperation in learning. Through the study of theories of culture and human development, students in the Learning Community learn to use existing curricular materials wisely and to create new ones that foster an appreciation of diversity and learning that is meaningful and shared. In addition, Learning Community students learn to discuss and think critically about their own practice as life-long learners. Students in this program of study become aware of the many related communities of home, neighborhood, school, and the teaching profession and the interactive impact these communities may have on classrooms and teaching.

The Learning Community Program is designed for students seeking an elementary provisional teaching certificate and planning to teach in grades K-8. It is currently not available to students planning to teach at the high school level.

Educational Goals of the Learning Community

The relation of school and classroom to the wider community, the social contexts of teaching and learning, and the classroom as a community are concerns that undergird this program emphasis and reflect its distinctive perspective on the roles of the teacher. The goal of this program emphasis is to help teachers to become skilled at crafting learning communities out of the everyday realities of classrooms. In so doing, it is hoped that graduates of this emphasis area will encourage in their pupils propensities toward personal achievement, cooperative learning, and social responsibility. Thus, graduates may help their pupils not only to master academic content, but to become responsible community members within and beyond the classroom.

Characteristics of Learning Community
The Propensities

A Learning Community teacher is one who possesses certain perspectives toward the school curriculum, the learning environment, personal and social responsibility, and rational processing. These perspectives are expressed in propensities, which are internal dispositions toward acting in specific ways. The Learning Community teacher seeks to create a collaborative community for individual and group growth and welfare. The following list specifies these characteristic propensities.

Learning Community Propensities

A. CURRICULUM:
A propensity to:

- take a holistic view of the instructional process in which managerial decisions are integrally related to pedagogy;
- seek integration of the subject matter content as a cornerstone of the curriculum;
- use of the school and community as resources for teaching and learning;

B. LEARNING AND INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY:
A propensity to:

- view learning as interactive;
- foster risk-taking;
- engage in discourse about the consequences of personal action for the well being of others and for the group as a whole;
- encourage students to have a sense of personal power initiating action, thus minimizing the tendency to locate all decision-making within the role of the teacher.

C. SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND GROUP LEADERSHIP:
A propensity to:

- negotiate shared norms and expectations among class members and develop a sense of common purpose;
- acknowledge and appreciate student diversity in the life and work of the classroom;
- encourage and value empathy and caring.

D. CRITICAL THINKING AND DECISION MAKING:
A propensity to:

- create opportunities to learn that involve inquiry, rationality, interdependence, and reciprocity among learners and that arise meaningfully within classroom, school, or community;
- create an atmosphere in which judgment is suspended and ambiguity tolerated while class members work toward consensus and shared understandings;
- view the teacher as reflective planner of the learning environment, who uses past experience to shape future action in a cycle of planning, teaching, and reflection.

The Knowledge, Skills and Predisposition of the Learning Community Teacher

In order to create and maintain a Learning Community, the graduates from our program emphasis need particular knowledge and skills. What follows is an enumeration of the knowledge and skill objectives of the Learning Community keyed to courses in our emphasis area. A Learning Community teacher should have knowledge of the following:

(a) major theories and ways of understanding culture and social life particularly as they bear on the interactions of individuals in groups (TE200D, TE350D);

(b) major theories of human development (intellectual, social, emotional, physical) particularly as they pertain to group behavior, individual differences and the relation of these to teaching and learning (TE200D, TE201D);

(c) an understanding of the academic disciplines (e.g., mathematics, science, language arts, social sciences) as they play a role in the life of the community and as they are imparted to new generations as cultural tools as part of community membership (all methods courses);

(d) the use and critique of existing curricular materials and school practices in terms of their potential to instill valuing of diversity, interdependence and reciprocity in learning; and the integration of curricular content in genuine learning situations (all methods courses; TE370D, TE470D);

(e) the design and implementation of innovative curricula that are integrated and based on genuine concerns of students and their communities 80 that (1) subject matter knowledge is acquired in use as it is applied to the concerns of learner and community; (2) subjects (and skill areas within subjects) are combined as a viable means to address complex learning goals; (3) the management and content of instruction are viewed holistically within the design of the curriculum (all methods courses; TE370D, TE470D, TE480D); and

(f) the acquisition of a repertoire of teaching strategies and instructional activities that promote individual and cooperative learning in the classroom (all methods courses; TE370D, TE470D, TE480D).

Such knowledge objectives are augmented by acquisition of skills in planning, curriculum design, and instruction. By means of extended journal keeping and discussion over the course of their professional education, the students practice the "habit of reflection" upon their professional activities. Extensive work in the methods and materials for integrated instruction focuses on the ability to identify meaningful occasions for learning in the everyday lives of students in classroom and community. A focus on group processes in teaching and learning and opportunities for micro teaching enable students to experience both the ways in which the content and measurement of instruction are interwoven in the enactment of classroom life and ways in which they may be isolated for critical examination and reflection.

In addition to the knowledge, skills, and dispositions described above, the Learning Community offers students an introduction to the use of computer technology in teaching and learning. In a special section of the course, CEP434, Computers in the Classroom, and in numerous projects and activities for independent study, the Learning Community introduces prospective teachers to the role of technology in cooperative learning, language arts, social studies, math, and science methods. Students learn to use computers thoughtfully as part of the learning environment in elementary and middle school classrooms and in support of professional activities such as planning, communicating with parents and the community, and networking with other teachers.

Students selecting the Learning Community program emphasis may already have predispositions to group work, social action, and values clarification. However after they arrive, it is expected that upon completion of their preparation experience, the graduates will have acquired the following attitudes. The Learning Community teacher:

(a) demonstrates self-esteem, respect and sensitivity to others in the classroom community in her/his

(1) attitudes of caring, genuineness, empathy, and helping,

(2) orientation to problem-solving by means of rational discourse, and

(3) engagement in constructive interactions; and

(b) acknowledges and participates in the professional community

(1) as a life-long learner,

(2) in identification and resolution of social problems,

(3) by sharing ideas with other professionals,

(4) by taking social action in the form of educational leadership.

Description of the Learning Community Course of Study and Its Requirements

The Learning Community is a six-term educational experience that includes coursework in a variety of formats, diverse field experiences, and directed teaching. Each course that is a part of the overall curriculum of the Learning Community will be described in detail. However, before presenting the individual courses and field experiences it is useful to consider an overview of the program. The following chart illustrates the course of study followed by a typical student in the Learning Community Program. Included in the chart are all of the courses and field experiences required and the order in which they are taken.

As can be noted in the chart, the course of study for the program emphasis can be construed as two interwoven strands. One strand is comprised of the foundational courses in theories of culture and human development (TE200D, TE201D, and TE350D). Another consists of courses in methods, materials and management of instruction (TE310D, 311D, 312D, 313D, 315D, 316D, and 318D). The third strand is comprised of the field experience, student teaching practicum, and proseminar courses (TE370D, TE470D, and TE480D). As will be seen in the descriptions that follow, great effort has been made to relate these three strands meaningfully to each other.

A important feature of the program emphasis is the effort to integrate methods courses both within content areas and across them. The Learning Community offers to its students a four-course integrated literacy experience that treats reading, writing, speaking, and listening holistically and in ways that open the possibilities of integration of language arts/reading and children's literature with other areas of the curriculum (TE310D, TE311D, TE312D, TE313D). At the same time, the four-course sequence satisfies the requirements for certification in the State of Michigan.

Integration is manifest in the methods sequence in several ways. Each of the methods courses treats the instructional process in a holistic, integrated way in that management, materials, and methods are not isolated from one another but are taught in concert. In addition, courses such as the literacy series, and mathematics and science methods integrate cognitive developmental objectives so that students learn to teach toward more complex cognitive operations such as open search and situational use of skills along with less complex ones such as recognition, algorithmic and application activities. Finally, throughout the program, opportunities to identify ways to integrate subject matter and practice developing integrated curricula are afforded the students.

In line with state certification requirements, the NCATE guidelines, and recommendations of various learned societies (e.g. the Council on Anthropology and Education of the American Anthropological Association), many facets of the Learning Community curriculum address problems of education in cultural perspective. One course has an explicitly multicultural focus (TE350D). Issues of language and culture as they relate to acquisition of skills of reading, writing, speaking, and listening are also treated in the integrated literacy sequence. Also in line with the requirements for state certification and the NCATE guidelines, the program emphasis offers direct, early, and substantial participation in school settings.

Program of a Typical Student

	Fall	Winter	Spring
Juniors	TE200: Personal and Social Dimensions of Teaching (3)	TE311D- Methods of Higher Level Reading and Writing (3)	TE313D Oral Language and Children's Literature (3)
	TE201D: Student Learning and Development (3)	TE316D: Methods of Teaching Social Studies (3)	TE318D: Science Methods for Learning Community (3)
	TE310D: Methods of Developmental Reading (3)	TE350D: School and Community (3)	TE370D: Field Experience in Learning Community (3)
	TE370D: Field Experience in Learning Community (1)	TE370D: Field Experience in Learning Community (3)	
Seniors	TE312D: Integrating Reading and Language Among Subjects	TE470D: Student Teaching Practicum (12) or	TE470D: Student Teaching Practicum (12)
	TE315D- Teaching and School Mathematics (3)		TE480D: Proseminar in Learning Community (2)

*Students in Special Education should anticipate a longer program of study with graduation occurring after the seventh term.

*CEP434, Computers in the Classroom, is also strongly recommended as an elective professional course or to supplement majors or minors.

Tentative Time Table for Applications, Interviews and Decisions for New Admits to the Alternative Programs 1990-91

	Fall 1990	Winter 1991	Spring 1991
Application filed with alternative programs by 7th week of term	November 9	February 15	May 8
Interviews for alternative programs completed by 9th week of term	November 23	March 1	May 22
Decision about alternative programs placement made by last week of final exams	December 7	March 15	June 5
R.S.V.P.	December 28	April 5	June 26

Application for Consideration of Placement in the Learning Community Program 1990-1991

Date of Application:_____

First Name:	Last Name:
Student Number:	Birthdate:
Social Security Number: - -	GPA:

Local Address:	**Permanent Address:**
Street:	Street:
Apt. No.	Apt. No.
City:	City:
State:	State:
Zip:	Zip:
Phone:	Phone:

Please list our Academic Major, Minor(s):

Major	**Minor(s)**

What is your planned date of graduation:

1. Have you been admitted to the College of Education?**

2. In what term will you achieve Junior Standing?

3. Are you planning to major in: (check one) (if neither, please move on to question 4.)	
Child Development, **or**	Special Education

4. Are you in Honors College?

5. When will you (or did you) complete TE101?

6. Who was your TE 101 instructor?

7. Please list the Math courses you have taken or are currently taking:

8. Please list the English course you have taken or are currently taking:

9. When will you be eligible to take Math 201?

****Placement in Learning Community is available only to students who are admitted to the College of Education. Students should consult their advisors concerning admission procedures.**

On a separate sheet of paper please type one or two paragraphs on each of the following:

1. Describe the development of your interest in teaching.

2. Describe how you learn best.

3. What do you see as the major problems facing teachers?

4. What qualities and experiences do you have that would make you a good Learning Community teacher?

5. How do you think Learning Community will help you learn and grow as a teacher?

Please return this form to:

Ms. Tena Harrington
College of Education
302 Erickson Hall
East Lansing, MI 48824

You will be interviewed by one or more of the following members of the Learning Community Program:

Dr. Susan Florio-Ruane
Dr. Helen Featherstone
Ms. Corinna Hasbach
Ms. Sandi Isaacson
Ms. Sharon Schwille

An interview will be scheduled as soon as possible after you turn in the application to the Learning Community Office. You should return to the Learning Community Office for your interview. If you have any questions at all please feel free to call the Office at 355-8292.

APPENDIX B

Interview Protocol

APPENDIX B

Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol
for
LC Literacy Group
(Individual)

Introduction

Thanks for taking the time to meet with me today. I'm really glad to have an opportunity to talk with you individually. This interview is going to focus on two big issues: first, what it's been like being in the teaching profession during this past year (or two), and second, what it's been like to participate in this sharing group? With your permission, I'd like to audiotape our conversation today and perhaps even transcribe portions of it later. What you tell me today will really help me to better understand your experiences as a beginning teacher. Let me stop now and ask whether you have any questions about this interview.

Teaching

Can you talk a bit about your experiences as a teacher this year? (Probe: What is it like to be out for a year or two?)

(For the second year participants: How was this year--your 2nd year of teaching-- compared to your first? Did it make a difference belonging to this group? In what ways?)

Biography

As teachers, we draw on many experiences to sustain us and to shape our practices-- we draw on our own family histories, our own schooling experiences, critical events or readings, things we learned from significant people in our lives, etc.--what kinds of experiences do you find that you've drawn upon this year?

Community

How would you characterize our LC Sharing Circle? Can you think of a metaphor that would describe what it's like to be in this group, or how this group has worked for you?

Group Process

Thinking about the conversations that we had, can you talk a bit about what it felt like to participate in the Groups' discussions? (Probes: group dynamics, turn-taking, whether you felt you had enough time to talk, or were able to talk freely, etc.)

If you were talking to another teacher in your school about this group, what would you tell her about the things we do?

Learning (Link this question with the one above)

As you just mentioned, our group has read autobiographies of other teachers, kept journals, and met together monthly to talk about teaching. Which of these activities was valuable to you & and why? (Also probe here to get a sense of how they would define "valuable.")

Narratives

Can you recall one of the stories that you told in one of our group meetings? What did you learn from telling this story (or others like this one) of your students, your experiences with teachers, parents & other staff, and your teaching?

Did you tell this story to other people (e.g., friends, other teachers at school, or a family member)? Was telling stories in our LC group different in some way from telling stories to other people?

Can you recall a story (or stories) that one of the other people in our group told? What did you learn by listening to this or other stories group members?

Learning

What did you learn by reading published accounts of other teachers' experiences?

What did you learn by keeping a journal?

Critique/Use of Group

What didn't you get help with (and wanted help with) in this group? Were there things about the group or about the project that you didn't like or wish you could have changed?

Learning

What do you know now about literacy teaching and learning (or teaching in general) that you didn't know before our group started meeting together?

Other

Is there anything you would like to bring up or discuss that was not covered by these questions?

APPENDIX C

Transcription Conventions

APPENDIX C

Transcription Conventions

Following Tannen (1989), the following transcription conventions were used:

.	indicates sentence final falling intonation
'	indicates clause-final intonation
! or ?	indicates rising intonation
underline	indicates loud intonation
BOLD	accent on words indicate emphatic stress
/	indicates pause of 1/2 second or more
[]	indicates overlapping speech
---	clause interrupted

Dialogue Excerpt Showing Transcription Conventions Used:

Amy
But ah, so she was in the building for a Halloween party and one of my kids saw her walking down the hall--I think she might have I'd never seen her, and one of my kids--we're standing there, and her game was done and the other games were going on. My parents were totally doing the games and I was standing there by the door talking to a mom, and um, she said: "**THERE'S OUR TEACHER**!"
And my heart just went ----
[]
"Ohh **NO**!" (group chants--)

Amy
And then--
[]
Val
I'm you're teacher!

Amy
Yes. I was like: "Excuse me." And then one of the other girls said, "Are you cleaning the room cause Mrs. V. is coming back? and I'm like "**NO**." And I felt bad afterwards,

Christine
I know!

Amy
that's what I'm saying, but I got this little attitude, I'm like "**NO**." (laughs)

Val
but she didn't know any better--

Amy
--no, and then she said, she made me feel better, she said: "Well, that's good, because you're fun."

(Group laughs)

Val
Awwwwh.

(Sharing Circle Transcript, 11/02/92)

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