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**EXAMINING THE CAREER TRANSITIONS AND TRANSFORMATION OF AN
URBAN EDUCATOR**

by

Frank E. Penick Jr.

A Dissertation

Submitted to the
Department of Educational Services and Leadership
College of Education
In Partial fulfillment of the requirement
For the degree of
Doctor of Education
at
Rowan University
April 1, 2017

Dissertation Chair: Dr. James Coaxum III

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Dedications

This manuscript is dedicated to my wife Chaliyah. You are my soul mate, confidant and partner. You are the Yin to my Yang. I love you through the lengths of eternity and the depths of infinity. Thank you for your patience and support through this process. I also dedicate this to Noble my first son. You will be born within a few weeks of the conclusion of this doctoral journey. So as one journey comes to an end, another journey into parenthood is set to begin. Knowing of your arrival gave me inspiration to keep writing, reading, and researching, because I knew that once you arrived everything would change.

We would also like to dedicate this work to our parents. Thank you being there for us and letting us stay in your homes while we repaired the house after the fire. To our extended families thank you for understanding when we could not make some of the gatherings and events due to the demands of this scholarly work.

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I would also like to thank Dr. George Cross for giving me insight into the ‘Coolpose’ that helped me navigate teaching on the front lines of our urban school district. I truly appreciate the mentorship you provided as a professional educational leader and the many meaningful and insightful conversations that increased the depth of thought I was able to add to this work with your guidance.

I would like to thank Dr. Meredith-Brown for the positive encouragement and feedback. Your positive energy and perspective helped give me the confidence to keep moving forward with this autoethnographic study as I worked through personal challenges. Your positivity helped me to press forward and believe I could achieve the end goal even when it seemed most difficult.

Abstract

Frank Edward Penick Jr.

EXAMINING THE CAREER TRANSITIONS AND TRANSFORMATION OF AN URBAN EDUCATOR

2016-2017

James Coaxum III, Ph.D

Doctor of Education

The purpose of this study was to examine the critical career transitions that transformed who I am on both personal and professional levels during my fifteen-year teaching career as an urban educator. This autoethnographic research approach systematically analyzed and described personal experiences within the broader cultural context (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2010), utilizing Schlossberg's (1995) *Transition Theory*, as an analytical framework. I found that engaging in this autoethnographic study increased my awareness of the situations, self, support, and strategies (Schlossberg, 1995) impacting the career transitions I navigated throughout my career. I also found that this narrative examination fostered a deeper understanding of the hidden forces that have influenced and motivated decisions I have made throughout my career and transformed who I am on various levels. The challenges I faced during my transitions may be unique, however, numerous teachers regularly cope with similar complexities teaching in urban districts. Yet, these challenges often go undocumented because teachers are often so deeply engaged in the responsibilities of the moment that they rarely have time to conduct scholarly analysis and subsequent articulation of their experiences (Zembylas & Papanastasiou, 2006). By documenting my career transitions and transformations, I have added to the collective storehouse of shared knowledge and wisdom as a reference to researchers and other educators transitioning through similar transformations.

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Chapter 1

Introduction of the Study

Teaching in an urban school context has challenges that are specific to the environment and greatly influence the career success or lack thereof of those who teach in it (Borges, 2016). The reality is that separate and unequal schools still exist in the United States (Ingersoll, 2001, 2003a, 2003b). This inequality in education is particularly acute in urban school districts and causes great difficulty in maintaining retention of qualified teacher as 46% leave within five years (Ingersoll, 2001, 2003a, 2003b). The high attrition rate of teachers in urban districts enhances an already inequitable situation (Quartz, Barraza-Lyons, Thomas, 2005). Teachers who manage to survive the first five years of teaching and commit to actively enhancing the experience of learners face unique and at times emotionally draining challenges (Borges, 2016).

The challenges in the urban environment can lead to teacher burnout (Freudenberger, 1974). Teacher burnout can impact the mental, physical, and emotional health of teachers in varying degrees (Pines, Aronson, & Kafry, 1981). Most teachers will have to battle with some form of burnout at one time or another in their careers (Singh, & Billingsley, 1996). Teachers that are able to overcome burnout must navigate through various transitions in order to successfully refocus and revitalize their careers (Espeland, 2006).

The concept of teachers moving through career transitions is not new (Huberman, 1993). Yet understanding the impact of career transitions is helpful in career management and helps to avoid burnout (Tsui, 2003). The process of career transition mirrors the biological cycle of life in that there is a conception, development and growth, maturity

and, eventual decline (Steffy, 2001). As teachers transition through their careers they are transformed through reflection, redefinition of belief and assumptions towards increased self-efficacy or they move in an opposite trajectory toward professional withdrawal and disengagement from their work environment (Huberman, 1989). Therefore, teachers would be wise to seek to understand how the career transitions they experience impact and transform them as educators and individuals (Tsui, 2003).

Personal Rationale for the Study

My personal rationale for this dissertation took into account my belief that human transformation is the result of complex interrelationships between social attitudes, activities, technological innovations, mechanical functions, and natural phenomena (Vaill 1996). Due to the intricacy and inherent instability of living in such an environment, creative and imaginative responses and initiatives are critical for the success of those immersed in the transformation process (Vaill, 1996). There are times when transformations are subtle, going essentially unnoticed and other times when changes take place in dramatic shifts of momentum, where paradigms are altered on large scales as critical masses reach “tipping points” (Gladwell, 2002).

The process of transformation can at times be difficult and even painful due to its abrupt nature, yet in order for the society to evolve and remain fluid, change must occur (Fullan, 2007). Tomaselli, Dyll, & Francis, (2008) are of the notion that the current state of educational exchange between many teachers and students lack true commitment and rigor in that there is an unspoken agreement between teachers and students to display a façade of order and purpose that provides the least irritation for either party. This behavior is displayed in teachers agreeing not to push students too hard in exchange for

reasonable behavior and compliance to the daily routine (Tomaselli, Dyll, & Francis, 2008). Although this exchange of information may offer the path of least resistance, it certainly is not an effective means of promoting the innovative and creative thinking needed to survive and thrive in our ever-changing society (Gladwell, 2002). This dissertation examined how I have been transformed through multiple transitions while navigating through an urban school district. This autoethnography utilized the personal narrative which made transitions discussed more tangible and relatable to readers as I expressed intimate immersion within the study. The articulation of this intimate immersion in the study was therefore able to connect with the emotional bonds that relate to the totality of the human experience (Ellis, 1997).

Teacher Transformation

The phenomena of transformation and change permeate all levels of social organizations, including the teaching profession. As professional educators, one of the primary objectives is to help others, learn, grow, and change. Yet, “to help others to change without this change being preceded and accompanied by an exquisite awareness of the process in ourselves is delivering a product or service which truly has little or no significance for our personal or intellectual growth” (Sarason, 1982, p. 122). Finding the balance between helping others grow and growing personally is a challenge numerous educators encounter. My personal journey of growth, transition, and transformation as an urban educator was the essence of this study.

This dissertation examined my transformation as an urban educator evolving out of critical transitions over a fifteen-year career. This study addresses how I strived to develop the capacity to proactively engage in Schlosberg’s (1981) transitions theory in

order to improve my self-efficacy and facilitate transformation. The transformation of professional educators is comparable to any other people moving through the inevitable changes of career and life. Tracy (1998) discusses life as a journey whereby teaching, like life, offers distinct challenges each day. When people begin their careers they may or may not have a clear goal in mind of their desired final destination in the profession. Everyone encounters ups and downs, trials and tribulations, some planned, yet most are unexpected. The experiences one has and how one reacts to various situations will set the precedence for that person's success moving forward (Tracy, 1998).

Successful transformation in teaching as in any career is highly subjective and contingent upon the circumstances of time, place, climate, and culture. Yet regardless of the standards of the time and place, successful transformation often takes place “in the midst of an outer confusion” (Homes, p.19, 1918). The process of transformation essentially requires one to face personal fear, anxiety, and uncertainty while searching deep within to discover hidden reservoirs of strength and courage. Yet the inner power and reserve that comes from these transformations must remain flowingly active to avoid complacency and stagnation (Homes, 1918).

There are practical methods that teachers must use in their classrooms to facilitate their own professional development and transformation while also providing effective instruction. Danielson (2007) identifies planning and preparation, classroom environment, instruction, and professional responsibilities as being the four domains that can promote improved student learning. Currently, public educators in New Jersey are evaluated heavily on their ability to demonstrate skill and aptitude in these four domains. As a result of pressure to carry out these and other external mandates, many teachers

“presume that if they shut their classroom doors and concentrate all their energies on what goes on in their classrooms, they are satisfying their moral charge” (Weiner, 2012, p.15). Teachers in such environments may perceive themselves as being coerced into compliance out of fear of low professional evaluations while simultaneously feeling a sense of isolation from school community in order to protect themselves from real or imagined threats to their classroom and career stability (McLaren, Martin, Farahmandpur & Jaramillo, 2004). Teachers operating in these conditions must find methods and strategies that will allow them to grow and not become professionally stagnate. Teachers who desire to avoid feelings of isolation, professional stagnation, and burnout must seek ways to constantly refine and renew their passion for teaching (Lemov, 2010). Teachers must find passion and purpose in their work in order to consistently perform at high levels in the classroom and feel satisfaction in their careers (Lemov, 2010). Yet according to Weiner, (2012), current models of teacher reform do not address the passion and purpose of the teacher and instead focuses on protocol and procedure.

The issue of teacher transformation when discussed in a traditional sense attempts to produce individuals with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to facilitate the educational process of those being taught (Fullan, 2007). However, “these strategies by themselves will never work” due to the discord between abstract theory and reality in the classroom (Fullan, p. 264, 2007). Concerns about the discord between theory and practical application are further raised by Levine’s report that concludes, “teacher education graduates are inadequately prepared to meet the demands of today’s classrooms because facilities, curriculum, and research are disconnected from school practice” (Levine, p. 1, 2006). Inadequate preparation and strict adherence to theory

without practical application can inhibit individual teachers' growth, development, evolution, and transformation in the field of education. Fullan, (2007) adds that adapting positively to educational reform is a personal choice and endeavor. Yet, broad strategies that fit nicely into preset patterns are ineffective. Effective teacher transformation can then be considered the ability to adapt, perform, and make informed morally sound decisions; while being actively engaged in the realities of the learning environment, to do the right thing (Elmore, 2000).

The ability of teachers to take personal responsibility for their transformation process is as crucial now as ever. The last two decades have brought about tremendous, significant, and at times traumatic changes in the institution of education by any objective standards of measurement (Fullan, 2007). There are large-scale sociological, technological, political, and economic forces that are predicted to increase to even greater levels of intensity over the next few decades. The forces and factors of change are redefining the form and function of educational institutions and the teaching profession as new technologies and methods render traditional models and modes of education obsolete (Fullan, 2007). Change is inevitable and educators unable or unwilling to actively engage in the transformation process due to complacency, fear, and/or a lack of urgency will face difficulties as converging trends sweep through the profession (Fullan, 2007).

Transforming through change. Constant changes that synergistically influence one another are part of what Wheatly describes as *open systems* that interact with the external environment (1994). This constant interaction is in response to and receptiveness of external stimulus. Individuals or entities engaged in open systems must be able to adapt and exercise some degree of flexibility in order to survive, thrive, and avoid

entropy (Wheatly, 1994). As a teacher in an urban district engaged in career transitions, I have utilized this study to cultivate the requisite characteristics of adaptability and flexibility in order to thrive through these experiences.

The way to successfully adapt to change, according to Wheatly (1994), is to be consciously aware of the whole system in which one works. Adapting to change requires being aware of oneself as part of a larger system as ideals of working and thinking in purely individualistic ways becomes less feasible in contemporary society. Teachers must develop a keen understanding of the effects of interdependent relationships within learning communities (Wheatly, 1994). Just as living things adapt and change as a means of survival in nature, so have I learned to adapt and change through transitions as “educational change depends on what teachers do and think- it’s as simple and as complex as that” (Fullan, 2007, p. 129).

Surviving and thriving though the transitions taking place in the teaching profession are challenging as Fullan, (2007) states:

The conditions of teaching, with pockets of exceptions, appear to have deteriorated over the past 2 decades. Reversing this trend...must be at the heart of any serious reform effort. Teacher stress and alienation are at an all-time high, (as are) numbers of teachers leaving or wanting to leave the profession. The range of educational goals and expectations for schools and the transfer of family and societal problems to the school, coupled with the imposition of multiple, disconnected reform initiatives present intolerable conditions for sustained educational development and satisfying work experiences (p.129).

Fullen's (2007) statements are reflected in teacher attrition rates, which according to Bliz (2008) are 4% higher than other occupations and up 50% overall in fifteen years (Carroll, 2013). In urban education, teacher attrition is exacerbated even further whereas the national attrition rate of teachers is 16.8%, while in urban schools attrition is over 20% (Carroll, 2013). The reason for the high teacher attrition rates can be related to the high stress of the profession (Kyriacou, 2001). Essentially, the stressors associated with the teaching profession gradually wear away at educator's sense of mental and emotional well-being to cause burnout (Kyriacou, 2001; Howard & Johnson, 2004).

Fullan (2007) goes on to state that teachers who do not increase their ability to effectively manage stressful changes will increasingly be intruded upon and victimized by external forces. Therefore, if I am to successfully thrive through career transitions, I must be willing to also transform into something greater in personal character, mission, and vision. I must have the capacity to let go of past perceptions and ideals as I develop deeper and expanded viewpoints, insights, and skills in order to function effectively in a world that constantly evolves (Wheatly, 1994). This transformation can be achieved by accepting chaos as an essential process by which natural systems, organizations, and individuals revitalize and renew themselves (Wheatly, 1994). This study is an identification and examination of transitions I have experienced that have transformed the person I have become after fifteen years of urban teaching experience articulated in the form of an autoethnographic study.

Transformation defined. Akbar (2002) states that transformation is a movement through multiple forms that brings about the manifestation of the highest or truest nature by converting energy from one form to another (Akbar, 2002). On a human level,

transformation involves identifying with a transcendent mission that motivates one to refine strengths and increase capacity in areas of weaknesses, while taking personal ownership of work and outcomes to optimize results (Bass, 1998). Simply stated, transformation is change in individuals or systems (Bass, 1998).

Transformation is a universal phenomenon. American philosopher Henry David Thoreau states: “all change is a miracle to contemplate; but it is a miracle which is taking place every instant” (1997, p.3). The perpetual state of transformation involves the interconnectedness of macrocosmic and microcosmic systems actively engaged in the ebb and flow of life. According to Wheatly, (1994) “everything alive is an open system that engages with its environment and continues to grow and evolve” (p.77). Transformations are inevitable in all facets of life. Just as societies change, people change through the process of life.

Although transformation and change are universal, they are also a personal and conscious undertaking according to Walker (1992), who suggests that the way to elevate oneself from the lower realms of existence is to go to work quietly on one’s own sense of self-awareness. Walker (1992) goes on to state that in order to have a positive impact on the larger society, one must be willing to face and overcome his or her own negative aspects with the intent of consciously transforming oneself to make a noble and righteous contribution to society. Conscious positive transformation is considered not only socially beneficial but also personally empowering as understood by Holmes, who as early as 1918 states that “we have within us a power that is greater than anything that we shall ever contact in the outer, a power that can overcome every obstacle in our life and set us safe, satisfied and at peace, healed and prosperous, in a new light and in a new life” (p.

20). This dissertation has examined my journey to discover the intrinsic transcendental forces that operate within and motivate me to strive to improve through career transitions and transformations.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to produce an in-depth personal account of an urban educator who has navigated through identifiable transitions during a fifteen-year career that have transformed my personal and professional perceptions as an urban educator. This autoethnographic research approach systematically analyzed and described personal experiences within the broader cultural context of urban public school education (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2010). The purpose was as much about process as it was product as autoethnography is a methodology that “treats research as a political, socially-just and socially-conscious act” (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2010). This study aided me in becoming more aware of how to navigate transitions while also fostering a deeper understanding of the hidden forces that have influenced and motivated decisions I have made throughout my career. Articulating this narrative in the autoethnographic form added to the realism of the study by adding the human touch that provided a relatable model that can assist readers researching or going through similar transitions (Ellis, 1997).

The transition process. Schlossberg’s (1995) transition theory focuses on adult development through the course of a lifetime and conceptualizes a qualitative means of analyzing transformations towards increased self-efficacy. The focus of Schlossberg’s transition theory (1995) is on how adults adjust and cope with changes. Transition is defined as “any event or non-event that results in changed relationships, routines,

assumptions, and roles” (p. 27). Schlossberg (1995) defines transition as occurring when changes are integrated into an individual’s daily life. The elements of Schlossberg’s *transition theory* (1995) that framed this study were first identifying the time period that the transitions took place as well as the type of transition that occurred (anticipated, unanticipated, or non-event). This was followed first by a descriptive analysis identifying the overarching *situation* in which the transition occurred. The next component of transition theory that framed this study was the “*self*” as it relates to my point of view or state of mind during the transition. The external “support systems” in place was another component of transition theory that helped facilitate the transition. Finally, the strategies I utilized to navigate through career transitions framed this study with the ultimate goal of achieving increased self-efficacy.

The critical transitions I experienced during my teaching career that are examined within Schlossberg’s (1995) transition theory were (1) the closing of the Siggs Adult Education Center (2008), (2) conflicting with my ESL Supervisor at Columbus Middle School (2009), (3) teaching at three schools during one school day as a floating ESL teacher (2010-2011), (4) teaching at Innovative Expressions (2012-2013), (5) teaching social studies at Damcen High school (2013-2014)

Research Questions

The research questions that guided this study are:

1. How has the autoethnographic approach engaged me in a self-analysis process that promoted self-efficacy?
2. How did Schlossberg’s theory of transition influence my ability to cope with multiple transition experiences as an urban public school educator?

3. How have the critical transitions I experienced transformed me as an educational leader?

Significance of Study

This study provided novice and experienced teachers and researchers with a personalized account of a teacher in transition during an age of transition (Erlandson, 2009). While engaged in this study I utilized literary research and tools of autoethnographic methodology to analyze experiences. I also took into consideration how my transitions and transformation process may assist other urban educators in similar situations (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2010). This study provided an in-depth illustration of cultural phenomena through the personal lens, thus making cultural facets recognizable and tangible to those with intimate knowledge of the context as well as those conducting general research (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2010). In order to complete this task I have compared and contrasted current research with personal experiences (Ronai, 1995, 1996), conducted interviews with members of the culture in which I am immersed (Foster, 2006; Marvasti, 2006; Tillmann-Healy, 2001), and examined cultural artifacts that were relevant to the context (Boylorn, 2008; Denzin, 2006).

The challenges of aligning instruction to national standards while they are being developed in real time, facilitating authentic learning experiences, while in the midst of transitioning is a very complicated process for educators (Besecker, 2000). The challenges I faced during my transitions may be unique, however, numerous teachers regularly cope with similar complexities teaching in urban districts. Yet, these challenges often go undocumented because teachers are often so deeply engaged in the responsibilities of the moment that they rarely have time to conduct scholarly analysis

and subsequent articulation of their experiences (Zembylas & Papanastasiou, 2006). By documenting my career transitions and transformations towards increased self-efficacy, I have added to the collective storehouse of shared knowledge and wisdom as a reference to other teachers going through similar transitions.

This form of self-study provided the opportunity for me to examine the forces that have shaped my perspective and circumstances operating in this cultural context. This study was not simply a personal narrative of a single event or experience; it was an opportunity to draw on my own experiences to support others in their understanding of their own transitions within their particular culture or context (Dethloff, 2005).

Reflective practice in teaching and the power of stories is a recognizable and utilizable means of supporting the teaching craft (Lopate, 1975). Therefore, educators who are in the trenches would be justified in documenting their experiences, interpretations, and responses to interventions. Through this investigation into the specific circumstances and events, a deeper level of critical understanding of the broader arena of educational practice has emerged (Lopate, 1975). The narrative method of story-telling has value in that, “this format is the most familiar method for humans to understand life’s epiphanies as a race” (Ellis, 1997, p. 124). Emotional narratives have the capacity to convey meaningful truths that can make more compelling and lasting impressions than merely stating historical facts and quantitative findings (Ellis, 1997). This autoethnography contains subjective interpretations that were unique to my experience, theoretical framework, and world-view. Yet the uniqueness of my voice in analyzing the transitions I encountered within the framework of Schlosberg’s (1995) transition theory towards the goal of understanding my transformation towards

increased self-efficacy are what validated this study (Ellis, 1997).

Conclusion

This autoethnography documented my career transitions utilizing Schlosberg's (1995) transition theory towards the goal of understanding my transformations towards increased self-efficacy. This study provided the opportunity to engage other researchers in autoethnographic scholarship while offering reflective analysis and insight into career transitions in the urban teaching setting (Alexander, 2009; Berry, 2006; Goltz, 2011; Tillman, 2009). Through this study I acted as a research practitioner creatively, proactively, and consciously documenting my transitions while increasing my sense of self-efficacy.

Developing this study took a great deal of reflecting on and analyzing journals and archives in order to explore, identify, and examine thoughts and feelings that have influenced my professional transformation as an urban educator. The more skillful the analysis and careful the choice, the better one will be able to manage, negotiate and navigate the transitions in the classroom or school setting (Vorndran, 2009).

Increasing self-efficacy through multiple transitions was the goal of this study. Self-efficacy is defined as one's belief in his or her ability to complete tasks and reach goals (Ormrod, 2006). The process of transformation and self-efficacy are intricately linked in that each time successful transformation occurs individual self-efficacy increases (Ormrod, 2006). The increase in self-efficacy through transformation is linked to *social learning* theory. Social learning theory is predicated upon the individual coping mechanisms one adopts when encountering success or failure on emotional and practical levels within group settings. Through transformations people learn from each

other through modeling, observation, and imitation. Self-efficacy is increased through transformation as one acquires new skills and experiences that aid in group cohesiveness and collective success (Ormrod, 1999). This study was based on the understanding that the craft of teaching is about much more than standing in front of a classroom and reciting facts for the students to memorize for a grade. The goal was to reflect upon and analyze transitions I have experienced over a fifteen-year career in urban education as an innovative practice in exploring transformation.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

This literature review focused on five topics that assisted in increasing the breadth and depth of this autoethnographic study of an urban educator transforming through transition. The first area reviewed that formed the theoretical and conceptual base for this study was mid-career teacher transition. The second topical area reviewed was career transitions effect on transformative learning. The third area of review focused on the urban school context which provided the framework in which this autoethnography occurred. The fourth area reviewed was burnout because the urban context of education has higher rates of teacher burnout when compared to other teaching contexts. The final area reviewed was teacher self-efficacy because the focus of this study was on increasing self-efficacy through career transition and transformation.

Career Teacher Transitions

The literature on mid-career transitions begins with a discussion of Huberman's (1989, 2001) life cycle of teachers as the theoretical bases of contemporary research in teacher transition (Betty, 2001). The three phases of Huberman's (1989, 2001) life cycle of teachers are novice, mid-career, and late career. According to Huberman, (1989) novice teachers are concerned with demonstrating competence, surviving through the challenges of the learning context, and eventually improving their craft to enhance students learning experiences. The perspective of novices differs significantly from mid-career teachers (Huberman, 1989). While novice teachers are concerned primarily with surviving; mid-career teachers have mastered the environment and seeks to establish new

norms and face other challenges (Tsui, 2003). Mid-career teachers will have established a sense of confidence, stabilization, and predictability in their teaching pattern (Huberman, 1989). Mid-career teachers may also be more willing to experiment with various approaches in the classroom while also beginning to reflect on their career and contemplate the value of their past work and plans moving forward (Huberman, 1989). Teachers who make it through the mid-career transition into the stage of being a late career teacher will have experiences that are distinct to their situation and place in life. The teacher that has successfully transitioned to the late career stage may be comfortable within his or her role in the classroom and experience a period of serenity (Huberman, 1989). However, it is likely for late career teachers to experience disengagement whereby they become emotionally distant from their students and the learning community as a whole (Huberman, 1989). According to Steffy (2001) the teacher transition phases are not linear and can be blurred as teachers simultaneously move through various personal, social and environmental experiences that shape their development in the field.

According to Fessler (1985), teachers transition back and forth between career developmental stages. An example of this would be a late career teacher who is exposed to new teaching material or an assignment that can shift them back to the level of novice in that particular content area. Although it is acknowledged that teachers can move in and out of career stages, the focus of this review is on the prototypical mid-career teacher. The focus on the mid-career teacher provides the most insight for understanding this autoethnographic study.

Mid-Career Teacher Transitions

Teachers with 6-20 years of experience in the field are known as mid-career teachers (Burke et al., 1987; Hargreaves, 2005; Huberman, 1989; Meister, 2010; Rosenholtz & Simpson, 1990). Mid-career teachers are no longer novices seeking to simply survive in uncertain educational environments (Huberman, 1989). Mid-career teachers work towards a more stable period of professional growth in which they tend to take various trajectories in their career from that point forward (Huberman, 1989). The positive trajectory of mid-career teachers is termed as generative, which includes active engagement and experimentation. The negative career trajectory of mid-career teachers is referred to as discordant or disengagement, and apathy as it relates to the profession and potential to influence positive changes in the lives of students (Huberman, 1989). The goal of any well-intentioned teacher should be taking the positive trajectory, yet the realities in the field can at times make achieving a positive trajectory challenging.

Rosenholtz and Simpson (1990) conducted a study of teachers in Tennessee who had different levels of experience in the profession, from novice to late career teachers. These researchers utilized a survey method to develop a greater understanding of teacher perceptions of the professional climate, contentedness, and commitment. Rosenholtz and Simpson discovered that teachers in the mid-career range had a stronger tendency toward being disaffected as they transitioned from novice to more established roles in their careers. The research concluded that classroom management techniques and discipline issues inside the classroom primarily challenged beginning teachers. On the other hand, experienced teachers were more adept at classroom management and

skilled at the usage of innovative instructional techniques. Mid-career transitioning teachers were also found to express a greater desire for independence in implementing the routine task of teaching and provided stability to the overall school environment; therefore, mid-career teachers that perceived themselves as not being able to express their desired level of independence or as not being respected as a stabilizing force in the school environment began moving in the discordant and disengaged career trajectory (Rosenholtz and Simpson, 1990). There is a clear need for teachers to continue to perceive themselves as growing and evolving as teacher practitioners and contributors to the professional community in order to facilitate the generative career trajectory.

Burke et al. (1987) recognized the need for acknowledging change and growth at various levels of experience for teachers. Burke et al. (1987) consider increased professional development to be a necessary component of school reform particularly related understanding the ethnic backgrounds and populations of students in the quest to make education more meaningful. Therefore, as teachers transition throughout their career it is essential to allow them ample opportunity to develop and practice the skills that will help them reach their target student populations.

Burke et al. (1987) and Rosenholtz and Simpson (1990) consider it of paramount importance for mid-career teachers to be engaged in the process for school reform efforts to be successful. The unifying theme of these studies is that if teachers become disengaged or in other ways apathetic towards the profession then change efforts in the overall school community will not succeed. As a result, an important part of positively impacting educational environments is to successfully engage teachers in sustaining commitment throughout their career transitions (Choi & Tang, 2011; Day &

Gu, 2007; Margolis, 2008; Huberman, 1989).

Although the common themes of engaging mid-career transitioning teachers involves providing opportunity to express independence while also contributing to the overall school community (Burke, et al. 1984; Meister, 2010; Oplatka, 2005; Rosenholtz & Simpson, 1990), according to Hargreaves (2005), each teacher will develop through the stages of his or her career uniquely depending on the circumstances and experiences they encounter. Keeping this uniqueness as a central concept, Hargreaves (2005) focused on the emotional processes of teachers as they transition throughout their careers. The author's conclusion is that "teaching, learning, and leading all draw upon emotional understanding as people reach into the past store of their own emotional experience to interpret and unravel, instantaneously the emotional experiences and responses of others" (p. 968).

Hargreaves (2005) conducted a study of 50 teachers from middle to high school, varying in age and experience levels. The study was based on the emotional intelligence theory and the researcher discovered that teachers had different opinions about the profession at different career stages. For example, new teachers had the perception that experienced teachers were less capable of and willing to handle or embrace change. While experienced teacher's generally perceived newer teachers as being naïve.

Hargreaves (2005) also discovered that mid-career teachers expressed greater empathy towards veteran teachers nearing retirement age. The empathy expressed by mid-level transitional teachers contrasted with new teachers who were critical and dismissive of veteran retirement age teachers. Mid-career teachers seemed to have a better understanding of the trials and tribulations of the profession compared to younger

contemporaries. Transitioning mid-career teachers had a clearer conceptual understanding of why veteran teachers were hesitant to change due to the nature and challenges of educational reform than their less experienced counterparts (Hargreaves, 2005).

Another study conducted by Choi and Tang (2011) focused on how satisfaction and dissatisfaction influenced teacher commitment. Choi and Tang recognized that a teacher's level of commitment and perspective has a strong propensity to change over the span of a career. They also asserted that student level of success correlated to teacher's feelings of satisfaction in the profession. Choi and Tang's (2011) research involved interviewing 23 teachers and concluded by asserting that regardless of where a teacher was in their career, the majority of teachers reported a level of commitment change during the first 10 years. The significance of Choi and Tang's (2011) study highlights the importance of continuing to find ways to engage teachers in opportunities for growth and development through transition for them to continue on a positive and generative career trajectory (Huberman, 1989).

The emotional state of teachers changes, to such a degree as teachers transition throughout their career that research by Zeichner (1999) found that "there is no more important responsibility for a school, college department, or faculty of education than to do the best job that it possibly can to support the learning of all teachers throughout their careers" (p. 13). Teachers working in districts undergoing major changes can draw from Bidwell's (2001) reference to schools as organizations constantly evolving while teachers work in environments that are incredibly dynamic with complex interest and challenging performance demands. Bidwell (2001) states that there should be systems

of support put in place to offer guidance for teachers involved in such circumstance.

Zepeda and Ponticell (1998), explore the wants and needs of teachers and “increasing individual teachers’ understanding of their own observable teaching behaviors and their ability to analyze their own performance” (p. 68). The focus of the study highlighted the relationship of individual teachers within the context as they relate to the overall organizational goals. The conclusion was that in order to promote active student engagement teachers should be involved in collaborative activities, challenged cognitively through professional development, and encouraged to engage in reflective thinking and decision-making.

Mid-career teachers experiencing transitions often form the instructional core of schools (Burke et al., 1987; Hargreaves, 2005; Rosenholtz & Simpson, 1990). Understanding the insights of this core of educators informs research into career transition processes as well as teacher transformation as a whole (Conklin, 1970). The very process of teacher transition is recognized to be an essential element of teacher transformation over the course of a career (Whitacre, 2015).

Teacher Transformation

Teacher transformation is the result of the career transitions a teacher experiences (Whitacre, 2015). Teacher transformation is linked to research into the area of transformational learning whereby perspectives are revised through examination, exploration, and reanalysis to form new paradigms (Whitacre, 2015). Mezirow (1991) postulates that learning becomes transformative when previous systems of belief are revised through reconsideration to form new mental and conceptual habits. These

transformations are grounded in conceptual theories of change in which learners form new concepts through engaging in transition processes (Strike & Posner, 1992).

Whitacre's (2015) study explores the relationship between teacher transformation theory and Bandura's (1977) theory of self-efficacy by comparing the transition experiences of two teachers. The Whitacre (2015) study found that belief systems influence commitment to goals, effort, and resiliency while moving through transition to influence why one teacher experienced a transformation while another did not. As such, understanding self-efficacy is a critical element to understanding how transformational learning takes place through transition.

Although transformational learning and transformational teaching are inextricably linked, the criticism of transformative learning theory is that the context within which one experiences transition is not adequately considered (Whitacre, 2015). Therefore, to fully understand the transformation process in teachers, sociocultural scholars strongly suggest that transformation is contingent upon the context, and culture that transitions take place (Vygotsky, 1978 & Wenger, 1998). Whitacre (2015) incorporated the sociocultural components into practice by utilizing Wenger's (1998) analysis of individual participation within the context of the community to be transformed through transition.

When the sociocultural context of transformational learning is fully taken into consideration teacher transformation can be understood to occur when previous ways of thinking and acting are altered as a result for a shift in perspective (Whitacre, 2015). The transformational shift in perspective can occur in what Mezirow (2000) terms as epochal or incremental. Mezirow (2000) refers to the epochal transformation as a disorienting dilemma in which a single dramatic event triggers a sudden and swift paradigm shift. In

contrast, incremental transformations are the result of a cumulative series of transitions that over time result in changing habits of mind (Mezirow, 2000).

The foundation of transformational learning theory is based in Mezirow's (1978) research in perspective transformation (Whitacre 2015). However, transformational learning theory has expanded to include various perspectives for understanding the shape and scope of transformation. The divergences in transformative learning began when Mezirow (1978) began to be criticized not fully placing the individual within the social context of transformation (Taylor, 1997; Taylor & Cranton, 2012). Mezirow's (1978) theory was also critiqued for being rationally centered and not taking into account the effect of emotional response to transformation (Cranton, 2006; Dirkx, 2001).

A result of the critiques of Mezirow's (1978), perspectives on transformation was that other researchers have developed expanded theories of transformative learning (Whitacre 2015). Dirkx (1997) explored how emotions influence transformation. Dirkx (1997) considers emotions to be a communicative modality that aids in transformative learning as one interacts with the external environment. Brookfield (1987) explored how individuals influence transformation through tapping into the creative imagination of alternate perspectives to effect transformation. Cranton and Wright (2008) consider the balanced relationship between the rational and emotional faculties to be essential to learning transformation. Scholars are currently working to integrate the various viewpoints of transformational learning in a complementary fashion (Taylor & Cranton, 2012).

Essentially, scholars have just begun to add to the breadth and depth of research regarding the process of transformational learning within the last thirty years (Mezirow &

Taylor, 2009). There are several potential areas whereby further research into transformational learning can be conducted through the innovative expansion of the conceptual scope to increase insight (Taylor, 2012). As scholars continue to expand the conceptual scope and framework of transformation, deeper more meaningful understandings can be attained particularly when taking into account the impact of the context on the transformation process (Taylor, 2012).

Urban School Environments

Transition and transformation for mid-career teachers must be understood within the context of the urban environment for this autoethnographic study's significance to be fully articulated. The reason is that there are a myriad of situations and circumstances educators encounter depending on time, place, demographic, social, political, and economic factors. Yet, this study specifically focuses on the transitions one educator has faced within the context of an urban environment and the unique challenges therein. Therefore exploring literature pertaining specifically to the urban environment place transitions within the proper context for this study. For example, there are contextual variables associated with the urban setting that contribute to below average academic performance by students which adversely impacts the pressure teachers face while engaged in the education process (Becker, 2013).

The urban context is an environment in which socio-cultural factors such as lack of employment, poor early childhood education programs, crime and poverty contribute to the general lack of academic success in urban schools (Hock et al., 2009). The academic disadvantages of living in an environment of urban poverty are exemplified by literacy rates (Becker, 2013). The *national report card on reading* released test scores in 2011 of

students using eligibility for reduced lunches as a measure of family income levels. Thirty-seven percent of eighth grade students eligible for free or reduced lunch scored “below basic” in reading compared to 15% of those who were not eligible that scored below basic. These low literacy rates place extra pressure on teachers to meet state mandates while catering to the true needs of students that are academically unprepared to complete curriculum based pacing of assignments (Beechum & McCray, 2004).

Urban educators are required to promote the academic achievement of those in low socio-economic status who are adversely impacted in urban environments where “approximately half of the incoming ninth-grade students read at the sixth- or seventh-grade level or below” (Heller & Greenleaf, 2007, p. 3). According to estimates a mere 20% of students in urban school districts have the skills needed to read at the grade level necessary to fulfill the requirements of a high school curriculum (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006). Urban educators often work with minority youth who grow up in low-income urban environments whereby they must contend with complex social and structural issues that adversely impact academic performance levels and larger learning community (Burroughs, 2010).

The challenges of teaching in urban settings can be studied from numerous perspectives in order to gain a clearer understanding of the pressure teachers are under to perform (Burroughs, 2010). There are researchers that focus on the cultural practices and structural conditions that form and shape society on the macro level. Other researchers investigate the influence of family and individual classrooms on a micro level in order to understand phenomena that occur in urban school settings (Burroughs, 2010). Giroux utilizes a mixed and balanced perspective that examined the larger social-cultural context

that trickle down to everyday occurrences in the classroom. As Giroux explains, this enables researchers of urban settings, “to understand more thoroughly the complex ways in which people mediate and respond to the interface between their own lived experiences and structures of dominance and constraint,” (In MacLeod, 1995, p.21).

Bourdieu adds that understanding there is a reciprocal relationship between the overarching climate, culture, and structure of an environment and individualized or local responses to it influence teacher transition experiences in urban environments. Bourdieu explains, “...objective structures tend to produce structured subjective dispositions that produce structured actions which, in turn, tend to reproduce objective structure,” (In MacLeod, 1995, p. 15). This means that individuals have a tendency to identify with the values and attitudes that replicate or perpetuate the conditions of the social class of which they are a part (Burroughs, 2010). Unfortunately, in urban environments with students from low social economic status, this can lead to the perception that formalized education does not lead to economic opportunity and is therefore not valued in the manner as those from backgrounds and communities where the connection between economic advancement and educational achievement are more explicit (Burroughs, 2010). Urban educators work in conditions where the value of education may not be the highest priority to the very students they are trying to teach (Tatum, 1997).

Burroughs’ (2010), study contends:

...objective structure of the political system favors those with economic and political capital, thus leading to subjective dispositions that suggest that the political system does not lead to social or economic advancement, therefore engagement is not viewed as desirable, thus reproducing the

objective, political structure. Hence experiences must be introduced that substantially change individuals' experiences so that a new set of subjective dispositions may be formed and acted upon (p.46).

There is a contextual complexity that perpetuates low performance in urban communities that increases educator tension due to a self-perpetuating cycle of social, cultural, and economic inequity (Burroughs, 2010).

In order to understand the status of low performance in urban education, it is necessary to go back to the ideals of Karl Marx and Max Weber who first suggested that there were recognizable differences in the availability of knowledge between the peasant and literati, or the laborer and the aristocrat. Although they were comparing differences between earlier societies, there does exist stratification in advanced contemporary societies with more fluid class structures (Burroughs, 2010). However, students' contemporary urban educators discover they are "still likely to be exposed to qualitatively different types of educational knowledge" (Anyon, 1981, p. 1).

Thirty years ago when Anyon made observations about the discrepancies in curriculum and exposure based on social class, yet these inequalities still exist and persist, as urban settings that lack advanced and rigorous courses compared with more affluence in suburban areas (Fine, 2004; Michie, 1996; Obidah, Christie & McDonough, 2004). Literature suggest that instruction in urban schools are permeated by curriculums that place heavy emphasis on rote memorization that limits the teachers' and students' ability to think creatively and critically about complex topics and issues (Anyon, 1997; Delpit, 1996; Lipman, 2004; Rubin, 2007a).

In addition, to educational quality that generally lacks in the development of

creative and critical thinking skills compared to more affluent areas, research suggest that urban districts with large minority populations of parents who are working class or poor are likely to focus on regimented forms of classroom management that emphasizes adherence to strict rules and behavioral controls (Mason, 1999; Rubin, 2007). This contrasts sharply with suburban schools according to MacLeod, (In Jackson, et al, 2006) that generally value standards of internal control and operate more openly, with less direct supervision and greater student participation and centeredness. Therefore, the tendencies, skills, and ideals implicit in the instruction are unequal to the quality of instruction affluent suburban districts receive according to Burroughs (2010).

The challenges and inequalities of urban education are more than academic and researchers are of the notion that many urban schools exist in a tumultuous and unwelcoming environment (Rubin, Hayes & Benson, 2009; Schultz, 2008). Occurrences of violence, indifference, apathy, and overcrowding are seen as reasons for teacher stress and low student performance (Beechum & McCray, 2004). Structurally many urban buildings are aging and in need of major repairs (Kozol, 2005). The discrepancies between those in low-income urban schools and affluent suburban schools are highlighted in the hyper connected multimedia society where members of learning communities are keenly aware of the inequities. A low-income high school student pondered in Rubin’s study “why should some people be treated better just because they live in another place?” (2009, p. 217).

The awareness that members of urban school communities have of the disadvantages of their position manifest on psychological and emotional levels that can lead to alienation and disillusionment over time (Burroughs, 2010). A California based

study concluded, “that these schools not only systematically under-educate...but they taint pride with shame, convert yearning for quality education into anger at its denial” (Fine, Burns, Payne & Torre, p. 2193, 2004). Banks (2001) points out that both teachers’ and students’ identities are formed and shaped to a great degree by the messages they receive about their worth through the society in which they live and the schools of which they are a part.

Despite the challenges facing urban schools and the students in them, there is literature that emphasizes positive potentialities through practical application and results while serving low-income urban schools. Michie (1999) and Schultz (2008) offer insight through personal accounts of experiences working with Chicago’s lowest performing and poorest schools. Michie (1999) discusses the tribulations and trials of a middle class white teacher’s efforts to connect with his students. Michie (1999) discovered that through connecting with student’s cultural experiences and interest, he was able to improve academic skills by creating meaning. Schultz (2008) described how he worked to empower students through problem-based learning activities to increase students’ belief in themselves to succeed. Both Michie and Schultz offer compelling insights into the potential for producing positive outcomes in urban environments.

According to Burroughs, (2010) researchers also draw from practical experience to offer frameworks for academic achievement and success in urban schools. Ladson-Billings (1994) conducted a study of eight urban educators with various teaching styles who exhibited the ability to successfully educate urban youth. Ladson-Billings (1994) identified and described common attributes to culturally relevant and rigorously intellectual classrooms. According to Ladsen-Billings urban educators who found the

most success were able to create environments where quality education is viewed as both important and meaningful.

Delpit (2006) states that urban educators can have a transformative impact on the lives of urban students. Delpit (2006) presents the notion that individual teachers can make a difference by building a sense of community in the classroom, responding to the needs of students, establishing high achievement standards and regularly assessing students, building trust, and incorporating the culture of home, urban students can succeed.

While Delpit and Laden-Billings draw on teacher experiences to make suppositions, other researchers articulate practices that can be applied in urban settings. Rubin (2007b) states that critical awareness and personal responsibility can be built among students by utilizing specific teaching practices. In Rubin's (2007b) study of the urban context in education found that educators that are able to actively engage students in discussions, analyze critical issues, and participate in classrooms that engaged in democratic practices were more willing to value and work within the educational system towards constructive change.

Duncan-Andrade (2007) found that successful teachers in urban low-income schools in California shared several traits when analyzing classroom practices. The traits listed that impacted the classroom environment were building trust in the classroom, detailed planning and including the students' lives in the process of learning.

Another study of urban education by Esposito & Swain (2009) revealed that teachers who associated learning with activism and social justice motivated students intellectually and idealistically to desire improvement in their lives and their

communities. Each of the above studies demonstrates the potential for successful education in urban schools (Burroughs, 2010).

The amount of effort that it takes for urban educators to foster transformational learning among the students they teach within the context can overtime wear on a teacher's emotional and mental resilience (Esposito & Swain, 2009). The external factors and challenges of teaching in an urban environment cause higher levels of attrition when compared to other teaching environments (Fine, 2004). The higher stress and attrition rates that urban educators experience is often a result of larger phenomena known as *burnout* (Maslach, 2003).

Burnout

According to Espeland (2006), burnout is a condition whereby one experiences diminished energy, enthusiasm, and self-confidence in one's career as a result of internal and external stressors over an unspecified period of time. Historical research into burnout can be segmented into two phases according to Schaufeli, Maslach, and Marek (1993). These phases are termed *pioneering* and *empirical* (Schaufeli, Maslach, and Marek, 1993). The phase of pioneering began with Freudenberger (1974) who observed coworkers experiencing gradual depletion of emotions, reduction in motivation, commitment, and interest in work. Freudenberger (1974) observed peers during a one-year period and recorded the psychological and physical changes they appeared to display during that timeframe. Freudenberger (1974) established the term "burnout" to describe a state of exhaustion in his book: *Burnout: the high cost of high achievement*.

Another important contributor to the pioneering phase of burnout research was Maslach (2003). Maslach conducted research into workplace stress perceptions of the

human service sector in the 1970s (Maslach & Leiter, 2001). Burnout was first explored Maslach and Schaufeli (1993) for its pragmatic use in clinical descriptions. The importance of exploring burnout was recognized for its' practical and social implications in the workplace prior to becoming a focus of scholarly discourse (Maslach, 2003). Early research into describing burnout was made primarily through case study and observation (Maslach & Schaufeli, 1993).

Schaufeli et al. (1993) commented that initially limited interest existed in the development of burnout theories because no conceptual framework for evaluating, integrating or findings solutions existed. Research into burnout in the teaching profession was practically nonexistent as empirical research focused generally on how job satisfaction and stress influenced burnout (Lortie, 1975). Lortie (1975) states that more research into the teacher's view of the world will provide greater insight into the views and values of teachers that can add insight in what causes burnout in the profession. However, Schaufeli et al., (1993) indicated that the proliferation of burnout as a modern phenomenon began after World War II when human service work became impersonal and isolated due to the nature of large-scale government intervention, regulation, and bureaucracy that placed more demands of workers.

Factors also adding to increased rates of burnout included society's shifting focus towards individualistic pursuits. This shift towards individual pursuits precipitated the breakdown of well-established community norms and values. This resulted in burnout research focusing on social services most impacted by these societal changes in fields such as criminal justice, medical and religious (Maslach & Schaufeli, 1993). The

practical application of social causes and implications of burnout represent the root of the pioneering phase of burnout exploration (Maslach & Schaufeli, 1993).

The empirical phase of the study of burnout began in the 1980s when the focus became more systematic and scholarly through the use of quantitative methods to study larger populations (Schaufeli et al., 2001). The empirical phase resulted in the generation of more complex theories, models, and standardized measurements interpreting burnout. However, the empirical phase of burnout and current literature have similar theoretical tenants when compared to the pioneering phase (Maslach and Schaufeli, 1993). The difference being that input from organizational and industrial psychology caused an expansion of the methodological and theoretical study of burnout into areas such as job attrition, retention, absenteeism, commitment and job satisfaction (Schaufeli et al., 2001).

Empirical research into burnout expanded beyond the fields of human services in the 1990s. This period emphasized research methods that included modern technological and statistical matrixes (Schaufeli et al., 1993). It was during this period that longitudinal studies of the effects of burnout overtime began to be undertaken (Maslach & Leiter, 2001).

Since the turn of the century there has been limited expansion of theory regarding burnout. However, it is universally accepted by scholars of the subject that professional burnout is facilitated by exposure to work related stressors that over time wear a person down, mentally, physically, and emotionally (Innstrand, Espnes, & Mykletun, 2004), yet is clearly related to perceptions of job satisfaction (Bolin, 2007).

Essentially, burnout is defined as “a state of fatigue or frustration brought about by devotion to a cause, way of life, or relationship that failed to produce the expected

reward” (Freudenberger and Richelson, 1980, p. 13). Another definition of burnout is “state of emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion caused over time by emotionally demanding situations” (Pines and Aronson 1988, p. 11). Maslach and Jackson (1981) established an operationally applicable definition of burnout as “a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment that can occur among individuals who do ‘people work’ of some kind” (p. 3).

Theories of burnout. There are three models of burnout that have added to the breadth and depth of research into the topical area. The first is three-dimensional burnout theory (Maslach, 1976: Maslach & Jackson, 1981), next is the model of phase burnout (Golembiewski & Munzenrider, 1988), and finally burnout’s existential theory (Pines & Aronson, 1988).

Burnout dimension theory. Maslach and Jackson (1981) first conceptualized depersonalization, emotional exhaustion and personal accomplishment as the three dimensions of burnout. The three dimensions of burnout are variables that function independently. Yet, each dimension serves as a variable that when taken together correlate to job satisfaction as a dependent variable (Maslach and Jackson 1981).

The first dimension, emotional exhaustion, is described by Maslach et al. (1996) as a critical component of burnout. Burnout is described by Maslach (2003), as a “psychological syndrome that involves a prolonged response to stressors in the workplace” (p.189). According to Maslach (2001), the most widely studied and reported aspect of burnout is exhaustion because it is the most visibly form that burnout manifest itself. Although individuals who are exhausted emotionally and physically often lack energy, exhaustion alone does not take into consideration one’s work environment and

personal relationships (Maslach, 2003). This leads to the next dimension of the three-phase burnout theory.

Depersonalization is the dimension of burnout that is typified by the expression of distant, negative, and cold attitudes about the people and environment in which one works. The distancing and detachment from others are clear indicators of depersonalization (Maslach, 2003). Depersonalization has a negative effect on individual effectiveness and well-being (Maslach & Leiter, 1997, p. 18). According to Maslach & Jackson, (1986) the depersonalized individual expresses cynicism, pessimism, and contempt. In time, the individual experiencing depersonalization may experience remorse or guilt regarding their treatment of others and work performance (Maslach & Leiter, 1997). Yet even with these feelings of guilt or remorse the depersonalized individual may have a tendency to retreat further into a form of self-imposed exile while cutting themselves off from potential support sources (Maslach & Leiter, 1997). The effects of depersonalization lead to a spiraling downward of more withdrawal and stress which impacts the final dimension of the three dimension burnout theory (Maslach & Leiter, 1997).

When exhaustion and depersonalization take full effect and individuals' sense of personal accomplishment is inevitably affected, the third dimension of burnout manifests. According to Maslach (1982) feelings of inadequacy and loss of confidence are hallmarks of the personal accomplishment dimension. When feelings of reduced personal accomplishment take hold, individuals can become overcome with feelings of ineffective hopelessness. According to Maslach, this "sense of reduced personal accomplishment, a feeling of low self-worth, lack of confidence, failure and ultimately may cause the

individual to leave their work (1982, p. 7).” A reduced sense of self-efficacy and depression have also been linked with diminished feelings of personal accomplishment (Maslach, 1998). Lack of personal accomplishment permeates so deeply into an individual’s sense of well-being that those experiencing this phase of burnout are likely to experience negative feelings about themselves, others they work with, and the work environment of which they are a part (Maslach, & Leiter, 2001).

Phase model of burnout. Although the dimension theory of burnout provides an in-depth description of the attributes and effects of burnout, the phase model of burnout research takes insight into the phenomenon a step further. According to Golembiewski and Munzenrider, (1988) the phase model theory of burnout was developed based on Maslach’s burnout theory (1982). The difference between the three-dimensional burnout theory and the phase model burnout theory is that the phase theory does not measure perceived burnout (Goodman & Boss, 2002). Goodman and Boss add that the phase model theory was a “scale that measures experienced levels of burnout that fall on a continuum” (p. 43). The phase model theory groups the Maslach (1982) model into sub-domains. However, the phase model starts with depersonalization and progressively declines to a decreased personal accomplishment (Goodman & Boss, 2002). When contrasting the dimensions of burnout with phase burnout Maslach considers emotional exhaustion to be the first phase of burnout while Golembiewski and Munzenrider consider the emotional exhaustion as the culminating manifestation of burnout.

There are a total of eight phases to this burnout model with the first phase indicating the lowest level and the eighth phase representing the highest level. An individual may experience stressors at various levels of frequency and intensity that

dictates which phase of burnout an individual may be experiencing (Goodman & Boss, 2002). Individual coping responses are also taken into consideration when examining the phase theory of burnout as individuals have various means of adapting to stressors (Golembiewski & Munzenrider, 1988).

Another distinction between the phase model theory and dimension theory of burnout is that individuals may not sequentially pass through the phases along either chronic or acute phases (Golembiewski, Boudreau, Munzenrider, & Luo, 1996). In addition, Golembiewski and Boss (1992) state that an individual may experience emotional exhaustion without moving through the dimensions of reduced personal accomplishment or depersonalization. Despite the differences between phase burnout and dimension burnout theory, a sufficient body of scholarly research exist for the phase model to warrant an operational definition (Goodman & Boss, 2002). Literature supports the notion that a correlation exists between the phases of burnout and stress, conflict, and job performance (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993; Golembiewski, Boudreau, Munzenrider, & Luo, 1996).

Existential theory of burnout. Critics argue that the dimensional and phase theories of burnout are impersonal and therefore offer an interpretation of burnout through a more humanistic lens (Pines & Aronson, 1988). The theory of existential burnout is based on (Espeland, 2006) the motivational force of human activity is to find meaning and purpose and when that motivational force is not achieved symptoms emerge. Clinical case studies that formed the foundation for the existential theory of burnout summarized that burnout is the result of individuals failing to fulfill the basic human need to do useful, meaningful, and important work (Pines & Aronson, 1988).

Existential burnout theory assumes that individuals that are highly motivated are more likely to become victims of burnout as Pines articulates “in order to be burn out, one first has to be on fire” (p. 41). The assumption is that individuals begin their careers highly motivated and with high expectations, aspirations, and goals, but as time moves on they experience decreased self-esteem, enthusiasm, hopelessness and irritability as the burden of unfulfilled expectations become harder to escape (Pines, 1993). Pines and Aronson (1988) assert that “idealistic people work hard because they expect their work to make their lives matter in the larger scheme of things and give meaning to their existence” (p. 83). When individuals fail to arrive at a sense of meaning from their work they first become disillusioned which stimulates eventual feelings of burnout (Schaufeli & Enzmann, 1998).

Pines and Aronson (1993) put forth the notion that a motivated individual exposed to the perception of long-term negativity would be susceptible to burning out. Pines and Aronson also suggest that personal feelings of failure can also lead to burnout. Pines and Aronson identified three motivational factors in the existential that if not fulfilled can cause burnout: (a) universal, (b) profession-specific, and (c) personal (p. 34).

The universal motivational force behind existential burnout theory include, experiencing growth and development by participating in a fulfilling social environment. Another aspect of universal motivations is experiencing emotions that make one feel their work is important and that they are receiving fair and sufficient material reward for work performed counterbalanced with a sense of professional autonomy. The professional-specific element of burnout consists of having a perception of making a positive contribution to the lives of those served (Pines & Aronson, 1988). Critics of the

existential burnout model argue that the theory is not predicated upon reality in that positive and negative experiences are complex when combined with a myriad of varying degrees of supports and stressors which make identifying and articulating burnout less clear (Lambie, 2006).

Although there are various theories regarding burnout, urban educators face a higher rate of burnout compared other educators in less tense environments. The challenges of urban educators face are considerable, therefore it becomes essential for urban educators to develop avenues and means to stay motivated. One way to develop this motivation is to cultivate a sense of self- efficacy. Self-efficacy in education is the focus of the next phase of this literature review.

Self-Efficacy in Education

Despite the challenges of teaching in urban environments, there exist the possibility to positively educate socially, economically, and geographically disadvantaged students without facing the looming possibility of burnout. Educators that are able to navigate burnout are able to develop deeper and more meaningful relationships with their students and therefore positively contribute to the academic and social success of urban youth (Bonner, 2012). Delving deeper, Bandura (1993) indicates that the teacher's perception of self-efficacy and belief in his or her efficacy as an instructor impacts students dramatically. Ashton and Webb (1996) conducted a study that demonstrated that teacher's positive or negative beliefs can in fact predict student levels of mathematic and language arts performance. It seems apparent then that students benefit most when they have teachers who possess high degrees of perceived efficacy instructing them in the class.

Self-efficacy is a key component of Albert Bandura's social-cognitive learning theory that revolves around an individual's belief in one's capacity to achieve one's goal. Tschannen-Moran et al. (1998) interpret Bandura's definition as "a cognitive process in which people construct beliefs about their capacity to perform at a given level of attainment" (p. 203). Dellinger et al. (2008) defines self-efficacy as the belief that teachers have in their abilities to perform within the context of their classrooms. Finally, Tschannen-Moran (1998) and Woolfolk (2008) define the teacher's perceived self-efficacy as their capacity to produce favorable results of student engagement even among unmotivated or difficult to reach students. In essence, teacher achievement is related directly to the belief in their ability to achieve goals even more so than actual ability (Bandura, 1993). Bandura also expresses that the higher the degree of and educators perceived self-efficacy, the more successful the learning communities academic environment will be.

Various studies have been conducted on the topic of self-efficacy in the past two decades, for example Ashton and Webb (1996) discovered that "teacher's efficacy expectations influence their thoughts and feelings, their choice of activities, the amount of effort they expend and the extent of their persistence in the face of obstacles" (p. 3). Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2007) stated that self-efficacy in the educational realm has sparked investigation into how teacher's belief in their efficacy influence actions and outcomes. Numerous studies offered variations of the term self-efficacy but the core meaning remained the same as typified by Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy's development of a *Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale* (2001). Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2007) define teacher efficacy as "beliefs in their abilities to affect student

performance” (p. 753). Dellinger et al. (2008) created an analysis of self-efficacy called the *Teachers’ Efficacy Beliefs System-Self* (TEBS-Self) that focuses on the current situation a teacher faces when engaged in specific task. The analysis and results of the study were presented from three independent studies performed across the United States.

A common thread of the authors researched in defining perceptions of self-efficacy is that the degrees of efficacy change over time and are built upon success or failure during various experiences and “develop over time as specific tasks are completed” (Barkley, 2006, p. 195).

Since the concept of self-efficacy was introduced, there has been continuous development of how teacher self-efficacy is measured (Bonner, 2012). A study conducted by RAND (Armor et al., 1976) focused on reading program interventions. The RAND study was the first teacher self-efficacy assessment. The assessment contained a 5-point, 2-item Likert scale (Armor et al., 1976). This represented the start of measuring assessing teacher sense of efficacy and was followed by another RAND (Berman, McLaughlin, Bass, Pauly, & Zellman, 1979). In the second RAND study the researchers were able to identify results that influenced funding of federal projects. The findings demonstrated that teacher efficacy was a reliable means of predicting student performance (Bonner, 2012). The results of the 1976 and 1979 studies resulted in further research being done to examine the relationship between teacher efficacy, student performance, teacher’s willingness to experiment with new methods, manage stress, and remain in the profession. However, due to concerns with reliability regarding the RAND study researchers began exploring measures that were more comprehensive in measuring efficacy.

Tschannen-Moran et al. (1998) explored and identified three methods of measuring teacher efficacy as well as four measures connected with social cognitive theory and teacher efficacy of Bandura. Dellinger et al (2008) added that the results of the Tschannen-Moran et al. measurements and the RAND studies sparked over twenty-five years of research by numerous authors under the terms: “teacher sense of efficacy, teacher efficacy, and teacher self-efficacy” (p. 752).

Gibson and Dembo (1984) developed the *Teacher Efficacy Scale* that served as a popular measure of teacher efficacy for numerous years. However, “theoretical and psychometric issues may invalidate findings based on these measures” (Dillinger, 2008, p. 755). A result of discrepancies in validity such as Gibson and Dembo and other early efficacy assessments was the development of a more comprehensive measurement of teacher self-efficacy by Tschannen-Morgan and Hoy known as the *Ohio State Teacher Efficacy Scale*. The Ohio State Teacher Efficacy Scale focuses on the “multidimensional nature of teaching by including specific teaching tasks within several domains” (Dellinger et al., 2008, p. 755). The three areas of concern of measuring teacher efficacy assessments were identified as the following: first, the meaning of self-efficacy should reflect an accurate and clear definition, second, the measure of teacher self-efficacy should reflect the context in beliefs were developed, and third, the task selected for measurement must be meaningful in that they reflect the abilities and skills documented as correlating with effective teaching and learning (Dellinger et al., 2008, p. 756).

The Ohio State Teacher Efficacy Scale is considered to be valid, reliable, reasonable and “superior to previous measures of teacher efficacy in that it has a unified and stable factor structure and assesses a broad range of capabilities that teachers

consider important to good teaching” (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001, p. 801). Additionally, Tschannen-Moran et al. (1998) identified Anderson, Greene, & Loewen, (1988); Ashton & Webb, (1986); Midgley, Feldlaufer, & Eccles, (1989); and Ross, (1992) as researchers that identified teacher’s sense of efficacy as having a powerful impact on “student achievement, student motivation and student sense of efficacy” (p. 207). A relationship was also found between teacher’s sense of efficacy and their openness to trying innovative methods and strategies to better meet student needs. Also articulated was that teachers with higher degrees of self-efficacy organize and plan more extensively, display more enthusiasm, commitment, and resiliency in the profession while also tending to stay longer. The net result of this increased efficacy is a more orderly, healthier and positive collective school efficacy.

Investigations of teachers within a whole school revealed that a higher degree of teacher efficacy related to a healthier, more orderly, and positive school with a higher collective efficacy. A new model of examining the efficacy of teachers found that variations of efficacy occur within distinct context and circumstances (Tschannen-Moran et al. 1998). Tschannen-Moran et al. also state that in making “judgments about efficacy, teachers must assess what will be required of them in the anticipated teaching situation” (p. 231). Anticipated efficacy is the ability to predict what may occur and select the best strategy through meta-analysis.

In summary, ample scholarly research accumulated over the past 30 years reveal the relationship between teacher beliefs about their capacity, student motivation and outcomes. Not only does teacher efficacy positively influence students but it also results in “higher motivation, greater effort, persistence, and resilience across a span of a

teaching career” (p. 238). Teacher efficacy has also been directly related to classroom behavior (Woolfolk Hoy, 2007, p. 944). Teachers who work in urban environments would be wise to learn to cultivate their sense of efficacy in order to avoid career burnout, while also successfully navigating career transitions and transformation.

Conclusion

This literature review has strengthened the breadth and depth of the central focus of this autoethnographic study of an urban educator transforming through transition. The exploration of the theoretical and conceptual base of mid-career transition established the foundation of awareness career vantage point that this autoethnography was developed. The review of how career transitions influence transformative learning gave insight into changes that this autoethnographic assisted and facilitating. The review of the urban teaching environment increased the context within which this ethnographic study took place. The review of burnout literature gave insight into the causes and effects of this phenomenon for educators working in situations that make them more susceptible to increased instances of burnout. The final topic of self-efficacy served as a vital element of this review because it provided the theoretical foundation for improving professional practice despite the numerous challenges educators encounter. The study of self-efficacy fit with the primary goal of this autoethnographic exploration of transition and transformation of an urban educator.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Career transitions facilitate personal and professional transformation through the altering of one's daily interactions and routine to facilitate changes in behaviors and thought patterns (Whitacre, 2015). Teacher transformation is defined as the exploration, examination, reanalysis and, revision of perspectives to form new paradigms to shape the direction of decisive action (Whitacre, 2015). Mezirow, (1991) postulates that transformative learning occurs when previous systems of belief are revised through reconsideration to form new mental and conceptual habits. During my fifteen-year teaching career I have transformed through six identifiable career transitions as a mid-career professional (Huberman, 1989).

The result of the transitions that a mid-career educator encounters tends to take divergent trajectories while transforming professionally and personally (Huberman, 1989). The positive trajectory is termed as generative, which includes active engagement and experimentation. The negative career trajectory is referred to as discordant or disengagement and apathy as it relates to the profession and precipitates a high probability of teacher burnout (Huberman, 1989). Effectively moving through career transitions as an urban educator transforming to increase my self-efficacy were the core components of this dissertation. Delving further, the purpose of this study was to produce an in-depth personal account of an urban educator who has navigated through identifiable transitions during a fifteen-year career that has transformed my personal and professional perceptions as an urban educator. This autoethnographic research approach

systematically analyzed and described personal experiences within the broader cultural context of urban public school education (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2010).

Research Questions

The research questions that guided this study are:

1. How has the autoethnographic approach engaged me in a self-analysis process that promoted self-efficacy?
2. How did Schlossberg's theory of transition influence my ability to cope with multiple transition experiences as an urban public school educator?
3. How have the critical transitions I experienced transformed me as an educational leader?

Research Design

Autoethnography was the research design I utilized while engaging in this qualitative study. Ellis and Bochner (2000) state that the genre of autoethnography highlights the connection between personal experience and cultural phenomena through analyzing and articulating complex levels of the author's consciousness.

Autoethnographies generally utilize first person accounts in the form of personal essays, short stories, and poetry as essential data points (McCaskill, 2008). The core of this autoethnography focused on the development of a rich narrative of my experiences as a teacher in transition and utilized photos, personal poetry, journal entries, and cultural archives to inform this study.

The meaning of autoethnography has evolved since its inception (McCaskill, 2008). Autoethnography is defined by Reed-Danahy (1997) "as a form of self-narrative that places the self within the social context. It is both method and a text, as in the case of

ethnography” (p. 9). The interest in autobiography, life history, and personal narratives are of interest to anthropologist in the postmodern period according to Reed-Danahay (1997). Similar terms that describe autoethnography are personal essays (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Krieger, 1991), self-stories and personal experience narratives (Denzin, 1989), personal accounts (Ellis, 1989), and narratives of self (Richardson, 1994). The unifying theme among these ethnographic terms is that the unit of analysis for the study is the author and the data is derived from the author’s interpretation of experiences. The author explores internal thoughts, feelings, and reflections to examine cultural implications of phenomena (Ellis and Bochner, 2000).

According to Creswell (1994), qualitative designs such as autoethnographies are concerned with the process by which individuals make meaning of their experiences through learning and transformation. As the study progresses in autoethnography, unforeseen details emerge as the researcher hypothesizes, to form theories, concepts, and abstractions while engaging inductively in the field to form unique descriptions as the primary subject of the research. Since there is no one way to fully grasp or quantify the subtle complexities of the human experience, the qualitative researcher using the autoethnographic method must be capable of intense introspection in order to legitimately express the subtlety of experience within a particular context (McCaskill, 2008). The researcher needs to have a broad knowledge base of the nuances that underlie the autoethnographic method in order for it to be effectively executed (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

Autoethnographic writing focuses on personal experiences in relationship to the larger society and cultural environment in which one participates. My personal

experiences through transition articulated critical reflections that exposed emotional contentions and vulnerable aspects of my innermost self during this study. I provided a degree of breadth, depth, detail, and description of my reactions to transitions that were uniquely personal and at times unflattering in order to add authenticity and a sense of realistic tangibility to this study (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). The nature of autoethnography required that I expose vulnerabilities of thought, beliefs, and actions that touched the core of my emotional being and resonated in the depths of my heart and mind to facilitate true transcendental transformation. The growth generated by the nature of this autoethnography consisted of an engagement in a back and forth look at aspects of my personal vulnerabilities interplaying with the external environment (McCaskill, 2008, p.14).

According to Carlyn Ellis's *Heartful Autoethnography*, (1999) the characteristics of autoethnography include the systematic usage of recalled emotions and introspection that demonstrate the authors vulnerabilities while producing evocative stories that examine how the human experience is full of meaning which links literature and social science. The value of autoethnographic studies is the utilization of personal experiences to bring light to universal themes and phenomena as humans have communicated thoughts, feelings, and important information through stories since the advent of human language (Cohen, 2011).

This study provided both experienced and novice teachers and researchers with an account of a teacher transitioning during an age of transition (Erlandson, 2009), thus allowing other educators to analyze how my particular experiences can be applied to others in similar situations (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2010) and have their voices

counted and heard (Quinn, 2004.b) utilizing Scholsberg's (1981) transition theory.

Setting of the Study

Damcen Public School District. This study was conducted during a period when Damcen City public school district was currently undergoing major reform. The stated goal of the school district's reorganization was to develop strategic plans aimed at removing barriers that limit student achievement (Cross & Joftus, 2012). Although expectations for the district had been lofty and noble, the outcomes of reform efforts have been uncertain.

The perspective I offered was an inside view from the perspective of a career educator serving in an urban school district that has undergone unrelenting restructuring initiatives and how these restructurings precipitated six critical transitions during my fifteen-year career. The school district where I teach according to Cross & Joftus' (2012) *Strategic Needs Analysis* was essentially caught in a complex web of multiple causes and effects, including pervasive violence and a faulty infrastructure that over time had contributed to the city's overall decline. Schools in this area have been struggling with the conditions of urban poverty for the last 60 years. These struggles include slim employment opportunities, dilapidated homes, and substandard private and public service (Cross & Joftus, p. 2, 2012). The district's decline in student population, poor attendance, and low graduation rates mirror the city's struggles. Yet despite challenges there remains hope in knowing that "there are some wonderful educators in this district, and some students receive a very good education, however; the public school system is deeply broken" (Cross & Joftus, p. i, 2012).

The Cross & Joftus (2012) study identified several reasons the Damcen school

district was in need of reform. One reason the district was considered broken was that it never met the academic standards for adequate yearly progress under the former *No Child Left Behind* accountability requirements first implemented in 2004 (Cross & Jofus, 2012). Also, the district's brokenness was confirmed according to the New Jersey Department of Education's, (2010-2011) *Districts in need of improvement* measurements, which highlights student struggles in basic proficiency from elementary to high school have been sub-par in Language Arts, Math, and Literacy for multiple years. In addition, poor performance on the 2011 New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge exam clearly showed that the district had not met federal requirements (Cross & Jofus, 2012). The district's struggles were tangible as only 51% of the students met or exceeded the state's most basic requirements for proficiency or advanced proficiency in the Language Arts component of New Jersey's High school proficiency assessment. Twenty percent of students were proficient or advanced proficient in math (Cross & Jofus 2012). Other struggles in the district were reflected in the graduation rates for 2010-2011 where 56.89% of the students graduated compared to the New Jersey average of 83.17% (Cross & Jofus, 2012). Furthermore, 2011-2012 graduation rates dropped by 7 percentage points to 49.3% according to the New Jersey Department of Education (Dunn, 2013). These statistics were a clear reminder of the work that needed to be done to raise the expectations of the district and the performance of the students.

Proximity One's (2014) American Community Survey offered more detail into understanding of the overall demographics of the population in Damcen. Proximity One provides geo-demographic-economic analytical data tools. Data relevant to this study

show that as of 2010 the population of the city was 77,606. The median age of the population was 28.3 while the rest of the state had a median age of 38.9. The population distribution of people under 18: 0-4 7,334, 5-9 years 6,641, 10-14 years 6,347, and 15-17 years 4,088. The racial origins of the population are: Black\American 35,657, American Indian/Alaska Native alone 924, Asian alone 1,780, Native Hawaiian/OPI alone 9, Other race alone 23,674, Two or more races 3,481, Hispanic/Latino Origin 37,338 (Proximity One, 2014). The demographics of total school enrollment for populations 3 and older are 24,189. This includes 2,491 preschool, 17,362 primary and secondary and 4,336 in college. The educational attainment level reached by populations 25 and over was 64.2% graduated high school and 7.6% graduated college (Proximity One, 2014).

In the area of economics, the median income in Damcen was \$26,705 while the rest of the state had a median income of \$71,637. The percentage of all people living in poverty was 38.6% while people under 18 years old had a poverty rate of 52.0%. In housing occupancy 16% of the total housing units in the city were unoccupied, while 83.3% were occupied. 39.9% of those homes were owner occupied while 60.1% were renter occupied. The median housing value homes in Damcen was \$90,000 while the rest of the state had a housing value of \$337,900 on average (Proximity One, 2014).

The above demographic data highlights differences in income, home value, and educational attainment compared with the rest of the state. The Proximity One data demonstrated hard numbers to explain why the Damcen school district was classified by the New Jersey Department of Education as *District Factor Group A*. This ranking was the lowest of the eight groupings statewide when comparing relative social-economic

characteristics. The factors that place Damcen in this category are: the percentage of adults with no high school diploma, the percentage of adults with some college education, occupational status, unemployment rates, individuals living in poverty and median family income (New Jersey Department of Education, 2009).

It was within this setting and context that this autoethnographic study of my career transitions took place. The social, economic, and political situation of the general populous and the school district in particular led to the state sponsored take over that took place in July 2013 according to Green and Oluwole, (2012). States take over districts in order to promote education and financial stability as a form of educational reform. State takeovers of districts have been going on for over 20 years.

In 1989, New Jersey became the first state in the country to take over a district. Kentucky followed the same year. By the end of 1989, six states had enacted state takeover laws. By 2004, the number increased to twenty-nine states. Most takeovers occurred between 1995 and 1997. Before this peak, it is estimated that “60[%] of the takeovers were for purely financial and/or management reasons, while only 27[%] were comprehensive takeovers that included academic goals. In the three years after 1997, however, the percentage of comprehensive takeovers had risen to 67[%] (Green and Oluwole, 2012).

State takeovers of school districts were set forth through administrative codes and state statutes (Green and Oluwole, 2012). Although these takeovers were decided upon in the highest echelons of state authority, students and teachers felt the impacts in the classrooms. The climate, and context that facilitated the state sponsored district

takeover stimulated the beginning of several career transitions I experienced and ultimately transformed my perspective as an urban educator and sense of self-efficacy (Green and Oluwole, 2012). The autoethnographic component of this study was important because I was immersed in a highly personalized form of reflective study that reflects the larger phenomena of teacher transition (McCaskill, 2008). This dissertation offers insight into the trends of change impacting urban school districts and how individual teachers respond to such changes.

Worldview

According to Cresswell and Plank (2011), humans interpret the world they are engaged in to make meaning. The meaning that humans make is based on their social, cultural, and historical perspective in order to make sense of the world. This meaning making that humans engage in while interacting with the world informs an individual's world-view (Cresswell and Plank, 2011). Creswell (1994) has developed a set of worldviews that inform researchers engaged in empirical studies to assist in making meaning of data and theoretical assumptions.

The worldview that best exemplified my perspective in this study incorporated elements of the constructivism, participatory, and transformative paradigms (Cresswell and Plank, 2011). These three elements of my worldview added balance to the study and most clearly express the process I engaged in during this autoethnography.

The element of constructivism in my worldview has been shaped by my subjective perception through social interaction. The constructive worldview took into account my personal history when creating meaning and understanding. This understanding moves from the bottom up or from the personal perspective, towards

broader pattern recognition to aid in understanding the whole system being studied (Cresswell and Plank, 2011).

The participatory worldview has been incorporated into my worldview because of its' inherent concerns with improving society through empowering marginalized groups through engagement in the political process. It was through this study that I have not only sought to transform myself into a more balanced and skilled educator of urban youth, I will also use my platform as an urban educator to inform and empower the students I come in contact with who due to multiple social economic factors had been marginalized from mainstream society.

The transformative emancipatory paradigm like the participatory framework is based on addressing and advancing the needs of marginalized and underrepresented groups. In the transformative emancipatory worldview I have been sensitive to student needs while transitioning and made recommendations for changes based on research conducted to improve the conditions of social justice within the overall community I studied (Cresswell and Plank, 2011 p. 98). In this case, I am the center of my own study and will be working to improve my self- efficacy through transition and transformation.

Combining and synthesizing the constructive, participatory, and transformative paradigm into a uniquely personal worldview assisted me in identifying imbalances and questioning the status quo. My worldview has been shaped by the concept of ideological refinement and value based decision making (Green, 2007). My worldview was suited the advancing of the transformative goals of the study through increased self-efficacy and self-awareness. In essence, the syntheses of the constructive, participatory and transformative worldviews provided an overarching paradigm that

was empowering, action based, and change oriented (Cresswell and Plank, 2011).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study is grounded in Schlossberg's (1995) transition theory. The core components of Schlossberg's transition theory supported the purpose of this study of which was the creation of a narrative autoethnography.

Anticipated transitions, unanticipated transitions and non-events are central components of Schlossberg's transition theory and include three types of transitions known as: anticipated, unanticipated and non-events (Chickering & Schlossberg, 1995). Anticipated transitions are expected occurrences that require preparation. Anticipated transitions occur as a natural part of life, for example graduating school, going to college, getting married or buying a house depending on the cultural norms in a particular demographic. Unanticipated transitions are unexpected occurrences that one has no way preparing for or knowing they would happen, yet have an impact on one's experience. Unanticipated transitions, are the unexpected death of a loved one and getting laid off from a job unexpectedly. Unexpected transitions can have a more traumatic impact because of the random and unpredictable nature with which they occur (Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995). Non-events can also be referred to as expectations that are not realized. An example of a non-event would be when one expects to get a raise or promotion in a job but if that expectation never occurs an individual can experience a transition that could trigger feelings of disappointment or lack of self-worth (Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995). It requires a great deal of persistence to move through non-events because enough of them over time can take a toll on one's sense of self-efficacy. Schlossberg's anticipated transitions, unanticipated

transitions and non-events allowed identify the critical transition experiences I encountered during my fifteen-year teaching career.

I utilized Kottkamp's (2004) description of *Critical incidents* to identify essential transitions in my career. Kottkamp (2004) states that critical incidents arise out of cognitive conflict as reality and expectations clash according to one's perception (Tripp, 1994). However, critical incidents need not always be dramatic or obvious. According to Tripp (1994), critical incidents can also be straight forward accounts of occurrences within the professional setting, yet be critical in that they place indicative emphasis on the underlying structure and motive of an event (Kottkamp's, 2004). Critical incidents are explained by Tripp (1994) in the following way: "In teaching, importantly, critical incidents are created. Incidents happen all the time, but critical incidents are produced by the way we look at a situation: a critical incident therefore is an interpretation of the significance of an event" (p. 72). Through reflection of critical incidents within the framework of Schlossberg's 1995 transition theory I was able to give structure to this autoethnographic narrative.

The structure of this study was based on Schlossberg's (1995) conceptualization of *Situation, Self, Strategies, and Support* as the essential resources utilized for navigating transition. The first resource known as the *Situation* examines the features of a transition and how they may influence its significance to the individual (Schlossberg et al. 1995). The situation can be likened to a synthesis between the context, climate, culture, place, and time. There are external variables that define a situation such as economic, political, or social factors. Teachers engaged in transition would be wise to

develop an accurate perception of the situation in which they are immersed in their work community as well as the external factors impacting them.

The next resource to be explored and reflected upon, according to Schollberg (1995), is the personal self. The aspect of the self in transition examined how my psychological traits and demographic background influenced my behavior, interpretation, and perception of the context as expressed through journals, and field notes. The *self*-variable is composed of a person's outlook on life, as influenced by personal characteristics and psychological resources (Schlossberg et al. 1995). A person's state of mental or emotional being at the time of transition will also influence the outcomes or the educator's ability to successfully navigate transition.

The next resource I explored were the strategies that I developed to move through challenges. The relevance of Schlossberg's four resources is that it utilizes a structure to aid in coping with the "ordinary and extraordinary process of living" (Evans, et al., 2010). *Strategies* are defined as actions that individuals take in response to transitions (Schlossberg et al. 1995). There are numerous strategies that can be implemented by urban educators moving through transition. The strategy one takes when dealing with transition deals primarily with the professional and personal goals of that individual at any point and time.

The final resources I examined were the support systems that were available through cultural archives and personal archives that demonstrate external influence over my perceptions during the time journal entries or field notes were taken. *Support* refers to the resources available to people (Schlossberg et al. 1995). Support in urban education relates to administrative backing, monetary or material accesses to resources,

and backing from the community in general. These support systems influence educators able to transition within the profession.

Taken together, the situation, self, strategy, and support formed an effective theoretical framework for navigating transitions towards the goal of transformation and increased efficacy while engaged in this autoethnographic study. Schlossberg's (1995) transition framework assisted in examining the challenges and complexities of making transitions from the metaphorical trenches or front lines as an inner city educator.

Procedure

This narrative autoethnography utilized Schlossberg's (1981) *model for analyzing human adaption to transition* while describing and discussing the major transitions that shaped, molded, and transformed who I am as an urban educator. The critical transitions I experienced during my fifteen-year teaching career that were discussed within Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory framework were: (1) the closing of the Siggs Adult Education Center (2008), (2) conflicting with my ESL Supervisor at Columbus Middle School (2009), (3) teaching at three schools during one school day as a floating ESL teacher (2010-2011), (4) Teaching at Innovative Expressions (2012-2013) and, (5) teaching social studies at Damcen High School (2013-2014).

The narrative utilized Schlossberg's (1981) framework of transition to guide the narrative. Transitions were first described and discussed by identifying the time period that the transitions took place as well as the type of transition that occurred (anticipated, unanticipated, or non-event). This was followed by a discussion of the overarching situation that the transition occurred. The next resource in Schlossberg's transition

framework to ground the study was the “self” as it related to my point of view or state of mind during the transition. Next in the framework to be discussed were the external support systems that facilitated the transition. Finally, the strategies I utilized to navigate through the transitions concluded the nature of my transitions within Schlosberg’s (1981) transition framework.

According to McCaskill, (2008) the rewards of autoethnography are developing a deeper understanding of the others in the culture within which they exist while gaining a greater understanding of the authentic self. “autoethnography provides an avenue for doing something meaningful for yourself and the world” (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 738). This self-study assisted me in knowing the intricacies of my own personality and how I relate to the world. This study facilitated a deeper understanding of how to navigate transitions moving forward to bring about more productivity, meaning, purpose, and efficacy in my life and career.

Data Collection Strategies

This study took place from September 2009 - June 2016. This timeframe represented the period that I experienced the most significant critical transitions during my fifteen-year teaching career. Data was collected in the form of journals, field-notes, personal archives, and cultural archives. I composed journal entries in my home, at the local library, and in the classrooms where I taught. I also took field notes during school meetings or in the classroom recording my impressions while being careful not to interfere with my normal professional responsibilities. Cultural archives were collected via emails, flyers, evaluations, meeting agendas, and other documents or physical effects that shed insight on occurrences that influenced my perceptions during

transitions. Personal artifacts were also data points that represented creative expressions that shed light on how I interpreted occurrences that transpired around me during transition. This data sources were the core resources of this autoethnographic study that highlighted and substantiated critical incidents of my transitions.

The process of gathering facilitated the recording numerous unanticipated narratives (Cortazzi & Jin, 2006) that impacted me in profound ways. Some phenomena was reassuring while other occurrences left me bewildered, forcing me to accept that I knew, which Richardson and St. Pierre state as "...something without claiming to know everything" (p.961). The method that used to gather data evolved over time and changed with my interactions with the environment (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Ultimately, I followed the recommendations of Ellis and Flaherty (1992) to chronicle transitions I encountered as they occurred. The primary data sources will be personal journal entries, field notes and, cultural archives.

Journaling and Fieldnotes

I began journaling when I started taking doctoral level courses with Rowan University in September 2009. I wrote journal entries approximately 2 or 3 times per week for approximately five years. As I took notes I also gathered archives such as letters, flyers, newspaper articles, emails that coincide with my journals, and field notes. I also gathered anonymous student work to highlight some of my observations in class as well as archives that I created as a teacher. During this process numerous unanticipated events transpired and I had no way of knowing which events would be critical so I took the advice of Clandinin and Connelly (2000) and I noted a plethora of events, feelings, hunches, conversations in the corridor as they unfolded. I also noted

daily occurrences, and personal aspirations as I dealt with the situations unfolding around me. This gathering of data over years impacted me in ways that I was not able to fully understand at the time, until I began to look back in retrospect and note transformations in my thinking and attitudes as I evolved as an urban educator.

My personal journal was a key data source for this autoethnographic study of transition. According to Phifer (2002), journals are a record of daily growth, insights, and musings and can have a tendency to be a bit fragmentary in nature. While Chang (2008), compares journals to diaries for their descriptive and chronological nature, they are written in first person and can end up being published to broader audiences. The value of using journals as a resource for self-narratives is that they reveal less self-censored thoughts and behaviors (Chang, 2008).

A derivative of journal writing is field-notes, which according to Holman Jones, Adams, and Ellis (2013), is a fundamental data collection form for ethnographers and also represents a core inquiry method for autoethnographic research. The weight of personal writings in the form of journals and field-notes in ethnographic study is critical because according to Van Maane (1998) this method is “the peculiar practice of representing the social reality of others through the analysis of one’s own experience in the world of these others” (p.ix). Probing deeper, autoethnographic field-notes are not only about representing the social reality of others but of the of the author’s reality as well (Holman Jones, Adams, and Ellis 2013).

The writing of autoethnographic field-notes is not a rigid practice, set in stone by tradition or precedent. Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (2011), state that the practice of writing field-notes can vary from composing immediately following participant

observation to going for extended periods of focused immersion within the social setting followed by focused recollection. Both of these methods can be effective in Autoethnographic studies. For example in Jason Laurendeau's (2011) autoethnographic study of base-jumping, he utilized field-notes following activities and events following specific base-jumping occurrences. Bass Jenks, (2002) utilized a similar method by creating a note-pad that ultimately served a field-notebook/journal while spending six weeks at a summer camp for visually impaired children with her son. In both of these cases, researchers recorded observations were recorded observations at or near the time specific events and activities occurred.

In contrast, to Laurendeau and Jenks (2011), the majority of autoethnographers construct notes and journals from occurrences that are more distant, recollected and reflected upon (Holman Jones, Adams, and Ellis 2013). Ellis's *Ethnographic I* (2004) offers an example of an autoethnographer with the pseudonym "Valerie" using the recollection and reflection method of to describe her experiences with breast cancer. She wrote her story as "field notes organized chronologically" (p. 113).

The method of journaling I used focused on reflection and recollection. Field notes and journals were ordered chronologically. The focus was on introspection and self- description as I maneuvered through career transitions. I utilized creative flexibility to determine when and where the self was interjected into journal entries. In some instances, I utilized less detail at the point of the occurrence and later returned to the journal entry to reflect on the events from a deeper perspective.

Although many autoethnographers construct chronological field-notes others write in fragmented vignettes, retelling and revisiting emotional or memorable events in

their lives (Holman Jones, Adams, and Ellis 2013). However, the factor that distinguishes the ethnographer from the autoethnographer is the focus on the introspection and self-description as central factors in autoethnographic field-note writing (Holman Jones, Adams, and Ellis 2013). Although ethnographers recognize the significance of the focus of the self in research, there are differences in the point in time and analysis of where and when self- engagement is injected. This tends to be true even in autoethnographic studies as there is variability as to how and when the self is incorporated in field notes, journals, and analysis (Holman Jones, Adams, and Ellis 2013).

Some ethnographers rely on introspective field notes to such an extent that they can be considered personal diaries. Others build primarily on recollections from distant events that are thus open to interrogative analysis by the researcher at another point in time, thus allowing the researcher to engage reflexively in the field notes themselves. However, there are instances when field notes are written with less reflective detail in the moment only to be followed by deeper more articulate reflection at a future point in time.

Autoethnographers are encouraged to reflect deeply upon their interaction in the climate and culture of their research field. Yet, to some autoethnographers the field in which notes are taken may actually be a “state of mind that one assumes when recording one’s own experiences and how one is changed by these” (Holman Jones, Adams, and Ellis, p. 67, 2013). In essence, there are numerous ways that field notes and journals can be incorporated into autoethnographic studies as new themes emerge as “writing is also a way of ‘knowing’ - a method of discovery and analysis is used. By

writing in different ways, we discover new aspects of our topic and our relationship to it” (Richardson, 1994, p.516).

In this autoethnography of a teacher in transition, I utilized a combination of journals and field notes to search for emergent themes related to research questions. I then categorized the themes and engaged in a narrative analysis of the themes providing specific examples from my journals as they related to specific research questions. I considered how the various emergent themes intersected and created a synthesis to provide a balanced analysis of my experiences as an urban teacher who transforms through transition.

Autoethnographic scholars can draw from personal journals and diaries in order to complement traditional field notes. For instance, Fullagar, (2002) utilized a detailed travel diary to develop her autoethnography on the study of feminine desire in leisure. The diary captured a range of experiences from riding on camels in the desert in India to battling fatigue while hiking in the mountains of Nepal. She used richly descriptive text to “write the embodied feminine self into knowledge as a strategy of disrupting the primary oppositions that are so central to the phallogocentric” (p.72). In another example, Leon, (2011) used personal diary entries over a 10 year period that chronicled conversations, reflections, and dreams to supplement separate field notes when writing an autoethnographic study of the challenges he faced balancing family, work and leisure activities. In essence, most “most autoethnographers would make little distinction between field-notes and diaries; all such material provide value for autoethnographic inquiry” (Holman Jones, Adams, and Ellis, p. 68, 2013).

Cultural and Personal Archives

As useful and diverse as field notes and journals may be for autoethnographers, they are not the only method that can be used in data collection. Cultural and personal archives also offer a rich reservoir for autoethnographers to explore when telling their story. Some examples of personal documents that can be used as archives are college transcripts, medical reports or even social media post (Holman Jones, Adams, and Ellis, 2013). “Further, our lives are embodied and reflected through many artifacts and personal belongings, the range of such materials that may be incorporated into autoethnographic inquiry seems limited only by researchers’ interest and imagination” (Holman Jones, Adams, and Ellis, p. 69, 2013). Documents such as personal diaries, and letters have been mainstays in socially humanistic research, from contemporary life narratives (e.g., Plummer, 2001) to classic works such as *The Polish Peasant* (Thomas & Znaniecki, 1927).

Artifacts. Artifacts and personal documents are not limited and extend beyond diaries and letters in autoethnographic inquiry. The value of a particular artifact lies in its evocative potential to open the researcher to greater reflection or stimulate compelling understanding, images, and emotions in other readers (Holman Jones, Adams, and Ellis, 2013). Other scholars use photographs as a method to engage in autoethnographic inquiry and have become so common that it has led to the development of an emerging genre in the field known as “visual autoethnography” (Smith-Shank & Keifer-Boyd, 2007). Photographs provide a tangible medium that is conducive to evocative presentation and introspection reflection. Crawly (2002) used photos in conjunction with narrative autoethnographic writing to build the foundation

for the contextual understanding of her frustration with being forced to conform to social norms while having divergent tendencies. Guyas (2007) also utilized photos of her grandmother as the basis of reflection of changing perceptions of Guyas's grandmother during different stages of life that can be clearly seen as physical changes occur over time and are depicted in the imagery.

When considering the uses of archives in autoethnographic study, the influx of multimedia forms of expression that are available has drastically expanded the range of data from which social scientists and autoethnographers can draw. Examples of this include but are not limited to emails, text messages, and digital videos (Dumitrica & Gaden 2009). With the increase of multi-media means of collecting data "autoethnographic text and performances is extensive and can be expected to expand even more dramatically in the coming decade. The kinds of products that will emerge as a result of these new technologies are likely to take forms we cannot yet even imagine" (Holman Jones, Adams, and Ellis, p. 69, 2013).

Data Analysis

Data for narratives can be represented in a variety of manners. These manners of analyzing narratives include. Variations of autoethnographic narrative include: narrative analysis (Polkinghorn, 1995), fictionalized representation (Clough, 2002), dialogic/performance analysis (Riesman, 2008), structural narrative analysis (Labov, 1982). In this study I utilized the narrative analysis because it allowed me to place myself as the researcher and autoethnographer in a temporal and special setting in order to provide a broader understanding of events that occur during the study (Cooper, 2010). This form of analysis was relevant and pertinent to this study because it was

essentially concerned with the meaning conferred upon experiences (Cooper, 2010). As such researchers using this method must be clear on how data is gathered and analyzed (Trahar, 2009). By going through the five layered process discussed in the procedure section I will be able to clearly demonstrate how, when, where, and how I was able to identify critical incidents that guide the autoethnographic narrative towards the goal of answering the pedagogical, contextual, and organizational research questions.

The data analysis for this study was conducted using a five-step process that resulted in the creation of this narrative autoethnography that addressed each of the critical transitions I experienced during my career. The first step was to gather all journal and field notes taken from 2009-2014 when this study first started and put them into a concise binder that is in chronological order (Holman Jones, Adams, and Ellis 2013). The second step was to create a parallel binder of cultural archives from the same period and place them in chronological order (Holman Jones, Adams, and Ellis 2013). The third step was to read through the journal entries and cultural archives, while identifying themes that articulated key points of transitions and transformation. Each of the transitions identified were then organized within Schlosberg's (1981) transition theory framework. The fourth step was to research and identify scholarly articles that correspond with the identified themes that added academic validity to the study. The fifth and final step was to reflect upon the significance of the findings as they related to answering research questions.

Trustworthiness in Autoethnography

Establishing trustworthiness in autoethnography requires a balance between the context of study and the philosophical assumptions that ground it (Flaherty, et al., 2002;

Grant & Giddings, 2002). Traditionally, the quality of trustworthiness is based on a studies ability to be validated through rigorous analysis to establish reliability (Tuckett, 2005). Trustworthiness in autoethnography is established through ensuring the credibility and transferability of the study (Tuckett, 2005).

The essential measure of credibility is establishing whether the way data is represented, presented, interpreted, and collected is sound, true, and believable (Nicholls, 2009b; Tuckett, 2005). In autoethnographic studies credibility is increased through the transparency of the author's intentions (Atkinson, et al., 2003). Transparency is established by clearly and precisely articulating data collection methods and theoretical assumptions while acknowledging that the very nature of autoethnography is subjective is established by since this form of study is essentially subjective in nature (Ellis, 2000). Since Autoethnography is an acknowledged form of subjective study that offers various methods of setting up and presenting findings, criteria for establishing credibility will largely established on a case by case basis (Gingrich-Philbrook, 2005; Holt, 2008; Wall, 2006, 2008).

The element of transferability in autoethnography deals with the usefulness of the study beyond the individual researcher who conducted it (Tuckett, 2005). This usefulness is established by the meaning or relevance of the study to other populations or situations (Vryan, 2006). Transferability relates to the contribution that the study makes to further the understanding and knowledge of others in various context to increase meaningful sociological and theoretical analysis (Vryan, 2006).

In my narrative autoethnography I built credibility by collecting, organizing, and placing journal entries and field notes collected over a five-year period in the framework

of Schlosberg's (1981) transition theory. I also collected cultural and personal archives that validated times and places of various occurrences during my transitions. The transferability of my study was established by making the study relatable to other urban educators who experience career transitions and have to find ways to transcend career burnout. Taken together years of journaling, collecting archives, and making the study relatable to urban educators and researchers established the trustworthiness of this specific study of teacher transition.

Conclusion

This study is a narrative of my transitions as an urban educator. During my fifteen year teaching career, I have experienced many ups and downs, successes and failures. By engaging in this autoethnographic study utilizing Schlosberg's (1981) transition theory as a framework to guide this narrative I was able to put the critical transitions into a perspective that allowed me to further explore how I have transformed through my career. The underlying merit of this study is that "all people can benefit from thinking about their own lives in terms of other people's experiences" (Ellis & Bochner, 1996, p. 18). Through reflecting on my transition I was able to gain a clearer understanding of how I transformed as a professional educator.

Chapter 4

Career Transitions in Urban Education

This chapter utilized Schlossberg's (1981) *model for analyzing human adaption to transition* to explore the critical career transitions that have shaped, molded, and transformed who I am as an urban educator. Schlossberg's transition theory defines transition as a change in relationships, assumptions, roles, and routines due to perceived events or non-events (Schlossberg, 1981). Events are direct occurrences that lead to measurable or felt transitions while non-events are expectations that do not occur but still change some facet of one's life, role, and/or responsibilities. According to Schlossberg (1981), career transitions are personal experiences that are understood most profoundly by the impact that they have on the individual who experiences them.

This autoethnography utilized the key components of Schlossberg's (1981) framework of transition to guide this narrative. Transitions are described and discussed by first identifying the time period that the transition took place as well as the type of transition that occurred. The three types of transitions featured in this autoethnography were: *anticipated transitions* that one expects to occur, *unanticipated transitions* which occurs but one is not prepared for yet non-the-less has an impact on that persons daily role, function or routine, and *non-events* which are expectations that impact ones daily routine or life situation due to the non-occurrence of an anticipated transition.

The structure of this narrative follows Schlossberg's (1995) conceptualization of *Situation, Self, Strategies, and Support* as the essential resources utilized for navigating transition. The first resource known as the *Situation* examined the features of the transition and how they may have influenced its significance of the transition I

experienced. Situation can be viewed as a synthesis between the context, climate, culture, place, and time. There are external variables that define a situation such as economic, political, or social factors. While engaged in the transitions discussed in this narrative autoethnography, I described as accurately as possible how my perception of the external environments impact on the situations I encountered throughout my fifteen-year career. The next resource explored and reflected upon using Schlossberg's (1995) transition framework as a guide was the personal self. The aspect of the self in transition examined how my psychological traits and demographic background influenced my behavior, interpretation, and perception of the critical career transitions I experienced. I explored how my state of mental or emotional being during the transitions experienced influenced my ability to navigate the transitions and the perceived impact I personally was having on my external environment. The next resource I explored was the strategies that I developed to move through challenges of critical career transitions. The strategies I employed during the transitions reflected my state of mind, goals and aspirations during the transitions. The final resources I examined were the support systems that were available as I navigated career transitions. The support systems influenced my ability to cope with critical career transitions on both personal and professional levels. Taken together, the situation, self, strategy, and support formed an effective theoretical framework through which I was able to explore how my career transitions transformed me as an urban educator.

The critical incidents that precipitated the career transitions that I have experienced and explored during my teaching career discussed within Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory framework were: (1) the closing of the Siggs Adult Education

Center (2008), (2) conflicting with my ESL Supervisor at Columbus Middle School (2009), (3) teaching at three schools during one school day as a floating ESL teacher (2010-2011), (4) teaching at Innovative Expressions (2012-2013) and, (5) teaching social studies at Damcen High School (2013-2014).

I selected these transitions to explore in this autoethnographic study because they represented occurrences that had the most profound and lasting transformational impact on my career, perceptions, and perceived purpose as a career educator in an urban school district. In essence, the critical transitions discussed in this autoethnography have transformed me on personal and professional levels while serving in the Damcen Public School District.

This autoethnography followed the theoretical framework of Schlossberg's (1995) transition theory. I first articulated the types of transitions that occurred within Schlossberg's transformation theory framework. The types of transitions included were anticipated transitions, unanticipated transitions and non-events which (Schlossberg, 1995) allowed me to identify the critical incidents (Kottkamp, 2004) that equated to critical transition experiences I encountered during my fifteen-year teaching career. The critical incidents that occurred as a result of career transitions were discussed utilizing the elements of Scholssberg's (1995) descriptions of the context. The context provided an overview of the circumstances within which the transition occurred, followed by the previously discussed situation, self, support and, strategies used to navigate the transitions. Each element of the specific transition identified and discussed subthemes that were then examined in greater detail by identifying and articulating the impact that transition had on my overall personal and professional transformation towards increasing

my sense of self-efficacy as an urban educator.

In order to compose this narrative of my career transition, I examined fifteen years' worth of cultural archives, field notes, and journal entries while engaging in the process of looking back in order to move forward in the same vein as the concept of Sankofa, which originated with the people of Akan West Africa (University of Illinois Springfield, 2015). Sankofa's essential meaning is that through looking at the past and gathering information about the origins and causes of circumstances we are better equipped to move towards a more enlightened future (University of Illinois Springfield, 2015). As such, this autoethnography begins by looking back at the transitions that have shifted my mindset over the years and shaped who I am as an urban educator.



Figure 1. The symbol of Sankofa is a bird looking back and gathering the egg that teaches not to forget the past when moving forward.

Full Circle

On December 2, 2014 at 3:44 am I wrote in my journal:

“...when I finish this entry, I will put together my lesson plan for the day, go downstairs to my basement gym and workout for about 2 hours before I go to work at *Damcen High School*. I have a meeting with the Navy recruiter tomorrow after school. Today is a big day. The Governor will have a press conference at my school and make some type of announcement. Rumors have been circulating around the building regarding the subject of the upcoming announcement.

A day prior, the principal informed the staff at a meeting that the school would be divided into at least three entities: one alternative, one college prep, and one technically oriented. How these changes to the school structure would impact our jobs is anyone’s guess. However, what I do know is that I cannot be passive and that is why I am joining the Navy. I intend to develop intangible skills and create options for myself that would not exist any other way.”

When I began my teaching career in the Damcen Public School System in 2002, joining the military was the farthest thing from my mind. I also had no inclination that I would be teaching at the historic, iconic, and at times infamous Damcen High School. Yet, here I am presently in 2017, in the midst of another major organizational change as the Damcen High School in its present form is on the verge of being demolished after 100 years of service to the community. Personally, I am preparing to be deployed to Bahrain to serve a one-year military tour less than one week after Damcen High School, “The

Castle on the Hill” closes its doors to be forever transformed. How did I get here? This narrative autoethnography presents the journey to critical career transitions that brought me to this point and how those transitions have transformed me both professionally and personally as an urban educator.

Transition 1: Siggs Adult Education Center Closing (2008-2009)

The examination of this transition first describes the type and context that the transition took place. When the type and context of the transition are fully identified, an examination of the situation, self, support and, strategies within the framework of Schlossberg’s (1995) transition theory are explored. I then discussed within each element of Schlossberg’s (1995) theory sub-themes that add depth and breadth to the examination of this transition. When examining the situation, resources of this transition I explored the sub-themes of forming the foundation of my educational philosophy, how I gained confidence as an ESL teacher, and the closing of the Siggs Adult Education Center. The sub-themes of the self-resource examined during this transition were: the ending of the false illusion of career stability, personal challenges, and not wanting to be controlled. The sub-themes examined in the support section of this transition were: keeping my feelings inside and coping with limited organizational support. The sub-themes examined in the strategy section of this transition were: deciding to stay in the district and empowering myself through education. When considered together, the themes and sub-themes examined during this transition increased the understanding this transition had on my overall personal and career transformation in the quest for increased self-efficacy as an urban educator.

Type of Transition

The first transition I encountered as an urban educator was unanticipated and occurred seven years into my teaching career in the Damcen Public School District. Prior to this transition, my first seven years as a professional educator was teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) at the Siggs Adult Education Center. This transition was unanticipated because I did not predict nor was I prepared for the closing of the Siggs Adult Education Center at end of the 2009 academic school year.

Contextual background. The Siggs Adult Education center was a unique public school entity in the city of Damcen that was named after a community service worker who served as a member of the local Board of Education for eighteen years (Jerrothia Riggs Adult Education Center, n.d. 2016). The namesake of the school was a woman who overcame many personal obstacles in order to achieve a general education degree despite being out of school for fifteen years and raising seven children. Mrs. Siggs spent her adult life advocating for the educational rights of Damcen city students. As a result, the district of Damcen dedicated an Adult Education school in her namesake (Jerrothia Riggs Adult Education Center, n.d., 2016).

The Siggs Adult Education Center offered daily and evening Basic Adult Education courses, a Nursing program, and Adult English as a Second Language instruction geared towards citizenship participation (Jerrothia Riggs Adult Education Center, 2016). The Siggs Adult Education Center is where I was first hired as a full time ESL teacher in 2002. The school was divided into various sections, each with its own specialization. Upon entering the school each morning, it was not unusual for me to be greeted by nursing students, adult basic education students, and staff members from each

of these departments on my way to Adult English as a Second language wing of the school where I taught. The ESL wing consisted of myself and one other teacher. We also shared the wing with the Damcen Police School Patrol Unit, which was located directly next door to my classroom.

Situation

Foundational shaping of my educational philosophy. Through seven years of working at the Siggs Adult Education Center, the core components of my educational philosophy were formed as I worked primarily independently with minimal supervision. The educational philosophy that I developed evolved naturally out of the context that I taught, the tenants of my personality, and the students I served. The first foundational element of my educational philosophy that was shaped during my first seven years of teaching at the Siggs Adult Education Center was that teaching was an art form that was enhanced by creative expression, innovation, and spontaneity. Allitt (2017) asserts that teaching was one of the primary components underpinning a civilized society whereby high levels of craftsmanship, creativity, and skill were required to convey meaning to students in ways that ensured essential knowledge, wisdom, and understanding will be passed from one generation to the next. My experiences had taught me that becoming a skilled and refined teacher required careful observation, experimentation, and reflection over time in order to perfect the craft. Teaching like art moves through stages of trial and error while attempting to move closer to the ideal vision being conveyed in the classroom or in the genre of art pursued.

The next foundational element of my educational philosophy that developed from my seven years of teaching at the Siggs Adult Education center was that an exchange

existed between students and teachers whereby neither was superior nor inferior, yet each were actively engaged in an energetic exchange of ideas, experiences, and understanding. According to Posner, (1992) the exchange of energy that takes place between teacher and student fosters awareness as both teacher and student were elevated to realms of understanding that either were previously aware. This was particularly true in my experiences as an English as a Second Language teacher because I viewed my students as having a wealth of knowledge and experiences that when accessed and articulated in the classroom setting increased the richness of class discussion while also promoting a positive learning environment where students felt free to express themselves without judgment.

The final core component of my educational philosophy that evolved from my seven years at the Siggs Adult Education Center was that an open-minded teacher can and should learn as much from students as students learn from the teacher. Stenhouse (1969) professes that teachers who are able to incorporate a wide range of viewpoints into their perspective are better equipped to communicate with the numerous divergences of opinion and perspective that permeate learning communities to facilitate a well-rounded exchange of intellectual ideas. Keeping an open mind was particularly important when I taught at the Siggs Adult Education Center because I considered myself to be learning more from my adult students than they were learning from me as the majority of my students were older and much more experienced than me, so as I taught them English as a Second Language and basic knowledge for the citizenship exam, they were teaching me about their life experiences and how diverse cultures interact.

In retrospect, the underpinning ideals of a great deal of my teaching philosophy that emerged during my seven years of teaching at the Siggs Adult Education center were based on Zen Buddhist philosophy and teachings. The primary conceptual idea of the Zen philosophy when applied to teaching is that the way one teaches ultimately reflects the internal self (Creative teaching site, 2017). My mind state during this transition was that of a creative artist utilizing the classroom as my canvas. I relied on spontaneity and creativity in all facets of my life and it came across in how I ran my classroom in an open format in which I designed lessons day to day based on insights and interest gleaned from my students. My educational philosophy and practice was reflected in the style and method that I taught my class.

My experiences teaching at the Siggs Adult Education center were essential to the formation of my early philosophical assumptions about human motivation and teaching style. This was a direct result adapting my lessons and presentation format to the internationally diverse adult student population that I taught.

Development of a confident ESL teacher. I was impacted in ways that I did not fully comprehend through working with mature and highly motivated, international adult learners who resided in the surrounding metropolitan area and were not confined to the Damcen city region. These students attended classes voluntarily instead of compulsorily compared to regular K-12 students in the district. My experiences made me very confident in my ability to teach and relate to diverse student populations. Looking back, I considered myself to be in a fortunate position compared to my other teachers in the public school system because I was afforded the opportunity to develop a teaching style and philosophy that emerged organically from my environment with minimal

administrative interference. In addition to having a mature, motivated, and diverse student population, for seven years, my classroom was also located directly next to a sizable, active, and fully functioning Damcen School Patrol Police Unit. As a result the wing where I worked generally remained quiet, and secluded as a highly conducive learning space for my adults ESL learners from countries as diverse and divergent as Germany, Vietnam, China, Mexico, Nigeria, Cambodia, and the Dominican Republic.

The advantages of my situation at the Siggs Adult Education came from not having to contend with the complex social and structural challenges that adversely impact academic performance levels and the larger learning community in many urban school settings (Burroughs, 2010). The freedom and autonomy I experienced as an Adult ESL teacher serving highly motivated students for seven years gave me a confidence in my ability to the point that I gradually began to consider myself to be in complete control of my situation.

The closing of the Siggs Adult Education Center. I was surprised and unprepared when the Adult Education program ended as I suddenly found myself not knowing where I would work until two weeks before the start of the 2009- 2010 school year. As a result of this unanticipated transition, my sense of control over my situation dissipated rapidly. This transition was precipitated by a shift in district budgetary priorities that led to the total discontinuation of the daytime Adult Education program in 2009. The first signs of change began when it was announced that the nursing program was being cut due to budgetary reprioritizations. I recall shortly after the nursing program was discontinued that I began to notice members from the district's upper management team walking through the school, taking notes, making observations, and talking quietly

amongst themselves with growing frequency. In retrospect, these were clear signs of a takeover (Bishop, 2009). Eventually, rumors began to grow louder and more frequently circulate around the teachers' lounge about the school closing, then in short order, the staff was notified that June of 2009 would mark the end of the Siggs Adult Education Center. My perception of the staff at that time was one of general uncertainty. In my journal I reflected in May 17, 2009 that:

This is the end of Siggs; we had a farewell lunch this week, staff members were sentimental, and expressing what a pleasure and honor it has been working here. I don't know what to expect. I just know that I will miss the staff and the students. Staff was talking about how much this program is needed to give adult learners opportunities to improve their lives. This is true, but what can I say or do about it? Nothing, so I guess I just have to roll with the punches...

Self

False illusion of career stability. When the reality of the Siggs Adult Education center occurred I almost immediately began to sense the transition I experienced from what I perceived to be a confident and popular Adult English as a Second Language teacher not bound by the borders of the Damcen Public School System to one of an ordinary unknown teacher in the larger Damcen Public School District facing an uncertain future. Before it was announced that the school closed, I often mused about retiring from the Siggs Adult Education Center. I figured I had my career path set. I was well-respected and enjoyed work. Yet, when the Siggs Adult Education Center closed, I lost the illusion of prestige that was cultivated from seven years of working with international adult learners who according to Zhao, viewed teachers as a valuable

commodity to the community to the starkly contrasting reality that many urban educators encounter in public school systems across the country according to (Eckert, 2011).

I never considered or contemplated the prospect of the Siggs Adult Education Center closing prior to the rumors and the formal announcement. I was very content in my position and thought deeply about the prospect of spending the rest of my career as an adult ESL Instructor at the Siggs Adult Education Center. Although I experienced some challenges in my personal life, I considered myself to be a successful adult ESL teacher and was therefore totally unprepared for the transition of the school closing.

When the Siggs Adult Education Center closed and the transition occurred I was unsure about the future. I did not know what to expect going into the 2009-2010 school year. I also faced the concurrent stress of working through a personal bankruptcy, while coping with a failing marriage and pending divorce. The personal challenges I faced combined with unanticipated career transition caused a general feeling of uncertainty regarding my position and trajectory in life.

Personal challenges. When I first returned to Damcen in 2002 from teaching abroad in Brazil, I wanted to attain what I perceived to be financial independence and made some very risky real-estate investment choices early in my career due to greed and inexperience. By 2009 those risky investment choices began to come back to negative financial effect simultaneous with the Siggs Adult Education Center closing. My poor investment choices eventually led to my filing for Chapter seven Bankruptcy. As a result of poor investment choices, my financial life was in tatters as I suddenly found myself on uncertain professional ground.

Although I made some poor choices and had begun feeling the repercussions of those choices, I knew in my mind that I was well suited for academic and scholarly endeavors because I had been an eager seeker of knowledge, intellectual growth, along with cultural, and idealistic exchange for most of my adult life.

Not wanting to be controlled. When my false pretenses of career stability were removed, I began to sense that from that point forward, career stability was an illusion and that circumstances could change at any time. I wanted to be an active agent in the changes that I would encounter in my career moving forward. I perceived myself as not wanting to be controlled by the Damcen School District when decisions were made that impacted my career but that I had no control over as a result to trust issues I developed when I was younger when I put my faith in others only to be disappointed. I perceived that many of the teachings and belief systems I was infused with as a result of enculturation as a youth, were simply not true and that society gave me a false narrative of reality. While developing my leadership platform as part of my doctoral studies when discussed, not wanting to be controlled by a system that I felt was corrupt when I made the following statements regarding questions and issues:

I am struggling as an educator working towards a career in leadership due to personal observations of the world around and my experiences working in the Damcen City Public School System. There was an article in Philadelphia Inquirer on Sunday, November 8, 2009 titled *Damcen Rebirth: A Pledge Unmet*. The article claims that, “the biggest municipal takeover in U.S. history-175 million, cost residents their rights for little in return.” The article then highlights graphic depictions of statistics that are referenced to the *U.S. Census Bureau: N.J. Department of Education*. In these graphs it compares key markers of the city’s progress since the 2001 state take over. According to the article, in every

category the results are not positive. Tax dollars revenue has decreased. Murders in 2008 are more than double compared to 2001 figures. The individual poverty level has increased by 5%. The percentage of 11th graders who passed the math and literacy exam has decreased.

I have lived in Damcen for a total of 15 years, 10 as a child and 5 as an adult. I have taught in the district for 8. When I first returned to Camden after attaining a master's degree and traveling abroad, my idealism and enthusiasm for the potential for the city was very high. Now eight years later, I have a different view-point. I try to remain positive, but I am not blind. I can read the writing on the walls, not just in Damcen, but across the nation. My question is how I can speak out against moral and institutional corruption while trying to find my place and establish my career, "where the people muddle and confuse each other. Mixed up and extravagant, their love of pleasure and sex is endless. This is a sign of a doomed state" (Sawyer, 1997, p.82).

Am I to just stay quiet and act like I do not see the miss-education, miss-appropriation of funds, political slander tactics, urban blight and poverty? What can I do? Sometimes I feel powerless with regard to the deeply entrenched apathy and corruptive practices unfolding in the society in which I live.

Choye and Omotani's, 2009 article, *Obama the Socialist, A Low in American Schools asks:*

"How have educational discussions become so debased in this country? One factor is the toxic, often race-based, rhetoric of talk radio and cable television. Our national conversation has been coarsened. Government-bashing is a spectator sport. Yet in many ways the ongoing national debate about schools has prepared the soil in which this brutal rhetoric could flourish. Criticizing educators is like shooting fish in a barrel"

I see the society as beginning to convulse as more people appear to be disenfranchised while money and might are concentrated into fewer hands.

Boland's (2005) article, *Whatever Happened to Postmodernism in Higher Education* claims that:

The world appears to be breaking up but reorganizing itself. Globalism, the information revolution, science and technology, fluidity in the definitions of identity and self, and terrorism are producing a society filled with contradiction: an open society with almost unlimited possibilities and options yet constricted by increasing regulation and surveillance, the threat and actuality of war, and a growing redistribution of wealth. A host of unanticipated consequences flows from the rapid concurrent changes taking place, creating a world of such complexity that it produces a widespread sense of anxiety, dislocation, ambiguity, and risk...

The above writing reflects the seeds of intellectual rebellion against the status quo and resentment to the notion of being controlled by what I considered to be a corrupt system. The aspect of my personality that did not want to be controlled was part of what Davis (2013) called a rebel personality at that stage in my life. The elements of my personality that reflected the rebel personality according to Davis (2013) were that I intrinsically resisted authority, was adverse at being told what to do, and preferred to do things my own way. I preferred to make independent decisions regarding my life and circumstances and therefore was upset when I found out that not only was the Siggs Adult Education Center closing but that I had no authority in where I would be teaching the following year as a result.

When I started teaching at the Siggs Adult Education Center, I was twenty-seven years old. When the Siggs Adult Education Center closed I was around thirty-two. During that period, I was a young man full of energy and bravado. That energy and bravado caused me to make mistakes and display poor judgment that ultimately left me

feeling intimately hurt and alone. I distinctly recall wondering to myself in the midst of my self-induced despair and broken relationships in my personal journal when I wrote “is this what life is all about, how can I be in the prime of my life, yet feel so low and alone, I never imagined that my life would be like this; I feel bad, but I need to get myself together.”

Support

Challenges of keeping my feelings inside. My mother and father were there for me and supported me but I did not discuss my personal problems with them. I was like many African-American men in that I kept my feelings and emotions inside (Jones, 1996), perhaps to my own detriment. I limited what I expressed to my family about regarding the intimate details of my life. They only knew that I did not know where I would be teaching in the upcoming year. They would ask me questions about my career and personal relationships and I would give them vague answers. My parents were totally unaware that in addition to not being sure about my career trajectory, and financial setbacks, that I was also going through a divorce from my first wife. I kept a lot of emotions inside at that time yet, just having a mother and a father there for me during this period of transition helped keep me grounded. I realize in retrospect that I was dangerously close to taking actions that could have had permanently negative life repercussions by engaging in risky behaviors that could have caused me personal harm. The Siggs Adult Education Center was a source of career stability and confidence in my life as I navigated through personal challenges, therefore when the school closed down one of the only areas left where I thought I had control was gone, thus shaking the foundation of the foundational elements of my personal and professional image.

When the adult education program was discontinued I did not have any formalized assistance or services available within the school district to aid in the transition process. The staff at the adult education center were dissipated and the general attitude of employees at the school at that time was to wait and see, as very limited information and support mechanisms were in place. During this time I kept to myself and did not have a large network of friends. This was particularly evident during this period of transition as I was often embarrassed to even discuss the level of complexity and depth of my personal, professional, and financial problems with anyone. I kept to myself.

Strategies

The decision to stay within the district. Without consciously realizing it at the time, I strategically modified the situation by considering various options when I learned of the unanticipated transition of the closing of the Adult Education Center. One option was to leave the Damcen School District and pursue employment as an English Second Language teacher in another geographic region. The second option, which I chose was to stay in the district, wait and see what would happen, where I would end up, and hope for the best. The reality at that time was that I was going through such turbulent personal transitions that I simply chose the option of staying in the district while utilizing the inner resources of character that had been cultivated through my lifetime to the best of my ability to cope with the changing circumstances. The specific aspects of character that I chose to cultivate were personal integrity, self-discipline, expressing creative energy, and building positive relationships with other like minded people. I discussed the desire to develop these character traits when I when composing my leadership platform in

2009 as part of my leadership platform while articulating through Rowan University when I wrote,

Although I will admit that sometimes I feel saddened or just numb by all that I see, I do feel that there is a solution. The solution I see is not in legislature, or funded aid or support but in individuals deciding that they have had enough of the negativity and choosing to focus their energy and thoughts on positive endeavors. I feel it behooves me to start with myself. Experience has allowed me to come to the understanding that before a person is able to meaningfully help another person, they must be first willing and able to help themselves.

When I analyze the conditions of the society and ponder the actions I may take to improve the situation, I have chosen to focus on four areas of personal development that are time tested standards and means of attaining success in practically any endeavor, personal or organizational.

The first area of development I have chosen as a focal point is that of *personal integrity*. The reason is because in order to combat corruption in a society in which “personal standards are crumbling in a world that has taken to hot pursuit of personal pleasure and shortcuts to success.” (Maxwell, 1993, p. 35).

According to Maxwell, in his book on *Developing the Leader Within*:

“The White House, the Pentagon, Capitol Hill, the church, the academy, even the daycare center have all been hit hard by scandal. In every case, the lack of credibility can be traced back to the level of integrity of the individuals within those organizations and institutions” (Maxwell, 1993, p. 36).

Maxwell helps to define integrity by claiming that it is a “state of being complete, unified...when words and deeds match

up.” (p.35) I view this quality of personal integrity as being absolutely essential for all responsible individuals but even more so for professionals working in leadership capacities. Maxwell suggests that this quality is so important because:

A person with integrity does not have divided loyalties, that is duplicity, nor is he or she merely pretending which is hypocrisy. People with integrity are whole people; they can be identified by their single-mindedness. People with integrity have nothing to hide and nothing to fear.

Integrity is not what we do as much as who we are. And who we are in turn, determines what we do. Our system of values is so much a part of us we cannot separate it from ourselves. It becomes the navigating system that guides us. It establishes priorities in our lives and judges what we will accept or reject. (Maxwell, 1993, p. 36)

We are all faced with conflicting desires. No one. No matter how spiritual can avoid this battle. Integrity is the factor that determines which one will prevail.

When integrity is the referee we will be consistent; our beliefs will be mirrored by our conduct. (Maxwell, 1993, p. 36)

The next quality that I choose to focus on developing in order to improve the situations I face as an emerging educational leader is to cultivate the habit of self-discipline. Discipline is a critical factor to leadership success because when one practices a disciplined lifestyle his or her life is less complicated because he or she is focused to move on a straight path utilizing industry and hard work. James Allen puts it best in his classic publication *As a Man Thinketh*, states that:

“Men are anxious to improve their circumstances, but are unwilling to improve themselves; they therefore remain bound. The man who does not shrink from self-crucifixion

can never fail to accomplish the object upon which his heart is set” (Allen, 1902, p.14).

One of the most well-known transformational leaders of the century is Mohandas Gandhi, who helps to articulate the importance of discipline and its implications. He states that,

“By reaching normally untapped inner resources, one can unleash the energy needed to make major changes in one’s self and others and the wisdom to guide that energy.” (Gandhi, 1999, p.16).

The next area of which I would like to focus on developing in order to make a difference is in the area of creativity. A transformational leader possessing the qualities of creativity combined personal integrity, and self-discipline can positively impact any organization. Homes in his book the *Creative Mind* claims that:

“We have within us a power that is greater than anything that we shall ever contact in the outer; a power that can overcome every obstacle in our life and set us safe, satisfied and at peace, healed and prosperous, in a new light, and in a new life. We have as much creative power to use in our daily life as we can believe in and embody. The store house of nature is filled with infinite good awaiting the touch of our awakened thought to spring forth into manifestation in our life” (Homes, 2007. p. 20).

The final area of character cultivation that I began to focus on during this transition was having a mind to listen and work towards building relationships with like-minded people. The ability to work with people and develop relationships is absolutely indispensable to effective leadership (Maxwell, 2009, p.106). To do this has a leaders’ head to understand people. A leader must be able to treat people as individuals. The ability to look at each person,

understand and connect with them is a major factor in relational success (Maxwell, 2009, p.107).

To have the heart to love the people, leaders must have the keen ability for empathy. Extend a leader's hand to help people. If your focus is on what you can put into people rather than what you can get out of them, they'll love and respect you- and these create a great foundation for building relationships.

While many service learning programs have surged in community colleges, in the future the outcomes of service learning should go beyond community renewal. What is equally important here is to renew the humanistic, spiritual dimensions of students themselves. In other words, service learning at its highest level involves a connection between the inner world of spirit and the outer world of service. (Rendon, 2002).

Although I did not formally articulate the above thought until I began my studies in the Rowan University Doctoral Program that following fall, I had already begun reading, focusing my mind, and thinking deeply about how to improve my situation through character refinement as the Siggs Adult Center closed with little fanfare. The summer arrived, moved along, and the new school year was approached. As the summer came to a conclusion, I still did not know where I would be teaching. I lived off of the money I saved up by working overtime and began the painful process of facing my situation head on while working on emotional healing and understanding the root causes of my situation.

Empowerment through education. My personal nature, ideological understanding, and desire to cultivate a more refined character led me to seek higher education as a way to positively transform my situation. I had a strong desire to take

control of my situation and minimize uncertainty. The only way that I knew at that time and under those circumstances to gain positive control of my situation was to continue educating myself while pursuing the path self-improvement which meant increasing my knowledge, character, and skill as a way to attain a positive solution through the adversity I faced (McGee, 2002).

During this period of unanticipated transition as an urban educator I was uncertain of my future as an ESL teacher. Yet, at the same time I was eager to begin the path of a doctoral scholar. I did not know what my future held in the district, but I knew that by pursuing higher education I would gain knowledge and experience that would be a benefit to my life.

Before the Siggs Adult Education Center closed I made the decision to pursue a doctoral degree in Educational Leadership. Although this decision did not directly impact my career as an ESL teacher at that time, it did place me in a more proactive position to expand my career options by increasing my knowledge base and professional contacts outside of the confines of the Damcen School District while also striving to make sense out of the situation.

During that time of transition and heightened personal turmoil, I developed a fear of being trapped and running out of options. I detested the idea of being stuck in what I considered as being a dead-end career (O'Brien, 1991). Although the situation and circumstances had me unsure and emotionally down, I knew I had the heart of a fighter and would not let myself go too far down before finding or even inventing a way to raise myself out of those circumstance to create a better situation. I viewed the pursuit of higher education as my way out of the despair of financial ruin, career uncertainty, and

failed relationships. I deeply desired to be greater. I knew that had something to contribute to the professional community. I felt that attaining an Ed.D. in Educational Leadership would give me the prestige and voice that I felt deserved to be heard by larger audiences than just in the confines of my classroom. I believed that I had ideas nurtured by experience about teaching, learning, and education in general that would be of value to others. This is why as the Siggs Education Center was closing I was actively applying to Rowan's Doctoral program in Educational Leadership.

The strategies I used in the aftermath of the closing of the Siggs Adult Education Center was to rededicate myself to the pursuits that I felt were at the core of who I was as a person and scholar. I increased poetry writing output and independent reading and research. I did not know where I would be teaching at the start of the 2009 school year, but I knew that if I was a more refined version of myself, I would be more equipped to deal with the uncertainty of the upcoming school year and the start of my doctoral studies.

Impact

I was transformed as a result of transitioning through the closing of the Siggs Adult Education Center by having to come to terms with my own personal vices and karma (Boruah, 2007). Although the closing of the Siggs Adult Education Center in and of itself was a challenging transition, the folly of my youth caused me to be in a financial turmoil while coping with broke intimate relationships that magnified the intensity of this transition. Taking this autoethnographic approach has caused me to look squarely at the causes and effects of my folly in order to learn from those experiences to become more prudent when making decisions, more patient in personal relationships, more committed

to improving my life through character development, self-study, and the quest for higher knowledge and learning.

Schlossberg's theory of transition influenced my ability to cope with the transition of the Siggs Adult Education Center closing by helping to put the transition in a broader perspective through reflective analysis. When the transition occurred I was primarily reacting to the stimuli of my surroundings. However, Schlossberg's transition theory helped me to understand the interrelationship between the situation, self, support networks, and the strategies I employed while navigating the transition in order to make meaning through reflection and inform the direction of future career transitions by understanding how the elements of Schlossberg's (1995) transition theory applied to my circumstance.

The critical transition of the Siggs Adult Education Center closing transformed me by forcing me to expand my perspective by opening my eyes to the realities of living under the false illusion of career stability. When I learned of the Siggs Adult Education Center closing I decided to apply to enter graduate school in the field of Educational Leadership because up until that point in my life formal education was the one way I knew with any degree of certainty that I could improve my life condition. I was accepted into the Rowan Doctoral program in the fall of 2009 and began to focus blocking out, avoiding, and eliminating a great deal of outside distractions which were the cumulative effect of my own poor decisions based on inexperience as I began to focus exclusively on the task at hand of pursuing the Doctorate Degree while waiting to see where I would be placed within the school district for the upcoming school year.

Moving to a deeper level of understanding how this critical transition transformed me and looking back in retrospect prior to the Siggs Adult Education Center closing my daily routine was set. I knew exactly what was required of me in the school. I also knew that I would have a dynamic and diverse group of multinational adult learners registering for my class each year. This was primarily because the school offered free Adult ESL and citizenship preparation classes in a time when many adults in similar situations had to pay for such services. By my seventh year at the Siggs Adult education center I had become very confident and competent as an ESL instructor. I was able to perform my job without having to think about it, essentially teaching on what Kordyban & Kinash, (2013) considered autopilot. Yet when the adult education program was discontinued towards the end of the 2009 school year the stress of breaking with a routine became apparent and obvious (Kordyban & Kinash, 2013). This uncertainty of this transition placed me in a position of being unable to effectively prepare for the upcoming academic school year.

Transition 2: Teaching ESL at Columbus Middle School (2009-2010)

The examination of this transition first describes the type and context that the transition took place. When the type and context of the transition are fully identified, an examination of the situation, self, support and, strategies within the framework of Schlossberg's (1995) transition theory are explored. I then discussed within each element of Schlossberg's (1995) theory sub-themes that add depth and breadth to the examination of this transition. When examining the situation, resources of this transition I explored the sub-themes teaching English as a Second Language at the middle school level and the loss of my teaching autonomy. The sub-themes of the self-resource examined during this transition were: the perception of losing control my teaching style and resisting

authority. The sub-theme examined in the support section of this transition was conflicting with the professional system that was actually set in place to offer support. The sub-themes examined in the strategy section of this transition were: closing my classroom door and ignoring the recommendations of the supervisor while at the same time becoming involved in extra curricular school activities. When considered together, the themes and sub-themes examined during this transition forced me to humble myself and conform in order to become part of the vision and mission of the bilingual department.

Type of Transition

Transitioning into teaching English as a Second Language at Columbus Middle School was an unanticipated transition in that I was informed that I would be teaching at this location two weeks before the academic school year began. During the summer of 2009, I did not predict that I would be teaching middle school ESL students after seven years developing and practicing the skills needed to teach adult ESL in the Damcen Public School District. The closing of the Siggs Adult Education Center precipitated the transition of teaching English as a Second Language at Columbus Middle School.

Contextual background. Columbus Middle School is a historic building donated to the Damcen City Board of Education in 1938. The building is old but stately according to Anderson and Mashore (2006). Although the demographics of the school have fluctuated throughout the years and no specific total student population was sighted, within the last decade the approximate student population consisted of 53% percent Hispanic, 36% percent African-American, 3% White and 1% other ethnicities according

to Anderson and Mashore (2006). This transition marked my first year of teaching middle school students in the United States as well as my first year as a doctoral student.

Columbus Middle School provided three typical services, one would expect in an urban middle school densely populated with latino students (Becker, 2013). The services offered were Regular Education grades 6-8, Special Eduaiton Grade 6-8, and Bilingual Educaiton grades 6-8 (Mashore, 2006). The service I was placed in the school to provide was part of the umbrella of Bilingual education, whereby I was assigned to teach English as a Second Language to students grade 6-8.

Situation

Teaching middle school. The transition to teaching middle school began when I met the staff and department chairperson on the first day of the 2009-2010 school year. It was then that I was informed that I would be teaching basic English as a Second Language to beginning 6th -8th grade ESL students who were overwhelmingly from Hispanic backgrounds with limited experience in primarily English speaking school settings. This new demographic contrasted drastically my prior experiences of working with adult ESL students from a multitude of national, economic, social, and cultural backgrounds.

The unanticipated transition of teaching at Columbus Middle School was also the first time in my teaching career that I worked as a part of a larger bilingual department. The amount of students that required English as a Second Language support was so vast that this school offered math, science, social studies, and language arts classes in both English and Spanish as part of what Aceves (1997) termed a bilingual program continuum separate and distinct from the main student body which was majority

primarily English speaking. Therefore, the bilingual department that I was a part of operated with its own set of norms and cultural standards that influenced teachers and lead administrators attitudes toward bilingual students that equated to standards of procedure and norms that had been in place (Metti, 1991) prior to my arrival to the school that year. This meant that I had to quickly learn to function within a bilingual department with unspoken cultural norms that shaped communication and cultural dynamics in the learning environment.

On those first days of school I was introduced to the bilingual department chair who was also a bilingual language arts teacher who had been teaching at the school for a number of years prior to my arrival. She was a middle-aged Caucasian woman who assumed the role of my guide and director who informed me about the curriculum, student body, and content that I would teach that year. As such, shortly after I was introduced to the members of the bilingual department, the department chair informed me that I would be teaching basic level bilingual language arts to students ranging from 6th-8th grade while she, as the department chair, would teach the advanced class.

Loss of autonomy. The most immediate impact of the this unanticipated transition was a clear loss of what Whaley (2012) describes as teacher autonomy when compared to my previous seven years teaching experiences working primarily independently as an adult ESL teacher. In that situation, I was integrated into a fully established, staffed, and functioning bilingual department in the middle school complete with cultural norms and an unstated hierarchical structure that I did not fully understand or appreciate when the school year began. The loss of my teaching autonomy experienced during this transition as I adapted to teaching ESL at the middle school level caused me

to react on a personal level. My perception of losing my teaching autonomy was a result of no longer teaching independently as I had for the previous seven years working with adults. During that transition I had to work within an established curriculum that spanned across multiple grades, within a larger department, that also functioned as part of a larger middle school context. This changing of roles I experienced teaching while middle ESL eventually altered my self-perception as an urban educator. The reason for this altering of self-perception was because all that I knew and was accustomed to as educator was suddenly rendered irrelevant by the department chairperson and bilingual supervisor, in a matter of weeks. I went from being a well-known and respected adult ESL teacher unchallenged and unquestioned as it related to the exercising of the teaching strategies and techniques I used, to being told how and when I would teach the subject content without regard for my previous experiences and masters level training in the content teaching ESL.

The loss of my teaching autonomy that I experienced during my first seven years of teaching brought with it challenges as I adapted to the situation was complicated by adjusting to working with younger students. The reason why the transition was complicated by teaching younger students after seven years of teaching adults was because I had to adapt quickly to a different student demographic that was primarily motivated by reward and punishment systems while functioning at vastly different maturity levels when compared to adults who had a stronger tendency to be intrinsically motivated (Monix, 2012). This change caused some stress at the beginning of the school year because I was accustomed to working with highly motivated, and mature adult learners.

Self

Losing control. When the 2009-2010 school year began, I was faced with the reality of not having the teaching autonomy I had grown accustomed to during my first seven years of teaching. This change initially caused a perception of having a reduced sense of control over my situation. The reasons I perceived a loss of control was a result of communication dynamics that developed between the department chair, bilingual supervisor and myself. When the school year began I did not realize that the district bilingual supervisor was very active in shaping the curriculum and direction of the bilingual department at Columbus Middle School.

Not only was the bilingual supervisor instrumental in shaping the curriculum I was expected to teach, the district bilingual supervisor was a close personal friend of the department chair as a result of their working together several years prior to my arrival. As the school year progressed, I soon found out how close the two administrators had been as I perceived their words, actions and deeds were mirror reflections of each other's thinking. I was expected to conform to their way of thinking and to implement the instructional strategies they recommended, which was reasonable considering the circumstances. Yet I resisted the recommendation of my new supervisors out of habit and stubbornness cultivated over seven years of teaching experience in the Damcen School District in which I was given wide-ranging freedom as to how I conducted each day.

In retrospect, I realize that I was not prepared for what Overfelt (1998) describes as ways and means that lessons were presented and information was disseminated to middle school students. The middle school environment was more regimented than when I taught adults. To contrast, my adult students had jobs and responsibilities and conducted

themselves as such, while the school and teaching staff's job was to be responsible for not only the students learning but also their safety, movement, and well-being while in the school (Monix, 2012). In some ways I felt that the more controls I had to exert over the student, the less control I had over what I taught, because the content that I was required to teach was dictated to me. I was not accustomed to having to monitor student behavior so closely and track their progress intently.

In addition to my seven years of teaching experience in the Damcen School District, I also spent one year teaching abroad in Mexico, Namibia, and Brazil in which I was also afforded the opportunity to teach freely with very few restrictions and limitations. My previous experiences had cultivated in me strong opinions and theories as to how to best teach bilingual students. Therefore, when I was assigned to the middle school and instructed as to how and what I was to teach, I resented losing total control of the way I taught lessons in my classroom environment. The result of rather abruptly being informed that I would no longer be in total control of my classroom, I initially resisted my supervisors and the department chairs recommendations.

Resisting authority. I resisted the recommendations of my supervisors due to workplace stressors (Maslach, 2003) in that my personal attitudes, thoughts, and beliefs about teaching freely and creatively were inconsistent with the reality of the highly regimented middle school teaching environment. The work place stressors caused by inconsistency between internal beliefs and external realities caused me to experience *Cognitive Dissonance* (Egan, 2009). The dissonance was a result of an authentic desire to grow professionally and intellectually, yet my perception at the time was that I was being mentally and creatively restricted by the confines of teaching at the basic middle school

level. As the year progressed, I found my self growing increasingly agitated and defensive as pressures mounted from demands placed on me by the district supervisor and bilingual department chairperson at Columbus Middle school. This is reflected in a journal entry I wrote in February17, 2010:

This sucks! I am not having fun, I like the students but I hate being told how and what to teach. If they would just leave me alone the class would be fine. They would learn to communicate in English and pass the end of the year test. But teaching like this has me feeling trapped and held back. I don't like how Ms. Dollar and Ms. Hands tell me what to teach. This is not why I got into this profession, I have to find a way out of this...

In retrospect, this is when I began to battle with feelings burnout (Espeland, 2006) as I struggled to find meaning and purpose behind the situation I found myself in as a Middle School English as a Second Language Teacher. By the midway point in the school year I experienced enough conflict of interest and reprimand from my supervisors that I essentially entered survival mode whereby I became emotionally and mentally numb while working at Columbus middle school, which signified the beginning of my active efforts to avoid teacher burnout (Maslach, 2003).

This was an intense period of transition as I navigated through experiences I had not encountered until that time. For example, I was reprimanded twice and had letters placed in my permanent employee record for not teaching to the curriculum to which I was instructed. In my seven previous years in the Damcen Public School District, those were the first times I had ever been formally reprimanded. On another occasion, I was chastised because I did not complete a form that I was instructed to complete by a certain date that related to student progress in the class. In my perspective at the time the whole

chastisement was part of a misunderstanding as I prioritized the students getting the language concepts, and simply forgot about the form that ended up buried under papers on my desk. Then when the department chair asked for the form, I told her that I forgot about it and that I would have it for her the next day. She proceeded to call the bilingual supervisor and I had to have a meeting with the department chair and bilingual supervisor about my overall job performance. In my perspective, I did not see the significance of the form they wanted filled out within the larger context, and did not think it was that big of a deal at a time, I figured teaching the students how to speak English was my most important function. But I did not know that the form was important for funding and accountability purposes within the larger bilingual department.

I was experiencing a professional dilemma. I felt as if there was an increasing chasm between my intellectual development and the reality of my professional situation. I was actively engaged in developing a leadership theory, studying ethics in education, and transformational leadership which cultivated more complex thought process about the nature, function, and purpose of education while at the same time feeling as if I was intellectually constricted and undervalued working under that particular supervisor in those circumstances at Columbus Middle School.

I realize now through introspection that I was projecting negative emotions towards my supervisor and the department chair as I perceived them both as representing an outdated model of teacher/student interaction which did not conform to the needs of the modern culturally diverse students (Mitchell, 2008). There were instances in which I directly heard the department chair say statements that I felt and thought were racist, such as undermining student's academic potential and work ethic. I was angered by her

statements, but felt powerless to take any direct action because it was my first year in the school. I did not know who I could trust and had learned that the department chair was a close friend of the supervisor through several interactions that I had with them; many of which were stressful and emotionally draining. I also felt as if they were in subtle ways prejudging my potential and disregarding my professional input.

Although I realize that it may be irrational now looking back, I cannot deny that there were times when I worked at Columbus Middle School that I felt similar emotions that I felt as a child when I was placed in the back of the classroom, separated from the rest of the class, and reprimanded because I did not do exactly as the teacher directed. As I examine that transitional period deeper, my conflicts with my supervisor and department chair were triggering negative childhood memories of being in school and having older white women telling me what to do. I think it was a combination of hearing the perceived contempt the department chair had for the students, empathizing with the students, while also getting reprimanded for not performing my job the way they wanted.

I despised the emotions that were being drawn up as a result of my perceived loss of control and began to mentally rebel by intentionally ignoring the recommendations of my supervisor ultimately to my own detriment. I focused on having fun with the students while teaching them learn English because I was under the impression of what Fu (2013) contended when he proposed that responsive ESL instruction facilitates better learning environments when younger students are happy, and entertained particularly when absorbing a new language. I did this by drawing on my previous knowledge and experiences teaching ESL in Brazil when working with younger students. I also used the students' natural energy to inspire my lessons. I managed stress and made decisions by

eventually reverting back to the teaching habits I developed over the previous seven years while actively striving to fit in and adapt to the learning community that I found myself a part of.

Support

Conflicting with professional support system. The unanticipated transition of teaching middle school ESL was the starting point of conflicts I experienced with the bilingual supervisor who ironically was my primary source of professional support. These conflicts began to become more pronounced as I continued utilizing my own teaching methods as the supervisor became increasingly active or interested in the learning processes going on in my classroom. In my previous seven years of teaching, I had not experienced a supervisor who from my perception at that time was blatantly intrusive into my classroom while questioning my teaching style and forcing me to teach in a way that conformed to what she considered to be in the best interest of the students. Although, when I reflect on the situation, I realize that I was projecting unfair negative thoughts towards her perhaps due to resentment of being told what to do as a result of my rebellious nature; never-the-less, I felt as if the curriculum that I was being required to implement was haphazardly constructed, unclear, outdated, and that I would have more success reaching students in the way I knew based on the teacher training programs I engaged in as an undergraduate student in elementary education, my masters level studies in the art of teaching, my experiences teaching ESL to similar age students in Brazil and my previous seven years of teaching experience in the Damcen School District. I therefore, began to intentionally teach in a method that was in direct opposition to my

professional support system. This decision had a direct detrimental impact on my job security at that time.

There was an instance in which the bilingual supervisor specifically instructed me to stop using a particular workbook that I had acquired through the years and felt was useful and effective at engaging students through the use of interactive drawings that depicted scenes that students could discuss and describe to one another in English. I specifically and intentionally ignored the supervisor's directive and chose not to use the book she recommended after reviewing the materials she provided. I decided to disregard her recommendations and continue teaching with my resources because I felt the material she provided was not engaging enough. Yet, when the supervisor came back into the class unannounced and saw that I ignored her directive, I was reprimanded and had a disciplinary letter of intentional noncompliance placed in my personal file.

Looking back, the underlying issue was that after seven years of teaching in an open free format with adults and very little supervision, I suddenly found myself working within what I considered at the time to be the tight and controlled intellectual confines of a middle school setting. In addition, I was not formally prepared for such a shift with only two-weeks notice leading up to this transition. However, at the time my failure to adapt and conform was also severe enough that I was not sure if my job would be in jeopardy because of the pressure I felt from my supervisor and the other write ups that went into my personal file for similar reasons as the one mentioned above generally associated with non-conformity.

Strategies

Closing my classroom door. During the 2009-2010 school year of teaching at Columbus Middle school I worked to gradually gain control of my classroom environment by establishing a rapport with my students simply by observing them and striving to get to know their needs and interest. I felt that as long as I was able to follow Clay's (1992) description of educators that close the door and teach hoping not to be bothered with the outside world and the students would learn to communicate in English.

This strategy ultimately was ineffective and detrimental because it was the root cause of my conflicts with the bilingual supervisor and department chair. Looking back, I realize that the conflicts could have been resolved sooner if I had worked harder to conform to the supervisors mandates and been a better team player. Instead, I focused on striving to build relationships with the students to the exclusion of the recommended middle school ESL curriculum, which I felt was archaic. I utilized my own resources to teach the class. In retrospect, I should have taken my time to get to know and understand how the middle school bilingual department worked, while also getting to know what the supervisor wanted and what resources I had available to facilitate aiding the supervisor achieve her goals.

Towards the end of the school year, after being formally reprimanded for a second time for not following orders, I finally realized that I would not be successful in teaching the way I wanted to teach without facing disciplinary consequences. This realization caused me to conform because my desire to remain employed. I realized that I had responsibilities that were more important to me than my creative expression as a teacher.

Outside of the classroom. I utilized my creative and athletic gifts to make social and professional connections with the larger student and faculty population beyond the classroom setting. For example, I began to involve myself in committees and school activities such as the Hispanic heritage month committee, Black history month assembly committee, faculty vs. fire department basketball game, and faculty vs. police basketball games. By participating in various school committees and activities I managing the stress of cognitive dissonance caused conflicting with the bilingual supervisor and department chair.

These extracurricular activities were personally enjoyable and endeared me to the students, when they saw me play sports or perform on stage as part of the various assemblies we had at the school. Also staff in the larger learning community beyond the bilingual department began to look to me to organize activities that related to cultural learning that involved the whole school community. I essentially built relationships with the overall learning community to the exclusion of the bilingual department curriculum which caused emotional stress, eroded my sence of efficacy, caused me to begin battling with professional burnout. I realize now that my priorities were misaligned.

Looking back in retrospect, I recognize that most effective strategy I could have implemeneted during this transition could have been to work to understand the specific needs of the department chair and supervisor within the larger context from the beginning. The decision to conduct my classes instinctivly and from a self-referencial viewpoint eventually caused me to clash with the supervisor and department chair in ways that I had not experienced before and threatened my continued employment in the Damcen school district.

Impact

This transition transformed who I was as an urban educator by causing me to be honest with my short-comings and character flaws to explore new paradigms (Whitacre, 2015) as a professional educator. Only by looking squarely at my deficiencies was I able to address those weaknesses, humble myself, and build strength of character.

My weakness during that time in my career stemmed from resisting being told what to do as a result of negative experiences in my youth that impacted how I perceived older white females holding positional authority over me. I resisted the bilingual supervisor's and department chairs recommendations to a fault and a flaw that hurt me professionally.

Through facing the negative consequence of my defiant behaviors and I was forced to humble myself upon realizing that if I continued to resist the recommendations of my supervisors that I was at risk of losing my job. I came to realize that although my participation in school wide activities made me popular among the students, I recognized that I needed to maturely handle my professional responsibilities, regardless of how I felt personally about the situation.

Towards the end of the school year, I realized how wrong I was to judge and resist my supervisors when they were simply doing their jobs. My perspective changed and I gradually began to appreciate working as part of a larger bilingual team. I realized that I needed to conform and become a positive contributing force of the bilingual department. Although this period of transition and transformation was emotionally challenging and stressful, looking back it caused me to increase the strength and depth of my character through adversity that had a long term impact of improving self-efficacy (Bandura, 1993).

The 2009-2010 school year humbled me and gave birth to an authentic desire to conform and adapt to my new situation as a middle school teacher. However, that year would mark the first and only year that I taught ESL as part of a bilingual department in a middle school because the following school year, I experienced another critical career transition.

Transition 3: Becoming a Traveling ESL Teacher/The floater (2010-2011)

The examination of this transition first describes the type and context that the transition took place. When the type and context of the transition are fully identified, an examination of the situation, self, support and, strategies within the framework of Schlossberg's (1995) transition theory are explored. I then discussed within each element of Schlossberg's (1995) theory sub-themes that add depth and breadth to the examination of this transition. When examining the situation, resources of this transition I explored the sub-theme of having no school to call my own. The sub-theme of the self-resource examined during this transition was coping with existing in a form of teacher exile. The sub-theme examined in the support section of this transition was becoming a part of a community of drifter or floating ESL teachers that I did not know existed. The sub-theme examined in the strategy section of this transition was making the most of my situation as a floating ESL teacher. When considered together, the themes and sub-themes examined during this transition caused me to change my perspective as I strived to use a positive mental focus to reconfigure my perceptions of my situation as a floating ESL teacher.

Type of Transition

The next critical career transition I experienced occurred immediately at the start of the 2010-2011 school year when I was reassigned to teach at 3 different schools during

the day as a traveling English as a Second Language teacher. This transition was unanticipated as I was assigned to service two middle schools and one elementary school per day. This unanticipated transition followed a similar pattern of the one I experienced the previous year in that the program that I was a part of was discontinued and I was notified of my reassignment two weeks before the school year began.

Contextual background. This transition marked the second time in two years that I experienced a transition that was unprecedented compared to anything I had experienced in my career prior to that point. This unanticipated transition occurred immediately after my first year teaching in at Columbus Middle School and two weeks prior to the start of the 2010-2011 when I was informed that I was reassigned to teach ESL at three schools as a *floating* (Wong, 2007) ESL teacher. A floating teacher according to Wong (2007), is a teacher who does not have a permanent classroom and is typically found in middle and high schools where specific subjects are taught utilizing a schedule whereby teachers move in and out of classrooms in order to teach specific subjects or service students with certain needs. The context that I was assigned as a floater was a little different in that not only did I have different students in various classrooms to work with. I also had different schools with students ranging from K-8 and functioning on numerous academic levels.

The timing of this transition occurred one year after I experienced professional conflicts with my former bilingual department chair and the bilingual supervisor in my first year teaching middle school age students. Although it was never stated, I suspected the reason I was not included in the Columbus Middle School bilingual department move to another building was directly or indirectly related to my conflicts with my professional

superiors the year before through what Niit (1996) called the politicizing of education in which hidden agendas are acted out to the benefit of some and the detriment of others. This transition occurred the year after I came to the realization that I needed to humble myself and conform to the supervisor's mandates or face consequences that could adversely impact my career. This transition also occurred simultaneously with the start of my second year of doctoral studies in the field of educational leadership.

Situation

During my first critical career transition, I experienced the illusion of career stability being shattered. During my second critical career transition, I gave up some of my creative and intuitive understanding about the art of teaching in order to conform and not be reprimanded while still being a member of the larger team. This third transition placed me in a position in which I did not have a school or classroom to call my own. I tangibly felt as if I was losing control of my situation year by year and wondered if I was somehow being what (Bond, 1995) considered set up to fail.

No school to call home. When the school year began, I was given a list with student names and corresponding schools, I was then informed by my supervisor that I would provide ESL services to the students on the list at those schools each day. The schools were from three distinct sections of the city. This meant that I traveled by car in a triangular shaped pattern from one area of the city to another to fulfill the task of reaching my new list of ESL students. My first task was to work with the principals and teachers at each school to set up preliminary evaluation test schedules for the students on the list to get baseline data on the students to determine eligible student's ESL proficiency. I was given an English language proficiency assessment corresponding to each student's grade

and prior known English Language proficiency skill level. If the student scored above a standard English language proficiency level based on their age, time in the country and exposure to the English language, that student would be removed from my list of service. If the student did not score above the required proficiency level they would stay on my list of students to service until the end of the year proficiency exam was administered whereby I would test the students again to see if they scored high enough to test out of ESL services.

Once the preliminary tests were finished being administered during the first month of school, at the various schools, I worked again with the teachers and principals to come up with a schedule in which I was able to provide ESL instructional service to students throughout the day and/or week. In addition, when new students came to the school from other countries, I would test their Basic English Language proficiency to determine if they were eligible for ESL support. This transition resulted in me servicing approximately 25 ESL students in three separate schools ranging from grades K-8 and functioning on a multitude of English Language proficiency levels. Adapting to the circumstances of this transition in this situation was personally challenging in many ways.

When I first became a floating teacher I did not know what I was doing at all. I was trying to figure out how to be a floating teacher with no training or preparation. I was in constant communication with the bilingual department supervisor because I needed direction and order. As the year went on and I began to understand the scope and range of my responsibility I was afforded more autonomy compared to the previous year teaching

at the Columbus Middle School, however, this autonomy did not occur without significant trial, error, and emotional strain.

Self

Teacher exile. When I learned that this transition had occurred and I contemplated the ramifications of not having a classroom, not having a specific school, and not being included in the Columbus Middle Schools relocation, I wondered if I was being somehow punished for the previous year when I conflicted with the Bilingual Supervisor and the Department Chairperson at Columbus Middle School. I wondered was this how I would be singled out, marginalized, and finally eliminated from the Damcen School District. I felt as if I was on an island, in a totally unfamiliar position in that I initially had no concept, preparation, or understanding of what a floating teacher was or did. I was very unsure about my career and job stability.

I recall being extremely frustrated as I traveled between schools trying to stick to the schedule that I set up with the teachers. I recall thinking how can I be expected to help these students when all I do is show up at their school for an hour or two, pull a group of students out into a hallway, the library, a corner or anywhere where there were free desks, review some basic English language concepts, tell them to have a nice day, and then take them back to class before running out of the school trying to stay on schedule as I traveled to another school on another side of town. At some points during this transition I felt as if I was serving no purpose at all other than keeping a track of students, maintaining what Slipp (1976) calls the bureaucratic structure so that whatever funding the bilingual department needed would continue to be approved.

I knew that I could not effectively fulfill the job requirement of creating lesson plans for 25 individual students varying needs from so many so many different backgrounds in three separate schools during a school day. My youngest student was a six year-old Spanish speaker of Mexican decent. My oldest was an 8th grade Haitian student who spoke French as a primary language. I had special education students whose difficulties were more cognitive than a result of language barriers in that they spoke and understood English fluently but were unable to pass the bilingual assessment due to neurological functions beyond my scope of knowledge. I had such a wide range of students, proficiency levels, and grades that it was not possible to engage in what Ayres (2002) described as effective lesson planning strategy or even prepare for what would happen on any given day considering the divergent schedules of three different learning communities that I served.

The physical, emotional, and mental toll were beginning to impact on me at this stage in my career as I began to truly experience symptoms of professional burnout (Cordes, & Dougherty, 1993). The physical toll was caused by the physical exertion of moving in and out of schools, trying to find classrooms, locating students, and constantly moving trying to stay on schedule throughout the year. The emotional toll was a result of trying to meet the expectations of the supervisors, principals, teachers, and students I was serving. However, I faced a dilemma in that I truly felt as if it was impossible to effectively plan and give equal and fair treatment to each student while floating between 3 schools in one day. These challenges converged to challenge me mentally as just tried to balance the travel schedule, administrative requirements and, provide some semblance of dignified ESL instruction to the students on my roster. Quite simply the reality of the

situation I faced as a floating ESL teacher and the administrative expectations were incongruent and I was starting to burnout because of the intensity of the workload (Cordes, & Dougherty, 1993).

Support

Community of drifters. Also I found support from other ESL teachers in the district who were in the same situation as I, moving between various schools. When the floating ESL teachers in the district would come together for meetings we would exchange stories, discuss strategies, and reflect on our predicaments. Although there were times when these meetings felt more like therapy sessions than meetings, in the end I appreciated them because it gave me a chance to vent, hear the experiences of others, and know that I was not alone in my struggles to meet the needs of multi-grade level ESL students in various schools across the district.

One of the members of the floating ESL teachers network I was introduced to was in the early part of the school year. The supervisor told me to contact a teacher who was also a floater to explain to me the finer details of the job requirements. This teacher had been in the district about the same amount of time as me but had been a floater. I met her at the school where we worked and she showed me how to balance the administrative task with teaching the students ESL. This teacher was hispanic and about my age so I was able to connect with her easier than when trying to understand the perspective of my supervisor. This teacher was highly recommended by the supervisor as one of her most trusted and dependable employees. When I met her I found her to be very easy to relate to and authentic. She showed me the unspoken norms (Slipp, 1976) of how to be a successful floating ESL teacher.

This teacher taught me that being successful as a floating ESL teacher revolved around simply to have all my required paperwork in on time and to staying out of the way of the teachers and principals at the schools I was assigned to. I did this by being flexible and accommodating myself to their schedules.

My newfound perspective attained as being a part of a floating ESL community also assisted in the slow development of a more positive rapport with the district bilingual supervisor. This did not come easily, however; as the year went on, we slowly began to gain a better understanding of each other's skills and the weight of each others responsibilities from our respective positions as she was the one who facilitated the meetings between the community of floating ESL teachers. I therefore began to work with her in a different capacity than when I was confined to the Columbus Middle School the year earlier when we had so much conflict. I watched her field complaints from other floating ESL teachers and realized that she was also under a tremendous amount of stress and pressure. Also as she got to know me she seemed to understand the pressure. In time, I also began to see her as less of a threat to my career stability and more as someone just trying to do her job to the best of her ability. I did my best to serve the ESL students that I was required to service in the most professional way I knew how, while submitting my required paperwork in a timely and neat manner, which slowly began to ease the tension I felt when interacting with the bilingual department supervisor who was also in charge of our community of drifters.

Strategies

Making the most of the situation. The strategy that I employed during this unanticipated transition was to adopt a positive attitude. I also worked on being able to

adapt to the situations and circumstances through humility and flexibility of personality that reflected back to the foundational principals of my educational philosophy. I made a concrete choice during this transitional period to view things in a positive light particularly when I attended meetings with other teachers in the same situation, I would often hear negative comments about how unreasonable and unfair it was to place us in these situations of moving from school to school.

I eventually got tired of hearing what I considered negative complaints form others began to focus to the best of my ability on tuning the negativity out. I focused on engaging in academic scholarship and gaining knowledge. Yet, I cannot deny that as much as I tried to stay positive, I struggled with feelings of disassoication and isolation on my job. I felt like I was on an island, a drifter with no school to call my own.

I battled with feelings of despondency which were markers of burnout that are reflected in a journal entry I wrote on November 21, 2010 when I stated:

“What is my purpose? Why do I work here? I guess I just work here. All I do is go from school to school carrying papers pretending like I am serving students, but in reality it is all a façade, everyone is faking, including me, would anyone miss me if I were gone? Is this why I became a teacher in Damcen. I go to these meetings and all they do is complain. This is not for me. This can't be it for me. I have to find some way to make the most out of this. I am not going out like this. I am not going to fall into the negativity. I will use this experience as a floater to gain knowledge and insight. If I change how I see things, and focus on turning obstacles into opportunities I can transcend and become something greater, but it all starts in the mind, in my mind, I have to tune out negativity and be the best I can be.”

The above journal entry reflects my struggles to find purpose and passion in my profession. The journal entry articulates how I came to the realization that if I wanted to change the situation I had to begin by altering my mindset as a floating ESL teacher. This marked a critical mental transformation as I began to move beyond blaming others on the situations I found myself in and began to take personal responsibility for transforming my situations by becoming more aware of the importance of having a positive and proactive mental state.

Eventually, I was able to establish a balance whereby I began to use my research and scholarship to inform me of the external forces within the larger school district that had been impacting my career transitions (Smith, 2002). I began to look at the bigger picture and see myself as part of a larger movement of what Chang (2014) called school restructuring initiatives within the school district. I focused on simply doing my job, and completing the task assigned to me with regards to servicing the students I was in charge of servicing. I focused on making the most of the situation by becoming an active observer in the schools that I went into as a way to overcome Hafer's (2009) description of the impact of cognitive dissonance on the self-schema. I began to consider myself as more than just a floating ESL teacher and more of a scholar and research practitioner. I utilized my position as a floater to gain access to and interview three principals and numerous teachers as part of courses I took in action research and research methods while matriculating through my doctoral studies. I changed my mindset to view my position as a floater as a chance to collect data from different points that would help me to gain a more-well rounded viewpoint of the overall condition of Damcen City Public Schools. I

was able to discover trends and also contradictions that I was able to utilize while completing assignments during my doctoral studies.

By the end of the 2010-2011 school year, I was able to maneuver with relative efficiency through each of the school cultures that I traveled between as a floating ESL teacher. However, I continued to perceive myself as not utilizing my full talents as an educator and I craved as deeper desire for career stability as I continued to battle cognitive dissonance beyond the success of that one year. The reason is because my true passion was for teaching and interacting with students in a school community yet my professional responsibilities kept me from becoming a fully integrated member of any one school community because I was constantly traveling between schools.

Impact

The impact of this transition was that I found myself for the second time in as many years in unfamiliar territory as an urban educator. This time I taught students ranging from kindergarten – 8th grade in three schools in three different sections of the city in one day under unprecedented time constraints. The previous academic year I had to accumulate to teaching middle school students in one school. That year I was required to teach in two elementary schools and one middle school in the span of one school day with no preparation for the teaching assignment or prior warning that it would occur. The impact of this transition was that for the first time in my nine-year career, I did not have my own classroom and was officially a floating teacher. I no longer had to consider how I could best conform to the environment of a specific school, I now had to learn how to navigate three distinct school cultures and climates in three different sections of the city.

Changed perspective. Engaging in the autoethnographic process through this transition allowed to reflect on how I slowly gained confidence as the school year went on. I reflected on how I was able to move into an uncertain situation and slowly through diligence, effort, and focus take positive control of my situation and raise my confidence and efficacy to the point that I felt I could weather any situation or transition I encountered in the Damcen school district moving forward.

Schlossberg's theory of transition influenced my ability to cope with transitioning as a floating ESL instructor by allowing me to see and understand the transition that was happening as it occurred from a scholarly point of view by looking examining these transitions objectively within the larger context of social cultural phenomena. I found myself relying on the leadership platform I developed to alter my perspective towards seeing the positive side of this transitional situation. This awareness combined with my doctoral coursework in the field of educational leadership caused me to gain immense confidence in my ability to not only navigate future transitions, but to contemplate taking positive control future career transitions.

The critical transition of becoming a floating ESL teacher transformed me as an urban educator by exposing me to three different school climates, complete action and mixed methods research assignments as part of my doctoral studies, while completing my responsibilities as a floating ESL instructor.

The result of choosing to view the transition from the viewpoint of an active observer engaged in a scholarly inquiry while I traveled between the different schools observing their various cultural dynamics, I was able to unbind myself mentally from the confines of the protocols of any one school setting. I chose to view each school that I

traveled between as a reference point during my doctoral studies. I was able to apply what I was learning in my academic studies towards analyzing how three different schools operated and the leadership styles of the principals with whom I worked. I managed stress by striving to maintain a positive outlook, although at times it was awkward moving in and out of schools and interrupting teachers lessons to pull ESL students out of class.

My resiliency increased a great deal as a result of adapting to becoming a floating ESL teacher with no preparation at the beginning of the year. I also learned how to move beyond my former boundaries of perception and according to McCorkel, (1998) transmute situations through altering my perception and mind state.

Transition 4: Teaching at Innovative Expressions (2011-2012)

The examination of this transition first describes the type and context that the transition took place. When the type and context of the transition are fully identified, an examination of the situation, self, support and, strategies within the framework of Schlossberg's (1995) transition theory are explored. I then discussed within each element of Schlossberg's (1995) theory sub-themes that add depth and breadth to the examination of this transition. When examining the situation I contemplated whether or not this transition was chance or destiny. The sub-themes of the self-resource examined the desire to become a part of something bigger than myself, and the desire to take control of my career. The sub-themes examined in the support section of this transition were recognizing the congruence between my personal and professional life, reestablishing a connection with a network of friends, and institutional communities that offered support. The sub-themes examined in the strategy section of this transition were volunteering my

time and energy, and getting certified to teach social studies. When considered together, the themes and sub-themes examined during this transition caused focus on becoming a full time teacher at Innovative Expressions Magnet School by committing to change the trajectory of my career.

Type of Transition

The next critical career transition I experienced occurred as an unanticipated event. An unanticipated resultant event is a transition that is caused or precipitated by another event (Schlossberg, 1981). This critical career transition shifted my career focus during the 2011-2012, academic school year, which was my second year as a floating ESL teacher. The result of this transition is that I ended up striving for and attaining a middle school social studies teaching certificate that would have effectively ended my ten-year tenure as an ESL teacher in the Damcen Public School District.

Contextual background. This transition began when I was informed that I would be teaching for half of the school day at Innovative Expressions, the school where I worked my first job as a substitute character education teacher in the Damcen School district, To fully understand the impact of this transition it is necessary to refer back to the beginning of my teaching career to gain a fuller contextual understanding. Innovative Expressions is where I began my career as a professional educator. It started when I knocked on the front door of the school during the summer of 2001. I was buzzed in the door by the principal. I introduced myself to her, handed her my resume and told her that I heard about the school due to its reputation as a school for the teaching the performing arts. I informed her that I would very much like to be a part of that learning environment and community. I was fresh out of graduate school and returned to my hometown looking

for work when I was first referred to Innovative Expressions. I was very much into creative expression and the arts at that time as an inspiring guitar player, poet, and dramatist. Therefore, the prospect of teaching at a school for the performing arts particularly in Damcen City, my hometown was very appealing to me at that time. After an extended conversation with the principal she informed me that she would very much like to have me as part of her team. She informed me about where to go and how to apply to in order to become as a substitute character education teacher until my teaching certificates were cleared by the state. I followed the principal's instruction and that was the start of a very positive relationship with the staff and administration at Innovative Expressions. This positive relationship was born out of a common love the arts and cultivated through 10 years creative collaboration in the form of musical concerts, plays and other artistic forms of expression that I volunteered my time to be a part of with staff members of the school.

From the beginning of my teaching career in Damcen school district I wanted to teach at Innovative Expressions as a full time staff member. Yet, in early 2002 I left Innovative Expressions when I took a 6 month teaching position in Brazil in order to gain teaching experience in my field as an ESL teacher. I planned to return to Innovative Expressions, however when I returned to Damcen, city and tried to return to Innovative Expressions as a Certified ESL teacher, I was informed that I would have to take a teaching position where there was a higher demand for ESL teachers. That is how I ended up teaching at the Siggs Adult Education center for 7 years and not at Innovative Expressions where I initially sought to pursue a teaching career.

Moving forward to the 2011-2012 school year, in addition to teaching ESL half of the school day at Innovative Expressions, I was also assigned to teach ESL at the renamed Columbus Family School, which was where I taught in 2009-2010 as a full time middle school ESL teacher. The differences being that Columbus was reconfigured to serve students from grades K-8, renamed a family school, and the Bilingual department was no longer in place in that facility which resulted in me being the only ESL teacher servicing that building.

Situation

Chance or destiny. I often wondered to myself if it was pure chance or destiny that I ended up teaching at Innovative Expressions as part of my floating ESL responsibilities. When the 2011-2012 school year began I was initially assigned to work at Lincoln family school exclusively. However, during the first few weeks of school a coincidence occurred that altered my fate in the Damcen School district.

One morning when I arrived to a special education class to provide ESL service to a first grade student, the sister of my student's teacher happened to be in the classroom. We exchanged general pleasantries and casual conversation; she told me she was a paraprofessional teacher at Innovative Expressions magnet school. I told her that my career began at Innovative Expressions as a substitute ten years prior to that point and that I always wanted to teach there, but circumstances had not led to that opportunity. As we wrapped up our general conversation, I wrote my phone number half-heartedly on a piece of paper and told her that if Innovative Expressions ever needed an ESL teacher to give me a call.

I proceeded to go about my daily task of servicing ESL students and did not think much more of that brief interaction, until I was instructed to report to the Director of the District's Bilingual Department's office a couple of weeks after that conversation occurred and informed that I was being reassigned to teach for half of the day at Innovative Expressions and the other half of the day at Lincoln family school. These schools were literally at opposite sides of the city and I could not see any logical reason why I would suddenly be assigned to teach at Innovative Expressions without some type of exterior influence coming from an administrative directive beyond my understanding or what Lane (2003) describes as the hidden hand in educational accountability and oversight. I say this because the principal at Innovative Expressions was very successful as a public school administrator, she was also very well know throughout the district, at one point she served as the deputy superintendent of the entire school district. The principal at Innovative Expressions had leverage in the district and I assumed she had the power to call in a favor or two with some of the administrators at the district leadership level. I believed that the principal at Innovative Expressions used her professional pull to have me transferred to the school because of the positive relationship I developed with her over my career, although I will never know for sure if that was actually the case.

I never found out definitively how or why I was reassigned to Innovative Expressions, especially since there was only one ESL student in the school and I had over twenty students on my list at Columbus. When the director informed me that I would be servicing the one ESL student at Innovative Expressions, I simply complied with a silent smile when I was told of this change because I had a long and positive history with that school and I knew that working there would be positive to my mental and emotional

well-being that had been challenged greatly over the previous three years of continuous career transitions.

Self

Desire to be a part of something bigger than myself. I never could have known or guessed that such a simple and brief interaction with a paraprofessional teacher could end up having the impact of reshaping my entire career trajectory while also rekindling what Lambert (1998) describes as my passion for teaching that had been slowly withering since the Siggs Adult Education center closed in 2009. The reason for the rekindling of my passion for teaching was because I reconnected with music, art, and dance teachers at Innovative Expressions who had become close friends through voluntarily working together over 10 years in Damcen public school district.

After ten years teaching ESL in 4 different school in the district, I was reassigned to spend the first half of the school day at Innovative Expressions which allowed me to reconnect with the first school in which I taught when I was a novice, substitute character education teacher before taking a brief teaching job in Brazil. In the ten-year period between the start of my career and the 2011 school year, I developed a very strong bond with the staff and principal at Innovative Expressions. The bond I perceived between myself and the staff at Innovative Expressions had been established through the years on numerous creative extracurricular activities such as plays and musical productions outside of the school day and was so ingrained that I considered certain members of the staff to be like actual family members.

Determination to take control of my career. Teaching at Innovative Expressions for half of the school day and reconnecting with the staff in that learning

community was positively impactful, gave me an increased sense of control over my career, and renewed my hope in teaching. Prior to getting assigned to teach at Innovative Expressions for half of the school day, I experienced three career shifting unanticipated transitions in a three year period that took away a large degree of my sense of professional control. However, my familiarity with the staff at Innovative Expressions and the excellent relationship with the principal going back ten years caused my confidence in my ability to begin taking active control of my career transitions to increase as I saw opportunities to grow professionally that I did not see during the previous transitions.

I became reinvigorated by the expression of creative artistic energy that was exuded from at Innovative Expressions. Innovative Expressions was not only one of the most successful schools in the district, but the schools mission of promoting learning through the arts was also congruent with my core ideas and values as a teacher. These values included using art and creative expression as what Wallin, (2009) terms as a primary rationale for empowering students to strive to reach their full potential.

Although I greatly enjoyed my newfound connection with the Innovative Expressions school community and flexibility I had while moving between two schools, I was not fully satisfied. I desired to teach at Innovative Expressions full time as a part of the school community instead of floating between schools. I felt like I could have a more positive influence at Innovative Expressions as a full time staff member. I focused intently on that goal and felt a sense of destiny or what Aubrey, (1998) considered a moral purpose behind my endeavors with the expectation that I would eventually be teaching at Innovative Expressions full time.

My outlook on life became reinvigorated and very positive after the successful experience supporting the vocal arts teacher, parent, and students endeavor of raising over fifty thousand dollars using pure creative expression in the form of concerts and singing engagements to take students to Prague Czech Republic to compete in a music competition. I believed that I was moving with the team that harmonized with my own intrinsic sense of personal destiny. Perhaps I was living in my own fancy, attempting to create what Sutton (2009) considered to be my own personal mythos (Which is). I believed that my 10 years of experiences in Damcen City Public Schools were leading me back to the place where my journey (Sutton, 2009) began and I was seeking to be an active participant in the shaping of my own career trajectory. My center of control was internally driven and focused. I managed stress by striving to bring balance between my personal values and teaching career in order to alleviate years of built up cognitive dissonance by working towards getting assigned to one school as a social studies teacher at Innovative Expressions.

Support

Congruence between my personal and professional life. It was during this transition that I first began to get to know and court my wife. I met her while working on fundraising efforts with the students at Innovative Expressions. She was a close friend of a music teacher at Innovative Expressions who organized a student trip to Prague Czech Republic that I participated in. I first saw my wife at a fundraising event for the Innovative Expressions, Prague Czech Republic at a church. I was attracted to the way she carried herself and wanted to know her more. Seeing my future wife for the first time at the fund raising event motivated me to voluntarily commit increased energy and time to

helping the students of Innovative Expressions get to Prague, Czech Republic. In essence, meeting the woman who would eventually become my wife while working with the members of the Innovative Expressions school community to help students attend a music competition in Prague, Czech Republic created an emotional bond with that learning community that has been and remains profound, lasting and provided a congruence between my personal and professional life.

Network of friends. Working at Innovative Expressions allowed me to reestablish friendships that spanned a ten-year period starting when I first started teaching. Prior to the transition of teaching at Innovative Expressions I would consider myself to be in what Rosenholtz, & Simpson, (1990) considered to be fighting to resist teacher burnout and as faltering in my commitment to the teaching profession. Prior to getting assigned to teach at Innovative Expressions, I was just fulfilling my professional responsibilities with little to no feeling or passion. I had become withdrawn, in a what Pines, & Aronson (1988) describe as a defensive and protective mind frame as a result of experiencing such intense career transitions during the years following the closing of the Siggs Adult Education Center. Yet reuniting with the staff at Innovative Expressions allowed me to expand my social network as my work and friendships became intertwined, cohesive, and as Wheatley, (1994) describes as interdependent.

Institutions and communities. The period of working with the staff and administration at Innovative Expressions was a period in which I perceived myself as belonging to a learning community whereby we worked towards what Zembylas & Papanastasiou, (2006) considered to be the collective goals of the school that greatly enhance teacher satisfaction. I would consider myself as having a very strong and

mutually supportive connection with various members of the school community. I felt connected with members of staff as if they were family and close friends because we shared driven by a common vision (Consenheim, 1996) as it related to the mission and purpose of the school.

During this period of transition I had the most extrinsic professional support I had ever experienced working within Damcen school district. The support I had available at this time came from within the school, the local community, and the students themselves. I had a open and trusting relationship with the principal of Innovative Expressions that had been established over 10 years in which she was not only my principal but also a mentor and guide. I was able to discuss my concerns and goals with the principal of Innovative Expressions in what I considered to be a safe environment.

I also began to build a much more positive relationship with the bilingual supervisor over three year period of working with her. The smoothing out of our relationship exemplified how my mental attitude, scholarly endeavours in reflective research practice were helping me to more smoothly navigate carer transitions were helping me to mature and gain a greated understanding of how to positvly effect change in my career which increased my sense of self-efficacy. Also, I was gaining congruence and balance between my personal and professional life.

Strategies

Volunteering my time and energy. During this transition I managed stress by becoming deeply involved in extracurricular activities at the school. I chaparoned field trips, assisted in musical productions, particpated in talent shows, and staff vs student

sporting activities. My mode of thought was truly mission driven and goal oriented in a way that I had not experienced any other time teaching as an urban educator.

I also volunteered my time to various extracurricular activities such as becoming parts of committees that took students out of state and out of country to participate in talent competitions. The most ambitious endeavor was becoming a member of a staff and parent fundraising initiatives dedicated to getting vocal students to participate in an International Music Festival in Prague Czech Republic.

I felt that working on this endeavor with the teachers from Innovative Expressions was a way to get involved in an activity that was bigger than myself and part of a collective mission to help the students see things they never saw before. I believed in the virtue of the goals we set and achieved. I was internally motivated during this period, however, I also was motivated by being part of team and feeling that the team needed me so I had to do my part. This feeling of belonging and being needed greatly increased what Bolin (2007) considered a major factor in influencing my perception of job satisfaction at that time. I felt a sense of camaraderie while working with the staff at Innovative Expressions that I had not experienced before. This sense of camaraderie was forged out of voluntarily working together on creative projects that were in line with the overall school mission of using the arts as a vehicle to inspire and motivate student achievement caused me to feel professionally satisfied in the work that I was doing.

Getting certified to teach social studies. As a result of the common artistic, and creative bond I felt with the staff at Innovative Expressions, I developed an intense desire to teach at the school where my career began on a full time and permanent basis. However, I was unable to teach at Innovative Expressions full time because there were

not enough ESL students in the building to justify my teaching there for a full day. Therefore, I decided after conferring with the principal at Innovative Expressions that the most expedient way to attain a full time teaching position at the school was to attain a social studies teaching certificate because a teaching position in that content area because a teacher was retiring that year.

Not only did I have support in my efforts to achieve become a full time staff member at Innovative Expressions in the form of congruence between my personal and professional life, a network of teachers that were my friends, and the guidance of the principal. I also began to develop a relationship with the district social studies supervisor who gave me the opportunity to get participate in professional field studies to the Gullah Islands in South Carolina to study culture, and Selma, Alabama to learn about the Civil Rights movement as told by the people that experienced it first hand. In addition I became involved in a grant program that gave a select group of social studies teachers additional training and resources. Overall, in my first few months of acquiring the Studies Certificate I received what I considered to me more useful and applicable training and development opportunities then I experiences in my entire ten years as an ESL teacher.

Impact

The impact of getting assigned to teach at Innovative Expressions for half of the school day gave me the opporutnity to use the situation I was in as a floating ESL teacher to network and make professional connections. My previous experiences as a floating ESL teacher the year before gave me the confidence to network beyond the scope of my job description and seek ways to improve my overall career leverage. This prompted me to seek another teaching certification with the hopes of moving beyond being a floating

ESL teacher and back into an established classroom in one school. I initiated the transition of striving to get certified to teach social studies as a direct desire to teach in Innovative Expressions Magnet School. Initiating this transition represented the first time that I actively sought to directly influence my own future career transitions.

I had the opportunity as a second year as a floating ESL teacher to make my own schedule as I maneuvered to service ESL students between the two schools. In this situation I was familiar with the staff and leadership at both schools through my previous relationships with Innovative Expressions and Columbus Family School. The familiarity that resulted in working with individuals I knew empowered me to push to further my career as I began to be perceived as the onsite ESL expert in the buildings that I floated between.

Focusing on teaching full time at Innovative Expressions. During this stage of transition my primary focus and strategy was to figure out how I could become a member of the Innovative Expressions staff full time. I was so focused on and committed to this goal that I attained a certification to teach social studies. social studies was a content area that I felt lent itself to my being placed in Innovative Expressions full time after meeting with the principal and specifically discussing ways that I could become a member of the staff full time.

Committing to change. The decision to get certified to teach social studies was significant because it caused me to transition beyond past 10 years of ESL teaching experiences and embracing a new challenge. I gradually began to feel myself committing with the very fiber of my being to the hope and possibility of teaching social studies at Innovative Expressions full time. The urge was so strong to become a part of this school

community that any other alternative would have likely have stimulated more cognitive dissonance. The more I committed to serving at Innovative Expressions, the more I began to rebuild my confidence and form alliances that I believed would aid in this goal. The timeline that I set for myself to achieve this objective was that I intended to make a proactive transition to social studies and Innovative Expressions by the start of the 2012-2013 school year.

Working with the staff at Innovative Expressions engaged me in a process of self-analysis that promoted self-efficacy by causing me to surrender to what to forces for psychological growth (Gallant-Churko, 2014). This psychological growth was the result of dedicating time and energy to a cause and goal greater than myself. Engaging in this transition caused me to grow emotionally and spiritually. I healed in a lot of ways as a result of participating in this transition. I began to shake myself out of what (Freudenberger & Richelson, 1980) describe as the angry, jaded burnt out way of thinking as I began to regain my original passion for the teaching art.

Schlossberg's transition theory allowed me to understand how the prior three critical career transitions I experienced impacted me emotionally as I faced serious bouts with burnout and doubting whether or not my purpose was to continue in the teaching profession. Yet my increased understanding transition theory allowed me to recognize patterns of transition and the impact on my personality as I began to work more intimately than ever with the staff from Innovative Expressions and gained more perceived control over my situation.

Understanding the context of the transitions and my increased levels of self-efficacy allowed me to confidently set my own teaching schedule as a floating ESL teacher while

simultaneously gaining increased respect from supervisor whom I clashed with so intensely during the second and third career transitions. It was during this transition of teaching at Innovative Expressions, that I began to feel once again appreciated as a valuable resource in the learning community capable of handling the assigned workload with fluidity and dexterity.

The critical transition of being assigned to teach at Innovative Expressions and the resultant striving to attain a Social Studies teaching certification transformed my self-perception. I no longer considered myself as being stuck on an intellectual island of fading importance and relevancy in the Damcen public school district. I now saw myself as being intricate to the success of students involved in a once in a life time endeavor in which the students not only were able achieve the goal of making it to Prague, Czech Republic they also performed exceedingly well by receiving a silver medal in an international music competition. Participating in helping the students achieve this goal was one of the proudest moments of my career until that date and helped immensely with my self-efficacy.

This success essentially facilitated my focus exclusively on the goal of getting transferred to teach at Innovative Expressions full time as a social studies teacher. This transition never occurred as I was eventually offered a teaching position at Damcen High School not one at Innovative Expressions as I had planned. Although I took all the necessary steps within my circle of influence to get certified to teach Social Studies at Innovative Expressions such as discussing with the principal a specific strategy I could implement in order to secure my position for the following year and engaging in volunteer work with the district Social Studies Supervisor, it was to no avail, because in

the end I was sent to another school, one that would have repercussions unique unto itself and lead to other unforeseen transitions and perhaps my greatest transformation to as a urban educator.

Even though things did not go exactly as planned and I never became a full time staff member at Innovative expressions, I gained the confidence from that point forward to be an active participant and shaping my career trajectory from that point forward. I learned during this period a great deal about patience and to accept when things did not always work out in my favor as means of increased maturity and poise. I was proud of myself for trying to make this transition happen and feel that in the long run I ended up in a better place as a result. Although the transition did not go through as I expected and I ended up at another school besides Innovative Expressions, this was the first step in taking control of my career path, something that I would continue to do in the at increasing levels of frequency from that point forward in my career.

Transition 5: Teaching Social Studies at Damcen High School (2012-2013)

The examination of this transition first describes the type and context that the transition took place. When the type and context of the transition are fully identified, an examination of the situation, self, support and, strategies within the framework of Schlossberg's (1995) transition theory are explored. I then discussed within each element of Schlossberg's (1995) theory sub-themes that add depth and breadth to the examination of this transition. When examining the situation I discussed the nostalgia of the castle on the hill, contemporary realities, and becoming a social studies teacher at Damcen High School. The sub-theme of the self-resource examined accepting the teaching position to become a social studies teacher at Damcen High School. The sub-theme examined in the

support section of this transition was discussing my relationship with a retiring teacher who served as a mentor. The sub-themes examined in the strategy section of this transition were getting prepared to teach social studies and becoming active in a community theater company in order to gain access and insight into the culture and climate at Damcen High School. When considered together, the themes and sub-themes examined during this transition caused me to harness and refine my skills as a performance artist teacher while also identifying some ironic ways that the artistic project I was involved in while transitioning into Damcen High School had long term real life consequences as art imitates life.

Type of Transition

The next transition I experienced began in May 2012 when I acquired my certificate to teach social studies and began the process of embarking on a self-directed career transition. This transition therefore was anticipated. However, although I knew that I would be teaching social studies in a self-directed, anticipated transition, my original intent was to teach at Innovative Expressions full time. I was never assigned to Innovative Expressions to teach full time and was instead assigned to teach as a member of the Damcen High School's social studies department. Therefore, not getting assigned to teach at Innovative Expressions represented a non-event. Schlossberg (1981) describes a non-event as an event that one expects to happen but does not yet facilitate another unexpected form of transition.

Situation

Nostalgia of castle on the hill. The situation I was stepping into when I was assigned to teach at Damcen High School required me to rely all of my previously

discussed career transitions to navigate because I was teaching a new content area in a learning environment that I never taught in before. Damcen High School had a long and stoic reputation, founded in 1891, it is one of the oldest, and largest schools in the city or as McNichol (2008) puts it, “for almost a century, the facade of Damcen High School had towered over the Sidepark neighborhood just southeast of the city's downtown area, offering inspiration to generations of residents as the community's "Castle on the Hill (p. 2a)." McNichol (2008) goes on to quote local resident Joe Jones as saying, “This building is a symbol for the community; it's an icon for the community." While the mayor of the city stated that that "The castle is iconic. It represents a symbol" (McNichol, 2008).

Not only is Damcen High School a school with a long historical significance within the city, I also had deep personal connections to the school. Yet, I found it ironic that I would be teaching at such a historic school as an adult because as a child between first and third grade I went to a school across the street from Damcen High School.

St. Mary's was a catholic school that has since been knocked down and replaced by a nonprofit youth center. Yet my earliest memories as a school age child involve looking across the street and watching intently as the students at Damcen High school socialized in the park directly across from my school. I had family members and babysitters that attended Damcen High, so I always simply assumed that when I got older I would go there as well. I remember as a youth experiencing the creative energy of the marching band; which still is known as one of the best in the area and is a source of pride for the local community. I remember attending football games with my father who also attended Damcen High. My mother also attended Damcen high school.

Contemporary realities. Yet despite the nostalgia, the reality of Damcen High School in contemporary times is that it is an urban high school that has experienced turmoil on many levels for numerous years. Fights, drug abuse, high teacher attrition, constant administrative changes were part of what Jewer (2009) described as the lived reality of urban educators at Damcen High School. The school had a reputation since I was a child as being one of the tougher schools in the city. As an adult educator I was keenly aware of what Becker (2013) described as the myriad of contextual social, cultural, economic, and political variables that contributed to subpar academic performance, teacher stress, burnout, and high attrition rates.

Becoming a Damcen High School social studies teacher. I became a social studies teacher at Damcen High School by filling out an internal district application for social studies teachers. I was selected and interviewed by several district administrators about my teaching background in English as a Second Language and my desire to become a full time social studies teacher, at the conclusion of the interview I was told that someone would contact me and let me know the results. My original intent was to teach social studies at Innovative Expressions for reasons discussed in the previous transition. Within a few weeks time I received a call that said I had been selected to teach social studies but it was not at Innovative Expressions as I had hoped. Instead the offer to teach social studies full time was at Damcen High School.

Self

Acceptance of the new teaching position. When I found out that I would be transferred to Damcen High School, I accepted the position eagerly because my desire to teach in my own classroom after two years as a floating teacher. My desire to teach at one

school was stronger than any trepidation I may have had about teaching in a school with such a well know reputation as a rough and tumble urban environment (Burroughs, 2010).

Damcen High School was known as a school where fights could break out at any time. The school had a reputation of being a place where teachers could be assaulted, drugs could be sold and all manner of unexpected occurrences could happen at any time. Although I knew of the rumors, risk and reputation of Damcen High School still I saw the chance to teach there as an opportunity to truly make a difference in the lives of urban youth while also recalibrating my career.

My outlook was generally positive, focused, and determined. I was culturally connected to the school through my parental lineage and social network. When I first arrived in the school, I quickly discovered that I knew some of the staff members from years of working in the district and a couple since my childhood. I knew about the negative stigma connected with the school because of the fights, drugs problems, and perceived low academic performance typically associated with urban schools (Heller & Greenleaf, 2007), but I was just happy to be teaching in my own classroom and not traveling between multiple schools anymore even though I was assigned to teach a political education course that I had no training or preparation for.

At that point in my career, it was important to my sense of efficacy to have my own classroom and belong to one school community, even if it was not my first choice of where preferred to teach. I wanted to belong to something. I wanted to find a niche, fit in, and be considered of a value and service to the learning community I was a part of. I understand not that the reason I felt that way was because I had been experienced 3 years

of critical career transitions in a row, with my role and function changing each of those transitions. I desired career stability in order to resist becoming professionally burnt out through all the changes I experienced.

Support

The retiring mentor teacher. When it became official that I would teach at Damcen High School I received a course load of American History, Global Studies and a political and legal education course. I prepared myself the previous summer to teach the American and Global studies courses but I was not familiar with the content or prepared to teach the political and legal education course. I was assigned to take over the teaching schedule of a teacher who was retiring. This teacher became my mentor and showed me the intricacies of the content while also introducing me with various people in the school community. When he officially retired at the Christmas break in December 2012, I took over the class in January 2013. However, the retired teacher would come back into the building to assist with the political and legal class a couple days per week. That was the first time I ever had a mentor to aid in any of my transitions. When the retired teacher would come to assist me, I sometimes clashed with him because in my perspective at the time he was trying to take over the class and run it his way. I never articulated any discontent towards this mentor as the feelings and thoughts were all internal. I realize now through reflection that I continued to fight feelings of resentment towards people telling me how to run my class. These feelings came with my previous discussions of having a rebellious nature and my past conflicts with my former supervisor. Yet in the end, I greatly appreciated having this retired teacher serve as a mentor and respected him taking the time to come help out in the class as I now realize the tremendous impact

mentors can have to teachers entering new learning communities for the first time (Holcomb, 2006).

Strategies

Getting prepared. Then when the transfer to teach at Damcen High School took effect in December 2012, I made concrete efforts to get to know as many staff members as I could in order to get their perception of the climate of the school. The reason I sought to know as much about the school as possible by talking to people who worked there was because I believed strongly in the power of emotional intelligence and the wisdom of others when entering a new situation (Goleman, 1995). I understood that the more insight and intelligence I was able to gather about the school's culture and climate the better the chances I had to successfully navigate transitioning into Damcen High School to teach social studies (Goud, 2005).

The intrinsic knowledge to take the above action came as a result of cultivating emotional intelligence over the previous 10 years working in various situations in the Damcen school district. According to (Zeidner, Matthews, & Roberts, 2004) emotional intelligence moves beyond the accepted intelligence measures of traditional academia and is grounded on theories of self-regulation, social intelligence and metacognitive functions. Emotional intelligence is an effective aid in the navigation of complex social and cultural context (Stein & Book, 2006) and has been linked to improved performance in school and work while also mitigating negative experiences. Goleman, (1995) suggests that the emotional intelligence is more important than IQ and technical skill in most professional context.

The cumulative and vicarious experiences with Damcen high school over the years had caused me to form a mental picture of what the context of the school would be like before I set foot in the building to teach on December 3, 2012. I assumed I would have to be mentally tough and to expect the unexpected. I also knew intrinsically that I would have to immediately begin building relationships with people inside the school.

The community theater group. Another strategy I utilized upon learning of my arrival Damcen High School volunteer my time to a local theater company that had strong ties to the community and school. While with the theater company I participated in a play that would be seen by many members of the school community.

We rehearsed at Damcen High School nightly leading up to the play production that premiered December 14-16, 2012. While practicing for the play production, which would ultimately be titled, *The Twelve Dancing Princesses*, I worked closely with numerous students from Damcen high school, community activist, and teachers from around the district. The show was a success at that time and had implications that forever changed my life.

Impact

The performance artist teacher. While preparing for the role I would play in the production I noted on November 14, 2012:

I have been practicing, with the group, I accepted the role of the solider, it is me, it is almost like I am the character, I am the solider who has traveled far, who has been through many battles who has been through conflict and strife, who now has been almost purified yet is still on a journey. I have been broken down, I have been through transition, I am about to enter into a new school, in a situation that I really don't know about.

This play is emotionally intense, also the woman that I am interested in ironically, will become my wife in this story. The people that I am working with are like my spiritual family. Also I have been working out tremendously to get in shape for the part in the play, I am anxious to start at the Castle on the Hill.

This play has been kind of a shock to my system, because I haven't been getting much sleep, trying to get the lines down. But it is good because it is making me a better person.

The above journal entry shows that as I practiced and prepared to perform the part of a soldier in a play, I was also practicing and preparing for the role I would play as a Social Studies Teacher at Damcen High School. Through this process I came to understand that being a teacher and a performing artist are similar in how voice inflection and body language are used to interact within the context to gain and maintain the audience's attention (Hart, 2007). By working with the community theater group I was harnessing my public speaking skills, stage presence, and ability to connect with larger audiences that would ultimately connect to how I was able to gain and keep students' attention in the classroom. Hart's study *Act like a teacher: Teaching as a performing Art* goes on to state that just as the performing artist spends many years perfecting their craft and transforming to meet the demands of various roles, teachers must learn to develop and focus their craft in order to create learning environments that are optimal for student success (2007).

As such, I prepared to become a social studies teacher at Damcen High School through participating in a community theatrical production. I realized that, "what makes someone a good teacher is not methodology, or even ideology. It requires an engagement with identity, the way individuals conceive of themselves so that teaching is a state of

being. (Danielewicz, 2001, p. 3 APA)” I embraced my role as a social studies teacher at Damcen High School much the same way an actor would embody their role in a play. I intentionally built relationships within the larger community while working on the play and taking the role of a soldier.

Art imitates life. Working with the community organization on the theater production had far reaching consequences that I did not anticipate, with a major example being that the woman I married in the play who would become my wife in reality two years later. Another way that art imitated life during this transition was that I played the part of a soldier in the theater production and ended up joining the military as a Navy reservist. This period of transition caused me to channel my creative energy into building relationships, cultivating a positive mental state, and diligently study the subject matter that I was moving into. During this period of transition, I learned increased patience and humility. Prior to this transition, I perceived myself as almost desperately craving to be a part of something larger than myself, to be a part of a team or organized movement while still maintaining my own individual capacity for self-expression, increased efficacy, and avoidance of burnout.

Chapter 5

Summary, Recommendations, Conclusion

Synthesis

This chapter is a discussion of how the transitions I have experienced over my fifteen-year teaching career have transformed who I am as professional urban educator and person. During this process emergent patterns of disaffection with the self-perceived status quo, conforming to ideals that were not aligned with my own values, and instability in the working environment have forged a sense of urgency and struggles with cognitive dissonance that led to battles with professional burnout throughout various critical career transitions. The intensity of the critical career transitions I have navigated throughout my career caused me to constantly contemplate the long-term viability as a career urban public school educator. The underlying reason for this constant contemplation has been the process of seeking to balance professional responsibilities, with personal core beliefs and values about the nature of urban education. The struggles I have faced while dealing with cognitive dissonance through 15 years of career transition ultimately led to me join the United States Navy Reserve as a way of attain the perception of career stability. Since joining the Navy I have discovered the sense of belonging and shared mission that I searched for throughout the last 7 years of my teaching career when I began experiencing the most intense critical transitions discussed in this study.

The study engaged me in a process of self-analysis that promoted increased self-efficacy. The study also utilized Schlossberg's transition theory as a way to cope with and understand the multiple transitions I experienced within a larger context as an urban public school educator. The use of Scholssberg's transition theory resulted in a

reflective practice that influenced my approach to teaching while seeking to positively influence urban learners. These conclusions were drawn to while utilizing research methodology of Autoethnography to conduct this study.

Engaging in this Autoethnographic approach fostered looking inward at the self, while maintaining the outward gaze of ethnography (Denzin, 1997). I have acted as the subject and the researcher in order to facilitate the reflective process of teaching in transition. The narrative autoethnography was articulated in the first person whereby I have reflected on my experiences within the context of an urban school district.

This Autoethnographic study has been totally immersive as a highly personalized form of reflective study McCaskill, (2008). The synthesis of this study revealed emergent themes that were consisted of considerable reflective analysis over time regarding my 15 year journey of transition and transformation as an urban educator. The emergent themes that arose through reflection of my career of transitions consisted of three identifiable patterns of behavioral and motivational patterns. The first emergent behavioral theme throughout my career transitions was a constant striving to overcome cognitive dissonance and burnout in the quest for self-actualization, which was the second emergent theme. My efforts to reach self-actualize were predicated upon the third emergent theme which was an intense desire to achieve career stability and consistency in the learning communities that I have been a part of. It took deep introspection and examination the critical career transitions to fully understand how these experiences have transformed as an educator and leader.

Emerging Themes of Transformation

Striving to overcome cognitive dissonance. I began to experience cognitive dissonance and the early stages of burn-out after 10 years of teaching ESL when I reached a point of no return, (WordNet 3.0, 2008) and became committed to changing the course and trajectory of my career in the Damcen Public School District. It started when I began to be impacted by management styles and economic trends that clashed with my intrinsic desires and motives for becoming an urban educator in Damcen city. The clashing that I experienced caused cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957) that led to shifts in my attitude and actions based on the desire to restore a sense of balance between my career trajectory and personal beliefs. According to McLeod, cognitive dissonance occurs when there is a clashing between individual values and the demands of the external world (2014). This dissonance caused tension that motivated an inner drive towards the pursuit of harmony between my personal paradigms and the external circumstance. The battle to create harmony between my internal worldview and the demands of the work environment were deeply personal and trying. These struggles eventually led to intense feelings of isolation and what Maslach and Leiter refer to as burnout (1997). I was mentally exhausted and emotionally drained by my experiences as an ESL teacher at the end of the 2012 school year.

This wearing down or burning out was a gradual process of working through numerous unexpected transitions and the challenges associated with teaching in a low-income urban school district. According to Maslach and Leiter, I was felt the classic symptoms of burnout that included an eroded sense of self-efficacy as intense feelings of being constrained by standards that I considered unrealistic when taking into account my

unique circumstance that were overwhelming my initial passion for teaching (2007).

When I was going through the most intense feelings of burnout between the years of 2009-2012, I thought I was alone. Yet through reflection and research I discovered that “burnout was reaching epidemic proportions among North American workers and occurs in greater frequency when the nature of the person and the nature of the occupation do not blend well together” (Maslach & Leiter, 1997, p. 6). According to Maslach and Leiter burnout essentially occurred because numerous work settings place human values far below economic goals, political nuisances, technological trends, and failing corporate citizenship (1997). Literature suggested that the very factors that motivate one to work with purpose, vision, commitment, and dedication were being ignored in favor of corporate models in which humans were “supposed to adjust to the demands of this brave new world and figure out how to survive in it. But when the gap between people and the demands of the job is so great, this progress comes at a high human price” (Maslach & Leiter, 1997, p. 10). During the most turbulent period in my career from 2009-2012, I battled with cognitive dissonance and burnout to such a great degree that I regularly questioned if I was in the right profession.

I experienced all the classic symptoms of burnout, such as feeling overloaded, sensing a loss of control in professional life, feeling unrewarded for efforts, and battling with conflicting values. The results of burnout I experienced were chronic exhaustion, cynicism, detachment from work, and increased feelings of ineffectiveness on the job (Maslach & Leiter, 1997). Burnout was expressed in an erosion of engagement from the job, an erosion of positive feelings about the job, and imbalances between my personal goals and the job. These imbalances cause me to view these imbalances as personal crisis

whereby “some people reach the point where they can’t take it anymore and they quit” (Maslach & Leiter, 1997, p, 19). There were numerous instances particularly between 2009-2012 that I considered quitting teaching and felt simply overwhelmed.

Striving for Self-Actualization. The feeling of burnout began to shift in a positive direction as I began to learn and reflect on my transitions as part of my doctoral studies during the summer of 2012. I became focused on the things that meant the most to me and began to spend a considerable amount of time on character development as I noted July 24, 2012 in my journal when I wrote that the “greatest obstacle to my success is and always has been myself.” It was at this period of time that I began to reflect on my life and my purpose. I came to understand through experience the importance of the people and environments that I needed to surround myself with in order to feel mentally and emotionally complete. I realized that I needed to work diligently to keep myself balanced and moving in a positive direction. I realized the important roles that patience, humility, and clarity of mind had on my overall health and wellbeing. I also noted that the changes I experienced until then were about more than teaching one subject or another. The transformation I was experiencing was part of a personal evolution or revolution of mind and heart. The transformation was about becoming a better man and living my life to the fullest potential while giving back to the community and society in the best way that I knew how.

The transformation I was experiencing caused me to seek to fully utilize my potential and capacity, in other words I was seeking to self-actualize (Maslow 1968b, 1970a). My journey as an urban educator over the last three years epitomizes Maslow’s concept of self-actualization in that my transitions highlighted an intense desire to be a

part of something larger than myself, a greater mission, while still living in harmony with and exercising the full potential and creative ability of my natural self (Maslow, 1971). Part of the maturing process of this transformation was the realization that the biggest battle I would face was in my own mind. As I matured, I moved beyond blaming situations that I found myself in on other individuals or circumstances and instead realized that I had to take personal responsibility for every cause and effect I encountered in my life. I composed the following on July 25, 2012 11:47 am while contemplating the challenges of teaching in an urban district simply entitled

Change:

“The death of the old me simply must to be-

Born again to walk this earth in a state that is heavenly-

Transcend the human body,

Cast away my sins

There are devils all around trying to keep me trapped in-

Using my natural tendencies against me,

Got my mind divided, going in different directions simultaneously.

If I focus, concentrate, and practice diligently

I can become the conscious shaper of my own destiny.”

Seeking career stability and consistency. The transitions I experienced transformed me to strive for self-actualization. However, before I could reach the actualized mental state, I sought career stability. Prior to my transitions I never considered stability as a vital component to my success because my first seven years of teaching consisted of working with highly motivated adults. That was a truly unique and stable situation that due to inexperience I took for granted. However, I began to experience significant career transitions in my eighth year of teaching when the adult program was discontinued. That was in I began getting transferred from school to school

with little notice and not knowing where I would be teaching from one year to the next. I felt isolated, like a drifter. I felt as if I was looked upon by students and staff as some type of auxiliary teacher, substitute, or in one form or another not a real teacher. The crux of the matter resulted in not being attached to any one school or having a solid sense of involvement in the sense of community of any one school. Taylor and Tashakkori point out that "...school atmosphere is an important factor in teacher satisfaction"(1995, p. 23). By being on the road so much traveling between schools, I did not have an opportunity to develop a common purpose or solid sense of community with any one particular school (Lee, Dedrick & Smith, 1991). The lack of having a feeling of belonging to one school community had a tremendous impact on my sense of teacher efficacy since the schools in which teachers feel most effective are likely to be environments in which human relationships are supportive (Lee, Derrick and Smith, 1991). Essentially, Lee, Dedrick and Smith (1991) indicate that the most important factor in determining a teacher's sense of efficacy is the degree that teachers feels connected to the school community.

From 2009-2012 I was a teacher who spent a great deal of time traveling between schools. I felt like an outsider looking in at the various schools I went into. I did not feel connected to a school, I felt alone. My sense of efficacy and esteem were lowering, I was once a confident teacher who belonged to a program that drew students from outside Damcen city, with international backgrounds. Yet I was reduced to a teacher who drove between schools with no classroom, utilizing hallways, closets, corners in libraries or wherever I could find space to pull students out of their regular classes to provide ESL instruction to them. According to Moore's research (2012), the sense of belonging to a school community was critical to feelings of job satisfaction for teachers. I did not feel

connected to a school.

I felt like I was not being effective as a teacher or reaching the students in any meaningful way because the time I spent with them was limited due constantly seeking to meet and maintain travel obligations. I lacked a sense of shared purpose with any school and became increasingly dissatisfied with my job and career path. Zembylas and Papanastasiou (2006), suggests that teacher satisfaction was derived from having a sense of contributing to society through working with students and collaborating with fellow staff members. However, the reasons for dissatisfaction stem from a lack of autonomy, lack of status and respect in the community, student failure and a lack of discipline in the classroom (Zembylas & Papanastasiou, 2006). Although discipline in the classroom was not a problem, I was frustrated with being evaluated according to the same standards as a teacher with their own classroom, in more stable environments while still being scrutinized by my ESL supervisor to maintain standards that were, in my opinion, unrealistic.

The desire for career stability were highlighted in a journal entry I wrote on August 21, 2012 at 5:25 pm as I was preparing to teach the subject of Social Studies because I wanted to be in one classroom and in one school.

“School is about to start soon. Officially, I am still an ESL teacher, although mentally I have moved on. I have been focusing all summer on preparing to teach a new subject. But right now I don’t have a class. I don’t have a grade to teach and I don’t technically have a school.

I have been here before. There have been times when I didn’t know where or in what capacity I would be teaching until the two weeks before.

This time it is different. I feel that a lot is riding on this. I want

some stability; I am a tired of being tossed around in the wind...

Research Questions

1. How does an autoethnographic approach engage me in a self-analysis process that promoted self-efficacy? Engaging in the autoethnographic approach has elevated my scholarly and competency levels of self-analysis and awareness. This elevated level of self-awareness has also promoted a heightened sense of self-efficacy. This autoethnographic process gave me confidence and understanding of who I am as a professional educator in an urban district navigating career transitions. Composing and arranging this autoethnography has helped put my career in perspective and made me more conscious of who I am and the forces that have shaped me. This knowledge has been critical in my movement going forward in my career beyond the scope of this study.

Delving deeper this, narrative autoethnography engaged me in the process of self-analysis by causing me to reflect upon on the core incidents I encountered as an urban educator through the lens of Schlossberg's theory of transition that utilizes situations, self, strategies, and supports as gages to measure my transformation through the years. Also the autoethnographic approach brought me to greater levels of understanding and efficacy through not only composing the narrative but also through analysis of personal journals and the gathering and examination of personal and cultural archives. The strength of autoethnographic narratives in promoting self-efficacy is based on the premise that understanding and meaning were derived through the evocative nature of story telling in the human experience (Andres, Squire, & Tambokou, 2008).

This narrative autoethnographic approach increased my level of self-efficacy by providing "insight that befit the complexity of human lives" (Josselson, 2006, p.4). This narrative encompassed more than simply the gathering of stories and vignettes,

uncritically (Trahar, 2009). This narrative inquiry attended to the ways and methods with which the construction of the story draws upon cultural discourse that:

“... carries many meanings and is used in a variety of ways by different disciplines, often synonymously with *story* paying analytic attention to how the facts got assembled...” (Riessman & Speedy, 2007, pp.428-429) [1]

According to Bochner, the process of gathering information in order to tell narrative stories provided "knowledge *from* the past and not necessarily knowledge *about* the past" (2007, p.203,) as such:

"Making stories from one's lived history is a process by which ordinarily we revise the past retroactively, and when we do we are engaged in processes of language and describing that modify the past. What we see as true today may not have been true at the time the actions we are describing were performed. Thus we need to resist the temptation to attribute intentions and meanings to events that they did not have at the time they were experienced" (2007, p.203).

This autoethnography has engaged me in an honest, introspective, and at times biased retrospective journey whereby I came to a deeper understanding of the meaning of unfolding events that occurred during my transitions in the Damcen school district. When taken together the journals, field-notes, and archives utilized to explore key incidents that occurred during this study that resulted in increased self-efficacy through increased knowledge of how the transition process impacted my transformation.

2. How does Schlossberg's theory of transition influence my ability to cope

with multiple transition experiences as an urban public school educator? Schlossberg's theory of transition influenced my ability to cope with multiple transitions as an urban educator by giving me a theoretical framework within which to filter and understand the transitions I experienced. Prior to exploring and implementing Schlossberg's transition theory, I had no logical or coherent way to gauge or define the changes I experienced. I knew that changes were taking place as I moved from school to school, subject matter to subject matter, and between various administrative changes but I had no way to put it all into perspective. Prior to Schlossberg's theory, I felt like a drifter; an outsider in the district I taught while struggling against circumstances to find a place of belonging. I faced numerous uncertainties because I did not know where I was heading or how I would get there. The shifting situational dynamics I encountered were unique and specific to culture, school climate, personal disposition, and ideals (Phillion, 2002). Schlossberg's theory gave me a means to collect data and explore my unique transitions within a specific framework.

While articulating and interpreting my transitions over the last 10 or 12 years of teaching in Damcen public school district, I realized that during the early part of my career I was improvising and adapting to changing circumstances without any real sense of direction or focus. When I began to utilize and reflect upon the transition theory, I began to look squarely at the vices and virtues of my character that forced me to grow. This process allowed me to examine the unconscious impact my ways of thinking influenced my transitions, which caused me to view myself as less of a victim of change and more of an influencer of it. The more I came to understand and implement transition

theory the more I became an active participant in my transitions and conscious shaper of my transformations.

For example, my decision to join the Navy Reserve was a conscious transition that transformed the way I see and interact with the world and the way that the world interacts with me. I am now an official member of a national defense organization that has afforded me with a heightened level of prestige, admiration, and respect when I returned the local community of Damcen school district. I was given awards for service and applauded upon my return to the district. Prior to this conscious transition I was battling with similar forces of inertia that were threatening to stagnate my career such as being told what and how to teach and becoming increasingly bitter about the teaching profession as a result. When I came back from military training as a transformed man, I was more appreciative of the rules and learned to implement my creativity within the structure of those rules while also implementing the knowledge of transition theory to place the changes I was experiencing into a logical and concise sequence.

3. How have the critical transitions I experienced transformed me as an educational leader? When I first began my career I cherished my independence and creative freedom in the classroom but after years of change and uncertainty, I transformed to an educator seeking belonging and consistency. Even after becoming a Social Studies teacher and teaching at Damcen high school for four years I continued to crave career stability and consistency. The reason this craving has continued was because each year I taught at Damcen high school the administrators and their leadership styles changed. In addition, to the constant administrative changes each year staff members were laid off and many colleagues who I have known for years had their jobs

discontinued. I never knew when I would be the next on the list of employees to be laid off or when I would encounter another administrator who did not agree with my teaching style. The result of these challenges added to a general lack of career security and stability for the past 8 out of fifteen years that I had been an urban educator.

I have transformed from desiring to teach freely and restriction based on my own knowledge and skill to desiring consistent leadership and direction above all else. The consistency I speak of is a consistency of policy, of leaders, of school mission and purpose. I desired consistency to such a degree that in 2015 I joined the U.S. Military because it represented the structure, consistency, and discipline that I have been craving for the last 8 years. Joining the military represented a major transformation and maturing of my mind state. Early in career, my mind state was that of a free spirited creative artist who did not want to be defined controlled or told what to do.

Now I am a more reserved person who thrives in an ordered system with clear demarcation of rewards and punishments based on clear and specific goal.

The transformative effect of joining the military was that I finally felt as if I belonged to something larger than myself. I was selected as a leader in every phase of my military training. I was honored as a distinguished graduate from my security force training school. While I was away from teaching for those 6 months I felt as if I belonged to an organization that was successful, honorable, and stable. This contrast sharply with my experiences in Damcen whereby I felt “isolated, like a drifter, with no real school to call my own.” July 25, 2012, 11:47 am. Not only did I feel alone and increasingly detached as a teacher in Damcen I also noticed that when I returned from military training that I was treated differently. When I would tell people that I taught in Damcen

school district I would usually hear comments such as sorry to hear that, or are you scared. Yet when people find out that I am a military member they thank me for serving the country and speak with me in a very dignified manner. The contrast is sharp between my teaching career and my emerging military career. The transformation is tangible. I have decided that the best way for me to fully actualize my potential as a human being and educator is to leave Damcen public school system and become full time active member of the United States Navy. There are still steps I need to take in order to make this transition become a reality. However, my 15 years of teaching in an urban district have taught me that I have to be an active agent in my own career transitions in order to feel actualized and renew myself to avoid burnout.

Leadership Reflection

My autoethnographic research and application of transition theory has allowed me to become more aware as an educational leader of the forces and factors influencing my transformation as an urban educator. I have become better equipped to navigate changes and therefore have become a conscious molder of my own transformation. This process has stimulated a renewed emphasis on continuing to educate myself in order to avoid burnout and feelings of being trapped in a rapidly changing environment while also increasing opportunities for continued growth and development both personally and professionally. This autoethnographic study has be a journey in which I have come to recognize that through years transitions in the Damcen school district the underlying theme was that I have craved to be a part of something larger then myself, to be a part of a team or organized movement while still maintaining my own individual capacity for self expression. Throughout my career, I have come to recognize that during periods of

transition, the times when I have not felt personally or professionally connected to the school community or greater mission I have faced the greatest battles with professional burnout.

This Autoethnography has forced me to deeply and at times painfully reflect upon the transitions I have encountered as an urban educator while still taking the position of an objective observer when engaged in the process of analyzing transitions. I have acted as the primary subject and primary researcher in this self-study articulated in the first person. This experience has allowed me to reflect on my experiences through emergent transitions that I have faced which other urban educators can relate to and learn from.

This autoethnographic study through transition and transformation have caused me to reflect upon three beliefs that I hold about leadership that have encouraged me to move forward beyond this study towards assisting other educators gain a greater understanding of how their career transitions transform them on personal and professional levels. The first belief I hold is that leadership should be principle centered. The second belief I hold about leadership is that building resonance greatly improves effectiveness, efficiency, positive social interaction, and the emotional climate within a given social context. The final belief I hold about leadership is that it should be flexible and able to be adapted to the social context in which it occurs.

The first belief I hold is that leadership should be principle centered. “Principles were the fundamental ideas of ancient education (Akbar, 1998, p.22)”. Covey (1991) claims that principles are like a compass, always pointing in the direction of true north. Covey says that when leaders follow correct principles they will never get lost, confused or fooled by conflicting voices or values. Covey goes on to state that:

“Principles are self-evident, self-validating natural laws that don’t change or shift. Principles apply at all times in all places. They surface in the form of values, ideas, norms and teachings that uplift, ennoble, fulfill and empower, and inspire people. The lesson of history is that to the degree people and civilizations have operated in harmony with correct principles, they have prospered... principles unlike values are objective and external. They operate in obedience to natural laws regardless of conditions” (p.19).

The second belief have come to value is that transformational leadership through transition require building resonance to improve effectiveness, efficiency, positive social interaction, and the emotional climate within a given social context. Building resonance is built by leaders starting as to with themselves and examining their motives, mission and passion which brings in the notion that, “in order to heal others we had to know ourselves and open ourselves. We needed to look at our values and beliefs, and at the differences between what we know and what we say and do” (Henze, Katz, Norte, Sather, Walker, 2002, p. 17). This is EI

I have learned through my career transitions that transformational leaders provide authentic leadership by first discovering their own sources of motivation and inspiration and diligently cultivating proven leadership skills that build resonance. Building resonance sets the foundation for my final belief about leadership.

The final belief that I have learned to value more through transition is that leaders should be flexible and able to adapt to the social context that transitions and transformations occur in which. Golmen, Royatzis and McKee (2002, p. 87) support this notion in a discussion of primal leadership when it is stated that:

The most resonant leaders go beyond a mechanical process of matching their styles to fit a checklist of situations; they are far more fluid. They scan people individually and in groups, reading cues in the moment to tip them to the right leadership need, and they adjust their style on a dime. This means they can apply not just the four sure-fire resonance-building styles, but also be pacesetters or even exhibit the positive side of the commanding style- with strong, urgent direction-as appropriate, But when they lead through these more risky styles, they do so with the requisite dose of self-discipline so that they avoid creating dissonance by acting with anger or impatience or by giving in to the impulse to attack character. As a result, these leaders not only get performance results, but also build commitment and enthusiasm in those they lead.

Heider's *Tao of Leadership* takes the notion of flexibility and adaptability in leadership a step further when it is claimed that:

The wise leader is like water. Consider water: it
Creatures without distinction and without judgment water freely and fearlessly goes deep beneath the surface of things; Water is fluid and responsive; water follows the law freely.

Consider the leader: the leader works in any setting without complaints, with any person or issue that comes on the floor; the leader acts so that all will benefit and serves well regardless of the rate of pay; the leader speaks simply and honestly and intervenes in order to shed light and create harmony.

From watching the movements of water, the leader has learned that action and timing is everything

Like water, the leader is yielding, because the leader does not push, the group does not resent or resist. (Heider, 1985, p.15)

I conclude this leadership reflection by stating that the beliefs that have been cultivated during this exploration of transition and transformation are transferrable to

numerous educational settings. I believe that principle centered leadership, focused on building resonance, and is flexible to changing circumstances are firm pillars will assist leaders guiding groups or learning communities through transition and transition towards the goal of increasing efficacy.

Recommendations

Autoethnographic study is an effective means of becoming totally immersed in a highly personalized reflective study (McCaskill, 2008). This study has significance when one considers that becoming a great teacher is a result of constant development, considerable reflective analysis to find ways to improve practice and adapt skill sets to changing times (Artzt, 2002). This dissertation reflects my journey of transition and transformation as a scholar and urban educator.

I recommend that educators actively engage in an analysis of their various career transitions consider autoethnography as a positive means to gain a deeper understanding of processes that occur naturally with or without their consent or knowledge. Reflecting on transitions through the autoethnographic lens affords educational scholars and practitioners the opportunity to demonstrate that there are common factors and strategies that not only empower educators but also to have their voices successfully heard and counted (Quinn, 2004.b).

It is also recommended that educators actively engage in reflective practices. Reflective practices give educators the ability to step back, gain awareness of one's own thoughts and emotions through an analytical lens. These reflective measures are important in any professional setting, however; this awareness is of particular importance in the highly interactive environment of a classroom where teachers are responsible for maintaining clean and clear relationships with students to promote positive learning.

Reflecting through transitions on the obstacles, opportunities, and interpretations derived from experiences have the capacity to strengthen educators practice and efficacy through increased awareness of phenomena occurring during the process of transition while heightening metacognitive skills (Bormotova, 2010). Each educator will encounter unique challenges while pursuing the goal of enhancing their pedagogical practice depending on the culture, climate, and student demographics in the school. Yet the evaluative introspective aspect of autoethnographic research facilitates a deeper understanding of the process of teaching during transition (Spurlock, 2010).

Educators will be wise to reflect on the fact that change and transformation constantly take place all around and within us whether we know it or not, whether we like it or not as “we are actually powerfully influenced by our surroundings, our immediate context, and the personalities of those around us” (Gladwell, p. 259. 2002). Heinder (1997) advises individuals to regard change as an aspect of reality whereby we must “learn to trust what is happening. If there is silence, let it grow; something will emerge. If there is a storm, let it rage; it will resolve into calm” (Heinder, p. 115, 1997). The transitions that I have experienced have all impacted the way I think about my career as an urban educator. These experiences have transformed my perceptions and practices in profound ways and can be applied to other scholars attempting to understand and reflect upon their own transitions and transformations.

Conclusion

Since my initial critical career transition when the Siggs Adult Education Center discounted in 2009, my underlying effort has been to become a part of something bigger than myself. Through numerous transitions I finally found something that I felt I could be

a part of that accepted my unique abilities and that was the US. Navy Reserve. When this study began I never considered becoming a member of the military. Yet here I am, now in the midst of another career transition as I prepare to be deployed to the country of Bahrain for one year. This pending military deployment will transform in personal and professional ways that I cannot yet imagine. Yet, the process of chronicling and examining transitions I have experienced up until this point that has given me the ability to recognize patterns in my behavior as I react to contextual and situational stimuli This ability allows me to make sounder, wiser, and more informed choices moving forward as I navigate through future situations, self, support and strategies that are a part of Schlossberg's (1995) transition framework.

This journey started when I felt stagnated and burnt-out in my career as an ESL teacher in 2009. While composing this autoethnography I have spoken honestly, reflected on my situation, my vices and virtues. When I began this study I initially thought it would be primarily about my transition between teaching ESL and Social Studies. However, this process has caused me to look back over my entire teaching career and the situations I was in when I got out ESL to 2009. This autoethnographic study also caused me look at my future trajectory and evolution as an educator, scholar, and military member.

The importance of this autoethnography of a teacher in transition relates to Fullan's (1991), observation that for greater meaning to be achieved, educators must understand occurrences from both the macrocosmic and microcosmic points of view. The importance microcosmic or individual point of view addresses concerns that large research efforts are often void of tangible meaning for individuals working daily within particular systems. Fullan (1991) proposes that the neglect of change phenomenology or

how individuals experience change related to intended and actual outcomes is “at the heart of the spectacular lack of success of most school reforms (p. 4). However, in the end this study has shown me that the perspective one takes during transition and also reflecting upon transitions greatly influences perceived success during and after transition.

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