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Teaching with Passion: A Narrative Inquiry into Elementary Teachers' Identity Development, Personal and Professional Knowledge, and Love of Teaching

Evelyn Lightfoot Aimar
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TEACHING WITH PASSION:
A NARRATIVE INQUIRY INTO ELEMENTARY TEACHERS’ IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT, PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE, AND LOVE OF TEACHING

by

EVELYN LIGHTFOOT AIMAR
(Under the Direction of Ming Fang He)

ABSTRACT

This is a study of elementary teachers’ identity development, personal and professional knowledge, and love of teaching. The participants of this inquiry are six teachers who teach at Hesse Elementary School in Savannah, Georgia. Diane, Julie, Mary, Susan, Uticia, and Yolanda provide viable insights about their journey as teachers. Their stories offer narrative truisms concerning their identity evolution and the transformation of their professional personality as they live their lives in the classroom.


Amid the overwhelming obstacles teachers face each day, the nuances of these teachers’ experiences of developing passion for teaching or becoming dispassionate about teaching are found in the stories of my teacher participants. From the desire to become teachers at their early ages to the joys and sorrows they have experienced or are experiencing, my participants divulge what it takes to be a teacher today. Sonia Nieto’s (2003) lament that, “Even under the best of circumstances, teaching is a demanding job,
and most teachers do not work under the best of circumstances. The enthusiasm and idealism that bring them to teaching dissipate quickly for many” (p. 3), supports the need for more research in the area of teacher burnout and attrition. Found within the lived experiences of Susan, Mary, Julie, Uticia, Diane, and Yolanda are antidotes for addressing the demands of teaching.

In order to present viable narratives, I utilize Jean Clandinin and Michael Connelly’s (2000) narrative inquiry methods to collect the stories of my participants. Participant profiles, autobiographical writings, and reflective journals, are presented in this study. This inquiry also includes interviews, informal conversations and participant observations. Common pedagogical beliefs or disbeliefs are revealed in this study.

This study is significant for pre-service and in-service teachers, educators, administrators, and policy makers. For pre-service teachers, this study helps prepare them to develop courage, knowledge, and passion to meet the challenge in the teaching profession. For in-service teachers, the experiences of my teacher participants reveal how passionate veteran teachers “go against the grain” (hooks, 1994, p. 203) and fight oppressive mandates with silent opposition. For educators, narrative texts offer additional information about “what keeps teachers going” (Nieto, 2003). For administrators, my participants’ stories provide a much needed megaphone for teachers’ voices that are often silenced in fear. These important axioms give administrators guidance for encouraging, supporting, and sometimes defending their teachers. For policy makers, critical nuances concerning teacher identity and professional development reveal what works in my participants’ classrooms and provide viable information for curriculum reform. In a time when teacher shortages plague our nation’s schools, passionate teachers hold viable
information for strengthening teacher commitment to the teaching profession. This narrative inquiry provides keys, often overlooked, for unlocking a treasure chest of encouragement for pre-service and in-service teachers who aspire to make a difference in the world.

INDEX WORDS: Teacher Identity Development, Teacher Passion, Teacher Personal and Professional Development, Elementary Teachers’ Identity and Love of Teaching
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A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of Georgia Southern University in
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DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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EVELYN LIGHTFOOT AIMAR

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Committee: Mary Ellen Cosgrove
           William M. Reynolds
           Rosemarie Stallworth-Clark

Electronic Version Approved:
May, 2006
DEDICATION

This research study is dedicated to Louise Rowland, my fourth and fifth grade teacher, who planted and fertilized the seeds of my teacher identity, professional knowledge, and love of teaching deep within the soil of personal identity development.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Upon completion of this study, among many other revelations, I have acquired a deeper understanding that no human is an island. Not only are we unending evolutions of identity development, but that evolution is in conjunction with our interactions with others. Similarly, this study would not have been possible without the interactions with others who provided the support and encouragement I needed to persevere and push onward to attain my research goals.

It is with deep appreciation that I acknowledge my committee members. Dr. Ming Fang He whose passion for research, writing, humanity, culture, and the Curriculum Studies program at Georgia Southern University shined a bright beacon that guided my research. Dr. Rosemarie Stallworth-Clark whose expertise in identity development and care in education kept my thirst for answers unquenched. Dr. Mary Ellen Cosgrove whose devotion to teacher education and curriculum improvement challenged me to find new and improved suggestions for the teaching profession. Dr. William Reynolds whose deep concern for and desire to improve curriculum in the United States motivated me to provide an arena from which teachers’ voices can be heard.

Without the love and support of my friends and family who cheered me on to completion, this study would have not been possible. My husband, Paul Aimar, whose vision for my life and who I can become has always been clearer and better than my own, and whose love has sustained me for 32 years. My sons, Paul and Kevin, who have always been my inspiration and motivation. My granddaughter, Alexis, who has brought me more joy in three years than I could have ever imagined.
Through this process of attaining my long term goal, I hope you have felt my love and appreciation for all you have done to support my research and writing.

In addition to my husband, sons, and granddaughter, there are those who gladly lined up to push me forward. My mother, Joyce Snyder, who has always held the bar high so that I might reach my full potential. My stepfather, Jim Snyder, whose constant nudging and confidence in my work gave me fuel to keep going. And, my daddy, Weyman Lightfoot, whose passion for children was seen as he laughed at my childhood antics and expressed that unspoken twinkle of pride in his eyes for all my successes. Without the parental guidance afforded me, I could not have achieved at the level in which was always made possible for me by way of your constant love and encouragement.

Family has a way of naturally supporting admirable goals. Then there are those who have made the choice to cheer me on to victory through their undying friendship. Lisa Aliotta, who endured, motivated, learned, ran the race, and finished with me. I could not have completed this journey without your help. Dawn Wooten, who has always been my cheerleader, confidante, and mentor. Your friendship provided the comfort I needed on the most difficult stretches of the expedition.

Inasmuch as my committee members, family, and friends provided the guidance and support necessary to complete this research dissertation, the entire study would not have been feasible without the faculty and staff at Hesse Elementary School. Six teachers demonstrated their passion and dedication to teaching by allowing me the privilege of investigating their professional and personal lives in a search for the roots of their teacher passion and professional identity development.
Without their cooperation and patience, this study would not been possible. I owe a lifetime of gratitude and appreciation to my participants who willingly contributed time and work to help me complete my research inquiry into their lives. Susan Donovan, Mary Griggs, Julie Mayville, Uticia Brown, Diane Nobles, and Yolanda Doctor not only demonstrated their dedication to teaching, but also showed their camaraderie and collegial support for my investigation into their personal and professional lives.

Also, Becky Wilson’s expertise in editing my writing made this journey much more endurable than it might otherwise have been. It is with gratitude and deep appreciation that I acknowledge your help and support throughout the writing of this dissertation.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>READING THE DISSERTATION</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>I</strong> INTRODUCTION: THE FOREST FROM A BIRD’S EYE VIEW</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Context of Study</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autobiographical Roots of My Inquiry: A Teacher in the Making</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of the Researcher</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenges of this Study</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance of this Study</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contribution to the Field of Curriculum Studies</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>II</strong> REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE: SEARCHING THE FOREST FOR OAK TREES</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current Issues that Affect Teacher Passion</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Constraints: What Do Educational Policy Makers</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Really Know about Teaching?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States of America: Are We United?</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents: Teacher vs. Student – Whose Side are They On?</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Accountability – Yet, One More Standard!</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Salaries – Are Teachers Working as Cheap Laborers?</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Teacher Identity Development ................................................................. 72
Teachers’ Personal Experiences ................................................................. 82
Teacher Knowledge .................................................................................. 86
Passion ....................................................................................................... 89
Passion for Teaching ............................................................................... 91
What Teacher Passion is Not ..................................................................... 93
Hope for Tomorrow: Learning to Hold on to Passion ............................... 95
Summary .................................................................................................. 96

III METHODOLOGY: A PLAN FOR INVESTIGATING OAK TREES ........... 98

Theoretical Framework: Narrative Theory .................................................. 99

Historical Roots of Narrative Theory ....................................................... 100

Narrative Theory as a Framework for Research ....................................... 106

Narrative Inquiry ................................................................................... 109

Collecting Teachers’ Stories and Composing Field Texts ....................... 113

Participants’ Life Histories ...................................................................... 114

Teachers’ Professional Knowledge Landscape ....................................... 114

Teachers’ Autobiographical Writings ....................................................... 119

Teacher Interviews .................................................................................. 120

Teacher Observations: Part of the Research .......................................... 122

Reflective Journals .................................................................................. 122

Field Texts .............................................................................................. 123

Managing Participants’ Stories and Field Texts ....................................... 124

Summary .................................................................................................. 126
IV TEACHERS’ STORIES: FROM ACORNS TO OAK TREES .......................127

Susan Donovan: A Life Devoted to Children .............................................128
  My First Mentor ..................................................................................128
  Susan Donovan’s Personal Life History .................................................129
  Susan Donovan’s Earliest School Experiences .....................................131
  Susan Donovan’s Professional Identity Development ........................132
  Susan Donovan’s Passion for Teaching ..............................................133

Mary Griggs: From the Cotton Fields to the Classroom ..........................135
  Kindred Spirits ..................................................................................135
  Mary Griggs’ Personal Life History .....................................................136
  Mary Griggs’ Earliest School Experiences .........................................137
  Mary Griggs’ Professional Identity Development ..................................138
  Mary Griggs’ Passion for Teaching ....................................................139

Uticia Brown: Precision in Professionalism ..........................................141
  Admiration from a Distance ................................................................141
  Uticia Brown’s Personal Life History ..................................................141
  Uticia Brown’s Earliest School Experiences .......................................142
  Uticia Brown’s Professional Identity Development .............................144
  Uticia Brown’s Passion for Teaching ..................................................145

Julie Mayville: A True Southern Belle ...................................................146
  The Epitome of Professionalism ..........................................................146
  Julie Mayville’s Personal Life History ..................................................147
  Julie Mayville’s Earliest School Experiences ......................................148
  Julie Mayville’s Professional Identity Development ............................149
  Julie Mayville’s Passion for Teaching ..................................................150

Diane Nobles: An Authentic Non-Conformist .......................................150
  Comrade in Resistance .......................................................................150
  Diane Nobles’ Personal Life History ...................................................150
  Diane Nobles’ Earliest School Experiences ........................................152
  Diane Nobles’ Professional Identity Development .............................153
  Diane Nobles’ Passion for Teaching ...................................................154

Yolanda Doctor: Fairy Godmother Extraordinaire .................................155
  Instant Respect ..................................................................................155
  Yolanda Doctor’s Personal Life History ..............................................156
  Yolanda Doctor’s Earliest School Experiences .....................................157
  Yolanda Doctor’s Professional Identity Development ........................157
  Yolanda Doctor’s Passion for Teaching ..............................................159
Understanding the Effects of Lived Experiences on Teachers’ Identity Development, Personal and Professional Knowledge, and Love of Teaching ....................................................................................161

V TEACHERS’ IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT: RESISTING DESTRUCTIVE ELEMENTS AND BEATING THE ODDS.................................................................163

Teacher Interviews..........................................................................................164
Political Constraints ..................................................................................165
Analysis of Teacher Responses Concerning Political Constraints ..........167
Parents ........................................................................................................168
Analysis of Teacher Responses Concerning Parents .............................171
Teacher Accountability ..............................................................................172
Analysis of Teacher Responses Concerning Teacher Accountability ....173
Teacher Salaries ........................................................................................174
Analysis of Teacher Responses Concerning Teacher Salaries ...............176
Passion for Teaching ..................................................................................177
Analysis of Teacher Responses Concerning Passion ............................181

Participants’ Reflective Journals.................................................................182
Journal Prompt – October 27, 2005 - Standards ..................................185
Journal Prompt – October 28, 2005 - Germinating a Teacher Identity ......188
Journal Prompt – November 3, 2005 - Parents .......................................191
Journal Prompt – November 21, 2005 - Passion ...................................194
Analysis of Teacher Responses to Reflective Journal Writing Prompts .197
Boring Deeper Into the Core of Teacher Identity Development ............198
Analysis of Mary’s, Uticia’s, and Yolanda’s
Journal Prompt Responses .......................................................................202

Interpretive Activity....................................................................................205
1. Susan Donovan’s Personal Wreath ....................................................207
2. Mary Griggs’ Personal Wreath ............................................................208
3. Uticia Brown’s Personal Wreath .........................................................209
4. Julie Mayville’s Personal Wreath .......................................................210
5. Diane Nobles’ Personal Wreath .......................................................211
6. Yolanda Doctor’s Personal Wreath ....................................................212
Analysis of Participants’ Interpretive Activity Constructions ............213
Addendum to Interpretive Activity ............................................................214

Teacher Observations..............................................................................214
Susan Donovan .........................................................................................215
Mary Griggs ..............................................................................................216
Uticia Brown .............................................................................................217
Julie Mayville ............................................................................................219
Diane Nobles .............................................................................................221
Yolanda Doctor .........................................................................................222
Common Characteristics Gleaned from Teacher Observations ..............224

Field Texts .....................................................................................................225
Analysis of Field Texts..............................................................................227

Capturing the Elusive Components of Teacher Identity Development .......227

VI RESEARCH FINDINGS: PROTECTING ACORNS
OF TEACHER IDENTITY ............................................................................229

EPILOGUE ......................................................................................................................273
REFERENCES ................................................................................................................275
APPENDICES .................................................................................................................284

A. IRB APPROVAL LETTER ...........................................................................285
B. LETTER OF CONSENT FROM PRINCIPAL .............................................287
# LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figure 1</td>
<td>Susan Donovan’s Personal Wreath</td>
<td>207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2</td>
<td>Mary Griggs’ Personal Wreath</td>
<td>208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3</td>
<td>Uticia Brown’s Personal Wreath</td>
<td>209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 4</td>
<td>Julie Mayville’s Personal Wreath</td>
<td>210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 5</td>
<td>Diane Nobles’ Personal Wreath</td>
<td>211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 6</td>
<td>Yolanda Doctor’s Personal Wreath</td>
<td>212</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
READING THE DISSERTATION

Over the past five years, as my writing has developed through the process of composing theoretical research papers, I realize that I often write metaphorically in order to illustrate and emphasize certain points. This dissertation contains several metaphors intended to portray the passion with which I write and to explain and stress specific points. Although a variety of metaphors pepper the chapters of this narrative study, the metaphor of an oak tree is used to represent teacher identity. Within that metaphor, teachers’ personal and professional knowledge and passion are seen as components of teacher identity development.

Six chapters are included in this narrative study. Chapter one contains a context of study which explains the need for this investigation and offers insight into questions that this study proposes to answer. Specific research questions are provided as a guide for this narrative inquiry. Also found in chapter one are the autobiographical roots of this study, which provide my personal justification for conducting this narrative inquiry and detail the planting and growing of my own teacher identity, personal and professional knowledge, and passion for teaching. Difficulties that challenge this inquiry, as well as its significance, are also included in chapter one.

Chapter two is an in depth review of literature that is pertinent to this study. A close inspection of current issues that are obstacles for teachers is presented here. Literature concerning political constraints, parental opposition, teacher accountability mandates, and low teacher salaries is reviewed and analyzed in this chapter. After a review of current issues is presented, literature pertaining to teacher identity
development, teachers’ personal experiences and the effects those have on passion, teacher knowledge acquisition, and love of teaching are presented.

Chapter three includes the components necessary to support the methodology used to attain the research found within this narrative investigation. Narrative theory as a theoretical framework for this inquiry is made available. The historical development of narrative theory is provided and used as a support for the contents of this study. Narrative inquiry is explained and examples of exemplary narrative works are contained in this chapter. Data collection methods including participant profiles, a description of teachers’ professional knowledge landscape, teachers’ autobiographical writings, teacher interviews, teacher observations, research journals, and field texts are located in this section of the study. This chapter also includes methods for managing and maintaining teachers’ stories and field texts.

Chapter four presents information gleaned from the participants’ stories found in this report. This information introduces the participants of this study narratively as I explain the relationship I have with each participant, each participant’s life history, early school memories, personal and professional knowledge acquisition, and teacher passion.

Chapter five gives more detailed information revealed in the storied lives of the participants. Each participant’s perspective on teacher identity development, teacher professional knowledge acquisition, and love of teaching is presented. An analysis of each topic is provided following the data presentation of each area.

Chapter six comprises findings drawn from the stories gathered and investigated. Analyses of teacher interviews, journal reflections, and interpretative
activity participation are divulged in this chapter. Concurrent themes supported by the data texts in this study are disclosed and explained. This section also contains suggestions for education programs that were gleaned from participants’ experiences as passionate educators.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: THE FOREST FROM A BIRD’S EYE VIEW

In a search for the delicate sinews of teacher identity that are embedded deep within the core of individual teachers, this narrative inquiry into the lives of six elementary teachers begins much the same as a robin in spring searching a forest packed with trees for that perfect tree upon which to build her nest. From a global perspective mired with the dialogue of politicians, curriculum theorists, education specialists, and the public in general, focusing my view and seeking to observe the often invisible lives of elementary teachers with an “experiential eye – seeing, hearing, and feeling the nuances” of each lived experience – provides clearly revealed information that contributes to the field of curriculum studies (Connelly, He, and Phillion, 2005, p. 2). Seeing the lives of passionate teachers through a finely tuned lens by way of narrative investigations causes the blurriness of too much information and the noisiness of the “cacophony” of curriculum to be wiped away and silenced (Pinar, 2004, p. 1).

And certainly the glass was beginning to melt away, just like a bright silvery mist (Carroll, 1960, p.298).

This study is an inquiry into elementary teachers’ passion for teaching derived from their personal and professional experiences. Much like Alice’s attempt to “see” into the looking-glass house, our attempts at recalling those personal and professional experiences hold a great deal of reality and mystery. As I removed the mist of mystery and embellished memories in order to find the reality of experience, this study unveils hidden threads of pedagogical commonalities that were planted and
fertilized in the first learning experiences of the participants of this inquiry. Likewise, this study investigates the passion that is evidenced in many teachers’ lives as their personal and professional identities were and are being shaped. In reference to Alice’s experiences with the *Looking Glass* Marc Edmund Jones (2004) states, “Here everything is alive and is not so much actuated reflection as a self-actuating reality” (p.303). Teachers’ pedagogical practices are not simply reflections of their elementary experiences; they are self-actuating realities embedded in the identities of those teachers. In this dissertation, the results of an investigation to find the importance of teacher identity development within the confines of those experiences in teachers’ early school encounters and how those experiences affect passion and professional development are reported.

The theoretical framework for this study is narrative theory. The components of narrative theory make available those lived experiences of teachers that hold valuable meaning concerning the construction of teachers’ identities and the passion that is evident in their daily encounters as teachers. As those stories were dissected and analyzed, specific pedagogical beliefs surfaced and provided evidence of specific passionate behaviors that are impervious to obstacles that otherwise reduce or omit those behaviors.

**Context of Study**

Yet, I am perplexed about why teachers remain in teaching, why they dedicate their lives to a profession ostensibly honored but generally disrespected by the public in a climate increasingly hostile to public education and fixated on rigid conceptions of “standards” and accountability. (Nieto, 2004, p. 9)
Why do teachers remain teachers and continue to demonstrate a deep passion for their profession in spite of the constant barrage of political, social, and personal pressures? In a profession that often causes new teachers to retreat and run the other way, many teachers seem oblivious to pelts of critical bullets that are fired daily at them. As researchers delve into the personal and professional development of teacher identity in search of explanations for those die-hard teacher behaviors that keep teachers teaching, adversities teachers face each day surface as reasons that many teachers leave the profession. Likewise, that same research reveals hidden experiences that cause some teachers to be impervious to similar difficulties.

One such investigator asks, “How does one compensate professionals for inadequate books and supplies, large classes, disruptive students, public criticism, limited assistance, increased duties, and the lowest salaries paid to highly educated personnel in the nation?” (Parks, 1983, p. 12). This study addresses such questions by inquiring into the lives of elementary teachers who have stood the test of time and what seems to be a mountain of negative conditions. Yet, how to compensate teachers is not the only question. Another question to be explored is why do teachers continue to have passion for teaching in spite of the obvious constraints they face each day.

This study looks closely at the lives, stories, and experiences of six elementary teachers in order to find those hidden stamina-building encounters that make certain teachers resistant to the continuing growth of public disdain and obvious lack of appreciation for what they do. Six participants were chosen in order to represent each grade level housed at Hesse Elementary School where the participants teach. A meticulous look at those teachers who demonstrate noticeable passion for their
profession divulges answers to the daunting question that is also the title of Sonia Nieto’s (2003) book, *What Keeps Teachers Going?* Beyond answering that question, this study also provides ideas about the development of passion as the participants disclose their memories, experiences, and perceptions about their professional development.

I have pondered the question, “What keeps teachers going?” for quite some time. As I constantly consider the day-to-day interactions that hold answers to that question, a walk down the second and third grade hall of our elementary school (Hesse Elementary School) is an enlightening experience, one in which passion seeps under the doorways and permeates the wing much like the sweet aroma of homemade bread as it seeps into every room of a house. This passion is felt and experienced by visitors to our school. Many times people come to our school and remark about its positive atmosphere. Our students seem to be genuinely happy and learning is visible and audible in every classroom. As I made my way from my classroom to the library, I paused to watch and listen as teachers interacted with their students. Instead of hearing lectures and constant “blah, blah, blah” from teachers, I heard conversations, discussions about place value, regrouping numbers, common and proper nouns, dinosaur extinction, and a multitude of other interesting topics. This type of experience always intrigues me. I hunger to get to the hidden factors that not only foster and maintain strong teacher passion and dedication to children, but also gird up that passion to make it invincible when assaults from various constituencies threaten to crush it.
Hesse is not a school in isolation. It is much like all the other forty-five elementary schools in Savannah. In a detailed description of Hesse as teachers’ professional knowledge landscape, the details that are obvious are provided. What are missing from the overt, statistical data about Hesse are the personal and professional experiences of its teachers. Often those hidden nuggets of information are missing from the overall condition of America’s schools. It is my hope that this revelation of identity construction of six teachers conveys information that is often missed in the reports that paint dismal pictures of the conditions of our public schools.

“Evelyn, these students need us.” As Mary Griggs and I watched our students as they played during recess, she verbalized her passion for wanting to be a comfort zone for those students who are hurting as they watch their parents divorce. This type of remark is the evidence of passion expressed by the participants of this study. Sixteen plus years of teaching with these six teachers have provided me with a clear understanding of what makes our school “feel” so wonderful for students, parents, and visitors alike. As I continued to watch, listen, and think about passionate exchanges between teachers and students, colleagues, and administrators, overt behaviors and statements expressed that elusive, metaphysical entity called passion.

Yes, Hesse does house a cadre of teachers who have seen the battlefield, have watched the destruction of comrades, and who have marched forward into the assault of incoming criticism, disrespect, and low pay. Those teachers enter the battle zone daily equipped with more ammunition for sustaining and guarding their passion than any enemy can endure. Their joy, internal strength, and love of learning and teaching
work magic to melt away the pelts of daily battering that threaten to tear down their resistance. This study shines a beacon into the very fibers of teacher identity development to reveal those characteristics that are needed to strengthen America’s teaching cadre and ensure longevity and dedication to the teaching profession.

There are those teachers who “find joy and passion in the teaching profession” while others “find drudgery and then simply pick up a paycheck every two weeks” (Perricone, 2005, Intro.). That drudgery is evidenced in the high rate of teacher exodus from the profession by those novice teachers who cannot see beyond the drudgery. According to the National Education Association (August 2005), “One-third of new teachers leave the profession within three years and almost one-half leave within five years.” Even in the popular press, in an Oprah Magazine (October 2005), an advertisement for Jones of New York states, “By 2010 the nation will need 2.2-2.4 million more teachers, and 30-50% of teachers leave the profession within the first five years” (p.13). Such statements express the dire condition of America’s teaching profession. America’s classrooms are wrought with teachers who have had their passion ripped from their souls. Yet, there are those teachers who, in spite of passion-robbing obstacles, enter America’s classrooms with a will and determination to spread the joy of learning to all who enter their classrooms. How can the passionate educators of today strengthen the ranks and help novice teachers and preservice teachers prepare for battle and enter the looking glass house with hope and immunity to those encounters and experiences that often send teachers in search of something better? This study answers that question and gives useful information to all those who call themselves “teacher.”
In the sea of controversy on teacher attrition and burnout, almost every aspect has been considered. From low pay to public perception and bureaucracy, reasons and solutions have been suggested and provided to answer this growing problem. Yet, the obvious, as is the case in many dilemmas, has been overlooked. Yes, there are certain obstacles that cause teacher burnout and teacher attrition. Those obstacles can readily be found. Nevertheless, the solution is not found in improved academic programs, more and better textbooks, or even in higher salaries. The answer is found in the identities of teachers who carry the load of preparing our nation’s masses to compete in a world economy and to maintain and improve society in general. Much like students’ test scores on standardized tests, statistics on teacher education programs and teacher attrition are only part of the picture. The biggest part of the picture in student achievement is found in individual student success that cannot be measured by a standardized test. Likewise, information found in numbers concerning teacher burnout, education courses, and teacher retention do not reveal the whole picture of exactly what happens or does not happen to each individual who enters the classroom, burnouts, and leaves the profession. There is much more to teacher passion than numbers can provide. A close look at teacher identity development reveals those hidden components that provide experts a close look at the missing pieces of their research.

In order to explain exactly what it is that conceives, feeds, and builds passion that is impermeable to the daily assaults that threaten to kill that passion, passion must be defined, nailed down, so to speak. A clear understanding of passion had to be put in place as I endeavored to scrutinize precisely any and all factors that affect
teacher passion. Likewise, my participants had to be given a common grasp of the term “passion” in order for them to describe exactly those experiences that have fostered their passion as they develop their teacher identities and professional pedagogy. A close inspection of passion and exactly what it means and how it pertains to teaching is presented in this study.

As Deborah Meier (Fried, 2001) states, “We’re living in an age of inflated rhetoric” (p.ix). With the focus on politically, culturally, and ethically correct verbiage, mission statements and school system visions created to improve our educational system, what are lost, or perhaps, were never found, are those valuable experiences that describe passionate teaching that carries our society toward the future with or without mission, vision, or goal statements. As I join those researchers who shed light upon the importance of those experiences, this study provides a close look at how passionate teaching can be attained and implemented at the onset of teaching regardless of teacher proof curricula, governmental mandates, and/or social woes that plague our classrooms.

The United States of America boasts of superior educational standards and products. In our nation’s attempt to improve a reportedly successful educational program, President George W. Bush’s administration has implemented its No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (2002). With the trickling down of bureaucratic mandates and promises, the overwhelming pressure to wave a magic wand to educate the masses could cause educators to become faint hearted. In that the government promises American parents and children a better education than ever before, who is given the task to ensure that those promises are fulfilled? Teachers, of course. In
addition, who keeps striving to obtain that elusive goal of *No Child Left Behind*?

Passionate teachers!

Narrative inquiry was used to investigate the early educational experiences of six passionate elementary teachers. These teachers were selected through an intense survey investigation from a pool of 40 possible participants. The participants teach at Hesse Elementary School and are my teaching colleagues. The survey process was intended to find those teachers who have strong recollections of their elementary experiences and an obvious passion for the teaching profession. It also was used as a sorting tool to find those teachers who were willing to be a part of this research study. Although this research study presents certain challenges in the very nature of its context, it divulges useful information that can be used to enhance teacher education programs as well as help all educators tap into their own passion for teaching.

As I used narrative inquiry as a dissecting tool to expose common traits evident in passionate teachers, viable and useful information was gained concerning teacher identity development, teachers’ knowledge acquisition, and teacher passion maintenance. This narrative inquiry unveils the power behind early childhood educational experiences that build such passion for teaching that even with the pressures teachers face today that passion is not compromised or diminished.

**Research Questions**

The central research question for this study was:

- How do elementary school teachers’ identity development and personal and professional knowledge affect teacher passion and love of teaching?
Specific research questions were:

- What keeps elementary teachers passionate about teaching?
- Can passion for teaching be taught?

**Autobiographical Roots of My Inquiry: A Teacher in the Making**

Sitting in the oversized art room with 39 colleagues as we congregate for yet another training session on Georgia Performance Standards, I watched intently as the passion slowly drained from the faces of the those teachers I had grown to love and respect after working with them for over sixteen years. The voices of my colleagues were silenced but their faces spoke volumes of the disrespect they have endured at the hands of policy makers whose well-intentioned assumption that teachers need to be taught how to teach “effectively” has undermined the very heart of what drives teachers to continue the uphill march to help students “become more powerfully and self-consciously alive” (Ayers, 2004, p.1). Georgia Performance Standards are a representative sampling of the same how-to’s teachers have been taught for decades. The words are the same, the chorus and refrain are repetitions of years of precise terminology, and the goals are explicit replications of prior standards. The only thing that is different is the package. Wrapped in pretty words and more precise outcomes, the contents are the exact same as Georgia’s Quality Core Curriculum objectives and other such programs devised for the sole purpose of telling teachers exactly what and how to teach the masses.

As I continued to observe the facial expressions and body expressions of my friends, I was convinced that this type of training is but one of the factors that drain the passion right out of the heart and soul of teachers. The message is a reverberating
echo from policy makers that teachers are inept and unable to do exactly what it is that they were taught to do in their college classrooms. The passion that drives them to toil day in and day out equipped with more professional training than most professions is shaken but not destroyed. Oh no, it takes much more than the constant barrage of policy makers’ lack of confidence in the teaching profession to totally destroy teacher passion. But, what is it that makes us (teachers) continue to stoke the fires of passion in spite of political, social, and personal assaults on that part of our lives that we love so deeply? How was that passion planted? Who fertilized it? How does it withstand the droughts, floods, and other disasters that constantly attempt to suck the life out of it? Teachers’ lives reveal that passion that is resistant to what often destroys human drive and desire to do what is right and good for students.

From my own recollections, my passion for teaching is derived from several passionate teachers who planted the seeds of teaching deeply into the rich soil of my identity development during my encounters with them in their elementary classrooms. Unlike Alice, I have a strong sense of just what it is that I can and cannot see. I can vividly remember every single one of my teachers. I strongly believe the encounters with these teachers became a vital part of who I am as a passionate educator. As I attempt to earn my terminal degree in education, the question that haunts me the most is, “Why do teachers do what they do?” This question is not mired with the why’s of teachers making the choice to become teachers. It simply is a burning desire to understand why teachers behave the way they behave, teach the way they teach, and interact with students the way they do. The answer to these questions is embedded in the stories of teachers’ elementary school and life experiences as teacher identity is
being conceived and groomed. No matter why a teacher chooses to become a teacher, certain philosophical and theoretical beliefs are interwoven into the very fiber of that teacher’s identity as he/she experiences his/her own teachers. In order to help teachers divulge those core beliefs, an investigative dissection of memories of influential encounters with their teachers uncovered reasons for certain practices in the classroom. In addition to educational theory, practice, and methods, these revelations can help strengthen teachers’ understanding of themselves and can help them become confident and effective professionals.

After four years of undergraduate studies in order to earn my teaching degree, I was equipped with educational theory that included understanding childhood development from Piaget to Bruner and back again. I was prepared to present the most intriguing lessons to entice the most stubborn of students. Yet, as I entered a classroom of 33 first graders, I realized that they had a vast repertoire of knowledge already in place. They knew how to line up and make their way to the cafeteria and balance a tray of food. They knew how to stand in respect to The Pledge of Allegiance. They knew how to take turns, use manners, and listen. I quickly came to the realization that my responsibility was not only to add to the knowledge base already in place, but also to entice those students to hunger for more knowledge. As I went about the business of teaching, with this awesome revelation in mind, I could often hear the voices of my very own elementary teachers echoing throughout my classroom. Beyond the textbook learning I had gained in the college classroom, there was obviously much more to my actions and interactions as I taught my students.
Following a very successful year of teaching first grade, I wanted to know more. I wanted to know just what it was that I did that made my students and I connect so strongly. Surely there was more to it than what I had learned in my undergraduate courses. The next two years, I taught and worked on earning my master’s degree in education. Finally, I would have the answers for those people who asked me how I made the children love me and learning so much. To my dismay, those answers were not found in the college classroom. I learned more philosophy, theory, and methods. I did not learn why I teach the way I teach. Thus, my desire to find the answers to why teachers teach the way they teach was made even stronger.

From the early age of nine years old, I knew that there was something special about certain teachers. There were those teachers who did their job of disseminating information to us, and there were those who disseminated information but gave us so much more that just information. There were those teachers who invited us to taste the sweetness of knowledge. That knowledge went far beyond the factual information found in textbooks. It was the knowledge of caring for each other as we were cared for by our teacher.

After a great deal of reflection, and a close look at my very own story, I can now answer my own question. “Why do I teach the way I teach?” I teach the way I teach because that’s how Miss Hicklin and Mrs. Rowland taught me. Their voices ooze from my lips like honey. Their passion for teaching is reflected in my own silly antics and invitations to learning. They made me feel as if I were the most important student they would ever encounter. I believe each student I teach is the most significant individual I will ever teach. My story is one in which teachers made my
life one of happiness, confidence, and curiosity; one in which my passion for teaching was put in place by my elementary teachers.

Mingled among a lifetime of experiences including encounters with family and friends, is the impact that teachers had on me. As I entered first grade in 1962, I remember Miss Hicklin as vividly 42 years later as if it were yesterday. Her long, slender neck that showed blue bulging veins when she laughed with delight at my antics is quite clear in my mind’s eye. Her gentle hand upon my shoulder as she directed me to the time-out chair for talking too much again can be felt as if it were there at this moment. Miss Hicklin would clap her soft white hands together to get our attention, which always worked. She showed her love to me in indefinable ways.

My second grade teacher, Miss Cook was the complete opposite of Miss Hicklin. Miss Hicklin’s youth (or perhaps it was perceived youth) gave her an enthusiasm and drive that constantly found ways to see the positive in each child. Miss Cook, on the other hand, must have been ready for retirement. She was one of those elderly teachers who appeared to be there just to get the job done. My antics were not appreciated, but tolerated. Inasmuch as I got the unspoken message that I was a nuisance, I was okay if I just kept my mouth shut and did my work. Miss Cook taught me that school is a place of business and not a place for shenanigans.

Long black hair, worn pulled to the side with a long barrette and turned under on the ends, searing blue eyes, and ivory skin made Mrs. Freeman, my third grade teacher, look a lot like Snow White to me. However, she was as mean as the wicked witch. She was one of those teachers who sat behind her desk and doled out work page after work page of assignments. In Mrs. Freeman’s class, I learned that students
often do not feel safe. I was bullied by boys and told to stop crying when I was hurt. Mrs. Freeman just did not want to be bothered with the intricate social issues that are apparent among any given group of students. I learned how deeply students can feel threatened and stressed when they do not feel safe in a classroom.

The following two years were the highlights of my academic career and foundation for becoming a teacher. Mrs. Louise Rowland was my fourth and fifth grade teacher. Her silver, perfectly coiffed hair, polished nails, elegant clothes, and perfumed aroma were examples of appropriate grooming. Her genuine love and respect for her students were characteristics to be emulated by all her students. Mrs. Rowland showed extreme compassion anytime one of her students was hurt. She made a point to instill in us respect for one another despite our differences as she allowed us to verbalize our feelings of sorrow for what injustice may have occurred in our classroom. Not only while we were in class, but also as each has taken a place in society, those values are a part of who we have become. My classmates from Mrs. Rowland’s class have gone on to become educators, ministers, daycare providers, nurses, social workers, and parents who are extremely active in their children’s education. I cannot explain exactly how Mrs. Rowland made each of us feel as though we were the most important things in her life, but she did.

As I breezed through sixth grade and junior high school (as it was called then), I can remember each of my teachers. They all had an impact on me in a special way. Most of them contributed positive attributes to the development of my psychological demeanor as a teacher, but none as strongly as Mrs. Rowland.
The seeds of passion for teaching were planted long before they were fertilized and began to germinate. As my teachers placed the seeds into the lush ground of my soul, a high school counselor dumped a patch of weeds on top of all their good work. This powerful adult told me that I needed to take clerical classes and become an office worker. In not so many words, she made it clear that college was not for me, or I was not meant for college. Therefore, I did as she said…never mind what I had been groomed to become by so many excellent educators. I took clerical classes, stopped studying, and began working in a bank.

In spite of the detour my life took, I longed to touch the lives of children the way my teachers had touched mine. When my youngest son entered pre-kindergarten, his teacher saw the seeds that had been planted into the very fiber of my being and beckoned me to enter the field of education. At her constant encouragement, I did so. The watering, pruning, and grooming of my teacher identity took place in the halls of college. Yet, I believe those seeds were planted many years ago in the classrooms of my elementary encounters with excellent teachers.

As I travel the road of learning, it has become very easy for me to identify with those teachers who went beyond the role of robotic fact givers. Those teachers who loved their students (me included), have made and continue to make an indelible impact upon my life. That mark is so deep it beckoned me and continues to call to me to be one of those teachers who influence their students’ lives in powerful ways. The drive to cause students to love learning and the passion with which I was taught has molded me into a passionate teacher. That same passion makes me yearn to see
the very core of other passionate teachers. I want to touch the elusive, often hidden, causes of love of teaching.

Yes, passion for learning and teaching was planted and fertilized long ago in my early experiences with my own teachers, but that passion has been kicked around, robbed of nourishment, and sat in the shadows away from the sun by many factors that come with the title “teacher.” From irate parents to over-bearing administrators, the lack of respect afforded the profession of teacher is overwhelming. I have had my share of daily assaults along with the constant public perception that teaching is less than all other professions. In spite of all the constraints that attack teacher passion, there are other factors that feed, feed, and feed that passion. Teachers must focus on those nourishing encounters and experiences that build up their passion for teaching.

Without a doubt the most passion-building experience for teachers is the constant “strokes” given by students. Hugs, smiles, and words of encouragement are just the beginning of the regular fodder that fattens up teacher passion. Likewise, students’ successes are the extra nutrients that strengthen a teacher’s love of teaching.

Just recently I was falsely accused of violating our state’s Code of Ethics. These accusations were lodged by an irate person who had personal issues with me. Following the investigation, in which support was shown to me by numerous people, including our superintendent of schools, the results revealed that I was not in breach of the Code of Ethics. This experience left me down trodden and exhausted. After sixteen years of teaching, I could not believe that my reputation and record as a teacher was being so closely scrutinized and questioned. During this entire episode, I did not take my eyes off my students. I leaned on them for daily doses of happiness,
effort, and innocence. My encounters with them helped sustain my passion for teaching even in the shadows of persecution.

The same day I was notified of the final results of the school district’s investigation…total absolution…a former student of mine came to my classroom to give the following speech.

Have you ever had a teacher that didn’t just teach you about school work or how to behave in the classroom? Did this teacher teach you about life, too, and how to deal with it? Well, my third grade teacher, Mrs. Aimar, from Hesse Elementary was this person for me.

Every morning I was excited to go to school and be with her all day. I have realized that Mrs. Aimar is not only a teacher but a heart-warming person that will stay with me always. She is hardworking, compassionate, and inspirational. Mrs. Aimar is like my second mom, and I’d like to tell you why.

My first reason to pay tribute to Mrs. Aimar is that she’s hardworking. Mrs. Aimar takes a lot of time to prepare lessons that will get her students interested and get them to understand the concept. If she thought the class was struggling, she would reteach, even if it meant taking time away from her own schedule. Mrs. Aimar kept up with her grading and would give us a weekly report on how we were doing, so on report card day we were never surprised on what our grades were. Mrs. Aimar cares for her students, and if anything were to happen to them, she would be there in a heartbeat. It’s amazing she gets everything done and still has time to rest.
Mrs. Aimar is also a very compassionate person. When my parents were getting a divorce, Mrs. Aimar was there to help me get through it, even though I was no longer in her class. Mrs. Aimar even gave me a journal that said on it, “Rachel Coleman LeGear’s Personal and Very Private Journal.” I would write in it every night. Ever so often, I would bring the journal to Mrs. Aimar, and she would write a full page of encouraging comments. I would read over the comments and take her advice. Then I would start writing again. Now the journal is almost full.

Another way Mrs. Aimar is compassionate is she would allow me to come into her classroom anytime I wanted to just talk. She would sit, listen, and give advice. Sometimes Mrs. Aimar even shared some of her own pain in life. Then I would sit, listen, and give advice. During that time we learned a lot from each other. As you can see, Mrs. Aimar is very compassionate.

The third reason I want to pay tribute to Mrs. Aimar is because she’s inspirational. Mrs. Aimar has inspired me not to worry so much and just have fun whenever I can. If God wanted all of us to worry, he would give us a lot more to worry about. You can’t go on in life worrying about the future. Mrs. Aimar taught me that. Mrs. Aimar has taught me a valuable life lesson that can be found in the Bible. The Bible says, “Don’t be anxious about tomorrow, for God will take care of your tomorrow so, live one day at a time.” In these past three years, Mrs. Aimar definitely inspired me.

I know just a regular teacher wouldn’t do all this for me. But Mrs. Aimar is not a regular teacher. She’s like an angel from heaven who was sent
down to help little children in need. And, if she really is an angel, she has met her goal. But just because she’s met her goal doesn’t mean she’s going to stop. I believe she’s going to keep doing good deeds for children for the rest of her life. I love Mrs. Aimar so much. And, I’d like to thank her for the impact she’s had on my life (Rachel Coleman LeGear, 2005).

This precious student has no idea the potency of fertilizer she administered to my wilting passion as she reflected upon her time with me. This type of experience tends to strengthen passion as teachers soak up those positive comments, reactions, and interactions with students. Inasmuch as the seeds of passion are planted early in a teacher’s identity development, and inasmuch as certain factors tend to try to destroy teacher passion, there are those encounters and experiences that strengthen teacher passion and make it impervious to the hurricanes of negative public perception, ignorant politicians, and power hungry administrators.

As is the case with my passion development and growth, I believe the seeds of passion are planted in other teachers in their elementary classrooms, too. The experiences and encounters teachers have with their elementary teachers are as strong as the experiences they have with their parents. Spending seven hours a day for nine months out of each year with a teacher is a powerful influence on identity construction. In that construction, the hidden realities of teacher identity are found. As teachers reflect, through the looking glass, they find those early encounters that hold the roots of their every passionate action in their classrooms. Likewise, as those seeds are rooted out and remembered, passionate teachers also bring to light those experiences and encounters that fertilize their professional development. Much like
the tribute that was written by a student who remembers my passion three years after being in my classroom, teachers are given positive feedback from students that tends to strengthen passion, especially when that passion has been trampled upon.

**Role of the Researcher**

This study is different from other such studies because of the relationship between the participants and the researcher. I have known each of the participants, except one, for over sixteen years. I have known Yolanda for eight years. Having worked with the participants at Hesse Elementary for a significant amount of time offered advantages to ascertaining personal stories, professional encounters, and student/teacher interactions without embellishments or exaggerations. Years of observation and informal chats with my participants provided an intimate arena from which to gain entry into the lives and stories that might otherwise be shrouded if I were a stranger to my participants. On the other hand, the close relationships I have with my participants placed the participants and me in a state of vulnerability. Likewise, my participants probably felt compelled to respond in ways that are commensurate with their beliefs about my role as a teacher and researcher. Overall, my relationship with my participants provided research discourses that reflect the innermost thoughts and opinions held by the participants concerning teacher identity construction and passion for teaching. With an understanding that this research is unlike many due to the nature of the relationship I have with my participants, I was cautious to silence my own voice and listen intently to my participants’ voices. I took extra care to ask thought provoking questions not tarnished by my own beliefs and preconceived notions concerning the interview questions. Yet, those preconceived
attitudes and beliefs concerning each participant could have affected the final analysis of data as I interpreted the research texts had I not used an “experiential and imaginative eye” as I gathered and investigated their stories (Connelly, He, and Phillion, 2005, p 294).

Thus, it was not only my role as the researcher to adhere carefully to the tenets of narrative research strategies, but also to be cognizant of my place as an insider to the overall interview and research process. I had to take on the role of outsider looking in as I attempted to peel back the layers of lived experience in order to find the most useful information from each participant’s story. My place as an insider offered privileges and advantages that were not ignored or abused as I tried to bring viable research data to the forefront of the curriculum arena. As I moved very carefully among the familiarity of my participants, I had to view them from a researcher’s lens and hold my own preconceptions at bay as my participants revealed their innermost thoughts and feelings to me. I had to remember that my research is based on their stories…not my own. As our lives intertwine and mingle, in order to present useful data, I had to separate myself for the most part taking care to interject myself when necessary.

**Challenges of this Study**

This study provides useful information for the teaching profession. What is encapsulated in this study can bring change for the better for those individuals who truly love teaching. What this study is not is just as important as what it is.

Inasmuch as my passion drives me to discover and reveal those hidden components of teacher passion, the realization that those components are often
elusive, private, and sometimes reserved for individual reflection is found in the pages of those passionate researchers who have forged the way before me. One such researcher laments the need to find the power hidden in teachers’ stories. According to Robert L. Fried (2001), “We boil the stories down to their essences but their power slips away” (p. 15). Although this study is a microscopic investigation for the purpose of finding those hidden personal experiences that hold so much information for building and maintaining teacher passion, the “power” found within this study could be constricted due to such a small sampling of teachers. The participants of this study demonstrate passion for teaching; yet, their life experiences of growing up and living in southeast Georgia restrict their global view of education. They are constrained by their own cultural mores. Yet, the confines of living in southeast Georgia do not reduce the human characteristics inherent in passionate teaching. Although teacher passion is not at the forefront of newspapers and magazine journals, it is an entity that holds a great deal of hope for the teaching profession for all Americans. As I join those researchers who have made a life work of investigating teachers, my research study is designed to provide yet one more possibility for helping budding teachers find their passion and hold on to it. Although that possibility is challenged by the personal boundaries found within my research sample, it presents viable information for improving the teaching profession.

Upon completion of my doctoral course work, a variety of educational dilemmas remain unanswered and daunting as I attempt to contribute to the wealth of knowledge already available to those in power. John Weaver (personal communication, October 2001) passionately laments the institution called school in
America. His detailed course on the history of curriculum in America reveals Michel Foucault’s (1991) assertion that schools are replicas of prisons. Weaver also drives home the fact that in one hundred years not much has changed in America’s educational system. In a high-tech world, America’s schools still resemble the schools of the industrialized nation of the early twentieth century. In that all this is true, and it is the same old problem of power-hungry politicians that keep schools the way they are, this study does not address the woes of our antiquated system of educating our children.

William Reynolds (personal communication, July 2001 and July 2003) drives home the political contradictions that plague and corrupt America’s educational system. Reynolds’ passion for curriculum seeps into the moral fiber of his students as he shares his experiences as a teacher in high school classrooms and mourns the stifling effects of standardization, commodification, and commercialization of America’s curriculum. As Reynolds (2003) points out, often our children leave our schools with “full heads and empty hearts” (p. 43). He goes on to add, “Compassion would allow us to be filled with hope. Compassion would allow us to return to the original enthusiasm with which children greet the world” (p.43).

Certainly John Weaver and William Reynolds have legitimate concerns about the corrupt methodology and motivation that drives curriculum mandates and capitalistic treatment of our schools. Yet, what Weaver and Reynolds are missing in keeping a focus on the hopelessness that might permeate their view of America’s educational system is that the power that is bubbling below the surface of school reform is the passion that drives some teachers to “teach against the grain” (hooks,
1994) and “toward freedom” (Ayers, 2004). Even though that passion is powerful, I was challenged as to how to bottle that passion in an applicable form to remedy the inequities, injustices, and/or idiosyncrasies found in America’s educational dilemmas. Much like these passionate professors of curriculum who constantly search for antidotes for the flaws that are apparent to philosophical and theoretical thinkers, I, too, lament the misery that systematic standardization causes America’s children and yearn for a brighter future and freer society for them.

Even though this study does not provide a solution to the political problems that keep America’s school in a conservative “status quo” mode, it does offer hope for enriching the lifeblood of our schools. Teachers are the very heartbeat of what truly takes place in the institution of school. As said by Deborah Meier (Fried, 2001), “Passionate teaching is not a luxury, a frill we can do without. We can’t afford to keep sending kids to schools that disrespect the qualities of heart and mind we claim to be promoting” (p. x). As teachers become more passionate about their role as agents for change for the betterment of society, education of the masses, including future politicians, could improve.

Another challenge to this study is that it does not reflect the voices of those teachers who have left the teaching profession. This study focuses on those teachers who stayed the course and maintain their love for teaching. The voices of those who have left the field of education hold a grand narrative that is full of the answers as to why teachers burnout and ultimately leave the teaching profession. Yet, this study does not investigate those lived experiences. Found in the group of teachers who leave the teaching profession are those novice teachers who decide to find another
profession or those who switch gears mid-stream in their undergraduate education coursework. The voices of those individuals who either never had a passion for teaching or whose passion was killed before it could germinate are not heard in this study.

Similarly, novice teachers’ right to be heard is not granted a stage in this study. Much like those who leave the teaching profession, those beginning teachers hold a great deal of information, experiences, emotions, and information that should be considered as their passion is blooming, growing, and becoming vulnerable to the storms of teaching. Although this study does not reveal the voices of novice teachers, it focuses on those veteran teachers who were once novice teachers and who can recall much the same experiences of many novice teachers.

Finally, participant and researcher preconceived notions about this study and unspoken expectations blemish the narrative truths that have surfaced throughout this study. Inasmuch as I attempted to be as objective as possible, there is no objectivity. Each participant held her own beliefs, biases, and human constraints that interposed themselves as stories were told, questions were answered, and layers of living were peeled back. My own personal experiences as a student and teacher have built certain beliefs that limit this study in its ability to be free from human persuasion. Likewise, my relationship with my participants posed a potential slant caused by participants eager to please the researcher and my own affection for these teachers. On the other hand, the closeness and camaraderie shared with my participants provided a more relaxed and open arena for personal and private investigations into identity evolution. Therefore, this study is not a clinical study wrought with numbers and statistics. It is
limited to a small, but viable, sampling of teachers who endeavor to provide useful information for improving, not changing, but improving America’s schools.

Significance of this Study

Delores D. Liston (personal communication, October 2001) began our Philosophy of Education course by stating, “There is nothing new under the sun.” Liston allowed that thread to wind its way throughout the semester in an attempt to prepare us for our doctoral dissertation work. In those early doctoral classes, our budding ideas were electric with solutions for America’s ever needy educational system. Dr. Liston enticed us to search the universe for those researchers who shared an interest in our ideas. Periodically she would repeat her premise, “There is nothing new under the sun.” With that in mind, I join the ranks of those researchers who have paved the way before me in searching for ways to attract people into the field of education, to strengthen educational undergraduate programs, and to motivate and cheer on those soldiers who call themselves teachers. It is my hope that I can not only follow those who have invested their time and hard work into finding solutions for our nation’s teacher shortage, teacher burnout, and teacher attrition, but also add to their work in ways that are novel and effective.

This study offers useful information for policy makers as they attempt to address the condition of America’s educational system. Yet, this study is not the first of its kind and policy makers are not noted for reading the literature presented by persons in the field of education. Most legislators make their assumptions and offer legislation based on statistical information provided by research companies, textbook publishers, and lobbyist factions. Often times, programs such as the No Child Left
Behind Act of 2001 (2002) produce more curriculum realignments, readjustments, and rewordings. It is not often that legislation has been made or changed based on the research, experience, and expertise of qualified educators. Although the information found in this study could be used as a catalyst for bolstering the teaching profession through legislative procedures, I hypothesize that it will never be read or considered by legislators.

Although it is doubtful that this study will find its way to Congress, much like my premise that this study does not blatantly address the political pressures that try to dictate how schools operate, I hypothesize that its usefulness and power will evoke gentle but powerful change as preservice teachers strengthen their passion for teaching in university and college classrooms. Recently, I presented my aspirations for empowering undergraduate education students by sharing my own experiences in becoming and developing as a teacher to Dr. Joanne Coleman’s education practicum students. At the onset of my presentation I had the student teachers make a list of the top ten nouns that tell who they are. After I collected the lists, I asked how many people had listed teacher as a noun that tells who they are. Only one person raised her hand. That revelation validated my assumptions that teacher identity is at a precarious developmental stage in undergraduate classrooms. As I concluded my presentation and interactions with that very eager group of future teachers, one student said to me, “You should speak to all Dr. Coleman’s classes.” What did she experience as she listened, watched, and absorbed the words of my presentation? My passion for teaching.
In spite of this study’s inability to cause a revolution in the United States’ educational structures, it is significant to America’s colleges and universities that provide undergraduate education programs. This study could and should be used by professors teaching those entry level education courses that help students determine whether teaching is for them or not. An introspective investigation into the budding passion for teaching that brings students into the field of education could begin to fertilize and strengthen that passion before those students enter classrooms of their very own. As aspiring school teachers, undergraduate students should be shown how to probe into their lived experiences in order to find the roots of their passion for teaching. From that point, those individuals should be shown ways to reinforce that passion and be given strategies for dealing with the obstacles that will surely try to stamp out that passion.

As the Curriculum Studies Department of Graduate Studies as Georgia Southern University grows at wild fire speed, it is clear that passion for teaching is alive in the ranks of veteran teachers. There is not a problem with keeping and maintaining passionate teachers whose enthusiasm has withstood the rages of constant assault. It is that newly planted passion in first year and novice teachers that needs strengthening. In order to fertilize and protect the germinating love of teaching that is evidenced in the classrooms of teacher education programs, this study will provide viable information that will help budding teachers fertilize their passion to the point of ensuring that those teachers who might otherwise be susceptible to the diseases that kill passion are guarded against the daily attacks that might drive them from the teaching profession.
Because there are those teachers who, “find drudgery and then simply pick up a paycheck every two weeks” (Perricone, 2005, Intro.), administrators should be aware of those teachers who have lost their passion for teaching and simply occupy a desk and baby sit their students for seven to eight hours a day. This study provides useful information for administrators in that it helps administrators determine if a teacher has passion or not. Every child should be afforded a passionate teacher, and it is imperative that administrators learn how to support teachers in order to nourish waning passion, fertilize healthy passion, and be insightful enough to tell which is which. This study offers administrators a close look at just what it is that destroys passion as well as just what it is that keeps it growing strong.

Parents of elementary students can use this study to fully understand those persons who, whether parents like it or not, share the role of shaping their child’s life. Children spend seven to eight hours a day with one person each year of their lives for the greater portion of their early childhood development. Parents can become better acquainted with those experiences that entice teachers into the classroom and strengthen their ability as teachers. This information can serve parents well as they enter into a relationship of nurturing with a total stranger each August of their child’s life. Understanding is the key to any relationship. As parents learn to understand and to appreciate the passion with which teachers enter the classroom, the triad of the student, teacher, and parent relationship can be made stronger which ultimately will tend to serve the student better.

Along with legislators, undergraduate education programs, administrators, and parents, teachers can find this study useful. In the pages of this study are found
the lives of teachers, their stories, their failures, their successes, and most of all, their passion. Most teachers will find this study viable in that it reveals those common passion-building experiences as well as those passion-killing obstacles. As the participants of this study reveal how they cope, endure, and energize in their role as teacher, other teachers can find themselves, connect, and celebrate with other educators. Teachers whose passion is wilting and on the verge of dying, can rehydrate that passion as they see themselves in the stories told and investigated in this study. Teachers whose passion is growing strongly can relate with other comrades and fertilize their passion with encouragement found in the pages of this study.

With the rate of attrition in the teacher profession, it is imperative that researchers continue to search for ways to entice people to the field of education, and more importantly, to find ways to support and encourage those passionate teachers who become “burned out” by the daily pressures that wear out the most diligent teachers. I believe that there are passion-building experiences and encounters found in the lives of those teachers who remain passionate in spite of pressures placed on them by society. Those experiences and encounters hold valuable information for the teacher education and professional development programs. As I dissected the lived experiences of six elementary teachers, I found several common occurrences that have built an imperious passion that is resistant to the onslaught of negativity teachers face on a daily basis. Upon finding the revelation of those commonalities, vital information is made available to aspiring teachers, teacher education professors, and other interested parties.
Contribution to the Field of Curriculum Studies

“The present historical moment is, then, for public-school teachers and for those of us in the university who work with them, a nightmare” (Pinar, 2004, p. 3). Pinar’s lament concerning the point in which curriculum studies finds itself is dire, to say the least. Reflecting upon the history of curriculum and the present circumstances in which we, as educators and curriculum specialists, find ourselves, as well as the future, Pinar bemoans the state of stagnancy in the field of curriculum. He blames these United States of America and its political destruction of public schools. Pinar posits that a focus on our past as well as our future holds hope for curriculum reform and an awakening from the “nightmare.”

Studying curriculum, its history, its founders, its specialists, and its revolutionaries, brings me to the point of understanding the description of “cacophony” as analogous with curriculum. Staying immersed in Understanding Curriculum (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, and Taubman, 1995) for five years has given me a strong foundation for understanding the ebb and flow of curriculum as it is acted upon by politicians who hold no stake in its well-being other than to control the masses. I prefer to adhere to William Doll’s (1993) “phase space” description of curriculum as a “non-linear system” (inside cover). Viewing curriculum as an ever-changing system moving in and out of the structure of humanity helps me grasp the varying “texts” of curriculum in order to make sense of the “cacophony.”

In the sea of information, contexts, discourses, and “nightmares” of curriculum are located the very humans who are at heart of the debate. Teachers and students are the living, breathing humans who are at the very core of curriculum
discourses. Teachers and students are those who William Pinar finds as the victims of the curriculum “nightmare.” I understand Pinar’s concern. From the standpoint of focusing on capitalistic America and politicians’ attempts to make school a business and hearing the complaints of public-school teachers who decry the awful standardization mandates for students and accountability guidelines for teachers, Pinar would no doubt be convinced that surely we are caught in an awful “nightmare” in which no one seems to be able to awaken.

This study offers hope to those like Pinar who bemoan the condition of the field of curriculum. The participants of this study have seen the political mandates and policies that try so hard to squeeze public education into a Bill Gate’s business venture. With the media focus on all the well-intentioned attempts of politicians to force, coerce, and frighten teachers into becoming robotic disseminators of information, many curriculum specialists shiver at the thought. But, as long as passionate teachers grace the halls of public schools, political attempts will be for naught. Much like the honeybee farmer who works under the cloak of protection from bee stings, teachers go about their daily jobs in feigned obedience with no fear of stings from the political arena. This study expresses to William Pinar and other curricularists that in spite of the obvious push to control student achievement and outcomes by bullying teachers, education is safe in the hands of passionate teachers who smile in the face of political innuendos and teach in quiet, but powerful, opposition and resistance to what could undermine their students’ chance for the best possible education available in today’s classrooms.
Summary

Narrative inquiry has become a sharp tool for dissecting the intricate fibers of lived experiences revealed in the storied lives of research participants. As I conducted a close investigation into the lives of passionate teachers, this sharp tool cut to the very core of teacher resilience and love of teaching. As those stories were laid open for exploration, critical components of teacher identity development were revealed. A close inspection of those parts showed common passion-building occurrences that can be useful to the field of education. In finding out why certain teachers, and specifically their passion, are impervious to political, social, and personal constraints, practical information is provided for use in college education courses as well as professional development seminars and workshops. The participants of my study give voice to the multitudes of passionate teachers who continue to march forward in their endeavors to teach the masses in spite of watching those comrades who give up in defeat. My goal has been to combine the great works of curriculum theorists and researchers and teachers’ lived experiences into an understandable and useful explanation for why some teachers can and do ignite the fires of learning while others simply put the logs in a stack and leave the fire to be started by someone else.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE:

SEARCHING THE FOREST FOR OAK TREES

In order to find commonalities and differences in research literature pertaining to teacher identity development, personal and professional knowledge, and love of teaching, I conducted a meticulous search through the forest of curriculum theorists’, narrative inquirers’, and educational writers’ research documents and compositions. I sought to find those bodies of work that either supported or negated experience as the key component of teacher identity development.

Contained in my review of literature are several bodies of work that discuss the development of teacher identities, teacher professional knowledge expansion, and passion for the teaching profession. Also included are current research findings concerning teacher dissatisfaction with teaching conditions that lead to teacher burnout and attrition. Literature in relation to current issues that rip at the fiber of teaching in the United States is examined and presented in this review. Research results concerning passion for teaching must include those factors that press against that passion so forcibly that they destroy many teachers’ love for their career choice. Likewise, exemplary work pertaining to those variables that describe passionate teaching and what strengthens that passion are included. As a framework for my own inquiry into the storied lives of my participants, a review of works incorporating narrative inquiry as a research implement are used to reveal the importance and viability of narrative as a research method. Narrative inquiries into teacher personal and professional knowledge provide support for this study. Quality research in the
area of narrative theory and the evidence provided in those findings give my study the foundation needed to build upon those revelations pertaining to teacher identity development, professional knowledge composition, and passion for teaching.

**Current Issues that Affect Teacher Passion**

**Political Constraints:**

*What Do Educational Policy Makers Really Know about Teaching?*

Institutional constraints silence the discourse of passion and love in the public realm of teaching and learning (Garrison & Liston, 2004, p.1).

It is not without warrant that policy makers spend hoards of time, energy, and money to formulate what they believe are standards for improving education in the United States of America. What policy makers fail to consider is the power found in teachers’ intelligence and passion for education. In perusing and studying the literature concerning political constraints placed upon teachers, several bodies of literature address the effects of standardized curriculum mandates upon teacher passion. The works of William Ayers (2001 and 2004), Robert Fried (1995), Jim Garrison and Daniel Liston (2004), bell hooks (1994), and Sonia Nieto (2003) provide a resounding lament about the pressures placed upon teachers by well-intentioned policy makers.

Along with the works of these educational writers are found other curriculum theorists who complain about political demands inherent in our education system. Among the most hostile purveyors of public school policy are Michael Apple (1993) and Henry Giroux (2000). Their criticism of the political pressures placed upon schools for the purpose of educating for capitalistic purposes paints a formidable and often scary picture of our nation’s educational system. These educational theorists
provide a wealth of information on the impact that policy makers have on educating our student population for political purposes. Yet, this study does not focus on the plight of education at the hands of politicians. It focuses on passion that is impervious to political constraints and flies in the face of those alarming and very real factions that oppress humanity.

Most teachers have a deep love for teaching. “Perhaps they are in love with every aspect of teaching” (Garrison and Liston, 2004, p.1). Garrison and Liston (2004) offer several variables that impede that love and often destroy the passion with which teachers enter the classroom. “Daily, it seems, students are spoon-fed ‘educational’ material, not to satiate their learning hunger but rather to meet mandates of the state” (Garrison and Liston, 2004, p. 2). Likewise, Sonia Nieto (2003) sees the stifling effect of national and state curricula:

I had received a curriculum so rigid that it included not only the daily objectives and lessons that teachers were to cover, but even the very words they were expected to say. At first comforting for its step-by-step guidance, the curriculums soon tested my patience and thwarted my creativity. (p.17)

Like Garrison, Liston, and Nieto, other curriculum theorists and researchers find the same oppressive curriculum transcending America’s classrooms. Rigid curricula threaten to smother teacher passion and transform teachers into robotic disseminators of information. According to bell hooks (1994), who speaks loudly against the oppressive nature of America’s schools, “Given that our educational institutions are so deeply invested in a banking system, teachers are more rewarded when we do not go against the grain” (p. 203). I concur that it is often easier to flow with the
mandated curricula than to step out against it and “go against the grain.” And, I also agree with Robert Fried (1995), who says, “Where do teachers hit the wall in their struggle to become or to remain enthusiastic about their profession? Standardized tests that determine who succeeds and who fails, without regard for individual differences or learning styles” (p. 92). This is but one variable that keeps teachers from “going against the grain.” These researchers have hit the bull’s eye in pinpointing the negative aspects of political constraints that can, and often do, pluck passion out of our nation’s schools.

A huge political constraint is found in the political platform of presidential candidates. No Child Left Behind…what a profound, yet practical, statement. It does not matter what the program is called, the goal is the same…to provide every child an optimal education. Our nation has always boasted about the effects of our top-notch educational system, yet, our nation’s criminal institutions are bursting at the seams. We have an epidemic of drug abuse, teen pregnancy, suicide, and general criminal acts within the walls of our superior educational institutions. The dire condition of our schools is bemoaned by Marla Morris (2001), “To create a safe place for young people to learn is the dream. But more often than not, school is like a prison: school is a deadly place where murders occur, where drugs are exchanged, where lives are destroyed” (p. 199). In an attempt to remedy all of the woes of society, our schools are supposed to be the unilateral equalizer in a society that is truly unequal. Powers-that-be posit that more of the same, standardized tests, will fix these ills. Tests, textbooks, technology, and more money will provide every child with the tools needed to become successful contributors to the status quo.
Not since Sputnik landed on the moon, have we truly reconceptualized education. More tests, more textbooks, more technology, more yakkety yaking about education and the promises of legislators have left our schools in the same social melee that has plagued us for decades. Even teacher evaluations have not changed over the years. The routine is the same, day in and day out. The words of the song may change, but the tune and melody are the same…test, test, test, standardize, standardize, standardize. As long as teachers are put under the gun to produce better products, the results will be the same.

Along with President Bush’s No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (2002), comes Georgia’s own antidote for failing schools. Georgia Performance Standards is but one more standard for ensuring improvement in Georgia’s educational system. Laden with “essential elements,” another word for teaching outcomes or objectives, teachers are told exactly how to word just what it is they intend to pour into the minds of students. Teachers are made to create units in which precise verbiage is expected to tell others and themselves how and what to teach. Nowhere in the Georgia Performance Standards manuals is mentioned the affective stance, attitudes, or passion of teachers who are forced to deliver the beautifully packaged standards.

William Ayers (2004) says so well how America’s schools contradict the very goals they aspire to attain. “If education stands in one instance for freedom and breaking through arbitrary and imposed barriers, we can point to other cases where it parades a specific kind of repressive training, structured as steel bars and barbed wire” (p.2). Ayers’ lament about the nature of schools to force conformity is seen not
only in the institution of school for students, but also in the forced curriculum of standards for teaching.

Perhaps this close investigation into why teachers teach the way they teach and why they treat students the way they do would put us on the path to quality human interactions. Perhaps those improved human interactions would motivate students to want to learn. Just maybe, teachers who entice, motivate, and appreciate their students would turn education on its head and a true educational revolution would be initiated. I believe a close dissection of teacher behaviors would reveal the seeds of teacher actions. These revelations hold powerful nuggets of information that could help teacher education programs groom teachers to be the best possible leaders in helping education become the vision that politicians so boldly promise without a roadmap as to how we can get there. In the sea of overwhelming political constraints, what makes certain teachers ambivalent to those pounding waves of bureaucratic mandates and constant hostility toward public education? Is the death of passion in education an epidemic or are there anti-negativism steps that can help our teaching forces become impervious to the constant barrage of passion-robbing political constraints? The literature supports not only the issues found in political mandates wrought with passion-robbing “how-tos,” but also provides examples of educators who rise above the assaults and march forward in the name of humanity in spite of possible persecution for “going against the grain.”

This narrative inquiry into the lives of six passionate teachers helps unveil some of the stamina-building experiences that have helped these teachers retain their passion and roll with the pounding waves of political and social issues that plague the
teaching profession. Supported by the literature that provides a sharp inspection and critical analysis of several political constraints that propose to guide education in America, this study adds to the argument for the power of passion to take those very mandates in stride as teachers enter America’s classrooms equipped with tools for enhancing their drive to implement those standards without fear or trepidation for “going against the grain.”

**United States of America: Are We United?**

In the sea of humanity is found a plethora of diversity. That diversity is seen no more evident anywhere in the world as it is in the United States of America. The old adage of “melting pot” is no longer the mantra of our political, social, or educational fabric. America prides herself in celebrating diversity. All cultures, races, religions, and ethnicities are welcomed and embraced. They are no longer expected to “melt” into American culture. In America’s idealistic political and social assumption is the belief that each human is recognized for his or her own diversity. That diversity is part of our nation’s stance that we are, in fact, “united.” Not by the melting of our differences into a blended society, but by the acceptance of our differences as we unite for the common good of all our citizens.

Of course, the fifty states are certainly united as a nation, but are we united in our political and social beliefs that all children are entitled to a proper education? It would seem that legislators, with their good intentions, would be united with the work force whose job it is to make sure that their policies are carried out. Not so. Almost every White House administration boasts of an education platform that promises a better educational system for all. This top-down mentality is the very sword that
severs the actual artery that carries lifeblood into America’s classrooms. Educational programs that push down policies, mandates, and standards, all with money attached for effective programs, force teachers into a box from which canned teaching becomes the norm and passion is driven from the very heart of each classroom.

Found among the educational arena of curriculum theorists and researchers are those leaders who present a dismal picture of a very fragmented social order in this United States of America and its treatment of students and teachers in our classrooms. Much like Apple (1993) and Giroux (2002), who bring their passion against the injustices found in our capitalistic, commodified school institutions, multiculturalists argue against inequities found behind those same walls. Apple and Giroux join those curricularists who pave the way for enlightening the world about the inequality rampant in today’s classrooms. A close look at the literature surrounding the problem of diversity in America’s classrooms reveals voluminous criticisms about inequality, prejudice, and injustice in what we profess to be a “united” country. From bell hooks (1994) to Vivian Paley (1997), writers reveal their passion against Eurocentrism that permeates our classrooms and murders diversity of race, culture, socio-economic status, and ethnicity, all of which give the United States its right to boast “Give me your tired, your poor, Your huddled masses, yearning to breath free, The wretched refuse of your teeming shore, Send these, the homeless, tempest tossed, I lift my lamp beside the golden door” (Emma Lazarus, State of Liberty).

In White Reign (1998), Joe L. Kincheloe, Shirley R. Steinberg, Nelson M. Rodriquez, and Ronald E. Chennault (Eds.), present a compelling set of essays that
address the problems found as White educators encounter diversity. This comprehensive collection of powerful compositions provides a clear understanding that we, as White Americans, do a grave disservice to those who enter our White world of education. In his essay, “Youth, Memory Work, and the Racial Politics of Whiteness,” Henry Giroux (1998) contends, “Racism feeds this attack on kids by targeting black youths as criminals while convincing working-class white youths that Blacks and immigrants are responsible for poverty, despair, and violence that have become a growing part of everyday life in American society” (pg. 123). Likewise, Joe L. Kincheloe and Shirley R. Steinberg agree with Giroux when they say, “Critical multiculturalists thus, are fervently concerned with white positionality in their attempt to understand the power relations that give rise to race, class, and gender inequality” (p. 3).

With a huge focus on the detriment done to those who are not White by Whiteness, there is so much more to bringing equality into the classroom. “United” does not refer to White versus Other. It refers to people who aspire to the tenets of the American Dream. It is not limited to those Eurocentric individuals who have slurped at the trough of privilege in America’s classrooms. What multiculturalists aspire to shed light upon is the diversity that makes each of us unique to the status quo. In her book, Teaching to Transgress, bell hooks (1994) addresses the need for action as society moves forward and boasts progress in the area of multicultural education. “Despite the contemporary focus on multiculturalism in our society, particularly in education, there is not nearly enough practical discussion of ways classroom settings can be transformed so that the learning experience is inclusive”
bell hooks speaks loudly and boldly for not only Black students, but for all those who are considered “on the margins (people of color, folks from working class backgrounds, gays and lesbians, and so on)” (p. 30).

If we are “united” in our attempts to educate the masses for the purpose of, according to William Ayers (2004), helping “human beings reach the full measure of their humanity” (p. 1), we have to be cognizant of diversity and embrace it. Like bell hooks says, “All of us in the academy and in the culture as a whole are called to renew our minds if we are to transform educational institutions—and society—so that the way we live, teach, and work can reflect our joy in cultural diversity, or passion for justice, and our love of freedom” (p. 34).

Along with political constraints, our stance as a “united” nation flies in the face of endeavors by passionate teachers to teach the masses. While passionate teachers, like Vivian Paley, wrestle with obstacles that present themselves on a daily basis, we must also consider those pressures that come hidden in political innuendos and our own hidden agendas that could contradict our desire to respect and celebrate diversity in our classrooms. In the sea of diversity that boldly enters every teacher’s classroom, Vivian Paley’s (1989) revelation about children unfolds. “Anything a child feels is different about himself which cannot be referred to spontaneously, casually, naturally, and uncritically by the teacher can become a cause for anxiety and an obstacle to learning” (Preface, xv). In our attempts as educators to “unite” our society for the betterment of humanity, we must celebrate our differences and view those differences as a direct result of our very own freedom. Passionate teachers are not threatened by or fearful of diversity in these United States of America.
Parents: Teacher vs. Student – Whose Side Are They On?

Among political and social pressures that push against teacher passion is parental disrespect. This huge social opposition to the teaching profession is the perception parents have of teachers in general. Lack of parental respect is a tremendous pressure teachers must face as they endeavor to meet the growing social needs of their students. According to the results of a recent (February 21, 2005) *Time Magazine* survey, “73% of new teachers said too many parents treat school and teachers as adversaries” (p. 44). Many teachers lose their passion because parents constantly complain about their ability to teach. Often times, it is a slap in the face to spend four years in a teacher education program, untold hours planning, and hours on end assessing student needs to have parents attack your job as a professional. Today’s parents do not see teachers as their comrades in helping their children become successful adults. *Time Magazine* reports what has been obvious to teachers for a long time. Most parents do not trust teachers. Constant accusatory questions that rip at the fiber of teacher professionalism can make the strongest teachers want to throw their hands up and surrender to the negativity wrought by ‘well-meaning’ parents.

What has been reported in *Time Magazine* has not been thoroughly investigated and reported by curriculum researchers who often intend to reform our system of educating society. With a great deal of focus on inequality in the classroom, political constraints and interference, and the problems wrought by our industrialized, technological way of viewing education in America, little emphasis has been placed on parents as players in the game of school. Even in the literature
specifically written to address teacher passion, not much is mentioned about the
damage that is done to passion by well-intentioned parents. Yet, *Time Magazine*
opens a can of worms that should be investigated more closely by curriculum
researchers and theorists in order to leave no stone unturned when trying to nail down
those variables that affect education.

Dealing with unruly, unmotivated, and resistant students does not seem to be
as powerful a deterrent to teacher passion as those parents who undermine teachers’
 attempts to provide the best possible education for their students. According to *Time
Magazine* (2005), “Many teachers believe they (parents) drop their rambunctious kids
off and want them all cleaned up and proper by the end of the day” (p.47). Teachers
who believe that their sole job is to disseminate information find this type of parental
attitude demeaning and offensive. When teachers lose their drive to teach, often
initiated by accusatory parents, parent dissatisfaction becomes the focus of many
teacher gripe sessions. Parental disrespect and incredible expectations placed upon
teachers to “fix” their children poke holes in teachers’ passion and allow that passion
to seep slowly out to the point teachers feel inadequate and defeated.

A rigorous search to find research support for the tension between parents and
teachers leaves a great deal to be desired in this area. Robert Fried (2001), who
covers the how-to’s of becoming a passionate teacher, encourages teachers to build
relationships with their students’ parents. I agree that teachers should most definitely
build relationships with their students’ parents. I contend that passionate teachers are
experts at doing that very well. What is missing from the literature is data that
supports the need to address the conflict that is obvious between parents and teachers.
In a plethora of research on culture and its impact on education, it would seem that parental influence would be at the heart of student identity construction and its effects on students’ educational experiences. Even Vygotsky (1978 and 1986) and Bruner (1990), the kings of constructivism, do not address the relationship that is built or avoided by parents and teachers.

Therefore, I took Nancy Gibbs article in *Time Magazine*, and ran with it as a means for investigating the effects of parents on teacher passion. The participants of this study have had plenty of experiences dealing and working with parents. Those experiences are added to the skim amount of research done in the area of parent/teacher relationships and their effects on teacher passion.

*Teacher Accountability – Yet, One More Standard!*

In Barry McGhan’s (2005) article on teacher accountability, “Accountability as a Negative Reinforcer,” the negative aspects of semantics and the misunderstandings of well-intentioned initiatives are revealed.

If we say that ‘someone is accountable,’ we usually mean that ‘he must suffer the consequences of his actions.’ We hardly ever mean the more positive ‘he will profit from the consequences of his actions.’ One wonders what the social and psychological ramifications might be if teachers have to carry out their jobs in a retributive atmosphere. (p. 3)

Much like the hoops through which we expect students to jump to measure their success or failure as we implement educational standards, teachers are expected to jump through hoops that have blurred boundaries.
According to the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (2002), President George W. Bush’s education reform initiative, “accountability systems and teacher preparation and training” are but two areas of intense concentration that would “ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education…” (Delisio, *Education World*, 2002, p. 1). While noble endeavors are constantly in the process of fine-tuning teachers and their effectiveness, tools for measuring accountability and teacher effectiveness are wrought with gray areas, to say the least. They are riddled with subjectivity and political innuendos that will continue to plague American education systems as long as education is a business of dealing with human beings.

Often policy makers and administrators scramble to find the proper measuring tool to assess teacher effectiveness and to hold teachers accountable to the public. Likewise, how to reward or punish the results of accountability achievement, or lack thereof, is just as problematic as tying down those precise standards that might measure accountability. According to a report published by the Education Commission of the States (1999),

As evidence increasingly points to the key role good teaching plays in enhancing student achievement, policymakers, educators, and parents are intent on holding teachers accountable for the success or failure of their students, and on finding reliable ways to assess teacher effectiveness. (p. 1)

While policymakers, politicians, and legislators chart and revise the standards for teacher accountability, “the power of the state exerts its force on young minds and bodies. The world is no longer a magical place but rather an achievement course
filled with obstacles” (Liston, 2004, p. 102). Teacher accountability, as deemed as a necessary implement, forces teachers to perform according to directives devised by persons who know little about the relationships that are inherent in classrooms. Quality literature on the woes of teacher accountability laments the dehumanization by such standards that are comparable to standardized testing of America’s school children. Passionate teachers weave standardization into their relationships with their students and meet the requirements in loving and tolerable ways. What is demanded by means of standards is met with quiet opposition. Passionate teachers simply smile in the face of standardization powers and close their doors and do what they always do…teach children instead of standards. Passionate teachers understand that it is not the desire to have high expectations of our students and teachers that is the core of the negativity on the standardization process of America’s educational system. It is the plucking out of all that is important to education and boiling education down to the bare essentials of numbers that replace human beings that plague teacher and student standardization implements.

**Teacher Salaries – Are Teachers Working as Cheap Laborers?**

“I guess I will just have to ride my bike to school next week.” With the recent gas price increase, like most middle-class citizens, teachers are feeling the crunch on their wallets. Ann-Marie White (personal communication, September, 2005) bemoans the unexpected expense of filling up her tank. “You know teachers are great at finagling their paychecks, but this is ridiculous.” Inasmuch as Ann-Marie’s statement is about gas prices, it also reflects the talent that teachers have for
manipulating their low pay to accommodate the cost of living. According to Sonia Nieto (2003),

It is difficult to reconcile the national rhetoric that education is the nation’s major priority with the actual salaries teachers make---teaching remains among the least well compensated of all professions, and teachers’ salaries, measured in constant dollars, have barely kept pace with inflation in the past decade. (p. 4)

Teachers’ salaries are seen as deterrents to the profession as well as agents that force teachers to leave the profession. Also, the debate surrounding increasing teacher pay for the purpose of improving student performance adds to the push against teacher passion.

Erich Hanushek (2005) discusses the effect that teacher salaries have on student achievement in his article “The Truth About Teacher Salaries and Student Achievement.” Hanushek states, “there is virtually no relationship between teacher salaries and student achievement” (p. 2). He goes on to posit this utopian idea.

Imagine a world where good teachers were paid large salaries and poor teachers were helped to find alternative jobs. Imagine a world where schools could compete for skilled specialists without having to pay the same to everybody, regardless of scarcity. This world would be very different from our current world, and the discussions of pay comparisons with other professions would be more meaningful. (p. 2)

The discussion about teacher salaries is a controversial topic that includes banter about teacher quality, teacher shortages, teacher effectiveness, and teacher apathy.
Aldridge and Golman (2002) argue that higher salaries could be the remedy for retaining teachers (p. 21). As policymakers and statisticians realize that teacher shortages and teacher attrition are at an all-time high, increased teacher salaries becomes a possible cure for reducing teacher shortages and teacher attrition.

Teachers’ salaries have been the topic of much debate and often find their way as the topic of discussion for enticing higher quality professionals into the teaching profession. Yet, according to the American Federation of Teachers (2003), “The latest AFT salary survey shows that efforts to make education salaries competitive with other professions face a stiff headwind” (p.1). Keeping the focus on low teacher pay often undermines teacher passion by casting teachers as less valuable than their professional counterparts. According to Allied Physicians Employment Data Base (2005), registered nurses are paid a starting salary of $39,000.00 per year (p. 2). Conversely, beginning teachers start at $29,000.00 (AFT, 2003, p.1). With approximately the same years of education to earn a degree, it would seem that nurses are more valuable than teachers, if one bases worth on salary.

Teacher salaries, although in the forefront of many discussions about education and often found in the newspapers and educational journals, is not a topic that is given much attention in the curriculum studies debate. Reports concerning teacher attrition and retention often cite teachers’ low pay as a cause for teachers to leave the profession. Yet, other obstacles that plague curriculum reform and advancement take precedence over teachers’ monetary woes. Moral commitment, ethical issues, and curriculum as a variety of texts fill the pages of books concerning educational problems and hope for reform. Although Oprah Magazine (2005) states,
“Teachers spend an average of $1200 out of their own pockets to outfit their classrooms” (p. 14) and teachers notoriously earn less than their professional counterparts, teacher salary is not given a stage among the other pressing issues that threaten the field of education within the discourse of curriculum.

Passionate teachers do not enter the education profession for the sole purpose of earning as much money as they can. According to Sonia Nieto (2003), “The prospect of lucrative salaries or posh working conditions in not what initially attracts teachers to the profession, nor is it what keeps them there” (p. 4). Teachers realize at the on-set of their teaching career that their paychecks are not comparable to other professionals’ paychecks. Most teachers realize that low pay just comes with the territory of teaching. It does not take a rocket-scientist to figure out that the choice to become a teacher is not one that will get you monetarily rich quick. Yet, the constant media hub that frequently paints teacher salary as the key to improving the teacher cadre and the quality of education is yet one more slap in teachers’ faces. Not only does the media attention on teachers’ inferior pay insult teacher passion; it also adds to negative public perception of teacher quality. Ineffective and dispassionate teachers give meaning to the term cheap labor as a descriptor of teacher performance. Nevertheless, it is the passionate educators who pull the slack and gird up the students who have been victimized by those cheap laborers. Passionate teachers teach in spite of and in conjunction with low pay.

Legislative mandates, parent distain, and low salaries are but a few of the variables that chip away at the foundation of teacher passion. Veteran teachers who have weathered the constant barrage of negative public perception often regret their
decision to remain in the teaching field. Others lament that if they had known the consistent negative conditions under which they would be assaulted daily they would not have chosen teaching as a profession. Yet, inasmuch as those teachers verbalize their fatigue and disappointment in teaching, there are those passionate teachers who rally and ride on a high of positive “but, what about…” attitudes that retaliate against the most brutal assaults. Those teachers stand firmly on the foundation that was built as their teacher identity was developing in their earliest experiences and encounters in the classroom. “What about that light bulb that goes off in students’ eyes? What about the difference you are making in students’ lives? What about the future? What about society?” Passionate teachers relish the hidden moments of pure delight that teaching students bring. Low income? Parental disrespect? Bureaucratic banter? Resistant students? Behavior problems? Passionate teachers respond, “Bring it on!” Their passion prevails in spite of all the woes they face each and every day. But why and how?

**Teacher Identity Development**

As I unraveled the threads of teacher identity development and professional knowledge acquisition, a difficult task was at hand. Separating teacher identity development from professional knowledge acquisition is much like trying to separate salt and sugar once they have been mixed. Although each keeps its flavor, trying to discern salt from sugar is a rather daunting task. Likewise, teachers develop their identities and their professional knowledge simultaneously. The body of research on these human traits is intertwined and often overlaps. William Ayers (1989, 2001, and 2004) provides a bounty of research in his books concerning teacher identity
development. His own personal story, *To Teach: The Journey of a Teacher*, gives readers a close look at just how powerful lived experiences have on building that “allure” to the teaching profession that cannot be squelched by the opposition that the teaching profession faces (2004).

In addition to providing an in depth review of several of William Ayers’ narrative works concerning teachers, several authors are included in this review of literature. Jean Clandinin and Michael Connelly (1988, 1995, 1999) have made teacher identity development and professional knowledge their life work. Using narrative inquiry as their research tool, Clandinin and Connelly make available a wealth of information concerning teachers’ identities. Other authors also add their voices to the on-going research of teacher identity development. Other than the voices of those narrative inquirers already mentioned, the works of Eila Estola (2003) and Jane Danielewicz (2001) give support to the premise that teacher identity is developed early in life and is shaped by daily experiences and encounters with other educators. Both Estola and Danielewicz provide in depth accounts of student teaching experiences and offer those encounters and stories as evidence of teacher identity development as the threshold of teacher professional identity construction. As student teachers reflect upon their experiences with their teachers, they realize that who they are as teachers has a direct correlation to their experiences with their own teachers. Estola emphasizes the importance of narrative to understand identity construction. Not only does she use narrative to help student teachers reflect upon their teacher identity development, she also uses narrative to help students understand their responses to others’ stories and how those touch the sometimes hidden
components of our own identity. Estola contends that teacher identity development is directly related to our experiences with our own teachers and with others. Likewise, Danielewicz focuses on reflection and narrative as tools for building identity. As Danielewicz tells the stories of six undergraduate student teachers and her relationships with them as they develop their teacher identities, the connections to prior educational experiences surface as strong influences on teacher identity development. Estola and Danielewicz provide strong samples of narrative inquiry as a research tool for finding the importance of story as teachers develop their professional and personal identity.

Inasmuch as Ayers (2004) and Clandinin and Connelly (1999) supply my research with a strong backdrop of quality literature, these bodies of literature report the pedagogical nuances found in the lives of teacher participants and others who are predominately White. Ming Fang He (2003), Michele Foster (1997), and Sonia Nieto (2003) give a multicultural perspective on teacher identity development. In order to make my literature review somewhat more comprehensive in the area of teacher identity development, a review of African, Asian, and other non-European American teacher perspectives is necessary.

My research offers a glimpse into the effects that teachers have on developing teacher identities of the future. As teacher identity development is started in the earliest educational experiences, those identities are shaped as budding teachers live their lives in educational settings and experience encounters with their own teachers and other teachers. Education students cut their teeth on theory and practice as they experience college coursework in their attempts to earn certification as teachers. Yet,
the intricate dissection of “Who am I as a teacher?” often does not occur until teachers reach their own classrooms and begin affecting students’ identity construction. In her narrative research findings, Eila Estola, (2003) writes,

This extremely experienced teacher gave me something I never got while studying in the Department of Education. None of the staff ever told us about their teaching experiences. No one ever told me about the process they have gone through while growing from a young and uncertain novice to an older and wiser professional educator… I do not know why none of our teachers, with the exception of one lecturer, wanted to share their memories and experiences with the students. I am sure I will remember this interview and this teacher’s memories for a long time. (A female student, p.4)

I believe student teachers could benefit from a guided reflection of who they are as humans, why they desire to teach, and how their teachers have impacted their identities. Hopefully, this reflection will provide those students with psychological strength as they attempt to impact their own students and to “make a difference” in the world. According to Danielewicz (2001), “College, famously, is a time for ‘identity crisis,’ for the transformative reimagining of the self” (p.35). That “reimagining” should involve an intricate analysis of the whys of wanting to become a teacher as well as a close look at the experiences that affected the identity formation of each student teacher. Danielewicz’s book supports my efforts “to create classroom environments where identity construction is possible, and indeed, almost
inescapable” (2001, p. 133). When student teachers become experts at dissecting their own experiences for the sake of finding their theoretical underpinnings and pedagogical beliefs, they also become experts at identifying those identity-building experiences that will, hopefully, make them more passionate in their efforts as teachers.

William Ayers’ passion for teaching is evident and permeates his writing. As Ayers tells his story of becoming a teacher, of developing his identity as a teacher and of spreading his passion for teaching to others, his passion for teaching is heard. Ayers’ love for teaching often leaps off the pages of his books into the very fibers of his readers’ identity. Just listen and experience Ayers’ passion for teaching.

People are called to teaching because they love children and youth, or because they love being with them, watching them open up and grow and become more able, more competent, more powerful in the world. (2001, p. 8) Teaching is the vocation of vocations, a calling that shepherds a multitude of other callings. (2001, p. 8) To teach consciously for justice and ethical action is teaching that arouses students, engages them in a quest to identify obstacles to their full humanity and the life chances of others, to their freedom, and then to drive and to move against those obstacles. And so the fundamental message of the teacher for ethical action is: You can change the world. (2001, p. 142) The allure of teaching, that ineffable magic drawing me back to the classroom again and again, issues from an
ideal that lies directly at its heart: Teaching at its best is an enterprise that helps human beings reach the full measure of humanity. (2004, p. 1) Teaching is an act of hope for a better future. There is a particularly powerful satisfaction in caring during a time of carelessness, of thinking for yourself in a time of thoughtlessness, of opening humanizing pathways for yourself and others, pathways that involve a quest. The reward of teaching is knowing that your life makes a difference. Like friendship, good teaching is not something that can be entirely scripted, preplanned, or prescribed. Teaching is primarily a matter of love. The rest is ornamentation. (2004, pp. 121-122)

William Ayers’ identity shines through as he speaks so eloquently of the passion of his life…teaching. Ayers’ own autobiographical writings concerning his identity construction as a teacher are evidenced in his book, To Teach: The Journey of a Teacher (2001). As Ayers tells his life story of being immersed in a family of five children where he was given many “opportunities to learn as well as to teach” (p.7), he emphasizes the importance of lived experiences and their effects on developing a teacher identity. Ayers also goes on to address the continuation of identity construction while he reveals the metamorphosis of his own identity as he tells of his experiences when he entered his first classroom at the age of 20, taught a variety of levels from preschool to graduate school, and continues to experience teaching as a Distinguished Professor at the University of Chicago. While discussing his own teacher identity, Ayers points to the importance of
being “self-aware” as a teacher (2004, p. 107). Developing a teacher identity begins with the earliest educational experiences. As Ayers describes the continuation of his teacher identity development, novice teachers and veteran teachers alike are provided with ways to enhance their ability to not only recognize and celebrate their teacher identity, but also to help students see and develop their own identities.

Jane Danielewicz (2001) adds her own emphasis to the importance of teacher identity development in her book, *Teaching Selves: Identity, Pedagogy, and Teacher Education*. Danielewicz reveals her own teacher identity development as she recalls those teachers in her early school experiences that impacted who she has become and is becoming. “All my teachers, through their daily acts and demonstrations of self, helped define who I am. The imaginative teachers made agency viable: they showed me that it was possible to think and to speak and to act, to be someone” (p. 2)

Danielewicz’s book lends itself very well to this study in that it not only addresses the importance of teacher identity development, but also utilizes qualitative research to report the findings as six preservice teachers share their experiences while they endeavor to identify, enhance, and develop their teacher identity. Danielewicz’s revelation concerning teacher identity construction is one I believed would be evidenced as I listened to and analyzed the responses of my participants.

Identities themselves are always unfinished and in the making; identities develop through continuous processes. There is no one process by
which identity comes about, but many. Change is unavoidable and is, in fact, what is most characteristic about selves and identities. A teacher education program can provide the space and opportunities for students to actively imagine themselves as teachers. For this or any identity to emerge, envisioning and enacting are essential. (Danielewicz, 2001, p. 181-182)

Jean Clandinin and Michael Connelly (1999) reverberate Danielewicz’s statement that “envisioning and enacting are essential” as they present real life stories of teacher identity construction in their book, “Shaping a Professional Identity: Stories of Educational Practice.” Yet, unlike Danielewicz’s book, which is so full of her own identity and experiences, divulged throughout her responses and interactions with her students, Clandinin and Connelly present a variety of viewpoints in a collection of narratives that reveal identity construction within the context of teacher knowledge development found in the daily lives of teachers. The commonality between these two narrative works is that resounding premise that teacher identity is constantly developing. As teachers begin their journey as teachers in college classrooms and continue that journey into their very own classrooms, teacher identity development is dependent upon daily experiences as teachers.

What is vital to this research study is the wealth of information provided by Danielewicz while she has her undergraduate students reflect upon their lived experiences as students to find those beginning seedlings of teacher identity and as Clandinin and Connelly provide a continuation of
teacher identity development when teachers reflect upon their own beliefs, actions, and reactions to everyday encounters in their classrooms.

Connelly, He, and Phillion (2005) contribute a multicultural perspective to this study. As teachers develop their identities, those identities are as varied as the humans who house them. He’s educational experiences in China, Canada, and the United States hold a different perspective than those of teachers born and reared in America. As He’s (2003) narrative inquiry into the lives of three Chinese women as they transcend the cultural borders of living in China and Canada brings a different perspective to the discussion of teacher identity development, her work is “marked by passion” (p. ix). He’s passion for understanding identity development, including her own, is felt when she says, “Our identities and our inquiry of identities are transformed into an intellectual river…forever flowing between China and North America in the multicultural landscape” (p. 20).

Although this study does not focus on the issues concerning diversity and multicultural populations that comprise our classrooms, it behooves me to consider perspectives on teacher identity construction other than White middle-class females. Since identity is developed as life pushes and pulls upon it, life in other cultures holds an important place in the discussion of teacher identity development. Ming Fang He (2003) and JoAnn Phillion (2002) share their expertise in multicultural perspectives that are viable for this study. Being immersed in the American institution of school after having identities that were born in cultures other than the Canada or the United States
allows those individuals the chance to see teachers through a different lens.

Like He and Phillion, Michele Foster (1997) provides a rich narrative work to this investigation. In her book, *Black Teachers on Teaching*, Foster uses a multi-aged, multi-experienced group of Black teachers to glean interesting and useful points of view concerning teacher identity development. Black teachers bring their own powerful sets of experiences to the table of teacher identity development. In reference to a lecture presented by Margaret Mead in 1950, Foster (1997) quotes,

Teachers who are members of any group who are in a minority in their particular community will have to add in their own words that they are Negro teachers…as the case may be, redefining themselves against an image of woman who for most of the country is white, middle class, middle aged, and of Protestant background. (p. xxiv)

Foster adds, “This comment, delivered forty-seven years ago, succinctly captures the condition of black teachers today, whose numbers are in sharp decline” (p. xxiv). Current research can confirm that Black teachers are definitely on the decline as teacher shortages in general threaten public schools. This study adds to Foster’s narrative truths that Lisa Delpit (Foster, 1997) so eloquently applauds when she says, “While all teachers are invited and welcome in the struggle to educate all black children, there is so much that white and black teachers and teacher educators can learn from the teachers in this book” (p. xii). My participant group includes three Black teachers. I wondered if their voices would harmonize with the teachers in
Foster’s book. I believe that teacher identity development, although diverse among cultures and races, holds common happenings that develop teacher passion.

William Ayers (1999, 2001, 2004), Jean Clandinin and Michael Connelly (1999), and Jane Danielewicz (2001) provide viable guidance and support for this study. In an attempt to find those viable experiences that shape teacher identity development, I yearned to find what fertilizes passion along with what kills it. The participant stories found in the works of these curriculum leaders offer insight into not only how teacher identity is planted and nurtured, but also how research to report those findings is conducted.

**Teachers’ Personal Experiences**

Beginning teachers have a vast repertoire of experiences embedded in their teacher identity development. Upon entering their classrooms, that identity development either becomes strengthened or weakened by personal experiences and encounters with students, parents, colleagues, and administrators. William Ayers (1989) and Jean Clandinin and Michael Connelly (1999) provide several narrative studies concerning teachers’ personal experiences in their classrooms. These studies offer quality examples for my research into the effects of teachers’ personal experiences upon their professional knowledge development.

The *Good Preschool Teacher* (Ayers, 1989) and *Shaping a Professional Identity* (Clandinin & Connelly, 1999) are two studies that involve narrative inquiry as a research method. William Ayers’ (1989) investigation into the lives and practices of six pre-school teachers provides a close look at how these teachers have
developed their own identities as pre-school teachers. The common pedagogical practices that are made obvious as these teachers tell their stories involve a great deal of caring and careful identity construction of their students. As Ayers (1989) points out, “Certainly these teachers highlight for us qualities that we would look for in good teachers” (p. 140). Those qualities include, but are not limited to, care and concern for students and their fragile identities. When describing the good preschool teacher, Ayers goes on to say, “we see a kaleidoscope of possibility, for there are endless good preschool teachers, each grounded in a real situation, a living context, each caring, dreaming of a world where people care more, and working to make that more-caring world come to be” (p.141). Ayers’ narrative inquiry into the lives of these six preschool teachers provides an intricate look at the interactions found between these teachers and their students. Not only does this study give useful information to educators, it also provides the participants with a close look at their pedagogical beliefs and teacher identities.

The teachers of Ayers’ (1989) study reflect on their childhood experiences that impacted their actions in their classrooms. Concerning the reflections of his participants, Ayers applauds the power of remembering. “Successful teachers remember. They have the capacity to look at things as a child sees them” (Ayers, 1989, p.24). Most of the teachers give credit to family members who had shown them a great deal of care and concern for their academic and personal well-being. For example, Anna, one of the participants in Ayers’ study, remembers how special her mother made her feel. She remembers being held and rocked by her mother. She also vividly recalls, “feeling her mother’s presence when she opened her lunch at
school and saw the way the sandwich was cut” (Ayers, 1989, p. 24). Although most of Ayers’ participants evoke memories of family members, Michele speaks of the impression that her fifth grade teacher made on her as she was developing her identity. Michele remembers, “There was only one black teacher, Viola Harper, and she was my fifth-grade teacher. She was special. She did a lot of things other teachers didn’t do, like taking us to Rockefeller Center for ice skating” (Ayers, 1989, p.91). Michele’s recollection of Miss Harper prompts her to plan special field trips for her students. She believes these extraordinary experiences help her students feel important.

William Ayers (1989) gives a detailed account of how he used narrative inquiry as his methodology for this research project. Beginning with extensive observations and field notes, Ayers then had each participant write journal entries concerning “their lives as they affect their teaching practice” (p. 6). After analyzing those writings in order to search for patterns, Ayers continued observing the teachers. He also added informal interviews with open requests for information. Ayers also included the use of interpretive activities, such as working with clay for the purpose of gaining more insight into each teacher’s thoughts about teaching. These activities brought animation to the conversation. Teachers talked while they worked with clay. These relaxing activities allowed the teachers to talk more freely and to release their emotions and values about teaching.

Ayers (1989) explains the components of his research that include ethnography, autobiography, and portraiture. Ethnography was used to gain information about each participant’s culture. Autobiography provided self-awareness
and self-understanding for the participants, which helped Ayers gather important data for his study. Portraiture is a close description of the aesthetic and experiential dimensions of story, which bring a better understanding of schools and how they operate. Descriptions of each participant’s professional environment enhance the overall picture of their daily lives as teachers. After gathering substantial data through a variety of methods and procedures, Ayers provides an excellent research product that offers valuable information for educators.

Likewise, Clandinin and Connelly (1999) present an excellent product for understanding teacher identity development in their book *Shaping a Professional Identity: Stories of Educational Practice* (1999). This detailed look at teacher identity construction is a bounty of teacher, administrator, and curriculum specialists’ stories. Each chapter presents the story of an educator or an explanation of building teacher identity. Through the use of storytelling, journaling, and interviews, a variety of authors conduct narrative inquiries into the lives of educators in the field. This study specifically looks at teacher identity construction within the confines of teacher experiences. Participants do not reflect upon their childhood or early schooling memories in search of their teacher identities. Instead they probe the components of daily experiences with their students, their colleagues, their administrators, and the pressures they feel as teachers.

Finding limited narrative research that addresses early schooling memories that affect teacher identity construction motivated me to conduct a thorough narrative inquiry into those recollections in order to find those stories that hold so much information as teachers build their teacher identities. Clandinin and Connelly’s
(1999) book is an excellent example of narrative inquiry and how it is used to find viable information for education scholars. Yet, like many other research studies I have found, it focuses specifically on teacher identity as it is built in the college classroom and in the schools of the participants.

Once again, teachers’ personal experience is intertwined with teacher identity development and professional knowledge. “There is no professional development without personal development” (Freppon, 2000, p. ix). Although these topics walk hand-in-hand, the importance of each is crucial to detecting those stamina-building encounters that construct strong passion for teaching. William Ayers (1989) and Clandinin and Connelly (1999) provide two excellent resources for looking into those experiences teachers view as meaningful to their identity development. Likewise, other bodies of research provide quality narrative research findings concerning the value of teacher experience. One such resource is found in Teacher Lore: Learning From Our Own Experience (Schubert and Ayers, 1992), which is a compilation of teachers’ stories that focuses on how teachers learn from their own experiences.

Teacher Knowledge

Because we see the professional knowledge landscape as composed of relationships among people, places, and things, we see it as both an intellectual and moral landscape. (Clandinin and Connelly, 1995, p.5)

Teacher knowledge is an ever-developing entity that is shaped by the lived experiences of teachers. From the very first learning experiences and encounters with caregivers to the every day encounters in the classroom, teacher knowledge is being affected, shaped, and reshaped. As relationships with people come and go and daily
experiences occur as life is lived, teacher knowledge is being developed and fashioned. Among those experiences, encounters, and exchanges are the hidden agents that strengthen or weaken teacher passion. Passion does not merely address a personality characteristic that effective teachers have, and ineffective teachers don’t have. It is as vital a part of each teacher as her/his eye color, skin color, height, and dental records. Those identifying traits that are often measurable by scientific measures, like teacher certification tests, are no more important than a teacher’s passion for knowledge. Teacher passion for knowledge is not a static number that each teacher acquires and keeps as part of a statistical representation of achievement or effectiveness. It is a pliable, growing force that can be pushed, pulled, and sculpted to infect others or smothered to the point becoming stagnant and useless.

Converse to Ayers (2001) and Clandinin and Connelly (1995), Gary D. Fenstermacher (1994) addresses teacher knowledge as a linear body of information necessary for quality teaching to occur. Although Fenstermacher discusses the knowledge that teachers acquire from their own experiences, he places a great deal of emphasis on teacher knowledge that is generated from traditional methods. In that Fenstermacher moves away from the narrative mode of finding information about teacher knowledge, his findings revert back to the actual experiences that hold evidence for “What is known about successful teaching?” and “What is known about what makes teachers good at what they do (p. 7)?” Fenstermacher’s initial report concerning Gage’s attempt at “creating a scientific basis for the art of teaching that will be acceptable to the general public as truly specialized knowledge” (p. 8) seems to remove the human side of teacher knowledge acquisition. Yet, Fenstermacher does
review the work of Freema Elbaz and Jean Clandinin and Michael Connelly in his research document. He gives credit to Clandinin and Connelly when he realizes their own motivation for researching very carefully and gently the lived experiences of teachers in order to ascertain just what it is that teachers know. As this revelation comes to light, Fenstermacher states, “In taking teachers seriously as holders of practical knowledge, it becomes necessary for Connelly and Clandinin to find ways of learning what teachers know without using methods that distort, destroy, or reconstruct this knowledge” (p. 11). Fenstermacher acknowledges Clandinin and Connelly’s research methods as different but viable when he states, “this study proposes to use a more gentle, yet thorough, investigation into teacher knowledge acquisition related to teachers’ passion for knowing (p.11). In his conclusion, Fenstermacher says, “Teacher knowledge research is not for researchers to know what teachers know but for teachers to know what they know…for teachers to be knowers of the known” (p. 50). Precisely!

In their narrative research studies, Clandinin and Connelly (1995) provide a wealth of information on the development of teacher knowledge as revealed in the lived experiences of their research participants. Likewise, Ayers (2001) provides a close look at his own professional knowledge development and that of many other research participants. Teacher knowledge development is a vital component of passion for education. A passionate teacher has a deep love for learning and acquiring new knowledge. As teachers continually develop their knowledge, they yearn to share that knowledge with others. By investigating the lives of elementary teachers, that passion for knowledge development is revealed. In a close look at the
continued professional knowledge development those experiences that fertilize that hunger offer new understanding for why some teachers keep learning while others lose their love of learning.

**Passion**

In order to fully understand the term “passion” as it is used in this study, a close look at exactly what passion is and what it is not is provided here. While performing a thorough search for precise definitions for the term *passion*, most searches resulted in definitions for the Passion of Christ. With respect for the terminology used to define the religious use of word *passion*, in terms of this study, definitions pertaining to the Passion of Christ will not be used.

According to *Merriam Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary* (1996), passion, among many other definitions, is “intense, driving, or overmastering feeling or conviction.” Passion is also “a strong liking or desire for or devotion to some activity, object, or concept.” These definitions explain the intense emotional entity known as passion and describe very well the type of feeling many teachers have for their profession. Another definition posited by Curt Rosengren (2004) provides an even better description that relates well to what passionate teachers do. Rosengren defines passion as “the energy that comes from bringing more of YOU into what you do.” Yet, what is missing from these dictionary definitions are the overt behaviors demonstrated by humans consumed with passion for or against those activities, objects, or concepts.

Passion…
Mary Lou Retton describes the passion she had for gymnastics that drove her to become an Olympic Gold Medalist as “the desire to reach a goal set in one’s heart” (as seen on Oprah Winfrey, June 2005). Retton posits that no one can be made to do something successfully. Passion must be in that person’s heart.

Was it passion that drove Benjamin Franklin to stand in a thunderstorm for the purpose of capturing electricity? Was it passion that drove Martin Luther King, Jr. to fight peacefully for Civil Rights? Was it passion that carried Mae Jemison (2001) to *Find Where the Wind Blows* as she reached her goal of becoming a scientist who eventually became the world’s first Black female astronaut during an age when all odds were against her?

I believe it is passion that drives people in many different directions toward personal and professional goals. Whether those goals are for the common good or not, the person striving for success embraces the idea that he or she is doing something positive for humankind. Passion is often thought of in terms of strong emotions displayed during brief outbursts of love or hate. Yet, is it not passion that kindles the flames that keep people doing what it is that they love? Is it not passion that drives the brain surgeon to desperately try to save the most damaged brains? Is it not passion that pushes the firefighter to go into flames looking for that lost pet of the crying child outside a burning house? Passion is that ever-present drive that not only makes us yearn for a desired goal, but also to take action to reach that goal. Many teachers demonstrate that passion each day as they go about the task of educating children. What some teachers do each and every day may appear to some as the easiest job on earth, while others make it seem like an insurmountable task that tends
to drain the very life out of those attempting to do so. Given that throughout the
literature concerning teachers’ love for teaching researchers often use the term
passion to describe that characteristic that describes highly effective teachers, a close
examination of just what constitutes teacher passion was necessary.

**Passion for Teaching**

Those who feel the call to teach, who sense teaching is a profoundly
meaningful part of their life, have a passion for teaching. (Garrison &
Liston, 2004, p. 1)

Passionate teaching is not a luxury, a frill we can do without. (Meier, in *The

As part of my inquiry, a close examination of the term “passion” is necessary
for complete understanding of that component of teaching that is so often overlooked.
Many times the word “passion” is used interchangeably with love and misconstrued
to have implicit meanings other than how it will be used in the context of this study.
In *The Passionate Teacher*, Fried (2001) offers a description of a passionate teacher
as “someone in love with a field of knowledge, deeply stirred by issues and ideas that
challenge our world, drawn to the dilemmas and potentials of the young people who
come into class each day” (p.44). Fried (2004) goes on to say, “Passion is not just a
personality trait that some people have and others don’t, but rather something
discoverable, teachable, and reproducible” (p.44). It is that premise that motivated
me to investigate just how teachers become passionate and how that passion is kept
alive, strong, and growing in spite of the difficulties present in today’s classrooms.

William Ayers (2004) describes his own love of teaching in the introduction of
one of his most recent works, *Teaching the Personal and Political: Essays on Hope
and Justice*, when he states, “These essays arise out of a lifelong passion for teaching
Like many educational researchers, William Ayers knows exactly what it is that comprises and defines his feelings about teaching. His work oozes with his love for teaching and all that it encompasses. Likewise, Robert Fried (2001) shares that passion and puts into writing those components of passionate teaching that can be evidenced, studied, and analyzed.

Yet as I look into hundreds of classrooms, watch teachers working with all kinds of students, when I ask myself what makes the greatest difference in the quality of student learning---it is a teacher’s passion that leaps out. More than knowledge of subject matter. More than a variety of teaching techniques. More than being well-organized, or friendly, or funny, or fair. Passion (Fried, 2001, p. 16)

Fried goes on to offer another description of what it means to be a passionate teacher.

Of course some of our teachers, we remember their foibles and mannerisms; of others, their kindness and encouragement, or their fierce devotion to standards of work that we probably did not share at that time. And of those who inspired us most, we remember what they cared about, and that they cared about us and the person we might become. It is this quality of caring about ideas and values, this fascination with potential for growth within people this depth and fervor about doing things well and striving for excellence that comes closest to what I mean in describing a “passionate teacher.” (p. 17)

In Fried’s comprehensive book on passionate teaching, a host of obstacles and how-to overcome them is provided. Fried’s own passion is experienced as he discusses the
power in the hands of those passionate individuals who take their fervor for students, learning, and knowledge into their classrooms.

**What Teacher Passion is Not**

It is a common teaching strategy to teach a concept by contrasting that concept with its exact opposite. For example, a square is not an oval. It is not a triangle. It is not a circle. This type of discussion can continue in a give and take exchange of description as to why certain shapes do not qualify as squares. This simple example is offered as a prologue to an explanation concerning exactly what passion is not for the purpose of understanding precisely what it is that constitutes itself as passion for the teaching profession.

First of all, passion is not busy-ness. Even the most ineffective, unproductive, burned-out teachers can appear to be busy. Running in circles much like hamsters upon their wheels, teachers can and do spin wheels in an attempt to find some type of success, be it their own feeling of success or accomplishment or their students’ success. Creating and recreating lessons in hope of finding something that will get the point across is often mistaken as passion. Granted passionate teachers do seek those awe-inspiring lessons that grab student attention and ensure mastery of concepts, but the specific busy-ness of doing so does not constitute passion. It can in some instances be seen as drudgery. There is distinctly a fine line between passion for teaching and the observable busy-ness that goes with task of teaching. Yet, busy-ness in itself is not passion.

Secondly, passion is not longevity. Stamina and endurance cannot be misconstrued as passion. There are multitudes of teachers who have withstood the
constant pelts of opposition, have had their passion ripped out the soil of their teacher identities, and who basically come to school day in and day out because they know no other way to exist except in the role of teacher. Just because a teacher endures the torture does not constitute passion for teaching. Yes, passionate teachers do endure. They do have stamina. Yet, passion in itself is not staying power.

A third characteristic that is often confused as teacher passion is intellect. Many teachers continue their education and seek higher degrees. While these endeavors are certainly noble; they are not interchangeable with passion for teaching. Once again, yes, passionate teachers love learning. Many passionate teachers attain terminal degrees. Nevertheless, simply getting one degree after another does not indicate or demonstrate passion for teaching. Lots of teachers attain degrees in order to escape the drudgery found in the classroom. They yearn for something more than is found in a classroom of students. Therefore, they get more education, not for the purpose of becoming better teachers, but for the purpose of doing something else with their teaching degrees.

As the list for what passion is not continues, a fourth entity that is often confused as passion is evidenced in those teachers who appear to be the band leaders, the lobbyists, the squeaky-wheels, so to speak. Those teachers who habitually find a mission to be accomplished and take the role of saving the world through their assertions and actions to right the wrongs in the teaching profession are often seen as passionate teachers. Much like longevity, intellect, and busy-ness, boisterous teachers do not constitute passion in and of itself. Like the other descriptors that do not define passion for teaching, being a loud band-leader who beats the drum for the
sole purpose of beating the drum, does not make one a passionate teacher. Passion for teaching is much more that desiring to be heard by the powers-that-be.

In the swirling sea of opposition and constraints placed upon the teaching profession there are those teachers whose passion prevails. This study provides important historical factors that have built strong passion in certain teachers. As their stories are told, specific commonalities have surfaced that reflect those early experiences in the classroom that planted the seeds of passion for teaching in the participants’ identity development, professional knowledge composition, and love of teaching. Those commonalities serve as a catalyst for devising an implementation plan for inculcating preservice and novice teachers with a strong dose of passion building and strengthening fertilizer.

**Hope for Tomorrow: Learning to Hold on to Passion**

This narrative inquiry into the effects of personal and professional experience and encounters upon elementary teachers’ passion supplies useful information for helping undergraduate education majors find those core beliefs that led them to develop passion for the task of teaching. This study discloses vital information that can help education students identify and foster those qualities that are necessary for enticing and motivating students to learn. Likewise, it discloses the hidden components of intense passion that does not waver in the face of political and social obstacles.

In spite of political, social, and personal demands placed upon teachers, many teachers are resilient and continue teaching with passion that defies explanation. As teachers develop their individual identity through personal experiences, that passion
is planted early in each teacher’s life. That passion is either fertilized or weakened by encounters with others. A close look at veteran teachers who are considered passionate by their colleagues, students, administrators, and students’ parents exposes those occurrences that help solidify passion as part of each teacher’s identity and personal and professional development.

Summary

Many narrative inquirers and education researchers have paved the way before me as they provide exemplary works concerning current issues that pose problems for teachers, including political constraints, lack of unity among policymakers and educators, parental disfavor for teachers, standardization for students and teachers, and low teacher pay. Inasmuch as these researchers go before me in investigating those obstacles to teacher identity development, personal and professional growth, and love of teaching, I disclose how the participants of my study add to, contradict, and/or validate the positions found in their literature. My participants bring a new perspective on how they take each obstacle in stride as they celebrate learning each day in their classrooms.

Likewise, the literature presented in this review of teacher identity development and personal and professional knowledge gives a thorough look into the lives of many teachers. From each of Ayers’ books to Fenstermacher’s chapter, no stone has been left unturned in the search for how teachers develop their identities and how they acquire and nurture their professional knowledge base. What I found in my investigation are those nuances that have not yet be revealed as teachers reflect
upon their earliest school memories, experiences in their college classrooms, and living in the profession of teaching.

Robert Fried’s (2001) consummate work, *The Passionate Teacher*, speaks eloquently of that elusive quality called *passion*. This incredible book describes those teachers who, like my participants, demonstrate how powerful their love of teaching is. It describes in great detail those oppressive entities that threaten teacher passion. Ways to deal with those obstacles are suggested. This study adds to the literature as it addresses nascent passion and proposes ways to strengthen it in college classrooms before beginning teachers drown before they can even begin to dog-paddle in their own classrooms.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY: A PLAN FOR INVESTIGATING OAK TREES

Within the dense forest of curriculum studies’ literature and methodological research options, the tenets of narrative theory provided the most useful framework upon which to conduct my investigation. Since narrative theory follows John Dewey’s (1938) position concerning the importance of experience and its power in education, the tools of narrative theorists helped me dissect the stories and lived experiences of six elementary teachers for the purpose of finding the components of teacher identity development, personal and professional knowledge, and love of teaching. This chapter explains how I conducted a dissection of each participant’s teacher identity and passion for teaching.

Harry F. Wolcott’s (1994) description of his book, *Transforming Qualitative Research*, “My thesis is that the real mystique of qualitative research lies in the processes of *using* data rather than in the processes of *gathering* data” (p. 1) expresses the desire I have had for this research inquiry. The usefulness of this investigation is dependent upon the methods I have used to gather, analyze, and report the data found in my teacher participants’ stories. According to JoAnn Phillion (2005), “Narratives provide a rich, detailed experience that is often ignored in teacher education” (p. 1). Lest the stories of my research be ignored, it was crucial that I take extreme care to present theoretically and methodologically sound research. Also, the growing acceptance of qualitative research, specifically narrative inquiry, in many professional disciplines beckoned me to follow the experts in the field of narrative inquiry by using precision, care, and accurate methodology suggested by those experts.
This study comprises the data analysis gleaned from participant’s personal profiles, autobiographical writings, and reflective journals; formal and informal interviews, observations, and conversations; and, field texts and researcher reflective journal entries. Since Harry Wolcott (1994) suggests that researchers “begin writing early,” my own personal thoughts about exchanges with my participants were started the moment I gained Institutional Review Board approval (p.349). As I explain in my data management section, to avoid facing an insurmountable amount of data, the guidelines suggested by Miller (2005), Clandinin & Connelly (2000), Denzin & Lincoln (1998), Brookfield (1995), and Wolcott (1994) guided me methodologically in a continuous process of analysis. As I adhered to the work of these specialists in qualitative research, I have produced viable and useful narrative truths for the field of education.

**Theoretical Framework: Narrative Theory**

According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), “Formalists begin inquiry in theory, whereas narrative inquirers tend to begin with experience as expressed in lived and told stories” (p.40). Narrative theory offers a close look into the components of lived experience in order to reveal new meaning and importance to research topics. Based primarily on the work of John Dewey (1938), which surrounds the importance of experience and the connectedness it has with education, narrative theory is grounded in social sciences. From anthropology to sociology, theorists offer their ideas and support for the viable information entrenched in the lived experiences of research participants. Inasmuch as other theories are applied to certain research questions as possible answers or antidotes for research problems,
narrative theory provides a research tool for investigating those hidden components that traditional research often leaves untouched.

“The contribution of a narrative inquiry is more often intended to be the creation of a new sense of meaning and significance with respect to the research topic than it is to yield a set of knowledge claims that might incrementally add to knowledge in the field” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 42). Research topics that are often considered in the affective domain of human experiences lend themselves well to narrative theory research.

The tenets of narrative theory guide this study of teacher passion and how it is developed, manipulated, and strengthened in the lives of teachers. As participants told their stories, a new sense of meaning and significance has been added to the field of teacher professional knowledge development.

**Historical Roots of Narrative Theory**

Although most theoretical and philosophical positions can be traced to the ancient Greek philosophers, narrative theory is basically a baby in the realm of educational research in comparison to other forms of curriculum inquiry. Yet, narrative theory can be traced back to Greek philosophers through the “Father of Education,” John Dewey. As a budding philosopher, John Dewey started out as a Platonian idealist. As he studied and earned his Ph.D., Dewey moved from Platonian idealism to Hegelian idealism. From there, John Dewey developed his philosophical position into pragmatism. Since John Dewey had a very powerful hand in developing ideas concerning experience, he is considered the starting block for the development of narrative theory. Dewey’s fifth book, *Experience and Education* (1938), is still an
excellent philosophical resource for narrative theorists. According to Dewey (1938), “The principle that development of experience comes about through interaction means that education is essentially a social process” (p.36). Those interactions and perceptions are the basis of experience, which can be documented as truth and used to find common grounds from which to draw educational data. From this premise, narrative researchers find their own means of collecting and interpreting data. John Dewey is considered the foundation for narrative research, and he is steeped in the tenets of pragmatism. Thus, narrative theory does stem from the great Greek philosophers like other forms of curriculum theory.

From Dewey, there is great span of time before narrative inquiry is viewed as a viable form of research, because E. L. Thorndike’s scientific theoretical position forced its way into the spotlight of education and Dewey’s ideas were pushed aside for a more systematic, proof-oriented means of research and education. Yet, as educators and curriculum theorists cling to Dewey’s ideas, narrative inquiry has gained more and more acceptance as a “valid” form of educational research.

Maxine Greene is an existentialist philosopher who supports narrative theory through her encouragement of building relationships between individuals. Greene’s focus on building students’ imagination in order to develop understanding and appreciation for all humanity is a major component of developing one’s story. According to Greene (1995), story can be used “to help students to realize their deep connection to and responsibility for not only their own individual expression but also for other human beings who share their world” (p.28). This premise is a major component of narrative theory. The intricate connections between humans and their
experiences are laden with data that can and should be used to find solutions to educational woes as well as psychological underpinnings. Maxine Greene has taken John Dewey’s philosophy and paved the way for other narrative researchers. Greene can be considered a pioneer in narrative theory since there was such a long span of time from Dewey’s work until she began documenting her ideas and reasons for the power of human relationships.

Much like Maxine Greene, Nel Noddings sees the importance of building connections between humans, especially between teachers and students. Noddings’ “ethic of care” parallels Maxine Greene’s “releasing imagination” in that both are essential for developing positive experiences. These experiences encapsulate the fibers of stories that offer valuable information to curriculum theorists. Nel Noddings (1993) posits, “The more connected the self to others, the better the self is” (p.21). As these connections are made, each story becomes relevant in meaning to so many other human beings. Commonalities within experiences offer “valid” information that is imperative in revolutionizing education.

Along with Maxine Greene and Nel Noddings, Madeleine Grumet (1988) offers pertinent support for narrative inquiry as a useful form of curriculum research. Women’s stories, especially those experiences that teachers share within a patriarchal society are imperative for initiating change within an antiquated educational system. Grumet leads the way in reporting the silenced voices of female educators and their impact on society. According to Grumet (1988),

They (women) go back and forth between the experience of domesticity and the experience of teaching, between being with one’s own children
and being with the children of others, between being the child of one’s own mother and the teacher of another mother’s child, between feeling and form, family and colleagues. (p. xv)

Once again, like Greene and Noddings, Grumet’s assertion that those experiences bring volumes of information to the curriculum table supports the validity (not a narrative research term) of narrative inquiry in the field of education.

After John Dewey’s philosophical focus on experience was minimized and E. L. Thorndike’s methodology was embraced, Maxine Greene initiated a strong interest in narrative as a source for educational research. Nel Noddings and Madeleine Grumet jumped aboard the narrative train and continue to offer influential voices to the importance of individual experience and stories. Likewise, many have followed suit and narrative inquiry is gaining a broader support system through curriculum studies experts.

Two such experts are Donald Schön (1992) and Max Van Manen (1990). Donald Schön (1992) believed that “practitioners should be viewed as connoisseurs and critics” (p.18). Schön left a legacy of magnifying the role of educators in the consideration for educational reform. In the same vein, Max Van Manen continues to verbalize his support of educators and their stories as tools for improving instruction. According to Richard Cairney (2002), “Van Manen has developed an area of research that simply did not exist in North America educational studies before his contributions. For over 25 years, he has focused on human perception and experience as an alternative to ‘objective’ experimental paradigms” (p.1). According to Van Manen (2002), statistical research cannot measure just what it is that occurs when a
teacher walks into a rowdy class of students and calms the class into an organized zone of learning (p. 28). This is the juncture at which narrative inquiry fills in the blank spots found within scientific research. Donald Schön and Max Van Manen are two narrative inquirers who have helped lead the way in developing the importance of teacher voices and experiences.

Among some of the other important leaders in narrative inquiry are Donald Polkinghorne (1998), Mary Catherine Bateson (1989 and 1994), and Freema Elbaz (1983). These narrative researchers have contributed a great deal of resources and guidance to the field of curriculum studies. Their journal articles, books, and presentations offer a variety of perspectives on the importance of the stories of experience and life in general.

As leaders in narrative inquiry continue to contribute to this blooming area of educational research, there are two leaders in the field of narrative inquiry who continue to forge the way for educators. Michael Connelly and Jean Clandinin (2000) are considered the leading researchers in the field of narrative inquiry. Their endeavors to gain a place of respect for narrative inquiry among other forms of curriculum inquiry are not only admirable, but also effective. Connelly urges his doctoral students to meticulously listen, document, document, document, and analyze the stories of their participants. In doing so, rich and “valid” data rises to the top of their research. Connelly’s abundant articles, books, and lectures on narrative inquiry help beginning and seasoned researchers fine-tune their investigations to find the meat of the research. By presenting these research “conclusions,” useful information for educational improvements is revealed. Likewise, Jean Clandinin demonstrates the
fine art of gathering, interpreting, and presenting narrative research data. Finding the “right” story is just as important as gathering that story and interpreting the data found within that story. Michael Connelly and Jean Clandinin provide a wealth of information on the importance of story to find valuable educational information.

As Connelly and Clandinin (2000) prepare doctoral students to continue searching for the best way to utilize narrative inquiry, two of Connelly’s students are well on their way to carrying his dreams to fruition. JoAnne Phillion (2002) and Ming Fang He (2003) have provided exemplary work in the area of narrative inquiry. Phillion’s knowledge in the area of multicultural narrative inquiry provides important guidance to those interested in the impact that multicultural experience brings to the educational world. Likewise, He’s research in the area of cross-cultural narrative inquiry will help people make transitions into an unfamiliar land an easier task. Her research also helps educators understand how students new to the American or Canadian culture develop their identities as they mix, meld, and flow between social and cultural diversities. These two curriculum specialists will certainly carry on the work of Connelly and Clandinin as they continue providing their expertise through articles, books, and lectures.

Recently, He and Phillion (2005) have joined Connelly in writing another compelling book about narrative inquiry. This book helps guide my research by encouraging me to develop an “experiential eye and an imaginative eye” for research texts (p. 294). It was very important that I heed the advice to “live vicariously in the lives of my participants” (p. 294). Likewise, I had to “see the participants within the context” of their lives as teachers (p. 294). With this guidance, I was able to
“transform everyday experience into insights with cultural, social, and educational significance” (Connelly, He, and Phillion, 2005, p. 1).

John Dewey opened the door for narrative inquiry to find its way into the realm of educational research. His focus on the importance of experience as a tool for understanding may have been overlooked by educational policy makers, but great minds like Maxine Greene and others have shone a light upon that darkened corner of educational research. More and more evidence of the power of embedded information offered in the stories of individuals is being found as today’s narrative researchers report their findings. The revelation that statistical research leaves out a great deal of answers makes way for the power of narrative inquiry.

**Narrative Theory as a Framework for Research**

According to Yvonna Lincoln (2003), there are many reasons that narrative inquiry is an important method of research. Unlike scientific or statistical research, narrative inquiry offers a situation whereby there is a mutual relationship between respondent and researcher. In the clinical methods of statistical research, this is not usually the case. As narrative researchers gather their data, they not only learn a great deal about their respondents, their respondents learn a lot about the researchers. This give and take scenario offers a more sincere environment from which to glean accurate and pertinent data. Often times, researchers and respondents become life-long friends.

Also, unlike statistical research, narrative inquiry documents have a lot to offer to anyone interested in using them. Statistical research is reserved for those who are experts in reading charts with statistical data that is much like learning a
foreign language. Narrative inquiry research texts are user friendly. A basic ability to read is all that is needed to comprehend the data provided in these texts. Likewise, narrative texts are available for anyone who needs the information. Unlike statistical research, which might be limited to one area of a field, like radiology, doctors, psychologists, educators, lawyers, etc., can use narrative texts. Anyone who needs the information can and should use it. Finally, narrative texts offer a multitude of information. While statistical data limits itself to one variable, narrative texts offer a glimpse at the whole picture, which usually contains more information than is needed to answer a specific question.

Narrative inquiry is a powerful tool that fills in the blanks created by statistical data. While statistical research answers one or two questions, narrative research can provide a multitude of answers concerning a topic or situation. For example, I can find out how many teachers did not like high school through a given statistical measurement tool. Yet, through narrative inquiry, I can find out why those teachers did not like high school. From that document, I can also find out what commonalities are present between the respondents. This type of information is imperative for effective educational change.

Yvonna Lincoln offers a simple flow chart that can be used as a road map for the collection and interpretation of narrative data. Data should be gathered immediately. Even when trying to gain entry into a data collection site, this step should be documented by way of field notes, cassette recording, photographs, or any other means to document the procedure. Once entry is gained, it is imperative that the researcher begins documenting any and all interactions with the respondent and
his/her environment. This documentation should be transcribed and analyzed daily. As the research continues, the researcher should periodically type a copy of his/her research and have the respondent/s read the text for clarification. It is vital that the respondent is being presented accurately. Once a researcher has gathered what he/she feels is an adequate amount of data to construct a report, this information should be presented to another authority in the field, i.e., a colleague, professor, or narrative expert. Feedback from that authority usually leads to more data collection or revisions. Eventually, the narrative research report is ready for publication so that others can use the information.

Since narrative theory is grounded in the social sciences and has its roots in the studies of experience, it lent itself well to my inquiry into teacher passion and professional development. John Dewey (1938) placed a great deal of importance on the connection between experience and education. Likewise, current researchers in the field of narrative theory concur with Dewey in that experience holds valuable information for the development of knowledge. Given those tenets, what better research method and theoretical framework for investigating the impact of lived experiences on teacher passion and professional development? Narrative theory provides a strong framework upon which I built connections as stories were told and analyzed for the purpose of finding those occurrences that have developed resilient passion in many teachers.

Narrative research methods were the best possible way of finding out exactly what I have been curious about for a long time. Although there has been a great deal of research and documentation concerning teachers and their experiences, I did not
find the answer as to how teachers’ teachers impacted them as educators. I read a lot about teachers’ experience in the classroom and how they interact with students. Yet, I longed to know why teachers continue their passion for the teaching profession, and I wondered if one or more of their teachers led them to develop their passion for learning and teaching. Narrative inquiry was the best form of research to get to those answers. I found that within the storied educational life of a teacher there was at least one teacher who so strongly affected him/her that he/she desired the role of “teacher.” I discovered that those experiences hold common threads that have been woven into a pattern that can be used to help undergraduate students better prepare for the classroom. I determined that the art of teaching is developed at a young age much like the art of parenting. So often we find ourselves parenting the way our parents parented because we know no other way to do it. Likewise, I ascertained that teachers teach the way they were taught, and often that is not the best way to teach. Unveiling the power that teachers have to build new teachers is an important part of reforming our educational system. The results of this inquiry present information that can help change teacher preparation programs by providing detailed insight into the passion that drives some of our very best educators.

**Narrative Inquiry**

We have been students of teacher knowledge for many years. When we began this line of work in the 1970’s, the field of teacher thinking was just emerging in the educational research literature, prior to that, researchers focused on teacher skills, attitudes, characteristics, and methods. There was excitement throughout the research community when attention turned to teachers’ thought processes. (Clandinin & Connelly, 1999, p. 1)

Clandinin and Connelly (1995) provide their perspectives from a social science perspective and their interest in personal experience. They argue that social
sciences are founded on the study of experience; therefore experience is the starting point and key term for all social science inquiry. Likewise, Clandinin and Connelly have found a position that avoids reducing experience to skills, techniques, and tactics. They propose narrative and story telling as an alternative mode of inquiry, one, which places them as centrally involved in the study of experience. In their arguments for narrative inquiry as a useful research method, Clandinin and Connelly agree with Jerome Bruner (1990) who says that experiences structure expressions, but expressions also structure experiences. According to Connelly and Clandinin, narrative inquiry focuses on human experience and has a holistic quality. It is a way of characterizing the phenomena of human experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995). Connelly and Clandinin (1999) go on to say, “Narrative is the study of how humans make meaning of experiences by endlessly telling and retelling stories about themselves that both refigure the past and create purpose in the future” (p.24). These “tellings and retellings” explain practicable experiences that offer understanding to knowledge formation.

Narrative inquiry, as shown by Clandinin and Connelly (1988), is a viable research method for education. Not only have Clandinin and Connelly written about the importance of shared experiences as a system of finding meaning for curriculum; they have used narrative inquiry to perform several investigations into the lives of teachers. Their work is highly respected and referenced by many curriculum scholars. Joe Kincheloe (1999) praises the work of Clandinin and Connelly when he says that their work “offers profound insight to students of education” (back cover). From their work concerning teachers and curriculum to the development of teacher
identities as they are constructed in the classroom, Clandinin and Connelly prove that narrative inquiry is a useful research tool for education. In my efforts to use narrative inquiry for the purpose of finding meaning in the stories of teachers as they reflect on their elementary teachers, Clandinin and Connelly provide guidance and examples of how to gather, document, and analyze those stories in order to find embedded knowledge concerning teacher identity. Clandinin and Connelly supply years of experience and expertise in exactly what narrative entails and how to use it for research purposes.

Although the work and writings of Clandinin and Connelly (1988, 1995, & 1999) were the guiding influences for my research study, I also referred to the work of other researchers in the area of narrative inquiry. A few of those scholars are Freema Elbaz (1983), Donald Polkinghorne (2001), Catherine Marshall and Gretchen Rossman (1999), and Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln (1998). These experts in the field of qualitative research offered direction and leadership for using narrative inquiry in this educational research.

According to Denzin and Lincoln (1999), “Modern social science disciplines have taken as their mission ‘the analysis and understanding of the patterned conduct and social processes of society’” (p.11). Narrative research goes beyond statistical, quantitative research in that it reveals those unmeasureable factors that affect human social experiences. Often, quantitative research ignores the variables that hold a great deal of meaning to the outcome of research investigations. Harry Wolcott (1994) explains, “Qualitative data are whatever data qualitatively oriented researchers collect that are not intentionally and recognizably quantitative” (p. 4). Specialists in the field
of narrative inquiries recognize the importance of lived experiences as a vessel full of qualitative data. Therefore, the strengths of narrative inquiry are many. Yet, the most obvious strength is that of finding hidden meaning in the stories of the participants of any narrative inquiry. In my research efforts, narrative inquiry made available those lived experiences of teachers that contain valuable historical meaning to the construction of teacher identities.

As with any human endeavor, there are limitations to narrative inquiry. Critics of narrative inquiry, along with many supporters, point out that the human tendency to “fictionalize” stories in a way that puts the storyteller in a positive light is a factor with which to be contended. According to Mary Andrews (2002), editor for the Center for Narrative Research Web Newsletter, “The ‘murky side’ of narrative, ‘myth,’ as a core narrative can constitute the seductive yet hidden structure of social or political theories and personal life stories” (p. 1). What Andrews is referring to here is that human tendency to add to or take away from individual stories. This dilemma in narrative is closely related to the subjectivity inherent in telling one’s own story. In response to the criticism concerning subjectivity and a propensity to embellish or fictionalize stories, Kathy Carter (1993) sees this problem with narrative as a crisis in the field of education. According to Carter, this type of analysis of narrative “leads directly to a rejection of all generalizations about teaching as distortions of teachers’ real stories” (p. 8). Carter urges narrative researchers to address this criticism “by helping teachers come to know their own stories” (p. 8). As a narrative researcher it was vital that I communicate, communicate, communicate with my participants in order to ascertain and analyze their stories as closely as possible.
Collecting Teachers’ Stories and Composing Field Texts

In order to find those experiences and encounters that have developed strong passion for teaching within the identities of my participants, several strategies for collecting participant’s stories were used, which include participant profiles, a description of the participants’ professional knowledge landscape, teachers’ autobiographical writings, teacher interviews, teacher observation, research journals, and field notes. Once participants were identified for this research inquiry, detailed life histories were documented to show the personal history, educational status, and other pertinent information for each participant. This information is provided as background knowledge for understanding each participant’s place in this study. In addition to the life histories, each participant wrote autobiographical stories to shed light upon those happenings that they believe have affected their teacher identity development, professional knowledge, and passion for teaching. A detailed description of the participants’ professional knowledge landscape gives even more details pertaining to the environment in which the participants go about their jobs as teachers.

After pertinent information concerning the participants and the school environment is provided, I report revealing information based on teacher interviews, informal conversations, teacher observations, field notes, and researcher’s reflective journals. These research components magnify the participants’ experiences and encounters embedded in their identities, professional knowledge development, and passion for teaching in a way that makes the inner core of each teacher visible and easy to understand.
**Participants’ Life Histories**

Prior to beginning my narrative inquiry research, I systematically found participants who were and are willing to become part of this research study. In order to ascertain those participants, a detailed survey was distributed to the faculty members at Hesse Elementary School in Savannah, Georgia, where I am a third grade teacher. Those surveys contained specific questions posed for the purpose of locating participants who have clear memories of their elementary experience and encounters with their teacher/s, who are passionate about the teaching profession, and who were willing to participate in the study. I have known the majority of teachers at Hesse for over sixteen years. In order to reduce subjectivity of the participant selection process, surveys were disbursed and read in anonymity. Surveys were numbered and randomly disseminated. Once the participants were chosen from the surveys, teachers were notified concerning numbers. At that time, teachers having the chosen numbers were revealed to me and I started my investigation with more surveys, interviews, observations, and informal conversations.

**Teachers’ Professional Knowledge Landscape**

This narrative study looks closely at the lives and experiences of six passionate teachers who work their magic in the classrooms found in Herman W. Hesse Elementary School. Hesse is located at 9116 Whitfield Avenue in Savannah, Georgia and is positioned between two community churches. Cresthill Baptist Church is located to the south of Hesse, and St. Luke’s Methodist Church is located to the north of Hesse. Neighborhoods comprised of middle class families surround Hesse and the churches on either side of it. Likewise, the Bethesda Home for Boys is
less than a mile from Hesse’s campus. This orphanage/school for boys contains a rather large pasture in which cows are grown and harvested as the main source of meat for the boys.

Hesse was built in 1917. At that time, Hesse was located in a rural community that was surrounded by forests and pig farms. The student population consisted of those children who lived within walking distance of the school. In 1945, parents built a kitchen in the rear of the school so children would no longer have to walk home for lunch but could stay at school to eat their lunches.

Today Hesse is comprised of four wings that house ten classrooms each and a boys’ and girls’ restroom; a media wing that contains a music room, an art room, a media center (library), an assistant principal’s office, and a teacher’s lounge; a fully equipped cafeteria and kitchen; and a large gymnasium. The first wing houses pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, a nurse’s office, a counselor’s office, the main office, and the principal’s office. The second wing accommodates fourth and fifth grade classrooms. The third wing contains second and third grade classrooms. And, the fourth wing houses first grade classrooms, a speech pathologist’s office, and two SEARCH classrooms. (SEARCH is an acronym for Chatham County’s gifted education program.)

The campus includes an enormous playground equipped with special play areas designed and designated for pre-school, first through third graders, and fourth and fifth graders. The equipment in these play areas is especially designed to meet the physical needs of children of certain ages and stages. Each play area is enclosed with large wooden planks and is filled with soft cedar chips. Hesse’s campus also
includes two parking areas. The front parking area is allocated for parents to use as they bring their children to and pick them up from school each day. The parking area in the rear of the school is allocated for buses.

Although Hesse was built many years before its dedication in 1963, from its beginning it was used as a neighborhood school. In 1980, to adhere to a mandate for desegregation, Hesse housed grades kindergarten, fourth and fifth. Hesse’s population at that time changed from a predominantly white neighborhood school to a population of students from the neighborhood and students bused in from inner city neighborhoods. Hesse’s neighborhood students in grades first, second, and third were bused to a predominately black neighborhood school in the inner city.

In yet another attempt to racially balance the county’s school population, in 1985, Hesse was given Select status. This label was designed to be in conjunction with Magnet schools for the sole purpose of racially balancing Chatham County schools. Magnet schools were designed to draw white children to predominately black schools by providing special programs that would entice students to those schools. On the other hand, Select schools were designed to attract black students to predominately white schools by providing equally enticing programs for students. With the implementation of Select school status, Hesse became a racially mixed school serving students in grades kindergarten through fifth.

Although Hesse has a rich history in that it was built in 1917 and was considered one of the first modern schools in Savannah, for the past 20 years it has held an even more prestigious place in Chatham County’s educational system. Hesse is known for its distinction in education and ranks in the top five schools for
performance excellence. Our city’s local newspaper’s reports on standardized test scores and other community bulletins show Hesse as being among the top schools in our district. As Hesse remains a leader in quality education, our student population has changed as the county removed Select status as an option for Savannah students. Hesse’s population has waned from over 1,000 students during the late 80’s and mid 90’s to less than 500 students at the present time. The reduction in student population enrollment has not affected our standing as a leader in Chatham County schools. Today Hesse has 477 students. Of those students, 242 ride school buses. Unlike during the days of Select status when students were bused from inner city locations, Hesse’s bus riders are neighborhood children who live more than a mile from the school. As Hesse has gradually converted from a state mandated racially balanced school to a racially balanced neighborhood school, the quality of instruction remains the same. Likewise, Hesse’s performance on standardized tests remains above the state and national averages. Although our local newspapers report student performances, and Hesse holds its place among the top achieving schools, what those reports do not show is the passion with which teachers at Hesse teach. Among the 40 teachers who teach at Hesse, 33 have taught in excess of ten years at Hesse. Their loyalty to Hesse and their passion for teaching are evident in the school’s success and atmosphere.

Those dedicated professionals who grace the halls, classrooms, and faculty meetings at Hesse bring a common desire to educate and support children to work with them each day. The cadre of teachers at Hesse include two pre-kindergarten teachers, five kindergarten teachers, four first grade teachers, four second grade
teachers, four third grade teachers, three fourth grade teachers, four fifth grade teachers, one and half SEARCH facilitators, two speech pathologists, two Educational Improvement Program teachers, one Specific Learning Disabilities interrelated teacher, one teacher for our mildly disabled students, one art teacher, a physical education teacher, and one music teacher. Support personnel at Hesse include a media specialist, two kindergarten paraprofessionals, five kindergarten paraprofessionals, three special education paraprofessionals, a school counselor, a nurse, five custodians, five cafeteria workers, a data clerk, a secretary, an assistant principal, and a principal. Each adult works in tandem with all other professionals to ensure the safety and well-being of Hesse students.

Hesse’s student population is comprised of 477 students. Of those 477, 238 are boys and 239 are girls. 313 students are White; 120 students are Black; 15 students are Asian; 14 are Hispanic; and 15 are Mixed. 135 students receive free breakfast and lunch, while 43 receive reduced price breakfast and lunch. These numbers show that 57% of Hesse’s student population receives free or reduced meals.

The statistical information concerning Hesse’s student population holds importance for understanding the context in which my participants carry out their passionate enticement to learning. Inasmuch as students are vital players in the day-to-day encounters that build or destroy teacher-student relationships, this body of quantitative descriptors means little to the teachers at Hesse who see students as individuals. Much like the statistics of standardized test scores that are reported to the media, numbers that describe Hesse’s student body do not tell much about the precious children who live their lives in Hesse’s classrooms.
Teachers’ Autobiographical Writings

Selecting teacher participants from the cadre of teachers at Hesse Elementary was one of precision and careful analysis of the preliminary surveys. Once those surveys were sorted and analyzed to identify passionate teachers, the sample was narrowed to six participants. The participants are Susan Donovan who teaches first grade; Mary Griggs who teaches second grade; Julie Mayville who teaches fourth grade; Uticia Brown who teaches fourth grade; Diane Nobles who teaches fifth grade; and Yolanda Doctor who teaches interrelated special education. After notifying each participant that she had been chosen to participate in my research, I conferenced with each participant in order to explain my research study. Each participant was asked to sign a consent form giving me permission to use her stories, classroom observations, and other documentation in my research findings. As my research continued, I asked each participant to write an autobiographical account of her educational experiences and the memories she believes have impacted her passion for teaching and her teaching practices.

Teachers’ autobiographical writings were the foundation upon which further inquiry was built. According to Stephen Brookfield (1995),

The influences that shape teachers lives and that move teachers’ actions are rarely found in research studies, policy reform proposals, or institutional mission statements. They are more likely to be found in a complex web of formative memories and experiences. (p. 49)

Embedded in teachers “formative memories and experiences” the raw ingredients of teacher identity are hidden but active. As I brought those ingredients to the surface
through careful analysis of each participant's autobiographical writings, more and more questions were formulated and guided my inquiry. Since, like Brookfield (1995) says, “Our autobiographies as learners in childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood frame our approach to teaching at the start of our careers…” (p. 50), my participants’ autobiographies contained many narrative truths concerning their identity and professional knowledge development.

**Teacher Interviews**

“Asking questions and getting answers is a much harder task than it may seem at first. The spoken or written word has always some residue of ambiguity…” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p. 47). With the understanding that interviewing can be tenuous, the guidance of Clandinin ans Connelly (2000) and Denzin and Lincoln (1998) supported my efforts to garner practical revelations embedded in my participants’ stories. Since I had already established a close relationship with my participants, there was a certain level of vulnerability inherent for my participants and myself. Trust that had been established between my participants and me opened the door for a close inspection of identity development experiences. Yet, that trust also posed a problem in that my participants could have been seeking to give right answers instead of authentic ones. Their eagerness to help me could have possibly impeded or convoluted their responses and conversations with me. With an awareness of the precariousness of interview situations it was imperative that I constantly and consistently allow my participants to read and respond to interview transcriptions and data analysis.
With the literature provided by specialists concerning interviewing processes leading the way, and after reading each autobiography, I interviewed each participant with questions pertaining to the autobiographical information. These questions were geared toward finding each participant’s pedagogical beliefs and any commonalities between each participant and her teaching experiences and encounters. In addition to unstructured interviewing, like William Ayers (1989), I used an interpretive activity for one of my interviews. This activity was a group activity in which the participants shared their stories and released more information concerning their pedagogical and theoretical beliefs. This activity involved an artistic construction of personal reflection wreaths by each participant. The construction of a wreath decorated with symbols of personal identity gave participants a means to artistically represent themselves and a tangible item from which to talk freely about themselves.

As a framework of pedagogical beliefs was established, I observed and met with each participant once a week in order to discuss that framework. The field texts from those observations and interviews were documented in order to find meaning within the lived experiences of my participants. Those observations and interviews provided information concerning the affects of remembered teachers on each participant’s pedagogical beliefs and practices. Much of my research discoveries were embedded within participant interviews and informal conversations we had concerning the topics presented in our discussions. A careful analysis guided by experts in the field of qualitative research exposed useful data.
**Teacher Observations: Part of the Research**

According to Clandinin and Connelly (1988), “Field records collected through participant observation in a shared practical setting is one of the primary tools of narrative inquiry” (p.5). It was imperative that I include observations of my participants in order to gain viable research data. Without these observations, part of the picture would have been left without form. The stories that teachers told about their experiences as elementary students and how those memories affected their pedagogical beliefs and actions were validated by observations of their teaching practices and interactions with their students. Without observation, there would have been no corroboration that each teacher’s perception of her pedagogy is reflected in her classroom.

**Reflective Journals**

“A powerful way for individuals to give accounts of their experiences is through journal writing” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p. 166). Because teacher experiences happen on a continuum, and as Clandinin and Connelly (2000) explain, inward inquiry responses are best revealed through journal writing, my participants were given journals for jotting down their innermost thoughts about day-to-day interactions with students. Likewise, my own personal thoughts concerning my experiences during this investigation were documented in my journal. Participants were given writing prompts, open-ended questions, or situations to ponder for sparking those elusive memories or current experiences that affect teacher identity and/or professional knowledge development. Also, journal entries guided the construction of further questions as the inquiry continued.
Field Texts

I agree with Clandinin and Connelly (1988) as they point to the importance of “field notes of shared experience.” Unlike the clinical observations performed by administrators, my observations were from the perspective of participant observer. As I interacted with the teacher and her students, those experiences added to the documentation provided by the teacher. Also, there were occasions in which I observed the teacher in relaxed, interpersonal exchanges with students in unstructured situations, i.e., recess and lunchtime. These experiences provided pertinent information as the teacher participants of my study demonstrated their perceived pedagogical beliefs. Inasmuch as teacher stories are full of meaning making experiences, observation is the key to watching those stories unfold and finding the threads of those stories as lived experience in the classroom.

It is the intricate exchanges and encounters between teachers and students that revealed the most convincing research data for my study. As I entered the world of teacher and student, I consistently and constantly took notes. From these notes, a close analysis revealed those often hidden clues to teacher passion and its effects on students. As I considered and reflected upon the bodies of literature concerning teacher passion and teacher identity development and the world of teaching, I continuously jotted down these ideas and reflections. When I began my in depth research into the lives of the participants, I continued to add to these notes based on informal discussions, chats, and observations of the participants and their students. The field texts from this study support the other documentations and research data collected in other research strategies of this study.
Managing Participants’ Stories and Field Texts

Even before I started my investigation into the lived experiences and storied lives of the participants of this study, I realized the importance of an organized system of gathering, storing, and retrieving important documents pertinent to this inquiry. A. Michael Huberman and Matthew B. Miles (1998) provide a very useful “checklist of what information needs to be stored, retrieved, and usually, retained for a number of years afterward for a qualitative study” (Denzin & Lincoln, pp. 184-185). This checklist was used extensively for ensuring thorough and organized management of my research texts. All documents pertaining to this study are organized in three-inch binders. Six binders contain research articles, dissertation approval forms (i.e. IRB documents), and field notes. Each binder is labeled and contains labeled dividers indicating what is enclosed in each section. These binders are a very organized and useful system of storing research texts for easy retrieval.

Each of the participants in the study were given personal journals for responding in writing to interview questions, prompts, and/or personal experiences. These journals were retained by the participants in locked file cabinets in each participant’s classroom. Periodically, each participant shared her journal with me, which gave me information needed to formulate deeper questions for investigating teacher identity development, professional knowledge acquisition, and love of teaching. Those journals are now housed in a locked file cabinet in my classroom at Hesse Elementary School.

My own research journal is kept in either a locked file cabinet in my classroom or in a locked desk drawer in my home. This journal contains my own
personal reflections about my teacher identity, knowledge acquisition, and love of teaching. Within these parameters, personal experiences and encounters as a mother, grandmother, wife, and daughter permeate my role as teacher.

As I began personal interviews, observations, and interactive activities with my participants, cassette tapes were labeled, transcribed, and stored in a locked file cabinet in my classroom. These cassettes have been filed and organized in an appropriate cassette tape file box. Likewise, transcriptions of these cassettes have been filed into a three-inch binder, divided and labeled, and stored in the same file cabinet with the tapes. Field texts gathered during random encounters with participants, or others, have been typed neatly and maintained in a three-inch binder labeled “field texts.” This binder has been locked away for safe keeping.

Huberman and Miles (1998) explain the importance of data management due to the nature of qualitative research methods. “Essentially, a raw experience is converted into words, typically compiled into extended text” (Denzin & Lincoln, p.182). They go on to describe a situation in which one researcher had over a thousand pages of transcribed research data and was puzzled as to how he should begin to analyze it. Huberman and Miles give a detailed process for gathering, storing, and analyzing qualitative research data so that the analysis is not only viable, but also manageable. Their guidance and support to this study helped me perform and present a quality research document that is useful and user friendly for all who choose to use it.
Summary

Wolcott’s (1998) assertion “So the greater problem for first-time qualitative researchers is not how to get data but how to figure out what to do with the data they get” (p. 9), motivated me to be very cautious with and cognizant of my participants’ input during this narrative inquiry. It also led me to lean very heavily on the work of several experts in the field of qualitative research, specifically narrative inquiry. In my attempts to uncover and divulge those practical experiences pertinent to identity and professional knowledge development, I had to allow the “research to guide me instead of me guiding the research” (Ming Fang He, personal communication, October, 2005). Methodologically, the components of narrative inquiry allowed the research to guide my investigation while providing a strong framework upon which was developed a useful narrative inquiry into the lives of six elementary teachers.
CHAPTER IV

TEACHERS’ STORIES: FROM ACORNS TO OAK TREES

Contained within this chapter is a short synopsis of the lives of my research participants. Their stories are presented in concise prose that reflects their memories and experiences pertaining to their personal and professional identity development and their love of teaching. The information found in this section was gleaned from teacher interviews, participant journals, and an interpretive activity. These contents are provided to give a general overview of each participant, her early school memories, her professional development, and her teacher passion. This chapter is written in first person to help the reader place himself or herself inside the lives of each participant. First person narrative was also used to help make the stories more personable and real for the reader.

This chapter introduces the lives and personalities of the participants who graciously shared their memories, beliefs, experiences, fears, and hopes for teaching. Hidden within the detailed descriptions of each human portrayed in this chapter are the very constructions of teacher identity and professional knowledge attainment. Their stories are as varied and diverse as their teaching styles and personal lives. Yet, one common thread winds through the lives of each participant…a deep commitment to education and love for teaching.

Presented in this chapter is an organized overview of identity construction from each participant’s earliest school experiences in which little acorns of teacher identity were planted to their passion for teaching as it has become a full grown oak tree resilient to the current trends and issues that plague the teaching profession today.
As I tell each participant's story, I precede that story by telling my own story of the relationship I hold with that participant. Intermingled with the participants’ verbatim recollections, thoughts, and opinions, my own thoughts are interjected as I share my experiences and encounters with each participant.

**Susan Donovan: A Life Devoted to Children**

*My First Mentor*

In August of 1989, I began frantically preparing my very first classroom. It was located in a portable classroom next door to Susan Donovan’s perfectly decorated classroom. Our classrooms were connected in a two classroom portable trailer with a bathroom separating the classrooms. One peek into Susan’s room revealed a classroom straight out of the pages of *Classroom Beautiful*. I had exactly one week to prepare my classroom for thirty-three first graders. Finally, all those teacher created materials for fulfillment of undergraduate course work that kept me up late at night for the past two years would come in handy. Even so, I called in the ranks to help make my classroom look as beautiful as Susan’s. My sister, my sister-in-law, and my niece were solicited to cut, color, and paste, measure, staple, and decorate. In what seems like mindless busyness today, at the time seemed noble and honorable to have a perfectly decorated classroom. What I did not realize at the time was that Susan has a knack for creating those inviting, warm bulletin boards that entice learning and support children’s work.

The revelation that behind her prize-winning classroom décor was a passionate teacher whose expertise with first graders far exceeded her ability to decorate did not come until many years later. As I taught with Susan, she became my
very first professional mentor. I watched her much like a baby hawk watches its mother to learn to fly. I listened intently. I emulated her presentation of reading instruction. I attended her workshops on language arts and reading instruction. It became clear to me that Miss Donovan held a very strong belief system concerning student achievement. Her moral code and expectations were clearly established and only each child’s very best efforts were accepted. Susan Donovan laughed with her children, held them to high standards, and celebrated their achievements. Her ability to embrace each child, to understand his or her home experiences, and to prepare him or her for future learning were qualities that I wanted to emulate. Since I already had a growing passion for children, Susan’s example and professional demeanor added nutrients to that passion.

Over the past sixteen years, I have had the honor of continuing to watch Susan’s devotion to children. Her quick smile and dry wit evoke smiles and giggles from students whose lives she has touched throughout Hesse Elementary. Her classroom is still picture perfect, but even more important, her love for children and teaching have stayed strong and resistant to the obstacles that come with title “teacher.”

**Susan Donovan’s Personal Life History**

Susan Donovan is a middle-aged, White female who was born in Savannah, Georgia, grew up here, and attended school here. At the early age of seven, Susan’s father divorced her mother and moved away. Susan never saw her father again. Susan, her mother, and her two sisters moved in with Susan’s maternal grandparents and life moved on. Susan grew to revere her grandfather’s work ethic as she watched
him continue to work beyond retirement age in order to provide for Susan’s family. Likewise, Susan’s attention turned to her grandmother for love and approval, which was readily given. In the face of an absent father, other role models filled Susan’s life with love and support as she grew and developed a strong desire to emulate her grandmother’s unconditional love and support of children. Not only did Susan’s grandmother inject a strong dose of unconditional love into Susan’s developing identity, she also “taught” Susan a multitude of skills. From cooking and sewing, to caring for family, “Granny” taught Susan that doing things to the best of one’s ability is the goal to reach. Granny also taught Susan that being dependable is an admirable trait. When Susan was afraid that others might leave her, like her father did, Granny was the rock of stability that taught Susan to trust again. She was always there for Susan, no matter what.

Following a successful school experience and graduation from Savannah High School, Susan earned her Bachelor’s Degree in Early Elementary Education from Georgia Southern University. Susan had the great opportunity of completing her student teaching experience at Georgia Southern’s Marvin Pittman Laboratory School. As her story is told, Susan attributes her teacher identity development to her experiences in the Marvin Pittman Lab School. After teaching for over 24 years, Susan has no trouble remembering her journey to reach a point of confidence in what she does and who she is in the classroom. Her story is one that holds rich memories of school, the development of her own identity as a teacher, and a deep-seeded passion for the teaching profession.
Susan is a single woman who has devoted her life to children. She not only teaches first grade at Hesse Elementary School, but also teaches Sunday School at Immanuel Baptist Church. Never married and with no children of her own, Susan’s students have always been and continue to be the focal point of her life. Her passion for teaching and desire to prepare students for their long academic careers guide Susan’s actions in and out of her classroom. Teaching does not stop at her classroom door. A quick question about manners, kindness, responsibility, and/or newly acquired knowledge is a common exchange between Miss Donovan and her previous students. She is quick to give a high-five or impish chuckle when she gets appropriate responses to her questions. Her love for Hesse’s children is obvious and contagious.

Susan Donovan’s Earliest School Experiences

With apprehension that no one would be home when she returned from school, Susan’s earliest school memories are wrought with feelings of fear of abandonment. Those feelings were soon put to rest as Susan’s interactions with teachers and classmates provided a safe haven during her school hours and Granny met her at the door each day when she got home. Those consistent experiences helped Susan learn how important it is to be consistent with students and others. The security provided by smiling teachers and Granny’s warm welcome gave Susan the courage to face her fears and develop a love for learning.

Susan recalls classmates who would invite her to their homes so their fathers could help Susan with projects because they knew that Susan’s father was not there for her. “Divorce was not common among my classmates,” writes Susan. The care
and concern of her classmates gave Susan surrogate fathers who showed a genuine interest in her. Those experiences were trust-building exchanges that Susan needed to develop in order to become the confident teacher she is today. Those experiences also helped Susan develop a strong commitment for helping children of divorce develop confidence and trust for other adults in their lives. School was a place that not only welcomed Susan warmly but also helped her learn that the world is not a frightening place.

Mixed among the memories of classmates who cared are those teachers who so strongly impacted Susan’s life that she developed a strong desire to emulate their care and compassion. Mrs. Pruitt, Susan’s second grade teacher, lined her students up and walked them to her home. Susan recalls, “Mrs. Pruitt took us to her house for science lessons.” Susan saw Mrs. Pruitt’s willingness to provide a place for science as a genuine love for her students. The experiences Susan had with Mrs. Pruitt left a lasting impression on Susan. That impression helped mold Susan into a caring, compassionate teacher who desires to emulate Mrs. Pruitt’s example.

_Susan Donovan’s Professional Identity Development_

Susan recalls the moment she decided that teaching was the career for her. “My second grade teacher cared enough about our science knowledge that she designed her home as a vast science resource for our learning experiences. That sent a loud message to me that learning was important to her. I learned to really love school as Mrs. Pruitt demonstrated her joy each and every day.” Since Susan already had a vast repertoire of positive school experiences, Mrs. Pruitt’s example developed Susan’s love for knowledge and learning.
Likewise, Susan gives credit to her sixth grade teacher, Mrs. Hakestead, for developing her desire to become a teacher. Although Susan’s second grade teacher was a strong impact on Susan’s teacher identity, Mrs. Hakestead is the teacher Susan gives credit for helping her learn to love school so much that she decided she wanted to become a teacher. Mrs. Hakestead helped Susan learn to like herself. Susan wanted to help others gain the same confidence that Mrs. Hakestead had helped her develop.

When asked about her professional identity development, Susan is quick to give Georgia Southern University credit for molding her early teaching skills and identity. Being immersed in school as a daily life through interactions with students and teachers at the Marvin Pittman Lab School on the Georgia Southern Campus gave Susan the experiences that sculpted her early teacher identity. Although Susan cannot recall much of the theory and philosophy classes in her undergraduate coursework, she concurs that those courses are part of her knowledge base that has helped her develop her own teaching philosophy.

Several years after attaining her Bachelor of Science degree in Early Elementary Education from Georgia Southern University, she earned her Master’s degree from Armstrong Atlantic State University. Her professional development has flourished as she encounters students and teachers who help develop and validate her actions in and out of her first grade classroom.

*Susan Donovan’s Passion for Teaching*

Susan Donovan exudes passion in her very walk and talk. She sprints around the school like a miniature roadrunner on a mission to outsmart that wily coyote. She
often gives a quick smile and a salutation as she scurries to her destination. Susan’s quick pace and passing smile are not in and of themselves evidence of passion. They are simply by-products of her enthusiasm for what she does.

When asked about her passion for teaching, Susan states that she is passionate about her work because she believes teaching is what was intended for her life. Her memories of the impact teachers had on her life as she dealt with the emotional devastation of her parents’ divorce and her father’s abandonment helped mold her desire to be a comfort zone for her own students. Not just those students who might be experiencing the divorce of their parents, but also those students who are dealing with any of life’s unexpected blows. From childhood illnesses, like juvenile arthritis, to the loss of a sibling, Susan encourages and supports those students who have devastation staring them in the face. Likewise, those students who simply have a bad morning before coming to school, Miss Donovan provides consistent love and kindness to face each day of life in her classroom.

Her own feelings of fear and insecurity as a child are as much a part of her teacher passion as they are a part of her personal identity. Those negative feelings have provided her with empathy for childhood fears and traumas. That empathy supports her passion for loving her students and doing all she can to help them overcome their fears and develop confidence to face anything their lives bring their way. Susan Donovan’s passion is strong and is a shining example for others with whom she teaches.
Mary Griggs: From the Cotton Fields to the Classroom

Kindred Spirits

Mary Griggs came to Hesse one year after I did. I immediately felt a connection to Mary because she, like me, was a mother of boys. Mary not only had three sons, but also two daughters. Likewise, we both shared a deep connection with each other through our faith in God. From those first years of teaching together, Mary and I shared a common desire to expand our professional knowledge. We attended workshops, conferences, and professional development seminars...sometimes together, other times separately. On one such attempt to learn more about mathematics instruction, Mary and I attended the Georgia Council for Teachers of Mathematics Conference in Rock Eagle, Georgia. In retrospect, I must admit, spending three days and two nights in bunk beds constructed for Girl Scouts and showering in shower rooms with no heat in North Georgia in late October makes even the most distant of humans somehow become better acquainted. Mary and I knew each other fairly well. So the experience of sharing our passion for learning, children (our own and other people’s), and teaching was made stronger as we hiked in the brisk fall weather among the orange and golden leaves of autumn.

It was during that long weekend that I learned a lot about Mary’s journey to become a teacher. I learned about her love of family. Her devotion to teaching based on her connection to family members who were teachers and those who were becoming teachers. I learned about her childhood spent picking cotton for a quarter per bale. I learned about her strong faith in God and her curiosity about the hidden meaning in dreams. I learned to love Mary’s secretive way of talking in riddles and
in code. It took me a long time to master her language for secrecy and diplomacy that has allowed us to share friendship secrets not meant for others.

While working with Mary for over fifteen years, I have developed a deep admiration and appreciation for her life story and her obvious passion for teaching. Mary’s quiet demeanor and elusiveness do not hide her devotion to the needs of children. Her focus goes far beyond paper/pencil instruction, standards, and traditional curriculum demands. Instruction in Mary’s classroom is anything but cookie-cutter, politically driven standardization. It is hard to connect such a quiet person with the sounds that seep under Mary Griggs’ classroom door. As Mary steps outside her persona as a quiet, mild-mannered, God-fearing woman, her voice becomes electric with excitement. Her students become electrified by her eclectic teaching methods. Silence is not the norm in Mary’s classroom. Students experiment with knowledge, contribute to their learning, and respond to Mary’s invitation to enjoy every aspect of school.

**Mary Griggs’ Personal Life History:**

Mary Griggs is a petite, Black woman who does not show her grandmotherly age. She was born, grew up, attended school, and met her husband in Wheeler County, Georgia. Mary’s childhood was spent picking cotton in the fields of Alamo, Georgia. She escaped the drudgery of the cotton patch by playing school. According to Mary, she feared becoming the farmer’s wife and continuing a life of back-breaking farm labor. In an attempt to escape her destiny, Mary immersed herself in school and lived the life of a budding school teacher. It didn’t hurt that many of her family members were teachers.
Mary is a wife, mother, grandmother, and devoted family member to fifteen brothers and sisters, and a multitude of nieces and nephews. Mary is surrounded by children who hunger for knowledge. As Mary reflects on her own passion for learning, she points out the on-going exchange of knowledge that is the center of many of her family’s gatherings. Children surround her and engage her in discussion about the fascinating details of life, which she readily shares her knowledge and feeds their hunger to know more. Mary also shares her knowledge with children in her church. As an active church member, she utilizes her skills as a passionate teacher to help the youth in her church learn more about life application of her faith.

Mary has been married for over 32 years. She has five children. Both of Mary’s daughters are registered nurses. One son has a college degree and the other two are diligent workers. In addition to her five children, Mary has five grandchildren. Since Mary is the ninth child of sixteen children, having children surrounding her is very natural for Mary.

*Mary Griggs’ Earliest School Experiences*

As the middle child of sixteen children, Mary Griggs cannot imagine not being surrounded by children. She gleaned the privileges of being younger than her older siblings all the while enjoying her place as a big sister to her younger siblings. Growing up in such a large family taught Mary to be patient, kind, and loving. Those qualities were cemented as Mary entered school and watched her own teachers become surrogate mothers to their students. According to Mary, “My teachers just seemed to be my mamas at school.” Mary’s interactions with teachers were not limited to the schoolhouse. Mary’s teachers knew her family, attended church with
her, and were visible throughout her community. Those teachers also visited her at her home and cooked for her classes when they had parties. A sense of family at school was as important to Mary as her own family at home.

Mary recalls being made to feel especially smart by her first grade teacher. Since Mary had older siblings at home, learning came easy for her. She simply watched and listened to her brothers and sisters as they did homework. When her first grade teacher asked the class what a period was, Mary was the only student who could answer correctly. Mary remembers her teacher’s praises, “She praised me as if I’d solved an algebraic equation or something.” Mary also remembers being treated with respect by her teachers. When she could not afford to contribute to a class party, one teacher told her not to worry that she would have the same treats that everyone else would enjoy. Another teacher took Mary to the cafeteria and had the cook prepare chicken noodle soup for her. Mary gleams, “I could not believe that she would get the cook to fix soup for me. Just me!” Those interactions with her teachers have impacted Mary’s life in ways that are evidenced today as she continually encourages and applauds her students’ performances.

*Mary Griggs’ Professional Identity Development*

All through Mary’s life, she was groomed to be a teacher. In her mind, the only escape from the cotton fields was to either teach or preach. To confirm her ideas, she was surrounded by teachers in her family. Mary’s own grandmother was a teacher and Mary adored her grandmother. Her own sisters encouraged her to pursue her dreams and nudged Mary in the direction of college. Mary’s desire to “make a difference” in the world much the same as teachers had made a difference in her life,
led Mary to enter Fort Valley State College where she earned her Bachelor of Science degree in Early Elementary Education.

As Mary reflects on her professional identity development, she gives credit to colleagues who have helped her develop a strong passion for what she does. Mary believes that college was necessary to attain her goal and states that she “must have learned a lot about teaching while I was there.” Inasmuch as Mary knows she learned necessary things in college, she gives credit to her experiences in the classroom and colleagues who support her efforts as the keys to developing her professional identity. A few years after earning her Bachelor of Science degree, Mary earned her Master’s degree in Early Elementary Education from Armstrong Atlantic State University. In an attempt to gain more knowledge, a master’s degree seemed the best option for attaining her goals as a teacher. Yet, Mary still believes even with a Master’s degree, the support and encouragement given to her by her colleagues have molded her teacher identity and helped her remain passionate about her role as a second grade teacher for 22 years.

Mary Griggs’ Passion for Teaching

Mary Griggs is not one of those teachers who is so colorful, noisy, busy, or outspoken about her daily tasks that you cannot miss her. Mary is quite the opposite. Mary is quiet, demure and rarely makes a fuss about much of anything. If you did not look very closely at the faculty and staff of Hesse, Mary might just otherwise blend into the sea of teachers and students. Mary is one of those teachers who stays to herself, closes her doors, and lets her true colors shine. I happen to have the privilege of teaching students from Mary’s second grade class when they get placed in my class
for third grade. Her students demonstrate eagerness and attention to detail for producing their best work. Those qualities are evidence of the passion with which Mary teaches.

In her own words, “Teaching with passion to me means to teach with your heart and soul. It’s not just to get a job done, but also to teach in a manner that exemplifies you’re driven for the task. You love teaching, and you do it well!” Mary does not simply talk those words. They are the very fiber of what she does every day in her classroom.

Mary’s passion is not as obvious in the outward daily interactions in our school’s hallways. They are subtle exchanges with her students behind the closed doors of her classroom. Her gentle way of chuckling at childish mistakes is as powerful as her sarcastic humor used to address a silly antic. Her passion is also evidenced in personal exchanges with other teachers when she bemoans how badly certain students need a comfort zone and that we are that zone. This year Mary teaches a child who has a notorious reputation for angry outbursts and temper tantrums. During Fred’s (pseudonym) first grade year, he was diagnosed with Asperger’s Syndrome. One day on the playground, Fred approached me with a knock-knock joke. In an attempt to play along and challenge his thinking, I started telling Fred more knock-knock jokes. On certain ones that he just could not get, Mary was quick to help him out. When Fred had enough of the jokes he ran off and began playing. Mary told me that she worried that I would push him over the edge and cause a meltdown. This type of mother-hen mentality is a perfect example of Mary’s passion for her students.
Uticia Brown: Precision in Professionalism

Admiration from a Distance

Uticia Brown is one of those women who glides into a room and all eyes turn her way. She is the epitome of grace and confidence without the air of conceit. Her stunning beauty captures the attention of all who are in her presence. That’s how I remember Uticia over fifteen years ago as our principal introduced her to our faculty. That’s how I still think of Uticia. Much like her beauty and confidence, her dedication to students is something to be noticed and of which to be in awe.

Uticia keeps her calm demeanor, along with her repertoire of tricks for reaching at-risk students, behind her classroom door. As quickly as her beauty and grace grab attention and hold it, so does her seriousness about education capture and hold her students’ attention. Her no nonsense approach to relating to and bonding with students is seen as she talks quietly to individuals and flashes her beautiful smile in approval for each response. Those intimate conversations reflect her respect for her students’ privacy and the passion with which she embraces each tender personality in her class.

Uticia Brown’s Personal Life History

As Uticia Brown tells her life story and writes her autobiography, school is the resounding center of her life. From her earliest memories to current experiences in the classroom, a focus on school and its impact on her life take precedence over family and friends and other interactions that compose Uticia’s life.

Uticia is a Black female who is divorced and has one son. She was born and grew up in Sylvania, Georgia. As the oldest of three children, Uticia spent more time
with her grandparents than her parents. She feels that her grandparents raised her, but her parents were vital in her upbringing. All adults in her life provided a constant chorus that a good education is the most important thing one can attain in life.

Surrounded by family members and others who insisted on a quality education, Uticia’s teachers molded her into a caring teacher who sends the same message to her students. From Ms. Jaudon, Uticia’s first grade teacher, to Mrs. Herrington, Uticia’s third grade teacher and others, a foundation for developing a strong teacher identity and passion for teaching was put in place. Not only did Uticia emulate her teachers when she played school, she also used their strategies as she taught Vacation Bible School in her church and helped her younger siblings with their homework. The desire to become a teacher was planted in Uticia’s identity at a very early age.

In a lifetime of loving learning, Uticia has traveled the road of life as a wife and mother and has remained loyal and dedicated to teaching. When she talks about her teachers and her students, Uticia’s eyes twinkle and her smile becomes even more brilliant. Uticia’s teachers showed her how to respect all students and just how powerfully a teacher can impact a child’s life. Even in the negative experiences with teachers, Uticia learned how to treat students with respect and care. Those qualities are evident as she interacts with students on a daily basis.

**Uticia Brown’s Earliest School Experiences**

Uticia Brown recalls her first days of first grade. Most of the students in her first grade class were crying. Not understanding why they were crying, Uticia joined in and cried for their sorrow. To this day, Uticia has deep empathy for others,
especially her students. She is quick to try and understand any and all emotions as she develops her relationships with them.

As her days in school became years, Uticia has many fond memories. Some of the most important memories Uticia has are those of her third grade teacher, Mrs. Herrington. According to Uticia, “Mrs. Herrington believed in me and I knew it.” Mrs. Herrington showed her belief in Uticia in many ways, but none so strong as making direct eye contact with her. “Mrs. Herrington was not like other teachers who simply answered your question without removing her face from the papers she was grading. Mrs. Herrington would always stop what she was doing, make eye contact with you, hold that eye contact, listen to your question, and give an answer. She let me know that my questions were important to her.” The interactions Uticia had with Mrs. Herrington developed Uticia’s desire to emulate those same behaviors.

Inasmuch as Uticia recalls Mrs. Herrington and other kind and compassionate teachers, she also recalls her fourth grade teacher who embarrassed her in front of her classmates and talked about her to another teacher. Uticia recalls the pain that she endured at the hands of that inconsiderate, disrespectful teacher. “I remember there was a piece of paper on the floor. I picked it up and threw it out the window. My teacher became very angry with me. She said some very mean things to me and paddled me in front of my classmates. Later, she discussed the situation with another teacher in front of the entire class. I will never forget the embarrassment I felt and how poorly she handled the situation.” Uticia’s pain is readily recalled. She uses that episode in her life to be extra cautious of the feelings of her students.
Even though Uticia can recall the negative experiences in her early school experiences, she gives excellent elementary teachers in her life credit for enticing her to the field of education and for making her who she is as a teacher. According to Uticia, “My elementary teachers motivated me to learn by offering me support and encouragement. They made evident through their actions that all children can learn given the opportunity and support.”

**Uticia Brown’s Professional Identity Development**

Uticia states, “I think playing the role of my teacher when she was out of the room influenced my choice to become a teacher.” Uticia decided in elementary school that she wanted to become a teacher. Also, helping her younger siblings with homework and teaching Vacation Bible School at church cemented her commitment to get a teaching degree. Uticia earned her Bachelor of Science degree from Savannah State University. After several years of teaching she earned her Master’s degree from Cambridge College.

When considering her professional development as a teacher, Uticia gives credit to her elementary teachers. She believes that educational theory helped her develop a stronger understanding of student learning. Uticia believes that her student teaching experience helped her become passionate and able to withstand the obstacles that teachers face each day. In her student teaching assignment, Uticia found herself in a less than desirable class. She did not agree with the way the teacher was managing the class. She complained to her college supervisor. Her wise college supervisor told Uticia that she had specifically placed her in that situation because she knew that Uticia would learn from the experience and “do things differently in her
own classroom." “I learned what I liked and what I didn’t like from that experience. It helped me find out who I wanted to be as a teacher. I believe that all children should have an opportunity to learn what is necessary to enable them to be a successful participant in the community in the best school environment possible.”

Uticia’s professional identity was developed early in her elementary classrooms. That identity grew and developed in her undergraduate education courses and became quite strong as she endured her student-teaching experience. As Uticia has interacted with other passionate professionals, she has developed a strong sense of who she is as a passionate fourth grade teacher. Uticia’s passion for teaching has grown and flourished for 28 years.

**Uticia Brown’s Passion for Teaching**

“To teach with passion enables me to recognize the differences among my students, realizing that they learn in different stages. When teaching with passion, I must first teach the child, then the subject.” Uticia Brown is truly a passionate teacher. As is often the case, certain passionate teachers are given those difficult students who have developed a reputation, or label, of at-risk. With all the characteristics that fall under the label, “at-risk,” Uticia addresses the needs of those students. For whatever reason, each year she finds herself facing a very diverse group of students. In her magical way of respecting differences in students, Uticia melds her class into a family of students who respect each other and move toward academic progress. Without passion, Uticia could certainly be overwhelmed by her plight. Other than the obvious obstacles teachers face with political issues, irate parents, low pay, and general distain for teachers, Uticia has the added challenge of spinning the
plates of diverse student needs. It is passion that keeps Uticia going. Seeing the successes of her students and rising to meet their needs fuels Uticia’s passion. That passion is evidenced in her students’ obvious respect for her and the students in their fourth grade classroom community.

**Julie Mayville: A True Southern Belle**

*The Epitome of Professionalism*

“Julie, Julie I am going to be on third grade with you and I just know I will become a leech stuck to your side for guidance!” I excitedly blurted my desire to emulate Julie’s teaching style and demeanor. I truly meant it in the most sincere of compliments. “I beg your pardon! You most certainly will not become a leech!” Julie’s response was a typical response for her belief that we are all professionals and should act that way. At the time, I was shocked that Julie did not roll with my analogy for needing her support as a newbie on third grade. As the years have passed, I have learned to respect Julie’s southern grace as a professional and friend. Her expectations for professional and lady-like behavior are as much a part of her as her crystal blue eyes that fill with tears at the mention of student success, student needs, and/or the latest Folgers’ commercial that touches her heart.

Not only does Julie have high expectations for her colleagues and their professional behaviors, she also has the same high expectations for her students. Julie’s students understand that effort is expected and that nothing less than diligence will be tolerated. As firmly as Julie sets her standards for behavior and academic performance, she also places her hand in the hand of her students as she lets them know they are not alone in their endeavors. Watching Julie nudge resistant students
and cajole them toward successful progress has helped me develop my professional identity in ways that are hard to explain.

**Julie Mayville’s Personal Life History**

Julie is a White mother of three children and has been married for 19 years. She was born, grew up, attended school, and graduated in Summerville, South Carolina. Julie has one brother and recalls spending a great deal of time at church with her parents. Both her mother and father were Senior High youth counselors in their church for over fifteen years. Julie recalls singing in the church choir from third grade until she graduated from high school. According to Julie, her parents brought her up in “a conservative, Christian home.”

Julie also recalls babysitting a lot, earning her Red Cross Lifeguard Certificate so that she could teach swimming lessons, and teaching children during Vacation Bible School at church. Her early experiences in her church and community paved the way for Julie to become the passionate educator she is today. As Julie tells her story and writes her autobiography, a vision of identity development within the cocoon of adult/child interactions reveals the person Julie has become.

Julie has been married for over nineteen years and has three children. Her son is 16 and attends our local public high school. She has one daughter who is 14 and attends a private middle school and another daughter who is eight and attends Hesse. (I have had the privilege of teaching all three of Julie’s children.) As a busy wife and mother who monitors her minutes carefully to make sure she meets the needs of her own children, Julie does the same for her students. A lifetime of devotion to children was put in place early in Julie’s life as she was immersed in church and family
activities focused on children. As Julie’s professional identity as a teacher continues to reflect the experiences of 22 years in the classroom, her passion grows stronger each year.

**Julie Mayville’s Earliest School Experiences**

Julie Mayville has very strong memories of her elementary years in school. From Ms. Lacy, Julie’s kindergarten teacher, to Mrs. Spell, her fifth grade teacher, Julie can recall a vast amount of interactions with her teachers. One of her earliest memories was making peanut butter and Ritz cracker stacks for snacks in Ms. Lacy’s kindergarten class. Ms. Lacy had red, curly hair and taught her kindergarten students how to speak Spanish words. Kindergarten was a time of happiness and learning for Julie.

When Julie broke her arm in first grade, she vividly recalls the tender care Ms. Beach gave to her. “I would have to say that one of my fondest memories of elementary school is related to Ms. Beach taking care of me when I broke my arm. Ms. Beach was always smiling. Even if she was upset with you, she talked with a smile on her face.” Inasmuch as Julie loved Ms. Lacy and Ms. Beach, she gives her third grade teacher, Ms. McIntosh credit for planting the seeds of teacher identity into her development of who she has become. “My third grade teacher, Ms. McIntosh, was the best ever! She read to us every day. She taught me how to write in cursive. She was always in control. I thought she knew everything. I have always said that Ms. McIntosh is the reason I became a teacher.”

Julie Mayville’s early school memories are powerful experiences that have helped develop her personal and professional identity. Meshed among those
memories of encounters with teachers are Julie’s memories of watching her parents interact with the youth in her church. Babysitting and teaching swimming lessons also have their place in Julie’s identity development. As Julie watched adults interact with children, and as she interacted with children, early experiences were developing Julie’s love for learning and teaching.

**Julie Mayville’s Professional Identity Development**

After an active and successful school career, Julie entered the College of Charleston. When Julie got her student teaching assignment, she was pleasantly surprised to see the name Dr. McIntosh as her student-teacher advisor. “Yes, it was the same Ms. McIntosh who had taught me in third grade!” Julie says that her student-teaching was much like that of Susan Donovan. “The College of Charleston had recently begun a partnership with Memminger Elementary School.” That partnership gave Julie access to her professors and teachers in a school that resembled a lab school environment. With Mrs. Hill’s guidance, Julie’s professional development was well on its way to becoming a firm foundation upon which to build a strong passion for teaching. “I learned so much about classroom management from Mrs. Hill. She taught me all the ‘little things’ that end up being so important to a successful teacher!”

When asked about her college classes, Julie is quick to say, “No theoretical or philosophical teachings in my college coursework influenced my decision to become a teacher or made me a passionate teacher.” Like some of the other participants, college coursework is viewed by Julie as necessary to meet her goal to become a
teacher, but her professional identity has been developed through experience with other teachers, her own, and colleagues, and experiences in her own classroom.

**Julie Mayville’s Passion for Teaching**

Julie’s passion is as obvious as the sparkle in her blue eyes. When Julie talks about students or interacts with them a distinct aura of love seeps into her words and actions. Her care and concern for her students are genuine and provide a safe, inviting place for learning to occur. According to Julie, “To teach with passion means that you are in it for the long haul. No matter what obstacles are thrown at you, you continue to give it your best shot.” And, that’s what Julie does. Julie has a student that I taught last year. That student came into my classroom performing below grade level in all academic areas. He was resistant and had already faced failure in his early school experiences. I made it my goal to change Antwan’s (pseudonym) attitude about learning. By the end of the year, Antwan was happy, cooperative and on grade level. He passed the third grade Criterion Referenced Competency Test in both reading and mathematics. Julie has kept Antwan’s positive attitude going and is pleased at how well he is doing in her class. Her constant questions, reports, and discussions about Antwan are evidence of her care and concern for her students, which can be translated into teacher passion.

**Diane Nobles: An Authentic Non-Conformist**

**Comrade in Resistance**

Diane Nobles attended Armstrong Atlantic State University with me. We graduated together and began working at Hesse Elementary that same year. Much like in our college classrooms, Diane demonstrated her admonition that students are
individuals and “one-size does not fit all” attitude in her classroom at Hesse. From early on in our conversations about parents, administrators, and legislators, Diane’s concern has been commensurate with mine…we close our doors and do what we believe is best for our students. With quiet resignation that in spite of lesson plans, standards, and threats of public humiliation, Diane and I resist the status quo and teach our children.

It is not uncommon to see Diane dressed as a damsel from the Middle Ages, a bumble-bee, or a military drill sergeant for the purpose of engaging her students and motivating them to discuss the topic at hand. She does what it takes to keep fifth graders interested and talking…even at the expense of being laughed at by dispassionate others.

**Diane Nobles’ Personal Life History**

Diane is a White female who has been married for 31 years. She has four children and two grandchildren. Diane was born in Savannah, Georgia, and is the youngest of six children. A lot like Julie, Diane recalls church activities with youth groups as an important part of her family life as she was growing up. Diane’s father was a Baptist preacher, so Diane was surrounded by children in the church. Since Diane is the youngest of six children, she had several nieces and nephews who were younger than she. Diane recalls helping them with their homework and playing school with them. Although Diane did not decide to become a teacher until she was a wife and mother of three, Diane’s teacher identity was being established early on in her life as she was surrounded by children and took the role of surrogate teacher to many.
Diane Nobles’ Earliest School Experiences

As Diane tells her story about her early school experiences, I am able to travel back in time with her. Her blue eyes twinkle as she tells of being the only child in her first grade class who was allowed to go and play in the centers during reading time because she could already read. Being the youngest of six children, Diane had the advantage of learning from her siblings and “being spoiled by them.” Her first grade teacher also rewarded Diane’s reading by giving her wooden blocks for each book she could read. She also recalls her older sister coming to her class to watch the children while her teacher did other teacher tasks.

When Diane was in the third grade, she was in a third and fourth grade combination class. Diane focused on what the fourth graders were learning and developed a strong memory of fourth grade skills and concepts. She attributes the memory of what she learned in fourth grade to the fact that she believes she had fourth grade presented to her twice. Diane also recalls her fifth grade teacher who “played the guitar while the students sang along.”

According to Diane, “Elementary school was an exciting time for me, and I loved school. I had younger nieces, and I remember playing school with them. I would mock the teachers I had and I only remember doing this in a positive and rewarding way.” Diane’s recollection of her early school experiences is full of joy and fondness. As she recalls those experiences, she states, “The way my teachers taught in my early years and the kindness they would show is what influenced me to be like them.”
Diane Nobles’ early school experiences and her interactions with five older siblings laid the groundwork for Diane to develop a strong sense of who she is as a teacher and how she has developed her teacher identity. Those experiences have given her the tools she needs to emulate her teachers’ “kindness” with her own students.

**Diane Nobles’ Professional Identity Development**

Much like me, Diane did not decide to become a teacher until her own children were school age and she was pregnant with her fourth child. Although Diane had positive school experiences and knew she wanted to work to help people, her life took a slight turn as she became a young wife and mother. As she watched her own children grow and enter school, she decided to pursue her desire to help others. “I decided to become a teacher when I was pregnant with my fourth child. I wanted to become a social worker. But after getting a degree and beginning to raise a family, I felt that teaching would be a way to combine social work and raising a family. After all, in teaching I would see children who need social help a lot more by teaching nine months out of the year instead of making social visits once a week or month. Also, as I volunteered in my children’s schools, the teachers I would help would always encourage me that I needed to become a teacher.”

Since Diane had already earned an associate’s degree in Criminal Justice, she added the coursework necessary to earn her Bachelor of Science degree in Early Elementary Education from Armstrong Atlantic State University. A few years later, Diane continued her education and earned her Master’s degree in Early Elementary Education from Georgia Southern University. In her college coursework, Diane
learned a great deal of theoretical and philosophical teachings that serve her in her pedagogical beliefs. “I apply the tenets of Gagne, Bruner, Thorndike, Rogers, Piaget, Gardner, and Skinner in my classroom as I consider the needs of students. Basically, these theorists say that the child learns best with different instructions based on their development and past learning. I also believe that essentialism and progressivism best describe my teaching philosophy.” Diane partially attributes her professional identity to the knowledge she acquired about her own belief systems as she studied these theorists and philosophical tenets. She gives credit to her elementary teachers, her parents, and her siblings for helping her develop a caring and respectful attitude toward her students, but also believes her undergraduate experience helped make her who she is as a fifth grade teacher. Diane’s teacher identity has developed deep roots for the past 16 years that provide the nutrients necessary for her passion and commitment to education to flourish.

**Diane Nobles’ Passion for Teaching**

It’s early September and Diane’s class is gathered around the picnic tables outside our school cafeteria. The boys are dressed as medieval pages. The girls are dressed as medieval ladies-in-waiting. Diane is dressed as a medieval lady with a scarf flowing from her medieval headdress. Anyone who has been in our school for the past few years knows what is taking place. Diane’s class has been studying Medieval Times. The students are participating in a culminating medieval feast as they end their study of their unit.

Likewise, during the week before standardized testing, Diane dresses in a variety of military uniforms for the sake of drilling her students for their tests. I also
believe Diane dresses in military uniforms to show that every day is not supposed to be comprised of drills and that drilling for the sake of a specific attack is for the military. Diane is passionate about students learning for the sake of acquiring knowledge, not for the sake of passing a test.

Diane has a huge collection of costumes that she wears to enrich her students’ school experiences. These costumes are just one example of how passionate Diane is about teaching. She will go to any lengths to make sure her students enjoy learning. According to Diane, “To teach with passion is to teach with determination. I am determined to see that students enjoy learning and want to learn.”

**Yolanda Doctor: Fairy Godmother Extraordinaire**

**Instant Respect**

In the smooth running business of elementary education at Hesse Elementary School, which never resembles a company but looks a lot like a huge organized family of connectiveness, Yolanda Doctor entered our family in 1997. She assimilated herself much like an antibiotic that seeps into the blood stream to aid white blood cells in their attempt to remedy physical illnesses. Yolanda brought much needed ammo to address the requirements of special needs children attending Hesse. In Yolanda’s petite physical stature came a powerhouse of expertise in transforming those students who seemed unlikely candidates for academic success into productive students who soon became respected members of our family. Prior to her employment at Hesse, special needs students were basically invisible, going about their days in quiet obedience. Yolanda opened a whole new world for those students with her strongly held belief that they were and should be a part of the school human
race with contributions equal to all others students in the Hesse family. From having Tyrone (a mildly mentally handicapped student) become her personal teacher assistant and run errands around the school for her to organizing the school’s “Black History Celebration,” which included all her students, Yolanda demonstrated her conviction that all students can and do contribute to the school community.

_Yolanda Doctor's Personal Life History_

Yolanda is a Black woman who was born, grew up, and attended school in Beaufort, South Carolina. She is the second of five children. Both of Yolanda’s parents are educators. Her father was a science teacher for many years and her mother continues to work with children. Yolanda has been married for nineteen years and has two sons. Like the other participants in this study, Yolanda’s life is a compilation of interactions with her teachers.

Being the second of five children and the oldest girl, Yolanda took on the role of helping her parents with her siblings. Growing up in a small community where “everyone knew each other” gave Yolanda a sense of responsibility. Her grandfather’s insistence on the importance of education motivated Yolanda to set high goals and attain them. Her decision to become a teacher came during her second year of college at South Carolina State University. There she earned her Bachelor of Science degree in Special Education (Interrelated). Yolanda recently added a Reading Endorsement from Armstrong Atlantic State University to her teaching certificate. Yolanda has been teaching at Hesse Elementary School for eight years and is married to Bernard Doctor who is a chemist. Their sons are 18 and 13 years of age.
Although Yolanda is a very active wife and mother, she never takes off her teacher hat when she leaves our school each day.

**Yolanda Doctor’s Earliest School Experiences**

The aroma of hot chocolate evokes memories of pre-school for Yolanda Doctor. She recalls her pre-school teacher, Mrs. Brown, who greeted each child with a huge smile and warm cup of hot chocolate on cold mornings. Those fond memories continue as Yolanda recalls Mrs. Wildie, her second grade teacher, who encouraged her students to do their best and applauded their efforts even if the work wasn’t quite what she expected. Mrs. Smith, in third grade, continued that encouragement by creating an environment in which everyone could be successful and work at his or her own pace.

As Yolanda recalls those warm memories of days in her elementary classroom she gives credit to her elementary teachers for helping her develop her teaching style. “I remember feeling safe and being cared for most of the time I was at school.” Even though Yolanda’s parents were teachers, she believes her interactions with her elementary teachers are the experiences that have helped develop her professional identity.

**Yolanda Doctor’s Professional Identity Development**

Unlike the other five participants, Yolanda did not decide at an early age that she wanted to be a teacher. The opposite is true. As she watched her father grade papers until late at night and spend hours on the telephone with parents, Yolanda decided that she never wanted to be a teacher. “To be honest, I never wanted to be a teacher. I would watch my father who was a science teacher for many years. He
would grade papers nonstop, make phone calls, and attend school meetings whether he wanted to or not.”

With a strong determination to avoid the drudgery of teaching, Yolanda entered South Carolina State University (SCSU) undecided about her major. During her second year at SCSU, Yolanda was given the opportunity to complete some observations in a special needs classroom on the college campus. “The more I worked with those children, the more I felt the desire to make teaching special needs children my career.” Although Yolanda made the decision to become a teacher in her second year of college, the foundation of her professional development was already in place. In her own words Yolanda tells of experiences that helped her develop her professional identity long before she entered college. “In the African American culture, education is and will always be an important factor in our lives. We hold it with very high regards given the fact that our ancestors were denied the opportunity to get an education. It was always mentioned that those of us who went to college should get a degree in education. That way, we could come back home to educate our own. The teachers in my community were very well respected and were held in high regard. I worked in daycares during my summers off from college. It was there that I learned a lot about what it really takes to be a caring and compassionate teacher…no matter the background of the child.” These words reflect just how important Yolanda’s culture’s philosophy about education impacted her professional identity development. No matter what Yolanda had chosen as her life work, education held an important part in her life. The decision to become a special education teacher
cemented the groundwork that elementary teachers and family members had helped Yolanda put in place.

Yolanda gives credit to her elementary teacher, family, and her experiences in that special needs classroom for helping her make the decision to become a teacher. Once Yolanda earned her degree, her expectations of a beautiful classroom supplied with all the materials her special students would need were shattered as she entered her very first classroom…a closet not even big enough for a teacher’s desk. In spite of her disappointment, Yolanda’s determination to reach and teach special children pushed her toward doing the very best job she could as a teacher. After teaching for 15 years, reflecting upon those early experiences as a novice teacher, Yolanda realizes just how much they helped develop her commitment to students and teaching. “If I can teach in a closet, I can teach anywhere.” Yolanda believes beginning teachers give up too easily when their expectations do not match the reality of their first teaching experiences.

**Yolanda Doctor’s Passion for Teaching**

“Teaching does not come easy to all who want to teach. Teachers usually develop a passion for teaching based on their initial experiences. To teach with passion to me means having a desire to watch young minds develop and grow.” Yolanda’s passion is not only heard here as she defines passion in her own words, but it is also seen as she implements her own teacher beliefs and convictions about teaching. Yolanda considers her special needs students as equals in the world of elementary school. She helps them assimilate into the business of school and gives
them the confidence they need to adjust to things that others might think are too
difficult for them.

One such student transferred to our school from Atlanta, Georgia. Zack
(pseudonym) was born with severe brain damage. His parents were told he would not
live long, and the doctors did not give them much hope for any kind of life for Zack.
After a multitude of operations, Zack is a fifth grade student in our school. Yolanda
makes sure Zack’s needs are met as she helps him through our school’s inclusion
plan. Zack has made tremendous progress especially in the area of social skills.
Zack’s parents rave about Hesse and how their son has made such tremendous strides
since he entered Hesse this school year. They are quite in awe of Yolanda Doctor and
our entire school population of students and teachers. Zack’s mother has been chosen
to be a member of our new superintendent’s task force because she boasts so loudly
of her son’s progress in our school. Yolanda Doctor gets the majority of the credit for
helping Zack grow and learn.

Zack’s progress is only one example of the impact Yolanda’s passion has on
her students. On the day of our interview, I had to wait for Yolanda. She had an
unexpected visit from one of her last year’s students. He needed help with his science
project. Yolanda, without hesitation, helped her previous student map out a plan and
gave him pointers for completing the science project. That encounter is typical for
Yolanda. Her passion for her students and teaching are evidenced in her students’
success in spite of their special needs.
Understanding the Effects of Lived Experiences on Teachers’ Identity Development, Personal and Profession Knowledge, and Love of Teaching

This chapter is a brief overview of the lives of the research participants of this study. Their stories are presented here to give voice and meaning to their lives as they contribute to this research inquiry. No matter how or when a teacher decides that he or she wants to become a teacher, the lived experiences of that person impact his or her life in the classroom. As the participants’ stories reveal strong recollections of elementary teachers, family, and undergraduate courses as influences in their decision to become a teacher and remain a teacher, viable information and knowledge is provided for understanding how some teachers develop their professional identity and a passion for teaching. In most cases, interactions with students and other teachers helped these participants strengthen their commitment to teaching. That commitment reflects their passion for teaching and learning that is impervious to some of the same obstacles that cause others to leave the teaching profession.

Acorns fall from oak trees by the millions each fall. Yet, only one in ten thousand will become an oak tree seedling. Much like those acorns, millions of students graduate from our nation’s schools. Yet, only a small percentage of people enter the teaching profession. The conditions for teacher identity development have to be conducive in elementary classrooms for the seeds to have a chance to germinate. In this chapter, six teachers remember their earliest school experiences in which their own elementary teachers provided rich environments for the development of hearty teacher identity that would withstand the conditions that often kill the nubbins (young acorns, not yet mature) of teacher characteristics. Likewise, they share their current situation in family and community, which provides a closer glance into the strength of
who they have become as individuals. By sharing their professional development, they divulge exactly how their teacher identity matured during their college coursework and through interactions with colleagues. Their experiences in undergraduate classes and in their first years of teaching provided the nutrients needed to allow their teacher identity roots to grow strong while its tiny leaves pushed through the rich soil of professional knowledge acquisition. Similarly, their passion for teaching was cultivated and nurtured with each encounter.
CHAPTER V

TEACHERS’ IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT:
RESISTING DESTRUCTIVE ELEMENTS AND BEATING THE ODDS

There are many elements that can destroy an oak tree. Even when an acorn has germinated and grown into a massive, gorgeous oak tree, there are a lot of enemies that threaten to obliterate the life of an oak tree. From insects, fungi, and bad weather to human caused destruction, oak trees are susceptible to certain entities that can damage them. Diseases and fire are two of the most common elements that kill oak trees. Recently in Marin County, California, oak trees started dying at a rate that reached epidemic proportions. According to a recent web article, Interesting Facts about Oak Trees (2006), “Such a massive die back of live oaks has never been reported in California, and a severe environmental crisis is expected in the months and years to come.” Much like stately oak trees, teacher passion is susceptible to certain elements that threaten to destroy it. Those elements are responsible for the teaching profession’s own “severe environmental crisis” as the rates of teacher attrition and teacher shortages increase to epidemic proportions. According to a report prepared by the National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future (2003), “One-third of new teachers leave the profession within three years and almost one-half leave within five years.” In an attempt to help remedy growing rates of teacher attrition and teacher shortages, AARP (American Association of Retired People) and NRTA (National Retired Teachers Association) (September 2003) conducted a qualitative research study in order to determine why the teaching profession is plagued by such high numbers of teachers who leave the field. Fifty former teachers (with less than five years teaching experience) provided a list of
reasons for leaving the teaching profession. Encompassed in their justifications for quitting teaching careers were political pressures, including standards and testing, lack of parental support, low pay, general lack of respect, negative colleagues, and unmotivated students. These entities are the fungi that infect teacher passion and ultimately kill teacher identity.

Found within this chapter are data texts collected from the six research participants. Each section includes specific questions and each participant’s response to those questions. Following each type of data collection, i.e. teacher interviews, an italicized analysis of those texts is provided. Those analyses are provided to help understand how each participant’s teacher identity has grown as strong as a gigantic oak tree with passion that surges through it as strongly as nutrients flow through the xylem and phloem of an oak tree.

**Teacher Interviews**

In this section, responses from each participant’s interview questions are documented. In order to help my participants feel more relaxed and less distracted by visuals in a strange location, I interviewed each participant in her own classroom. Likewise, in order to make the interview session as comfortable as possible, each participant was asked to schedule an interview that best suited her schedule. Susan and Uticia scheduled their interviews early in the morning before school started. Mary, Julie, Diane, and Yolanda preferred afternoon sessions after their students had been dismissed. Each interview was recorded on an audio-cassette tape. I chose to organize the responses according to each topic of discussion instead of transcribing
each interview in its entirety. An analysis of the data texts is provided following each topic of discussion.

**Political Constraints**

**Interview Question:** What political influences affect your performance as a teacher?

**Interview Question:** With the implementation of Georgia Performance Standards as a directive of The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, how have the standards impacted your teaching?

**Susan Donovan:** I consider myself fairly knowledgeable about the political aspects of our educational system. I don’t necessarily agree with the solutions that politicians and legislators propose for remedying low student performance. No Child Left Behind sounds like a great plan but who does it help in the long run? I mean it seems to me that when a child does not pass the CRCT he or she will certainly be left behind. Georgia’s new standards have not really changed at all from Georgia’s QCC objectives.

**Mary Griggs:** Evelyn, it is difficult for me to say that any political influences affect my teaching performance. Maybe I should consider the political aspects of our educational system, but I don’t. I simply teach because it’s what I love. The new standards have not changed at all. I still teach the same way that I have always been teaching. I still present the same second grade skills and concepts that I have been teaching for years.

**Uticia Brown:** Political influences? Do you mean how the politicians complain about how poorly our students perform? I’d like for them to come and do my job for a few weeks. I think they would change their minds. Evelyn, I believe
standards are very important. I think teachers need a guideline for what it is that they should be teaching and what the students in each grade should be learning. I don’t think our new standards have changed much, but I do think they are necessary.

**Julie Mayville:** When you ask about political influences, I can think of several fairly recent political mandates that have impacted my job as a teacher. Not necessarily my teaching performance, but our teaching situations have changed. For instance, Governor Roy Barnes gave us increased pay and reduced class size. I think those are two positive political influences that have impacted my job as a teacher. GPS has not really changed our curriculum at all. The new standards are simply worded a little different and are grouped under new headings and fancy categories, but they are basically the same as the QCCs.

**Diane Nobles:** *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001?* Right! I have a thirteen-year-old in fifth grade and he’s still not motivated. GPS standards are good guidelines that help teachers stay on track and focus on what is necessary in each grade. These new standards are the same old thing just stated differently.

**Yolanda Doctor:** Political influences that affect my teaching performance are the amount of paperwork I am required by law to submit on each child. I spend hours and hours completing IEP’s. I do most of the work at home so that I can spend my time at school with my students. It’s not their fault that I have to do so much paperwork. For me, the state standards have not changed. I
have to match my students IEP’s to the standards and I don’t see much change at all.

**Analysis of Teacher Responses Concerning Political Constraints**

Many of the present reforms and mandates in education have proved to be incommensurate with the belief system of many teachers. Some school districts have become so narrowly focused on test scores and test preparation that teachers have been forced to jettison successful curriculum units of long standing because they don’t explicitly connect to the exam.

(Intrator, 2002, xli)

All participants unanimously agreed that Georgia Performance Standards, which is a directive from the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (2002), is simply a rewording of previous standards. Likewise, the participants agreed that the new standards have not changed the way they teach. Most participants agreed that standards are necessary for giving teachers a guideline for information that should be taught in specific grade levels. According to Sam Intrator (2002), it is the dehumanizing of students wrought by standardization that makes teachers feel “undermined” (p. xli).

What is surprising to me is that in the writings of Pinar (2004) and Palmer (1998), teachers lament standardization and feel “undermined” and “underappreciated” by the political constraints placed upon them by standardization. Yet, the participants in this study do not bemoan standardization. They see it as a necessary evil and teach with freedom in spite of the media frenzy and hullabaloos about standardization. The participants are confident in what and how they are teaching and use the standards as a mere guideline for presenting appropriate skills and concepts to their students.
The participants in this study teach in silent opposition. They take what they need from political mandates and teach in ways that they know are effective. They do not need a cookbook to tell them exactly what to use and how to use it to help students make progress toward becoming contributors to society. What is said by these participants is not readily documented in other studies. Most studies give voice to those teachers who complain why they cannot do their life work because of government interference. The teachers in this study do what Bill Ayers (2004) beckons teachers to do…they take the labels, the mandates, and standards and rip them apart as they go about their business of loving and caring for students.

What makes these teachers different from other teachers who decry the injustice and stifling effects of political constraints? Confidence and passion. The participants of this study have been teaching for at least fifteen years. They know how the pendulum swings and how programs come and go. Likewise, they know students. They do not gripe about how students have changed. They take their students as they get them. They go about their task of building relationships with every individual and do what it takes to help each child make academic, social, and emotional progress. In spite of political issues, the participants of this study use their passion to do what they know is best for students.

Parents

Interview Question: How have interactions with parents influenced your teaching?

Interview Question: How do you approach the issue of irate or overly concerned parents?
Susan Donovan: Parents can really make you feel badly about yourself. I believe parents could be the major reason some teachers quit teaching. Even though I have been teaching for over 24 years, parents can still bring me to tears. They just make me feel so badly. It really hurts my feelings when I know that my intentions are right and good for my students and parents attack me for the silliest things. Usually when I am approached with an irate parent, I try very hard to listen carefully. Then I can address the parents’ concerns by telling them that I understand their concern. Understanding helps parents relax. But, it still hurts my feelings!

Mary Griggs: I have been fortunate in that I don’t really have too many problems with parents. If I am approached by irate parents, I try to make them feel at ease.

Uticia Brown: I had a situation this year in which one of my students went home and told his mother a twisted story about an incident at school. The mother went straight to the principal about it without contacting me first. What could have been handled so much more positively turned into a really big deal. The mother felt that I did not handle the situation appropriately based on what her son said. After all was said and done, the mother realized that her son had told a different view of the whole incident. I was upset that she did not come to me before lodging a complaint against me to my principal. Other than this incident, I don’t usually have too many irate parents. Most of the students’ parents are fairly supportive and appreciative. You have to remember, a lot of students have experienced failure. The parents are used to getting negative
reports about their child. I try to focus on the positive. That usually helps parents. They need to hear something good about their child.

**Julie Mayville:** Since this is my first year back in the classroom after being a SEARCH facilitator for the past five years, I am back to square one with parents. I feel like I did when I was a first year teacher…totally scared to death that I am going to disappoint my students’ parents. It’s awful. You would think that I would be more confident. Talking to parents with respect always helps. When I have had irate parents in the past, I have made it a point to try and diffuse their anger. I am always prepared with documentation and a professional attitude to address any concerns. Once, several years ago, a parent thought her son’s grades were incorrect. She went to the superintendent with her complaint. After the superintendent requested my grades and poured over them, he determined that I was right. What a relief!

**Diane Nobles:** I cry. When parents accuse me of some injustice to their child, I cry. When I am approached by an irate parent, I remain calm and stoic. I do not show my emotions. I listen and respond with respect. When the parent leaves, I cry.

**Yolanda Doctor:** Honestly, I cannot recall having an irate parent. Most of my students’ parents are very supportive and appreciative. They see their special children making progress. That makes them happy. I guess the best thing to do if you have an upset parent is to listen and answer them with kindness and reassurance.
Analysis of Teacher Responses Concerning Parents

When high-involvement teachers describe interactions with parents, they tend to welcome and include parents as partners in the education of the child. They describe parent involvement as a ‘relationship among the three of us,’ and say, ‘We made a good team.’ These teachers say they want to draw the parent in in any way they can.

(Patricia L. Hulsebosch in Schubert and Ayers, 1992, p. 117)

Although three participants of this study stated that parents can make teachers feel badly and often falsely accused, the participants agreed that parents should be heard and respected. Patricia L. Hulsebosch (in Schubert and Ayers, 1992), discusses the difference between high-involvement teachers versus low-involvement teachers and how the difference between these types of teachers affects parent-teacher interactions and relationships. Based on the responses from my participants, I agree that teachers who see parent participation in the relationship building process as a necessary part of the equation usually approach parents with respect and dignity. Their desire to understand the child’s life from all perspectives supersedes any criticism they have concerning parents.

From the perspective of my participants, I find that these teachers have a genuine desire to be trusted and respected as teachers. When parents become irate or disgruntled due to their child’s skewed perspective on certain incidents at school, these teachers become hurt and disappointed more than angry. These teachers question why parents do not trust them more and respect their attempts to provide a safe and secure arena in which learning is taking place. Inasmuch as they welcome parents to be actively involved in their child’s life at school, negative encounters with parents undermine teacher passion and are not readily forgotten. Even though my
participants handle negative interactions with parents in the most professional of manners, they are often left saddened by the exchange.

Teacher Accountability

Interview Question: What does teacher accountability mean to you?

Interview Question: How do you feel about teacher accountability mandates according to the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 initiative?

Susan Donovan: I am not concerned about teacher accountability. I put enough pressure on myself that no list of teacher behaviors can top my own standards for myself.

Mary Griggs: I think teachers need to be held accountable for their students’ progress. I am not sure I agree with the process for determining teacher accountability but I do think some type of teacher assessment should be in place. I feel badly for those teachers who are being told that they are not ‘highly qualified.’

Uticia Brown: Teacher accountability does not bother me. I know I am doing a good job of helping my students make progress so I do not worry about teacher accountability assessments. Teacher accountability under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 might scare some people into not wanting to be teachers. It might also make some teachers leave the profession, especially in middle and high school.

Julie Mayville: When dealing with human beings, there is no way to escape the levels of subjectivity in an accountability assessment tool. Assessors have too much leeway in determining who is being accountable and who is not. Test
scores are but part of the picture. Once again, we’re dealing with human beings not products. The *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* teacher accountability section ignores the exceptions and pigeon holes teachers.

**Diane Nobles:** I believe teachers do the best they can with what they’re given. In spite of those who stand in judgment and criticize teachers, teachers try their best to help students learn. Teacher accountability is one more way to make teachers look bad. Instead of finding fault, politicians should be finding what’s right in our schools.

**Yolanda Doctor:** I would prefer that teacher accountability was based solely on my performance. I am one of those teachers who falls under the ‘not highly qualified’ label. Because I am certified in special education, I must pass the Praxis Test and gain certification in Early Elementary Education to be considered ‘highly qualified.’ It’s a shame that the guidelines do not take into consideration my years of excellent performance and success with my students.

**Analysis of Teacher Responses Concerning Teacher Accountability**

According to Pinar 2004, “Accountability is not about learning, but about controlling what we teach to our children. It is about controlling the curriculum” (p.26). The participants of this study reveal something quite different. In their responses to the topic of teacher accountability, much like their ideas about standards, they understand the mandates, but go into their classrooms and do what they KNOW is best for children. Ayers (1989) explains and concurs with the teachers in this study when he writes,
It is true that teachers finally decide what goes on in classrooms. When the door is closed and the noise from outside and inside has settled, a teacher chooses. She can decide to satisfy distant demands or not, accommodate established expectations or not, embrace her narrowest self-interest or not. She can decide whether to merely survive another day of inexhaustible demands and limited energy, or she can decide, for example, to interpret and invent, and resist and rebel when necessary. (p. 5)

Participants in this story choose to “resist and rebel” behind the closed doors of their classroom. They have enough confidence in their abilities as teachers to stand firm against legalistic terminology concerning teacher accountability for the sake of their students. They choose to use their energy worrying about student progress instead of worrying about their accountability to some “distant demands.”

**Teacher Salaries**

*Interview Question:* Teacher salaries are at the heart of the public debate. What are your thoughts about teacher salaries?

*Interview Question:* Some people believe that increasing teacher pay would entice higher quality people into the teaching field. What are your thoughts about that premise?

**Susan Donovan:** It’s true. Teachers are underpaid, especially when you reach the step that does not allow for an increase in pay. But, my small salary is not what keeps me teaching. I knew before I became a teacher that I would not make a whole lot of money. Money is not what entices a person into the teaching profession. Perhaps higher salaries would make college students
consider teaching, but it would not necessarily bring more qualified people into the field.

**Mary Griggs:** Of course I would not mind making more money. Who wouldn’t?

But, my paycheck is not why I wanted to be a teacher. I really wish teachers could make more money. My own daughters chose nursing as their careers because they knew they would make more money as nurses than as teachers. Perhaps increasing teacher pay would make people who want to teach consider teaching instead of some other higher paying career.

**Uticia Brown:** Because teachers are paid so much lower than our counterparts, teaching is not perceived as a reputable profession. Perhaps if we were paid more money, teaching would become respected as a noble profession. I believe some people who really want to be teachers do not consider the teaching field as a profession because they do not believe they can support themselves or their family with low teacher pay.

**Julie Mayville:** Who in the world decides to be a teacher based on how much money will be made or not? Of course, income is a consideration when deciding on a career, but college students who enroll in education courses don’t usually do so based on the income they will make. They choose to teach because they believe they will enjoy teaching. It amuses me when politicians, reporters, or community leaders use teacher pay to discuss quality of instruction. Would they do a better job if they were paid more? I think not. Increasing teacher paid would not increase teacher or student performance. To imply that increased teacher pay would entice higher qualified persons into the field of
teaching sends one more negative message to the public… ‘teachers who
currently teach and earn low salaries are not the best people we can get.’

**Diane Nobles:** I don’t want to make more money because I would fall in a higher tax
bracket and the government would get more of my paycheck. Increasing
teacher pay for the sake of drawing higher quality people to the field would
only increase the chances of a higher rate of burnout. Money does not make a
person a good teacher.

**Yolanda Doctor:** It’s frustrating to read about low teacher salaries. Not that it’s not
the truth. It’s just that putting the focus on teacher pay as a way of improving
education is not fair. Pouring more money into teachers’ salaries will not
make me work any harder than I already do. I don’t know. I did not choose
to become a teacher for the money. Remember, I did not want to be a teacher.
It was working with special children that helped me decide to become a
teacher. The idea that higher teacher salaries would entice higher quality
people into the field might be true, but I would hope that those who enter the
field of teaching do so for other reasons than just earning a lot of money.

**Analysis of Teacher Responses Concerning Teacher Salaries**

*With a mind like yours, you could have landed almost any kind of job
you wanted. The field was wide open. Your options seemed endless.
But at the end of the day, you counted the cost, assessed your talents,
and set your feet on the path of your heart. Even now, even on the
hardest of days, you’re still glad you traveled down this road. You’ve
chosen a career that embraces the lives of children.*

(from *Hugs for Teachers*, 1999, p. 38)

Based on input from six teacher participants, teacher salary is not a deterrent
to the teaching profession. It may become a factor when novice teachers become
overwhelmed by other issues. When a new teacher considers leaving the field of
education, most of the time her salary is not high enough to cushion the negative
aspects she is experiencing on a daily basis. Perhaps increased teacher pay would
help retain teachers, but it is certainly not a reason that most teachers choose to
become teachers. Likewise, the premise that higher salaries would entice highly
qualified individuals into the field of education sends a message to those of us who
are teachers that we are not highly qualified. The quote above says so eloquently
what teachers do before becoming teachers. The world is wide open and full of
opportunities. Certainly many of us who chose teaching for our life work could have
chosen higher paying careers and most probably would have been very successful in
those endeavors. Yet, we realized the importance of teaching, had been groomed to
become teachers, and were well aware that our salaries would not be comparable to
other professions. Still, we made the choice to do what we believe to be the most
noble of all professions…to teach those who will become the doctors, lawyers,
politicians, college professors, judges, and presidents of tomorrow!

**Passion for Teaching**

*Interview Question:* What is passion?

*Interview Question:* How did you become a passionate teacher?

*Interview Question:* How do you sustain your passion?

*Interview Question:* Can passion be taught?

*Susan Donovan:* I think passion is knowing in your heart that teaching is your
calling. I believe I am a teacher because I listened to that calling and take it
very seriously. It is that belief that keeps me passionate about teaching. I
can’t put my finger on the moment I became passionate about teaching. I think I have always been passionate about doing a good job in whatever I do, so that just carries over into my teaching. Just being with my students every day helps my passion stay strong. Their smiles and efforts are all I need to keep me passionate about teaching them. No, passion cannot be taught. Passion comes with that inner calling to become a teacher.

Mary Griggs: Passion is being excited about coming to school even on those mornings when you don’t feel great. I think it’s a desire to be here with your students. When I wonder about my own passion, I believe those teachers who were compassionate with me helped me become passionate. I wanted to be just like them. So my excitement is a lot like theirs. Sometimes when I get down about a student, or start thinking that I don’t have the answers to help a student, my passion gets a little weak. But, all I have to do is take a long walk around the lake and think about how blessed I have been to help so many. Then I remember other students that I worried about and how well they improved with time. My passion gets stronger and I can’t wait to watch that student fly. I don’t think passion can be taught. You have to love teaching or you won’t be passionate about it.

Uticia Brown: Passion is a sense of fulfillment. Knowing that I make a difference in each student’s life keeps me passionate. My passion stays strong most of the time. I just feel so rewarded when my students show understanding and success. Knowing that I am responsible for those learning moments that sometimes are hard to come by, keeps me going. I think my teachers
demonstrated their love for teaching and their love for me. I think that helped me know that I wanted to be a teacher. I think my passion has grown over the twenty-eight years I have been teaching because of the interactions I have with students. I don’t believe passion can be taught. I think some teachers choose teaching for all the wrong reasons. Perhaps they never had passion and so they will never get it.

**Julie Mayville:** To me passion is an overwhelming sense of desire. In teaching, I yearn to make a difference in the life of a child. I strive to provide a positive and disciplined environment for my students so I can reach that goal on a daily basis. A classroom where children are comfortable, happy, not threatened, appreciated, loved and cared for is something I try to ensure daily. In doing so, my passion for teaching and learning is what keeps me trying. If I lost my passion, what would be the point? No job is worth doing just for the sake of coming each day. My passion comes from wanting to do what I saw my teachers and parents doing. My parents were always showing compassion to the youth in our church. Likewise, certain teachers showed compassion to me over the years. And, of course, I got to practice being passionate about children when I was a youth counselor and swim instructor. I guess I have always been passionate about children. Parents can sometimes burst my bubble, or at least try to. When that happens, my colleagues are the best way I can rekindle my passion. No teacher is an island. You can’t isolate yourself or you’ll drown or end up at Georgia Regional Mental Institute. I always depend on my colleagues to help strengthen my passion when it gets low.
Hmmm….can passion be taught? I don’t think so. You have to want to be here. You have to love children. Here at Hesse, most teachers are passionate. That makes it easier to show your passion and share it, but it’s something that develops over years of experiencing fun with your students.

**Diane Nobles**: Teaching is not about passion. It’s about commitment and dedication. I teach because I am dedicated and committed to helping children. Evelyn, when you ask about passion, I think passion is why we teach, but I don’t think teaching is all about passion. There are times when I don’t feel passionate about teaching at all…like when I compare what we do with other professionals. If I need to be out for a day, it takes two days to prepare for a substitute and two days to get things back on track the day I get back.

Another comparison with other professionals are those times when parents don’t cooperate when I give them my professional opinion about their child. Parents do not see us as professionals. My passion wanes with each negative thought I have about what I do compared with other professionals. Of course, my students’ successes and their smiles when they finally understand really make me feel good about what I am doing. My passion for teaching increases with every smile from my students. I don’t think I became passionate about teaching. I always knew I wanted to help people. Originally I wanted to be a social worker. I think passion comes and goes. Some days, I am passionate. Other days I’m not. You can’t teach passion. I would suggest that teachers who find themselves disillusioned about teaching continue learning new ways to teach and trying new ideas to keep them interested in student success.
Also, sometimes changing grade levels, teaching positions, or team teaching might help them.

**Yolanda Doctor:** Passion is an instinctive feeling derived from within. I became passionate about teaching when I worked with special needs students while I was a sophomore in college. I loved interacting with those children and eventually made the decision to become a teacher. Knowing that my interactions with my students helps them make progress in life keeps my passion growing. Also, getting chocolate bars and thank you notes from students and parents helps my passion stay strong. Passion is needed to be a good teacher and it is the key to motivating students. I don’t think passion can be taught. Passion is evident in those teachers who love what they are doing.

**Analysis of Teacher Responses Concerning Passion**

*To be a passionate teacher is the be someone in love with a field of knowledge, deeply stirred by issues and ideas that challenge our world, drawn day---or captivated by all of these. A passionate teacher is a teacher who breaks out of the isolation of a classroom, who refuses to submit to apathy or cynicism. Only when teachers bring passion about learning and life into their daily work can they dispel the fog of passive compliance or active disinterest that surrounds so many teachers. I believe that we all have it within ourselves to be passionate teachers, and that nothing else will do the trick.*

*(Fried, 1995, p. i)*

This study does not attempt to determine whether the majority of America’s teachers are passionate or not. It offers insight into the hearts and minds of six teachers who demonstrate passion in their daily interactions with their students. That insight holds hope that all teachers have the potential to become passionate about teaching. I concur with Robert Fried’s (1995) comment that “nothing else will do the trick” (p. i).
In this section, the participants attempted to define passion based on their own understanding of their love of teaching. Encapsulated in those definitions is a genuine desire to help children learn. Although the words vary, that desire is echoed over and over again. Most of the participants found it hard to determine exactly how or when they developed their passion. Five out of six participants gave credit to their teachers for demonstrating passion as a means of helping them develop their own passion. What is surprising to me is that all six participants expressed their belief that passion cannot be taught. Even with the premise that their own teachers were passionate about teaching and learning, they concluded that passion cannot be taught.

Participants’ Reflective Journals

According to Denzin and Lincoln (1998), teachers use journals “to weave together their accounts of the private and professional, capturing fragments of experience in attempts to sort themselves out” (pp. 166-167). This section provides the “sorting out” of each participant’s thoughts pertaining to issues about teaching. For several days during my research process, I emailed the participants a writing prompt. These prompts were intended to stimulate thought about topics pertaining to my inquiry. The responses to those writing prompts are provided here and give yet another arena from which the participants share their thoughts about teaching with passion.


On a damp, brisk morning what are your feelings about coming to school? In the course of the day, what happens to your passion?
Susan Donovan:

I hate rainy days! I would rather stay home than endure the cold, dampness in the air. Yet, as the day goes on, the excitement and joy the children bring with them makes me glad I came. They are my sunshine every day!

Mary Griggs:

Today is just like all the other days that I come to school. When I get up each day to prepare for school, I feel great! I feel that I’m about to enter a new day to engage students in a new learning experience. I really get excited about what we will do in class for the day and the exciting things they have on their little minds to share with me. My passion does not dwindle during the day. I get joy on days like today when I know a student has been struggling to master a skill and finally his or her understanding just pops right open. When I hear, “Oh, now I get it!” my spirits just soar. Knowing that teaching is my calling keeps me pressing onward, even on days when my students seem “out to lunch” all day.

Uticia Brown:

On this damp, brisk morning, I am wondering how my students will behave today. Will they be calm or unruly? How will I address any negative behavior situations? What will the day be like? As the day progresses, my students’ moods are reflections of my own. My passion has not dwindled. I am responsible for setting the tone in my classroom to fit my students’ moods.

Julie Mayville:

It was raining outside this morning and very cool. I didn’t want to get out of my warm bed. What motivated me to get going was knowing that I had to be at
school for my kids today. I remember the things I wanted to accomplish with them today. Sometimes we get more accomplished on quiet, rainy Mondays. Today was no exception. Generally I get more motivated and energized the minute I hit the classroom door. So much to do and so little time to do it in. Got to get those sleepy little people’s brains going! It’s also stressful to be out – other jobs, when you are out you just have lots to do upon your return. Teachers not only have that to deal with, but also have to prepare before they can be out. You can have all the substitute folders together and still you have to sit down and write a dissertation to help prepare the sub for the day. Sometimes it’s just easier to come than to prepare for a sub and then face what a sub leaves for you. So instead of staying in my warm bed, I rushed to meet my students with expectations for a productive day!

**Diane Nobles:**

On a damp, brisk day, I would love to stay in bed. But who wouldn’t. School is a job and I have to go. It’s not about passion but commitment, dedication, and responsibility. My passion wanes with each unpleasant thought. My passion increases with every smile and positive interaction with my students.

**Yolanda Doctor:**

On a damp, brisk morning, I am wondering if my students are feeling refreshed from the coolness in the air, and if they are ready to write fall poems. It is my teacher passion that keeps me worrying about a student that I no longer teach. Who is going to give the love and compassion he needs?
Journal Prompt – October 27, 2005 - Standards

What are your thoughts, feelings, and opinions about Georgia’s Performance Standards?

Susan Donovan:

Same song, same verse. We are already “doing” standards and just calling it something else. We need guidelines but we don’t need to keep reorganizing them, rewording them, calling them something different, and spending valuable time and money training on them.

Mary Griggs:

After attending a faculty meeting/training session on GPS, my thoughts about standards are these. Why do we try to fix things that aren’t broken? Why are we going around in a circle and coming back to the same thing? Why don’t we just build upon what we already have? In essence, I think the standards are the same standards we’ve always had. I think we should expand what we have and look at the qualities of each and work with them. Our students are learning. They are doing well at the next grade level and making great progress. They are successful! Therefore, standardized testing, when given at the end of the school term, is alright with me. I don’t think standardized testing does an adequate job of revealing the actual potential of knowledge of a student. Administering standardized tests at the beginning of the school term isn’t profitable to me at all.

Uticia Brown:

I feel that GPS standards are the right approach for improving education. Think about it. What would we use to prepare students for standardized testing if we
didn’t have standards? I feel that if there were no standards, teachers would probably just teach anything, but with standards we know exactly which areas to cover. After all, haven’t we always used standards to assess students’ needs?

**Julie Mayville:**

Georgia Performance Standards is yet another way to organize curriculum. Did it actually change the curriculum? My impression with the new Language Standards is “No.” I do like the way the new standards are structured and formatted.

Ultimately the purpose of standards is to help teachers prepare their students for standardized testing. Testing is a necessary evil. Testing itself is not what I have issues with. It is the use of test results and their interpretations by the outside world that I take issue with. I believe teachers need to test for diagnostic purposes, to determine ability, achievement of students, to assess prior knowledge, to determine weaknesses and strengths of individual students, to assess progress of individual students, to determine a course of action for students and teachers to proceed toward.

Having to look at last year’s fourth grade test results to determine this year’s goals for fourth grade is crazy! Looking at school performance by comparing last year’s test results with this year’s test results is wrong. Populations change in schools from year to year. This year’s students may perform better in math because math is their strength. Next year’s group may be weak in math. It’s going to make improvement difficult because someone will compare one year’s ninetieth percentile score to next year’s seventy-fifth percentile score and say, “Oooh, what happened?” When actually the students in the seventy-fifth percentile group may have made gains. They may have gone from scoring in the seventieth percentile to scoring in the
seventy-fifth percentile. Instead of looking at individuals, administrators look at one school year’s performance compared to the previous year’s performance. But even then, looking at a group from one year to the next isn’t right either because that population may have experienced a change during the summer.

I believe testing is necessary. I just don’t agree with the way the outside world looks at them. I use test results as a diagnostic tool whether it’s my weekly spelling test, timed tests, or ITBS or CRCT test results. That’s all I believe tests should be used for.

**Diane Nobles:**

Standards are good guidelines for teachers. They help teachers stay on track and focused. Unfortunately standards sometime limit some teachers to only teaching the standards. Instead of using the standards as a guideline, some teachers use them as the whole of teaching. The new GPS standards have too many standards in a long list. Why not just number the standards? Standards are the same old thing, just stated a different way. Standards are in place to help prepare students for standardized testing. It is unfortunate that testing never really shows what students have learned or what teachers have taught.

**Yolanda Doctor:**

Georgia’s Performance Standards will help us monitor students’ progress with objectives that are more measurable. Teachers should use the standards as an assessment tool for revising their presentations and their students’ progress.

December 5, 2005 – I have been teaching for 16 years and according to the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*, the Special Education Department has notified me that
I am not “Highly Qualified.” This notification says that I have to take the Praxis. What a joke! I’ll take the Praxis, but I can’t say that I will continue to teach in Special Education. In spite of this notification, I had a great day with students.


Recall your first year as a teacher. What would you tell first year teachers about your experiences? How could you help them acclimate to teaching?

Susan Donovan:

Everything I learned in a textbook was just fantasy. The real world in my classroom was so different from what I learned in textbooks. My experiences with the lab school are what prepared me to teach. New teachers should be flexible and go with the flow. They should be willing to go with a child’s interest or question. That is where real learning takes place.

Mary Griggs:

Since my family has so many teachers in it, my first year of teaching was not that much of a struggle for me. My grandmother was so proud that I had followed in her footsteps; I did all I could to continue to make her proud. Teaching just seemed to come naturally to me. I do remember asking the teachers in my family (not my grandmother…I wanted her to think I had all the answers) a lot of questions. Most of those questions were about how they had done things in their classrooms.

Most new teachers are not as lucky as I was. So, I would tell them to make sure they have a lot of teachers to talk to. I guess they should try to meet some veteran teachers before they get their first class of students. It helped me a lot to have family members to talk to. We still talk about school when we get together. It’s
important to have people who understand what you’re going through and who can give you some advice.

**Uticia Brown:**

My first year teaching was in Effingham County at Rincon Elementary School. I recall an unusual incident that happened one day. There was a student in my class who was distributing candy in my class among the other students. In spite of my constant warnings to put the candy away, he continued passing it out. I immediately stormed over to the student and took the remaining pieces of candy. This angered the student so much he left the room in a rage only to return later with a brick he would use to shatter the classroom windows. If I would have known then what I know today, I would have handled the situation differently. I feel that experience has helped me deal with similar incidences I have encountered.

I would tell first year teachers to never humiliate or embarrass students in front of their peers. Instead treat them with respect and they will respond in kind.

**Julie Mayville:**

My first year of teaching was definitely a time of learning. I was given a fifth grade class of resistant students who were determined to avoid compliance at all costs. Thank goodness I had learned a lot from Mrs. Hill during my student teaching experience. My experience as a Camp Counselor with our church’s youth group also helped me during those first few difficult days. I held my ground, put my expectations in place, feigned authority and soon had my students conforming to the institution of school.
I would tell first year teachers to have a reward system in place. All students enjoy earning rewards for their efforts. Have a game plan in place for students who finish early. Down time is an invitation for inappropriate behaviors. Plan too much to do. Then there is no down time. Teach the teachable moment. Don’t miss it because it wasn’t on the schedule. Read aloud to your students and always use different voices for each character. Appear organized. Document all conversations with parents, what was discussed and resolved. Don’t have more than one out of the ordinary activity going on at the same time. This creates chaos. Be consistent and fair when handling inappropriate behaviors and failure to meet expectations. Be sure your consequences are fair for each infraction.

Diane Nobles:

My first year of teaching was a year of learning more than I taught. Thank goodness I was supported by my colleagues. The overall willingness of Hesse teachers to share and encourage one another helped me survive my first year in the classroom.

My own daughter is a beginning teacher. Her situation is different in that she is a gym teacher. Yet, I constantly tell her to ask if she does not know something. I would encourage all first year teachers to ask.

Yolanda Doctor:

My first year of teaching was not too bad. Even though I taught in a closet that was not very big at all, I had a lot of support from my administrator and fellow teachers. I quickly found out that careful and over planning was a must. It was also
very essential to be organized. I would suggest that first year teachers use the wisdom of their fellow teachers to learn as much as they can.

Pre-service teachers would be advised to create an environment that is safe and comfortable for their students. Set good and high expectations for themselves and students. Let students see their human and understanding side. Learn from their mistakes and understand their strengths and weaknesses.

*Journal Prompt – November 3, 2005 - Parents*

Think about and reflect on parents…your students’ parents. How do interactions with parents affect your role as a teacher?

**Susan Donovan:**

I sometimes find myself as teacher, counselor, and confident to my students’ parents. Sometimes parents want advice on how to help their children at home. Sometimes they want to confide in me about a problem they see with their child at home. I have to be careful to not get too close with parents when I have their child in my class so that my integrity is not questioned. Most of the time I need parents’ support and assistance to help their child make the best progress. Often times, I have found that the most critical parents are the ones who come back later and thank me for my help with their child.

**Mary Griggs:**

As I reflect on my parents (my student’s parents), I feel honored to have students whose parents are so involved. I keep in communication with them through newsletters, notes, and telephone calls. They let me know what their concerns are as well as what they are pleased with. They are very supportive. As a teacher, the
feedback I receive from my parents is very helpful. They make me feel that they truly appreciate my work and what we as teachers do to help their child in school.

**Uticia Brown:**

I have excellent rapport with my all students’ parents. Well, almost all. There was one incident that happened earlier this year that I felt I could have handled differently if the parent had confronted me first. Why do some parents head straight to the administrators first? Don’t they have faith and confidence in their children’s teachers? After all, it’s the teacher who spends the majority of time with students.

The lack of respect for the teaching profession has certainly dwindled. On behalf of all teachers, parents used to listen to us. Some parents are so rude to teachers that we are often fearful of conferences, phone calls, and confrontations. Some parents have no respect for the profession and their attitudes filter down to their children. It doesn’t take me very long to recognize students whose parents use negative put-downs about teachers. I just listen to their comments.

I will not let interactions with negative, irate parents affect my role as a teacher. I have to keep an open mind and realize that some customers will never be satisfied no matter how hard the teacher aims to please.

November 7, 2005 - I had a parent conference today. This father said some very positive things about Hesse. It makes me feel happy to be a part of this great institution!

**Julie Mayville:**

Parents come in all shapes and sizes with all attitudes and from all backgrounds. We have to figure out how to handle them and their children. It’s a
package deal and honestly the part of teaching that quickly cuts a teacher’s passion to shreds. Over the twenty-two years I have had teaching, I have had many wonderful supportive parents. They are the ones always willing to come in and help (and not be critical). They offer support for what I try with students. They are willing to try new things to help their children who are having trouble in class. They attend conferences, send notes, volunteer for school functions, and organize PTA activities.

I have also had parents who cannot be contacted. No phone, written requests go unanswered, and when they do show up they are uninterested or belligerent as if they are being bothered to be there. Just this past week, I had a run in with a parent whose child I don’t teach. There are those parents who feel the need to protect their children from teachers. Those are the parents who have lack of faith in teachers and are fearful that their child might somehow be mistreated by a teacher. Parents can knock your feet out from under you with their perspectives!

Diane Nobles:

If a parent does not like what I am doing as a teacher, I wish he or she would simply remove the student from my classroom and place him or her in another teacher’s class. It is frustrating when parents who are or were teachers try to tell me how to do my job. Although most parents leave me alone to do my job, it is the ones who criticize me that make me more than sad.

Yolanda Doctor:

When I think about the parents of students I have taught or are now teaching, I think about how well I have been treated and respected by the vast majority of them. Usually by the time I am working with their child, it has been a long educational
struggle and they are willing to do whatever is needed to ensure the success of their child. Some parents are involved in all aspects of the program. Some are very well educated as to their rights concerning their special needs child. On the other hand, there are those parents who provide very little feedback and assistance in the educational process of their child. There are those who are in denial and nothing that anyone does is right for their child. Overall the parental support has been great and it helps to make my job easier.

Journal Prompt – November 21, 2005 - Passion

What keeps your passion for teaching alive? How can passion be taught?

Susan Donovan:

My students keep my passion for teaching alive. I have been called to work with children, yet, they are the ones who keep me wanting to come back every day. I don’t think passion can be taught. I simply love what I do.

Mary Griggs:

When I’m away from school and see my students, I like how they run over to give me a hug. They aren’t shy and don’t give a hoot as to who they are with at the time. When we return to school, they want all their classmates to know that they saw me somewhere outside of school. Also, when my students give me little “love notes,” I keep them posted in my classroom all year. These notes remind me that my students really do care about what I do each and every day.

These are just a couple of things that keep me passionate about teaching. I also recall how compassionate my teachers were with me. One time recently, a student came to school and told me her mother was in the hospital. I asked her who
she would stay with. She said she didn’t know. So I told her to tell her mom that if she didn’t have anyone to stay with, I would keep her during the holidays. She didn’t need me to do that, but I would have. That’s the kind of compassion my teachers would have shown toward that precious little girl.

Passion for teaching is not something that can be taught. I know I was called to be a teacher and that’s part of my passion. You just know if you like teaching or not. If you really love it, you will show your passion to your students in how you treat them. But, one teacher cannot teach another teacher how to be passionate.

Uticia Brown:

I have never felt so fulfilled as I do teaching. Every day something occurs that convinces me that I make a daily difference in the lives of my students. Whether they are my former or present students. Sometimes it is success where there was previously failure. Sometimes it is recognition of understanding on the face of one who previously showed disappointment. Occasionally it is a thank-you from a student or a parent for something we have accomplished at school or something positive I have said to my students.

Julie Mayville:

My passion for teaching is fueled by desire to make a difference in each child’s life. I strive to provide a positive and disciplined environment for my students. A classroom where children are comfortable, happy, not threatened, appreciated, loved, and cared for is necessary for students to grow and learn. My expectations are high because I know that students will rise to meet them and go beyond what I imagine for them. I expect students to give me 100% and behave
according to school rules and the golden rule. I am rarely disappointed by my students. Their willingness to give their best keeps my passion strong and growing.

Knowing that I am helping each student become prepared for next year’s academic expectations is what feeds my passion. I love laughing with my students and seeing the proverbial light bulb go off in my students’ eyes. I want students to know I care about them and I want to protect them. These desires are a part of my passion.

No, I do not believe passion can be taught. My passion is in place because I love what I do. I could not begin to teach someone to care as deeply as I do for teaching.

**Diane Nobles:**

I don’t believe passion can be taught. I would suggest that teachers continue learning new ways and trying new ideas to keep their passion growing. Change grades, positions, team teacher, or alternate strategies to keep passionate about teaching.

**Yolanda Doctor:**

I don’t know that passion is something that can be taught. Passion is an instinct devised from within. Teachers can express that passion is needed to be a good teacher, or that passion is the key to motivation. I don’t think passion can be taught, but you can certainly identify a teacher with passion.

Teaching with passion is brushing your teeth and mentally implementing a lesson before you go to work. It’s getting out of bed to write down an idea that has just popped into your head in the middle of the night. Teaching with passion is wanting to teach despite the obstacles that come along with this profession.
Analysis of Teacher Responses to Reflective Journal Writing Prompts

In a culture that often equates work with suffering, it is revolutionary to suggest that the best inward sign of vocation is deep gladness---revolutionary but true. If a work is mine to do, it will make me glad over the long haul, despite the difficult days. Even the difficult days will ultimately gladden me, because they pose the kinds of problems that can help me grow in a work that is truly mine.

(Palmer, 1998, p. 30)

This section is a revelation of inner reflections that tells more about the heart of these research participants. Beyond their lived experiences that have developed who they are as teachers, their day-to-day thoughts continue to sculpt those identities. Deep within the responses to each writing prompt is a love of teaching that encapsulates each participant. Teaching is a work that each participant can say is truly her very own.

The responses found in the participants’ reflective journals reveal the connectiveness between home and school that passionate teachers demonstrate. Passionate teachers have an on-going dialogue in their minds about their students and their strategies to meet their students’ needs. In spite of their concern for parental interference, these teachers continue to search for ways that will ensure student success. They feign obedience to the standards, but ultimately do what they know works for students. “Re-membering” their first year in the classroom “involves putting themselves back together, recovering identity and integrity, reclaiming the wholeness of themselves” (Palmer, 1998, p. 20). By doing so, they are better prepared to offer suggestions for other first year teachers. What becomes apparent through their responses is that novice teachers need support to learn effective ways of building their teacher identity and passion for teaching.
Boring Deeper Into the Core of Teacher Identity Development

After reviewing and analyzing the stories, journal writings, and interviews gathered, I began to ponder about the writings of Michele Foster (1997), Sonia Nieto (2003), Ming Fang He (2003), and Gloria Ladson-Billings (2005) concerning multicultural perspectives on education. Although my participants had not mentioned the differences in experiences of White and Black teachers, I wondered if my participants who are Black had deeper thoughts concerning their life experiences as Black Americans and how those impacted their identity development. Therefore, I posed the following as a writing prompt exclusively for Mary, Uticia, and Yolanda.

Journal Prompt – January 31, 2006 – African American Culture

Please reflect upon your life and discuss the importance of African American culture upon your life and career as a teacher.

Mary Griggs:

My childhood days were great! I did not know there was so much prejudice in the world. I remember feeling and thinking we (Blacks) were superior to Whites. I thought we were smarter and just all around better. Why did I think that way? Well, in my narrow mind then, I thought that’s why they were “there” and we were “here.” My mom never said anything negative about Whites or any other race. I just didn’t know that there was a mean and different world outside of mine. I didn’t attend school with Whites until I was in the twelfth grade. They were fine. I only had one occasion when one White teacher chose to let us know how she felt about integration. She called the Black students “Niggards!” But when the Black students let her know
how they felt, she went crying to the principal. The White principal never reprimanded the students or anything.

I attended a predominately Black college except when I earned my master’s degree. All went well throughout my college education.

I really don’t see myself as a Black teacher. I am a teacher who just happens to be Black. When I started my teaching career, I taught at Richmond Hill Elementary School. The parents there were respectful. We had no White parents who didn’t want their children in a Black teacher’s classroom. Here at Hesse, I see the opposite all the time. There are White parents who don’t want their child in my class because I am Black. Frankly, I don’t care. I’d rather that child not be in my class. There are just too many children to educate to squabble over one or two. That type of prejudice hit me hard when I started teaching at Hesse fifteen years ago. I took it personally. Now I don’t. If a parent wanted his or her child out of my room because I am not a good teacher, I would be upset; but if it’s because I am Black, I don’t apologize for that and it doesn’t bother me.

Uticia Brown:

When I was a child, I remember the signs that read, “Colored” and “White.” I honestly thought those signs meant that the water was colored or clear. I had no idea it meant that the water fountains were for Blacks and Whites. I grew up in rural Georgia and I did not experience racism or hatred while I was growing up. The differences between White and Black people were never an issue in my home or community. I remember attending a different school when integration was implemented. There were never any signs of hatred or racism as my Black friends
and I became part of the student population. I remember White students looking at me with a peculiar look once in a while, but I did not think much of it. Now, I realize they were probably not happy that Black kids were coming to their school. But, I did notice how much better the White school was than my old all Black school. Boy, was it better in the White school.

As an educator, I don’t recall experiencing negative comments from parents. A few parents tell me that their child has never had a Black teacher, but most do not see my race as a negative issue. Although most parents are respectful, some White children have accused me of being prejudice when I reprimand them. One boy told me I did not like him because he is White.

One year, I was asked to teach a SEARCH cluster class (gifted students). I remember feeling inadequate because in our school only White teachers taught the gifted students. I was surprised at how well the parents and students respected me. That year at Open House, parents and students streamed into my classroom with smiles on their faces and the parents were eager for me to teach their children. It was not at all what I expected.

Even though I know my culture makes me who I am, I have not experienced the brutality that racism has brought to many Black Americans. My journey as a Black woman and Black teacher has been smooth sailing!

Yolanda Doctor:

As a child, I remember being in an environment conducive for learning. Every Saturday was designated for movies and the library. My father would always
say, “Being exposed is the key to gaining knowledge.” My parents always stressed the importance of reading and doing our best at whatever we did.

As I grew up, I have vivid memories of going to church and listening to the preacher talk about the importance of getting an education. He often reminded us of our ancestors who were punished when they tried to learn to read and write. He also spoke about how having a good education would make our lives easier and would pave the way for others to follow. Many stories from the preacher, my grandfather, and other older family members were told about the struggles and the successes of our people. My mom would always tell us about the days when she and her siblings had to walk to school in the cold and rain. Once they got there, they had to make a fire and start preparing food for that day. She told us about the one room schoolhouse with dedicated teachers who didn’t expect anything less than the best.

As I reflect, I also remember how the older members of our church would bring their Bibles every Sunday to church. I knew that over half of them could not read or write, but they pretended to keep up with everyone. Those memories and the impact of my family and people in my community made me aware of my rich culture and heritage.

Before I entered college, my father told me I would encounter many different people with many different ideas. He encouraged me to stick to my values as they had been taught. He told me that my greatest lesson would not come from any book, but from the lessons life itself would teach me. Many of the people who went off to college in my community majored in education. The older people in my community always stressed the importance of coming back home to educate our own.
As a Black student, I always felt as though Black teachers were able to make a better connection to us. They pushed us harder and expected more from us. The non-African American teachers didn’t push us very hard and often times didn’t care if we learned or not. It’s hard to explain, but you could tell that the Black teachers were dedicated to teaching and took their responsibility to educate us very seriously.

As a teacher myself, I treat all students equally. Instinctively, I tend to gravitate to African-American boys who are at risk. This group of young men are often neglected or ignored. I feel compelled to teach them because they will hold a vital part in the continued development of the African-American community. It is my hope that I have made a difference in the lives of most of the students I’ve taught. I hope to have left a positive impression on their minds as to the love and passion I have for teaching.

**Analysis of Mary’s, Uticia’s, and Yolanda’s Journal Prompt Responses**

It was ironic to me that my question was posed during our school’s focus on Martin Luther King, Jr.’s life and legacy. My own sorrow for the injustices that have been endured by Black Americans surged with a feeling of helplessness and frustration. By the time Mary, Uticia, and Yolanda sent their journal responses to me, I was spent with emotion and angst against my White privilege. Once again, the realization that no matter how hard I try to understand I will never know the rippling effects of the civil oppression experienced by my Black friends, colleagues, and students saturated my thoughts and feelings.

It was with a heavy heart that I read Mary’s response. Realizing that somehow she had been spared the hurt and blatant inequalities stacked upon her
people as she grew up in rural Georgia helped relieve a portion of my angst. Mary’s feelings of superiority as a child began to mend a small part of my aching heart. Although it was upsetting to learn that her first experiences of prejudice were during her first years at our school, I was glad that her childhood and college years were not tarnished by the ugliness of racism.

Then Uticia’s writing added another soothing balm to my heart. Just like Mary, Uticia had been spared the ravages of racism and hatred while she grew up. Yolanda’s writing concurred with Mary’s and Uticia’s. Racism was not an issue in her early identity development. Instead, Yolanda’s family and community rallied around the progress their people had made and gave education credit for those huge strides.

Each participant explained the added pressures of being a teacher “who just happens to be Black.” Having parents request that their child be moved out of your class because of your skin color is very hurtful and frustrating. What was interesting to me was the fact that I have experienced the same racism in reverse as a teacher. There have been several occasions when Black parents want their children switched from my class to a Black teacher’s class. When I shared that with my participants, Mary could remember those times that I had children removed from my class to another teacher’s class. Uticia and Yolanda were surprised.

Inasmuch as my participants did not recall the adversities of racism as they developed their personal identities and family and community impacted the development of a strong teacher identity, African-American culture and heritage are strong influences in Mary’s, Uticia’s, and Yolanda’s life. Their pride in being
teachers “who just happen to be Black” reverberates their hope for and confidence in bridging the gap of social justice in America. And, as White teachers hold the same hope as they teach children, Black teachers have an insight from experiences immersed in African-American culture that White teachers cannot fully understand. Their lens of White privilege limits their ability to see and comprehend the impact of decades of social injustice and brutality upon Black Americans at the hands of our White forefathers.

After I read my participants’ journal entries, I met with them for a follow up interview about their entries. Each concurred that her childhood was free from racism. It wasn’t until each reached adulthood that she realized the horrors of hatred and bigotry. Mary and Uticia shared their frustration, again, at how some parents are so narrow-minded that they do not want their children in a Black teacher’s class. As a reflection of her parents’ influence, Yolanda discussed the progress that her people had made.

The next morning, I stuck my head into Mary’s classroom to thank her again for her input. “Are we still speaking?” Mary asked in her quiet, humble way. I asked Mary why she would think we would not be speaking. “I don’t know. I guess I just thought what I said yesterday might have made bothered you.” I reassured Mary that I appreciated her honesty and was grateful for her contributions. Mary smiled and seemed relieved.

This exchange with Mary caused me to wonder if in fact Mary, Uticia, and Yolanda had given me authentic recollections of their experiences as Black Americans, or if perhaps they were sparing my feelings. I thought it most unusual
that none had experienced racism as a child. Once again, the tenets of narrative place my participants and me in a state of vulnerability. Perhaps Mary, Uticia, and Yolanda would have felt more open and relaxed had I been a Black researcher. In my state of vulnerability I completely believed what they had told me about their experiences as Black Americans. Yet, Mary was concerned that I might be upset by her responses to my questions. That concern is evidence of the vulnerability she obviously felt at being interviewed about her culture by a White researcher. Although we have worked together for over fifteen years, the secrecy that is an unspoken barrier between Blacks and Whites became extremely clear. I concur with Ladislaus Semali (1998, in Kincheloe, Steinberg, Rodriguez, and Chennault) when he says, “I encountered silencing, a place where accepting silence and not questioning were rewarded with platitudes” (p. 177). Inasmuch as Mary, Uticia, and Yolanda provided a consensus that African-American culture does play a huge part in their teacher identity, I wonder if there are experiences that were not shared with me because of the borders between cultures that prohibit entrance by other.

**Interpretive Activity**

Beyond the narrative strategies for gaining entrance and access to my participants’ stories, I used an interpretive activity in order to garner deeper understanding of each teacher’s identity, personal and professional knowledge, and love of teaching. According to Ayers (1989),

> Focused interpretive activities explore the same ground as interviews or vignettes but without the heavy reliance on speaking or writing. They involve working with familiar materials (paper, clay, and paint, for example) to
represent or symbolize salient experiences. Interpretive activities disengage people from conscious thought and can provide fresh insight and significant discoveries. (p.7)

Much like the interview process, in order to make the interpretive activity one in which my participants would feel comfortable, unhurried, and relaxed, I planned the activity for a Tuesday afternoon after school. Tuesdays are earmarked for faculty meetings. I checked with our principal before hand to find a Tuesday on which he was not planning a faculty meeting. Since we have been instructed to leave Tuesdays open for faculty meetings, having my interpretive activity on a Tuesday afternoon would ensure attendance by my participants. Likewise, since our faculty meetings are held in our school’s art room, I made arrangements to hold the interpretive activity there. On the day of our scheduled interpretive activity, all six participants showed up ready to contribute, once again, to my research endeavors.

As my participants entered the art room, several tables were decorated and contained snacks and beverages. Two tables contained the materials needed for the activity and one table was used as our work table. Prior to beginning our activity, my participants and I greeted each other, munched on snacks, and chatted about school. After a few minutes of socializing I explained the purpose of our interpretive activity.

The interpretive activity in which my participants contributed involved constructing personal wreaths that would represent each participant’s identity. Each person was given a Styrofoam wreath, a choice of colored ribbon, and a variety of miniature models from which to choose. A hot glue gun was provided for each teacher to use during her construction of her personal wreath. While participants
worked on the construction of their wreaths, I facilitated a discussion pertaining to the topics of this research study. Areas of autobiographical data, professional knowledge development, obstacles to teaching, and teacher passion were shared and discussed. When the wreaths were completed, each teacher took a turn to share how the objects on her wreath represent her personal and professional identity.

Pictures of each participant’s wreath and her own description of its representation of her identity are presented on the following pages. Also, my own analysis is included in italics.

1. Susan Donovan’s Personal Wreath

I chose yellow for my wreath because it’s my favorite color. I don’t know why I chose purple for the bow. I just thought it would look good, I guess. The hand represents my little students. They work with their
hands to create a lot of wonderful things, especially stories they write for me. The schoolhouse represents my home away from home here at Hesse. The flip-flops represent my love for the beach. And, of course, I love to read on the beach, so I put a book on my wreath.

Susan’s wreath reflects her flare for neatness and precision. It also reveals her passion for her students. She not only used a hand to represent her students, she also placed a schoolhouse on her wreath to signify how important teaching is to her identity.

2. Mary Griggs’ Personal Wreath

I am such a colorful person I decided to use all the colors on my wreath. The colors represent the different parts of who I am. The yellow is my sunshiny outlook; the red is my passion for teaching; the purple represents Jesus in my life; and, the green is for my growing family. I put rabbits on my wreath because there are so many children in my life. They are like little bunnies hopping all around.
Although Mary did not use a lot of symbols to represent her identity, her choice of rabbits speaks volumes about her love for children. Loving children is not the only characteristic that makes Mary who she is, but it does encompass a huge part of her identity. Mary’s use of a variety of colors reflects the hidden aspects of who Mary is. In her quiet demeanor is hidden a colorful array of positive human qualities.

3. Uticia Brown’s Personal Wreath

I chose yellow and orange because I think they go together and I like them. The hand represents my students. The school bag represents all the work I do as a teacher. I put two books on my wreath because one book represents learning and the other book represents my love for reading. I chose the sunglasses because I wear sunglasses when I take
my students outside for recess. The crayon represents the colorful characters I teach each day.

Uticia’s wreath represents the strength of teacher identity that has developed over the past twenty-eight years of her life. Uticia’s teacher identity has permeated all other aspects of her existence. In all that she is and does, “teacher” is who Uticia Brown is for the most part.

4. Julie Mayville’s Personal Wreath

I didn’t realize when I chose blue and orange ribbon that I was choosing Clemson’s colors. I was really thinking about the beach. The blue represents the water and the orange is for the sun. Oh well, since I have a daughter heading to Clemson, I better get used to those colors. The three hands are my three children. I love to shop, so I put the ‘born to shop’ bag on my wreath. The chalkboard and book bag are for all the work I do at school. The flip-flops are to show how much I love the
beach. I love to read on the beach so I added a book. The crayon is to show my artistic side. I am pretty creative!

Julie’s wreath conveys her identity as a mother and as a teacher. It shows her love of teaching as well as her affection for the beach, reading, and creating. Julie creates scrapbooks of her life, which have come to be a legacy for her children. Julie’s attention to detail in her wreath represents her precision in all that she does…including teaching. Not only does Julie have high expectations for precision for herself, she also holds the same high expectations for her students.

5. Diane Nobles’ Personal Wreath

I chose red and blue and let the white show because I am very patriotic. My oldest daughter and my youngest son are serving in the navy. I am very proud of both of them. I put a schoolhouse on my wreath because
it's where I spend most of my time. I added a van because when I am not at school, I am usually running around doing errands in my van. In the summer, I love the beach so I glued on some flip-flops. And, the four rabbits are my four children.

Diane’s identity is conveyed very well by her wreath. Her patriotism is recognized by everyone at Hesse. Often Diane has military personnel visit her classroom to talk with her students. Also, she has a son and a daughter serving in the navy. Like the other participants, school is a large part of Diane’s life and identity. Her role as a mother is as much a part of her identity as her role as a mother to her students.

6. Yolanda Doctor’s Personal Wreath

I chose purple because we have been talking about being passionate about teaching and purple is often used to represent passion. The
books are for the subjects I teach. The school bag is for the IEP’s I have to write, which I usually do at home. The phone is for all the phone calls I make to my students’ parents. The flip-flops are in place of the slippers I put on the minute I get home. The shoes show how important it is to me to dress professionally and I do wear heels a lot of the time. The apple is a symbol for teaching. I enjoy reading when I get a chance, so I put a book on my wreath. I put the car on my wreath because I spend a lot of time traveling back and forth to the school.

Yolanda’s professionalism and dedication to teaching are a large part of her identity. Her attention to dressing professionally exudes her serious attitude about teaching and learning.

**Analysis of Participant’s Interpretive Activity Constructions**

During this interpretive activity, each participant shared her own story of enjoying elementary school. It became quite apparent to me that elementary teachers played a large role in planting acorns of teacher identity into the lush soil of each participant’s individuality. The participants exchanged fond memories of caring, compassionate teachers who taught them how to be passionate teachers.

Issues that plague the teaching profession were discussed. Political constraints, including standards and teacher accountability, were seen as necessary evils or negatives that will never go away. The participants unanimously agreed that political interference does not impede their teaching beliefs or daily interactions and exchanges in the classroom. Low pay was seen as a possible reason that some people leave the profession but it is not a reason to not become a teacher. Each participant felt called to be a teacher and did not consider low pay as a deterrent to becoming a teacher.

Inasmuch as each participant contributed to this study by constructing a wreath to represent her identity, none of the participants represented their husbands.
Susan and Uticia are single. But, Mary, Diane, Julie, and Yolanda are married. It was interesting to me that their role as wives did not enter their descriptions of who they are. Teacher and mother seem to hold the most valued places in their identity development.

Addendum to the Interpretive Activity

The day after my participants completed their interpretive activity, I was curious to see how my own students would respond to the question. “How have you become who you are?” Since I try to encourage my students to reflect on various topics, I preceded the question by having them brainstorm and list words that would describe who they think they are. After they had comprised a list of words describing their characters, I asked them to make a list telling how they have become who they are. To my surprise, without exception, each of students listed “my teachers” as responsible for helping them become who they are. Are we not who we are, at least in part, because of our teachers?

Teacher Observations

In this section, narrative presentations of my observations of each participant as she teaches her students in her classroom are provided. This section provides a close look into the encounters and exchanges the participants have with their students. Each observation was unannounced. I did not schedule an observation with any of the participants. In some cases, which will be divulged in each participant’s section, I observed the participant on more than one occasion. The reason for unannounced visits is one in which random, unexpected observations reveal life as usual in the classroom. Often, prescheduled visits dilute the spontaneity and normalcy necessary
to see and understand real life daily interactions between teachers and students in their classrooms.

Susan Donovan

Since Susan’s classroom is located on the far end of our newest wing, which seems like miles from my classroom, I did not make my unannounced visit to her classroom until the week before our Christmas break. No matter. Watching Susan interact with students is the same whether you go there...on the first day, the last day, or any other day of the school year. Susan is consistent. Over the years I have observed Susan and her interactions on many occasions, so I know first hand that she presents herself as a kind and loving teacher at all times.

As I entered the classroom, cherub faces turned toward me and a chorus of “Hi, Mrs. Aimar” filled the air. I explained to the students that I just wanted to visit with them for a while and see what they were doing. Since it was in the afternoon, after reading and math instruction, the students were working on letters to Santa. Susan had Christmas music playing quietly in the background as students wrote their letters. Above the chatter from each table, a young man asked, “Miss Donovan, are those real people singing those songs?” Not sure exactly what the child meant, Susan responded, “Of course they are real people. Who else do you think they could be?” With the seriousness of a judge, the young boy replied, “Well, you know, they could be those people that live in the radio.” While I contained my laughter, Susan gently explained, “Well, those people don’t actually live in the radio. They are real people, too.” Without going into great detail about radio waves and just how we are
able to hear the “real people” Susan did not skip a beat as she helped a young mind sort out a misunderstanding about voices in the radio.

As each student finished his or her letter, he or she brought the letter to Miss Donovan. Susan listened to each child read the letter. Instead of correcting any mistakes, Susan asked the student if there were any things he or she wanted to add or change. Susan did not pass judgment on the masterpieces. She respected each child’s self-analysis to guide any corrections or changes. Many times Susan would agree with the child or offer another possibility for change…never forcing her opinion on the child.

Susan’s gentle way of guiding her first graders through their infantile, yet advanced, efforts at constructing letters is one example of her passion for teaching with love and care. Understanding that first grade self-concept and self-esteem are as fragile as eggshells causes Susan to handle every interaction with kid gloves.

As I slipped out the door, I left with a smile on my face and pep in my step. Watching Susan in action made me recall all the days in our portable classrooms sixteen years ago, in which I learned to be extra careful of students’ feelings and emotions by watching Susan interact with her students. A balance of high expectations and respect for individuality and diversity was emulated by Susan and still is evidenced through her interactions with her students.

Mary Griggs’ classroom is located in the same wing as mine. That makes it very accessible for my observations. During the course of this school year, I have had the opportunity to drop into Mary’s classroom on several occasions. On one such
occasion, Mary was presenting a review of nouns and verbs to her students. Mary paced the floor intermingling in close proximity to her students. In what was almost a cheerleading session, Mary engaged her students in a choral response chant about verbs and nouns. She would pose a question and in unison her students would respond. Before concluding the session, she asked her class in which part of a sentence would a verb be found. In unison the class responded, “The predicate!” “And in which part of a sentence would the main noun be found?” Once again, the class answered together, “The subject.” I was amazed that Mary’s second graders were so confident in their responses and were being exposed to higher level concepts. I quietly left the room.

On yet another occasion, I entered Mary’s classroom unexpectedly. Mary and her students were giggling. Mary was walking around the room. She had to stop for a moment to compose herself. She explained that her giggle-box had been turned over. She and her students were laughing at the antics of a character in one of their reading passages. After a brief moment, Mary continued her lesson with her usual personal style and engaging manner. It is always intriguing to watch Mary interact with her students.

_Uticia Brown_

Entering Uticia Brown’s classroom is much like entering a library. Everyone is quiet and working. When I inaudibly slipped into the room, no one looked up. Uticia turned her head in my direction and flashed that gorgeous smile of hers. I whispered that I was just watching. She went back to her work. She was checking homework at each student’s desk. She asked specific questions, placed a mark in her
grade book, and progressed to the next student. What was blatantly obvious was how Uticia looked directly into her students’ eyes and they into hers as she spoke to each one and he or she spoke back to Uticia. Each student responded in whispered tones as Uticia made her way around the room. I lingered for just a few minutes as I realized that Uticia had just begun this routine housekeeping task. As stealthily as I entered the room, I left.

A few days later, I stopped by to observe Uticia again. It was a dreary rainy day and the school’s electrical power was out due to the brief storm. Uticia’s room was dark like everyone else’s. Since it was too dark for reading, textbook work, or any sort of group activity, Uticia was quizzing her fourth graders on nursery rhymes. “Who jumped over the candlestick?” Uticia prodded. Hands shot up…everyone knew this one. “Okay, Jamal (pseudonym), who jumped over the candlestick?” “Jack Be Nimble!” Jamal proudly exclaimed. “Okay. I believe his name is just Jack.” “Now, who had a wife and could not keep her?” A few hands this time showed that this nursery rhyme was not as well-known as Jack Be Nimble. Yet, one hand was waving with unusual vigor. “Okay, Nathan (pseudonym), who had a wife and could not keep her?” Without hesitation and with all the confidence that his answer was correct, Nathan yelled, “My dad!” In what could have been an embarrassing moment for Nathan, Uticia handled the situation with her usual grace and diplomacy. First of all the class did not burst into laughter, partially because they did not know the answer and partially because Uticia has taught them to respect all answers that are given. No one laughs at effort in her classroom. “Nathan, I realize that your dad has been married a few times, but the nursery rhyme I am referring to is
Peter the Pumpkin Eater.” “Well, my dad can’t keep a wife either,” Nathan justified his answer. From across the room, before Uticia replied, came a quite voice. “I know what you mean, Nathan. My dad can’t keep a wife either,” Jane (pseudonym) interjected. “You know what?” Uticia said calmly to her students. “Lots of moms and dads have trouble staying married, but it’s not our fault, right? I am divorced, too. It’s sad, but it’s not my son’s fault. His dad and I both love him very much.” After a pause, Uticia continued her discussion of nursery rhymes and what the hidden meaning of each might be.

In both observations, Uticia’s quiet demeanor and obvious respect for orderliness and structured work were evident. Her students demonstrated confidence in responding to her questions and mutual respect as they made precise eye contact with Uticia when she spoke with each student. Uticia’s seriousness about learning is contagious in her classroom. Her passion is likewise evident and readily emulated by her students.

**Julie Mayville**

The day I entered Julie’s classroom unexpectedly had been “one of those days” for Julie. She wasn’t smiling her usual beautiful smile. She seemed tired and frustrated. “Evelyn, today is not a good day. Murphy’s Law is in effect.” I explained to Julie that I wanted to see this kind of day. “It is rare, Julie. But it is reality,” I tried to reassure her. Julie’s students were working on a group project constructing totem poles from boxes they had brought from home. It appeared to me that they really didn’t need a lot of teacher interaction or interference as they worked diligently to build their totem poles to represent their own Native American tribes.
This time of self-direction and group work had given Julie time to decompress from her hectic morning with a sinus headache compounded by one of her student’s involvement in a bus incident in which she had to complete disciplinary referral paperwork. Her disappointment was apparent as she explained how hard she had been working to help this young man learn how to avoid conflict and to handle it diplomatically. I did not prolong my visit. I encouraged Julie by telling her that her efforts were not undone by one bus altercation. I told her I would come back later.

Later that day, I stopped by to see how Julie and her students were doing. Julie’s smile had returned and she was in the middle of explaining to her students how they would complete a shopping list, purchase order, and check for payment of goods as they shopped in their classroom store. Julie’s students were having their second checkbook sale in which they were given an opportunity to spend money they had earned for appropriate behaviors, daily effort, and responsible duty completion, i.e. returning signed papers from home. Julie’s upbeat demeanor had returned. Outside her classroom door six Native American totem poles displayed the precision with which Julie’s students had carried out their assignments.

Even though passionate teachers, like Julie, experience those days when everything seems to go wrong, most of us rebound very quickly. Our passion becomes strong again and we return to the desires of our heart…teaching children. Julie is no exception. Her passion is seen, heard, and experienced as she interacts with professionalism, high expectations, and a ton of love for her students.
Diane Nobles

It would be hard to escape observing Diane’s class, and Diane, in action. Diane does not stay contained in her classroom. Whether her students are walking the hallways singing Christmas carols, or blowing bubbles outside your classroom window for the sake of studying surface tension, Diane and her students can be found all around the school. Likewise, Diane’s students pop in and out of all the classrooms at Hesse as they gather data for analyzing taste tests, most popular TV shows, or student opinion polls on a variety of people and issues. Diane is the antithesis of the traditional teacher.

Given that Diane does not adhere to the confines of her classroom, I was excited to find her there one morning. As I quietly entered her classroom, Diane rolled her eyes, but continued her lesson. She was firing one question after another at her students about the molecular make up of atoms. Since many of her students had once graced the spaces of my own classroom, I was amazed to hear Diane’s students chime in unison their responses… “Protons!” “Neutrons!” “Electrons!” After the choral response to knowledge based questions, Diane began posing hypothetical questions to her students. Unlike her prior questioning technique, this time Diane waited patiently. No one raised his or her hand. “Mr. Brown (pseudonym).” When Diane called on the young man to answer, he proudly restated her question and offered his response. “Excellent thinking, Mr. Brown. Does anyone have any other suppositions?” It sounded as if I were in a college classroom instead of a classroom of eager fifth graders. In Diane’s own non-conforming ways, students in her classroom rise to the occasion of high expectations, learning outside the parameters of
textbooks, and traditional learning exchanges. Diane’s respect for her students is reciprocated as her students engage in deep discussions about scientific concepts normally presented in middle and high school science classes.

I left Diane’s classroom with a new respect for her nontraditional methods of teaching students. Diane’s passion for teaching and learning are obvious as she interacts with her students. She treats them with the expectation that they are tomorrow’s leaders, they can learn, learning is exciting, and it happens all around us…not just in a classroom. Diane demonstrates that passion for teaching does not mean that all teachers have to march to the drumbeat of standardization, teacher accountability mandates, and/or traditional measures.

**Yolanda Doctor**

One of the newest buzz words in education is the dreaded “inclusion.” Teachers complain about inclusion, praise inclusion, and generally balk at it, especially if they do not understand their roles in the inclusion process. To find Yolanda Doctor in the course of a day, her schedule must be readily available to you. Yolanda is often in her own classroom where she works with students with varying learning difficulties. Yet, sometimes she travels throughout the school with her students as they are included in various classrooms. Yolanda is much like a nomad carrying her belongings from one place to another to address her students’ needs.

Prior to making my unannounced visit, I took an opportunity to talk with several teachers who have special needs students included in their classrooms over the course of the day. One teacher commented that she is amazed at how well Yolanda’s students perform with the support given to them by Yolanda. “It’s as
though they (the students) have become a part of my class. They interact and respond to our class discussions as though they are with me all day long” (a fifth grade teacher). Another teacher said, “Yolanda and her student come in quietly, find a seat, and begin participating in the lesson without causing any disruptions at all” (a fourth grade teacher). “My students have learned so much about the power of each person to contribute to our learning community. I don’t think they realized that Yolanda’s students could interact like they have this year” (another fourth grade teacher). These comments capture Yolanda’s passion for helping her students become a vital part of society. The teachers quoted here offer a voice for the positive interactions afforded special needs students as well as regular students as they interact within the inclusion program at our school.

As I entered Yolanda’s classroom, she was preparing a fifth grade student for her spelling test. Yolanda was excited to see me and quickly said, “Zach (pseudonym) is coming in just a minute. He has been with the speech teacher.” She continued her directions to her student. “Study these words for five more minutes. You know writing them helps you remember, so you might want to write them a couple of times before I give you the spelling test.”

The door opened and Zach lumbered into the classroom. “Hi, Zach,” Yolanda sounded as though Zach was returning from a lengthy visit outside the classroom. Her voice was full of jubilation at seeing him. Zach’s face lit up with a huge smile as he walked toward Yolanda. Before Yolanda’s next move, she hugged Zach. “Let’s go to your desk. We’re going to keep working on “E,” okay Zach?” Zach slurred his response but said it with conviction, “E!” “That’s great Zach. Give me five!” As
Zach sat clumsily into his chair, which was built much like a high chair to keep Zach from falling out, Yolanda removed his helmet. (Zach wears a helmet to protect his fragile head. He has had numerous brain surgeries to address his birth defects.) The moment Zach realized I was in the room, he locked his gaze in my direction. “This is Mrs. Aimar, Zach. Can you tell her ‘hello?’” Zach grinned and said, “Aimar!” I was thrilled that he seemed glad to speak instead of being afraid of me. When Zach first came to our school, he was timid and did not meet new people very well. Yolanda has made great strides in helping Zach with his social skills development.

If time had allowed, I would have stayed with Yolanda for much longer. Her patience and respect for Zach and the fifth grader with whom she was working captured my attention and my heart. It’s no wonder that Zach’s parents are overjoyed with his progress at Hesse. Yolanda has a gift for reaching those students who might otherwise seem unreachable…it’s her passion!

**Common Characteristics Gleaned from Teacher Observations**

*Inasmuch as my participants are as different from each other in their teaching styles and personalities as there are varieties of oak trees, they all exhibit certain common characteristics that reflect their love of learning and teaching. First of all, each demonstrated respect for her students. There are no occasions in which public humiliation, ridicule, or sarcasm is used by these teachers. They respect each individual and expect their students to follow suit.*

*Secondly, they have high expectations for student performance and behavior. Learning is presented as fun but important, too. From Susan Donovan’s first grade writing lesson to Diane Nobles’ fifth grade science lesson, students were engaged,*
interacting, and responsible for their own learning. Likewise, student behaviors reflected each teacher’s belief that everyone should be appreciated and treated with kindness. Students interact with each other and their teachers with regard for individual feelings.

A third characteristic, which has been verbalized by the participants, was reflected in their interactions with their students. Their own teachers’ kindness, compassion, and enthusiasm were evident in each participant’s classroom. In retrospect, I found myself wondering, “Who wouldn’t love being in any one of these teachers’ classroom?”

Respect for students, high expectations for learning and behaving, and obvious enthusiasm for learning and teaching were apparent common characteristics demonstrated by the six passionate teachers of this study. What was added to this study through my observations are viable truisms that were corroborated by each participant’s interactions with her students. Within my participant’s stories, interviews, journal entries, and interactions during our interpretive activity, a variety of beliefs are revealed. By observing these teachers in action, their own beliefs came to life through their encounters with their students.

Field Texts

According to Denzin and Lincoln (1998), “all field texts are constructed representations of experience” (p. 169). With respect given to my place as an insider and a researcher in relationship to my participants and their contributions to this study, there were times when all other research strategies did not capture the experiences of my participants in their entirety. For the purpose of presenting each
participant in as many venues as possible, I frequently jotted down notes about my interactions with each participant in informal exchanges throughout our days at school. This section is a brief glance into the lives of my participants from a viewpoint not revealed in other research materials presented in this study.

**Susan Donovan:** You just missed it! We just finished making and eating pancakes.

*(The entire wing was filled with the most pleasant aroma.)*

Susan passes me daily on the walkway as she takes her students to lunch and I am returning to my classroom after taking my students to lunch. She readily hugs my students who were in her first grade class two years ago.

**Mary Griggs:** It has been another wonderful day, Evelyn. I cannot believe sometimes just how much we do for our children. They really need us, don’t they?

**Uticia Brown:** In an exchange with another teacher who is eligible for retirement next year, Uticia responded, “It’s like a death sentence. I don’t know what I will do with myself if I chose to retire in two years.”

**Julie Mayville:** Well, I had another no-show for a parent conference. But, you know, I feel like a super-hero sometimes. I am Super Teacher. I will help those who fall victim to uninterested parents no matter what!

**Diane Nobles:** I have a metaphor for my class. It is a progression. They move from riding a tricycle to riding a ten-speed bicycle. Right now they have moved to the mountain bike. Next, the ten speed. They are on their way!

**Yolanda Doctor:** Zach was in an exceptionally bad mood today, but I know he will do better tomorrow. He was probably just tired.
Analysis of Field Texts

My participants’ personalities are revealed in candid, relaxed exchanges as they interact with each other, other teachers, students, and me. These teachers have developed their teacher identity, personal and professional knowledge, and love for teaching so strongly that it is actually who they are. Their joy and exuberance permeates the halls and walkways in their every encounter with colleagues and students. Their passion is evident and contagious.

Capturing the Elusive Components of Teacher Identity Development

The research data presented in this chapter portrays the thoughts and opinions of the six participants of this study concerning current issues that often suffocate teacher passion. In their responses to interview questions and journal prompts, conversations during an interpretive activity, and exchanges with their students during classroom observations these participants demonstrate commitment and dedication to teaching that is resistant to political constraints, irate parents, low salaries, and general public negativity toward teaching. The participants verbalized their usually silent opposition to standardization and teacher accountability. They have accepted low pay and parental issues as part of their plight as teachers, but do not see these as deterrents to their passion for teaching. And, most importantly, the participants showed how their passion was developed in conjunction with their personal and professional identity evolution. With respect to other such studies, this study offers viable information for the teaching profession. As heard through my participants’ voices, there is hope for strengthening the field of education and for
helping others develop passion for teaching that will become impervious to the obstacles that so often undermine teacher passion.
CHAPTER VI

RESEARCH FINDINGS: PROTECTING ACORNS OF TEACHER IDENTITY

In this chapter I summarize ten findings that emerged from my research inquiry: (1) Teacher identity is conceived through teachers’ interactions with their own elementary teachers. (2) Teachers develop their personal and professional knowledge through relationships with others in their lives. (3) Teacher passion is part of teacher identity. (4) Teacher passion grows with positive personal interactions and perseverance against obstacles. (5) Teacher passion can be taught and strengthened. (6) Passionate teachers are on an infinite search for knowledge; are not afraid of political mandates or constraints; embrace parental involvement; and, value collegial support. (7) Culture influences teacher identity development. (8) Teacher identity development, personal and professional knowledge, and love of teaching are always evolving within the context of lived experience. (9) It is extremely important to create a school culture which nurtures passion for teaching and learning in an era of standardization and accountability. (10) There is a need to foster an educational landscape of hopes and dreams for developing passion for teaching and education.

The participants in my study were six teachers who teach at Hesse Elementary School in Savannah, Georgia. My interactions with my participants evolved in several ways. Participant interviews and autobiographical writings provided information from which further investigatory inquiries were developed. Based on information given in these preliminary texts, more detailed interview questions were formulated. Follow up interviews provided viable data pertaining to teacher identity
development, personal and professional knowledge, and love of teaching. Participant reflective journals provided a vehicle by which to present more in depth inquiries into my participants’ lives and identities. An interpretive group activity granted me access to social interactions between my participants in which participants’ teacher identities were conveyed in yet another arena.

The metaphor of the life cycle of an oak tree has been used for teacher identity development, personal and professional knowledge, and love of teaching. Since all six participants are viable examples of strong, vibrant teacher identity with a storehouse of personal and professional knowledge and passion that is resistant to diseases wrought by less than optimal teaching conditions, their life stories provided useful information for strengthening the teaching profession and reducing teacher burnout and attrition. The lives investigated in this study reveal a development of teacher identity with components of personal and professional knowledge acquisition and teacher passion that resembles the growth of an acorn into an oak tree and its intricate life system. Much like acorns that do not develop into oak trees, many humans have experiences that prepare them to become teachers, but most do not develop into teachers. All acorns are not meant to be oak trees. Some are meant to become food for animals. Others are meant to become fertilizer for other plants. These acorns take on other roles instead of becoming oak trees. Only one in ten thousand acorns grows into an oak tree. Likewise, most humans do not become teachers. They take on other roles instead of becoming teachers.

As an acorn germinates and develops, roots grow deep into the soil and a stem with leaves pushes its way up toward sunlight. Germinating teachers grace the halls
of education colleges and universities. Some tiny oak trees never make it. They get
plucked from the ground by animals, wind, or water. Similarly, some prospective
teachers do not develop a strong teacher identity and soon leave the profession before
they even get started. The remaining prospective teachers search for nutrients much
like the growing oak tree seeks out sunlight and water. The nutrients necessary for
teacher identity development are found in theoretical, philosophical, and
methodological education courses. The instructors of these courses administer these
nutrients while nurturing teacher identity development through their interactions with
education students.

A tiny oak tree develops an internal system of making, storing, and
transporting food as it develops into a larger, stronger oak. Teacher passion is
developed in the same way. A student teacher’s eagerness to teach, interact with
students, and share her knowledge are the earliest surges of teacher passion. As
winds blow, droughts come and go, and diseases plague a young oak tree, it becomes
stronger and continues to grow, or it becomes weakened and dies. Teachers who
leave the profession within the first five years in the classroom are the victims of
obstacles that have killed their teacher passion. Eventually their identity as “teacher”
dies, too. On the other hand, teachers who endure those same obstacles develop a
strong teacher identity and, in most cases, a teacher passion that grows more resilient
with each assault. Even the oldest and sturdiest oak trees fall prey to diseases, fungi,
and destruction at the hands of nature and humans. Likewise, teachers who have
taught for years and years can show evidence that their teacher passion has become
infected and, in many cases, has died. It is those stately oaks that have weakened root
systems or no vitality within that are ripped from the ground by hurricane winds. They have not produced acorns in years and have nothing left but bark. Similarly, teachers can occupy a place in a teacher desk and have no vitality or passion left inside.

Found within the context of this study are remedies that can help strengthen teacher passion. Even those teachers who have lost their passion for teaching and learning can be rejuvenated. Much like the application of water and fertilizer can help sick oaks flourish and eventually reproduce again, teacher passion can be rekindled. Also, it is not the oak that recognizes its state of deterioration. Like an oak that has lost its ability to seek water and minerals through its own natural system for doing so, dispassionate teachers need guidance in having their passion nourished.

In comparing teacher identity development to an oak tree and in search of the very beginnings of teacher identity, I found strong evidence that interactions in elementary classrooms could be the starting point for the development of teacher identity (Thesis Finding 1). Without exception, each of my participants was able to vividly recall positive encounters with her elementary teachers that influenced her identity as a teacher. Likewise each gave credit to those teachers for providing a strong example by which to follow. Found in chapter IV, are participants’ recollections of early school encounters in which teacher identity was born. Susan Donovan credits her second grade teacher’s passion for learning as the acorn of teacher identity planted into her developing personal identity. “Mrs. Hakestead sent a loud message to me that learning was important to her,” Susan recalls. Similarly Mary Griggs’ earliest school experiences wrapped Mary in a cocoon of teacher
identity developing experiences. Mary remembers school as a continuation of her home life where education was paramount. Mary’s grandmother was a teacher, and her elementary teachers knew her family, came to her house, and attended the same church as Mary. Mary’s first grade teacher made Mary feel extremely intelligent and smart. “She praised me as if I had solved an algebraic equation or something,” Mary said about her first grade teacher. Those experiences were the mold for Mary’s own teacher identity to take shape. Much like Mary’s experiences, Julie Mayville’s life has been immersed in education and learning as her family and teachers wrapped her in the warmth of adult/child interactions. From the role her parents played as they set an example for Julie as youth group leaders to the compassion shown to her by her elementary teachers, Julie could not escape the nutrients supplied to her developing teacher identity. Julie remembered, “I would have to say that one of my fondest memories of elementary school is related to Ms. Beach taking care of me when I broke my arm in first grade.” Likewise, Uticia Brown’s third grade teacher definitely planted a healthy acorn of teacher identity into the soil of Uticia’s identity development. “Mrs. Herrington believed in me and I knew it.” The kind of faith Mrs. Herrington had in Uticia nourished Uticia’s interest in learning and teaching. Diane Nobles recalled elementary school with the same fondest expressed by the other participants. “Elementary school was an exciting time for me.” As Diane reflected upon her elementary experiences, she said, “The way my teachers taught in my early years and the kindness they would show is what influenced me to be like them.” Much like the others, Yolanda Doctor was immersed in a home and community where learning was one of the most important aspects of life. “I remember feeling
safe and cared for at school,” Yolanda reflected. Those earliest experiences and encounters with elementary teachers planted the seeds of teacher identity into the participants’ lives. Deep within the psyche of human development those elementary teachers so richly impacted each participant that “teacher” became a strong component of each life investigated in this study.

“Remembering ourselves and our power can lead to revolution, but it requires more than recalling a few facts. When we forget who we are we do not merely drop some data. We dis-member ourselves” (Palmer, 1998, p. 20). Remembering our past, our beginnings, our yesterdays, leads to stronger identity development. Likewise, “Good teachers remember” (Ayers, 1989, p. 24). Participants of this study remember the compassion that was shown to them by their elementary teachers. In doing so, their own passion is revealed and understood. As passionate teachers reflect on the development of their identities, they express how their own identity as “teacher” was conceived in the elementary classrooms of their earliest school experiences. First teachers, or those who play the role of teacher in our earliest learning, set an example that impacts teachers’ lives as teachers emulate those behaviors in their classrooms.

During my research, I found that the development of teacher identity is impacted by personal and professional knowledge. Teachers develop their personal and professional knowledge in relationship with others in their lives (Thesis Finding 2). Participants in this study revealed experiences in which encounters with parents, students, administrators, and colleagues affected their understanding of themselves as teachers. Reflections about interactions with others helped the participants gain
understanding about themselves and their role as teacher. A resounding and repeating chorus for the importance of personal exchanges with colleagues is found within my participants’ journal entries. Professional knowledge development was directly related to participants’ interactions with colleagues. All participants concurred that their professional development was a result of talking with, observing, and emulating veteran teachers throughout their careers. Personal and professional knowledge becomes part of teacher identity which is constantly evolving through interactions with colleagues and other teachers.

Biology also shows us that we can expand our cognitive domain. This arises through a novel experience brought forth through reasoning, through the encounter with a stranger, or more directly, through the expression of a biological interpersonal congruence that lets us see the other person and open up for him room for existence beside us. This act is called *love*, or if we prefer a milder expression, the acceptance of the other person beside us in our daily living. This is the biological foundation of social phenomena: without love, without acceptance of others living beside us, there is no process and, therefore, no humanness. (Maturana and Valera, 1998, p. 246)

It is the “living beside us” that cultivates teacher personal and professional knowledge. Not only is teaching “relational and interactive” (Feuerverger, 2005, p. 178); it is an act of humanness. As we, as teachers, understand the importance of the “other” and his or her impact on our lives, we continue to strengthen our personal and professional knowledge. That development and strength are evidenced in the stories of Susan, Mary, Julie, Uticia, Diane, and Yolanda who gave credit to those teachers who supported them during the first years of their teaching experiences. Susan spoke about textbook situations in college as “fantasy.” It was the guidance of veteran teachers that helped Susan develop a healthy teacher identity. Mary echoed Susan’s admonition by stating that first year teachers need to “make sure they have a lot of
teachers to talk to.” Julie and Diane added to the importance as they suggested that beginning teachers need a lot of support. Julie pointed out that education students do not build relationships with veteran teachers and that is one reason they often feel lost and alone during those tough first few years. Diane expressed gratitude for experienced teachers when she said, “Thank goodness I was supported by my colleagues.” Yolanda confirmed what the others expressed by adding, “During my first years, although I taught in a closet, I had a lot of support from my administrator and fellow teachers.” Without important interactions and exchanges with other educators, parents, and students, I believe the participants’ personal and professional knowledge would have stagnated and eventually caused their teacher identity to wilt and die.

Teacher personal and professional knowledge becomes a vital part of their evolving teacher identity. That identity is encapsulated in self-knowledge and understanding. “Teachers require a dynamic understanding of self in relationship to both self and others across multiple contexts” (Hollingsworth, 1994, p.). Within the contexts of ongoing interactions with students and colleagues, teacher identity becomes who we are in our place in this world. Like our skin or eye color, it cannot be shed or removed.

Philip McGraw, the famous Dr. Phil, says, “we must separate who we are from what we do” (as seen on a broadcast aired on January 6, 2006). Although his advice is noble and addresses, in general, human psychological well-being, passionate teachers do not separate themselves from being a teacher. “Teacher” is a much a part of who they are as their position in family, their morals and beliefs, and their own
self-concepts. Perhaps the majority of other careers are ones in which the professional leaves at the door when he or she goes home each day. Not so with teaching! Because the very heart of a teacher beats for his or her students, a passionate teacher’s work is never left at the door. Ongoing consideration for students and all their needs consumes teachers. That consideration becomes another body system that resembles the respiratory, circulatory, and/or nervous system with its own organs and organized functions geared toward student progress. Inasmuch as Dr. Phil suggests that our professional occupations should be separate from who we are as individuals, teachers develop their personal and professional knowledge as part of their identities as teachers. That development is consummated through daily interactions with colleagues and others over the course of a lifetime as a teacher.

The stories provided by my participants reiterate Bill Ayers’ (2004) assertion,

Many fine teachers find in their work the vital link between private and public worlds, between personal fulfillment and social responsibility. They bring a sense of commitment of connectedness to other people and to shared traditions, and of collective goodwill. The also reject the sense of measured calculation that pervades so much of work today, embodying instead a sense of work closely tied to a sense of self, a view that work is not merely what one does, but who one is. (p. 85)

In that teaching becomes who one is, interactions with others continue to mold and shape personal and professional knowledge. Personal and professional knowledge as relational knowing is apparent in the lives and identities of Susan, Mary, Uticia, Julie, Diane, and Yolanda. This finding concurs with Sandra Hollingworth’s (1994) contention, “The concept of knowing through relationship, or relational knowing, involves both the recall of prior knowledge and the reflection on what knowledge is perceived or present in social and political settings” (p. 77). The social and
professional encounters teachers have with others are constantly affecting personal and professional knowledge. Passionate teachers value their colleagues and others who support and encourage their attempts to gain useful knowledge about their students and themselves.

Along with personal and professional knowledge development, teacher passion is part of teacher identity (Thesis Finding 3). As the participants of this study shared their experiences of developing a teacher identity and passion for teaching, it became apparent that passion is part of their teacher personality. Inasmuch as teacher passion evolved in college classrooms as participants’ teacher identities were developing into strong saplings of potential growth, it became the core of teacher identity as each participant experienced rewarding occurrences with her own students. A resounding and rippling belief that students are consistently a passion-building nutrient to teacher identity was heard and experienced as I interacted with my participants. In their interviews and journal entries, the impact that students have on passion is a concurrent and unanimous theme. Each participant at some point stated that she truly “wants to make a difference in the life of a child.” These six teachers have a common belief that they are influencing the lives of children and eventually the world.

Teaching, like any truly human activity, emerges from one’s inwardness, for better or worse. As I teach, I project the condition of my soul onto my students, my subject, and our way of being together. The entanglements I experience in the classroom are often no more or less than the convolutions of my inner life. Viewed from this angle, teaching holds a mirror to the soul. If I am willing to look in that mirror and not run from what I see, I have a chance to gain self-knowledge—and knowing myself is as crucial to good teaching as knowing my students and my subject. (Parker Palmer, 1998, p. 2)
Much like Parker Palmer’s discussion about teaching as a reflection of one’s self, this study reveals much the same evidence. Passion comes from the very heart of each teacher. That passion is a reflection of identity development, personal and professional knowledge, and love of teaching. The convoluted evolution of teacher identity either nurtures and develops passion or allows it to wither. A deep investigation of the lived experiences of the six teachers who willingly opened their lives for exploration reveals what Parker Palmer discusses in his book, *The Courage to Teach*. Julie, Diane, Susan, Mary, Yolanda, and Uticia represent those teachers who remain passionate because they are willing to look at themselves inwardly and bring their positive experiences to their students. The whole of their very nature is wrapped up in who they are and who they want their students to become. Even their most devastating memories are sculpted into experiences of learning and growing in much the same way a fruit tree is pruned to make it bear more and better fruit. In chapter V, interviews and reflective journal entries provide participants’ thoughts and beliefs about passion and how it is developed, maintained, and strengthened.

Within those stories are the concentric circles of teacher identity development in which experiences, positive and negative ones, affect teacher passion. “The self is not elastic---it has potentials and it has limits. If the work we do lacks integrity for us, then we, the work, and the people we do it with will suffer (Palmer, 1998, p. 16). Susan, Mary, Uticia, Julie, Diane, and Yolanda have learned how to “hold in their imaginations the elements of passionate teaching and have made a commitment to engage their students as partners-in-learning” (Fried, 2001, p. 307). Their students appreciate the respect shown to them as these teachers devote their lives to them. “In
whatever form or style a teacher’s passion emerges, students know they are in the presence of someone whose devotion to learning is exceptional” (Fried, 2001, p. 17). Not only do their students know these teachers are devoted, their colleagues and many others know it, too. Their passion has become so much a part of who they are it’s impossible to separate it from their identity as teachers.

Teacher passion grows with positive personal interactions and perseverance against obstacles (Thesis Finding 4). When asked to explain how passion is made stronger, each participant gave credit to interactions with students as one way of rekindling waning passion. From smiles to successes, students’ outward expressions of enthusiasm, effort, and newly acquired understanding nurture teachers’ passion. An overused cliché, “when the light bulb comes on in a student’s eyes,” is the very experience that thrills a teacher on her most frustrating and hard days. Participants expressed their disbelief that teachers could experience the “light bulb effect” and still choose to leave the profession. Besides feeling a great sense of joy when a child finally reaches understanding, other strokes from students help teacher passion grow. Notes, cards, candy, and gifts of appreciation also provide added nutrients to a teacher’s passion. Student hugs are also contributors to a love for teaching.

Like personal and professional knowledge development within the context of social interactions and exchanges, teacher passion is affected by social experiences. “Passionate teaching, like all teaching, is necessarily a social process, not just an individual performance. It is grounded in the relationship between teacher and student” (Fried, 1995, p. 30). Within the give and take relationships teachers have with students are the experiences that help build teacher passion.
In addition to constant encouragement of students and their parents, overcoming obstacles and opposition also strengthens teacher passion. Participants shared their reflections of negative interactions with difficult students, irate parents, or pessimistic colleagues. In each instance, participants eventually learned how to use diplomacy and tact to counter such occurrences. Reflecting upon their successes in diffusing such individuals gave them a sense of pride and rejuvenated passion. Likewise, their own methods of silent opposition used to endure the pressures wrought by meaningless political mandates fuels passion. Learning that they can address the standards, show evidence of accountability, and motivate students to learn all in one felled swoop has congealed their passion.

When discussing passion and what has helped it grow, Susan, Mary, Julie, Uticia, Diane, and Yolanda discussed their knack for taking the negatives and making them positives in their lives. Susan referred to negative interactions with parents and how she has learned to focus on the positive comments from parents instead of allowing a few unhappy parents to diminish her passion. Similarly Julie talked about those irate parents who “often burst my bubble” as a huge deterrent to passion. To nourish her passion Julie said, “My colleagues are the best way to rekindle my passion.” Diane added to the discussion about parents and confirmed just how powerfully parents can negatively affect teacher passion. “Parents just don’t see us as professionals. Of course, my students’ successes and smiles when they finally understand really make me feel good about what I am doing,” expresses Diane’s way of taking a negative situation and turning her attention to the positive. Mary discussed struggling students as one issue that often plagues her passion. Not having
all the answers often causes her to experience feelings of inadequacy as a teacher. Yet, as Mary explained how she takes even those depressing occurrences with students and tries to be patient she added, “I remember other students I worried about and how well they improved with time.” Much like Mary, Uticia bemoaned the at risk students who often put a drain on her passion. Inasmuch as students often are the culprit of waning passion, Mary and Uticia both look to students to strengthen their passion. Uticia turns the negative experiences with students into positive ones. “I think my passion has grown over the past twenty-eight years I have been teaching because of the interactions I have with my students,” Uticia wrote in response to a question about passion. Yolanda addressed the passion-robbing obstacles inherent in teaching by saying, “Teaching with passion is wanting to teach despite the obstacles that come along with this profession.” Each participant concurred that with each stormy encounter with irate parents, poorly achieving students, or other obstacles passion becomes stronger and able to withstand the next assault.

Concerning teacher passion and what affects it, Liston and Garrison (2004) contend, “only those who have suffered and grown wise from such painful experiences have the moral perception and empathetic compassion to comfort others” (p. 134). Susan, Mary, Julie, Uticia, Diane, and Yolanda have “suffered and grown wise” from their experiences with and perseverance against political constraints, hostile parents, and resistant students. Their passion has grown stronger and they are better prepared to address these obstacles with grace and confidence. “Although there is always more to learn and more to know as a teacher, the heart of teaching is a passionate regard for students. With it, mistakes will be made and obstacles will be
overcome” (Garrison and Liston, 2004, p. 60). All six participants brought evidence that they have overcome many obstacles and in doing so their passion has become stronger.

Teacher passion can be taught and strengthened (Thesis Finding 5). Although the participants of this study gave a resounding “No” when asked if passion can be taught, their lives are viable examples of passion that has been taught. Passion was taught and nurtured along side their teacher identity development. As the participants’ teacher identity was conceived and positively affected in elementary classrooms, passion eventually germinated under the sunlight of interactions with other teachers. Whether it was in elementary, middle, or high school; undergraduate college courses; or those first few years of encounters with students and colleagues, passion was learned from the example of other passionate teachers.

Although each participant revealed a clear understanding of what she believed passion is, described her own passion for teaching, and credited her elementary teachers for demonstrating passion, none could verbalize a method for teaching passion. Without exception each participant stated that passion is not a teachable concept. Susan said, “passion comes with the inner calling to be a teacher.” Mary added, “You have to love teaching or you won’t be passionate about it.” Uticia concurred, “I think some teachers choose teaching for all the wrong reasons. Perhaps they never had passion and so they will never get it.” Julie stated, “You have to want to be a teacher. You have to love children. Passion is something that is developed over years of experiencing fun with your students.” Diane suggested that “passion comes and goes.” In addition, Yolanda agreed by saying, “Passion is evident in those
teachers who love what they are doing.” These beliefs give evidence that each participant recognizes passion when she sees it, yet, even with those beliefs participants state that passion cannot be taught. They suppose that passion is something you either have or you don’t.

Inasmuch as each dogmatically concurred that passion cannot be taught, each gave credit to other teachers for emulating passion toward her as she developed her own passion. It is ironic to me that these passionate teachers are teaching passion to their students each and every day without considering the impact they are having on future teachers; yet they give their own elementary teachers credit for demonstrating passion to them. From Susan’s interactions with her passionate second grade teacher, the compassion showed to Mary in her elementary classrooms, Uticia’s recollections of Mrs. Herrington’s interest in her, Julie’s fondness for her first grade teacher and warm memories of how she cared for her, Diane’s recollections of her happy days in elementary school and the respect that was shown to her by her teachers, to Yolanda’s admonition that “teachers develop passion based on their initial learning experiences,” it was teachers who taught my participants to be passionate about teaching.

When asked the question, “Can passion be taught?” without exception each participant answered, “No.” Most of them said that passion is something you have or do not have. Although at first thought, I agreed. To me, passion is something that had to be built early on in one’s life. Like Mary Lou Retton, I believed that passion is something that drives one to do his or her best because that person has a deep-seeded heart desire to attain some goal. After researching passion, becoming consumed with
the ideas of passion, hearing the term passion used in abundance in the media and
other areas, I have changed my mind about the possibility of passion as a teachable
concept.

Yes, passion can be taught. No, it cannot be taught like an algebraic
algorithm. No, it cannot be taught like the writing process. No, it cannot be taught
like teaching a child to ride a bicycle. Nevertheless, it can be taught. The very
participants of this study were taught to be passionate about teaching. It was taught to
them in subtle, but powerful, ways by their very own teachers. It was taught to them
by their colleagues. It was taught to them by their students. If learning is a constant
life process, then certainly, passion can be taught.

Having worked at Hesse Elementary for almost seventeen years, I have
watched the subtle teaching of passion. I have watched passion grow to the point of
squashing out negativity and apathy. I have watched passion blossom into that
beautiful entity that captures the attention of visitors to our school. No one seems to
be able to put words to just what it is that makes Hesse feel so good, inviting, electric,
and warm. What people fail to recognize is passion. The majority of teachers at
Hesse are passionate about their students. That passion has become contagious to the
students. Hesse students are passionate about learning. The common ingredient to
that elusive “thing” that Hesse is…is passion. It has been taught. It continues to be
taught…Every day, with every interaction, with every experience, passion is taught.

“Evelyn, I need your help,” Julie placed her hand on my shoulder in what
seemed to be to hold on for dear life. Not imagining what in the world could be so
imperative, I listened intently for the next words. “I have a student in fourth grade
who cannot tell time. I don’t mean elapsed time, or any other difficult time concept. I mean she cannot tell time to the hour or half-hour. She doesn’t even know what the hands mean.” Julie was passionate about her student. “How can a student make it to fourth grade and not know how to tell time?” Julie was in disbelief.

After a brief discussion about time being just one small skill that certainly would not keep a student from passing each grade level, Julie took my Judy clock and a handful of cutesy worksheets, including a pattern for making your own clock with her. She left my classroom on a mission…a mission to help her student acquire a life skill that somehow she had missed in her short academic experiences.

This exchange with my colleague is but one example of what passionate teachers do. Passionate teachers don’t blame. They don’t blame parents; they don’t blame society; they don’t blame previous teachers; and, they don’t blame students. They take the issue at hand and find a way to fix it. So many times teachers become whiners about all the issues they face. Instead of becoming passionate about being the remedy for the problems and finding ways to make things better, they become bitter complainers stuck in the mire of negativity. Inasmuch as negativity is contagious and can poison the teaching profession, positive enthusiasm and passion are just as contagious. I have watched it evolve in the hallways, on the playground, and in the cafeteria of our school.

Passion was not only learned by these six teachers; they also are teaching passion to their own students and other teachers. By way of example, they learned how to imitate passion and make it part of their teacher identity and personality. Likewise, by way of example, they are demonstrating passion in their daily
interactions with their students and colleagues. Just who is watching and learning to be passionate may never be revealed to these teachers, but passion is definitely being taught as these teachers inculcate passion into the identities of many of those who have the privilege of interacting with them on a regular basis.

Although teacher identity is constantly developing and changing through life experiences, teacher passion wanes and waxes during those same experiences. Teacher passion is acted upon by obstacles that push, pull, and often diminish its existence. The degree to which passion has developed determines how resilient it is to the assaults it must endure by way of political constraints, hostile parents, and less than optimal teaching conditions. As teacher passion endures and survives these difficulties and problems, it becomes stronger. Each time passionate teachers interact with colleagues, students, and others, their example can be, and often is, learned by individuals who experience it.

Another way in which passion can be taught and/or strengthened is through special programs provided for undergraduate students as well as veteran teachers. “Under the guidance of Parker J. Palmer, the Fetzer Institute created Courage to Teach, a seasonal program of quarterly retreats for the personal and professional renewal of public school educators” (Intrator, 2002, p.325). This type of program needs to be in place in each school district. If we, as educators, are on a common mission to bolster the teaching profession, recruit and retain teachers, and reform curriculum, it is imperative that we minister to the needs of our profession. Passionate teachers stay the course and march onward no matter what obstacles are
placed in their paths, yet, those comrades who falter at the first misperception of their reality as a teacher need support and guidance to strengthen their waning passion.

Since most of the participants discussed the importance of collegial support, especially during their first years of teaching, this study supports the need for an improved support system for undergraduate education students, student teachers, and novice teachers. Inasmuch as passion can be taught within the context of a school setting and through special programs like Parker Palmer’s Courage to Teach program, another arena in which passion should be inculcated is in college education courses. Teacher preparation programs should attempt to partner with public school teachers to address those needs early on in their education classes.

While it may not be possible to anticipate every experience every student will encounter as a teacher, it is perhaps realistic to provide a fuller view of what teaching means to teachers and to prepare students to be active problem solvers they will have to be in order to be effective in the classroom. Inexperienced teachers may learn a great deal about the profession from the images that experienced teachers have developed. (Schubert and Ayers, 1992, p. 58)

An education student should have the opportunity to observe, reflect and analyze, and choose a teacher with whom he or she would spend a two-year professional relationship. That relationship should include a prescribed minimum amount of observations, discussions, and guidance documentation. That relationship should continue into the student teacher’s student teaching experience. Even if the student teacher does not fulfill her student teaching with the same teacher (his or her mentor teacher), the relationship would serve to support the student teacher in her student teaching endeavors. Likewise, that relationship would help bolster the novice
teacher as he or she faces the obstacles and disappointments of incorrect expectations often experienced by first year teachers.

This finding is ripe with suggestions for helping novice teachers find and strengthen their passion and for nurturing passion for learning and teaching. As the participants shared their own experiences of passion-building occurrences, hope is given to the field of education for ensuring teacher retention and continued growth.

Bill Ayers (2004) agrees that schools of education often are remiss in educating student teachers about the affective aspects of teaching.

Teacher-education and credentialing programs often have students dipping into educational philosophy, educational psychology, and history of education, picking up a few courses on the methods of teaching, and finally bringing it all together in a semester of student teaching. This approach structures the separation of thought from action, and nowhere elevates the moral and ethical to a central place. All of this ignores the humanizing mission of teaching, and again, diminishes the heart of teaching. (p. 17)

What Ayers says here is powerful for colleges of education. Passion is that entity that is diminished, or not addressed, in college classrooms. With programs like Parker Palmer’s Courage to Teach programs and a focus on inculcating student teachers with stronger relationships of passion with veteran teachers, passion would improve and teacher attrition would be reduced.

“Since reform proposals, curriculum units, and administrative directives ultimately live or die in the hands of individual teachers, it is to individual teachers that we ultimately turn in order to understand teaching” (Ayers, 1989, p. 5). Ayers recognizes the need for teachers to be heard in order for curriculum reform to occur. Yet, some teachers do not feel that their voices or their lives matter at all in the scheme of the overall teaching profession. This study attempts to find out what
builds passion and what tears it down. The participants of this study are the strong ones who have survived the daily difficulties teachers become victim to as they attempt to teach the masses. In their personal and professional identity development passion has become a part of who they are. Their passion was developed along side their belief system and pedagogical commitment to making a difference in the world. These teachers experience the same fears, disappointments, and pains that other teachers face. They are not immune to the assaults on their professional identities by politicians, reporters, and the general public. Yet, they do not lose heart. They do not throw in the towel and become dead bodies that occupy a teacher’s desk much like the teacher in *Ferris Bueller’s Day Off*.

Although teacher identity is a human construction that is constantly evolving, it is strong in its development. A human who has developed a teacher identity does not always develop a passion for teaching. A person can look like a teacher, talk like a teacher, and act like a teacher while not demonstrating passion for teaching. In most cases those people who call themselves teachers have developed a teacher identity. Since there are so many intricate components to teacher identity, individuals who have devoted their time and effort to becoming a teacher, in most cases, become teachers. Yet, teacher passion is not always found as a component of those identities. Those who become teachers and do not have passion or who lose it, can be found in all schools. Teachers who are pessimistic whiners who find fault with almost every encounter they endure each day lack teacher passion. They may, in fact, be passionate, but their passion is not for teaching. Perhaps their passion is for fault finding and finger pointing; but, obviously, they do not have a passion for teaching.
Many times, passionate teachers fall victim to the constant barrage of problems and difficulties that infect the teaching profession. Much like a diseased oak tree, they lose their exuberance and eventually become dispassionate. Provided here are suggestions that will help dispassionate teachers become passionate about teaching.

“I just wish parents could be flies on the wall in my classroom. Then they might take what I am saying seriously about their children.” At Hesse, this type of negativity is met with a barrage of positive statements that immediately apply a dose of passion to the situation.

“So what if parents could be flies on the wall, would that make you a better teacher?”

“Yeah, and what about how long the students are with us. They spend more time with us than they do with their parents. I think parents would expect us to help our students not criticize them.”

“I guess you’re right. I just get frustrated when my students don’t try.”

I witnessed this exchange recently as we gathered for yet another Professional Learning Communities committee meeting. The teacher who boldly complained about her students could have initiated a negative dumping ground for poor student behavior and performance. Instead, her complaint was met with the reality of our profession. Passionate teachers redirected her complaint by showing her that ultimately it is our responsibility to help students make progress toward becoming who they are and who we hope they become.

In yet another exchange, a teacher complained that her kindergarten student comes to school dirty and without underpants. Her complaint was met with
passionate opposition that the child was not responsible for her hygiene or the
clothing that is available to her. That teacher’s lack of respect for her little
kindergarten student was met with a huge dose of “shame on you.”

In one final story of passion as a deterrent to negativity, my own passion
turned a student bashing conversation into an apology. It was a beautiful spring day.
My students were playing on the playground with the friskiness of little puppies. As
they darted in and out coming to me with giggles and childlike stories, I enjoyed the
freedom they demonstrated. Eventually, I was joined by two teachers and our
principal. One teacher was bringing her class outside for their recess. The other
teacher was taking a break. And, the principal was simply walking the school, as he
often does, to drink in the passion of our school.

“You know, Evelyn, I think Antwan (pseudonym) needs Ritalin. He is so
hyper and he gets into so much trouble in our after school program. I can hardly get
him to finish his homework. I have talked to his parents and they are just waiting to
see what you think. I really wish you would just tell them he needs Ritalin.”

The other teacher chimed in. “Yes, I have seven students on Ritalin and it
really makes a huge difference. I think Antwan surely could use it.” My principal
stood in silence as if waiting to see me pounce.

“Antwan does not need Ritalin. He needs to be understood. He needs adults
to stop criticizing him and accept him for who he is. He does not fit the mold of
perfect student, but he is making fantastic progress. He is happy, gets along well with
his classmates, and gives 100% effort to accomplish every task I give him.” My
response is not what those teachers expected, but it is exactly what my principal knew I would say. I do not condone medicating children for the sake of compliance.

Nothing more was said on the playground. But, a few minutes after school, my classroom door opened. It was the Ritalin-answer wielding teacher. “Evelyn, I apologize. I should not have been so bold as to assume that you should convince Antwan’s parents that he needs Ritalin.” Her apology was a nice gesture, but it did not change the fact that this teacher wants a quick fix for resistant students. She was not taking responsibility for her influence on Antwan’s behavior in the after school program.

“Tracy (pseudonym), I understand what you are thinking, but you spend two hours a day with Antwan. I spend seven and a half hours with him. You and I do not see the same behaviors. I do not believe Antwan needs Ritalin at all. I believe he needs to be understood and respected. More of that would help him learn to understand and respect others and it’s what it will take to help Antwan succeed in school.”

Whether or not the exchange between Tracy and me administered a dose of passion for students or not, Tracy has not approached with me with her quick-fix remedies for students again. Most teachers at Hesse meet this kind of negativity with positive comments and their dedication to students. Over the past sixteen years, I have watched and heard about exchanges in which teacher complaints are met with positive solutions and/or possibilities for positive change.

In order for passion to be taught, undergraduate programs should prepare student teachers for the negativity that is poisoning our profession. They should be
given alternatives for addressing teachers who have become dispassionate about their roles as teachers and teachers who have become extremely negative. Likewise, those teachers who have become dispassionate should be guided by example how to rekindle their passion. “Anything we do in this life with repetition has the potential to become monotonous, whether it be our jobs, our relationships, or even a hobby” (Perricone, 2005, p.62). Much like the experience of waning passionate love, love of teaching must sometimes be reignedited. Those of us who have weathered the reality of marriage and its seasons, often find that recalling those first kisses, touches, and feelings of insatiable passion helps us rekindle our love for our life partners. Similarly dispassionate teachers need guidance from administrators and colleagues to resuscitate them back to a life of passion for learning and teaching.

At some point those teachers cared about their students and their role as teacher. They need to remember how to care. Without care there is no passion. Nel Noddings’ Ethic of Care encompasses the necessary environment in which care is cultivated and shared by everyone in the learning landscape. “It should be clear that schools are centers of care” (Noddings, 1992, p. 72). It is within that type of environment that waning passion can be recognized and addressed with care. By helping dispassionate teachers recall their reasons for teaching, their idealistic dreams of making a difference, and their initial surges of passion for teaching, a renewed passion is possible.

Whether passion is taught in college courses or rekindled in those who have somehow lost it, there are certain unified pedagogical beliefs that passionate teachers usually demonstrate in their actions with students and others. Found within the texts
of participant interviews, journal entries, and classroom observations is the
confirmation that passionate teachers are on an infinite search for knowledge; are not
afraid of political mandates or constraints; embrace parental involvement; and, value
collegial support (Thesis Finding 6). Other than findings revealed in this study
concerning teacher identity development and personal and professional knowledge,
specific unified pedagogical beliefs were demonstrated by my research participants.
One of those beliefs was made clear as these passionate teachers demonstrated
concern for their performance. Without exception each participant was nervous about
her interviews and responses to my questions. This desire to give the right answers is
part of each participant’s need to be the best she can possibly be in each and every
endeavor attempted and to make sure her knowledge is in line with her and others’
expectations. I found that reassuring each that her innermost feelings and beliefs
were the right answers helped each to relax and engage in a personal exchange of
information.

Another conviction expressed by the participants is their never-satisfied
hunger for knowledge and love of learning. Passionate teachers are on an infinite
search for knowledge. Whether that knowledge is gained by way of professional
development seminars and workshops, by way of continued education in colleges, or
by way of learning from colleagues and students, each participant demonstrated her
commitment to a life of learning. Each participant has her master’s degree and
continues to develop her professional knowledge through staff development and in-
service courses.
Another common pedagogical belief expressed by my participants is that passionate teachers are not afraid of political interference, mandates, or constraints. Susan, Mary, Uticia, Julie, Diane, and Yolanda each stated that political interference through standardization, accountability mandates, and strict guidelines does not impact their teaching methodology or teacher passion. Susan and Mary admitted that they do not pay a lot of attention to political pressures. Concerning political constraints, Mary said, “I guess I should consider the political aspects of our educational system, but I don’t. I simply teach because it’s what I love.” Julie, Uticia, and Diane said that standardization is necessary, not something to complain about or fear. Yolanda said that political mandates cause her to be overburdened with paperwork, but showed no evidence of fearing the state’s condemnation that she is “not highly qualified.” These six teachers have learned to silently feign obedience to any political interference that might otherwise cause others to shudder. They do not fear political meddling in the realm of education. They simply continue teaching in spite of the blustery winds wrought by the hot air of politicians.

Often times, parents are seen as a major opposition to teachers. The AARP (2003) investigation conducted to find those factors that make teachers leave the profession found that “lack of support from parents” was a reason often stated by their participants as one reason for leaving the profession. Unlike those who allow parents to gain power through their verbal assaults or cause frustration when they don’t show an interest in their children, Susan, Mary, Julie, Uticia, Diane, and Yolanda do not let irate parents bully them. On the contrary, passionate teachers embrace and encourage parental involvement and are not bitter when there is a lack
thereof. Likewise, parental assaults are met with professionalism and quickly
dissipate from the participants’ global view of parent interactions. Based on
responses to interview questions and journal prompts, Mary and Yolanda said that
they have been fortunate in that negative interactions with parents are rare for them.
Susan, Julie, Uticia, and Diane expressed how badly parents have made them feel.
Yet, each has maintained a strong commitment to teaching and do not let the negative
interactions with parents taint their love of teaching.

In the same way that passionate teachers resist the negativity and pain often
inflicted by unhappy parents, low pay does not cause passionate teachers to leave the
field of education. Passionate teachers do not bemoan low teacher pay. Low pay as a
significant reason that some teachers leave the profession is posited by the AARP’s
(2003) study. Low teacher salaries are in the forefront of many publications
concerning teacher attrition and our nation’s teacher shortage dilemma. Yet, the
participants of my study conveyed something to the contrary. Although my
participants would, of course, enjoy increased salaries, each said that teachers’
salaries are not what caused to them to decide to teach or not and do not impact their
commitment to teaching. Likewise, the participants did not believe that increased
teacher salaries would entice “higher quality” individuals to the field. The
implication that increased teacher pay would entice people of a higher quality is
insulting to those of us who chose teaching because we are passionate about teaching
and learning. Individuals who feel compelled to teach and truly yearn to impact the
lives of children do not let low pay stop them from becoming teachers or cause them
to drop out of the teaching profession. Likewise, persons who come to the teaching
field because its salary has been made competitive to other professions will not necessarily become higher quality teachers. Without passion, no amount of money will keep a person in a classroom of eager children.

From the discussion concerning parents and low teacher pay, it was apparent that passionate teachers teach for one purpose…their students. As Susan, Mary, Julie, Uticia, Diane, and Yolanda shared their innermost thoughts about teaching, students were the reoccurring theme that kept teachers going in the face of obstacles that plague the profession of teaching. From political constraints and parent opposition to low teacher pay, each participant voiced her love for her students and told about the power of students to nurture and build teacher passion.

Other than their love for their students as an inveterate common topic of passionate teachers, passionate teachers recall and recognize the importance of collegial support. Much like the finding concerning the importance of collegial interactions as a catalyst for developing a culture of passion found in Thesis Finding 7, likewise collegial support is necessary for building and maintaining teacher passion. “This is one of the tragedies in education today. We have a lot of people who don’t recognize that being a teacher means being with people (hooks, 1994, p. 165). Colleagues are part of the group of “people” that impact our lives as teachers. Our assistant principal often recognizes the unified pedagogical belief systems shared by our faculty. The participants also verbalized the importance of support that is readily given to them by their colleagues.

The research texts of this study reveal some of the same findings found in other research documents. The joys, fears, successes, and failures of teachers have been
revealed through the works of other researchers in the field of education. Bill Ayers (1989 and 2001), Parker Palmer (1998), Jean Clandinin and Michael Connelly (1995 and 1999), and others have discussed those common occurrences that describe a teacher’s life in the classroom. Each of these educational writers has studied teachers and teaching and provide a multitude of research texts that reveal political constraints, less than optimal teaching conditions, and an overall attitude of disrespectfulness that teachers must endure as they continue their mission to make a difference in the world. “Some focus on our dispositions and habits of thinking, others question our expertise. All seem giddily poised to spring upon our bleeding bodies” (Ayers, 2004, p. 19). My study concurs with those researchers who have made it their life goal to tell teachers’ stories. Yet, this study offers other research findings that should be considered when preparing teachers for the classroom and when trying to retain teachers in the teaching profession. The implications of this study are useful for undergraduate teacher preparation programs, novice teachers, and teachers who are experiencing a desire to leave the profession.

Teacher preparation programs and those who implement them should attempt to foster those unified pedagogical beliefs and actions demonstrated by Susan, Mary, Uticia, Julie, Diane, and Yolanda. “Preparing teachers of judgment and thought, of care and compassion, has long been a concern of those who educate teachers, and yet it has been ignored or supplanted by issues of more urgency in many colleges” (Ayers, 2004, p. 103). Perhaps those colleges and universities feel some of the same political pressures that try to force teachers into a uniform group of robots. Teachers like the participants in this study provide useful and practical knowledge as they share
their unified pedagogical beliefs. That knowledge could help novice teachers embrace those beliefs, which would give them tools for facing the obstacles that often destroy teacher passion. “Inexperienced future teachers may learn a good deal about the profession from the images that experienced teachers have developed” (Schubert and Ayers, 1992, p. 58).

In a search for those unified pedagogical beliefs shared by my participants I analyzed my data looking for hidden meaning in the stories shared with me. In that quest, I did not find, as stated in (Pinar, et al., 1995), that “any comprehensive theory of curriculum must include race and its concepts” (p. 319). I understood the tenets of narrative theory and had a plethora of literature on narrative theory and a multitude of narrative literary works. It was not that narrative theory did not include race. On the contrary, multiculturalism is studied carefully by narrative theorists. In my search for unified pedagogical beliefs in teacher identity development and teacher passion, I simply ignored the fact that three of my participants are White and three are Black. Having been immersed in Connelly, He, and Phillion’s (2005) work on multiculturalism and recalling Meta Harris’ chapter titled, Black Women Writing Autobiography, I suddenly realized I was negligent in not delving deeper into the African-American components of my participants who are Black.

Realizing that I had left a huge stone unturned, I queried Mary, Uticia, and Yolanda with yet another journal prompt. As I studied their responses to my question about African-American culture and its impact on their lives and careers I found that culture influences teacher identity development (Thesis Finding 7). Inasmuch as Mary, Uticia, and Yolanda could not recall the impact of racism on their early
childhood experiences, the history and heritage of African-American people in our country did impact their development of their ideas and beliefs about education (as evidenced in their journal responses in chapter V). Each spoke of the importance of education to promote social justice and equality. In not so few words, each was taught that education was the main roadway to improvement for the lives of their people. Throughout the interview process and journal writing responses, Mary talked about the importance of education as a means of escaping the cotton field. Uticia discussed the importance of helping at risk students better themselves by way of education. Yolanda reverberated and echoed her family and community’s admonition to “return home and educate our own.” Much like Junia Yearwood (in Nieto, 2003), my participants gave evidence of

a sense of urgency and commitment to my students have heightened and are constantly fueled by the daily reminders of the ‘savage,’ cruel realities that Jonathan Kozol has written about and the inequalities of educational opportunities and preparation of students of color; the relentless specter of discrimination and racism…(p. 28)

Since my focus was on personal experiences as a means of developing teacher identity and Mary, Uticia, and Yolanda had not personally experienced the “cruel realities of discrimination and racism,” I had to narrow my focus once again and use both “an experiential eye and an imaginative eye” (Connelly, He, and Phillion, 2005, p. 294). Doing so allowed me to see the impact of the “cruel realities of discrimination and racism” as components of Mary’s, Uticia’s, and Yolanda’s passion for teaching for social justice. Their African-American culture and its history and heritage have strongly influenced their teacher identity development, personal and
professional knowledge, and love of teaching and continue to do so as they forge the way for the next generation of educators and other Black professionals.

The finding that culture impacts teacher identity is not a novel idea. My research concurs with other narrative researchers who have written about the importance of culture as it impacts education in all aspects of our educational milieu. “The call for recognition of cultural diversity, a rethinking of ways of knowing, a deconstruction of old epistemologies, and the concomitant demand that there be a transformation in our classrooms, in how we teach and what we teach, has been a necessary revolution” (hooks, 1994, p. 29). Mary, Uticia, and Yolanda carry on their silent battle of reform by recognizing the importance of “teaching our own.”

These teachers are committed to African-American children and the communities which spawn them: to believing in their unlimited potential, to working hard to provide a quality education despite different circumstances, to struggling against all forms of racial oppression, and to building a sense of connection between students and their communities. (Delpit, in Foster, 1997, p. xxi)

The participants of this study also concur with bell hooks (1994) who says, “When we entered racist, desegregated white schools we left a world where teachers believed that to educate black children rightly would require a political commitment. Now, we were taught mainly by white teachers whose lessons reinforced racist stereotypes” (hooks, 1994, p. 3). Mary’s assertion that one of her White teachers called her classmates, “Niggards,” Uticia’s claim that “white schools were really different,” and Yolanda’s recollection that Black teachers pushed her harder than White teachers reflect hook’s observations and experiences concerning culture and education. Teacher identity is not constructed devoid of culture, race, gender, or social economic place. Culture is an important part of the landscape upon which
teacher identity is molded. Similarly, culture has an impact upon teacher passion. “Racial and cultural identity is the motor that keeps teachers passionate about their work” (Nieto, 2003, p. 30). Mary, Uticia, and Yolanda divulged their commitment to the Black community in its “continued development.” Their teacher identities and passion for learning and teaching reflect their desire to cultivate continued progress for not only their Black students, but for all students. Their African-American heritage fuels their evolving teacher identity and passion for teaching.

As I continued to collect, to listen, and to hear my participants’ stories of their identity development, I realized that teacher identity development, personal and professional knowledge, and love of teaching are always evolving (Finding 8). The constant consideration and reflection about who I am and why I teach the way I do provide more questions and fewer answers. To see my own passion commensurate with my research participants’ passion has been invigorating and rewarding, yet I believe many stones have been left unturned in truly touching the elusiveness of passion. Certainly there have been revelations about teaching with passion. Teaching with passion can be shared and cultivated in a teaching community. Teaching with passion wanes and waxes. Passion for teaching can be destroyed. Yet, the development of passion has many varying possibilities. What develops passion in one teacher might not necessarily be the defining moment for all other teachers or any other teacher. Teacher passion is developed as intricately as all other personal characteristics are developed. Humans develop love, hate, narcissism, benevolence, kindness, selfishness, rudeness, consideration, apathy, ambition, and all other human
traits according to their interactions, exchanges, and experiences with others. Each individual life story is a construction of identity.

“Reaching back over the years, seeking the themes of my becoming, I try to find contact points between my story and the stories of those who are teachers-to-be and teachers today. We have in common, I want to believe, the notion of teaching as a project” (Greene, in Ayers, 1995, p. 65). This ongoing project is one in which my participants and I are connected. Our lives at Hesse Elementary School intertwine and become concentric circles of identity development, personal and professional knowledge, and love of teaching. As we travel toward our destination of teaching to make a difference in this world, our project, our journey is never-ending. “To be human is to be on a voyage, to be a project, imagining, reaching, changing oneself and the world. Having a mind capable of projecting, choosing, reflecting---that is the human signature that teachers both seek and nourish” (Ayers, 2004, p. 59).

My own passion is a constant construction of interactions and exchanges with those who enter, touch, and often leave my life. The participants of this story, in their willingness to share, have helped me recognize and celebrate my own teacher passion which has grown stronger as I have interacted with them. My own teacher identity, personal and professional knowledge, and love of teaching are woven into who I am as a person. In spite of all the public attention and negative press given to the profession of teaching, I am more than proud to call myself a teacher and believe with all my heart that teaching is the “profession that makes all other professions possible” (Ayers, 2001, p. 8).
In searching for ways to teach and rekindle passion, and after I had gathered what I believed to be more than enough research texts from my participants, I probed the thoughts and opinions of Lola Burse, a first year assistant principal at Hesse. As Mrs. Burse shared her ideas of identity development of teachers at Hesse, I recognized that it is extremely important to create a school culture which nurtures passion for teaching and learning in an era of standardization and accountability (Thesis Finding 9). This finding is also supported by journal entries written by my participants.

I asked our new assistant principal to explain to me exactly what it is that makes Hesse so special. Our new assistant principal served in the Marines and is married to a military officer. She has traveled the United States and has been an assistant principal in five other elementary schools. Since she has such vast experiences with schools, I thought she could offer an objective viewpoint on Hesse. Being the professional that she is, she began to answer the question with great diplomacy. She attributed our academic success to our leadership. Likewise, she gave our principal credit for the positive school climate that is obvious at Hesse. I allowed her to expound on how important administrators are to setting the tone for the school.

When our assistant principal finished her answer to my question, I provided my personal response to her answer. I told her that I had been teaching at Hesse for over sixteen years. I explained that in those years, Hesse had been under the leadership of four different principals. Their leadership styles ranged from extremely rigid and harsh to almost non-existent. Yet, I had not seen a change in our school’s
atmosphere since I entered Hesse in 1989. We ended our conversation and went our separate ways.

A few days later, the assistant principal came into my classroom one afternoon after school. She explained that she had given a lot of thought to what I had said.

“Evelyn, I believe Hesse has its very own culture. That culture includes the common belief of all our teachers that all children can learn, all children can behave, and all children can and should become productive citizens. The longevity of Hesse teachers has made our school one in which a sense of family cohesiveness is very strong. Our teachers know and respect each other. The students do not belong solely to their teacher. They belong to all of us. Students understand that teachers are here for them and that all teachers are interested in their progress. So to answer your question, I believe that Hesse has its own culture of passion for learning that is evidenced in our students and teachers.”

In an attempt to find out just what makes teachers passionate about teaching and why Hesse teachers rarely leave the profession, I believe our assistant principal is right. I feel certain that my research participants would remain in the teaching profession no matter where they taught. Yet, I believe the teachers at Hesse share a common belief that students are the sole reason for teaching. We support each other, celebrate our students’ progress, and encourage each other when things get tough. We are not competitive with each other. Instead, we acknowledge and respect the diversity in teaching styles and presentations that each teacher brings to her students.
Hesse is fortunate in this time of standardization and teacher accountability that we have a principal, who has been our principal for nine years, and a new assistant principal who respect and celebrate our professionalism. We are not encumbered with tedious lesson plans, meaningless meetings, and duties that rob us of our time with our students. Yes, we have to make an attempt to address the minor changes wrought by Georgia’s Performance Standards. Yes, we must make an attempt to make our school even better. But, in the long run, our administrators respect our desire to teach without restrictions. We are allowed to use our professional identities to do a job that surpasses most governmental expectations. For the most part, Hesse teachers eagerly come to work. We enjoy our students. We enjoy our freedom to teach. And, we enjoy each other. Perhaps that is why education students yearn to work at Hesse, teachers yearn to transfer into our school, and when some teachers leave, it’s because they choose to finally retire.

In this era of increased standardization and accountability, passionate teachers must have the support of stakeholders who are on the same page with them. Policy makers, news media, college professors, and the entire milieu of people who propose to be in favor of an improved educational system must embrace the attitudes and narrative research findings that show what works to make education truly “more democratic” (Dewey, 1938). Many curriculum theorists realize the problems wrought by governmental control of our country’s educational system. Notions of profit efficiency and control “place the greatest weight on the product—a human being—of the educational system. We can see this demonstrated in the continuing push for more standardization, accountability, testing, and national curriculums” (Reynolds,
“Teacher education candidates need to be equipped for lifelong learning. This is especially true in societies like ours where expectations regarding academic standards are constantly being refined as our world changes” (Darling-Hammond, 2005, p. 358). “Teachers have become accustomed to turning their attention upward as they step out of the classroom into the out-of-classroom place on the professional knowledge landscape. They look to see what new prescriptions, new mandates, and new policies are dropping from the conduit to litter the professional knowledge landscape” (Clandinin and Connelly, 1995, p. 32). “We are distanced by a grading system that separates teachers from students, by departments that fragment fields of knowledge, by competition that makes students and teachers alike wary of their peers, and by a bureaucracy that puts faculty and administrations at odds” (Palmer, 1998, p. 36.) The voices of curriculum researchers and theorists decry the dehumanization of schools that are controlled by political interference.

Certainly political pressures are the forces that dehumanize curriculum. Yet, fostering an educational landscape of hope and dreams for creating a culture of passion for the sake of building more schools like Hesse Elementary would soften the bars of the imprisonment often forced by standardization and accountability. Hesse’s culture of passion is a landscape of hope that cultivates an obsession for learning and education in all those who live their daily experiences there.

The culture of passion expressed by Mrs. Burse is contagious and permeates the identities of each teacher who has joined our faculty. With a majority of our teachers reaching the point in which retirement becomes an option, I often wonder
what will happen to our strong culture of passion. It is my hope that it will continue to be a contagion and infect all who become part of our professional family.

In addition to creating a school culture which nurtures passion for teaching and learning in an era of standardization and accountability there is a need to foster an educational landscape of hopes and dreams for cultivating passion for teaching (Thesis Finding 10). This study offers hope for reducing the rate of teacher burnout and attrition. In doing so, it also presents hope for improving the teacher profession. Not by way of reduced political interference, protection from parental and public distain toward teachers, or increased teacher pay, but by way of shared teacher identity development that has withstood the ravages of less than optimal teaching conditions. For those who lose hope of becoming and remaining teachers, information on how to build a teacher identity and strengthen teacher passion is found within the lives of the research participants to this study. For administrators who become frustrated with ineffective teachers, insight for identifying dispassionate teachers and methods for igniting passion are shared in this dissertation. And, for reforming curriculum to best suit our students and our society, teachers’ voices are heard within the pages of this research inquiry. In the current era of technological growth and rapid change, teachers are the catalysts for preparing humans to meet the needs of today and tomorrow’s society. Likewise, as our world becomes more diverse and cultures meld into blurred landscapes of existence, teachers are the microscopes with which children can see themselves and celebrate their and others’ diversity.
In order for teacher passion to grow and flourish it must be nurtured within a community of passionate others. Like an oak grows concomitant with other oaks, as moss is grown and shared, and as oak pollen spreads from tree to tree for reproduction, there must be a community conducive for passion to grow. The participants in this study not only share their passion, divulge how it was conceived, share how it was nurtured, and offer their own stories of passion that was taught; they also reveal the importance of teaching within a culture of passion that is evident at Hesse Elementary School. It takes a community of policy makers, administrators, parents, teachers, students, and the entire milieu of education stakeholders who embrace the importance of cultivating teacher passion in order for schools like Hesse to lead the way in fostering curriculum change by way of teacher passion.

“In a compassion-filled world, you see, it doesn’t matter how big the fish you catch is or how many books you’ve read and/or cited; it is the road you have traveled. It is life, the way you live it and the way you treat others along the way” (Reynolds, 2003, p. 45). “Compassion-filled” education is demonstrated in the classrooms of Susan, Mary, Uticia, Julie, Diane, and Yolanda, and most other teachers at Hesse. Not only are colleagues treated with respect and kindness, the students are also treated this way. “We need compassion for the child as child. A curriculum should allow both teacher and student to develop critical, caring, compassionate conversation” (Reynolds, 2003, p. 43).

“At some point, parents and education need to stop talking about school reform and begin the difficult task of reinventing schools top to bottom, completely new” (Ayers, 1995, p. 123). “Perhaps we can invent a future that will make
whatever past we appropriate as our own part of a narrative with a sense and purpose, and with pulsating meaning for which we are all in search” (Greene, in Ayers, 1995, p. 75). Many curriculum theorists, like William Pinar, and others realize that our schools need a renewed vision and hope for curriculum reform. We need to awaken from the “nightmare” that is fraught with apathetic teachers, complacent students, and a bureaucracy that runs in circles tossing one idea after another at schools. The faculty, staff, administration, and student body at Hesse Elementary School are viable, real-life examples of how an educational landscape of hope and dreams can be a reality for America’s children.

This study reveals the hope that humanity is in good hands as passionate teachers divulge their commitment to providing the best possible education for each child who enters their classroom and to reproducing acorns of teacher identity in their own elementary students. This narrative inquiry, much like the germination of an acorn into an oak tree, is a start to a life of continued investigation into teacher identity development and a search for ways to spread and strengthen passion for the teaching profession for the purpose of reducing teacher burnout and attrition. It is with hope for authentic curriculum change that I join the ranks of curriculum researchers who diligently search for those entities that are important to making the schools in the U.S.A. the best they can be for preparing our children to develop a more just society. Contained within the lives and identities of passionate teachers is the power and hope for curriculum reform. As I press forward in shining a light into the often ignored lives of teachers, I commit myself to spreading my love of learning and teaching to all who will listen. For it is the voice of teachers that holds the keys
for unlocking the cupboards that hold elusive ingredients for curriculum change and reform. The quietly contained passion of teachers for their students and their own professional growth needs a microphone so that it can be shared and put to good use for helping our ailing educational system. The power hidden in passion for teaching and learning needs to be unleashed.
EPILOGUE

Three hundred seventy-six acorns (third grade students) have fallen from the branches of my oak tree of teacher identity. Much like the oak tree from which acorns fall, I rarely know which acorns will find their way into the rich soil of education courses or the sunlight of passionate educators. Yet, of those three hundred seventy-six acorns, one has germinated into a promising oak sapling. Elizabeth Ingram developed a nubbin of teacher identity in my third grade classroom. Thirteen years later, she is now a growing oak tree of teacher identity. Elizabeth has kept in close contact with me and shares her passion for teaching with me. We now share the rich soil of Hesse Elementary School and bask in the sunlight and nutrients of passionate teachers who teach with us.

Unlike Elizabeth, who fell from the branches of my own teacher identity, two other oak trees of teacher identity have benefited from my own passion for teaching. Angela Alcorn and Linda Byerly are two tremendous oaks that came to me as germinating oaks. As student teachers, both watched, listened, and emulated my passion for teaching and learning as they fulfilled their student teaching requirements in my classroom. Angela chose to return to the grounds of her oak orchard and teaches in the private school from which she graduated. Linda remains in the Savannah-Chatham County Public School System reproducing her own healthy acorns, I am sure.

Inasmuch as these teachers join the orchard of professionals and continue to share their passion for learning and teaching, I wonder how many others will germinate and develop a teacher identity strong enough to endure the ravages that
come with the title “teacher.” It is my hope that any student who has experienced my passion for learning and teaching, and yearns to emulate those experiences with students of their own, will carry on the legacy of teaching with passion.

My study has to conclude, but life continues. Susan, Mary, Uticia, Julie, Diane, Yolanda, and I continue living our lives as passionate teachers. Our journeys are never-ending and our quest is never fully accomplished. Much like oak trees, our lives of growing and developing continue to evolve.
REFERENCES


Clandinin, D. & Connelly, F. (2000). *Narrative inquiry: Experience and story in*


APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

IRB APPROVAL LETTER
Georgia Southern University
Office of Research Services & Sponsored Programs

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Phone: 912-681-5465
Fax: 912-681-0719

Administrative Annex
Ovisight@GeorgiaSouthern.edu
P.O. Box 8005
Statesboro, GA 30460

To: Evelyn Lightfoot Aimar
   5 Rivers Bend Court
   Savannah, GA 31406

cc: Dr. Ming Fang He, Faculty Advisor
   P. O. Box 8144

From: Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs
      Administrative Support Office for Research Oversight Committees
      (IACUC/IBC/IRB)

Date: July 14, 2005

Subject: Status of Application for Approval to Utilize Human Subjects in Research

After a review of your proposed research project numbered: H05201, and titled "Teaching with Passion: A Narrative Inquiry Into Teachers’ Identity Development, Personal and Professional Knowledge, and Love of Teaching", it appears that (1) the research subjects are at minimal risk, (2) appropriate safeguards are planned, and (3) the research activities involve only procedures which are allowable.

Therefore, as authorized in the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects, I am pleased to notify you that the Institutional Review Board has approved your proposed research.

This IRB approval is in effect for one year from the date of this letter. If at the end of that time, there have been no changes to the research protocol, you may request an extension of the approval period for an additional year. In the interim, please provide the IRB with any information concerning any significant adverse event, whether or not it is believed to be related to the study, within five working days of the event. In addition, if a change or modification of the approved methodology becomes necessary, you must notify the IRB Coordinator prior to initiating any such changes or modifications. At that time, an amended application for IRB approval may be submitted. Upon completion of your data collection, you are required to complete a Research Study Termination form to notify the IRB Coordinator, so your file may be closed.

Sincerely,

Julie B. Cole
Director of Research Services and Sponsored Programs
APPENDIX B

LETTER OF CONSENT FROM PRINCIPAL
Mr. Raymond Patricio, Principal
Hesse Elementary School
9116 Whitfield Avenue
Savannah, GA 31406

Dear Mr. Patricio:

As an elementary teacher working with young students and many veteran teachers, I am interested in learning more about the effects of experiences and encounters on the personal and professional development of teacher identity and passion for the field of education. Therefore, I am proposing to conduct a narrative research study as part of my doctoral dissertation in instructional improvement and curriculum studies into the effects of teachers' personal and professional identity development and the growth of passion for teaching. As a teacher at Hesse Elementary School for sixteen years, I am interested in the stories of those teachers who exhibit continual passion for their role as teachers. I believe there are specific experiences and encounters that have developed and maintained that passion that are important for education programs and novice teachers to use in their development of commitment to the education profession.

This letter is to request your assistance in gathering the data necessary to complete my research. The consent documents as well as an interview protocol questions that will be used are attached. Upon completion of my research, a copy of the report will be sent to you at your request.

If this is agreeable to you, please sign and return this letter to me to present to the International Review Board at Georgia Southern University. If you have any questions about this research project, please call me at (912) 354-5257 or my supervising professor, Dr. Ming Fang He, at (912) 681-5091.

[Signature]
Instructor, Signature

[Signature]
Mr. Raymond Patricio, Principal

8/22/05
Date

8/25/05
Date