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WRITING THEIR LIVES: EXPLORING THE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN

HIGH SCHOOL ENGLISH TEACHERS' LIFE HISTORIES AND

WRITING INSTRUCTION

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by

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Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

the University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Texas at Austin

May 2008

Dedication

For Crystal, my rock

For Noah and Toby, my joy

Acknowledgements

First, I want to thank Dr. Randy Bomer for giving me opportunities to watch and learn and then to experience and practice. In research, writing, and teaching, you offered me a healthy balance of guidance and freedom, which allowed me to learn a lot about myself in all three areas. You also taught me to trust my instincts, which will serve me well in my future academic life.

Thank you to my committee for contributing to the success of my dissertation project. Colleen, thank you for your wisdom during my first year as a doctoral student and for always challenging my thinking. I would not be where I am today without your help. Jim, even though we did not have the opportunity to interact much during my graduate work, your insights during my dissertation process were much appreciated. Jo, you showed me how to balance rigor and pleasure in academic work, a lesson I will carry with me forever. Diane, you taught me how to talk about complex academic work in a way that does not exclude people outside of our strict discourse community, which is one reason your classes are so crowded; I hope future students will say the same thing about me someday.

Joan and Tom, you are still the answer when people ask me who has been the most influential on my teaching life. Thank you for being such positive mentors in my life all

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Publication No. _____

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2008

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This multiple case study (Merriam, 1988) examined the relationships between the life stories of six high school English teachers and the ways those teachers think about and practice writing instruction. Multiple interviews were conducted with each participant over a period of two months, during which the participants shared stories from their lives and talked about themselves as writing teachers. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, broken into story units, and analyzed using the constant comparative method (Strauss and Corbin 1990). Classroom observations and artifacts served as additional forms of data.

The perspective that teachers' personal narratives can contribute to an understanding of the complex influences that help shape their beliefs about teaching and their resulting classroom practices was used to inform the analysis (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000; Goodson and Cole, 1993).

Findings suggest that the participants frequently perpetuate or act against specific past writing experiences in educational settings by intentionally adopting or avoiding the practices themselves as part of an ongoing process of identity construction; the participants' beliefs about the essential nature of writing ability influence the ways they think about their students and interact with them during writing instruction; and the predominant themes in the participants' life stories are consistent with the professional teaching identities they construct in their classrooms. This study suggests a strong relationship between the life stories of high school English teachers and their beliefs and practices, which indicates a need for university-based teacher-educators involved in English education programs and inservice professional development to empower teachers to reflectively, intentionally, and effectively integrate the personal and the professional in writing instruction.

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Chapter One

Introduction

Writing Teacher Beliefs and Practice: My First Research Experience

As a high school English teacher for many years, I often found my beliefs and practices to be at odds with many of my colleagues, which sparked curiosity about how teachers come to believe and practice the things they do, especially when it comes to teaching writing. I generally practiced a writing workshop kind of structure in my classroom, with a lot of time devoted to in-class student-driven writing, student-student and student-teacher conferences, and short direct instruction through mini-lessons. My colleagues incorporated writing instruction in a variety of ways, from class-length lectures to lessons from the grammar textbook to reading literary criticism (for many high school English teachers, "writing" is analogous with "response to the literature we just read" – I remember sitting in a tenth grade level meeting as a first-year teacher sharing our writing assignments for the grading period and being the only teacher with student-directed writing the first six weeks; other than "how was my summer" kinds of essays the first couple of days of class, the rest of the tenth grade teachers were assigning analysis / interpretation essays for *Julius Caesar* and *Of Mice and Men* and chapter homework from the grammar book as their "writing instruction" for the first grading period).

As a beginning teacher, I did not understand how teachers at the same school with the same district expectations and yearly professional development could engage in such different classroom practices. I believed my practice to be consistent with the district's

goals and policies, in addition to being what I believed at the time to be commonly understood effective pedagogy. As I gained experience through the years and developed relationships with my colleagues, my initial shock at the differences in practice wore off somewhat, and even though I worked hard to be collegial and to engage in conversations about specific practices, I primarily focused on my own teaching. I remained curious about the disparity in the beliefs and practices of the teachers in my department, though, and I carried that curiosity with me as I moved out of the secondary teaching world.

Several years as an administrator provided me with opportunities to observe a variety of teachers in a different context since I was acting as an official appraiser. On one hand, it was a unique opportunity for me to actually observe teachers with different patterns of practice. On the other hand, though, most of the classes I saw were much more artificially constructed because of the nature of official administrative observation – the teachers knew I was coming and generally prepared lessons they believed would generate the types of interactions and activities that would encourage me to assign high scores on their evaluations. In many cases, the practices I observed during these appraisal visits were not reflective of the practices the teachers consistently implemented in their daily instruction. Despite the artificiality of the situation, however, I still saw a variety of classroom practices among the high school teachers, which allowed my curiosity about the nature of teaching practices to continue to simmer.

After several years as an administrator, I moved into full-time doctoral work, where I finally had the opportunity to explore through research the differences among teaching beliefs and practices I had experienced as a teacher and an administrator. In a secondary

curriculum class, one of the assignments was to conduct a small-scale study on some element of secondary curriculum or instruction, and I knew immediately what I wanted to explore. I reflected on my experiences and worked to develop research questions for my study. As I began to think anew about what might currently account for the differences in teachers' beliefs and practices, I had suspicions that in the current system, high-stakes testing might have a strong influence. Given my own experience and interests, I also assumed that having different teacher education programs could account for a lot of the disparity.

Drawing on research about teacher beliefs / practices in relation to teacher education (Feiman-Nemser & Buchmann, 1985; Grossman, Wilson, & Schulman, 1989; Smagorinsky, Cook, Moore, Jackson, & Fry, 2004) and high-stakes testing (Gordon & Reese, 1997; Hoffman, Assaf, & Paris, 2001), I developed a plan to explore the nature of high school English teachers' beliefs about writing instruction and the relationship between beliefs and practice. I developed an interview protocol that included the following basic themes:

1. What do you believe about teaching writing?
2. Where do those beliefs come from?
3. How do those beliefs translate into practices in your classroom?

Despite the open nature of the questions, I expected my participants primarily to talk about their educational backgrounds and the current high-stakes testing environment. I

conducted single interviews with four teachers in the same district, and when I analyzed the data, I found several themes across the participants, primarily in the areas of frequency of writing, student choice, and individualized instruction, and numerous individual ideas about specific classroom practices. Each teacher acknowledged some of the things they learned in their teacher education programs, and they did admit that some of their practices were necessitated by departmental and district policies as a result of high-stakes testing issues, but to my [then] surprise, all four teachers explained how their personal experiences were the most significant factor in the ways they thought about and practiced writing instruction. Each participant proceeded to tell multiple stories from her life about events that had affected the way she taught writing.

One teacher, for example, described her elementary experiences in a small, strict private school. Each classroom had a "wall of fame" and a "wall of shame" on which the highest and lowest quality pieces of writing were displayed, respectively. This teacher explained that for two years in a row, she frequently had had work displayed on the "wall of shame" while not once having her work on the "wall of fame." She largely attributed several of her own practices to this negative experience: she had an "author's wall" where students were required to self-select work to be displayed at least once per grading period; she always wrote at least three times as many positive comments as constructive comments on student papers; and she made phone calls to the parents of each student at least once a grading period to specifically share positive things about their writing.

Another teacher, Sarah, talked about her daughter's struggles with writing. She explained that for the first ten years or so of her career, when students came to her in the

tenth grade, she would give them writing assignments she believed were clear – "Write an essay analyzing the theme and structure of one of the poems we read in class today. Make sure you use textual examples to support your analysis." She would ask if there were any questions and would then let them work. When some of the students struggled with the assignment, she assumed they had not read carefully, did not put in much effort, or simply were not "good" writers. When her daughter had a teacher in middle school with similar practices, however, and began to struggle with her writing assignments because she just did not understand what she was supposed to do, something clicked in Sarah's mind. After extensive conversations with her daughter, she realized how important models are for some students. Since then, she has incorporated the practice of reviewing a model essay with the whole class each time she makes a new writing assignment, and she said that most of her students generate more effective essays as a result.

Since I conducted those interviews and submitted the report for that class, I have continued to reflect on the relationship between the stories from teachers' lives and the ways the teachers think about and practice writing instruction. After numerous talking sessions with friends and instructors, dozens of books and articles, and a great deal of self-reflection, I decided that pursuing this research area for my dissertation project was a worthwhile endeavor.

Significance of the Study

Writing about the various aspects of teachers' personal and professional lives – beliefs, practices, stories – and the relationships among them has suggested that researchers first must recognize the fluid, contextual nature of teachers' lived experiences. Britzman

(1991) said that learning to teach "is a time when one's past, present, and future are set in dynamic tension. Learning to teach – like teaching itself – is always the process of becoming: a time of formation and transformation, of scrutiny into what one is doing and who one can become" (p.8). In her study of preservice teacher development, Britzman suggested that beliefs and practice are not simplistic or static, but are instead constantly in flux, that at all levels of the teaching profession, the identity, beliefs, and practices of teachers are complex intersections of each teacher's history and present context. She further argued that too often, "institutional biographies" are the norm when researchers examine the contexts in which teachers live and work. Instead of giving attention to the individual lives and experiences of teachers, teachers' lives and careers are often relegated to the stereotypical, institution-confined stories that permeate popular thought. "Unlike autobiography which is very idiomatic," she said, "institutional biographies are made from defined roles and functions (such as teacher or student), have routines that occur regardless of the person, and offer definitional guides or coercions (measures of right and wrong that preclude situation and context) that one must confront or live" (p. 1). A meaningful study of teachers' lives must move away from this kind of static biography and must instead consider a more complex and authentic context.

Cole (1991) echoed that claim, suggesting that teacher knowledge is a "multiplicity of personal, social, cultural, and political influences" (p.185) and that educational research must work toward being more contextual; that is, teacher studies must include attention to the "texts" of the participants – personal, social, and professional – and when we think about how teachers develop beliefs about teaching and their classroom practices, therefore,

we must recognize the importance of lived experience as individually situated within each teacher's socio-cultural history.

When individuals enter the teaching world, they come with well-developed beliefs about teaching and learning that influence their ongoing educational experiences, including the relevance of their teacher education courses and the vision they have for their own teaching careers (Bullough, 1994). These individuals have spent much of their lives in an "apprenticeship of observation" (Lortie, 1975) as students in schools, which has contributed to the ways they think about how teaching and learning should happen. Their personal experiences in various schooling settings have influenced "the development of a body of values, commitments, [and] orientations" toward teaching and learning (Calderhead & Robinson, 1991, p. 1).

In addition to the context of formal education, numerous other interrelated contexts exist within the personal and professional lives of teachers that can influence teachers' thinking about teaching and learning. Scholars have suggested that individuals learn from experiences in a variety of out-of-school settings (Kirshner & Whitson, 1998; Lave, 1988) and have recommended that researchers examine teachers' beliefs and practices through the integration of situational, biographical and historical information (Britzman, 1991; Hargreaves, 1994). Ball and Goodson (1985), for example, suggested that it is likely that "teachers' previous career and life experience shape their view of teaching and the way [they] set about it" and that "teachers' lives outside school, their latent identities and cultures, have an important impact on their work as teachers" (p. 13).

A growing body of research explores the relationships between teachers' lived experiences and how they approach teaching, much of it focusing on teachers' attitudes toward teaching in relation to their personal educational histories or other formal teaching/learning situations (Clandinin, 1985). Other research has explored the impact of experiences that impact their personal lives while they are teaching (Bullough, 1994; Richardson, 1996). Like Ball and Goodson (1985), other scholars have suggested that various types of educational experiences that take place in schools, homes, or communities may significantly influence teachers' pedagogical beliefs (Holt-Reynolds, 1992), but they provide little data about teachers' out-of-school life experiences within their homes or communities or the relationship among these life experiences, their learning experiences, and their attitudes toward teaching and learning.

What seems to be missing in the literature is careful attention to the relationship among the various types of life story events, including formal educational experiences, informal learning contexts, and other aspects of teachers' lived experiences in relation to specific content areas and how their stories of those experiences might shape teachers' beliefs about the nature of a field of study and what it means to teach and to learn within that discipline. Specifically, little attention has been given to the relationship between the myriad experiences, activities, and contexts that make up teachers' life stories and the ways they think about and practice writing instruction.

Why Writing Instruction?

According to the National Commission on Writing (2006),

American education will never realize its potential as an engine of opportunity

and economic growth until a writing revolution puts language and communication in their proper place in the classroom. Writing is how students connect the dots in their knowledge. Although many models of effective ways to teach writing exist, both the teaching and practice of writing are increasingly shortchanged throughout the school and college years. Writing, always time-consuming for student and teacher, is today hard-pressed in the American classroom. (p. 41)

National trends have echoed the Commission's statements, as high-stakes testing across the country is including more writing components and schools are increasingly focusing on professional development to improve writing instruction in order to address the testing demands.

Given this trend, recognizing the need to continue to explore writing instruction as a critical component to students' educational experiences, and understanding the relevance of research that examines the role of individual teachers of writing, studies examining teacher beliefs / practices and writing instruction have begun to emerge that inquire into this issue. Norman and Spencer (2005), for example, conducted a study to examine factors that shape teachers' views of themselves as writers and their thinking about writing instruction. Many of the teachers indicated that they had little formal training in writing instruction, if they had any training at all. As Norman and Spencer explained, many states do not require specific coursework in writing instruction in order to be certified as a teacher, even an English teacher. Consequently, teachers have little choice but to revert to the practices in their own educational pasts or to conform to the common practices in their

schools – if they work in a school where collegiality is high, they tend to adopt the practices of their colleagues, but if there is a lack of professional sharing, they tend to practice what they know from their own experiences.

One other critical element to the explorations of writing instruction over the past several decades is the importance of the integration of the personal and the educational in the writing classroom. Numerous theorists and researchers have highlighted the necessity of personalizing writing in the classroom, especially the vital nature of students and teachers writing about their lives and of mutual student-student, teacher-student, and teacher-teacher interactions around the writing they are doing from their lived experiences (Atwell, 1987; Bomer, 2005; Calkins, 1994; Graves, 1983; Murray, 1996).

Teachers' life histories are, therefore, an interesting area of study, given their importance both to the development of their instructional beliefs and practices and to the personal nature of writing and writing instruction. As they move through their lives and careers, their new and cumulative experiences provide changing contexts for their understanding of how to teach writing and the practices they implement to do so. This study extends the trends in research on teaching writing by specifically addressing the ways the stories of teachers' lives matter as they construct how they think about and practice writing instruction. Because writing instruction is nationally recognized as a crucial element to students' education, because the development of beliefs and practices about writing instruction is so complex, and because the very nature of writing instruction as it relates to students' lives makes it fertile ground for the exploration of life histories, I designed a study to explore the following questions:

1. How do high school English teachers' life histories influence the ways they construct their beliefs about writing instruction?

2. How do high school English teachers' life histories influence the instructional practices they adopt to teach writing?

3. How do the experiences gained at different life and career stages of high school English teachers change the ways they construct their thinking about writing instruction and the practices they adopt to teach writing?

Organization of the Dissertation

Chapter one has provided an introduction to the background and significance of this study. Chapter two contextualizes the study's significance by first exploring the socio-cultural approach to teaching and learning as a theoretical perspective and then by reviewing the literature in the areas of current writing instruction, teacher beliefs and identities, and teacher life history research to provide a framework for the study.

Chapter three explains the methodological decisions I made during this study, including a discussion of narrative research, specifically life history research. After a brief discussion of my positionality as a researcher, I provide a detailed description of the participants, the data collection process, primarily the interviews and observations, and the data analysis, situating my decisions within accepted research practices. I close the third chapter with a discussion of the limitations of my chosen methodology.

The fourth, fifth, and sixth chapters report findings focused on three of the themes that emerged from the participants' stories. Chapter four explores stories from the participants' educational histories that the participants name as influential to their current

practices. I present the stories the participants selected and the practices the participants currently employed, along with the corresponding explanations of the narrated relationships between the past experiences and the current practices. I discuss the ways the participants made claims about the current practices, either as the deliberate perpetuation of or active reaction against the past events, and the ways the stories from their educational histories interacted with their current practices as part of an ongoing process of identities construction.

Chapter five explores the relationship between the participants' essentialist attitudes about writing ability and the influence of these attitudes on the ways they think about and practice writing instruction. After a brief discussion of essentialist views of writing, I provide details from the participants' stories that reveal their attitudes about their own writing abilities and the deterministic connection between their innate writing abilities and their entrance into the teaching profession. In addition, I explore the participants' attitudes toward their students' writing abilities and the resulting instructional practices they employed.

Chapter six draws upon the predominant themes in the participants' life stories in order to explore the ways their professional identities reflect their narrated themes. After a discussion of the ways I use the term *identity*, I provide incidents from various stages in the participants' narratives that explore the same general theme. I then discuss the connections between their narrative themes and the ways they thought about and practiced writing instruction.

Chapter seven summarizes the study's findings and discusses the specific ways the findings address the research questions and contribute to current trends in research on the ways teachers think about and practice writing instruction. After my discussion, I explore implications of the study, especially in the areas of pre-service teacher education and ongoing professional development. Finally, I suggest ways the findings and limitations of the study provide directions for future research in these areas.

Chapter Two

Review of Literature

In this chapter, I discuss the theoretical perspective and related literature I am using to frame my study. First, I explain the significance of maintaining a sociocultural approach as a theoretical perspective throughout the study. Then I examine the relevant research relating to writing instruction, teacher beliefs, and identity. I conclude the chapter by discussing research on the role of narrative research, specifically examining the life stories of teachers, in the exploration of teacher beliefs and practice.

Theoretical Perspective

Throughout this study, my research has been guided by a sociocultural approach to teaching and learning. Before I review the relevant literature for my study, I want to describe the way I understand the sociocultural view and use it in this dissertation. The sociocultural approach to understanding teaching and learning emerged primarily from the work of Soviet psychologist Lev Vygotsky and has continued through the work of cultural psychologists Cole and Wertsch, among others. Wertsch (1995) explained that the purpose of a "sociocultural approach is to explicate the relationships between human mental functioning, on the one hand, and the cultural, institutional, and historical situations in which this functioning occurs, on the other" (p. 3). The approach seeks, therefore, to understand the ways the people under investigation are socially, culturally, and historically situated (Wertsch, 1989). An important concept in my study is the discursive nature of a sociocultural approach – that the actions of individuals are influenced or changed by the

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setting and, in turn, actively reform or re-shape the setting in which they are situated (Wertsch, 1985).

Sociocultural theories are applicable to an understanding of teaching and learning (Grossman, 1990; Britzman, 1991; Collins & Green, 1992). Within a sociocultural context, meaning is socially constructed; that is, the interactions of the members of the educational community lead to the building of meaning within the social and cultural setting. From this perspective, learning takes place not as isolated acts of individuals but in a social and cultural context (John-Steiner and Mahn, 1996).

For the purposes of this study, employing a sociocultural perspective means acknowledging the contexts within which the teachers constructed (and continue to construct) their storied lives, their beliefs about writing instruction, and the practices they employ to teach writing. When I use the term *context*, I am referring to the way Gee (1992, 1996) discussed it in reference to Discourse; that is, speakers, listeners, readers, and writers coordinate their words, actions, values, and emotions with those of other people, settings, symbols, and technologies. Using a sociocultural approach to the understanding of teaching, I examined the dual contexts of the participants' life stories and their current teaching positions. Together, these contexts shaped action, meaning, and knowledge in the teacher's professional and personal lives.

In addition, a sociocultural approach is important in considering the interview setting itself. Though an examination of the interactive positioning only makes up a small part of the analysis in this study, it is significant to note that the narrating events are

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constructed between the interviewer and the participant in a particular sociocultural setting (Wortham, 2001).

Writing Instruction

The national conversation continues to rage over what our students need to be taught and the best ways to make sure they are learning. Recent events like the conflict over the release of the new English Language Arts section of the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills by the Texas Education Agency highlight the ongoing debate in our state and our nation over what constitutes necessary content and effective instruction. A significant part of this conversation is writing instruction and assessment. As writing is viewed as a key component of literacy, "how students connect the dots in their knowledge" (National Commission, 2003, Introduction), there is much disagreement about the most effective ways to teach and measure effective writing (Neumann & Dickinson, 2001).

Further supporting the need for more research exploring writing instruction, The National Assessment of Educational Progress Report Card for the Nation (1998) cited serious deficiencies in the writing ability of high school students. Only 22% of high school seniors achieved the 'proficient' level on the assessment, which measures organization, convincing and elaborated responses to the assigned tasks, and the use of rich, evocative, and compelling language. The National Writing Commission Report (2003), initiated by the College Board, described classrooms across the country where students do not write enough, except maybe in English class, a deficiency of teacher training, and a lack of attention to the importance of writing. Since they claimed writing is "not a frill for the few

but an essential skill for the many" (2003, Introduction), the Commission has called for a much greater emphasis on writing, including time spent composing in all academic classes.

Despite the Commission's emphasis, however, there have not been many studies taking a broad look at the state of writing instruction in quite some time. One study that did attempt to look at the issue is *Writing Next: Effective strategies to improve writing of adolescents in middle and high schools*, Graham & Perin's (2007) meta-analysis of writing research over the last twenty years. They concluded that the following strategies are effective in teaching writing as demonstrated by empirical research:

1. Writing Strategies, which involves teaching students strategies for planning, revising, and editing their compositions

2. Summarization, which involves explicitly and systematically teaching students how to summarize texts

3. Collaborative Writing, which uses instructional arrangements in which adolescents work together to plan, draft, revise, and edit their compositions

4. Specific Product Goals, which assigns students specific, reachable goals for the writing they are to complete

5. Word Processing, which uses computers and word processors as instructional supports for writing assignments

6. Sentence Combining, which involves teaching students to construct more complex, sophisticated sentences

7. Prewriting, which engages students in activities designed to help them generate or organize ideas for their composition

8. Inquiry Activities, which engages students in analyzing immediate, concrete data to help them develop ideas and content for a particular writing task

9. Process Writing Approach, which interweaves a number of writing instructional activities in a workshop environment that stresses extended writing opportunities, writing for authentic audiences, personalized instruction, and cycles of writing

10. Study of Models, which provides students with opportunities to read, analyze, and emulate models of good writing

11. Writing for Content Learning, which uses writing as a tool for learning content material. (p. 4-5)

They insisted that these conclusions in no way represent a complete writing curriculum, and they ultimately concluded that

> although writing instruction has been researched much less often than reading instruction, it is an equally important component of literacy proficiency and encompasses, in itself, an extremely complex set of skills. The rich nature of the practice of writing and its relative neglect in instructional research make it inevitable that a whole compendium of possible approaches has not yet been studied. Research is clearly needed not only to identify additional effective practices that already exist but to develop new ones. (p. 26)

In one sense, this dissertation study answers the call to research by Graham and Perin by exploring the ways teachers think about and practice writing instruction in the hopes of shifting some research momentum in the direction of the teaching of writing.

There has been some research examining writing instruction and how teachers think about and practice it, most of which has been in the area of preservice or first-year teachers.   In a recent study, for example, Norman and Spencer (2005) examined the autobiographies of fifty-nine preservice teachers from two cohorts in a California university to investigate factors that contribute to the ways they think about writing and teaching writing. Their data included the teachers' writing histories and an assignment in a preservice methods course, and using a grounded theory approach, they identified four major themes:

> (1) personal/creative writing is the most meaningful and interesting kind of
>
> > writing;
>
> (2) teachers have both positive and negative effects on writing identity;
>
> (3) encouraging writing development is different from teaching writing;
>
> (4) the importance of writing instruction is influenced by beliefs about the
>
> > nature of writing. (p. 29)

This dissertation study extends Norman and Spencer's work by examining these issues in the lives and careers of inservice teachers, especially in relation to the second and fourth themes above.

Other than a handful of studies like the ones described, though, mostly looking at specific writing instructional practices, there is little research on the influences in high school English teachers' lives that lead to the construction of beliefs about writing instruction or the resulting practices. In a larger sense, therefore, this study moves the research into the teaching of writing in a fairly new direction, as it explores the relationship

between high school English teachers' life histories and the ways they think about and practice writing instruction.

Teacher Beliefs

In the first part of this dissertation, I have already interchangeably used the terms or phrases "beliefs about writing," "attitudes toward writing," and "thinking about writing." At this point, it is important to examine some of the literature about beliefs and to establish a working definition of the term for the duration of this dissertation.

When researchers examine the practices of teachers in their classrooms, instructional methods vary by instructor, as do the complex sociocultural histories of the teachers that have contributed to the use of those practices. Numerous factors including preservice and inservice education, life experiences, state and national mandates, and school-based policies, values, and norms contribute to the instructional decisions teachers make on a daily basis. Many educational researchers would argue that one of the most significant influences on classroom practice is teachers' beliefs (Nespor, 1987; Pajares, 1992). Richardson (1994) suggested that the relationship between beliefs and instructional practice is interactive and transactional, and Guskey (1986) echoed this statement, stating that changing classroom practices is often followed by changing beliefs, reinforcing the sociocultural nature of teaching. Exactly how researchers define a "belief," however, is frequently debated by scholars, and because of the nature of this dissertation study – interviews in which participants talk about what they "believe" about teaching writing – some working definition must be arrived at for the purposes of examining relevant issues in this study.

A Working Definition of Beliefs

Some scholars have described beliefs as "messy constructs" separate from empirical observation and difficult to define for research purposes (Pajares, 1992). Nevertheless, even though beliefs can be difficult to pin down with language and attempts to do so often flirt with an essentialist view of the individual, there is agreement that people call something *beliefs*, and that something can affect the ways individuals think about and make decisions in the world. Often, beliefs go unexamined or unquestioned and instead act as unreflective influences on people's lives (Fenstermacher, 1994). Consequently, even with the nebulous nature of the term, many researchers have agreed that beliefs are one of the most accurate gauges of the choices people make throughout their lives (Bandura, 1986).

In specifically looking at teacher beliefs, Kagan (1990) used the term interchangeably with knowledge, stating that "what a teacher knows of his or her craft appears to be defined in highly subjective terms" (p. 421). Richert (1992) affirmed this idea, stating that beliefs and knowledge are connected because of the way knowledge is constructed. She suggested that as knowledge is constructed and reconstructed over time, beliefs about teaching undergo similar changes. People hold something to be 'true' at one point in time, but then later the knowledge is reframed or even discarded altogether as new ideas and constructs become available.

Clandinin and Connelly (1989) suggested a more limited outlook – that the term *belief* is not interchangeable with *knowledge* but represents instead a teacher's practical knowledge and understanding about the dynamics that occur within the classroom. In this

sense, knowledge is closely connected with the entirety of the learning experience and not just cognition, which suggests a more socioconstructivist view of the relationship between the learner and the environment (Johnson, 1987).

Schulman (1987) applied a more specific definition to knowledge, actually aligning it more closely with the way some researchers use the term "belief" by describing teacher knowledge based on the view of a teacher as a member of a scholarly community. A teacher must not only understand the structures of subject matter and the principles of conceptual organization, but also the "pedagogical content knowledge" of the processes of the construction of knowledge based on the subject matter structures. As Schulman explained, while a mathematician or scientist may understand and use conceptual representations to solve problems, a teacher must use those same representations as learning tools.

Nespor (1987) tried to differentiate the two terms more clearly – knowledge, Nespor argued, is stored semantically, while beliefs, which are constructed from cognitive, emotional, and cultural sources, are stored in episodic memory. In that sense, then, beliefs can have an impact on practice more directly than solely theoretical knowledge because of their accessibility.

Ultimately, it may not be possible to arrive at a single definition for beliefs or a clear distinction between beliefs and knowledge. For the purposes of this study, I do not attempt to artificially separate the two. Instead, I adopt a socioconstructivist view that beliefs, for the purpose of studying teachers, represent the ideas – practical and theoretical – that are constructed through experiences with the teacher's environment and represent a

sort of knowledge or understanding about specific practices within the classroom context. The term *constructed* is significant in the way I talk about beliefs because as soon as we begin asking teachers to talk about what they believe, they use words as a mediation tool to try to represent the perspectives that have been put together through their experiences (Wertsch, 1991). Suggesting, therefore, that I can somehow *know* exactly what is in someone's mind about a subject is problematic and does not represent the way I use the term in this dissertation – though, arguably, it may be the way the participants think about the word when they use it – so I move forward with an understanding of the constructed nature of the ideas the teachers represent to me. In the same way, depending on the context, I may use the phrases *think about* or *attitudes about* instead of *beliefs*, but in all cases, I am referring to the ways the participants have constructed their ideas about a particular subject.

My definition seems to be similar to a sociocultural approach developed by Tabachnick and Zeichner (1984). Opting for the term teacher *perspectives,* they defined them as "a reflective, socially defined interpretation of experience that serves as a basis for subsequent action . . . a combination of beliefs, intentions, interpretations, and behavior that interact continually" (Clark & Peterson, 1986, p.287). Unlike the more commonly-held notion of beliefs as abstract ideas out of their situated contexts, perspectives are seen as specific to situation and action, and they include the beliefs teachers have about their professional practices and the "ways in which they [give] meaning to these beliefs by their behavior in the classroom" (p. 28). In my analysis of the data, when I talk about what the participants believe about writing instruction, my use of the term is informed and guided by this sociocultural frame.

Given a working definition of the term beliefs, it is important to explore the available studies that have been conducted exploring the nature of beliefs in teachers, the

persistence and change in beliefs, and the relationship between beliefs and practice. Most studies in this area have been conducted primarily in relation to preservice and first-year teachers, while fewer studies have been conducted with experienced teachers. For teachers, beliefs about the purpose of education, the capabilities of students, and the significance and practice of their selected subject matter, which are continuously constructed through the course of a their lives, can influence both their instructional decisions and the ways they interact with students in the classroom. These beliefs are established early – studies have indicated that when preservice teachers enter their professional development programs, including methods courses and student teaching experiences, they already have a strong sense of what teaching and learning should be like (Hollingsworth, 1989; Holt-Reynolds, 1992; Grossman, 1990).

One primary source of the beliefs of preservice teachers is the thirteen-plus years of schooling they bring with them that have helped them develop an understanding of what it means to teach and to be a teacher, the "apprenticeship of observation" (Lortie, 1975). Through these educational experiences, students – who then grow up to be teachers – come to understand the various roles teachers can inhabit. Their understanding is not based purely on observation, but is constructed along with content knowledge as they actively participate in schooling throughout their childhoods and into their adult experiences (Clandinin, 1985; Collins & Green, 1992). Kagan (1992) also noted that preservice teachers view other teachers through the evaluative lens of their own experiences and beliefs. Feiman-Nemser & Buchman (1985) reported similar results in their study, suggesting that "ideas and images of classrooms and teachers laid down through many

years as pupil provide a framework for viewing and standards for judging what (teachers) see now" (p.56).

Teacher education programs, in theory, provide an opportunity for preservice teachers to construct a research-supported set of beliefs and practices to apply in their eventual classrooms. The research into the impact of teacher education programs on beliefs and practices has yielded interesting results. For example, Graham & Ross (1999) found that the prior experiences and theories of preservice and inservice teachers can be so strong that they can actually "wash-out" the influence of teacher education programs.

Carter and Doyle (1995) found similar results, explaining how years of educational experiences are used as a lens to encounter new ideas about education. They found that when most preservice teachers encounter something new in their professional development experiences, they think about it through the eyes of a student. That is, they consider how the practice would have worked for them in the given classroom context. Their beliefs about the new material are strongly shaped, therefore, by their own educational histories.

When confronted with conflicts between their beliefs and those of preservice education professors, Holt- Reynolds (1992) found that novice teachers invariably doubt and question their instructors rather than their own beliefs, thus substantiating the divide that often occurs between new teachers' practices and the theories to which they were introduced in their university coursework.

Nespor (1987) spoke of these "apprenticeships to teaching" as memories found in episodic storage representing personal events or episodes from past experiences. Nespor explained that "such critical episodes are probably at the root of the fact that teachers learn

a lot about teaching through their experiences as students" (p.320). In general, preservice teachers do not reflect critically upon these experiences. Instead, the experiences serve as emotive moments in their schooling histories that the teachers draw upon without analysis in their own classrooms.

In exploring the ways teachers develop their knowledge, Grossman's (1990) study of six teachers and their teacher education training (or lack of training) pointed to the need for education courses. Grossman emphasized the importance of these courses, recognizing the powerful influence of these beliefs and ideas about teaching, specifically subject matter knowledge, that preservice teachers bring with them to their teacher education programs. Grossman stated, "it is the teacher's own knowledge and beliefs concerning the teaching of English that continues to exert a major influence on the particular version of English appearing in any given classroom" (p.39).

Zeichner and Tabachnick (1981) raised questions about the effectiveness of university programs in establishing long-term changes in teachers' instructional strategies. They reported that if students have a quality teacher education program, they are more likely to examine the experiences in their own classrooms in relation to the methods and theories from their university coursework. Students who had a weak teacher education program, though, tended to rely on prior knowledge or their own educational experiences instead of the theories and methods from their program.

Studies have also suggested that the school environment into which preservice teachers are placed for their internship experiences or new teachers enter as their initial job placements can be significant influences on their beliefs and resulting practices, often

superceding the theories and practices discussed in their university education programs (Grossman, Smagorinsky, & Valencia, 1999). Even though preservice teachers may verbally acknowledge beliefs and subsequent practices during their participation in university teacher education programs, this study suggested that the environments of both student teaching and early teaching positions often exert too much pressure for the teachers to maintain these beliefs and implement these practices.

Smagorinsky, Cook, Moore, Jackson, and Fry (2004) documented the tensions in the various environments in which new teachers find themselves – the university classroom, the student teaching environment, and the first school as a full-time teacher. They indicated that student teachers often do not have the agency to resolve conflicts between practices discussed in their teacher education programs and those in their cooperating teacher's classroom. When they move into full-time teaching, they do have more control, but the context of the school is still a strong factor in the ways they think about and practice instruction. Ultimately, these tensions, the researchers suggested, are resolved as a result of "socially contextualized intellectual" solutions, which in their participant's case, meant making accommodations during student teaching but flourishing in the early teaching situation.

As I reported above, the quality of the teacher education program does seem to be a factor in this issue, as well. Hoffman, Roller, Maloch, Sailors, Duffy, Beretvas, and The National Commission on Excellence in Elementary Teacher Preparation for Reading (2005), for example, found that teachers in high-quality teacher education programs were more likely to be successful in incorporating the kind of excellent literacy environment

suggested by the education programs. These results indicated that the influence of teacher

education on beliefs and practice varies from program to program.

My study directs the questions and issues raised by these studies in the areas of

preservice and early inservice education into the lives and careers of teachers with a variety

of teaching experiences. In that way, my study begins the process of extending the

established ground of the ways beginning teachers construct their beliefs and practices into

research on the ways teachers at various life and career stages construct their beliefs and

practices.

Identities and Narrative

Researchers have employed numerous narrative methods to develop a more

complex understanding of the relationship between personal experience and theory

development (Clandinin & Connelly, 1989). Narrative theory has been used to explore

teachers' metaphors for teaching in an effort to understand their thinking about instruction

(Tobin, 1990), and to conceptualize images used by teachers to understand practical

knowledge (Johnston, 1992; Clandinin, 1985). As teachers tell stories about their practice,

they construct their understanding of pedagogical content knowledge (Schulman, 1987)

and build theories of teaching based on their own practices.

Narrative, as Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggested, is simply story. The actual

physical story or the act of creating one, narrative is a broad term that is used to describe

story-like practices along a wide spectrum. Life story research is simply the collection of

narratives in order to study individuals. According to Goodson and Sikes (2001), life

stories are constructed by taking the remembered and relayed events of a person's life and

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putting them together in story form. They suggested that life history research extends research on life stories by placing the accounts into broader personal, historical, or social contexts, in order to better situate the experiences socioculturally. In that sense, life stories explore narratives to make meaning from experiences, while life history goes a step further and contextualizes experiences to broaden the interpretation. In this dissertation, I employ primarily life story research; that is, while acknowledging the sociocultural nature of the narratives, I primarily focus on the stories themselves and the ways the participants use the stories to make meaning. When appropriate, however, I also provide as much context for the stories as possible in order to appropriately situate them for interpretation.

An increased interest in using narrative-oriented theories and methods to conduct research on teachers' lives and careers has led scholars to employ a variety of biographically-oriented techniques to study the beliefs and practices of teachers in light of changing social and educational trends (Goodson, 1994). In addition to employing this kind of educational research to challenge perspectives that position teachers' knowledge as being grounded entirely in the realm of policy or practice, narrative-oriented research like life history work also overturns frequently narrow views of teachers' lives and practices by giving voice to often silenced, hidden, or marginalized experiences, including the careers of female teachers and teachers of color, which gives life history research the potential for a broader social impact.

Thinking ahead to the implications of my study for university teachers and researchers, narrative inquiry and life history research can be useful in several additional ways. First, it can be used to build theory. As Muchmore (2002) explained, even working

with one teacher to explore issues many teachers share can result in valuable data that can

be used to develop a more general understanding of the experiences of larger groups of

teachers. In this way, although the type of research methods employed in my dissertation

do not permit generalizations based on large research samples, the complex understanding

that results from a close study of a few teachers can actually lead to a more thorough

understanding of the topics being researched (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

In addition, life history research can help universities pinpoint the ways they can

improve the quality of preservice education programs to generate understanding that lasts

well into the teachers' careers. Holt-Reynolds (1992) demonstrated, for example, that

preservice teachers often accept the practices they learn in university classes without

actually understanding their theoretical basis; in fact, the practices are often in opposition

to some long-held beliefs or attitudes developed throughout their lives, and once they get

into their own classrooms, many of these teachers revert back to these pre-existing systems

of belief and practice. By developing a more complex understanding of the ways these

previously held ideas actually impact teachers' beliefs and practices, universities may be

able to make more effective instructional decisions in their teacher education programs.

One potentially problematic quality of narrative research is that it is constructed and

is, therefore, always partial and incomplete, given the nature of storytelling. Despite their

constructed nature, however, stories can reveal a great deal about the person doing the

narrating (Bruner, 1990; Mishler, 1986). By selectively including and omitting

information, by emphasizing or deemphasizing particular incidents, through natural

inaccuracies that result from constructing remembered past experiences, "autobiographical

narratives tell a listener as well as the self who you are and what kind of person you are. And they tell the self and others what sorts of life experiences are important aspects of self-definition" (Langellier & Peterson, 2004, p. 324).

When I initiated this study, my intent was to build on this foundational narrative research by examining the relationship among high school English teachers' life histories, beliefs, and practices, specifically those related to writing instruction. As I began the process of analyzing the data, however, the theme of identities construction began to emerge from the narratives as well. I discovered that the process of ongoing identities construction helped explain the relationship among the participants' life history stories, beliefs, and practices, and provided a lens through which they could be most clearly understood. Consequently, as part of my discussion of the literature on narrative and life history in this chapter, I will also examine literature on the construction of identities, especially as it serves to illuminate the relationships among narrative, beliefs and practice. I will more thoroughly explain the ways I use this research during my discussion in Chapter seven.

Like the term *beliefs*, the word *identity* has traditionally drawn on essentialist ideas of personhood. In this sense, identity is something static and immobile inside of each person "like the kernel of a nut" (Currie, 1998, p. 2). Even today, many people would describe identity in this manner, in words like "who someone *is*."

Current thinking about identity, in alignment with a sociocultural perspective, argues that identity is inherently situational and relational, drawing upon similarities and differences with those around us, and, therefore, cannot be an internal state of being. As a

general concept, this definition draws on Holland et al's (1998) work in which they defined identity as "self-understandings" strongly related to situated emotional responses. Calhoun (1994) explained identity by noting that it is necessarily social, is co-constructed through the process of conveying meaning to others, and that even when some identities seem long-term, the ways they are understood, the meanings they inhabit, and the means by which they are communicated change over time. Sarup (1996) extended the sociocultural nature of identity by suggesting that identity is only conceivable when individuals communicate what they are *not* to set themselves apart from the Other, whose actions are in contrast to the individuals'.

Holland et al. (1998) incorporated Bakhtin's description of the dialogic nature of self-making when they suggested that identity involves an ongoing internal conversation through which people try to understand who they are. They explained this complex process through the concept of "figured worlds," which extended Bakhtin's exploration of identity construction through cultural activities. They described figured worlds as socio-historically situated phenomena, relevant to specific times and places, in which individuals engage in activities based on imagined social types perpetuated within the worlds. Identities – the ways individuals construct understandings of themselves – develop interactively as individuals participate with other individuals in the sociocultural activities of the worlds they inhabit. Consequently, the voices of the individuals within the figured worlds dialogically contribute to the ongoing construction of individuals' identities. Through this dialogic process, "people tell others who they are, but even more important, they tell themselves and then they try to act as though they are who they say they are" (p.

3), further reinforcing the concept that when people engage in this ongoing process of self-making, they conceptually construct themselves, through speech and action, both as individuals and participants within their worlds. In my study, I draw upon this explanation by using the concept of identities as situated, changing, social phenomena through which people engage in the ongoing process of self-construction as they explain who they are and who they are becoming, and as they act as participants in the figured worlds in which they live and work.

The way we understand identities in professional situations is predicated on the assumption that the way we make our selves – our identities – influences the practices we take on in our work lives. Connelly and Clandinin (1999), building on Holland et al's (1998) explanation of figured worlds, suggested that teachers often think about who they *are* as they engage in a specific instructional situation instead of what they *know*, implying that engaging in practices as a teacher is taking on the teaching identity. In this discursive relationship, as Cameron (2001) suggested, our identities may not dictate our actions in a linear fashion; instead, we can also construct our identities based on what we do. Teachers' actions, therefore, past, present, and future, can be influenced by constructed identities and can contribute to their ongoing identities construction.

Furthering the explanation of identities construction as the process of making sense of oneself not just in the present but also through the process of one's life, Holland and Lave (2001) described history-in-person, each person's subjective individual experiences and personal social history, typically produced as narratives people tell about their lives and past experiences. Through these narrative tellings, they argued, individuals engage in

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situated identity construction. Hinchman and Hinchman (2001), in the introduction to their edited collection *Memory, Identity, Community*, echoed this concept and argued that identities emerge both in the structures of narratives and through the telling of those narratives. They suggested that the stories we tell during the process of identity construction may not be the ones we "tell to others or to the public at large" but are instead socially situated stories "we construct as we orient our present choices and actions in light of our imagined futures and the version of our own pasts that fits with these projects" (p. xvii). In this view of self-making, identities are constructed through the stories people selectively construct about their lives in various social situations as they simultaneously look at their past actions, present situations, and future prospects in the ongoing process of identities construction.

According to Britzman (1992), stories have the power to help us make meaning of our experiences as we retell them. Brunner (1994), in studying narrative as an educational practice, saw narrative as a means to theorize our lives. We use narrative to position ourselves within our society, which for teachers includes educational histories and their current school environments. Through these stories and narratives, teachers construct theories about our world.

Ochs and Capps (2001) suggested that narrative allows us to confront and examine ourselves, to "clarify, reinforce, or revise" our values and beliefs (p. 46). They also argued that the stories people tell inherently take moral stances, value judgments on the world in which we live. As people relate stories from their lives, Ochs and Capps argued, the narrative constructions not only include a sort of judgment of the events themselves, but

also a broader moral stance as they anticipate applying the experiences to future actions. As teachers narrate stories from their lives and engage in the construction of their identities through the narrative events, they take moral stances about the events they are describing through their narrative acts and anticipate their own practices as moral reactions to those events.

As I move into the methods section, I want to restate that this study sits at the nexus of the worlds described in this literature review: the teaching of writing, teacher beliefs and identity, and life story/history research. Extending the research discussed in this section, this dissertation explores how the narrative tellings of the participants' life stories influence (and are influenced by) the ways they construct their identities within the worlds they inhabit, their beliefs about teaching writing, and their instructional practices.

Chapter Three

Methodology

Research Questions and Positionality

As I detailed in the first chapter, the questions I explored in this study are:

1. How do high school English teachers' life histories influence the ways they construct their thinking about writing instruction?

2. How do high school English teachers' life histories influence the instructional practices they adopt to teach writing?

3. How do the experiences gained at different life and career stages of high school English teachers change the ways they construct their thinking about writing instruction and the practices they adopt to teach writing?

As I begin to describe the specific methods I employed for participant selection, data collection, and data analysis in addressing these questions, it is vital for me to reflect on my own position as a researcher. Acknowledging that I entered this research project as a white male, university-based, former high school math and English teacher, former administrator, husband, parent, Christian student places me in a contrasting role to the participants whose lives I studied. Although I carried some insider status as a former teacher, reflexive inquiry into my own position necessitates the realization that I am no longer a part of the sociocultural context in which the teachers find themselves, and I view their work differently. In addition, because I investigated dimensions of experience that go beyond the academic realm, I also had to be conscious of my own experiences and

background as I began my inquiry (Foley, 2002). I addressed my positionality as a potential source of interference in my research process primarily through ongoing collaboration with my participants through and after the interview process. Although I transcribed the interviews myself and took deliberate care in coding the data, I also communicated regularly with my participants during the initial analysis to ensure my adherence to their stories and to prevent the interjection of inaccuracies as a result of my own biased position.

Participants

As I began the process of selecting participants for my study, I first had to make a decision regarding the size of my sample. Life history studies vary in the number of participants they employ. Muchmore (2002), Elbaz(1983), and Bullough and Baughman (1997) are just a few studies that have included only one person's life history. Muchmore (2002), for example, described his work in a five-year collaborative study with a teacher named Anna, in which he explored her thinking as a teacher, and he used life history research to explore how Anna thought about her practice. Bullough and Baughman (1997) presented their research in a book-length exploration of the experiences of one first-year teacher. In these cases, the researchers were simply attempting to present the life histories as stand-alone examples of the experiences of teachers. Each researcher addressed a slightly different aspect of teaching and, therefore, made different decisions in the way they approached their studies, but none of them required comparison with the experiences of others as a tool for understanding.

When comparison is desirable, however, in order to answer the research questions effectively, multiple participants are necessary. The exact number depends on the questions and the practicality. Morse (1994) made a general suggestion about qualitative research: the correct number of participants means that "sufficient data have been collected and saturation occurs and variation is both accounted for and understood…In qualitative research, the investigator samples until repetition from multiple sources is obtained" (p. 230). Applying this principle to life history research, in an article on the decisions of African-American women to become teachers, McCray, Sindelar, Kilgore, and Neal (2002) explored the life histories of six participants and drew comparisons across their experiences in order to make some more general claims about their experiences and the sociocultural influences on their decisions to become teachers.

Because my research questions necessitate examining data across multiple participants but also being constrained by practical limitations, I also elected to include six participants in this dissertation study. I elected to engage in purposive and convenience sampling as defined by Patton (1980). The sampling was purposive in that I had specific criteria with which to draw my sample.

- Each participant must be teaching high school English (9-12) for at least three periods a day.
- The participants must collectively represent a range of years of experience, from being a first or second-year teacher to having more than thirty years of experience.
- Each participant must be teaching at a different school.

- The participants must be characterized by an instructional supervisor as teachers who:

    1. Actively practice writing instruction in their classrooms.

    2. Frequently participate in collegial conversations about writing instruction.

    3. Critically reflect on their own teaching as a regular part of their professional life.

The sampling was convenient in that I contacted the district-level secondary English language arts coordinator in a large south Texas school district with whom I had worked in the past. I knew she was familiar with the professional practices of the high school teachers in the district, especially regarding writing instruction, and I was confident that she would help me select participants for the study based on my criteria.

After a meeting in her office during which I explained the purpose of the study, she provided me with the names and contact information of twelve teachers across the district who met the criteria and would likely be willing to participate in my study. The following week, I contacted each teacher by telephone to explain the purpose of the study and the requirements for participation. During these conversations, I tried to make clear the amount of time that would be required of them during the research process (Goodson, 1994). As a result of these conversations, eight teachers from six different schools expressed interest in possibly participating. Two of the teachers had positions at a communications magnet school; one of the teachers had seven years of experience and the other had thirty-four years of experience. Because I did not have any other participants with over thirty years of experience, I elected to include the second teacher in order to

address more effectively the research question concerning experiences in various life and career stages. Two of the other teachers had positions at a magnet school oriented toward healthcare professions; as one of the teachers was a man and there were no other men in the remaining potential participants, I elected to include him in order to diversify the sample as much as possible.

I include below a brief description of the district and the participants. All names are pseudonyms.

- Folksberg Independent School District is a primarily suburban district on the northwest side of a large south Texas city. During the 2007-2008 school year, Folksberg ISD had an enrollment of approximately 85,000 students. The district reported the ethnicity of the students to be 63% Hispanic, with 25% of the students reported as Caucasian and 8% as African American. The district had eight comprehensive high schools, each of which enrolled approximately 3,000 students, and four magnet high schools, each of which enrolled approximately 450 students. Three of the magnet schools were cooperatively situated on the same properties as comprehensive high schools. One magnet school, whose concentration was on healthcare professions, had its own campus.

- Mary Valenzuela was a 57-year old Hispanic woman who had been teaching for 34 years. Both sets of her grandparents were originally from Mexico, and her parents both spoke Spanish and English in her home. Her father was in the U.S. Navy, so she spent most of her childhood in different cities around the United States where her father was stationed, mainly on the west coast. He was frequently at sea, so her

mother single-handedly took care of Mary and her three older sisters most of the time. She attended high school in a mid-sized city in western Texas, and she attended college at a state university in northern Texas. She began her teaching career in a small community in north Texas, and then she moved to south Texas, where she had taught in Folksberg ISD for 27 years. She taught at Johnson High School, the most urban of the Folksberg high schools students, for 16 years. She then taught at the health professions magnet school for seven years, where she served as the department coordinator for four of those years. At the time of this study, she had taught for three years at the communications magnet school, where she had five classes of AP English IV. She had been married for eight years to her second husband and had two children from her first marriage, both of whom were in their thirties. Mary also had eight grandchildren. Mary was an active member of a monthly book club with teachers who all used to work together and then taught at different schools across the city.

o Ellen Dougherty was a 24-year old Caucasian woman and was in her second year of teaching. Ellen grew up in a large city in east Texas with her parents and her younger brother. Her parents owned small businesses, primarily Laundromats, and worked together to manage them. She attended a small private south Texas university, where she received her BA in English and an MAT as part of a fifth-year internship program in the university's education department. Ellen got her first teaching job at Matthew James High School, where, at the time of this study, she taught two English IV classes and four English II classes. Ellen lived in an

apartment with her college roommate and spent a lot of her time attending school athletic events. She also played kickball in a city recreational league on Sunday afternoons.

o Beth Kirby was a 35-year old Caucasian woman and had been teaching for eight years, all at the same campus. Beth grew up in a small town in central Ohio, where she attended Catholic school. As a teenager, her family moved to central Virginia, where she graduated from high school and attended college. At that point, her parents moved to the Chicago area and Beth went with them. During several years in Chicago, she held several different jobs and went to school part time, eventually receiving a Master's degree in English and a teaching certificate. She went to a teaching job fair at a local university and met a representative from Folksberg ISD, who offered her a job. Beth moved to south Texas and at the time of this study, had been working at Johnson High School, the district's most urban school. For the previous three years, Beth had taught primarily students from the science-engineering magnet school located on the Johnson campus. During this study, she taught five classes of AP English III and one class of pre-AP English II. She was married to a musician who played in the Air Force Band when they got married and then mainly did production work. They had two children, ages three and one.

o Hank Brown was a 27-year old Caucasian man who had been teaching for three years. Hank grew up with his parents and brother in a small town in Iowa, where he graduated from high school. He attended college at a university in Iowa, where he graduated with a BA in English; he also received a teaching certificate, though

he had no initial desire to teach. His parents moved to the Chicago area, and after

graduation, he moved back in with them for a year and worked odd jobs. In May of

2004, he moved to central Texas with a friend and after some corporate jobs did not

work out, he applied for some teaching jobs in central and south Texas. He was

offered a position in Folksberg ISD at the health professions magnet school, where,

at the time of this study, he taught three classes of English I and three classes of

English II. Hank lived with his girlfriend, an elementary art teacher.

o Sophie Roberts was a 33-year old Caucasian woman in her sixth year of teaching.

Sophie grew up with her parents and twin older sisters in a mid-sized town in

eastern Minnesota, where she graduated from high school and attended college.

She earned a BA in English and her teaching certificate, and right out of college,

she worked as a nanny for three years. Then she got married and moved to south

Texas with her husband, a former Air Force mechanic who now does custom

motorcycle work. After they moved, she applied at several school districts and was

offered a job in Folksberg ISD teaching middle school English. She taught there

for three years, and when the department coordinator accepted a position as the

department coordinator at a new high school in the district, Sophie moved with her

and, at the time of this study, was in her third year at Steven Pope High School, a

middle-income comprehensive campus. Sophie taught five classes of English III

and one class of focused writing for seniors who had not passed the state writing

test required for graduation. Sophie and her husband did not have any children, but

they did have an old dog. They traveled every couple of years to Europe during her summer break.

o Melissa Campbell was a 42-year old Caucasian woman in her sixth year of teaching. Melissa grew up in south Texas, where she graduated from high school. She attended a large central Texas university, where she received a BA in journalism. She worked at various television news stations in Texas, Florida, and North Carolina, eventually moving into the position of newscast producer. After several years in that position, Melissa decided to go into teaching, so she moved back to south Texas, where she went back to school and earned her teaching certificate. She completed her student teaching at Daytona High School, the most rural school in Folksberg ISD, after which she was hired there full-time. During this study, she was in her sixth year at Daytona, and she taught three English I classes and three AP English III classes. Melissa was not married, but she did date occasionally. She had a close relationship with her parents and spent a lot of her extra time with them.

The Interviews

As I prepared to conduct the interviews, I had to consider some theoretical and practical issues, especially as I made decisions about the exact format I wanted the interviews to take. In general, I knew I wanted the participants to tell stories from different times in their lives, for them to construct narratives of their life stories in a series of interviews. Clandinin and Connelly (1994, p. 419) referred to "chronological annals," Bullough and Pinnegar (2001, p. 19) described "nodal moments," and other researchers

have used similar language to explain slight variations in the process of eliciting

participants' responses during interviews most likely to represent the most meaningful

experiences to them.

From a practical standpoint, Paul Thompson (2000), in his work on oral history,

developed an "oral history interview protocol" with specific kinds of questions to ask about

various points in a person's life in order to elicit the most comprehensive responses – that

is, the goal is to capture through the series of specific questions in the interview interaction

the details in some basic areas from the stories of particular times in a person's life.

On the other hand, some researchers have suggested that interview can initially

consist of just one question or a few select questions that allow the participants to explore

their life stories without the constraints and researcher-centered meaning inherent in a list

of more limited questions. In her (1993) study of the lives of women teachers, for

example, Kathleen Casey explained her process:

> In actual practice, the interviews (mercifully) never even came close to the
>
> analytical neatness of [my dissertation] proposal. There are several reasons
>
> why this happened. The major cause was the sentence with which I opened
>
> the interviews: 'Tell me the story of your life,' a challenge which I followed
>
> with silence. This was the most open-ended way I could ever invent to elicit
>
> the selectiveness of the subjects themselves…and it was extraordinarily
>
> successful in achieving that end. (p. 17)

Because I wanted to give the participants the opportunity to construct their stories without

the interference of a confining list of questions, I drew on the work of Clandinin and

Connelly (1994), who suggested minimizing researcher intentions in interviews by "asking the person to tell his or her story in his or her own way…the participant's intentions are uppermost" (p. 419) and I planned, after asking the participants to talk about the basic details of their current teaching situation (school, courses taught), to include in my initial interview Casey's question – "Tell me the story of your life" – and to shape future interviews based on the first experience.

I followed this protocol, and the participants responded by telling me stories from their lives, usually chronologically – typically beginning with where they were born and moving through their lives. Based on their particular content and style, I planned subsequent interviews to encourage the broadest possible data while interfering as little as possible with the participants' decisions about how to construct their stories and make meaning from them.

For example, in the first 30 minutes of Melissa's first interview, she had given me a narrative summary of her entire life. At that point, I asked her to talk in more detail about her current teaching situation. At the beginning of the second interview, I began by asking her to tell me some stories about her childhood. Sophie, on the other hand, was still talking about elementary school after two hours during our first interview, so I made a note of the story she was talking about and simply asked her to keep talking about her life at that point when we started the next interview.

Another way I offered some guidance during the interviews was if a participant talked about a topic that was not necessarily common to the interviews but that I thought might be interesting for other participants to explore. For instance, in an early interview,

Mary talked a lot about a book club in which she was participating and some of the books they had been reading. I jotted down a note – "book club / current books" – on a running list that I used if participants did not know what else to talk about near the end of a particular interview.

Finally, as I began transcribing interviews, I wrote down notes about specific incidents that were unclear or incomplete. In the last couple of interview sessions, I asked the participants to clarify the incidents I had taken notes about.

In addition to planning the content of the interviews, I also had to work out practical considerations, namely where and when we would conduct the interviews and how I would record them. After additional phone and email correspondence, the following schedule for weekly interviews was finalized:

- o Melissa – Monday afternoons at 4:30 in her classroom

- o Beth – Tuesday mornings from 9:40-10:40 in her classroom

- o Mary – Thursday afternoons at 3:00 in her classroom

- o Ellen – Friday afternoons at 4:30 in her classroom

- o Sophie – Sunday mornings at 9:00 in her home

- o Hank – Sunday afternoons at 1:00 at a local restaurant

The schedule included open-ended interview times for all the participants except Beth, who elected to conduct our interviews during her conference period. The interviews ran concurrently for six weeks, from early October to the middle of November and ended in the same week with two exceptions. Because Beth's interviews were shorter, we met two additional times, for a total of eight meetings. Also, even though Hank and I only met six

times, scheduling the initial interviews with him was delayed because he had concerns

about confidentiality, despite the assurances in the consent paperwork. After considering it

for a couple of additional weeks, however, Hank agreed to participate, so our interviews

went into early December.

In terms of how to record the data, there were several options, though the most

common techniques are note taking and audio recording for later transcription. Wengraf

(2001) recommended taping the interviews and not taking notes. Notes, he argued, are

distracting to participants and can actually draw the researcher's attention away from the

participants' responses. I opted to record the interviews and to have a notebook out during

the interview in case taking notes was warranted; during almost every interview, I did write

down a few notes about nonverbal communication, the interview settings, and details from

the interviews I wanted to remember or wanted the participants to talk more about later. I

recorded the interviews on a Sony digital voice recorder with built-in stereo microphone.

Once I got home after each interview, I downloaded the audio files onto my personal

computer and converted them using the Sony software into a file compatible with iTunes.

As soon as possible after each interview each interview, which ranged from one day to

three weeks, I used iTunes to listen to the interviews and I transcribed them into Microsoft

Word files.

Other Sources of Data

Depending on the exact research requirements, other methods may be employed in

life history research besides the individual interviews. In order to better understand the

context of the beliefs and teaching practices discussed during the interviews (Hatch, 2002),

to visualize the environments the participants had been describing during the interviews, and to gather data that could serve as a source of triangulation for my interview data, I observed each teacher three times. I began my observations during the sixth week of interviews, and I observed each participant during the same class period one day per week for three weeks.

During each observation, I took field notes in a spiral notebook to document the activities of the teacher (and students), and the notes themselves served as the data record for the interaction (Hatch, 2002). I recorded a description of the physical space in each classroom, the words and actions of the teacher and students, and any interactions that took place. I recorded teacher and student talk as close to verbatim as possible, and I included descriptions detailing the physical movements of the teacher (Merriam, 1988). After each observation, I reviewed my field notes and filled in any missing or unclear information. In addition, I typically made additional notes about ways the observations were informing my understanding of the participants' interview data. For example, based on early transcriptions of interviews with Ellen, the theme of being an organizer was emerging, and when I observed Ellen and noticed typed label-maker labels on almost everything in the room – from bookshelves to baskets – I made a note to myself about the organizational theme.

As an additional source of triangulation, I also collected some documents, including lesson plans, handouts, note sheets, assignments, rubrics, and other paperwork the teachers used or distributed during my observations. In addition, as artifacts came up during the

interviews – Melissa talking about rubrics, for example – I asked the participants for copies

of the particular artifacts.

Both of these additional data sources increased my reliance on the credibility of the

interview data, especially in terms of the teachers' espoused practices. I also conducted

member checking throughout the extended interview process by reviewing the transcripts

with the participants as I completed them, in order to ensure the most consistent possible

construction of the teachers' life stories from the participants' perspectives. Both of these

techniques suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1989) increased my confidence in my data as I

moved into the analysis.

Data Analysis

Qualitative researchers analyzing interview data have numerous options available

to them from a methodological standpoint; probably the most common general method is

drawn from grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin, 1990) and involves the process of

breaking down the original data, making meaning from it, and re-arranging it according to

an interpretive frame. Following this process, researchers divide the original data into

message units (Green & Wallat, 1981), which can vary in size according to the research

questions, assigning each unit a label or code (or multiple codes) representing some

meaning the researcher is able to derive from the unit, and then examining the data to look

for similarities and differences about which new meaning can be made.

This kind of analysis process seemed to be appropriate for this study, but because

of the unique nature of narrative research, especially when the data was from interviews

where the participants told extended stories, some more specialized methods for breaking

down the data were helpful. I especially drew from the work of Emden (1998), who suggested a process for eliminating excess language in order to get at the core story in a process of peeling away the extraneous information. While I did not actually eliminate the non-story data, I did group my data into story units reminiscent of the stanzas Gee (1986) described. McLeod and Balamoutsou (2000) explained it as a procedure where the whole transcript needs to be broken into story-sized units before smaller segments of the text are more closely analyzed.

Following these principles, I physically separated each story unit within the Word documents from the talk immediately before and after each story. I made judgments about the story units based on language cues in the text; in some cases, a question from me signaled the beginning of a new story, while in other cases, the participant gave a specific signal: "Now I'm going to talk about…" There were a few times when it was difficult to tell when one story ended and the next began; in order to most safely preserve the participants' original narrative structure, I did not divide those into separate stories.

I then assigned codes to each story representing the central themes from the text. I wrote the codes as comments in my Word documents. For example, in a story Sophie told about her father living for six months a year in a small Minnesota cabin where he spent his time fishing and reading hundreds of books, I assigned the following codes: family, father, hometown, family literacy, reading, nature. I tried not to limit the codes but instead listed all the central themes that seemed to be present in the story. I followed this procedure for every story.

As I began generating numerous transcripts, I engaged in an ongoing process of code revision. I looked across my transcripts to try to improve the consistency of my coding. For example, I found that I had used the codes "hometown" and "childhood home" in different stories to represent the same idea – the physical location where the participant grew up. There seemed to be no logical distinction between the two codes – I had used them both to represent stories about cities and about physical houses, so I decided the most appropriate general term was "childhood home." I double-marked the previous "hometown" codes with "childhood home" as well, and I used "childhood home" in all future coding for like themes.

Once I had all the transcripts coded by story unit, I further divided the transcripts into incident units. Some stories really only contained single incidents, such as Hank's description of a brief discussion with a college professor about *The Old Man and the Sea*, and were not subdivided. Other stories contained multiple incidents, such as Ellen's description of a sorority service project, including the planning meetings and the actual service event, and I subdivided those stories using the same principles I described above when I divided the original transcript into stories. When I was finished subdividing the stories, I followed the same coding procedure I explained for coding the story units.

Finally, I took one final opportunity to break the incidents into even smaller meaning units. I looked across the incident-level (or undivided story-level) units to see if any specific passages, sentences, phrases, or words were unrepresented in the original codes. For instance, in the incident I mentioned above where Hank had a brief conversation with his professor about *The Old Man and the Sea*, he commented about how

enlightening the conversation was. Because the content of the conversation was about a specific theme in the text, I had not originally coded the story "enlightening," but after the exhaustive process of coding all the transcripts, the single word "enlightening" had significance in light of the themes emerging in Hank's other stories. In the few cases like this one that I found, I bracketed the smaller meaning units and gave them unique codes using the comment function in Word.

Once my data was coded, I grouped the units of data into separate files by code. For instance, I named a Word document "Family" and then I copied and pasted the data units into the document that had been assigned that code, organizing them by participant. Using this process was efficient because it allowed me to move each data unit into multiple code groups; in addition, as I moved into a second phase of grouping higher-order codes, it was a simple operation to copy and paste whole documents into new combined documents.

After moving my data into meaningful code groups, I began the process of constructing meaning from the similarities and differences in the data across participants. I selected three significant patterns in the data to discuss in this dissertation, and I include my findings about these patterns in the following chapters. Chapter four describes the ways the participants made connections in their narratives between some of their instructional practices and specific incidents in their educational histories. Chapter five explores the essentialist language the participants used when they talked about writing and the ways this outlook influenced their writing instruction. Chapter six discusses the major themes from the life stories the participants told and the ways the participants constructed their professional identities using those themes.

Dialogic Analysis

Before I move into my findings, I want to briefly discuss Wortham's (2001) notion of dialogic narrative analysis since I do reference it several times in my findings. As I completed my analysis of the data from a sociocultural framework, I constantly filtered the process through an understanding of the situated nature of language interactions, including interviews (Bakhtin, 1981; Wertsch, 1991). My participants did not merely use language during their narratives to represent literal events; instead, the interview event itself represented a social language event where the participants used language to construct or position themselves not only in their narratives but also within the interviews. Another level of analysis of the interviews, therefore, would involve an exploration of the ways the participants used language to place themselves in certain roles within their narratives and in certain positions within the interview situation itself (Wortham, 2001). A more complete positional analysis would be an appropriate future research endeavor. For the purposes of this dissertation, however, I included this description because I do sparingly reference this kind of analysis when it adds significantly to a more complete understanding of the text at hand.

Chapter Four

School Stories: Constructed Narrative Relationships

Between Educational Histories and Current Practices

In recounting their life stories, the six participants in this study described a diverse collection of educational experiences and then subsequently positioned themselves in relation to those stories – usually in alignment with or in stark contrast to the experiences – as they described themselves in their own teaching narratives. In this chapter, I will examine the ways these teachers talked about their own classrooms as forums for continuing the narratives of their own education by either perpetuating the experiences they valued or acting against the experiences they did not. The incidents I include do not represent a complete picture of the participants' educational histories or their teaching lives; instead, they represent specific incidents the participants chose to narrate as being significant in the formation of their current classroom practices.

As I begin to describe some of the participants' educational stories, it is important to note again that identities construction occurs through narrative as individuals tell stories from their personal histories (Holland & Lave, 2001; Hinchman & Hinchman, 2001) and that actions – both present and narrated – can contribute to ongoing identities construction (Cameron, 2001). In addition, as Ochs and Capps (2001) noted, narrative gives people the opportunity to "clarify, reinforce, or revise" their values and beliefs (p. 46) and to anticipate the future moral implications of narrative tellings of stories from the past. In these narratives, therefore, the participants were not simply telling the "real" or "factual"

stories of their educational experiences and current practices; they were using the interview events to make meaning in and from their lives.

Mary Valenzuela

Mary was a 57-year-old teacher with 34 years of experience in the classroom. She grew up in communities with Navy installations in various locations around the country, primarily the west coast. Her father retired and the family moved to west Texas when Mary was entering high school in the mid-1960s. As the oldest participant in the study – within a couple of years of retiring – Mary indicated that she had a hard time remembering a lot about her schooling, especially elementary school, but there were a number of writing-related educational experiences that she did tell stories about and relate to her teaching in the AP English IV courses at a communications magnet school she was teaching at the time of this study.

One practice she named from her early childhood in the late 1950s was keeping a journal. She did not specify exactly which classes or teachers required her to keep a journal, but she did recount the experience of keeping a journal for several classes:

> I used to love journaling, you know. I don't know exactly when I first had
> to do it – maybe second or third grade – I don't know, but I know several
> teachers made me do it, which really sticks out to me because that means it
> was in different schools, right, in different places. I had so much to write
> about with, well, with my dad being gone and living in different places…it
> was just a great way for me to express myself, I guess. I think I needed a
> way to talk about things, or, well really, to think about them and go over

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them in my head. It's just so important, you know.

Mary talked about the importance of regular in-class time to write in a journal, especially when she had the opportunity to select the content for the writing. Given the circumstances in her home life, journal writing gave her an outlet, an opportunity to engage in reflective expression.

When I asked her if she used journals in her classes, she emphatically replied, "Of course! As far as I know, I've used journals of some sort in every class I've taught, well, in my career." Her statement confirmed her desire to perpetuate the practice of journal writing that had been so meaningful to her in her own educational experience. Possibly because of the positive emotional connection she made as a student, Mary made a choice in her practice to create that emotional moment for her own students. In addition, as she had constructed her beliefs about current best instructional practices through her three-plus decades of teaching (Tabachnick & Zeichner, 1984; Feiman-Nemser & Buchman, 1985), she made meaning of her positive schooling experience by making a narrative connection between the experience and her practice in our interview.

I asked her to talk a little more about journal writing, especially in relation to her practice, and she explained, "I never make them write on a topic. I – well, sometimes, if there's something really pressing, I make a suggestion – but they always have the option of writing about whatever, whatever is on their mind. I just remember hating it when my teachers *made* us write about something. I mean, what's the point, you know? Why not just write an essay? A journal should be a journal!" As she answered my question, she made direct connections between her experience with journal writing and her classroom

practice. Her narrated practice of giving her students free choice in their journal writing was a direct reaction against her negative experiences with teachers who made her write on particular topics. In Mary's mind, "a journal should be a journal" – which necessarily involves student choice – and that is how she treats journaling in her classroom. By talking about journal writing in such definitive terms – "a journal should be a journal" – Mary turned the interview event into an opportunity to make a judgment about the practice, further constructing her identity as a teacher who uses journals they way they "should" be used. Calhoun (1994) suggested that identities are co-constructed in social situations as meaning is conveyed to others. By naming the meaning of her past experiences with journals in light of her current practices, Mary was engaging in identity construction with me in the interview. In addition, Ochs and Capps (2001) argued that individuals can use narrative to clarify their beliefs as they tell stories from the past, make moral judgments about them, and anticipate future applications. In this way, Mary used the journaling story to clarify her beliefs about the practice and to make a statement about its future application in her own teaching.

My classroom observations reinforced her claims about her practice. During all three observations, the students opened class with a free journal time, during which the students wrote on the topic of their choice. One day, she had written a quote on the board from one of her student's recent essays – "writers' journeys never have to end" – and she announced that the students were welcome to write about it if they were interested. Her practice with journaling seemed to directly perpetuate her positive experiences with

journals during her own educational experiences, further reinforcing the relationship between the story from her educational history and her current practice.

Another educational experience Mary talked about in direct relation to her classroom practice was talking with students regularly about their writing. She only told one story about it, but it seemed to influence her talk about meeting with students and her resulting practice.

> I do remember in fifth grade, Mrs. Guerrero. She was so good with us and just seemed so interested. What I remember most about her is, oh, what did she call it? Her…I think she just called them meetings, but anyway, she would meet with us one-on-one *every* week for, well it seemed like a long time, it was probably only ten minutes or so. I just remember her asking about my writing every week, and that just really sticks with me because I don't remember other teachers, well, I'm not sure they did that much then. She just made the time to talk to us about our writing.

Even though she did not remember much about the details of the meetings, Mary did specifically mention the importance of regular teacher-student meetings about the students' writing. As a teacher looking back on the profession, she commented, "I'm not really sure they did that much then," an accurate statement about education in the 1950s and 1960s that could only be told as a professional looking back at the practice. The statement itself assigned a higher moral value to Mrs. Guerrero's practice because she was making instructional choices ahead of her time. Once again, Mary used narrative in the manner explained by Ochs and Capps (2001) to make a value judgment about a specific event and

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then consider its future application. In this specific instance, Mary named this kind of conferring as having positive value, setting the stage for her own use of the practice in her classroom.

She drew a connection between the experiences and her current teaching in a way that suggests a deliberate perpetuation of the practice of regularly meeting with students about their writing: "I try to make time to talk to my students now, but, you know, high school is hard to do that. It's not like fifth grade, where the teacher sees them so much. I've got them for one class a day, but I do conference with each one of them at least twice a grading period. I mean, it's really important to me. It's not a lot. But, well, it seems to help." Her willingness to engage in regular meetings with students must be considered in light of the development of the practice in the profession over the course of Mary's 34-year career. Current thinking about writing instruction values these meetings, generally referred to as conferring, where the teacher actively listens to the student-writer, asks thoughtful question, and provides strategic teaching in order to help the student as a writer on this piece of writing and in all future writing situations (Calkins, 1994; Anderson, 2000). It is unclear whether or not Mary treated conferring in the same manner as it is discussed in the literature, but she did perpetuate the practice. Even though she did not feel that she could engage in weekly conferences, given the constraints of her schedule, Mary did make a direct connection between the conferences she did hold and the positive experience she had with conferences in the fifth grade. In this way, Mary again constructed a relationship between her practice and her educational history, guided by the professional identity she had been constructing over the last three decades through a changing profession.

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In addition to positive experiences Mary perpetuated in her classroom, she also talked about one negative experience she strongly avoided in her own teaching.

> I believe in modeling, you know, providing sample essays and what not, but I had a teacher in high school, oh! [frowning] She made us copy, well, today, I guess it would be like a copy change poem, but she did it with whole paragraphs. She would read a whole paragraph to us from a great [quoting with her fingers] author, and we had to write it down word for word. Then we had to write a paragraph with the same number of words, the same style, and just change it to our own topic, can you imagine? I will *never, ever* do that! I just saw no value in…I hated it! I always tell my kiddoes that the samples are just that – samples.

Mary had a negative experience with imitating a model paragraph, with most of the story's meaning being based on the emotive response she had at the time, and she made a clear claim of not only avoiding that particular practice, but also of clarifying the purpose of the writing samples she did use. She made some strong statements – "I will never, ever do that…I hated it!" – that served as her conscious action against a practice in her educational history that she wanted to react against, thereby doing her part to assure that the practice will not be perpetuated. She justified her avoidance of the practice through an emotive explanation, which seemed tied to her experience as a student; arguably, at this point in the narrative, she was positioning herself as a student (Wortham, 2001). Her words indicated that her positionality shifted during this part of the interview because as she explained the practice from her educational past, she described it as being "like a copy change poem"

without any additional information, assuming my knowledge of the practice as a former high school English teacher and current graduate student. However, as she began to justify not using the practice, she shifted into the student role when she said, "I hated it!" This shift signaled a reliance on emotive rather than professional positioning when deciding to avoid the practice of imitation in her own teaching.

Sophie Roberts

Unlike Mary, who lived in different locations as a child, 33-year old Sophie lived in the same Minnesota town from the time she was born until she graduated from college. In her sixth year of teaching at the time of this study, she had five English III classes and one class designed to help seniors pass the writing portion of the graduation-level Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills. She did, however, talk a lot about teachers having students write in notebooks, just like Mary did. In her narratives, there was no indication that when she used the term "notebooks," she necessarily practiced their classroom use in the current established professional sense as a general tool for students to write about things they notice and think about (Bomer, 1995), but she also mentioned having recently read *Time for Meaning* as part of a book study, so she positioned herself professionally by using that language in the interviews. In Sophie's experience, however, notebooks served a different purpose. "I loved it when teachers kept notebooks in class and gave us different, you know, like quotes or stories or something. It gave me something new to think about every day. It kind of, I don't know, I kind of felt like I was thinking about important things." In Sophie's narrative, notebooks served a different purpose than they did for Mary. They acted as a launching pad for new thoughts about "important things."

In Sophie's narrative, the point of notebook writing was not to reflect on her own experience but to think about issues beyond her experience, which was consistent with another theme that ran through her stories – getting out of her hometown. Along those same lines, as she constructed her narrative identity as someone wanting to escape a small hometown, she had an emotive reaction to the notebook's ability to allow her to think about things in the larger world, which she mirrored in her practice. Holland et al (1998) argued that individuals inhabiting figured worlds participate in actions determined by socially constructed generic roles and conceptually construct themselves, both as individuals and as members of the collective, as they participate in the worlds they inhabit. Through her narrative telling, Sophie described her actions in the context of the figured world she inhabited as a child in a school full of children with different roles, many specifically relating to an emotional connection with their small Minnesota community. Sophie narrated her role as the dreaming student anxious to extend her life beyond the community, and through the telling of this story about journaling, Sophie engaged in identities construction in our interview.

As Sophie talked about her own use of notebooks in her classroom, her practices were reminiscent of her own educational experiences. "It is so much fun," she explained, "coming up with new notebook topics. I've got all these on-line quote sites and You Tube and lots, well, just different stuff. I just try to get them to think, you know, it brings them out of whatever world they are thinking about, away from the distractions, and makes them think…they just seem more ready for class after they write." In Sophie's classroom, therefore, as in the stories from her own educational history, notebooks were a way to get

students to think about issues beyond what was immediately on their minds. She engaged her students in notebook writing that perpetuated her own positive experiences with the practice, and she constructed her teaching identity as someone who could help students get outside of the worlds they typically inhabit, which she posited as a desirable outcome.

My observations in her classroom confirmed the way she described her use of notebook writing. At the beginning of all three classes I observed, she provided a prompt of some sort for her students to write about. One was a quote about civil liberties, one was a You Tube video of a presidential address about the war in Iraq, and one was a paragraph from *The Great Gatsby*. During all three classes, she gave the students five minutes to write and then had volunteers share their responses with the class. The discussion generally focused on what the quotes or the video "meant" and several times, Sophie said things like, "Come on, guys, think!" and "Don't just take the easy answer!" Through her language, she made a judgment about the purpose of notebooks – getting students to think about issues beyond the immediate answers – which positioned her as a particular kind of teacher, though she never offered clarification about what "thinking" meant. In our interaction as fellow educators, her language indicated that we would both agree that "thinking" is a desired activity (Wortham, 2001). Without a clear explanation of the practice, then, Sophie clearly perpetuated in her own teaching the positive experiences she had with notebook writing and constructed a professional identity during the narrative as a teacher who helped students "think."

Another experience from Sophie's educational history that influenced the way she constructed her classroom practice was visiting the library. In the portion of her narrative

where she discussed her elementary education, she talked several times about the library. Her mother had frequently taken her to the library when she was preschool age in the late 1970s, and she developed early reading skills. In Sophie's story, there was one teacher whom she named as the most influential in providing library time as a vehicle for writing.

> Mrs. Rosenthal used to take us to the library all the time. "Shop for ideas!" she used to say. "The library is a grocery store for ideas and I'm buying, so fill your carts!" At the time, I don't remember exactly, but I probably thought she was kind of goofy or something. I remember, though, because she used to tell us to, like, well, to look at the words and the pictures and the way the books, well, like the style. She wanted us to learn about, umm, about writing, you know, from books.

In Sophie's story, Mrs. Rosenthal promoted books, specifically library books, as a way to learn about writing. Without using the current professional term "mentor texts" (Davis & Hill, 2003; Dorfman & Cappelli, 2007), Sophie described the practice from the position of a student, explaining that her teacher wanted them to "learn about, umm, about writing, you know, from books." It was significant, however, that she positioned the teacher as the person ultimately responsible for the learning – "I'm buying," which revealed a certain amount of teacher-centeredness in the way she narrated this educational experience and her selection of notebook topics.

Sophie claimed to perpetuate this practice in her own classroom, as she continued her story of Mrs. Rosenthal. "I learned so much from that…I mean, and I try to get my students to do it, too, you know? I mean, I don't say the whole 'grocery store' thing – that

would so not work with my kids. But I do take them to the library every few weeks. I think I'm the only 11th grade teacher who does, except at research paper time, you know, but I think it's important, so I make the time." In explaining her practice, Sophie again reflected a certain sense of moral superiority, as she was the "only teacher" to engage in the practice. Without offering any kind of professional justification for visiting the library with her classes, no explanation of the positive impact on learning, Sophie instead perpetuated the practice based on a sense of what a positive experience it was for her as a student.

Like Mary, Sophie's educational narratives also included negative classroom experiences. There was one experience in particular that Sophie deliberately seemed to react against in her own classroom – writing a group essay. Sophie told the story of a middle school English teacher who put the students in groups once every grading period to write an essay together for a major grade. The intent, according to Sophie, was for the students to learn from each other about different ways to approach the content, make stylistic choices, and work through the writing process. Sophie explained, "It sounds good, right, in theory? WRONG! It was a fucking mess! Excuse me, I just…I can't even tell you how much I dreaded it *every* grading period. And I always got stuck with the same losers, so you know who wrote the damn thing." From her tone and language, Sophie made no attempt to hide her dislike for writing group essays. At that point in the narrative, she moved into the student position, offering an emotional reaction of a frustrated middle schooler.

As she continued talking about group essays, Sophie claimed to never use them in her classes. "I know some teachers who swear by them," she explained, "but I just can't do it. There must be some value. I mean, the teacher next door does them a couple of times…but I, I won't. I'm sorry, I just…I just can't!" Based on an emotion-laden reaction to a past educational experience, Sophie had made deliberate instructional choices to leave a particular practice out of her classroom, despite the fact that she had colleagues for whom the practice was successful. The act of making her own emotive-based meaning from her past experience caused her to overlook potentially positive ways to structure student writing groups. Instead, she constructed herself as being in almost heroic opposition to the practice that was inflicted on her – "…I won't. I'm sorry, I just…I just can't!" Her moral statement on the practice of group essay writing, especially set in contrast once again to the actions of her colleagues, was consistent with her earlier claims of a sort of teaching superiority. Based on the process described by Ochs and Capps (2001), in which individuals use narrative to revise or affirm their moral stances on past events in anticipation of future applications, Sophie used the narrative telling about group essays in her past education to make a moral statement, largely based on her own emotional reaction, that the practice provides a negative experience for students. Consequently, she made a claim that she would not engage in the practice in her own teaching.

Melissa Campbell

42-year old Melissa, who was in her sixth year of teaching after a thirteen-year career in television news, was teaching three English I classes and three AP English III classes at an upper-middle class suburban high school at the time of this study. Like Mary

and Sophie, Melissa also told stories about a variety of educational experiences. Unlike the first two participants, however, Melissa talked about more negative experiences than positive experiences. Also, the negative experiences tended to be across several grades; that is, Melissa rarely mentioned specific teachers, even when prompted. Instead, she talked about what "most of [her] teachers" did. Despite the general nature of the experiences, though, Melissa talked about some specific connections to her own practice.

One practice Melissa mentioned was teachers grading essays without much (or any) specific feedback. She claimed in her narrative that receiving assignments back from teachers with just a grade on them was a common occurrence.

> To be honest, I can't think of a teacher who really gave me good feedback. Most of the time, just a grade on the top. Sometimes just a letter grade. I would think, "You've got to be freaking kidding me!" because I had worked so hard on the essay, I felt like the teacher read the title and put something at the top. You know? Ugh, I just, it pissed me off in a huge way. I mean, I never complained because the grades were good, but I, I don't know, I never learned anything. I just never really had a sense of my own writing, I guess.

For Melissa, getting back graded assignments with no specific feedback was a frustrating experience. Without offering any professional evidence to suggest that providing written feedback on formally-assessed student writing has positive outcomes, she made a moral judgment about the practice based on her emotional reactions in her story. She talked about both the perceived educational shortcomings of the practice and the negative

emotions the practice evoked based on an idea she has constructed about the way student-teacher interactions should occur on a formal writing assignment. Tabachnick and Zeichner (1984) argued that beliefs are reflectively constructed through the ongoing interpretation of experiences. Based on this understanding, Melissa's beliefs had, therefore, been constructed through the process of her ongoing observations about her education and her subsequent decisions about her own actions as a teacher in response to her experiences. She had interpreted her experiences with feedback on writing assignments to construct her own beliefs about the practice in her own teaching life.

Feiman-Nemser and Buchman (1985) specifically suggested that teachers' previous experiences as students provide a framework from which to judge what they see in their own teaching life. Clearly, in this sense, her constructed remembered images of her own experiences with teacher feedback framed the way she judged teaching practices in her career. Out of a narrated desire to provide more meaningful instructional feedback to her own students – to live the teaching identity she had constructed – Melissa developed an extensive set of rubrics for assessing student work. "I use rubrics for everything," she explained. "Even on short writing assignments, I want students to understand what they did well and what they need to work on. I make comments, too, but with so many kids, rubrics are usually the way to go." Based largely on the frustration she experienced in her own educational history with a lack of instructional feedback on written assignments, Melissa's explanation of her rubric use practices designated a direct reaction against her negative experiences. Despite the fact that many students do not perceive rubrics as the kind of personal feedback Melissa claimed to have been missing, she took a moral stance

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that rubrics were a way for her own students to experience more meaningful feedback than she did, echoing the arguments of Ochs & Capps (2001), who suggested that narratives of past experiences can provide a framework though which to judge future events. She had used the narrative of her own experience with teacher feedback as a framework for decision-making in her own practice.

Melissa also narrated a negative experience with the use of audience in writing assignments, which she reacted specifically against in her own practice. Again avoiding the specific mention of any class or teacher, she explained the most common uses of audience in her high school writing assignments.

> I just remember in high school, teachers would tell us to write to some far-away audience. You remember…"Write a letter to the President of the United States" or "Write a proposal to present at the United Nations." It always seemed like such bullshit, you know? The President…come on! Like I believed I was actually writing for him, we all knew it really had to be for the teacher. Whatever it took to get the grade, I never really thought about how the President would react to my paper, just how my teacher would grade it.

Again, Melissa injected both instructional shortcomings and emotional reactions into her story based on an idealized notion of the way writing assignments should work. And once again, she directly attributed a classroom practice to the reaction she had to this part of her educational history. "I always have them write to a real audience," she explained, "even if it's me. I don't play pretend with them, I just won't do it. If they are writing to the

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principal, I actually give him the letters. And the students know it. And if I'm the audience, I talk to them about what to expect from me." Her claim of causality between her educational history and her practice demonstrated a process of Melissa making meaning out of her practice and her past experience. Giving students a legitimate sense of audience when they write is a common strategy in current writing instruction, yet Melissa narrated it in a way that made her stand out as exceptional. The narrative form allowed her to more definitively construct her own practice as something different from the negative example from her past. Connelly and Clandinin (1999) argued that teachers often think about who they are in teaching situations, as opposed to thinking about what they know about the content or pedagogy, which implies that the very act of teaching involves taking on a constructed teaching identity. In this way, because Melissa concentrated on who she was in relation to her past experiences instead of what she knew professionally about the practice of having students write to a specific audience, she was using her practice as an opportunity to take on that particular teaching identity.

Beth Kirby

Beth, 35 years old at the time of the study, had eight years of teaching experience and taught five classes of AP English III and one class of pre-AP English II at a science and engineering magnet school housed on the campus of the most urban school in Folksberg ISD. Beth's early educational experiences were in central Ohio, and her high school experiences were in central Virginia. Like Melissa, Beth also told stories of some negative educational experiences, one of which she vehemently reacted to as something

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she will "never do" in her own classroom practice – sentence diagramming. She told the story of first being introduced to sentence diagramming in dramatic fashion:

> I don't remember a lot of things in this much detail, but I do remember when Mr. Franklin started making us diagram sentences. I can see him, yellow chalk, his glasses on his forehead, he – it's funny now because I almost see it in, like in slow motion – and he got his little smile and wrote a sentence on the board. I don't remember what it was, but I remember him turning around and just smiling this evil little smile. We had to copy the sentence and then he popped his knuckles, you know, like this [demonstrates with her fingers interlaced] and started diagramming. We spent weeks on diagramming…and I hated it!

Even though Beth said she remembered it well, she actually never said much about the specific instructional practice. Instead, she focused on her emotional reaction and on the teacher's demeanor during the activity, enabling her to make her own meaning from the event on her way toward constructing her own teaching identity.

In her story, she described Mr. Franklin, with his "evil smile," in antagonistic terms. Given the fact that by the 1980s, when Beth was in school, the professional discourse had moved away from sentence diagramming as an effective practice, she was able to take on the identity of a teacher who adhered to professional standards of grammar instruction: "I just refuse to do it," she explained. "I mean, for the most part, our department is pretty modern, you know, teaching grammar in context, using student writing, you know. But there are still several teachers who lecture on grammar and have

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students do at least some diagramming. I just can't!" She mentioned her colleagues to further separate her own teaching identity from Mr. Franklin (and those like him). In addition, she moved from "I just refuse" to "I can't," a narrative shift that, based on both her emotional reaction against her remembrance of the event and her constructed professional teaching identity, reinforced her self-construction as a protagonist standing up for the moral practice. Based on the process Ochs and Capps (2001) described, in which individuals use narrative telling of past events to express and refine their own moral stances on the events for potential future application, Beth used the narrated story of her experience with sentence diagramming to not only take a stand that the practice is morally substandard, but also to frame her own teaching as a reaction against the practice. In addition, mirroring a process described by Cameron (2001), in which people's actions are not only affected by their identities but also discursively participate in ongoing identities construction, Beth used narratives of her classroom practice to construct herself as a teacher who did not emphasize teaching grammar out of context, especially sentence diagramming, even as the very act of identities construction simultaneously influenced her practice in this area.

Beth did tell some stories about some positive educational experiences as well, a couple of which she deliberately tried to perpetuate in her own teaching practice. Her most positive writing experiences happened in high school with Mr. Green. She described his class like this:

> He was my drama teacher, too, which was probably the reason I liked him
>
> so much. He really brought a flair to the classroom, incorporated drama,

sort of, into his teaching. He used to perform scenes for us, like, acting,

being one of the characters, and he would tell us about himself in character

and answer, we could ask him questions and he would, his character would

answer the questions. It was so funny, but we learned so much…and he had

us perform, too. Every time we wrote an essay, we had to give – he called

them "dramatic interpretations" – we had to read part of our essays in front

of the class. Some people hated it, you know, but I thought it was a blast!

Largely because of the positive emotional connection with the experience based on her

interest in drama and her relationship with him in that context, Beth described his

"dramatic" classroom practices in positive terms. She mentioned learning, especially when

she described his performances, but she also focused a lot on how much she enjoyed

performing her essays and just being in his class. In these ways, Beth constructed Mr.

Green as a teacher to model one's practice after – someone who addressed both the

professional – the learning – aspects of writing instruction and also created an environment

where students could have positive emotional experiences.

Her positive emotional connection with the practice of students performing their

own writing led her to perpetuate the practice in her current classroom. Even though she

acknowledged that not all the students enjoyed it as much as she did, she still incorporated

the practice into her classroom instruction, and she attributed this practice directly to her

experience with Mr. Green. "I want my students to have fun and be proud of their

writing," she explained. "Mr. Green used to say that performing really gave our writing

authentic voice, and I couldn't agree more. I love watching my students perform their

writing. They, um, I just, they really come out of their shell, I guess, and put themselves

out there." Beth acknowledged that, in part, she engaged in the practice because it created

the same emotional reaction in her then as it did in her childhood – "I love watching my

students perform." She also, however, positioned herself as a professional educator both

by making statements about what she wanted for her students – "to have fun and be proud

of their writing" and to "come out of their shell" – and by using the term "authentic voice"

in her story without explanation; the best explanation for her use of this term is that she

assumed as a fellow English teacher and current literacy researcher, I would see "authentic

voice" as a positive outcome of the practice, which would support the claims she was

making as part of her identity construction.

　　　　Another practice she attributed to Mr. Green was the use of flexible scheduling and

what she called portfolios. Given her schooling in the 1980s, it is hard to say whether or

not he would have used that term in her classroom, but in telling the story, Beth applied her

pedagogical knowledge to make sense of the practice she was describing. Beth told me

that he never assigned due dates to individual assignments. Instead, he allowed the

students to submit a portfolio each grading period with their "best work" after completing

each of the required assignments at their own pace. "I felt like, I don't know, like an adult,

or maybe just like he treated us like college students or something," Beth explained. "I

mean, we had to do the assignments, but we got to work on them in whatever order we

wanted to, sort of, well, we just had choices in how we got it done." Like the practice of

performing their writing, Beth described an emotional connection to the practice of flexible

due dates and portfolios – how it made her feel.

Based on that connection, Beth claimed to perpetuate the practice in her own classroom, though in somewhat limited form. "I can't do it exactly like Mr. Green," she explained. "It just, well, with my kids…but I do just count the individual grades as quizzes and they get to, they decide what counts as a major grade, and they have some choices about when they turn things in." Beth directly attributed her use of portfolio-like practices to Mr. Green, even though she "can't do it exactly" like he did. Because she had previously constructed him in positive terms and talked about the positive emotional reaction she had to his use of a portfolio-like practice, Beth almost felt defensive that she had not taken up the practice in its entirety. Her language was actually somewhat apologetic: "I can't do it exactly like Mr. Green…but I do just…" She had given herself such a positive teaching identity at this point in her narrative – closely allied with Mr. Green – that she had to almost apologize for not more successfully integrating one of his practices.

Hank Brown

Hank was 27 years old and in his fourth year of teaching at the health professions magnet school at the time of this study. He taught three classes of English I and three classes of English II. Unlike Beth, Hank did not tell many stories of positive educational experiences he wanted to perpetuate in his own teaching, especially prior to college. He did have some experiences as an undergraduate that were significant in the formation of his professional identity, and I discuss those experiences in more detail in Chapter six. In this chapter, however, I am going to focus on the stories he told about secondary schooling and the implications for his own teaching.

Like Beth, Hank had an extremely negative experience with sentence diagramming, though he did not tell the story about one specific teacher. Instead, he talked about the general practice and his reactions to it. "Every damn year," he explained, "we had to diagram sentences. It was so, just, mind-numbing. We would finish doing it and I remember writing 'WTF?' on a piece of paper and showing it to my friend. I just, I…I loathed it, I…it was just so boring, you know, and we would finish and I couldn't tell you what I had learned about writing." Also like Beth, Hank talked about an extreme emotional reaction toward the practice of diagramming sentences, and he also decried the lack of instructional purpose behind the practice. He took on the position of a student in the 1990s as he revealed the internet-age shorthand "WTF?" he wrote during a social interaction with another student. In his story, he situated himself in emotional and instructional opposition to his teacher, as he explained how "boring" it was and how he "loathed" the practice.

Based on the description of figured worlds by Holland et al (1998), in which individuals participate in socially defined activities based on generic roles within the worlds they inhabit and engage in ongoing identities construction both as individuals and as members of the inhabited world, Hank used the narrative telling of his experience with sentence diagramming to place himself in the figured world of his small community school. In this world, Hank narrated himself as the smart student caught in an educational situation that was not up to his standard, being forced to engage in meaningless activities like sentence diagramming and then reacting negatively to the activities. His narration of himself in this way set the stage for his construction of himself as a teacher.

In a later conversation about teaching grammar, Hank referred to this experience as he discussed his own practice. "I do some direct instruction and a little practice, just to get them thinking about how to use something in their own writing, but *never* anything like the sentence diagramming I had to do. I won't, my kids will never diagram sentences." As he talked about his own practice, he made a deliberate choice to mention the sentence diagramming he had to do as a student in order to set his instructional choices apart from his past experiences. Part of his identities construction was dependent on setting himself in opposition to such a practice, in addition to describing his practices in positive terms. By using the word "never" twice, he reinforced his opposition to the emotionally negative practice, further situation his own teaching identity.

Hinchman and Hinchman (2001) suggested that individuals use narratives selectively in specific social situations as a framework through which to view their past experiences, present actions, and potential futures, as a part of the ongoing work of constructing identities. This dialogic self-making allowed Hank to define himself through his narrative as a teacher who would never teach grammar through sentence diagramming. In this narrative telling, therefore, Hank was actively engaged in the very act of identities construction as he drew connections between his past experiences and his current practice.

Another practice Hank discussed in negative terms was publishing writing for the class, making it public. Unlike Beth, who had an extremely positive experience sharing her writing with her classmates, Hank talked about making his writing public with disapproving language, especially in one particular high school class.

> Mrs. Parks used to have this wall for our work, and she would put it there

every time we turned something in. We didn't have a choice. It didn't

matter, no matter what grade, I mean it could be horrible. I remember

having a couple of essays I hated, I mean, I don't think I failed them,

but…she put up everything, and of course, we ran to see what other people

had written. She must have thought it was a good thing for us to be, for us

to be interested in each other's work, but…I never felt like I could just

write, you know? I had to, I guess I wrote, um, sort of, hmm, like

defensively or something. I knew everyone was going to see, so I wrote

about things I thought people would like, not about what I wanted to.

Hank explained that he could understand the teacher's motivation for having them make

their work public, but it created anxiety for him and changed the way he approached his

writing, so he rejected the practice. By acknowledging his teacher's motivation, Hank

gave a nod to the professional discourse about the positive aspects of publishing or

displaying student work, given a more effective process for doing so, while still rejecting

the practice on emotive terms. Along the same lines, Hank promoted an essentialist view

of writing, as opposed to a sociocultural view, when he described how he did not want

everyone to see his writing. It almost seemed like Hank viewed his writing as part of his

essential self that he did not want other people to see.

  As he talked about his own philosophy toward publishing student work, Hank

referred back to his experience with Mrs. Parks. "I *never* force my students to share their

work," he insisted. "I give them the option, I mean, there are lots of times where students

will read things aloud, their writing. But I *never* make them share their work." As he

talked about his practice, he again emphasized the word "never" in his speech and used it twice, in direct reaction to having his work displayed "every time" by Mrs. Parks. As he talked about his own teaching, he constructed his practice in direct opposition to the experience he had with Mrs. Parks. It seemed as though Hank wanted to clearly make distinctions about his own identity – he was the kind of teacher who *never*…. – clarifying his identity through the actions he claimed to avoid through absolutist language.

Another experience Hank talked about and subsequently rejected in his own practice is having to write about teacher-selected topics. Hank had a negative reaction to being told what to write – which echoed his earlier emotional reaction to posting work – and feeling like he could not write what he wanted to. Hank believed that directed student writing limits the learning students will achieve. "I used to hate it," he explained, "when teachers told us exactly what to write. I don't, I can't remember ever having, I mean, getting to choose what to write about. We would get these essays and it was, well, really just regurgitation, you know, like taking the question and filling in the blanks with what the teacher had told us." Hank made a connection between topic selection and a lack of thoughtfulness as he positioned himself as a professional educator talking with another teacher in our interview situation (Wortham, 2001). He used the terms *regurgitation* and *filling in the blanks* to elicit a negative response from me as a fellow teacher, acting under the assumption that we would both be against those practices. Through this communication act, Hank was telling me something about himself as a part of his identity construction process. In addition, Hank once again used language like "hate" and "ever" as

polarizing tools to set himself on one side of a professional line he had constructed –

teachers who do or do not, always or never engage in certain practices.

Hank's language in this story reflected the process described by Ochs and Capps

(2001), in which individuals use narrative to make judgments about past circumstances as

they anticipate future actions. When he discussed his own methods for topic selection on

student essays, Hank set his practice apart from the negative experiences he described

above. "I always give them some choice," he explained, "even if I have to give them a

general topic. I mean, if we are studying *The Odyssey*, they do have to write about it, but

beyond that, I give them the freedom to explore." Once again, Hank chose language –

"always" – to describe the frequency with which he gave his students choices in their

writing topics in direct opposition to the description of not "ever" getting to choose topics

during his own high school experience. Also, he drew upon the discourse of freedom and

choice as opposed to other professional discourses he might have drawn upon, such as

responsibility or academic rigor or research-based practice. From a self-making

standpoint, Hank used these incidents to define himself as a particular kind of teacher – one

who liberated – clearly distinct from the "other" type of teacher – one who constrains. I

explore this identity construction in more detail in Chapter six.

Ellen Dougherty

Ellen was a 24-year old second-year teacher during this study. She was teaching

two English IV classes and four English II classes at a middle-income comprehensive high

school. Ellen grew up in a large city in eastern Texas and unlike Hank, Ellen described

educational experiences that were primarily positive. One practice she spent some time

describing was ratiocination, in which students mark specific technical aspects of their written work – sentence lengths, be-verbs, lead words – often using different colors, in order to identify aspects of the writing that can be changed according to a standard set of criteria (Carroll & Wilson, 1993).

> I used to love doing ratiocination in middle school. It was just so much fun! We got to pull out our markers – I remember going shopping with my mom for special markers just for English – and make all these marks. It was so cool. You probably think I'm nuts, but I loved it! I don't know, I guess it made English, well, about more than just stories and poems and research papers. Does that make sense? I just love the fact that learning English can be fun, and for me, it doesn't get much better than markers.

For Ellen, the practice of ratiocination had a specific emotional connection, largely related to the "fun" of using markers (and first shopping for them with her mother). In Ellen's construction of her current practice, she drew upon this emotional connection.

As a teacher in Folksberg ISD, she had participated in the district's version of the New Jersey Writing Project summer institute the summer before these interviews, where she was exposed to specific practices including ratiocination. Consequently, it had become a part of her professional discourse and she could have cited her professional experience as she explained her use of the practice. Instead, she never mentioned the educational value or the presence of the practice within her professional discourse community. The emotional connection of her experiences was so strong, it seems to be the dominant influence on the way she constructed her understanding of her own practice. "I was so

excited when we did ratiocination in [The New Jersey Writing Project]…I know a lot of

teachers in my department think it's beneath them or something, but my kids love it.

They're fifteen, sixteen, and they have so much fun pulling out their markers." She

constructed her own practice; then, to re-create the emotional experience she had

connected with ratiocination. In addition, like the other participants, Ellen set herself apart

from her peers when she talked about the practice being "beneath them" – she constructed

herself as the type of teacher who was willing to engage in such a practice; it was not

beneath her.

Cameron (2001) argued that people' actions simultaneously are influenced by

constructed identities and interactively influence the process of identities construction

itself. In this way, Ellen used the stories of her own past experiences and current practices

with ratiocination to engage in identities construction – she was the kind of teacher who

was willing to engage in this practice because it provided a positive experience for students

like it did for her – even as she narrated stories of her own teaching as being influenced by

her past experiences.

Ellen also told several stories about her journalism background in high school and

the ways those experiences had affected her thinking about her instructional practices.

"My journalism teacher was so anal about having way more questions than we would ever

use for an interview," she explained. "She would make us, like, for a two-minute interview

– we would probably use one quote or something – we had a list of ten or fifteen questions.

'Be prepared,' she would tell us, 'because you never know where the interview is going to

go.' And she was right." As she was telling the story, it seemed to have a specific

journalism application, and Ellen seemed to be establishing her credibility as a person with some journalism background. Also, she constructed her teacher as a wise mentor-type figure, dispensing advice; Ellen made a statement about her teacher's status by saying that she was "anal" and that she was "right." By describing her in both ways, she was constructing a belief that being overly strict in the implementation of a classroom practice was the "right" way.

Feiman-Nemser & Buchman (1985) suggested that teachers put themselves in the position of students as they judge practices in their current professional life based on their own perspectives through their own years of schooling. In this way, Ellen used her own experiences as a student to frame her judgment about the practice of using this journalistic approach as she made an immediate connection with her practice. "When my students get ready to write a paper," she explained, "I tell them they are like little reporters. I make them ask questions about all sides of the issue before they start writing." In her story of her own educational experience in journalism and her instructional practices, she made a direct connection between asking questions as a student reporter and having her students ask questions as they started an essay. She offered no other justification for the practice other than stating that her teacher was "right," which attempted to offer some legitimacy to her implementation of questioning as a required part of the writing process. Managing their invention processes this way might have seemed "anal" to her students, but based on the way she constructed her experience with her journalism teacher, she confidently asserted her practice as "right."

Constructing Educational Stories and Current Practice

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Several important patterns emerged from the stories of educational experiences and current practices. First, all the participants, as they were constructing the connections between their experiences and their practices, typically reverted to an emotive-centered position as they justified their practice in light of the stories they told. That is, they typically put themselves in the position of a student (Carter & Doyle, 1995) to filter the practices they implemented and invoked student-like discourses, mainly relating to how particular events made them feel, rather than speaking from a professional position to critically assess the experiences from their past and the practices from their own classrooms.

Closely related to their drawing upon their constructed student experiences was the shifting in positioning that occurred, both from a narrative and an interactional perspective (Wortham, 2001). Frequently, when they did want to position themselves as a current professional educator, they invoked south Texas high school English teacher discourse, using jargon without explanation to position themselves as a certain type of teacher in the interaction, even as they shifted into the student role in order to draw upon the emotion-based experiential past.

Through the process of role shifting, they were also engaged in active identities construction throughout the interviews, as the stories from the past interacted with the stories about their practice in a discursive process of actively constructing their own beliefs (Tabachnick & Zeichner, 1984). Specifically, they filtered practices in their own professional lives through the experiences they had had as students (Feiman-Nemser & Buchman, 1985). In addition, they used the narrative form to make sense of their own

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identities within the worlds they inhabited at the time of the study and the worlds they inhabited in the stories from their past (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998). They also engaged in identities construction through the very act of narrating their teaching practices, as their actions simultaneously influenced and were influenced by their constructed identities (Cameron, 2001). Finally, they selectively narrated specific events from their past experiences and professional practices at the time of the study, and made statements about their future practices, in a dialogic process of ongoing identities construction (Hinchman & Hinchman, 2001).

The participants also frequently used language in their narratives to strategically position themselves as particular types of teachers, including words like "never" and "always." They also set themselves apart from their peers by explaining how their practices stood in contrast to the practices of other teachers at their campuses.

The stories of specific educational practices enabled the participants to make certain kinds of claims about their own teaching identities, beliefs, and practices. Chapter five examines another theme from their stories, through which they make similar kinds of claims relating to the ways they view the nature of writing ability and how their outlook influences their writing instruction.

Chapter Five

Being a "Good" Writer: Essentialist Writing Identities,

Deterministic Futures, and Classroom Practices

In Chapter four, I examined specific narrated educational experiences and some related teaching practices of the participants, and the ways beliefs and identities were constructed through the interactions of the two kinds of stories. In this chapter, I examine stories of educational identity the participants established for themselves early in their narratives, especially those stories including identity statements related to writing, their subsequent journeys into teaching English, and the influence of these stories on their constructed beliefs about students and writing and the resulting instructional practices.

Essentialist Views of Writers

One consistent element of the stories of the participants in this study was their sense of the essentialist nature of being a writer and the determinist future this inherent quality creates. The participants consistently named themselves early in their narratives as *writers*, using language that indicated a belief in the term *writer* as something a person can *be* in an internal sense. They also used this conception to describe their students – some were writers, and some were not.

A significant portion of the findings in this chapter are devoted to the stories into the teaching profession the participants constructed. There was a sense, across the participants, that other professions were available – in fact, in a couple of cases, other professions preceded teaching – and that teaching sort of "happened" along the way. Yet

there was a clear sense of belonging in the profession, demonstrated through the language of the participants and typically narrated as a natural extension of their own writing identities, that reflected a belief in a natural inevitability that they would be English teachers. In their stories, they were, from an essentialist identity standpoint, protagonists who possessed within themselves the purpose of teaching writing, yet it took various stages of wandering through life in search of the profession finally to arrive at the seemingly preordained destination. There was, ultimately, a sense across the teachers that they were finally in the "right place." That is, as they characterized themselves within their stories, teaching English made sense from an identity perspective.

The participants' language about identity indicated a consistency with the identity work of Erikson (1968), who extended Piaget's theories of stages to make arguments about an internal kind of identity, something essential within the self. From a writing perspective, Berlin (1982), in his critique of Expressionist theory, likened Expressionist conceptions of writing to this essentialist type of identity, as a personal activity whose source is the internal self. Although current identity theory has moved away from this essentialist viewpoint, the participants had constructed beliefs about the essential nature of writing through socially defined experiences, and their beliefs and actions interacted based on their thinking processes. Their instructional practices provided evidence of this interaction (Tabachnick & Zeichner, 1984).

Through the sociocultural perspective I used to examine identities construction in the last chapter, I again present the findings in this chapter with consideration of the work of Holland et al (1998), who took "identity to be a central means by which selves, and the

sets of actions they organize, form and re-form over personal lifetimes" (p. 270). I also

consider Giddens (1991), who suggested that a person's story "must continually integrate

events which occur in the external world, and sort them into the ongoing 'story' about the

self" (p. 54). Based on this view of identity construction, I examine the ways the

participants used their essentialist views of their own writing identities to construct

deterministic stories for themselves, and the ways their essentialist views of their students'

writing influenced their practices.

Beth Kirby

In Chapter four, I examined 35-year old Beth's stories about diagramming

sentences, making written work public, and using flexible scheduling and portfolios, and

the ways she used the stories as part of a process for constructing her teaching identities.

Now I will explore the ways her essentialist beliefs about writing identities had influenced

and were being influenced by her classroom instruction.

In her stories from childhood, Beth explained that she was encouraged at an early

age about her writing ability and developed a sense of herself as a writer. Both at home

and in school, she had a variety of writing opportunities, and she qualified herself as a

"good" writer early in her narrative. She told one particular story from the fourth grade: "I

was always told I was a good writer, you know. I mean, it just came naturally to me…once

I wrote a story about Jesus, the fishes and loaves or something, and I put in so much

description and stuff and the teacher told everyone how great it was. I knew then I could

write. I guess I was a natural." Her use of the word "natural/naturally" and the statement

that she "could write" indicated a belief in writing from an essentialist framework – that

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being able to write is an internal quality (Berlin, 1982) with which a person is born and there are two distinct categories into which people's writing abilities fall: either they can write or they can not.

Beth's belief in her innate or natural ability to write continued as she moved through secondary school. "In high school it was the same," she explained. "I knew I could write." Events in her narrative seemed to reinforce her assessment of her own natural abilities, even when her teachers may not have agreed. She described a story she wrote about her family at Pizza Hut in which she described various embarrassing behaviors by her parents. Her teacher's initial response was "pretty critical" but because she believed in her own natural ability, Beth entered it in a contest and "it won the city and regional and third in the state, so I went back and showed her my plaque. She said, 'that's nice' or something. I knew I was a better writer than she said I was." Ultimately, then, Beth's success in the writing contest reinforced her view of herself as a natural writer.

After high school, Beth's story moved away from her ability as a writer and focused more on the specifics of her journey into teaching in deterministic terms, as an inevitable extension of her natural ability. At first, it was a story of uncertainty and change, in which she made some educational and career choices for the sake of enjoyment and some just because she wanted to do something different. As she finished college with a degree in English and communications, she was unsure about where she belonged. She narrated herself, first and foremost, as a lover of school who went to college because it was the natural choice for someone uncertain about the future. For her, the pleasure of school was the primary motivating factor in the decisions she made at that point in her narrative.

"Quite honestly," she said, "the reason I got my master's [in English] is because I love school and I love English and I didn't know what else to do. So I finished my master's program and I took two years; I was really having a good time."

At this point in her story, Beth did not know where she belonged – she was a writer in search of a profession – she had maintained the safe environment she enjoyed for as long as she could, so she had to venture out into the world to seek her fortune. Despite her uncertainty, though, she maintained the thematic connection with her innate writing ability and the deterministic perspective of her career journey. "I didn't know what to do," she explained, "so I moved up to Chicago and got a job with a publishing company. It wasn't glamorous…it was editing legal texts for a legal book company, but at least I was working with writing." She felt the need to work in a profession consistent with her identity as a writer but was unfulfilled by the supposed glamour of the publishing world, which provided the impetus for her to keep searching. She was still uncertain about her future and needed to try something else.

Teaching English, in Beth's story, came quickly and without a great deal of fanfare or thought, at least initially. She concluded her initial transition from publishing to teaching abruptly and without much explanation: "I did that for about a year and then I decided I wanted to be a teacher, so I went back to school and taught freshman comp at a community college." She told it as if it was just another decision and at that point in her life, she was able to make the changes frequently as she searched for the "right" balance for herself. Even as she searched for the precise direction her life was going to take, though, she reverted to her "natural" writing proficiency and taught freshman composition.

Her initial stay in teaching was short-lived as concerns of personal comfort and enjoyment took precedence over the career she would eventually have and led to a brief move away from her determined career: "It was a real drag because I was still living at home…I said, 'I've gotta move into the city and do something else.' So I quit the teaching program – I still wanted to do it and thought I should, but I had to do something else for a while." Despite her desire to change her living situation and take on a different job, she still inserted the phrase "I still wanted to do it and thought I should" as a narrative signal that even though she made the choice to move out of the world of teaching English temporarily, there was a deterministic sense of the inevitable in her desire to be an English teacher that would eventually bring her back to it.

Her narrative sense of herself as an English teacher and the inevitability of her return to the profession was clear as she described her relatively short stay in the Chicago business world:

> I got a job as an administrative assistant that paid reasonably well with a small venture capital company, and then I went to a larger, well-known bank, and I did that for a while, but that *was just not me*! I was not, you know, part of the- I just didn't enjoy, I mean I was a 'cog in the wheel of the money-making machine'…so I went back to the [first] company…I worked part time and got my teaching certificate.

In her story, she exclaimed that working for the bank was "just not me," invoking a sense of identity that would only be fulfilled when she returned to teaching English. Also, the specific connection with her natural writing ability was conspicuously absent from her

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story about working in the business world and provided further evidence of why the job was not right for her. She was uncertain about how to describe her experience with the bank, so she borrowed a phrase to explain her negative emotional attachment to the bank job – "'a cog in the wheel of the money-making machine'" – in contrast to her sense of her professional self as an English teacher. In Beth's story, her desire to teach and her ability to write were latent for a while as she sought gratification in other areas – moving from the "drag" of living at home to the potentially exciting life in the city. Ultimately, though, her narrative moved her into the place where she belonged – teaching high school English.

As she described her teaching placement at the time of this study – her first and only high school teaching job – her sense of being in the pre-determined right place was strong. She described her situation – being a level leader, teaching advanced courses – in almost providential terms: "I have gotten a lot of opportunities, being a younger teacher…in my career. I mean, my second year here, I was teaching pre-AP classes, and who gets that opportunity?" She told the story of her arrival with confidence that she had found her place – her circumstances had confirmed her decisions and had ultimately placed her in the position most natural for someone with the innate abilities she had described early in her narrative. Through the narrative form, her teaching identities interacted with her past experiences to construct the connecting story from both ends – she made meaning of her profession out of her life story and made meaning of her life story out of her profession.

Now that she was in her teaching position, her beliefs about the nature of writing ability began to surface once again, this time in relation to her students. As she described

her students, she initially lamented their lack of interest. "For me," she explained, "one of the hardest things is understanding why my students don't like to read and write as much as I do. I try to share my passion with them, but it doesn't always make a difference. I want them to see it like I see it, but they just don't." At this point in her narrative, it almost sounded like Beth had moved beyond her sense of writing ability as natural; she seemed to be describing passion and interest in more constructivist and less essentialist terms.

As she continued to describe her students' interests and abilities, however, she quickly reverted to her beliefs about the internal, natural quality of writing ability. In describing why some students do not succeed in her AP class, she explained, "I just get so sad when a kid doesn't have it. I'm not sure what to do for him. I mean, I believe that all students can learn more and can go beyond the level where they are, but some just don't belong in that environment. Some students just don't have the writing talent." Her use of the phrases "doesn't have it" and "writing talent" signaled an underlying way of thinking about writing students as categorically possessing the ability to write or not possessing it, which was a clear reflection of her attitudes and beliefs about writing ability that appeared early in her narrative.

As further evidence of this core belief, she made a clear distinction between those students who do not "have it" and those who do "have it" but choose not to use it or do not have the family or social support to succeed. For instance, she described a student in one of her classes who had potential but was not succeeding by stating, "I'm sure it is something at home. I'm sure that somewhere along the way, there was no emphasis placed on education. This kid is smart and he can really write – I can see in the work he does

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sometimes that he's a writer – but something is holding him back." She identified him as "a writer" and explained that he "can really write" which distinguished him from many of his peers who did not possess that same ability. In Beth's view, she invoked sociocultural theory in suggesting that environmental factors played a role in whether or not students were ultimately able to apply their abilities, but she maintained her essentialist stance by reaffirming that the quality of being a writer was still an inherent one.

Beth's distinction between the two classes of writers was also reflected in her writing instruction. As she talked about teaching her students to write, she explained,

> One really tough challenge is how to deal with students of so many different abilities in the same class. I mean, they're all over the map, you know, in how well they read and write, really in the ways they think. What I end up doing is if they can write, I try to stretch their thinking with different styles or genres or language constructions and things. If they can't write, I work on the basics, sometimes as simple as how to make sure they are writing a correct sentence.

Once again, Beth initially seemed to be talking about student abilities in more diverse terms, which appeared to be linked to the interview situation as she inserted the phrase "you know" as she was describing how the students were "all over the map." The phrase "you know" did not recur throughout her narrative, except in situations where she appeared to be talking about a common experience with a fellow English teacher, like the fact that it was challenging to deal with students of a wide variety of abilities in the same classroom (Wortham, 2001). After making that common connection with me as a fellow English

teacher, she moved back into her narrative theme of the dual nature of writing ability. If students *could write* their instruction was challenging and enriched; if they *could not write* their instruction was focused on grammatical construction and other "basics." She seemed to be suggesting that if students lack innate writing talent, the teacher's job is to build their basic skills as much as possible without the types of challenging thinking reserved for those students who do "have it."

Observing her class yielded additional evidence of Beth's beliefs about the essentialist nature of writing ability. While students were working on an in-class writing assignment, Beth walked around the classroom to help individual students. She had the following interactions with two different students at their desks as she knelt to help them with the same assignment:

Student #1: "Okay, you don't seem to be offering enough evidence for the theme you picked. You are a great writer. Your language is beautiful, but you have to think about what you need to use to really convince your audience about your theme, right? Don't assume they know the story. With your given audience – think back to our discussions about rhetoric – what is going to appeal to them? Get specific, okay?"

Student #2: "I can tell you worked really hard on this. You are definitely making progress. I mean, this paragraph has a clear topic sentence, which you didn't have in your last draft. Great job! See if you can write that kind of topic sentence for all your paragraphs, okay?"

Beth made clear distinctions in her interactions with these students about their inherent writing abilities. Student #1 had the ability, which she recognized explicitly when she talked to him, so she challenged him to think about the rhetorical situation and the

evidence he offered. Because he "had it," he was asked to think critically about the

content. Student #2 did not have the ability, so she reverted to praising his effort. Because

he lacked the innate writing gift, she was obligated to focus on basic structures so he could

at least mirror the kinds of skills other students who "had it" possessed. Because he

needed to focus on basic skills, he was not encouraged to think about the rhetorical

situation or the content.

This observation was evidence of the complex interaction of past experiences,

beliefs, identities, and current practice (Cameron, 2001). Beth's past experiences

contributed to the construction of beliefs about the essential nature of writing and her own

identity as a writer. Looking back as a teacher in the profession, she made meaning of her

circuitous path into her position by turning the story into something deterministic. To

reinforce her own beliefs and identities and to continue their ongoing construction, she

engaged in practices that both represented the culmination of those experiences and served

to validate them in an ongoing cycle.

Sophie Roberts

In the last chapter, I described Sophie's experiences with teacher-directed notebook

writing, trips to the library, and group essays, and the ways those experiences interacted as

part of a meaning-making process through which she constructed her teaching identity and

some current practices. Like Beth, 33-year old Sophie, in her sixth year of teaching and

placed at a comprehensive middle-class suburban high school at the time of this study,

believed in the inherent nature of writing ability, but in Sophie's story, a wider spectrum of

people *could write* and the application of the innate abilities was essential to their

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maintenance; otherwise, like muscle atrophy, the abilities could actually diminish. An early example of this belief in her narrative was a self-description from her childhood:

> I could read by the time I was like four. I was reading books at home and writing, too. Stories mainly. In kindergarten, they didn't know what to do with me. I don't want to sound like I'm bragging or anything, but I was way ahead of the other students. I don't know, I guess it was just a part of who I was, even then, being able to read and write. I don't know how it happened, exactly, I mean, my parents raised my sisters the same way and they couldn't do all that in kindergarten. I don't know…I guess I was just born with it or something.

Sophie attributed her early ability to write as something she was born with, an essential quality. She placed herself above other students in her class, and while she interactionally took credit with me as the interviewer by saying that she didn't want to brag (Wortham, 2001), actually implying that she was responsible and had done something noteworthy, she ultimately took the credit out of her hands by suggesting that she was "born with it." Her beliefs about the nature of writing and her own identity as a writer were, like Beth, constructed out of these early experiences.

Initially, it seemed that she was suggesting that her sisters were not born with that same ability, but she clarified her position a little later in her narrative as she explained her move into junior high.

> When I came into junior high, the coaches were all excited because I was Linda and Luna's sister. They were like these star athletes, so people

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assumed I would be, too. They were excited for about five minutes, though,

until I got on the court and they saw that I was nothing like my sisters. My

teachers assumed the same thing in the classroom, that I wasn't going to be

a great student. I mean, my sisters were smart and everything, even when

they were little. They could read and write and do math and stuff, but even

when they were young, they just weren't interested, so they didn't work

hard in school, I guess. You know, they could get away with it when they

were in elementary school because they were smart, but after a few years of

not working very hard at it, like in junior high, they barely made it through.

Sophie assigned the innate attributes of intelligence and early ability to her sisters,

reinforcing her essentialist belief in the inherent quality of writing ability. However, as she

described her sisters' diminishing academic success as the product of choosing not to work

hard to develop their abilities, she revealed an underlying belief that by the time students

get to junior high, and especially high school, inherent gifts that have not been developed

can be lost. This variation on the pure essentialist view of identities took on a slight

sociocultural tone as she explained how experiences could contribute to the shaping of

identities.

As she moved into the portion of her story where she began to construct her move

into teaching, Sophie explained that she was originally going to pursue a career in

business: "I planned to get a business degree and move to Manhattan and work in an office.

I could write proposals and marketing plans and other exciting stuff." This initial career

choice was in stark contrast to the family she had described; she had explained that her

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parents were "really outdoorsy" and had described them as "hippie naturalists without the drugs" – describing about what her parents *were* and not describing what they *did* signaled an essentialist view of them as well. Making the choice to move to Manhattan and work in an office seemed contrary to a sort of family identity she had constructed, though she was getting to do some work consistent with her essentialist identity as a writer. Quickly, though, Sophie realized the mistake she had made: "I realized that I hate high heels, I'm not that fond of computers, and I would go insane sitting behind a desk all day!" Soon after this revelation, she changed her major to communications / journalism. She saw that major as an "opportunity to use my reading and writing abilities without the heels and the office." As she looked back to construct the narrative of her passage into teaching, she was able to narrate herself as moving into the "right" profession for someone "like her" at the identity level.

During her studies in communications, she eventually asked herself the question, "Why don't I teach, really?" She explained that she developed a more acute self-awareness and realized that she was running away from the career that made the most sense. "It was in my blood!" she declared as she narrated this change in her life, further emphasizing her belief in both the essentialist nature of her abilities and the determinist view of her career.

After that decision, things began to fall into place and events seemed to unfold in such a way that the story's conclusion seemed inevitable, now that Sophie was headed in the right direction. The story of her interview for her first teaching job demonstrated this narrative momentum, as Sophie described how she just "fit" with the coordinator doing the

interview and how the things she learned in her teacher preparation program closely matched the goals of her interviewer. She narrated the interaction, " [The coordinator] asked me what book had influenced me and I told her *Grammar in Context*. She said, 'Are you kidding me?' and I said, 'No, it's my bible. I've read it like three times.' So she said, 'Hired!' It was so funny. I didn't know that was what I was supposed to be saying." In her story, the interview happened the way it was supposed to happen, without Sophie even knowing it or having conscious control over it. In the interview, an essential self took over to lead her in the right direction, independent of her social self. In this way of viewing the event, there was no other way it could have happened for someone with her identity.

In fact, circumstances beyond the interview itself seemed to confirm the inevitability of her position. For instance, she accepted the job not even knowing where the school was, but she found out it was "two miles from my house. It was serendipity!" Ultimately, in her story, her teaching position was exactly the place she needed to be as she finally had the opportunity to professionally apply the reading, writing, and teaching skills with which she was born.

Her beliefs about her students reflected her own constructed identities and her narrated ideas about the essential qualities of being a writer. "One of the great things about teaching," she explained, "is how they all come to me at a different point. Many of them are natural writers, brilliant. Some, I can tell, have it underneath; it's like their writing selves are wanting to get out but they never let them out and now it's quiet inside or something. Many of them just aren't writers, never will be, and that's okay. Maybe they are brilliant in math or at music or even sports." She reinforced the idea that students are

born with certain abilities that are either nurtured or are allowed to lapse. Her extension of student gifts beyond the skills in her classroom reflected her life experience. Having sisters who were state-level athletes while not possessing any athletic ability herself reinforced the idea that natural abilities take many forms and that students come to her with some kind of natural ability or gift, whether expressed or latent. As she constructed her narrative, she made meaning of her life story through the filter of current circumstances and her stated beliefs.

Sophie also applied her beliefs about inherent abilities to her classroom writing instruction. "I guess my job is to take them where they are and move them forward, you know? Make the brilliant ones more brilliant – really challenge them. Kick the lazy ones in the ass a bit, try to get them to see what they can do. Help the really low ones – the students who can't write their way out of a paper bag – just give them some skills, see if they can get by and pass TAKS and graduate." Like Beth, Sophie's practices reinforced the meaning she had made from her life stories and current circumstances. They both reflected her beliefs and identities, and confirmed them.

Some of the practices I observed in her classroom reinforced this analysis of her beliefs about the nature of writing instruction. For instance, at one point Sophie assigned a project in class in which the students were supposed to design some sort of advertisement promoting the group novel they were reading. She met with each individual student during writing time to go over the student's plan for completing the project. While offering positive encouragement to each student, usually saying things like "sounds good" or "great idea," Sophie, like Beth, seemed to have two different kinds of responses to the students'

plans. For some students, she seemed to focus on the structure of the assignment. She commented to one student, "Think about how many paragraphs you need. Introduce the novel, then tell us something, you know, in each paragraph, about the novel you think we want to know. Like interesting stuff, right? One kind of thing per paragraph and elaborate, give us details from the book." She had similar conversations – focused on structural issues like paragraphs and organization – with six or seven students.

With four or five other students, she had a different kind of conversation, focused on more complex thinking and writing. For instance, with one student she recommended, "Think about your audience. Who are the students in this class? What do they like, right? What gets them excited, makes them interested…be careful when you pick things from the book to talk about. Pick details, stories, you know, from the book that will make them say 'Wow!' And write it that way, too, the words you use, you write with, the same way." She made similar kinds of recommendations, ranging from the use of rhetorical strategies to the application of textual themes to current events, with these students.

The difference in her treatment of the students reinforced her narrative explanation of her practice. When I asked her in a post-observation interview about the two kinds of conferences, she explained, "Some of the students can really write already, so I can do more with them, take them higher. The ones who can't yet, they need more structure, you know, the basics, to try to build their skills." Sophie's stories and practices discussed in this section also confirmed the developing understanding of the complex relationship among life stories, beliefs, identities, and practice, as they worked discursively to shape each other over time.

Melissa Campbell

Melissa, 42 years old and in her sixth year of teaching after a thirteen-year career in television news at the time of this study, was assigned three English I classes and three AP English III classes at an upper-middle class suburban high school. She narrated her experiences in slight contrast to the first two participants, though the ultimate theme was the same. Melissa used language that indicated a similar belief in the essentialized nature of writing, but her assessment of her own abilities in that spectrum and her view of her own journey into teaching high school English made her a unique case.

When we were talking about a childhood, I asked her if she was a good writer. She responded, "I don't know about that. I never saw myself that way. I mean, I had friends who I thought were great readers and writers because it was easy for them or something, I think. I mean, I got by, I could do it when I had to, but mainly because I was a thinker, um, a student of the world." In her narrative, she did not seem to characterize herself as a person with innate writing ability, but she did indicate a perspective consistent with a view of writing as a natural part of a person, as something some people have and others do not. From an identity perspective, however, she categorized herself as one who is not a writer.

Melissa reinforced this belief when she talked about her high school experiences in journalism, "I think I was drawn to journalism, umm, because even though I wasn't really a writer, I could still do it and do it well. Journalism wasn't writing, not like lit mag or research papers or something. I wasn't a writer, really, but I could put down what I saw on paper." Her ideas about writing not only reflected the essentialized nature of being a writer but also the school-based definitions of writing skill that many students use to construct

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their own writing identities; in this case, Melissa defined the skills writers have in terms of academic genres like research writing and creative writing for the "lit mag," as opposed to journalism, which just involved putting things on paper. Even though she had the skill within the scope of journalistic writing, because she constructed a belief about the kinds of writing that constitute a writing identity as being in the more academic realm described above, this story reinforced her identity as a non-writer.

I also asked her to talk about what she meant when she categorized herself as "a thinker" and "a student of the world." She explained,

> I'm like my parents, I think, they, we, just have a knack for news or something. My dad always read the paper, news magazines, and stuff. Mom, too, though not so much, I guess. They never told me I had to but, like, I just wanted to, like, even when I was little, I would sit with Dad and ask him to read me his magazine, and I'm sure it was *Newsweek* or something. I'm just one of those people, I guess. I want to know about the world.

This response only reinforced her earlier assertions about essentialized identities and allowed her to construct her own identity definition as someone who "wants to know about the world."

Because of her differing view of her own identities, the determinism with which she narrated her journey into the profession of teaching English was also unique. As she explained it to me, she first acknowledged the difference between herself and most English teachers, "They're just different, you know. They write poetry and laugh in the face of

research papers. They sleep with *The Crucible* under their pillow, for God's sake. They're just made for this stuff." Again emphasizing her essentialist ideas about most English teachers, she distanced herself from the identity qualities of English teachers as she defined them – writers and lovers of literature – to construct her own identities partially by describing what she is not.

Melissa described her early professional career as a logical choice, given her innate abilities as a "thinker," but she also signaled in her narrative the inevitability of becoming an English teacher.

> At first, I did the journalism thing. I assumed that was it. I mean, it fit me, who I am, or thought I was. I went to…for my undergrad and right out of school, I started, actually before with an internship, and right into a local news station. I worked in the newsroom…but soon I was directing it, and that's when I really started to notice these new people coming in who were going to work for me, but they couldn't, a lot of them, they couldn't write anything. Just mistakes and a lot of them couldn't even write a complete sentence, for God's sake…anyway, I started thinking about why they were that way, and I realized I could get them early, before they got here, early enough to make a difference.

Melissa's language, first describing who she "thought" she was and then explaining that she "could get them early" indicated a deterministic view of her professional journey, that she somehow was a person who needed to help correct the inadequacies of the educational system, especially in the area of writing instruction. This viewpoint is drastically different

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from the first two participants because they constructed their own journeys as inevitable based on their identities as writers. In Melissa's case, the writer identity was not a prerequisite for being a writing teacher.

As Melissa described her instructional practices, she reinforced her essentialist view of students, though not necessarily just as writers and not-writers. Instead, she had broader categories, often associated with tracking for their educational futures.

> In the AP class, it's easier. They're all on their way to college, so it is more straightforward, you know, more uniform. They all work on the same skills. In the regular classes, whew, you've still got a few college kids, your workforce kids, your lucky-to-graduate kids, and the no-way-in-hell kids…I try to give the college kids more AP-like work, but the rest, I guess, um, I just try to make it individual, you know, so if they can't write a sentence we do that first, and we keep doing it until they get there and we can move on."

Her differentiation of students along career paths reinforced her belief in a deterministic view of the students' futures, a natural continuation of her beliefs about the essential qualities of student abilities.

While I was not able to observe many individual interactions with students during my time in her classroom, she did allow me to look at some of the student essays she had been grading and the rubric she used as she graded the assignment. In many ways, it was a fairly standard rubric, with points being assigned based on short qualitative descriptions of the different levels of achievement of the performance goals in the following categories: Organization, Clear Ideas, Details / Elaboration, Voice, Insight / Creativity, and

Mechanics. I noticed, however, that the point values on each rubric were slightly different for each student. When I asked her about it, she explained, "I try to individualize it for each student. The advanced students, who always get full points for things like organization, I don't count it for as much. I want them to be challenged, to push them, so I make them earn more points for, um, the harder things, like special insight or creativity. It just seems fair…the students who aren't AP-level need more work on the organization and stuff."

In her use of differentiated rubrics, Melissa directly reinforced her deterministic view of student achievement and her essentialist outlook on writing instruction – the "advanced" students, who had more natural ability and were destined to move on to more intellectually complex futures, got to work more on creativity and bringing special insights to assignments, while those students without those inherent talents got to work on the more basic skills, which, according to the deterministic view of student achievement, were appropriate for the kinds of academic and career options available to them. Consistent with the first two participants, then, Melissa had constructed practices in her classroom discursively influenced by and influencing her beliefs about writing instruction, her identities as a teacher, and her life stories.

Hank Brown

Hank, 27 years old and in his fourth year of teaching at the health professions magnet school at the time of this study, taught three classes of English I and three classes of English II. In Chapter four, I examined Hank's stories about posting student work, sentence diagramming, and teacher-directed writing. In the stories this chapter addresses,

Hank narrated his childhood intellectual identity in a way that was different than the first three participants in that he did not really name himself as a writer or not a writer – he did not essentialize writing in that way. Instead, he categorized himself intellectually as "artsy" and "philosophical" and then constructed his narrative about how teaching English is the place someone like him – with "artsy" and "philosophical" identities – belongs.

Hank did not tell many stories from his early childhood – he indicated that he just could not remember the events that clearly – but he did make some general statements about who he was intellectually at a young age. "When I was a kid," he explained, "my favorite word was 'why.' It wouldn't surprise me if it was my first word. [laughs] I guess I was a little philosopher, you know, wanting to understand things or something. Like, I just always asked my dad why things were a certain way, I wanted to, I don't know, to experience and express the world. Does that make sense? I liked artsy stuff. I was just like that." In these stories about his childhood, Hank's chose language from the way he had constructed his identity as an adult to characterize himself as a child. By talking about his childhood self as "artsy" and "a little philosopher" and by indicating that he was "just like that," Hank made some identity claims about a self he viewed as essential or within.

When I asked him if writing played a part in being a young philosopher, he responded, "Of course, you know, expression was just so much a part of who I was, I couldn't help but write about the things I was thinking. It was my way of seeing what I understood, sort of even who I was." In Hank's story, therefore, writing was a means for discovering and exploring the essential qualities that defined him, a natural extension and expression of his inner self (Berlin, 1992). As he talked about moving into high school, he

began also emphasizing reading as a way to explore the world, and he set down the groundwork for his later explanation of his journey into teaching English.

> I like reading…when I was in high school, I think that by my junior year, the group of friends I had always talked about books, and I think if you can teach someone to read on their own, then you can teach them to be more empowered…okay, Frank Zappa said that if you really want to be educated, drop out of school and get a library card. I mean, I don't really believe that, but the whole point he was trying to make is that there is a whole world of things to learn out there…and I just want people to realize that.

In his story, Hank saw reading as the key element in "getting your hands on as much information as you can," a quality consistent with his philosopher identity statement. In addition, he was able to construct the story to represent his own deterministic teaching journey by inserting language about teaching into a story about his past, as if the idea of teaching was present in his essentialized self in high school. Also, he used the word "empowered" in a way that suggested interactional awareness within the interview context; that is, given my position as a former teacher and current researcher, he assumed that I would agree that empowerment is a moral goal for teaching, which was a significant element to his ongoing identities construction through our interviews.

In college, he made the decision to become an English major: "I felt like there were lots of career paths, but the only place where people really talked about the important things going on, really expressed themselves, was when they were discussing literature. There is just something in literature that was more important in helping me understand

myself and the world that I couldn't get from other places. By writing about it, I was writing about the world…and about me." In Hank's story, therefore, being intimately involved with reading and writing about literature was akin to being intimately involved with life in this world, which indicated a strong belief statement about the role of literature in the classroom. He equated – on a grand scale – reading, writing about, and discussing the ideas in literary works with the development of his personal identities as an informed intellectual in the world.

As he began to talk about his transition into becoming an English teacher, Hank smiled slyly and said, "At first, I got my teaching certificate as a back-up, just in case I couldn't get another job with my English degree…I came to see that the best possible place for me to make a difference and nurture that artsy philosopher inside me is teaching English. It's perfect! So even when I graduated and thought about doing something else, teaching English at [his school] was just waiting for me." Like Melissa, then, even though he had not constructed his identity as being essentially a writer, Hank discursively constructed his story about entering the teaching profession as an extension of the essential self he did construct and, as a result, as something he was destined to do. In this way, Hank was able to make meaning out his life stories and his teaching situation.

His essentialist-determinist beliefs found their way into his classroom as well. He explained,

> Everyone here [at his school] wants to go into some kind of health-centered
> career, but they are different kinds of kids, which surprised me at first.
> Before I met them, I pictured them all as the kinds of kids who had test-tube

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kits at home since kindergarten and did autopsies on frogs in their back

yards. And there are some of those. But I also have a couple of, you know,

artists, a musician or two, a couple of philosophers like me, you know, all

kinds of kids.

In Hank's mind, there were "kinds" of students who possessed certain inherent intellectual

qualities that defined them. His language about his students reinforced his narrated beliefs

about identity, and helped him understand himself as a particular "kind" of person.

Hank's practices also reflected his attempts to make meaning out of the

essentialized nature of his students' intellectual identities and their consequent

deterministic futures: "I try to, um, encourage them, like, push them to excel in their

special area. Like my scientists, I have them pretend they are writing for scientific journals

or something, and my philosophers, um, write scientific philosophy. I feel like I owe it to

them to help them develop their, um, natural skills, you know, to see what it will be like

when they get out there." By calling them "scientists" and "philosophers," Hank

reinforced his essentialist view of students' intellectual identities and deterministic futures.

He constructed his practices to help him make meaning from his own story and to reinforce

his own sense of identity.

I was able to observe Hank as he discussed the current essays the students were

working on, and I heard them talk about a variety of topics, ranging from a new process for

developing usable human organs in a variety of domestic animals to the work of surreal

artists who represent the human body in their work to a legal objection to stem cell

research. After that class, I asked Hank about the students who were writing on each of the

subjects, and he responded, "Yeah, the papers fit them. Like the stem cell student…she's my little lawyer, a debater, and this paper is right up her alley." My observations provided further evidence of Hank's beliefs about the nature of identities and the ways his practices and his stories reinforced each other and made meaning from each other.

Ellen Dougherty

In the last chapter, I examined Ellen's stories about ratiocination and journalistic questioning as invention. In this chapter, I explore how Ellen, a 24-year old second-year teacher at a middle-income comprehensive high school at the time of this study, constructed her own writing identity through her narrative and how that identity interacted with her practice.

In Ellen's story, working in the English field was a given. "I love English," she said, "and I always knew I would be an English major." In her narrative, Ellen represented her young self in essentialist terms that were similar to the other participants in that there were natural, innate qualities that manifested themselves early in her story: "I don't even remember when I started to like writing. I have always done well in school, but I have always liked English the best. I like reading everything…and it is just something that came easily to me. I don't have to think about 'is this a sentence?' or 'does a comma go here?' – it just felt like it came naturally to me." Using terms like "always" and stating that something came so "naturally" that she didn't even have to think about it invoked an almost moment-of-birth sense of having the essential quality of writing within herself. Like Sophie and Beth, Ellen's narrative indicated early-on an identity construction as a writer.

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Ellen told stories from different times in her life to reinforce this characterization. As she narrated her writing experiences in school, she explained, "It was fun…filling a page just never felt like work…I got a lot of writing awards and newspaper awards and UIL awards." Ellen characterized her writing as fun and effortless, just an extension of her innate abilities, and she almost casually listed the awards she won, as if it was inevitable that someone with her natural gifts would earn such honors. In this way, she used narrative to make meaning out of her constructed identities and her experiences.

Because of the mention of her early involvement with journalism, however, she did take the time in her story to distance herself from a potential journalism career, which seemed inconsistent with an almost humanitarian obligation that accompanied someone with her essential identities: "Very rarely do you see a sympathetic journalist. I mean, there's a house fire and they don't care that your house is burning down. They just want the story, so they ask, 'So, how do you feel about your house burning down?' which is a stupid question. I just knew I could do more in teaching, help people instead of hurting them." By distancing herself from journalists, Ellen made a statement based on a moral separation of herself from an identity as a journalist, anticipating her own future teaching actions (Ochs & Capps, 2001). Based on this moral identity claim, she had made meaning out of her career choice and her past experiences.

Her description of her beliefs about her students and her resulting instructional practices reinforced her earlier essentialist description of her own abilities: "It's really hard, uh, when they aren't writers, when they can't do it very well," she explained. "I mean, I definitely have some writers in my classes, but most of them aren't. Most of them,

they, I mean, I just have to get them to a basic level, you know, to be able to pass the

TAKS and graduate. I don't have to worry about the kids who can write, but the others…."

In Ellen's mind, the students could be divided into two distinct categories – those who

could write and those who could not – a reflection of her essentialist views about writing.

In addition, she used the requirements of the state's testing-accountability system to help

her define who could and could not write, which reflected the view of the nature of writing

performance being situated in a school context. Her practice of differentiating writing

instruction for students with different essential writing identities represented the ongoing

interaction of Ellen's past experiences, constructed identities as a writer, and placement as

a teacher, as her beliefs, identities, and practices interacted to make meaning in her life.

Mary Valenzuela

Mary was a 57-year old teacher with 34 years of experience in the classroom at the

time of this study, and in Chapter four, I described stories she told about the practices of

student-choice journal writing, teacher-student conferences, and imitative writing. In this

chapter, I will begin with an explanation of how Mary's characterization of herself as a

child echoed the essentialist language of the other participants. "My whole life," she

explained, "I have loved books and reading and writing. I started reading before I started

school, and I have always been a writer." She confidently asserted her own identity as a

writer as something she can be and always has been, a claim consistent with the essentialist

outlooks of the other participants.

For Mary, however, unlike the other participants who claimed writing identities for

themselves, teaching was not the natural extension of the writing identity. Actually, in her

story, she talked about wanting to become a "professional writer" at several points in the narrative, though she used the term without explaining what she meant by it: "When I was little, I knew I was a good writer, so I figured I would, you know, write books when I grew up…when I graduated from high school, I wanted to be a professional writer, so I went to college and majored in English…I had a professor who told me, 'If you want to be a professional writer, just get a job where you can write." As she told the story, she structured her narrative where becoming some kind of "professional" writer seemed like an inevitability. Instead, however, she explained that she got married, had a baby, and put her career plans on hold. "I knew I needed to put my career on hold and take care of my family…I would figure out what I wanted to do later." By constructing the narrative this way – claiming her writing identity and mentioning the most natural career course, only to be interrupted by the necessity of her putting her own career on hold to take care of her family – Mary made a moral identity claim; she was willing to do what she *needed* to do. From a historical context, a woman having a child in the 1970s and staying home to take care of the child was not uncommon. Mary chose to construct her narrative in such a way that, given the drastically different landscape of our understanding of family structures at the time of this study, her choice seemed more unusual, only adding to her identities construction in the development of her story of becoming a teacher.

At this point in the narrative, Mary actually paused and engaged in some small talk. As someone who admitted to me that she loved to tell stories, "they way they work," she seemed to be enjoying letting the suspense build about how she eventually became a teacher since I knew that was the inevitable end but not how her story would get there. She

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seemed to make an intentional interactive decision about taking a break before finishing this story (Wortham, 2001), so she asked me to talk about how I became a teacher.

After a few minutes of conversation about my professional journey, she brought our interview back to her story. "I guess you probably want to know how I became a teacher now," she stated, smiling, and then she launched into the plot twist she had been waiting to tell me about.

> There was a knock on my door and I just kind of fell into it, or, really, it, um, fell into me. My landlord at the time knocked on my door one day and asked me if I might want to teach. His wife – busybody – had told him I had a degree in English, so he thought, well, he told me he was the superintendent of a small district about thirty miles north of where we were living and he couldn't find an English teacher and did I want to come. I don't know why, but I said, "Yes." So here I am, right where I belong.

At this point, Mary smiled and paused again, having completed the plot turn in her story. By using the words "right where I belong," Mary reinforced her claim to an essentialized identity that had a pre-determined place and interacted to make meaning of her experiences leading up to her teaching position.

As she discussed her teaching assignment at a magnet high school focusing on communications arts, her foundational beliefs about the essential nature of writing instruction were evident. "I think the students here, more than anywhere else I have taught," she explained, "can really write. I mean, they aren't all writers, but most of them are. I know being at [the school] is a big part of it – I mean, that's why they come here –

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but I still can't get over how many of them can really write." By making the statement that the students at her current school can write "more than anywhere else [she has] taught," Mary established her belief statement as being grounded in a career full of experiences, in an ethos-centered linguistic move. Ultimately, claiming her experience, Mary, like the other participants, used language that separated students into two distinct groups – those who could write and those who could not.

Because she believed almost all her students at the magnet school were writers, she did not talk about treating the two essentialist categories of students differently in the ways she managed her writing instruction. However, she did talk about their future careers in deterministic terms that reflected these beliefs, and her explanation of her writing practices reinforced this idea.

> One cool thing about this school is how many directions the students are going. I mean, a lot of them, the creative ones, I guess, a lot of writers, will go into communications work, television, the arts, you know. We do have some – not many but a few – who will do other things, you know, like I have one who wants to be an engineer. So I let them write about what they want, what they, related to what they want to do next year…most of my writers, um, go for the creative careers and write that kind of stuff in class.

In her description of her students, Mary used language that reflected a link between being able to write and having a "creative" career, versus not having that innate ability and pursuing a career like engineering, situating the identity of being a writer in work-defined contexts, reminiscent of her early-life desire to be a "professional writer." Ultimately,

Mary constructed her narrative in such a way that her practices made sense in light of her past experiences, stated beliefs, and constructed identities; in addition, her practices discursively helped her construct her experiences, beliefs, and identities as she moved through her life.

Constructing essentialist writing beliefs and identities

Given an understanding of beliefs as interactive constructions and not as static internal things we have or own (Tabachnick & Zeichner, 1984) and identities construction as an ongoing discursive process, interacting and co-constructing meaning with our past experiences and current worlds (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998), some consistencies emerged in this chapter that demonstrated the complex interactive nature of teachers making meaning out of their lives. On one hand, their constructed identities and life stories influenced the ways they thought about their practices; in addition, though, their practices influenced the ways they constructed their identities, including the process of selectively telling stories about their lives.

Another important theme that emerged from this chapter was the strict definition of what specific skills constitute identity-level writing. Two participants separated journalistic writing from *writing*, and other participants talked about the skills certain identity-bound students just did not have and tied the skills to career paths. In addition, there was mention of "creative" writing and "research" writing, both school-defined skills, as essential to writing identities.

As I move into Chapter six, more identity themes emerge, though not exclusively related to being writer. Instead, I explore broader life themes from the participants' stories and how they interact with beliefs and practices.

Chapter Six

The Story of Their Lives: Personal History,

Professional Identity, and Writing Instruction

In Chapter five, I examined the ways the participants' beliefs about the essentialist nature of writing and the resulting deterministic outlooks for students (and themselves) affect the ways they construct their own identities as writers and teachers and, consequently, the ways they think about students and practice writing instruction. The last two chapters have explored specific incidents from the teachers' stories as being influential in particular ways as they constructed their identities as writers and teachers. This chapter extends the findings in Chapter five by examining the predominant theme of each participant's narrative in an effort to understand the ways they constructed their life stories through a systematic interaction with the themes. In their stories, their professional selves – teachers of writing – were assigned purposes consistent with, and in many ways the natural narrative conclusion of, lifetimes of experiences and representations of personal qualities that have participated in the construction of their professional identities. Based on their narrated professional roles, they constructed beliefs about teaching and they made instructional decisions consistent with their life stories. In the analysis of the interviews with each of the participants, a unifying theme stood out across the stories.

This chapter deals primarily with constructed identities over the course of a lifetime as represented across the stories, where the participants had constructed their identities through internal conversations throughout their lives and continued to construct them, even

as they practiced teaching on a daily basis and especially as they told me the stories of their lives. The participants inhabited a variety of figured worlds (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998), and the identities they constructed through their participation in those worlds were reflected in their narratives. Each of them used stories to describe personal and social histories (Holland & Lave, 2001) that contributed to their identities construction. In their narratives, this identities construction primarily stemmed from both essentialist statements about who they were (Erikson, 1968) and statements constructing their identities based on what they had done throughout their lives and did in their classrooms at the time of this study (Cameron, 2001). Based on the predominant theme they constructed through their narratives, I assigned each participant a professional identity title, representative of the meaning they made through their stories. That is not to say that all their stories represented the theme I describe; they all told numerous stories that, during the analysis, were coded with other terms. This chapter does represent, however, the most consistent theme across each participant's stories.

Ellen Dougherty: Teacher-Organizer

Throughout her narrative, twenty-four year old Ellen told stories about herself as someone who needed to be involved in organizing things. In fact, in the first interview, she admitted, "I guess you could call me an organizer," as she explained how she set up her classroom. I had noticed typed labels marking everything in the room, including the categories of books on different shelves, supply drawers in a freestanding plastic cabinet, and each individual class period's portfolio boxes, inside of which the portfolios were alphabetically sorted in labeled hanging files. I commented on how much time it must

have taken just to print all the labels, and Ellen began telling me about her organizational habits. "I'm so bad," she admitted, "that my mom got me my own label-maker when I graduated from high school. I guess I had used hers so much, I, um, needed my own to carry on the family tradition."

In Ellen's story, being an organizer was an essential quality in her family, specifically in her mother, that Ellen then claimed for herself. As she constructed the stories about her life, starting with descriptions of her mother from her childhood, the theme of organization was consistently present in the details of the stories themselves and in the language she used. Throughout her narrative, Ellen used both words and descriptions of actions to make meaning from her life within the framework of an organizational theme. For instance, Ellen talked about the parties her parents used to have in their house:

> My mom really put them together, and it was fun for her in, well, it was weird, but I think she almost liked getting ready for the parties as much as she did having them. I, like, she would make lists and take trips to the store and would stack all this stuff – food, decorations, you know – on our dining room table the week of a party, and my brother and I had to eat in the living room. She would – I know this sounds weird – she would label the supplies with these signs: Kitchen or Den and she got all these records and put them in order, you know, like music for the party, and, I don't know, she just planned and planned and planned. She loved it…I guess that's where I get it.

In the stories about her mother, Ellen typically focused on the ways her mother organized specific events in their lives, and in almost every case, Ellen made an essentialist identity claim about her mother's organization being the source of her own. In this story, the very acts of attending to a high level of detail indicated support for an identity as an organizer. In addition, using language like the emphasis on her mother having "planned and planned and planned" further reinforced the narrative moves she was making to build this theme in her stories. Despite the fact that she talked about a variety of early childhood stories, from daily rituals to family vacations, organizing events was consistently the predominant theme.

Another important element in Ellen's life to which she assigned importance in her narrative was the Girl Scouts, and her participation in the program provided the context for the transition from mother-centered to Ellen-centered stories of organization. Ellen first talked about her mother's willingness to help by providing a home for the meetings and planning events. "It was weird," she admitted, talking about her mother's role in the Girl Scouts, "because she was hands-on, in a way, but not really. It was like…well, she always volunteered to help, and she, um, I mean, she would let me help her plan for like a cookout, make the grocery lists and stuff, but she usually didn't go." In her stories, Ellen explained that her mother wanted to be a behind-the-scenes organizer in most of her activities. In making the distinction between her mother being a planner and a doer, Ellen constructed her mother's – and, in turn, her own – identity partially in terms of what she was *not*. That is, she narrated an Other to whom she could stand in opposition during her narrative telling and simultaneous identities construction (Sarup, 1996).

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Ellen went on to explain what she learned from her mother during Girl Scouts: "…I was always prepared, I'll give her that. She made sure I brought everything on the list. Girls always forgot stuff – toothpaste, underwear, you know – but not me. Mom made sure…I learned a lot about getting things together. I'm kind of anal, really…my dad says I'm just like her." Ellen again attributed her organizational skills to her mother, this time offering evidence of the ways her mother taught her to be organized during her time in Girl Scouts. Even though she talked about Girl Scout experiences, including service projects and campouts, the theme of bring organized was once again the most prominent. Once again, she set her self apart from what she was not – in this case, she was not disorganized like some of the other girls. Also, she made a narrative move in this incident as the stories of organization moved from her mother to herself, describing what her mother did, and then what she learned and was able to do, emphasized by the statement, "My dad says I'm just like her." At this point, Ellen took on the identity of organizer and carried it forward to construct stories focusing on her actions.

The theme of organization in Ellen's stories surfaced again when she started talking about her experiences in high school. While she did tell some stories about classroom experiences, she also talked a lot about her participation in clubs and other extracurricular activities. "I was in everything, you know?" she explained. "NHS, Student Council, a lot of journalism stuff. I did UIL – like headline writing, you know – and yearbook." When I asked her why she was in so many things, she responded, "I don't know. I mean, you know, it looked good on college applications and all, but, I don't know,

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I just loved it, you know? The meetings, the elections, the banquets, the whole shebang. Call me crazy, I just love doing that stuff. It's fun, you know, organizing everything."

Once again, the theme of organization emerged in her narrative. At first, Ellen simply told me about activities in which she was engaged. When she had the opportunity to make meaning out of the activities, she chose to frame them thematically as activities she could organize. At this point in her story, the interaction between her constructed identities and her narrated actions was growing stronger. She was, in essence, not only using her constructed identities as a source for action but also using her actions to construct her teaching identities (Cameron, 2001).

Because she was so involved in journalism, I asked her to talk about it a little bit, and the theme emerged even more clearly.

> I *loved* yearbook. I mean, how cool is it to get to decide where things go in the yearbook *everyone* was going to get. I mean, we had to do a sports section and a clubs section and spirit and yadda yadda, but we got to decide – when I was editor – the order and the page layouts, you know? How big the pictures would be, how many, the captions, all of it. I, um, I mean, it was, I don't know, it was perfect for me, I guess.

As Ellen talked about her experiences in journalism, she did not spend much time describing the content of the stories themselves. Instead, she primarily focused on the process of organizing a high school yearbook and how much fun she had doing it. The discursive relationship between narrative action and identity, in this case working on the yearbook and her self-proclaimed essential identity as an organizer – was evident as her

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narrative actions revealed her constructed identities, and her identities determined the narrative actions she described, as they also did in the stories from college.

As she talked about her college experiences, the theme was again present in her stories. Ellen's participation in a sorority was a significant part of her university life, and she drew a clear connection between her organizational nature and her success in sorority leadership. "My junior year," she explained, "I was social chair. I had to put together all the events: service, parties, all of it. The previous chair had told me how hard it was coming up with stuff week after week, but, I don't know, I never thought it was that hard. I, well, it just all came together, I guess. I thought it was fun." In Ellen's story, the very challenges of organization that were problematic for the previous social chair were fun for her. Her identities construction in this story was partially the act of setting herself apart from the previous chair, again defining herself by what she was not. Her natural, innate capacity to organize allowed her to be successful in that environment. In fact, Ellen explained, "I couldn't believe it when I got elected president the next year. It's usually not the social chair, but, I don't know, I guess they thought if I could do that…anyway, I was president…I still got to plan some stuff, just more official, you know, ceremonies or whatever, but not as much. It was still fun, I guess. Just more work." In Ellen's mind, she was elected president of her sorority because of her organizational skills, and as she told the story of her term as president, she still specifically mentioned her planning duties, even though they were not the major function of her position. The theme of organization continued its strong presence, as she constructed her life through the interaction of past events and constructed identities.

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As she discussed her teaching placement at the time of this study, the organizational theme that had been present in stories from throughout her life was prevalent again. At one point, I asked her why she liked teaching high school English. Her response was an extension of her constructed life theme.

> I guess I like being able to, I mean, I *love* the kids and the literature is great and I love teaching writing. I just, I don't know, there's something about watching it all happen, you know? It's like I get the curriculum book and I plan the lessons. I mean, they do whatever I ask them to do. That sounds egotistical, I know, but there's something cool about it. I love putting it all together and watching them do the work.

Aside from a brief interactional positional digression during which she explained that she loved the students and the content because she knew she should say those things to me (Wortham, 2001), Ellen seemed to focus primarily on the organizational nature of planning activities for the students, on "putting it all together." She mentioned other aspects of her teaching assignment almost dismissively, and instead constructed herself as a teacher who loved the act of organizing instruction.

As she talked about some specific instructional practices, the theme of organization continued to be strong. For example, she explained how she organized the writing process into "days," each one of which had its own pre-planned rules and procedures. On "Prewriting Day," for instance, Ellen described, "I give them each a packet with the activities, like whatever prewriting they're going to do for the project, and I time them. Like, they may have a cubing sheet, so they get three minutes for each part. I use the

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overhead timer so they know how much time they have left." In Ellen's classroom, therefore, prewriting was a structured process dictated by the teacher's packets and timer. Because planning the structure of the activity was the dominant concern, the organization became the focus of the story of her instructional practice. She spent more time explaining the process of running the activity than she did explaining how it was useful to the development of the students' writing skills. By selecting which details to spend time talking about, Ellen reinforced the construction of her identity as an organizer.

One of my observations served as an additional source of reinforcement for the theme. The tenth-grade students were conferring with each other about a writing assignment based on *Of Mice and Men*. After they completed their warm-up activity, Ellen instructed them to move to their peer conference seats. It was apparent that the students had done this activity before because they moved the desks around into facing pairs and each student was with a partner. Ellen clicked her computer mouse and a Power Point slide came up on a television screen in the corner. The slide read, "Tell your partner which theme you are writing about and describe your best piece of evidence from the book." Ellen turned on the overhead projector and announced, "Partner #1, go." She then pressed a button on a timing device and a readout on the overhead started counting down from three minutes. One student in each pair started talking, and Ellen stood at the front of the room and watched. After three minutes, the timer went off and Ellen announced, "Partner #2, go." She quickly reset the timer and kept watching from the front of the room. This process continued through four different sets of discussion prompts, lasting a total of thirty

minutes. Ellen maintained the same procedure throughout the class, constantly watching from her position at the front of the room.

After class, I asked Ellen how she thought it had gone. She smiled broadly. "Smooth as silk, don't you think?" she responded confidently. Ellen's emphasis on the planning of the activity, from teaching the logistics of the conferring process to preparing the Power Point slides with the discussion prompts, reinforced the theme of organization that was consistent throughout the stories from her life. In constructing her identities along the theme of organization by telling stories from her life, Ellen demonstrated a complex interrelationship among the stated beliefs, constructed identities, and narrated actions that had discursively interacted (and continued to interact) as she had made (and continued to make) meaning in and from her life.

Melissa Campbell: Teacher-Producer

Like Ellen, 42-year old Melissa also talked a lot about planning and organization, though thematically, Melissa's stories also included incidents and language indicating a more hands-on approach during the implementation of activities. One of the first things Melissa said during our first interview was, "I'm probably different than a lot of your interviews. Before I became a teacher, I was a news producer for many years. In some ways, I guess I still think of myself that way." From the beginning, then, Melissa identified herself as a producer, someone who planned and implemented, and many of the rest of her stories reinforced this characterization as she constructed the identities she claimed through the stories she told. Also, she intentionally set herself apart from the other participants, naming them as the Other she was not (Sarup, 1996).

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Even in stories from her early life, Melissa described herself as a producer. "My nickname was 'boss' when I was a kid," she explained. "Probably because I bossed everyone around, told them what to do. I've always been that way." In her description of her young self, Melissa's primary self-characterization was of someone who liked to tell other people what to do. She did not tell a lot of stories from her early childhood – she embarrassedly explained that she couldn't remember that many stories – but when I asked her why she was so bossy, she replied, "You know, I'm really not sure. I can't remember ever *not* wanting to boss people around. I mean, I wasn't bossy at home – my parents would have kicked my ass, you know? But everywhere else…" Melissa constructed her childhood identity as being inherently bossy, explaining that she "can't remember ever not wanting to boss people around" and claiming that she had "always been that way." In the early part of her narrative, she made an essentialist identity claim and began constructing the identity through her stories.

Even though she did not tell many stories from her early childhood, Melissa did talk a lot about high school. Like Ellen, Melissa was actively involved in journalism, specifically the school newspaper, and her explanation of her experience reinforced the theme of being a producer.

> I loved working on the paper. I did it for four years. Senior year, I was editor, which was great. It was crazy. I sat in the journalism room, right, and I would make assignments – go cover this story, get this picture, get this quote – and I would check their work. It was such a rush saying, like, "re-do this!" They had to do what I said. I sounded like my parents: "When I

was a reporter…" I was good, so I had reasons for making them change –

well, most of the time – anyway, it was great.

In Melissa's story, she again named being motivated by the act of telling other people what to do and how to do it, further establishing her producer identity. In a hands-on fashion, Melissa's story showed her acting the part of someone making quick decisions about what other people needed to do, making some assignments proactively and others reactively. Even in a story from high school, Melissa constructed her producer identity through the actions she described.

Melissa did not talk much about college or the early part of her news career, but instead she moved quickly through her narrative so she could talk about being a news producer. When she got to that point in her story, she paused for a couple of seconds and started again with slow emphasis. "And then," she explained, "they offered me a producer position. I knew right away that I was home." Her narrative choice to slow down and emphasize the transition into the new job followed by the statement that she "was home" reinforced the idea that Melissa, based on the essentialist identity she was constructing, belonged in that position.

Early in the story of being a news producer, as she talked about the other people in the newsroom for whom she was responsible, Melissa began making connections between producing and teaching. "I thought I could just give them a job and make sure they did it," she explained, "but I started to see that some of them just couldn't do it. I had to show them everything if I had any hope of them getting it right." In Melissa's narrative, she made a shift into a teacher-producer identity by narrating the action of not only giving

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instructions, but also teaching her subordinates how to do their jobs. This description offered further evidence of Melissa's construction of her teacher-producer identity through the actions she described and her construction of the narrative actions based on the identities he had claimed.

Melissa next described how, in her effort to ensure the quality of her subordinates' work, she developed the idea for a "producer school" at the station, where she would plan a specific course of study for new hires to prepare them to be successful in the newsroom. She ended up teaching them the curriculum in a classroom setting while she directed them in the newsroom, and she made the teaching-producer connection more explicit. "It worked beautifully," she explained. "When I directed them on the news floor, I knew exactly what they should be able to do because I had taught them myself!" By explaining this dual role she took on in the newsroom, Melissa further cemented her identity construction as a teacher-producer.

After several years as a news producer, Melissa decided to go into teaching. Her rationale for the change was that people coming into the profession seemed to have fewer and fewer basic skills, and Melissa decided the best way to remedy the problem was to teach high school English. She described it as getting students "while they're still on the vine," and she began making explicit connections between her teacher-producer theme and the classroom. "As a producer," she explained, "I had to keep track of dozens of people working simultaneously, and I had to keep them, well, make sure they were all doing their job. Teaching English is a lot like that – I just have to make sure all my students are doing their jobs." In this description, Melissa made a couple of belief claims that she constructed

from her experience, namely that high school English teachers can remedy the "problem" of a lack of basic skills in the workplace and that teaching English involves making sure students are doing their job.

As she discussed her classroom practice, Melissa used the narrative opportunity to make active meaning of the belief claims she had just made; in other words, she made the discursive connection between narratives of beliefs and practice – her stated beliefs influenced her practice, and her practice influenced the way she constructed her beliefs. She talked about setting up workshops, conferring with students, and teaching specific skills, but she spent a disproportionate amount of time talking about rubrics.

> I'm the rubric queen. I've got a whole file of them. People come to me, you know, when they need a rubric for something...At the station, I did performance evals all the time, and I used forms with descriptive ratings for each specific category of the person's work…Really, writing rubrics are just the same thing. I can mark what students are doing well and what they still need to do. Then they know how to fix their writing. If they need me to explain, I will, but usually, they know what they need to do better.

For Melissa, assessing student writing was a process akin to performance evaluations in a newsroom – tell the students what they are doing wrong and how to "fix" it – and she used rubrics like performance evaluations. Rather than referring to evidence from the professional education discourse community or using the language from that community, she reinforced her identity claim as a teacher-producer by using the language of the newsroom in the classroom. She demonstrated such a high level of confidence in her

identities being worked out in her practice that she referred to herself as the "rubric queen."

That title and her practice of using rubrics in the classroom succinctly illustrated the

discursive relationship within the narrative among her identities as a teacher-producer, the

stories from her life, and her classroom practices.

Beth Kirby: Teacher-Guide

Similar to the stories of the first two participants, 35-year old Beth's stories

emphasized a sense of having information and feeling the need to disseminate it. The

primary difference in Beth's professional identity-life theme, however, was that she

focused much more on the individual students than on large-scale event planning. For

Beth, offering individualized guidance was the central tenet to effective teaching, and

being a teacher-guide was a central theme to the stories she told.

In the stories from Beth's early life, the theme of being a guide emerged like

Melissa's producer theme did – she wasn't sure exactly where it came from, but she

remembered when it was there and how it revealed itself. Indicating that she did not

remember many stories from elementary school, Beth primarily talked about middle and

high school. She told this story from high school:

> I was like a counselor to all my friends. This may sound funny – when I
>
> think about it, it's kind of funny to me now – I used to give them advice,
>
> like on their relationships. Don't laugh – it's true! I mean, couples would
>
> come to me, like I was a therapist or something, and tell me their problems,
>
> and I would give them on-the-spot advice, like Dr. Phil or something. Now
>
> it's embarrassing, but then, I mean, I really thought I was helping them.

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They thought I was too, I guess, 'cause they kept coming…I think I helped some of them. Actually, I think at least one of my early clients is, they're married now.

As she talked about her role as a counselor with her high school friends, Beth cautiously asserted her ability to offer them guidance. At first, she seemed reluctant and even apologetic, but by the end of this story, she acknowledged that she helped some of her friends through her guidance, which, along with her language of being a "therapist" and a "counselor" and being like "Dr. Phil," demonstrated an early identity construction as a guide, or someone who helps other people navigate some challenging or unknown aspect of their lives.

As she told more stories from high school, Beth quickly began to use language indicating the identity transition from guide to teacher-guide, especially as she talked about her writing experiences in some of her classes. She got specific about the guidance – or in most cases, the lack of guidance – she received from her teachers about her writing. "Most of the time," she explained, "I didn't understand what they were saying anyway. It used to frustrate the hell out of me because they would make some comment and I had no idea what to do." In Beth's educational life, meaningful guidance was not a part of her experience, at least when it came to writing instruction. In her stories, the teachers offered some help, but it tended to be rather meaningless to her. By telling these stories, Beth was developing a pattern of characteristics she wanted to identify herself as being in opposition to (Sarup, 1996) as she continued the narrative transition into her teaching career.

Beth's solution to her frustration with the lack of guidance was to work with some friends to give each other feedback. "We looked at each others' papers," she explained, "and we tried to help, like, give each other advice on our writing. It didn't really help me that much – I felt pretty good about what I was doing anyway – but my friends said I gave them good advice, so we kept it up for most of high school." Once again, the theme of guidance emerged from Beth's story, this time specifically relating to writing instruction. Reasserting her essentialist identity as a writer, Beth explained that she did not really need the help, but she described herself helping her friends as a teacher-guide, narrating actions that supported her identity claims. In addition to the actions, the words she used, including "help" and "advice," signaled her teacher-guide identity construction as well.

In stories about college, Beth continued to assert her identity as a teacher-guide as she described working in the university writing center. She had the opportunity to work with students individually as they came in to get help with assignments from their courses, and Beth indicated that she was comfortable in the role. "It was perfect for me," she explained, "even though I used to really piss off the other tutors. We didn't have a specific time limit, unless other students were waiting, so I used to take forever – I admit it – to go through their work. I used to read it to them aloud, the whole thing. It was the best way for me to give them real advice." By describing the job in the writing center as "perfect" for her as she gave out more "advice," Beth further asserted the action-identity teacher-guide connection she was constructing. In addition, Beth took a moral stance (Ochs & Capps, 2001) about the "best way" to help the students who came in and she clearly set herself apart from the other tutors, whom she "pissed off" by doing the right thing and

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taking her time giving advice on her students' writing. Her language did indicate a teacher-centeredness to her role as a teacher-guide; in her construction, the guide had the information and gave it out, as opposed to more professionally accepted views of guidance, which look more like conferring in a workshop environment (Calkins, 1994; Anderson, 2000).

As she talked about her current writing instruction, she continued to construct the theme of being a teacher-guide in almost every aspect of her professional life. From a planning standpoint, Beth admitted to doing very little to prepare for most elements of writing instruction, unlike the first two participants. I asked her how she planned for talking with students about their writing, for example, and she responded bluntly, "I don't. How can I? I don't know what they're going to show me until I see it, so…I just read it fresh and give them the best advice I can based on what they have." In one sense, Beth was attempting to position herself squarely within the professional discourse on conferring I referenced in the last incident (Calkins, 1994; Anderson, 2000), but she also continued to use the language of her construction of the teacher-guide identity, giving "advice" based on what she read in their work, quite similar in form to the pop psychology of Dr. Phil she referenced at the beginning of her narrative.

The theme of being a teacher-guide even showed up when Beth talked about her consistent attendance at work. "It is so hard to be gone," she explained. "It's probably easier in other areas, but I don't see how a writing teacher can, well I have a hard time, anyway. There's just no way for a sub to help them with their writing…I can't leave a lesson plan for that. I have to be here." Making another moral claim about being present

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to guide students through their writing, Beth further tried to make meaning from her actions that would support her professional identity construction.

My observations in Beth's classroom reinforced the claims Beth was making in her stories. She took the time to hold individual conferences with students in which she read through a piece of their writing and gave them individual feedback on the areas she believed needed to be addressed. Ranging from including topic sentences to offering more comprehensive evidence from the text to support an argument, Beth's comments were based on her individual assessment of each student's educational needs and her confidence in her own ability to discern the specific areas of appropriate desired improvement for each student. Beth constructed her narrative and her classroom practices as a reflection of her identity as a teacher-guide, and her stated identity determined the stories she told and the words she used.

Sophie Roberts: Teacher-Advocate

The predominant theme in 33-year old Sophie's narrative was, in many ways, like Beth's in that they both were primarily concerned with how to help individual students with unique needs. Sophie's story, however, focused more on the desire to be an advocate for the students, and stories throughout her narrative reflected this identity construction.

Sophie first mentioned the word "advocate" early in her narrative as she described her parents. "They were always on my side," she explained, "especially my mom. She was, well, for lack of a better term, she was my advocate. People expected lots of different things from me, but I always knew my mom wanted me to be me." Sophie described her mother's role in her life using that specific word, and then she went on to define it, saying

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that her mother "wanted me to be me" and was "always on my side." Early in her stories, then, Sophie established a name and a definition for the identity she would construct through the course of her narrative.

To reinforce her naming of her mother as her advocate," Sophie told several stories about her mother's role in supporting her through various life circumstances. For example, she told a story about when she was in fifth grade and she wanted to start a class newspaper, but she met with resistance from the teacher. She described a conference her mother had with the teacher:

> I don't remember everything about the meeting, but I do remember my mom really getting in her face. She never yelled, my mom, at least not in front of me, but she got this look and talked in this slow monotone – I hated it when she used it with me because it meant I was in deep-, well, you know. Anyway, she got the voice with Mrs. Miller and started saying things about creativity and nurturing our interests and a teacher's responsibility and stuff. She was on a roll. She really went to bat for me.

In Sophie's narrative, her mother played the role of advocate in her life, speaking on her behalf, and the actions she described helped her construct the identity she had named for her mother.

As she began telling stories of herself getting older, Sophie began expressing a desire to be like her mother. Even though she initially tried to avoid being in the same profession – her mother was a teacher's aide and eventually became a special education teacher, and Sophie thought seriously about working in business, among other things – she

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made numerous statements claiming the identity she had been constructing for her mother as her own and aligning herself with her mother's character and behavior. For example, after a story where she described how her mother had helped her through a tough incident in middle school, Sophie explained, "I can't tell you how much she did for me. Even as a kid, I wanted – I mean, I understand it a lot better now – but even then, part of me wanted to be like her. Every time she got me through something, I wished I could do something for her. In a way, teaching is how I, um, how I give back. I know that probably sounds dorky and cliché, but I think it's true." Even as she positioned herself in the interview as someone who would tell me exactly the way it was, no matter how "dorky and cliché" she sounded (Wortham, 2001), Sophie made a moral claim of "giving back" and began to construct the connection between her advocate identity and her teaching identity, both mirroring her mother to some extent. In addition, at several points during her narrative, she called herself "my mother's daughter," which indicated the way she was constructing her own identity parallel to the one she had constructed for her mother.

In other stories from her life leading up to her teaching career, Sophie explored the theme of being an advocate in an indirect manner. She described several incidents when she needed an advocate, especially in school, but did not have one. She even made some direct connections to instruction. In one story from high school, for example, she talked about having a desire to learn about herself as a writer and wanting her teacher to help her through the process. "I was really starting to, um, think about what kind of writer I was, you know? I didn't know what to call it then, but now I would say I was looking for my voice, and Mr. Petri, God love him, didn't have the first clue! He kept giving me A after A

and telling me what a great writer I was. I really wanted him to help me tell, er, figure

myself out." Sophie took on professional language – referring to "voice" and talking about

the importance of learning over grades as both the interactive positioning (Wortham, 2001)

of one teacher talking to another, and as a means of furthering her identity construction as a

teacher-advocate. In the story itself, Sophie described how she wanted her teacher to help

her "figure [herself] out," describing a quality she claimed as her own as she told her story.

When Sophie talked about herself as a teacher, she explicitly stated that she wanted

to fill this role for her students and explained how being an advocate was especially

meaningful for writing instruction, echoing the frustrations she felt in her own educational

experiences and making narrative connections between her past experiences and her

teaching practices as a function of the meaning she was making from both.

> I really believe in being an advocate for my kids, helping them find their
>
> voice. Some of them are more ready than others, but they all have
>
> something to say. The problem is that most of the time, no one wants to
>
> listen, even English teachers, which makes me, well, anyway, they just
>
> don't get the chance to be themselves, to speak out, they don't know how
>
> and no one takes the time to show them or let them do it. For me, it's,
>
> hmm, I know it sounds weird putting it in these terms, but for me, it's like a
>
> mission, if that makes sense. It's who I want to be in my kids' lives.

In this description, Sophie used several of the meaning making processes the other

participants used. First, she actually used the word "advocate" to describe her own

practice, firmly claiming that identity in her teaching. She supported this identity assertion

by explaining the role she wanted to play in the lives of her students, almost exactly echoing the description of her mother's advocate role in her own life. In addition, she set herself apart from her colleagues who didn't want to listen to their students, using the construction of things she did *not* do to help make more definitive the identity she was trying to construct for herself. Finally, she described her "mission" to help students, making a moral claim of purpose to reinforce her constructed identity.

As she talked about her practice, Sophie described one kind of conversation she had with students about their writing. "Notebook time, I put up a quote or something. I tell them to say something about it nobody else has ever said…I tell them the same thing when they write their essays or even on semester exams – tell me something I don't know, say something different. I feel like someone has to encourage them to speak out." In narrating this aspect of her practice, Sophie made a belief claim about student writing – that it should say something unique. She also narrated the connection between this belief and her practice – that she was just the person to help them speak out – which was a significant part of the identity she was trying to construct for herself through her narrative.

When I observed her classroom, I did notice that even in the ways she called on students to share something they had written with the class, she used language encouraging them to find their voices, as she described it. When students raised their hands, she called on them by saying things like "tell us something, Julie" and "Marco, enlighten us." These phrases themselves served as language that reinforced her identity claims as a teacher-advocate and as catalyst for her ongoing identities construction. Through her narrative,

Sophie made identity claims, told stories, and discussed her teaching practices, all of which interacted as part of her meaning-making process.

Hank Brown: Teacher-Enlightener

Like Sophie, 27-year old Hank described himself as a teacher who tried to help his students find something, but unlike Sophie's mission to give her students a unique voice, Hank described his responsibility as helping his students discover "all the ideas in a world they didn't even know were there." Hank's narrative consistently returned to the theme of enlightenment – a word Hank introduced – to the idea of minds opening up to new ways of thinking about the world, both in the stories of his own life and in his description of his teaching.

Hank described his early life by focusing on a sheltered upbringing in a small community in Iowa. While he spoke fondly of his parents, he placed a lot of negative responsibility on them for not allowing him to know more about the world outside his community. "We hardly went anywhere," he explained, "unless we were visiting family or something. I thought the whole world was like Iowa. I just didn't know anything else. And my parents didn't tell me. I guess they thought I might stay there or something, live there forever." He attributed his parents' decisions not to expose him to many experiences beyond his immediate community to their desire for him to spend his life in his hometown. Through this description, he constructed his parents as people holding him back from something. In his story, he associated learning about the "outside world" with the desire to explore it and leave his home community behind. At one point, he described people who never had that desire or took the opportunity to learn about life beyond the small

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community as not being "enlightened," and though he did not use this term directly to refer to his parents, the implication, based on his description of his parents' actions, was that they fell into that essentialist identity category. By making a negative identity claim both about his parents and about other people in his home community who had no interest in leaving, Hank was developing a sense of Other (Sarup, 1996) against whom he could begin constructing his own identity. Throughout the rest of his narrative, including stories of his teaching life, Hank returned to the idea of leaving home and exploring the world, of becoming "enlightened."

Hank described his childhood self in terms that are typical for someone raised in a small community. He used words like "trapped" and "stuck" when he talked about his early life, and he was critical of the "small-mindedness" of the people in his community, which he attributed primarily to their lack of exposure to outside ideas and their lack of desire to look beyond their isolated lives. "They just didn't have a clue," Hank explained. "I doubt any of them knew anyone personally who wasn't a straight white Christian. Most of them had never, honestly probably still haven't, ever met someone with brown or black skin, or an openly gay person, or, God forbid, someone who doesn't believe in God." In this description of the people in his hometown, Hank made a value judgment in describing people who live such isolated lives they have never encountered people different than themselves. By describing them in this way, Hank was further setting up his separation from them, both geographically and in terms of the identities he was constructing for himself.

Hank's stories of his school experiences perpetuated the language of an unenlightened childhood. He talked a little about education in general, describing creation-based science and extremely one-sided history, but he spent most of his time talking about his experiences in English courses.

> There was a right way to write, of course. Introduction, thesis sentence, you know the drill…and we wrote about the same shit all the time, it was crazy. Year after year, I think most kids just recycled their A's, the same stuff, yea death penalty, down with abortion, yea America, hee-haw…sorry, it still pisses me off to think about it, and I know there are kids there now writing about how we are doing God's work in Iraq. Shit!

In this description, Hank extended his stories of an "unenlightened" hometown into a school setting. As he began describing the practices – including formulaic writing and unoriginal, politically one-sided research topics – Hank made an interactional move by saying "you know the drill," positioning himself as a professional English teacher in an interview with a former English teacher and current university researcher. By making that statement, Hank was also aligning himself with me – that we must both be enlightened people compared to the people he described earlier from his hometown. By rejecting these practices as "unenlightened," he continued his pattern of setting himself in opposition to certain beliefs and practices, setting up a revelation of the identity he was working hard to construct.

Hank's story turned as he described going away to college. In his narrative, his experience at the university was the transitional action between his unenlightened

childhood and his professional identity as a teacher-enlightener. "I was blown away," he described. "I couldn't, it was amazing, literally a whole new world, pardon the cliché, but it took me a while to adjust. I was in heaven. Now I feel like such a racist, but it was all I knew, because I was like, 'Wow, black people write books, too!' and 'I can say 'shit' in front of other people' and 'I can write about the delusion of religion' and there was no one there telling me I was going to hell." For Hank, the very experience of being in a place where, in his words, "the world lived," allowed him to begin experiencing the intellectual freedom he had been craving his entire life. As he told the story, he made several statements – "black people write books, too," for example – that drew a sharp contrast between his childhood experiences and the identities he was constructing.

In addition to the general university experience, Hank talked about a number of professors who helped him move into a more enlightened life through their courses. He specifically talked a lot about Professor Parker, with whom he took several classes.

> I took two, really three courses with him. My favorite was actually my first class with him, something like "Culture and Thought," which seemed like such a generic title, I didn't know what to expect, but it filled a requirement, so I signed up. And it, I wish I could describe it better, but I'm serious when I say that it blew my mind. Every week or two we would look at these bizarre sets of, like one time, we read some Langston Hughes poetry and *The Old Man and the Sea* and we had to watch *Apocalypse Now* and we listened to a speech by JFK. At first, I was like "what the hell?" but after we started talking, damn! I think he opened up by asking, "So, what *does* it

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mean to be an American?" Blew me away. I had never thought that way

before…and after we talked about it for a couple of classes, we had to write

about it. I had *never* written anything in my life questioning patriotism or

love of country. It was awesome!

In Hank's life story, this class served as a turning point in his identities construction from

sheltered and frustrated youth to enlightened and empowered teacher. The mixing of

genres, the exploration of texts from multiple perspectives, the discussion of controversial

ideas, and the opportunity to write in ways that challenged his traditional conceptions of

the world served to awaken a sense of possibility in Hank, not only to the kinds of ideas

that were available to him as a student, but also to the kind of teacher he could be. As he

told the stories of this eye-opening time in his life, he made meaning of the experience by

making identity claims about his own enlightenment and about the kind of teacher he

would eventually become through his narrative.

As he began to describe his early teaching experience, he made an explicit identity

claim related to Mr. Parker, his own teacher-enlightener. "At first, I was scared shitless,"

he explained. "I didn't know what I was doing in a high school again. But then the

students came in with these looks like they had it all figured out, you know, like they knew

about life, right, and I realized I could blow their minds, too. I could be their Parker."

Saying he could "be their Parker" signaled his move from an identity as a student being

enlightened to one of a teacher facilitating the enlightenment.

Hank described the process of enlightening his students in two steps – reading and

writing. Even though he was bound by the curriculum, because he was at a magnet school

where the students' test scores were not a major issue – only one student in all his classes did not pass the state assessment the previous year – he had the freedom to lead them through literary works that teachers at other schools might not be able to cover. In Hank's class, writing served as a vehicle for exploring the new ideas from the reading selections. He explained,

> I tell them to think about new things when they write, to try out ideas. At first, they look at me like I'm crazy – "how can we write about something we don't know anything about?" I have to get them past that so they can use writing not just to say what they believe, but to figure out what they might believe or to question what they believe. There is a fine line, especially with parents, but I usually couch it in rhetorical terms – looking at all the sides of an argument while they figure out which side has the most evidence. Once they get used to it, they really start thinking about stuff, some of them for the first time.

In his story, Hank acted as an enlightening agent to give his students the opportunity to explore ideas that may not have been available to them before. He used writing as a tool for students to try out new thoughts and ideas, to question their beliefs, and to practice arguing different sides of an issue. Like similar explanations from other participants, Hank made no reference to professional discourses that might also value this kind of writing as legitimate; instead, he used it in his personal narrative to solidify his identity claims as a teacher-enlightener.

Mary Valenzuela: Teacher-Nurturer

Finding her own niche among the participants, 57-year old Mary's predominant life story theme and subsequent teaching identities were primarily concerned with her interactions with students, specifically as a classroom nurturer, someone who carefully and gently looks out for the well-being of others. The oldest of the participants, Mary was also the quietest and the most reserved during the interviews, her demeanor mirroring her narrated identity theme. As I transcribed our conversations, I sometimes had to listen to a section two or three times to discern what she had said, her tone was so low. Despite her quiet nature, however, she probably displayed the most confidence of any of the participants, so comfortable with the statements she was making that she did not need to elevate her voice to make a point. In this way, her very way of being was consistent with being a nurturer.

The stories Mary told about her early life picked up on the theme of nurturing from the beginning. Possibly because she was talking about events so far in her past that she could not recall most of the specific facts or details, Mary instead relied on the emotional memories – the feelings she had – about the specific experiences. For example, even though she could not tell me much about many specific classroom practices in elementary school, she did recall how it felt to be in different schools every few years as her family move around because of her father's career in the Navy. "I was lonely a lot at school," she explained. "At home, I had my sisters and my mom, but at school…I remember not wanting to work because I felt so out of place…I had some great teachers, though, who helped me through it, helped me fit in, I guess, helped me want to learn." In Mary's story, the most significant early emotional impression she described about positive experiences

with teachers was their ability to nurture her – to care for her and help her feel comfortable – which then enabled her to learn. In that sense, Mary had early identity models of teacher-nurturers she could draw upon to construct her own identities through her stories.

Mary described one of the most significant influences on her writing and, subsequently, on her teaching practice, as she explained how, in middle school, she went to after-school tutoring to get help with her writing.

> Mrs. Green was amazing. She had the after-school writing tutoring in her classroom, and there was just something about her. I remember the first time I went to see her, I sat down, pulled out the essay I was working on, and put it on my desk. She rolled her chair – she loved that thing; I hardly every saw her stand, she would just roll around the room in her chair – over to my desk and looked right into my face. She introduced herself and we talked for a while. I just remember waiting for her to ask me about my paper, but she didn't, not for a while. I was *so* nervous, but after she talked about her cat and I talked about my sisters, I felt better, and I was a lot less nervous when we talked about my essay. I never had her in class, but I went to her for help for two years, and she really helped me with my writing.

As Mary explained her interactions with Mrs. Green, the theme of nurturing was central to the story, and like Hank did with Mr. Parker, Mary constructed Mrs. Green as a model for her own emerging identity construction. She did go on to talk about some of the specific ways Mrs. Green helped her improve her writing skills, but underneath the instructional practices was the language of comfort she felt being in Mrs. Green's classroom and the

importance of the personal care she received. In fact, Mary acknowledged that "had Mrs. Green not been the way she was, I probably would have failed English." Through that statement, Mary gave Mrs. Green moral weight in her narrative and reinforced Mrs. Green's identity as being worth emulating. A critical component to her descriptions of Mrs. Green was the relationship between nurturing and instruction, that only through the nurturing, in the way Mary constructed it, were the instructional goals achieved.

As she finished telling the story of Mrs. Green, Mary tried to align herself with that teaching identity. "Even now," she admitted, "I try to be more and more like her. I know how nervous and lonely I felt, and I can't imagine how my life would have been different without her. I probably wouldn't be an English teacher, that's for sure…I try to do that for my students, you know, make them feel comfortable like that." As this passage indicated, her description of Mrs. Green served several purposes. First and foremost, it provided her with an identity model through which she could make meaning of her own practices and construct her own identity. Also, it allowed Mary to make the ultimate meaning out of her experience with Mrs. Green – that she would not have become an English teacher without Mrs. Green's influence. Finally, it set the stage for her own practices, as she made the statement that she tried to act like that with her students.

In a later session, as she talked about her own teaching, she constantly went back to the idea of being a nurturer first, making explicit her identity as a teacher-nurturer. Starting with the way she narrated the first few days of school, she reinforced the notion of nurturing as a vehicle for effective instruction. "We'll get to the work," she explained, "but we have to start with *them*. They have to be willing to work first, to want it. I know a

lot of teachers who do diagnostic essays the first day or two, to understand where the students are with their writing. I get to that, but first I need to know *who* they are, then I can figure out the rest." Setting herself apart from her colleagues who did not nurture their students by getting to know "who they were" at the beginning of the year, Mary constructed her own identity in the classroom by both describing her own actions (Cameron, 2001) and by making her identity distinct from the other teachers (Sarup, 1996). Mary believed that diagnosing students' writing abilities actually starts with understanding them as individuals, echoing the sense of essentialism scattered throughout these narratives. At this point in her narrative, Mary started bringing together her stories from her life, her descriptions of her current practices, and her beliefs about teaching writing, and they all contributed interactionally to the construction of her teaching identity.

Mary described some specific practices that also served to illustrate her self-construction as a teacher-nurturer, most of which centered on meeting with students at various stages of their writing process. For instance, she claimed to require a pre- and post-conference as part of every major writing assignment, during which she would ask the students "about their experience with the essay." At the pre-conference, she would ask them to talk about "why they want to write on this particular topic – why it matters," as well as "what else is going on in their lives that might affect the way they are thinking about the assignment." At the post-conference, she wanted them to talk about "whether or not they enjoyed writing the essay, if it was a good experience for them" and "what meaning they found in their writing outside the classroom." The way she described her

conferences with students reflected the identity she constructed throughout her narrative and also served to guide her narrative construction.

Watching her in the classroom reinforced the identity claims she made as she told stories from her life and practice. During one class period, the students were working on revising an essay they were writing, and she moved around the classroom to confer with individual students. As she approached each student, she bent or kneeled to get to the student's level, gently placed a hand on each student's arm or shoulder, and looked straight into their eyes while she asked them to talk about their work. She started each conference by asking some variation of "how are you today?" and always gave the appearance of being genuinely concerned about their answers. She did not seem to be in a hurry to get to their writing, and they seemed to understand, giving her details about their lives. Then she asked them to talk about their essays, to explain how they were going and any questions or concerns they had, hand still on their arms and still looking right into their eyes. Unless the students wanted to look at something specific on their written pages, her eyes never wavered from their faces as she listened to them talk about their writing. Her entire demeanor, from her body language to her words, seemed the embodiment of the teacher-nurturer identity she had constructed. In that way, Mary was an excellent example someone whose current practices – her classroom interactions with students – discursively worked with her stories and beliefs to construct her identity.

Narrative Identity Themes

As I discussed at the beginning of this chapter, a significant pattern that emerged from a cross-case analysis of the data was that each participant narrated a theme across

many of their stories that then served as a basis for the construction of professional identities. Their narrative constructions reinforced the discursive interactions of beliefs, stories, and practices in the process of identities construction as they participated in the figured worlds they inhabited (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998). The personal and social histories they narrated (Holland & Lave, 2001) interacted with their instructional practices (Cameron, 2001) through the ongoing identities construction process.

Another significant pattern that emerged from the data was that in order to more clearly develop their constructed identities, the participants commonly assigned an identity to someone else – in these narratives, a parent or a teacher – and then offered stories to support the identity label and to explain the process of influence through which the participants took on the identities they had assigned to the other individuals. In some cases, the participants, rather than constructing the identity of someone who represented themselves, they constructed Others (Sarup, 1996) who represented the qualities inconsistent with their own constructed identities, and against whom they could define themselves.

Chapter Seven

Discussion and Implications

Questions Answered

As I began to look across my data to explore the ways the findings in this dissertation might make contributions to the research community, examining the questions I set out to answer seemed like a logical place to start:

1. How do high school English teachers' life histories influence the ways they construct their thinking about writing instruction?

2. How do high school English teachers' life histories influence the instructional practices they adopt to teach writing?

3. How do the experiences gained at different life and career stages of high school English teachers change the ways they construct their thinking about writing instruction and the practices they adopt to teach writing?

As I stated in Chapter two, I initiated this study with the intent of exploring these three questions, specifically trying to describe the relationship between the life stories of high school English teachers and the ways they think about and practice writing instruction. My findings, however, have necessitated a more complex, and hopefully a more meaningful, framework for discussing the data – the ongoing construction of identities.

The research suggests, and my data confirms, that there is an interactive relationship among life stories, beliefs, practices, and identities; that is, for the purposes of this study, high school English teachers' thinking (or beliefs, as I have defined them) and

practices are intricately related to the experiences they gain at different life and career stages, as expressed through the narrative telling of their life histories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Additionally, as teachers engage in practices, they frequently think about who they are in the classroom instead of what they know about the practices (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999), thereby taking on the teaching identities they have constructed for themselves through the narratives of their past experiences and their current teaching. Also, teachers are able to clarify their own beliefs through the narratives they tell (Ochs & Capps, 2001), making judgments about events and applying the judgments to the broader world and future personal action. Taken together, these concepts appear to frame an interactive relationship among the construction of beliefs, practices, and identities, specifically through narratives, and the data in this study seems to reinforce this framework for understanding the ongoing identities construction of teachers in the figured worlds they inhabit, as they participate in imagined social roles and construct their own individual identities within the worlds (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998). I will use this framework as I discuss the data throughout this chapter.

Teachers Constructing Identities

Probably the most significant finding across the data is the way the teachers employed their narratives as a part of an identities construction process through the course of their life histories. Holland et al (1998) have suggested that, consistent with Bakhtin's theory of discursive self-making, through the course of their lives, people have an ongoing internal conversation through which they try to figure out who they are, to construct themselves as they inhabit imagined social positions within figured worlds. They have

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also suggested that people tell themselves and others who they are and then try to act in a manner consistent with who they say they are. In the same manner, Cameron (2001) has suggested that there is a dialogic relationship between our actions and our identities – that we act based on who we have constructed ourselves to be, but in the process, our actions themselves also contribute to our ongoing identity construction. Hinchman and Hinchman (2001) have also concurred, arguing that identities emerge in narratives and through the narrative tellings.

Another important related finding is that the identities the participants named for themselves were essentialist in nature (Erikson, 1968); that is, they explained or described their identity statements in terms of something they "are." This idea of being has been influenced by a lifetime of experiences, and they have established beliefs about the nature of identities. I use beliefs as Tabachnick & Zeichner (1984) defined perspectives, as interpretations of experiences over time, grounded in social interactions and guided by reflection, that subsequently influence action.

The findings suggest that through the course of narrating their life stories, the participants in this study all engaged in this kind of ongoing identities construction, which impacted and was impacted by the ways they thought about and practice writing instruction. One kind of construction specifically named having an identity as a "writer," and the participants told stories from their lives to substantiate their essentialist claims of *being* a writer. For example, Ellen made an identity claim through the course of her narrative that she *was* a writer. She offered evidence through her stories and descriptions of her practice in support of the claim. She talked about early writing assignments and

how they came "naturally" to her, how she seemed to be able to write well without really

knowing why, and she listed some awards she won in school for her writing.

This finding is significant because of the way her own constructed identity shaped

and was shaped by the way she thought about her students and practiced writing

instruction. For example, referring to her students, she said, "I definitely have some

writers in my class." This statement essentialized writing – someone either is or is not a

writer. Based on her identity claims of being a writer herself, she identified with this group

of students; they were writers like she was. On the other hand, she viewed the students

who were not like her – those who could not write – differently, and she had a different set

of expectations for them. She explained that when it came to the state accountability test,

she did not have to worry about her writers; on the other hand, helping her non-writers pass

the test was her primary responsibility to them. Ellen's binary, essentialist identity beliefs

about writing ability significantly impacted the ways she thought about her students and

the kinds of instructional activities she needed to engage them in. In addition, her

experiences with her students – her *writers* were the ones who seemed to be able to

effortlessly produce text, get grades, and win awards – guided her own story as she

constructed it in narrative form during our interviews. The interactive, discursive nature of

identities construction, beliefs, and practices not only played a significant role in the way

she told me the stories from her life, but it also significantly influenced her day-to-day

writing instruction.

This finding is particularly relevant since every one of my participants indicated

similar essentialist beliefs about the nature of writing. Even though they did not all see

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themselves as writers and did not all, as Ellen did, identify closely with the writers in the classroom and use that identity identification as part of the construction of a life story, they did all make the claim about their students, which is probably more significant. Because they had constructed beliefs about the students in their classes along the same binary dividing line that Ellen described – the writers on one side the non-writers on the other – their classroom practices involved different treatment, including the conversations, topic choices, expectations and opportunities for complex thinking, and stylistic experimentation, of students on either side of the line.

This trend is especially significant, given the specific characterization of the participants in this study. They all claimed to be writing teachers – specifically interested in the theory and practice of writing instruction – and they were named as such by the district coordinator who helped me recruit them. As voices in their classrooms and campuses about writing practice, they should have represented excellent writing instruction – and in all fairness, all of them engaged in numerous meaningful practices and seemed to genuinely want what was best for their students – but their beliefs about essentialist writing identities seemed to negatively impact the ways they constructed writing instruction in their classrooms. In addition, the least damaging practices seemed to be occurring in the magnet classrooms, especially Hank's and Mary's classes, where their practices did not particularly inhibit the opportunities for the success of their students. In the comprehensive classrooms, though, especially where non-AP students were being taught by teachers like Ellen, Sophie, and Melissa, their instructional practices seemed to have the potential to

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widen the skill gap between the writers and non-writers, as they identified their students, and to ultimately limit many of their students' opportunities.

The second primary kind of identities construction in the data involved the predominant theme in the participants' stories. Each of the teachers in the study told numerous stories from their lives, and through their story selection and language, a theme emerged from each narrative, not present in every story but certainly consistent across the body of data. In the course of narrating their life stories, the participants constructed themselves as certain *types* or *kinds* of people at an identity level; they used their stories to construct these identities and their practices substantiated the stories they constructed; consistent with a discursive view of identities construction, their practices and named identities also influenced the stories they told.

Melissa, for instance, constructed her identity as a teacher-producer. She explained during our initial interview that she was different from my other participants because of her previous career as a television news producer. In her early life stories, she described herself as bossy, telling other people what to do, and she described her activities from different stages in her life, including her work in the high school journalism program, where she knew what she was doing and told other people what to do and how to do it. Her journey continued into her news career, where as an early producer, she had to individually show the staff how to do their jobs so she could be certain they were done right. Ultimately, she developed a "producer school" at her station to systematically teach the incoming producers the skills she knew they needed to be successful in the profession. In her own classroom, she was the "rubric queen" because she had developed

comprehensive rubrics to efficiently diagnose her students' writing problems and tell them how to "fix" their work.

Her producer-themed stories reinforced the early identity claims she made and her practices reflected her identity as a teacher-producer; in turn, her practices contributed to the ways she constructed her identity as a teacher-producer, and her identity claims influenced the stories she selected, all in a discursive identity cycle. Melissa had assigned significance to her self-named essentialized bossiness, her journalism experiences, her news career, and her classroom practices, by constructing a relationship about them under the umbrella identity claim of being a teacher-producer; in a sense, her practice justified her life and vice versa.

All the participants engaged in similar kinds of identities construction: Mary as a teacher-nurturer, Hank as a teacher-enlightener, Beth as a teacher-guide, Sophie as a teacher-advocate, and Ellen as a teacher-organizer. All these teachers revealed a life-practice, practice-life discursive identity construction cycle as they told their stories and engaged in writing instruction. Without questioning their practices through the filter of professional discourse, they engaged in many classroom practices purely because they seemed *natural*, given the identity they had constructed.

These findings extend some of the beliefs-practice research that has been done primarily with preservice teachers into the inservice realm. In addition, they highlight the specific discursive relationship among identities construction, beliefs, practice, and narrative tellings within the framework of the current body of work. Many researchers have argued that when preservice teachers come into the profession, they already have a

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clear sense of what teaching and learning should be like (Holt-Reynolds, 1992; Grossman, 1990) from their years of education, both in and out of the classroom (Lortie, 1975; Clandinin, 1985; Collins & Green, 1992; Feiman-Nemser & Buchman, 1985). The findings in this study suggest that the complex relationship among beliefs, practice, and identities construction, especially as explored through the narrative constructions of life histories, is perhaps a more comprehensive way to examine teachers' beliefs and practices, affirming the work of researchers like Connelly and Clandinin (1999) and Cameron (2001). This study also extends the conversation into inservice teacher beliefs and practices and into the specific realm of writing instruction. The exploration of a more complex understanding of what teachers believe about writing instruction and the ways they practice it by examining identities construction through life history research extends Norman and Spencer's (2005) examination of the autobiographies of preservice writing teachers in California by examining the life stories of inservice teachers and by introducing the discursive theory of identities construction to the conversation about patterns of beliefs and practices among writing teachers.

Emotive Memories, Student Positions, and Current Practice

An additional significant pattern in the findings was the emotive nature of so many of the educational experiences they narrated. This pattern clarifies the research on the specific influences of classroom practices on beliefs about instruction, going back to Lortie (1975). Researchers have suggested that beliefs about practice develop alongside content knowledge (Clandinin, 1985) and that ideas and images from teachers' educational pasts provide a "framework for viewing and standards for judging" the teaching they see now

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(Feiman-Nemser & Buchman, 1985, p. 56). Carter and Doyle (1995) suggested that when preservice teachers encounter new ideas and practices, the teachers view them from the perspective of their past student selves – how would they have experienced the new practices when they were students?

I want to extend this conversation by suggesting that many teachers at all levels inhabit a student position when they consider not only new practices, but also as they justify the practices they do use. The narrative inquiry format of this study gave the participants the opportunity to talk about their educational histories and to establish relationships between their educational experiences and their current practices. An interesting pattern that emerged across the data was the emotive nature of the experiences they decided to name as being influential on specific practices in their current instruction. Their language consistently focused on how the past experiences had made them *feel*, and their current justification for using the practices was often just that – the feeling the practices gave them in their past and could now give their current students.

For example, when Sophie talked about her experience with notebook writing in her educational past, she explained, "I **loved** it when teachers kept notebooks in class…I kind of **felt like** I was thinking about important things." She never offered any actual examples of the writing she did in her notebook or made any judgments from her current professional position about the kinds of topics the teachers gave her; instead, she focused on how it *felt* to her as a student. She might or might not have been actually been writing about "important things," but in her narrative, she did *feel* like she was. Since she used directed notebook writing in her classroom and named her childhood experience as a

significant factor in her decision to use them, there was evidence that the way she constructed her practice was influenced by the emotive reaction her student self had in her narrative.

Another example of the tendency to draw upon the emotive nature of experiences when constructing practices was when Mary talked about imitative writing:

> I believe in modeling, you know, providing sample essays and what not, but I had a teacher in high school, oh! [frowning] She made us copy, well, today, I guess it would be like a copy change poem, but she did it with whole paragraphs. She would read a whole paragraph to us from a great [quoting with her fingers] author, and we had to write it down word for word. Then we had to write a paragraph with the same number of words, the same style, and just change it to our own topic, can you imagine? I will *never, ever* do that! I just saw no value in…I hated it! I always tell my kiddoes that the samples are just that – samples.

Mary's story about imitative writing was significant, especially given her typical patterns of behavior and language across interviews. Most of the time, she was soft-spoken to the point of being hard to understand on the recording, she did not use many gestures or body movement in general, and she used calculated, professional language, appropriate for the professional position she took on during our interview sessions (Wortham, 2001). When she told this story, though, she deviated from her usual behavior. She caught herself getting angry as she began talking about the experience – "I had a teacher in high school, oh!" Her exclamation "oh" and the accompanying frown indicated a negative emotional

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reaction to the story she was about to tell; she had not even started the story, but just thinking about what she was getting ready to say caused a change in her disposition. When she held up her fingers as she said the word "great" to describe the authors her teacher would use as models, she was mocking her teachers' judgment as a professional, who felt like after thirty years in the classroom, she should be able to judge whether an author was great or not, but she took on the emotional language and the physical demeanor of a student. By saying, "I hated it!" and "I will never, ever do that!" she made absolute claims both about how the experience made her feel and how she will never make other students feel that way.

All the participants had similar stories with emotion-based reactions that they claimed as being influential in their current practice. Building on Lortie (1975), Clandinin (1985), Feiman-Nemser and Buchman (1985), Carter and Doyle (1995), and others who have explored this area, the fact that teachers attributed or justified instructional decisions based on student-positioned emotive-laden stories from their pasts indicated an important characteristic about beliefs and practice, that sometimes, instead of constructing their understanding of their own practice based on professional discourses or school norms or district mandates, teachers simply name how the specific practice made them *feel* when they were students.

Teacher Education and Professional Development

Because the questions in this study and the resulting findings are primarily concerned with what teachers believe about teaching writing and how they practice writing instruction, the most logical setting in which to apply this work from a practitioner

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standpoint is in teacher education programs and through inservice professional development. A more comprehensive understanding of the ways teachers' life histories relate to their current beliefs and practices, largely through the discursive process of identities construction, informs the ways we think about preparing teachers and participating on their ongoing learning experiences.

Research suggests that the teaching placement, both preservice and first-year, can have a significant influence on teachers' beliefs and practice, often overriding or superceding their teacher education programs through a tension-laden process of reflection, revision, and practice (Grossman, Smagorinsky, & Valencia, 1999; Smagorinsky, Cook, Moore, Jackson, & Fry, 2004). Hoffman et al (2005) have argued that the quality of a preservice education program can determine the level of success of the program's participants in maintaining the teaching practices they discussed in their teacher education courses once they move into actual teaching placements. Consequently, recognizing the patterns of identities construction in which teachers engage, both about themselves and their students when it comes to writing instruction, for example, can guide the planning of preservice education for writing teachers. Based on the findings in this study that high school English teachers tend to have essentialist beliefs about the nature of their students' writing abilities and that these beliefs influence the ways they construct their instructional practices when they teach writing, English education programs should make a deliberate effort to engage preservice teachers in conversations about what it means to be a *writer*, perhaps beginning with an exploration of their own writing life histories and their constructed beliefs about what writing means, and then reflectively examine their beliefs in

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light of relevant research and practitioner-oriented texts that speak to a more socioconstructivist view of writing.

These same conversations and reflections can and should occur in professional development as well, recognizing that the longer a teacher has been in the profession maintaining essentialist beliefs about writing, the more complexly entrenched the teachers' practices will be. They will have used their experiences with students – noting year after year which ones are writers and which ones are not – to engage in the ongoing construction of their beliefs about writing and of their students' identities based on those beliefs. Constructive conversations will be different, therefore, and in many ways will have the potential to be more meaningful, because professional development can involve teachers of different levels of experience coming together to explore how their beliefs and practices match up against current research. In many cases, the teachers whose beliefs, practices, and resulting identities are intimately tied to an essentialist view of writing will reject the research and will simply keep constructing their professional lives the way they always have. Because of the significant impact these beliefs have on the instructional experiences of students, professional educators have an obligation to do what they can to move in the right direction.

Another application for both preservice education and ongoing professional development is the deliberate integration of reflection as a necessary practice for effective teaching. When I use the term *reflection*, I refer to the kind of practice suggested by Raelin (2002), who builds on Schon's (1983) work to describe reflective practice as the process of examining one's own life and work to better understand the relationship between them in

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order to improve one's practice moving forward. From the theoretical perspective of this dissertation, reflective practice involves thinking about one's life and practice in order to make meaning from it in a way that informs future life and practice. The reality is that through ongoing identity construction, this process is going to happen anyway, to some extent; however, as this study has demonstrated, intentional reflection, in this case through narrative-based interviews, facilitated the process and clarified the knowledge about the participants' beliefs and practice. In turn, giving preservice or inservice teachers the opportunity to reflect on their practices in a forum where productive dialogue can occur and can be guided by research or practitioner texts, is likely to be an effective way to help the teachers identify patterns of belief and practice in their own lives that might not be consistent with the professional discourse or, in some cases, even with the participants' other beliefs.

Recent conversations I have had with my participants have confirmed this idea. As I shared some of my major findings with them, each of the participants had different reactions to the data from their own life histories, but all of them made some version of the statement "I had no idea!" In a couple of cases, recognizing the ways they had constructed their practices based on certain patterns of beliefs and out of their own identities has led to some immediate changes. Beth, for example, almost apologetically told me she was going to make sure all her students have the opportunity to explore challenging topics and styles, regardless of their skill level. She even caught herself using the term *writers* in an essentialist way and almost humorously slowed down her speech and clarified, "the students who have not developed the same level of writing skills." She acknowledged that

she still does need to help them build skills, but to classify them as *non-writers* was doing

them a disservice.

Realistically, not all reflective interactions will have this kind of positive result. In

fact, only two of the six participants in this study talked about changes they were making.

My hope is that since all of them at least in some way acknowledged how "interesting" the

findings were, perhaps as they continue to make meaning in their own lives, the stories

they told and the conversations we had will become a more significant part of the beliefs

and practices they construct in the future.

Limitations and Future Research

This study, while making relevant contributions to several research conversations,

clearly had limits as well. As a narrative study, the beliefs and practices of the teachers in

the data were primarily located in their stories and not in their actual classrooms, allowing

me to talk about the ways they constructed their beliefs and practices with more confidence

that actually describing the practices themselves. A study including more classroom time

and focusing more on consistent practices within teachers' classrooms, followed by

interviews about the teachers' lives and beliefs, might offer some new insights about the

more intricate relationships between the practices themselves and the stories the

participants tell.

In addition, given the abundance of research on preservice teacher education and

the implications of this kind of research for such programs, a study including more

attention to preservice education would produce some more complete data about the

particular ways preservice programs contribute to the ongoing construction of teachers'

professional identities, beliefs, and practices. A longitudinal study could examine

preservice teachers' thinking early in their professional development programs (or, ideally,

before they even start) and could follow them several years into their careers, which would

be more relevant to the numerous conversations about preservice education and induction

in the literature.

Finally, because this study focused exclusively on writing instruction, it limited

somewhat the analytical frame from which I worked and the teachers talked. While several

of them did still talk about the ways they approached teaching literature, for example,

every one of them, despite my assurances that it was okay and that they should just keep

going with their trains of thought, stopped themselves a couple of times in the middle of

conversation about another aspect of teaching high school English to move the

conversation back to writing. This problem complicates the research process, as the

teachers tried to steer the content of the interviews based on where they knew they were

supposed to go (Wortham, 2001). A more comprehensive study about the beliefs and

practices of English teachers might lead to some interesting and more complex data,

especially given the nature of English instruction as the ongoing integration of literature,

writing, viewing, presenting, research, and other curriculum elements.

Conclusion

Ultimately, then, there is a lot of work to be done. As teaching high school English

becomes more and more complex with the development of more extensive testing systems,

the integration of new technologies and resulting literacies, and the introduction of new

vocabulary and literary content, helping teachers reflectively examine their own beliefs and

practices in order for them to most effectively serve their students is an important

conversation to sustain. New understandings of the ways people discursively construct

their identities, their past experiences, and their current practices will be significant to the

future of research and practice in the field of English education. As I move into a full-time

academic career, I intend to be a voice in this conversation for the rest of my life.

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Vita

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