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CAREER PORTRAITS: LEARNING HOW TO SWIM IN  
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DEBORAH L. SUMNER

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CAREER PORTRAITS: LEARNING HOW TO SWIM IN URBAN WHITEWATER

By

Deborah L. Sumner

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to  
Michigan State University  
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Doctor of Philosophy

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2003

## **ABSTRACT**

### **CAREER PORTRAITS: LEARNING HOW TO SWIM IN URBAN WHITEWATER**

By

Deborah L. Sumner

Teacher preparation for the urban context is inadequate; the fact remains that teachers are not specifically prepared for challenges that await them in the urban context. The need to improve teacher preparation for the urban context is grounded in the expectation that more effective training will prepare teachers for the unique challenges and poor working conditions characteristic of inner city schools.

Students entering teacher education programs often lack a contextual framework for understanding the cultural, political, and ideological factors that comprise the urban experience. They are also unaware of the knowledge and dispositions necessary for successful urban teaching. This study investigated teacher preparation for the urban context by examining how three urban teachers responded to contextual challenges and dealt with poor working conditions throughout a 30-year career.

These teachers were chosen because they taught for years, enjoyed what they did amidst doubt and disappointment, received the respect of their students and peers, took on leadership roles in their district, and retired from an extensively long, complex career. These

teachers are the staying power of our nation's teaching force; they remain in the profession because they find the work deeply satisfying.

This multiple-portrait, qualitative research will address the following questions:

- (a) How do teachers in the urban context sustain a career of 30-years?
- (b) How do teachers perceive their own identities in this particular setting?
- (c) What did these teachers learn about the urban context that is distinct?

Learning from 30-year veteran teachers provides a new way to look at urban teaching; their contextual experiences and ways of knowing help facilitate the understanding of the knowledge and dispositions that lead to successful teaching in the urban context.

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2003

## Dedication

To my family,  
who encouraged and inspired me,  
who sacrificed so much for my success in this endeavor:

Douglas Dean

Matthew Heath

Jeffrey Douglas

Nicholas James

Whitney Cameron

and

Joanne June

and to the memory of my beloved father,

Richard Lewis Van Wagoner

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Dr. Mark Conley: Your support and guidance sustained me through this arduous journey. With humor and insight you helped me see things in perspective. From all the strengths you offer, I hope to pass along to my own students, your commitment to mentoring in the highest sense of the word.

Dr. Douglas Campbell: Thanks for your capacity for patience. You will never know how much your faith in my abilities has meant to my success. Your suggestions and advice were instrumental in keeping me on course.

Susan Florio-Ruane, Ed. D.: Your generosity in poring over my work is deeply appreciated. From you I have learned an immense amount about cultural identity and how to constructively offer the most effective help in the writing process.

Dr. Laura Roehler: Your knowledge, teaching, and suggestions for direction, and your interest in my growth over the years before and during MSU greatly improved this study. Thank you for your friendship.

Meghan Bacino, Margery Guest, Lois Tyson, and Marion Robinson: Finally, I owe the humblest acknowledgement and appreciation to the above names for support and advice. These friends were steadfast, insightful, and encouraging every step of the way and served to influence my work on this dissertation.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### CHAPTER 1

RESEACH PROBLEM AND STUDY INTRODUCTION.....	1
Purpose of This Study.....	5
Research Questions.....	6
Limitations.....	9

### CHAPTER 2

TEACHER PREPARATION.....	12
Teacher Preparation Programs.....	12
Urban Conditions.....	16
Teacher Preparation for the Urban Context.....	18
Conclusion.....	26

### CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY.....	28
Design.....	29
Qualitative Perspective.....	30
Questions.....	32
Participants.....	33
School and Community Context.....	34
Community Context.....	36
Data Collection.....	38
Data Analysis: A Four-Step Method.....	39
Confidentiality.....	44
Conclusion.....	45

### CHAPTER 4

#### COLLECTION OF PORTRAITS

##### Ann Meyers

Personal History.....	48
Classroom and School Experience.....	55
Overview of Decades.....	63
First Decade.....	66
Second Decade.....	68
Third Decade.....	73
Ann's Reflection.....	76

##### Halle Dandrich

Personal History.....	83
Classroom and School Experience.....	87
First Decade.....	90
Second Decade.....	93

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C  
Fir  
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CHAPTER  
STRIVING

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Cho  
Rec  
Con

BIBLIOGRAPHY

APPENDIX

A  
B  
C  
D  
E

VITA.....



Third Decade.....	96
Halle's Reflection.....	101
Everett Spears	
Personal History.....	102
Classroom and School Experience.....	112
First Decade.....	115
Second Decade.....	118
Third Decade.....	124
CHAPTER 5	
STRIVING FOR FAIRNESS AND HONESTY IN REAL LIFE SITUATIONS....	
Developing Identities.....	134
Urban Struggle in Madison Shores.....	140
Bracing for Urban Schooling.....	144
Education is Everything.....	147
Gender.....	149
Identity.....	151
Social Relationships.....	153
CHAPTER 6	
FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS.....	156
Knowledge for Sustaining a Career in the Urban Classroom..	157
Identity Construction: Dispositions in Urban Teaching.....	164
Motivations & Identity.....	169
Changing Identity.....	170
Recommendations for Urban Teacher Preparation.....	172
Conclusion.....	180
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	184
APPENDIX	
A    Cover Sheet.....	198
B    Preliminary Questionnaire.....	201
C    Protocol.....	204
D    Questions.....	206
E    Consent Letter.....	214
VITA.....	216

## **Chapter One:**

### **Learning How to Swim In Urban Whitewater**

#### **Research Problem and Study Introduction**

American society continues to be stymied with improving education in the urban context (Weiner, 2000). Reasons for this concern are many, from the need to provide meaningful educational opportunities for urban youth to viewing education as a key to economic and social improvement in urban contexts (Houston, Hollis, Clay, Ligons & Roff, 1999). Many approaches are being tried to improve urban education, including raising standards, incorporating more assessments, and improving the qualifications and quality of the teaching force in urban schools (Gordon, 1995; Liedel-Rice, 1995; Tiezzi & Cross, 1994; Tellez, Hlebowitsh, Cohen, & Norwood, 1995).

Historically, urban and inner city schools have been places characterized by large numbers of immigrants, domestic poor and minority ethnic and racial groups. At the same time, the urban context is plagued by diminishing resources. Some researchers have argued that, because of the unique requirements of the urban context, educational needs may no longer be met with traditional pedagogies there (Banks, 1999). Others have argued that improving the teaching force in urban settings is the key to improving both educational and

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economic opportunity in those settings (Haberman, 1996).

Unfortunately, students entering teacher education programs are not exposed to the pedagogies or experiences that would lead them to successful teaching in urban contexts. Beyond question, a number of programs around the country have made attempts to design effective urban-based teacher preparation programs.

Regardless of the call to improve teacher preparation, this country has yet to produce a system of teacher preparation that preeminently, and in sufficient numbers prepares teachers for effective work in diverse school settings (Darling-Hammond, 1994; Melnick & Zeichner, 1997; NCTAF, 1996; Zeichner, 1996; Murrell, 1991, 1997, 1998). Williams (1999) also articulates three unmet needs. First, is the need to comprehend and accept the paradigm shift in *conceptualizations of diversity* supported by new understandings of human development. Literature in education has long acknowledged the significance of culturally relevant pedagogy, but there has not yet been a consequential impact of this concept on the preparation of teachers nationwide.

Secondly, the necessity is to put the new diversity-related understandings about human development in current reform proposals conceived to increase the learning success of diverse students. Large-scale, high-stakes standardized testing dominates the urban setting

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and neglects to enrich the intellectual, social, or cultural underdevelopment of children in diverse urban communities. Thirdly, the need is to integrate obtainable models and systems of practice. These things—diversity-related understandings of human development, positioning school reform proposals around new understandings, and the development of diversity-germane models of practice—are the absent elements in the educational reform landscape.

Unequivocally, the current configurations of teacher education are not currently equipped to fulfill these needs for urban education (Comer, 1997; Delpit, 1996; Murrell, 1998; Sykes, 1997; Hollins, King, & Hayman, 1994). There seems to be a general consensus that the renewal of teacher preparation will require the linking of at least two professional communities—the community of schools, colleges, and departments of education on the one hand, and school personnel on the other hand.

Teacher education programs that deal with the urban context emphasize a concentration on content, a clinical component of 32 weeks of practice, a blending of the arts and sciences, concern for ongoing professional development, and meaningful partnerships with local districts. However, more recent research needs to be conducted concerning the efficacy of these programs

(<http://www.aft.org/edissues/teacherquality/At298.htm> p.1).

More importantly, despite program goals, pre-service teachers continue to find themselves ill-equipped to enter the urban classroom. For example, they receive little or no instruction in cultural sensitivity and adaptability on more than a surface level in teacher preparation. Unfortunately, prospective teachers entering the urban classroom for the first time often teach working-class or minority students and find that they lack a well-articulated framework for understanding the cultural, political, and ideological factors that make up the urban experience (Murrell, 2001).

The primary reason teacher preparation often fails to adequately prepare teachers for the urban context is that few, if any, teacher preparation programs have yet to effectively identify the knowledge-base or dispositions necessary for successful urban teaching (Garcia, 1999). There are programs that have provided field experiences as well as immersion in the urban context. Immersion may be ineffectual without the proper knowledge-base. Yet, one example of a program that has attempted to prepare teachers for the urban context is the Urban Teacher Preparation Program, a Masters Degree program which represents a cooperative relationship between Syracuse Public Schools and Syracuse University. The program began in 1964 and continues to meet the need to provide specialized urban

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training for teachers in order to have a positive impact on the lives of minority youth. The underlying assumption of the program is that a field-centered, competency-based approach will result in producing individuals who can work more efficiently and effectively in urban schools (Anderson, 1976). But Syracuse is limited by its exclusion of knowledge-base required in order to be effective. This is precisely why teacher preparation programs must draw on the knowledge-base of veteran teachers.

This study begins to identify the knowledge-base and dispositions necessary for successful urban teaching through interviews with three teachers each of whom sustained long and successful careers in urban schools. Researching the experiences of veteran educators can illuminate the actual realities of urban classroom life. This study is important because by learning from career teachers in urban contexts, it becomes possible to design more effective preparatory teacher education programs that better equip beginning teachers for urban teaching and learning.

### **The Purpose of This Study**

The ultimate purpose of this study is to improve teacher preparation for the urban context. As evidence points to the positive impact quality teaching has on student achievement, school districts are taking additional measures to ensure that every child has a caring

and competent teacher. The problem seems to be that the strategies for preparing urban teachers are not well known; therefore, the purpose of this study is to inquire into the successful careers of three urban teachers and use the resulting research to enhance teacher preparation programs. These teachers are well qualified within their field and have remained in very difficult and highly complex high school teaching assignments. This approach is better than what has been tried before because it goes beyond just the student characteristics that define an urban setting and examines a host of other challenges that make the urban setting unique.

### Research Questions

The following questions guided my research in this in-depth analysis:

1. How do teachers in the urban context sustain a career of 30-years?
2. How do teachers perceive their own identity (ties) in this particular setting?
3. What did these teachers learn about the urban context that is distinct?

I have been asked how I became interested in the research questions. I can provide general points of reference. This study reflects my long-standing interest in how teachers sustain a teaching career in ever- changing and unstable teaching assignments which require

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tremendous adaptability. Adaptability is vital in the urban context; the urban setting poses challenges that may not be addressed in current teacher preparation programs. The central ideas emerged gradually from my involvement in various educational settings: teaching assignments; leadership activities; administrative assignments; travels and discussions among friends; colleagues; and students. During 13 years of teaching in three elementary schools and a middle school, I have found that maintaining a career long-term is difficult in the best of circumstances with supportive working conditions. Therefore, I questioned how a teacher in a very complex and difficult teaching assignment could sustain a career long-term. Also, I wanted to know what do pre-service teachers need to know and understand about sustaining a career in the urban setting? Finally, what needs to be changed in current teacher preparation programs?

Certainly, the challenges to successful urban teaching are not simply a matter of working more effectively with children of color; a critical understanding is needed of how to effect change in the broader social, political, and historical context in which unequal schooling is constructed. The effectiveness of pre-service teachers depends on their ability to connect with learners from culturally, linguistically, and racially diverse communities. But, how do we prepare students to understand and develop successful practice within the

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complexity of urban schools and communities? This is an era in which racism and poverty still fuel educational inequality.

As an American Caucasian woman and educator with an olive complexion who has spent her adult life examining the prospects of quality education for all children, I still have hope that the contemporary educational reform in the form of teacher preparation will reverse the long-standing educational inequality for African Americans and other marginalized groups. Knowing a little about my background is important. My great-grandfather George Lewis Van Wagoner was one of 12 brothers who immigrated from Holland. Six brothers came to America through Ellis Island. As a child, I was told there was an island of dark Dutch. I remember visiting many of my father's family members and their complexions were also dark. My mother's family migrated from England and France; she had a dark complexion also. I never appeared to look American and people would consistently ask me, "Where are you from?" As a young child I did not understand the question, and often children thought I was African American. My school experiences were culturally diverse in Jackson, Michigan; this cultural experience has shaped me as a person, teacher, and educator. My complexion has allowed me to cross boundaries with different cultural groups. In sub-cultures, too, I was made aware of the complexity and multi-dimensionality of cultural

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As I pursued my graduate studies and explored research, my questions became more defined, particularly when I saw what had been done in teacher preparation and what attempts had been tried in preparing pre-service urban teachers. Therefore, both my personal background and graduate course work exercised their influence on the questions to be pursued in this dissertation study.

Another reason I include my own experience here is to emphasize that thinking about the nature of education cannot be done in a social, cultural, and historical vacuum. Each of us comes to believe what is normal or even what is real in a particular culture at a particular time in development.

### **Limitations**

I used a long interview in this study which, is a powerful approach in qualitative inquiry. For descriptive and analytic purposes, no approach is more revealing because it allows entry into the world of the individual, a vision of the content and pattern of his or her experiences. It is the opportunity to step into the mind of an urban teacher, to see and experience the world as he or she does (McCracken, 1988). I spent four years with these teachers in the field working on school reform issues within the Professional Development School (PDS) model. I plan to use the research information from the



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interviews in this study, but it is important to mention that I have a great deal of knowledge from this particular urban site that influences my decisions as a researcher. This is not a field study, but below I include Katz's observations because I became a "significant other" in this context and this fact influenced my decisions as a researcher.

Katz's (1983) observations about relationships between researchers and subjects in the field acknowledge that one of the strengths of field studies is that the researchers and subjects come to recognize and treat each other as "significant others." Researchers, on their part, have to be attentive to the fit between their interpretations and their subjects' understanding, which serves as a validity check on their findings. Katz asserts: "Subjects respond to the researcher not simply as an 'objective' scientist but a person with personal qualities and views, and their behavior toward the investigator resembles their behavior with others in their worlds" (Mishler, 1986, p.125).

The data reported is unique to one high school setting; the portraits of this case communicate information about the context that is grounded in the particular setting that was studied. As Firestone (1993) suggests, the most useful generalizations from qualitative study are *analytic*, or *case-to-case transfer*. However, the description present in this qualitative study enables readers to make independent

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judgments of the generalizability of specific data from teachers and context. This study will contribute to the research on teacher preparation in urban schools and expand the current understandings of how urban teachers are able to sustain long careers and what they learn in the process. This may help teacher educators to develop more effective strategies for designing teacher preparation and retaining high-quality cadres of urban teachers.

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## **Chapter Two:**

### **Teacher Preparation**

The need to improve teacher preparation for the urban context is grounded in the expectation that more effective training will prepare teachers for the unique challenges and poor working conditions characteristic of inner city schools. Students entering teacher education programs often lack a contextual framework for understanding the cultural, political, and ideological factors that comprise the urban experience and are unaware of the knowledge and dispositions necessary for successful urban teaching. Because of this, I conducted this study in order to provide an empirical basis to develop a starting point for improving teacher preparation for the urban context, by examining how three urban teachers responded to contextual challenges and dealt with poor working conditions throughout their 30-year careers.

### **Teacher Preparation Programs**

Multitudinous collections of work have been written during the 1990s about the need to reform teacher preparation programs (Goodlad, 1990; Grant & Secada, 1991; Kagan, 1992). Some suggest that teacher preparation programs need to be changed in order to prepare teachers to work with proliferating diverse student populations

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in public schools (Carnegie Forum, 1986). Improving teacher preparation may rectify problems in public school systems such as decreasing student achievement test scores (Baca & Cervantes, 1984) and increasing student drop-out rates (Ornstein & Levine, 1989). Researchers have asserted that traditional teacher preparation programs may not integrate theory and actual classroom practices (Jacknicke & Samiroden, 1990). In addition, they fail to address cultural, social and pedagogical variables that can affect instructional decisions (Borko, Eisenhart, Underhill, Brown, Jones, & Agard, 1991). Essentially, traditional teacher preparation programs may be unrealistic regarding what it is like to teach in schools (Bullough, 1990). This assertion becomes extremely relevant in regard to teaching in urban schools. Many teachers' backgrounds do not mirror those of their urban students or the urban environment; if their teacher preparation programs also fail to prepare them for the unique contextual challenges and poor conditions of the urban environment, they have no frame of reference and are set up for failure.

In her review of 40 learning-to-teach studies, Kagan (1992) found that pre-service programs often fail to provide beginning teachers with adequate knowledge of classroom procedures, student behaviors, and teaching within the context of classrooms—nor do the programs offer sufficient classroom experiences. Prospective teachers generally



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remain unchanged by pre-service programs in regard to their personal beliefs about teaching, their images of themselves as teachers, and their conceptions of good teachers (Aitken & Mildon, 1991; Florio-Ruane & Lensmire, 1990; Gore & Zeichner, 1991; Shapiro, 1991).

Kagan (1992) developed a model that would provide more procedural knowledge, promote procurement of standardized routines that integrate management and instruction, and provide broadened interaction with students in schools. Goodlad (1990) proposed a multitude of conditions necessary for effective teacher education, including: (a) greater university commitment and allocation of resources for teacher education; (b) more faculty responsibility and accountability for teacher education; (c) less state regulation of curriculum requirements; and, (d) a curriculum that stresses teachers' knowledge of moral as well as instructional issues. It has been suggested by Feiman-Nemser and Buchmann (1987) that teacher educators and cooperating teachers stimulate entrants' self-reflection and verbalization of the underlying rationales for practice. According to above researchers, a good teacher preparation program would:

- Provide more resources for teacher preparation;
- Increase faculty responsibility for teacher preparation;
- Blend theory and practice in teacher preparation;

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- Expedite opportunities for extensive interactions with students in the classroom context; and
- Provide time for prospective teachers to reflect on their beliefs and practices about classroom teaching and the profession.

This blueprint may foster success for beginning teachers; however, for successful teaching within the urban context, a different sort of knowledge-base must be constructed and disseminated to prospective teachers. The development of instructional cases such as mine aims to capture some of the challenges of urban teachers who are committed to social justice and educational success. The cases may be considered learning tools for faculty, school-based teacher educators, and teacher candidates. Therefore, researchers need to develop more cases of quality urban teachers in various contexts. Eugene Garcia, a theorist, observes that we "presently lack any definitive body of research and knowledge regarding the constructs that define good teachers in general and of teachers that serve culturally diverse students in particular. That knowledge base is developing, but it is presently inadequate" (Garcia, 1999, p. 37). These cases demonstrate the diverse, caring, socially responsible teacher learning we seek to create in schools. Exemplary programs of teacher preparation should focus on veteran urban teachers' experiences, giving attention to the moral, cultural, and political dimensions and the

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### **Urban Conditions**

The conditions of America's urban schools are continually perceived to be in a state of deterioration. Run-down facilities, unmotivated faculty, crime, and low expectations from teachers are typical characteristics of most urban schools (Kozol, 1991). Furthermore, urban educators report growing challenges in educating youth who present problems such as poverty, limited English proficiency, family instability, and poor health. Researchers and educators often link the performance of urban students to home and school environments that do not foster educational and economic success (Willie, 2000; Darling-Hammond, 1997; Health & McLaughlin, 1987; Schorr, 1989).

Previous research indicates that a high concentration of low-wealth students correlates with less commendable student performance. There is a greater likelihood that students who are exposed to safety and health risks will not excel in school. These students are also more likely to be engaged in risk-taking behavior, such as teenage pregnancy, that can hinder teaching and learning efforts (National Center for Educational Statistics-Urban, 1996).

Without question, students and teachers in urban schools have greater challenges to overcome in comparison to suburban students. The NCES examines a wide range of urban school characteristics such

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as staffing and resources, school program offerings, and student behavior that make the urban setting distinct:

- Urban schools maintain larger enrollments than suburban or rural schools at both elementary and secondary level.
- Urban teachers have fewer resources available to them and less control over their curriculum than teachers in other locations.
- As an indicator of morale, teacher absenteeism was more of a problem in urban schools than in suburban or rural schools.
- Student behavior problems were more common in urban schools, particularly in the area of absenteeism, classroom discipline, weapons possession, and student pregnancy.
- Regardless of location, students in high-poverty schools were less likely to feel safe in school or spend time on homework than those in low poverty. High-poverty students watched television excessively and required more discipline from teachers in classes compared to counterparts.
- Urban students were less likely to live in two-parent families.
- Urban students were more likely to change schools frequently.
- Young adults who had attended urban and urban high poverty schools had higher poverty and unemployment rates later in life than those who had attended other schools.

(National Center for Educational Statistics-Urban, 1996, pp. 1-10.)

These statistics illustrate the need to improve teacher preparation in order for teachers to know how to work within the distinctive qualities of urban and inner city schools. This dissertation study does not offer ways to change urban conditions, but rather adds to the research on preparing teachers for success within the urban environment.



## **Teacher Preparation for the Urban Context**

Research shows that many teacher education programs have emphasized urban teacher preparation. Early attempts include Program 120 at Hunter College, the Associated Colleges of Midwest Urban Semester Program, the Inner-City Teacher Education Program in Missouri, the Syracuse University Urban Teacher Preparation Program, the Inter-Institutional Program Development Project, the Sausalito Teacher Education Project (STEP), and the Cooperative Urban Teacher Education Program (CUTE). Exposure to urban conditions during training is emphasized, as are the problems of language and communication (Clothier & Hudgins, 1971).

Exposure to urban conditions has been the main focus of subsequent programs. Most teacher education programs stress the importance of field experience and knowledge-through-practice by creating curricula that place pre-service teachers in the urban context and require observation, reflection, and discussion. This type of immersion in the urban environment is a way for prospective teachers not only to learn and read about challenges of urban conditions but actually to confront and deal with the challenges in the urban setting.

For example, the Gary, Indiana, Moorhead State College Project in Cooperative Urban Teacher Preparation has three dimensions: living and learning in the inner city; clinical experiences in cooperating

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schools; seminars and theoretical studies related to the experiences, problems, and perceptions emerging from the first two dimensions (DiPasquale, 1972). With a similar focus on immersion, Jersey City College's revamped Junior Field Experience Program (JFE) requires all prospective teachers to become familiar with students and conditions in a range of urban schools. This program encourages students to assume urban teaching assignments and examines pertinent pedagogical, social, and political issues. All JFE students observe urban elementary and secondary schools for one semester and are assigned to a cooperating teacher for the next six weeks. Seminars with other pre-service teachers are conducted to encourage students to share diverse experiences and challenge each other with new insights (Heinemann; Obi; Pagano; Weiner, 1992).

In addition to field experience and immersion within the urban environment, collaboration and networking are central to the Center for Innovation in Urban Education at Northeastern University in Boston, Massachusetts. The center's new framework for effective urban teaching provides a blueprint that fosters new communities of learning, embraces diversity, and prepares prospective teachers through community and collaboration partnerships (Murrell, 2001).

The Professional Developmental School (PDS) model establishes partnerships in a more narrow perspective, providing teacher

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candidates with practical experience in school settings in which they can see exemplary teaching modeled. The main strength of the program is that new teachers get the opportunity to learn from veteran teachers. Even most current writings disallow a wider community in PDS model (Patterson, Michelli, & Pacheco, 1999). The program also provides urban schools with assistance from university faculty in areas such as curriculum development and innovation. However, this model does not work in an urban context without administrative support and continuing a long-term commitment to such projects over time is difficult for university faculty (Weiner, 2000). It is a movement in the right direction, but is limited by its exclusion of broader community movements for educational renewal.

Teach for America is another popular but problematic initiative that addresses the urban context. Funded by corporations and foundations, the national project places graduates of elite liberal colleges with little formal preparation in urban schools to teach children of poverty (Shapiro, 1993). The main benefit is to account for teacher shortages in urban contexts; however, Teach for America provides teacher candidates with only a summer of coursework before placing them into school settings where they assume a full teaching load. Lacking any form of immersion or practical experience for these prospective urban educators, the initiative makes no attempt to deal

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with unique challenges posed by urban schools. Its critics argue that the program shows a disregard for the knowledge base about teaching and learning in the urban environment and has deprofessionalized teaching (Darling-Hammond, 1994). In addition, since the teachers are uninformed about the knowledge and dispositions that would lead them to successful urban teaching, it is unlikely that they would have an impact on urban students or transform the current state of impoverished schools.

In order to prepare professionals for urban teaching, scholars continue to address and re-visit the knowledge base necessary for urban teaching. Linda Darling-Hammond of Columbia University's Teachers College is currently heading up a project that has identified seven outstanding teacher education programs to become case studies. The programs it focuses on are from Alverno College, the University of Virginia, UC-Berkeley, Bank Street College of Education, Michigan State University, the University of Southern Maine, and Trinity University in Texas. The programs range from free-standing programs to small, four-year liberal arts college-based programs to those at research universities. These programs require both an academic major and intensive study on how children learn. Most require extensive field experience and use experienced teachers as mentors and/or adjunct faculty. Stressing classroom knowledge, field experience, and

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relationships with skilled educators, these programs can serve as models that address the needs of urban sites

(<http://www.aft.org/edissues/teacherquality/At298.htm> p.1).

Although these models address the need to specialize teacher preparation for the urban environment, the knowledge and dispositions that lead to successful urban teaching have yet to be clearly identified. Scholars continue to examine teacher preparation programs that emphasize the urban context; however, research that calls attention to urban teachers' actual experiences in the classroom and wisdom that has developed from their familiarity with urban conditions and students is still lacking. Studying the experiences of veteran teachers would enhance teacher preparation by learning from the knowledge, dispositions, and beliefs that have actually kept these teachers in a complex, challenging urban environment over a prolonged period of time.

Without a doubt, particular research gathered from urban educators would serve an important purpose. California State University at Northridge became convinced and arranged to have teachers in their third year reflect on their process of teacher preparation as fully credentialed professionals working with diverse students in the innovative teacher preparation program from which they received their training. These credentialed professionals were not

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veterans. The majority of these graduates of the Comprehensive Teacher Institute (CTI) repeatedly stated that the most important and long-lasting contributions of the program to their professional development was fostering a network of colleagues and university faculty who continue to provide moral support (Cabello & Eckmier, 1995).

UCLA's IDEA project also seeks to understand the knowledge base of practicing teachers. Urban Teacher Education Collaboration: Research and Evaluation studies graduates as a way to gauge the success or social benefits of what Marilyn Cochran-Smith calls the "new multicultural teacher education." In 2000, a research group was formed (IDEA) to track the career development and retention of graduates. The goal was to understand whether these teachers remained in urban schools at higher rates with specialized training and why the teachers remained, switched schools, or left teaching altogether.

In the preliminary stage (2000-2002), the graduates from UCLA were staying in education at higher than average rates. As the research group expected, retention decreased over time, yet after five years 70 percent of the graduates remained in the classroom compared to 61 percent of teachers nationally. Based on preliminary research, the group in 2002 developed a more comprehensive

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longitudinal research design to extend work across ten cohorts of graduates. Three annual surveys were developed: (1) an intake survey for novice teachers graduating; (2) an exit survey of teachers graduating; and (3) a graduate survey. These instruments serve two purposes: they provide longitudinal data—information about teachers at different stages of their development—and they are formative tools used by clinical faculty to understand their students as a whole and assess their practices. The core question is: under what conditions do highly qualified urban educators stay in schools that need them most? The research team is creating a database to understand teachers' backgrounds (e.g., where they went to high school and other important life experiences that contribute to a person's development) and characteristics of the schools where they work. My research supports this endeavor by suggesting that there are highly successful teachers who have been and remain in the field over time who can be used as resources to teach prospective urban teachers.

In addition, the Center for Excellence in Urban and Rural Education uses research and detailed data to bridge the gap of cultural and socioeconomic differences that teacher candidates in urban and isolated rural school districts face. In regard to recruitment efforts, it is the Center's supposition that teacher candidates often return to their homes of origin when entering the workforce. These

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novice teachers find various levels of support, such as financial security and emotional help. They are also better able to understand the context of their teaching environment.

It is important that teacher preparation programs “demystify” the knowledge and dispositions that would lead to successful urban teaching and encourage prospective teachers to seek out and make a reformation in urban teaching assignments. The guiding historical principle is that one measure of teacher readiness has been self-efficacy, or the ability to view oneself successfully in a given role (Bandura, 1977). When teacher candidates are confident in their ability to teach in urban schools and have experiences that validate this self-efficacy, they are more likely to accept the challenge of working in an urban context (Haberman, 1995). The Center for Excellence in Urban and Rural Education stresses that student backgrounds—as a foundation for the development of beliefs, values, and understandings—strongly influence this self-efficacy. Teacher abilities can also establish a connection with students of different backgrounds; hence, teacher preparation can make a transformation in this area by equipping urban teachers with the knowledge-base that would allow them to make a difference (<http://buffalostate.edu/~ceure/recruit.htm>). This dissertation study supports this effort.

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Without question, utilizing an instructional case of veteran teachers as a way to supplement the current efforts of innovative teacher education programs would add to the effectiveness of these programs. Current research that focuses on the experiences of teachers who have completed innovative teacher education programs is helpful. The other approaches lack the knowledge-base and disposition necessary for the urban context. However, learning from veteran educators provides a more thorough, rich understanding of the challenges imposed by the urban context; the knowledge within the case of this dissertation reflects 30-year teaching careers and represents a new body of research on urban teaching and learning.

### **Conclusion**

The case for urban preparation suggests a significant interrelationship between contextual challenges, workplace conditions, and teachers' experiences and success with students. Teacher educators have the responsibility to recognize and address urban teachers' special circumstances in their work environments. Teachers placed in the urban schools often lack the resources and tools necessary to deal with cultural differences, contextual challenges, and poor working conditions. Although much research has focused on which teacher preparation programs prepare prospective teachers for the urban environment and what the programs entail, little

circumstantial evidence from teachers who have actually sustained extensive careers in the urban environment has been gathered and shared instructionally. Some experts suggest that "classroom and field experiences that have served well in the past are not sufficient to bridge the gap of cultural and socioeconomic differences teacher candidates will face in urban schools" (Vanderpool, 1991). This dissertation study stresses the need to learn from veteran teachers who have sustained careers in urban schools in order to develop urban teachers. Studying their experiences imparts meaningful, practical knowledge and enhances the current research on teaching in the urban environment.

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## **Chapter Three:**

### **Methodology**

This qualitative study was designed to improve teacher preparation by examining three urban teachers' experiences and how they were able to preserve their careers for 30 years. These teachers possess a unique body of professional urban knowledge and teaching expertise. The pervasive view among researchers is that teachers have experience, while academics have knowledge. Some researchers were concerned about this dichotomy, so I have sought to describe and analyze what teachers know more broadly as teachers' practical knowledge (Feiman-Nemser & Floden, 1986). In addition to their practical teacher knowledge, I chose to look at how the social identification of these teachers changed over time as they became immersed in the culture of one urban school. This study considers the practical knowledge of these teachers from the perspective of diverse cultural backgrounds in the context of an urban school, and my intent is to see how the meaning and practice of an urban career is shaped by the cultural context. I plan to use the complicated findings to enhance teacher preparation for the urban context.

I have organized this chapter by describing first the overall design of the study, followed by a description of my approach and my role as a researcher. I will explain my research methods in the following

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order: first, a general overview of my research design; second, discussion of the participants; third, description of the setting in which the study was conducted, including the high school and the neighborhood; fourth, procedures for data collection; fifth, procedures for data analysis; and last, my methods of protecting the privacy of the participants.

### **Design**

My inquiry was designed as a case study of three individuals from diverse backgrounds who became part of the same school community. Thus, in a sense, the school or context is a case itself, since it is a "bounded system" that interested me. Miles and Huberman (1984) describe a case as "a phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context" (p. 25). Yin (1989) says: "A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (p. 13). Stake (1994) embraces the call for qualitative inquiry about teacher efficacy by employing a case study approach to data gathering using researcher interviews as data collection techniques. The case study approach was selected because it provided an opportunity to concentrate on and inquire about the specifics of the teachers' experiences through oral

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Through these definitions and ensuing discussions, I came to see my case as a unit with boundaries. I wanted to examine a particular school context in which teachers could sustain a career in the urban setting as part of the urban school experience. Although I consulted for four years at this Professional Development School, the teachers brought their own perceptions to the experience. I wanted to get an internal view from the teachers themselves to see how they perceived their identities—particularly in terms of the different groups with which they identified—and how those perspectives changed over time. Data collection began in December, 2001 and ended in March, 2002. The research reflects my voice in two important ways: first, as a researcher studying the career of each urban teacher, individual identity, and urban context; second, as an elementary classroom teacher, elementary school/middle school administrator, and university instructor whose reflective background provides a way to understand the connection between teachers' self perceptions and their careers.

### Qualitative Perspective

Qualitative research covers a spectrum of techniques—but central to the process are observation, interviewing, and analysis (Miles and Huberman, 1994). I spent four years at this site and took notes, talked with teachers and collected various artifacts related to literacy



instruction at the high school. To gain a more thorough understanding, I also worked within the district context in language arts two to three days a week with many teachers over the course of four years. Interested in these teachers' careers, I decided to conduct day-long interviews. Since I wanted them to truly reflect and establish emotional distance from their careers, I interviewed them one year after they had retired. At times, I made follow-up calls to procure more detailed responses as I thought about their testimonies.

Throughout this investigation, I have been concerned with honoring the language and perspectives of the participants, specifically their efforts to make sense of their past experiences. I have attempted to include their own words to show the influence of personalities. In addition, I have tried to make sensible methods decisions given the purpose of the inquiry, the questions being investigated, and the resources available, all of which involved critical reflection. Patton (1990) states, "The validity and reliability of qualitative data depends to a great extent on the methodological skill, sensitivity, and integrity of the researcher" (p. 11). Therefore, I approached the interviews with a disciplined intention not to impose preconceptions, but at the same time I have included my insights, interpretations, and inspirations on what is happening in the context of the setting. Patton (1990) corroborates this by stressing flexibility and creativity in revising

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plans made during design when important new possibilities and sources of data become available: "Creative fieldwork means using every part of oneself to experience and understand what is happening. Creative insights come from being directly involved in the setting being studied" (p. 238). A further dimension of an insistence on imagination and creativity is to help avoid shallow reductions of ideas.

### The Questions

To engage the participants, I began by inquiring into their personal backgrounds. I then asked questions in the area of education and life themes (APPENDIX, p. 184). These questions were chosen to start the interviews off; however, when interviewees started going in different directions, I adapted and kept the conversations as natural as possible. I then asked each interviewee about the first ten years of teaching, the second ten years, and finally the last ten years in chronological order. I used the following list of pre-selected questions; however, I came up with follow-up questions that allowed me to get more specific information about the themes that surfaced.

1. What is your first memory of attending school?
2. Did you enjoy school in the beginning?
3. What do you remember most about elementary school?
4. Did you have a favorite teacher in grade school? In junior high?  
In high school?
5. How did your teachers influence you?

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6. What are your best memories of school?
7. What are your worst memories?
8. What accomplishments are you most proud of?
9. How far did you go with your formal education?
10. What do remember most about college?
11. What was the most important book you read?
12. What did you learn about yourself during these years?
13. What has been your most important lesson?
14. What is your view of the role of education in a person's life?
15. What were the crucial decisions in your life?
16. What was the most important learning experience in your life?
17. What did it teach you?
18. How do you feel about yourself at the age you are now?
19. How would you characterize the first decade working in the high school? The second decade? The third decade?

### **Participants**

I chose to interview three teachers from varying disciplines who were known for their leadership abilities. All of the participants teach at Madison Shores High School, a fictitious name for a Midwestern high school. Their personal profiles are as follows:

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<b><u>Teacher</u></b>	<b><u>Ethnicity</u></b>	<b><u>Gender</u></b>
Ann Meyers	Caucasian	Female
Halle Dandrich	African American	Female
Everett Spears	Caucasian	Male

Ann: "I would describe myself as a taskmaster always challenging students and teaching them a great deal; maybe at the time they didn't realize it but after a while they gained an appreciation for what I had taught them."

Halle: "I would describe myself as a dedicated, dependable, fair teacher who tried to instill discipline and compassion in all students and athletes. I am a hands-on-teacher who demands that students perform to the best of their ability and give 100 percent on all endeavors."

Everett: "I would describe myself as a deeply stubborn person with a deceptively accommodating exterior. What other people thought was dedication may have been insecurity—but it worked. I believe that we, my students, colleagues and I, grew into a learning community where everybody taught and everybody learned."

### **School and Community Contexts**

#### **Integrated Reform Structures**

During the years of my consulting (1994-1998), the school leaders had been successful in smartly integrating three reform structures for implementation at the high school since 1990: Michigan's Public School Act 25/335 School Improvement, The Professional Development

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School partnership, and North Central-Outcomes Accreditation. Thus, a common set of goals provided the focus for school improvement and the Professional Development School partnership in the high school since spring of 1992. A related set of five target area outcomes for student learning and two organizational outcomes provided the structure for North Central-Outcomes Accreditation efforts since winter, 1993.

A strategic plan created in 1994-1996 integrated School Improvement, the Professional Development School model, and North Central-Outcomes Accreditation efforts. It extended the earlier strategic plan developed in the early stages of Professional Development Schoolwork and featured more strategies to achieve the same goals. The planning goals at that time were as follows:

1. INCREASE STUDENT ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT
2. IMPROVE STUDENT AFFECTIVE DEVELOPMENT
3. ENHANCE SCHOOL-HOME-COMMUNITY INTERACTION
4. CONTINUE TASKS NECESSARY TO OBTAIN NORTH CENTRAL-OUTCOMES ACCREDITATION AT HIGH SCHOOL
5. INCREASE AND DEEPEN PROFESSIONAL LEARNING BY HIGH SCHOOL STAFF
6. IMPROVE COMMUNICATION AMONG ALL MEMBERS OF THE HIGH SCHOOL COMMUNITY
7. DEVELOP COLLABORATIVE LEADERSHIP AND PLANNING

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The benefits of this close integration of various reforms at the high school were apparent in April, 1995, when it was announced that Madison Shores would receive mid-level "interim" status according to the new Michigan School Accreditation Plan [MAP] program. Although the school's history of low student achievement [MEAP] scores should have placed the school at the bottom-level, "pending un-accreditation" status, the state MAP regulations directed officials to review their school improvement plan to meet the requirement that such low-achieving schools need to be implementing a strategic plan directed at improving the learning for *all* students. As a result, the high school was awarded mid-level "interim" accreditation status. The fact that the improvement plan was favorably reviewed was a direct result of the decision to integrate Professional Development School activities with School Improvement and North Central-Outcomes Accreditation reforms at the high school.

#### Community Context

This high school is the only high school in the city, a city with a population of approximately 13, 000 people. The school's 512 students are drawn from throughout the city, which is surrounded by an urban city center and adjacent suburban areas. Over the past 40 years, as these primarily white, suburban areas grew, they created their own

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schools districts, which broke away from what now remains as the Madison Shores School District. The district has one middle school, six elementary schools, and both pre-school and adult education programs.

Over 90 percent of students come from low-income families who qualify for free or reduced-cost lunches. Of the children under age five, 75 percent live below the official poverty line. While 71 percent of residents and 82 percent of total students are African American, they comprise about 95 percent of the high school students I researched. Students' families live in small, single-family homes or low-income housing that makes up a majority of the city's landscape. Forty-one percent of the city's housing units are renter-occupied, and 31 percent of the households receive some form of public assistance. Most of the students walk to the high school, which is located in a neighborhood of churches and small, single-family wood-framed bungalows. The middle school, district office, and commercial and municipal buildings are located only a few blocks from the high school. Most community activities center around various churches, the family, and to a lesser extent, the school system.

According to the census data during my analysis, 44 percent of the adults in the community did not graduate from high school, 30 percent completed high school, and 25 percent of the adults over age

25 have some post-secondary education. These figures contrast with the 1993 consensus data which reported that 46 percent of the high school graduating class was enrolled in college or technical school. Although less than three percent of the adults graduated from college, education is viewed as a primary means by which children may overcome the effects of poverty, racism, and unemployment. This was illustrated by the winter, 1995 student survey data [56 percent response rate] in which 89 percent of the students reported a belief that their families support their efforts to achieve in schools. Seventy-three percent said that there is an adult outside of school with whom they can discuss personal problems.

However, as evidenced by census data, severe challenges exist for youth growing up in this community today because of poverty, limited education/employment skills, persisting elements of societal racism, and a community landscape with many closed factories and businesses.

### **Data Collection**

Two interviews were taped in a private conference room at a local intermediate school district office and one interview was taped in the home of the participant. All tape-recorded interviews were transcribed from audiotapes. Informational notes gathered from informal interviews held in December-March also supplemented the

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extended case study interviews.

In each interview, I spoke with the teacher about his or her experiences and perceptions, and the gestures and words each used to express or explain those experiences and perceptions played a prominent part in my ability to empathize and relate to him or her. Along with the challenge of creating substantively appropriate questions was the difficulty of choosing wording free of idioms or using syntax that would either lead the respondent or interfere with his/her understanding.

The initial part of each interview focused on the teacher's career and the remaining part focused on the context in which he or she worked. The interviews were based on a combination of scheduled/standardized and interview approaches (Patton, 1990) in which I selected the topics and issues in advance (APPENDIX, p. 184-191). This was intended as a time to become re-acquainted and build a rapport.

### **Data Analysis: A Four-Step Method**

There are two domains that were used in this study: the review processes and discovery processes. Together, the axis divide the qualitative research into quadrants, each of which represents a separate and successive step in the research process. The four



quadrants are:

- (1) Review of analytic categories and interview design
- (2) Review of categories and interview design
- (3) Interview procedure and discovery of categories
- (4) Interview analysis and discovery of analytical categories

I used these stages to organize a four-step pattern that shows their sequence and the nature of their interaction (McCracken, 1988, p. 29).

#### Stage 1: Review of Analytic Categories and Interview design

The first step in this process is reviewing the literature and defining the problem in order to use scholarship to supplement my investigation. The methods are powerful and unique in illuminating "where no one has gone before." My investigation was necessary in order to find problems and follow important intuitive guesses about these urban cases. This review sharpened my capacity for surprise (Lazarsfeld, 1972). By researching, I was well versed in the literature and that allowed for a set of expectations the data could either support or contradict.

Using the literature review as a critical undertaking exercised my skepticism. I searched out the conscious and unconscious assumptions in my research to determine how these assumptions forced the definition of problems and findings. This critical process assisted me in

mastering the scholarship. The questionnaire established the domain the interview would explore. It specified categories and relationships that organized the data. It also helped to determine what questions asked and what I listened for. In sum, the first step of the four-step method reviewed and "deconstructed " the scholarly literature. It established the ground upon which the interview was conducted and established an inventory of the categories and relationships to investigate.

#### Stage 2: Review of Categories

The second step was a review of the categories in order to provide a more detailed systematic appreciation of the topic of upholding a career. It called for a minute examination of this experience. I examined some of my own associations, experiences and assumptions that surround the topic of continuing a career. I have been trying to draw on my own experience, separating the structural from the episodic, and the cultural from the idiosyncratic. There are three purposes for the review. The first is the questionnaire construction. I have identified the categories and relationships from literature reviews. These categories are the basis of question formation such as: What should I look for? How will it be configured? What will be connected to what? What is the best and least obtrusive way to ask

questions? What questioning strategy would most likely elicit what I do not know about this subject?

#### Stage 3: Discovery of Categories

The questionnaire was formalized as I searched for life study questions. An example of these is given in (APPENDIX, p. 177), as previously mentioned. These questions allowed me to ascertain the simple description of details in each individual's career. Collecting the details in this way helped inform me as to biographical information that informed the teacher's testimony.

#### Stage 4: Discovery of Analytic Categories

The object of this analysis was to determine the categories, relationships, and assumptions of each teacher's view of the world in general and his or her career in particular. I came to this undertaking with a sense of what ought to be there, a sense of how the topic at issue is constituted in his or her experience, and a glancing sense of what data dictated new categories. I used all of this as a guide, but I was also prepared to ignore it and explore things that it failed to anticipate. I did prepare to reconstruct a view of the world that bore no relation to my own view or the one evident in the literature.

There are five steps to the analysis process. Each of these represented a higher level of generality. The first step treated the

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interview on its own terms, ignoring relations to other aspects of the text (Geertz, 1976). This created an initial understanding. In the second step, I examined these understandings by themselves and then viewed them according to the evidence in the transcript and to previous literature. In the third step, I examined interconnections and once again previous literature review, moving away from transcript and towards intricate understandings and inferences. I only made references to the transcripts at this point to check ideas as they emerged from the data comparison. I determined the pattern of inter-theme consistency and contradiction. I took these patterns and themes in the fifth step as they appeared in the interviews for the case in this project, and I subjected them to a final process of analysis.

For example, in this five-step process, I moved from the particular to the general. I was deeply embedded in the details of the interview transcript and with each step, I moved upward toward more general observations. This helped me keep a record of the processes of reflection and analysis in which I was engaged. This kind of record has been identified as a condition of qualitative reliability check (Kirk & Miller, 1986).

### Checking Interpretations

All three urban educators read the transcripts for accuracy, made comments in the margins, and wrote clarifying notes. I also had

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frequent phone conversations and discussions of the data as it was collected and analyzed. These conversations served as an informal type of checking because these dialogues allowed me to substantiate and interpret the data. Finally, when portraits were written, the urban interviewees read their portraits and others to verify information (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

### **Confidentiality**

Throughout my research and writing, one of my chief concerns was the observance of ethics. I always sought to protect the privacy of the educators and assured confidentiality. All educators and others were given pseudonyms to preserve their anonymity. I also disguised the school in which the research took place with the name of Madison Shores High School.

Letters of informed consent explained the research project to the three teachers (APPENDIX, p. 193). When asked what I was learning, I always gave a response that led away from particular individuals and toward discussion of general concepts. This was to avoid violating my commitments to any of the participants and to avoid invading their rights of privacy. From the beginning point of informed consent, I was concerned with personal but unobtrusive data

collection and rapport with participants, as well as with establishing interview climates that facilitated open responses.

### **Conclusion**

Qualitative researchers seek to make sense of personal stories and the ways in which they overlap. I performed multiple readings of the data to categorize and code responses which helped me in the recognition of themes. I color-coded the data by teacher responses. Utilizing the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), I searched for important issues and recurring events in the three decades in the data in order to develop categories of focus. As themes emerged, broad categories collapsed or divided into smaller categories. Lincoln and Guba (1985) refer to this as inductive category coding, and this step was repeated throughout the analysis in a complex, recursive fashion. Analysis was also conducted for commonalities and differences in relationships in this particular high school. I engaged a professional transcriber in order to organize raw data in a timely and efficient manner.



## **Chapter Four:**

### **Collection of Portraits**

This chapter contains the portraits of three urban educators and how they came to represent this school. Initial identification for participation was based on the diversity of gender and backgrounds and their leadership in the school environment. Three native-born Americans are included to represent their cultures, two European American and one African American. I will demonstrate how these three teachers of different backgrounds synthesized influences of the school into their own modes of understanding and participation; furthermore, I will reveal how each teacher responded to poor working conditions and contextual challenges in one urban public school system. The wisdom and practices they developed can be passed on as starting points to enhance teacher preparation for the urban context.

The portraits are divided into five categories: (a) personal history; (b) classroom experiences and school life; (c) the first decade; (d) the second decade; and finally, (e) the third decade. Each begins with a personal history, gathered by a long interview with the teacher. This is followed by observations and self-perceptions of classroom experiences and school life. The final section of each case study is

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devoted to the first, second, and third decades of their careers as observed through the long interview at the intermediate school district. This approach led to the development of models that illustrate the diverse ways in which meanings drawn from the teachers' family, peer, and school combine to create teachers' perceptions of themselves.

I would like you to imagine that when you read the collection of three portraits assembled here, someone is saying something to you. Hear the narrative accounts of these three urban educators. Pay close attention, even if you do not understand what is being said, trusting that the collection taken together make an important case for the preparation of urban teachers. Begin to see the patterns and rhythms of their way of seeing and the interpretation of their experiences.

In Chapter Five, I will come back to a process of "revision," or re-seeing and discuss common themes across the three portraits that make up this instructional case. The portraits I have investigated for this dissertation study all provide powerful ways of seeing (or framing) the teachers' common experience in Madison Shores. The portraits cannot be quickly summarized because they are striking, surprising, and sometimes troubling in how they illustrate teachers challenging common ways of seeing the world. Research on teachers, through its inherent reflection, helps researchers to *make the familiar strange* and interesting again (Erickson, 1984). This case has given me a dramatic



experience, like a discovery. I suddenly saw things as I had never seen them before, and, as a consequence, I had to work hard to understand what had happened and how my thinking had changed.

### **Ann Myers**

#### Personal history

Ann Meyers was born October 21, 1948 in a smaller-sized Midwestern town in Michigan. She had an opportunity to live in Kalamazoo, Michigan from 1968-1970; otherwise, all of her time has been spent in this smaller-sized town. Ann was the first-born in her family, and has a brother, Robert, who is 50 years of age at this writing. Ann's mother is presently 77 years old and has worked as a bank manager for her entire career. Ann's father worked as an engine inspector and died in 1985. The highest level of education for both parents was high school: her mother completed 12<sup>th</sup> grade, and her father finished 11<sup>th</sup> grade. Ann lived with her parents from birth until 24 years of age. She is Caucasian, and her ethnic background is Dutch on both her mother's and her father's side of the family. Ann has remained single throughout her career. Her religious background is moderate non-denominational, and she attends worship every week in her hometown.

Overall, Ann enjoyed her own K-12 public school experience. When she started school, she was a very "young five" due to her

birthday being in October. At that time, as long as you turned five before the middle of December, you could start school at age four. One of Ann's significant school memories came from a kindergarten experience. The kindergarten teacher had been in the district for a number of years and her spring project was to help each student make a paper bunny. Each child would make a bunny and dress it appropriately for the season. When the project was completed, the entire class lined up for a photo. The memory of this positive school event was kept alive because the project was fun; Ann's mother kept the photo for her to revisit the experience.

Academically, Ann performed well as a student. However, her first grade teacher, thinking that she was overly shy and immature, made a suggestion to Ann's parents to have her repeat the first grade. Ann's parents tossed the idea around for some time but decided that she would be bored repeating first grade. By the time she was in third grade, her maturity level was on par with her third grade classmates. While Ann doubts that having been retained would have made her less introverted throughout her school career, it did take many years for Ann to become more socially adept. Ann says that she is still shy in certain situations.

During her school years, Ann's family lived directly across the street from the school where she attended K-6<sup>th</sup> elementary school. In

seventh grade, she began attending a school located a mile and a half from her home, quite a daily hike to school. She remembers the unfairness of some children living a block in the other direction having bus service to their school. "Oh well, that's life!" she said. Due to the overcrowding of the seventh and eighth grades at her junior high school, the ninth grade class was shifted to the high school. The other school's ninth grade junior high students did not have to move into the high school. Ann and her classmates always felt a little cheated for never being able to be the "top dogs" at their junior high school. They had to be the youngest kids on the block again at the high school. Ann graduated with 588 students in June of 1966.

When asked about memorable school experiences, Ann remembers that Miss Delaforce was a real task master. She was a very small person but had firm control. She used a pointer for the multiplication wheel. When she pointed at a particular fact, you had better know that multiplication fact or you were in big trouble. Overall, Miss Delaforce really cared about her students and wanted them to learn. Another important educational experience occurred in junior high. Ann's sixth grade teacher, Mrs. Lambert, had the students doing research projects which were a lot of work; but Ann really liked this, and she was amazed at how much she learned through this experience. This was her first encounter with a research project. Her

favorite high school teacher was Mrs. Katt, the senior English teacher. Ann thought that Mrs. Katt was an excellent teacher. A quiet, soft-spoken woman, she had a way of encouraging everyone to try to reach his or her own writing potential. Ann was very quiet, so she related to Mrs. Katt's kindred spirit and was inspired by her. Ann thought if Mrs. Katt could be successful, then so could she. This was an advanced honors class in which the students read three novels were read with the same basic theme. Students had to write papers comparing the thematic elements in these novels.

Throughout high school, Ann was enrolled in a special program called Team because of the team teaching approach used, which involved a select group of students. Ann said, "Those of us in this group formed a special bond." The big disadvantage to being a part of this group was having limited contact with the rest of the high school population. However, the advantage was that it better prepared a student for college by providing lecture experiences, small group seminars, and accelerated courses. Almost all of the teachers involved in this program were excellent educators who challenged their students.

At the time she attended high school, there was a very small minority student population. The few African Americans she had contact with were friendly, and they got along well. Ann, in reflecting



about this, now feels that there were prejudices and biases that probably escaped her at the time. However, there is one incident that clearly stands out in her mind. One young woman who was up for the homecoming queen made a comment about not wanting to walk or dance with an African American male if chosen for the court. The students were angered by her attitude, and Ann started to realize that prejudices were present in her school. She recognizes now that her participation in the "accelerated program" kept her at a distance from many racial conflicts that occurred among the students.

By the time she had graduated from high school, Ann knew she wanted to become a high school teacher. This disappointed her high school counselor who wanted her to enroll in Western Michigan University's five-year elementary program. Her counselor more or less "washed his hands" of Ann when she decided to become a high school teacher. Ann thought the counselor made a snap judgment that because she was small and relatively quiet, she could not succeed as a high school English teacher.

For financial reasons, Ann had no choice but to attend the local community college. She worked as a waitress part-time when school was not in session. She learned to prioritize time and to budget money, which made her self-sufficient. As Ann grew up, her mother never worked full-time until her brother started attending the local high

school. Basically, like many families at that time, they were a one-income family. When her mother worked to help make ends meet, the family was a little more comfortable. Her father experienced strike periods and lay-offs. Both parents worked very hard, and there were times when the family struggled to pay bills. Because Ann's family struggled financially, she could relate to her students' economic struggles.

Ann thinks she might have displayed more anxiety about being separated from her family had she gone away to college as a freshman. Ann had two terrific professors of English at her community college who helped her recognize her talent and made her realize that she could be successful teaching English at the high school level. But by her junior year, she was ready for independence. Ann developed many friendships at the local community college, which created a support system when she went on to Western Michigan University. Everyone had a network of friends; and eventually, they introduced each other to many new friends. Presently, five or six friends who roomed together at Western Michigan University still set aside time every year to maintain their relationships. Ann feels fortunate to have been blessed with finding people with whom she has had a lot in common over the years.

Two courses had a major impact on Ann as a teacher. The first was African American Literature, which was her very first introduction to African American writers. These readings gave her insight into the historical context and culture of African Americans, but she was aware that it did not provide a full understanding. It did, however, open her eyes to the emotions involved in the protests of the 1960s and '70s. Ann expressed that this course helped her to comprehend the racial tension that existed.

The second was a class at Western Michigan University in which a professor modeled the ability to engage students. This professor provided a much deeper respect for teaching and learning and enjoyment of Shakespeare's writing, especially the plays. In high school, Ann had simply read Shakespeare's works to get through classes, but this professor brought Shakespeare's writing to life for her. The professor made it interesting and more complex by showing students the humor, bawdiness, and innuendos that pervaded the plays. Ann found herself laughing and gasping as much as she imagined the original audiences had done. Additionally, Ann and her classmates became playwrights. The professor had them write down incidents and add stage directions and asides—as Shakespeare had done in his plays. Ann felt that by having fun reading and studying the plays and by participating in writing plays as a student, she gained

great appreciation for the bard himself.

### Classroom and school experience

Arriving at Madison Shores High School in the second semester of January, 1970, near the area where she grew up, Ann found she was the only student teacher who had taken the African American Literature course. This background provided her with a basic understanding of some of the anger and frustration coming from her students. Many white students were leaving the school system to attend other high schools being built at the time because African Americans were moving into the district. With the advent of white flight from the school district in 1974-1975, the school population became a predominately African American population; this made for a difficult transition period for students, teachers, and the community.

Because of Ann's past experiences and openness, she was accepting of all students' backgrounds. Ann respects diversity, and when she thinks about her high school and college friends, Ann marvels at how unique each one is and yet how well they get along. Even though they are different, they respect each other for these differences and recognize how they compliment each other through varying strengths and talents. They do not always agree, nor do they always buy into each other's points of view. However, they can listen to each and respect divergent opinions while maintaining their own

principles and beliefs.

Dissimilarity in people takes many forms: racial, economic, political, personal, etc. Ann found that if she took the time to listen and watch other people, there was always some common ground to be found. Ann likes to be right and, much to her chagrin, has sometimes been very wrong. However, she has found that sometimes people of differing views can both be right—just in opposite ways. She suggests that we all have several talents, and when she encounters someone with musical talent, for instance, she stands in awe of them. The way people are distinctive has enriched her life and made it more enjoyable and interesting. Finally, seeing the contradistinctions in people and respecting those dissimilar qualities broadens a person's perspective. Recognizing these various talents often encourages people to try new things and may allow them to uncover hidden talents of their own.

Ann's educational philosophy is one that was shaped by the value her parents placed on education. Ann and her brother Robert were told by their parents that while they might never use their degrees, they could never lose what they had learned. Ann states, "No one can take away what you have learned, nor can they take away your ability to learn. Education is learning; and learning is a lifelong endeavor." Ann also believes that while formal education is important,

there are numerous types of learning. Not everyone needs to be in the same type of college preparation program.

In teaching high school English, Ann watched as many students were locked into a college preparation curriculum because of the elimination of vocational education and business programs. Ann thought college preparation was not for everyone. Students needed to experience success first in some area of interest to gain the self-confidence needed to live successful lives. Ann reveals, "There are too many students in most schools who are automatically set up for failure before they even enter a classroom. Some carry a lot of personal baggage with them which hinders their success, but the system also situates them for failure." Over the years, the system has become affirmed on the notion that every student must go on to college in order to succeed. Ann says, "Programs that are creative alternatives get axed first." For instance, a double dip (two classes) in reading or math can benefit the student. Thus, a student who is reading below grade level will be simultaneously enrolled in regular ninth grade English as well as Reading Strategies class. In times of economic struggles, the reading classes were eliminated. Ann has known many people who had degrees who could not repair a broken plumbing fixture, change the oil in their cars, or build an addition on their home. Many students who struggled with academics or who were not

interested in going to college often found success in vocational courses such as electronics, woodshop, and auto mechanics. Following high school these students usually could get entry-level jobs in construction or at the area auto dealers. Ann believes that with the elimination of such vocational programs at the high school level, students were short-changed and positioned for failure. "What's wrong with a student not being able to do trigonometry or calculus, but being perfectly capable of changing the oil in his/her car?" asks Ann. She recognizes that people have different talents and are suited to various diverse occupations.

Many of her young female students were mothers and yet programs such as parenting, food preparation, and sewing were gradually eliminated from the high school program. Courses for enrichment which appeal to students with special talents are often offered only on a very limited basis. Not everyone who graduates goes on to college or a university. "Yet," Ann stresses, "we make the students struggle through this type of coursework and offer them no alternatives. Being successful is liking what you do and doing it well. All too often we eliminate the courses many students like because these courses will not prepare them for the university and are considered a 'frill' or too expensive to maintain," she says.

The class sizes always fluctuate at Ann's school. Most special education students have always had the benefit of smaller class sizes. This allowed for individualized learning in which special problems could be taken into consideration and addressed. Unfortunately, students in regular education classes were not often afforded the opportunity for smaller class sizes, and yet many of these students would have benefited from this practice. In fact, Madison administrators had a theory: the better the students, the bigger the class sizes. The larger class sizes negatively affect teaching and learning in an urban high school, no matter what the ability level might be in the classroom.

Class size affects English classes regarding what it is possible to accomplish instructing 35 students in a 55-minute period. If writing samples are generated weekly, it is often impossible to effectively keep up and respond with the constructive criticism each student needs. In such cases, a teacher has the tendency to give fewer assignments in order to ensure timely responses to students, especially to students who need assistance in order to remain motivated. Mainstreamed special education students were at the low end ability-wise in large classes where there were already far too many varying ability levels. Often many students were reading at a very low instructional level for high school (5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> grade). Ann and others had students at so many divergent ability levels that in order to provide quality instruction and



assignments beneficial to students, the assignments had to be reduced to a manageable number. This way, students could demonstrate success. Many students worked on assignments in class due to a lack of materials and textbooks to take home. Most of the teachers devised lessons that addressed the middle of the ability level because the group dynamics were always a challenge. These lessons provided the lower ability students an opportunity to show success, and to not feel humiliated by a lack of ability. These lessons also needed to provide the academically capable or talented a chance to expand the assignment or project for intellectual challenge. Again, this needed to happen without embarrassment in front of peers.

For example, Ann developed a poetry unit which taught the basics for her students' understanding of rhythm, rhyme, figures of speech, and poetic forms. Students would then write their own poetry employing these techniques. The culminating project was to produce a booklet of poetry containing an original poem from each student in all classes. This was the idea of a student teacher. Much later, this idea was used as a small group project. Rather than the teacher formatting the booklets, students designed their own. The guidelines were set as to the types of poems, numbers of each type, illustrations, etc. Students within each group performed different tasks depending on their strengths: one student would illustrate; another would complete the

layout; and another process the words. Often times, lower ability students were nudged along by more capable students because everyone wanted the group to succeed. The quality varied from student to student, but the end product was usually one they could all be proud of. The students' success was in large part a result of the structure and stability of Ann's assignments.

Ann further reveals, "Part of the stable environment that occurred in my classroom came from my own personal need for stability. I did not deal well with chaos. I had to be organized." There were mornings that Ann arrived at 7:00 a.m. in order to set up the room, make sure all copies were run off, and get equipment up and running. There were other times Ann stayed at school until 5:30 p.m. to work out details or mentor her students. She did not feel she was doing her job well if she was not well organized. She always felt that organization helped her to raise expectations for her students; for the most part, they responded well to structure. "My students commented that they could actually think in my room because everyone was on task and quiet. They found that if they listened and followed instructions as given, they would do well," says Ann.

Setting the stage for the first 15 or 20 minutes of the period was extremely important to Ann. When students were not attentive, they missed helpful examples and directions that needed to be followed.

Unfortunately, there were many interruptions, such as people knocking on the door or announcements on the public address system. Ann's students knew that she would have torn that speaker off the wall if she could have. At one point, the interruptions became so bothersome that students asked if there was a way to disconnect the speaker. Ann felt that she had to keep interruptions to a minimum to protect her students' learning time during the school year.

Ann was often leery of school improvement plans because she claims her school has been notorious for jumping on bandwagons of various trends. Madison Shores tried everything from Larry Lazotte, to Ron Edmonds, to the PDS. Each had its own merits, but the problem seemed to be that the school never fully employed one before initiating another. When nothing whatsoever transitions from theory to practice, teachers get very leery of trusting or "buying into" the next educational innovation. Disappointment became a given in Ann's urban context, and Ann needed to find her own strength each day to sustain her career.

In Ann's teaching practice, she accepted some ideas from these miscellaneous initiatives but kept some out in order to protect students. She tried to mix her lessons to accommodate students' different learning styles. She attended seminars and special sessions on best practice and brought much back to the classroom. Her

expectations were high, and parents thanked her for her willingness to improve her classes. Ann tried to avoid initiatives that had a lack of direction or things that exemplified the disorganization that seemed to plague this urban system. Ann states, "Keeping things running smoothly in my classroom helped me to exist within the chaos that seemed to be constantly emerging."

### Overview of the decades

During the first two decades of Ann's teaching, the high school was organized and "blessed" with a very strong administrator. It was a school with a diverse population of students. Initially, the school used tracking. Many people have an anti-tracking pedagogy for urban schools. It was often viewed negatively and justifiably so in the community. Minority children often found themselves in lower tracks. Because of this, tracking was scrapped entirely in the district. This meant teachers had far greater challenges because students in one classroom were at such different ability levels.

When Ann started teaching in Madison Shores in 1970, the teaching staff was 95 percent Caucasian and 5 percent African American, while the student population was 60 percent Caucasian and 40 percent African American. This began to change rapidly. By 1975, the student population at Madison Shores was 40 percent Caucasian and 60 percent African American. The Caucasian

population was moving out and the African American population was shifting into the four-square-mile district. For the most part, Caucasians who remained in the district sent their children to the parochial schools after elementary school.

The 1974-1975 year was rough for Ann's school due to a great deal of racial tension. There were some violent incidents at school. Most of the students, both African American and Caucasian, were distressed by the destructiveness in when students or teachers were assaulted or harassed. The media coverage on these violent acts painted a negative view of the school district. After this time, the student population shifted dramatically. When Ann retired in 2000, the student population was 98 percent African American and 2 percent Caucasian. The teaching staff was 50 percent African American and 50 percent Caucasian. While this figure fluctuates at times, it is fairly constant to this day.

Retention was frowned upon, especially at the elementary levels; social promotion (pushing kids through the system) became the norm in the district. Students who might have gotten back on track had they repeated a grade began to fall further and further behind. In Ann's experience, by the time students reached high school, they were lacking so many basics that they were destined to fail. For example, an instructor might be teaching ninth grade English to a

tenth grader (with a reading level of fifth grade) who took both ninth- and tenth-grade English at the same time.

Toward the end of second decade, the district stopped having students declare a course of study such as business, vocational and technological, and college preparatory. Many courses and programs were eliminated, and Madison Shores began operating on the premise that every student should go on to a college or university. Ann and others knew that there would be more students failing in the long run.

It was during Ann's third decade of teaching that chaos reigned at Madison Shores. The district endured seven different superintendents and five principals. Each had his or her own unique perspective on what education should entail at Madison Shores. Some of the platitudes were "every student should go on to college", "we need more electives", "hire more teachers", "we are over budget", "we have to cut staff", "we can no longer afford a seven-period day", and "we must cut back to a five-period day." Many changes were made without considering the consequences or impact on students. Some of the students' lives were already complicated, and the changes only added to the confusion, chaos, and instability.

All of the district changes (administration, curriculum, structural) began halfway through the second decade, but the majority occurred in the third decade. During the second and third decades,

there were more standardized tests. Madison Shores struggled to improve its California Achievement Test (CATS) scores and the Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) scores. In the second decade, Ann and a colleague instituted a reading program which seemed to be working for the students. However, they noticed that every time scores started to improve—raising students' scores to the median test scores—a new test would be introduced with new formats and language. Then, they were back to square one, teaching students how to deal with the new test format. While the students always scored low in comparison with other districts, teachers were nonetheless doing a better job preparing students than most urban school districts. The administrators never vocalized the success of their top students (students who stayed on track all through their school years). These students were doing very well and competed with top students from other school districts. Most of the publicity in the local newspaper was very depressing, but the teachers' reward was knowing Madison Shores students were competing well when compared to similarly populated urban schools.

### First decade

Ann's first principal was a counselor promoted to principal. He seemed to not be able to demonstrate effective leadership strategies

that promoted a confidence from staff members. Her second Mr. Westley principal supported his teaching staff, and his willingness to put himself on the line for his teachers was inspiring. Teachers and Mr. Westley did not always agree, and there were heated discussions which sometimes ended with a teacher thinking he or she would never speak to the man again. But he was the boss, and they respected him and knew he supported them. He recognized their abilities and often asked for their help or opinions; he did not presume to know more than the staff. Mr. Westley had a terrible problem with spelling and grammar conventions. The English department at Shores became his editorial staff, and he received a dictionary as a gift from the staff. It is a tribute to his humility that the staff was comfortable giving him a dictionary; and actually, he laughed and thanked them for the gesture. Mr. Westley was aware of his limitations in expressing language. Knowing how to express himself was not his strong suit; therefore, nothing left the building without being checked for spelling or grammatical errors.

Unfortunately one incident occurred that negatively affected Mr. Westley's affable personality. The incident involved most of the high school seniors taking an unauthorized skip day. They partied at a house in full view of the middle school. The middle school principal, out of concern for students, called the high school principal. These two principals went to the house, took names, and planned to take the



appropriate action. Not only were the students having an unauthorized party, but a parent had provided alcohol. A suspension was in order, but because some of the best and brightest were involved, the area superintendent and the board of education did not support the suspensions. It was swept under the carpet, and students were not held accountable for their actions. This incident made Mr. Westley think that he no longer had the support or backing of the area superintendent and the board of education. Mr. Westley never put himself on the line for the high school again, and this lack of support filtered down from the administration to staff.

Mr. Westley did support the teachers he knew were trying to help students. He had, however, lost heart and began to waiver on decisions. After administrative positions of the high school principal and middle principal were switched, everyone noticed a real decline in the area of teacher support and for teaching and learning. Students went from knowing expectations and respecting teachers to open debates on who was right—the student or the teacher.

### Second decade

During the first two decades, the staff remained stable. Five or six new teachers were hired each year. Many of the staff members who had worked in the school district for a while would predict at school year orientations which new teachers would return the following fall.

They sensed the educators with the self-confidence, ability to relate to students, and fortitude to survive the urban environment. Teaching at Madison Shores was hardly a perfect teaching and learning situation, so teachers needed to be strong, confident and adaptable; otherwise, their chances of being successful were slim. Staff members were fairly accurate on their predictions about new teachers.

Sometimes teachers had the textbooks, materials, and supplies that were needed; but at times, they went without. Ann's first assistant superintendent, who was in charge of requisitions, hated workbooks and always denied those requisitions. Ann did not know how, but this superintendent knew she used the workbooks to supplement and reinforce lessons. Consequently, because she used workbooks in an appropriate way the supply order was filled each year. This was the case throughout most of her career. She came to rely less and less on texts during her years at Madison Shores.

The second decade at Madison Shores was riddled with financial difficulties. Governor Blanchard sent in a team at the request of the Madison Shores Education Association to investigate, and the team found questionable financial practices at Madison Shores. Rather than any lack of money or fraud in the district, there was frequent misappropriation of funds and the poor setting of priorities. This special team from the state of Michigan made out a line item budget to

appropriate money soundly. A report written during this time made the statement that the district's strength was in its teachers. Considering the bad public view urban teachers were always getting, this made the educators proud. The staff thought that someone had finally recognized the educators being the glue holding the district together. The high school staff in particular had the hope that things could be turned around financially. Then, Governor Engler took office and the Michigan State Board of Education members were replaced. That dashed any promise for assistance. The report never surfaced again; it was as though it never existed. Ann and others calculated that had the district received specific assistance from the state, this urban district could have been a model instead of a low-achieving district. Ann stated, "We had survived so much up to this point. The report and promise of assistance gave us hope; and when that never materialized, we felt like we had been kicked in the gut."

In Mr. Westley's final days at Madison Shores, he seemed to revert back to his original supportive role because he sensed an urgent need for change. The legislation of PA 25 had been enacted by the State of Michigan, and school improvement was now a mandate. Pressure to make positive changes was growing, and he responded accordingly. Ann approached Mr. Westley during the summer months about some suggestions for organization and communication; he was

totally supportive. A group of teachers gathered to put initiatives into place, such as a school calendar and a newsletter for the high school. The newsletter contained a monthly calendar, articles on upcoming events, and a number of helpful suggestions for parents on things such as bedtime, quiet study areas, and limited television time. The response from parents was positive, and they referred to the newsletters often. Unfortunately, things began to change rapidly with the arrival of a new superintendent. Within two years came adjustments which reverted back to a seven-period day and a college preparatory curriculum. Unfortunately, this led to a huge budget deficit due to the addition of structural changes, curriculum additions, and the hiring of new staff. After one semester, the school day was cut back to a five-period day.

In addition to administrative switches in which the former middle school principal was shifted to the high school, the new atmosphere was a tremendous change and adjustment for everyone. The principal seemed to undermine his staff, and the staff sensed a lack of support. For him, the school newsletter was not professional enough. Ann thought that she and her colleague would need extra preparation time to improve it since no monies had ever been appropriated to cover this extra duty. The new principal was unable to see their point of view. With no one willing to step in, the newspaper's existence ceased. Some staff members thought they were wrong not to go along with

him, but Ann knew without the extra released time they could not do a quality job and keep up with their responsibilities as teachers.

Ann and her colleague initiated a discussion to stress that they wanted to keep the newsletter going by making improvements. Computers were arriving at the high school, which involved a whole new learning process for Ann and her colleague. The printing teacher had shown them how to make the calendar on the computer. But the principal indicated he wanted something on glossy paper with photos to be sent to the whole district instead of just the high school students' parents. In order to produce this and get it out monthly, they needed more time and financial compensation. They actually needed time more than money. For example, an extra planning period would have given them enough time but would have meant that they taught only four of their assigned five periods. The principal thought that would be too expensive, and the district would not support it. Ann and her colleague realized that he and the new upper administration were expecting a district newsletter similar to those of other districts without providing the adequate time and compensation to produce it. The newsletter folded. In Ann's words, "That was such a shame, but you can only do so much." This is just one example of a leadership shift that resulted in changed priorities. Once something was lost, it became difficult to get it back on track in this urban context.

About the same time, the high school had applied to become a PDS. When it was accepted, the morale of the high school soared. The new principal never tried to conceal the fact that he had little use for school improvement. At one educational conference on Mackinaw Island, he rarely spent any time planning with the group for the advent of PDS and actually did his best to undermine the process.

### Third decade

In the last decade of Ann's career, she experienced many rapid changes. The staff never got a break from change after 1990. The PDS planning session had discussed how school districts went through periods of "whitewater" and provided techniques to survive these times. The PDS university liaisons suggested that things would soar once beyond the whitewater. Looking back, many of the teachers decided that their problem was that they never got beyond the instability period. The high school staff always came up against the rapids; and if they had not used the coping strategies they had developed, they would have sunk.

By the time the student population was 98 percent African American, schools of choice, charter schools, and the voucher system were being touted. When charter schools became a reality, many of the parents began to seriously look at pulling their children out of the

Madison Shores Public Schools. Parents looked at the racial make-up, declining test scores, weak administrators, and discipline problems and decided to give charter schools a try. Ann states, "The only thing holding the academic program to some kind of standard was the teaching staff." With the assistance of university representatives, they began to rewrite the curriculums in all academic areas. The English department at Madison Shores completed the K-12 language arts curriculum.

The entire K-12 curriculum needed rewriting and coordination, but the curriculum director was not qualified to demonstrate any kind of success. Teachers had maintained autonomy for so long that they were reluctant to buy into a new process. Most of the time when they had agreed to try something new, they had received little administrative support to initiate and maintain it. New teachers hired required some type of curriculum guide; this would have been stabilizing for the district. To the disappointment of many teachers, the revisions were never completed, thus repeating a traditional pattern. The K-12 language arts program was the only academic program that continued to be updated and reworked. Many language arts curriculums were reviewed, and K-12 staff members adopted aspects of these with slightly lowered standards. The idea was to elevate the standards after students demonstrated success.

Too many people in the central office did not know their job or made no attempt to learn their job. For example, the curriculum director did not take charge or work on curriculum matters, which left many gaping holes in the structural system. The personnel appointed did not have the qualifications and expertise to enhance these significant areas of the system. Job performance was not evaluated; virtually nothing was accomplished in these essential areas. Ann revealed, "The hole kept getting deeper and deeper because programs began to decline and many were eliminated. Students were not serviced effectively."

When Dr. Russell became superintendent in the second decade, the district shifted to a total college or university preparatory program which eliminated many programs that serviced the majority of students at this time. Many college preparation electives were added, but students were not interested in them. The end result was overstaffing. This was the same year that all the students' schedules were re-done mid-year because the district could not financially survive this overstaffing. Dr. Russell was succeeded by a couple of interim superintendents. The district hired Superintendent Dale Wheaton; form and appearance over substance characterized Mr. Wheaton. He did not care about teaching and learning or curriculum. Amid accusations of corruption and credit card misuse, Mr. Wheaton resigned



Superintendent Robert Bennett succeeded Mr. Wheaton. He thought that building a new high school would improve enrollment and the school district. Ann states, "Again, form over substance."

The new high school building is near completion and is scheduled to open soon. The district has created a new building and no curriculum program of substance. There are those who think students who are academically talented or who want specific course offerings only need a building and a well maintained facility. Ann believes that students will not stay in a building without a curriculum program. A group of 25-30 students at each grade level is academically on track and wants to follow a college or university preparation program; the rest have no choice but to follow a college or university preparation program because this is the only option. However, many of these students will enter the workplace directly after high school. These students would be better served by a strong business curriculum or vocational and technology curriculums.

#### Ann's reflection over her career

**Interviewer:** Ann, why did you decide to retire?

**Ann:** Many things went into my decision. With every change that came along, I tried to be cooperative. When the state team came in, we were willing to help. Others and I really felt that it was the answer; but when we were shot down, we felt defeated. After that defeat,

there were a few programs that were touted as school improvement plans, but we never completed one activity before the next activity was started. The PDS was, to many of us, our last hope. You, Lorraine, and Betty helped us stay afloat the last eight years or so. Maybe if Mr. Westley had remained as the high school principal, the PDS would have been more successful. Once he was removed, there was never the administrative support for PDS that there should have been. Every time we thought we were making progress, we'd have another administrative change and have to start all over again. I guess I just got frustrated and disheartened because of all the roadblocks that were thrown in our path, and I just burned out. I didn't feel on top of the game anymore. I felt like I was letting students down because I couldn't work up the enthusiasm I once had. Too many let downs, frustrations! What can an urban teacher to do?

**Ann:** I had some tough, rough kids. These kids came with so much baggage: low reading abilities, emotional impairments (you name a problem and they probably had it), and poor attendance. I didn't know how to effectively deal with all of their problems. With no administrative support in dealing with the most disruptive kids, I was overwhelmed and stressed out. There was no one who held them to any kind of standard. No one insisted they attend class regularly; no one told them certain behaviors were unacceptable in a classroom.

Despite all this, one of my ninth grade honors English students let me know that I was doing something right when she said, "This is the best English class I ever had." As a teacher you so often put so much into your instruction and you feel it was well done, but you aren't sure anyone noticed. It was great to know that at least one student appreciated my efforts. I often run into former students at the supermarket, the hospital, the mall; they usually can't wait to tell me how well they are doing and often tell me how much they appreciated what I taught them. They'll say, "It's so good to see you. Are you still teaching? Things have really changed up there; I don't blame you for retiring." Or, "I wish you were still there for my kids because you did such a good job for me." I know I made mistakes with some students and I would deal with them differently if I could go back, but I did right by the majority of students I taught.

**(pauses):** The hardest thing to tolerate was other people's attitudes about those who taught at Madison Shores Public Schools. Their attitude was that if you were really a good teacher you wouldn't be teaching in the Shores (an urban school), you'd be teaching at Bloomfield Hills (an upper- middle-class school). Granted those districts have their own set of problems, but, to be honest, I think it's much easier to teach in those districts. Parental interference is probably more of a problem for them, but we had to deal with students who often

took the role of the parents (they were raising themselves). Instead of being stigmatized, teachers in urban districts should be lauded and admired. You don't know how much it hurt to see the admiration in people's faces upon hearing you were a teacher turn to disdain when you revealed that you taught in an urban school district. Somehow, you instantly became less qualified.

**Interviewer:** *To what do you attribute this attitude?*

**Ann:** We always knew that if something negative happened it would make the front page of the newspaper. If it happened north of town, it would have been buried in the middle pages of the local newspaper or deemed not worthy of being reported. Much of it related to the bias and prejudice against minorities and people from low socio-economic backgrounds. [That somehow they are less of a person.] We did have some incidences of roughness and violence, but outsiders thought that these were everyday happenings and that we were threatened with guns and knives. The few incidents we had that involved a gun or a knife occurred in the parking lot or off school grounds entirely. Much of the publicity came from situations involving extracurricular events and non-students attending these functions. The assumption was made that the violence was occurring at the high school on a daily basis. We did have fights between individuals, but they usually stemmed from things that happened outside the school. I can count on one hand the

times I seriously felt threatened in my 30 years. The custodial staff and hall guards were always protective of us and watched over us whenever they sensed trouble.

**(pauses):** The other prevailing attitude was that because many of the students struggled academically and scored poorly on standardized tests, all of our students were less capable and so were their teachers. The truth is—our best students could compete with anyone, and it takes more talent to teach children with learning disabilities, behavioral problems, and emotional problems than those who read well, have high self-esteem, self-confidence, and are encouraged by parents. So many of our students had no one at home to encourage them to do well in school. I marveled at how well some of them did considering their backgrounds and home environments. Getting to school was an accomplishment for some, and for some, school was a safe haven because at home they experienced abuse and neglect. They had to deal with drug use and prostitution in their neighborhoods and sometimes within their own homes. During the winter months, school might be the only place they could get warm. How many of us would have done well in school under similar circumstances? They might not be doing as well on standardized tests but they are in school and learning. You really have to give some of these students credit for simply trying against all odds.

**Interviewer:** *Why do you think the staff bonded together so closely?*

**Ann:** We probably all came from similar backgrounds; either that or we rubbed off on each other because most of us would arrive early and remain well after the official dismissal time. Walking the picket line during numerous strikes and attending faculty potlucks and picnics also helped us to bond. As time went on, newer staff members and some of the veterans seemed less willing to be there early and reluctant to stay late unless they received compensation. One example of bonding together was when another colleague and I worked on a reading program to help raise the reading scores of students on the CAT and the MEAP. All incoming ninth graders who read below a certain level were required to take this course. We designed our own program using a lot of current events materials. The district decided (foolishly) to cut back on the number of sections offered and we were assigned other courses to teach. The new reading teacher was astounded that we were not using a basal reader and insisted one be ordered. We tried to suggest that the use of current event materials captured students' interest, but she felt that would be too much work and thus the program would be less successful. I was never comfortable with just a basic test; I adapted things to fit my students' style. Some of the staff members did not have the drive to do that. They were the ones who arrived at the starting bell or after it and who were walking out of the

building with the students. Here I was still coming in early and staying late. After the first superintendent, James Snyder, we had seven superintendents; and after our high school principal Mr. Westley, we had five principals; only four if you don't count the one who left and returned. Not one of them got to know the staff well, nor did they seem to want to know us. We held the district together. We, the staff, respected each other for our differences; we complemented each other, and we worked together for the benefit of our students.

Today, Ann continues to be involved with Michigan Alpha Delta Kappa and provides child care in her home for a young teacher whom she mentored at Madison Shores.

## **Halle Dandrich**

### Personal History

Halle Dandrich was born November 5, 1947 in Madison and remains in Madison where she cares for her 88 year-old mother. She has two older sisters, Jessie and Lillie, who both live in the Madison area. Halle is number ten in her family's birth order. Her mother had three stillborn babies, three babies died in early infancy and a brother passed away in 1999. Halle is African American. Both her parents were born and raised in Arkansas and then moved to Madison where her father worked as a crane operator and her mother as a domestic worker. She lived with both parents until her senior year in high school, at which time her parents decided to divorce. She then lived with her mother until college. After being married for only a year in 1974, she divorced and bought a house. Her mother lived in her own apartment until May 2, 2003 when she went to a nursing home. Halle Dandrich is a committed Baptist; she attends church weekly and has served as an usher and a chairperson in outreach ministry and has remained a member of the kitchen committee.

Growing up, Halle's mother worked cooked and cleaned in numerous homes in a nearby affluent area. Her mother was the main disciplinarian of the family and made sure Halle followed the rules. Halle was daddy's girl and says, "Dads don't discipline girls you know



because they spoil them." Halle's father sometimes worked two shifts as a crane operator in the local foundry. Often, he would return home and have dinner with Halle. Sometimes he would be called back to work on a furnace or whatever needed repairing at that time. During the summer months, Halle babysat young children or picked blueberries and cherries. Her father refused to let her ride on the trucks that hauled pickers, so he would drive her to the blueberry fields and fall asleep in the car while Halle worked. Sometimes he would help Halle pick berries. He would then return to the foundry at 3:30 p.m. to work. Halle developed a good work ethic. Because she could see the positive impact that hard work could have on students' lives, she put many hours into coaching in later years. Halle felt that she had experienced a loving, caring family structure, so returning this to her students by coaching them was important to her as a teacher in Madison Shores.

Education was always extremely valued by Halle and her parents. They constantly told her, "Education is the foundation of everything and it is a significant part of your life." When she was in school, her father worked second shift. After she changed school clothes and did her homework, she could eat dinner. Halle's parents continued to peruse her college grades when they arrived in the mail. As a student, she was expected to do well. Halle is not sure students

today get the same formidable message from their parents because many are working in order to buy clothing with designer labels. There is no priority placed on education; it's about a beeper and status. This lack of healthy priorities hurts the athletic program as well because students are not concerned about sports. Attaining a good education and participating in sports were always important to Halle in her primary, secondary, and post-secondary years.

The highest level of education Halle attained is a master's degree, plus 50 additional credits in business education and computer science. She had wanted to be a teacher ever since grade school at Goldfinch Elementary when she lived on Riordan. One of Halle's sisters is five years older than she, and Halle wanted to do better than her sister. She has always been goal-driven, knowing what she wanted from the start. One particular teacher who influenced her was Ms. Thompson, a physical education instructor.

When asked what she remembered most about elementary school, Halle replied, "You are really taking me back because it's been 35 years since high school." She remembered lots of new lady teachers, and she did not have a male teacher until fifth grade with Mr. Vanderwall. Her favorite teacher was Ms. Veverica in third grade, whose name stands for "squirrel" in her nationality, but Halle cannot recall the particular nationality. This little fact has stuck with her

throughout her schooling years. Ms. Veverica had such a positive impact on Halle because she was so kind and personable.

In junior high, her favorite teacher was Ms. Thompson because she coached the intramural basketball team and gave Halle a picture of the basketball team many years later. Halle made copies and laminated them for other team members. Ms. Thompson retired five years after Halle began her career in business in the same district.

Halle graduated from Madison Shores High School in 1965, the same high school at which she later taught for 30 years. After graduation, she attended the community college which was spread all over the district in satellite buildings. She landed a work-study job in the admissions office and was the only black employee. She thoroughly enjoyed working in this capacity. When she graduated with a two-year community college degree, she worked for six months before transferring to Western Michigan University. Every summer she would come back and work in admissions at the community college. When she did her student teaching at Madison Shores Public Schools in the fall of 1969, she was able to get a switchboard operator's job in the evenings, Monday through Thursday, working from 5:00-10:00 p.m. This assisted her with educational finances.

Halle lived on Western Michigan University campus. There were many people from the Madison Shores area who attended Western.

She knew that she wanted to be a high school teacher and could not imagine being an elementary teacher. Halle learned a great deal from seeing all of the students come through the admissions office. She learned how critical persistence is to success. She took this knowledge with her to Western. A competitive person, she played softball for 21 years before she finally had her fourth knee surgery. Then she had to give it up.

### Classroom and school experience

The first year that she came to Madison Shores, the cheerleading advisor quit, so Halle was asked to coach the cheerleaders. Within her first five years, she started coaching the track program and girls' varsity basketball. She was coaching all three sports at once, going from one to another all year long. She was extremely busy, but she claims she could do this because she was a single person. The teacher who supervised Halle for student teaching continued to be a mentor for Halle as a beginning teacher. She always had someone to talk with about important school issues. Halle believes that the reason teachers in the urban schools have difficulty is the lack of support they receive as professional teachers. Today's teachers often have mentors and supervisors, but in her district she did not receive the support from administration. She admits, "The support just wasn't there in Madison

Shores Public Schools."

Superintendent James Snyder would make trips to the southern colleges to recruit African American teachers. Halle explained that when she attended Madison Shores Public Schools, she never had a Black teacher. Mrs. Washington was African American and came to Madison Shores between the years 1961-1963, and she was the only Black teacher at the high school. Mr. Snyder recruited teachers from Jackson State University and Mississippi State University. Leo Johnson, Halle's teaching friend, came to Madison from Mississippi State University due to this recruiting. There were many other teachers who were recruited from the southern states.

In talking with Halle about her transition from pre-service to teaching, she revealed that the transition was easy because she viewed herself as a bit of a control freak. She says, "Most teachers are a little, you know." She always laid out her expectations on the first day. Basically, she provided a framework for how teaching and learning were going to happen for her students. She has always been the type of teacher who shows no favoritism in the classroom. She was fair and genuine to students. She feels that teachers are there to teach—not to be a student's friend; there is a fine distinction between the two roles. Halle understood this concept from the very beginning because she says, "A teacher has to be the adult and establish the

guidelines. You also need to stick to the guidelines that you constitute."

As a researcher, I wondered where this influence came from in her career. Halle thought that it was a combination of influences from the teachers in her life and her parents. She says, "My parents, they expected me to be in school except for the times I was sick."

In fact, she remembers that during her senior skip day, she remained in school all day and went to the senior party after school hours. When she reveals this about herself, she reflects on the fact that her older sister dropped out of business college and she felt that she had to do better in school. Halle continues her relationship to this day with Mrs. Washington, her mentor. The strong bond created between them has been maintained throughout her years in the Madison Shores community.

Halle became president of the Teachers' Association in the district and Everett Spears, Chief Negotiator, was thrilled that she accepted the position in the district. The district teachers needed her to organize and provide a united voice for them at the negotiation table. Many years of coaching had prevented her from taking on this added responsibility before. Halle also felt that with her temperament of being opinionated, she was not the easiest person to get along with in bargaining discussions. Parleying teaching contracts was a big responsibility in Madison Shores Public Schools. Some wondered

whether she could compromise but Halle admitted, "There is not much more you can do sometimes except compromise."

### First decade

Halle's first principal, Mr. Benny, did not have adequate leadership qualities for being a principal; he lasted one semester. Halle recounts, "Mr. Westley supported his teachers, which is something that today's teachers are not receiving. That is sad because Madison Shores Public Schools has a lot of teacher and administrative turnover now." With Mr. Westley, a teacher knew that when a student acted up, that student was going to have a problem with the principal. Things got done and a teacher was supported in teaching and learning. Halle felt that Mr. Westley could relate and recollects what it was like teaching with a sympathetic principal. This kind of reality check made him a good principal. Halle says, "A principal has to remember his or her teaching practice and the tension of teaching high school students."

Mr. Westley provided a school atmosphere in which teachers got together and talked with one another socially. Twice a year, a potluck was provided during exams. Mr. Westley took on the responsibility to organize the event for the staff members. Halle says, "He enjoyed it just as much as everybody else." Teachers would come together during these exam periods to eat, talk, and socialize. This created a genuine

climate of closeness and camaraderie; it initiated a bond that continued to draw staff closely together, and it felt very good knowing that staff members supported one another at the high school. Other social activities included student-faculty basketball games in the gym.

In the beginning of her first ten years of teaching, Halle says that students were goal oriented and wanted to achieve in school—to be at the top of their class, to compete for good grades, and (for some) to go to college. Everything shifted 180 degrees from the first decade to the third decade. Students no longer desired to be perceived as intelligent; it was not important to make the honor roll. They just wanted a 'D' to pass the class. As Ann also said, other things were more important such as working a job in order to purchase name-brand clothing. Teachers had a very difficult adjustment to this immense attitude change in students.

In the first decade, Madison Shores teachers and administrators felt the beginning of a declining graduating class. When Halle's sister graduated in 1960, hers was the largest class with 320 students, in what was at that time a Class A high school. She graduated in 1965 with 252 students in her graduating class. Halle was in the top ten percent of her graduating class. Madison Shores High School started out as a Class A high school, then it dropped to a Class B high school, and finally, ended up a Class C high school. The advent of schools of choice and



charters were impacting the high school by the third decade.

One positive feature of the first decade was that students were offered choices in numerous programs that appealed to many of their interests. There were different curriculum offerings, such as practical nursing, printing, photography, mechanical drawing, and computer aided design. There were also quite a few classes in business education. At one time, there were seven business education teachers. Much later in the second decade, classes, curriculums, and programs continued to be cut down to basic programs.

Mr. Snyder provided a vast amount of stability and kept these programs in the school district in the first decade. He was a graduate of Madison Shores High School and came up through the system as a junior high principal, high school principal, and finally a superintendent. People in the district saw him as a role model and respected him for his advancement. They also realized that he was preserving the stability of the district with coherent classes, curriculums, and programs to meet the needs of Madison Shores Public Schools students.

Despite his dedication, Mr. Snyder was one of the area's lowest paid superintendents in comparison with surrounding districts. (Teachers also received a much lower salary in Madison Shores.) But he had ability to maintain a balanced budget with strong programs. Mr. Snyder was adamant in his pursuit to offer various classes, different

curriculums, and a variety of programs that any top-notch high school could offer its students. Dr. Anita Russell was installed as superintendent in the second decade. This was a critical adjustment for both students and staff members. Halle reveals, "When she came to our district, she didn't have a clue about what to do for Madison Shores Public Schools."

### Second decade

Dr. Russell's first mission in Madison Shores was propelled the idea that all students should have a college or university education. "Today a college education is very expensive and students are not going to be able to afford the cost," suggests Halle. Dr. Russell purged the system of class choices, varying curriculums, and assorted programs. Halle disagreed with this process of dropping courses students liked such as auto shop, small engine, and woodshop classes. There also been culinary classes and retail clothing classes. She says, "Students were turning out a lot of very good products and they liked the courses." These student interests could have been continued further in depth at the local hospital or the local community college. In sum, the school sold its equipment and the courses ceased to exist.

Starting in November of a particular year, the teachers were laid off along with various program cuts. "How do you lay off teachers

in November? says Halle. The program cuts just deaden the spirit of students and staff members," she says. The high school was now a minimal program of reading, writing, and arithmetic. Halle felt that students would not be motivated or enticed with a very bare bones program such as this at Madison Shores High School. She could predict there would be discipline problems with the students. The reduction of program structure was the beginning of students' changing attitudes about receiving a good education at the high school.

Students started thinking that their education was not the most important priority. Unfortunately, many students were satisfied to socialize with their peers and rush through the school program with 'D' grades. The students did not work to get the most out of their classes, and thus test grades reflected their lack of attention. Teachers reminded students to rest up, get some sleep, and eat a good breakfast, but most students were not going to follow this sound advice. Some of the students were living in their own apartments, and many were living in single-parent homes without a father. Many students had the added responsibility of helping to pay bills. Some parents informed their children that they needed to work for the family in order to acquire material goods, so their high school education was a second priority.

Parent-teacher conferences were also very difficult for teachers. Teachers encouraged the parents to stop in and talk about their children. The staff gave pizza dinners and spaghetti suppers, but the parental response was disappointing. Halle says, "It let you know that the parents were not interested. I'd get eight parents who wanted a conference in a four-hour stretch." The teachers had a much better turnout of parents in the first decade when they had conference times which covered every shift; such as 1:00-3:00 p.m., 6:00-8:00 p.m., and 9:00-11:00 a.m. By the end of the second decade, teachers held conferences on one day only for a four-hour time slot and that was the extent of the schedule. The teachers socialized with each other during conference times. Not surprisingly, the parents who came to conferences were the ones whose children were successful in school.

Also in the second decade, many of the strong families of the neighborhood started leaving the Madison Shores school district. More of the homes went from home ownership to rental property; this created a significant change in students and the kind of support received from families at school. In thinking back over her own street, Halle remembers that two homes were vacant across the street from where she lives. She reports that today only about eight homes are owned on her street in Madison Shores and the rest of the homes are rental property or vacant.

### Third decade

In the third decade, Halle was getting fed up with the students' attitudes toward learning. Teachers were receiving a different kind of student in Madison Shores Public Schools than in previous decades. Mr. James Burdell was the principal and was unsupportive to teachers. In the beginning of Halle's career, if she sent a student to the office, she knew the discipline problem would be taken care of; by the third decade, it seemed to be the teachers who were at fault. For example, if a student started swearing in class, the principal wanted the teacher to come down to the office with a witness. Students usually returned without any consequences and a pass to enter back into class again. Halle learned to deal with her own students. She was teaching many computer literacy classes at the time, so she kept her students very busy from the time they entered class to time they logged out of the session.

Central office decision-making was not very effective in the third decade. Ineffective administrators were elevated to positions of power in the district. Sometimes an incompetent teacher was moved into a position of authority as principal. Halle believes that if an unqualified person is chosen, the probability of that person continuing to be incompetent in the next position is very high. An ineffective principal will end up with an uncontrolled school environment. The principal

needs to serve as the instructional leader. A partnership must be formed with staff and students to set instructional goals, coordinate the program and finally, evaluate the program. During all this instability, the teaching staff struggled and persevered with a lack of control over their teaching and learning environment. All this disorganization took its toll on all staff members; but, especially, the teachers close to retirement because it was one more disappointment.

Halle's last superintendent asked for an extension to the old teacher's contract in 1998; he was just coming into his position and did not want to start negotiating a new contract. The Madison Shores Teacher's Association agreed to honor his request until January. In January, the superintendent was not working on negotiating a new teaching contract, so the teachers suggested they begin meeting to get to the critical issues. The Education Committee needed to discuss concerns of teachers, and the superintendent would often miss these important meetings.

During this process, things became very political and numerous grievances were stacking up; in addition, many other items were getting backlogged because of all the inaction. Many teachers were not receiving their due process rights by the administrative decisions made weekly, monthly, and yearly. Health forms, substitute teacher forms, and many required forms were lost and never found. For

example, if a teacher needed a substitute, the paperwork did not get through the system, so a substitute would not show up. Students sat in a class unsupervised. Lots of excuses were given by central administration for their lack of organization and follow-through. These problems perplexed the staff members; it seemed incomprehensible. Still they persevered.

The organization of the politics in the school was always in flux and unpredictable. Halle was the Athletic Director in 1998. The new superintendent prearranged a first meeting with her. When Halle arrived, she was surprised to find Dan, Nate, and Harold, the superintendent's administrative assistants, attending the meeting. There seemed to be a hidden agenda. The first thing the superintendent started talking about was his dislike for coaches (football and basketball) being appointed for life. Halle thought, "Oh boy, more politics." She also started to laugh and thought to herself. "Well, we've got another bumner superintendent."

Problems seemed to plague the athletic system. In football, the number of players was way down and there were not enough members for a freshmen football team. The freshmen had to play on the junior varsity team due to the lack of students. This happened in the district quite a few times, and one explanation was that many of students came from single-parent families. Most boys play football

because their dads played, so family structure started affecting athletic sports programs at Madison Shores Public Schools. The football and basketball programs, however, were successful in spite of difficulties. The new superintendent really had no intention of knowing personalities or staff members before important decisions were made in the central office. Halle had the most seniority as a coach. The superintendent did not know the school history and did not feel the need to know.

Administration wanted to change the athletic director position (which was embedded in the teachers' contract) into a completely separate section of the contract. They said that they wanted the athletic director to evaluate coaches, but the real reason it was favoritism in deciding to target certain coaching positions for new people in the future. They had a motive, so they got rid of the boy's varsity basketball coach and moved another coach out and appointed the former football coach new athletic director. Contract negotiations dragged out a long time because people disagreed about which dates to meet for these important discussions. Often meetings did not happen due to no shows of administration. The contract was not settled until July, which was after school was out.

The lack of decision-making and late decision-making affected the athletic programs because key positions were not filled in these



important sports areas and students needed to practice. For example, the girl's basketball season and boy's football season begin in August. There were no coaches, so the superintendent appointed one of his friends to coach football. The girl's basketball coach did not get to apply due to a lack of notification of the coaching position. It is difficult, especially when a teacher has been involved in the program for many years and there's a history of many successes, to see it fall apart. Halle states, "It was just a sad, sad affair."

During one of her final basketball seasons, she asked the coach whether he wanted her to continue to keep record of the statistics for the team. The basketball coach said he did, but the principal would not allow her to sit at the table during the games. She had to write the statistics by the water cooler. She then received a letter on plain paper that stated her services were no longer needed in any capacity in the student athletic program. She went back to the secretary who typed the letter. Halle asked her whose handwriting was on the paper and why it was not on school letterhead. The secretary replied, "It was the superintendent's handwriting, but he wouldn't sign it." This was a major disappointment to Halle because she had dedicated herself and showed a real commitment to students and the school system.

To try to make a difference, Halle ran for an open seat on the Madison Shores Board of Education for two years in a row. She lost the

election. She thought citizens and other board members would want someone from inside the community with 30 years of teaching experience in the school district to be on the board. However, those with the most experience did not always acquire positions. Halle was forced to recognize the politics and move on.

#### Halle's reflection over career

**Interviewer:** *How did you make your decision to retire?*

**Halle:** I went in saying in 1998 that I would do great, 1999 I'll do fine, but in 2000 I'm through. The last year was the worst and I'm kind of glad that was the last year because the district continued to be completely disorganized and unsupportive of teachers. It was just chaos most of the time, so I started counting the days. I started counting down from 100 days until my last day. I knew that I wanted to retire ahead of time and let central office know in advance of my retirement.

Halle continues to work on activities in the community and works for H & R Block during tax time. There is a sense of loss when talented teachers leave the school system.

## **Everett Spears**

### Personal history

Everett Spears was born August 18, 1948 in Howell, Michigan and lived in a rural area for 21 years. Everett was born second in his family; he had one older sister, Mary, four younger brothers, and a sister: John, Mike, Pat, Jim and Eileen. Everett graduated from Howell High School in 1966 and went to Central Michigan University to become a teacher. His parents had grown up in the rural areas of Pinckney, and Howell, both in Michigan. He is Caucasian. His mother's ethnic background is Irish and his Father's is English and German. His father attended high school and completed tenth grade. His mother graduated from high school and then completed some college courses for her profession, practical nursing.

Everett's father was a farmer. He passed away in 1972 when Everett was 24 years old and working in Madison Shores Public Schools. After becoming a widow, his mother never remarried and continues to reside in Howell, Michigan. They have always been a strong Catholic family, attending mass weekly. Religion continues to be a significant part of Everett's life.

Everett would characterize himself as quieter than his brothers and older sister. They appeared to be an outgoing group to him. He was a reflective child, and did not know how he stacked up

academically against his siblings. His older sister, Mary, started out as a teacher and then went into the retail business. A brother, Pat, graduated from college with a degree in social studies but did not end up teaching because jobs were scarce. His sister, Eileen, became an English and science teacher and taught for many years.

The Spears family lived on a dairy farm, but they were not wealthy farmers by any means. People who lived in town had more money, so Everett considered himself a second-class person because he lived in country. He thought that he came up from behind, but he was happy all the time as a child. Family farms were being consolidated in the Howell area and many farms were disappearing. The Spears family farmed 120 acres when he was a child, and that was considered a blue prize dairy farm. By the time Everett was in high school, the family was farming 300, 400, then 500 acres to support themselves. They earned a lot of money, but they could not hang on to it long. They always had to deal with much financial debt. On the one hand, they paid more loan interest than they lived on as a family, but on the other hand, living was not expensive in terms of the kids. They usually ordered three pairs of pants from a clothing catalogue in the fall and wore them all year until they wore out or were handed down to another sibling. All of Everett's brothers handed down their clothing to him.

Everett remained a single person throughout his teaching career and retired in the year 2000 after 30 years of teaching science. After taking a year to reflect, sort everything out, and get things in order, he married for the first time in 2001. Everett and his new wife live in the neighborhood of Madison Shores. Everett liked the house because it had a cozy front porch. Most of the residents on this street were elderly at the time he purchased the property. He was the youngest resident in the neighborhood, as most of the elderly folks were ten or 20 years older than he.

When his neighbors passed away, most of the homes became rental property. Today, only two or three homes are owner-occupied. Everett says, "It's kind of like a frog in water. You don't notice the water getting warmer until you turn around and look and say, 'Whoa.' But it is a friendly place. There are people in the neighborhood who stop by all day long during the summer months when the weather's nice."

Everett purchased a vacant lot next to his home where he plants flowers (his wife works in a local greenhouse and can purchase plants at low prices). All the flowers are especially beautiful in the spring and summer months. He had some large pots that were constantly being stolen. The first and second time this happened, Everett replaced the plants and pots but it became very expensive to keep replacing them.

Finally, he drilled holes in the flower pots, threaded a very strong heavy cable through each pot, and cemented the cable into a secure base. Then he painted the words, "Thou Shall Not Steal" on each flower pot. Everett was determined that no one was going to prevent him from doing what he wanted to do in his yard. Later, he and his wife hung flower bags from their white picket fence; they were stolen, too. At first, he was angry; but then he realized that someone must have needed the money they would get from selling them. He jokes that he would rather have given them some money, as it would have been much cheaper in the long run.

There are times when Everett can look down his street and see parents arguing and fighting. Instead of trying to bring a bad situation under control or show responsibility as a parent, they come outside and get into neighborhood fights themselves. Everett lives on the corner of a major prostitution route on Columbia Street. The prostitutes felt the pressure to shift from the downtown area when the new mall was built and they came this residential area. He says, "Many of the men that visit the women look like me, middle-aged white males." When he is out in his yard, he feels that he can have an affect on the community because he knows so many residents. Everett believes that it is not comfortable for folks to do what they are not supposed to do when they are known in the neighborhood. He really likes living in the

Madison Shores area as a responsible resident. Everett says, "There is an actual influence being a homeowner in my area."

My visit to Everett's home as a researcher was an extraordinary, uncommon experience during this cold day in early December, 2001. Everett displayed a great deal of pride as he talked about home remodeling projects. One can sense that Everett has lived a kind of exceedingly unusual and sparse life filled with authenticity as a person in the Madison Shores Public School area. This is a neighborhood area most people would not make a commitment to financially or emotionally because of the environmental conditions. Everett appears to be a steadfast person, and he has held to his ideals to stabilize the area. He lives a simple life with high standards, so interviewing him in his home in Madison Shores was certainly a rare experience.

Our conversation turned to Everett's first memory of attending school. On his first day, he was so short that he barely could see his teacher, but he remembered that she looked pretty with her dark brown hair. On his way home, Everett fell asleep on the bus servicing this rural township. The bus driver had called his name several times, but he slept through it. Finally, the bus returned to the local storage area. Everett said to the driver, "When are you going to take me home?" The driver, Mr. Norton, was a little upset about having to drive him back home to the dairy farm. The next day, Everett got motion

sickness on the bus and was afraid to go up to Mr. Norton, so he threw-up on the bus. Mr. Norton was not very happy about these beginning of the school year incidents and thus began Everett's school career.

Everett changed schools between kindergarten and first grade because the rural districts were consolidated for educational efficiency. There were a number of K-8 districts consolidating in and around other areas in Michigan in order to provide better services to community residents.

I asked Everett if he could name all his teachers and he thought he could name quite a few of them: Kindergarten- Mrs. Rich; First Grade— Mrs. Walden; Second Grade— Mrs. Mortimer; Third Grade— Mrs. Moore; Fourth Grade— Miss McQuill; Fifth Grade— Miss Armstrong; Sixth Grade— Mrs. Creager; Seventh Grade— Mr. Hammer who taught health and Mrs. Reynolds who taught English; Eighth Grade— a first-year teacher Charlie.

Until seventh grade, Everett had all female teachers. One of his first male teachers was Mr. Splane. Everett identified with him right away because he was so smart. Mr. Splane had attended The University of Michigan and came to teach in Howell at the age of twenty-something. He coached track and had a slight accent. Everett remembers Mr. Splane had no physical flaws whatsoever and the female teacher across the hall had a very big crush on him. Mr. Splane



was not like other teachers; he was just different. Everett did get a chance to see Mr. Splane at a fair in his home town after his retirement from Madison Shores Public Schools. His mother said, "Do you know who that is? That's Mr. Splane." Mr. Splane had gotten old, and Everett did not know what had happened to him. While at church, Everett found out that Mr. Splane had married a girl from the area and lived most of his life in Boston, Massachusetts.

Mrs. Mortimer was Everett's favorite teacher, and his memory of her is a very strong one because he always had the feeling that she was looking out for him. She tested his second grade reading. Everett was not in the "robins." He might have been in the "bluebirds," but he was not in the lowest group. In any event, Everett concentrated so deeply on academic work that he did not finish school work quickly like other children in class. He was a reflective child and took his time on work, which slowed him down. The children took a reading test, and Mrs. Mortimer called them up to her desk to go over the results. She made everybody feel special when she was talking with them about their results. When she got to Everett's, he had the highest score in class on the reading test. Everett felt that she was so proud of him in regards to his achievement that he never forgot her or this positive school experience. Everett remembers Mrs. Mortimer as a genuinely wonderful person and an excellent teacher.

Everett had a real crush on his fourth grade teacher Mrs. McQuill; she had neat short hair. Everett tried to get her attention at lunch time by joking around. She was quite popular, so she always had a lot of kids around her at lunch. She said, "Everett, you're just a smart aleck!" This broke Everett's heart and spirit; he did not talk in school again until seventh grade. He remained quiet for the rest of the fourth grade school year. Mrs. Armstrong was her opposite. She was an older, big, robust woman with gray hair. The kids thought she was named right because she had a strong arm and she was an exceptional teacher. She said, "We're not going to have a whole lot of rules, but the ones we have—we are going to stick to." The kids made up the rules; she was way ahead of her time in a positive with this interactive and student-centered process. Mrs. Armstrong was very successful as a teacher. Without seeming to, she worked hard but she was never frantic. Everett said, "Everything was a positive outcome for her and just came natural for her as a teacher."

All his teachers had an influence on him; they all were doing something that he valued—teaching. Everett thought about three careers which he could pursue: farming, medical practice, and teaching. In the beginning, his parents perceived a future for all their children as farmers, but later they encouraged them to explore other professions. Only Michael ended up being a farmer for a while.

Because Everett felt his hands were always shaking, he thought it might be scary if a patient saw a hypodermic needle coming towards him with a shaky hand. He continued to think about teaching during high school and much later in college. Once he made it he did not waiver in his decision to become a high school teacher.

As a matter of fact, his strongest discipline of study was social studies. He scored at the 99 percentile in social studies, but he was an all around good student who liked every area of study. Education professors told most of their students what areas were the strongest in hiring positions. In the 70s jobs were difficult to come by and students had to really work at securing a teaching position. Everybody wanted to teach social studies and physical education; that combination was going to be very difficult to clinch during the 1970s. Everett followed the advice from teacher education and decided to teach high school science.

Several experiences taught Everett about leadership. He was president of both Future Teacher's Club and Youth Club at his Catholic church. Most of the leadership roles were service-oriented positions without much competition. Everett ended up learning a great deal about leadership in a very natural way. The accumulation of leadership experiences would eventually lead to becoming president of the Madison Shores Teacher's Association and the chief negotiator

for Madison Shores Public School District for over 20 years.

After obtaining his Bachelor of Science at Central Michigan University, he would have liked to have stayed in the rural area of his parents' dairy farm in Howell. Everett does not doubt that he would have stayed in town his first year and bankrolled some money to buy himself a car, but there were no available teaching jobs in Howell because it was so close to Michigan State University; many professor's spouses were available to take jobs in the area. Everett began thinking of Madison Shores because it was a beautiful area close to water. Everett and his college roommate traveled all over Michigan checking the postings for high school teaching positions. Finally, Everett landed a job. His first job was in a middle school. This position really opened his eyes up to reality because the norms and values of this area were quite different from his own Catholic values. Everett could not relate because these kids were blue collar suburban kids; they were rough around the edges. Everett was in culture shock; their background was so different from his farming background. If a teacher called home to a parent in this community, the conversation might have turned into what you had done wrong as a teacher to make the kid fail.

Everett then had an opportunity to teach at Madison Shores Public Schools in a big old building. When he met the people and saw the building, the decision to leave the middle school was an easy one

for him—even though it would mean that he would need to commute 45 minutes each way from another city for a year. He strolled around the chemistry lab area which was a double-sized classroom with large expansive windows from the floor to ceiling. This room had 12 foot ceilings. Everett said, "It was like being outside because the room was overlooking a nice lawn with oak trees looking like a forest. I loved it so much."

### Classroom and school experience

When he arrived in Madison Shores in 1971, most of the community residents had rural backgrounds and had been transplanted from the south, particularly Magnolia, Arkansas. A huge number of people were transplanted from a few locations in the South. When Everett talked with parents, they had a view of education similar to that he had grown up with in Howell. One day in his beginning years as a teacher, he made a phone call to a parent and started to explain that he had not done anything wrong. The parent said, "I don't care if you did anything wrong or not because you're the teacher; you are supposed to do that. My son is not there to make the decision; he is supposed to do what you told him. You won't have anymore problems out of him." Everett started thinking that he sounded just-like his own father. His father would have said, "Your job is to go to school, to be prepared, to listen, and you cannot blame whatever you did on

someone else." If he went home and said everybody was being bad at school, his parents would have responded with, "You must behave. We don't care what anybody else did at school." All these memories and experiences resurfaced for Everett, and he felt at home in Madison Shores Public Schools.

This was a different time period for educators because students in the 1970s were much more respectful and accountable for their own behavior. At that time either you had kids being raised by parents in a family, or they were being raised by grandparents. If a youngster had a child at a young age, the grandparents raised the child. Children were not raising children at that time. Today, students get pregnant in middle school, and there is a generation of single mothers. Everett says, "When you call home now, you won't find anybody there that is a responsible parent." Everett thinks you have to make a parent accountable by calling them at work, or showing up at their home, or having them come to the school. Everett would go to a student's home to have a discussion if necessary.

Recently, Everett worked as a substitute principal for a fall semester. He says every teacher has a telephone in their elementary room and middle school. When they call a home, the parent recognizes the elementary school's phone number and sometimes they will not pick up the phone. Sometimes they'll pick up

the phone and say that they don't want to be bothered in the middle of the day and to just take the child to the principal's office. Teachers and principals have to be clever because caller identification alerts parents that the school is calling. It gets very interesting.

Everett says, "I had parents come in irate about their kid failing." The student was not doing what he was supposed to do. He was not a high achiever, but he could do passing work. This student could be working much harder in school but was not demonstrating success. The parents would bring in the report card showing satisfactory progress and passing grades from another urban district. You had to wonder why the child was failing. The parent was angry, but this anger turned to understanding as soon as they began to go through the work folder. They started to look through the folder containing many unfinished math problems, and then we looked at English where the student had not done this or that assignment. Suddenly an acceptance would come over the parent's face and there was a common understanding of the problem.

Many of the parents and staff members came from diverse educational backgrounds and experiences, so the likelihood that they were going to agree on everything was small. However, they could learn to appreciate each others' viewpoints and conclusions on educational matters. Everett says, "The relationship is more important

than anything else you've got in the community. You have to preserve the relationships which can count for something."

Everett attended many student graduations, weddings, and funerals, and he feels honored being asked to attend. If he goes to a wedding, generally, he stays for the ceremony and not for the reception. Everett makes the effort to appear at these functions for his students. This shows a great deal about how he values the relationships he has in his neighborhood and community.

#### First decade

In the first decade when he arrived, racial tensions in Madison Shores had been high for two years. There was a significant portion of white students at the time. Following one disturbance, someone set the auditorium curtains on fire. A long-term principal had been replaced by another man called Bark, who was not a leader. Another short-term principal, Mr. Benny, followed so things were in flux and the power of the district was changing from white hands to black hands. Mr. Snyder, was the second African American in the district after Mrs. Washington (a teacher). Things were in transition with Mr. Snyder. However, the elite senior class of white students had experienced success in Madison Shores, and they were going to stay until they finished school.



The 70s was a time when many students wore afros and bell bottom pants. It was also the end of the Civil Rights protest marches, and these students were the last group of the more militant generation. Teachers felt students might walk out of class, since there was an activism on the part of students' even though it was beginning to fade. Students were moving back to a kind of "Happy Days" mentality where students were more inclined to have a good time. The first generation of students at Madison Shores were more strong-willed and opinionated because they were high achievers and workers. Students would talk about ideas in an outspoken manner. This was a period of time before designer labels came into vogue. Like the other teachers in this study, Everett finds it difficult to think about a time before designer labels came to Madison Shores Public Schools.

Clothing was always important in Madison Shores. Students always wore leather jackets, long coats and big afro hats. People were concerned about clothing, but not the labels. Everett felt they seemed to be more conscious about what they were doing and where they were going in the future but maybe did not understand how to arrive at that point. They wanted to graduate and get a diploma, and some went on to college. If you asked them what they were going to do, students were very clear about it. Then, at some point there was a shift. There seemed to be a prevailing attitude of resistance to any student

who wanted to achieve success. For example, Everett remembered one young woman who said she was going to be on a major basketball team. All the young men were really upset with her and gave her a terrible argument about wanting to achieve this kind of success. Everett remembered that had to do with female success in particular but she achieved her end goal.

Mr. Westley came in as principal and he possessed lots of authority. Everett says, "Reflecting back, Mr. Westley was a very good principal." Without leadership, staff members turn on each other, with leadership teachers are not as likely to be angry, and if they become angry, they are angry with the principal, not each other. Mr. Westley was defender of what was going on efficiently in education. There was stability. This was before the charter school movement, so there was a stable population of students and no changing of principals. Initially, we lost lots and lots of students to Catholic schools. Everett states, "Parents and students were a captive audience. You had a community that looked at the school district as its only real option and had a stake in its schools." The schools needed to operate efficiently because that's where their kids were going to go to school, and parents supported this ideal. Then the student body started shifting. Everett believes it was due to the housing shift from 40 to 60 percent owner-occupied homes to a high percentage of rental property.

In his neighborhood, two to four homes out of 20 were owner-occupied. This home ownership shift in Madison Shores created a tremendously mobile population of students.

As a researcher, I wondered what kept Everett there as a teacher and what had he learned. Everett imagined that on an emotional level, a person invests so much time that somehow or other the local community appreciates it. Something that nobody talks about much in the community is that the kids are good kids, and they express appreciation for teachers. One thing that helped Everett was a sense of humor. However, every culture has a different sense of humor. To him, that was lesson number one: jokes he had told in a different context never made these students laugh. There was a different sense of humor. In the Shores, Everett says, "You might be able to tease somebody because they walked funny, but you would never tease somebody because they were poor." In Howell, a person could tease another for being dirty or smelling funny, but it was a sin to tease someone for a disability or illness. Everett as he practiced his craft of teaching found humor to be reversed.

### Second decade

In 1978 and 1979, Everett assisted the wrestling coach with keeping statistics and the books. In 1980, the coach left, so Everett took over and became the head coach for the wrestling team. Because no

other staff member had any more experience, he ended up with the position. He was the chief negotiator—doing football statistics in the fall, coaching wrestling all winter, and attending all the track meets in spring. He was spending many hours at school—and lots and lots of nights.

Whenever another responsibility came up, the district coaxed him, even going as far as hiring him an assistant. He was not married, so he agreed to chair the teams for North Central Accreditation, PA 25 School Improvement, and building improvement of Madison Shores High School. Although he never asked for special treatment, somehow or another he was treated exceptionally. Despite the fact that he was bargaining the contract, the administration never turned down any of his requisitions. People started to look out for him as a teacher. He felt the appreciation in the Madison Shores Public Schools. I wondered if it was his personality. Everett did not know for sure. But he said, "It's like someone loving you and you think that they can't be seeing the real you."

Did Everett feel intellectually challenged? Yes. It seemed that nothing remained constant long in Madison Shores. Everything kept changing, and there was an the educational challenge in that. He remembered an old Irish proverb—*No Irishman is drunk if he can hold onto one blade of grass and keep from falling off the earth*. At times,

this is how Everett felt—as long as a he could hold on to the blade of grass that was urban teaching and not fall off, the earth would be fine. Everett never doubted for a minute that it would all work out. He did not care how bad things were, eventually everything turned out alright. For example, after a three week union strike over faculty and staff members being forced to reside within the school district, teachers felt they had accomplished something. The people who organized and facilitated the strike against the residency requirement were very persistent and never gave up and when they won, they felt as if they had come out smelling like a rose. They had worked 12 long years and endured three strikes over this contract issue.

In 1978 and from 1980 until the early 90s, the district was fixed on the notion that teachers must become residents of the community. Everett states, "Teachers were philosophically opposed to the requirement of residency." The teachers saw themselves providing a service—the students were their clients. Everett suggests, "Teachers didn't see the connection between where they lived and how much they cared about the children of the community in which they taught. But the board saw teachers living within the district as a mark of loyalty." The community also became concerned with the flight of many professionals from their small community. There seemed to be a total exit of professionals; this made the residency discussion even

more political. Everett states, "On the one hand, there were emotional issues, and on the other hand, the fact remained that the community was far too small geographically to have teachers become residents of the community." (Madison Shores Public School's attendance area is two miles by two miles.) Had the administration won the residency requirement, the community would not have been able to live with it because they could not have gotten a nursing teacher, a printing teacher, or a special education teacher. "On the teachers' side," says Everett, "it was an ugly issue because if you lived outside the district, you had the feeling that nothing you did mattered. You didn't live in the district so you were a non-valuable person." It was expressed in this way—"We love Madison Shores, so how come teachers don't love Madison Shores?"

The very last shot at the residency requirement issue came about when business manager Martin Kingley and his wife decided to build a house outside Madison Shores district. Kingley was abruptly terminated from his position. After the termination, the administration started to hire people who promised to live within the district. This led to new hires renting a house in the neighborhood just to keep an address. Eventually, the residency requirement collapsed.

As a researcher I was interested in how teachers handled the striking situation. Everett thought that during the union picketing the

best curriculum the school ever had surfaced. Everett says, "Teachers work a union strike; they are not like other people who go out and find a second job. When teachers are on strike, they go to work on the strike every day. For example, the morning picket folks would work two hours and then rotate. Everybody would get rotated and mixed-up resulting in elementary teachers working with high school teachers. Everett adds, "There were two hours of walking—lots and lots of bonding occurred during each rotation time in the course of three weeks." Many teachers had grown up in the South and this was new ground for them. Even while on strike, the teachers had to look professional and walk appropriately. There was a concern that if the strikes put their jobs at risk—African American teachers would have a much harder time getting new jobs because only urban schools were hiring minority teachers and only in token numbers. Everett states, "White teachers could go anywhere."

As soon as the strike was over, so was all of the animosity. During the strike, teachers talked not about objectives, but about discipline areas at many levels. They came to realize what was happening in many curriculum areas. High school teachers would ask why students who could not read were at the middle school level. This social promotion created a tremendous pressure on high school staff. Teachers have a tendency to blame the teachers that had the kids

before them. Everett states, "Teachers now had a chance to find out what was happening in literacy and in other subjects within the educational system and they came to an understanding about supporting one another."

In the second decade, Everett learned not to use sarcasm in working with the kids. It was big in most high schools. Everett's high school teachers had used a lot of sarcasm on him, but he learned not to "talk on two levels at the same time" in Madison Shores High School. Even though the kids may not be able to figure a square root or how to do a chemical formula, a teacher could never slide a joke past them in the classroom. Students were very alert and it was interesting to discover this fact about them. Everett states, "There is a gift there in the kids and you knew as a teacher that you weren't handling it right."

At first, he felt that if students did what the teacher required of them they did not need praise for simply meeting expectations. Kids in chemistry lab needed to wear their goggles all the time. And for the longest time, he would say, "Put on your goggles. Put on your goggles. That's the rule." One day he looked up and one table of students had on their goggles. He was amazed and complimented them and—boom—everybody put on their goggles. He began thinking to himself, all these rough and tough jokers are in need of is a little praise. Everett



regretted all the time he had spent nagging them when all he had needed to do was praise the ones that did it in the beginning.

### Third decade

What changed for Everett in the third decade was the fact that Mr. Westley was gone. There was a continuous succession of principals, and now the teachers became the authority in the school building. In fact, the Madison Board of Education discussed the fact that they could not do anything at Madison Shores because the principals were not knowledgeable about accreditation or PA 25 School Improvement. There did not seem to be a sound knowledge base in the administration. The administration became dependent on the people who had the experience, so in his last years at the high school, Everett was in control of circumstances. There was so much disruption from changing superintendents in the district. One superintendent was fired in the middle of the year. Another stole money from the district, was arrested and eventually fired. There were a number of interim superintendents.

With all this disruption, the school system lost its institutional memory. Everett remembers the administration calling him to ask for the seniority list for teachers because they had just fired the assistant superintendent and they could not retrieve this important information.

Thinking about this really Everett's mind: "The system could not retrieve information about its own institution." An administrative directory was made and Everett's name and phone number was put in the directory so people could call him for information about the institution. This was highly unusual. Without question, Everett had an immense amount of responsibility working in Madison Shores Public Schools as a high school teacher. At the end of his career, he was officiating honor assemblies, baccalaureate, and graduations. The administration needed a teacher to organize and facilitate this interactive process because they were afraid of failing in front of students. In an urban school, students needed to be in assigned seats with teachers present. Everett always created an alternative space for students who misbehaved because a teacher cannot threaten students. A leader of a group cannot threaten a whole auditorium full of students. He dealt with individuals who were acting up, and the administration thought he was brave. "I wasn't brave," says Everett. "There's a way to organize an assembly." He pauses, then chuckles to himself. "Brave," he says shaking his head.

Mr. Westley never had a problem with discipline because he would find a prominent place to stand, cross his arms, and use eye contact with the student body. In other words, students knew they did not have an option; they needed to behave in the auditorium. The

punishment was certain to be time spent with Mr. Westley and there was the knowledge that this administrator would follow-up. It is not about someone being so big, bad or ugly that everybody is afraid of him; it is knowing that an authority will follow up later.

There was one young teacher whom Everett mentored in learning how to prepare and facilitate honors assemblies, Sherry King. During an assembly, she went to the microphone and reminded students that an honors assembly was not a pep rally and that they needed to behave because there would be repercussions for not doing what was expected. The students surely believed her and that is all it took to bring order to the affair.

Everett mentions the fact that students and parents within this particular community take more risks by not wearing seatbelts, not taking care of their cars, not having brakes checked, driving without insurance, and driving with suspended licenses. Yet, when things happen, people treat it as fate. "My number was up, so I'm not going to worry about it." One of my students got killed at a Shell gas station because somebody came through the boulevard and drove into the station and clipped off the gas pump. There was a tremendous explosion and the student was burned badly. He lived a year and a day and then passed away. These kinds of circumstances of kids playing in the streets, not using the sidewalks for riding their bikes, or

playing basketball in the streets increases the odds of something tragic happening. Everett expresses that there is a sense of loss a teacher feels over time because a teacher can open a yearbook and notice kids who have died. He says, "Losing people physically, having successful students not survive, having students who are not successful in school—there is a sense of loss that teachers feel every day working in an urban teaching context."

Everett ended the interview by expressing how his uncommon personality helped him throughout his career. He says, "It is not a bad thing if students think their teacher is a little crazy. Everett has a saying—*The more predictable and stable you can be, the better off you are as a teacher, but having students think you are a little crazy and perceive that you are not the tree to climb never hurts you.* I finally asked what the reaction of other teachers was where he taught for 30 years. Everett said, "Overall, we became nameless and faceless teachers because we were teaching tough students. The common misconception is that quality teachers will get out and go to a place that pays a higher salary. In the long run they will get more respect." But Everett reveals, "I was appreciated and respected and this was expressed to me in a number of ways at Madison Shores Public Schools."

Everett continues working as a coordinator of mentors in  
Madison Shores.

## **Chapter Five:**

### **Striving for Fairness and Honesty in Real Life Situations**

This is the 40-year anniversary of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom August 28, 1963. A quarter of a million strong—citizens gathered for the largest demonstration of its time. The official button for the march showed black and white hands clasped together in a symbol of unity. Hundreds of travelers chorused, “Woke up this morning with my mind set on freedom, hallelu, hallelu, hallelujah!” (Voices of Triumph, p. 220). People gathered at the Lincoln Memorial that morning where 100 years earlier, Lincoln had signed the Emancipation Proclamation. A century later African American families still had to struggle with unemployment of around 11 percent. The average Black family earned \$3,500 in comparison with a white family at \$6,500. The goals of the march were expanded to include other civil rights—decent housing, education, and the right to vote. In the afternoon, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was called to the microphone as television networks ABC, CBS, and NBC filmed his speech. King talked about his litany of dreams—thousands would rise to their feet and cheer. It was an historic day and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. would end with a prayer “All God's children, black men, Jews and gentiles, Protestants and Catholics would be able to join hands...” (Voices of Triumph, p. 223).

This living vision of multiculturalism needs to be remembered as a symbol of unity by those teaching about racial issues, culture and history—issues that become part of almost any classroom. Talking about racial issues is uncomfortable for those with little experience doing so; young professionals need to understand their own racial identities to support the positive development of their students' racial and ethnic identities. Madison Shores Public School teachers worked together to advance racial and cultural knowledge, constantly thinking of new ways to define themselves and the educational setting in which they taught. Education can be viewed as power, and it is only through the sharing of knowledge that we can begin to mend racial, ethnic, cultural, and class divisions in our society. The voices in this study make their own long-term contribution in shaping our understanding of what it means to create diverse, caring, and socially responsible learning in an urban school; future generations can benefit from their authentic accounts.

These portraits represent a socio-historical case over a period of 30 years. Taken together, they represent the real life situations of three urban educators and should be understood as an extremely significant instructional case to use with pre-service students in teacher education. In *I Answer With My Life* (Casey, 1993, p. 157) the narratives

of radical Catholic nuns Jewish women of the New Left, and Black female teachers “offer new ways of being political in the world. In these life histories, not only the state and its institutions are terrains of political struggle; so is the language. Even personal identity is an area of political struggle” (Casey, 1993, p. 158). Ann, Halle, and Everett struggled politically, in learning a discourse in the urban context, and their personal and public identities within this urban institution.

The Madison Public School district reflects a typical urban educational site in that the majority of its students are member of minority groups. During the 21<sup>st</sup> century, students of traditionally underrepresented groups will constitute a new majority within the United States (Spencer, 1990). Commensurate with the U.S. Census Bureau, African Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans, and Native Americans constitute one-third of the U.S. population. Within ten years, they are expected to account for more than half the U.S. population. This cultural shift is taking place in American schools and because most teachers are white and were raised in predominately white communities their knowledge of race and culture is typically limited (Zeichner, 1995). Ann, Halle, and Everett experienced a shift in their high school population during a 30-year period. They dedicated their careers during this time, to adjusting and adapting to the real life situations of an urban context, socially, politically, and economically.



These educators took on the responsibilities of coordinating school change, persisting in a core emphasis on deep learning, sustaining political support, exhibiting dependability, and sustaining quality urban school leadership where problems and shifting ground occurred daily.

Pre-service teachers must be prepared to meet these unparalleled contextual challenges and meet the needs of students of diverse backgrounds. Even teachers of single-culture classrooms need to assist their students in understanding and appreciating other cultures. In fact, two of the portraits in this case raise awareness about the needs of teachers who discover that everything around them has changed and they are no longer members of the mainstream culture. Also, it raises awareness about the need to support new teachers in the urban context. It enhances sensitivity to their experience of having to increase their knowledge of another culture as an additive and adaptive process over their teaching careers. Ann's, Halle's, and Everett's stories are realistic and authentic; providing this instructional case for pre-service students as a way to start a conversation is vitally important to their learning. The portraits can raise awareness and increase sensitivity, and can lead pre-service teachers to find alternatives to the decisions these teachers made when confronted with cultural differences during their careers.

The three portraits are presented as one case. In society, things merge and the urban school is a prime example of cultural merging and intersection. There are many connections that need to become visible in a real-life way to the beginning professional. Most of us are interested in cultural matters and may even have observed or experienced some form of discrimination. As a result of these experiences, we questioned our own values or challenged the values of others and struggled to understand and be understood by others. In spite of living in a nation composed of many ethnic and racial groups, people still seem to want to package others. It is not enough to just teach—teachers need to create an identity in order to construct a place to stand morally and thus positively influence their students. Learning about personal identity is vital to a teaching position or belief about teaching and learning. From this point on in this chapter, creating an identity will be designated as a process of “spiraling identity.” Pre-service teachers need to explore their own pasts in order to figure out the present by thinking about the personalities, climates, and styles of their own teachers—bringing forward the parts of their own teachers' identities that meant something to them as individuals.

In this chapter, the portraits will be discussed in sections on gender, identity, and social relationships. The continuing argument that urban teacher preparation is necessary is provided to foreshadow the

final chapter of this dissertation. However, there is one more portrait that needs to be included in order for this collection of teachers' real situations and the merging that takes place in the urban context to be completely understood: my own.

### **Developing Identities**

Most significantly, it was the experience of finding one's "self" in a story—and of discovering that stories of self do not reinforce as they construct who we are—and who others are to us. (Florio-Ruane, 2001, p. 141)

I experienced wonderfully accommodating teachers and I seized parts of their identities to create my own public identity. There was Mrs. Holman, Mrs. Adams, Mrs. Ryan, Mrs. Richardson, Mr. Tate, Mr. Hammersly, and Mr. Buekers, among others. I was born into a middle-class family with a sister and two brothers and parents who stressed the importance of family. We attended the Greenwood Methodist Church in Jackson, Michigan. When I went to college, my brothers were ten and my sister was 13. Most of the time, we were a one-income family. Both my parents completed high school. My father worked in an engineering department and my mother worked as a Michigan Bell telephone operator and obtained a supervisor's position until the birth of twin boys.

Attending college was a dream I desired more than anything, so I worked at a jewelry store downtown during my high school years. At that time, Jackson was a city geared around automotive

manufacturing, so when financial difficulties threatened the automotive business, the school day was shortened. I was in high school. This provided a valuable opportunity to work and save 30 dollars a week. This small part-time salary added up in a tremendous way over time. Working summers and holidays was a necessary discipline in order to pursue my dream. Viewing education as power and developing a good work ethic were things that were encouraged in our family. My mother would suggest that I took her advice to heart. I scaffolded parts of my own teachers' identities onto myself and developed my own spiraling identity, thus constructing a multi-faceted identity. Creating an additive identity, while learning about and re-working content and pedagogical knowledge, is an important way of working toward social change in schools.

I was certified as an art teacher and elementary classroom teacher in 1974. My first teaching position was in an elite school system the following year. It was a struggle to learn the discourse, norms, and values of this community. Communities such as East Grand Rapids Public Schools usually hire from the inside. In fact, in the final interview, I lost the position to a person who had grown up in the district and graduated from University of Michigan with a minor in art. I graduated with a major in art from Grand Valley State College, but my college was not widely known. The school district called and offered me the art

position when the University of Michigan art teacher resigned before the end of the year. I accepted the position immediately. On the very same day, I was offered an elementary teaching position in a rural school community. Years later, I would be the principal of West Elementary and Lamont Elementary in that district.

Most of the children in the EGR school system had traveled to many places and I found that I had to develop discursive language, spiral my identity, and develop pedagogy within this homogenous culture and social class. This was a more privileged culture than I was used to. I advanced in my public identity and discursive practice to become assistant principal at the middle school (6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup>) within the school system after 13 years of teaching.

Accelerating and developing multiple identities, I then became an elementary principal of two rural schools, K-3. From September through October, the student count was as high as 850 students in a hundred mile rural school district. Eventually, I learned to work with large populations and still give personal attention to students, teachers, and community. The sheer number of students and teachers dictated conformity which I struggled against. I provided nine sections of kindergarten, 11 sections of first grade, and seven classrooms in second and third grades at West. As Coordinator of the Gifted and Talented Program, Chapter 1 Director, and West Building School

Improvement Program I learned to work in the immediate present. I persevered for three years, until the birth of my son.

I experienced gender discrimination during my pregnancy in the second year. The superintendent was unhappy about a pregnant principal. I was advised to keep my pregnant condition quiet within the system. As soon as I started wearing maternity clothing, I was summoned to his office for a discussion on the matter. As a young professional in 1991, I struggled to understand this gender discrimination. My family of three young children and a husband running a successful construction business needed a mother and wife, so I resigned.

Spiraling a newly added identity, I instructed 21 interns from Western Michigan University in the fall and spring semester as a teacher educator. In 1992, Grand Valley State University offered me a visiting professor's position and I remained in this position for five years. During this period, I met Ann, Halle, and Everett through my work as a Language Arts Project Specialist. Additionally, I began doctoral coursework at Michigan State University as a part-time graduate student and came to realize that becoming a full-time doctoral student was going to be important to my future success.

Before deciding to work as a full-time doctoral student, I became an urban principal. One thing followed me constantly as a

principal: teachers never let me forget the privileged system in which my first identity and pedagogy was constructed and developed. I was miles and miles away from that original teaching identity, but, then again maybe not. How could I truly know the urban teaching struggle working in a university setting? In addition, not being a tall male with the stature of a policeman worked against me. I wanted to change the stripes of my identity, but the stereotype remained rock-solid, particularly in the urban environment.

Our school's achievement scores were extremely low. The previous principal had been removed without much notice to teachers on staff. Complicating matters, the teachers had expressed their choice of principal and that was refused prior to my arrival. I accepted the position of principal in the urban setting knowing none of this. I was the third principal since September and it was now October. I learned much later that there was actually a fourth principal, who lasted a day and quit.

When I arrived antiquated computers were stacked up on the school stage, the playground had unsafe equipment, the library had not been visited by students since the previous spring due to space problems, and books were lying in cardboard boxes. Basically, the school needed to be set up for teaching and learning and I accomplished a lot to that end in a year. It was during this time that I

realized this job was an impossible task, so I made the decision to put my final career efforts into preparing pre-service teachers for this type of environment. I wanted to provide more critical epistemology in order to prepare and teach pre-service students how to work for social change.

When Ann's, Halle's, Everett's, and my paths merged in 1994, we recognized the enormous challenges that lay before us in social relations and politics in the urban school context. We were all in the eye of the urban storm. In this storm the students mattered and deserved so much more in their education. Anne, Halle, and Everett knew they would be difficult to replace and they persevered. I left my teaching assignments in search of something deeper and broader. I desired to make practice and school improvement highly visible, sustainable. In this dissertation study, I look at our lived experiences as a mirror to understand our motivations. We are not entirely self-made because teacher preparation, professional development, coursework, students, other teachers, and communities helped shape our spiraling or multiple identities and developed pedagogies. The common ground we discovered is that our students are the solution to the future, and it is through them that we see part of our identities. Being positive role models with "spiraling identities" seems the most effective route when it comes to positively influencing the students.



### **Urban Struggle in Madison Shores**

As evidenced by each individual in this study, there is no single-minded conception of success, of competence, of conduct, or of survival. Success prevailed for these teachers: the reason I could recognize their struggle in working toward social change in language, culture, and politics, is due to my own struggle towards a more equitable and democratic school for students, teachers, and community. I moved from place to place adding on multiple identities in search of a more meaningful identity and a place to practice politically. Ann, Halle, and Everett found it difficult to remain uninvolved in the plight of their students and they remained because they were truly involved and needed. I needed to find answers on how they were able to survive this environment of disorganization and low support. These teachers worked against conformity because conformity devalued their prospects of becoming and using their civil action in a political way. They became social change activists in Madison Shores through their leadership activities.

These teachers did feel a sense of loss of language and culture with other professionals in the area; in part, due to the heightened sensitivity and added cultural identity they developed as teachers. Ann, Halle, and Everett could no longer communicate in the same way with teachers from other districts about their practice. Other urban

teachers outside the system could not understand why they remained. It was a privilege, not a sacrifice to Anne, Halle, and Everett. Working with these good kids in a social and political way and servicing the private and public good for society was a calling to them.

At times, teachers avoided administrators to protect the instructional learning of their students. The conditions of language, culture, and politics in the context positioned their cultural identity and pedagogy as urban teachers in Madison Shores. The actions of these urban teachers made sense in their lived reality. As James Donald explains:

In a common sense way we often take experience to mean simply what happens to us—the *lived experience*...But that *lived* already implies the ambiguity of the term—it hints at a process whereby we attribute meaning to what happens to us. Our cultural identities are formed as the experiences of our biographies accumulate: we become *experienced*. And that entails the conceptual ordering of what happens to us within consciousness.  
(Cited in Deborah P. Britzman's, *Practice Makes Practice*, 1991, p. 214)

Deborah Britzman in *Practice Makes Practice* presents the notion that cultural myths provide us with a set of ideal images, definitions, justifications and measures for thought, feelings, and agency that work to depict a unitary and steady depiction of culture. She suggests, "Myths provide a semblance of order, control, and certainty in the face of uncertainty and vulnerability of the teacher's world. Given the emphasis on social control in the school context, order and certainty are constructed as significant psychological and institutional needs." In student internships or student teaching, cultural

myths structure discourse about power, authority and knowledge. In Ann's, Halle's, and Everett's case, school structure was constantly underestimated by the school district and a lack of school structure imposed on their personal and public identity and their pedagogical decisions. They became exceedingly strong role models for students and developed a discourse of language that displayed their vulnerability and uncertainty in cultural matters to students. This made them genuine, and authentic, displaying a high degree of care for African Americans. These teachers were human beings struggling alongside their students in culture and language.

As expected, the students needed guidance from their teachers in taking up the agency of their learning. Passivity could not prevail in the students' lives and this induced a strong identity development in Ann, Halle, and Everett in order to work for individual and social change for their students. Britzman further elaborates in the myth that *"everything depends on the teacher,"* In compulsory education the power struggle is predicated upon the institutional expectation that teachers individually control their classrooms, and they construct learning synonymous with control. Ann, Halle, and Everett judged themselves and the administration tended to also judge them, on the success of their individual struggles. The interdependence created among teachers was out of the necessity to demonstrate the

evidence of success in this urban environment. The bond between teachers remained a powerful influence despite the lack of administrative support and the tensions in teaching and learning that surfaced in classrooms.

They were able also to construct their public identities to the students' lives by becoming non-authoritarian in order to better relate to students as people learning and struggling. They were neither the tyrant nor the comrade, but they were able to develop a multiplicity of numerous identities that they in fact embodied because the context dictated such action as urban teachers. These teachers were able to render meaningful the multiple meanings and tensions present in their practice. Having the capacity to learn discursive practices from each other as teachers to ground their pedagogical responses ensured their survival as urban teachers. They did not follow the pattern of "everything depends on the teacher" but summoned the help of other teachers, community, and churches in Madison Shores to create collaborative meaning and success. Their work was extremely contextualized and others could easily overlook this fact.

Another myth is the "*teacher as expert*." This tends to produce an image of the teacher as an autonomous individual and as the source of knowledge. Ann and Everett had to learn a great deal about urban culture to enact an appropriate identity and pedagogy.

Who is teaching whom in this environment? Ann and Everett needed to develop a grounded theory about the urban culture in order to develop their practice and they learned the culture from their students and community as they provided a context for them. Urban teacher preparation could have provided a smoother, quicker transition with a useful knowledge base. The final myth that teachers are "*self-made*" forms a conflicting view or the dominant belief that teachers make themselves. This devalues the relevance of teacher preparation. It took ten years to experience the feeling of understanding the culture and context in the community (Ann mentions this in conversation). Ann and Everett did not learn this by themselves. Students and community members had a huge impact in teaching and guiding these two teachers.

### **Bracing for Urban Schooling**

All three teachers may have been overlooked by administrators who came after the first ten years of their careers because these were solid-performing teachers. They had the power to enact and establish the heart of the urban teaching and learning in their area and could have moved to another local urban district and received an increased salary to make them feel more appreciated. The long-term success of this district to this point depended far more on the performance of

these individuals than society realizes. These people were steady, communicative, and well-balanced. They were not the conspicuously talented nor were they weak teachers. If they got angry, it was only after a long time and a great deal of patience been tried. They put in longer hours and were willing to take on extra assignments for the same pay with very little appreciation. They worked hard to move students from the bottom to the middle of achievement scores.

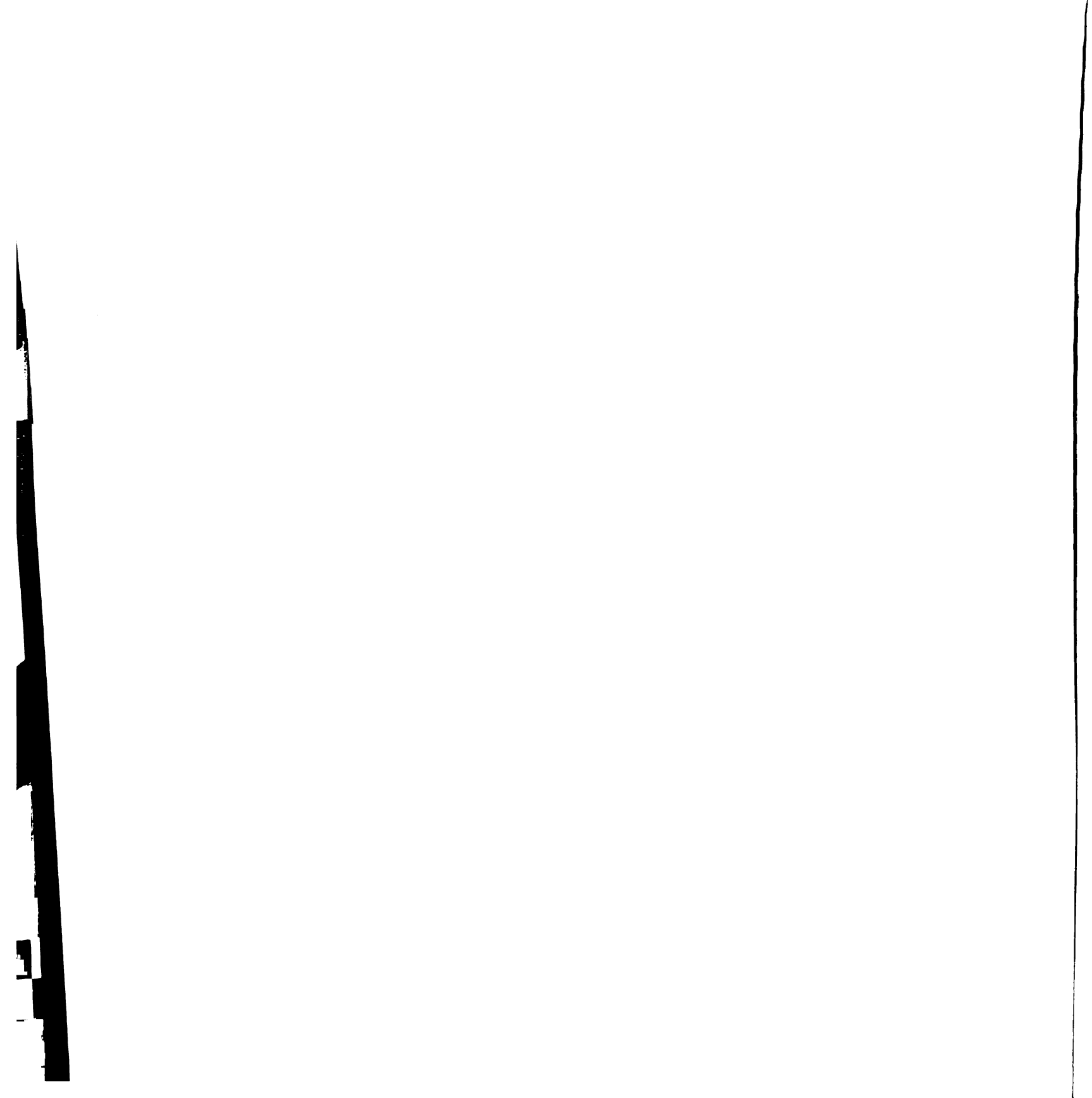
Anne, Halle, and Everett were the caregivers while the system fostered extreme agitation, disorder, and radical change. The teachers did this because they tended to think of the people around them as family. I saw these teachers nurture and mentor many young teachers to show them the ropes of an urban teaching experience. These teachers recognized that administrators who came tended to skip around, but Ann, Halle, and Everett remained rock-solid. They all developed social leadership skills over the years. Ann developed leadership by becoming the English chair, initiating the writing of a newsletter each week. Halle involved herself with coaching and association activities and she advanced in leadership skills. Everett remained consistent and stable in his personal relationships because he valued students, teachers, and community. As in *A Common Faith*,

The things in civilization we most prize are not of ourselves. They exist by the grace of doings and sufferings of the continuous human community in which we are a link. Ours is a responsibility of conserving, transmitting, rectifying and expanding the heritage of values we have received that those who come after us may receive it more solid and secure, more

widely accessible and more generously shared than we have received it. (John Dewey, 1934)

These teachers lived a democratic way of life and participated fully inside and outside of the school. Anne came from a supportive family structure where she involved herself in the life of nieces and nephews, assisting with graduation parties and educational expenses. Anne never thought to self-promote or would want to be called a hero. She lived a life of concern for the welfare of others and a desire for the common good. Halle also balanced human dignity, equity, justice, and caring with her students, mother, and members of the community. Everett used political, economic, and social relations to serve as both ends and means in Madison Shores. These teachers were not faddish and they never used a fly-by-night program structure. All of them had a moral compass and said the kids deserved everything they could give them instructionally and pedagogically.

Many pioneering educators such as Deborah Meier, Ted Sizer, and James Comer work hard to connect educational policies and classroom practices to expand the scope of freedom, justice and democracy. Anne, Halle, and Everett were all religious in their private identities and worked towards social change in their public identities by informing students about public services, good housing, safety and security. They were always promoting cultural diversity and economic justice as a matter of politics, power, and pedagogy. They worked as





intellectuals and did not reduce themselves to technicians even though working conditions were poor. Ann, Halle, and Everett shaped the environment under which African American students could learn about themselves and about their social relationships to others in the world. These teachers were ethical and had to solve many dilemmas in their urban teaching landscape.

### **Education Is Everything**

In the eye of the storm, these teachers faced intense criticism and they still believe that "education is everything." Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. affirmed education as a political process and encouraged people to identify themselves with the democratic process. Ann, Halle, and Everett expected problems in the path of the storm but they got a lot more than they bargained for in Madison Shores Public Schools. Their family values shaped their personal identities and the personal informs the professional identity as an urban teacher. Education as a worldview was the key to success and the same is true in my own family structure. Our lives were structured around private needs as individuals and the development of our public selves as teachers. To this day, all of us have a great deal of respect for our parents, family structure, and the way our parents struggled against all odds and came out as strong, purposeful individuals. These teachers knew who

they were and made the best decision they could and lived lives in the eye of the storm.

Were they transformed as individuals? Yes. How could they not have been transformed by the urban experience? These teachers were renewing themselves everyday to meet the diverse needs of their community and they became involved in local and state political forces to ensure funding resources. They knew that the education of the youth would determine the future lives of these students in a democratic way. Such a responsibility necessitates prioritizing important values, the rights of their students and the public good of citizens. They lived through a difficult challenge and they never backed away when the charter schools came into the community. Anne, Halle, and Everett continued to claim public schools as public good rather than a much narrower consumer private good. Involvement with these students affected each individual teacher in a deep, caring way. Anne, Halle, and Everett provided an inescapable service to their students, peers, and community. It was difficult to not become involved and I can attest to this transforming experience in the four years that I spent in Madison Shores. Since education meant everything, we therefore were transformed to support the development of students' lives.

Appreciation did come from a superintendent and a principal. These administrators let their employees know that their efforts were appreciated in the beginning of their careers. Others were less appreciative in more difficult times with the rise of choice, charters, magnet schools, and vouchers. A more commercial and competitive concept began to change the rules. Teachers more or less needed to graciously accept the competitive environment because the parents and other taxpayers were determining how and why Madison Shores Public Schools stayed in business. In the eye of the competitive storm, the good will of these teachers could never replace a good education and so the circle goes around—"education is everything."

### **Gender**

The portraits of Ann, Halle, and Everett show the personal consequences of racial struggle inside Madison Shores Public Schools following civil rights initiatives. Casey suggests, "that young black women are not seen by others, nor do they see themselves, as *individuals* striving for academic achievement; within the institution of education, they are interpellated as, and choose to present themselves as, representatives of and for their people (p. 125)." Halle does not mention the Civil Rights Movement whatsoever, so I imagine that she has soften some in her public identity discourse in a 30-year career. Ann mentioned at one point that Halle felt strongly about civil

rights issues and that knowledge represented power. Remember Halle said that she was opinioned so it took her a while to warm and trust other staff members. Then again, she became association president so respect came.

Anne and Halle's reflective statements suggest experiences of gender and the possibility of age discrimination experienced in the last decade. Since I experienced it myself, I understand gender discrimination, especially being highly supervised by males in my professional career. When Anne and Halle used their voices, there were consequences for using their voice. At times ideas of their particular urban experience were submerged or ignored. These women spoke out and expressed strong intellectual voices. Politically, the consequence of becoming less powerful because of this can burden a professional.

Teaching is a women's profession, so Everett fared much better in status and appreciation. Thus, he acquired more power over a 30-year career. He felt appreciated by Madison Shores Public Schools and he continues to mentor today. When men become administrators, it is not uncommon for the other administrators to circle around a new recruit. The same care in helping a woman get started does not happen as much. Instead, a "sink or swim" or "wait and see" mentality emerges.

Ann and Halle gave of themselves and the school was family. After a long while, it was time to retire and try some new challenges. Newly hired urban teachers should carry on the social justice agenda of caring and determined teachers like Ann, Halle, and Everett. They realize now that in taking a moral stand to embody a social justice change, the gains made were more temporary than once envisioned. But as teachers, they realize civil rights affect everyone in society. Anne and Halle would have continued to give attention to the moral, cultural, and political dimensions of teaching to work with new professionals had they been provided the option to do so. They would have enjoyed helping to establish small, long-term learning communities in Madison Shores. In some respects, they were silenced as women, as I have been silenced in my professional career.

### **Identity**

These portraits invite a kind of reflection about the nature of teaching and learning in relationship to who we are as individuals. Ann, Halle, and Everett would not offer their storied lives to tell educators and pre-service teachers what to do in the urban context. Rather, their stories taken together invite you into their lives. They paid a high price working toward social change for students because as Everett says, "Something nobody talks about is that the kids are so good." This case

matters because there are wonderful teachers practicing and when they are gone it seems that all we can do is miss them. These teachers matter and we need to appreciate them before it is too late. The words of Dr. Lynne Paine come rushing back, "Trust that there is something important to be learned here about teaching and learning." Anne, Halle, and Everett tell us there is a gradual urban identity that is developed over time that is vitally experience-based. The journey of two white teachers and one African American teacher describes the high price of being successful in the urban context. By developing this additive urban identity, they became isolated from the dominant discourse of teaching practice. It was a customized identity that caused alienation from others outside their district. Each urban teacher is going to develop a different customized discursive practice and it is unethical to not inform them during teacher preparation of the social conditions. They also need to be told how they could possibly work toward a social justice agenda in harmony with a core of teachers together who desire to make change. This case can provide teachers with a social space in which to reflect on the fairness and honesty that was lived out each day in an authentic teaching practice.

### **Social Relationships**

The students brought to Madison Shores had widely varying literacy experiences influenced by cultural traditions, linguistic heritage, family history, and place (e. g., Heath, 1983; Purcell-Gates, 1995). Remember, Ann said, "The children were set up for failure." And Everett said, "Relationships need to be preserved." Listening to these teachers demonstrates how important it was to set students up to succeed and the power of social relationships. These relationships seem to be even more important in the urban context. These teachers provided warm, trusting social relationships and we know that this can have a positive effect on achievement (Bryk & Schnieder, 2002). They maintained relationships that dramatically increased the likelihood that students would want to succeed. The social relationships set students up for success, whereas the institutional norms set the students up for failure. By the time students graduated, one half of them had dropped from the class in the four years. The school could have lost even more students had the interpersonal relationships not been established between staff and students.

Ann, Halle, and Everett established relationships with each other in order to provide support every day for survival and power, but also to get to know their students better. They knew that in order to teach students well, they needed special kinds of contextualized information

about student needs. These teachers established a discursive practice that became "customized" to Madison Shores Public Schools. The quality of their communication and the action they took as individuals personalized instruction at a different level of care than in a typical high school. As Sizer states, "At its heart, personalized learning requires profound shifts in our thinking about education and schooling (1999, p. 6). Some would ask, isn't this just good teaching? Yes, but these social relationships were notched-up because the teachers depended on interpersonal communication and problem solving skills for survival and power because most administrators in later years were seen as nut cases. These teachers took the time needed to understand the cultural differences and used this information in a customized, contextualized practice in order to teach urban students. These social relationships helped to produce successful students.

One of the many successes was a student at Madison Shores who was accepted by the University of Southern California's School of Cinema-Television. Her 4.0 GPA earned her \$115,000 in scholarship money at this prestigious school. She wrote two scenes and used personal experiences in her life because she thought it would help her chances. A high school math teacher at Madison Shores said, "People in society tend to fall between the cracks when bad things interrupt their lives. She said it gives them an excuse to not follow through with



their dreams. She chose to do well with everything she touches." All the teachers at Madison Shores High School could feel proud about this student's success.

## **Chapter Six:**

### **Findings and Implications**

This study examined how three teachers sustained long, complex careers in an urban poverty school for 30 years. They created their own identities, to the extent that they identified with cultural roots distinct from their own in two of the cases; these social identifications changed over time as the institution changed around them. Many influences including their home cultures, past classroom experiences, and an ability to relate to students' struggles had an impact on the teachers; furthermore, their willingness to stay motivated in a difficult environment allowed them to make a difference. Learning from their personal stories unveils practical advice for prospective urban teachers. More importantly, examining the veteran teachers' experiences sheds light on the knowledge and dispositions that can help sustain an urban educator; these instructional case studies can be utilized to improve teacher preparation programs.

The first part of this chapter will focus on pragmatic knowledge gleaned from the teachers' classroom experiences. The next section will address the social identity the teachers constructed in this particular urban setting, illuminating the dispositions that sustained them and how these dispositions can prepare prospective urban teachers. Recommendations for teacher preparation programs and

implications for further study will conclude the chapter.

### **Knowledge for Sustaining a Career in the Urban Classroom**

In the context of this school, like all schools, the teacher is a critical influence. The teacher is the bridge between home and school cultures, which becomes especially important in an urban context where primary cultural identities and home discourses do not always gel with educational goals (Lareau, 1996; Gee, 1992; Delpit, 1988; Heath, 1983). Ann, Halle, and Everett strived to make real connections with their students and created opportunities for students and teachers to collaboratively build a shared set of meanings. They did not rely on pre-set expectations for what they thought classroom outcomes should be. Rather, they adapted their styles of teaching to fit the needs of a diverse group of students. They "built pathways" by gauging where students' abilities lay and then working toward realistic goals. The following four strengths combined to shape their students' engagement with learning:

#### **1) Acceptance of Diversity**

From their interviews, it was clear that these teachers accepted and appreciated African American students by establishing the thread of commonality connecting all people. They had to abandon preconceptions of an urban environment, viewing the students not as

simply representatives of black culture but as unique individuals who brought varied strengths and talents to their learning. Since they valued their students as individuals and gained their confidence, students respected them. The teachers also noted that their openness amongst their colleagues set a positive example for the students. The teachers in Madison Shores knew that few teachers would choose to teach in an urban setting because of the poor working conditions and stigmas attached to urban schools. This reality actually bonded many of the teachers and motivated them to positively influence the students. It strengthened a sense of identity amongst the teachers and broadened their perspectives; they began to view themselves as members of a unified teaching staff bonded together despite different cultural backgrounds or racial make-ups. This finding is consistent with research in social identification of individuals (Trajel, 1981; Gee, 1989) and in studies of separate cultures (Au, 1993; Cazden, 1988; Delpit, 1988; Heath, 1982; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Ogbu, 1991; Phelan, Davidson, & Cao, 1991). There is agreement that bridging discourses and engaging in multicultural experiences adds to learning and helps students from different backgrounds gain a deeper understanding of themselves and others. In other words, increased contact with diverse populations—both teachers and students—increases understanding and acceptance in the urban environment.



## **2) Earning Students' Trust**

Ann, Halle, and Everett claimed that over time they gained their students' trust; students felt comfortable talking with them about school concerns or problems in their personal lives. They did not embarrass students and tried to keep their classroom safe from fights. The teachers encouraged the students to be active in their learning, and as best they could, organized events for students so they could come to know each other. Not surprisingly, Ann, Halle, and Everett all came to realize the importance of having students participate. The students saw their concern, and in turn, began to trust them.

The students also trusted the teachers because they were not singled out as being "different" or less capable than students in higher privilege areas. The teachers stressed the importance of finding common ground with the students and maintaining a heightened sensitivity to the students' struggles. They allowed students to maintain their individuality because these teachers exhibited respect for other people's values, norms, and views. This was crucial in the urban setting, especially for Ann and Everett, since they did not share similar cultural backgrounds and experiences. Even if they could not relate to their students' experiences, they could show a high level of respect and willingness to understand.

### **3) Classroom Management**

A willingness to understand their students did not negate the need for order. These teachers all emphasized the necessity of keeping order. Of course, students did not always follow the posted rules, but their respect for these teachers seemed to discourage troublesome behavior or major disruptions during class time. One salient implication from the case studies reveals that teachers placed in an urban setting who provide firm direction and explicit instructional practices for students are able to not only maintain order but also positively influence students' learning. Ann, Halle, and Everett all stressed the importance of organization and structure. Despite common perceptions that urban schools may be unruly and chaotic, Ann claimed that students actually responded well to structure. Setting the tone in the first 15 minutes of class was vital if she wanted to get the students on task. Halle corroborates this by stressing the need to set clear expectations for students and then keep them busy throughout the entire class period. She found that distractions could ruin a whole class period; hence, she worked to leave no room for such distractions. Everett learned to use praise in order to highlight positive behavior and discourage other students from getting off task rather than just

expecting a certain behavior because he thought the students should meet his expectations.

Although these teachers' ability to maintain structure was one of their greatest strengths, they claimed that it was often a challenging task. Due to students' wide range of both academic abilities and personal backgrounds, teaching their classes was a tremendous drain on their energy. They worked diligently to get the students to adapt to their high school. However, the administration was not always accepting of diverse activities in the classroom. At times, teachers were constrained by established curricula of conventionally organized programs. In addition, the teachers claim that reading did not always happen due to a shortage of books and because there was no time set aside to read for pleasure.

Ann revealed that some of the class work was concentrated on worksheets and some prepared students for state tests. Time was spent preparing students for tests each year; sometimes students used special test booklets that dominated the class schedule. Consequently, even as students learned to read, some did not learn to read critically. Often times when students were asked to identify the main point of a paragraph, they could not even demonstrate comprehension. When possible, Ann relied less on texts and tried to adapt the class content to suit the students' interests. She used current



events and found that students were more apt to pay attention if they were interested in the material. However, she did face scrutiny from the administration, so Ann was forced to mesh her own teaching style with the requirements of the school district. Often frustrated, she adapted her teaching practice to find a balance.

#### **4) Coping Mechanisms**

The teachers admitted that the daunting task of teaching such an academically diverse group was at times overwhelming. All used personal coping mechanisms to meet the basic needs of their students and stay level-headed. All three were unmarried at the time they began teaching. Their teaching involved dedicating much of their personal lives in order to perform at a certain level of competence in their positions. All were involved with different forms of community activities that kept them informed about their students' lives.

Their work emerged as a public service to others, and at the same time provided them with a sense of identity and meaning. Ann, Halle, and Everett all conceived their work in terms of service. To judge from their testimony and their classroom work, they were committed to their students' intellectual and moral-well being. Moreover, they worked on committees, developed curricula, supervised school events, addressed colleagues in formal circumstances, and more. They performed this work despite the conflicts of personality and philosophy

that arise among any high school faculty and administration. To evidence this point, Everett continually talked about the importance of preserving relationships between teachers, parents, and the community in this urban setting. He found that a sense of connection helped everyone deal with the contextual challenges and ups and downs that they faced. Bandura (1997) claims that social support systems increase teachers' self-efficacy and ability to be socially persuasive in their environment.

Aside from community relationships, all three teachers derived personal fulfillment and meaning from their work, which infused them with a sense of resilience. As the cliché has it, teaching for them was more than a job. When they stepped through the doorway to their high school, they acted as if teaching was more a way of life than a task or profession. They brought their knowledge of subject matter, of pedagogy, and of human development into play. They repeatedly made intellectual judgments of their students' effort and conduct and found it difficult not to get emotionally involved. They "embraced" their students and acted as if they bore responsibility for all that took place in their classrooms. The personal fulfillment they derived from teaching may be the direct consequence of the high level of investment they had in teaching.

### **Identity Construction: Dispositions in Urban Teaching**

Social identification plays a fundamental role in all our lives; there is a need for individuals to relate in a form of social persuasion to other people in their environment (Mulholland & Wallace, 2001) and develop a sense of collective efficacy within the faculty (Goddard & Goddard, 2001). For teachers entering the urban environment, their social identification with other teachers, students, and the urban way of life may seem daunting and unrealistic if they share dissimilar upbringings and cultural experiences. Furthermore, they may be unaware of the dispositions that would lead them to successful urban teaching.

Many scholars contend that educators who grew up as part of the urban culture are the only teachers who can truly have the disposition that is necessary to connect with and influence urban students. Foster (1993,1995) argues that African American teachers can best relate to their students and the urban culture. Others claim that teachers who attempt to teach students who differ from their own culture norms often distort values and fail to reach the students (Deyhle, 1995; Irvine and York, 1995). In other words, the teachers who most profoundly affect urban students are those who have actually

lived and experienced the educational experiences, living conditions, and cultural values that comprise the urban culture.

This is a reasonable argument, and as evidenced by the case studies in this study, there are urban schools that recruit black educators in order to achieve a level of commonality between teachers and students. The belief that one has to live the urban experience to understand it is undeniably widespread. The tacit implications of this belief suggest that teachers of varied cultural backgrounds cannot become skilled at relating to the African American culture and cannot exhibit the disposition that would lead to success in the urban classroom. However, after studying these diverse teachers' experiences, I am compelled to believe that social identification with the urban culture, adaptability, and resilience are more powerful indicators of teaching success than shared racial make-up or cultural background.

In this study, the teachers' perceptions of their social identities were linked first and foremost to their authoritative roles in the classroom, not to their cultural backgrounds. Through experience, they found that their social identification within the urban setting would be an additive, gradual process. Furthermore, when divergent backgrounds came into play, Ann and Everett found that multiple identities could make up their persona. They did not alter who they

were but scaffolded another layer of social identification onto their existing identity. Since many teacher preparation programs have yet to clearly identify the dispositions that would make an urban teacher successful, examining these diverse teachers' dispositions throughout their 30-year careers is particularly valuable.

Examining how these teachers perceived their own social identities and dispositions in the classroom, it became evident that their cultural backgrounds were not erased. For example, all of the teachers utilized their past experiences to relate to their students because they had endured common experiences such as family struggle and financial hardship—so their own personal identities and cultures were rooted, in a sense, in much the same way as many of their students. Finding some sort of common ground allowed them to cultivate tolerance, which became a fundamental aspect of their dispositions. In another sense, even if the teacher did not share the same experiences and could not establish common ground, they found ways to adapt and bridge the gap between their students' different cultural experiences.

The creation of social identities within this urban setting was individualized and unique to each teacher; however, all teachers used adaptability to gradually bridge the gap of cultural difference and find meaning in the classroom. The teachers claimed that they relied on

their ability to identify what type of authoritative behavior and classroom atmosphere students would positively responded to. Then they adjusted their dispositions accordingly.

For example, Halle talked about the importance of first identifying as a teacher and role model and not trying to be a "friend" to the students. Halle said that carving out her role in the classroom often meant disciplining students, challenging them to achieve substantive goals, and never compromising her values as an educator. She claimed that students, many of whom had few role models outside of school, actually wanted a role model in the classroom. In essence, they already had many friends but were in need of more role models.

Everett indirectly touched on social identification issues and adaptability when he remarked how he had to become aware of his sense of humor and how it might be different from his student's, since he was from a rural area. For instance, in his educational experiences, Everett claimed it was common to tease someone because they were dirty or unkempt, but by watching the students in Madison Shores, he soon realized that there was no tolerance for jokes that alluded to being poor. Before he understood the urban culture, Everett made sure to think about the stories he told and the humor he used in the classroom.

Ann and Everett also revealed about how they learned to continually praise their students and give them credit for their learning efforts—even efforts that would seem basic to most teachers. Since their students' learning often happened in the midst of economic hardship and lack of familial support, their efforts warranted attention. For instance, Everett found that when he praised students, even for minor accomplishments, others followed suit. This, he learned, worked more effectively than reprimanding students who did not complete the expected tasks. The teachers altered their dispositions because they recognized that urban teaching is distinct from suburban teaching.

These specific examples provide useful advice for prospective urban teachers: the teachers did not necessarily assimilate into the urban culture right away, but instead learned what was appropriate and altered their dispositions to fit the urban context. They acted with a level of professionalism and tolerance, while gradually learning to identify with the contextual challenges imposed by the urban setting. The teachers in this study found that students respected them when they acted as role models—not necessarily because they socially identified with the urban culture right away. The teachers' social identification with this particular urban setting was developmental and additive; this is especially significant for the teachers who did not grow up in an urban setting.

Naturally, prospective urban teachers will be of diverse backgrounds. Yet teacher preparation programs can stress that social identification within the urban setting is gradual and developmental; teacher educators must instill within their students a level of respect for diversity, a desire to acquire their own unique social identity regardless of background, and an elevated level of patience, adaptability, and resilience. This is true because social identity within an urban setting is most often an additive and developmental process.

#### Motivations and Identity

What motivated these teachers to construct their social identity during the time they spent immersed in this urban school culture? In addition to intrinsic motivations, observable influences including bonds with peers and knowledge that most prospective teachers did not seek out urban teaching positions affected the teachers' motivation to remain part of this particular urban culture. The challenge, then is to encourage candidates with commitment, strong identities, and social justice agendas into the urban context.

First and foremost, teacher colleagues played a significant role in the environment. None of the administrators who spent time in the classroom or the school appeared to have significant impact on how these teachers perceived their own identities. Furthermore, when administrative support seemed to be completely lacking, the teachers



relied on each other for help and support. As the years progressed, the teachers, through very tough experiences in this school, awakened to the realization that they had an extremely important role in maintaining the school district. They realized that most prospective teachers would not have the level of investment that they did; they saw themselves as "pillars" in the high school—teachers who would stay in a tough situation because they cared about their students. Although it was a lot of pressure, this was also very validating to them and sustained them in their long, complex careers.

### Changing Social Identity

Throughout their careers, social identification did change as these teachers became immersed in school culture and developed relationships within the school. Everett presented a classic example of being empowered as he moved from being an isolated teacher to finding a positive place for himself in union and district leadership. Everett was able to articulate the needs of the teachers from a moral standpoint, and teachers respected the way he put their ideas into action. Making his peers laugh and laughing at himself made the work more bearable for everyone; this characteristic created a very human experience in the toughest of situations. Everett acquired knowledge over time and became more grounded in this expertise. That provided him with permission from others to move beyond boundaries of the

classroom and make a more pronounced difference in the urban culture. Everett had knowledge of discourse, community, school, students, parents, teachers, administrators, and school improvement information. Halle claimed her perception of herself also broadened when she identified herself as an athletic coach. Ann, too, said that she blossomed after being identified as the English Department Chair. Their various roles in this urban setting allowed for the creation of multiple social identities.

These veteran teachers' experiences reveal how each teacher, in his or her own unique way, acquired the knowledge of the urban classroom and, in turn, cultivated the disposition that would lead to success with their students. Furthermore, once they started becoming part of the school culture and taking on added responsibilities, they continued to scaffold new layers of their social identification onto their existing identity. So while it may be true that those from the urban culture may best identify with urban students, the case studies in this dissertation prove that teachers from varied cultural backgrounds, when committed wholeheartedly to the process, can achieve success in the urban context.

The teachers in this study did not react to this school setting in predictable ways according to their own ethnic or racial identity, but rather synthesized their identities with those of students and teachers in

the urban school. Tajfel and Gee concur that language is a huge part of social identity but social adeptness involves more than language use (Gee, 1989; Tajfel, 1981). The teachers in this study were learning to speak, think, and act with respect and value for the culture that they had become a part of. Much like participants in Gee studies, Ann developed an "identity kit" which included always providing a stable classroom environment and a casual attitude that belied her interest in an administrative role. She projected a cool indifference to being popular, which served her purpose of increasing the level of respect she got from her students and peers. This construction of identity was a direct manifestation of the practices and disposition she knew would positively affect the urban environment. Ann, Halle, and Everett each developed a unique identity that allowed them to connect with the urban culture and influence their students.

### **Recommendations for Urban Teacher Preparation**

Teacher preparation programs that emphasize the urban context can benefit from the extensive knowledge gathered from the teachers in this dissertation as a starting point. The information is particularly valuable because new approaches to urban teacher preparation must be integrated with existing measures.

Since teacher educators play such a vital role in uncovering teaching knowledge and influencing prospective teachers'

development, it is important to start by examining the role of the teacher educator. Preparing prospective teachers, especially urban teachers, means that teacher educators must be open to re-writing and re-creating their roles in the classroom. They must discuss social identification issues and openly debate social, political, and ideological factors that pervade the educational system in general and the urban setting in particular. Many researchers have alluded to the ideologies that permeate education and have discussed how these ideologies are passed down from teacher educators, whether tacitly or explicitly. Although it is not the specific focus of this study, the concept is relevant and cannot be ignored. Paul Friere (1970) and Henry Giroux (1983) address this issue of the underlying political process in learning and literacy, citing cultural forms of resistance in depth, but I have chosen the words of Michel Foucault (1972) to describe the relationship of power in relationship to my study. He conveys the reality that "every educational system is a political means of maintaining or of modifying the appropriation of discourse, with the knowledge and powers it carries with it." (p. 227) Maxine Greene similarly states:

When we teachers have wanted to believe that education has been the means of giving every living person access to any sort of discourse that a person may prefer, when we have wanted to believe that literacy is a personal achievement, a door to personal meaning, it takes effort for us to realize how deeply literacy is involved in the relations of power and how it must be understood in context and in relation to a social world. (Greene, 1995, p.110)

Stressing the power struggles within the classroom has been a common practice of many teacher educators. However, entangled in this complex idea is the more pressing question of how to equip prospective urban teachers with the knowledge that would allow them to understand the distinct political and ideological factors present. These factors influence their teaching and create a unique identity within the confines of a distinct social and cultural context.

The words of bell hooks (1994) are provided as a reflection and promise of possibility:

The classroom remains the most radical space of possibility in the academy. For years it has been a place where education has been undermined by teachers and students alike who seek to use it as a platform for opportunistic concerns rather than as a place to learn...I add my voice to the collective call for renewal and rejuvenation in our teaching practices. Urging all of us to open our minds and hearts so that we know beyond the boundaries of what is acceptable, so we can rethink and recreate new visions. I celebrate teaching that enables transgression—a movement against and beyond boundaries. It is that movement which makes education the practice of freedom. (hooks, 1994, p. 12)

Implicit in the call for improving teacher preparation for the urban context is the hope that teacher educators will be open to renewing their role in the classroom and constructing an atmosphere that equips prospective urban teachers with the knowledge and confidence to succeed, while allowing them to cultivate their own identities as teachers.

Teacher educators, along with prospective teachers, must look for possibilities and be open to rewriting themselves. In other words, they must think more critically about how cultural backgrounds enter into their own prejudices and perceptions as well as those of others. Teacher preparation programs that emphasize the urban context would benefit from educators who pass down pertinent knowledge, while encouraging their students to maintain their individuality and stressing the importance of adaptability and responsiveness in the urban environment.

Next, in relation to field experiences and discussions of these experiences, teacher preparation programs must emphasize social identification within the urban context as a gradual and additive process—especially since identifying the disposition necessary for success within the urban environment has been lacking in most teacher preparation programs that address the urban context. Cole and Knowles (1993) criticize the imbalance in teacher preparation programs by recognizing that too much focus is placed on procedural knowledge and not enough emphasis is placed on “becoming teachers,” or learning the disposition of successful teaching. This concern becomes essential in terms of urban teacher preparation.

Without question, the African American culture is a distinct culture with specific norms and values. The teachers in this study,

regardless of race or background, learned to build a sense of community and identify across discourses and cultures. Two of the teachers had to adjust their ways of being in the world through interaction with African American students, parents, and the community. These teachers stressed the importance of adaptability to suit what was acceptable in the changing school environment. They scaffolded their identities to include elements of the urban culture while they maintained their individual personalities. All of the teachers claimed that their students respected them for being role models above anything else. In short, these teachers developed awareness that there was a unique culture, and that identification with that culture was developmental and additive in nature; the teachers did not aim to assimilate into the urban culture right away but instead learned what was appropriate and modified their dispositions to fit the context. According to the teachers, this gradual identification increased students' trust in them because the students sensed a level of authenticity and genuine caring. Teacher preparation programs can treat social identification within the urban context as developmental and additive in nature; this type of knowledge would better prepare urban teachers to be resilient, patient, and adaptable when it comes to cultivating an identity within the urban culture.

Another dimension of social identification within the urban context involves interaction with the community. All of the teachers in this study said that leadership roles sustained them and granted them fulfillment, even in the most difficult of circumstances. Teacher preparation programs can encourage students to seek out their own ways of connecting to the urban culture, introducing the notion that community and school involvement often lead to a deeper sense of identity within the urban culture. The classroom is so often emphasized, but teacher educators can begin to explore how other types of engagement with cultures and connections with multicultural groups can strengthen an urban teacher's sense of identity and belonging. This ultimately fosters better teaching.

Aside from learning about the disposition that would lead to successful teaching in the urban context, beginning teachers must also become accustomed to practical strategies and knowledge needed in the urban classroom. Teacher preparation for the urban context can impart pragmatic knowledge that would aid prospective urban teachers in daily management of their classrooms. For example, teacher educators could discuss that in the urban setting, structure is of the utmost importance. All of the teachers in this study stressed the importance of organization and holding students accountable for their actions. As the teachers indicated, many of the students were not



provided with structure in their homes. The teachers all came to value firmness and stability and, in turn, their students respected them. Teacher preparation programs must explain how structure becomes an integral part of successful urban teaching.

Secondly, prospective urban teachers must be willing to question the negative perceptions that often inaccurately categorize or pigeonhole urban students. They must question their own low expectations of urban students and focus on building pathways that validate students' knowledge and provide a scaffold for their learning. In essence, teacher preparation must aim to make prospective teachers adaptable in order to build pathways between their students' knowledge and ability levels and the expectations of the teacher.

Prospective urban teachers must also learn the importance of resiliency. As the teachers in this study emphasized, urban classrooms are often a mix of students with varying, often very dissimilar ability levels. It is often difficult to accomplish daily tasks as a group; Ann, Halle, and Everett all stressed the importance of being resilient in working toward common goals. Since Ann, Halle, and Everett also claimed that students responded well to praise, teacher preparation programs could begin to demonstrate how commending students on a regular basis is a necessary tool for garnering success in the urban classroom.

As Ann, Halle, and Everett demonstrated in their interviews, teachers of varied cultural backgrounds can achieve success with urban students. The influences of their families and personal histories—often enmeshed in a web of complex social and innate forces—did not prevent them from partaking in an additive construction to their perceptions of themselves and connection to others. This is perhaps one of the most salient findings from this study. Teacher preparation programs must address the complex issue of social identification before pre-service teachers undergo field experiences. Many have argued that learning to teach must be grounded within the authority of the experience (Ethell & McMeniman, 2002; Loughran & Russell, 1997; Russell, 1999; Schon, 1995). This argument is both accurate and compelling—but in a sense misleading. The need to improve teacher preparation for the urban context is grounded in the expectation that rich, multifarious dialogue and extensive knowledge must precede field experiences. Immersion in the urban context cannot be meaningful if students are unaware of the knowledge and dispositions leading to success. Although each teacher will have a unique experience, teacher preparation programs can take the knowledge from veteran urban educators like those in my study to illustrate what dispositions sustained successful urban teachers. In Madison Shores, Ann, Halle, and Everett all learned how to make meaning from their

experiences and struggles, proving that their identification with the urban culture resulted directly from experiences and struggles; all of the teachers implied that isolated coursework or "one size fits all" approaches to curriculum are largely insufficient when it comes to preparing teachers for the urban context. Since acquiring the proper disposition is perhaps the most difficult challenge when it comes to urban teaching and can only happen through situated experience, teacher preparation programs must raise the issues that stress pre-service teachers' growth and empower them to enact a critical approach to teaching. Teacher preparation programs must equip students with the tools for acquiring the disposition, while at the same time imparting pragmatic classroom knowledge if they want to prepare pre-service teachers for success within the urban environment.

### **Conclusion**

This study defined a small, specific research population, but the rich knowledge from veteran teachers can be a valuable tool for improving teacher preparation programs that emphasize the urban context. The most significant finding is that it is possible for teachers of varied cultural backgrounds to succeed in an urban school by using culturally responsive behavior and bridging discourses. In these veteran teachers' experiences, this did not render their foundational

socialization obsolete but rather added another layer to their social identity.

Through this research and sensitive examination of all the data collected, I believe even more firmly than I did before that teacher educators must open possibilities for their pre-service teachers and emancipate them from the limiting expectations of the dominant culture. Poring over the lives and perceptions of these three teachers illuminates discernibly the fact that there are some conflicts that a teacher educator cannot prepare a pre-service teacher to resolve. However, teacher educators must equip pre-service teachers with the knowledge and dispositions that would lead them to successful urban teaching, and they must also be aware that each pre-service teacher will make his or her own sense of the particular site in which they teach. Individuality and gradual identity construction are important; teacher educators cannot impose their own values on students but must openly discuss and debate social, political, and ideological factors that will contribute to a preliminary understanding of urban culture.

Well-designed longitudinal studies in naturalistic urban settings are underutilized. These offer considerable potential for discerning future theoretical and practical direction. My goal was to provide awareness of critical features of context—here, the urban and urban poverty school for teachers' exercise of social identities in a changing

school system. I believe that insights from multiple perspectives are valuable because a teacher's social identity is neither fixed or rigid. At the same time, Dewey and Vygotsky still have much to offer on the individual within a culture. Moving forward does not mean disregarding the works of the socio-historical theorists. It means adding on new understandings of multiple identities in prospective teachers. The problem of developing potential for excellence in all our pre-service teachers is one of the core issues facing today's teacher educators, and teacher educators must keep this idea in the forefront of their reflections; the recognition that there is no knowledge without a knower. I believe that just as individuals can have varying degrees of success in more than one language, they can have varying degrees of adeptness in more than one culture, and since cultural identity is an additive process, teacher educators must understand that no prospective teachers should be reduced to a particular identity in teacher preparation programs. Examining the experiences of three veteran urban teachers highlights the importance of individuality amidst connection to the urban culture. Teacher educators can demystify the knowledge and dispositions that would lead to successful urban teaching, while at the same time fostering uniqueness and the development of adaptable, tolerant, and resilient teachers.

The future of our teachers and the advancement of social change depends wholeheartedly on learning from the experiences of three dedicated and dynamic teachers as starting points. My dream is that change within the urban context becomes the norm rather than the exception. This dissertational study is just one endeavor that calls for more research, more time, and more energy towards improving the urban context. I take comfort in the fact that many scholars share my vision, and are passionately communicating for social change.

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## **APPENDIXES**

## **APPENDIX A**

### **Cover Sheet**





**CAREER PORTRAITS: LEARNING HOW TO SWIM IN URBAN WHITEWATER**  
**APPENDIX A: COVER SHEET**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Transcript Accession No. \_\_\_\_\_ Gender \_\_\_\_\_  
 (interviewee)

Interviewer \_\_\_\_\_ Audio Tape No.: \_\_\_\_\_ Video Tape No.: \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewee birth date: \_\_\_\_\_ Age at interview: \_\_\_\_\_ Birthplace: \_\_\_\_\_

Current residence: \_\_\_\_\_ Ethnic background: \_\_\_\_\_ Religion: \_\_\_\_\_

---

Events and experiences mentioned in long interview:

---

Childhood:	Youth:	Adulthood:
___ Earliest Memories	___ Puberty	___ Marriage
___ Traumatic Experiences	___ Mentor	
___ Relationships:	___ Relationships:	___ Relationships:

---

Cultural traditions:	Education:
___ Celebrations	___ High School
___ Rituals	___ College
___ Holidays	___ Postgraduate
	___ Professional
	___ Community
	___ Technical
	___ Other

---

Work/occupation/career:	Accomplishments/ Achievements and Community activities:
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Transitions and life changes:	Dealing with loss:
___ Moves	___ Death
___ Successful	___ Divorce
___ Job	___ Illness
___ Difficult	___ Accident

Major life themes/strong threads (guiding motifs): \_\_\_\_\_

Other important information:

Source: *The Long Interview* by Grant McCracken. Qualitative Research Methods Series #13; Sage Publications 1988.

**APPENDIX B**

**Preliminary Questionnaire**

**CAREER PORTRAITS: LEARNING HOW TO SWIM IN URBAN WHITEWATER**  
**APPENDIX B:**  
**PRELIMINARY QUESTIONNAIRE**  
**FOR QUALITATIVE RESEARCH PROJECT**

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Today's Date: November 1, 2001  
Interviewer for Study: Deborah L. Sumner

---

Subject's Name:  
Birth (Maiden) Name:  
Sex:  
Birth Date:  
Age:  
Birth Place:

Residence Pattern:  
Born in

_____	till _____	big, medium, little, village, rural
_____	till _____	big, medium, little, village, rural
_____	till _____	big, medium, little, village, rural
_____	till _____	big, medium, little, village, rural

Special Comment: (e.g., military family, moved every 5 years)

Birth Order: 1<sup>st</sup> \_\_\_\_ 2<sup>nd</sup> \_\_\_\_ 3<sup>rd</sup> \_\_\_\_ 4<sup>th</sup> \_\_\_\_ 5<sup>th</sup>

Brothers:

First name _____	present age _____	now lives in _____
First name _____	present age _____	now lives in _____
First name _____	present age _____	now lives in _____
First name _____	present age _____	now lives in _____

Sisters:

First name _____	present age _____	now lives in _____
First name _____	present age _____	now lives in _____
First name _____	present age _____	now lives in _____
First name _____	present age _____	now lives in _____

Parents:

Mother age \_\_\_\_\_ died in what year \_\_\_\_\_ your age then \_\_\_\_\_  
Father age \_\_\_\_\_ died in what year \_\_\_\_\_ your age then \_\_\_\_\_

Marital Status: divorced \_\_\_\_ you were how old: \_\_\_\_

Father remarried when you were \_\_\_\_

Mother remarried when you were \_\_\_\_

Lived with mother between ages \_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_

Lived with father between ages \_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_

Special Comments:

Place of birth of mother: \_\_\_\_\_ stepmother \_\_\_\_\_

Place of birth of father: \_\_\_\_\_ stepfather \_\_\_\_\_

Ethnic background of mother: \_\_\_\_\_ stepmother \_\_\_\_\_

Ethnic background of father: \_\_\_\_\_ stepfather \_\_\_\_\_

Occupation of mother: \_\_\_\_\_ stepmother \_\_\_\_\_

Occupation of father: \_\_\_\_\_ stepfather \_\_\_\_\_

Education:

Highest level:

Emphasis/specialty (if any):

Teacher

Marital Status and History:

Not married: \_\_\_\_

Married what year: \_\_\_\_

Divorced what year: \_\_\_\_

Remarried what year: \_\_\_\_

Remarried what year: \_\_\_\_

Children:

(ages and gender)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ age: \_\_\_\_\_ now living: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ age: \_\_\_\_\_ now living: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ age: \_\_\_\_\_ now living: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ age: \_\_\_\_\_ now living: \_\_\_\_\_

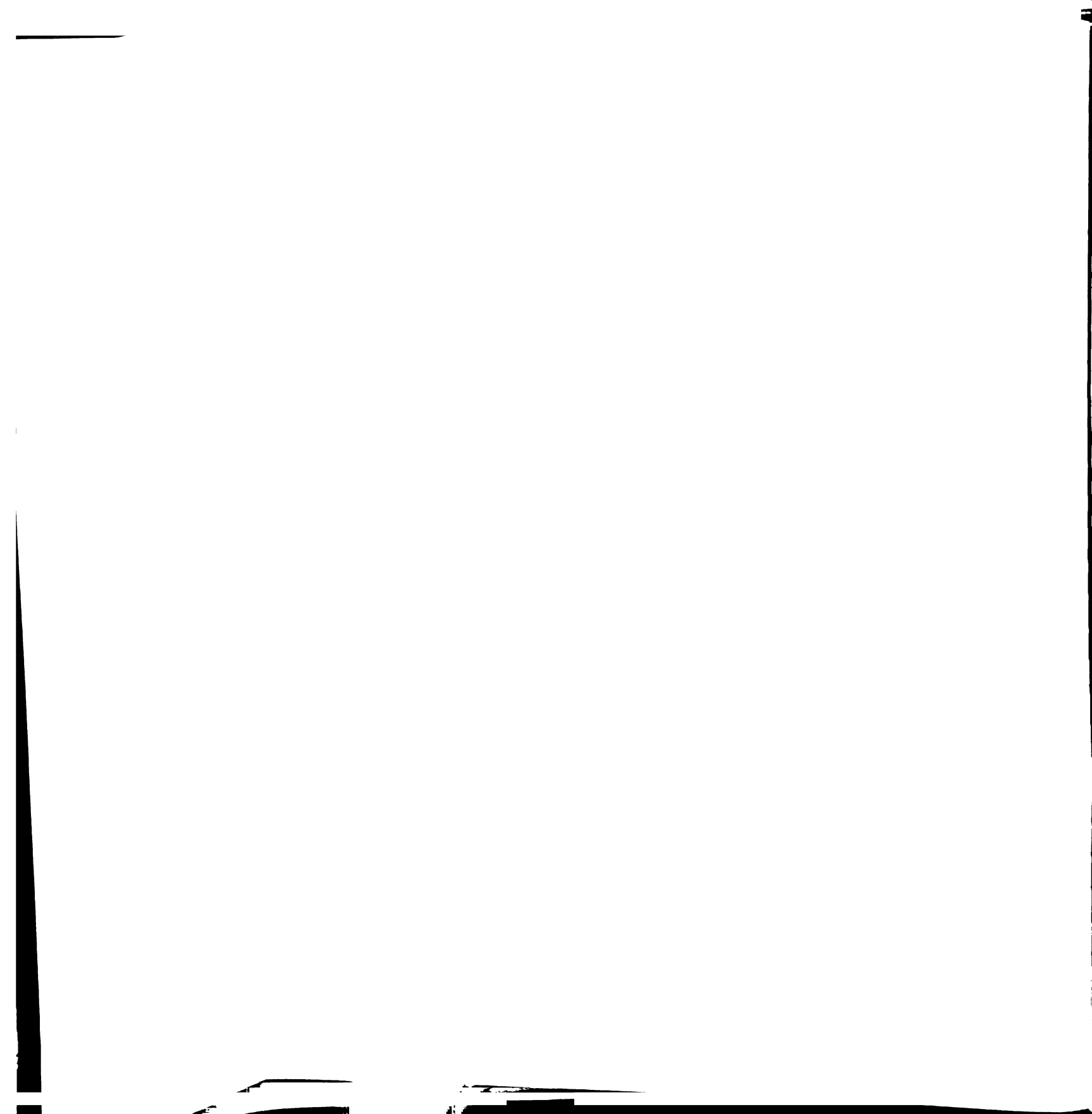
Religion:

How religious: strong moderate inactive indifferent

Frequency of worship: daily, weekly, monthly, several times a year,  
yearly, once every several years

Additional Comments:

Source: *The Long Interview* by Grant McCracken. Qualitative  
Research Methods Series #13; Sage Publications 1988.



## **APPENDIX C**

### **Protocol for the Interview**





**CAREER PORTRAITS: LEARNING HOW TO SWIM IN URBAN WHITEWATER**  
**APPENDIX C:**  
**PROTOCOL FOR THE INTERVIEW**

1. The interviews will take place on Tuesday, December 4<sup>th</sup> and Thursday December 6<sup>th</sup> 2002 at the Area Intermediate School District in Rivers Conference Room D 9:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.
2. I will step back, and observe the process that is occurring as it is happening, see what direction it might best go in, and know what questions to ask next, all before it happens. Being a good guide who can anticipate exactly what needs to happen next will be the key to these interviews and the less structure a life story interview has, the more effective it will be in achieving the goal of getting the person's own story in the way, form, and style in which the individual wants to tell it. The urban teacher telling his or her story has control over what goes into the story, how it is said, and how it reads in the end. I have a list of optional questions and these should help to facilitate the interviews but not get in the way.
3. Say, *It would be helpful to me if you could give a brief life summary before we start the interview.*
4. Explain: *You may tell your story in chronological order (from childhood to adulthood) or start anywhere you like to start and at certain points I may ask questions or comments to get at some of the details of your life story such as "What was that experience like for you?" "What happened next?" "Tell me more about that."*
5. Say, "          , tell me about your life."
6. Say, *"Is there anything that we've left out of your life story?" "Do you feel you have given a fair picture of yourself?" "What are your feelings about the interview and all that we have covered?"*
7. After final comments, say: *"Thank you for participating in telling your life story today."*

## **APPENDIX D**

### **Optional Questions for Interview**

**CAREER PORTRAITS: LEARNING HOW TO SWIM IN URBAN WHITEWATER**  
**APPENDIX D:**  
**OPTIONAL QUESTIONS FOR PROBING**

**BIRTH AND FAMILY OF ORIGIN**

1. What was going on in your family, your community, and the world about the time of your birth?
2. Were you ever told anything unusual about your birth?
3. What characteristics do you remember most about your grandparents?
4. What do you like most about them? What do you like least?
5. How would you describe your parents?
6. What do you think you inherited from them?
7. What feelings come up when you remember your parents?
8. What is your earliest memory?

**CULTURAL SETTING AND TRADITIONS**

1. What is the ethnic or cultural background of your parents?
2. Can you recall a story told by a family member?
3. Was there a noticeable cultural flavor to the home you grew up in?
4. What was growing up in your house or neighborhood like?
5. What was the feeling of this cultural setting for you?
6. What are some of the early memories of cultural influences?
7. What cultural celebrations, traditions, or rituals were important in your life?
8. What cultural values were passed on to you, and by whom?
9. What beliefs or ideals do you think your parents tried to teach you?
10. What was your first experience with death?
11. What was that like for you?
12. Was religion important in your family?
13. How would you describe the religious atmosphere in your home?
14. Did you attend religious services as a child, as a youth?
15. What was that like for you?

16. Was religion important to you as a child, as a youth?
17. Is religion important to you now?
18. What cultural influences are still important to you today?
19. How much of a factor in your life do you feel your cultural background has been?

### **SOCIAL FACTORS**

1. Did you feel nurtured as a child?
2. Were you encouraged to try new things, or did you feel held back?
3. What do you remember most about growing up with, or without, brothers and sisters?
4. Did you get along with family members?
5. Did your parents spend enough time with you?
6. What did you do with them?
7. What were some of your struggles as a child?
8. What was the saddest time for you?
9. How was discipline handled in your family?
10. What would you say is the most significant event in your life up to age 12?
11. Did you make friends easily?
12. What childhood friends or teenage friendships were most important to you?
13. What pressures did you feel as a teenager, and where did they come from?
14. Did you tend to go in for fads, or new styles?
15. Were you athletic?
16. What clubs groups, or organizations did you join?
17. Did you enjoy being alone, or was that too boring?
18. What did you do for fun?
19. Was social class important in your life?
20. What was the most trouble you were ever in as a teenager?
21. What was the most significant event of your teenage years?
22. What was being a teenager like?
23. What special people have you known in your life?
24. Who shaped and influenced your life the most?
25. Who were the heroes and heroines, guides and helpers in your life?
26. Who most helped you develop your current understanding of yourself?
27. What social pressures have you experienced as a adult?

28. Were you in the military?
29. What was this experience like?
30. How do you use your leisure time?
31. Is a sense of community important to you? Why? How

### **EDUCATION**

1. What is your first memory of attending school?
2. Did you enjoy school in the beginning?
3. What do you remember most about elementary school?
4. Did you have a favorite teacher in grade school? In junior high? In high school?
5. How did they influence you?
6. What are you best memories of school?
7. What are your worst memories of school?
8. What accomplishments in school are you most proud of?
9. How far did you go with your formal education?
10. What do you remember most about college?
11. What was the most important book you read?
12. What did you learn about yourself during these years?
13. What has been your most important lesson in life?
14. What is your view of the role of education in a person's life?

### **LOVE AND WORK**

1. Are you married?
2. How would you describe your courtship?
3. What was it about her or him that made you fall in love?
4. Do you have children?
5. What are they like?
6. What roles do they play in your life?
7. What values or lessons do you try to impart to them?
8. What has been the best and worst part about marriage?
9. Is there anything else about your marriage you would like to add?
10. Did you have any dreams or ambitions as a child? As a adolescent?
11. Where did they come from?
12. What did you want to be in high school?

13. Did you achieve what you wanted to, or did ambitions change?
14. What were your hopes and dreams as you entered adulthood?
15. What experiences helped you understand and accept your adult responsibilities?
16. How did you end up in the type of work you did?
17. Has your work been satisfying to you, or has it been something you merely put time into?
18. What was important to you in your work?
19. What came easiest in your work?
20. What was most difficult about your work?
21. Why did you do this work?
22. When did you realize that you had become an adult?
23. Do love and work fit together for you in your life?

### **HISTORICAL EVENTS AND PERIODS**

1. What was the most important historical event you participated in?
2. Do you remember what you were doing on any of the really important days in our history (Pearl Harbor, atomic bomb, the polio vaccine, the civil rights movement, President Kennedy's assassination, the Viet Nam War, Martin Luther King's assassination, the moon walk, Watergate, Earth Day, Nuclear protests, the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Persian Gulf War, the end of the Cold War, the attack of September 11<sup>th</sup>)?
3. What is the most important thing given to you by your family?
4. What is the most important thing you have given to your family?
5. What is the most important thing you have given your community?
6. Do you recall any legends, tales, or songs about people, place events in your community?
7. Are you aware of any traditional ways families built their buildings, prepared their food, or took care of sickness?
8. What did your work contribute to the life of your community?
9. What has your life contributed to the history of your community?

## **RETIREMENT**

1. What was retiring from work like for you?
2. Do you miss work, or are you glad to have it over?
3. How do you feel about your life now that you are retired?
4. What do you do with your time now?
5. Is there anything you miss about work?
6. What is the worst part about being retired?
7. What is the best part?

## **INNER LIFE AND SPIRITUAL AWARENESS**

1. How would you describe yourself as a child?
2. Do you think you had a happy childhood?
3. What was your happiest memory from childhood?
4. Did you feel loved as a child?
5. Did you have any deep thoughts, or inner dreams, as a teenager? As an adult?
6. What turning points did you experience as a teenager? As an adult?
7. What changes have you undergone since 40? Since 50?
8. What role does spirituality play in your life now?
9. What primary beliefs guide your life?
10. Have you ever had a spiritual experience?
11. How do your spiritual values and beliefs affect how you live your life?
12. Have you ever felt the presence of a spiritual guide within you?
13. How has this guide helped you?
14. Do you have a concept of God or a higher power?
15. Has imagination or fantasy been a part of your life?
16. Do you feel you have inner strength?
17. Where does it come from?
18. In what ways do you experience yourself as strong?
19. How would you renew your strength, if you felt you were really drained?
20. What values would you not want to compromise?
21. What do you see as the purpose of life?
22. What do you see as the highest ideal we can strive for?
23. Do you feel you are in control of your life?
24. Do you feel at peace with yourself?

25. How did you achieve this?
26. Do you have any kind of daily or regular practice?
27. How would you describe this?

### **LIFE THEMES**

1. What gifts (tangible or intangible) are still important to you?
2. What were the crucial decisions in your life?
3. What was the most important learning experience in your life?
4. What did it teach you?
5. Have there been any mistakes in your life?
6. How have you overcome or learned from these difficulties?
7. How do you handle disappointment?
8. Are you satisfied with the life choices you made?
9. Is there anything you would change?
10. What has been the happiest time in your life?
11. What was the least enjoyable time?
12. What relationships in your life have been important?
13. Have you helped or hindered your own spiritual growth?
14. Has there been a special person who has changed your life?
15. What have been some of your greatest accomplishments?
16. Are you certain of anything? (: great question :)
17. What are some of the things that you hope you will never forget?
18. Is there anything in your experience of life that gives it unity, meaning, or purpose?
19. How do you feel about yourself at the age you are now?
20. What is your biggest worry now?
21. In what ways are you changing now?
22. What has been your greatest challenge of your life so far?
23. What has been the most awe-inspiring experience you ever had?
24. What one sentiment or emotion makes you deeply alive?
25. What matters to you most now?
26. What do you wonder about now?
27. What time of your life would you like to repeat?
28. What was the most important thing you have had to learn by yourself?
29. How would you describe yourself to yourself at this point in time?
30. Is the way you see yourself significantly different from the past?
31. How would you describe your worldview?



### **VISION OF THE FUTURE**

1. When you think about the future, what makes you feel uneasy?
2. What gives you most hope?
3. Is your life fulfilled yet?
4. What would you like to achieve so that your life is fulfilled?
5. What do you see for yourself in the future, in 5, 15, 25 years?
6. What three things would you like said about your life?
7. Do you have wisdom for the younger generation?

### **CLOSURE QUESTIONS**

1. Is there anything that we've left out of your life story?
2. Do you feel you have given a fair picture of yourself?
3. What are your feelings about this interview and all that we have covered?

Source: *The Life Story Interview* by Robert Atkinson. Qualitative Research Methods Series #44; Sage Publications 1998.

## **APPENDIX E**

### **Letter of Consent**

**Michigan State University**  
**Career Portraits: Learning How To Swim In Urban Whitewater**  
**APPENDIX: E**

**Consent**

November 1, 2001

Hello, my name is Deborah L. Sumner. I am a researcher on this project entitled: Career Portraits: Learning How To Swim In Urban Whitewater. This project is being sponsored by the College of Education at Michigan State University.

This career study will include your teaching career of thirty years in a secondary high school in the urban context. You are invited to participate in a 2-3 hour interview and you will be given a brief 10-15 minute questionnaire to fill-out the day of your interview. Information obtained from this life story study and questionnaire can enable professors to modify and improve teacher education in the urban context.

I want to clearly state that your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You can refuse to answer any question as well as stop participating in the study at any time. If at any point during the study you wish to discontinue, the information collected will not be used in the analysis and results of this project.

To ensure confidentiality, your name or any identifying information about you and the school district will not be exposed in any way and only a number or pseudonym. The location of the school district will also be disguised in the data analysis. Every effort will be made to protect the confidentiality of the information in the questionnaire, data from voice, and video made for research purposes only. All materials will be kept in a secure and locked location. In case individual data is needed pseudonyms will be used to disguise personal and district identifiers in any written reports, publications, and presentations. You indicate your voluntary agreement to participate by completing and returning this consent form.

If you have any questions about the study, feel free to contact my advisor Dr. Mark Conley or me.

Dr. Mark Conley  
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Department of Teacher Education  
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If you have any concerns about the protection of participants in this research, you may also contact:

Ashir Kumar IRB Chairperson  
246 Administration Building  
Michigan State University  
East Lansing, MI 48824-1046  
(517) 355-2180  
[E-mail-UCRIHS@msu.edu](mailto:E-mail-UCRIHS@msu.edu)

Name (Please Print): \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

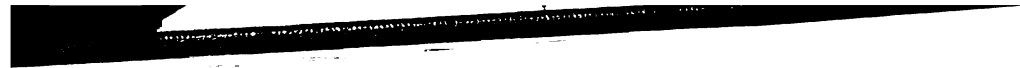
Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

## VITA

Deborah L. Sumner was born in Jackson, Michigan, to Richard Lewis Van Wagoner and Joanne June Van Wagoner. After graduating from Parkside High School she attended and received her degree from Grand Valley State University, Allendale, Michigan in art and education. She is the mother of three children. Matthew is presently attending Grand Valley State University celebrating its 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Year. Jeffrey is attending Forest Hills Central High School, and Nicholas is attending Central Woodlands in Forest Hills Public Schools.

Deborah Sumner earned a master's degree in elementary education in language arts in 1978. She has traveled in France, Italy, Germany, Greece, and the United States. She taught for thirteen years in public elementary schools and was an administrator for five years in public schools. She studied full-time for three years at Michigan State University in teacher education in the area of literacy.

Deborah is currently completing the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Curriculum, Teacher Education, and Educational Policy in the College of Education. That degree will be awarded in fall, 2003.



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