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Methods of a Narrative Inquirist: Storying the Endured Teacher Identity

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Abstract

While I was a young English language arts teacher, my teacher identity matured in a nurturing environment cultivated by my veteran colleagues. Finding that this is not the common narrative told by beginning teachers (Alsup, 2019, 2006; Danielewicz, 2001), I wondered what impact sharing the stories of my veteran colleagues could have on young teachers. The purpose of this paper is to explain why narrative inquiry fit the parameters of this particular inquiry, what methods were utilized and how the project was constructed. Like Spector-Mersel (2011), I intend to describe my use of narrative inquiry to expand its conceptual and methodological definitions.

Keywords

Narrative Inquiry, Teacher Identity, Qualitative Methodology

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Methods of a Narrative Inquirist:
Storying the Endured Teacher Identity

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While I was a young English language arts teacher, my teacher identity matured in a nurturing environment cultivated by my veteran colleagues. Finding that this is not the common narrative told by beginning teachers (Alsup, 2019, 2006; Danielewicz, 2001), I wondered what impact sharing the stories of my veteran colleagues could have on young teachers. The purpose of this paper is to explain why narrative inquiry fit the parameters of this particular inquiry, what methods were utilized and how the project was constructed. Like Spector-Mersel (2011), I intend to describe my use of narrative inquiry to expand its conceptual and methodological definitions. Keywords: Narrative Inquiry, Teacher Identity, Qualitative Methodology

"Had you known all of the above, you might have decided not to get on, and then you would have missed the best 25 years of your life." —Marylin[1], ELA teacher, 25 years' experience

While I was a young English language arts (ELA) teacher, I was inspired by the veteran ELA teachers with whom I worked. They were not old and crotchety, as I had heard veteran teachers sometimes described. Instead, they were creative, communal, and reflective. They used their experience to inform classroom decisions; they wisely advised new teachers; they planned courses and advocated for students as a whole group. Also, they were genuinely happy with their professional identity. This is the environment where my young teacher identity matured, and their demonstrated creative-communal-reflective teacher stance and positive well-being became my model. As my teacher identity grew, the influence and support of these experienced colleagues encouraged me to take on leadership roles in curriculum and student advocacy. In these roles and surrounded by passionate and positive veteran teachers, I transitioned from student to teacher with little tension. I would come to find, however, that this is not the common narrative told by teachers with two years or less experience (Alsup, 2019; 2006; Britzman, 1991; Danielewicz, 2001). Learning that my experience had been different, I was curious about what possible impact sharing this embodied stance and well-being could have on young teachers.

When I entered my doctoral studies, I consciously nurtured an inquiry project geared toward defining and describing the creative-communal-reflective teacher stance and positive well-being I mimicked as a young teacher. To bring the inquiry to light, I approached five of my veteran ELA teacher colleagues, all with 15 plus years' experience, and asked that Marylin, Elizabeth, Lauren, Marla, and Harry[2] narrate how they created and recreated a teacher identity informed by an evolving teacher stance and experienced through a positive well-being. I wondered how their teaching life stories might inform the identity narratives of other young teachers, who have been known to leave the profession in the first few years teaching because

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[1] Pseudonyms are used to protect the identity of all participants.
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of the tension caused while students transition to teachers (Alsup, 2019, 2006; Britzman, 1991; Danielewicz, 2001). This paper, though, will not recount the stories of these five veteran teachers; rather, it will explain why narrative inquiry fit the parameters of my inquiry project, what methods were used to interpret stories of professional identity, and how the project took the particular shape it did as I pursued narratives to explain why these five teachers remained in their classrooms—even after their first border crossing from student to teacher.

Like Spector-Mersel (2011) and McCormack (2004) before me, my intention is to describe my process and detail my practical applications of narrative inquiry to expand its conceptual and methodological definitions. Particularly, I share the story of my project for other inquirists who want to tell the story of an identity embodied in oneself, but inspired by another's, or better yet, one's community. Because Macintyre Latta et al. (2018) suggest mobilizing narrative inquiry to illustrate "individuality in ways that enrich others and the community-in-the-making" (p. 9), I constructed an inquiry project that aimed to define an identity that, I believed, had the potential to enrich the teaching community. An identity that I came to embody but inherited from the wise advisors of my professional community. Wanting to mobilize narrative inquiry to uncover this definition, I had to find ways to co-author their stories; I had to find ways to litter the pages of my inquiry with their voices. I had to find methods that would speak through their stories, while speaking back at their stories.

To speak through and back at their stories, post-qualitative inquiry recommends that inquirists make clear "the ways in which knowledge claims are made" through their choices in methods and methodology (Gerrard, et al., 2017, p. 391). These clarifications speak through and back at what the inquirist surmises about a participant's narrative experience; they listen, live, and report the participant's experience. To reach this goal, I operated as a third-person omniscient narrator during the teachers' stories, and a first-person narrator while telling the narrative specific to the inquiry. To compose their stories, I used the methods of life story interviews (Atkinson, 2007; Baddeley & Singer, 2007); reflective writings composed by myself in the form of a researcher's journal (Barkhuizen & Hacker, 2009), and by the participants in the form of a letter to their former teacher selves (Bullock & Ritter, 2011; Carlsson, 2012); and a narrative written by the participants reflecting on their participation in the project (Frank, 2010). With the participants directly speaking through the project's methods in their reflections and letters, the inquiry spoke back to knowledge claims, that if done any other way, would have been only my own.

Once compiled, organized, and completed, this inquiry project became a set of love stories for readers to experience and make sense of in their own teacher lives (Greene, 1994). Marylin's quote above is what I learned summed up in less than 30 words. These five veteran teachers narrated stories of endurance. They endured the evolving of emotional distress and professional responsibility as students and standards came and went. They endured their teacher identity even when they felt they could no longer "get on". Accordingly, the focus of this paper will be how the endured teacher identity was found, framed, and storied through narrative inquiry's lens.

Why Narrative Inquiry?

The stories we tell of our experiences matter (Barone, 2001; Bruner, 1990; Polkinghorne, 1988). They narrate our identities (McAdams & McLean, 2013; Damasio, 1999). They give our life purpose, intention, and conviction (Frank, 2010). Narrative inquiry's methodological purpose is to honor the power of the stories we tell, which offered me and the participating teachers an intimate, collaborative research methodology invested in human development and worldly awareness (Caine et al., 2017; Chase, 2018; Clandinin, 2013; Maple & Edwards, 2009), as well as a relationship that goes beyond the paradigmatic, logic-scientific

epistemologies and into the realms of post-qualitative inquiry (Barone, 2001; Bruner, 1986; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Gerrard et al., 2017). Furthermore, narrative inquiry yields a dialogic space to discuss matters of being human, in that space and at that time (Bakhtin, 1981; Bhabha, 1994). The space that calls our stories masks and asks those stories why they are masks (Grumet, 1988).

According to Bakhtin (1981), it is the novel, not the Epic, that dialogues openly about its interpretation, and works to make sense of existence in the post-industrial age. Novels are localized; they exist in only the story's space and time; they are influenced by which words were chosen to represent any notable story, an interpretation that is bound only to the context in which the words exist. Narrative inquiry, then, can be read like a novel, as it is composed of relative language and subsequent stories (Rorty, 1979) that are open to and fluid in their interpretation (Barone, 2001). This fluidity became of utmost importance while constructing my inquiry project, since I wanted the inquiry to speak *for* itself while speaking *to* itself. I wanted the narrative to discuss matters of being a teacher that mattered to the teaching community.

Narrative inquiry is a methodology that inquires of a narrative while narrating the process of its inquiry. This transparency and flexibility furnish inquirists with methods of all shapes, shades, and sizes. Methodological choices are subjective to the inquirist's project. This subjectivity must be shared among inquirists to expand the parameters of future conceptual and methodological interpretations. After all, shadows cast between dark and light are composed of the same elements but result in infinite contrast. This is my project's shade on narrative inquiry's subjective spectrum of methods. I share my methodological choices to offer a possible application of narrative inquiry in order to expand its current applications.

The Shades of Narrative's Gray

Narrative inquiry is extremely "multi-layered and complex"; it cannot capture facts; instead, it can articulate the "meaning of experience" (Thomas, 2012, p. 211). Therefore, the questions a narrative inquirist asks about the inquiry's purpose are part and parcel to her choosing narrative inquiry as a methodological direction (Barone, 2007; Chase, 2018; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). If the study is grounded in narrative inquiry, then these questions, too, *choose* the qualitative methods and the analysis procedure by the researcher aligning the methods to her research objective (Chase, 2018; Tierney, 2002). To represent this analysis, the narrative inquirist must be totally transparent when reporting the project's findings (Montero & Washington, 2011). For me, this transparency opened up a channel of storytelling that wielded no authority in its way of knowing (Caine et al., 2017). I did not want to own my colleagues' stories; I did not want to be the authority of their ways of knowing. Therefore, the nature of narrative inquiry and its ability to report participant stories and blur the lines of authority fit my needs.

If the narrative inquirist has no truths to report or statistics to call significant, then there is only the inquirist's voice and her narration of the work as representation. So, first, it is important that the narrative inquirist know what inquiry narrative she wishes to explore (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Montero & Washington, 2011). Knowing that I was after the personal narrative of veteran teachers who had an evolving teacher stance and a positive well-being, I began seeking out methods that could represent the stories they told about their embodiment of this identity. Because there is no one way to do any of this, the narrative inquirist spends time trying on methods and determining what benefits her unique inquiry. This process has led to different methodological reasons for capturing and narrating human experiences with narrative inquiry. Generally, inquirists might choose methods that capture participant stories as they live in relation with them (Boje, 2007); they might choose methods

that narrate stories told of lived experience (Baddeley & Singer, 2007). Through "interviews, conversations, autobiographical writings, and so on" (Clandinin, 2007, p. xi), inquirists capture and narrate the telling or living of human experience, either professionally or personally (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). One such way an inquirist can capture stories telling of the human experience is through life stories (Atkinson, 2007; Spector-Mersel, 2011; Thomas, 2012).

This need to capture life stories came from narrative researchers, as social scientists, needing "to explore and develop knowledge about areas of the human realm" that were more specific to "people's experienced meanings of their life events and activities" then to the limits put on social scientists by common positivist frames (Polkinghorne, 2007, p. 484). When reporting what they learned about the human realm, trustworthiness and transparency gave the research quality and integrity (Barone, 2007; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Polkinghorne, 2007). This transparency and trustworthiness are pertinent to the composure of a life story, as it is crucial that the narrative inquirist's participant(s) trusts her well enough to know that what will be reported in the life story is what was discussed between inquirist and participant(s). Narrative inquiry, then, expects that truths will be analyzed based on these agreements, as well as truths that "search for meanings among a spectrum of possible meanings" (Bruner, 1986, p. 25).

Again, my intentions with this project aligned with the expectations of narrative inquiry. I planned to report my findings not as finite truth, but as possible meanings within the infinite range of other possible meanings. To do these meanings any justice, I was responsible for using methods that restory my participants' stories in their own terms. I was obligated to live and relive the events storied in their chapters (Chase, 2005; Frank, 2010; McCormack, 2004; Spector-Mersel, 2011). What I learned adhering to this demand, agreed with Barone's (1995) warning. He recognizes through his own use of the methodology that this restorying has the potential to put both/either the inquirist and/or the participant(s) at risk because of the vulnerability associated with sharing and reporting life stories. This vulnerability is what sets narrative inquiry apart, as it is that, "*living* narrative inquiry is what distinguishes narrative inquiry most drastically from other modes of qualitative research" (Montero & Washington, 2011, p. 339). Participants and inquirists alike have only their stories to support their conclusions about the human experience, which is a risky endeavor for both.

As I lived another's story and the participants relived their own stories, this vulnerability was a palpable reality. Yet, the trustworthiness and transparency possible within narrative inquiry furnished safe spaces within our at-risk environment. Moreover, because narrative inquiry weaves the inquiry's history throughout the participant(s)' lived experiences (Chase, 2018; Clandinin, 2013; Sikes, 1997), we were able to openly dialogue about our own vulnerability. Marylin relived her granddaughter's diagnosis and remission of cancer as it related to her growth as a teacher. Marla told stories of the self-hatred she experienced as she tried to find a positive work-life balance. I dreamt in their stories and cried while trying to make meaning out of their vulnerability. Through narrative inquiry, I was capable of reporting this vulnerability either as a third-person or first-person narrator.

The Shade of my Narrative's Gray

My purpose in using narrative inquiry stems from my need to tell the story of my inquiry as well as the stories that resided within it. That is what I had heard Barone (2001) saying. It is not about making our participants' stories history; it is about reporting the work as an artifact of history. It tells the stories within a time and place that will never exist again. It reports the facts as they lived on that day. I thought, at first, this work would be a comprehensive look at teachers re-storying their lived experience as teachers, one that would be filled with redemption

sequences involving turning points that led to choices important to their professional journeys (Frank, 2010; McAdams & Bowman, 2001). Positioning teaching as a life story, I found a narrative identity not filled with sequences of redemption but sequences of endurance.

Using the methods I describe in detail below, I was able to construct lived narratives spoken from the participant's understanding of their pedagogical growth and professional development while enduring the teacher's life. Teaching life stories, then, are not just the lived stories of the experienced tension correlated with the border crossing of the student turned teacher (Alsup, 2006; Danielewicz, 2001), but the stories that narrate the border crossing of the teacher turned parent, teacher turned partner, teacher turned coach, teacher turned department head. The application of life story research to this inquiry project highlighted each participant's progression through their teaching life regardless of space and/or time (Berger, 2008; McAdams & McLean, 2013). By recalling these autobiographical memories, veteran teachers were able to reflect upon their own recollections to make meaning of their teaching lives (Damasio, 1999; Atkinson, 2007).

Life story interviews. Interviews are the most common method used to collect narrative research (Hollingsworth & Dybdahl, 2007; Rogers, 2007). Well-crafted interview questions have the potential to reveal participant life stories when analyzing and reporting the inquiry. With this being the case, I began by collecting the participants' teaching life stories with a one-time, roughly two-hour life story interview, which was also recorded and transcribed. Because I was inquiring the veteran teacher's life story, a narrative that I hoped would be prone to the positive well-being I observed as a young teacher—a well-being I would come to understand through Aristotle's concept of "eudaimonia" (Bauer, et al., 2006) because it was a well-being that was happy and fulfilled—Atkinson's (2007) approach to the life story interview permitted the construction of interview questions that re-storied participants' memories about their understood well-being and existence. By constructing interview questions that recall memories about (1) *ourselves*, (2) *others*, (3) *the world around us*, and (4) *spirituality*, participants were able to bring forth narratives of awareness, experience, existence, and reflection regarding how each understood her/his professional well-being. Following Atkinson's suggestions, I constructed the following interview questions:

Q1: *Ourselves*: How did you come to call yourself "teacher" —what types of events happened to inform this new identity you knew as "teacher?"

Q2: *Other*: How did the community within the school contribute to you calling yourself *teacher*? How did the students contribute to you calling yourself *teacher*?

Q3: *The World Around Us*: What happened to you outside of the classroom that made you see yourself as a teacher? What happened out there, in the world, that allowed you to think, "I chose the right profession?"

Q4: *The World Around Us/Spirituality*: What happened in your life as a teacher that affected your personal life?

Q5: *Spirituality*: What experiences have you had in the school or your classroom that contribute to your belief that you were always supposed to be a teacher?

I used the transcripts of these five-question interviews to re-story the participants' teaching life stories (McCormack, 2004), and organized their stories as love stories to translate their histories in a relatable way (Caine et al., 2017; Hardwick, 2011). What I provide below is how I came to do this. Example 1 is the beginning of one of the participant's, Harry's, answers to the interview, and Example 2 is how I storied the story within the inquiry.

Example 1:

> Author: When you were younger, do you have a first memory that describes how you might have seen yourself as teacher?
>
> Harry: (He stops to consider the question)—I can remember one of the things that happened to me, as a child, that started to make me think of myself as a teacher—first one occurred about, I'm going to say 4th, 5th, or 6th grade, I grew up in Middletown, when I went to elementary school, 4th, 5th, or 6th grade we had a student in our class, who was two years older than the rest of us, he had held back or failed twice, or whatever it was called in those days, I remember his name, and in those days there was sort of a stigma, being held back like that, probably would be true today, except nobody's ever held—but, you know, we made fun of him for being stupid, he was our friend, but we knew he was different, we knew he belonged a year or two ahead of us, and I just remember once, I and a couple of other kids in class, you know, we were all talking about how unintelligent this one guy was, we said, "Let's make a test for him," so we started to make this multi-page test for him, covering all the different things we were learning in school, there was a math section, it was like we were doing a standardized test, well the teacher got wind of what we were doing and cut it off just like that, for obvious reasons, and I remember thinking "I was having a lot of fun doing that," trying to make it a good test, and be fair, I just didn't see what the commotion was, so that's when I was maybe 11 years old, maybe 10, maybe 12.

Example 2:

> Regardless of Harry's avoidance, teaching always fascinated him. He found the work captivating, the ability to affect change intoxicating. In an early grade, 4th, 5th, or 6th he says, one of his classmates was an older boy. This boy was older because he had been held back twice. Having repeated the grade two times, Harry and his friends decided to assess his knowledge, "so we started to make this multi-page test for him, covering all the different things we were learning in school, were multiple sections, it was like we were doing a standardized test." In those days, being held back was a sort of social stigma, it suggested something about both work ethic and intelligence. Playing into what society had taught them, Harry and his friends embarked on an expedition to prove social thought true. Before they had time to assess this boy, though, their teacher "got wind of what we were doing and cut it off, just like that, for obvious reasons." Yet, he remembers that experience not because he feels remorse for making fun of the held back kid (which, of course, he does), but that he remembers actually *enjoying* the test-making process. Searching through materials and deciding what content to select for a good and fair assessment was just plain exciting.

Through this method of re-storying and organizing participant interviews, generally, I added between 3000 and 4000 words to each participant's interview in the forms of connective words/phrases and introductory words/phrases. These added words and phrases shaped a more coherent and intelligible story. I did this to challenge my authority as the researcher. By using their words to narrate the majority of their stories, I was able to share the representation of each

participant with each participant (Gerrard et al., 2017; St. Pierre, 2013).

To do this storying, I took stories out of their interviews like puzzle pieces and thematically placed them where they made the picture of their teaching life stories feel most complete based on the stories they chose to share and our intimate relationship as colleagues. To "deepen the awareness" of these teaching life stories (Caine et al., 2017, p. 218), I then organized the pieces detailed by the participants as a love story (Chapman, 1995; Gee, 2005; Hardwick, 2011). After reliving Marylin's statement above, I came to see the image of the endured teacher identity piece by piece. A 25th anniversary party. Low lights. A microphone. An aged hand. Frail lips. A set of eyes that fall on a partner, happy they'd "stuck it out."

This image became clearer after I reviewed how a novelist plots a love affair (Hardwick, 2011). Hardwick (2011) plots love in five stages: infatuation, flirtation, friendship, commitment, and love. These five stages arranged spaces to organize all five participants' identity narratives in a translatable way (Caine et al., 2017). What I provide in the example of Harry's re-storying is organized in the infatuation stage, because his disinterest turns to interest when he unintentionally performs the actions of a teacher as a young boy. I found these certain puzzle pieces by listening actively to their descriptions of their lived stories as teachers, recognizing moments that seemed similar across stories, and living the narratives being spoken (McCormack, 2004).

Through this process of listening and living, I storied all of the teachers' chapters story by story until it assembled as a love story that exposed the image I had recognized as the endured teacher identity. I used the interview to construct the first four stages, and supplied, in full, participant-written letters to their former teacher selves and reflections about their participation in the inquiry to close the fifth and final stage. Therefore, to complete each participant's story, I went directly to the source, and asked each participant to write two reflections about their understood teacher selves. I did this because I wanted the reader to hear from the participant directly, so to be transparent. By reading their reflections, readers are able to hear from all parties involved in the construction of the inquiry. This resulted in a co-authored narrative between researcher and participant.

Reflective letters to their former teacher selves. I asked participants to write letters to their former teacher selves to make visible the negotiations and re-negotiations narrative identities process (McAdams, 1993; Sarbin, 2001). Negotiations and re-negotiations that Bullock and Ritter (2011) assert are elements of self-study, a non-biased, non-prescriptive method that aids in the description, interpretation, and analysis of pedagogical development (or impediment) while constructing one's narrative identity (Singer, 2004). These letters were presented in full to represent the love they had for their inherited teacher identity. In this letter, teachers were prompted to tell a story or set of stories they would have liked to have known during their first few years as a teacher. This letter uncovered conversations of turning points and transitions without specifically asking for them, something Carlsson (2012) advocates for when in search of authentic moments of self-innovation or transformation. Additionally, I did this to display something from each participant that they storied (Bakhtin, 1981; Barone, 1995; 2001). Because we use language, written or spoken, to build and rebuild the worlds around us, I wanted to add, directly, the language written by each participant about his/her teacher identity (Bakhtin, 1981; Gee, 2005).

Although "love" was only used as a verb to identify what they liked about their job in retrospect, they never stated directly that they loved their professional identity. I performed a discourse analysis to explain how I qualified their letters as love notes to their teacher identity. I concluded their stories with this discourse analysis. Gee's discourse analysis situates meaning in the language used regarding "things that exist in the mind and in the world" (p. 68). This is the truest and the easiest way "to grasp what [participants] mean" in their own language; as

well as offer some suggestion for "how and why they are significant" in the researcher's voice (p. 69). Because I claim it to be a close, intimate relationship—the endured teacher identity—I used Chapman's (1995) languages of love as the tools for my discourse analysis (Gee, 2005). Chapman, a trained therapist, found five languages most commonly spoken by his clients when speaking about their love affairs. There were lonely wives who wanted quality time away from the television with their partners, there were husbands who completed all of the household chores without any gratification or thanks, there were couples who never had a kind word to share with one another.

These languages helped me analyze the particular language used in the teachers' letters about their love and affection toward their teacher identity. Chapman's (1995) languages are as follows:

> Words of affirmation: Words of kindness used to encourage or compliment one's partner.
> Quality time: Time spent together that inspires a kind of togetherness that shares an intimate dialogue.
> Receiving or Giving of Gifts: Tokens of affection and/or visual symbols of love; gifts are given to show one partner present to the other.
> Acts of Service: Any service provided to help with necessary tasks for which both partners are responsible.
> Physical touch: Any sort of physical touch, from hand holding to intercourse.
> (p. 15)

While analyzing the discourse used in the letter, I found a maintained, open line of communication within themselves that spoke directly to their teacher selves in languages similar to Chapman's love languages. The endured teacher identity, though, only spoke in a few of Chapman's (1995) love languages. "Physical touch" had no real presence in the language the five teachers shared about their former professional selves. Furthermore, they did not make much mention of "giving and receiving gifts" regarding their embodiment of the endured teacher identity. What was found was a saturation of "quality time" when speaking of this identity.

For example, all five veteran teachers shared an intimate dialogue between themselves and their former professional selves in their letters. This dialogue was inspired by a shared togetherness, an if-I-had-known-then-what-I-know-now kind of dialogue. One teacher in particular, Elizabeth, spoke of keeping teaching journals while a young teacher. In order to construct her letter, she used feelings found in those journals to explain how quality time spent between her and her teacher self had been most beneficial to the teacher she is today, as she writes in her letter to her former teacher self:

> Rummaging through a box of old journals, I found the one you kept in the spring of 1968, your second full year of teaching 7th and 8th grade English in Wisconsin. On the first read, I squirmed—so many rookie mistakes and such profound naïveté. No wonder the two years before this had been so rough. Between the lines, I could read your angst and sensed the strain. You recorded your gripes and a whole slug of criticisms, but mainly what you said was this: "School is so hard—it demands so much." … By the third read, I was past the embarrassment over my own clumsiness. I could see myself in your narrative. Teaching style, values, impulses as an educator—the seeds of what you (I) became are all there.

Analyzing her discourse for language of her teacher identity spoken in one of Chapman's love languages, I interpret:

> Elizabeth seems to utter language to her former teacher self in words of quality time, time spent between Elizabeth and her teacher self reflexively asking questions of personal reflections occurred over her many years as a teacher. By reviewing her past teacher journals, she ultimately finds humor in her naiveté, and reminds her earlier self that this naiveté, no matter how embarrassing, will be a big part of her coming to find a sense of self in her classroom, a sense of self she truly loves.

Finding language in her letter that suggested it was this reflective dialogue that she established through these early activities of writing about her classroom, I was able to see this reflection as quality time spent thinking about her teacher identity. Elizabeth's reflective thinking, she reports, is what solidified her teacher identity.

Reflective narratives regarding their participation in the inquiry. The participants' discourse was further analyzed based on reflective narratives the participants wrote based on their experiences with the inquiry. To bring this to life, I posted the participant's letters to their former teacher selves to a blog. Each letter was posted by me and was presented to the group under each teacher's pseudonym. The teachers were asked to read the letters on the blog. They were then asked to compose a final reflective narrative based on their experiences participating in the study. Because participant reflections have the ability to restory how participants might understand the narratives they presented while participating in the study, narrative inquiry finds a dialogic voice that emphasizes growth and development through participant reflections (Frank, 2010). The reflective narrative inquired of this dialogic self-awareness—wondering what the participants became aware of while composing and reading other relational narratives of professional identity (Clandinin, 2013). This dialogical self-awareness is revealed in the following statements made by the teachers:

> Harry: The gist of another comment also resonated with me: "Don't spend too much time comparing yourself to other teachers. Everyone is different, and kids need variety. They will run into many different kinds of bosses and fellow employees that they will need to get along with." Yes! I believe deeply that our work—or perhaps our actual impact—as teachers is just as much to model proper adult behavior and relationships with others than to get kids to master particular areas of knowledge and skills.

> Lauren: When I have days that are not great, when I have days where I just want to throw the towel in, when I have days where I think, "Why am I here? What am I doing?"—I will look back at this experience, I will read my reflections and the other things I have written, and I will know and remember and enjoy this wonderful ride that is being an English teacher.

> Marla: I feel as though I could place an identity on each letter. The teacher who is informed by social changes in her youth continued to experiment throughout her career and work to expand the world of her students. The teacher who discussed teaching as a community-building endeavor has long roots in our community with family and employment. His family

is at the foundation of our town. The roller-coaster rider is the poet and artist. She is a student favorite for her understanding and smooth cool interactions with the teens. Now I realize that you meant how do we identify with these teachers. I wish that I was as introspective as they are. I wish that I was more about the big picture. I am caught up in survival and low on Maslow's hierarchy. They are much closer to self-actualizing themselves as teachers.

All reflective narratives were also supplied in full and organized in the love stage. I used the language used in the narratives to subsequently analyze their love for their teacher identity, as was done with the letters. These narratives spoke in "acts of service" and "words of affirmation" mostly.

Role of the inquirist. Because these stories are collaborative, because their stories are narrations made by me drawing "semantic conclusions about the self from the episodic information that the stories convey" (McAdams & McLean, 2013, p. 235), my role as the inquirist was to convey the story and its worth to teacher identity research. Through this conveying, interpretations can be made across episodes, and these interpretations could offer teachers' semantic conclusions. To support my claims of interpretation and limit the risk of mistelling their stories, I included ample amounts of original text, such as that of the letters and reflective narratives written by the participants (McCormack, 2004; Thomas, 2012). I did this hoping to stimulate reflection and discussion within the reader about these teaching life stories (Barone, 2001).

In studies methodologically driven by narrative inquiry, the role of the inquirist is to be reflexive, reflective, and aware of the participants' stories and the inquirist's analysis of these stories (Chase, 2018; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Polkinghorne, 1988; Riessman, 1990). As the inquirist, I storied each teacher's identity as a third-person omniscient narrator to stay reflexive, reflective, and aware while constructing their identity narratives, and a first-person narrator when telling the narrative specific to the inquiry. To aid this analysis, I kept a researcher's journal. In order to apply and know the narrative spoken by each participant, reflexively and rigorously, I kept a reflective journal that questioned what I thought the work was going to be, how it was going to be that way, and important reflections of what was happening, intra-personally, while I wrote the entire study.

Other than my own personal reflections on the work, I kept any continued communication with the participants in this journal. If there was a need to re-interview a participant or there were any emails shared between the two of us that found purpose in a participant's narrative, I added them to my researcher's journal. For example, when Marylin decided to retire mid-year, we scheduled a new meeting focused on her decisions and its connection to her professional life story. This second interview was then transcribed in my journal.

The teaching life stories were then constructed by the life story interviews, participant-written reflections, and any subsequent communication we had during the creation of their stories. This method of writing their stories allowed me to tell their story as their storyteller; it allowed me to story their stories in their terms (McCormack, 2004). Upon their completion, participants were emailed their stories before my doctoral defense. It was encouraging to receive "words of affirmation" from them. In their own terms, Elizabeth, Harry, Marylin, Lauren, and Marla explained that their stories made them proud of the teachers they had become.

Conclusion

By way of narrative inquiry, these veteran teachers taught me that a sustained teacher identity must be one that *endures*. This endurance evolves into a practice informed by a creative-communal-reflective teacher stance and experienced through a positive well-being. It hurts. It celebrates. It listens. It advocates. It empathizes. It disciplines. Yet, ultimately, it loves. That is why this project was pieced together as a love story. Similar to a love story, this identity evolves and revolves as it endures the conditions of sharing space in another's life. I collected these stories so that young teachers could have a collection of stories to support them through their first tense border crossing from student to teacher, in order to cross the next border, then the next, and the next, until their teaching identity gives their lives purpose. Until their teacher identity is inseparable from who they are. If this purpose is not found, then, I fear, young teachers will continue to prematurely resign from their classrooms because of their inability to cross the student-teacher border.

When I first stepped into my classroom, I crossed the threshold between student and teacher as most young teachers do; I entered into a career about which I knew nothing. I chose a career based on a profession I had imagined. I had no idea what would be expected. I had no idea I was going to have to teach through students dying, through students dropping-out, through students being searched for oxycontin only to find out it was aspirin, through students losing all of their possessions in a fire, through students calling me stupid, through students telling me I failed them. I had no idea. But the veteran teachers with whom I worked did, and that is the life-blood of this entire project. Their stance and well-being informed my vulnerable and frightening first few years. My inquiry project's goal was to find a way to share their teaching life stories, so that young teachers could have the tools I had as a young teacher. Once narrative inquiry revealed itself as a method that embodied experience through stories, I found a way to tell the story of the endured teacher identity, an identity inspired by my colleagues and defined to enrich the teaching community as well as its community-in-the-making.

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