ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES TEACHING WHILE GRIEVING A DEATH

By

Mandie B. Dunn

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

Curriculum, Instruction, and Teacher Education—Doctor of Philosophy

2019

ABSTRACT

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES TEACHING WHILE GRIEVING A DEATH

By

Mandie B. Dunn

In this dissertation I investigate 1. What it is like to teach English language arts while grieving a death and 2. How the relational work of teaching influences teachers' engagement with English language arts curriculum while they are grieving a death.

In order to understand experiences of grieving a death while teaching English language arts, I drew on phenomenological traditions to interview seven English teachers. I then transcribed their accounts of their experience. To analyze these interviews, I engaged in qualitative coding that yielded five main themes.

A synthesis of these themes found that while grieving a death, teachers managed their emotions, worked to reconcile professional expectations with competing emotions, and endeavored to keep positive relationships with students and colleagues. The findings from this study also indicated that due to their perceptions of their professional roles, teachers did not have significant space or time at school to process their personal grieving.

I argue that teachers' perceptions of their roles, especially their roles as professionals who work to build relationships with students, matter a great deal in understanding how teachers engage with curriculum. Educational research should therefore attend to the relational role of teaching, especially in explorations of how English teachers and students make personal connections to texts as part of engagement with ELA curriculum. Furthermore, I argue that teachers' experiences and their understandings of their roles as professionals, which are often grounded in historical discourses about the teaching profession, should be addressed more

readily in teacher education curriculum. Finally, educational research should center teachers' voices and experiences to better understand what happens in schools and to help teachers to feel less alone in their navigation of healing from grievous personal circumstances while simultaneously fulfilling their professional roles as teachers.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to acknowledge the teachers in this study: Ann, Emma, Jerry, Rachel, Rose, Tara, and Tiffani. This dissertation would not have been possible without your vulnerability and generosity. You have each touched my heart and moved my soul.

I also wish to acknowledge my committee members: Dr. Kyle Greenwalt, Dr. Mary Juzwik, Dr. Peter Smagorinsky, Dr. Jennifer VanDerHeide, and Dr. Vaughn W. M. Watson. Mary, thank you for your wisdom and for modeling how to set boundaries. You have been my constant source of encouragement without which I surely would not have kept going. Peter, thank you for changing my life by listening to my story and making the world of academia open to me through your mentorship. Once a dawg, always a dawg; once your student, always your student. How sweet it is. Jen, thank you for taking care of me. You have given me every opportunity to learn and grow as a scholar and have also stepped in during small and large moments of crisis; I will never forget these acts of love. Vaughn, thank you for being a source of energy for me and for my scholarly pursuits. You have shown me how to be positive, how to be a better collaborator, and how to bust out of formulas and embrace deep, messy theory and practice. Kyle, thank you for your listening ear and unceasing kindness. I can only hope that every doctoral student finds a mentor like you; thank you for keeping my needs at the forefront and for knowing the best way to help me forward in each situation. I must also thank two additional scholars who poured into me and continue to be sources of support for me: Dr. Lynn Fendler and Dr. Amy Parks.

My fellow doctoral students, especially the 2014-2015 cohort, have been continual supports for me without whom this journey would not have been bearable. Thank you! To those

scholars who came before me, thank you for mentoring me. Especially in the dissertation stage, I'm indebted to mentor texts written by Drs. Christine Dawson, Julie Bell, and Kati Macaluso. To Dr. Cori McKenzie, thank you for everything, from feedback at research meetings to general support and encouragement, to help with the job market. To Dr. Lindsay Wexler, thanks to you and Jim for your friendship and love. To Ashley Johnson and Davena Jackson: if all that ever came of my move to Michigan was meeting the two of you, it would have been worth it. To have been in your presence and to have taught students with two such outstanding educators was a great joy. To count you both as friends is life's greatest blessing.

Finally to my family: thank you for supporting and loving me through one of the biggest challenges of my life. To my in-laws, Alan and Kim Dunn, thank you for your unwavering support of my scholarly pursuits and me. To my parents, Steve and Janice Bevels, thank you for loving me unconditionally and always wanting the best for me. To all four of you, thank you for your help during a time of trial after Josh's near-death accident in year 3, and after the birth of Aaron in year 4.

To Josh, thank you for listening to every long-winded ramble or tirade. Thank you for seeing the best in me when I can't see it or don't think it's there. Thank you for loving me always. To Aaron, thank you for your giggles and for keeping me from being consumed by things less important than you and your Dad.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

CHAPTER 1: WITHIN THE WALLS OF SCHOOL

Buses arrive and kids begin pouring in at the beginning of the school day. Cacophonous hallways bustle with sounds from a pick-up game of basketball in the gym, groups finishing up homework, and students traveling from one end of the school to the other to arrive at their classroom. A bell will sound momentarily to let everyone know that it's time to begin for the day.

But no one has arrived to school as a blank slate. The bell doesn't signal the beginning of the lives in the building.

Rachel[1] is stopped in the hallway by a friend before the morning bell. Rachel's mother is dying. It's influencing how she performs at school. Her friend wants to check in to make sure she is ok.

Rose talks with friends in the hallway and pretends everything is fine but really she is angry on the inside.

During first period, Emma struggles to focus on the assigned reading. She is exhausted from the mental toll of grieving.

Down the hall, Ann is carrying a secret. She pushes it to the back of her mind and tries to smile.

Tara has withdrawn from some relationships at school after her mother's sudden death.

Jerry isn't focused on the lesson because he sees an empty chair. A reminder of the kid in class who was found dead in the middle of the woods.

Tiffani is struggling with depression again. Her anxiety has flared up, making the depression worse. She's on medication, but getting through the day is a battle.

[1] All names of people and places, except for mine, are pseudonyms

Rachel, Emma, Ann, Tara, Jerry, Tiffani, and Rose are not blank slates. When they enter the school building, they bring with them life experiences and emotions that influence how they perform in and engage with school.

Maybe when you read about Rachel, Emma, Ann, Tara, Jerry, and Tiffani, you imagine them as students. It's true that many students are trying to navigate the ups and downs of life and may enter the walls of school with physical and emotional needs unmet.

Yet, students aren't the only people in school who have physical and emotional needs unmet. In this case, Rachel, Rose, Emma, Ann, Tara, Tiffani, and Jerry are actually teachers getting ready for their day at school.

As I said earlier, Rachel's mother is dying and it's affecting her performance at school. When her friend, a fellow teacher, checks in on her, she learns that Rachel is worried about the stacks of student assignments piling up around her desk, ungraded. Rachel has been spending many of her nights in the hospital by her mother's bedside and driving straight into work the next day, already exhausted before the day has even begun.

Rose's friends in the hallway have brought their new babies in to meet other staff members. They try to be sensitive to the fact that Rose has had six miscarriages, but sensitivity doesn't ease Rose's pain. She closes the door to her classroom after school and cries. She's angry and jealous and sad.

Emma is in her first year of teaching and has already lost a student. She's trying to follow the protocol set by her administration, but her grief is stronger than she would've thought. She has already known the reality of collapsing at the end of a school week from physical exhaustion, but now she is learning of the mental exhaustion from a profession that relies on building relationships, even when those relationships make us vulnerable to hurt and pain.

Ann is known among both her colleagues and her sixth-graders for her humor and for the passion with which she shares her grandparents' successes with literacy. She publishes anthologies with students because she believes stories help us process our lives. She puts a positive spin on almost everything. Yet, she's still processing her miscarriage. She hasn't found the humor or positive spin yet. She doesn't want anyone at school to ask her when her new baby is due.

Tara's mother died suddenly right before the new school year. She is excused from teacher professional development days and instead spends the time planning lessons alone in her classroom. She struggles to connect with her students during this time.

Two of Jerry's students have been murdered. He tries to focus on what he can do to help the kids. He wants to ease their pain. He makes phone calls so the students can find out the news from him. He speaks at the memorial service. At the end of the year, with his students, he plants a tree in memory.

Tiffani shows up to school every morning to fulfill her duties as a teacher intern. Her performance depends on good attendance and good teaching. But timing is against her. Her mother died just one week before her internship. So while she balances her university courses with learning to teach, she also must manage her depression and anxiety, which have flared up in the wake of her consuming grief.

Teachers Matter

I introduced you to these seven teachers—Rachel, Emma, Ann, Tara, Jerry, Tiffani, and Rose—without first outright stating that they were teachers. I introduced them this way because I have a particular interest in pointing out that much of education research avoids discussions of teachers' experiences in favor of focusing on students and students' experiences to the point

where we might assume that stories about schools are stories about students. In the next chapter, I'm going to discuss more thoroughly how the history of the teaching profession in the United States contributes to this focus on students. I'm going to argue that in particular, the feminization of the teaching profession over time puts pressure on teachers to care and sacrifice for children; this history perpetuates an expectation that for teachers to focus on themselves would be considered selfish. When I take this idea a step further, it could be considered selfish for educational researchers to focus on teachers rather than students.

Nonetheless, I'm going to argue in the pages that follow that unbalanced focus on students limits our understandings of what happens in schools. Because learning happens in the building of relationships between people in a school, the relationships between teachers and students matter a great deal in understanding curriculum. I cannot view curriculum without viewing what that curriculum is like for both students and *teachers*.

But before I get in to the history of teacher roles and the work teachers do for students, I want to share a little bit more about why teachers matter to me, and why I wish their experiences mattered more in discussions of curriculum in my specific disciplinary field of English Education. I want to share why I think it's important that I began this dissertation by telling you about seven teachers, using their first names. I want to share why Rachel's mother's dying and Tiffani's depression matter in thinking about the teaching and learning of English language arts.

Rachel and Tiffani and all the other teachers and their experiences certainly matter whether they are English teachers or other kinds of teachers, but because I spend most of my time as a scholar situated in the field of English language arts, I think about their experiences in particular in relation to a curriculum focused on texts, writing, reading, and discussion.

Describing NCTE: My Place in English Language Arts

Each year I look forward to *National Council of Teachers of English* the most of all the education conferences I plan to attend. I get excited about seeing other English Educators who work with preservice English teachers. I am always happy to room with friends I made during my time at The University of Georgia while I was getting my Master's in English Education—these friends are now professors of English Education and very soon I will be too. I enjoy hearing about their jobs and work with preservice English teachers, shared breathlessly while moving in and out of each other's way, brushing teeth, taking out contacts, checking email, hanging blazers, and munching on snacks that serve as dinner. I hope these annual catch-ups never end.

I attend and present at sessions all weekend at NCTE. I see old friends and make new ones. Just this past year in Houston, I got to catch up with one of my preservice teachers, now a teacher in the Houston area. We sat on the floor of the conference center while she told me about her students and the funny things they say. For some reason it's important to me that this teacher, who used to be my student, could share about her classroom and her experiences freely, her head equally level to mine, our postures both completely informal as we sat with legs crossed on a carpet that likely was far too germy for us to be sitting on. This moment made me happy. The distance between us—a distance we sometimes felt in our roles as teacher and student—was lessened in this moment, and I think that's what NCTE should be all about.

Everyone around me at NCTE is usually buzzing with excitement. People cannot wait to get free books in the exhibit hall or finally get their hands on their box of Young Adult books that comes as part of their conference registration to ALAN, the Assembly on Literature for Adolescents of the NCTE. People are excitedly talking about strategies they've learned about in

sessions. Twitter is active with people either sharing a picture of a new book they just found out about or a picture of them and their friends on NCTE's big green couch, a visual feature of the new NCTE brand.

As excited as I am to be at NCTE every year, I feel out of place in this buzz. I like books, but I don't seem to believe in their power in the way those around me do. I don't spend any time at all in the exhibit hall getting free books. I wonder if I'm really an English Educator at all if I'm secretly worried that I don't believe in the power of English language arts curriculum in the way everyone around me seems to. I wonder if anyone anywhere is talking about teachers like the ones I shared in the opening vignette here, whose grieving experiences are not really stories of triumph and healing or moments of great breakthrough for students. I wonder if anyone will want to listen if I talk about them.

For me, the missing piece in conversations about books and writing and English Education is what's going on for the teachers. I believe that what's going on for teachers in their engagement with English language arts curriculum affects the relationship they have with students. Because of my own experiences as a teacher and now as a scholar, I'm deeply aware of how teachers regulate their work according to what they believe they must do as professionals. I think any discussion of curriculum should include how teachers navigate their perceptions of their professional roles. I always wish conversations at NCTE about what particular strategies or books can do for students would instead consider what particular strategies or books might do for students and *teachers*. I also wish conversations at NCTE would admit that teachers are sometimes limited in their roles.

Maybe I can't join in on the NCTE buzz because I'm not sure that English language arts curriculum did for me or for my students what others want or believe it to do. That is, I felt as

though teaching was mostly about hiding my personal life and emotions, not sharing my personal life and emotions. I still remember one day in my parents' kitchen confessing to my mom that teaching was the profession that broke my heart. I'm not sure I even knew it had broken my heart until I said it in that way to her.

You see, I wanted to be a teacher from a very young age. I loved school so much even as a preschooler that I brought home my Spanish worksheets, erased the answers, and forced my little sister to play school with me. I wore my mom's high heels for extra ethos.

As I moved through my K-12 education, I took every opportunity to work with young people and teach others, from babysitting to volunteering to teach recorder at a music camp, or from helping my friends with their English essays to leading my high school marching band. I probably arrived at English as a focal subject because it was the subject I was best at, and also because my ninth grade English teacher was the most formidable, wonderful teacher I had during high school. She made me want to do my best work and helped me to develop my passions for literature and discussing literature with others.

I arrived at The University of Georgia for undergrad planning to major in English and English Education. I defended my choice in major to relatives who suggested I could do something more lucrative, and to my Dad when he warned me that teachers have to work very hard for little respect and pay. I stayed the course even when I learned I was the only student in the Honors program during my year pursuing a degree in Education. I graduated with dual degrees in English and English Education and obtained my teaching certification in grades 6-12 in the state of Georgia.

When I arrived in my 9th and 10th grade English classroom, it didn't take long for me to better understand the concerns I had heard from family and friends about the challenges of the

teaching profession. One of my biggest struggles as a new teacher was feeling pulled in many directions by different stakeholders: parents expected me to give their children good grades so they could get into top-notch colleges; other teachers expected me to pull my weight in collaborative planning and departmental duties; administrators expected high test scores and quiet classrooms; and students expected me to teach them something about English language arts in an engaging way. Strangely, I did not spend much time thinking about what I expected of myself.

The one time I left my classroom crying was a day when I was playing a review game with my students. We were playing a flyswatter game, which is when there are words or phrases written up on the board and two students, each with a fly swatter in hand, listen to a question and swat the answer with a *thwack* as fast as they can. The first student to swat the correct answer gets a point for their team. On this particular day we were reviewing literary elements. Metaphor. Simile. Personification. Students were needling me a bit, I felt. It was my third time that day going over the same list of examples with my different classes. My 3rd period students were arguing that some examples could be multiple literary elements. A few students were grumbling about the test the next day because they were also preparing for a chemistry quiz. I felt my patience wearing thin. I thought I might yell.

I got up suddenly, said I needed to leave, and left.

As soon as I crossed the threshold of the door, I began crying. I thought I would get a drink from the water fountain to calm down and return to my class, but crying turned to sobbing and I had no idea what to do. Worried about getting caught with a room full of unsupervised students, I tried to find my colleague who was on planning period, but she wasn't in her room. I went to my assistant principal's office instead, and she immediately wanted to know what was

wrong. I told her I was overwhelmed and that I was sorry but that my uncle had passed away and I just was feeling stressed and could she just go sit with my students while I took a few minutes to gather myself. I was ashamed then, and still am now, of that day. I wasn't even particularly close with my uncle, I thought. I shouldn't have allowed myself to become so upset, I thought. My students didn't even know that he had died.

This story is just one of many examples of moments when I hid something from my students or felt that I wasn't fully myself with them. I hid something from my students because of how I perceived my role as a professional and as a teacher: I was supposed to be concerned for my students, not for myself. Being a teacher for me meant putting on a face for students from the moment I walked in the door.

Because of my experiences, I'm worried that school spaces and English language arts curriculum are in some ways limited spaces—that teachers and students are not fully able to be themselves within the walls of school. I want to look more closely at what's happening when teachers and students try to bring something that happens outside the school within the walls as part of engagement with English language arts curriculum.

Because of my experiences of knowing what it felt like and how much energy it took to be "on" from the moment I walked into school every day, I'm particularly interested in how other teachers experience their professional roles and in how discourses about who teachers should be affect their well-being as professionals and as people. My early teaching experiences revealed to me the external expectations for the role of the teacher, and the general desperation and subsequent defeat I felt when trying to fulfill one or more of those expectations at the same time. Smagorinsky, Rhym, and Moore (2013) have described teaching as like being "drawn and

quartered" or "drawn and sixteenth-ed" (p. 148) and this description resonated for me as a teacher who felt pulled from all different directions, to the point where I lost myself.

In my work, I have been continually drawn to talking and listening to teachers as a starting place for my research, probably because I'm still trying to heal the wound of losing that ideal I had of the teaching profession when I was trudging around in way-too-large high heels teaching my sister Spanish. All of my scholarly work is an anthem and tribute to teachers and to the hard, complex work teachers in the institutional spaces of school undertake every day. My scholarly commitments are to always account for the full and complex experiences teachers have in classrooms. My work, though, also raises questions about how schools are set up and how schools may or may not be spaces where experiences are valued, even within the walls of English classrooms - spaces often thought of as the most open place for talking about life. I want to know if English classrooms really are spaces where all personal experiences are valued. If so, how and why? If not, how and why?

My greatest fear in pursuing these questions is that others will read this dissertation and think that all I care about is myself and saying what I have wanted to say for many years about my own hiding of my "self" while teaching. My greatest hope is that all research is a way for scholars to care for themselves and to say what they have wanted to say for many years.

In the sections that follow I will introduce a specific personal experience that teachers carry with them into the classroom—grieving the death of a loved one. I will explore whether or not those loss experiences come into fruitful conversation with English language arts curriculum including books, other texts, writing, and class discussion.

The purpose of putting these teachers experiences of grieving into conversation with English language arts curriculum is to give attention to teacher's experiences. Attention to a

teacher's experiences as part of teaching English language arts may give a fuller picture of the task teachers face in negotiating their professional and personal roles as part of the teaching of English language arts curriculum.

Death and Loss as Personal Experience in English Classrooms

I'm broadly interested in how teachers and students bring the personal into conversation with English language arts curriculum. In the case of this study, I'm looking at one particular personal experience: grieving the death of a loved one. I came to study this particular experience because two teachers in my life were grieving deaths while I was in the midst of trying to decide on a dissertation topic. Tiffani had lost her mother to cancer and Emma had lost a student to suicide. We would talk about these life events in passing, over lunch, and over email.

I was also dealing with a trauma in my own life. My husband had been in a life threatening car accident that resulted in a traumatic brain injury, a punctured lung, eight broken ribs, and many other small breaks and cracks all down the left side of his body. I was teaching an English language arts methods course at the time. Most of my teaching during the initial weeks after my husband's accident is a complete blur to me. I can't remember lessons I taught. I do remember being annoyed at a student who was dealing with a surgery recovery and kept needing me to help her work through it. I sort of felt as though I had a lot to deal with myself. But, it was my job to help her. It wasn't my job to help myself, or so I had been socialized to feel.

My own experience of trying to balance my personal life with my teaching life during a particularly draining and upsetting life experience perhaps made me particularly sensitive to the experiences of Tiffani and Emma, who were grieving deaths and still trying to keep it together to teach rooms full of students each day. I would find myself thinking about Tiffani and Emma when waiting for the elevator or standing in line. I became very worried that no one was showing

any concern for how difficult it must be for these teachers to teach while grieving. In spite of my having already halfway completed a dissertation proposal about dialogic teaching, every time I met with my professors and mentors I somehow ended up talking about Tiffani and Emma. Thus, my dissertation project was born. I started reading all over again, looking back through literature for information about how teachers and students deal with death and loss in the English classroom.

So, what do English Educators and attendees of NCTE have to say about teaching English language arts and its role in bringing in topics or experiences of death and loss into classrooms?

English Language Arts Curriculum and Addressing Death and Loss in English Classrooms

To contextualize how the field of English Education currently seems to be dealing with death and loss as part of curriculum, the next section explores what the primarily practitioner-oriented publications in the field suggest about the role of English language arts curriculum and teachers and students in addressing death and loss as human experiences. In my reading, I have identified two major themes about exploring death and loss as part of English language arts curriculum: 1. Scholarship about death and loss in English classrooms is pedagogical in focus, and 2. Scholarship about death and loss in English classrooms is focused on what teachers do for students through bringing in the topics of death and loss.

Pedagogical Focus on Death and Loss

One major theme in English Education scholarship is that publications are primarily pedagogical, or focused on how practitioners might apply strategies for discussing death and loss to their classrooms (e.g. Allen, 2001; Falter & Bickmore, 2018a.; 2018b; Gorlewski, 2017). For example, Falter and Bickmore (2018a; 2018b) recently published two edited collections that

addressed talking about death and loss in English classrooms. The first volume is focused on personal loss, while the second is focused on societal grieving. Falter and Bickmore (2018a) argued that students are "curious about death" and that children "have experienced" death or "will" (p. xv). Because students are "curious about death" (p. xv) or have experience with it, Falter and Bickmore's (2018b) compiled a collection of chapters in which "the authors … encourage teachers to confront death and grief" (p. xiv) as part of their teaching. Across these two collections, chapters offer pedagogical ideas for English teachers, always around specific texts and activities. For example, one chapter suggested teachers introduce young adult novels on the topic of suicide and then provided sample discussion questions a teacher might use with the class (Falter & Bickmore, 2018a, p. 16-23). In another chapter, authors provided a "character silhouette activity" for studying school shootings through young adult literature (Falter & Bickmore, 2018a, p. 99) in which students analyzed characters who were experiencing grief as a way of understanding character's decisions. Across all the chapters in Falter and Bickmore's (2018a; 2018b) collections, authors provided strategies and suggestions for addressing topics of grieving through English language arts curriculum, such as the reading of texts, participating in discussion, or composing texts. Other publications also offered pedagogical suggestions for teachers, such as suggestions for specific novel titles that deal with topics of death and loss (e.g., Allen, 2001; Johnson, 2014) or examples of short texts, poems, or writing activities that might be appropriate for bringing the topics of death and loss to the forefront as part of engaging in reading and writing in English classes (e.g., Ekholm, 2017; Spalding and Calton, 2017; Ungemah, 2017).

I am glad that someone is writing about possible activities and texts teachers might use in in classrooms to bring in exploration of the topics of death and loss. However, I'm worried that

the field of English Education does not know much about what happens when teachers do the things suggested in these publications. We lack empirical research on the experiences of teachers and students who engage in English language arts curriculum centered on the topics of death and loss.

Exploring Death and Loss in English Classrooms is About What Teachers do for Students

Across the primarily pedagogically focused literature about death and loss in English classrooms, another major theme I've noticed is that the purpose of exploring death and loss in English classrooms is to help students. There are two major ways that scholarship discusses teachers helping students: helping them to gain literacy skills and helping them to heal from or process grief and loss.

Chin wrote in the forward to Falter and Bickmore (2018a)'s edited collection about personal loss that English teachers are "committed to helping our students grow as literate, responsible, and respectful individuals. By teaching literary texts, we engage our students in exploring what it means to be human, how to empathize with others, and how to develop dispositions and skills for lifelong learning" (p. ix). Here the purpose for bringing in personal experience as part of English language arts curriculum is about "helping our students" to become "literate," which seems tied to becoming human. Other scholars tied specific disciplinary skills to explorations of the topics of death and loss. Major (2017) argued that the genres explored in English classrooms are appropriate for processing grief and loss: "Because I teach in a language arts classroom, I have the privilege of introducing journal, memoir, and poetry writing, natural vehicles for exploring what inspires and frightens us the most" (p. 32). Major (2017) thus suggested that students gain literacy skills with genre through exploring death and loss. Ulin (1980) suggested that "students can write letters of condolence, epitaphs, wills, obituaries . . . or

they may compose verse or write fiction. The fact that students may not have had wide or deep experience with death should present no bar to their writing about it" (p. 165). Here Ulin (1980) asserted that exploring death and loss would also help students to develop literacy skills with writing. It makes sense that many pieces about exploring death and loss also stated what skills students would gain with reading or writing through that exploration. Still, it's clear that across these pieces, the focus is on how teachers helped students to develop these skills. In other words, the direction of instruction is unidirectional: students are not helping teachers with their reading or writing skills as they explore loss; teachers are helping students.

One additional specific literacy skill mentioned in scholarship that promoted exploring death and loss was the development of empathy for others (Eckholm, 2017; Spalding & Calton; 2017). For example, when students did not have experiences with death and loss, or did not have experiences that closely matched the loss experienced by characters in texts, teachers helped students build empathy for others who were different from them. Spalding and Calton (2017) argued that reading, for example, fostered empathy in students for victims of the Holocaust. Eckholm (2017) argued that in his efforts to teach poetry through a work about the Virginia Tech massacre, he aimed to build empathy and understanding amongst students for the victims of the massacre.

In addition to teachers helping students gain literary skills through talking about death and loss, much scholarship in English Education suggested that talking about death and loss in the classroom helped students to confront or heal from death and loss experiences (Allen, 2001; Collins, 2017; Falter & Bickmore, 2018a; 2018b; Kaser, 1998; Loofbourrow & Peterson, 1999; Nguyen & Scott, 2013; Oehlberg, B. 1996). For example, Collins (2017) described her experience losing her father as a student, age 14: "I sat nestled between the brick walls of my

high school English classroom. I maintained normalcy by skirting around death and averting gazes of concern that I felt in the cafeteria. Only in English class did I experience my inaugural confrontation with loss, my loss, and study its jagged edges" (p. 47). Collins (2017) went on to express her connection to Holden Caulfield in *Catcher in the Rye* (Salinger, 1951) and how her reading experiences in her language arts classroom forced her to "confront" her experience of loss. Shafer (2017) told of her experience sharing a piece of writing with students about the death of her sister and the ways that moment opened up opportunities for students to write about death, an experience her students had not before considered "suitable for a classroom" (p. 35). Shafer (2017) pointed out that teachers in many ways set the tone for what counted as shareable experience within the walls of school, and in this case, the teacher modeling sharing about an experience with death opened up possibilities for students to share. These two articles suggested that getting death out into the open was important in explorations of death and loss in English classrooms.

Ungemah (2017) detailed how the somewhat accidental occasion of writing a model paragraph about her father's death led students to explore song lyrics that comforted them and encouraged them to write about their own experiences with death or Junior's experiences with death in *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part Time Indian* (Alexie, 2007). Ungemah (2017) therefore moved beyond getting death out into the open and suggested that students were "comforted" by exploring death and loss. Allen (2001) suggested that young adult literature about death helped troubled teenagers to cope with end-of-life issues they were facing.

I also conducted a database search through ERIC, a U.S. national bibliographic database covering the journal and research field in education, using the search terms *grief* and *English language arts,* which yielded nine results from the year 1990 or later. Of those results, four

sources were articles about dealing with trauma in schools, such as the trauma of relocation for refugee populations (Medley, 2010), and were thus not directly related to the topic of this project, grieving a death. Another article was eliminated because it included the title of a children's book containing the word "grief" but was otherwise not about grief or grieving. The remaining four articles were all about helping children to process grief about a death as part of classroom experiences (Kaser, 1998; Loofbourrow & Peterson, 1999; Nguyen & Scott, 2013; Oehlberg, 1996). The focus of these papers is on how literature helped students process their lives (Kaser, 1998), how writing helped students to process strong emotions (Loofbourrow & Peterson, 1999), how teachers helped children develop positive self-concept to deal more gracefully with grief (Nguyen & Scott, 2013), or how teachers engaged students in activities that encouraged self-healing (Oehlberg, 1996). Thus, it seems that literature about grieving and K-12 settings is focused on how teachers can help students with their grief. All of these studies implicitly suggested that part of a teacher's job was to help students deal with grief and trauma as part of their engagement with curriculum in classrooms. Additionally, because the focus of these works remained pedagogical, the focus was always on what the teacher could or should do with students. This focus strikes me as uni-directional; that is, the impetus is always on the teacher to engage students in topics of death or loss, or to model for students how to write about death and loss. Hierarchies between teachers and students are upheld across these publications.

Dutro (2011) instead argued for reciprocal sharing of trauma or loss experiences between teachers and students, conceptualized as "a circular notion of testimony and witness" that requires "teachers to participate as both witnesses to student experience and testifiers to their own" (p. 198). Dutro (2011) raised questions about the ethics of asking students to share grieving and loss experiences without teachers sharing of similar experiences. Dutro (2011) also

positioned teachers and students as part of a bidirectional relationship in which both teachers and students shared grief stories. Dutro (2011) suggested that this circle of sharing created more trustworthy spaces for teachers and students alike to heal from loss. Dutro's (2011) conception of what addressing death and loss in classrooms should be is the closest to my own ideas and values because of how it accounted for how teachers and teachers' relationships with students might influence what happens in the classroom space when death and loss are discussed.

K-12 and Post-secondary *Teachers* Dealing with Death

I did find one study that focused on the grieving of teachers, not students: Rowling's (1995) study addressed the individual experiences of 6-12 secondary *teachers* only. In this study, Rowling argued that the grief of teachers is "disenfranchised" (p. 317) because teachers showing grief was considered a "failure of care" (p. 317) for students. Here Rowling argued that something about teachers' roles as professionals in charge of young people precluded them from being able to grieve in the spaces of school. Rowling's study was multidisciplinary, and therefore looked less specifically at the influence of grieving while teaching on English teachers, whose curriculum may indeed be more likely to bring up topics of death and loss because of the focus on texts, writing, and discussion. That is where the present study enters into the conversation, aiming to contribute to both practical teaching conversations as well as scholarly conversations seeking to understand roles and relationships of teachers and students in English classrooms, in particular when death and loss become part of what teachers and students are discussing as they engage with English language arts curriculum.

Some research in the post-secondary Education context have also addressed the influence of grieving experiences on teachers as members of the social space of school. Parker (2002) and Granek (2002) both explored through authoethnography their own experiences of grieving while

teaching at the university level. Parker (2009) drew on feminist theories to argue that her experience of teaching while grieving the loss of her partner was read on her body by her students. She writes: "I had realized that my grief had caused me to (in Butler's words) 'lose composure' such that I could no longer check my body at the door of the classroom" (p. 74). She described how her declining physical appearance, a manifestation of her grief, became part of how her students read her identity as a teacher. She also argued that allowing her students to help her in her grief "interfered with [her] perception of the proper role of care in the classroom" (p. 75). Granek (2009) similarly addressed the role of the teacher and the relationship between teacher and student as she explained how her grieving influenced her teaching:

> I had done the unthinkable, after all: I had brought death into the room with us. I had transgressed every taboo that exists in the classroom … I had transgressed, or more accurately, erased altogether the line between The Professor and The Student. I was vulnerable. I was a human being. (p. 46)

Both Parker (2009) and Granek (2009) focused more on their experiences as teachers than did the articles in the field of English Education that I've shared above. While the students were still part of their process of grieving, these scholars worked to define their experience of teaching while grieving, and raised questions about how grieving as teachers in classroom spaces might break some sort of traditional relationship between teacher and student and work against what is generally acceptable to talk about in classroom spaces. In this study I'm aiming to extend this exploration of how grieving influences the relationship between teachers and students to the 6-12 Secondary English context. I'm also expanding the body of scholarship on teachers' grieving experiences, which at this point consists primarily of authethnographic studies.

Summarizing Themes in English Education about Teaching About Death and Loss

Across research about explorations of the themes of death and loss in classrooms, scholars have argued that teachers should bring these topics into the curriculum and that English language arts curriculum is a good space in which to bring these topics to school conversations. However, the focus on teachers' experiences with grief remains on how they brought those experiences up with students and how the experiences became part of curricular activities in their English language arts classrooms. On the whole, these articles about grief, death, and curriculum emphasize how a teacher's use of instruction in reading, writing, and discussion might benefit students in terms of helping them to have space to talk about death and loss and possibly to heal some of the grief they feel over these losses. These articles do not describe the experience of teaching while grieving a death by attending specifically to the ways teachers grapple with the complexities and challenges of bringing experiences of grief to bear in their classrooms. Is it always as easy to share with students as Shafer (2017) did when sharing her poem about her mother's death with students? How does the relationship between teachers and students affect how experiences of death and loss get shared and explored as part of English language arts curriculum? Ultimately, I want to return to a question I posed earlier in this chapter that I have asked you to hold on to: What might make teachers different from students when they bring in grieving experiences as part of engagement with curriculum?

Where This Study Fits In

I am interested in what is involved for the teacher when they endeavor to engage in curriculum as a person who has experienced a personal loss in the form of the death of a loved one. I am furthermore interested in acknowledging the complexity of a request for teachers to discuss death and loss, what it is actually asking of English teachers.

I believe this study adds to the current conversation in English Education around teaching about death and loss an examination of the experience of *teachers* who are grieving and how those experiences complicate efforts to teach about death and loss within the institutional space of school. As already noted, research that has explored teachers' experiences with grief primarily focused on instructors at the university level (Granek, 2009; Moore, 2002; Parker, 2009). Little research contributes to knowledge of secondary teachers' experiences of grieving a death while teaching English language arts. It is my contention that understanding these experiences will deepen our understanding of how teachers and students address death and loss in school spaces around, within, and outside of curriculum.

Looking Ahead: Overview of Chapters to Come

In introducing this project and Rachel, Rose, Emma, Ann, Tara, Jerry, and Tiffani to you, I began by giving you the first names of seven teachers and sharing a tiny bit of their stories, stories that will continue to unfold in more detail in the pages ahead. I began with these seven teachers and their first names because I want these teachers to be people to you. If you at first read the opening vignette and thought that the characters were students, I want you to wonder about why that might have happened to you. I want you to feel a little uncertain about what would even make Rachel, Rose, Emma, Ann, Tara, Jerry, and Tiffani different from students at all. I hope you will keep that question close to you in the chapters ahead.

After I introduced the seven teachers that are the focus of this study, I shared a little bit about why I personally am so interested in them: I have been looking for teachers' voices in conversations about English Ed and I haven't been finding them. I have my own history with the English teaching profession that I'm looking to better understand. I have a new role as an English teacher educator and scholar and I want my voice in that role be one that amplifies

teachers' experiences. So, I have shared with you about how the profession broke my heart and how alone I feel when surrounded by conversations about the power of books, writing, discussion, and texts because I'm not sure I believe in the power of books, writing, discussion, and texts when they are discussed separately from conversations about the relationships between teachers and students.

I then used specific literature about death and loss in English classrooms to illustrate that the absence of discussions of the relationships between teachers and students is present in current literature about death and loss and English language arts curriculum. I first acknowledged that much research details the importance of talking about death in the classroom as a way to bring students' identities into conversation with curriculum. However, I also established that much research in the field focuses on how teachers can use curriculum to teach about death and trauma without considering how that effort becomes complicated when the teacher must both fulfill a particular role as an educator and also reciprocate personal sharing about death and loss as part of building relationships with students and as part of engagement with texts and writing.

In the chapter that follows this introduction, I'm going to situate the experiences of these seven teachers by establishing some of the historical origins of roles or expectations for teachers in the United States. This move to looking at the historical roles of teachers in the U.S. is intentional: I believe that to understand the way that English teachers experience teaching while grieving, I must look at not only their perceptions of their English curriculum or their roles as English teachers, but also their perceptions of their profession more generally. In zooming out and exploring discourses about general expectations for U.S. teachers more broadly, I suggest that teachers bring with them particular ideas about what is expected of them in classrooms and what is expected of them in building relationships with students. This material about roles of

teachers in the U.S. will be at play in my analysis of teachers' experiences just as much as specific literature about English language arts and teaching.

Following my discussion of some of the historical underpinnings of teachers' perceptions of their roles, I explain in Chapter 3 the rationale for my methods of inquiry, both in terms of the design of my interview protocol for this project as well as how I selected participants. Most importantly, I share a little bit more about the seven teachers whose stories are the primary data for this inquiry. In keeping with the phenomenological tradition focused on lived experience, I pay particular attention to how I honored the words and stories of participants through qualitative methodologies.

Chapter 4 is my first findings chapter, and takes a broad view of the experiences of the seven teachers in this study. In this chapter, I explain the five major themes that emerged as findings across the interviews. These five major themes communicate what is shared in these seven teachers' experiences of teaching English language arts curriculum while grieving a death.

In Chapter 5, I then take a closer look at two of the five themes that emerged in this study to explain how teacher's roles as educators conflicted with their roles as grievers, in particular when teachers worked to manage their own emotions based on discourses about who teachers should be, who women should be, and how teachers and women should interact with children. In this chapter, I investigate how teachers in this study perceived of their roles by connecting their words directly to the literature in Chapter 2 about the historical underpinnings of expectations for teachers in the U.S.

Finally, I close this dissertation by evoking the words and suggestions of the teachers in the study. In this chapter, I lay out what I see as the ways forward to education and teacher education in response to the findings presented.

CHAPTER 2: TEACHER ROLES AND RELATIONSHIPS

Rachel, Rose, Emma, Ann, Tara, Jerry, and Tiffani are in a particular predicament when it comes to navigating what is happening in their personal lives once they arrive within the walls of school in the morning. Because they are all public, secondary teachers in the U.S, they have specific professional responsibilities they must fulfill. I'm arguing that these responsibilities make these teachers different from students within the walls of school. What are the origins of these professional responsibilities? How do expectations for teachers intersect with teachers' experiences?

Historical Roles of Teachers in the United States

First, I'm going to explore how some of the expectations for the roles of teachers were established at the onset of the common school movement, which historically marks a shift in public education in the United States. In particular, the common school movement was the time period when the teaching profession shifted from a predominantly male to a predominantly female profession, and this shift has particular implications for how the role of teaching was discussed in public discourse. Horace Mann, a chief proponent of the spread of common schools, for example, promoted common schools as a way to solve "social problems" that were arising as a result of industrialization and urbanization (Reese, 2005, p. 21). Mann saw common schools as a way to educate citizens in the proper way to be in a changing social and economic world.

Grumet (1988) argued that the common schools were really an effort to continue the "homogenization of culture," specifically on her reading, a culture based on White, male norms. So, as industry expanded in the United States and people began moving to cities, people from other walks of life--i.e., walks of life that were not middle class, not male, and not White—

needed to be taught or forced into social and moral norms that matched White middle class norms.

The increase in the number of students that needed to be taught these moral norms also meant an increase in the demand for teachers, which is really what I'm interested in here. Because more men were taking industrial jobs, and because common schools vastly expanded the need for teachers, women became a good labor option (Grumet, 1988; Reese, 2005). Prior to this time period, women had few career opportunities outside the home, so women had no better options than to accept teaching jobs at lower pay than men, making them an even better and more efficient labor option for filling teaching needs. As a way of promoting his mission to expand public school and staff his school houses, Mann argued that women were predisposed to taking care of and nurturing children because of their role in the home. The maternal rhetoric that undergirded the recruitment of female teachers established teaching as a role in which one cares for children and raises them to be moral citizens (Grumet, 1988). The maternal rhetoric surrounding teaching worked to fulfill the need for more teachers without allowing women to gain power over men. For example, Catherine Beecher, in her support of women taking on teaching roles, emphasized that teachers should be self-sacrificing and submissive and through the embodiment of these characteristics, promote compliance from students (Grumet, p. 40-42). This rhetoric emphasizing the caring and nurturing nature of teachers therefore worked to control women in their new professional roles as much as it worked to control students.

Female teachers were paid less than male teachers, first because they had few other professional options, and second because their work as teachers was supported by rhetoric suggesting that the work of teaching yields rewards that are not necessarily monetary. Lortie called the rewards of teaching that were of no extrinsic value *psychic rewards*. In Lortie's (1975)

Five Towns study, he found that 76.5% of teachers' goals were linked to psychic rewards whereas only 11.9% were linked to extrinsic rewards. Lortie defined extrinsic rewards as those "attached to a role and [involving] money, income, a level of prestige, and power over others" (p. 101). Lortie included salary, respect from others, and a chance to use influence as extrinsic rewards. Psychic rewards contrastingly "consist entirely of subjective valuations made in the course of work engagement; their subjectivity means they can vary from person to person" (p. 101). According to Lortie, examples of psychic rewards were: the "chance to study, read, and plan for classes"; "know[ledge] that I have 'reached' students and they have learned"; and the "chance to associate with children or young people" or "with other teachers" (p. 105). Lortie pointed out that "the traditions of teaching make people who seek money, prestige, or power somewhat suspect" (p. 102) and that the tradition of teaching as a profession for women before they got married or as a short-term career means that its structure did not "emphasize … extrinsic rewards" (p. 102). In other words, the profession of teaching was not focused on extrinsic rewards or opportunities for increased extrinsic rewards, such as pay raises. Instead, teachers were expected to work for less because of the relational rewards. Because teachers cared about children, their relationship with children was enough, and they did not need monetary reward for that work. This rhetoric echoes Mann's original argument that female teachers were a natural fit for the profession because of their experience mothering and caring for children. Lortie's (1975) Five Towns study supported that some of the roles of teachers set by Mann and other supporters of the Common School movement carried on into teacher's perceptions of their roles. Teachers interviewed by Lortie (1975) emphasized psychic rewards as the reason they did their jobs.

Teachers' Roles as Reapers of Relational Rewards

One professional norm for teachers that emerged out of the historical roles of teachers is that teachers do relational work and that this relational work is where they reap the greatest reward from their job. Hargreaves (1998a), for example, built on Lortie's (1975) Five Towns study to explore one of the psychic rewards of teaching: the relationship of care between the teacher and the student. Hargreaves (1988a) argued that this psychic reward was a good thing: "for many teachers [teaching] is a labour of love" (p. 322) and the emotions that were involved in teachers' building relationships with students made classrooms less boring and "barren" (p. 322). Hargreaves (1998a) suggestion that relationships kept classrooms from being "barren" (p. 322) highlights that, for Hargreaves (1998a) the lifeblood of the classroom is what is built between teachers and students. In other words, the meaningful part of engaging with curriculum is in the relationships.

While meaningful relationships between teachers and students are not on the surface a bad thing for teachers, it's important to consider what teachers must do to make those relationships happen. Building relationships with students in the context of schools means that building relationships becomes part of the *work* of teaching. Making relationships with students happen becomes more complex when we consider that all teachers are engaging with students within the institution of schools, where the relationship between a teacher and student, positive or negative, is imposed on students because attendance at school is compulsory. Furthermore, teachers are similarly not able to sever relationships with students with whom they do not get along. Instead, teachers must maintain relationships with every student. The nature of relationships as compulsory work for teachers makes it clear to me that I need to account for the labor that teachers do to build relationships when I think about curriculum.

Teachers' Roles as Emotional Laborers

Building relationships with students under the compulsory system of schooling requires emotional labor, a term coined by Hochschild (1983) in her study of service professions, in particular her sociological investigation into training programs for flight attendants. In other words, building relationships within institutions requires work.

Hochschild (1983) defined service professions as requiring emotional labor, or work that puts the client's emotions and needs above the needs of the self. Hochschild's argument drew on Marx and situated the management of emotion in the realm of economics. Three features characterized a job as requiring emotional labor:

1. First, they require face-to-face or voice-to-voice contact with the public.
2. Second, they require the worker to produce an emotional state in another person - gratitude or fear, for example.
3. Third, they allow the employer, through training and supervision, to exercise a degree of control over the emotional activities of employees. (p. 147)

Hochschild's definition of emotional labor in service professions applies to secondary school teachers: teachers work face to face with students. They must also help students achieve success or a sense of accomplishment (Cohen, 2011). Finally, teachers' employers control their emotional activities because the sense of student accomplishment relies on the teachers' self-management of their emotions. Specifically, administrators evaluate teachers on their job performance, which includes the management of their emotions in the service of building positive relationships with students to promote student learning or achievement.

Furthermore, it's important to consider that teaching remains a predominantly female profession, and it is common for females to engage in professions that require emotional labor.

Part of Hochschild's (1983) argument explained that women in service professions do more emotional labor than men: "There is one further reason why women may offer more emotion work of this sort than men: more women at all class levels do unpaid labor of a highly interpersonal sort. They nurture, manage, and befriend children" (p. 170). Hochschild's description of the work teachers do – "nurtur[ing], manag[ing], and befriend[ing] children"– echoes the image of the teacher from the Common School era as nurturing and maternal, and Grumet's (1988) depiction of teachers as maternal and caring. Thus women in teaching jobs are upholding the responsibilities of their profession when they engage in emotional labor, but they are also upholding the responsibilities of their gender to be nurturing and caring, especially toward children.

Hargreaves (1998b), who noted the positive effects of relationship work in teaching (1998a), also recognized that the teacher-student relationship required emotional labor:

> Teaching involves immense amounts of emotional labor. Not just 'acting out' feelings superficially like pretending to be disappointed or surprised, but also consciously working oneself up into a state of actually experiencing the necessary feelings that are required to perform one's job well—be these feelings of anger or enthusiasm, coolness or concern. (p. 840)

What Hargreaves (1998b) suggested is that the building of relationships between teachers and students does not always happen naturally. Instead, the teacher makes an effort to build the relationships.

Another way of thinking about the emotional labor required in the teaching profession is to think about what happens when someone in the teaching profession does not care: one might assume that teachers who don't care about children should not do the work. However, when

caring about children becomes the number one moral imperative for teachers, requests for other rewards might be seen as focusing on the wrong thing, or even as selfish. Such rhetoric was evident when, in 2018, Secretary of Education Betsy Devos responded to teachers who were striking to get fair pay, "suggesting they were failing to serve their students and urging them to 'keep adult disagreements' out of the classroom" (Reilly, 2018). Devos rebuked the teachers' request for external rewards by suggesting that asking for fair pay means that teachers are not focused on children and are instead focused on themselves. Teachers must manage their emotions to put the needs of children above their own. Otherwise they risk being labeled as selfish people and as "failing to serve students."

Teachers' Roles as Exercising Control

The meaning of being a teacher in the United States context certainly has much to do with caring for students, but it also requires controlling students, and because of the compulsory nature of schooling relationships detailed in the previous section, controlling students becomes interwoven with caring for students (Greenwalt, 2016).

As I explored previously, the impetus for widespread schooling during the Common School movement was defined by concerns that urbanization and industrialization were causing the downfall of society. Indeed, according to Reese (2005), the very purposes of wider school attendance was to exert social and moral control over people. Thus, teachers were put in control of leading students to "moral" behavior.

Cohen (2011) characterized this work of teaching as the work of "human improvement" (p. 4). In Cohen's (2011) conception, teaching had particular challenges distinct from other "human improvement" professions because the teacher must "improve" the student to a level of expertise that he or she has, thus rendering him or herself obsolete. Thus, teachers cannot

succeed without “clients who work with them toward their success” (p. 11). Cohen’s description made it clear that the teacher’s “success” depends on controlling the situation of the client; when the client fails, so does the teacher. Cohen pointed out that this challenge was different from the same dynamic in other professions, such as medicine. While doctors certainly faced rules surrounding medical malpractice, doctors were not immediately considered failures as doctors because a patient did not get better. Cohen therefore defined the teaching role as an “artifice” or “an unnatural act” (p. 27) because the relationship between teacher and student is not always authentic, or not always developed naturally, as relationships sometimes are in daily life.

Hochschild (1983) also considered the particular challenges faced by individuals in service professions who must control clients, although Hochschild’s work is focused on airline attendants, not teachers. Still, both airline attendants and teachers are engaged in caring for clients, and workers in both of these professions are disproportionately female. Both flight attendants and teachers must control their own emotions to maintain a particular environment for a group of people being served.

Hochschild described the impetus for control in flight attendants’ jobs as *hidden* labor in the service professions: “The emotion work of enhancing the status and well-being of others is a form of what Ivan Illich has called "shadow labor," an unseen effort, which, like housework, does not quite count as labor but is nevertheless crucial to getting other things done. As with doing housework well, the trick is to erase any evidence of effort, to offer only the clean house and the welcoming smile” (p. 167). Thus, the role of the flight attendant was to make the client feel that he or she was taken care of and to feel at home, and that it had been joyful for the flight attendant to make sure those circumstances are met, even when it was far from a joy. Applying Hochschild’s description of care and control in the work of flight attendants to the role of

teaching, a teacher must stay in control of the situation in the classroom and of themself in relationship to the students while at least appearing to enjoy the work and the relationships with students.

Revisiting the Roles of Teachers

One role of the teacher, then, is to engage in emotional labor to suppress negative or unproductive emotions of the self in service of producing positive or productive emotions in students. Thus, when teachers build relationships with students, that relationship is somewhat unequal in that the relationship is in service of the student's learning. I don't mean that teachers never get anything positive from relationships with students. Regardless of whether teachers gain positive returns from working with students, it is a teacher's job to teach students particular moral and social values through the relationship-building they do with them. Underneath this role is the need for teachers to both submit to those particular moral and social values themselves and to show outwardly that they enjoy the psychic rewards of teaching—the relationship—so much that they do not worry about extrinsic rewards so much. For, were a teacher to be concerned with extrinsic rewards, it follows from this logic that they would be valuing money or power or prestige over building relationships with children, and would therefore be an uncaring, amoral person.

Moss, Reilly, Burdman, and Parsons (2005) sum up the competing visions of the roles of teachers by detailing differing conceptions of teaching as "a calling, a technical vocation, or some blending of these concepts" (p. 86). The discourse of teaching as a "calling" emphasized teaching as a profession that *should* focus on psychic rewards. The discourse of teaching as a technical vocation emphasizes the teacher's mastery of curriculum. However, the teaching of that curriculum relied on relationship building; thus the teacher and student were tied to one another

in “some blending” of a “calling” and a “vocation.” When Moss et. al (2005) analyzed the lived experiences of teachers, they arrived at the conclusion that the most significant effort expended by teachers is that “the desire to meet the needs of each student in the class” (p. 106), which I interpret as a relational goal. They close their chapter with this characterization of teachers:

> To teach is to establish and maintain relationships with students, colleagues, and parents. It is to advance one’s own skills and knowledge. It is to be a role model, counselor, mentor, and advocate. Teaching involves early mornings, late nights, weekends, and yes, even summers. Assessment, curriculum, pedagogy management, organization, discipline, and sometimes lunch duty are but a few of the daily responsibilities. Split-second decision making is routine. The stakes are real. Respect is elusive. The pay is poor. The rewards are tremendous. The dedication is real. (p. 108)

When I read this quotation, I immediately recognize the pattern of rhetoric about teaching—that teachers are on the front lines, being disrespected, but caring about students anyway—and I get frustrated. I don’t really understand why we are congratulating teachers for being dedicated in return for being treated terribly. Moss et. al’s (2005) characterization of teaching nonetheless focused on the relational work of teaching as in service of student’s gaining knowledge and skills. They also echoed Lortie’s (1975) findings that teachers are expected to reap psychic rather than extrinsic rewards by explicitly noting that while “pay is poor,” “the rewards are tremendous.” Yet Moss et. al’s (2005) admission that the intrinsic rewards of teaching, such as building relationships, are tied up in the delivery of knowledge and curriculum emphasized Hargreaves (1998a) assertion that teaching requires emotional labor. The relationship building that teachers do serves a purpose beyond simply building a relationship; it also gets a job done.

In the United States, the historical purposes for schooling and subsequent tying of the teaching profession to "maternal" characteristics such as caring for children, defined the teaching role as being focused on the building of relationships with children in a way that best serves children. Sometimes, this focus required the teacher to forsake personal rewards.

Bringing Together Teacher Experience as Mattering and Expectations for Teachers

I have detailed some of the historical roots of expectations on teachers in the United States because teachers carry these expectations with them into classrooms just as they carry in personal experiences such as grieving. For teachers, talking with students about one's personal experiences with death and loss is not as simple as including specific texts that address these themes as part of the curriculum or inviting students to write about their experiences with death and loss. The decisions teachers make regarding curriculum are also influenced by their perceptions of what is expected of them as teachers. Because teachers are expected to reap psychic rewards and to care for children, teachers regulate the sharing of their grieving experiences according to rules they perceive about how the sharing of those experience will influence the relational work they are expected to do with children.

This project therefore explores the relationship between roles for teachers, experiences of grieving a death, and the English language arts curriculum by asking:

1. What is it like to teach English language arts while grieving a death?
2. How, if at all, does the relational work of teaching influence how teachers engage with English language arts curriculum while grieving a death?

I suggest that in order to conceive of schools where people within the walls are engaged in inquiry and learning through the study of, writing of, reading of, or discussion of texts, we have to conceive of schools where teachers' and students' experiences alike matter. I also suggest that

in order to understand what is being asked of teachers when English Education suggests they should talk about topics such as death and loss, we must also ask how expectations for teachers influence how they believe they can talk about death and loss and with whom.

For Rachel, Emma, Ann, Tara, Jerry, Tiffani, and Rose, teaching English is influenced by both their disciplinary expectations to include personal connections as part of engaging with texts, writing, reading, and discussion, and their expectations of themselves as professionals, as teachers, who have particular norms to follow in their relationship with students.

CHAPTER 3: MODES OF INQUIRY

In the opening chapter of this dissertation, I introduced how English Education scholarship positions teachers' in terms of their engagement with curriculum around death and loss. In the second chapter, I explored general expectations for teachers in the United States. Now, I turn to the modes of inquiry I used in this project to understand experience. I begin my explanation by more carefully explaining the phenomenological roots that help me to conceptualize experience. Then, I explain my interviewing method and introduce my participants to you. My interviewing technique is tied directly to my understanding of experience. Next, I describe how I analyzed my interview data. It's important, however, for me to explain now that the analytic methods that I used to explore the data in this project informed my decision to include the literature in the opening two chapters; that is, that my exploration into teachers' roles was informed *during* the coding process I undertook with my data as I began to see patterns and themes emerging. I documented these patterns and themes alongside my coding as part of my writing of analytic memos (Saldaña, 2006, p. 44).

Conceptualizing Teacher Experience

In this project I'm choosing to focus on English language arts teacher experience because I believe these experiences offer insight into what it is like to teach curriculum. Teacher experiences influence teachers' perceptions of curriculum as well as how they choose to engage with it. I believe that educational research that attends to a teacher's full experience in the classroom, including social and emotional experience, offers expanded notions for the way human beings engage in classroom life. Attention to a teacher's social and emotional experiences as part of teaching English language arts may give a fuller picture of the challenges teachers face

in negotiating their professional and personal roles as part of the teaching of English language arts curriculum.

In thinking about experience, I draw on both Van Manen (2001) and Clandinin and Connelly (1990; 2000). Van Manen (2001) noted that "from a phenomenological point of view, to do research is always to question the way we experience the world, to want to know the world in which we live as human beings" (p. 5). From Van Manen's (2001) phenomenological perspective, humans are always in an intentional relationship with the world; human beings are conscious and in that consciousness, in relation with the world. For Van Manen (2001), experience begins in the lifeworld (p. 7); human beings have relationships with the world and then by reflecting on those relationships, make meaning from experiences. This view of experience assumes that the study of experience is always a study of perceptions of that experience, not the experience itself. Van Manen's (2001) conceptions of experience inform my decision to use interviewing and inform how I developed my interview questions. I will explain these decisions more fully in the sections that follow.

Connelly and Clandinin (1990) conceptualized experience by building on Dewey (2007) in their rationale for narrative inquiry, a methodology that explores the lived experiences of people through the language people use to tell of those experiences. While I am not engaging in traditional narrative inquiry in this project, Connelly and Clandinin's (1990) framework informs my assumptions about how people making meaning of experience. They described narrative as "the context for meaning making" (Connelly & Clandinin, p. 3), or to reference my language above, as a space where people name their perception of their experiences. For Clandinin and Connelly (2000), narrative "is the best way of representing and understanding experience" because narrative has a temporal element to it (p. 18). The temporal nature of narrative

pararalleled Dewey's (2007) criterion that experience include *continuity*, or a connection among past, present, and future experiences. For Clandinin and Connelly (2000), when people locate things in time through narrative, they make meaning of events and experiences.

Drawing on Van Manen (2001) and Clandinin and Connelly (2000), I believe that the language people use to tell stories about their experience is a way for humans to make sense of their experiences and come to know something about the world. These theories about experience and narrative inform the decisions I made in this project about how best to explore questions about what it is like to teach while grieving. I decided that eliciting lived accounts, or narratives, of teachers' experiences of teaching while grieving, was the best method for understanding teaching while grieving because I believe teachers use the language of narrative or storytelling to process and make meaning of their lived experience. I also believe that by attending to participants' language in interviews, I make meaning and sense of their experiences as I interpret their experiences.

Clarifying the Terms *Grief* and *Loss*

Before I move into my explanation of my analytic methods, I want to clarify the terms *grief* and *loss* because I will use these terms throughout this dissertation to name teachers' experiences. It is true that in some ways this project was focused in on experiences of grief and loss before participants were interviewed. I was broadly interested in personal experiences teachers might hide from students when engaging with curriculum, and grief and loss were experiences being named by teachers in my life—Tiffani and Emma, who both ended up being part of this study— as experiences they were in fact hiding. However, I originally conceived of this project as including a broad range of grieving and loss experiences, possibly including experiences such as divorce, ambiguous loss, loss of dreams, and so forth. When participants

responded to my invitation to be interviewed, though, they only offered up examples of grieving the death of a loved one. Thus, the focus of this study narrowed.

In terms of conceptualizing what counts as grief and loss in the study, I'm most interested in the ways participants define these words. In keeping with my commitment to honoring teachers' experiences, I use the words grief and loss to describe participants' experiences in the study because their words and descriptions match the definitions and traditions of these words.

The word *grief* comes from the Latin "to make heavy" ("Grief. Def. 1," 1989). Early uses of the verb form "grieve" are transitive, meaning grief was something that is done to someone or something ("Grieve. Def. 1," 1989). This original transitive form of the word suggests that grief is something humans may not be able to control happening to them. In modern usage, the Oxford English Dictionary's first two definitions of *grief* are "hardship" and "hurt" and the first definition of *grieve* is "to press heavily upon, as a weight" ("Grief. Def. 1," 1989; "Grief. Def. 2," 1989; "Grieve. Def. 1," 1989). All of these definitions have connotations of heaviness, or of something humans carry around with them. Grief is a burden.

Grief is often associated with loss, although loss doesn't always mean a death. Kuebler-Ross and Kessler (2005), in their famous book about the five stages of grief, describe the death of a loved one as an "indescribable loss … unmatched for its emptiness and profound sadness" (p. 29). The Oxford English Dictionary's first definition of *loss* is "perdition, ruin, destruction" ("Loss. Def. 1," 1989). This definition has a connotation of emptiness, or of something no longer being what it once was.

These two words—grief and loss—seem linked when the participants in this study talk about the experience of processing a death. For example, Rachel described her experience by saying she was "in the middle of this fog of grief" and expressed that "it was like sometimes

[she] just couldn't function." When Rachel described her "fog of grief" she explained that it kept her from completing tasks she had hoped to complete. Rachel's description of being in a "fog of grief" thus suggests that she is disoriented, especially when it comes to her being able to complete everyday tasks. Instead, she is unable to see what's ahead of or behind her, and her fear and uncertainty becomes a burden for her. Her "fog" was an obstacle that precluded her from acting in ways she considered normal, typical, or desirable for her. Though fog is not typically considered "heavy," in the way Rachel talks about fog, she evokes it as something that prevents her from doing what she wishes to do, evoking connotations of her "fog of grief" as being a burden or hardship. Rachel describing herself as "in the middle" of fog also evokes an image for me of her not being able to lift the fog, something she seems to wish she could do. Her use of fog specifically also invokes notions of uncertainty and fear; when fog surrounds us, we cannot see easily and might be fearful of the disorientation we feel. Rachel also explained that during her "fog of grief, she "just couldn't function," a description that invoked the meaning of loss of function or as the destruction of her functionality as a person.

Similarly, Tiffani explained that "grief is kind of like you're forced to recognize that you've lost something important to you and that things will never be the same again, like they just can't be." She goes on to say that during grief, "you're also upset because you've lost like a sense of, it kind of deals with control too, like you've lost a sense of control over what you were familiar with like, this was my life before and I don't know what's going to be my life after." Tiffani's definition pointed to how grief was something that was forced upon her, because she "lost a sense of control." Her expression of not knowing what her life will be "after" invoked loss, or destruction. Because participants' expressions of their experiences matched the

connotations of the words grief and loss, I use these terms throughout the project to refer to the experiences I'm exploring in this paper.

Some recent research in English Education has examined experiences of *trauma* (e.g., Dutro, 2008; Hill, 2009; Kirkland, 2011). I consider these studies to be exploring experiences that are separate from the experiences in this project because *trauma* encompasses a wider range of experiences and because *trauma* invokes a different meaning. The Oxford English Dictionary defines trauma as a "wound, or external bodily injury" ("Trauma. Def. 1.," 1989). In modern usage of the word, a wound can be mental as well as physical, as in the Oxford English Dictionary's second definition of trauma as a "psychic injury, esp. one caused by emotional shock the memory of which is repressed and remains unhealed" ("Trauma. Def. 2.," 1989). A death can certainly cause or be a trauma, but trauma can also encompass other experiences, such as a spouse being in a life-changing car accident or having to witness a school shooting. Scholars have used the word trauma, for example, to describe how racism in English language arts curriculum harms students (e.g., Dutro, 2008; Hill, 2009; Kirkland, 2011) or the ways that schooling experience more broadly leaves students wounded (Noguera, 2008). These kind of experiences are not the precise focus in this study. This project focuses on grief and loss as a burden of coping with death specifically.

Methods of Inquiry

While the linear structure of this dissertation may suggest that I went into coding my data with particular ideas about how English Education scholarship should better account for the relational work of teaching or how expectations for teachers to care for children might influence teachers' experiences of grieving, in reality, the process of analytic coding was ongoing *with* my reading and re-reading of particular literature. Thus, as patterns emerged in the data I was

coding, I focused in on particular literature that allowed me to think through those patterns. Though the processes of coding and reading and theorizing were ongoing and simultaneous, the process of qualitative coding is at the center of how that reading and theorizing took shape. In actuality, this chapter (except for this paragraph you are reading right now) was written before the preceding chapters, and was the first chapter I completed.

In order to understand experiences of grieving a death while teaching English language arts, I interviewed seven English teachers from August 2017 to January 2018. Each interview was audiotaped and lasted between 45 and 100 minutes. After each interview, I engaged in memoing as a way to reflect on things that happened as part of interviews that would not necessarily have been captured in the audio recording and to capture some of my initial reactions to each interview. Upon concluding individual interviews, I met and audio recorded a follow-up focus group with four participants. I also followed up with two additional participants one on one. One participant chose not to participate beyond her initial interview.

Additional Data Sources

Additional data sources for this study emerged as a result of what participants shared as part of the interview. In certain interviews, teachers mentioned writing that they shared with their students related to their experiences of grief. I asked those teachers to share that writing with me. For example, the data set includes two poems written by teachers about their experiences grieving a death; both of these poems were shared with students. In one interview, a participant references her tattoo, so I took a picture of it as an artifact of her experience.

Why Interviews?

I chose to interview participants about their experience grieving because I wanted to know about their experience from their perspective. In my interviews, I wanted to ask questions

about a particular topic, teaching while grieving, but I wanted to ask them in such a way that participants felt free to tell me their experience at length. I thus approached interviewing from a phenomenological tradition, drawing largely on Van Manen's conceptualization. Van Manen (2001) noted that in the phenomenological tradition, "practice (or life) always comes first and theory comes later as a result of reflection" (p. 15). Therefore in thinking about the structure of my interviews, I created possible questions that were grounded in the lifeworld rather than questions that asked participants to provide reasons for *why* they acted in a particular way or questions that asked participants to name the meaning of their experience. Instead, my questions were aimed at participants sharing concrete details of their experience with me as a first step to my beginning to understand their experience. Seidman (2006) describes this purpose of interviewing: "The purpose of in-depth interviewing is not to get answers to questions, nor to test hypothesis, and not to 'evaluate' as the term is normally used. At the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience" (p. 9). In this project, I did not have a hypothesis about what teachers did or did not do during a time period of teaching while grieving. I'm also not trying to evaluate how participants handled their grief while teaching. Instead, I'm hoping to understand something about their experiences and what their experiences mean to them in the context of their roles as teachers.

I therefore designed my interviews as conversational interviews (Patton, 2002) in that I asked many questions as they came up in our conversation. However, I did have particular topics that I wanted to make sure we got to through over the course of the interview. Therefore, I created a note sheet for myself that reminded me of what I wanted to know about in the interview and several different possible ways I might come to know that part of my participants'

experience. I did not ask all questions of all participants. Instead, I used the pre-phrased questions as possibilities for how to ask participants to name particular experiences related to grief and the curriculum, and I decided which questions to use in the moment, in response to what the participants were sharing with me.

Table 1. Conversational Interview Protocol

What I want to Know	How I Might Ask It
What is their experience of teaching while grieving like?	"Well as you already know I'm very interested in understanding more about the experiences of teachers who are dealing with a significant loss while also having to teach in front of a room of students every day. Why don't you tell me a little bit about the experience you had in mind when you reached out to me."
How does their experience of teaching while grieving influence their relational work as part of curriculum?	Did your students know about XXX? Do you remember telling your students about XXX? What was that like? Do you remember a moment in your classroom during this period of grief that sticks out as being particularly difficult? What was the hardest part about teaching during this time of your life?
How does the loss experience interplay with English language arts curriculum?	What texts were you reading that semester/year with your students? Did any of those texts touch on themes of loss or death? Did you think about that connection when reading? Did you talk about that connection when discussing literature with students? Did you read anything in your personal life to help you deal with your loss? What strategies did you use for dealing with your grief outside the classroom? Was it different than those used in the classroom?

Listening in Interviews

Listening is a key part of my methodology. I came to this project because I was listening to teachers around me talk about issues that were coming up for them, and the experiences about grieving were sticking out to me as experiences not typically addressed by their schools or by research. I chose to conduct interviews because it provided me with an opportunity to listen to teachers tell their story at length.

My role as a listener is important in both my positionality as a researcher and in my method. Teachers needed to trust that I wanted to listen to their stories in order for them to feel comfortable volunteering to be interviewed. I conveyed this willingness to listen through my invitation letter (see Appendix A), but also through my actions over my time in the local community in which the teachers worked. The two teachers who forwarded my initial invitation to other teachers they knew had come to know me as someone who cared deeply about the lives of teachers and the complexity of their experiences. These teachers vouched for me when it came to inviting their colleagues into the study. For example, Rachel told me as part of her interview that she agreed to be interviewed because Emma, a teacher I had worked with previously, assured her that I was the "nicest person in the world" and that I "really cared about teachers." Rose, the other teacher who forwarded my invitation on to her colleagues, wrote in her evaluation of me in my role as a university-based field instructor that "my experience helped me to understand her experiences as a teacher." These comments from Emma and Michelle provide me with the understanding that something about my orientation to my relationships with them even as a university educator let them know that I had been a classroom teacher and that I support classroom teachers, and this reputation that I developed caused them to encourage their fellow teachers to be part of the study.

Listening is also a critical part of the interviewing process. Glesne (2011) wrote that "Interviewers are listeners incarnate; machines can record, but only you can listen" (p. 118). Here Glesne invoked the principle that the interviewer is always part of the interaction, even when he or she refrains from speaking. In line with phenomenological assumptions about the need for the researcher to be fully open to the experience of the participant (Van Manen, 2001), Glesne wrote that an interviewer who is a learner takes up a "frame of mind by which [they] set aside [their] assumptions (pretensions, in some cases) that [they] know what [their] respondents mean when they tell [them] something rather than seek explanations about what they mean" (p. 121). This perspective informed my decision to listen to participants' responses in interviews and follow up with them for clarification on certain phrases or ideas. For example, when Amy told me she was afraid she would "lose it," instead of assuming I knew what it meant to "lose it," I followed up by asking "Could you tell me more about what it would look like to lose it?" Listening to participants' responses and responding in the moment was thus a key aspect of what I did in my interviews. Kinloch and San Pedro (2014) described listening as an essential part of humanizing research, and that meaning happens "between us, emerging not necessarily by you speaking or me listening, but in this space between us where we were interacting and engaging an idea together" (p. 25). Following Kinloch and San Pedro's (2014) description, I do not consider my bracketing of my assumptions to mean that I removed myself from the interaction, but rather that my listening role in the interviews became one where what "happened between" (Kinloch & San Pedro, p. 25) was led by the participant's language and experience rather than my analysis of that language and experience.

Participant Selection

Seidman (2006) pointed out that "the major criterion for appropriateness is whether the subject of the researcher's study is central to the participant's experience" (p. 48). Thus the main criteria for participation in this study was that the participant be a middle or high school English teacher and that the participant have a life experience that matched the experience I was interested in knowing about: teaching while grieving. To find participants, I sent an invitation for teachers to participate in my study to two teachers that I knew, as I mentioned in the section above; one was Emma, a teacher whom I had previously worked with on a research project; the other was Rose, a mentor teacher whom I had worked with in the context of the university teacher preparation program. I chose to send the invitation to these two teachers because I had a history of working and sharing stories of teaching with them. I was not sure if either would want to participate in the project, but I invited them to, and I also asked them to share the invitation with other English teachers in their department who might be interested in participating in the study. Emma and Rose both volunteered to be interviewed as part of the project; they also both passed along the invitation, leading me to be emailed by four teachers I had never met. Finally, I emailed my former students who had been engaged in their teaching internships for certification the year before while simultaneously enrolled in a subject-specific course that accompanied the internship year. This email resulted in my being contacted by Tiffani, who indicated she would like to be part of the project. In total, I interviewed seven teachers: Rachel, Jerry, Tiffani, Ann, Tara, Rose, and Emma. Now I would like to introduce each of them to you.

Rachel

I immediately recognize Rachel when I arrive at her middle school Spanish and English classroom. We had taken an exercise class together maybe several years prior. There had been

such limited space in the class that the barre we were at was overcrowded. I myself was stuck in the corner; it was impossible to lift my leg straight up in front of me to the beat as requested by the instructor because the person occupying the adjacent space was Rachel, with long legs and fierce determination. She most certainly did not miss any leg lifts. I awkwardly tried to lift mine opposite the main beat so that we both had a chance and space to complete the lifts. I did not mention this memory to Rachel upon my arrival in her classroom to interview her, too mortified to remind her how she might know me. Instead I pretended it was my first time ever encountering her. I offer her chocolate covered pretzels and engage her in a conversation about the student work hanging on the walls.

She is buzzing with energy that afternoon as she tells me about her school day and tries to finish her half-eaten lunch before our interview begins. As my story about leg lifts suggests, she is tall. She strikes me as capable.

Once we sit down to talk, she tells me about the year her mother got lung cancer that metastasized to her brain. She had taken care of her mother during her rapid decline and handled her estate after her death in the spring.

Of all of the teachers in the study, Rachel wanted the most from me in terms of my own responses to her story and my thoughts and opinions. She wanted to know how I set up my project and how I got approved to do this research, an interest which seemed more personal than scientific. Even after our initial interview, Rachel wanted to know if I had everything I needed to tell the story. She always wanted to give more. She wanted to be involved. She wanted to help.

During the year of her mother's illness, decline, and death, she had driven over an hour on most days to be there to take care of her mom. She had been with her in the hospital, slept there overnight, and driven to work to teach middle school Spanish and English the next day. She

tells me that a teacher on her hall once reminded her to remember to enjoy some time with her mother that year. After a fight about which cutting board to use, Rachel had looked at her mother and said, "you know I love you mom, right?" Rachel tells me she is so grateful for that colleague who reminded her to take the time to tell her mom she loved her.

Jerry

I'm sitting in Jerry's classroom for the first time, interviewing him about his experience losing two students on two separate occasions. Both were murdered. I've never met Jerry before this interview, but he strikes me as calm and kind. He doesn't seem harried at the end of the school day; his footsteps are even, his voice mild, his demeanor inviting. He tells me he worries about sharing the story of his students' deaths because he doesn't want to tell the story for the wrong reasons, for the shock value of it.

The air conditioner loudly turns on and off, punctuating our conversation. I listen to him as he tells me about speaking at a memorial service for his student. Our eyes meet occasionally. I see little creases around his eye line, the only sign that he's been teaching almost 20 years. A student opens the door and asks if she left her water bottle. Jerry hasn't seen it and she says goodbye.

Jerry returns to sharing with me some of the challenges he faced as a teacher following the murder of his students. He explains about trying to stay focused on the lesson with the empty chair looming in the space. He tells me about planting a tree with his class in memory of their friend. He explains that he was always looking for what he could do to help – calling students to tell them the news personally, being lenient with students on assignments, and kissing one student on top of her head to comfort her while she cried.

Jerry tells me that the reason he agreed to be interviewed as part of the project is because another teacher, Emma, had told him about it and he wanted to be a voice that reminded younger teachers that even after the grief of losing students, teaching gets better. I get the sense that his official role in mentoring Emma extends beyond co-planning and getting to know the school. He wants to make sure she remains whole. Jerry talking with me is not really about him and his needs; it's about hers.

Tiffani

Tiffani was in her first year of teaching at the time of our interview, but I had known Tiffani for two years, since the time she was in my preservice English language arts methods course.

Tiffani's voice is even and pleasant, and in the tenor range. She speaks carefully and thoughtfully, although her voice becomes most urgent when she is performing slam poetry, an art form I have witnessed her engage in during a reading at a local hookah bar the first year I met her.

Tiffani's mother died the week before her teaching internship began, timing which Tiffani describes as being the *worst possible* because she had been looking forward to her internship and now it was overtaken by her mother's death. Tiffani's mother had been fighting colon cancer for many years and then it had spread to her brain.

In so many ways, Tiffani's experience was an original inspiration of this project because as her teacher, I had little idea of how to support her during her teaching internship while she was also grieving her mother. I remember letting her miss class to spread her mother's ashes in a nearby lake with her Dad and brother. She wrote a poem about her first Thanksgiving without

her mother's pies and shared it with our class. She refused to make the pies because her mother made the pies. Making pies would never make up for her mother not being there to make them.

Tara

Tara teaches 11th grade English next door to Rose, a teacher I worked with in the previous year. When I first meet Tara, she is in the middle of her 26th year of teaching. She wears dark rimmed glasses and bustles about her room tidying it at the end of the day. As I engage in conversation with her, she describes herself by telling me her colleagues say she is stoic and hard to read. She says she doesn't show much of her true emotions to others at school.

Tara tells me that about four years ago her mother died suddenly. She remembers getting a phone call from her dad that her mother was in the hospital with what they had thought was the flu, but that she had probably had a heart attack and was now having another. She remembers asking her dad if it was serious and if she needed to come down. Just a few days later she tells me through tears that they had to make the decision to say goodbye.

Tara tells me that she spent a lot of time that school year working alone in her classroom, crying quietly. She tells me about not having the energy to attend department lunches. She tells me about leaving school most days and shutting her car door, only to begin sobbing. When she talks about her teaching that year, she says it was different. She felt she struggled to build relationships with students and she worried that the students could read the sadness in her.

Ann

Ann teaches 6th grade language arts at the time of my interview with her and has previously also taught elementary school. I arrive at Ann's classroom after winding through many middle school hallways to find her waiting patiently for me. Unlike other teachers in the study, she isn't grading or tidying up her room when I arrive. She is waiting to talk to me.

When I first ask Ann to tell me about the experience she was thinking of when she agreed to be interviewed, she talks for almost ten full minutes. She excitedly and passionately tells me about how she has carried on the memories of her grandmother and grandfather by sharing their stories with students. Her grandparents were coal workers in Kentucky and did not have access to traditional literacy practices, such as reading alphabetic texts. She uses their stories of eventual success, which they achieved through mentorship, to talk with students about literacy and access. She connects her understanding of her grandparent's paths to literacy to a book she read in her Master's courses, Purcell-Gates' *Other People's Words.* She and her students once composed anthologies of stories and dedicated the collection to her grandparents.

Ann talks frequently about her faith and its role in helping her to work through the grief over her grandparents' death. She says her mother told her brother that she knew Ann would be OK after these losses because she had her faith.

Ann also tells me that she had a miscarriage last year. She had a regular check-up appointment last year in November where there was no heartbeat. She tells me about having to tell her two children that she had lost their little brother or sister. She explains about apologizing to her principal for the poor timing of her loss, which happened in the days leading up to Thanksgiving break. She had also just recently told her students about her pregnancy, excited to share the news with them. She tells me she had to send an email to all the parents in the class apologizing for having involved them in her pregnancy and explaining that she had now lost the baby. She addressed the issue in person at parent night that Thursday, once again apologizing for having involved her sixth graders in the pregnancy only to now have to involve them in the sadness of her loss. Partway through the parent night, Ann's body started working against her.

She would not be able to wait for her Saturday appointment to remove the fetus from her womb. Instead, she needed leave early and head straight to the hospital.

Ann tells me that her grandparents were both unwell at the end of their lives and she was glad to know they were in Heaven, pain-free. She admits to me that she still does not know why she lost her baby. She hasn't made sense of it yet.

Rose

Rose has been teaching for 11 years. We have previously worked together because I have supervised her teaching interns for the university. We have developed a good rapport over time. She has a warm personality; I always feel invited into her room.

I have watched Rose play chess with a group of lonely teenagers over lunch and support the yearbook team in their photo story project. I have watched her chat happily with students in between classes. She rags on them about their love lives.

Rose had mentioned to me in a side conversation once that she had lost a baby by miscarriage, but when I arrive to interview her for my dissertation, I learn that she has not had just one miscarriage: she has had six. Rose shows me the tattoo on her inner wrist. Each bud on the vine represents a different baby and the size of the bud represents how far along she got in her pregnancy. She lost one of her babies at 22 weeks. The vine has two flower blossoms representing her two living children.

Rose describes her life as always having one "prep" that suffers. She says she has three main preps: her children, her Master's coursework in journalism, and her teaching, and that it's not possible to do well at all three. Instead, she feels like one is always getting the short end of the stick.

Emma

Emma is a cheerful teacher who describes her purpose in teaching as to let her students know that they are loved. As I have mentioned previously in my introduction of the teachers in this study, I knew Emma before this study began. I had worked with her on a research project during her student teaching year and even presented with her at conferences.

Emma and I always had much in common when talking about teaching; we seemed to be kindred spirits in many ways, though she is a more extroverted version of me—in fact, she is an ENFJ (Extroverted-Intuitive-Feeling-Judging type) on the Myers Briggs test while I am an INFJ (Introverted-Intuitive-Feeling-Judging type), a detail we delightfully discovered while taking personality tests with her 12th grade English class.

Emma cares so deeply about her students as human beings. I remember that she closed her student teaching year by creating a video letter for her students reminding them how much she believes in them.

Six weeks into her first year of teaching middle school, Emma lost a student to suicide. She feels this loss deeply, often crying at school. She describes not having space to talk out her feelings because she needs to keep the classroom going. At the end of the year, she wrote a poem to her students addressing their collective loss. In it, she states that she most wishes for her students to know that they are loved unconditionally by their teachers from the moment they become students in their class, without expectation or exception.

Table 2. Summary of Research Participants

Participant	Level and Number of Years Teaching at the Time of the Interview
Rachel	6th grade English language arts and Spanish teacher; 12 years teaching
Jerry	8th grade English language arts; previously taught 4th grade for a period; 19 years teaching

Table 2 (cont'd)

Tiffani	Less than one year teaching; was completing her teaching internship during the year following her mother's death
Tara	High school English language arts; 26 years teaching
Ann	6th grade English language arts; 12 years teaching
Rose	11th grade English language arts and yearbook; 11 years teaching
Emma	8th grade English language arts; 2 years teaching

Focus Group Data

In addition to in-depth interviews with the seven teachers in this study, I also conducted a focus group with a subset of the teachers. Several teachers expressed an interest in knowing more about what I was going to do with their stories or asked about whether other participants talked about their experiences of teaching while grieving a death in the same way that they did. Because of this interest, I organized the focus group. I reached out to each participant to find out whether or not they wanted to be included, and six out of seven participants wanted to try to gather as a group. Scheduling was difficult, but I met with Emma, Jerry, Rachel, and Ann as part of a focus group and I also met with Rose and Tiffani individually.

When I met with the four teachers as part of a collective experience, I began the focus group by sharing with them that I was working on developing my findings and writing about the project. I also shared with them a summary of the major themes that were emerging about the experience of teaching English language arts while grieving a death. Under each major theme, I included anonymous quotations from across the seven interviews. The participants in the focus group looked for their own words among the words of other teachers who had also experienced grieving a death. Then, I opened up the space for the teachers to share what stuck out to them about the themes or what questions the themes brought up for them about teaching. We also

discussed what we were learning from the experience of talking across our experiences. At the end of the focus group, I had each teacher respond to the following prompts in writing: *What is your biggest takeaway from today's conversation? What is one thing you wished we had talked about but didn't? What is one thing you wished you had said but didn't?*

Modes of Inquiry

I analyzed transcripts of the seven in-depth individual interviews to understand what aspects of teaching English language arts while grieving a death were common across the teachers' experiences.

I engaged in three cycles of coding to explore patterns and themes in seven teachers' experiences of teaching English language arts curriculum while grieving a death (Saldaña, 2009).

A Note on Transcription Methods

In transcribing the interviews, I first transcribed the words that participants said and also any audible expressions such as laughing, crying, or audible sighing. Laughing, crying, and sighing are italicized in transcripts to indicate that they are not words that participants said but rather sounds I heard the participant make on the recording. During my initial transcription, I also included filler words such as "uhm" and "like" when transcribing. When I could not determine what exactly a participant said, I used the marking [xxx] to indicate that the participant said something but that I do not know what they said.

For the purposes of sharing participants' words in my analysis and findings chapters, I have eliminated filler words such as "uhm," "you know," and "like." I eliminated these filler words when sharing them as part of these chapters because I did not want the reader to be bogged down during reading by filler words uttered in speech.

Cycle One Coding

In the first cycle of coding, I read through transcripts and created codes for individual lines of participants' responses (for a full list of codes created in the first cycle, see Appendix A). When reading through the transcripts, I created codes for responses that named experiences of teaching while grieving. In particular, I was considering the following research questions as guidelines when coding:

1. What is it like to teach English language arts while grieving a death?

2. How, if at all, does the relational work of teaching influence how teachers engage with English language arts curriculum while grieving a death?

These questions are the same questions that guided the development of my interview protocol.

For example, related to the first question, *What is it like to teach English language arts while grieving a death?,* I developed codes that described how participants defined grieving. Tiffani said this about grieving:

> Grief is kind of like you're forced to recognize that you've that lost something important to you and that things will never be the same again. They just can't be. And so you're upset because you've lost a person that's important. And you're also upset because you've lost a sense of, it kind of deals with control too. You've lost a sense of control over what you were familiar with, like this was my life before and I don't know what's going to be my life after. But, so for me it's just kind of grappling with both of those different losses. Losses of a person, of a concept, of time and being and all that.

I coded this excerpt as "grieving is described as life never being normal again."

Related to the second research question, *How, if at all, does the relational work of teaching influence how teachers engage with English language arts curriculum while grieving a*

death?, I developed codes that named how participants talked about sharing or not sharing their grief with students or colleagues. For example, codes included "my loss made me feel distant from students," "I didn't know what to say to colleagues," and "sharing loss meant staying positive for others." Related to this second research question, I also coded passages where participants talked about curriculum and how their experience influenced their curriculum, or how their curriculum influenced their experience. For example, in the following exchange, Tara described trying to teach *The House on Mango Street* after her mother's death:

> Mandie: So, do you remember a moment or a day in your classroom that sticks out to you as being particularly difficult?
>
> Tara: Hmmm. I don't know that I can think of anything in particular. There's a chapter of the *House on Mango Street* that I had to really psyche myself up for. *(laughs)*. If that makes any sense. So there's the chapter, it's really early on in the book called Hairs.
>
> Mandie: Mmhmm.
>
> Tara: That's my mother's hair, my mother's hair, and it smells like bread, and when she makes space for you in the bed beside her, and it's still warm *(sighs)*. Yeah. I remember just knowing that was coming and I think it probably is a good thing that I was still in that first couple of weeks after her death actually, that sort of numbness of, I don't know, something about it. I could push myself through reading that chapter and I was really worried that I was just gonna like I said before, lose it. I was really worried I was just gonna cry my whole way through that chapter and I had to do a lot of self talk about how to do it without yeah. Without crying. I don't know. That was a challenge, but I can't think of any days that were particularly bad. It just sort of all felt really rough. Coming up on the holidays was hard.

I coded this excerpt with many codes: (a) trying not to lose it when discussing a text in class; (b) a text brought about an emotional response related to grieving; (c) part of being a teacher is not losing it; (d) crying is associated with losing it; (e) coming up on the holidays are hard; and (f) getting through a passage was considered the right way to proceed as a teacher.

Cycle Two Coding

In the second round of coding, I first looked for codes that should be collapsed because they described similar experiences. For example I collapsed the codes "grieving is described as being not all there" and "grieving is described as being distracted" into the one code, "grieving is described as being not all there," because the codes were applied to descriptions that were similar.

In this second cycle, I also assigned some individual codes to new parent codes. For example, Ann described her experience of teaching while grieving as one where she couldn't "make it a teachable moment." She referred to not being able to use her experience of miscarriage to teach the students a lesson about how to be sensitive when speaking. I considered Ann's description a definition of "the role of the teacher," which was already a code applied to other excerpts; she implied that her role in sharing her experience would be a "teachable moment" and so I re-parented her excerpt under that code. However, I chose to keep her excerpt labeled as "I couldn't make it a teachable moment" because she described a distinct experience of sharing miscarriage in the classroom.

For other codes, I collapsed them based on thematic similarities across excerpts. For example, in the interview I mentioned above, Amy said, "There's a chapter of *The House on Mango Street* that I had to really psyche myself up for. *(laughs).* If that makes any sense. So there's the chapter, it's really early on in the book called Hairs…" The word "psyche" stands out

to me here as marking this moment as important for Amy and also makes me wonder what part of her experience prompted her to say that she had to "psyche" herself up. In my first cycle of coding, this excerpt from Amy's interviewed would be underlined.

In the second cycle of coding, I collapsed codes into themes or patterns that incorporate the descriptions that were most salient in the first cycle of coding. For example, in Rachel's interview I marked a passage discussing teaching *The Giver* that shares some similarities with Amy's interview excerpt above:

> And at the time that this was all happening … there's some like really deep themes in that book. We're talking about euthanasia and all of that stuff and parental units and family and stuff. I mean, I did it OK, but I remember sometimes I felt pretty … Sometimes I was just. I would want to say something about my mom but I wouldn't because if I started talking about her I didn't want to make the kids feel uncomfortable because they knew she had just died.

This passage stuck out to me because Rachel cannot seem to find the right word to name how she felt and she makes this statement that she "did OK," presumably referring to how she handled the discussion or activity related to the text. This excerpt from Rachel's interview and the excerpt from Amy's interview were collapsed into a category described as "teachers were open to sharing experiences about their own grief in relation to text but that they would only do so when they felt they could retain control over their emotions." For a list of all the codes included after the conclusion of Cycle 2, see Table 3.

Table 3. List of Second Cycle Codes

Second Cycle Codes housed under this thematic statement (number of excerpts included in this code)
Teachers named crying as an emotion that should be controlled while teaching (63)
Teachers named emotions that they felt shame about in the context of grieving in school (40)

Table 3 (cont'd)

Teachers suggested a need to stay in control (17)
Teachers described moments when they were not in control (37)
Teachers stated school is not the place to be emotional (30)
Teachers identified religion outside of school was a place for seeking comfort (6)
Sharing loss meant minimizing my feelings for the sake of others (28)
My loss made me feel distant from colleagues and students (11)
Not wanting to share loss with colleagues and students (32)
Colleagues showed empathy, sympathy, or caring for me about my loss (13)
Sharing loss helped me process my grieving (13)
Sharing loss is gendered (17)
The curriculum was therapeutic for me or for students dealing with loss (25)
My personal experiences helped me relate to the text (10)
It was hard to get through a text because of a personal connection (14)
Textual connections are about processing the text, not processing the experience (45)
Hard to fulfill professional responsibilities while grieving (41)
Grieving requires a focus on the self which is counter to a teacher's focus on others(17)
I was not myself while grieving (10)
The role of the teacher (45)
Participant does not finish an explanation or the thought trails off (6)
Participant expressed competing thoughts or feelings within one turn of talk (4)
We need to do something positive with our grieving experience (1)
Reference to aspects of the research project (10)

Cycle Three Coding

In the third cycle of coding, I collapsed my existing codes into five major themes (see Table 4):[2]

Table 4. Cycle 3 Thematic Statements

Thematic Statement	Total Number of Coded Excerpts	Second Cycle Codes Housed Under this Theme (number of excerpts coded)	Example of Second Cycle Code

[2] I dropped the individual code "we have to do something positive with our grieving experience" because the code was only applied to one excerpt. I also did not include the category of codes in which participants referenced aspects of the research project (for example, sometimes participants mentioned talking to another person about participating in the project or would reference why they wanted to be in the project).

Table 4 (cont'd)

Teachers regulate their emotions in schools according to discourses about their roles as professionals	193	Teachers named crying as an emotion that should be controlled while teaching (63)	" [I] can't find a place to have a cry without somebody seeing me. It's just you can't really be yourself."
		Teachers named emotions that they felt shame about in the context of grieving in school (40)	"There were days when I would just be like, "Ugh. I can't do it today." Switch all the plans. Last minute, we're going to do something else more quiet. Even silent reading or something else. We're going to listen to the audio or something. That's when you feel like you're half-assing it."
		Teachers suggested a need to stay in control (17)	"[I was] trying not to delve into it too much because I didn't know how emotionally stable I would be while we continued the discussion… so I didn't talk to them about it."
		Teachers described moments when they were not in control (37)	"I remember that I went to the bathroom and cried (*laughs*) and had to pull myself together and that was one of the first of many times I had to do that."
		Teachers stated school is not the place to be emotional (30)	"People wanted me to get over it cuz they were like, time and place and this isn't it!"
		Teachers identified religion outside of school was a place for seeking comfort (6)	"It would've been the church that we did her funeral at where we grew up, and one of the nuns was sent me this, this grief, it was Stephen ministry Journeying through Grief stuff, which turned out to be really awesome and now it's like if I know someone who goes through that I actually share those with them."

Table 4 (cont'd)

Sharing loss with students and colleagues is as much if not more about attending to the emotions of others than attending to one's own emotions	114	Sharing loss meant minimizing my feelings for the sake of others (28)	"So, just those moments when I would just see the baby and just have to walk away. You fake excitement and, "Oh. It's so nice to see the baby. I'm okay. Yeah, it's okay." Then walk away and bawl your eyes out. You know. That happened more than once."
		My loss made me feel distant from colleagues and students (11)	"I struggled that year, I struggled with bonding with my students. I struggled with feeling like I developed decent relationships with them. I kinda closed myself off in a lot of ways."
		Not wanting to share loss with colleagues and students (32)	"I didn't want to talk about it. I didn't want it to be something my students knew about me."
		Colleagues showed empathy, sympathy, or caring for me about my loss (13)	"They were really respectful of what I was sharing, and it's not like I didn't expect them to be, but it was just kinda nice to just get some respect, especially in an environment where I didn't really feel like I had much of it from peers and colleagues. And also a lot of them related to me, so it kind of made me feel good."
		Sharing loss helped me process my grieving (13)	"People tried to be comforting, like colleagues, "Oh, I've been there." And you do find out that a lot of people have experienced it."
		Sharing loss is gendered (17)	"Crying. Hugs. You can just see in somebody's face when you tell them bad news. You know, a lot of kids, especially boys would be like, "Oh, okay. Oh, that sucks. I'm sorry." But then there's girls, some girls, who are just like, you can see the shock in their face. They're like, "I can't believe that," or they would come up with stories, "That happened to my mom." "That happened to my aunt." Or whatever, right?"

Table 4 (cont'd)

Responding to Literature in the English language arts curriculum is dominated by technical aspects of literature response	94	The curriculum was therapeutic for me or for students dealing with loss (25)	"I wanted to process my grandmother passing away and I wanted to memorialize it. So I wrote a story, it was called the fight that cancer won. And I gave a copy to all of my relatives and I recounted her funeral. So when we start the personal narrative assignment in here, I always share that story first. And I just tell my students, writing can be cathartic, it can be therapeutic. So if you need to use the assignment to deal with something, let's do it. Let's open the doors."
		My personal experiences helped me relate to the text (10)	"I mean, we have to have some sort of compassion for her, as a character, because of what she's been through, you know. So I was able to then be like, "I get it. I get where she's coming from now. You should too."
		It was hard to get through a text because of a personal connection (14)	"Yeah. I just remember struggling with *(pauses)* wanting to add, cuz you know you always want to add that personal connection and I was suddenly much more connected to it and I wanted to add to it, but I just couldn't."
		Textual connections are about processing the text, not processing the experience (45)	"We talk a lot about imagery with that chapter, that's a chapter that is, it's packed with a lot of imagery, that and it's also a chapter in *The House on Mango Street* that has this surface description of the family's hair that underlying it is really more a message about family love and family closeness. So we talk, it's mostly class discussion and reading and referring back to the text for what's the author, why is she talking about hair, what's she trying to say about her family, what in particular is she trying to say about her mother, why would she describe that her mother's hair smells like bread. So we have a lot of discussion and close reading in that chapter."

Table 4 (cont'd)

Teaching While Grieving a Death Required Navigating Multiple Competing Roles	113	Hard to fulfill professional responsibilities while grieving(41)	"I wish I could've been there but she didn't want me to. So I went to school on Monday, had sub plans to put together cuz I was gonna be gone Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday. I went—woke up in the morning, didn't put any makeup on."
		Grieving requires a focus on the self which is counter to a teacher's focus on others(17)	"You just have to keep going because it's not about you and that was always what I tried to tell myself, because its not, but at the same time like it has to be a little bit."
		I was not myself while grieving (10)	"You know I think it was probably, oh spring break, before I really felt kind of back to myself. It was really painful to kind of be, not just lost in grief the whole time. It was a rough year."
		The role of the teacher (45)	"I think as teachers we feel like we have to always appear like we've got it together all the time."
Sometimes teachers do not have the words to explain what it was like to grieve	10	Participant does not finish an explanation or the thought trails off (6)	"So the next fall comes around and I don't know."
		Participant expresses competing thoughts or feelings within one turn of talk (4)	"And I don't know. I always had this, I don't even know if this is true or not, but I always had this perception that maybe it was uncomfortable for the kids to hear my talking about it. I don't know. It's not like they ever gave me any indication, but I didn't want the kids to feel uncomfortable if I started talking about my mom's illness or her death. So I didn't talk to them very much about it. Just a little bit. It would just be like, you know, I just didn't. So."

Coding as Systematic Analysis

I engaged in three-cycle coding (Saldaña, 2016) to systematically look across data for patterns and emerging themes. Smagorinsky (2008) wrote about coding that it "makes evident the theoretical approach used to analyze the data by applying code names to segments of text … In this conception, coding manifests what theory would say about data and makes the researcher's theoretical perspective on the data corpus explicit, without precluding other ways of looking at it." (p. 399). In my coding, I was creating codes based on my research questions: What is it like to teach English language arts while grieving a death?; How does their experience of teaching while grieving influence their relational work as part of the curriculum?; and How does the loss experience interplay with English language arts curriculum?

Using these questions to guide my coding helped me to determine what patterns and themes were present in the data and related to my questions and theoretical understandings of teaching, teachers, curriculum and experience. However, engaging in three-cycle coding helped me to make sure that I would not *only* notice patterns that matched my experience as a teacher, an experience which I shared in Chapter 1. A systematic process instead helped me to stay open to what teachers said, guided by my overall interests in the relationships between teachers and students and my interest in understanding how teachers think about including aspects of their personal life as part of engagement with English language arts curriculum.

Looking Ahead

Now that I have explained my conceptualization of experience, introduced my participants, and described my analytic methods, I am now ready to share with you the overarching findings of my study of what it is like to teach English language arts while grieving a death.

CHAPTER 4: WHAT IT'S LIKE TO TEACH ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS WHILE GRIEVING A DEATH

In this chapter I will share the five thematic findings resulting from my analysis of participant interviews. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, these five findings developed *with* my reading of scholarship about teachers' roles and teachers' roles in teaching English language arts curriculum. What was very evident to me, though, early in my analytic memoing and coding process, was that teachers spent a great deal of energy regulating their actions and emotions at school during their grieving. While this finding is perhaps not particularly surprising, I'm most interested in understanding *how* they regulated their actions and what that might tell me about how teachers engage in building relationships with students and how they perceive of their roles as teachers, even during a time period of deep personal grieving.

Findings

Three cycles of coding resulted in five thematic findings answering the research question: What is it like to teach middle and high school English language arts while grieving a death?

Teachers regulate their emotions in schools according to discourses about their roles as professionals

The first theme is that teachers regulated their emotions in schools. In excerpts included in this theme,[3] teachers described controlling or regulating emotions by confining particular emotions to places outside their individual classroom.

One particular expression of emotion that teachers seemed to think was negative or at least not preferable in the context of their work was crying. Indeed, one of the largest subcodes included in this theme was that teachers regulated where they cried[4]. In many responses, teachers

[3] 193 excerpts are included in this theme.
[4] 67 of the 193 excerpts coded in this theme referenced the regulation of crying.

indicated that they went somewhere else away from their classroom to cry, such as a bathroom stall in the corner of the student's restroom or behind a closed car door in the parking lot. Sometimes teachers explicitly stated that the they were avoiding crying *in the classroom* by crying in other places. What's clear from these responses is that teachers assumed that crying was not something they should be doing in classrooms in front of students, though I'm not sure this rule would be found anywhere in a teachers' handbook.

I want to look more closely at Emma's discussion of her crying over her grief from losing her student to suicide. Emma explained that crying is something she tried to hide while in the school space:

> So we were doing silent reading. So I was just kinda sitting at my desk and I was able to kinda cry without people seeing me. Cuz my desk was in the back of the room. And I know one of the kids that came up to me, I just can't remember which one it was. But I know this kid walked up to me to tell me one of my little mistakes in the groups, and she just walked up and I remember just looking up and I was like, I'm so sorry *(laughs)*. Just crying, and I was like, I'll fix it. And then I just walked out. Cuz I didn't know what else to do *(laughs)*. So.

In Emma's account, I see that she somehow believed that she should not be crying while she is in her classroom working with students. First, she was "able" to cry only because her students were occupied doing silent reading. The alternative might be that Emma would be up in front of the class, but her response suggested that were that the case, she would not be "able" to cry. She also suggested that crying was allowable because she could do it "in the back of the room" "without people seeing me." When her student came to the back of the room to point out "one of [her] little mistakes," Emma described apologizing. This entrance of the student into the space where

she was crying prompted her to leave the room, "cuz [she] didn't know what else to do." This leaving of the classroom reminds me of the story I told in Chapter 1 about getting up and leaving when I didn't have the energy to deal with students after my uncle died. Whereas I waited until I crossed the threshold of the door to being crying, in Emma's case, she was already crying; but as soon as she was seen crying by a student, she moved her body outside the walls of the classroom.

Emma talked about regulating her expressions of emotions such as crying by controlling the spaces in which she would cry. Her control of what she perceived as negative emotions extended to students. Here Emma explained how she saw her role as a teacher after the loss of her student to suicide:

> I had my copies and I was supposed to give them their "copy room space" where it was like, "hey sometimes you need a break from your emotions, and if you wanna go talk about what happened you go to the media center, but I'm here just to give you some mindless, easy stuff to do."

Earlier in her interview, Emma described first finding out about her student's suicide in the office of an administrator after school hours. She told me that initially there was hugging and crying amongst the teachers, but that when given the opportunity, she had jumped at the chance to make copies because it would give her something to do besides cry. So here, Emma invoked her own example of "copy room space" to explain what she felt she was supposed to do as a teacher to provide for her students. She believed that she was supposed to give them "space," that having emotions existed separately and privately from the curriculum and space of the classroom. She named the media center as a place for students to have their emotions and identified her job as a teacher as creating a classroom that perhaps parallels what "the copy room" was for her when she first found out about the student's suicide: it was a space to stay

away from one's emotions or to stay busy doing something besides having emotions. As a teacher, she was supposed to keep moving forward with the curriculum, even if it was "mindless, easy stuff." For Emma, regulating her crying and her students' crying was related to what she saw as her job as a teacher. Emma regulated her emotions by moving her body or her students' bodies out of the space of the classroom.

Jerry, Rose, Rachel, Tiffani, Tara also talked a great deal about crying and finding places to cry that weren't their classrooms. Ann was really the only participant who did not talk about crying. In many ways, this focus on crying in interviews about grieving wasn't surprising. Maybe it's expected for people to cry when they are grieving and expected for people to try to hide that crying in professional settings.

Still, I can't help but think that there is something specific about teaching that makes these teachers feel a particular need to hide their crying. Here's what Tiffani told me about teaching while grieving:

> Mandie: Hmm. Do you think that teachers are allowed to grieve?
>
> Tiffani: In my limited experience, I would say it's discouraged (*laughs)*. I think you can on your own time. I think that's kind of why people wanted me to get over it, cuz they were like, time and place and this isn't it! Even if they didn't say that it was just kind of the feeling, and even just, I can't find a place to have a cry without somebody seeing me. It's just, you can't really be yourself. You can in certain ways but you're supposed to leave the ugly parts of yourself at home and deal with those later. That's how I've felt mostly.
>
> Mandie: What were some places that you went to cry?

> Tiffani: *(sighs)* The corner of, cuz our English office is kinda set up in a U shape, so go to the corner there and stare out the window for a minute. And I would go to the bathroom and go to the last stall and (*sighs*) sometimes I would just kind like hold it all in *(laughs)* and take a walk during my prep or something around the school and see what would happen. Sometimes I would cry, sometimes I wouldn't *(laughs),* but just, I don't know, that's what I would do.

Tiffani's account explored how the space of school, where she was a professional, was not a place where she could show the "ugly parts of herself." Similarly to Emma and to me, Tiffani also named spaces at school that she would go when she needed to cry, and characterized these spaces as being hidden from view. The "corner" of the English office seemed set away from the social space of school and the "last stall" was a private place where she could not be seen. Other times, she physically "h[eld] it all" in and her body became the private space for her emotion of crying.

Tiffani said, though, that crying was something she can do on her "own time." This comment makes me think about how when teachers are working in schools, it's not their time, it's work time. On the whole, work operates in this way for most adults. For the English teachers in this study though, I'm wondering about what it means for teachers to feel that they cannot cry because it's not part of the curriculum or their roles as professionals, even while they also simultaneously have a particular imperative on them as English teachers to actively bring in the personal as part of discussions of texts, or as part of writing or reading. Does the field of English language arts suggest that teachers should model for students how to make personal connections to texts but *also* suggest that teachers should not cry while doing so?

It also seems that particular expectations for teachers to care for children (Grumet, 1988) comes with an expectation for teachers to avoid burdening students with their negative emotions. However, this kind of regulation seems to thwart other efforts for teachers to build relationships with students through mutual sharing that builds trust. Teachers' efforts to work relationally with students seem undercut by the expectation that they also care for children above themselves, especially when that expectation causes them to suppress or regulate particular emotions while in the space of the classroom.

Responding to Literature in the English Language Arts Curriculum is Dominated by Technical Aspects of Literature Response

My thoughts about how teachers regulated their own crying and how that might have influenced their relational work with students leads directly into my next theme. For the English teachers in this study, responding to literature was not about responding emotionally or with one's personal connection; rather, it was dominated by technical aspects of literature response[5]. This theme of focusing on technical aspects of the text, such as identifying rhetorical devices or comprehending a plot line, surfaced across my interviews with participants despite recent work in English Education suggesting that young adult literature or literature might help students to talk through tough topics such as death and loss (e.g., Allen, 2001; Falter & Bickmore, 2018a).

[5] 45 out of 94 responses from teachers about curriculum indicated that they stayed focused on technical aspects of the text instead of talking about their loss. This finding does not mean that teachers never found the curriculum to be therapeutic in talking about their experiences losing a loved one. 25 responses out of 94 did reference texts in a way that suggested teachers processed grief by relating to characters or experiences in texts, though these relations were not always explored in the context of conversations with students. This finding speaks to what other scholars (e.g., Falter & Bickmore, 2018a; Falter & Bickmore, 2018b; Allen, 2001) imagine to be possible when teachers and students engage with the themes of death and loss through curriculum in English language arts classrooms. However, hesitations or refusals to engage in discussions about loss experiences and instead remain focused on the text were more common for teachers in this study. I focus my analysis on these responses to explain how and why teachers responded in this way.

Across responses, teachers in this study described how English language arts texts and writing activities often made them think about their experience of grieving or evoked an emotional response for them, but that they tried to hide those responses and focus on the text. Even when teachers encouraged students to make personal connections to the text, it was in the service of making meaning out of the text for a "schooled" understanding, not an embodied or affective response to literature.

For example, Tara, whose mother died suddenly of a heart attack, described hiding her loss from her students while engaging with reading *The House on Mango Street*:

> There's a chapter of *The House on Mango Street* that I had to really psyche myself up for. *(laughs).* If that makes any sense… it's really early on in the book ... That's my mother's hair ... and it smells like bread and when she makes space for you in the bed beside her, and it's still warm (*sighs*). So, yeah. I remember just knowing that was coming and, I think it probably is a good thing that I was still in that first couple of weeks after her death actually. That sort of numbness … I could push myself through reading that chapter and I was really worried that I was just gonna like I said before, lose it. I was really worried I was just gonna cry my whole way through that chapter and I had to do a lot of self talk about how to do it without yeah. Without crying … Yes, yes. And yeah. And I think it probably just was more about the text than any kind of personal connection to the text in that case.

I cry every time I read this response from Tara. In the car on the way home after this interview, I called my own mother just to tell her I loved her.

Tara suggested to me that this chapter from *The House On Mango* Street was hard for her to get through "without crying" because it was about a mother and daughter relationship. She

explained that even though in the book the mother does not die, the daughter describes the smell of her mother's hair and the warm spot left behind for a child when a mother gets up. Tara told me she realized she would never feel a warm space left by her mother again and that was what was so hard for her thinking about this chapter. Even though my own mother is still alive, I sometimes think about this story Tara shared with me when I have the chance to visit my mom. It makes me want to knock on her bedroom door as I did when I was a small child and have her move over so I can feel the warmth she leaves.

Yet, when Tara described teaching this book and chapter, she did not share her experience or her feelings about her mother with students. Tara ignored how the chapter influenced her and focused on "the text" to keep from being emotional. In subsequent turns of talk, Tara identified focusing on the text as comprehending the story and connecting the new reading to previously identified themes. She also connected the reading of *The House on Mango Street* to building students' understanding of narrative writing. She did allow students to write personal narratives that touched on thematic and emotional connections they may have to the text, but her experience and connection of her mother's death to the text was not something she felt was part of textual analysis with her students. I'm left wondering why lessons about writing personal narratives or textual analysis are more important than the one I learned from hearing Tara's story about remembering to value my own mother as often as possible. I know that for Tara, her focus on the text had something to do with her staying in control of her emotions and with her considering becoming emotional to be unallowable in the context of her role as a teacher.

Similarly, Rachel described feeling uncomfortable sharing her personal connections while teaching *The Giver* the year her mother died from a brain tumor:

> And at the time that this was all happening, and there's some like really deep themes in that book. We're talking about euthanasia and all of that stuff, and parental units and family and stuff. I mean I did it ok, but I remember sometimes I felt pretty, sometimes I was just like, I would want to say something about my mom but I wouldn't because if I started talking about her I didn't a) want to make the kids feel uncomfortable because they knew she had just died and b) emotionally not be able to finish the discussion. Does that make sense?

Rachel shared her personal connection with the text with me and later in the interview even stated that she encouraged students to make personal connections with what they read in class. However, she did not share her own personal connection while reading *The Giver* because it was a connection that might make students feel "uncomfortable." Rachel's statement indicated that the topic of death was not a personal connection that was shared as part of engagement with curriculum because of its taboo nature and because the teacher needed to stay in control of their emotions. Here Rachel's description of having a discussion relied on "finishing" the discussion, which seemed in conflict with having an overly emotional response. Emotional response was not part of having a discussion in an English classroom according to Rachel's description of her experience.

Teachers responded to English language arts curriculum and its intersection with their experience by focusing on the text instead of bringing in their personal connection. These responses raise questions about the purpose of reading in classroom spaces and the purpose of bringing in personal response. Which personal responses are ok to talk about in classroom spaces and which aren't? Why? Is it ok for students to share personal connections but not for teachers to do so? Are teachers and students only supposed to share personal connections when

they can keep control of our emotions? Why do classrooms have to be spaces of emotional control? How are making connections to texts limited if people in classrooms need to maintain emotional control while making them?

Excerpts from interviews in this study indicated that teachers defined responding to texts as comprehending the text and its themes and making some personal connections, but only when those personal connections did not cause the reader to "lose" control of their ability to discuss the text. This approach seemed in conflict with English Education scholarship that has suggested that the English classroom is a place for investigating humanity, including death and loss (Gorlewski, 2017).

Teaching While Grieving a Death Required Navigating Multiple Competing Roles

Across the responses I've already shared, one theme that's coming to the surface is that teachers had particular thoughts or emotions they dealt with as grievers that they were hiding for some reason when they engaged with students in their classrooms. This hiding brings me to my next theme: teachers navigated multiple competing roles while grieving. Based on the responses of teachers, I argue that some of the roles of teachers were in conflict with roles of grievers because grieving was perceived as a lack or loss of control. The teachers in this study perceived that it was expected for teachers to remain in control of students, the classroom, and curriculum.

Rachel's explanation about being a teacher showcased her belief that she should remain in control, even in the face of grief:

> And not feeling like you could even give yourself an inch. Like not just the, I mean we spend all day cutting the kids slack. And also trying to reach out to our coworkers, and you have to teach these standards, but I feel like I never cut myself any slack, you know? I think it's because I want, I feel like they're watching me, do you know what I mean?

> Those kids. It's important to them to see an example of, I don't know, it's hard because on the other hand, how real is it? If you always seem like you have it together? Do you know what I mean?

Here Rachel identified that she didn't cut herself "slack" as a teacher because the kids were "watching" her. She said that she needed to set a positive example for students by being in control. In the same turn of talk, however, she questioned how "real" that was and wondered about whether or not she was sending the right message to students that she "ha[d] it all together." Still, her response showed evidence that she felt pulled between her role as a teacher and her role as a griever.

Rachel explained that this responsibility of the teacher was different from responsibilities in other professions in her mind:

> And we don't, because the kids are watching your every move. You know? Whereas, and again, this is just, I have no experience in this, but I feel like if I were just sitting at a desk all day and I was having a really emotional day, I mean, who's gonna know?
>
> Mandie : mmhmm
>
> Rachel: Unless they come up and say something to me and I snap at them or whatever, but in the classroom, you are on … the spotlight is on you every day, all day. And that's a lot of pressure that I don't think that, again it's just a thought, but I'm not sure that other professions necessarily understand that.

Rachel's description of being "on" as a teacher evoked a performative quality. She even described teaching as having the "spotlight on you" as if she were on stage. She narrated that when she had to be "on" she was not able to have an "emotional day." Instead she had to perform "in the classroom." She indicated that perhaps such a performance would not be a daily

demand in a job where someone is "sitting at a desk all day." Rachel suggested that perhaps in other professions, she would be able to have "an emotional day" and it would not necessarily be noticed by coworkers, but that this kind of day was not possible as a teacher who needs to always be putting forth a particular self in front of students. Rachel's description of teaching reminded me that the power dynamic between teachers and students—that is, that teachers are watched and noticed by children who are under their authority—informs how teachers perceive their roles and in Rachel's case, informed how she felt about her ability to grieve within school walls.

Tara also talked about what it meant to be a teacher and explained that she would be grieving in the car as she commuted to work and then "switch" to "teacher mode":

> So forty minutes in the car is a lot of time to think. And it's a lot of time to think about what you're going through. That's probably an essential piece of information (*laughs)* that I left out. And so, then switching from thinking all the way here about how, and I don't want to say it was like every day was like that, but a lot of days were like that, and then kind of switching into teacher mode when I got here and having it be about instruction and talking about literature.

Here Tara referred to her time in the car on her commute, which she told me was often a time she would just cry and think about having lost her mom. For Tara, "switching into teacher mode" was about instructing students. I'm most interested in her description of "switching." To me, it sounds like Tara almost has two different personalities, that she was a griever in her car and suddenly became a teacher when she went into the building. While Rachel questioned whether such switching was "real," Tara talked about switching into teacher mode as if there were no other option.

Rose went as far as to suggest that focusing on herself and her grief would break her role as teacher because it would shift the focus to herself:

> to be positive and to be excited about the content and to be charismatic and to be concerned. Authentically concerned with other kids and their emotional well-being and not be so self-indulged with my own grief and what's going on with me. So to "be on" is just taking it off myself and putting it out into the world. My stuff doesn't matter. It's all about you now. So you have to be entertained. You have to feel safe. You have to feel loved. You have to feel like this stuff is super important. I would have to convince myself of that because right now it's not super important, right. There's too much other stuff going on. There's other stuff that's more important.

Rose indicated that "this stuff"--or the learning that was happening in her classroom--was "not super important" to her when she had other concerns, such as the miscarriage of her babies, but that her role as a teacher was to help her students to "feel like it [was] super important." Here Rose's role as a teacher superseded her role as a griever.

In particular, Rose suggested that part of being a grieving was being "self-indulged," something that Rose identified as being counter to the role of being a teacher. I see this concept of focus on the self coming up in other stories I've told so far in this dissertation. For example, when I walked out on my students during the flyswatter game, I was frustrated because I wanted students, for once, to consider that maybe I had more going on than dealing with all their questions and concerns. I wanted them to care for me while I was stressed. That was self-indulgent, and when I was pushed with just one more question from students, my patience waned, and I had to leave to cry. I was ashamed that it happened though, because I know it's not part of students' role to care for me. It's my role to care for them.

Similarly, I return to Emma's explanation of crying in the back of her room. When the student came up to her to point out "one of [her] little mistakes" she apologized. It's as if it were her job as a teacher to carry on and make no mistakes for students, even in the midst of her grief. The entrance of the student into her crying space prompted her to leave.

Across these two moments I've shared about myself and about Emma, we were dealing with our own emotions and needs, only to realize that to do so in the context of teaching was somehow not right. Rose seemed to name this experience. She said "My stuff doesn't matter. It's all about you now," even though she also admitted that there was other stuff going on for her in her life that was "more important." However, there's no space for Rose to deal with or process what's going on for her in the context of her role as a teacher.

The findings of this study suggest that teachers must negotiate their personal roles with their professional responsibilities and that for these teachers, that meant allowing their roles as teachers to take precedence over their grieving. I do not know that I think that teachers should become, as Rose suggests, "self-indulged with [their] own grief" in classroom spaces, but I do wonder about how schools might become places where teachers have some relief from this constant "on"-ness that the participants described. I'm worried that teachers aren't being taken care of. I'm concerned that the suppression of emotions and the guilt that teachers expressed over attending to their own needs contributes to burnout, depression, and anxiety. How can schools support teachers' well-being? What do schools risk when they don't?

Teaching While Grieving Means that Sharing of the Loss Experience is about Attending to the Emotions and Needs of Others

Although teachers certainly hid their losses at times, as Rachel, Tara and Rose discussed in the previous theme, teachers also sometimes shared their loss or had no choice but for others

to know about their loss. For example, Ann and Rose were both already pregnant and their students and colleagues knew about it before they lost their babies. Emma and Jerry both lost students, so others at school were aware of the deaths. In some cases, colleagues knew about a loss due to time taken off even when students were less aware of what was going on. In this theme about sharing loss, I'm going to look at what happens in the relational space between teachers and colleagues or between teachers and students during a grieving experience. Participants in this study certainly talked frequently about needing to assuage, respond to, or address the negative feelings or concerns of others about their loss experiences[6]. Across interviews, participants talked most frequently about two groups of others whose emotions and needs they attended to: colleagues and students.

Attending to the emotions and needs of colleagues. Rose described protecting the feelings of her colleagues when she told them she lost her baby:

> I came back in the fall and everyone was like, "Oh, did you have the baby?" Because they didn't know how far along I was. I would have to say over and over, "I lost the baby." People just don't know how to react. I mean, some people do. They're just like, "I'm really sorry." Some people just don't. You kind of just have to fill in those awkward silences with like, "Oh, we're doing all right though. We're probably going to try again," or people always try to tell you, "Oh, there must of been something wrong." Well, duh. I know there must have been something wrong then. You know what I mean? But after seven times or six times, you're like, "There's something wrong. It must be me," you know what I mean? They keep telling me it's not.

[6] Of 114 total responses coded in this theme, 71 responses referred to strain created for participants by the need to attend to the needs of colleagues and students often at the expense of their own needs.

Rose described having to "fill in those awkward silences" when others did not know how to respond to her terrible news. Rose put herself in the agentive position, suggesting she saw it as her role to be positive for them to remove any discomfort her colleagues might feel about her situation. Rose's explanation here pointed to how one of her experiences of teaching while grieving was to try to make things less "awkward" for those around her. She indicated too that others' responses and concerns were not particularly helpful. For example, she mentioned that some colleagues apologized for her loss, but during the interview Rose spent more time telling me about the colleague who suggested that "something must have been wrong then" – to which Rose responded "duh." Rose's telling of this encounter pointed to how insufficient colleagues were in helping her to feel comforted after her loss. Instead, it was the other way around:Rose was trying to comfort others.

In Rachel's accounts of her interactions with colleagues while her mother was dying from a brain tumor, she went so far as to explain that she had "trouble" talking with colleagues because of the pressure she felt to be positive for them:

> It was [would] just be a side comment or I'll tell you that it was: I often found myself having trouble in between classes because someone would walk by and express concern to me like I said and just you know, "How you doing?" Or I had been gone for a couple of days, "How's your mom doing?" I mean the answer to that was always not good. *(laughs*). So it was hard for me to—I wanted to say, "Ohh, she's doing better," but she never really was doing better and it was such a loaded question. I knew in my mind I didn't want them to feel bad. By my response. So I didn't want to say. But I also didn't want to lie and be like, "Ohh, great." Because it was never great. *(laughs).* So most of the time when that happened it was somebody expressing, or even kids asking me how

she was doing and it was just, I can't tell you for real because I probably will cry type of thing. But I wouldn't say that. I don't think I ever had to say that to them.

Rachel was concerned with making sure her colleagues did not "feel bad" and she explained that she could not be honest about what was happening in her life because she would cry. She suggested that she "wanted" to be able to tell colleagues something different about how her mom was doing, but that there wasn't any *good* news to report. She even told me that when it came to responding to colleagues she knew she couldn't "tell [them] for real." I don't quite know what to make of this comment from Rachel, though I completely understand it. On the one hand, I don't think that other human beings can always comfort us when we are dealing with something like what Rachel was dealing with her. On the other hand, I don't think it should be Rachel's burden to bear to have to censor her responses to her colleagues when they ask her how she is doing.

When my husband almost died in a car accident, for example, nothing made me more tired than thinking about having to go to the university campus, only to be stopped every 10 feet with queries about how my husband's health was progressing. What made me tired was not the general concern that others felt; I appreciated that concern. I was tired thinking about staying positive and only reporting good news, such as that he was out of trauma care and getting physically stronger each day. Sometimes, I felt as though it wasn't ok to be angry that he couldn't walk without a cane or drive, or that his face was scarred, or that we had a hospital bed in our living room because he couldn't get in and out of a bed. The trouble was, no one wanted to hear this kind of update. They wanted to show care for me, but only in the sense that they themselves wanted to be assured that I was doing ok, and that nothing more needed to be done on their end to help me.

Rachel and I were able to talk about this issue when she told me about her colleagues in the hallway asking about her mom, and I of course shared with her the experience I just shared above. We laughed at how horrible it feels to have to be positive when you don't feel like it and how backwards it seemed. I'm not sure that there is any real way to resolve this burden that Rachel (or I) bore. It's not that I think her colleagues should have necessarily responded differently than they did. I just worry about Rachel's well-being during this time and wonder if there were other ways that she could have been supported at school.

Teachers' descriptions of interactions with colleagues in school spaces suggested that teachers felt that they needed to remain positive for others and protect others from negative feelings. Although some teachers discussed ways colleagues helped them—for example, Rachel did tell me that Jerry recycled one of her stacks of grading the year her mom was dying to relieve her of the guilt she felt over it sitting on her desk—most excerpts including descriptions of interactions with colleagues suggested that teachers hid their true feelings to protect others. Perhaps the focus on others' emotions has to do with the professional space, but the narratives these teachers told suggest that the appropriate space for processing personal loss was not school, and that hiding their personal feelings at school in relationships with colleagues was difficult. I'm left wondering how interactions between colleagues might be more humane to those in grief.

Attending to the emotions and needs of students.

Teachers also discussed their role of attending to the emotional needs of students over their own needs. In these instances, the relational work of teaching was at play, and teachers seemed concerned about their roles as adults and authorities over children.

For example, Emma explained:

> It's like, you're in the middle of teacher mode and then you draw the connection. All of a sudden you're thinking about [the loss] and that's always hard. Or every time the train goes off[7]. In the middle of class. It's like, well I'm thinking about [the loss] but I'm not gonna say it because if they're not thinking about [it] I don't want to make them think about [it].

Emma's description pointed to the disconnect between her students and herself surrounding the significant loss of a student to suicide. She did not bring the topic up because she simply did not know what the students were thinking. Her thoughts went unspoken. I'm most struck by her comment though, that she "didn't want to make them think about it" if they weren't thinking about it already. This comment pointed to Emma's concern and care for her students; she wanted to protect them even if it meant her thoughts or feelings went unshared. Human beings hide thoughts from each other all the time and may choose to share at certain times and not others. In this case, though, I think Emma did not want her feelings to dictate what happened in the class because she saw the classroom as being about the students, not about her. My perception comes from Emma's comment that she was in "teacher mode" before she was reminded of the loss. Her language suggested that to be thinking about the loss of her student was a different mode from "teacher mode" and she chose to stay in "teacher mode" rather than bring up the loss to students.

Rachel talked about sharing a little bit about her experience and thoughts with students but only to a certain extent. She explained that she would share with them, but would also be careful about how much she shared:

> [I was] trying not to delve into it too much because I didn't know how emotionally stable I would be while we continued the discussion. So. And I don't know. I always had this, I

[7] Emma's student committed suicide by stepping in front of a train.

don't even know if this is true or not, but I always had this perception that maybe it was uncomfortable for the kids to hear me talking about it. I don't know. It's not like they ever gave me any indication, but I didn't want the kids to feel uncomfortable if I started talking about my mom's illness or her death. So I didn't talk to them very much about it. Just a little bit. It would just be, I just didn't.

Similarly to how Emma described her interactions with students, Rachel was unsure of what the kids felt or would want her to do. There seemed to be no understanding of how personal connections such as death should be talked about in this school space between teacher and students, and this uncertainty meant that Rachel kept her sharing at surface-level. She once again stated her need to stay "emotionally stable" while engaging in discussions in her classroom. In particular, Rachel didn't want to share anything that would make her students "uncomfortable."

Finally, I want to discuss an excerpt from Tiffani's interview about what happened when she shared a poem with her students about her mother's death during her teaching internship. The following narrative is long, but I think it's important to include all of her words to show in particular the contrast between what Tiffani wanted to do in sharing her loss with her students and what her mentor teacher perceived her to be doing:

Tiffani: And I kind of like wanted them to [know about my mom dying], not so that they could give me sympathy or anything, but just to kinda show that I'm supposed to be this person who's kind of the authority and should have it all together, but I don't. So it's ok if you don't and you can talk to me and they did so I'm glad that they knew.

Mandie: Hmm hmm

Tiffani: Yeah they all knew eventually.

Mandie: Mmmhmm. So you said you had written a poem and then students asked you about it. Do you remember any specific instance of telling your students "well, this is what happened?"

Tiffani: Not really. But I remember, not in relation to that specific poem, but like almost at the end of the year, I shared another poem with and it was more … personal and had more details than the other one did so, I think they realized what I was talking about because I could say I lost my mother, but then when you hear more … they really got what I'd been dealing with the whole time.

Mandie: Mmmhmm.

Tiffani: Which I don't know. I think my mentor teacher wasn't comfortable with that because he was uncomfortable with me feeling anything (*laughs*). I think he thinks that I was oversharing and trying to get more from them than they were capable of.

Mandie: What makes you think he was uncomfortable with it?

Tiffani: Uh. He told me that he didn't always trust me to make my own decisions because I was too emotional and vulnerable. Which made me feel worse, cuz I'm not trying to be vulnerable (*laughs*) and emotional. And I don't think that I ever made any choices that negatively affected my teaching. I did kind of pour myself into what I was doing once I was able to do that? Because that was like my way of trying to block out what had happened to me.

Mandie: Mmmhmmm.

Tiffani: I don't really think that was fair and I think that affected me more (*laughs*). Just knowing that people were walking on eggshells and thought I couldn't do my job.

This response from Tiffani where she felt that her mentor teacher did not trust her to share personal experiences with students was difficult for me in the original interview. After my interview with Tiffani, I wrote a memo about this particular story about her sharing the poem with her students about losing her mother and her subsequent description of her mentor teacher not approving of her decision to share with her students. In the memo I wrote:

> I'm frustrated that when Tiffani did decide to share something of herself, she felt judged for it by another teacher. I'm trying really hard not to make assumptions about her mentor, because I want to always give teachers the benefit of the doubt in their actions. I just worry, though, about Tiffani's experience. She has struggled so much trying to teach during this year. She has hidden her grief at every turn. When she finally does decide to give a little bit of herself, her students seem to get it, but then she gets shut down by a colleague. I just don't know what to do with this story

In Tiffani's account, she shared the poem with students and it seemed to be a positive experience. She felt she was showing something of her humanity with students and helping them to understand what she "had been dealing with." Yet, she also expressed that she realized her mentor teacher was uncomfortable with what she talked about with students. Tiffani did not think that reading the poem for students "negatively affected her teaching" but she did come to the conclusion that "people were walking on eggshells" around her and thinking she could "not do [her] job." Thus, it seemed that what Tiffani learned from sharing this poem about her mother's death with students is that sharing of herself was not doing the work of teaching. Tiffani's account made me sad especially because when Emma and Rachel worried about making students feel uncomfortable, I understood where they were coming from but also wished they felt that they could share more with students. Tiffani did choose to show students more of

herself, and it even seemed to have potential to be a positive moment for her and students. However, it could not be a positive moment, because she was judged by other teachers. This story reminded me that teachers regulate themselves in the service of working for children. It also reminded me that others in school buildings regulate teachers by judging them according to a particular vision of teachers as always in control while in the classroom, always focused on students, and as always in control of one's emotions. I think this kind of control from others makes it especially risky for teachers to share personal accounts in the space of the classroom.

Sometimes Teachers Do Not Have the Words to Explain What It Was Like to Grieve

Although I have certainly tried to understand teachers' experiences through analyzing their language, I still want to clarify that language was not always sufficient for participants in this study to explain the experience of teaching while grieving. Over the course of interviews, there were particular times when participants would stop making sense to me or simply burst into tears, unable to finish speaking[8]. In the examples for this thematic finding, I will include filler words and stops and starts as part of the transcription because the high incidence of filler words and of the stopping and restarting of sentences is one marker I used to assess whether or not a participant was struggling to find language to name their experience.

Here, for example, Rachel stopped and started when talking about her uncertainty in what to share with her students about her mother's illness and death:

> So hopefully none of them or not too many of them have had to go through that. But I was also going to say, I sometimes got the impression, I can't really tell you why, but I, I

[8] In total, I coded 10 turns of talk where the participant speaking simply trailed off or where the closing of the talk turn directly contradicted what they said in the beginning of that turn of talk. I think of these excerpts as places where language was not sufficient to express what the participant is thinking or for explaining an experience because the participant does not fully understand yet the nature of their experience.

> think, I think they were trying to, they didn't wanna, def—I don't, I don't, I, I. *(sighs)* What am I trying to say? I, It makes me feel like maybe they were, wouldn't talk about it because they didn't want to set me off. But not set me off. Because I never had a, I don't remember ever having a total breakdown at all in front of the kids, but I wonder if maybe they were just trying to be, what's the word I'm looking for, not gentle. But, mindful of what I had gone through. Does that make sense?

Rachel had trouble here explaining what she meant. Her struggle seemed in part to be that she simply was not sure why students were treating her the way they did, once they knew about her mother's death. She assumed that they were being careful around her, but then seemed to question whether or not that was a plausible reason for the way they treated her. Rachel's response highlighted that one reason it might be hard to understand and explain her grieving experience is that the rationale for students' actions was hidden from her. She was trying to name the relationship between her and her students the year her mother died, but the relationship cannot exactly be described. Perhaps educators spend a lot of time explaining what they do for students in terms of learning goals, but they spend less time talking about the relationships they form with students. Perhaps Rachel just remained unsure of how to navigate her relationship with students during a time period when she was the one who needed help, care, and love. Rachel really seemed to struggle here to explain what she thought and ended her sharing by asking me if her response made sense.

Other participants simply trailed off when they did not seem to be able to capture their experience. Here's Rose, talking about returning to school after losing her baby to miscarriage over the summer: "So the next fall comes around and I don't know." Even after I waited for more explanation from Rose, she did not find words. Instead, she cried, which can be heard on the

audio recording. It's as if there was something in the experience of returning to school without a baby that Rose just cannot find the language to voice.

When Rose started crying in this moment, so did I. At the time, and according to the memo I wrote, I thought maybe I was more susceptible to crying when Rose cried because I had known her for almost two years prior to this interview and wasn't really expecting to find out that she had lost six babies. I was upset that I had felt as though I knew Rose, and yet I didn't know this fact about her. She had only mentioned one miscarriage to me.

She always seemed so positive and loving and happy. It's not that I think people who have experienced deep loss can't be positive and loving and happy. It's just that it hurt me to know that Rose had this deep hurt she was dealing with and that I hadn't listened hard enough to know that. I think my crying when Rose cried was in some ways about this disappointment in myself and about my being so sad that I was unable to do anything to make the situation better.

However, I also think there was just something so powerful about this tiny sentence: "So the next fall comes around and I don't know." Rose was at a complete loss to describe showing up at school that fall. She was supposed to have a new baby then. She didn't. There's just nothing that can be said about that experience. Or, at least, there's nothing she can say to me.

When I got home from Rose's school, I remember thinking I should memo right away in keeping with my methodological commitments. What I did instead was collapse on my couch, pull my knees up to my chest and just lay there. I couldn't even cry then. I remember how badly my stomach hurt. I didn't eat dinner.

Maybe I should've mentioned before that I was six months pregnant at the time of Rose's interview. We talked about my pregnancy in the moments after I turned off the audio recorder. She assured me everything would be fine with my baby. She told me she thought I had the cutest

baby bump she'd ever seen. She encouraged me to take pictures, something I told her I did not want to do. She told me she was glad to have been part of the project and that she would see me again soon, she hoped.

Sometimes I still wonder if it hurt her to encourage me that day and assure me that my baby would be fine. I wonder if she felt as though she had to be positive for me and assure me that I wouldn't lose my baby but that really she didn't feel positive. But my heart hopes that she was honest with me. She moved me with her honesty during our prior conversation.

Although this project investigates the experiences of teachers teaching English language arts curriculum while grieving a death, there were some aspects of this experience that I didn't have the language to describe or full understanding to account for.

Teaching While Grieving a Death: Exhaustion, Hurt, Confusion, Worry

The examples I've shared with you in this findings chapter are meant to highlight the complex experiences teachers in this study had teaching while grieving a death. Teachers managed their emotions, worked to reconcile professional expectations with competing emotions, and endeavored to keep positive relationships with students and colleagues. Yet, at least in sharing their experiences with me, teachers also voiced how exhausted, hurt, confused, and worried they were while grieving at school. I refuse to let these stories of exhaustion, hurt, confusion, and worry be superseded by rhetoric that suggests that if we just read books about death and loss we'll all be able to heal from the things that hurt us. Instead, I'd like to make sure that these stories have a place in research literature. I'd like to make sure that researchers and educational stakeholders admit that teaching while grieving a death isn't easy and that there aren't easy answers about how to be in school spaces together when some of us are hurting.

First, the theme of teachers regulating their emotions by controlling the space in which they had those emotions reveals that the teachers in this study believed to some extent that they should not be crying or expressing emotions typically thought of as negative, such as despair, sadness, depression, or anxiety, within the walls of their classrooms or in front of students. Instead, the teachers in this study regulated the spaces in which they will allow themselves to express these emotions. I'm left wondering, how should teachers talk about death and loss in classrooms if they do not feel that they can have emotions or cry?

This question becomes more exigent for me when I look at what teachers said about the second theme, remaining focused on technical aspects of the text. The teachers in this study regulated their emotions in engagement with literature as part of English language arts curriculum. Even though teachers in the study had emotional responses to texts that connect their understanding of reading to their personal experiences with grief and loss, teachers made an effort to stay focused on other aspects of responses to texts with students. When teachers did consider sharing their emotional connections to texts with students, it was in the service of building relationships with students through vulnerable sharing. Teachers certainly did not expect students to care for them or ease their pain. Still, the regulation of specific emotions that resulted in crying indicates that teachers considered these emotional responses to be negative. Teachers managed these emotions and engaged in emotional labor to hide them. Some of the strategies that teachers used to do this emotional labor were leaving the room, hiding their emotions, not telling people at school about their experience, and faking how they felt to make sure others felt comfortable. Several teachers told me that they agreed to talk to me about their experience because no one had ever asked them about how it felt for them and they had never

told anyone. Because of this fact, I know that teachers were often hiding their experiences in the classroom.

In the third theme, it's clear that some of the limits teachers placed on themselves and some of the impetus for the emotional labor they do result from perceived expectations and roles for teachers that compete with expectations and roles for grievers. Teacher's identities as grievers were tied to individual needs for processing and healing from loss. Because of the individual nature of descriptions of grieving, teachers' roles as grievers seem incompatible with their roles as teachers, a role focused on others. This idea shows up in the fourth theme as well, where teachers focused on managing others' needs regarding their grieving through, for example, assuring others that they were keeping a positive mindset. These two themes echo the roles for teachers I set up in the second chapter as being concerned for children and caring for children above the self, a theme I will continue to explore more deeply in the chapter that follows.

Finally, the fifth theme points to the ineffability of grief. While the previous four findings attempt to elucidate something about the experience of teaching while grieving in conversation with teachers' perceptions of their roles as English teachers, this fifth finding points out that grieving was not a measurable or concrete thing. It was difficult at times for teachers in this study to narrate and name their experiences in teaching English language arts while grieving. Sometimes teachers' words trailed off in interviews as they were overcome with tears.

In sum, what it's like to teach English language arts while grieving a death is that it's putting forth a great deal of effort to hide one's emotions pertaining to grieving in the service of maintaining a particular professional role and particular relationships with others in the school building. The findings from this study indicate that teachers do not have significant space or time at school to process their personal grieving.

I'm a little worried that some might come away from these findings with the understanding that educational research needs to figure out how our teachers can deal with grieving better. I worry that such address would turn into professional development on "how to grieving while teaching" or "how to interact with your grieving colleague," and such instrumentalization likely would not be helpful.

Instead, I suggest discussion among school staff about the tensions their roles as teachers bring up for them regarding their mental health at school, especially so that teachers can see that they are not alone in their struggle to keep personal burdens out of their professional space. The participants in this study remarked in our focus group that it was especially meaningful for them to talk with other teachers who had dealt with significant losses while teaching, and although such interaction should never be forced, conversations about tensions between professional teacher roles and personal roles in the workspace opened up possibilities for teachers to reflect on their position and feel less isolated.

But more real than my concern about how educational researchers or other educational stakeholders talk to teachers about their grieving or address the difficulties they face is that I'm worried that focusing on how to help teachers "grieve better" misses the point of this study entirely. What I'm more interested in is understanding how the relational dynamics in school and among teachers, colleagues, and students influence how teachers feel while grieving and what teachers do to try to manage that feeling while grieving. I think that investigating teachers' grieving experiences in ways that account for the relational demands inherent to the teaching profession offers up possible answers for why just reading more books about death and loss might not be enough when it comes to humanizing our schools and making them places for healing. Teaching while grieving is more complicated than what teachers and students do with

texts, writing, reading, and discussion, and much of that complication comes from the relational nature of the job.

In the next chapter, I'm going to take a closer look at two of the five themes and put these particular findings into more direct conversation with scholarship about teacher roles I shared in chapter 2, as well as with some new scholarship about emotions that became particularly relevant due to the high incidence of excerpts where participants described controlling or suppression specific emotions.

I'm going to take a deeper dive into what teachers told me about managing their emotions as part of adhering to particular expectations or roles they perceived of as being attached to being a teacher.

CHAPTER 5: MANAGING EMOTIONS WHILE TEACHING AND GRIEVING A DEATH

In this chapter I want to explore more closely the ways that teachers regulate their emotions about grieving can be placed in conversation with the historical origins of roles for teaching I introduced in chapter two of this dissertation. Before I dive in, I want to clarify that in this chapter, I am not arguing that the teachers in this study are consciously identifying with particular roles for teaching set by discourses in the common school movement or by narratives about psychic rewards and caring for children. Instead I'm arguing that I see evidence that this rhetoric shows up in the way they talk about their roles as teachers and grievers.

I'm interested in understanding what happens when teachers, who operate somewhat unknowingly according to particular narratives about who teachers should be, also become grievers; that is, what are the roles of the griever and how are they or how are they not compatible with the roles of the teacher I've outlined in the introductory chapters of this dissertation? Before I move forward, I want to remind you of two questions I raised in chapter two: How does the imperative to reap psychic rewards play out when teachers are sad, depressed, and grieving? How does the moral imperative to care for children above oneself affect how teachers go about caring for themselves as grievers while they also teach and care for children?

Roles of Grievers

Before I explain how I'm thinking about the roles of grieving, I think it's important to clarify once again how I'm thinking about *grief* and *grieving*. Although I recognize that there is a broad range of scholarship interested in defining grief and grieving experiences, I'm not trying to define grief or grieving from an etic perspective. Instead, I'm interested in defining grief or grieving from an emic perspective—that is from the perspective of grievers in the study. In other words, I'm interested in the experience of grief in the life of the teachers in the study, not grief as

a universal human phenomenon. So, when I talk in this chapter about roles of grievers, I'm not trying to generalize grief to what it's like for everyone. I'm trying to think about what grieving is like in the lives of Rachel, Tara, Emma, Rose, Tiffani, Jerry, and Ann.

One text mentioned by multiple participants was Kübler-Ross and Kessler's (2005) popular book, *On Grief and Grieving,* in which the authors explain the five stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. The language participants used to describe grief matches the descriptions and stages described in Kübler-Ross and Kessler's text. For example, Tiffani described her depression as "worsening" while she's grieving. She also said that what was most difficult during grief was accepting or "realizing that life will never be normal again" after her mother's death. Ann and Jerry both explained that carrying the grief got easier with time because you have accepted that it happened. Rachel and Tara both described a feeling of "numbness" immediately following the deaths of their mothers during which they ignored emotions or felt no emotions. Emma described needing time to be sad and depressed before she could move forward after her student's suicide, and Ann and Rose both shared the anger they went through after losing their babies. Although these examples are not meant to be an exact mapping onto Kübler-Ross and Kessler's five stages, they show that the teachers' thinking about grieving was in line with popular scientific understandings of grief, such as the ones detailed in Kübler-Ross and Kessler's text. I think this text is therefore an appropriate starting place for me in terms of thinking about how participants in this study perceive of their roles as grievers.

What Kübler-Ross and Kessler (2005) made clear is that one role of someone who is grieving is allowing oneself to feel emotions, even emotions perceived as negative, especially when someone's grief is magnified because they are grieving the death of a loved one, a grief

that is “unmatched for its emptiness and profound sadness” (p. 29). Kübler-Ross and Kessler suggested that when faced with depression following a loss, one should “invite your depression to pull up a chair with you in front of the fire, and sit with it, without looking for a way to escape. Allow the sadness and emptiness to cleanse you and help you explore your loss in its entirety” (p. 22). This image of “inviting” depression in is already hinting at grieving roles as being counter to the teaching roles because it suggests that a griever has to be focused on one’s self, not on a relationship between one’s self and others.

Furthermore, Kübler-Ross and Kessler advocated for a griever to feel emotions. Displays of particular emotions, especially emotions perceived as negative, run counter to the role of the teacher as someone who needs to be in control of themselves. For example, although Kübler-Ross and Kessler encouraged grievers to cry, teachers need to maintain a professional and authorial role in front of the classroom and crying might diminish their ability to do so.

Kübler-Ross and Kessler actually explicitly suggested that trying to stay in control is counter to the grieving process: “Control covers painful feelings such as sadness, hurt, and anger … But control feels empty and harsh as it covers up more vulnerable underneath. Control gives us the illusion of safety” (p. 95). For Kübler-Ross and Kessler, feeling in control during grief is an illusion. While I’m not trying to prove Kübler-Ross and Kessler’s five stages are how everyone experiences grief, I can understand their argument that one has to “invite” negative emotions in and let go of control somewhat to move forward (p. 22).

For example, when my husband was in his life-threatening car accident, a police officer came to my door to tell me the news because for some reason the police on the scene of the wreck could not find contact information for me other than a home address. At the time of the police officer’s arrival on my front porch, there was no medical update on my husband’s

condition. All I had was news that he had been in a car accident and that I needed to call the hospital to request an update. While I was doing that, I should probably head there right away.

While I was processing all of this and trying to procure a ride to the hospital, the police officer was under an imperative to follow protocol, and had to ask me twice whether or not my husband had any children with me or with anyone else. I had to verbally answer "no" twice. All this question did for me was make me believe that my husband was going to die and that they were trying to find his next of kin. I remember looking right at the police officer, and asking completely helplessly, "Why are you asking me if he has children?" This question really caused me to panic.

When I called the hospital, they said they didn't have an update yet and they would call me back when they did. They also had to verbally confirm with me that my husband had no children. After getting off the phone with them with no answers, I spent the next hour or so imagining all sorts of possibilities, from my husband being in a coma to him dying in the hospital to him already being dead and they just weren't telling me yet. Because of the trauma I experienced in the short time after learning of his car accident, for months after the accident I would find myself compulsively checking the driveway or porch in front of my house for a police car or officer. I also would jump and panic anytime the doorbell rang, even when I was expecting it. A therapist asked me how I was processing my compulsion to check my driveway and porch multiple times a day and I said I was trying to stay busy. When I found myself at the window, I would put away dishes or just get moving doing something else. Everyone in my life was proud of how well I was keeping it together so I was trying to shove this little nuisance with the window in a dark corner somewhere.

My therapist's opinion was that I was trying to control my feelings and that once I accepted the fear I had felt, I might end up at the window less. After her suggestion, the next time I ended up at the window, I stopped busying myself. I confronted the thoughts in my head about my husband's accident. I cried uncontrollably for almost an hour. After about a week of crying uncontrollably at the window, accepting that I had been terrified of what might have happened to my husband, I did begin to feel better. I stopped ending up at the window 5 or 6 times a day. Now I only end up there occasionally.

Kübler-Ross and Kessler's (2005) conception of grieving suggested that the process of grieving and fulfilling roles as a griever is to embrace a loss of control. Yet, one role of the teacher is to exert moral and social control and to stay in charge of one's authority and emotions in an effort to build relationships with students. What happens when these two roles come into contact with one another in the context of teaching while grieving?

Roles of Teachers

While the role of the griever may be to feel emotions, the role of the teacher seems to be to control emotions in the service of reaping psychic rewards and putting children's needs above one's own. In order to explore the relationship between displays of emotions in school spaces and the moral imperatives on teachers to reap psychic rewards and put children's needs above their own, I draw upon scholarship exploring emotions and schools.

Emotions in school spaces.

Boler (1999) argued that "emotions are a site of social control" (p. 3) because emotions and the management of emotions work in the service of capitalism. Boler's (1999) interdisciplinary discussion of emotions and schools echoes Hochschild's (1983) claim that workers in service professions do emotional labor: they manage their emotions but make the

work required to manage those emotions invisible and so they are not necessarily compensated for their work. Boler (1999), however, specifically tied this invisible labor to schools: "Emotional intelligence serves capitalism at several levels. If workers and schoolchildren are conversational in emotional literacy, the labor system profits" (p. 76). Boler's (1999) work suggested that when teachers and students recognize which emotions are acceptable or not acceptable in social sites, the invisible labor they do to regulate their emotions serves to make sure social sites are efficient, and thus more profitable.

Boler (1999) also explicitly addressed the power dynamic inherent in the teacher and student relationship when the teacher has power over the student and when participation in the relationship is compulsory for both parties. Boler (1999) suggested that the power dynamic limits the possibilities for authentic emotional relationships between teachers and students:

> The second feature that prevents community and emotional literacies is quite simply, the power relations that define the educator's relationship to students as an authority figure. To preserve authority, educators maintain immeasurable isolation and distance from students … reciprocally, since I do have power over them, why should they make themselves vulnerable to me, particularly in the public forum of the classroom? (p. 139).

Boler (1999) argued that students do not have motivation to share vulnerably because teachers are not required to reciprocate that sharing. Boler's (1999) analysis echoes the unnaturalness of the teacher's relationship with students detailed by Hargreaves (1998a) and Cohen (2011). Boler's (1999) analysis ultimately pointed to the regulation of emotions as a function of economics—that people in school spaces regulate their emotions to avoid slowing down the social mechanisms in which they participate.

Scholars in education have also studied the ways that individuals in schools control their emotions as part of engagement with curriculum. Zembylas (2002) argued that teachers self-regulate in classrooms according to emotional rules, which "like other rules, delineate a zone within which certain emotions are permitted and others are not permitted, and these rules can be obeyed or broken, at varying costs" (p. 200).

Zembylas (2002) tied the adherence to emotional rules to emotional labor (Hochschild, 1983) because teachers may not actively make clear that they are following particular emotional rules. Instead, they may hide the work they do to manage emotions; sometimes, emotional rules are "disguised as ethical codes, professional techniques, and specialized pedagogical knowledge" (p. 2000). Taking Zembylas' (2002) conception of emotional rules and putting it in conversation with the grieving teachers in this study, I see that the teachers and their impulse to remain focused on technical responses to texts even when the text compels them to cry is an enactment of specialized pedagogical knowledge. The English teachers in this study seemed to operate on an assumption or according to a rule that governed the way they respond to texts, and responses such as crying or a loss of control of one's emotions were considered "deviant" (Zembylas, 2002, p. 200).

Emotions in Literacy and English Education.

In the field of English Education, Thein, Guise, and Sloan (2014) have built on Zembylas (2002, 2004) and argued that teachers and students regulate their responses to literature according to emotional rules. Thein et al., (2014) argued that it's not that teachers and students leave emotions out of conversations about literature; instead emotions are always circulating. However, certain emotions, such as anger and confusion, are regulated as emotions that aren't good to have in classroom spaces.

Boldt, Lewis, and Leander (2015) argued that emotions are often over-regulated in literacy classrooms, limiting opportunities for learning. "To the contrary, we have found that emotion and ambiguity leverage the academic practice of transforming texts and signs that is at the center of what we call learning the English/language arts" (p. 435). Boldt, Lewis, and Leander's (2015) work warned against regulating emotional responses to text. Taking this idea a step further, Neville (2018) argued that three young women of color used "outlaw emotions" in responding to reading the novel *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe* (Saenz, 2012) to resist White normed ways of reading.

Studies in education and English education have established that emotions are regulated in classroom spaces according to social norms but also according to disciplinary norms.

Emotions and this study.

During my process of three cycle coding, I began to notice that teachers in this study talked a great deal about their emotions and controlling their emotions, often in the service of fulfilling particular roles of a teacher, even when those roles are not explicitly named. Thus, in this chapter I will explore two of the five major thematic categories from the larger findings: that teachers regulate their emotions according to discourses about their roles as professionals and that teachers navigate multiple competing roles: roles as teachers, who should stay in control, and roles as grievers, who struggle to stay in control[9]. In these excerpts, I see teachers mobilizing language about controlling their emotions to make sure that they are seeming to reap psychic rewards from the relational work of teaching and to make sure that they are seeming to put students above themselves.

[9] These two thematic findings house 193 excerpts across the seven interviews.

Findings: Managing Emotions in Teaching While Grieving a Death

In reading the words of participants, I wanted to know: How do the teachers in this study describe their roles as teachers? As grievers? And, what conflict do these roles bring up for them as part of their experience teaching English language arts curriculum while grieving a death?

Being A Teacher Means Being "On"

The teachers in this study all made some reference to their perception of their roles as teachers as being "on" and being there for kids.

Rachel described being "on" as a teacher as putting needs of students first. She explained that she did not talk to her students much about her mother's death because she "didn't know that I would be emotionally be able to do that … And also continue to conduct class." Rachel's description indicated that being able to stay in control of emotions is a component of "conduct[ing] class."

Rachel said she struggled to put students first in her reading of *The Giver* with students during the year her mother suffered and died from a brain tumor because the themes of death, euthanasia, and aging in the book reminded her of her personal situation caring for and grieving the death of her mother:

> Rachel: I just remember struggling with wanting to add, cuz you always want to add that personal connection, and I was suddenly much more connected to it, and I wanted to add to it, but I just couldn't … Or if I did, I would make it very cursory. You know?
>
> Mandie : What do you mean, cursory?
>
> Rachel: Like "yeah, and when this happened with mom," this and this and this. Trying not to delve into it too much because I didn't know how emotionally stable I would be while we continued the discussion. So. And I don't know. I always had this, I don't even

know if this is true or not, but I always had this perception that maybe it was uncomfortable for the kids to hear my talking about it. I don't know. It's not like they ever gave me any indication, but I didn't want the kids to feel uncomfortable if I started talking about my mom's illness or her death. So I didn't talk to them very much about it. Just a little bit. It would just be like, you know, I just didn't.

Rachel's concern in her discussions of *The Giver* is focused on the disciplinary content she believed she was supposed to be helping students learn and on how students will feel. She's worried students would have been "uncomfortable" with her talking about her mom, even though she explained to me at length about how much the themes of the book related to her personal situation. She also explained that the teachers on her team always encouraged students to make personal connections to texts through journaling or in discussions. Yet, when Rachel had a personal connection to the text, "she just didn't" or "just couldn't" share. She's not sure where she got "the perception" that it would make students "uncomfortable," but she stays focused on "cursory" readings of the text. She kept her thoughts about euthanasia and end of life care to herself and described herself as "struggling" with it.

Rose also worried about keeping the needs and feelings of the students at the forefront of her teaching. Rose explained why she has stayed positive in her classroom through six miscarriages:

I felt like as a teacher you have a certain responsibility to ... Because they are children, for the most part. I mean, even though half the time I really see them as really, truly young adults. But maybe as mentor, as an adult, as somebody many of them look up to, like a mother, you have to be strong for them. Even if you feel like you're going to

> crumble, you have to show them that, maybe tell them that, "I feel like it was so hard to go through all this stuff, but here I am."

Rose's described that "as a teacher" she needed to stay "strong…even if you feel like you're going to crumble;" she focused on the relationship between her and her students more than her own needs or feelings of grief. Echoing Hargreaves' (1998a) description of the relational work being central to a classroom that isn't "barren," Rose worked to fulfill her responsibility in her relational role with students: she was a "mentor" and "somebody many of them look up to." She was "like a mother." Yet, she also told me, "You know, when you're a teacher and I bet a lot of people say this, you have to be on … sometimes you just don't want to be on." Rose here explained a pull between what she felt was her responsibility and what she wanted to do on some occasions.

Jerry also described an impulse to fulfill what he saw as his role as the teacher after the murder of one of his students:

> That was part of the difficulty was the you know, dealing with the situation like that. Everyone kind of letting out the emotion and supporting one another for an hour or so, but then after that, it becomes hard to keep focus, having that be the focus where some kids were kinda getting, I don't know, bored with making a banner, or whatever it was that we were doing. Just trying to handle it correctly, cuz you didn't want to be disrespectful to kids who are still struggling with it. You didn't want to brush it off and then move on to something else. I guess that was a difficult part of that.

Jerry did not want to "be disrespectful to kids who are still struggling with it" but also was not sure how to "handle" a class who was responding differently to death "correctly." Indeed Jerry described at length in his interview wanting to be "sensitive" to students' needs through

grief but also having trouble knowing how best to do that in a classroom where students needed different things. Some students wanted to "make a banner" while others were getting "bored" with that. He described the hardest part about teaching during the time following the murder of his student as "staying focused on a, the academic lesson instead of getting back into talking about [the student who died]." In Jerry's description, his personal grieving of the student was entirely separate from the teaching of curriculum. His description of teaching while grieving did not seem to mention much about his own emotions at first. Instead he was focused on his role as the teacher in the room.

However, when I prompted him to share with me how he was personally processing his grief, he described having trouble speaking at the memorial service and how he cried when sharing a story about the student. He talked about leaning on his wife and his faith. He talked about wanting to be able to "do something" but feeling stuck about what that something was. He told me about comforting students while they cried. He assured me that he never felt, though, that he was going to "break down" in the front of the class. In front of the class, in his role as a teacher, Jerry is focused on what he can do for students.

Tara described processing death and grief at school and separating her grief from her role as a teacher as being somewhat more difficult than was for Jerry:

> Well I think to some extent, all teachers have that sort of put on a smile, leave, leave what's happening at home behind, and put on a smile and do your job. Or, at least at times have had to do that. Sometimes we show maybe a little bit more of our personal side and our humanity, but that was a year that I just didn't feel like I could do that. But it was very much forced. (*laughs*). And I wonder now how much my students could just read that in me. That I wasn't really being myself. It was a rough year for students too I

> felt like. I struggled that year, I struggled with bonding with my students. I struggled with feeling like I developed decent relationships with them …I kinda closed myself off in a lot of ways.

Like Rose, Tara knew it was her role as a teacher to build relationships with students but she "struggled" because she "closed herself off" in the school year following her mother's sudden death. For Tara, to "put on a smile and do your job" created a conflict for her because she seemed to indicate that it meant hiding her humanity at times. She could only show that "personal side" sometimes. She worried that students could "read that in [her]." Her concern that her students could read her forced emotions indicated that she perhaps saw her role as being authentic emotionally with her students but that was impossible when the emotions were not acceptable for a teacher. In this case, unacceptable emotions seem to be "struggl[ing]'" or "being closed off." Tara seemed stuck between two impossibilities: she could not build good relationships with her students because she was not being authentic, but she could not be authentic in her relationship with students because her true feelings were not sanctioned within her role of the teacher. Tara described crying on her 45-minute commute home almost every day of that school year.

Emma echoed Tara's sentiments when she explained the hardest part about teaching during the year following her student's death by suicide:

> The hardest part was feeling, I'm trying to figure out how to put it into words. I don't know. Feeling like a disconnect or feeling unsatisfied with what I have to do versus maybe what I want to do right now. I'd rather just be able to sit down and talk about this, or ask some honest questions, or let them ask me some honest questions.

Emma pointed to the need for relationship with students, and the "disconnect" during her grieving left her "unsatisfied." She indicated that what might have resolved that dissatisfaction would have been to "sit down and talk about [the death] or to "ask some honest questions" but instead she had to, presumably, mask how she felt. Yet Emma also explained that there were consequences to her efforts to hide her feelings. She told to me that she would leave her room to avoid having her student see her cry and that one day her administrator sent her home because she was crying in the hallway. She described not wanting to attend school-wide meetings about how to handle the student suicide with students because it would not help her to feel better and would instead get her very upset and then she would have to go straight to her classroom to teach a class. The meeting would also take away her time planning in her room. Yet, she described the conflict in her role as being between "what she had to do" and what she "want[ed] to do" and her response clearly indicated that maintaining her role as a teacher superseded what she wanted to do as a griever in the space.

Ann described not just a struggle to fulfill her role as a teacher after her miscarriage, but what she interpreted as her failure to fulfill her role as a teacher after her miscarriage. She described not being able to turn an uncomfortable interaction into a "teachable" moment. This story is the hardest one for me to read because of how I see Ann in this story. I see her as trying to keep the focus on her students and not herself and I want to travel back in time to make this situation different. I'm going to include all of Ann's words here because I think the context is important to understanding how Ann sees her role as a teacher:

> Mandie: Do you remember a particular moment in your classroom during that time from October to March that sticks out as being particularly difficult?
>
> Ann: Yes. When the student shouted out that, "her baby died."

Mandie: And what was that like?

Ann: A little startling. It was startling because if he had said it about anything else, I would have been there as a coach to say, "Well, let's think about how could we reword that or what could you have done instead?" And that one just stung so much that I just left the situation alone. And the worst part is, the flowers were from his family. It's like, you knew that at some point there was a conversation at his house. You knew that his parents were sensitive enough to go out of their way and send flowers. And then he walks in right behind somebody who says, "Hey, what are the flowers for?" And he's like, "Her baby died." It's like, "Of all people, how are you the insensitive one in this mix? Those flowers are from your family." But he may not have known that, he truly may not have known that his parents had done that.

Mandie: So when you say you left the situation alone, what do you mean?

Ann: I didn't coach like I would have any other student in any other moment like, "Whoa, let's redo that, let's rewind. How could we say that instead? How about you, student B, are you forgiving, are you okay with the way he reworded it? Can we accept that?" Just constantly problem-solving and all of that. And that just was just didn't deal with it.

Mandie: So you just didn't say anything and you just kept on teaching class or just moved on?

Ann: I'm fairly certain, yes. Because I knew better than to open my mouth at that time. I kind of wanted to hit him in the nicest way possible. But I knew I couldn't address it maturely, so I just went on.

Ann understood that this student did not mean to be so hurtful in response to her miscarriage, yet it still "stung." She seemed to suggest that the response of a teacher in this situation would be to help the student to understand how they might have reframed their response that "her baby died." She described how she might have helped the student understand why the comment was hurtful as part of class discussion "in any other situation." Yet, in this situation, she knew she could not fulfill the role of "coaching" this student because she "knew better than to open [her] mouth at that time." Ann's narrative in particular clarifies for me that while the relationship between teacher and student can indeed be a rewarding part of the profession, the compulsory nature of this relationship sometimes leaves teachers in impossible situations. Ann does not want to make this student feel bad by expressing how hurt she is, yet she cannot help the student understand because she is so hurt, and revealing that hurt would have meant Ann stepping out of her teaching role of caring for the student above herself.

I'm particularly struck by how Ann described what she wanted to do and then immediately followed her description with what she did, which was more in line with keeping her role as a teacher. For example, she wanted to ask the student, "how are you the insensitive one in all of this?" but she "just left the situation alone" instead. Then she ameliorated the actions of the student when she said "he truly may not have known." Later, she described how she wanted to "hit him in the nicest way possible." She said she wasn't able to address the situation "maturely." I'm not sure why exactly Ann added "in the nicest way possible" to her statement that she wanted to "hit him"—maybe she sensed that it was inappropriate for a teacher to want to hit a student and so she wanted to make sure I knew that she would not actually hit a student. Or, maybe she means she wanted to hit him in a nice way. Regardless, in this description, what she wanted to do was "hit him," but she qualified her statement: she wanted to

"hit him…in the nicest way possible." She moved back into her role as a responsible adult and teacher by suggesting that she would not actually want to be mean to the student. She then faulted herself for not being able to handle the situation "maturely," again invoking the idea that her role is that of a responsible adult. In Ann's account, it's her reaction to the student she wanted to change, not the student himself or the comment. Yet, Ann's story reveals the somewhat false relationship between teachers and students. In another situation outside of school, Ann might have been able to express how hurt she was by the student's comment. Here she just moved on.

Inability to Fulfill Professional Responsibilities

It's clear that while teachers were grieving, they did not feel as though they were fulfilling their roles as teachers in terms of building relationships with students that foregrounded the needs of students. Across interviews, teachers also explained ways that grief impeded their ability to fulfill professional responsibilities associated with their jobs, because they were "not themselves" or unable to take care of themselves. I see the way teachers describe being "not themselves" as connected to an impulse to make sure they seem to be reaping the appropriate psychic rewards from teaching.

Several teachers emphasized not having the appropriate *time* to process their own emotions. They struggled to put their emotions aside, resulting in their feeling as though they did not have it together at school or struggling to fulfill responsibilities associated with their teaching roles.

For example, teachers described feeling that they were "not [themselves]" during the time following the death of their loved one. In looking at what teachers meant by this statement, it seems that teachers felt they were not their typical selves at school or at home, and that not being

oneself meant lacking something; that is, that during a time of grieving, teachers were not doing something that they felt they should be doing or feeling something that they should be feeling.

Rachel first told me that teaching during the year of her mother's decline and death from a brain tumor was like "being in a fog of grief." When I asked her what being in a fog of grief looked like, she described her experience at work this way:

> I'm pretty scatterbrained sometimes, but sometimes it was just almost an inability to get organized. Sometimes for me it was like "get it together," or it was so easy for me to get overwhelmed which is not normal … Grading was such a big thing. I was so exhausted. All the time … Because some of the times when I had to be home with her closer to her death, like before she was on hospice, I had to, she was in the hospital for extended periods of time because her lungs would collapse or something. Because it was lung cancer that metastasized to her brain. So, she had these episodes. I think it was the tumor where she couldn't function unless somebody that she knew was in the room with. So one of us had to stay in her, in the hospital with her all the time. And you can't sleep in a hospital. I mean you're in this chair and the nurses are constantly coming in and the beeping and stuff. So I would be at work for two days and then I would go home and then I would, or I would go to her house for two days and I would be in the hospital the whole time and I would not be sleeping and then I would come back to school and barely be able to function because I was exhausted and grieving. In me, it was just like exhaustion, all the time. And it affected a lot. It was like sometimes I just couldn't function.

Here Rachel indicated that she was not able to focus at work on tasks such as grading in part because she was so exhausted. Rachel also moved quickly from explaining the fog of grief in the context of work to a thorough explanation of what was causing her exhaustion. When I consider

all that Rachel was carrying –scheduling issues, lack of sleep, spending time away from school taking care of her mother and sleeping in hospital rooms, all the while grieving as her mother began to die and then did – I am unsure why Rachel would even have felt that she had to explain why she may have been exhausted at work. In this particular description, the way she just casually mentioned that her mother's "lungs would collapse or something" and that it would require Rachel to spend extra time caring for her mom revealed just how much responsibility Rachel was carrying during this year. Yet, she described "being in a fog of grief" in terms of what she was unable to do at work. She was unable to stay organized. She was unable to get it together. While she wanted to think of herself as being "normal" she doubted she was. Underneath Rachel's story for me is a desire to have it altogether, and to be able to show that she was feeling happy about her work, something she is just unable to do all the time while she is grieving.

Ann also described not being "normal" at work following her miscarriage:

> I'm usually very, I like to call myself humorous. A lot of humor comes into the classroom. In fact, I tell people that I teach middle school because we're at the same maturity level. We've got the same like mind is in the gutter, always thinking about the wrong stuff, turning things into like, "Oh, you said the wrong word or that word makes me think of something I shouldn't be thinking of." We just have a really good time in here. And I was completely preoccupied. Couldn't make sense of where I was supposed to be. I felt a lot of guilt. I wasn't sure if I had done something that provoked the miscarriage. I had never been in that situation and I didn't have anybody in my family, I didn't have anybody I was close to that had experienced it either. And in the meantime your hormones just absolutely plummet.

> And so, I went literally in a matter of those six days from my pregnancy hormone being at 13,000 to being at a thousand. And then I had to go for the weekly draws and make sure that the number was coming down, and down, and down. And it was between that 13,000 and 1,000 crash where I didn't even feel like myself. I just didn't, nothing was funny. And I'm sure the kids were fine. I didn't light anybody's hair on fire or kick anybody in the shins or anything like that. But my mind wasn't here, I guess is probably the best way to say it. And I needed time, but even my time away from work was time with my own children. There was not a serious break ever, just a grieving break.

Ann's account broke my heart and made me laugh. Similarly to Rachel, she accounted for what was happening to her that was causing her to be "not normal" in great detail. She explained that she wasn't herself because "nothing was funny to her." While Rachel worried about the burden she was on others, Ann told me that she thought the "kids were fine" but still she "wasn't 'there.'" Ann's characterization of herself as having a sense of humor and of her classroom as a place where "we have a good time" points to how, in typical times, Ann's classroom was a place where she built positive relationships with students. However, during this time of grieving, she did not believe she was able to do that. Because Ann experienced a miscarriage, in particular I'm reminded of Hargreaves' assertion that the relationship between teachers and students makes the classroom less "barren" (Hargreaves, 1998a, p. 322). I'm annoyed by Hargreaves' (1998a) assertion because for me, the classroom in this episode is a barren place for Ann: she's not getting the support that she needs and no one is caring for her at all. Yet, what she focuses on in telling me her experience is how she failed her students in particular moments of her own emptiness; her classroom became barren. There's something in Ann's experience that precluded

her from being in relationship with others at this time in her life, and it is not Ann's fault or responsibility.

Her account also, similarly to Rachel's, pointed to the experience of grieving as one where she had to take care of herself first. In Ann's case, she mostly described having to take care of herself physically after having her miscarriage. She indicated there was not really even time to process her emotions about the miscarriage. She faulted herself for not being able to be her humorous self in the classroom. She faulted herself for not appearing happy.

While many of the responses focused on how a teachers' self differed from "normal" during the initial period of grief, I also asked teachers to tell me about the most difficult thing about teaching during their initial period of grief, which was a more focused question asking teachers to comment on fulfilling work responsibilities. Teachers addressed the logistics of taking time off, logistics of telling colleagues and students about grieving experiences, the responsibility of creating sub plans, the emotional energy required to teach while one is not one's self, and the logistics of not having the appropriate time off to spend time grieving.

Tara, for example, explains how her mother dying right before school started posed particular challenges. She noted that "it's hard to be a teacher and take time off in the first month of school" and described "holding back tears" "during professional development days." She told me that she did not feel "like [her]self" "until Spring Break" that year and "it was a rough year." The effects of her grieving experience resonated well beyond the event, seemingly in part because she returned to work immediately. Tara indicated that it would not have been good to start the school year with her absence because the early days of school are important for establishing the routines and dynamics of a classroom.

Tiffani also started the school year immediately following the death of her mother, one week exactly to the day of her death. She expressed that her loss was “still fresh” and that she remembered feeling angry, that it just “wasn’t fair that I didn’t have any time” to deal with her grief before beginning her student teaching, something she “was looking forward to,” and instead she had to “deal with [her mother’s death]” too. Tiffani wondered whether different timing might have helped her to have a better student teaching year. Both Tara and Tiffani point to needing time to take care of themselves before they could take care of others in their role as teacher.

Yet, even though Tara and Tiffani suggested that different timing might have relieved some of the pressure, Ann struggled with taking care of herself even though her miscarriage occurred later in the school year when routines and relationships were supposedly already established:

> I was out for a couple of days, we had tried to schedule the procedure and then my body kind of kicked in. The doctor had an emergency, she canceled the surgery and my options changed drastically within the matter of 24 hours like what do I do about this. So conferences ended on that Thursday, I did not come to school Friday. Over the weekend, everything kind of physically happened and I could not come back. I was physically and emotionally drained, I took Monday and Tuesday of that week and came in for three days. That Wednesday, Thursday, Friday. You've got your hormones re-regulating and getting back to where they need to be and I knew I could not be here. I was not being nice to my students. I had not processed everything that had happened. So I went to my principal and I said, "I have never experienced anything like this and I don't know where to go. I don't know how long I can be gone." That was the week prior to Thanksgiving, so I took the rest of that week and then was gone until after Thanksgiving.

Ann explained that she had tried to plan to take care of what her body needed at a time that wouldn't affect school, but that her body had other plans and she ended up needing to leave school. She also talked about not being sure of whether she could be gone from school but knowing that she needed to be because she was "not being nice to [her] students." She later went on to explain that she was lucky to have had a good relationship with her administrator, to whom she could express her needs. She still explained, though, that there was "no break" to process the loss of her baby because she spent her time off attending to her physical needs. She told me in the interview she "still doesn't know why [she] lost that baby" and that she went from having her miscarriage, to taking care of her physical needs, to taking care of her kids at home, to being pregnant again and hiding it for fear of telling her students and then losing it, to the time of the interview, where she is 34 weeks pregnant and only "just now" can tell her husband, "I'm ready to accept there is another human in [here]." When I read Ann's story, I myself am in tears, unable to comprehend why work spaces need to be such dehumanizing spaces where adults cannot take time off to process deeply difficult life circumstances.

Emma described her struggle with going to work so soon in the school days following the death of her student by suicide:

> I think it was just the fact that the week was still going was really hard for me. I shouldn't complain that he died on a Monday. But I don't know, he died on a Monday, so you still had four days left of your week to go through. And I was just really tired. I was already always tired by the end of the week but then to have that on top of it. I remember waking up, I think even the night before. I was telling my husband, "I can't believe I still have two more days of teaching to get through before I finally get a break."

Emma described needing a break that she did not get. She described being tired and having to "go through" the week. She "finally" got a break at the weekend.

For Emma and for these other teachers there just does not seem to be an appropriate break for them to take time to care for their physical and emotional selves. The teachers describe their days at school following a death as lacking: they were not able to be themselves, they were not able to focus on relationships with students, they were tired, they were not about to fulfill their roles the way they normally would. The pattern in the way the teachers talk about processing a death while returning to their professional responsibilities is that they did not have enough time, that it was difficult, that they did not feel like themselves, and that they characterized themselves as lacking as people in being able to return to work.

Teachers who are grieving are less able to reap the psychic rewards of teaching: because they are grieving, they need time to focus on their own personal experiences, yet the institution of school and the role of the teacher does not allow for that time or space. Because they do not have that time and space, they are not necessarily happy or fulfilled at school.

Putting Children Above Oneself

Across their descriptions, teachers also indicated that should put their emotions aside to focus on students and on the curricular needs of students when they are at school. Rose stated that the focus should be "on the children" and Jerry searched to find something he "c[ould] do" for students following the death of their classmate. Rachel stated that part of her job is "being on" from the moment she walks in the school door and Tara explained that part of the job is to "put on a smile." Rose indicated that sometimes she doesn't want to "be on" but that "because they are children" it is her job to remain positive for students, to "be a mother." Ann explained that when a student makes a rude, insensitive comment about the death of her baby, she could

not respond at all because she was unable to turn it into a "teachable moment." Because she knew she could not respond in a way that made the comment into a lesson or in a way that distanced her experience from the comment, she did not address it at all.

These articulations of teacher's roles both echo the psychic rewards discussed by Lortie (1975) and Hargreaves (1998b) and also invoke discourses about the teaching role as a service profession requiring emotional labor (Hochschild, 1988). Hochschild's description of "shadow labour" as "unseen effort" (p. 167) defined service roles as being dependent on the hiding of one's own emotions or thoughts to promote the positive rewards of others. In this case, teachers tried to hide their struggles to make sure that students were not negatively impacted by their grieving experiences. Both Tara and Emma explained that the year they were grieving was a struggle because they felt distanced from students, and couldn't form the same bonds that they usually did, primarily because they were hiding their true feelings about a grieving experience. Tara and Emma both pointed to the expectation that teachers will build relationships with students, but they both struggled to do so when they were not able to be themselves. However, each teacher believed it to be inappropriate to burden students with their emotions about their grief.

However, with teaching, there seemed to be an added pressure that was not as present with the flight attendants in Hochschild's (1983) study. Like flight attendants, the relationship between employee and client is forced: flight attendants have an airplane full of clients and they cannot pick them, just as teachers have a room full of students. Yet, teachers evoked discourses of what it meant to be an adult caring for a child in their descriptions of grieving, a dynamic that was not as present with flight attendants in Hochschild's study. The discourse seemed to be, you have to get it together because you are an adult, and these students are children. Rose even

described having to "be a mother," a role in teaching described by Grumet (1988). The maternal and nurturing role of female teachers was about giving unconditionally, a role that Grumet likened to a mother giving her baby all her milk from her body until she is empty. That seemed to be the expectation these teachers felt about teaching: that they should give unconditionally, most especially because the students are young people and children. However, some of the teachers also seemed to be empty themselves, and trying to give anyway.

Thinking about these teachers' stories in conversation with Hochschild (1983) and Grumet (1988) brings out the negative side of these discourses about teachers and teaching. Hochschild suggested that for a job to require emotional labor, and not just emotional work, there must be face-to-face contact, and the emotions of the client must be more important than those of the worker. However, Hochschild had a third requirement, which is that the emotional labor required must be able to be exploited by an employee's superiors.

One might argue that administrators are not explicitly or directly penalizing the teachers in this study for not being able to put the children's needs above their own. However, as Grumet (1988) suggested, they do not really have to because teachers are regulated by discourses about what teachers should be. Teachers are supposed to be maternal and nurturing and examples of what is good and moral. Therefore, failing to be these things means that teacher's risk being immoral or not caring, or as Hargreaves (1988b) suggests, of creating "barren" classrooms. Furthermore, teachers are not getting paid to do this work of managing their emotions--no one needs to pay teachers for the added work they must do to "be on" because there is a cost for not doing so: being labeled as not caring about children.

The responses about what it means to be a teacher indicate that each teacher in this study expected to have positive relationships with students that are focused primarily on the students'

needs. The teachers' needs while grieving were described by these teachers as getting in the way of the job of being a teacher. Yet, the participants in this study were also unable to fulfill their own needs as grievers. They cannot process their emotions by "sitting with them," as Kübler-Ross and Kessler (2005) suggested. Instead they hid and suppressed emotions. They had to look on the outside as though they have it all together. The real tragedy in my view is that the teachers in this study felt ashamed and guilt-ridden while they struggled to keep it together. Not only is there an imperative on them to be a certain way, it's their fault when they aren't.

Shame and Guilt

Teachers in the study expressed shame and guilt over "not having it all together" during their time of grieving.

Rose shared:

> [Loss] has affected my teaching and I feel like I'm not doing my best work. That's for sure. My mind is all over the place. So sometimes it's not in my content. That's the part that struggles the most. So then I feel guilty that I'm half assing things. Sometimes I feel guilty about that in front of [my intern] too. Not in front of him, but I feel like I'm shorting him. Because I'm not fully here emotionally. My head's all over the place. So I just don't dwell on it. I do what I can do. I try to do my best. I try to give myself grace and forgive myself for not being perfect.

Even though Rose said that she tried to "forgive herself" the fact that she felt she had to "give [her]self grace" and that she described her teaching as "half-assing" it shows that she felt some guilt over the job she was doing as a teacher while she was also trying to process her grieving experience. She felt she was lacking something in her role as a teacher.

Tiffani explained her shame and guilt through her efforts to conceal her emotions during her grief:

> I remember that I went to the bathroom and cried (*laughs*) and had to pull myself together and that was one of the first of many times I had to do that *(laughs)* but, just having to conceal everything cuz there's kind of like a shame of not having yourself together.

Tiffani's impulse to hide her emotions revealed that she feels some shame about them. Indeed, she described a "shame of not having yourself together" at school. She described at length being concerned that her colleagues thought she could not do her job as a teacher because she could not "get over" her mother's death. She described worrying about colleagues thinking she did not "hav[e] [her]self together." Because of these worries, Tiffani hid her emotions.

Other teachers also hid their emotions. Each of the teachers' descriptions of where they cried during their grieving showed that the teachers felt they had something to conceal: Jerry cried at the memorial service, not at school; Tiffani cried in a student bathroom stall and staring out a window in the teachers' lounge; Tara cried in her car; Rose shut the door to her room and "bawl[ed] [her] eyes out; " Rachel did not wear mascara at school so no one would see the evidence of her crying; Ann moved on when the student yelled that her baby died because she knew she couldn't "be mature;" Emma went to the media center, or in one case, even went home. Each teacher tried to stay "on"--to stay focused on students and teaching. They struggled at times, but none of them wanted to "lose it" in front of the class.

Hiding Selves

In many ways, all of the teacher's descriptions of teaching of "being on" reveals that they believed that one role of being a teacher is hiding parts of oneself, in particular, as Tiffani described them, "ugly parts" of themselves. "Being on" for these teachers meant appearing to

reap psychic rewards from their jobs and caring for children above themselves. The parts of themselves that teachers hid were the parts that would reveal that they are not reaping psychic rewards and not caring for children above themselves. Teaching in particular seems to be a profession where one cannot publicly state that they are miserable at work or that they hate their job without being chastised for not caring about children.

While the teachers in the study were hiding particular emotions or incomplete work or exhaustion, they were trying to maintain an outward appearance that they were reaping psychic rewards of teaching. Reaping psychic rewards for these teachers looked like being in control of their jobs even through their personal trials, staying positive in the presence of colleagues and students, and enjoying their students, pedagogy, and content. Teachers expressed worry when they felt they were not able to do these things.

For example, teachers described needing to be strong lesson planners and passionate about their subject: Rose worried that she was not putting enough attention in her lesson plans and Tara focused on reading *House on Mango Street* with students even though it was difficult for her.

They described wanting to stay in control of classrooms and suppressing tears, thoughts, and emotions to do so. Jerry confidently assured me that he never felt like he was going to "break down" in front of students. Ann described just not addressing the student who hurt her. All the teachers found other places besides their classrooms to cry, ideally places that were also hidden from colleagues.

The teachers indicated that they felt they were lacking as teachers when they could not "reach" students in the same way they usually would during their grieving. Tara "struggled" to

build relationships with students. Rachel hid her thoughts about her mother for fear of making students "uncomfortable."

Teachers assured me that they *usually* would be worried most about the relationships with the young people in their room as well as colleagues. Ann and her students "usually have a good time." Tiffani worried about how her colleagues perceived her grief and wished the timing of her mother's death had been different. She thought if the timing had been different she would have been able to be more positive at work. Emma became frustrated because she wanted to build relationships with students but felt inauthentic because she did not feel she could share her true thoughts and feelings about the death of her student.

When teachers described what they should be doing as teachers, it was leading students in discussions of texts, taking care of responsibilities such as grading and sub plans, coaching students through "teachable" moments and "putting on a face" or "putting on a smile." They try to "associate" (Lortie, 1975), or build relationships with the students in the room in appropriate ways.

All of these teachers' efforts to fulfill their role in appearing to reap psychic rewards and care for children during a period of teaching while grieving were perhaps summed up by Tiffani's explanation when I asked her whether or not she thought teachers were allowed to grieve:

> In my limited experience, I would say it's discouraged *(laughs)*. I think you can on your own time. I think that's kind of why people wanted me to get over it cuz they were like, "time and place, and this isn't it!" Even if they didn't say that, it was just kind of the feeling. And even just like, can't find a place to have a cry without somebody seeing me, it's just you can't really be yourself. You can in certain ways but you're supposed to

> leave the ugly parts of yourself at home and deal with those later. That's how I've felt mostly.

For Tiffani, her "ugly parts" were her grief over her mother's death, her tears over her grief, and her inability to always control when those tears come. She animated the voices of her colleagues as saying "time and place, and this isn't it." Here Tiffani established that school is not the place for her to be a griever. She needed to be that person "on [her] own time." However, Tiffani noted that for her, grieving on her own time meant "not being [herself]" in the context of her workplace.

I do not see the shame and guilt that the teachers express in describing their efforts to fulfill their roles as teachers while grieving as particularly helpful emotions for them. What I'm left wondering about regarding teachers' hiding of emotions and of selves is what alternative possibilities their might be for teachers to feel less ashamed and guilty for having typical human reactions to loss and death. What space can schools make for grieving roles even within the context of teaching roles? I will try to address this question in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 6: "THERE'S NOT A MATRIX": WHAT TO DO

Takeaways

So, what is it like to teach English language arts while grieving a death?

What listening to these seven teachers' experiences of teaching while grieving has helped me to understand is that teachers regulate their actions and emotions according to their perceptions of who they perceive should be. In the case of these seven teachers, I see them perceiving their roles as adult professionals who should feel good about the opportunity to do the job they do and who should care more about children than themselves. I'm not necessarily suggesting that this goal is incorrect for teachers. What I am realizing, though, is that these perceived roles are distressing for teachers who are dealing with grievous losses and tragedies in their lives, and there is not a whole lot of space within the walls of school for teachers to process difficult life circumstances. What it's like to teach English language arts while grieving a death is to constantly negotiate and renegotiate roles and relationships. It's a little bit tiring. In many ways, the space of school isn't a particularly humanizing space within which to negotiate and renegotiate these roles because it's an institution driven by duties: duty to work, duty to help.

In some ways, I expected teachers in the study to hide their grief while at work, just as professionals in other settings might do while focusing on the task of the day. However, thinking in particular about specific characteristics of the teaching profession: the emotional labor involved, the power relationships between teachers and students, and the unique demands for reaping psychic rewards present in the profession showed me why the shame and guilt teachers feel in this study was particularly strong. In particular, the teachers feel guilt and shame over having feelings and not having it completely together every single moment.

I suppose it's possible that the teachers in this study would find people in schools much more receptive to their emotions and possible weaknesses were they to share a little bit more openly. I actually thought that might be one thing to encourage with teachers. However, the teachers in this study have helped me to better understand why they did not simply openly share with students about their grief and loss or often chose to hide personal connections to curriculum and instead focus on getting students through a text or assignment. While some might consider it plausible that in the field of English language arts, teachers might have the opportunity to share personal experiences as part of literature discussions or writing, the teachers in this study have too much at risk to always do so. They need to maintain professional roles that put them in control of their classrooms and themselves. They need to seem as though they are enjoying work. They need to seem as though they care about children. These needs stem from historical roles for teachers in the United States and from discourses about emotions and their intersection with power in relationships. Any break from a particular kind of teaching performance means these teachers risk being seen as unprofessional or even immoral.

Additionally, several teachers in the study told me that they were relieved to be back at school after a funeral because it was a sense of normalcy and routine that they no longer had at home. I respect that teachers want some kind of structure at work that does not involve them constantly sharing their personal lives in the spaces of school.

I'm still left wondering, though, how do we take care of teachers when it is a teacher's job to take care of students in the classroom? Some of the teachers in the study are wondering about this question too.

What Do We Do Now?

When I met with four of the teachers from this study to share some updates with them about my findings and my thinking for this dissertation, I also asked the teachers to share with me their reflection on their participation in the project. Some of the questions they wrote that they were left with were:

> "What now?"
>
> "What can we do to better to support teachers through grief?"
>
> "And as English language arts teachers, how can our content be a catalyst for a healthier position toward death, loss, and hard times?"

I think these questions are valid and difficult to answer, in part because there is no research-proven linear way to deal with and talk about grief while teaching because human beings all have different ways of processing their experiences and engaging with the classroom.

Indeed, in an exchange that was part of a focus group I conducted with Ann, Emma, Jerry, and Rachel, Anne and Emma warn against the creation of professional development or tools that prescribe how teachers should handle teaching while grieving:

> Ann: Well there's not a matrix. Like if you have a miscarriage, this is what you say to this age group. Or, if a parent dies, this is what you do.
>
> Emma: "In the event that you feel you need to cry, pursue option A." I'm like, "Yeah, well."
>
> Ann: "Please vacate to the last stall."
>
> Emma: "Don't just put your desk in the back of the room and hope that works."

In this exchange, Ann and Emma used examples from teacher experiences shared as part of the study to make the argument that prescribing teachers what to do is not the best option. Ann

began by referencing her own experience of miscarriage and admitted that there was no way to create a "matrix" that would tell you how to respond given your loss experience and the age group you teach. Emma picked up on Ann's idea, and referenced her own experience of finding herself crying in the classroom and needing to find other spaces to be in to cry. Ann joined back in, referencing Tiffani's experience of retreating to the last stall of the student restroom when she cried at school. Emma referenced yet another example from the study, her own experience being able to cry at her desk because it was in the back of the room and students did not notice her tears. Here both teachers shared examples of what teachers did in the study, but within Ann's original comment that there is no way to create a matrix, the examples become comments on how prescribing what to do in situations where grief and loss become part of the classroom space just will not work very well.

In response to this exchange between Ann and Emma, Jerry said, "Right. I wonder if ... I think we all agree there isn't a set plan of this is how you do it, but it's there. Might there be wrong ways to go about it? Is there some things to not do?"

Jerry's question gave me some ideas about how to express what the experiences of these seven teachers have taught me about what schools and English teachers should not do as part of responding to the challenge of teaching while grieving, and I will use Jerry's suggestion to frame this chapter.

Don't Diminish the Relational Aspect of Teaching

One thing that the experiences of these teachers make clear is that the relationship building required of teachers means that any discussion of how to take care of teachers who are grieving cannot just focus on what kind of curricular activities to do or what kinds of mental

health resources to provide. Addressing teachers' grieving requires acknowledging the relational duties ever-present for teachers.

Ann wrote an email to me at the beginning of her new school year. Here's what she wrote:

> Our professional development this year has been related to trauma-informed teaching and understanding where our students are coming from. There's still a huge emphasis on mental health awareness for our students which makes me wonder when someone will start to be concerned about the mental health of the teachers involved. Your work is much appreciated.

Ann's email reminded me that professional development that focuses on how teachers might help students deal with or heal from grief or trauma could be more meaningful if it were reframed to acknowledge that students are not the only people in school buildings with mental health issues. In some ways, this recognition would break down unfair assumptions that teachers are always the ones helping students. Teachers need help sometimes too, and students help teacher sometimes too.

I think any discussions of mental health or teaching about trauma should include specific attention to the relational work of teaching and how that relational work influences how schools might approach these topics. Although the students may be the focus of the "human improvement" (Cohen, 2011, p. 4) of schools, it's clear that relational work is part of classrooms and teachers are part of the equation when it comes to students' experiences in schools. How can teachers be concerned about the mental health of students when they are struggling themselves? How can we reconceive of our school communities so that everyone is working toward taking care of each other rather than teachers working toward taking care of students?

Thinking back to the major works published since 2017 in the field of English Education (Falter & Bickmore, 2018a, 2018b; Gorlewski, 2017), I'm wondering about how conversations about teachers use of curriculum to engage students in discussions of death and loss might be expanded to address complications to such engagement. For example, how might a teacher's personal circumstances influence how they use such curriculum?

Don't Expect of Students What Teachers Don't Do Themselves

To consider how teachers experience teaching while grieving is to consider the relational work of teaching and teachers' and students' roles in those relationships. However, when considering helping students, we must also consider the power dynamic at play in the compulsory relationship between student and teacher.

One concern I have about trauma-informed teaching focused on students, and not *both* the students *and* the teachers, is that there might be a lack of consideration of the importance of reciprocity in healthy relationships. For example, when English teachers believe that personal responses to text should be part of reading and writing practices in English classrooms, they should not fall into the trap of thinking that the sharing of personal responses is one-sided. To ask students to make personal connections to texts when teachers know there are some instances when they themselves hide personal connections is not ethical.

Literacy scholars have already argued for reciprocal exchange of stories as a way to share in vulnerability and to build trusting spaces for storytellers, especially those who have been marginalized (e.g., Dutro & Bien; 2014; San Pedro, 2015). San Pedro (2015) specifically questioned how he could respond to the stories of the students if he did not share his own stories as part of his relationship with young people in the school space. Teachers in this study of teaching while grieving sometimes hid certain aspects of their grief, though. Given this fact,

perhaps it's not fair to always ask students to share personal connections to texts as part of English class.

We should consider that if teachers experience schools as institutional spaces where sharing of personal stories, especially stories of grief and loss, poses risk to the teacher, that students experience schools as institutional spaces where the sharing of personal stories, especially stories of grief and loss, may also pose a risk. Dutro (2008) pointed to the risk involved in sharing:

> How risky then to read in public. Yet that is what is continually asked of students in literature classrooms. Much of the time this public reading will be an emotionally-neutral undertaking for us and our students. Indeed, the literacy methods textbooks that line my office bookshelves all contain tips on how a teacher might encourage students to make personal connections to literature. Yet sometimes, without the need of encouragement, a student will respond, will testify – with a trembling lip or a story that is difficult to hear – and those present will be called upon to witness. (Dutro, 2008, p. 425)

Dutro (2008) recognized that English teachers ask students to make personal connections to texts, but pointed out that those present "will be called upon to witness." Witnessing, for Dutro, involves responding: "to be effective witnesses for the testimonies of our students, we need, in turn, to allow them to be our witnesses – even when it is hard, even when it feels too risky" (p. 424). However, the experiences of the teachers in this study remind me that in the relationship between teacher and student, the power dynamic and compulsory nature of the relationship makes the relationship between storyteller and those witnessing somewhat precarious because the teacher has power over the student. Teachers should be thinking about experiences, such as grieving, that they do not feel comfortable sharing in the classroom space as a way of

recognizing that asking students to share is not necessarily ethical when that sharing becomes forced or expected.

This ethical concern becomes even more exigent when we consider that students come from different backgrounds and experiences, and that sharing poses greater risk for some students, as pointed out by Garcia and Dutro (2018):

> While shared vulnerability is crucial in building humane and anti-oppressive classrooms, the [2016 presidential] election spotlighted the ever-present and different ways vulnerability affects particular members of classroom communities who are already positioned precariously in the inequitable structures and histories of oppression within and outside of schools. (Garcia & Dutro, 2018, p. 379)

For some students, vulnerability has different risks for how others characterize them or interact with them. A black student who shares vulnerably is judged differently than a white student. Emotions expressed by men are judged differently than those expressed by women. Asking students and teachers to share of their personal lives is more complicated than simply opening up curricular space to talk about topics such as death and loss because the relationships between teachers and students within the institutional spaces of school are already sites rife with power negotiation.

In many ways, the methodology of this project relies on witnessing but has moved the act of sharing and witnessing outside the traditional time and space of school. Because I am a former teacher, we removed some of the complications that arise due to the teacher-student relationship. As Jerry, Ann, Rachel, Emma, Tara, Rose, and Tiffani shared their story with me, I listened to, and I witnessed, their experiences. I witnessed their experience by believing in how complicated their experiences might be and by sharing of my own experiences. For example, I told several of

them about leaving my classroom crying during the flyswatter game I shared in Chapter 2. All seven of them know that my husband almost died in a car accident during the year before this project began. We talked about our shared experiences as human beings grieving losses and deaths, but we had the opportunity to do so because we were there voluntarily. I think to expect the same kind of sharing and witnessing from teachers and students is somewhat shortsighted.

Don't Make Teachers Feel Alone in Their Experiences of Grieving

Teachers in this study felt considerable shame and guilt over what they perceived as their own personal failure to "be on" or "be [them]selves" during their grieving. In written reflections, after a focus group that brought Emma, Jerry, Rachel, and Ann together to talk about their participation in this project, they wrote about feeling relieved to see that other teachers felt the same way they did. Emma wrote in her reflection about her participation in our project that "Despite how it may feel, we are not alone in grief. We are connected across these experiences." Jerry wrote that he "liked being reminded of the shared struggle and responsibility that we have as teachers." Rachel wrote that the project "helped [her] feel more 'human'" because others had similar experiences, which made her feel "relief." For example, Rachel shared "[this project] helped me feel 'more human' around others and there is always some relief around that." Given that the teachers in this study felt "relief" from realizing they weren't the only ones with these experiences or the only ones struggling to maintain their roles as teachers through it, teachers would benefit from spaces that let them know they are not alone in their experiences.

While participants in this study have made it clear that they do not want professional development that reduces how to deal with death and loss to a matrix, I do think that bringing stories of teachers' experiences with grief and loss into conversations in education could break some of the silence around the topic. My hope would be that having stories of teachers'

experiences circulating would help teachers to feel less alone and less ashamed of their own feelings about their experiences. Specifically, there is a great deal of silence around teachers' mental and emotional health. The focus on mental health in schools is usually centered on students and how teachers can help students. However, healthy schools should attend to the well-being of both teachers and students. If teachers are ashamed to have emotional grievances to the point where they can't even share them, much less address them, we are a long way off from having schools where people can lift one another up and flourish.

Another way to create space for teachers is to make sure their experiences and voices are part of educational research. I have relied in this project on the words of teachers because I believe there is power in their naming their own experiences with grief and loss. Storying as research opens up spaces for both researchers and participants to listen to stories of others and to be heard (Kinloch & San Pedro, 2014). Furthermore, many scholars have argued that people come to make meaning of experiences through narrating experiences in story (Clandinin & Connelly, 2001; Van Manen, 2001). Many scholars have explored how the silencing of stories is a means of erasure (Baker-Bell, Butler & Johnson, 2017; Garcia & Dutro, 2018; San Pedro, 2015). Stories are silenced in particular when people are made to feel shame or guilt for their experience.

Brown (2012) described shame as working like termites in a house: "it's hidden in the dark behind the walls" (p. 189). Thus, humanizing research works to bring projects into the light. Projects in humanization through storying offer possibilities for creating spaces for emotions to come into the light when teachers and researchers share their lived experiences.

Do Not Approach Teacher Education In Ways That Reduce Teaching to Delivery of Narrowly Defined Content

As a teacher educator, this project has illuminated for me what's at stake when we ask teachers to engage with students in curriculum around difficult topics such as death and loss.

Because of my greater understanding of how the relational work of teaching complicates issues of power between teachers and students, I have begun to think about what this understanding means for my interactions with preservice teachers as part of teacher education. I do not think that teacher education should reduce teaching to delivery of narrowly defined content. Instead, discussion of content should always include a discussion of the relational aspects of teaching. One part of the discussion might be an explicit exploration of the ethics of asking students to share, especially surrounding texts and reading and writing in English classrooms.

I also see some room for improvement of how teacher education courses witness the humanity of preservice teachers. Teacher education courses might consider including as part of methods courses discussions of teachers' roles and the pressures of those roles as they intersect with personal life and pressure. Once a student wrote to me that she wanted a course in "how to teach when your life is a shit show" and I do not necessarily think she is far off. Space in teacher education classes to discuss the invisible work of managing one's emotions in classroom space will help new teachers to realize they are not alone in their experiences. It also brings conversations about emotional labor into the teacher preparation classroom. Making this concept visible will help new teachers feel less wrong about struggling with their own emotions while trying to teach.

In my teaching I have worked with preservice teachers on lesson plans and English language arts content and have asked them to reflect on who they are becoming as teachers. However, because of my scholarly commitments, I also believe that becoming an English teacher means navigating complex and varied roles. I want my preservice teachers to understand their navigation of their personal lives as part of their teaching selves. After all, even when teachers hide personal circumstances, teachers carry those personal circumstances into the classroom always.

I have encouraged my students to write about teaching experiences broadly through dialogue journals which are Google documents that I respond to regularly. When I ask my students to write these journals, I invite them to include a range of teaching experiences. They may write about a particular lesson and how it went. They may also write about relationships with students, small moments in hallways, interactions with colleagues, or their own personal life. I explain to my students that because they are human beings with personal lives, all of their human experiences come with them into the classroom and become important places for reflection. I also write back to them about my own life. Maybe I have felt that I have more freedom as a university educator than I felt I had as a high school teacher, but I've written with many of my students about my own battles with anxiety, both in my own journey to becoming a teacher and in my adult life around major events, such as my husband's car accident or my Dad having cancer. I've also written about how bad moods effect my teaching. I've shared about moments from my high school teaching that I'm ashamed of and would do over in a heartbeat if I could. I do not always feel entirely sure that I should be sharing in this way with my students, but I certainly don't want them sharing these kinds of things with me if I'm not willing to write back with equal vulnerability.

I think that preservice teacher education courses should consider creating space to discuss the teaching profession, including expectations for teachers and popular narratives about how teachers are or should be in schools. I think centering awareness of these roles and space for processing tensions that arise because of these roles is a healthy way to make sure preservice teachers know that these issues are not unique to them or their experiences.

Conclusion

I'm not suggesting that we should never talk about death, loss, and trauma in the classroom because it's complicated by teachers' roles, the relational work of teaching, and perceptions about emotions in school spaces. I'm suggesting instead that asking teachers to talk about death and loss in the classroom is more complex than simply providing teachers with tools and activities that address death and loss as part of curricular engagement. I'm also suggesting that the field of English Education has consistently discussed what our humanities-oriented field can offer for students without considering what it can offer for teachers. The field of English Education has much to gain from considering that teachers may also have difficult personal and life experiences that intersect with and become part of their engagement with English language arts curriculum, whether they feel comfortable sharing those experiences or whether they, like the teachers in my study, keep them hidden.

I do not necessarily think that teachers should be openly and freely expressing their emotions and thoughts about personal tragedy and loss within the space of school either. In fact, many of the teachers indicated that this situation is not one they want: Rachel after all described smelling the sweat of the middle school gym as a "relief" because it meant she could think about something other than her mom, for example. I do, however, think including teachers in conversations about trauma-informed teaching or in conversations about how English classrooms

could address death and loss might open up more spaces for teachers to think through some of their experiences instead of feeling like they have to brush them away or hide them because they do not realize that other teachers are grappling with similar issues because those others teachers are also brushing them away or hiding them.

It's also clear from this study that teachers' roles become more complex when relationships with students are strained by the constraints of institutions or narrow conceptions of curricular content. Perhaps we need to think of logistical ways to ease the professional burdens on individual teachers around leave time. Teachers are often working as the only adult in their specific classroom. What are some ways to remove some of the individual load teachers' bear from being the person in charge of their classrooms? I'm not entirely sure what's possible here, but I wonder if teachers felt less silenced in grief, and felt more comfortable in sharing their experiences, if that sharing might prompt a more collaborative teacher workforce, right down to teachers covering for each other's classes or redistributing workloads.

Crying in Coffee Shops

It's important to think about what these teachers' experiences can illuminate about how schools work and how teachers' roles influence what they do and how they regulate themselves in classrooms. It's important to consider how teachers' roles in relationships with students influence how curriculum gets taught or learned. It's important to think about what's at stake when we ask people to share openly within an institutional space such as school.

But I think it's just as important to listen to the stories of Ann, Jerry, Emma, Tiffani, Rachel, Rose, and Tara and simply allow them to move us. I know I have been deeply moved by each of their experiences and by their willingness to share those experiences with me. I've spent countless hours writing in public places, mostly coffee shops, with tears streaming down my

face. Their stories made me feel less alone about my own experience of feeling hidden in my classroom, even when I was in front of everyone in the room. Their openness somehow surprised me, even though I was hoping, or really, yearning for it.

When I think back on this project, I remember exactly how Tara's voice broke when she told me that she had to decide to say goodbye to her mother and how it made a lump swell in my throat. I remember the way Jerry's eyes looked when he told me was worried that people would thinking he was sharing his student's stories for the shock value of it. My heart broke. I remember laughing with Rachel about how neither one of us could wear mascara on the day of her interview because we knew we would cry. And then we did cry. I remember the way I felt completely wrecked after my interview with Rose. I mentioned earlier that after talking with Rose, I actually curled up in a ball on the couch, so moved by her story that I was rendered physically unable to move.

I know that their experiences matter because of the way I feel about them. I hope that something in their experiences matters to you too.

APPENDIX

List of Cycle 1 Codes

Not myself
Acting different than normal
Not all there
Not being able to remember things from the immediate time period of grief
Not allowed to feel
Grief and depression are related
Carrying the experience with you
Carrying the loss gets easier with time
Depression as loss of control
Grief feels like a squeezing
grief is a physical reaction
grief is loss of life as it was
life never being normal again
moments when you desperately miss the person who is gone
loss is still fresh
good situation logistically when needing to ask for time off
hard to take time off
logistics for taking time off
logistics of how to handle loss with students
administrator supported time off/out for grieving
not having enough time to process grief
other life stressors at the same time
sub plans
teaching soon after a loss
I couldn't make it a teachable moment
Being "on" as a teacher
Definition of teaching
It's not about the teacher, it's about the students
Setting an example for students of how to be in control
Teaching as a giving of oneself
focus on the kids
help students' process have a sense of normalcy
"do what you gotta do"
not focusing on yourself
not wanting to push too hard on death
teachers have to earn the respect and love of students
wanting to be able to do something
wondering what would have happened if I had been more open with students
telling personal stories to make points about why curriculum matters
students sharing about their experiences with loss through textual connection
sharing loss with students through poetry
writing as therapeutic
person story of literacy on the walls

thematic connection in text to personal experience
understanding how a character feels
hard to teach due to personal connection
character's experiences deeply impacts teacher
hard to bring up loss as a personal connection to texts
focused on myself
can't handle a passage
imagery
the news and nonfiction drains me now
getting through a passage
curriculum isn't supposed to bring in real issues
curriculum separate from processing loss
some texts don't connect to our experiences
I had a lack of connection to my experience
Keeping textual connections surface level
What "we" do in English classrooms surrounding texts
Feeling like people at school need to know
not knowing how to respond to others' concerns
colleagues focusing on the positive
apologizing for the impact of loss on others
staying positive for students
colleague thought I was oversharing
didn't want to make students feel uncomfortable
student comment related to loss is hurtful
helping students through loss
sharing loss felt disconnected from emotions
students needing teacher
telling colleagues stuff to get them off my back
distance in relationships with students
colleagues asking about new pregnancy brings up anxiety
colleagues not knowing how to respond to the loss
colleagues were walking on eggshells around me
I think students were being careful with what they said around me because of my loss
Feeling disconnected from students
Not being able to share all the details with students
Difficult because I couldn't share the loss with students
Isolating experience
not wanting to be around people
students don't realize the loss is effecting the teacher
"I didn't want it to be something students knew about me"
not sharing loss at first, but sharing later
not sure talking about loss in classroom was right
not comfortable sharing personal stuff
loss experience too personal to bring into classroom
not wanting others to ask about loss
not wanting to bring up loss for fear of it being for the wrong reasons

one loss is easier to talk about then another
helps that colleagues have had a similar experience
colleagues tried to be comforting
colleagues helped me out
students crying to show emotion in response to teacher's loss
other people related to my experience
hugs
knowing what someone else is going through
being toughted by others' care
sharing loss helped me feel less alone
sharing with students helps teacher to stay positive
students cheer me up
students care about the teachers' emotions
being open
close relationships with students
personal experience impacts how I see students
sharing loss one on one
showing humanity
being more sensitive with students
students feeling bad for the teacher
students not knowing how to react
students related to teachers' experience of loss
students wanting to know more about teachers' loss
talking about the loss with students was challenge
wanting to help students
miscarriage as a female experience
boys talk about feelings instead of showing them
girls described as crying and boys not
girls show emotional sympathy for teacher's loss
boys don't know what mascara is
motherhood
not relating to a male character as a female
women as caring
women process thoughts differently than men
thought trails off
not being able to teach
hard to be in front of a class
hard to get to school
overwhelmed by stack of grading
not being able to continue speaking due to emotion
not being able to control an emotion
breaking down
not emotionally prepared
not having it all together
feeling lack of motivation to "do" school
exhaustion

feeling bad about not being emotionally distraught at loss
feeling emotional
feeling emotionally bogged down
feeling flat affect/emotionaless
feeling guilty
feeling helpless
feeling impatient
feeling jealous
day of collective loss felt long
feeling like I'm living two lives
feeling numb/having no emotion
feeling relieved
feeling sad
feeling surprised
in shock
not having enough energy to emote
shame
wanting to take emotions out on the other
not breaking down in front of class
holding it together
needed to get through it
feeling in control
trying not to be emotional
trying not to lose it
crying when you have nothing left
crying and breakdown
crying as part of participating in interview
crying in front of students
crying is associated with "losing it"
crying is an expression of emotion and love
crying on the way to and from work
could not stop crying
not crying in front of colleagues
not crying in front of students
space for crying is not classroom
student crying in class
teacher cries in response to text
trying not to cry
loss was an experience that allowed me to talk to students about religion
religion helped me process grief
school as a distraction from grief
ignoring something related to loss
my emotions didn't matter
not knowing what to say
not wanting to open up something kids have experienced
had to step out of class due to emotion

school going back to normal
struggle to keep a sense of normalcy in school
teaching as a distraction from grief
we don't talk about grief and depression
small thing setting off emotion
holidays are hard
loss comes up in context of talking about weekend
professional development activity triggers emotion
anniversary of loss
student said something that sparks emotional reaction
train as uncontrollable reminder of loss
unintentional reminder of loss
talking to another research participant
getting teachers' voices heard
crying on recording
why they wanted to be part of the project
divorce
death of student by murder
death of student by suicide
death of mother
death of a grandparent
miscarriage
experience is traumatic
tattoo
watching a parent grieve a parent

Total number of codes in cycle 1: 206

REFERENCES

REFERENCES

Alexie, Sherman. (2007). *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*. New York, NY: Little, Brown and Co.

Allen, J. (2001). *Using Young Adult Literature to Help Adolescents Cope with End of Life Issues.* Westport, CT: The Greenwood Press.

Beckelhimer, L. (2017). One teacher's experiences: Responding to death through language.*English Journal, 107*(2), 41-46.

Baker-Bell, A., Butler, T., & Johnson, L. (Eds.). (2017). From Racial Violence to Racial Justice: Praxis and Implications for English (Teacher) Education. (Special Issue). *English Education, 49*(2).

Boldt, G., Lewis, C., & Leander, K. (2015). Moving, feeling, desiring, teaching. *Research in the Teaching of English, 49*(4), 430-441.

Boler, M. (1999). *Feeling Power: Emotions and Education.* New York, NY: Routledge.

Brown, C. B. (2012). *Daring greatly: How the courage to be vulnerable transforms the way we live, love, parent, and lead*. New York, NY: Gotham.

Clandinin, D. J. & Connelly, F. M. (2000). *Narrative Inquiry.* San Fransisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Cohen, D. (2011). *Teaching and It's Predicaments*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Collins, B. R. (2017). Associative mourning: Learning to lose through literature. *English Journal, 107*(2), 47-52.

Connelly, F. M. & Clandinin, D.J. (1990). Stories of experience and narrative inquiry. *Educational Researcher, 19*(5), 2-14. http://doi.org/10.2307/1176100

Dewey, J. (2007). *Experience and education.* Simon and Schuster. Retrieved from https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=JhjPK4FKpCcC&oi=fnd&pg=PA14&dq=%22rather+than+in+terms+of+some+divisive+ism%22+about+education,+even+such%22+%22of+John+Dewey+on+both+the+theory+and+the+practice+of+American%22+%22business+of+an+intelligent+theory+of+education+to+ascertain+the+causes+for+the%22+&ots=D9uF4nECGe&sig=CO0X8AbaprOH9o9zP9GKq6eDGA#v=onepage&q&f=false

Dutro, E. (2008). "That's why I was crying on this book": Trauma as testimony in responses to literature. *Changing English 15*(4), 423-434.

Dutro, E. (2011). Writing wounded: Trauma, testimony, and critical witness in literacy classrooms. *English Education, 43(2), 193-211.*

Dutro, E. & Bien, A.C. (2014). Listening to the speaking wound: A trauma studies perspective on student positioning in schools. American Educational Research Journal, 51(1), 7-35.

Eisner, E. The primacy of experience and politics of method. *Educational Researcher, 17*(5), 15-20.

Ekholm, E. (2017). Ethical concerns of using texts involving death in the English classroom. *English Journal, 107*(2), 25-30.

Falter, M. M., & Bickmore, S. (Eds.). (2018). *When loss gets personal: Discussing Death through Literature in the Secondary ELA Classroom.* Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.

Falter, M. M. & Bickmore, S. (Eds.). (2018). *Moving beyond personal loss to societal grieving: Discussing death's social impact through literature in the secondary ELA classroom.* Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.

Fecho, B., Coombs, D., & McAuley, S. (2012). Reclaiming literacy classrooms through critical dialogue. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, *55*(6), 476-482.

Frow, C. A. & Filak, M. R. (2017). "Give sorrow words": A lesson learned. *English Journal, 107*(2), 19-24.

Garcia, A. & Dutro, E. (2018). Electing to heal: trauma, healing, and politics in classrooms. *English Education 50*(4), 375-384.

Glesne, C. (2011). *Becoming qualitative researchers, 4th Ed*. Boston, MA: Pearson Education, Inc.

Granek, L. (2009). "The cracks are where the light shines in": Grief in the classroom. *Feminist Teacher, 20*(1), 42-49.

Greenwalt, K. (2016). *Home/schooling: Creating schools that work for kids, parents and teachers.* Rotterdam, The Netherlands: Sense Publishers.

Gorlewski, J. (2017). From the editor. The *English Journal*, *107*(2), 8.

Grief. Def. 1. (1989). *In Oxford English dictionary online* (2nd ed.), Retrieved from http://www.oed.com.proxy2.cl.msu.edu/oed2/00098728

Grief. Def. 2a. (1989). *In Oxford English dictionary online* (2nd ed.), Retrieved from http://www.oed.com.proxy2.cl.msu.edu/oed2/00098728

Grieve. Def. 1. *In Oxford English dictionary online* (2nd ed.), Retrieved from http://www.oed.com.proxy2.cl.msu.edu/view/Entry/81401?rskey=cngZdI&result=2#eid

Grumet, M. (1988). *Bitter milk.* Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press.

Hargreaves, A. (1998a.) The emotional politics of teaching and teacher development: with implications for educational leadership. *International Journal of Leadership in Education, 1*(4), 315-336.

Hargreaves, A. (1998b.) The emotional practice of teaching. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 14*(8), 835-854.

Hill, M. L. (2009). Wounded healing: Forming a story-telling community in hip-hop lit. *Teachers College Record, 111*(1), 248-293.

Hochschild, A. R. (1983). *The managed heart : Commercialization of human feeling*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Johnson, M. I. (2014). *Young adult novels about death and dying: Arguments for reading about terminal illness and suicide* (Master's thesis, University of Wyoming). Available from PorQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (UMI No. 1617541143).

Kaser, S. (1998). *Literature study: A way to understand our lives.* New Advocate, 11(1), pp. 67-9. Retrieved from http://ezproxy.msu.edu.proxy2.cl.msu.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.proxy2.cl.msu.edu/docview/62400662?accountid=12598

Kinloch, V. & San Pedro, T. (2014) The space between listening and storying. In D. Paris & M. Winn (Eds.) *Humanizing Research: Decolonizing qualitative inquiry with youth and communities.* CA: Sage Publications.

Kirkland, D. (2011). Listening to echoes: Teaching young black men literacy and the distraction of English language arts standards. *Language Arts, 88*(5), 373-380.

Kübler-Ross, E. & Kessler, D. (2005). *On Grief and Grieving: Finding the Meaning of Grief Through the Five Stages of Loss.* New York, NY: Scribner.

Loofbourrow, P. T., & Peterson, A. (1999). The Quarterly of the national writing project [Abstract]. *National Writing Project*, *21*(1), 167. Retrieved from http://ezproxy.msu.edu.proxy2.cl.msu.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.proxy2.cl.msu.edu/docview/62249491?accountid=12598

Lortie, D.C. (1975) *Schoolteacher*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Loss. Def. 1. *In Oxford English dictionary online* (2nd ed.), Retrieved from http://www.oed.com.proxy2.cl.msu.edu/view/Entry/110406?rskey=aZGGth&result=1#eid

Major, G. C. (2017). Everything's Jake. *English Journal, 107*(2), 31-34.

Moore, J. (2002). Death, grief, and loss in classrooms: Teachers' stories. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (New Orleans, LA, April 1-5, 2002).

Moss, D. M., Reilly, S., Burdman, C., & Parsons, S. (2005). Walk a mile in their shoes: A day in the life of professional educators. In Moss, D.M., Glenn, W. & Schwab (Eds.) Portrait of a Profession: Teaching and Teachers in the 21st Century. Westport, CT: Praeger.

National Center for School Crisis and Bereavement. (2010). Children and Bereavement: How teachers and schools can help. Retrieved from: www.cincinnatichildrens.org/svc/alpha/s/school-crisis/guidelines-bereavement.htm

Neville, M. (2018). "Sites of Control and Resistance": outlaw emotions in an out-of-school book club. *English Teaching: Practice and Critique, 17*(4), 310-327.

Noguera, P. A. (2008). *The trouble with Black boys: And other reflections on race, equity, and the future of public education*. New York: Jossey-Bass.

Nguyen, H. T., & Scott, A. N. (2013). Self-concept and depression among children who experienced the death of a family member. *Death Studies, 37*(3), 197-211. Retrieved from http://ezproxy.msu.edu.proxy2.cl.msu.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.proxy2.cl.msu.edu/docview/1509080010?accountid=12598

Ochs, E. (1979). Transcription as theory. *Developmental pragmatics*, *10*(1), 43-72.

Ochs, E. and Capps, L. (2001). *Living narrative: creating lives in everyday storytelling*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Oehlberg, B. (1996). *Making it Better: Activities for Children Living in a Stressful World*. MN: Redleaf Press.

Parker, B. A. (2009). Losing Jay: A meditation on teaching while grieving. *Feminist Teacher, 20*(1), 71-80.

Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Piotrowski, E. S. (2017). Liberatory grief: The one truly serious pedagogical problem. *English Journal, 107*(2), 66-71.

Reese, W. J. (2005). *America's public schools: From the common school to 'no child left behind.'* Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

Saldaña, J. (2016). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications.

Reid, J., & Dixon, W. (1999). Teacher attitudes on coping with grief in the public school classroom. Psychology in the Schools, 36(3), 219-229.

Rowling, L. (1995). The disenfranchised grief of teachers. *OMEGA, 31*(4), 317-329.

Sáenz, B.A. (2012). *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe*. New York, NY: Simon and Schuster.

Saldaña, J. (2016). The coding manual for qualitative researchers. Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications.

Salinger, J. D. (1951). *The Catcher in the Rye*. Boston: Little, Brown.

Seidman, I. (2006). *Interviewing as Qualitative Research, 3rd Ed.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Shafer, G. (2017). Dealing with and writing about death. *English Journal, 107*(2), 35-40.

Smagorinsky, P. (2008). The methods section as conceptual epicenter in constructing social science research reports. *Written Communication, 25*(3), 389-411.

Snyder, T.D., de Brey, C., and Dillow, S.A. (2016). Digest of Education Statistics 2014 (NCES 2016-006). National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC.

Spalding, E. & Calton, B. (2017). Teaching Night: Humanizing the story of the Holocaust. *English Journal, 107*(2), 59-65.

Thein, A., Guise, M. & Sloan, D. (2015). Examining emotional rules in the English classroom : A critical discourse analysis of one student ' s literary responses in two academic contexts. *Research in the Teaching of English, 49*(3), 200-223.

Trauma. Def. 1. (1989). *In Oxford English dictionary online* (2nd ed.), Retrieved from http://www.oed.com.proxy2.cl.msu.edu/oed2/00098728

Trauma. Def. 2a. (1989). *In Oxford English dictionary online* (2nd ed.), Retrieved from http://www.oed.com.proxy2.cl.msu.edu/oed2/00098728

Ulin, R. (1980). A treatment of death in the classroom. *English Education, 11*(3), 162-68.

Ungemah, L. D. (2017) The absolutely true diary of my accidental (and successful) unit studying death. *English Journal, 107*(2), 53-58.

Van Manen, M. (2001). *Researching lived experience*. Cobourg, Ontario: Transcontinental Printing Inc.

Zembylas, M. (2002). "Structures of feeling" in curriculum and teaching: Theorizing the emotional rules. *Educational Theory, 52*(2), 187–208.

Zembylas, M. (2004). Emotion Metaphors and Emotional Labor in Science Teaching. *Science Education, 88*(3), 301-324.