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Teaching with the End in Mind: A Teacher's Life History as a Legacy of Educational Leaders

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A Teacher's Life History as a Legacy of Educational Leaders

by

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DEDICATION

To my wife and family:

You have never wavered in your belief in me.

I am grateful for your patience and love during this process.

To my friend and mentor, Craig Collins:

Your inspiration and words of encouragement have sustained me as I pursued this goal.

To Valerie J. Janesick:

Thank you for your keen insight in recognizing my passion for writing.

Your continued guidance and academic counsel have buoyed me and I am truly appreciative.

By the way, I know the drill: Keep Writing!

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to understand the life history of a female teacher by examining her beliefs about leaving a teaching legacy and by analyzing the narratives of four educational leaders as they reflect on the generative behaviors of this teacher. The research questions guiding this study were: (a) What elements of this teacher's life history contributed to creating a legacy of educational leaders? (b) What are the perspectives of the educational leaders impacted by this teacher as they relate to crafting an educational legacy? (c) How do the life stories of the teacher and educational leaders intersect to reveal narrative resonance – the ability of stories to interact in such a way that they influence other stories?

A review of relevant literature examined legacy creation or generativity. In addition, this study critiqued scholarship that extends narrative research approaches, specifically, fictional research texts. Since fictional research products can be catalysts for reflection and discussion, the final chapter of this study is presented as a fictionalized research-narrative that emerged from analysis of the data.

The data in this study included interview texts, participant artwork, reflections from the participant's journal, excerpts from the researcher's journal, and poetry written both by the participant and the researcher. The data were analyzed by using open and focused coding, employing the constant comparison process, and through artifact analysis. The data analysis of this qualitative study resulted in specific findings. First, the main participant demonstrated generative traits contributing to a legacy of educational leaders. Her compassion for all students, her passion for teaching/learning, her content knowledge, and her flexibility in the classroom all manifested themselves in the lives of the educational

leaders participating in this study. Additionally, the narratives from the participant

demonstrated narrative resonance, Stories, it seems, have their own legacies.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

"To craft a life is to engage in making art" (Cole & Knowles, 2001, p. 103).

Introduction

I was standing in the hallway glancing down at my class schedule as students moved past me at a brisk pace. It was the start of my senior year in high school and I had paused in front of Mrs. Brown's room. She was a teacher I had never had before, but due to the administration's refusal to allow me to have a second "teacher's aide" period, it was either Brown's humanities class or calculus –an easy decision for someone who recoils at the thought of doing math with letters. Brown's reputation preceded her: She was known as the hippie teacher who wrote on the floor.

A student brushed past me to go in and I noticed as the door swung open that painted on the inside of it was a full-size knight in armor, sword and all. The inside of her room was unlike any other high school classroom I had ever seen. There were murals on every wall: a *Wizard of Oz* scene to my right; what appeared to be a vignette from *Alice In Wonderland* on my left –the Cheshire cat with his huge smile; a larger-than-life portrait of King Arthur on horseback stared directly at me from the rear of the room. Various and sundry items dangled from the ceiling, intermittently moving to and fro as the door opened and closed. In one corner hung a model of the solar system made from colored Styrofoam balls. In another, a Calder-like mobile tittered nervously above the teacher's desk. Posters dotted the remaining un-painted wall space. Hokusai's *Great Wave* was taped up along the wide bank of windows and sharing space immediately above it was Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* –at the time of course,

I knew it only as the "naked lady and the clamshell painting." As of yet, there was no writing on the floor.

Nina Brown sat on the corner of her desk. Her bright frizzy red hair gave her a mischievous look and I watched her in animated conversation with a student. Abruptly she shooed the student towards a desk. "Okay, let's go," she began. "Everybody take a seat so we can get started." I plopped down in the closest desk available. She walked over and turned off the lights, the room now lit only by the muted sunlight coming from the windows. She motioned to a student in the back who turned on a slide projector and suddenly a brilliant image of the Sistine Chapel lit up the screen at the front of the room.

"Welcome to Humanities," she said from a dark corner. "It's the study of what it means to be human." I opened my spiral notebook to begin taking notes, not realizing how this teacher would forever change my life.

This story recounts the beginning of one teacher's influence on my life as an educator and as an educational leader. What bought this anecdote to the forefront of my memory, however, was a recent encounter with Nina during which she summed up how she felt about her teaching legacy: It's a gift given back and forth from one person to another," she said. It was then that I realized that the reciprocal "gift-giving" she was talking about actually resonated with me as well. And I was not alone in that thought. Though Nina teaches at a semi-rural small school in Central Florida, her effect on future educational leaders is profound. No fewer than five currently-practicing school-based administrators are former students of Nina's. As a doctoral candidate interested in educational narratives and how they function, my "inquiry button" had been pressed. I wondered what kind of teaching-life makes this type of contribution to the field of education. What could be learned about teaching and leadership by hearing Nina's stories? The idea for this study was borne from a pilot study I conducted in a qualitative research class. After the initial project, I found myself wanting to

document Nina's life history through narrative constructions that might reveal the connections between this teacher and a legacy of educational leaders. The pilot study primarily involved interviewing Nina. Her reflections and teacher-narratives served as the inspiration for the research questions at the heart of this current study.

In his book, *Conversations with Great Teachers* (2010), Bill Smoot acknowledges the existence of the "teaching triad," and notes that it consists of the "teacher, the student, and that which passes between them; and what passes between them both constitutes and depends upon a human relationship" (p. xii). I was struck by the idea that something in the teacher-student relationship has the potential to create a legacy of educational leadership – an intergenerational desire to impact the future by creating educators who would go on to become first, teachers, and then, school administrators or district-office personnel. This teaching-legacy offers researchers a unique opportunity to examine relational and narrative connections between a teacher and her students.

Leaving an Educational Legacy

It is not news that teachers place intrinsic value on developing close relationships with students (Spilt, Koomen, & Thijs, 2011). What is less understood is how those relationships develop into the mechanics of legacy-creation. Hunter (2007) describes the phenomenon of leaving a legacy as "the process of passing one's self through generations, creating continuity from the past through the present to the future" (p. 314). In an educational setting, this process can be examined through recording and analyzing teachers' life stories (Hunter & Rowles, 2005) in an effort to pinpoint narrative actions that contribute to the phenomenon itself. The use of teacher narratives to document one teacher's life affords a specific opportunity to add to the historical record in an effort to more fully understand how this one life contributes to other lives. It allows us to examine how legacies are created and transmitted.

Dingus (2008), in her study on African-American teaching families, noted how certain intergenerational factors contributed to professional socialization among the studied groups. This idea that teachers "learn" professional behaviors (and expectations, and pedagogical skills, and norms, etc.) can also be extended beyond biological families to include "teaching families": teachers and students whose relationships transcend traditional roles. In these situations, the teachers' ability to "transmit" a legacy of teaching is enhanced by teachers who extend their interest in the student beyond the subject-area content. This is most likely why Smith and Schmidt (2012) found that "a number of preservice teachers were motivated not only to pursue self-education, but to educate others, as well. In this, favorite teachers became responsible for inspiring future teachers" (p. 17). In other words, teachers have great influence in creating other teachers. This can also be seen in the field of educational leadership in which school administrators may also trace their inspiration, motivation, and pedagogical underpinnings to their former teachers.

Examining how teachers create a legacy of teaching is uniquely situated within the field of narrative analysis. As Uitto and Estola (2009) point out, storytelling through a reflective process can make visible themes that are not typically examined. By eliciting teacher narratives concerned with teacher-student interactions, by interviewing educational leaders who are recipients of this particular teacher's legacy, and by participating in the storytelling process via my own experiences, I documented how one teacher left a legacy for future educational leaders.

Life History Research in Education

The use of life history research in educational settings is becoming a valuable research project. The lives of many teachers simply go undocumented – creating an almost invisible segment of our society whose contributions are quickly forgotten in the scholarly literature. Recent work in graduate programs however have featured life history research focusing on

how teachers have worked with families (Cole, 2013), Black male teachers' experiences in inner-city schools (Pabon, 2013), and the professional development opportunities for art teachers (Noble, 2009). Each of these dissertations highlights a move towards the need for life history research in education. Teaching narratives should be valued for their ability to offer insights into a world that is seldom chronicled – an Oz-like peek behind the curtain of the science and art of education.

Following Denzin's (1989) definition that life history research consists of "an account of a life based on interviews and conversations" (p. 48), studies focusing on educational leaders document meaningful dialogue for the education community at large. As life history research is a subset of narrative research, its uses for educational research revolves around how teachers, students, parents, educational leaders, and policymakers all make sense of "education" through a storied account of its various practices. By trying to understand why teachers act in such a way (as told through their narratives), life history research transcends a desire to simply "mark the time" of a past educator (Caduri, 2013). Adding the examination of archival or documentary data to the process allows life history research to expand the experiences of the individual into the broader context of how we live our lives. Simply put, life history research honors the complexity of everyday life by celebrating the stories that connect us to each other.

This study examined the narratives of one teacher and four educational leaders. It is foregrounded in the belief that all narrative knowledge is temporal in nature and is subject to the whims of memory and introspection – stories don't always "mean" *now* what they "meant" *then*. By employing a life history approach to the study of how one teacher's legacy has been passed to numerous educational leaders, this study revealed a reflexive engagement between researcher and participants, offering a reciprocal approach to developing understanding – a co-construction of meaning with those involved in the study.

Following the tenets of qualitative research, I placed myself squarely in the research process, recognizing both my potential and limitations as a researcher. I acknowledge my relationship with the main participant of this study, Nina, as one of former teacher and student. I am also cognizant that the other participants in this research project (the practicing educational leaders) also share a connection with me as all having been taught by Nina. Life history research allows for collaboration between the research parties, especially as it recognizes that "data is developed in a reciprocal exchange" (Goodson & Gill, 2011, p. 44). Thus as a research instrument, I must make tacit my beliefs that understanding a life history comes from a mutual transaction between participant and researcher and that this understanding rests within these dialogic encounters. To do this, I must make clear my epistemological construct.

Theoretical Framework: Narrative Inquiry

Though narrative inquiry is often considered a discrete methodological approach to researching lived experiences (Cole & Knowles, 2001), it can also be viewed as an epistemological construction as well. Therefore I approached this study through a lens suggesting that human knowledge is contextualized and transmitted through storied representations of our lives: we "know" about our world through the narratives we hear, live, and tell. Jerome Bruner's classic text, *Life as Narrative* (1987), elevates the epistemological nature of narratives, noting, "eventually the culturally shaped cognitive and linguistic processes that guide the self-telling of life narratives achieve the power to structure perceptual experience, to organize memory, to segment and purpose-build the very 'events' of a life" (p. 694). We not only are story*tellers*, but we are story-*livers* as well. A narrative epistemology acknowledges the connection between a "storied" self and a perceived "real" self. It suggests the two are intertwined components of identity (and therefore knowledge) creation.

Sara Worth (unpublished paper, 2005) explicates this very idea when she states, "We explain our lived experiences in terms of plots, and more often than not, those plot structures produce the most sensible statements and explanations of our experience and beliefs." Her assertion is that we come to knowledge through narrative experiences. Furthermore, she offers a distinction between types of knowledge, noting that while we may know *facts* about something, knowing *what the experience is like* is best communicated through storytelling. This idea celebrates the contribution of a narrative epistemological framework: it adds contextual understanding to our knowledge-making processes. It does this by adding the "flesh" of story to the "bones" of our life-facts, combining them into what we claim as our experiential realties.

Narrative inquiry offers peculiar insight into the lived experiences of a life; it is a way of knowing contingent upon thinking with and through stories. Therefore, I approached this study of a teacher's lived experiences through a specific theoretical framework that assumes "narratives *are* our way of knowing" (Goodall, 2008, p. 15). This approach to knowledge-construction also meshes with the idea that a narrative epistemology creates different ways of ascribing meaning to our experiences. Therefore this research project probed how these pathways came to define the life of a teacher and the lives of the educational leaders she has influenced.

Narrative inquiry narrows the focus of the study to how the participants' *narratives* facilitate or "construct/interpret" their meaning-making processes. It does this by recognizing that the storying of our lives becomes the epistemological center of living itself. Eakin (1999) argues that our narratives *are* our identities, positing that narratives aren't simply the method we use to express ourselves, but that they actually come to form our very notion of our identities. As Gregory (2009) articulates in his text, *Shaped By Stories*, "the most powerful and comprehensive strategy that human beings possess for conducting holistic

inquiry into life is narrative" (p. 33). Narratives, then, become both vehicles *of* analysis and vehicles *for* analysis – each with the intent of fostering meaning-making. This current research project demonstrated that the teacher and those influenced by her legacy were indeed "shaped by stories" and that leaving a legacy is one narrative thread within those stories.

Purpose

The purpose of the study was to understand the life history of a female teacher by examining the narratives, reflexive writings, and aesthetic creations that constituted her beliefs about leaving a teaching legacy. Life history research provides a method of "understanding the relationship, the complex interaction, between life and context, self and place" (Cole & Knowles, 2001, p. 11). This study examined the narratives of one teacher as she recounted stories that alluded to creating not only a legacy of future educators, but also future educational leaders as well. The research also includes the narratives of these educational leaders as they too reflect on how their teacher instilled this legacy in them.

Janesick (2008) notes that documenting an individual life can serve a social justice purpose as well – oral (and life) histories often validate the worth of people once marginalized by society. Instead of only being concerned with "elite participants," life history research in the postmodern era is inclusive of ethnic minorities, indigenous peoples, children, and women. This study celebrated and examined how one woman's teaching, elevated to an art form, reverberated through her students' lives in such a fashion as to inspire them to become first, teachers, and then, school-based administrators. The purpose, therefore, of this research was to give voice to her legacy.

Exploratory Questions

The exploratory questions guiding this study were:

1. What elements of this teacher's life history contributed to creating a legacy of educational leaders?

2. What were the perspectives of the educational leaders impacted by this teacher as they related to crafting an educational legacy?

3. How did the life stories of the teacher and educational leaders intersect to reveal *narrative resonance* –the ability of stories to resonate in such a way that they influence other stories?

Research Design: Life History Research Methods

Life history research is a valuable method for examining how people make sense of their lives. Though essentially a narrative approach to research, life history research is distinct in that the narratives it solicits are life stories. Life stories constitute the essential components people use to re-construct and re-member their experiences in an effort to develop a comprehensive understanding of their lives as a whole. Life history research, therefore, is uniquely suited to place a person's occupational recollections into a social and historical context. The collection and analysis of life stories positions life history research as a method to create deeply nuanced descriptions and complex examinations of the narratives that constitute a "working life."

I follow Janesick's recognition that life history research follows similar tenets as oral history research (2010). Therefore this study enlisted a variety of qualitative research techniques to arrive at a "sense of history" of the participant (Janesick, 2010). Following the initial interviews with the primary participant, I analyzed the transcript for emergent themes or areas for further discussion in subsequent interviews. The two follow-up interviews with this participant allowed for more in-depth exploration of themes/issues and fostered new conversations surrounding recently-discovered themes/ideas from journal entries. Thus the

primary (but not sole) method of data collection was the recording, transcription, and analysis of oral interviews.

Additionally, in an effort to collect more nuanced data, I asked the primary participant to keep a reflective journal to reflect on issues or narratives that came to mind related to the phenomenon of leaving a teaching legacy. Cole and Knowles (2001) note the importance of collecting and examining *artifacts* about a person's life. The reflective journal serves as such an artifact and provided supplemental information that aided in the inquiry process. By having the participant reflect on her life story and its ancillary narratives, the journal served as a bridge between a given narrative and its personal meaning for the participant.

I also kept a researcher reflective journal during the lifespan of the study. Janesick (2014) reiterates the importance such an artifact provides to an oral history project: "The researcher reflective journal has proven to be an effective tool for understanding the processes of research more fully, as well as the experiences, mindsets, biases, and emotional states of the researcher" (p. 301). Therefore by reflecting on my own position within the research context, I brought to the forefront all of the respective elements of being the research instrument. This process added another layer to the "thick descriptions" that constitute critical narrative research.

Another point of data collection included the participant's aesthetic artifacts that relate to the themes/topic of the study. These materials included artistic representations such as poetry or visual artwork. Poetry, specifically, served as a valuable research tool as it presented collaboration between the life stories (personal narratives) and aesthetic embodiments of those stories. It does so because poetry "allows a researcher and participant to collaborate in the distillation of meaning pulled from an interview text" (Burdick, 2011, p. 15). This idea that meaning can be further illuminated through poetry also supports the

supposition that the readers of the study may gain particular insights from the data that traditional research texts may fail to elicit.

This study also included interviews with corollary participants – the educational leaders impacted by the primary participant's teaching(s). As these administrators reminisced, narrated, and re-created their interactions with their teacher, the recollected accounts aided their perception of how the teacher's legacy has been continued though their own professional practices (Goodson & Choi, 2008). In addition, this study examined the concept of "narrative resonance" – the interaction and influence that one's life stories have on life stories of others (see Figure 1). I analyzed Nina's narratives and the narratives of the
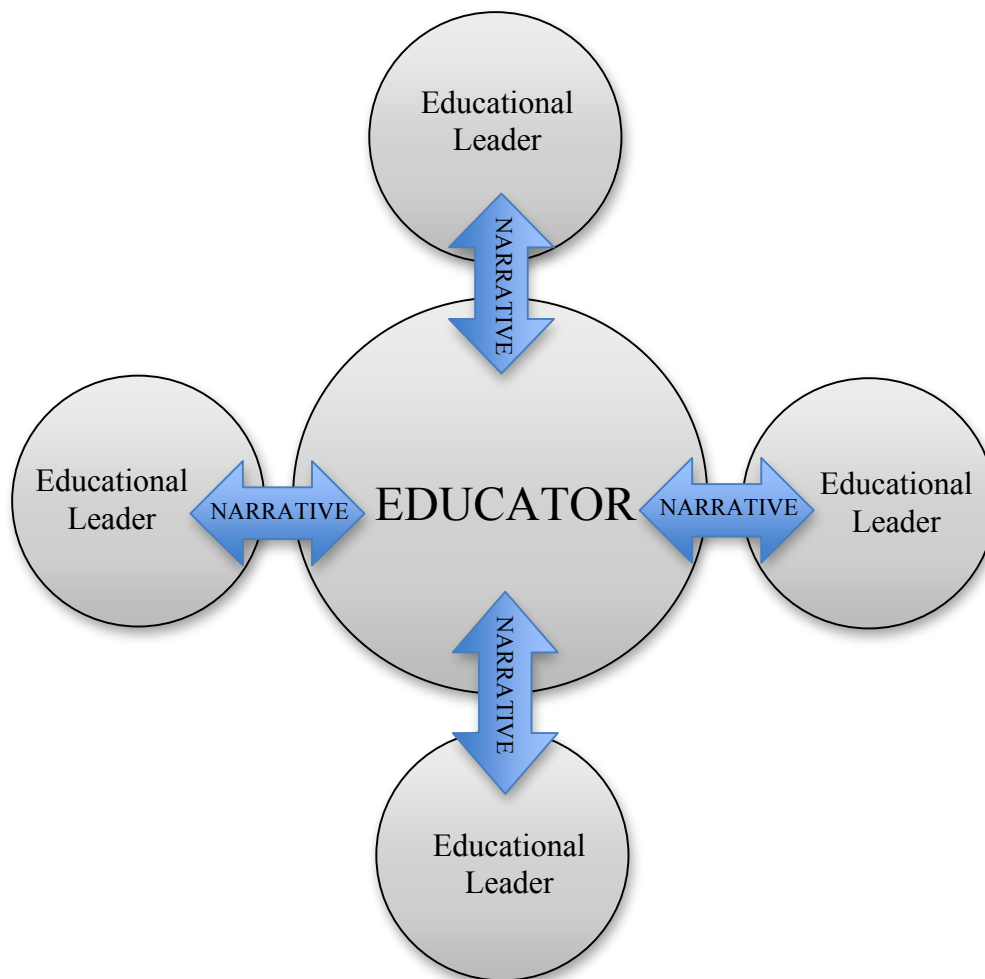
Figure 1. Narrative resonance between tellers and listeners.

educational leaders to make explicit the narrative "flow" between all of the participants. This narrative resonance exemplifies the reciprocal nature of storytelling –how stories beget stories.

In summary, the research data from this project included transcriptions of oral interviews with the primary participant as well as the educational leaders impacted by this teacher. The data also consisted of both participant and researcher-reflective journals – each chronicling the research process as well as serving as a repository for narrative exploration of particular topics. Distinguishing life history research from strictly narrative research (which relies primarily on stories alone), other data existed in the form of participant and researcher-created aesthetic representations of such abstractions as: legacy, teaching, a calling, etc. These included primarily text-based work such as poetry and visual artwork. Whatever the given medium, this arts-informed research method brought "together the systematic and rigorous qualities of scientific inquiry with the artistic and imaginative qualities of the arts" (Cole & Knowles, 2001, p. 10). Thus, the aesthetic representations or interpretations of the data also served an important interpretive function in the research process. They exposed/validated another facet of our multidimensional lives – lives that cannot be adequately (or even cursorily) captured solely through traditional research approaches. Life history research, however, honors those multiple dimensions (see Table 1).

Table 1.

Data Sources and Research Presentation Methods

Research Material	Type	Creator
Participant Interviews	Interviews	Participant
Corollary Participants Interviews	Interviews	Corollary Participants
Reflective Journal	Artifact	Participant
Researcher Reflective Journal	Artifact	Researcher
Poetry / Visual Art	Artifact	Participant
Constructed Life History Narrative	Research Text	Researcher
Fictional Work	Research Text	Researcher

The conclusion of the study resulted in a synthesis of the emergent themes or concepts emerging from the life history interviews and other data. It also includes an innovative approach to presenting a research text: a fictional narrative that illuminated and expanded upon the themes present in the acquired data. The use of fiction to communicate research findings is a novel method for eliciting resonance and understanding from readers of the research text. It offers yet another opportunity for knowledge to be transmitted through the process of inquiry. More of the specifics of the research process will be articulated in Chapter 3 of this proposal.

Importance of the Study

This study sought to contribute to the literature on the use of life history research in the field of educational leadership. Acknowledging Janesick's (2010) contention that we collect life (oral) histories "to understand the lives of those whom we interview in order to understand ourselves and our worlds," (p. 6), I maintain that the stories/experiences I collected throughout this study will serve as an "educative activity" (p. 16) for the reader. It situated ordinary people within an historical context and connected their intentions to a larger life-world. Simply put, telling the stories of this teacher and the corresponding educational leaders highlighted how educational leaders develop foundational approaches to their discipline – how a teacher's legacy is transmitted to future school-based administrators who are creating legacies of their own.

This study should also add to the body of scholarly research in arts-based educational research. It provides this contribution in two distinct arts-based research fields: the development of poetic inquiry for social science research and the use of fiction as a research product. As the teacher-participant is an artist herself (both as a poet and visual artist) and because she approaches the craft of teaching as an art form as well, it is appropriate that the research methods and research product demonstrated an aesthetic approach as well.

Faulkner (2007) provides a concise summary of the uses of poetry as a research mechanism, noting that it offers a

'special language,' a language that researchers want to access when they feel that other modes of representation, such as prose, will not capture what they desire to show about their work and research participants when they wish to explore knowledge claims and write with more engagement and to reach more diverse audiences (p. 219).

This study expands the use of poetic inquiry by examining the participant's poetry in an effort to express her ideas of an educational legacy. The poetry also worked to more effectively communicate her beliefs on pedagogy and to demonstrate how poetry can also serve an epistemological function.

Though the use of fiction as a research product has gained some acceptance (Leavy, 2013), there is still considerable debate about the "authenticity and veracity" of such research practices. Since fictional stories continue to be prime catalysts for reflection and evocative discussion, their use by educational researchers provides another method for examining experiences and phenomena important to the field of education. While fictional research-texts are a far cry from the purported "objective" products of quantitative research, they bear considerable attention as research products because "through the process of writing stories we are afforded the opportunity to reshape meaning, helping us to clarify and deepen understanding" (Jones, 2011, p. 635). My hope is that this study has added to the growing body of examples of using fictional narratives to communicate research findings.

Limitations

This study is limited with the following concerns being noted:

1. The recall of the respective life narratives in this study is inherently selective in nature and was ultimately dependent on the participants for authenticity and veracity. Though guided research questions were intended to direct the general subject of the

narratives (how a legacy of educational leadership is transmitted), the researcher was beholden to the stories as they were told, recognizing that the rhizomatic tendency of storytelling did not always follow the research plan as first circumscribed in the original research proposal.

2. As in all qualitative research, the researcher is the research instrument. As such, the data collection, analysis, and research product in this study were all influenced by the researcher's unique position as a former student of the primary participant and by the researcher's current status as an educational leader. My positionality is portrayed transparently throughout the research process in an effort to allow the reader an "open window" to the data collection, analysis, and creation of the research text itself.

3. Life history work produces data that is constrained by the researcher's specific subjectivity in crafting the guided interview questions and the participants' responses are likewise influenced by their own subjective sense-making of their professional experiences (Suzuki, Ahluwalia, Arora, & Mattis, 2007). This study, therefore, was concerned with specific stories of unique individuals and no attempt was made to generalize the findings of this research to any larger (or different) populations.

4. All life history work is limited. This study purported to offer insight into specific narratives of a teacher and the narratives of educational leaders who she influenced. It is but a brief glimpse into the overall professional experiences of the teacher and the school-based administrators participating in this project.

Definition of Terms

The following terms were used throughout this study.

Legacy

A conspicuous contribution to the future that involves the process of leaving something behind. A legacy is intimately tied up with our life story and with shaping the manner in which we are to be remembered: it is a mechanism for transmitting a resilient and enduring image of what we stood for (Hunter & Rowles, 2005).

Life History Research

An approach to social science inquiry that uses personal narratives *and* artifacts from a participant's life-world in an effort to gain insight into the broader human condition by "coming to know and understand the experiences of other humans" (Cole and Knowles, 2001, p. 11).

Narative Inquiry

A social science research approach that examines stories to reveal truths about human experiences (Clandinin, 2013).

Teaching Legacy

Concrete actions that teachers use to transmit idea of creating future generations of educators and educational leaders.

Conclusion and Organization of the Dissertation

This chapter began with a vignette that sparked my interest in capturing segments of the life history of particularly influential teacher. Nina has created a legacy of education, and specifically, educational leadership as evidenced by a number of former students who are now in administrative positions within schools or school systems. The examination of this phenomenon is appropriately situated for a study using life history research methods. By soliciting experiential narratives from the participants and by examining additional research

data such as aesthetic artifacts and reflexive journals, a more nuanced understanding of how Nina has crafted the lives of her students into educational leaders is made clearer.

The next chapter provides a critical assessment of current and historically significant literature surrounding the contents of this study. It offers a synthesis and a critique of literature related to legacy-creation, life history research in education, and the use of non-traditional research techniques such as poetic inquiry and the use of fiction as research texts. This study sought to provide a meaningful contribution to each of these respective fields of research. The review of literature is the primary mechanism necessary to foreground the nature of the present study and serves as the launching pad for further research.

The third chapter in this study outlines the research design of this study. It provides the specific methodological approaches used in this life history research, ranging from guided interviews and member checks to using specific arts-based research techniques. This section of the study also describes the sequence involved in the research procedures used in this study. The fourth chapter consists of the life history of Nina Brown, culled from interviews and artifacts, this chapter attempts to provide a thick, rich description of the teaching-life of this veteran educator. The penultimate chapter offers analysis of the research data to examine it for themes of generativity found in Nina's teaching and the impact her teaching has had on four practicing administrators (the author included). The final chapter is a work of derivative fiction – a short story carved from the life of Nina to offer yet another presentation of research findings. Though fictional, the story situated the life-world of the main participant in such a manner as to capture a slice of her lived experiences.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This study documented the life history of a teacher and examined her legacy of creating educational leaders. This particular chapter probes the extant literature relevant to the act of legacy-creation by educators in addition to providing a critical analysis of research related to the appropriate methodology used in this study. The concept of "leaving a legacy" pervades much of human experience. The desire to pass something on to future generations can be found in numerous human activities: parenting, mentoring, teaching to name just a few. This chapter reviews research that has examined the purposes and methods behind legacy creation. Through the course of this review of the literature, I offer a connection between the research on legacy transmission and how research approaches found in life history studies constitute a viable way to examine an educator's life.

Life history research is a developing discipline within the field of educational research as it seeks to problematize current research initiatives that promote the "standardization" of teaching practices. Life history methods accomplish this by refusing to succumb to positivist assumptions about education and instead by focusing on the relational aspects of the teaching act. In essence, life history research celebrates the narratives of educational experiences in all their complexity and humanity. This approach to research also serves to give voice to historically-marginalized peoples – in this particular study, a female teacher – in an attempt to place their subjective experiences in the foreground of scholarly examination. Therefore, life history research is a particularly appropriate method for helping us "make sense" of the education world (Janesick, 2010).

I conclude this chapter with a detailed critique of how an extension of narrative research approaches can benefit the disciplines of both narrative inquiry and educational leadership. I contend that the use of aesthetic representations of scholarly studies offer readers yet another way of making meaning from research findings. This component of my literature review includes an examination of an arts-based research approach, specifically the creation of fictional research texts, in an effort to position this method as beneficial to developing more nuanced understandings of educational research initiatives.

Leaving a Legacy: Relating the Past to the Future

Hunter and Rowles (2005) define leaving a legacy as an attempt at achieving a degree of immortality. In an effort to feel that life is purposeful, we engage in intentional behaviors to be remembered after we die. These behaviors or actions therefore serve as historical time-markers. Inherent in this process is an attempt at developing a sense of continuity – a desire to pass on something of ourselves to future generations. Leaving a legacy, then, is an individual act aimed at a very communal goal: creating meaning for our lives by passing on our beliefs and values to those who come behind us (Hunter, 2007). It becomes a defining feature in those who seek to create an identity based on making connections from the past to the present and then on to the future. The act of leaving a legacy is also often referred to as the intent to create a "lasting impression" (Newton, Herr, Pollack, & McAdams, 2014, p. 61). It is acting with the future in mind.

The concern with leaving a legacy is foregrounded on the issue of permanence versus impermanence. As Zacher, Rosing, and Frese (2011) note, "Individuals with high legacy beliefs think that their past and present actions will have a significant and positive impact in the future and that they will be remembered by other people for a long time after they die" (p. 44). Legacy beliefs are strong indicators of a person's desire to make a lasting impression on her/his life-world. These beliefs influence not only how people view their past

experiences, but also how their present actions come to have an intentional impact on the future. The idea of transmitting these beliefs through one's life-story will be examined later in this paper, however, it must be noted here that legacy beliefs adhere to a narrative arc – they are best understood through a storied expression. These beliefs are also intertwined with the notion of identity.

The extent that a person desires to leave a legacy is largely a function of the creation and promulgation of selfhood. When people relate their life-stories, those who demonstrate a great desire to leave a legacy are essentially concerned with a personal mission (extending the self) while at the same time being cognizant of the need for assisting others (doing things to benefit future generations). Newton, Herr, Pollack, and McAdams (2014) describe this as the intersection of agency and communion. A person's personal desire to be remembered (agency) is bolstered by a simultaneous hope to impact the future in a positive way (communion). Leaving a legacy, therefore, can be viewed as an individual endeavor with communal benefits. For many, it becomes an integral part of how they create identity; it is both self-serving and forward-thinking – a seeming dichotomy of existence.

A Brief Examination of the History of Research on Leaving a Legacy

Scholarship investigating the notion of leaving a legacy is by no means a new or novel discipline. In a landmark text, *Childhood and Society* (1950), Erik Erikson described the stages of psychosocial development one of which was the stage of "generativity." He defined generativity as "primarily the concern in establishing and guiding the next generation" (Erikson 1950, p. 267). Although Erikson located this "stage" in midlife, the idea was that at some point in a person's psychosocial development, she begins to develop a desire to do something meaningful for those coming behind her. This is typically expressed through specific contact with a younger generation (child raising, teaching, mentoring), but can also be found

through a variety of family and work roles, friendships, volunteerism and community
activity, and through a wide range of venues wherein men and women find
opportunities to make productive and meaningful contributions to society—
contributions that hold the promise of promoting, directly or indirectly, the survival,
well-being, and/or flourishing of future generations. (McAdams, 2013, p. 192)

Erikson's early work therefore connected the concept of leaving a legacy with the construct
of generativity. Current research tends to use the terms interchangeably, capitalizing on the
notion of a person choosing to impact the next *generation*.

It is important to note that Erikson's focus was on how generativity was related to
benefitting the future (others). Another prominent scholar, John Kotre, adds to that
description with a counter-suggestion that generativity is also bolstered by a distinct interest
in preserving the self – proposing a somewhat self-serving depiction of the desire to leave a
legacy. This is the previously-referenced "agentic" component of generativity. Kotre's (1984)
research explores the idea that generativity "embodies "a desire to invest one's substance in
forms of life and work that will outlive the self" (p. 10). His work focused on the desire to
create a type of "immortality" through intentional acts. Rather than being totally focused on
how to serve the future through generative acts, Kotre's research indicated a duality behind
wanting to leave a legacy. On the one hand there is the hope to improve or benefit future
generations, but on the other hand there is a somewhat selfish desire to not be forgotten.
Newton, et al. (2014) describe this as the "narcissistic" side of generativity. It is the self-
focused aspect of generativity (as opposed to the other-focused aspect described by Erikson).

Recent scholarship in the field of generativity studies is perhaps best summarized
through the work of Dan McAdams. By surveying the history of the field he succinctly defines
generativity as

a biological drive to reproduce oneself, an instinctual need to care for and be needed

by others, a philosophical urge for transcendence and symbolic immortality, a

developmental sign of maturity and mental health in adulthood, and a social demand

to create a productive niche in society. (2014, p. 193)

This description of generativity allows for a precise understanding of how leaving a legacy is

an essential component of many people's adult lives. It becomes, for many, the very purpose

for why they behave and act in a certain manner. Working with de St. Aubin (1992), the

authors proposed various components of generative development. One of the components of

their generativity model is *narration*. I explore this more in a section below, but suffice it to

say that narrating one's attempts at behaving generatively is a crucial aspect to "living

autobiographically" as the scholar, Paul John Eakin describes it (2008). This theoretical model

of generativity has allowed for considerable research opportunities to examine the process of

leaving a legacy.

　　　Recent research in the field of generativity has focused on the motivational aspects of

the desire to leave a legacy. Newton et al. (2014) have examined how the combination of

narcissism and generativity work together to inspire people to work towards leaving a legacy.

The study also sought to see if a relationship existed between these motivational factors,

with the ensuing results indicating that a connection between the two factors does exist.

Other research in the field of aging studies (Hunter & Rowles, 2005; Jones & McAdams, 2013;

Schoklitsch &Baumann, 2011) has also examined how older adults have come to define

generativity and its impact on their lives. For the purpose of this current study, however,

perhaps the most significant research examines the correlation between generativity and

narration. In other words, these studies look closely at how a legacy is transmitted through

storied representations.

The Narrative Element of Legacy Transmission

The transmission of a legacy is inherently connected to life-stories (Hunter & Rowles, 2005). How we communicate our unity and purpose in life is linked with our personal narratives. Since we continually edit and revise our life stories, our legacies become synonymous with how we construct our identities – it is our narrative way of determining how we will be remembered. McAdams (2013) lays bare his assessment of his considerable research initiatives by attributing an understanding of the generative process squarely to the role of narrative constructions,

> Despite the fact that psychologists know little, generative adults themselves have their own ideas about how they developed their strong commitments to promoting the well-being of future generations. Their own lay theories and developmental suppositions may often be found in the *stories* [emphasis added] generative adults compose to make sense of their lives. (p. 200)

The narrative capacity to create order and sense of our generative selves is fundamental to creating and transmitting our notions of what it means to leave a legacy. Thus it is the creation of a narrative identity – a desire to create meaning and purpose through storied constructions – that facilitates an understanding of our generative selves (Bruner, 1986; McAdams & Pals, 2006; McLean, Pasupathi, & Pals, 2007). Leaving a legacy, it would seem, is bound up in how we story our lives.

Research on generativity is predominantly predicated upon the idea of narrative identity. In their study on the correlation between narcissism and generativity, Newton et al. (2013) examined the "narrative expressions of lasting impressions" (p. 65) of the study's participants. It was the *stories* told by the volunteers that formed the basis for the research act. Hunter and Rowles (2005) succinctly posit the results of their research on legacy studies among older adult populations,

The process of leaving something behind, a legacy, is intimately tied up with our life story and with shaping the manner in which we are to be remembered: it is a mechanism for transmitting a resilient and enduring image of what we stood for. (p. 328)

This approach to studying generativity hinges on the manifestation and transmission of a "life story." By anchoring a present-day reflection in the context of a past and a future, a narrative approach to life supports the human desire to achieve coherence and meaning from experiences. Life stories have a unique ability to allow us to self-edit past and future events so these happenings are more understandable (and therefore transferrable) to both others and ourselves.

One of the more significant contributions to the literature related to examining generativity through a narrative construct again comes from McAdams. His "Life Story Interview" (2008) protocol is a carefully constructed script designed to elicit a narrative understanding of generative behaviors. Simply put, its design encourages the respondent to craft a legacy story. He begins the protocol with a brief introduction stating the purpose for using the instrument. It is, according to him, used to "collect people's life stories in order to understand the different ways in which people in our society and in others live their lives and the different ways in which they understand who they are." He goes on to point out it is not being used as a tool for a "clinical" diagnosis. The construct of the Life Story Interview protocol is perhaps its most useful aspect for narrative (and generative) researchers.

The instrument consists of seven main components: Life Chapters, Key Scenes in the Life Story, Future Script, Challenges, Personal Ideology, Life Theme, and Reflection. Central to the usefulness of this mechanism for constructing legacy narratives is the Life Chapters section. In this part, respondents are asked to reflect on their lives as a series of "chapters," imagining their lives with a narrative arc like that of a story. Each chapter requires a "title"

and a brief description of that life-section is expected. The instrument then asks participants to zero in on Key Scenes in these life-chapters. This is accomplished by looking for specific "points" in a life narrative. These include a high point, a low point, a turning point, and is followed by having respondents describe a positive childhood memory, a negative childhood memory, a vivid adult memory, and a religious, spiritual, or mystical experience. By forcing participants to think categorically about their life experiences, this instrument is helping them to think narratively.

The Life Story Interview protocol provides researchers with a functional tool for gathering narrative data about participants' lives. Jones and McAdams (2013) used a variation of this instrument in their recent study evaluating how older adults develop generative habits later in life. Newton et al. (2013) applied questions from the Future Script section of the instrument while researching the connection between narcissism and generative behavior. Cole (2013) also used this protocol in her dissertation that examined the life histories of teachers and how they approach working with their students' families. The instrument has also been used in identity research (de St. Aubin, Wandrei, Skerven, & Coppolillo, 2006) and in the study of the lives of academics to document their creative work (McAdams & Logan, 2006). In each case, the Life Story Interview guide allowed participants to construct narrative reflections that lent themselves to a study of generativity.

The Transmission of Educational Legacies

With its emphasis on relational dynamics and an understanding of the often delayed "fruits" of the teaching act, education is a profession primed for the study of how legacies are created and transmitted. Smoot (2010) rightly characterizes teaching as a profession in which practitioners "know that each moment is part of a larger journey, a journey drawing from the deep past and stretching far into a future largely unknown. Teaching is an act of faith in the future" (p. xiv). Education, then, can be seen as fertile ground for the creation of

legacies as it is centrally concerned with connecting the past, present, and future through relational and pedagogical acts. Therefore it is noteworthy that scholarship does exist to document the legacy of a particular educator or educational leader.

An early and important contribution to the literature was the text, *Stories Lives Tell: Narratives and Dialogue in Education* (1991). This book, edited by Carol Witherell and Nel Noddings, features a series of contributions from teachers (and researchers) about teaching. Though not entirely focused on how educational legacies are formed and passed on, the book does highlight how memories (narratives) contribute to later development (moral, pedagogical, etc.). Chapters in the book specifically address the role of narrative in education and highlight the scholarly importance of using storytelling as a method of transmitting educational legacies. Recent examples of this genre of legacy scholarship include the chronicle of a pioneering African American physical education teacher (Cazers & Curtner-Smith, 2013), a principal purposefully engaged in high school reform (Scribner & Crow, 2012), and a large study that asked respondents to recall their "favorite" and their "most effective" teachers (Breault, 2013). Though this scholarship does serve to document individual legacies, there is a paucity of research that examines whether and how educators or educational leaders approach their craft with an intention towards generativity. In essence, there are few examples of using a life history approach to document how a particular teacher attempted to leave a legacy – to chronicle her or his generative efforts.

Another area of legacy-research in education simply examines the impact of leaving a legacy in general. This scholarship is typically focused on how legacies are a component of the educational process. Hargreaves (2005) provides a salient example of this type of research in his work that analyzes "sustainable leadership." He notes that sustainable leadership connects the actions of "leaders who went before and the ones who will take up their *legacy* [emphasis added]." Though he recognizes the importance of a legacy to developing leadership

traits, he does not delve into the nuances of legacy-leaving. Stronge, Richard, and Catano (2008) also acknowledge an understanding of legacy as integral to school leadership, stating, "hiring, supporting, and retaining the best teachers . . . is the foundation of the principal's legacy on teaching and learning" (p. 37). However, they too neglect to examine the intricacies of generativity in the role of the educational leader, focusing instead on broad prescriptions for becoming an "effective principal."

What is needed in the study of educational generativity, therefore, are studies designed to look specifically at how educators or educational leaders view themselves as legacy-creators. One such study is the 2012 project by Bullough and Hall-Kenyon. The researchers examined the notions of hope, a sense of calling, and a commitment to teach in a group of Nevada educators. One theme to emerge from their work is that teachers who report a strong sense of calling and commitment also demonstrate a keen sense of generativity – they purposefully act (teach) in a certain way to impact the future. Their educative practices are designed to leave a legacy. Though this work does shed light on how generative behaviors are present in certain teachers, there are very few studies of a similar nature. This is where the contributions of life history research can be most beneficent to the cause of studying legacy behaviors in teachers.

Life History Research in the Social Sciences

The importance of the self-narrated life story to social science research has become an established tradition of inquiry. The use of personal narratives gained considerable notoriety through the efforts of the Chicago tradition of sociological research in the early 1920s. This early research examined immigrants' experiences by cataloguing their biographies or life histories (Suarez-Ortega, 2012). This research approach is centered on the idea that scientific knowledge is gained by accessing the participants' realities – in all of their contexuality and cultural milieus – through direct experience with the participants'

understanding of their life-worlds. In sum, a life-history inquiry recognizes the subjectivity of the participant *and* the researcher in the research act.

Anthropology has long used the narrative approach of the life history as evident in the early important work, Thomas' and Znaniecki's (1918-20[1958]) *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*. This influential text established a biographical approach to understanding a culture, which directly countered existing modes of inquiry that positioned the researcher as the determinant of what constituted research data. Another early yet important work was Paul Radin's 1926 work, *Crashing Thunder*. The book was the result of Radin's time spent with the Winnebago tribe and is significant in that it was the first major text to tell one person's story (Crashing Thunder) as opposed to a communal narrative and it also offered no analysis, rather it focused on the collection and reporting of data. Life history research, however, is not limited to the field of anthropology alone nor have the techniques used in the field remained stagnant.

Cole and Knowles (2001) document a variety of disciplines using this approach: aging and gerontology, education, nursing, psychiatry, sociocultural studies, to name a few. Janesick (2010) in her historical overview of oral history (an overlapping "sibling" of life history research) projects likewise notes specific shifts in the progression of the discipline. She characterizes the "Traditionalist Era" as being "marked by the social science of the time" (p. 8) and featuring the storyteller as the main creator of the narrative. This time period also focuses the research lens primarily on the elite or powerful. The next epoch, the "Reconceptualist Era" demonstrates a shift towards crafting theoretical positions for interview interpretation and begins to recognize the researcher's role in crafting the stories of the participants. Finally, she catalogues the "Postmodern Era" as one that is characterized by both researcher and participant "taking active roles in the project" (p. 10). The "Postmodern Era" of oral history research also becomes inclusive of traditionally marginalized

people; the research is democratic in its attempt to view any story as worthy of documentation. Technology, she acknowledges, has allowed ordinary people to participate in social science research. It has created space for the celebration and honor of all lived experiences.

Life history research, therefore, has grown into a valid and valuable methodological tool for the qualitative researcher's toolkit. Whether documenting the family life of a person growing up in substandard housing in a Latin American city (Lewis, 1961) or its chronicling the life of three art teachers in the Southern United States (Noble, 2009), life history is a provocative approach to social science inquiry. With such a variety of fields of research using life history, it is necessary, then, to carefully examine what constitutes life history research. How has life history research come to be defined?

Defining Life History Research

Belonging to the larger genre of narrative research (The specifics of narrative approaches to life history will be examined below.), life history research has methodological and epistemological commonalities with various other genres of life writing: autoethnography, autobiography, oral history, life story, and testimonio to name just a few (Janesick, 2010; Tierney & Clemens, 2012). The broad scope of the use of life history as a research method offers diverse examples of the power of individual narratives in social science inquiry. Samuel (2009) offers a concise description of the life history researcher as one who structures "the process of telling stories to yield rich, in-depth details about the specific life experiences, memories, and interpretations that the individuals [in the study] produce" (p. 4). Life history research situates its purposes in using these experiences, memories, and interpretations in an effort to reconstruct whole or partial aspects of people's lives in an effort to gain a substantive over-time perspective. It is a research method that not

only allows for the researcher to gain understanding of an individual's life, but also how that individual's life interacted with the lives of those around her.

Tierney and Clemens (2012) have crafted a helpful set of guidelines to assist in clarifying the definition of a life history. By synthesizing the work of Langness (1965), Crapanzano (2009), and Frank (1996), the authors describe, what they term as "three well-known articulations of the method" (p. 267). They begin by asserting that life history is a comprehensive account of a person's life experiences that is either self-reported or is recorded via assistance from another. Thus it follows that these recorded life stories may be written or in the form of an oral interview. The authors next distinguish life history from autobiography, suggesting that life histories are "immediate responses to a demand posed by the Other and carries with it the expectations of the Other" (p. 267). Life histories, therefore, *are* autobiographical in that they present the subject's story from her or his own perspective. However they *are not* like autobiographies, in that a life history is usually spurred by the interests, questions, or desires of an external researcher. Finally Tierney and Clemens carefully distinguish how life histories differ from biographies in other genres in that their subjects typically include ordinary people or those who have historically faced marginalization at the hands traditional researchers. The authors conclude their overview by summarizing life history as a "dynamic and recursive process between researcher and participant" in which they "jointly construct a narrative via multiple data sources, including interviews and documents" (p. 267). Therefore, co-constructed narratives are frequent products of life history research efforts.

In their classic text, *Lives In Context*, Cole and Knowles (2001) offer a crucial philosophical underpinning to life history research. They assert that life history research is not about "developing reductionist notions of lived experience in order to convey a particular meaning" (p. 10). It is not about "proving" anything. Instead it is about discovering

something, allowing viewers or readers to "make meaning and form judgments based on their own reading of the 'text' as it is viewed through the lenses of their own realities" (p. 11). Clearly shattering the post-positivist desire to generalize or predict human behavior, life history research is emancipatory in that it seeks to gain understanding into the larger human condition and it does so by documenting and celebrating the lives of ordinary individuals. This idea of a democratized research practice resonates with the writings of McCall and Wittner (2009) who suggest that life history research forces "us to examine our assumptions, incorporate more actors into our models, and generate more inclusive concepts for understanding the actual complexities of social institutions" (p. 46). Life history research can therefore be seen as a social justice project.

Life history as a social justice vehicle is a noteworthy idea proposed by Janesick (2007, 2014) in her writings. She recognizes that life history can be understood "as a postmodern social justice project by virtue of including those voices of individuals left on the margins and periphery of society or those generally forgotten" (2007, p. 4). It is a process that memorializes all voices, not simply those in power or the elite. Again McCall and Wittner (2009) echo this sentiment, noting, "As new groups emerge into public view and make claims to be heard, life histories become important tools for reconstructing not only about them, but about the society of which they are part" (p. 47). Life histories then become architectures that build up new knowledge – knowledge that was previously considered unworthy of knowing. In this manner, the actual methodologies of life history research, in addition to the finished projects, serve as a democratic expansion of the very idea of social science – one that recognizes *all* of the social, not just portions of it.

Life history research can also be defined by what it is *not*. Paramount on this list is a decided rejection of any claim to determining an "objective" truth. Following the essential tenets of all qualitative inquiry, life history research positions itself as championing the

subjective experiences of both participant and researcher. It privileges an interpretive stance that recognizes that humans make sense of their world through their respective experiences – not through a pre-existing external understanding of Truth. Life history research is not a systematic, procedurally-bound method of analyzing a person's life. Instead, as Suarez-Ortega (2013) notes, it is:

> A reflexive, dynamic, emergent, progressive design, that makes it possible to constantly create new forms of interaction and responsibility among the participants, and between the participants and the researcher, to generate an open dialogue. (p. 197)

Life history research is therefore a method that acknowledges the "messiness" of life, recognizing that the stories we tell about our lives are not always ordered, systematic accounts of "what really happened," but instead are interpretive narrations of how we viewed our worlds *then* by looking at how we view our worlds *now*.

The intertwining co-construction of a life history project also celebrates reflexivity – on the part of the participant and the researcher as well. Cole and Knowles (2001) describe this reflexive approach as "expected" of life history researchers and also note that the researcher "is every bit as vulnerable, as present, as those who participate in the research" (p. 14). This reflexive presence is central to current life history inquiries in the social sciences. It becomes incumbent on the researcher to disavow any practice of "interpretive hegemony" – valuing one position (researcher or participant) as more qualified to determine "truth" than the other. Thus life history research presents a unique opportunity to allow the participant's reflexive narration of their life story to 'theorize and explain their past, present, and future" (Musson, 2004, p. 34). This gives voice to the participant and through a dialogue the researcher and participant collaborate in the "sense-making" aspect of the

research. This is enhanced, and perhaps even requires, a reflexive approach to the study itself.

Life histories are also not simply life *stories*. "Life stories may be a starting point, the initial exploration of a life as lived, but life history grounds these stories of personal experiences in their wider social and historical context" (Harnett & Bathmaker, 2010, p. 2). This is an important distinction as the term life history and life story are sometimes used interchangeably. While they are often synonymous in terms of an epistemological structure, the inclusion of an historical frame of reference for the narrator broadens the scope of the research. Goodson and Gill (2011) suggest that life histories differ from life stories in that they are "located within historical contexts through collaborative interpretation and meaning-making as well as triangulation by other sources" (p. 40). The joint co-construction of meaning (by researcher and participant) based on the life stories being collected is the key to establishing the historical and social connections that create life histories. Musson (2004) recognizes that life histories extend beyond individual tales into stories that reflect institutional and organizational contexts. They are stories with history's dust settled throughout.

Another distinguishing feature of life history research is that it does not solely focus on the participant's narratives alone. The scholarly study of a person's life recognizes that our historical lives consist of much more than our narrated accounts of what we have experienced. Life history research is an inclusive approach to social science inquiry. It requires a variety of data types for analysis and review. Artifacts from a person's life are important to a life history study. Researchers have suggested collecting photographs, yearbooks, diaries, media accounts, institutional documents, and countless other examples of personal materials (Cole & Knowles, 2001; Goodson & Choi, 2008; Janesick, 2007; Labaree, 2006; Riessman, 2008; Sherwood & Freshwater, 2010; Tierney & Clemens, 2013) to use in life

history studies. This research approach also extends beyond narrative recollections to include participant-created research artifacts. This can include a researcher reflective journal (Cole & Knowles, 2001; Janesick, 2007; van Manen, 1990) as well as aesthetic products such as scripts, poetry, fictional representations, and visual art (Faulkner, 2009; Gray, 2004; Ketelle, 2010; Leavy, 2009; Samuel, 2009). Life history research, therefore, seeks an extensive array of data and understanding the role of various data collection methods is integral to distinguishing life history research from other qualitative approaches. The most profound data collection method used in life history research, however, is the qualitative interview.

The Use of the Interview in Life History Research

Coles and Knowles (2001) acknoweldge that life history research honors "depth over breadth" (p. 70). With this as a foundational assumption, they lay out different ways to access the depth of a person's life. The most significant and common data-gathering method is the personal interview. Though I elaborate on specific interview protocols in the next chapter, it is worthwhile to examine the literature within the field to offer a broad sweep of the importance of the interview to life history research. One of the most influential examples of conducting a life story interview comes from the work of Robert Atkinson. His 1998 text, *The Life Story Interview*, was an early methodological text designed to assist budding researchers in conducting life history research. Its noteworthy contributions include specifics on approaching the interview process. Atkinson is careful to note the true purpose of life history research: "Getting the story also means knowing how to invite stories as responses rather than reports. The real points, or messages, that want—and need—to be made through life stories are in actual stories" (p. 31).

Recent scholarly exemplars in the field of qualitative interviewing include Janesick's, *"Stretching" Exercises for Qualitative Researchers* (2011), Rubin's and Rubin's, *Qualitative Interviewing* (2012), and Kvale's and Brinkman's, *InterViews: Learning the Craft of*

Qualitative Research Interviewing (2009). Each of these texts offers guidance in constructing valid, ethical, and intentional interview practices. Janesick's book is particularly helpful in that it suggests that interviewing can be refined and improved upon by thinking of the practice as a habit. She begins by stressing that "interviewing is an act of communication" (p. 99). Thus solid interview practices must consider the dialogic components of the interview process – it is not intended to be a one-way narrative. Janesick therefore defines interviewing as two persons exchanging "information and ideas through questions and responses, resulting in communication and *joint* [emphasis added] construction of meaning about a particular topic" (p. 100). The book is a wealth of valuable interviewing advice, including conducting pilot tests of interviews, conducting pre-interview technology checks, and perhaps providing a copy of the interview questions to the participant in advance. The book also has sample interview protocols and even sample interview transcripts so novice researchers can see firsthand how a qualitative interview is constructed.

The text by Rubin and Rubin (2012) can also assist life history researchers as it offers significant methodological practices to the literature. The major focus of the book explicates the concept of "responsive interviewing." This technique eschews traditional interrogative practices and instead views the interview as an opportunity to build "a relationship of trust between interviewer and interviewee that leads to more give-and-take in the conversation" (p. 36). This idea of developing a relationship implies a reciprocal involvement between the researcher and participant. A hallmark of the responsive interview is its flexible nature. Despite creating guiding questions beforehand, the interviewer is patiently observant for opportunities to explore previously unconsidered topics, anecdotes, or emotions. The responsive interview is focused on achieving depth and therefore is open to "developing a solid, deep understanding of whatever you are studying based on the perspectives and experience of your interviewees" (p. 38). This suggests that the responsive interview

technique holds promise for life history research, which also seeks thick narrative descriptions of live events.

InterViewing (2009) by Kvale and Brinkman is yet another important text for gaining insight on crafting and conducting qualitative interviews. Significantly, this book proposes seven stages in the interview process. This approach offers a contrast to Rubin's and Rubin's (2012) "responsive interviewing" approach, suggesting a more linear, process-oriented interview technique. Kvale and Brinkman outline the seven stages as: Thematizing (formulating the purpose of the investigation), Designing (planning the study design), Interviewing (conducting the interview), Transcribing (preparing the interview text), Analyzing (determining proper modes of analysis), Verifying (ascribing validity to the research process), and Reporting (communicating the findings of the study). These sequential steps, the authors believe, will perhaps "assist the novice interview researcher through the potential hardships of a chaotic interview journey" (pp. 102-103). The book also provides extensive interview resources that vary from an epistemological discussion of interviewing to issues of analysis and validity in interview products.

As previously mentioned (in the literature review of legacy research), McAdams (2008) has also crafted a particularly useful guide for conducting life history research. His *Life Story Interview* protocol offers coherent directions for conducting life history interviews. Particularly helpful for novice researchers is the "script-like" nature of the protocol. One could simply read it almost verbatim to conduct a quality life history interview. The construct, however, also offers flexibility in that it notes, "The interviewer should feel free to ask questions of clarification and elaboration throughout the interview, but especially in this first part." Particularly interesting is McAdams' inclusion of a reflection piece in the interview guide. He suggests concluding a life history interview by asking the respondent to reflect upon the interview process itself. This allows the interviewee to contemplate how

telling stories about her life has caused her to feel and whether or not the telling of those stories actually has affected her. By directing the participant's attention to the narrative process from an external perspective (now that the stories have been told), this component of the interview process has the potential to develop more depth and layers to add to the original interview text.

A focus on life history narratives is a foundational aspect of life history research. The content of life history interviews typically constitute narrated events and it is this re-creation of our storied lives that reveal the complexity of our experiences. Interview texts, or other life history artifacts for that matter, can provide the participant, the researcher, *and the reader* with new or differing understandings of various life experiences. Marshall and Rossman (2006) also note that life history narratives have the potential to address both individual and social aspects of the culture of the participant. These stories move back and forth between macro and micro perspectives of the self's position in relation to society's norms. With such an emphasis on the efficacy of storytelling, it is little wonder that life history research is deftly intertwined with social science inquiry that promotes a narrative methodology.

The Role of Narrative Methodology in Life History Research

Life history research hinges upon the careful and appropriate use of narratives. The stories we tell about our lives come to define who we are and how we make sense of the world around us. McAdams (2010) succinctly characterizes how we create our narrative identities,

> the stories we construct to make sense of our lives are fundamentally about our
> struggle to reconcile who we imagine we were, are, and might be in our heads and
> bodies with who we were, are, and might be in the social contexts of family,
> community, the workplace, ethnicity, religion, gender, social class, and culture writ
> large. (pp. 242-243)

Our lives make up our stories and our stories make up our lives. This reciprocal narration-creation-narration cycle lays the foundation for how life stories are inherently linked with narrative inquiry.

The sheer pervasiveness of narrative in the social world situates it as a subject *of* and method *for* research. The field of educational research can particularly benefit from narrative inquiry as stories told by students, teachers, and other educational practitioners serve to honor their subjective experiences. This is Eisner's (2008) contention when he asserts that the function of educational research "is not to draw near-certain [objective] conclusions, but rather to secure technologies of mind that will enable us to peer more deeply into situations that might not be the same as the one that we study" (p. 21). The narratives, therefore, give us new perspectives to view the educational life-world. This suggests that narrative analysis might actually serve to increase our empathic intelligence and allow us to relate to the life histories being collected in an authentic and organic way. Ellis (2004) expands on this notion that interpretive understanding connects research with lived experiences: "Writers want readers to be able to put themselves in the place of others, within a culture of experience that enlarges their social awareness and empathy" (p. 30). The use of narrative research practices in the discipline of life history research, therefore, focuses scholarly attention on how social relationships create the very context of our life-worlds. Our histories and the manner in which we communicate them are intrinsically linked with our ability to narrate them.

Atkinson (2007) properly recognizes the role of narrative inquiry in the study of life histories,

> Our life stories connect us to our roots, give us direction, validate our own experience, and restore value to our lives. Life stories can fulfill important functions for us, and,

as we recognize now more than ever, everyone has a story to tell about his or her life. (p. 224)

He notes the use of life histories and applied narrative methods in such diverse fields as psychology, gerontology, sociology, anthropology, folklore, history, religion, and education. This array of disciplines has come to recognize the value of narrative inquiry in "assisting, if necessary, the storyteller to become more aware of the meaning within his or her experience as he or she tells and crafts it into story form" (p. 234). Life histories, then, can serve as research data to be interpreted and to which theories can be applied. It is only then, after the life history has been constructed and examined through a particular theoretical lens, that subjectivity may give way to a semblance of objective theory. In essence, the life history in its interpreted form stands alongside the subjective experiences of the storyteller to create a full composite of the participant's life (Atkinson, 2007). The stories told by the interviewee achieve a type of transcendence when they become subjects of inquiry – they become both personal and universal in their research scope.

It is also necessary to address the importance of narrative inquiry to notions of empowerment and to celebrating the lives of the marginalized. By using a narrative methodology when examining the stories of Others, life histories take on new meaning. Suarez-Ortega (2013) describes how life history/narrative methods have "formative value based on the preparation of and reflection of one's own history" (p. 190). She explains that by honoring the voices of those who are disenfranchised or socially ostracized, narrative methods in life history research can endow "the person with greater confidence and personal autonomy" (p. 190). There is much to be said for the empowering nature of life histories and their potential restorative powers for identity-creation. McLean, Pasupathi, and Pals (2007) contend, "storytelling is related to both the development and maintenance of the self" (p. 273), while McAdams (2007) acknowledges that narrative identity is how "the self comes to

terms with society" (p. 243). Our life histories and their associated narratives can therefore be seen as autobiographical constructions that enables us to make sense of who we are, who we have been, and who we want to be. They become our identity and it's an identity that we are constantly "editing."

Narrative methodology in life history research must also come to terms with the various tensions surrounding the collection of narrative data. Elliott (2012) notes the potential that narrative norms in one culture may unduly constrain the narratives told by someone from another culture, even going so far as to suggest that certain narrative modes may cause "violence to individual experiences by imposing an appropriate way of recounting those experiences" (p. 295). She also appropriately points out that narrative inquiry itself may privilege the stories embedded within qualitative interviews while failing to examine the interview data that is "un-narrated." This could lead to ignoring other aspects of the interview that may be important to the study at hand.

Another important tension is the differing theoretical approaches to what constitutes narrative research. One such division occurs between examining narratives that are "event-centered" as opposed to those that are "experience-centered." Event-centered narratives focus only on specific "happenings" in a narrator's life, while experience-centered narratives chronicle a broader range of experiences covering a longer time (Andrews, Squire, & Tamboukou, 2013). Experience-centered narrative approaches are most often used in life history research. Still another concern for some narrative researchers is the expansion of what exactly constitutes a narrative itself. Some scholars (life history researchers especially) broaden narrative analysis to include examination of such narrative artifacts as "scraps of letters, laundry lists, extensive multi-volume diaries, and narratives inhering in objects and actions such as the arrangement of objects on mantelpieces" (Andrews et al., p. 5). While this does somewhat dilute the "pure" sense of what a narrative is, it must be noted that

these "narrative expansionists" still focus on the life experiences that inculcate the data with meaning. Finally, a third type of narrative research examines co-constructed narratives between participant and researcher. This type of narrative analysis concentrates on how external factors influence narrative creation. For example, as Andrews et al. (2013) ask: "Are narratives shaped by the *audiences* to whom they are delivered, and if so, to what extent" (p. 6). This field of narrative inquiry is most interested in the complexity underlying the context of narrative construction, and not so much the content of the particular experiences relayed in the researcher-participant discourse.

One final important consideration for narrative inquirers is to acknowledge the importance of ethical considerations in such an intimate and personal research method. Clandinin (2006) argues for an ethics of "negotiation, respect, mutuality and openness to multiple voices" (p. 52). She implores narrative researchers to think past simply meeting requirements of institutional review boards and to attend to the relationships that are created when stories are shared. Janesick (2014) also highlights the necessity of ethical considerations when considering issues of confidentiality and privacy concerns surrounding the participant. Her qualitative work consistently addresses the importance of a dignified participant-researcher relationship and she charges the oral historian with making implicit any ethical issues that arise in the course of the research act (Janesick, 2007). A concern for protecting the participant is also evident in Ellis's (2007) approach to narrative work. She makes a case for "relational ethics" that require "researchers to act from our hearts and minds, to acknowledge our interpersonal bonds to others, and initiate and maintain conversations" (p. 4). Central to this idea is that research participants are not merely objects to be studied, but instead are humans who are worthy of respect. She cautions researchers to act compassionately when gathering the intimate details of a person's life.

Life history research is intrinsically linked with narrative methodologies. Its focus on gathering stories from individuals with a desire to document and create meaning from them places the research discipline squarely within a narrative epistemology. Art Bochner's piece, *Bird On a Wire: Freeing the Father Within Me* (2012) is an exquisite example of how narrative contributes to our life history. In this deeply personal work, Bochner uses fictional representations and specific life experiences to come to terms with his tumultuous relationship with his father. It employs narrative techniques to craft a segment of his life history. He writes,

> My memory work does not seek to discover precisely what caused me to be the self
> that I am but rather to confront and deal with the contingencies of my past by
> redescribing them, so I am not condemned to stay in the bubble of my psychic
> inheritance. (p. 142)

Bochner articulates a central premise of life history work: re-narrating the past in an attempt to story the future. Thus narrative becomes a vehicle to shed light on how we make sense of the world around us. This sense-making and an emphasis on relational understandings are what properly position life history work as an appropriate vehicle for conducting educational research.

Life History/Narrative Research in Education

This current study crafted the life history of an educator by examining her legacy and its contributions to three educational leaders. Therefore a review of life history/narrative research related to the study of educators and educational leaders is in order. Life history and narrative research in education-related subjects is not a new research area by any means. Over forty years ago Peter Abs wrote the book, *Autobiography In Education: An Introduction to the Discipline of Autobiography and Its Central Placement in the Education of Teachers* (1974). This was one of the earliest texts to promote the use of self-narrated life

histories to examine the education life-world of teachers. In the 80s, life history research in education proliferated with work published that examined how teacher's professional lives developed (Ball & Goodson, 1985) and studies that researched educator's career choices (Sikes, Measor, & Woods, 1985). Later research (Middleton, 1989) expanded the scope of life history work in education by examining the oppression of women in the educational system. In short, educational research has come to understand the efficacy of life history research. As Caduri (2013) notes, "it is possible to learn about teachers' personal practical knowledge (i.e. what teachers know through their teaching experience) by studying their life histories" (p. 40). Life histories provide a window into the teaching world.

   Life history research on teachers. Scholarly attention to the life-worlds of teachers has made the narrative approach of life history research invaluable to documenting and examining the connection between the personal and professional lives of educators. The subjects/topics studied using this approach are varied. One area that is a frequent area for exploration is the concept of teacher professionalism – what teachers feel about how their work constitutes their professional identities. Goodson and Choi (2008) use a life history approach to "study teacher professionalism, an area of concern which has been increasingly tied up with educational quality and global competition at the turn of the twenty-first century" (p. 5). This study used the concept of "collective memory" to examine how teachers' personal career arcs are impacted by the institutional nature of education systems. They argue that "the capacity of the combined method for locating the wider collective contexts of collective members thus helps us to make the transition from sponsoring individual voices to reflection about systemic issues" (p. 25). Life history methods, they contend, allowed their participants to examine their professionalism in light of institutional constraints and to come to terms with the often-contradictory roles they were forced to play. Life history research techniques have also been used to examine curriculum. Huber's (2008)

dissertation focused on the relationship between the varied narratives surrounding educational cultures. She discovered that curriculum-creation occurred "at intersections of youths' stories, teachers' stories, administrators' stories, subject matter, and school stories" (p. 162). She recognizes that these stories "bump" into one another and through their collisions enable teachers to craft a curriculum.

Other researchers have also turned the life-history "lens" towards documenting the pre-teaching or early-teaching experiences of educators and their associated narratives. Samuel (2009) collected and analyzed the life histories of nine South African teachers and asked them to tell the stories of learning to teach English. He proposes, "the process of telling the story for each of the students encapsulated an overt and conscious process of documenting and representing during a one-year period their emerging views about English language teaching and learning" (p. 5). Thus their early and pre-teaching life histories are brought to bear on their current practice. Kelchtermans (2010) too looks at pre-teaching life histories as he details a seminar he teaches to prospective teachers. He has them complete autobiographical exercises ("critical vignettes") in an effort to get the participants to make a conscious and "reflective move from the storied event to an analysis of its particular meaning and relevance to the narrator's actual thinking and actions" (p. 611). The participants use their own stories to arrive at professional meanings.

Life history research on teachers and the teaching profession also offers opportunities to promote social justice by documenting and giving voice to historically marginalized peoples. Boyce (2009), Pabon (2013), and Oliphant (2013) each used life history as a method to document the experiences of Black educators. These doctoral dissertations demonstrate a concerted effort to examine the effects of racism and cultural hegemony in the lives of Black teachers. This type of research celebrates the contributions of teachers whose stories have been traditionally ignored by the academy. In a similar vein, Gomez, Rodriguez, and Agosto

(2008) focused on the life histories of pre-service Latino teachers to examine how their personal experiences might influence their teaching. The authors' research suggested that Latino students have a great deal to offer as teachers – namely,

> Latino/a teachers appear to see their roles as including the building of connections between students' families and schools to encourage learning, using their personal family and cultural knowledge to understand students' ways of knowing and behavior/s, and seeking ways to incorporate students' cultural and family backgrounds into formal and informal curricula. (p. 269).

Lynn's (2006) report on a Black male teacher in South Central Los Angeles also provides an example of life history research with a social justice agenda. Though not strictly a life history (Lynn describes it as "portraiture."), her article does allow the story of a Black male teacher to be told in his own words through a co-constructed narrative with the researcher. This study serves to illustrate another potent use of the life history message. The participant hoped that by telling his tory, "he could inspire his students, especially young black boys, to stay away from gangs and drugs and excel in school. In his classroom, his life was a living, breathing text for his students" (p. 236). His life-narrative could be seen as an "educative activity" (Janesick, 2007) serving as inspiration for his students. All of the aforementioned scholarship seeks to honor the contributions of these minority educators by bringing to the forefront their life stories, thereby realizing an aim of using life history research for social justice purposes.

Perhaps one of the more innovative and aesthetic examples of life history research involving teachers and their professional-personal lives is a work titled, *Frank*, by Peter Clough. This narrative, found in the text, *Researching Life Stories* by Goodley, Lawthom, Clough, and Moore (2004) is unique in life history research in that it is purposely a work of *fiction*. *Frank* relates the story of the title character who is a composite of the people and experiences from Clough's own personal journey as a teacher. What is most interesting about

this story, however, is not the actual mechanics of the fiction (character, plot, setting). Instead, *Frank* is provocative in its claim to stand as social science research (A more nuanced analysis of the argument for fictional representation of social science research is found later in this chapter). Clough stands by this account of a life history, arguing, "this is how I see the world; I believe these characters and events to be true of human experience; I believe – short of wishing to be didactic – that there is something to be learned from the story" (p. 67). Clough's assertion here is that narrative research relies not on externally-validated "data," but instead requires *the reader* to "verify" the research by agreeing (or not) that after reading the work, "Yes, that's what it's [teaching] like." Clough contends that life stories are communicated through three components: the telling of events, the creation of a text, and the interpretation or analysis of those events. The difference, of course, is that in a *fictional* life history, "the events are not only told, but are also created" (p. 108). His foundational epistemological argument is that we experience the world through aesthetic sensibilities; therefore, it can also be explained through aesthetic representation. This approach to research exemplifies a postmodern epistemology – one that suggests that we (researchers, participants, and readers) are the ones who give meaning to our studies, not some mythical "grid" of external Truth forcefully applied on top of our research.

Life history research on educational leaders. Though life histories of educational leaders have potential to make valuable contributions to the field of educational research, the quantity of these projects does not approach the number of life histories conducted on teachers. Yet there is much to be understood about educational leadership from a life history approach. Furman (2012), for example, suggests using life history interviews in educational administration preparatory programs to encourage reflection and self-awareness around issues of social justice. Crawford (2011) adds, "Life-history researchers in education often use stories, and this can provide a useful starting point. Through story we can look at affect

in schools and the meanings *leaders* [emphasis added] take from encounters and events" (p. 207). Crawford recognizes that it is through story that we access the thoughts and beliefs behinds the actions of educational leaders. Though life history research on educational leaders is not as prevalent in the literature as studies of teachers, there are some noteworthy examples to review.

Perhaps the most common theme found in life history research on educational leaders is that of social justice. Like life histories of teachers who pursue social justice, there is considerable scholarly attention given to educational leaders (principals, district-level staff, and higher education instructors) who also seek to implement social justice practices through their professional actions (Agosto & Karanxha, 2012; Conrad, Brown, & Crockett, 2006; Jansen, 2006; Scanlan, 2012). Of particular interest is the study by Agosto and Karanxha (2012) which uses Critical Race Theory (CRT) as a theoretical construct to examine the life history of a Black female educational leader. Through their research, the educational leader's sense of spirituality comes to be viewed as important to her personal and professional life. The authors go on to note, "As an identified source of strength, critical spirituality among those leading in academia can support the development of practices and policies that help to sustain Black women in education and educational leadership at all levels" (p. 60). This specific study, in addition to documenting the participant's struggles against the systemic structures of racism, also contributes to the literature by providing practical implications for institutions of higher education that train future educational leaders. This life history, then, can also been seen as a form of empowerment.

Two other intriguing examples of life history work conducted on educational leaders pursuing social justice work are the projects by Jansen (2006) and Scanlan (2012). These pieces are unique in that they are life histories of white educators who practice social justice leadership in their schools. Jansen's (2006) piece examined two white principals and their

leadership experiences in South Africa. He was particularly interested in "the personal biographies of these principals [and how they] both compel and constrain their decision making around social change and social justice in postapartheid schools" (p. 40). After conducting considerable interviews and detailed artifact reviews, Jansen came to document how these principals were working against the tide of educational racism prevalent in South Africa. Scanlan's (2012) study also crafted the life histories of two white principals who were working in schools with high populations of students who have been traditionally marginalized and dehumanized by the education system. His purpose was to examine why these principals would choose to work in these schools and whether their commitment to social justice contributed to this professional choice. Interestingly, though Scanlan documented various social justice "sympathies," he noted that the two principals oftentimes appeared unaware of the tenets of a social justice approach to leadership. He contends that a lack of an "explicit focus on social justice leadership adds complexity to our understanding of the nature of the field of socially just educational leadership. Social justice leadership in schools can happen unwittingly" (p. 109). The life histories of these educational leaders add to the depth of the scholarly literature on social justice leadership by offering a different perspective. It examined the praxis of socially-just educational leadership through a more nuanced understanding of the practice itself.

Scribner and Crow (2012) also use life history methods in researching school reform initiatives. Though specifically described as a case study, the authors intentionally elicit narratives from a principal with the goal to see how his stories relate to his multiple professional identities. The authors sought to "discuss the ways he employs these identities, positioning himself in multiple ways in order to negotiate complex, dynamic expectations of different constituents and to build trust and political capital with the multiple audiences of his setting" (p. 245). The principal's narratives were collected throughout this two-year study

and allowed researchers to determine how he constructed his professional identity in a educational-reform setting. His detailed interactions with students, teachers, and parents served to paint a comprehensive picture of his life history as it related to his workings within the school setting.

A more recent example of life history work on educational leaders can be found in graduate-level scholarship. Gudalewicz (2013) wrote a dissertation examining the qualities of effective leaders. She conducted unstructured interviews to develop the life stories of eight principals and then the narratives "were analyzed to understand the factors, internal and external, that developed them as leaders" (p. 1). By using a narrative inquiry approach through life story analysis, the author generated specific themes that originated from the participants' stories. She then concluded that these effective principals exhibited such traits as having a triggering incident spurring them towards educational leadership, having mentors and/or a support structure, and recognizing that thinking narratively about their work lives contributed positively to their development as a leader.

In summary, the use of life history research methods in educational research is a respected approach to social science inquiry. Though life histories of teachers appear to be more prevalent in the literature than life histories of educational leaders, both subjects benefit from this research approach. By focusing on specific subjective realities of teachers and principals, life history researchers can "move away from studying abstractions and get at the particular, the detailed, and the experiential thus allowing one to grasp the ambiguities and inevitability of different perspectives" (O'Donoghue, 2007, p. 144). The life-world of education and its practitioners can be made visible in a specific and nuanced way, celebrating (and sometime exposing) the truth of the educational experience. Not all *truth*, however, is "real."

The Use of Fiction as Research Text

Arts-based education research (ABER) has proliferated in recent years as the boundaries between the arts and the sciences have become decidedly blurred in the postmodern world of social science inquiry. Texts by Barone and Eisner (2012), Butler-Kisber (2010), Cahnmann-Taylor and Siegesmund (2008), and Leavy (2009) have solidified the practical and theoretical use of artistic and aesthetic research purposes. The use of fiction to represent research texts is one such type of ABER. It is uniquely suited for research purposes as Barone and Eisner (2012) concisely explain,

> Works of fiction may indeed, through their recasting of the empirical particulars of the world, achieve extraordinary power to disturb and disrupt the familiar and commonplace, to question and interrogate that which seems to have already been answered conclusively, and to redirect the conversation regarding important social issues. (p. 101).

Fiction, then, is able to accomplish the objectives of social science research through its abilities to appeal to audiences in a way that traditional research approaches may not.

Fictional stories have great potential to engage the reader with the subject being studied Bal, Butterman, & Baker (2011) explain this interaction: "In sum, while experiencing fictional narratives, people are both emotionally and cognitively involved in the story and look actively for links between what they read and their own lives" (p. 364). The fictionalization of research data – the re-storying of the participant's experiences, impressions, and emotions – seeks to create a fictional "truth" – a truth that is anchored in the power of the narrative itself. In his classic text, *Narratives and Fiction In Educational Research*, Clough (2002) provides a particularly poignant insight into the function of the narrative structure,

> Narrative is useful only to the extent that it opens up (to its audience) a deeper view
> of life in familiar contexts: it can make the familiar strange, and the strange familiar.
> As a means of educational report, stories can provide a means by which those truths,
> which cannot otherwise be told, are uncovered. (p. 8)

The ability of fiction to evoke hidden values, agendas, and emotions can serve educational researchers well. It offers particular insight into both the systemic impacts and the human dynamics of the endeavor that is education. Humor, parody, and even pathos offer alternative aesthetic representations of educational "data." Though distinctly fictional in their traditional use, these literary genres may encourage deeper insights into understanding and interpreting research data.

It should be noted that creating works of fiction from research texts (interviews, field notes, participant journals, etc.) while untraditional has gained acceptance as a legitimate method of studying human interactions. Since Clough's early work, numerous scholars have argued the merits of fictional research texts (Bal, Butterman, & Bakker, 2011; Barone & Eisner, 2012; Cahnmann-Taylor & Siegesmund, 2008; Creswell, 2007; Jones, 2011; Leavy, 2009; Leavy, 2013; Reed, 2011; Richardson & St. Pierre, 2008; Vickers, 2010; Wallace, 2010). Leavy (2013) articulates the similarities between fiction writers and qualitative researchers when she champions "blurring the lines" in an effort to problematize the "fact/fiction dichotomy that has historically dominated our understanding of what is and is not considered research" (p. 24). The construct of facts being one thing and fiction being quite another is no longer blindly accepted in this era of postmodern research methodologies. The pursuit for one objective truth has been questioned, as objectivity itself is likely a fiction. Therefore the use of fiction to conduct research offers deeper introspection for its subjects (and practitioners).

Fictional narratives can be appropriately examined to identify embedded and perhaps even unseen assumptions. Thus the very act of education can be examined through a fictional

lens to expose areas in need of reform and/or further analysis. One manner of accomplishing this is through the use of satire. Satire, it should be noted, has as its primary objective "to improve human beings and our institutions. [It] is therefore a hopeful genre; it suggests progress and the betterment of society, and it suggests that the arts can light the path of progress" (Colletta, 2008, p. 860). Thus by crafting a work of satiric fiction, we strive to better the world in which we live.

Since fictional stories continue to be prime catalysts for reflection and evocative discussion, their use by educational researchers provides another method for examining policies, practices, and perceptions important to the field of education. While fictional research-texts are a far cry from the generalizable, "objective" products of quantitative research, they bear considerable attention as research products because "through the process of writing stories we are afforded the opportunity to reshape meaning, helping us to clarify and deepen understanding" (Jones, 2011, p. 635). The desire to increase our understanding is evident in recent scholarship employing fictive techniques.

Wallace (2010) employed the art of fiction when she had her pre-service teacher trainees create "fairy tales" of their intern experiences. The authors then shared their stories within a small group and received feedback during a reflection period. Wallace's action research project featured fictional representations by the participants for a variety of reasons. First, it allows for an analysis of systemic functions that are often imbedded and therefore unexamined within the educational culture. Fiction also allows participants to broach subjects on a "fictional" level that they might feel uncomfortable with or even unwilling to share in a strictly autobiographical product. Wallace notes that the writing of the stories raised "some important questions about professionalism, belonging and acceptance, as well as about behaviour management, which had been the initial concern for most of them [the pre-service teachers]" (p. 476). As a research approach, Wallace used fiction to explore

the intricacies of teaching – she laid bare the educative act by having her participants cast it in story form.

In a chapter from *Arts-Based Education Research* (2008), Douglas Gosse details how he came to write *Jackytar*, the first educational novel published in Canada. The novel was derived from his "explicit experiences and knowledge as an educator, researcher, and bilingual, working-class, disabled gay man" (p. 183). He contends that his use of fiction is designed to extend the reach of qualitative work in an effort to promote deeper and more empathic thinking among readers. Additionally, Gosse argues that using fiction as a research text places educational research in front of new and different audiences – ones that might be more engaged by fiction than traditional academic prose. Gosse describes this as contributing "to a needed bridge between the academy and the public" (p. 184). He adapted *Jackytar* from his dissertation, which contained footnotes (unlike traditional novels). He maintains the footnotes served five "academic" purposes: (1) They connected readers with ancillary anecdotes that Gosse used to develop his novel; (2) The notes also referenced key scholarship on race, gender, class, and sexual orientation; (3) They examined genealogical derivations of words related to queer resistance; (4) In addition, the footnotes allowed the reader to "peek" into Gosse's creative process as he was constructing the fictional tale; and (5) They explain terms and issues related to the culture of Newfoundland (p. 184). By using the footnotes (which were later removed from the published novel), Gosse presents a fictional research text that adheres to rigorous academic standards and demonstrates provocative arts-based scholarship.

De Freitas (2007) posits that fiction-as-research can actually promote a more nuanced reading of research findings. She writes,

> I argue that research narratives that draw directly from fictional strategies, and bring the reader's attention to the crafting of the narrative, can engender critical reading

habits. I suggest that fictional strategies can trigger reader suspicion about the immediacy, transparency, and researcher presence evoked by the use of the first person narrator – the personal "I." (pp. 436-437)

Thus for De Freitas, the possibility that fiction can make readers question the authority of the text is a legitimate goal of postmodern qualitative research. She recognizes that the person subjectivities readers bring to the texts are heightened by the use of fictional techniques. Her main argument is that readers are conditioned to be wary of the "unreliable" narrator in fictive works. By enabling this same suspicion, fictional research texts actually encourage critical reading – a decidedly common goal of qualitative scholarship.

Much of the recent scholarship surround fiction as a research technique has come from the work of Patricia Leavy. Her texts, *Method Meets Art* (2009) and *Fiction As Research Practice* (2013), are essential guidebooks for the budding "fictional" researcher. Noting that fiction writers also conduct serious and voluminous research for their novels, Leavy suggests that both fiction and research texts seek to "truthfully or authentically portray human experiences. It is not as if fiction writers *created* fantasies and researchers *recorded* facts" (2013, p. 21). Arguing that all experience, fictively represented or not, is borne of the life-world of the participant/creator, she articulates that fictional research representations also serve epistemological functions. They work to construct knowledge and meaning through literary aesthetics. Her *Fiction As Research* book is especially useful as a handbook for exploring the craft of fiction as social science inquiry. The text is broken into two large sections: the how-to part and then a compendium of exemplars in the field of research-as-fiction. The book further provides insight on developing a study that would employ fiction-based research as well being a guide for evaluating said research. In sum, it is a valuable contribution to the field of fiction-based research methods.

The use of fiction to represent research findings is yet another important method for qualitative researchers to consider when considering the design of a particular study. It must be noted however, that finding publishing outlets for this type of work can be difficult. A recent search of two online research repositories produced almost no examples of actual studies using this method. Examples can be found in books, but academic journals appear reticent to totally embrace this genre of qualitative work. Journals like *Qualitative Inquiry* and *The Qualitative Report*, however, have been known to publish fiction-based research. Despite the paucity of research examples, the use of the technique has merit and offers a unique aesthetic approach to conducting research. After all, as Annie Dillard states in her book, *Living by Fiction,* "Humanity has but one product, and that is fiction" (p. 148).

Chapter Summary

This chapter has examined the literature at the heart of this research proposal. I have reviewed the literature surrounding the study of legacy-leaving, known as generativity. I noted that while there is research concerning this field, there is very little that examines how teachers construct their life histories through generative thoughts and actions. In this chapter, I have also reviewed research concerning life history research, specifically looking at literature on how life history research is defined, the use of the qualitative interview in the life history research, and the narrative methods prevalent in this research paradigm. I then discussed the scholarly literature on the use of life history research in education, with specific critiques related to life histories of teachers and life histories of educational leaders. Finally, I examined how the use of fiction-based research is advancing as a qualitative research practice.

Based on my review of the above literature, I believe this current research project contributes to the field of narrative educational research in the following ways,

• By documenting the life history of a female humanities teacher, I advance a social justice cause by giving voice to a group of people (women) who have traditionally been shunned as legitimate contributors to research.

• This life history adds to the scholarship on educational generativity by charting how this teacher's narrative demonstrates intentionality towards leaving an educational legacy.

• By interviewing practicing educational leaders who were once students of this teacher, this research also contributes to the study of what factors influence people to become principals and/or district-level staff.

• This study increases the growing volume of fiction-based educational research. I created a fictional narrative derived from the life history and thematic derivatives from this teacher's narrative.

The next chapter details the design of the study, articulating the processes and methods used in this life history inquiry.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This study documented the life history of a female humanities teacher whose educational legacy has extended into the lives of two school administrators and one district office-level supervisor. I used a narrative inquiry approach to catalogue and examine her life stories; I analyzed her aesthetic and literary creations for themes of generativity; I interviewed the practicing educational leaders to see if narrative resonance supported my notion that their experiential stories are the direct result of the teacher's desire to leave an educational legacy; and I crafted a fictional representation of my findings to seek deeper or alternative meanings within the data. I surround all of these intentions with the belief that by constructing a proper life history, we develop what Worth (2005) calls "narrative reasoning." Narrative reasoning is created when we practice reading, hearing, and constructing well-crafted stories. I agree with Worth (2005) when she asserts that "those who are able to develop the capacity to reason narratively will be able to have a more comprehensive understanding of the human experience." By documenting this one particular teacher's life, I have enhanced my own narrative reasoning as well as offering her stories in an effort for us all to expand our knowledge of what it means to be human.

Following the appropriate rationale of social science inquiry, this study was guided by general research questions. The three exploratory questions that undergird this study were,

1. What elements of this teacher's life history contributed to creating a legacy of educational leaders?

2. What were the perspectives of the educational leaders impacted by this teacher as they related to crafting an educational legacy?

3. How did the life stories of the teacher and educational leaders intersect to reveal *narrative resonance* – the ability of one person's stories to influence other's stories?

In this chapter, I explicate the design of the intended study, beginning with an exploration of the epistemological conceits underpinning this choice of research method. Next, I discuss participant selection and the research context and I will also explore my role as a researcher and as a participant, as I too have been the recipient of this teacher's educational legacy. I must do so to "come clean" about how my relationship with the participant may influence my interpretation of the data. Finally, I discuss data collection methods and procedures, and the analysis techniques used in the research act.

Theoretical Framework

All research is imbued with a philosophical agenda. The tenets of a particular epistemological approach weave through the research design to illuminate what the respective researcher believes is worth knowing. Since this study uses a life history approach to social science inquiry, it is necessary to briefly examine how this particular approach views knowledge creation and the evaluation of truth-claims. At its core, life history research is an offshoot of narrative inquiry as it involves the collection and assessment of life *storie*s in an attempt to examine the relationship of these narratives to understanding the world around us. Jerome Bruner (2002), a noted proponent of the narrative construction of knowledge, asserts that stories allow us "to conceive of a 'real world' in a manner that fits the stories we tell about it" (p. 103). Thus our life narratives come to define our reality – they are our identities in storied form.

This section describes the essential tenets of a narrative inquiry approach to research. By examining the theoretical assumptions of this method, I explain why life history research

methods were appropriate for this study. Additionally, I use this section to articulate the concerns and criticisms of this theoretical framework, especially in regards to validity and reliability – important considerations in all human science work.

Narrative inquiry as an epistemological framework is essentially rooted in the interpretivist notion that we construct our reality (and thus determine what counts as knowledge) in a storied or narrative manner. Caine, Estefan, and Clandinin (2013) offer a succinct review of this epistemology, stating, "It is through story that people are able to understand, make meaning of, and relate experiences, because story is how people make sense of their existence" (p. 576). These authors build upon the ideas of John Dewey. Dewey, an influential philosopher and educator, acknowledged that our senses are the essential mechanisms through which we experience our world (Dewey, 1934). Caine, et al. (2013) assert that Dewey's concept of the relationship between sensory intake and experience can be brought to bear on the research relationship. They contend that the "engagement of the senses in a relational research context grounds inquiry in an embodied, connected process that works to develop an understanding of experience" (p. 582). In other words, our senses become our narrative way of understanding our experiences with the world around us. We are able to relate to this world through a narrative concept of experiencing the past and the present, the internal and the external, the perceived and the possibility. It is as if our life stories are continually working *on* and *through* our life history in an effort to produce what we call our reality.

A theoretical framework constructed on a narrative inquiry epistemology also suggests that we are constantly re-storying our understanding of knowledge and truth. Mischler (2004) contends that these "stories—or, more precisely, different episodes of one's life stories—get told and retold by oneself and others on different occasions. My premise is that life stories are always twice-, thrice-, indeed endlessly retold tales" (p. 102). A narrative inquiry

framework, then, acknowledges the temporality and contextuality of what may be considered as "facts." In essence, we story and re-story our lives depending upon the time, setting, and context in which we are telling these life stories. Whether it's due to memory issues, content requirements, or even audience particulars, the same story will never actually be told the same way – especially if the story has become a central component of how we have come to narrate our lives. This is an important aspect of a narrative inquiry theoretical framework: Just as the postmodern research paradigm suggests there is no one objective "Truth," this epistemology asserts there is no one story. Instead, our lives are a series of narratives, reflections on our narratives, and then retellings of those narratives.

Perhaps the most salient description of how life history research entails a narrative epistemology comes from Connelly and Clandinin (2006). The authors note,

> People shape their daily lives by stories of who they and others are and they interpret their past in terms of these stories. Story, in the current idiom, is a portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful. Narrative inquiry, the study of experience as story, then, is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience. (p. 375)

The very act of explaining our experiences through narratives is the lynchpin of life history work. Life history research is inquiry appropriately suited to compile life *stories* through narratives and narrative objects (written artifacts, aesthetic representations, reflective documents) in an effort to construct a life *history*. It seeks to represent our knowledge-creation process through interwoven narratives that coalesce into a jointly-crafted (between researcher and participant) whole. An apt metaphor for this framework is perhaps that of a tapestry. A tapestry consists of a variety of individual threads – each unique in color. By using a loom, the individual threads are interwoven to form one coherent image (be it

representational or abstract). In life history research, the loom is the epistemological framework of narrative inquiry and the threads are the unique narratives that get woven together to create a coherent life history. This metaphor also works to expand the notion of life history work into an artistic and aesthetic process between researcher and participant – there is no formulaic, prescriptive method to create the beauty of a life history.

Perhaps the aesthetic attributes of this inquiry approach are what open it up to questions of scientific validity and verifiability. It is tempting to dismiss these criticisms as a failure to understand the nature of qualitative work in general. Dispensing with the idea of truth with a capital "T" and recognizing the personal and subjective nature of the research act will, for many, suffice to counter arguments of a lack of scientific rigor. However, Chase (2010) cautions us to consider the relationship between the various disciplines of social science inquiry, suggesting the need to articulate two important contributions narrative inquiry offers researchers,

> "(a) the creativity, complexity, and variability of individuals' (or groups') self and reality constructions and (b) the power of historical, social, cultural, organizational, discursive, interactional and/or psychological circumstances in shaping the range of possibilities for self and reality construction. (pp. 230-231)

It becomes incumbent on narrative inquirers, therefore, to construct life history research and communicate its methods in such a manner as to both recognize its limitations (objectivity, generalizability) and to celebrate its depth and breadth as an inquiry approach. Quinn (2010) too calls the twin peaks of objective reality and subjective experience a "false dichotomy" and notes in her own research with narrative or biographical texts that it can be approached with rigorous and systematic techniques. She does add however, "systematicity does not always mean large samples or quantitative finding" (p. 237). Thus rigorous inquiry does not have to be chained solely to quantitative understandings of epistemological research designs.

While a detailed historical refutation of the criticisms against narrative approaches to inquiry is beyond the scope of this study, it is worth considering Art Bochner's understanding of narratives "virtues." In his examination of the critique of illness narratives, Bochner (2001) carefully outlines the importance of such research: "What do these stories teach us? One of the main lessons is about the struggle between personal and cultural meanings" (p. 147). Stories, according to Bochner, have a type of interstitiality – an ability to navigate between how we structure our reality and how our culture constructs its reality. Thus, for him, a narrative epistemology asks for a different understanding of knowledge. Instead of generalizable and coolly objective, knowledge is relational and what is desired is a type of "narrative truth." Bochner rejects the criticism that narratives can't adequately represent "the facts of one's life," noting that,

> it is within the frame of a story that facts gain their importance. Life stories may be based on facts, but they are not determined by them. The facts achieve significance and intelligibility by being articulated within a temporal frame that considers what came before and what comes after. (pp. 153-154)

Narrative inquiry celebrates the epistemological belief that "narrative is both about living and part of it" (Bochner, 2001, p. 153). It is the essential framework that makes life stories into life histories.

A theoretical framework that posits narrative inquiry as a method for understanding the world around us is a precursor to my conducting life history research. This study used life history research as its methodological approach for three specific reasons. First, it problematizes current educational research projects that promote a standardized approach to teaching and learning. By collecting Nina's stories in the form of a life history, I explored the resonance found in the teacher-student relationship. Second, I believe capturing Nina's life history and the corollary stories of the educational leaders was the most nuanced and pointed

way to examine how leaving a legacy may be portrayed in an educational relationship. I also examined the narratives of both Nina and the administrators to see if a generative theme exists between them. And finally, I believe that a life history approach rooted in a narrative inquiry epistemology is necessary to document the educational narratives of women. Pinar and Pautz (1998) recognize that biographical methods in educational research can articulate "the silence of women's experiences and voices, the separation of women's lived worlds from the public discourse of education" (p. 62). This study, therefore, provided a narrative voice for Nina and the other co-participants – who are all female educational leaders.

<div style="text-align: center;">**Participant Selection and Research Context**</div>

This study is a life history project focusing on a female humanities and English teacher whom I selected due to a previous relationship with her as a former teacher (and later a teaching colleague). As life history research suggests, every "in-depth exploration of an *individual* [emphasis added] life-in-context brings us that much closer to understanding the complexities of lives in communities" (Cole & Knowles, 2001, p. 11). Therefore my project entailed an n of 1. Cole and Knowles (2001) encourage life history researchers to begin with a "personal research history account" which details the researcher's path to the project at hand. The account of my personal journey towards conducting this project is outlined in Chapter 1 of this proposal and a more detailed examination of my role as the researcher (and my relationship to the participants) can be found in the next section of this chapter.

Labaree (2006) lists four distinct sampling approaches for life history researchers: extreme or intensive case sampling, maximum variety sampling, critical case sampling, and intensity sampling. My participant selection process can perhaps best be categorized as critical case sampling as I sought to explore "detailed, in-depth information on critical experiences" (p. 125). Specifically, I wished to examime the educational narratives of a teacher to determine if the teacher behaved "generatively" towards the students – did

he/she intentionally act in a concerted effort to leave a legacy? Nina was chosen as the focus of my study through a process of "purposive discovery governed by convenience" (Labaree, 2001, p. 125). This approach to participant inclusion is sometimes called purposeful sampling (Mayan, 2009). Purposeful sampling focuses on selecting participants who can contribute most meaningfully to the study. In other words, largely due to our prior relationship, specific experiences, easy access, and her willingness, Nina was an excellent candidate for my life history project.

Nina is 59 years old and has been a teacher for 38 years. Her career includes teaching such subjects as language arts, visual arts, art history, and most consistently, humanities. Her educational background consists of a bachelor of arts in art history and she later acquired a master's degree in art history and humanities. She has taught 35 of her 38 years in the same school: a medium-sized (900 students) high school in Central Florida. Nina's personal creativity was also a factor in her selection for this project. She is an accomplished poet as well as a visual artist – working in both traditional (paint, pencil) and mixed media. Her creative approach to pedagogy as well as her creative outlets in poetry and visual art offered me the opportunity to collect rich data for this life history study.

The other participants chosen for this life history project were also products of relational convenience. They went to the same high school that I did, had the same teacher as I did (Nina), and are also educational administration colleagues in the same Central Florida school district. Table 2 offers a concise overview of their specific demographic profiles.

Table 2.

Co-Participant Characteristics

Name	Year(s) w/ Participant	Teaching Position	Years of Experience	Current Position
Leigh	3	Science Teacher	17	Assistant Superintendent
DeeDee	2	Math, Science Teacher	25	Program Director
Deaundra	2	Language Arts Teacher	26	Principal
Daryl	1	Language Arts Teacher	27	Principal

Their specific relationships with Nina (as former students) and current positions as educational leaders made them excellent candidates to examine any potential generative actions in Nina's professional practice. Their narratives and responses to Nina's narratives provided specific insight useful in determining if Nina contributed to a legacy of educational leadership as suggested by their current administrative positions.

All of the research processes for this life history project took place in a county in Central Florida. Each of the participants are employed by the county school district, which has over 94,000 students and employs over 13,000 people ("Polk County Public Schools," 2014). The participants live in the same municipality within the county, but none (the researcher included) work in the same school. One participant is an assistant superintendent, however she does not directly supervise any of the other participants, Nina included. All of the participants are females – two are white and one is Black – with the exception of the researcher who is a white male.

This research project was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) following proper human research subject protocol and once approval was granted by the IRB (see Appendix B), I saw to it that all of the participants received copies of informed consent via email. They were then asked to submit a signed consent form (see Appendix A) denoting their acknowledgment of the objectives of the research project, the voluntary nature of the study, the confidentiality of the interactions and their responses, and my contact information as the principal investigator of the study. I also informed them of the methods I would take to protect their identities (pseudonyms and removing identifying details) as well how the data will be protected and stored.

Role of the Researcher

Making the role of the researcher explicit demonstrates a compact between researcher, participant, and the intended audience of a qualitative study. This transparency lends itself to enhancing "trustworthiness, as a way to be reflexive in the inquiry process . . . and as a way to act ethically and relationally with participants" (Butler-Kisber, 2010, p. 21). It is an essential tenet of any qualitative inquiry (Cahnmann-Taylor & Siegesmund, 2008; Caine, Estefan, & Clandinin, 2013; Cole & Knowles, 2001; Ellis, 2012; Janesick, 2007; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). In this section I outline my position within this study proposal. The specific contextualities that directly impact my research role are my relationship with the participant, my profession as an educational leader, and my beliefs about the relationship between narrative and knowledge-creation/identity.

My Relationship with the Participant

Caine, Estefan, and Clandinin (2013) make a salient point when they write, "A relational and transactional ontology precedes narrative inquiry research, because stories are about what happens to and between people. That we are living stories means that the connection between researcher and participant begins long before formal research contact" (p. 583). The "connection between researcher and participant" they speak of is pertinent to my understanding and execution of the research act. I have known Nina for over thirty years, first as my high school humanities teacher and then as a colleague (as I taught alongside her). In an effort to promote transparency and full disclosure of my researcher "bias," I must note that my relationship with Nina has deeply influenced me as a person and as a professional.

Noddings (2005) describes the need for an "ethic of care" in schooling and Breault (2013) documents empirically the importance of relational dynamics in teacher-student interactions. Nina embodies an ethic of caring in her relationships with students. As her student, I was treated with respect and she instilled in me a passion for human creativity. As

her colleague, I was able to learn discrete pedagogical concepts from her; my planning periods were frequently spent watching her teach. I can now recognize how she has influenced me as an educational leader through her compassion for others and her celebration of learning. I must therefore acknowledge that my subjective relationship with Nina colors my understanding of any research I may conduct. This begins by making plain the idea that Nina's narratives have the potential to intersect with my own. I must also be transparent about my relationships with the co-participants in that we all share common experiences with Nina as our teacher. Thus our stories also intersect or *resonate* with each other.

My Profession as an Educational Leader

My professional journey through public education includes being a student in high school, a student at a state university, then working as a high school teacher, next practicing as a school-based administrator, and finally to becoming a Ph.D. candidate at the University of South Florida. All of these educational stops along my life's journey have privileged my understanding of what it means to be a teacher and an educational leader. I was able to draw on my professional experiences and most recently, my graduate coursework in Educational Leadership. This insider status allowed me to use the language of educational discourse in an effort to communicate more effectively with the participants. Thus, through my experiential and contextual knowledge of what it means to be a teacher and a school administrator, I was able to tease out more nuanced explanations of the respective narratives that were generated in this study.

Clandinin (2013) describes narrative research as a "relational methodology" (p. 23). He defines this phrase as,

> the relational between person and place; the relational between events and feelings;
> the relational between us as people; the relational between the physical world and

people; the relational in our cultural, institutional, linguistic, and familial narratives.

(p. 23)

As a practicing educational leader conducting research on an educator and other educational

leaders, I was able to have my narratives "live alongside" (Clandinin, 2013, p. 23) those of my

participants. In this relational space, my narratives joined those of my participants in such a

way that we became co-participants in creating Nina's life history. While it is uniquely her

life history, my background as an educator and educational leader contributed to her story as

well as her story contributing to my own.

My Beliefs about Narratives and Knowledge Creation/Identity

Though elaborated on earlier in this study, it is necessary to re-visit my

epistemological beliefs as they relate to my role as a researcher. These beliefs have

significant influence over how I conducted the research and how I went about interpreting the

data once it was collected. Fundamentally, I believe we order our world (in an effort to

understand it) by creating meaningful units out of our experiences. These experiential units

are best communicated in storied form. I feel as Moen (2006) does, that "storytelling is a

natural way of recounting experience, a practical solution to a fundamental problem in life,

creating reasonable order out of experience" (p. 2). It can be said then, that I privilege

narratives as a distinct (and in my beliefs, the *most* distinct) method of making sense of our

lives. Bruner (1986) termed this as the ability to create "narrative knowledge." This concept

speculates that people construct meaning about their experiences by depicting them through

narratives and that these narratives may shift over time as people add (and subtract/forget)

meanings and experiences to the narratives themselves.

As a qualitative researcher with a narrative bent, I acknowledge that this inquiry

framework colors how I conduct and view research. For example, even when reviewing

rigorous quantitative studies, I find myself not necessarily questioning the findings, but rather

I tend to question *why* the findings are what they are. My "default" thought process wants the quantitative researcher to ask the participants (subjects, in their parlance) to tell a story about why/how she or he came to give that particular answer – what is the story behind a particular answer to a survey question. My bias in knowledge-creation then is a narrative one. For this particular proposal, therefore, I must acknowledge that there may be other means by which the generative potential of educators may be studied. Various quantitative or other qualitative approaches might also be appropriate. However, due to my personal epistemological underpinnings, I contend that a narrative life history account will access the deep, descriptive, truths about this teacher's experience.

The various assumptions a researcher brings to the research act must be acknowledged at the forefront of a qualitative study (Cole & Knowles, 2001; Janesick, 2007). My relationship to the participants, my professional practice as an educational leader, and my narrative epistemology each work to privilege the methods I used as well as the analyses that took place. The researcher reflective journal (discussed in more detail in the next section of this chapter) is one tool that I used to examine introspectively these biases that were brought to bear on this study.

Data Collection Methods and Processes

A life history research project utilizes specific data collection practices with the goal of crafting the life history of the participant in an authentic manner. While it is important that these methods be open-ended enough to allow for serendipity in the research act, it is not appropriate to say that they are not prescriptive. There is a decided purpose behind their use and there is an implication that by practicing narrative inquiry within a life history approach, the researcher is acting intentionally with regard to the overall research process. This section outlines the respective methods used in data collection and concludes with an explanation of the research process as it related to collecting that data.

The primary sources for life history data are individual interviews with the respective participants (Atkinson, 2007; Cole & Knowles, 2001; Janesick, 2010; Seidman, 2005). In fact, Atkinson (2007) notes, "The life story interview is a qualitative, ethnographic, and field research method for gathering information on the subjective essence of one person's entire life experience" (p. 225). Another consistent requirement for the efficacy of these interviews is the need for multiple engagements with the participants. Atkinson (2007), Misheler (2004), Siedeman (2005), and Suarez-Ortega (2013) among numerous other scholars advocate for intentional and repeated interviews with the participants. This study employed distinct interview protocols: one for the main participant (Nina) and two for the co-participants. These protocols can be examined be found in Appendices C, D, and E, respectively.

Main Participant Interview Protocol

For the initial interview with my main participant, I used a modified version of McAdam's *Life Story Interview* (2008). As previously discussed in Chapter 2, one of the main attributes of this guided interview document is its ability to assist a person in narrating her or his life (see Appendix C). Essentially, the guide asks a person to reflect on her life story by assisting the cataloguing of these events into specific conceptual frameworks: Life Chapters, Key Scenes in the Life Story, Future Script, Challenges, Personal Ideology, and Reflection. The major modification I made to this guide was to focus the topics towards Nina's professional experiences. I recognize, of course, that vocational experiences are intertwined with other life experiences, but for the purpose of this project, my intent was to examine her *teaching life story* for any semblance of generative actions. Therefore, I concentrated my research actions on how her educational legacy could be seen through her life history as a teacher.

The organization of this first interview protocol therefore revolved around her teaching narratives. For example, the Life Chapters section asked Nina to consider her teaching career as a series of chapters in a book or novel. I encouraged her to imagine a basic

plot summary for each chapter in her expansive professional narrative. The Key Scenes in the Life Story component of the guide asked her to focus on key points – high points, low points, turning points – in her teaching career. The Challenges portion of the guide prompted Nina to think of the various challenges or difficulties she has experienced over the course of her 38 years of teaching; it also asked if she had any regrets or particular failures that she was willing to reveal. The Personal Ideology section was designed to encourage her to espouse her educational philosophy. It asked for her specific thoughts and beliefs on ideas varying from the most important aspect of the teacher's role to how she views the nature of education in general. Finally, the Reflection section asked her to think about the stories she had just finished telling. It encouraged her to respond to how it felt to tell her own stories about teaching. As the intention of this first interview was somewhat expansive, I followed Janesick's (2007) suggestion and provided this protocol to Nina several days prior to our initial meeting.

This first interview section provided me with rich data in the form of numerous stories from Nina's teaching life. The purpose of this primary interview was not necessarily to probe for any aspect of leaving a legacy, but instead its goal was to develop a comprehensive life history of Nina's professional experiences. I then used the next interview to accomplish two things: (1) Delve more deeply into potential areas that might demonstrate generative behavior, and (2) Ask Nina to create an artistic (aesthetic) representation of one or more of the themes/ideas that emerged in the initial interview. It is important to note that although it will be discussed in more detail later in this section, I also used the initial interview (as well as the subsequent ones) as points of reflection for my researcher journal entries and as inspiration or topics for research-poetry related to this project.

The second interview with Nina followed more closely to the "responsive interviewing" method developed by Rubin and Rubin (2012). Instead of the prescriptive approach of the first

interview, this second interaction with Nina was characterized by a more flexible and fluid approach. Rubin and Rubin (2012) describe this approach as a "conversational partnership" that encourages the researcher and the participant to "actively contribute to the research by bringing to the interview their experiences and interests" (p. 72). This type of interviewer-interviewee interaction encourages the researcher and participant to engage in relational inquiry. During this interview, I explored my relationship with Nina, my own narratives associated with her teaching, and how I have been impacted by her pedagogy and her educational philosophy. This particular protocol was developed after the primary interview as it was dependent on stories and themes that presented themselves during the initial encounter. The final interview with Nina occurred after the interviews with the co-participants and after Nina had appropriate time to create an artistic representation of one component of her life history.

Co-Participant Interview Protocol

The interview guide with the co-participants (three currently-practicing educational administrators who once had Nina for a teacher) followed the Rubin and Rubin (2012) responsive interviewing model. As previously mentioned, this approach celebrates flexibility in the process. I utilized three types of questions: main questions, follow-up questions, and probes (see Appendix D). The main questions helped guide the overall direction of the interview while the follow-up and probe questions were specific to the conversation that occurred in response to the main questions. This interviewing model allowed for the dialogue between researcher and participants to be inclusive and organic. Sample main questions for the co-participants in this study included,

• Is there a particularly memorable story/event that you recall that happened in Nina's class or was a direct result of an interaction with her? What stories have "stuck with you" these years after leaving her tutelage?

• Reflecting back on your time as a teacher, can you think of any lessons or pedagogical precepts you learned from Nina? Were there any particularly meaningful examples she set for you in terms of dealing with students?

• As an administrator, reflect back on how/what Nina taught you. In retrospection, are there any skills/practices you would recommend to other teachers that you recall her employing? How would you describe her as a teacher from an educational leader's perspective?

These questions served to generate conversation surrounding Nina's impact on their professional (and perhaps, personal) lives. Additional communication with the co-participants was conducted following the second interview with Nina. That interview was intended to probe deeper into Nina's life history and how her narratives intersected with the narratives of the educational leaders in this study.

Life History Artifacts/Documents

As Janesick (2014) notes, "Documents are a mainstay and can be analyzed just as interviews are analyzed through the constant comparative method, looking for themes, and coming to some interpretation of the interviews and documents" (p. 304). For this study, I took an ABER approach and use poetic inquiry to generate additional life history data. Since Nina is an artist and expresses herself through both verse and visual art, I asked her to create original art based on the themes/ideas/concepts culled from the initial life history interview. As Leavy (2009) points out, though art as long been a topic of research, it is only recently that the use of art as a methodological tool has been employed by social scientists. She also recognizes the breadth of arts-based inquiry, noting, "the arts are being used during all phases of the research endeavor from data collection [as in this study] to analysis and representation" (Leavy, 2009, p. 4). Nina chose to use the art genres of poetry and a visual "life-map" as methods to communicate or enhance elements of her teaching-life story. It

must also be noted that although participant reflective journals are typically valued for their textual content, Nina's journal used a variety of visual representations as well. In other words, the journal itself became a piece of art that also constituted data for the purpose of this study.

Poetic inquiry as a research method offers a unique way to analyze respective phenomena. Janesick (2011) reflects this in her statement, "poetry is a way to see the world in new ways" (p. 64). Faulkner (2007) provides a concise summary of the uses of poetry as a research mechanism, noting that it offers

> a 'special language,' a language that researchers want to access when they feel that other modes of representation, such as prose, will not capture what they desire to show about their work and research participants when they wish to explore knowledge claims and write with more engagement and to reach more diverse audiences (p. 219).

Poetry, therefore, can provide not only additional qualitative data, but it can do so by allowing participants to speak in a different voice.

In this study, Nina chose to create poetry based on themes/issues that arose in our first interview session. This process contributed greatly to the relational nature of life history work as poetry "allows a researcher and participant to collaborate in the distillation of meaning pulled from an interview text" (Burdick, 2011, p. 15). Thus the poetry served a dual purpose: it became data to be examined for themes of generativity, but it also served as a catalyst for researcher-participant dialogue. This occurred as I read her poetry and then responded with poetry of my own, creating a "poetic dialogic encounter." This series of poems (see Appendix A) offered an excellent method of further exploring Nina's ideas about education, teaching, and generativity. The poems have the potential be more evocative than the interview text alone. They added yet another layer of interpretive co-creation on the part of researcher and participant. They do this by offering responses to the research questions in

addition to allowing for divergent narratives to be created in the form of new reflections on teaching, generativity, and education in general. In addition to the artistic creation of poetry, Nina also expressed her ideas through a visual medium: a life-map. Therefore another data point became the aesthetic representation of ideas/themes presented by the participant.

Visual Art as Data: Life Maps

Janesick (2010) elucidates on Dewey's concept of art as a communicative tool for human experience when she notes, "Thus art is a process within a given experience. It exists within a context of a given history, culture, language, and vernacular" (p. 181). Therefore the use of art – in this study, two distinct media – as data pieces offers even more opportunity for analysis, reflection, and interpretation. Leavy (2009) recognizes how visual art expands the researcher's access to the subject under analysis, proposing that participants may create "visual models in order to assist data analysis and interpretation [or create] art as a part of the representation of data" (p. 218). The visual aesthetic of the work, therefore, provides researchers another window into the possible narratives, thoughts, and ideologies at work within the life-world as portrayed by the artist-participant.

In this study, I employed Suarez-Orgega's (2013) idea of using *conceptual maps*. A conceptual map is a jointly-created visual representation of all or part of a person's life history. It is a visual (and sometimes textual) method for capturing a person's "path" in respect to a particular time-frame in her life. It is jointly-created in that as the researcher, I provided specific instructions for what this piece of art may communicate. While my instructions were not prescriptive, – Nina had complete autonomy in how the finished product would look – I did offer suggestions for the particular life-episodes that it might encompass. This occurred after the initial interview and subsequent transcription, thereby allowing Nina to craft an aesthetic/artistic representation of one aspect of her life history. Thus her life map served as a vital component of the research process as it further revealed her

interpretation of her teaching life – this time using visual *and* narrative components. Two additional data pieces used in conjunction with the research-poetry and the life map were the reflective researcher and participant journals.

Reflective Journals

Janesick (2010) suggests using reflective journals (researcher and participant) to aid in the triangulation of data sets in a qualitative study. Journal writing has the potential to shed light on the researcher's and the participant's thoughts during the research act. This creative habit also allows the participant to reflect on the actual telling of her lived experiences. Butler-Kisber (2010) describes this process as one way that researchers can "live the story" by keeping personal journals that "interrogate their assumptions, note reflections, and experiment with interpretations" (p. 69). Journaling, then, is a method for talking "back" to the data – it allows for reflective discourse with oneself throughout the research process.

I presented Nina with a notebook to note any ideas, thoughts, dreams or reflections that occurred to her throughout our time working on this project. I was especially interested in having her reflect on the generative nature of any elements in her teaching life history. The journal offered further insight into her life history, as it required her to record her impressions and contemplate her life in a concentrated manner. I, too, kept a journal to record my reflections and thoughts on varied aspects of this project. I noted any concerns, ideas, or creative musings that arose while creating Nina's life history. My journal entries also assisted in helping me clarify my role in the research act, situating me within the study itself as I reflected on the process. Additionally, my researcher reflective journal allowed me to chronicle how this study has changed me as a researcher and as an educational leader.

Data Analysis

Data analysis in life history research mirrors many of the same techniques used in all qualitative research. Central to this idea is the simultaneous collection and analysis of data

(Labaree, 2006; Suarez-Ortega, 2013). This means the researcher, who is also the research instrument, must be attentive to the narratives being collected, conducting analysis "on the fly," if you will. This permits the researcher to gain "a better understanding of the co-constructed nature of the data as it emerges" (Labaree, 2006, p. 129). By being attentive to the data being collected, the researcher is better able to capitalize on new avenues of discovery related to the phenomenon under study.

In this life history project, I used three specific approaches to analyzing the data. The first approach is adapted from Suarez-Ortega's (2013) analytical process. I first examined the data for *critical incidents*. These are points in Nina's narratives that may reveal what she feels are meaningful portions of her teaching life. These were areas where specific changes occurred or where she felt narrative emphasis should be placed. These became broad-based conceptual codes used in the initial analysis of the interview transcripts. These codes are described in more detail in Chapter 5 of this study. This analysis was conducted on the text from the first interview. This analytical approach, therefore, provided areas for further exploration in the second interview and created potential topics for the poetic inquiry phase of the research process.

The second analytical component was conducted on the second interview text. I examined the narratives and attempt to narrow the broad concepts or initial terms, coding them in such into identifiable "chunks" of specific thematic narrative groupings. This procedure involved reading and re-reading the second interview text to look for textual or conversational clues that may hint at a deeper meaning behind the words themselves. This process is typically referred to as focused coding in which the initial codes (from the first review of both transcripts) are further grouped to create specific categories or themes that can represent elements of Nina's life history (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Merriam, 2009; Saldana, 2013). I also employed the constant comparison method of analysis in which data from the

first interview text was compared with data from the second interview to look for areas of incongruity or tension between the narratives (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Constant comparison was additionally insightful when used to compare/contrast the interview narratives and the poetry that was created.

My final analytical technique was a reflective data analysis approach in which I reviewed the respective data sets and my analysis of those sets in an introspective and critical manner. This was designed to encourage thoughtful and transparent review of the data *and* the data-analysis process to create validity and transparency about the entire research act. This created a unique situation in which the researcher reflective journal became both data *and* data analysis. It is data in that it too contributes to the life history project, however it has the potential to do so in a reflective analytical manner, examining the entirety of both the narratives and the analysis (or response) to the narratives. This process used what Rubin and Rubin term the "analytic memo" (2012). The "memos" in my researcher reflective journal helped create an organizational structure for the data analysis process – I now have a documented way to focus my thinking concerning the life history data.

In summary, I organized the data-analysis process into distinct iterations (see Table 3). I examined Nina's first interview text for critical incidents and used that text to generate ideas/concepts for poetic inquiry. The first interviews of the co-participants will be coded using open and then focused coding, looking for narrative resonance between their stories and Nina's teacher-narratives. I also used this coding process on Nina's second interview. Finally, I conclude with member checks (Janesick, 2010) in which all of the participants are given copies of the transcripts. This allows the participants to check for fidelity in the respective narratives.

Table 3.

Data Analysis Iterations

Data Phase	Research Procedure	Purpose
After 1st interview of Main Participant	Critical Incidents / Open Coding	Develop life history narrative and/or subjects for poetic inquiry
Poetic Inquiry	Dialogue w/ participant through exchanged poetry	To create alternative representations of life history data
After 1st interviews of Co-Participants	Open Coding	Explore concepts for generative actions of Main Participant
After Open Coding of 1st interviews of Co-Participants	Focused Coding	Develop specific interpretative categories from open codes
After 2nd interview of Main Participant	Focused Coding	Develop specific conceptual terms related to participant's life history narratives
After Open Coding of 2nd interview of Main Participant	Aesthetic Conceptualization: Life Map	To provide additional methods of articulating important life history incidents/ideas
After Open Coding of 2nd interview of Main Participant	Focused Coding	Develop specific interpretative categories from open codes
After 2nd Interview of Co-Participants	Synthesis of interview texts and researcher interpretations	To examine narratives to see if a generative approach by the Main Participant exists
Final Interview with Main Participant	Constant Comparison between interview texts	To create a life history narrative of the Main Participant
Member Checks	Participants review transcripts	To check for fidelity to the participants' narratives

Research Trustworthiness

Qualitative inquiry rejects the positivist idea that one essential objective Truth exists to be discovered through research. Instead qualitative research adheres to a more naturalistic approach to inquiry, focusing "on how people perceive their worlds and how they interpret their experiences" (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 3). The respective participants in a study, therefore, subjectively and socially construct the "truth" surrounding a particular avenue of inquiry. Since a life history project is qualitative inquiry utilizing a narrative epistemology,

this study embraced the participants' personal construction of meaning through the storying of their lives.

Despite a disavowal of positivist notions of validity and generalizability, qualitative studies are still required to adhere to rigorous research practices and standards. The goal of this type of research is trustworthiness. Trustworthiness is variously described as research that is "thorough and credible" (Rubin & Rubin, 2012) and/or social science inquiry that is "persuasive, authentic, and plausible" (Butler-Kisber, 2010). However it is defined, trustworthy research is predicated on the researcher maintaining integrity throughout the research process. Largely this is accomplished two ways: through an intentional transparency on the part of the researcher and by recognizing and accessing a variety of data sources from which to propose findings.

In this study, I employ transparency in a variety of ways. First, the interview protocols were provided in advance to the main participant and the co-participants. This allowed them to think through and reflect on their possible responses. I also used a researcher reflective journal as a means to lay bare my own thoughts, biases, and research conundrums. This introspective process fostered an organic and holistic approach to addressing issues of concern and/or ethical considerations surrounding my study. Finally, the use of member checks also created a sense of transparency about this life history project. All of the participants were provided an opportunity to review and address inaccuracies within the transcripts in an effort to accurately portray their thoughts/ideas on the subject matter discussed in the interviews.

This study assumed the research act to be one of dialogue and reciprocal communication. It also recognized that multiple sources of data and thick, rich descriptions contribute to the research findings being viewed as credible. This life history project used interviews with two "sets" of participants (Nina and the educational leaders) as the primary

data collection method. It also uses participant-created documents/artifacts to delve more deeply into the concept of leaving an educational legacy. In addition, a researcher reflective journal and a participant journal were analyzed to provide yet another data set to be used in constructing the life history and/or the fictional representation that will also be created as a part of this project. The researcher reflective journal is particularly suited for situating the researcher in the process and for helping to orient the respective findings from the other data.

Essentially, the goal of narrative qualitative inquiry (of which this life history aspires to be) is to create a sense of verisimilitude. Verisimilitude is a literary term used to describe writing (literature, usually) that is crafted in such a way as to create a sense of believability and truthfulness of experiences. It is not supposed to be a literal (factual) truth, but instead it is writing that places the reader *into* the world of the narrative itself. I accomplished this by spending extensive time reviewing the transcripts, reflecting in my researcher journal, and by utilizing writing techniques that created a text consisting of clarity, believability, and realism. Ultimately, my desire for this project was that the finished report reflect a "narrative truth" which is grounded on the idea that "storied texts serve as evidence for personal meaning, not for the factual occurrence of the events reported in the stories" (Polkinghorne, 2007, p. 9). I therefore offer a construction of Nina's life history in a manner that honors her voice and her experiences as fundamental to who she is as a person.

Ethical Considerations

All human science research requires specific attention to issues of ethical concern. This is especially true for life history research as it is deeply relational in its processes (Cole & Knowles, 2001; Goodson & Gill, 2011; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Janesick, 2010). Rubin and Rubin (2012), for example, note that in their responsive interviewing model "both interviewer and interviewee are treated as people, with feelings, opinions, and experiences" (p. 10).

There is no attempt to view each other with detachment or a presumed objectivity. This research stance is therefore founded upon an ethic of care throughout the research act. Typically, ethical considerations in human science research are concerned with potential harm, issues of privacy, and use/presentation of research products. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) succinctly summarize questions that qualitative researchers should ask:

- How can the identity of the subjects be disguised?
- What are the consequences of the study for the participants?
- Will potential harm outweighed potential gain for the community at large?
- What consequences may arise from publication of the study?
- How will the researcher's role affect the study?

These are important questions for maintaining ethical researcher standards and practices.

In this study, I began by obtaining the informed consent (see Appendix A) of all the participants. I fully disclosed my research goals and aims and made sure that the participants were aware of the research process as well as my intentions towards how the research data would be used. Informed consent also solidified the voluntary nature of the research project, allowing participants to decline to participate and/or to leave the study at any time. This consent process specifically outlined exactly what the participants are consenting *to* – providing them full disclosure as to how the research act (and final presentation) may impact them. It is a method to show respect to the narratives they share during this life history project.

I also created confidentiality parameters within the project. For example, participants are identified by pseudonyms to protect them from any unwanted attention or embarrassing anecdotes shared in the course of the research process. Janesick (2010) recommends this to enhance efficient processing of oral history projects by institutional review boards. Confidentiality was also enhanced in the manner in which the data is stored – for the purpose

of the project the interview transcripts are being stored digitally on a password-protected computer and the files will be destroyed three years after publication of this project. This is to ensure limited access to the participant's stories in the event that they feel threatened (personally or professionally) by any of the anecdotes they shared with me.

Finally, I subscribe to the important mantra of human science research: do no harm. After reviewing my protocols and research processes, I foresaw no potential areas that would harm the participants. I am cognizant, however, that in telling life stories, participants may recall and narrate troubling experiences from their past. I recognized this potential and I was prepared to act compassionately should these situations arise. This meant that I was prepared to stop or postpone an interview until the participant was more comfortable sharing further. Ellis (2007) encountered the damage that may occur once these experiences are published. She writes, "I failed to consider sufficiently how my blunt disclosures in print might affect the lives of the people about whom I wrote" (p. 10). She therefore goes on to promote "relational ethics" which asks researchers to consider compassionately the potential of harm in the researcher-participant relationship. Throughout all of the interviews, none of the participants expressed any angst or anxiety in sharing their narratives. Again, in this researcher process, by using pseudonyms, I was able to protect my participants from any harm associated with having their stories told.

Chapter Summary

This chapter outlined the research design of this proposed life history project. In it, I summarized the epistemological framework undergirding this study and I explained the rationale for the selection of the participants. I next discussed my role as a researcher, highlighting my relationship with the main participant, my vocation as an educational leader, and my penchant for narrative expression. The details of conducting the study were also disclosed, which included the use of qualitative interviews, document/artifact creation and

analysis, and the use of reflective journals – both the participant's and the researcher's. The data analysis phase was reviewed and finally, I discussed the ethical concerns that should be considered in a life history project. The next chapter in the study presents the co-constructed teaching life-history of Nina using her interview transcripts, participant and researcher artifacts (poetry and visual artwork), and interspersed with reflections/anecdotes from the researcher's journal.

CHAPTER FOUR: TEACHING WITH THE END IN MIND: THE TEACHING LIFE OF NINA BROWN

The genesis for this particular study began when I was interviewing Nina Brown, one of my former teachers, for a pilot study for a qualitative research class as a part of my doctoral coursework. We were discussing the "calling" to teach and I asked Nina how she viewed that phenomena. "Oh, I don't think about it much," she said. "I kind of feel like I'm a 'life-entrepreneur' and that by crafting the lives of others, I'm crafting my own." That notion – the idea that you fulfill your own goals and dreams by edifying the goals and dreams of others – resonated with my own beliefs about teaching. It was then I began pondering how a teacher with this professional (and personal) philosophy might impact her students. What effect might she have on future teachers or educational leaders? How does her approach to teaching manifest itself in the lives of those students long after they've left high school? What could we all learn from her life history – the story of her teaching-life?

Co-Storying A Life History: The Findings of this Narrative Inquiry

This chapter offers a snapshot of Nina Brown's life history – specifically, her teaching-life history. In the narrative that follows, I present a "storied dialogue" between Nina and myself that chronicles her life as an educator of 38 years. Throughout the course of this analysis, I mined her anecdotes and artifiacts for examples of generativity: I probed the data for seeds of Nina's legacy later brought to fruition in the lives of the four educational leaders, DeeDee, Deaundra, Leigh, and myself. By immersing myself in the various data components, I was able to co-construct an artificial narrative in an effort to present the research findings in

an engaging and in a manner authentic to the tenets of narrative inquiry. The sections
immediately following explain this process in more detail.

Data Analysis Techniques Used in Creating a Storied Dialogue

Remaining consistent to the theme of searching for "narrative truth," I used specific
analytical processes to create a "plot" based on the data collected. Initially, this consisted of
an open coding of the initial interview with Nina. These codes (See Table 4) represent
repeated readings of the data until a semblance of coalescence began to emerge. After the
second interview (and subsequent transcription of the interview), I again used the codes
listed in Table 4.

Table 4.

List of Initial Codes from Nina's Data

Code	Category of Textual Data
CRIT_ED	Critiques of Education
FAM	Family Influence
GEN	Generative Behaviors/Thoughts
MET	Metaphors
SCH_K12	Schooling: K-12
SCH_COLL	Schooling: College
PHI	Personal Philosophy
BLFS_TCH	Beliefs about teaching
PROF_CHA	Professional Challenges

I then applied the same analysis to the other respective data elements: the
participant's journal and artwork, her poetry, and my reflective journal entries. Next, I re-
examined the initial codes until a portrait of Nina's life history began to emerge as a series of
metaphorical constructs. These metaphors (See Table 5) honor the artistic and aesthetic
intent of this research as well as the self-declaration that Nina considers herself to be an
artist – a "life entrepreneur" – who views everything she does as making art. That includes, of
course, teaching.

These metaphors offer a specific framework around which the co-constructed "dialogic encounter" that follows this section was developed. They served as organizing parameters for the larger teaching-life history narrative. Thus I was able to use these

Table 5.

Nina's Life History Through Metaphors

Metaphor	Nina's Use of the Metaphor
Hero's Journey	Joseph Campbell's Hero Schema as a life-organization tool
Dovetailed corners	The craftsmanship and attention to detail needed to do good work
The Box	The constraints of school, life, education that she faces
Mr. Roger's Neighborhood	Where she believes her emphasis on kindness originated
It's A Wonderful Life	The ability to appreciate where you are and what you're to do
Intentional Creativity	The intersection of science in art found in teaching
Net of Gems	The connectedness of experiences and relationships
Seeds/Planting/Blooming	The ideas of generativity found in her work
Sgt. York	Coming to grips with feeling that she's where she's supposed to be
Tree Rings	The influence teachers have on students

metaphors and weave the narratives and thoughts behind them into a coherent story depicting Nina's approach to teaching and her understanding of her legacy. Data analysis also allowed me to find metaphors/descriptors in Nina's early life and to see those influences were evident in her later teaching life. For example, the box metaphor (the constraints of conformity and a failure to appreciate individualism) was evident in her childhood, her high school years, and was evidenced in her early and late teaching career. Nina's anecdotes consistently emphasized how this metaphorical construct exerted a powerful influence over the way she sees the world and therefore how she chooses to interact with it. In summary, Figure 2 offers a visual depiction of how the various data components were analyzed and used to craft a narrative of Nina's teaching-life history. Each step in the research process (both the collection and the analyses) flows into the next, relying upon the interaction between them.
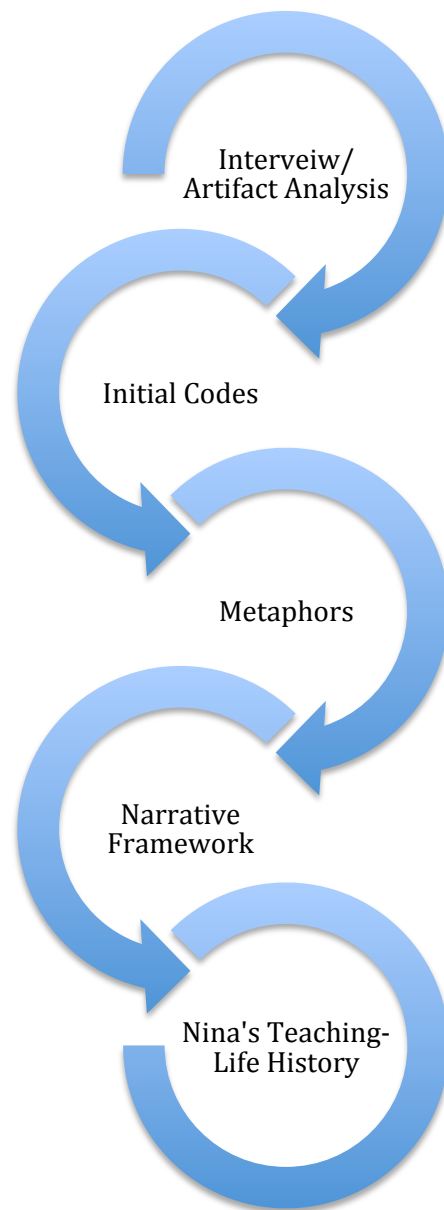
The next section breaks down more specifically how these elements were integrated into the presented story.

Figure 2. The creation of Nina's Teaching-Life History

Data Elements in the Narrative

The narrative that follows is an artificial construct in that it did not actually occur in the chronological or sequential manner that is depicted. As referenced above, it involved the analysis, interpretation, and manipulation of the data in an effort to produce a research

narrative. The weaving of the various elements of the data into a story provides the backbone for this narrative inquiry. It is what separates truly fictional narratives from research-stories: the researcher's agenda and research questions become the basis for the narrative that is presented as findings of the study.

The primary data elements used in this chapter's narrative presentation are interviews of the main participant – these interviews are actually more akin to research-conversations. In the narrative, I used both verbatim text from the transcripts in addition to paraphrased sections to create the narrative itself. Though it may appear by reading the story that Nina's words are in quotes representing her actual spoken dialogue, it must be noted that sometimes those words are combined narrative interpretations and manipulations on my part as the story's co-author. As mentioned in Chapter 3, I make no pretense that what is presented is intended to be a word-for-word recitation of the interviews. Instead I refer back to the tapestry metaphor, which depicts me weaving bits and pieces of the data into a narrative whole.

In addition to the interview text, components of the artifacts analyzed in this study are also woven into Nina's teaching-life history. Therefore, the story below also includes images from Nina's journal and words and phrases (whole or in part) from her journal. In addition, the life map Nina created as a piece of visual art was used in the story. By using the framework of metaphors described above, I was able to situate these images and words into the narrative in the appropriate place in order to further explicate and examine the research questions related to generativity and documenting a life history. For example, Figure 3 below is an image from Nina's journal and was something she discussed in the interview concerning Joseph Campbell's theory of the hero's journey. Nina's use of that metaphor to organize her own thoughts about her life and its purpose was bolstered not only by the textual elements of the narrative, but also by the visual image itself.

The use of Nina's and my poetry also is evident in the narrative. Again, depending upon the exact metaphor being discussed, certain lines and/or topics of poetry worked to further illuminate the power of that metaphor in Nina's depiction of her life. When Nina is describing how "boxed" in she feels, for example, lines from one of my poems is offered as a reflection on that feeling. Nina then responded with a poem that continued to examine how she communicates the truths of her life through that metaphor. Poetic inquiry, therefore, allowed both Nina and me to distill that feeling of constraint indicated by the box metaphor into concrete texts for readers of the study to interpret on their own merits.

A final data element present in the forthcoming narrative is the use of text from my researcher-reflective journals. In an effort to demonstrate reflexivity about Nina's generativity and her life history, I present this data as separate textual "interludes." While this runs the risk of disrupting the narrative flow of the piece, I chose to set these apart in italics to illustrate how authorial reflection contributes to the qualitative research project at hand. They are designed to give the reader a sense of the "voice" behind the research findings – in this case they serve as a brief narrative commentary on the particular metaphor/subject being discussed. Table 6 offers a summary of the various data elements synthesized into Nina's story.

Table 6.

Data Elements Used In Nina's Life History

Data Element	Narrative Use
Interview Transcripts	Direct quotes interwoven throughout and paraphrased passages
Life Map	Visual art inserted into the narrative
Nina's Journal	Visual art and textual data inserted into the narrative
Nina's Poetry	Select lines from the poetry used to reinforce the metaphors
Researcher Poetry	Select lines from the poetry used to reflect on Nina's metaphors
Researcher Journal	Reflective interludes inserted in the text to offer transparency

Teaching with the End in Mind: Nina's Teaching-Life History

I sat in Nina's classroom waiting for her to get back from a faculty meeting here at Small Town High. I was amazed by how little her room had changed – well the physical location had changed, but she still decorated it with the flair of an art history major. Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* was still stuck to one of the windows though it was beginning to yellow and tear around the borders. One wall was covered with student projects and the papers were softly rustling from the air conditioning vent blowing cool air over them. Her whiteboard was still filled from the day's teaching and her signature scrawls, diagrams, and little figures were all over it. I'd never been in this actual room before, yet I felt oddly at home.

Nina strode through the door in a bustle, apologizing for being late. I noticed her red hair was just as vibrant though much shorter than I remembered it. I also noticed slight tinges of gray at her temples. For some reason – and memory can do this – Nina was more petite than I recalled. Perhaps she had lost weight. Her cheeks were "Irish-ruddy-red" as she would describe them and their hue provided a distinct contrast to her fair skin (See Figure 3). She slid gracefully into the chair across from me.

"Are you familiar with Joseph Campbell's hero schema?" Nina asked me as she pulled out her journal from a drawer and set it on the table. I nodded, thinking back to a mythology class I took in college. "Sure. It's how he explains the monomyth – the idea that all cultures have a similar narrative arc for the their myths and legends."

"Well for me, finding Joseph Campbell's hero schema clarified my searching, my desire to encapsulate the journey I was on in this life of mine," she said. She opened up her journal and pointed to a page (see Figure 4). "Campbell," she continued, "chronicled how

Figure 3. Nina Brown
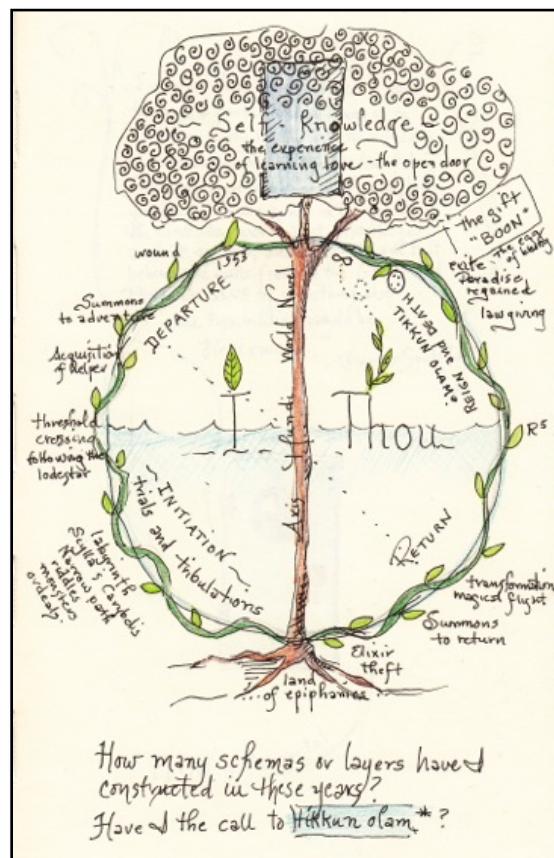
Figure 4. Nina's depiction of her life story presented through Campbell's Hero Schema

most cultures use a particular story-structure in their myths. It portrays our lives in the form a story about a journey. So he divides the story into three main sections: the Departure, the Initiation, and the Return Sometimes it's referred to as Birth, Adventure, Return." She again pointed to her drawing.

"These segments form an organizing narrative structure for the stories we tell about our cultures and therefore about our lives." Her eyes glanced up from the page to meet mine. "The Departure phase of narrative features tales and anecdotes associated with the beginning stages of the journey. Next, the Initiation stage highlights the trials and tribulations along the path of life. These are the tests, struggles, and triumphs that populate our life-stories. This is where all the 'stuff' happens. And finally, the Return describes the journey's approaching conclusion. That part's not my favorite because it reminds that things are coming to an end." She closed the notebook and sat back, lost for a moment in her own reflection.

"Anyways," she continued, "when you told me you wanted to interview me about my life history, I immediately began to think of it in terms of the hero's journey. And like all journeys, it starts at the beginning."

Nina's use of Campbell's Hero Schema doesn't surprise me at all. As her student and colleague, I've had numerous discussions with her about this. I even purchased The Hero With A Thousand Faces because of her. I don't know, though, how this metaphor will hold up throughout this project. I have to admit that I worry about whether I'll be able to construct a coherent story from all of her many anecdotes and philosophical opinions. I'm certainly not worried about collecting enough data – I'm more concerned whether I can extract any salient examples of her legacy to blend them all together into a life history. Or at least my idea of her life history anyway.

Departure: The Beginnings and the Things that Make a Difference

"When I think about the start of things or the Departure as Campbell calls it, I tend to think of who or what influenced me or what I learned from things in my life," Nina began. "So it works for me to divide things up into what people and events in my early life taught me. These are things that I remember to this day." I nodded.

"For example," she said, "do you know what this is?" She held out her hands clasped together with fingers interlocked. I shook my head.

"This reminds me of dovetailed corners. Do you know what they are?"

"They're joints woodworkers use when making drawers and things," I answered.

"Exactly. My father's hobby was woodworking. He was a mechanical engineer by training, but he loved building things out of wood. And he would make these fine, intricate joints where the corners of the board would come together – he'd spend hours on it. I'd ask him why he took so much time on a drawer that no one would even look at and he said, 'If you're gonna do something, damn it, do it right or don't do it all!' That's when I first learned about doing thing authentically . . . about honoring every moment."

"So even as a kid you began to appreciate craftsmanship?"

"Yes. And sometimes the most important parts of our lives are hidden from others. You can duff the outside so it looks good, but on the inside, you gotta live with yourself. And that's where the dovetailed corners come in. Here, let me read you a few lines from a poem I wrote about it." She slipped a poem from her journal and began reading,

A father's advice on well-built furniture is good to remember--

(Heed)

"It's those little details that only God notices"

My grandmother won't let me shortchange the art --

(perhaps that hem that is just uneven turned up material)

Blasphemy

It honors neither the fabric nor the craft

And that is the key –

Oh, this is the fiddly stuff of love

And art like a dovetailed trinity

Resides in hand, head, and heart

"You see," she said sliding the paper across the table to me, "that's what I mean by I carry these things with me even to this day. You have to be self-aware enough, even as a child, to know where your sources of truth are."

"What are some other types of experiences or lessons that make up your Departure stage?" I asked, reaching for her journal to guide my questions.

"Well I distinctly remember learning from my grandfather about the power of knowledge. He was a minister and I asked him one day about the tree in the garden. Why, I wondered, was it put there if we weren't supposed to eat from it? My grandfather explained that God didn't want puppets – he wanted people who made their own choices with care. That really got me thinking. Then I realized, as I got a little older, that every single day we're offered the choice to either eat from the good apple or the bad apple. It's a choice. And I like that."

"But how did that impact you on this part of your journey? I asked.

"It made me realize that knowledge could change things. I remember the day I learned to read. My mother taught me how to write with this big thick pencil – the letters – and then I realized that those words could be used for good or they could be used for evil. I soon learned there was naughty stuff that I wasn't supposed to learn and, of course, I wanted to learn that more than anything. So if a book was banned, I wanted to read it. I wanted to know why this

book was banned? So that root, from that tree, from that apple, was in me early on...maybe four, five – very early in this Departure stage."

Nina shifted in her seat and looked down again at the image of her journey. "One of the most significant things I learned in this stage was what it was like to be consigned to a box."

"A box?" I asked.

"I learned that other people's expectations can actually be limitations if you don't work, think, or act like they do. And that teachers have the potential to be the worst perpetrators of this narrow-mindedness.

"When I was in kindergarten we took a fieldtrip to the Pittsburgh Zoo. The next day we were told we could paint what we'd seen on the fieldtrip. I asked my teacher for yellow paint because all I'd been given was red and blue. And over there was yellow. It was in those little cups you get ketchup in . . . we were given paint in them. 'Can I have a yellow, please?' I asked. 'And an empty cup, because then I can mix them and make green.'

"No, I could not have yellow, I was told. I could only paint with red and blue! Well I wanted to paint a giraffe – I wasn't an abstract expressionist – I needed yellow for my giraffe not red or blue. So when she got busy, I went and helped myself. And I got spanked at school. I depict this in my life-map (see Figure 5)."

"And that was only the beginning of the box stories. Like the time in second grade when my teacher refused to let me write with my left hand."

"What did she do?"

"She'd come over, smack my left hand, remove the pencil, and shove it into my right hand."
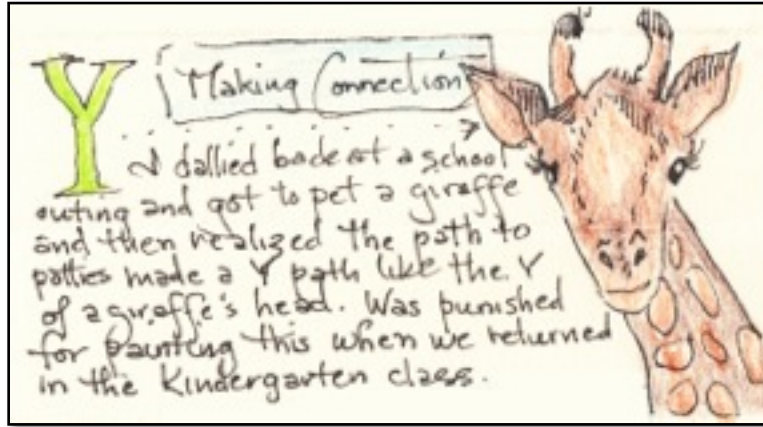
Figure 5. Nina's life-map describing her giraffe encounter.

"Well, it didn't stick, because I know you're left-handed."

"Of course it didn't. I'd watch her fat rear-end go up the aisle and I'd slap it right back into my left hand and turn the paper back around and start writing with my left hand again. I was going to do what I was going to do."

"And so you've spent most of your life trying to get out of 'the box' then?"

"More or less. But that's why the Departure stage is so important. You learn, you experience and then it all comes back to you during the Initiation stage. That's when you have to use what you've learned to along the next phase of your journey."

"I do find it interesting that some of these stories of confinement and conforming are directly due to schooling and yet you became a teacher."

Nina smiled. "That's *why* I became a teacher," she said. "You see, perhaps the most important lesson from my Departure stage was taught to me through years of watching *Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood*."

"I remember that show."

"He taught me that kindness is the key to all. I grew up watching him. And a lot of him went into me. He was so gentle and kind and caring. I used to watch this other TV show, the Ding-Dong School. And the 'teacher' of that show, Ms. Nancy, used to come out with the

Magic Mirror and she would see all the children, yet she never mentioned my name. She never saw Nina. But Mr. Rogers would look out at the camera and say, 'I like you just the way you are.' There was that intimacy of human-to-human interaction. He taught me to be kind."

"How so?" I asked.

"Well one time, in third grade, it was snowing like gangbusters outside so we stayed inside to do folk dances. There was a girl in my class, who had a birth defect and didn't really have a hand. She had a short stub for an arm and a few fingers. The music started playing and everyone began to pair up, but no one would take her hand. I'll never forget. I swallowed hard, walked across the floor and took hold of her fingers. It was the first time in my life I felt brave and compassionate. The truth was, I knew what it was like to be treated like an outsider. She was more like me than anyone really knew. Because another life-lesson I was taught for the journey was that I was different."

"I assume you don't mean the 'we're all unique in our own way' kind of different?"

"Kind of. I was seven years old and was in my basement. At that time we were living in Mt. Lebanon, Pennsylvania. I was crouched under the stairs painting on top of an old wood trunk that belonged to my grandfather who used it in boarding school. I remember it vividly. I was painting an apple and I was mixing colors. I was stunned when I discovered what orange and fuchsia do to red. The dance of colors fascinated me and I worked and worked and worked.

"When I was done, I couldn't believe where the time had gone. I'd been under there for hours and it seemed like I'd just started. That's the first time I realized how making art made me feel. It was the 'flow' of creativity and how you can get in the 'zone' and not even recognize the passing of time. Later, I asked some of my friends if they'd ever felt like that – they said 'no' so that was also the first time I felt different from other people."

Nina paused and glanced down at her journal. "So those are the things I recall from those early years of my journey that would later impact me," she said. "And, following Campbell's hero schema, it was then time to cross a threshold."

"A threshold? I asked.

"Thresholds are those pivotal moments in your life when you have to make a decision – you have to choose. In my case it was the choice to become a teacher. That marked the end of my departure stage and the beginning of the Initiation stage."

"How exactly did that happen?"

"To be honest, I never really planned to be a teacher. I was offered a chance to get a master's in art history – and I did. And then I figured I would get a Ph.D. in English and maybe teach college. I mean, the fire of learning had definitely been lit in me; I just never gave much thought to being a public schoolteacher. But like most people, my journey's taken a few turns I didn't expect. It isn't particularly romantic, but my mother went to a cook-out and heard they needed an art teacher at Large City High School so that's where I landed. After a couple of years, I looked around and saw that the teachers losing their jobs were always art or music teachers. So I took an English-teaching job at Small Town High School. So without even realizing it, I'd crossed a threshold and entered a new phase in my journey – time for some trials and tribulations." She leaned back in her chair and looked past me out the window.

Initiation: A Teaching Life

Nina views Campbell's hero schema as an organizing narrative for her life-journey. By leaving graduate school and crossing the "threshold" to become a teacher, she had entered the Initiation stage. This phase is marked by the formative events that slowly and surely craft the lives we come to know as our own. True to her artistic roots however, Nina's teaching life is best represented not as a chronological progression from her first years to the present

ones. Instead, she describes this phase through a series of metaphors and symbols that represent specific incidents and philosophies. She connects the things she's carried with her from the Departure stage to their influence or "blossoming," as she would put it, in the later stages of her journey. To honor her creativity and storied approach to how she portrays her life history, I've mined her journal, her interviews, her art, and our (hers and mine) poetry to create a narrative portrait of this metaphoric part of her life. I also continue to interject my reflections from my research journal.

Leaving the Threshold Behind

Nina's recollection of her early years in teaching was precise. "After surviving two years at Large City High School, I was pushed into another permutation of a teacher – this time as an English teacher – at Small Town High. That's when I think I began to first think of my life as a journey."

I pushed her on this point: What caused her to begin viewing her life that way, I wondered?

"Reflection," she said. "I began to ponder and reflect on what I was doing – or not doing. I was supposed to be an art historian. I was supposed to be exploring the humanities and then – poof – the ivory tower of college just vanished into thin air. There was this feeling of the whale's belly, the labyrinth, and hell's gate. I had hit my trials and tribulations.

"I questioned things. I learned and made mistakes and grew as a person. And now I'm able to look back at this stage of the journey in a very authentic *and* aesthetic sense. In other words, there's almost an artistic lens I view my life through. It's not really a chronology. It's more like a tapestry of events, ideas, people, experiences that are woven together to make a cohesive piece of life-art or teaching-as-art if you will."

This imagery piqued my interest. If she sees her life as a woven tapestry then that tapestry can be "unwoven." It can be broken down into its smaller parts for distillation and

clarification. "Describe these strands that come together to make up your teaching life," I asked. "To expand on your artistic analogy, if you see this stage as an impressionistic painting that can be viewed from afar as a coherent image – a tapestry, you say – then what do the individual brush strokes look like close up?" I asked.

Nina smiled. "I appreciate the painting metaphor," she said. "Okay, so let's start with how my teaching experience at Small Town High was similar to how my mother refused to buy Wonderbread when I was growing up."

It's a Wonderful [Teaching] Life

"I've taught 37 of my 38 years at Small Town High," she began. "You have to know the community there is very rural – very blue-collar . . . mostly phosphate miners back in the day, now a large migrant population who moves around at the whims of the harvest. So this school is very earthy – no pun intended [though she laughs at her little joke]. There are certainly social classes of students even here, but it's a small school that's typically under-resourced.

"But I love this school. When I started – and I largely believe this even today – I felt that to begin any adventure – to cross a threshold, for example – you needed to make some plans. But I also believed, then and now, in the expectation that you get what you need for the journey. So, I simply started teaching at this school knowing that I was placed here for a reason. I believe it was Eckhart Tolle who said, 'Whatever the present moment contains, accept it as if you had chosen it.' That became my mantra whenever I would wonder what it would be like to teach at a 'better' school – one with more wealth and resources."

"But Wonderbread?" I asked.

"That's from a poem I wrote about teaching at Small Town High. It's called, *It's a Wonderful Life. . . Continued*. In it I talk about how growing up I viewed Wonderbread with it's rich whiteness and brightly-colored packaging as the bread of 'all that.' I begged my

mother to buy it, but she never would – she served us wholesome 'peasant fare.' The poem helps me anchor my belief in being where you're supposed to be. I wrote,

> I knew that bread had to be the dainty triangles
>
> Crustless and decorated with tiny toothpicks,
>
> That graced the tables of the fabulously rich.
>
> I knew that bread was eaten by those who did not toil for a living –
>
> Early on, I realized the yoke I bore was hereditary
>
> Bread determined my lot in life.

The poem goes on to compare Small Town High with Bedford Falls from the movie, *It's a Wonderful Life*," and at the end I come to understand the blessings of not eating Wonderbread,

> Dear George: Remember no man is a failure who has friends. Thanks for the wings!
>
> Love Clarence.
>
> Cultivate the garden.
>
> Eat with all.
>
> Learn to like brown bread.
>
> Break it freely and share.

We both sit in silence for a few seconds, letting the thought (and for some strange reason, the smell) of bread and its connection to life settle around us. "The purity, then," I finally said, "of the 'real' bread contrasts with the falseness of the Wonderbread – meaning you came to appreciate the Small Town High experience for its authentic people and their need to be taught with just as much passion as the students at Large City High School."

"Sure, and the poem really holds me accountable to those dual feelings of longing for the 'better' teaching gig while at the same time wanting to honor the students at Small Town. I wrote,

So I drive my 8.6 miles to Small Town

My Bedford Falls

I know the streets,

The Potter's Fields and the Bailey park too,

And yes, I wanted white bread,

and travel and excitement. . .

Yet I also want the Zuzu petals more.

"And that's where the dovetailed corners I mentioned earlier come into play. I learned early on that craftsmanship and attention to detail and honoring the work was important. It didn't matter that these students were seen as less-than by some – hell, even by themselves sometimes. I was still going to teach them like they were worth it. Because they are.

And I can actually see a payoff to that now that I've been teaching for so long. I'm now teaching children of children and I'm getting ready to teach children of children of children. It's kind of like seeing like tree rings. I like the fact that I see the purpose, to see why I've worked so hard. There's a certain pride when they bring their child into my room to meet me. And they sometimes are embarrassed that they weren't the best students for me. And they want me to make their child better than they are. And I look at them and I say, 'Why darling, I don't remember any bad thing you did.' And most of the time, I really don't. And it might sound a little egotistical, but I want to feel like my life has meant something. I think that's why I've stayed so long at the same school."

I've always wondered why Nina stayed so long at such a small, almost-forgotten school. I even tried to hire her away once myself. I think, though, that this is really starting to get at her legacy – the fact that she was in it for the long haul and I have to admit, I get emotional thinking about how she made (and still makes) a conscious choice to serve the students

there. I know I wouldn't be who I am without her taking a notice in me as a teenager. I didn't realize it back then how starved I was for attention after the death of my father. Now I see that I was using my humor, wit, and writing ability to deflect any in-depth relationships. Nina saw through that and was both encouraging and inspiring. Again, I didn't see that then. I just liked the way she taught and paid attention to my antics. The legacy was starting and I didn't even know it.

I looked down at a few notes I had taken earlier. Her comments reminded me of something she'd said earlier. "But," I asked, "have you ever considered leaving Small Town High?"

"Yes," she answered. "I had a particularly difficult encounter with a parent who didn't want me teaching any literature that wasn't the Bible. My principal supported me the entire time, but it really soured me on the school and the children. So, I took an informal visit to the local International Baccalaureate school – the school where all the 'smart' kids were – because I heard there was an opening."

"What happened?"

"Well, I went and I looked at the school. I ended up having kind of a pseudo-interview at the end of the day. But I went from room to room to room. And I sat and I watched the kids and I watched the teachers. I walked down the halls and it was absolutely silent. There was low talking or there was the teacher talking, but there were no children talking. It was like the textbook perfect place. Knowledge…learning taking place. But I thought, I can't be noisy here. I felt like I would be going into a straight jacket.

"So, we finished the 'not an interview,' and the principal asked, "Could you see yourself here?' And I looked at him – and you know I'm very honest – and I said, 'I make too much noise. It's such a quiet school. Even the students are quiet. I'm not quiet. I'm noisy. I

write on the floor.' And he said that's what they needed. But it hit me just then: why would I go there to do something new for them when I could go back home and continue doing what the Small Town kids needed. That's when I realized that what I saw as a box because of the man who challenged my curriculum was really me just getting too comfortable. That visit totally blew me out of that. I came back renewed and ready to serve Small Town High again."

"There's the 'box' again," I said.

"Ah," Nina said, her eyes twinkling mischievously, "there's always a box."

Teaching outside the Box

"If we're talking grand metaphors to depict this stage of your journey," I began, "then the box metaphor has to be a powerful one for you. You talked about it considerably when you were reflecting on the Departure phase and how much the idea of the box came to frame many elements of your life."

"Absolutely," Nina said. "I have vivid memories from early in my life of thinking that school was too binding, too restrictive. It was almost like I was writing a note to my future self,

> School is boring. Teachers are, for the most part, pedantic and unimaginative. Learning must be interesting. It's only when I teach myself that I realize I'm responsible for my own head. P.S. Don't be like this when you're a teacher.

So early on I came to view the general structure of school as stifling. It's disappointing to me, that our education system seems to reward the constraints of the box.

"Not long ago, for example, we were getting together – the English department – to do some planning. We were discussing how to teach a unit on Greek mythology and they insisted on starting with Antigone. So I brought it up at the meeting. I said, 'Oh, I have some nice slides to show why the Greeks came to the theatre. It wasn't just the wealthy who came, you

know, everybody came. And I have a great theatron where they can learn where the orchestra is...where the chorus is...you know, the proscenium.'

"And these three other teachers looked at me and said, 'I don't want that. I'm not doing that.'

"I said, 'Are you going to give them some Greek philosophical ideas like Sophrosyne, etc?'

"They looked at me and said, 'Nope, we're not going to do that. They're just going to read the play and do what it says to do on the side of the book.'

"Well of course the students hated it. That's letting the box rule you instead of understanding the box and working your way in, around, and out of it. As teachers we have to be disobedient sometimes to the box. Understand what the box is...understand why the box was put there...understand the people that made the box.

"I'm very critical of public education because I believe in it so passionately. The other day I came across my Teacher of the Year essay from 1985. It's somewhat long – forgive me – but it captures how I felt and still feel about education. Now keep in mind this was written almost twenty years ago,

> Few of my students know the names or locations of any stars in the sky, yet we live in the 'space age.' The thought of a man going to Mars or even to 'see' the dark matter of the universe contains the best urges of man's need to discover. Why are students not excited by the frontiers offered? Many students are bored with education; I believe this is the problem, coupled with the need for real and relevant applications based in the classics, should be taught in tandem with new applications of knowledge. Too much emphasis is placed on knowledge that can be objectively tested. We need to teach reasoning, weighing of ethical principles, problem delineation and solving based on sound principles of creative application. I feel that our puny consideration for the

future in terms of careers stunts the full use of the human infatuation. Education should be exciting, timely, and also rooted in the great ideas of previous ages.

I've read over her "Teacher of the Year" essay numerous times and I'm dumbfounded how accurate it is in describing the plight of education today. Almost 30 years later and education has actually devolved into more of a dystopia than even Nina could have believed at the time. Again, I'm struck by how much I agree with her sentiments and I didn't even know she felt that way until this project. I wonder if even some of that part of her legacy has worked its way into me? Could I have been "brainwashed" by the way Nina taught so that I'm now repulsed by a system that wants to squash the creativity out of education? This is an epiphany: this process of exploring Nina's teaching life is also allowing me to discover some of my own educational "roots." It also makes me wonder even more, how the heck did she do it?

"So when people ask me why I write on the floor, why I have murals of knights fighting battles on my walls, why the solar system mobile hangs from my ceiling, or why I continue to re-work my lesson plans every year for each new group of students – it's because I won't let them box me in. That's what I took from my box-experiences in the Departure part of my life-journey and that's how it's affected my teaching-life of the Initiation stage."

"So what does a 'Nina Brown' approach to teaching look like then?" I asked.

"I call it intentional creativity. It's when teaching intersects with science and art. Our big problem in education is that we've murdered wonderment. So when I'm teaching A.P. English, I know that in order to take an AP test, students have to be able to think outside the box. And you can't do that if you've never learned to fly on your own wings, if you've never tested your wings. Or if all you've ever done is fill in blanks and write short answers and not explore an idea for the glory of the idea. That's why I like themes. Themes allow you to pull

things from different directions. My teaching is Socratic with a little didacticism thrown in to keep everybody honest.

"Here's a story that I think nicely captures what I try to do when I teach. I had a student once named Courtney Morrison. I knew right at the beginning of the year that she was going to try and use her prettiness as her 'ticket.' She looked like a Disney character – big, beautiful eyes. But she couldn't write a lick. And I thought, no, this year, I'm going to show you the deeper Courtney.

So this little girl – I said something – and it wasn't on a lesson plan somewhere. "And I told the class, 'You think about this: what am I grateful for?' And I said, you need to be able to remember one thing that made you happy during the day. And from the back of the room Courtney said: 'I don't think about things like that.' And I said, 'Well Courtney, maybe you need to.'

'Why?' she asked.

'Because it will put you in touch with your inner-Courtney.' And "poomph" you could almost see her head explode. She had never given any thought about her inner-Courtney. That was the door opening with Courtney Morrison. And all year I just picked at it and picked at it and picked at it. That's what I mean when I say I want my students to not be boxed in.

"Because, if I'm being honest, teaching is very spiritual for me. It's downright religious. Seeing whether or not you can get a person to get an idea and have it stick motivates in me with the challenge of getting them to be better and feel stronger and more powerful. It's the laying of my hand on an idea and figuring out how can I pass it to theirs? It's making connections.

"You talk and write a lot about making connections," I said.

"That's because it's another great metaphor for explaining how my teaching life has lasted 38 years," she answered.

The Net of Gems: The Connectedness of the Teaching Life

Nina flipped through a few pages in her journal before stopping on a page with a picture on it. "For many years I've appreciated the work of Frankl and Erikson that taught me there was real power in the act of self-reflection. The experience of working with you on this life history has really allowed me to see different 'pathways' that I couldn't see I was even traveling on at the time. And for me, the metaphor or image that works the best to capture this idea is the Net of Gems." She turned the journal so I could see it and pointed to her artwork (See Figure 6).
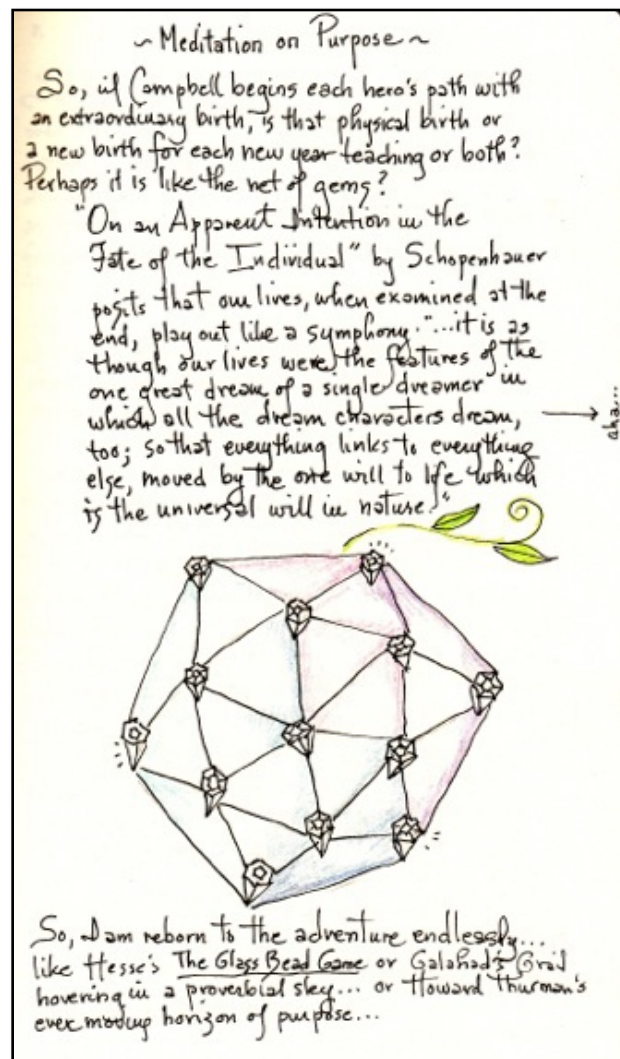
Figure 6. Nina's visual interpretation of the connectedness of life.

"The Net of Gems," she continued, "is an Eastern philosophical idea that all our experiences connect one to another. If we look at our life's journey as consisting of a series of experiences, they sparkle and then you make another experience and then you realize – and this is where self-reflection comes in and why this life history project [points to notes] was interesting – that you can look back and seeing the pathway. The paths don't exist in isolation. They all reflect - it's beautiful. It's the microcosm and the macrocosm. And I look at the stars at night and I realize that the same connecting network is in me, making up my atomic structure.

"I can see how that make sense on a cosmic existential level," I interrupted, "but how does this fit into your teaching?"

Nina chuckled. "Well, just like the sparkling Net of Gems, it's all connected. It works for me on a personal level and on a pedagogical level. Pedagogically, it's how I get students to think about and experience learning. I tell the kids all the time why I'm doing what I'm doing. I want the axon to hook into its little dendrite," she said, making a hooking motion with her hands.

So when we're learning Greek mythology or art history or studying Shakespeare, I want them to see a pattern and how it connects to another one and another one and another one. Every once in a while I might stop and ask, 'How many single thoughts go with the idea of Zeus?' It's very powerful when students make those connections and when they realize that those connections, these 'gems' in their nets, are really what learning is all about."

"But you also said this metaphor or patterns or 'gem-making' works for you on a personal level as well," I said.

"Yes, let me read a few lines from one of my poems about this." And she opened her journal, unfolded a poem that had been glued in, and began to read,

I like to look at pictures of the brain

Sometimes wonder which axon beckons which dendrite

The very uniqueness of the mind is a stairway of explosions

Brightness was all

And then the wrapped bundle of the self

We must peek through tiny pinpricks

Shield our eyes from the blast of arrogance and atom

Or shy away from the beast even inside our food.

"You see," she said, gently closing her journal once again, "I see my life – all of our lives actually – as this 'neural network.' Which is a life network. Which is the cosmos. Which is discovering, 'I'm not alone.' That discovery, I believe, is a moment of humanity.

"People ask me all the time, 'How could you stay at that little rural school for 36 years?' And on one level, they're right. I get up every morning and go to work at a tiny school. Some people would say I have a tiny life. But I don't feel that way at all. And maybe that's the beauty of it all. It wouldn't matter where I went, if you stuck me in a room at a large urban school, I'm going to do it the same way – make connections, make dovetailed corners with my students. And to me, that's what it's really about anyways.

"A gem is made - if you think about it carefully – by fitting dovetailed joints. And when I had that realization, it was big. That's teaching. That's living. I don't see how you can separate the two. Teaching is a unique profession in that sense."

"Nina," I said, "this is all very engaging on an artistic and metaphoric level, but how does it come through in actual practice in your classroom?"

"Okay," she began, "let me give you an example. Recently we were supposed to be reading *Cyrano De Bergerac*. So instead of just pulling out the play and reading it, I wanted to have them make some 'neural connections' –some gems. For example, I showed them a map of Paris. Showed them pictures of Paris. Showed them where the Marais is. Showed them

where the Bastille was. Showed them where the rich people live. It only took a few orchestrated minutes to do this. I had them fill out their own map. They may be in Small Town and they may never get to Paris, but these connections will enhance their understanding of the play.

"Another example would be how I intentionally leave images up on the screen from one class to the next. I pretend like it's not supposed to be for the incoming class. I know, it's a little devious, but hey, it works. So, recently I left a slide up of the ancient site, Machu Picchu. The students came slogging in from their previous classes and invariably somebody asks, 'What's that?' 'Oh,' I say, 'that's Machu Picchu.' We talk about it for a just a few minutes and then we'll get into the main lesson. And the gems in the net are being created – and they don't even know it yet.

"And remember, this is all a part of the Initiation stage – trials and tribulations. I'm taking those things I learned early and using them – or sometimes being used by them – along this part of the journey."

"Describe for me then, another example of something you carried with you into this phase of the journey," I said.

Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood and the Kindness Quotient

"For me, one of the most significant things I discovered early and then used essentially every day of my teaching career came from Mr. Rogers. I know it sounds cheesy, but like I mentioned earlier, I saw the empathy and kindness with which he treated everyone in his 'neighborhood' and that really resonated with me.

"So I learned early in my teaching career to treat students with kindness and respect. If you're nice to people, if you treat people with equity and kindness, they will not eventually run over you. They will realize that you care about them. And it can take a while. You have to practice great perseverance. So I do that in a variety of ways.

"For example, I have what I call 'hall-friends.' They're not my students, but I see them walking the halls between classes. And I greet them. I say hello. I wish them a good morning. So I've got all of these children who see me as someone who at least cares enough to notice them – to greet them. It's really the Mr. Rogers' thing again: be kind.

"And I stand at my door and I greet my students. I speak to them, not at them. I look at the cut of their character not at the circumstances they've been put in. This past year, for example, I had a student - he's sitting in jail right now. But one of his friends stopped and told me that he should have listened to me. And I told his friend, 'If you see him, tell him I love him anyways.' Yes, he should've listened when I took him into the room and I put it in plain language: you can't do that. You're not honoring who you are. I don't care where you come from – honor your life.

"I tried to give him love. I tried to show him that no matter how vile he was in class at first, I would tell him, 'I won't accept that behavior, but I still like you.' And then one day I was able to look at him and say, 'I really love it when you're here.' And he remembered that day. Because he would turn in papers and say, 'I tried to do my very best.' So while I grieve for his incarceration, I hope he at least knows what it felt like to be noticed, what it feels like when someone recognizes the value of the work you do.

The story of Nina's student who's now in jail intrigues me. I wonder how I would respond if I found out one of my students was in jail and thought to send a message back to me? I'm sure some of my former students are incarcerated – the law of averages would support that fact. This little anecdote is quite a "creative nugget" though. My creative wheels are turning and I'm wondering if I can use this later in the research product. This little snapshot goes to show – especially so – how generative Nina is/was. Here's a kid who remembers what he did for her even though he's messed up his life. Could something be done with this – also

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thinking about the whole giraffe/painting incident back when she was in school. That's also

possibly fodder for some type of fictional narrative expansion and for showing how research

can be communicated through a lot of different methods of representation.

Nina continued: "But it's important to note that being kind doesn't mean being wishy-washy or being soft. If you're really going to teach – to have students learn – then you also have to be very direct with them. That's being kind as well. This year, for example, I taught a young man with cerebral palsy – probably about a 70 IQ. And while he had not been given a lot of things to work with in cognitive terms, he had a heart as big as Missouri. He was incredibly loving and his classmates really responded to him. However, he lacked various social graces. He would pick his nose and sometimes touch himself inappropriately. And his peers noticed, trust me. My team teacher came over and expressed her concern. And I said, 'I'll take care of it.' So I took the child into my office and I looked at him and I said, 'Look. You're getting ready to work for SPCA. You're going to be dealing with people. Darling child, you cannot pick your nose and you cannot touch yourself in public like that. And if nobody else will tell you that, I will. So don't do it again. And I love you.' And he looked so embarrassed and when I said, 'I love you,' I was letting him know that whatever gross thing he just did, I still saw the goodness in him.

"That's kindness too. And the amazing thing is that students respond to honesty and authenticity when you have a relationship with them based on kindness and respect. I can truly say this is probably the most important tool in my teacher's toolbox: kindness and respect for the humanity of students. Be kind. Love one another. All those little diddly things that we forget - that we don't think are important. I teach students to honor the day."

Nina's passion for teaching – for education – was palpable to me. Her voice inflection rose and fell with each anecdote and philosophy from her teaching-life. And knowing that I

too was a benefactor of her teaching, made me even more curious about her own processes. I wanted to understand her thoughts about how she was able to transfer these passions to her students. "Nina," I said, "you've used some very specific metaphors and mental constructs to describe this part of your life – the teaching part of your journey, if you will. I wonder, though, why you think you've been so successful at reaching your students – beyond simply being kind to them? I mean, I agree kindness is important, but not every kind person can teach."

"Good point," she answered. "That goes back to another of those things I brought with me from my Departure phase: It's using the creative flow – the artistry of teaching – as a portal to engage students. Art, you see, has always been my foundation for teaching."

Teaching as Art: The Creative Flow of Education

"You'll recall I talked earlier about when I was painting as a child and time just flew by. That feeling, that experience of being in a zone – of understanding what a creative flow felt like – is the same feeling I get when I'm really teaching well. It's almost like it's a portal to a different world (see Figure 7).

"I admit this is a very abstract thing. I know people have studied 'flow' and how artists and athletes experience it and because I'm an artist – and have been since I was a child – the only way I know how to approach teaching is as an artist would. And I've seen this 'flow' in action over and over throughout my years of teaching. The best examples I can think of are when we're really into a lesson and time almost seems to freeze. I always know that the teaching and learning are good when they're fun. When I'm having fun, and they're having fun, and the bell rings and we have to hurry to clean up because we forgot time - that's a good day. That's teaching with artistry.

"And just like with any piece of art you're crafting – a story, a poem, a picture, a song – teaching with artistry is different for each class, for each student. For example, if you get
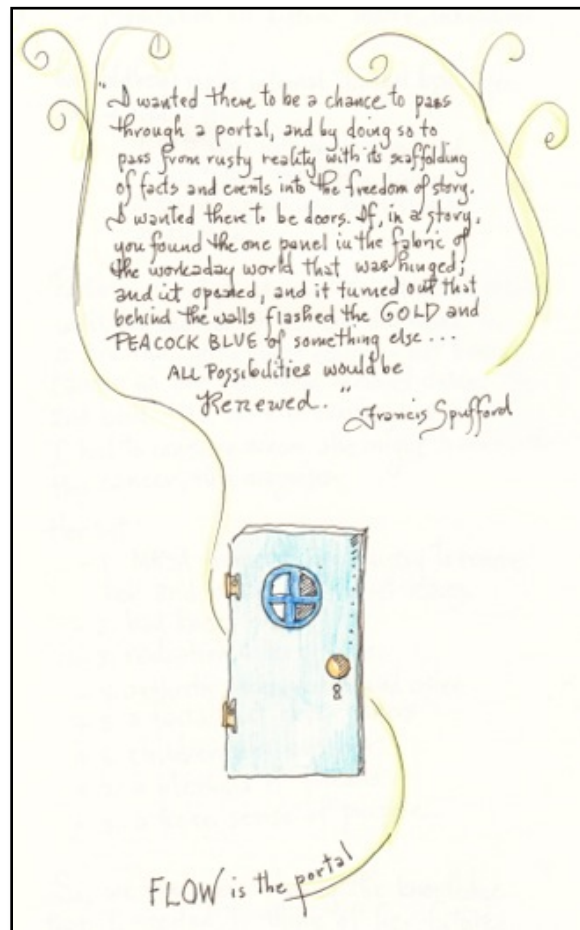
Figure 7. Nina's depiction of flow as a creative portal.

 to know a class intimately as to what their weaknesses and strengths are, you pick pieces of

literature that lift them, that add to their knowledge, that polish them. You don't cram them

into the same hole. You make the opening to fit them - for them to rise. So the way you

present it in one class is not the way you present it in other classes. And that's part of the art

of it all.

"This is where it all intersects for me. I think the amazing thing about art is that it lets

us see, hear, experience something from the perspective of someone else – in ways we could

never do otherwise. When I read Toni Morrison, I'm a Black woman. I become a different

person. Dickens is that way. He offers us female and male. So you can enjoy both

perspectives in his work. He allows you to experience something that you couldn't normally. And that's what the power of art is: you get to try on somebody else's thought process. And while I love science and I understand the mystery of math, those fields tend to prefer either a right or wrong answer. Well, the world isn't like that.

"And here's the connection: authentic learning also allows us to experience the world through someone else's eyes. That's why I think good teaching is like good art; it achieves the same thing in the end: to move us from one place to another. In one of the poems I wrote to you, I said, 'may we all want to work with people who are fevered with the need to do art as life.' Upon reflection, I would edit that. What I really want is for my students to see their need to be human beings fevered with a love to *do their work as art* – to learn like artists.

"I think you called it 'intentional creativity' earlier," I said.

"Yes. That's exactly it. I believe that if we approached teaching in the correct way, education would be seen as a national treasure, a living heritage, and as an art form always being recreated. Teaching is both science and art when done with intentional creativity. Well, I've been making art for 38 years and it's messy. I get 150-odd kids per year. And I'm expected to make something – that's art! And they're expected to make something – that's also art.

Now, to be honest, when I look at the next stage of my hero's journey, the Return phase, I reflect on how I don't really think this is the way our current educational climate actually views education, but that's better discussed then."

"So getting to that next 'threshold' to use your terminology, are there any other metaphors or descriptors of your Initiation stage you feel are important to understanding your life history?" I asked.

"Well," Nina answered, "I've always been aware of how much teaching is like farming."

The Growing Edge: Planting and Gardening as a Teacher

"I don't think it's intentional, but a lot of my own art –visual art and poetry – end up having growth as a theme," Nina began. "I'm the child of farmers, pastors, and teachers so the process of farming – the forward movement of plowing and reaping – has always been a deep part of my heritage.

"I can remember back when I was little thinking again about that apple in the Garden of Eden. Did it have seeds? If so, didn't that mean it was meant to make more? These were the things I thought about while climbing around in the apple trees in my uncle's orchards. Apple trees are quite conducive to sitting in the branches, reading in the branches, picking and eating the apples."

I flipped through some of my papers until I found what I was looking for. "One of the poems you sent me seems to make that same connection between the act of planting or tending the garden of knowledge," I said, sliding the poem across the table to her.

She quietly read the first few lines. "Ah, yes, *The Necessity of Earthworms* – that's what that poem is about. It's my attempt to characterize the relationship between growth and learning. She began to read from the poem,

They are of my forefather's bidding dreams:

Farmers and pastors,

Teachers and preachers.

All are farmers of a sort lifting loam or revealing that which (is buried),

Dark with sin or fragrant with possibility. . .

And I, the farmer, poke fingers and furrow through the dark earth,

Plant seeds and pray that the worms have done their work.

Eden earth silty loam melded into my hand's imprint.

And yes, as we ponder my fields of 39 years,

I am left with this – I am the field and the field is me;

God bless the field and God bless me.

And hopefully, I have caused others to ponder the wriggle and not just the crop.

Dark run the mysteries of humankind.

Dark runs the magic of the power of worms.

Cultivate mysteries.

"So the metaphors of seeds and planting things equates to the teaching process for you?" I asked.

"And 'blossoming' too," she added. "Some of the students I get come from very simple and hardscrabble backgrounds. They've been boxed and beaten down sometimes to the point where it's just pleasant to watch them blossom. Maybe I'm sentimental that way, but I like blossoming things. There's the potency of why I stayed all these years at Small Town High because they make me feel wanted and I want to be wanted. I don't want to be someplace where everybody's perfect. I want to plant seeds and watch them grow. I think it's simply the most powerful metaphor for teaching that I can think of.

"But at this stage in my journey, I'm not just talking about the growth in my students, but my own growth as well. It's a big metaphor. I intentionally don't use a teacher's edition because it forces me to get down and dirty with the work just like the students. The hardest thing that we have to do as teachers is to stay juicy your whole career. Not burn out. That's why constant professional growth is so important.

"If I'm honest, at various times in my teaching career – and this is year 38 – I could feel the edges being burnt. And I don't look to the school system to re-energize me because it won't. That's the place that's taking it from me. And I don't look to the students because I have to bring a certain amount of energy for that energy to come back to me. I find that it's

all about having time to read and reflect, to make art. That rejuvenation is central to my growth as a teacher. Just as it's central to the growth of my students.

"Rene Fowler, for example, is a student who I helped grow both as a student and a person. When she came to me in the ninth grade, she would just sit there and nod. She didn't talk. The only way she got her messages across was by writing. So everything had to be communicated through text. So I had her as a ninth-grader, tenth-grader, eleventh-grader, and twelfth-grader. By the time she graduated, she talked. There was a dry British humor in her. And she went off to college and I'm still flabbergasted about this, she majored in humanities. Art history to be exact and the she got her master's. She now works at a local college.

"I took a child who, in everyday society, was a misfit and wouldn't survive not speaking - she didn't even speak to her peers. I don't think she's ever been on a date, but she's growing. She takes trips with the college. She has friends. It's like watching something beautiful slowly open. Now, I don't pretend it's only due to me or to my classes; there are other things in her life that have helped her grow. She's brilliant. But she didn't talk. Well now she talks. She holds a job. She lives in an apartment. She no longer lives with her parents. And if you ask her, she'll tell you: I learned to talk because of ideas. That's what teaching and learning have to do with planting, tending, and growing.

The Final Threshold: Readying for the Return

I glanced back at Nina's hero schema diagram from her journal. "So, if your Initiation stage is marked by metaphors like the Box, the Net of Gems, Flow, and Growing, what's the next threshold? What do you have to cross over to get to Campbell's Return stage?

She sighed and was silent for a moment. "This was the toughest part for me because it's the most raw," she finally said. The Return obviously signals the end of the journey – not necessarily death (although it did for most of the mythological heroes) – but the conclusion of

a particular journey. And honestly, it's difficult for me to think about the end of my teaching career. But think about it I have and that's the next threshold: two years ago I had to submit my intention to retire in five years. That means I have three years left. And I've got to tell you it was extremely hard for me to finally 'cross over' that threshold.

"But Nina, I said, "after thirty-odd years aren't you ready for that next journey?" "Honestly, I always thought I would just keep teaching until it wasn't fun anymore. And despite my disdain for the way public education is currently politicized and all of its bureaucracy, I still find joy in what I do. Part of me just wants to freeze time and keep teaching and teaching and teaching (see Figure 8). However, my mother, who is 85, was diagnosed for the third time with cancer. And while she is recovering just fine, I had to consider where she might end up with this diagnosis. So, having the knowledge that I needed to think of her future pushed me over the retirement threshold. Two years ago, I met with my financial advisor, talked and talked, made some decisions, and then took my retirement papers down to the district office.

"This was an incredibly difficult decision for me. All I have ever known is teaching. I taught camping and swimming at the YMCA for four summers and then, after graduating from college, began the adventure: a green teacher teaching art. That began a leg of the journey that has to end in three more years. Coming to terms with this has begun a vast cerebral, emotional, and spiritual journey. A threshold has been crossed. A new adventure awaits."

Return: Reflections on a Teaching Life

Campbell's now-iconic schema for mythic narratives posits that there are three specific (albeit often very circumscribed) stages in the hero's journey. The Departure stage is where the hero learns of his or her task (hearing the call), prepares for it, and then decides whether or not to "cross the threshold" into the next stage. The Initiation stage is where
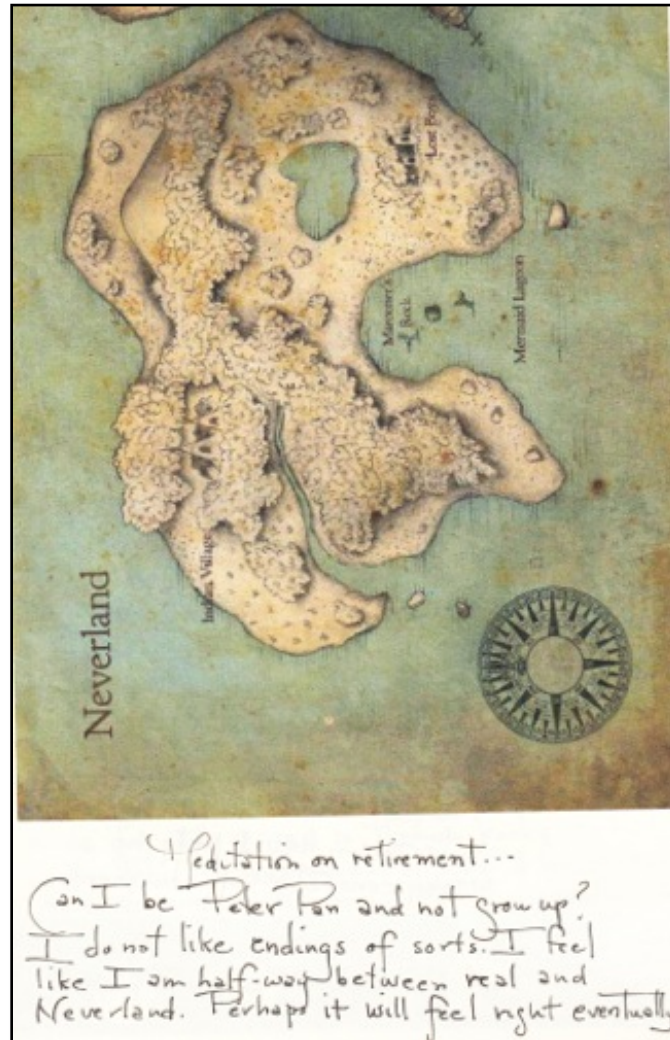
Figure 8. Nina contemplates retirement.

most of the story takes place; it focuses on the trials and tribulations of the journey. This stage offers a final threshold to be crossed which leads to the last stage: the Return. In Campbell's notion, the Return phase brings the hero full-circle, returning her or him to the place of origin – albeit having been changed by the experience of the journey.

Nina Brown, who has crafted her own life history through the hero schema framework, also views the Return stage as an "ending." However, instead of seeing this as a finality, she actually portends the Return as a pre-cursor to another, yet-unfulfilled, journey. The end of one journey is really a time of reflection in preparation for the beginning of another one.

"Instead of being morose and melancholy or even sappily nostalgic about it, I choose to embrace this phase of the journey joyfully," she said. "I choose to look at this as another adventure and adventures require planning. Now I'm not one for elaborate plans – my students will tell you how incredibly flexible I am with teachable moments in the classroom. I wake each day and expect a happy day. I love a happy day and, to an extent, I can craft my day.

"In response to my impending retirement – now three years on the horizon – I decided to see it as one year at a time. Most recently, I've merged that with my 'happy-day' equation. Just enjoying the passage of time and reflecting on the journey has become the soup du jour."

Reflecting on Reflecting

Nina asked if she could look at the journal she'd given me and I handed it back to her. "Like most things with me, the idea of reflecting or reminiscing works better with a metaphor to guide it. In the journal, I call this idea 'nest-building.' You see, nests are built one small bit at a time – chosen for location, safety, and materials. For me, picking apart the nests has been difficult because I am still engaged in the process and not always filled with then notion of reflection; if I'm building, then my conscious mind is enjoying and lost in the moment of building. So that's where this project with you has become so meaningful – it asks me to take a break from nest-building and think about the journey itself.

"In preparation for our talk, I thought it might be fun to run some numbers. Now, of course, these are purely anecdotal – I don't have any real statistics to verify any of this, but I thought it worthy of reflecting on anyway. If you assume I taught an average of 150 students per year, then I've taught over 5,800 students in my 39 years. At one lesson-plan-per week, 39 years equals 1404 weeks of lesson plans. I figured that I've taught an average of five classes per day – some years we taught six out of seven periods – and that totals to over

35,000 times that I've stood in front of students and tried to reach them. I've outlasted five principals and seven superintendents. And though I don't really use it any more, I do wonder how much chalk I've used over my career. They used to give me great big boxes to start out each year."

I laughed at her teaching data. "But the whole point of this project is to look beyond the numbers of a career and hear the stories you've been telling. That's what really makes up a teaching life-history," I said.

"Well, I'm nearing the end now so stories are all I've got. And that's why I find it so important to reflect at this point in my career on the most memorable aspects of what it's meant for me to teach."

Reflections on Teaching

"I characterize this part of the journey as the Return, and I can actually appreciate the reflective moments that much more. I've been through so much in 38 years: seen so many different teaching fads, met so many amazing students and parents, learned so much about myself. At this stage in my career, I do get asked a lot: Aren't you tired of the kids? Don't you feel like retiring? Why do you still put up with the nonsense? And some days the answers are: yes, yes, and I don't know. Not long ago, however, I was watching the movie *Sergeant York* with Gary Cooper on TCM and I realized how much I love that movie. I never get tired of it. Never. Why though? What primal joy does it ignite? Why do I cry? What do I carry from the experience of watching it? And then, during this last viewing, I had an epiphany.

"Here," she said and she slid a piece of paper with doodles and writing on it across the table to me.

Ten things I learned (and love) from *Sergeant York*:

1. He is from a humble background.

2. He changes after the storm's lightning strike.

3. He develops a deep and abiding faith.

4. He walks his talk.

5. He is big enough to apologize/make peace.

6. He considers how his actions affect the larger world.

7. He never forgets his roots.

8. He practices what *he knows he is good at doing*.

9. He is happy with *just enough*.

10. His humility gladdens my heart.

These attributes appeal to me because it mirrors why I have stayed at Small Town High all these years. It really clarified for me why I do what I do. They describe who I try to be as a person and as a teacher. And I think it's really important to say what I'm about to say. Because after I say it, I'm going to be really critical and it might seem like I'm jaded and bitter – that's not the case. That's why I have to say this first: If someone were to tell me, 'Nina, you can have 38 years of mostly pleasant days doing something that makes you happy,' then I would choose that over any fame in the whole universe. And I've most definitely had 38 years of 'mostly pleasant' days."

"Okay then," I said, "point taken. But what are your critical reflections from a life of teaching?"

"Ironically, it comes back to that metaphor of the box again. We've gotten away from what true education is really supposed to be about. It seems everyone, politicians mainly, wants little robot teachers and little robot children – they want 'boxed' teachers and 'boxed' students. In the past, I was trusted to make decisions about what I taught and how I approached the subject. I constructed my own study guides and tests. It was marked with my care and my choices. Yes, I knew the requirements, but I never taught to a test. Never. Now, the planning, the thoughts-behind-the process is all done for you and I find it galling that my

training and expertise is not required. You could stand and deliver what's written in the book and they'd call it teaching.

And the teacher evaluation process is another anathema to me. It expects – no requires – us to use a script, to literally be on the same page with each other. It's like the Big Brother approach to schooling: let's use this instrument, this document to check up on you to make sure you're doing your job the way we want it done. And that's just nonsense! That approach totally kills the free exchange of ideas and engaged learning that should be taking place.

"I guess that's really the most disheartening thing to me. We simply don't have time – in class or out – to talk about ideas anymore. Really, we don't have time for teaching. It's all about preparing for the test. I turned to my paraprofessonal last year and I said, 'Sherry, I know why they chose this piece - it keeps them quiet. There's lots of busy work and things to fill out.' And I said, 'They haven't learned a thing.'

"I was happier when I had the grace and room to actually play with an idea in my classes. Now I have to be on the same page as my 'esteemed colleague.' She gallops through every lesson with a certain duty and obedience to the 'box of teaching' versus learning for understanding. We even have to give the same tests at the same time in every class. It's a very 'big brother' approach to teaching. I feel like they want us on some kind of teaching assembly line, trying to produce exactly the same student in exactly the same way. But it just doesn't work that way.

I have to take some time and note this while I'm thinking about it. I've noticed a tiredness in Nina as we've gone through this project. It seems to be getting worse. I really can't tell if it's honestly her age, her frustration with the state of education, or simply the way the teaching year wears on people – it's almost the end of the school year. Whatever it is, it's

something. She's definitely more depressed sounding when she talks about her days or her concerns about her students. Even some of her poems have a hard edge to them. But I'm not one to talk, I can be really cynical about where education is headed (need to write something about that myself). I need to review the transcript again, but I thought I remembered something about her wanting to retire while she still has joy for it all . . . I hope it's not leaving her already.

"There certainly does appear to be a push to quantify education," I said.

"But like I recently told one of my assistant principals, you can't *count* kindness. You can't measure creativity. You can't measure empathy. And when they tell me everything's got to be counted, I always ask, 'Yeah, well how big's your soul?' The things that matter most about teaching and learning resist being counted and measured. For example, I'm not afraid to stop what I was planning to teach to teach manners and respect instead. I'll tell the students: 'Here are the rules of being civil to one another.' And we'll talk about that. Or I'll stop and I'll address something rude that happened and say: 'That was unkind and you will say you're sorry and I'll explain why you hurt my feelings when you said that. So now you've hurt two people's feelings.' That's important and no, it's not in my lesson plans."

Nina's voice trailed off and she looked down at the table. Her hands were clenched into fists that she very slowly unclenched.

"Well," she said after a few seconds of silence, "those are my indictments of the changes I now see in education – that and the dehumanization of the entire way we're seen and treated. I'm saddened by this change, as I am the constant bringing in of this or that latest fad in teaching. This exercise in looking back has been very difficult for me because I feel like I'm trying to find solid ground to teach on while they keep moving the floor. I still

love the act of teaching, but I don't like the circus – they removed the elephant, the monkeys, and the hearts of the clowns.

"But here's the crux of it for me. I really don't want to feel this way. Instead, I want to be seen as someone who survived teaching with all of her joy intact. And I've always said, when it's no longer fun, I'm going to walk out. And I'm going never going to teach again. Because I've been used up. And that's good. I don't want to become sour and bitter and poopy.

I laughed at the "poopy" comment and asked, "What then, still brings you joy after all these years of teaching?" Are there things about your job or your life that you still find fulfilling even after all of this time?

Reflecting on the Past to See the Future

"When you first asked me to participate in this project, I have to confess I didn't realize that it would be tough at times. Like anybody else, I don't particularly care for remembering the rough times in my teaching career: like the ignorant father challenging my use of Elizabethan vocabulary when we read Shakespeare or having 28 students who had no desire to be in my class crammed into my small room. It's painful to think about former students who are sitting in prison or who've died in military conflicts. But of course, those memories are part of the journey as well.

"So now, while I'm in my version of the Return stage, I can still find joy in things. And I will say one joyful part of this conversation and work with you has been that it's caused me to reflect on my legacy. You know me well; that's simply not something I think about much or at all, really. But this project has forced me to consider what kind of impact I may have made on my students.

"And so what are your thoughts about your legacy, now?" I asked.

"I have to start with the legacy that was passed to me by my former teachers. Hazel threw me Milton – said go read "Paradise Lost." Oh that just captivated me. Then she gave me Dante.

Then I asked her what her favorite books were. So I went and I read all her favorite books. And then I asked Grace Cromer, my art teacher, who were her favorite artists? What were her favorite books? And Claire, who was the prickliest of the three, would throw papers back to me and say, 'This is unacceptable. Go rewrite it.' She wouldn't do that with anybody else. They all noticed my grit and the willingness to learn and they would give me things with wisdom – in the best way. So their genuine passion for children and for teaching and learning were seeds planted in me that bloomed in my own teaching. There's no doubt any legacy I might have through my own students is intertwined with their legacies in me.

"That's how generativity works," I said. "It's kind of like the metaphor you used earlier when you were talking about tree rings. There's an initial interaction that has the power to resonate through successive generations."

"And," she said, "I've been fortunate to have many students return and confirm my influence in their lives. Perhaps my favorite example of these encounters was Pete Peterson. He constantly had his head down on the table. One day I woke him up and there was drool on the desk. And the kids made fun of him. And he would argue and he would ask, 'What do I need to know this for?" And I said, 'Because you're going to travel. And I'm going to get a postcard from you saying: Mrs. Brown, I'm in Rome. Or Mrs. Brown, I'm in Florence.' We were studying the Renaissance at that point.

"Then, about 10 years later, a great big manila envelope came to my school address. It was big and thick. I opened it up and inside was a postcard and then all these slides of Renaissance art. It was from Pete Peterson. And they were expensive. You know he spent a lot of money on them. I used those slides until I got my SmartBoard just recently. And I

always thought about him. And he was this big lump in my class. A big redneck lump who drank on the weekends – it was all beer and partying and smoking out. But he went in the Army. And he was stationed in Italy and he visited Florence and Rome and he wrote on the postcard: 'Dammit, I actually know what all of this means.' He felt smart. And I think that's the thing, you know, so many people don't feel smart. They don't feel good about themselves. I'm very proud of that aspect of my legacy.

"And when I hear those stories it makes me feel better. I mean, we all want to feel that we've lived authentically – true to ourselves. It's heartening to know that I translated, because that's really what I want for my students: to be lifelong learners. One of the reasons I've stayed at Small Town High is because I want them to be able to go out anywhere they want in the world. And nothing's going to shock them. They'll know some art and some literature and some music to talk about so that they aren't labeled. Because the great equalizer in our society is a good education. Plain and simple. And why should I not stay at a place where those students need that the most?

"And that's your reward, then? To feel that you've made better people through your teaching?"

"Listen, if you start out with the end in mind and you set out to be famous and you want to leave this giant egotistical legacy so that people tell you how absolutely wonderful you are, then you're missing the journey. And I'm all about the journey. Again, one of my poems sums it up for me,

Funny how the mind pokes back and forth like waves.

Discovers this meme and that.

Threshold crossings of life –

The journey of living waters.

For Campbell, there are 3 life thresholds –

Birth, Adventure, return . . .

Three times the charm.

My potency is done.

(Look carefully – this too has two meanings).

Ah . . . magical flight.

"I know I'm just part of a long line of people and I'm just doing what I was bidden to do. We have to bloom where we're planted and serve who we're called to serve. So, I guess I want to divest myself of the ego part of it. And if somebody speaks my name, I would hope they would think something good. But I would also hope that I spread some seeds in the garden and that they grew nice things. Oh I'm sure there's a few nettles. But I hope they grew so that then those people can sow their own seeds."

I smiled at those words and I wondered: What might those seeds look like when they've sprouted and grown?

Chapter Summary

Nina's teaching-life history is rich with detail and stories. No text, no matter how imaginatively-crafted, can truly capture her passion when she's describing her life, her teaching and her students. However the previous "dialogic narrative construction" does provide insight into how Nina has lived out her teaching-life. This, in turn, directs the inquiry towards examining the influence Nina has had on future generations of educators – specifically on four educational leaders. The next chapter takes a focused look at a few of those "seeds" Nina planted have borne their own educational fruit. It delves more deeply into how Nina's generative actions have been manifested in DeeDee, Deaundra, Leigh, and myself. We are all recipients of her legacy.

In Chapter 4, I extracted key metaphors from the data to give life to Nina's generativity. Her legacy as a kind, compassionate teacher and as someone who always

exhibits a zest for teaching was made evident through this research process. Her vast knowledge of content and pedagogy was portrayed through her poetry samples and through the conversations we shared (and later wrote about in our journals). Narrative inquiry suggests the storying of our lives is a key we use to make sense of it. I would add that by narrating our lives we are also making sense of the lives of others.

Chapter 5 takes up the "lives of others" as I concretely examine Nina's generative effect on four educational leaders – three female former students of Nina's and myself, also a former student. Together we shared our own stories and experiences about our time in Nina's classes. And true to the nature of how generativity works, there was an amazing synchronicity between Nina's actions as a teacher and our actions as educational leaders. What follows are examples of a teaching legacy being lived out. We are, after all, cut of the same cloth – the same tapestry, if you will.

CHAPTER FIVE: A TEACHER'S LEGACY AND ITS IMPACT ON EDUCATIONAL LEADERS

Jones and McAdams (2013) define generativity as "an adult's concern for and commitment to promoting the well-being and development of future generations" (p. 158). This act of leaving a legacy – specific thoughts, beliefs, and actions that influence the next generation – is certainly not limited to the teaching profession. However, in the study referenced above (Jones and McAdams, 2013), the researchers posit that certain socializing systems, such as education, have a unique ability to be generative "conduits," continuing legacy-leaving traits and behaviors from one generation (teachers) to the next (students). Thus teachers, it can be argued, are not only properly situated to be generative themselves, but also to inspire generative traits in the students they have taught. And examinations and analyses of these generative traits are often conducted through narrative methods (Hunter & Rowles, 2005; Jones & McAdams, 2013; Kotre, 1984; McAdams, 2010; Zacher, Rosing, & Frese, 2011). Narrative inquiry and its various constituent methods were therefore the most appropriate approach for this project as they provide both participant and researcher with a framework for communicating their lived experiences.

The purpose of the study was to understand the life history of a female teacher by examining the narratives, reflexive writings, and aesthetic creations that constituted her beliefs about leaving a teaching legacy. The research also includes examining the narratives of four educational leaders, DeeDee, Leigh, Deaundra, and myself, as we reflected on how Nina's legacy is present in our professional and personal lives. Thus this study explored three research questions:

1. What elements of this teacher's life history contributed to creating a legacy of educational leaders?

2. What are the perspectives of the educational leaders impacted by this teacher as they relate to crafting an educational legacy?

3. How do the life stories of the teacher and educational leaders intersect to reveal *narrative resonance* – the ability of one person's stories to influence other's stories?

The previous chapter in this dissertation offered the reader a portrait of Nina Brown's teaching life history. By constructing a "conversational narrative" between Nina and myself, I sought to illuminate and give voice to her life experiences (both prior to and during her teaching life) in an effort to provide testimony to her generative beliefs and actions. It must be noted that this type of narrative re-creation lies squarely within the realm of interpretive analysis. Through my numerous conversations and correspondence, my analysis of artifacts (art and poetry), and in my examination of both Nina's and my reflective journals, I "storied" the data into its narrative form. Kathard (2009) describes this as "languaging" the story, implying that it involves "an interpretation of the textual and non-textual clues involved in meaning-making" (p. 31). Therefore, my narrative creation is a synthesis of the research data, presented so that the questions referenced above can be answered through empirical analysis. In other words, before Nina's life story can be studied and examined, it had to be documented.

This current chapter delves deeper into examining the research questions by integrating another component of the data collection process: interviews with three practicing educational leaders who are former students of Nina Brown and my own reflections as I am also a former student of hers and a practicing educational leader. The transcripts and artifacts from these encounters were then analyzed, scrutinized for themes and/or patterns within them that aid in answering the research questions. The chapter begins with a review of

the characteristics of the co-participants. I then discuss the actual research and data-collection process specific to each educational leader interviewed. Finally, I conclude the chapter with a specific analysis of each research question, bolstered by evidence from the data to support my interrogation of the phenomena of generativity in the teaching life of Nina Brown.

The Co-Participants' Reflections on Nina's Legacy

Deaundra is a Black female principal at a middle school. She has been in public education for over 26 years, the last five years as a school principal. She taught high school language arts in the same school from which she graduated (for 13 years), making her both a student and colleague of Nina's. Deaundra served in the role of assistant principal seven years prior to becoming a principal. While a student of Nina's, she took classes in English (language arts) and humanities, making her Nina's student for two years.

DeeDee was a math and science teacher at the middle-school level prior to becoming a school-based leader. She is currently in her twenty-fifth year as an educator. She progressed from teaching to administration by working as an assistant principal at a local (albeit large) high school. Her area of educational supervision was curriculum and instruction, requiring her to be conversant in curricular standards, master schedule construction, and teacher certification parameters. After five years as the assistant principal, she moved to a district-level position, taking charge of the county's virtual learning franchise. She currently directs that program in addition to overseeing credit-recovery and summer learning programs for the district. She was a student for two years in Nina's humanities classes.

Leigh is currently an assistant regional superintendent in the county, beginning her second year in that role. Prior to that she was a high school principal at a large urban high school in the district. Previously, in the classroom, she taught high school science at the very same school where Nina taught. Like Deaundra, Leigh also has the distinction of not only

being one of Nina's former students, but a former colleague as well. Of all the co-participants (myself included), Leigh spent the most time as one of Nina's students, taking her for two years of English and one year of humanities.

I am also a former student and former colleague of Nina Brown's. I taught high school English with her for 15 years before becoming the assistant principal at our district's local performing arts high school. I served in that role for eight years, only recently having been promoted to the principal position. In total, I have over 27 years in public education, serving as a school-based administrator for the last ten. As a student, I only took one of Nina's classes – humanities – during my senior year of high school.

In summation, the co-participants, including me, have over 87 years' experience in education. As students, we span 10 years of Nina's teaching tenure. Though Deaundra, Leigh, and I did all *teach* simultaneously with Nina, none of us were ever students in her classes at the same time. This bears mentioning because the stories that were generated from this project will demonstrate marked similarities when it comes to Nina's practices, beliefs, and behaviors with students. It's important to note, therefore, that the related experiences were not shared ones in the sense of happening at the same time to each of us. I argue that makes their generative indicators all the more profound and illuminating to the research at hand.

The overview of the data collection and analysis processes can be seen in Table 3 and need not be reviewed here. However, the following sections of this chapter deal exclusively with each individual co-participant and the nuances and narratives they offer in support of the research questions. Each interview lasted between 30 and 45 minutes and was guided by the interview protocol found in Appendix D. I then transcribed the interviews and began analysis of the contents. Immersing myself in this data through several readings and additional hearings of the audio files allowed me to construct a secondary data-collection instrument (see Appendix E) for a subsequent interaction with each co-participant. The

resulting data (from the interview and the secondary interview instrument) was then further analyzed to construct individual portraits of the co-participants narratives concerning Nina *and* to provide the thematic propositions related to Nina's generative behaviors found later in this chapter.

The actual data analysis for each interview consisted of coding the transcripts with an initial open coding process. The codes (see Table 7) provided a general sorting mechanism to help categorize the interview/artifact data into large-scale thematic chunks. Though certain specific themes related to generativity seemed to present themselves with each iteration of data review, any in-depth thematic coding was postponed until all subsequent initial interviews with the co-participants had been transcribed and open-coded. Finally, focused coding was employed to begin a deeper

Table 7.

List of Initial Codes from Co-Participant's Data

Code	Type of Experience
STU_STRY	Story/Narrative about time spent as Nina's student
TCH_STRY	Story/Narrative about time spent as a teacher
ADMN_STRY	Story/Narrative about time spent as an administrator
CURR	Discussions related to curriculum
PERS	Personal and/or family narratives
CON	Personal and/or professional conflict(s)
CHAL	Professional challenges as an administrator
BLFS_TCH	Beliefs about teaching
BLFS_EL	Beliefs about educational leadership

analysis of the data. This included extricating any emerging themes from data in the form of examining whether any generative actions or thoughts transferred from Nina's teaching to the administrators' practices in their present roles. This final analysis is presented later in this chapter.

The next part of this chapter is similar in form to Chapter 4. It consists of narrative re-constructions of the interviews and artifacts of each of the co-participants. These "interview

stories" are presented to provide the reader with a semblance of the narrative nature of this inquiry. They demonstrate how the stories and anecdotes offered by the co-participants create a larger narrative about Nina and her influence in their personal and professional lives. By using the actual words of the co-participants as well as narrative and fiction-writing techniques, I maintain that these stories reach a level of "narrative truth" or verisimilitude – an assertion that the stories approximate the intended truth of the situation, not an attempt at a verbatim account of each interview.

Nina's Legacy as Seen by Deaundra

Deaundra expressed enthusiasm for this research project right from the start. "I'm so glad you're doing this work," she said. "Nina's influence in my life has been significant and I'm grateful to share some of those stories."

"Well then," I said, "why don't you start at the beginning?"

She began by describing her earliest memories of Nina. "One thing you may not know is that Nina's mother, Barbara Brown, was my fifth-grade teacher. So Nina, as a college student, used to come to our class and read to us or help us with the aquarium. I remember vividly her talking to us about the guppies. And even then, at 10 years old, I knew there was something special in the way she interacted with us. She didn't talk *at* us like most adults. She talked *to* us.

"Without much introspection here, what do you remember most about being in her classes?" I asked.

"How incredibly welcoming she was," Deaundra answered. "Both the physical aspects of the room and the way she made you feel combined to create a really inviting atmosphere. With my teachers here at this school, I try and transmit that to them. When I go in and the walls are white, I'll say, 'These are your walls. Make it personal in here. Stand at the door. Welcome them.' She always had a way of bringing students out of their comfort zones. That

only happened because we weren't afraid to take risks in her classroom. She took risks everyday and made it safe place to learn and fail. So I would say that definitely the warmth that she approached teaching with is a strong positive memory for me about her classes."

"You know, that's a really powerful thing – to be feel safe enough to fail," I said. "That's when real learning can take place."

"Yes, and another thing that really stuck with me is how genuinely she cared about all students – not just her own. She'd let us know that, 'Hey I love you enough to tell you when you're wrong.' She'd stop them in the hallways, in the cafeteria, between classes. I don't think many teachers do that anymore. If you're not in their classroom, they don't want to talk to you. She talked to everybody. She taught everybody. It didn't make a difference to her. You didn't have to be in her class. That kind of relationship is hard to find anymore."

"There was a really authentic feel to how she treated you," I said.

"I agree and while she was different in her approach to teaching, you could tell she was authentic. She wasn't putting on airs. You got the feeling if you ran into Nina Brown at the supermarket, she was going to be just like she was in class. There was no show. It was, 'I am who I am and either you can accept me right here where I am or you're gonna have a lot to deal with later.' That realness is also rare these days. It may have to do with the prescriptive approach we've taken to education. I don't know, but I don't see it as much."

"I'm curious," I said, "how did Nina's influence effect you as an educational leader?"

"Well," she began, "here, as the principal, I'll tell my teachers that. You need to do something to get them going and moving and shuffling around. Bring in a piece of art – I would do that – and have them look at the art. Some abstract piece...have them look at that. And have them write from that. So, not only in my classroom, but also even now, I ask my teachers do that. And sometimes, they'll say, 'Gosh, this kid is writing.' And I'll just smile

because they figured out how to get those creative juices flowing. That's what she did for us in her classroom.

"Okay," I said, "let's act like this is 'Nina: This is Your Life.' What would be the one thing you would say to her that made you who you are today as an educator and a leader?"

"Easy. Her unique ability to see beyond who you were at the time and foresee some type of better you. I don't know how she did it, but I really try and approach my relationships with students and teachers like that. It was as if she had a crystal ball that she and she could see into your very soul. Into your future of who you really were going to be. She had an amazing way to see a personal vision for every student . . . every student. It wasn't just one. She didn't have favorites. She loved every student the same – unconditionally.

"And I've taken that from her: just meet them where they are. Another thing she always said – and I've adopted this belief too – is that you don't have to be a product of where you came from. A student doesn't have to be limited by what they don't have. 'You can be anything,' she would say, 'It's going to take hard work and love and compassion for people, but you can do it' That idea that we're supposed to be helping students see and become their better selves has always been central to why I became a teacher. And even though I couldn't necessarily articulate it at the time, I'm sure it's what guided me into education in the first place.

"Another thing that I love about her is that she taught us to respect our names. Nina and I share the same maiden name, Brown, and she would say, 'Brown is a good name. It's a great name.' And she would tell everybody, 'You know, Smith is a great name. That's what you have is your name and your good word. Be honest with people. Be respectful to people. Don't let someone tarnish your good name and don't you tarnish your good name.' And so, again, I bring all of that right here to my current school. I'll say, "Centerville Middle School is

a good school. I don't care what the people say outside of these walls, it's a good school. Don't let people tarnish your good school. You speak up for your school.'

"And I would tell them, Nina Brown taught me that. She taught me to take pride in where you are in your life because that's where you're supposed to be right now. So while you're there, do something with it. Don't just sit on you bohonkus and do nothing. 'Do something with it,' she would say, 'Do something with it.' And so I tell the same things to my students."

"You know," I said, "I find it interesting that in this entire conversation we've talked very little about curricular matters."

"Well, we could," Deaundra said arching her eyebrows. "She was a master of her content knowledge. But see, and here's the important thing, she wasn't just teaching a bunch of stuff that you only needed to know for a test. She's taking you on a journey that no single book could ever take you on. She has the content knowledge – her vocabulary and knowledge of art, music, mythology, and literature is out of this world. She just recognizes that it's more important to plant seeds for further learning than it is to learn something for one day and then forget. Here, I can give you a personal example even beyond my own experiences.

"Take my son, because she taught him too, and he got a marketing degree. But do you know what he loves more than anything? Art. He loves art. And he loves it because of the seeds she planted in him for appreciating art. He goes to art shows all over the world. He'll be leaving in a couple of weeks for Europe and that's because of her. Because as she taught him, she made him want to actually go to these places . . . to see that his world was bigger than Small Town High. So he wants to go and he wants to visit these cathedrals. He wants to see them. He still has his notebook from where she taught him in high school and he took it out the other night. 'I've gotta go here and I've gotta go here, Mom,' he said, 'Because Mrs. Brown

said, 'You've gotta see this.' That's the most powerful form of education there is: one that makes you keep wanting to experience the world around you.

"So now, as a principal, that's what continues to drive me in many ways. I was talking to my staff the Friday before they left for the summer and they said, 'You're always researching something. You're always trying to figure out a better way to teach.' I said, 'Well it's just in me. It's just in me to do that.' When you've had teachers like Nina, she made us push ourselves forward and I'm still in the mode of pushing forward, wanting to learn more.

"So it's not just about what she knows, then," I said. "It's more about how she uses her knowledge and challenges her students to use what they've learned."

"Your final thoughts about Nina," I said.

"I believe that she's truly shaped this district. Has she done what she set out to do as a teacher? She's done more than that. She has former students who are now doctors, graduate students, psychologists, and people in the armed forces. She shaped a world just the way she told us that she could and that we could."

Nina's Legacy as Seen by Leigh

Out of all of the co-participants in this study, Leigh has had the most exposure to Nina's teaching. Having her for three years over multiple classes, Leigh's perspective is pivotal to probing how Nina's legacy works itself in the life of an educational leader. Her thoughts and stories are beneficial to examining the research questions at the heart of this study.

"I would say," Leigh began, "that the most significant thing I remember about Nina is how connected to people she was – still is, really. And I don't mean in just an ordinary 'I'm the teacher, you're the student,' kind of relationship. She had authentic relationships with us. For example, I specifically remember the story she told us about wanting to be popular in

high school. She wanted to fit and to have everyone think she was cool so she took a vacuum cleaner and gave herself a hickey."

I laughed at the image of Nina with a vacuum attachment sucking on her neck.

"Being able to be real with your students was a big thing with her. And I don't mean she shared inappropriate things – I means, you always knew she was the teacher and you were the student. But she wasn't afraid to bring the lessons into our world. For example, I remember when we were studying *The Odyssey*, she tied the lyrics of the Police song into the lesson."

"*Wrapped Around Your Finger*," I said. "It mentions Scylla and Charybdis from Greek mythology."

"See. That's what I mean. You remember it too. So it didn't matter who you were or what type of kid you were, she connected with everybody."

"And I wonder if that contributed to her longevity at Small Town High?"

"I think the fact that she was such an expert in her content and it was able to shine through made us all appreciative. Even back then, when we were teenagers and we didn't appreciate anything, I know I felt a sort of gratitude for the fact that she was at little dinky ol' Small Town High. I think we all knew she could have been doing anything really. She's so bright and so passionate, but that she chose to be there and she chose to be in our particular school. We put a lot of value in her for that."

"Any lessons in that for you?"

"Certainly. Be present where you are – don't constantly assume the grass is always greener somewhere else. You know I went back and taught at Small Town and while it wasn't directly due to Nina, I do feel that her passion for that school – my school – was evident in me as well. You taught there too. You get it."

"I do," I said. "There's definitely a sense of pride in coming back and contributing to the community that made you."

"You know another thing that I would say is her legacy for me is her spunkiness. She's a little feisty. And I like that in a teacher because I don't want necessarily a 'yes' person. I want someone who's going to stand up for herself and her kids and her classroom. And Nina's definitely passionate enough about the students and the curriculum that she'll defend it – argue for it. She told me not long ago – after I'd become an administrator – how she had to fight to keep a particular class . . . how she basically petitioned the school administration. And she won. So I really respect that about my teachers. I want them to be their students' biggest advocates."

"Can you think of anything from her legacy that really caused you to approach something like she did?"

"Humor," she said. "I always appreciated how she could make us laugh and had no problem laughing at herself. So I tried to reach my students through humor and just almost comic relief sometimes. It really opens up the mind for deeper learning when we can all just get in a good laugh.

"Probably though, the most impactful thing she taught me – and like most things, you simply can't appreciate it at the time – was how to learn to go with the flow when teaching. She was so confident in her teaching that she could go completely off script and do a 180 from what she thought she was going to do 10 minutes ago. It was like she could anticipate where the class was headed.

I supervise a lot of teachers and many of them approach teaching like, 'I'm going to allot 10 minutes for this, and 5 minutes for this, and then we're going to transition here, and then we're going to do this, and then we're going to do that.' Now, I'm not saying teachers shouldn't plan. I just think having Nina has a teacher kind of inscribed in me a sense of letting

the lesson take on a spirit of discovery. It's more about meeting the needs of the kids where they are and trusting your gut to find that tempo rather than worrying about missing something in some lesson plan somewhere.

"She's got the pudding that's got the proof in it. Her approach and authentic teaching have transcended superintendents, principals, and even evaluation systems. I know I wouldn't be where I am today without her influence in my life."

Nina's Legacy as Seen by DeeDee

DeeDee's experiences in Nina's classes were similar to the other co-participants: she was struck by how Nina embraced all students and refused to let their current circumstances cheat them out of a high-quality education. "You know, I grew up In Small Town and a lot of people don't see that as a very cultural place, Nina opened our eyes to the broader world outside Small Town High. Through her classes we were exposed to music; we had art.

"She understood that, in many cases, we didn't come from a world where we had a lot of cultural experiences, so she was very much into 'Be proud of who you are. Be proud of where you're from.' But she wouldn't let that limit us. In a word, I would describe it as transcendent. Thinking now of all that I've learned as an educator, I can see how she took us from one place and transcended any of our cultural boundaries. If you were open to learning what she was offering, there were a lot of valuable lessons."

"And that's certainly a key component of her legacy," I offered.

"Sure. She opened the doors to a world I didn't know existed beyond where I was living. I mean I saw it on TV, but you see it on TV, it's not real. I went to my first museum in her class. We took a field trip down to the Ringling Museum and the Renaissance Fair. And I just remember going and seeing the real paintings and just standing there and staring. And those kinds of experiences that a teacher gives a student, I don't know if those can be taught.

"I remember the Degas – the ballerinas - I remember seeing those in a museum and remembering how she taught us about impressionism. How many times did you tell your own two children about something and then you stop and realize you pulled it from her class? You pulled it from something she had taught. That's transcendence again."

"Can you think of another element of your time in Nina's class that still resonates with you today?" I asked.

"One of the aspects of her legacy that sticks with me the most," she said, "is the power of place. Her room and the feeling you got from being in that room. It was one of the safest places I think I've ever been in. And what's really interesting is that I remember her room being very disorderly in a good kind of way. I know many teachers like order and things to be in their proper places. For me, I used to have a very chaotic math room. I had projects going on with my students all the time and I remember her room appearing very chaotic as well. She always had projects going on. Or she had some piece of art that somebody had turned in. One time, I remember something that looked like sheer curtains – I think it ended up being the 'veils' from Scheherazade or something. They probably came from Wal-Mart, but in her room they belonged to a princess or to a commoner that had overcome something amazing.

"Her door was a portal. You left the drudgery of regular high school life and went into her room and everything felt secure and right with the world. It didn't matter what the strata of popularity or non-popularity was outside of the room. You were all amazing students and you all were going to be great students in her room. I mean, I learned about the caste system in social studies, but I understood it when I went to her room because outside of Nina's space there was a caste, but inside her room we were all treated fairly."

I interrupted: "That sense of place and belonging's difficult to replicate in other places,"

"I had a principal tell me once: you have one of the messiest rooms I've ever seen. And I was like, 'Yes ma'am, I do.' I can remember her coming in my room one day and saying, 'The superintendent's coming for a visit. Can you straighten this up a little bit?' And I'm looking around and I've got hot glue and popsicle sticks – you weren't supposed to have hammers and nails, but every now and again we'd have a few. You'd think I was in a shop class or something. But those kinds of projects and things and having students feel enraptured by a sense of place, I learned that from Nina."

"But for me," DeeDee continued, "the most sincere testament to Nina's legacy was the trust and kinship you had with anyone who was one of her students. Several years ago I was working as an assistant principal at a high school and I was overseeing curricular issues. One of my younger teachers came to me and said, 'I want to offer a humanities class like Nina Brown's.' He was a former student – just like me – so I was all in. He really didn't have to tell me anything more about why he wanted to create a class like that. There was no real need to sell me on it. So my answer was, 'You start building interest in it; start working on the curriculum, and bring it to me.' I had enough faith in how she taught that I knew he'd build something of quality. To me, that's a huge demonstration of her impact on not just Small Town High but other schools in our district as well."

My View of Nina's Legacy: The Researcher Becomes the Researched

I have tried to make plain my role in this study. I have claimed no objectivity in the research act, nor have I argued for any large-scale extrapolation from the data and the subsequent analyses of the data. I also recognize that this is research; it is being conducted to document and examine a life history for generative attributes. It is not a hagiography presented to lobby for a veteran teacher's enshrinement into some netherworld of an "Educator's Nirvana." I do, however, make the claim that the narratives and memories already presented are interwoven into my own and therefore require careful unpacking

(unpeeling?) to reveal how one teacher's legacy is transmitted and is useful for research purposes. I contend that my own story, created through reflective journal entries, conversations with the participants, and "call and response" poetry, is also a valuable and necessary component of this study.

I begin with some lines from one of the poems I wrote as a part of this study. In it, I reflect on one of the central elements of Nina's legacy for me: that knowledge is only valuable when shared with others. In the poem, I wrote (*The Pedagogy of Potting Soil*, Appendix F):

Furrowed brows lead to furrowed minds...

Fresh and fertile thought-soil

And I turn it over and over and over -

No seedlings yet,

just the manure of minutiae;

just the dark matter of unplanted soil,

waiting for the seeds to do what seeds do:

Which will soon enough become the

slender stalks of knowledge or the petals of wisdom

that arise from this pregnant loam.

And the sowed have become the sowers,

probing their generative dust,

for furrows of their own making.

These lines are presented as a poetic depiction of Nina's immense capacity to teach in such a way that knowledge is seen as a treasure to be passed on. Her classroom could truly be likened to a garden (and on some days a hothouse). It was important for her to know that you

knew and for you to understand *why* you knew. She was, in essence, being generative by teaching us to be generative. We needed to learn *now* what we could share *later*.

Therefore, by reflecting on how Nina's legacy has been passed down from her to me and then to my own students, I have come to see a distinct thread that posits learning as ongoing and dynamic, fluid in its ability to engage both teacher and student. Nina herself describes her main objective in teaching as, "I want them [students] to be lifelong learners. I want them to be curious about the world." She approaches teaching as guiding students through learning as discovery. And though she can be crass and forceful at times (I remember her once describing a particular teaching method as "learning by enema"), her respect for engaging passionately with the subject matter served as powerful model for her students.

I also recognize that her legacy is not just about the role of the learner – what was gained by being a student under her tutelage, but also about what it means to be a teacher. In her "response" poem to the one referenced earlier in this section, Nina wrote,

Curiosity comes and leaves, decanted at whim. . .

And yes, as we ponder my fields of 38 years,

I am left with this – I am the field and the field is me;

God bless the field and God bless me.

The teacher, too, is a fertile "field," ripe for planting and tending and harvesting in conjunction with the students. One of the entries in my researcher-reflective journal addresses how Nina taught me that teaching meant that you were never through learning. In the passage I recounted the time in my class when she was asked why something was the way it was. She didn't have an answer for the question. And although I can't remember the specific topic, even as a high school student I knew her answer was wise. "I don't have to know it all right now," she said. "If I keep working at it, it'll come in due time." Thus her legacy for me started right there (though of course I didn't know it at the time). I came to

understand that while it seemed important to "know everything" at 18 years old, real knowledge – wisdom even – would come only when I realized that I didn't (and couldn't) know it all.

As an educational leader, I also recognize another important legacy passed down from Nina to me: pay attention to what really matters in education – don't get distracted by the "noise" of the system. In Nina's classroom, it was all about the learning; the bureaucracy didn't concern her. Though she is without a doubt frustrated by how she feels education has devolved into a scripted "box-like" enterprise, that frustration is kept out of the classroom itself. When we were teaching colleagues, I was consistently impressed by her ability to "vent" during the planning periods we shared and then shed her frustration at the classroom door as she began teaching her next class. We talked about that ability during one of our conversations. "Well, when I'm teaching, I don't want to talk about the crap. I just want to talk about ideas," she said. "It's really about awareness for me. You have to be present in the moment. The students deserve *that* – not my ranting about why the system is broken."

As one of Nina's students, reflecting back on that time spent in her class, I remember that her presence was central to experience itself. I always felt that I mattered – that her attention to teaching and to knowing who I was as a person trumped anything else going on outside of that classroom. I asked her about this recently. She said,

> I knew you when you were young. And I saw into your heart early and without
> revealing a whole lot of things, I knew how I could be of service to you. To help you be
> a better Daryl – a more powerful Daryl. The Daryl that I knew wanted to come out.

Again, without really understanding how that relationship with Nina would impact me at the time, I am now able to reflect on its influence on me as an educational leader.

As a school-based administrator, I have developed a reputation over the years as a "people person." This is largely due to the value I place on the dignity of each person. Even

when forced to make difficult decisions, even ones of a disciplinary nature, I draw on a deep-seated belief in honoring the individual. Believing that we are more than the sum of our past mistakes, I try and work towards a resolution that both adheres to the respective policy at hand and one that respects the student for who she/he is. This study has brought clarity to how this mindset was planted in me by teachers like Nina.

And perhaps that is how legacies are supposed to work: they take place when we are intentional, but not necessarily when we are intentionally trying to leave one. Nina remarked to me, "Do you think the Dali Lama sits around and thinks about his legacy? Or does he think about spreading joy, spreading love, spreading kindness? The Dali Lama part will take care of itself." Her focus on what matters is what has caused her legacy to be so impactful and widespread. Paying attention to your legacy, she contends, is not what the journey is really about. However, paying attention to the legacy *is* what *this* project is about. A more in-depth and nuanced examination of Nina's generative behaviors and its effects on four educational leaders is the central focus of the next section of this chapter.

Nina's Generativity and Its Impact on Educational Leaders

The final section of this chapter looks closely at the research data in an effort to tease out any generative patterns or themes in Nina's teaching life history that have affected the three co-participants in this study. Specifically, this component of the study addresses the first two research questions: (1) What elements of this teacher's life history contributed to creating a legacy of educational leaders? and (2) What are the perspectives of the educational leaders impacted by this teacher as they relate to crafting an educational legacy? To answer these questions, specific data analysis processes and techniques were used to create a more nuanced understanding of the participant's life history and its influence on currently practicing educational leaders.

Data Analysis Processes Used in Examining Nina's Life History

After reaching a saturation point in reviewing the specific data gathered in this study (interview transcripts, participant artifacts, researcher and participant journals), general codes were developed (see Table 7). I then re-read the data as grouped by the nine general codes to look for themes or patterns. For example, I initially used the code TCH_STRY to denote any of Nina's or the co-participant's stories that discussed their time as teachers. I also used ADMN_STRY to mark any stories that were shared by the co-participant's in their administrative roles. At this juncture in the analysis process, I re-examined these two types of coded data and determined that a theme of *flexibility* was evident in both initial codes. I then grouped any data that demonstrated the role of flexibility in Nina's legacy and how that need for flexibility was evident in the lives of the practicing administrators. This process was repeated through several iterations until a synthesis of the analyses resulted in the emergence of four themes: *flexibility, compassion for all students, passion for learning/teaching, and content knowledge.*

The next phase of data analysis involved exploring the newly-themed data in an effort to bring "meaning and coherence to the themes, patterns, categories, developing linkages and a story line that makes sense and is engaging to the reader" (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, pp. 161-162). In essence, even though the data had now been organized into an ordered framework, I still had to interpret, analyze, synthesize, and manipulate the data to distill it into a logical narrative that advanced the findings of the research in a coherent manner. In keeping with the processes of narrative inquiry, coalescing the themes into a narrative sequence was the next step. What follows are the specific distillations of this component of the research act.

Bending but Not Breaking: The Role of Flexibility in the Life of an Educator

Nina's distinct "out of the box" personal ideology contributed greatly to her "outside the box" approach to teaching. This was one of my earliest recollections of meeting her and I reflected on this in my researcher-journal, noting that "her tendency towards provocative expressions and doing anything to get her point across" was something that was etched in my memory of her. This meant that the discovery that Nina had this feeling of "difference" from early in her life offered profound insight into the generativity of her teaching. She recalled her first experiences with school and remembered that "I wanted more and I asked inappropriate questions and did inappropriate things." This gives her a perspective that helps her identify with her students. "Deep down in my soul, I get why students don't like school. And why they hate doing some things." She was able to understand her students' feelings of "otherness" due to her own experiences.

This feeling manifested itself in various ways in Nina's childhood and early school experiences. She felt "boxed in" by the strictures of the schooling system: why couldn't she have more colors to paint the giraffe as she saw it? Why did she *have* to write right-handed? Why was she deemed "weird" by classmates because she was curious about the world around her and loved learning? Her beliefs/feelings were summed in her statement, "We're given brains to question and ask - to question and ask - to weigh the apple." This "weighing" would become a lynchpin that marked her personal life and her teaching life as well. It became a thread that weaves through the tapestry that is her life history and a thread that continues in the lives of those she influenced.

Nina's Ideological Flexibility

Nina's own philosophy of being malleable and adaptive is noted by her reflections on her teaching life history. She recognizes a struggle with a system that constrains her ability to be her authentic self in the classroom. "Being on the same page with everybody else on the

same day and teaching the same fill-in-the-blank that they're teaching, it just astounds me," she said. Artifact analysis also corroborated this belief as one of her poems, *Finding the Fiddly Stuff of Love*, states,

> That damning number set by my teaching . . .
>
> The toting up of point this and that . . .
>
> Perhaps this is necessary,
>
> Tidy,
>
> Explicit within the implicit act,
>
> But I always feel that the magic cannot be measured.

Nina holds an ideological stance that authentic learning cannot narrowly (quantifiably?) be defined – that it requires a flexible, variable approach unique to the class, students, and current situation.

This belief is echoed in the observations offered by the co-participants as they reflected on their time spent in Nina's classes. Expanding upon Nina's own "box" metaphor, Deaundra stated, "She doesn't fit in a box, but look at where we are because she didn't fit in a box. She's the one who stood out because of her openness and her teaching style." DeeDee noted the difficulty in using the current teacher observation metric to observe Nina's classes in an effort to evaluate her teaching.

> You [the administrator] have to be able to follow what she's doing. Can you follow her? Because you can't just go in and sit down and think, 'This is what it's gonna look like.' And you know, some of the best teachers aren't really built for that box.

The idea that Nina has elevated teaching to an art form that is difficult to measure and quantify squares specifically with her pedagogical approach as well.

Nina's Pedagogical Flexibility

DeeDee's perspective on Nina's flexibility in the classroom itself demonstrates the significance of this theme and its generative capabilities.

> I am sure she had a lesson plan. I am sure. But you know, if the class took a turn, she took a teachable moment and used it. Of course, I didn't know that as a student. She just flowed with the class – wherever it kind went. And there were times she'd have to bring us back. But she'd let us go and then feed more information to us. Finally, she'd have to reel us back in.

Nina's willingness to accept the fluidity of the learning process contributed significantly to her success as a teacher. This became a consistent aspect of her legacy, which DeeDee again confirmed, noting "As a teacher, I learned that sometimes, even with a pretty nice lesson plan, you have to be flexible and you have to have those teachable moments. You have to hold onto them and use them with the students." Nina's pedagogical legacy, then, is evident in DeeDee's own beliefs about teaching.

Leigh, another co-participant, noted this characteristic of Nina's pedagogy as well. "She knew what she wanted to accomplish, but wherever that moment took us is where we ended up." She continued to explain that the ending point of the lesson didn't seem as important as the way she took to get there. "It wasn't like she was pushing through a lesson just to get to her destination," she added. This attention to the "flow" of teaching was evident in her instructional choices. Noting the potential of a humanities curriculum to be very lecture-based, Leigh remembered Nina's diverse ways of presenting the subject matter: "She used tons of media – back then, slides. She also used music, filmstrip clips, and excerpts from literature. She used all kinds of things instead of just telling us to read the book and memorize stuff about the artist." This varied approach to teaching – to meeting the students where they are – is a prime example of the theme of pedagogical flexibility.

The Generative Effect of Nina's Flexibility

Nina's understanding and use of flexible approach to teaching is perhaps most resonant in the practices of the co-participants. This aspect of her legacy is both appreciated and viewed as necessary by her former students who are now educational leaders. DeeDee recounted how she communicates this belief in teacher flexibility to her own teachers. She described how her teachers were instructed to change their approaches based on the needs of the students. "If they ever felt, 'Whew, they've [the students] asked me that same question fifteen times,' I'd ask them if it was because they didn't change the way they explained it in those fifteen times." DeeDee was cognizant of how Nina's influence impacted her own beliefs related to teaching, noting "I learned to have flexible assignments. We tend to act as if this assignment or this curriculum needs to be done only this way, but I can remember her changing things." Thus DeeDee has extended Nina's legacy into her own practices.

Deaundra's exposure to Nina's teaching has also impacted her understanding the need for flexible structures within the classroom. When discussing the teacher observation instrument, specifically how Nina would fare on it, Deaundra reflected on the concerns she has about her own teachers. "There's a curriculum map out there - that's really just supposed to be a guide. But they take that as this is my, if we may, Bible. So this is my book that I've got to follow. And it's not that. It's not that." She recognized that teaching is more than following a scripted lesson plan. A concept Leigh echoed as well, noting that Nina seemed to have an intuition when she was teaching. "Her [Nina's] role could change and yet she always contributed and that's, I think, what I look for in my teachers." Thus Leigh, DeeDee, and Deaundra all have integrated the concept of the teacher as a flexible facilitator of learning into their own management styles as educational leaders.

I too have been influenced by this unscripted and organic approach to teaching. When I was a teacher and now as a school-based administrator, I recognize that the bureaucracy of

the education system can be stifling. One of my poems created in response to Nina's poem, *Dovetailed Corners*, is an example of how Nina's beliefs are reflected in my own. I wrote,

> But the dovetailed corners of teaching –
>
> The bob and the weave;
>
> The zig and the zag;
>
> The warp and the woof
>
> have been cut (we cut corners, you know?)
>
> Replaced by a craftless metric
>
> that is the new ruler.
>
> And the plumbed depths sound no twain,
>
> shallow pools reflecting the pedantic apothecary
>
> from whence they've come –
>
> that prescribes
>
> and demarcates
>
> how new corners are made.

Though Nina is not the only person to influence my beliefs about education, as her student I observed and experienced authentic teaching and individualized learning. This has been communicated to my own staff when I instruct them to keep teaching when I enter their classrooms to observe them. I discourage them from attempting any type of "show" for my own benefit, but instead to be in tuned to the learning opportunities that present themselves. They must, I maintain, be flexible enough in their own understanding of pedagogy and practice such that they can adapt and capitalize on the teachable moments the arise during the course of the class. I have been fortunate to witness this type of authentic teaching in many classrooms, but my earliest recollections come from Nina's room in Smalltown High.

Teaching What Matters Most: Compassion for All Students

Noddings (2005) places compassion at the center of her understanding of what schools should really be teaching. She challenges teachers to remember that "no matter how much a person professes to care, the result that concerns us is the caring relation" (p. 18). The sentiment of caring, therefore, cannot be divorced from its practice. It is, after all, about relationships. The idea that teaching is really about developing a compassionate and sustained encounter between teacher and student is central to who Nina is as a person and as an educator. "I think that's why we're here," she said, "to help one another to be better. To be what we're supposed to be. Some many people are not happy."

Her belief in compassion and kindness is foundational to who she is as a person. That's why it resonates in such a deep generative way with her former students. "There's an elegance," Nina said, "in greeting humanity each day. No matter where I go, I greet people. I try to make people feel comfortable in the skin they're in." This concern for others and how they relate to each other was a consistent refrain throughout this research project. Each co-participant offered narratives about this practice of Nina. Keeping with the tapestry metaphor, her compassion for all students would be represented by the most brilliant threads of color in her life history.

Nina's Students Reflect on Her Caring Relationships

Without a doubt, Nina's emphasis on relationships and compassion left a distinct impression on her students. At the very beginning of DeeDee's conversation with me, she nicely described her recollection of Nina's interaction with her students:

She accepted every student. Didn't matter who you were or why you were in her class or how you ended up there – you were there and you were hers. That acceptance was, you know, something that was not common in every classroom. I never remember her having a teacher's pet. We were all her pets and we were all *not* her pets.

Nina focused on a compassionate approach to teaching and on what Noddings (2005) calls developing "a capacity to care" in her students (p. 24). She modeled and expected a reciprocal climate of respect in her classroom.

Nina herself explained her approach to teaching kindness by describing a scenario that has played out many times in her classroom. She considers it her mission to teach students to do everything "with importance and love." She wants them to not only see her as kind, but also to learn treat each other with kindness. Her approach is relationally didactic.

Sometimes things arise in class and I'll say wait, wait, wait. Both of you need to stop and listen. Was that kind? Was that kind? No. Now, you: was what you did kind? So now we have two people thinking about what they've done and what they need to do.

By calling attention to acts of unkindness and by expecting students to respond to each other with compassion and respect, Nina's classroom becomes a safe place for learning to occur.

DeeDee explained how Nina taught her about acceptance. "There were a lot of quiet lessons about accepting people, tolerance of others, appreciation of and respect for differences." Deaundra echoed that recollection, adding, "She not only taught her content, but she taught you about life and about people. And how to work with people to see them just as they are, taking them just as they are, accepting them just as they are." She then gave a specific example from one of Nina's lessons.

She described how Nina would often discuss artists who were ostracized by society – perhaps they were gay or expressed a different religious belief. By using historical characters to expose the cruelty that exists in the world, Nina offered a counter position. Deaundra remembered her saying, "They're different people, but guess what? They're that – they're people. And you can learn something from them. Just accept them." Nina's instructions continued: "Don't criticize. And by the way, I'm learning from you everyday." Her willingness

to embrace all students and to teach them to embrace each other became a hallmark of her teaching life.

One of the most consistent stories the three educational leaders told about Nina was her use of "pixie" or "fairy" dust. Though in reality it was simply colored glitter, Nina called it fairy dust and her sprinkling of this "magic" dust on students in order to cure all types of ills has become a popular memory among her students. Deaundra recalled how she would indiscriminately share her fairy dust with any child in her purview.

> She would see you on the sidewalk and if you were looking like you were not having such a great day, she'd reach into her little necklace and pull out that pixie dust and sprinkle it on you. She'd then tell you to go and have a great day.

DeeDee's memories of the pixie dust were also vivid. She even referenced the generative effect of the pixie dust when her own child went to school for the first time. He came home after the first day talking about how the teacher sprinkled pixie dust on them to help them have a good first day of school. Intrigued, DeeDee did some research and discovered that her son's teacher had a child who had been in Nina's class – that was where she learned about the pixie dust. "So my own son got to experience a little bit of Nina's class without ever having been in her classroom," DeeDee said.

The Generative Effect of Compassion and Caring

Perhaps no other single theme seemed to resonate more with the co-participants than Nina's sense of compassion and concern for all students. Her willingness to meet students where they were and to treat them all with respect are both consistent concepts recalled by the members in this study. Nina traces this back to her own childhood watching *Mr. Roger's Neighborhood* and remembered how her own unkind treatment sparked in her a desire to treat others graciously. And Nina's own treatment of students became a significant

component of her teaching legacy. The educational leaders interviewed for this project each spoke of her profound influence this behavior had on their personal and professional lives.

Leigh has internalized this link between education and compassion. Upon reflecting on how Nina's compassion allowed her to serve as a role model for Leigh, she noted, "I can tell you as a principal, one of the interview questions I always asked was, 'Give me an example of a time where you've shown a child compassion.' Because the relationship pieces are big for me." The generative effect of Nina's emphasis on developing relationships with her students fostered that same feeling in her former students who are now educational leaders. Her knowledge of her students contributed to this feeling. "She knew so many things about all of her students," Leigh said. "She made you feel special." Her willingness to have a personal investment in her students has contributed significantly to her legacy.

Deaundra had arguably the most to say about Nina's legacy in relation to kindness, compassion, and fostering teacher-student relationships. She has obviously been deeply influenced by Nina's concern and care for all students. In a particularly poignant passage, Deaundra references the legacy she's inherited from Nina's compassion,

> She taught me to love people. So now, as an administrator, I know I need to show passion and compassion for who they are and where they are in their lives. She helped me remember the real reason why I went into education and that everything will align in the cosmos. That was her favorite thing to say: "If these things are done, everything's gonna align in the cosmos." She taught me that it was okay for people to see that you are human . . . to live . . . to love . . . to laugh. And that it's okay to make a mistake because, guess what, if you didn't get it right today, there's always tomorrow. And you can start anew.

Nina's understanding of the need for education to be seen as a human endeavor – concerned with all of the messiness of life – continues to resonate with her former students to this day.

In one of our poetic dialogic encounters, I pay homage to how Nina's legacy of acceptance and compassion has impacted me: "It's the twiddly stuff that matters anyway; The gentle nods, The "I-see-you" glances / The making of persons even when the making is unbecoming. Teaching is the delicate dance between what is and what can be." Nina seemed to be able to see beyond the "now" of the student and into what the student may become. And as DeeDee notes, as educational leaders, that can be a difficult thing to communicate to beginning teachers. "You know, you can tell people you need to accept every student. But is it really in their hearts? It was in her heart. Those things I don't know how much we can really teach." Nina, however, seemed to be able to communicate that need for caring and each of the co-participants recognizes the power of that legacy. As Noddings (2005) writes, "I want to suggest that caring is the very bedrock of all successful education and that contemporary schooling can be revitalized in its very light" (p. 27). Nina's light was very bright indeed.

Lighting the Fire: Nina's Passion for Teaching and Learning

Another theme that emerged from reviewing the research data was Nina's passion for learning and how she communicated and transmitted that passion to her students. She feels that teaching and learning depend on the reciprocal relationship between content knowledge and passion for learning. She recalled the frustrations of some of her own ineffective teachers and is now grateful that her parents "regarded creativity as something sacred that needed to be kept alive in a human being." She challenges herself (and other teachers) to be authentic in the classroom: "Did I honor my profession? You have to be able to say you did. And if you didn't, be brave enough to ask what you can change to make it better?" There's an ethical undertone to her belief in the integrity of the teaching profession.

Nina also understands the demands of the profession and how these demands can dehumanize teaching,

How do I get re-energized? Well that's no different for anybody. You go through

spiritual moments in your life where you're burned out in your career or your

marriage. How do you re-energize? You re-invent. You find a new thing to be excited

about.

This careful attention to staying "juicy" is another powerful memory for the co-participants

of this study. Her methods and antics not only make her memorable, but they create a legacy

that reverberates through future educators and educational leaders.

Remembering Nina's Passion for Learning

Deaundra's speaks to the vividness and engaging approach Nina took when preparing

to teach her students,

We would come in and there would be a different mural on the wall for the year. We

would be wondering, "Why did she paint that on the wall?" Or there would origami or

mobiles hanging from the ceilings. Even the way she dressed would change because of

what she was going to teach at that time.

Nina was committed to showing us that learning was active and dynamic. She once remarked,

"If everybody's file cabinets blew up, we'd have better teaching." Her belief was that each

student was unique and therefore each lesson had to be unique as well. "That's why I dance

on my desk," she said. "This is why I draw on the floor. Kids have never seen anything like it.

They don't know what to do." It's not about entertaining them, she would contend, it's about

engaging them in active learning.

The educational leaders interviewed for this project, myself included, all recall Nina's

engaging classroom practices. As DeeDee remembered, "Her class was very emotional. You

got excited about the learning." My own memories served as inspiration for the lines in my

poem, *Teaching Without a Net*, in which I wrote,

The room is never silent - empty - but not silent.

Peel back the layers of lesson plans and

the parade of false communion until what remains

is nothing like what began.

Dance on that desk, righteous sister!

Write on that wall - breaking boundaries of the blackboard box

for one and all (and all for one).

Nina's teaching provided a safe haven for risk-taking – not an easy task to do for high school students. As Leigh notes, "I think her passion – both for the kids and her subject – stands out to me." Nina's passion for the profession and the enthusiasm she has for teaching and learning also serves a generative purpose as well.

The Legacy of Nina's Passion for Learning

McAdams (2013) posits that generative behavior seeks to effect later generations. Metaphorically it is the small pebble in the pond whose ripples extend out far beyond its center. Nina's engaging approach to teaching and her genuine fervor for passing on knowledge is evident in the professional beliefs of the educational administrators involved in this study. One person, it would seem, can have a significant influence on the behavior of those who come behind her. And while it was never her intent to "create" future educators (or educational leaders), she would definitely agree that she did intend to instill a passion for learning in all of her students.

Deaundra was quick to offer an example of how she has benefitted from Nina's enthusiasm. "Her style of teaching is what we as leaders now dream of . . . what we want to walk into the classroom and see." She continued with her recollection,

The other thing is that she loved what she did and as she spoke about teaching, you could hear the passion that she had for it. So as I speak about my job and what I do,

it's not a job...it's my life. And so as I talk about it, I try to make sure that the parents

can feel and the students can feel my love for what I do.

Deaundra desires to influence her own teachers, parents, and students through her passion

for education. She offers this as a direct component of Nina's legacy in her own life.

DeeDee also offered a story from her professional life to illustrate Nina's legacy. As a

reading teacher, DeeDee didn't feel she necessarily fit the mold. Recognizing the importance

of connecting with the students, she would frequently use innovative approaches in her

classroom. "I was actually supposed to be teaching reading," she said, "but I was not the

normal reading teacher. So I taught reading through drama." She'd stay in her drama

"costume" to teacher her reading students, engaging them in thought-provoking lessons about

what they were reading. She fully recognizes Nina's influence in her professional life.

Compared to the other emergent themes, perhaps this element of Nina's legacy has

had the greatest impact on me – both as a teacher and as an educational leader. I've often

said that my primary objective as a teacher was to get students to take charge of their own

education. Empowering them to become responsible for their own learning is critical to

create lifelong learners. Nina's passion for continued learning and her willingness to extend

the learning beyond the classroom walls were early models for me – even though I didn't

realize it at the time. While I can't say that Nina inspired me to be a teacher, I can say that

her genuine desire for knowledge was contagious. I reflected on this in my journal, noting,

"her class was one of the classes that I hustled to . . . I didn't want to be late or miss what

'pre-class' discussions were taking place." In her class I (all of us really) learned how to think

and create. One of my fondest memories (and one of my earliest attempts at creative writing)

was my poem, *Barf the Bald*, parodying the epic poem *Beowulf*. Her class was a safe place to

engage and celebrate learning without worrying about what anyone else thought.

As an educational leader, Nina's passion for teaching and learning has long been my benchmark when hiring or evaluating teachers. I've come to expect my teachers to be engaging and participatory in the learning process. I believe that modeling the lesson is key to effectively transmitting knowledge and skills to students. One of my teachers is a professed "music theory nerd." His students recognize this about him and not only gravitate to his class, but they also demonstrate extreme proficiency on music theory assessments. It's clear that his love for the subject matter combined with his ability to relate to his students are two contributing factors to his success as a teacher. In my role as the school-based leader, I recognize that his passion mirrors Nina's (though they do not know each other). I feel it's my job to celebrate that passion and to seek more teachers like him. Having Nina as a teaching role model has allowed me to recognize those types of teachers.

Walking the Talk: Nina's Content Knowledge

The fourth and final generative theme teased from the data is Nina's immense content knowledge and its legacy for her students. Leigh recognized this as she commented, "People thought she was brilliant as far as content-area. Like, it was the gospel. Whatever she said, you never second-guessed her." Nina's passion and preparation was evident in her teaching. Maya Angelou, the American poet, once said, "Easy reading is damn hard writing" (Elliott, 1989, p. 59). The ease at which Nina appeared to be teaching was actually the result of difficult and conscientious study on her part. When questioned about how free-flowing and effortless her teaching looked, she responded,

> But I thought about it a long time before I decided to do it. And it's like any work of art; it shouldn't look hard. It should be *sprezzatura*. That's an Italian word that means making it look easy even when it isn't.

Her commitment to student engagement is enhanced by her deep knowledge of the subject matter.

Though she is quick to point out, "I didn't plan to be an English teacher. They just kept cutting art teaching positions," Nina has still left her mark with her profound content knowledge. "I know my stuff," she's quick to say. "And I have a hungry head." Her willingness to share her own knowledge-seeking process is embraced by her students. I referenced reading one of her poems in our conversation, noting that I had to go and "look up all the allusions because I didn't know what misericords were." Her use of an unusual word kick-started my own desire to understand so I researched it myself. I took charge of my own learning – perhaps her greatest legacy of all.

Leigh commented on the generative nature of Nina's content knowledge: That [her content knowledge] stuck with me because I felt like when I was a teacher, I really needed to know my content." With Nina as a role model, Leigh understood the first role of the teacher is to be well versed in their subject matter. DeeDee related a similar experience as she discussed how her experiences as Nina's student were amplified in her own classroom,

> You have to have that content knowledge. You have to have that background. And I was a math teacher, and as math people, I had to find a way to bring in those ideas and concepts from other subjects. For example, some of the things I learned in her humanities class, the Fibonnaci Sequence is one I remember. I mean, I saw it math and went, "Oh." But I really understood it because of how she taught us about it in her humanities class.

Thus, for Leigh and DeeDee, Nina's nuanced understanding of varied disciplines (art, music, architecture, drama) found in the humanities became central to their own development as teachers.

Deaundra too was a recipient of Nina's content-knowledge legacy. She credits what she witnessed as Nina's student as a pivotal aspect of her current role an educational leader. "Her content knowledge was phenomenal," Deaudra said. She is now very aware of this need

to examine how much teachers know about their subjects when she is interviewing prospective educators.

As an educational leader, when I'm looking to hire someone, my questioning is centered around that. And when I came here, people asked, "How did you know to do that?" Well, I've seen this when I was a student. Nina's legacy lives on through Deaundra's practices as a school principal.

When the three co-participants and I reflected on what we remembered about Nina's class and what still resonates with us to this day, her knowledge of her subject was one characteristic that stood out. DeeDee even credits Nina's ability to connect with her students to it. "She has that ability to ebb and flow with the class. You know, if she didn't have the background and the content knowledge, she couldn't do that." Perhaps Nina's own words, from one of her poems, best illustrates her passion for knowledge and why it's so important to her to transfer that knowledge,

> You asked me why I teach?
>
> Why I learn?
>
> Why I hover over an idea like the fume of Maron's brandy did for Odysseus?
>
> I am; therefore I think. I think, therefore I am.
>
> I think I am.
>
> I am as I think.

It is the thinking and the teaching and the learning that have continued her legacy beyond just her immediate students and down into the *students* of her students. Her own knowledge has been woven into that tapestry which is her teaching life; it has become a great thread that runs through the legacies of her former students.

Narrative Resonance in Nina's Life History

The third research question is concerned with exploring the concept of narrative resonance – how stories can be seen to impact other stories. This phenomenon manifests itself through the examination of the influence stories have on us. By looking at what may best be described as particular meta-narratives, narrative resonance can be assessed. In other words, are there stories that, due to their narrative influence, take on larger roles in influencing other stories. It's an attempt to see if narratives have generative capabilities themselves. This narrative inquiry explores how this concept is present in the stories of Nina, the three co-participants, and the researcher as well.

The first example of this metanarrative and its associated narrative flow can be seen in the oft-told stories related to Nina's use of "pixie dust." Nina's stories about her use of this "magic" dust, which is really just colored glitter, lend themselves to an almost mythical quality. And these stories, when repeated or recalled by the co-participants, in turn create other stories related to the metanarrative. DeeDee offers an example (see Figure 9) of how this process works. She remembered Nina's pixie dust, the many stories Nina told about why she used it, and DeeDee shared her own stories associated with the practice. She noted that Nina would often say, "Because you're in my class and you're all special, you've been sprinkled with pixie dust." This original story impacted DeeDee in such a way that she reflected on its influence on her own teaching. "I couldn't be a pixie dust kind of person," she said. "As a classroom teacher, I remember thinking specifically, what can I do for all my kids so that they'll feel special? For me, I did stickers." Thus Nina's pixie dust stories had created narratives in DeeDee's life as well, with her own child experiencing pixie dust when he

went to kindergarten. "He came home telling me about his teacher and pixie dust and I'm flashing back to being 16 or 17 years old," she said.

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│                                         │
│      Nina's stories about pixie dust    │
│                                         │
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                    ↓
┌─────────────────────────────────────────┐
│                                         │
│      DeeDee's stories about pixie dust  │
│           and her own teaching          │
│                                         │
└─────────────────────────────────────────┘
                    ↓
┌─────────────────────────────────────────┐
│                                         │
│      DeeDee's stories about her own     │
│      child's experience with pixie dust │
│                                         │
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Figure 9. The narrative resonance of "pixie dust."

DeeDee's stories were derived from Nina's stories of how she used pixie dust to make her students feel special. Deaundra also offered personal narratives derived from these stories, recalling,

> She would sprinkle her little pixie dust and utter some words that we didn't
>
> understand. It was made to take away the bad vibes so that you would have a good
>
> day.

For Deaundra the "pixie dust narrative" has inspired her own narrative about how she interacts with her teachers. She offers her own version of pixie dust in the form of encouraging words, hoping to inspire her teachers just as Nina and her stories have inspired her.

I offer another example of narrative resonance (See Figure 10) from this research –
how some stories seem to have more impact on us than others. This particular illustration is
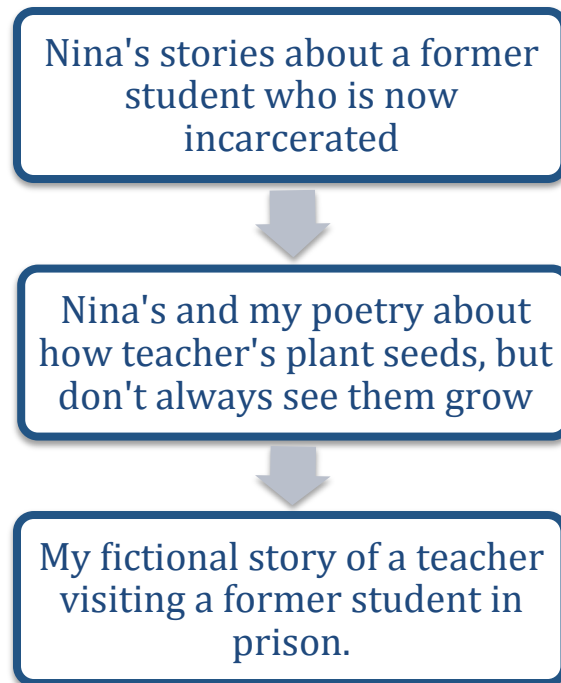indicative of the power of stories to beget more stories.

Nina's stories about a former
student who is now
incarcerated

Nina's and my poetry about
how teacher's plant seeds, but
don't always see them grow

My fictional story of a teacher
visiting a former student in
prison.

Figure 10. How stories lead to other stories.

During one of my interviews, Nina relayed a story about a former student who, despite
her attempts to reach him, is now in jail. As I reflected on this story, it began to resonate
with me as I thought of students who we hope to impact through our teaching, yet we never
really know if we've made a difference or not. This led me to write one of our "call and
response" poems and send it to Nina for her response poem. In my original poem, I wrote that
"I am, after all, / a serendipitous gardener: / not knowing which seeds will grow; / which
plantings need pruning;" I continue, noting, "The full flower - the harvest - / is not mine to
gather. / Though some return as thistles on a summer breeze."

Nina reflected on the narrative theme (of making a difference in our students' lives)
of my poem and answered with her own reflections. She wrote, "And I, the farmer, poke

fingers and furrow through the dark earth, / Plant seeds and pray that the worms have done their work." She offers further poetic images illustrating how teaching is in itself generative: "A cycle of linkage between that which pokes, / That which is poked and . . . / That which cycles under this poking and prodding with precision, / Leaving only something magical behind as a cast intention." These future narratives (in this case poetical ones) are the result of a resonance that emanates from the source story. And true to the nature of these metanarratives – certain stories that take on a larger field of influence than others – make deep impressions on us.

In the next chapter, I offer a culminating example of the resonant quality of this initial story. As I reflected in my journal about the story Nina told me, I thought about the final data representation for this study: a fictional narrative gleaned from the research and the subsequent analysis. I jotted a brief note: "Wonder what an encounter with an incarcerated former student would be like? What would that story reveal about the teacher's legacy?" Thus, like the act of teaching itself, a small seed was planted in my creative "garden" – Chapter 6 represents that seed come to life. Nina's original anecdote then, offered as a particular insight into how she has influenced one of her students, resounds through poetical musings, finally resolving into a fictional narrative.

The resonant quality of certain narratives may often be viewed as mysterious. There may not be any rhyme or reason as to why one story seems to influence and create other stories. Some stories end up forgotten in the great wastebin of history. Nonetheless, stories do affect us in profound ways, offering seemingly limitless opportunities for them to reverberate through our lives. It is perhaps fitting that narrative inquiry is the research approach used in this study as "Narrative research is increasingly used in studies of educational practice and experience, chiefly because teachers, like all other human beings, are storytellers who individually and socially lead storied lives" (Moen, 2006, p. 2). Nina's

"storied" life became, for me, the origin of many of my own narratives. It is no surprise to me, then, that her narratives continue to resound through the lives of so many of her students.

Summary

The crux of this work has been to explore the research questions at the heart of this research project. By examining Nina's life history and through careful analysis of the co-participant's narratives, I posit that indeed there are generative characteristics found in the teaching behaviors of Nina Brown. Combined with my own reflections, the other educational leaders offered stories that revealed patterns of thoughts and actions in Nina's life. These patterns remained largely unexamined until brought to light through the specific lens of narrative inquiry: What about Nina's and the other's stories reveal deeper insights into the phenomenon of generativity?

After deep review of the data – living with it, one might say – it became evident that there were four specific generative themes that emerged: flexibility, compassion for all students, passion for teaching/learning, and content knowledge (see Figure 11). These four areas revealed themselves through stories, poetry, and artifact analysis. The narratives of the co-participants offered examples of how these aspects of Nina's teaching have played out in their own professional lives. Leigh told how she learned from Nina the importance of knowing her subject matter. DeeDee offered stories of how Nina's flexibility was made evident in her own teaching experiences. Deaundra spoke of telling her teachers that their passion (or lack of it) would directly influence their students' engagement. And I offered my own poetry and its reflections/ruminations on Nina's compassion and its lasting effect on my approach to educational leadership. Each of those interviewed were able to narrate specific influences of Nina's teaching in their past and current job roles.
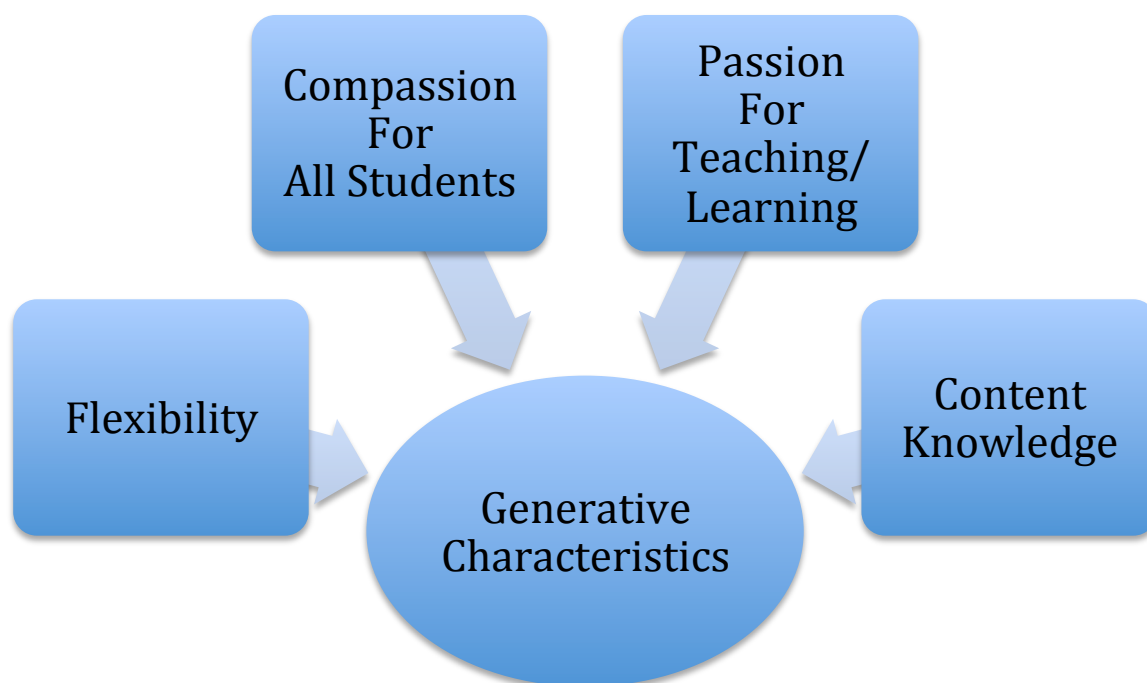
Figure 11. Generative themes found through data analysis.

This research project has sought to contribute to the field of educational life history research by creating a teacher's life history from her own recollections, reflections, artwork, and poetry. I used these data-collection methods to draft a narrative that, while it aspires to a high claim of authenticity, is still interpretive in nature; it is *my* version of Nina's story – though many of the stories and thoughts are her own. Thus, in many respects it is a jointly-crafted narrative. Perhaps not in the traditional sense of being written by more than one person, but certainly in the vein of interwoven narrative encounters between researcher and participant(s). This was accomplished through a specific and intentional approach to the process of narrative inquiry.

After a previous encounter with Nina for another project, my "researcher curiosity" was piqued and I generated three research questions for a potential dissertation topic:

1. What elements of this teacher's life history contributed to creating a legacy of educational leaders?

2. What are the perspectives of the educational leaders impacted by this teacher as they relate to crafting an educational legacy?

3. How do the life stories of the teacher and educational leaders intersect to reveal *narrative resonance* – the ability of stories to interact in such a way that they influence other stories?

These points of inquiry, therefore, became the guiding factors behind my choice of research method and data analysis techniques.

I subsequently interviewed Nina a total of three times, each time transcribing the interview myself, offering a further engagement with the data. I also asked her to consider representing aspects of her life history through her own choice of an aesthetic representation. This resulted in Nina writing poetry and creating an artistic "life map." These, too, became significant pieces of data for the study. Interspersed with these dialogues and artifacts, I also had two interviews each with three co-participants. I transcribed these conversations as well. Finally, I also offered my own reflections through the use of a researcher-journal in addition to my poetry, which was inspired from various tidbits from our conversations about teaching and leaving a legacy.

After interviewing, transcribing, reading, and re-reading the interview data, I analyzed the various artifacts. This data included the art, poetry, and journal of Nina as well as my researcher reflections and poetry. I then synthesized this into a semi-fictional narrative of Nina's teaching life history (Chapter 4). This text was centered on the idea of a "narrative truth" – one that aimed for verisimilitude and a certain storied authenticity. Offering no pretense that it was an objective presentation of the data, I instead created a narrative that set out to capture Nina's teaching experience in hopes of exposing any generative actions on her part.

The study then transitioned into the current chapter, using traditional qualitative methods such as open coding and searching for emerging patterns or themes. These themes (discussed at length earlier) were the result of constant comparison – contrasting Nina's stories with the stories of the co-participants all the while searching for any possible generative connections. The result was a detailed revelation of how Nina's influence transcended the classroom walls and influenced generations of teachers and educational leaders. McAdams (2006) provides an apt description of Nina's telling of her life history,

> When people tell their life stories, they not only recount the past. They also project their lives into the future. When highly generative adults do this, they tend to imagine the future as bringing continued growth for those things they have generated. (p. 68)

In summary, it would appear Nina's metaphorical use of Campbell's hero schema is apt with its circular depiction of life as a journey. Through her teaching and its subsequent impact, the journey continues, never quite finishing before it begins again in someone else's story. And one of those stories is my own.

Reflections on Nina's Legacy in my Own Practice

Before discussing how this research can be extended, I want to offer the reader additional reflections on Nina's and my own narratives. Using my journal entries as data points, I reaffirm my position as both a product of and conduit for Nina's legacy. This is akin to what Janesick (2011) describes as portraiture. Personal reflections and critiques in the researcher's journal can be used to create a "portrait" of the researcher though that portrait is ever evolving and fluid as she/he moves through the research process. In the section below (using excerpts from my journal set in italics), I present a "self-portrait" of myself as an educational leader impacted by Nina's legacy.

The Compassionate Leader

One of my teacher's came to me today to tell me about a personal problem – concerns about his marriage. He sat in my office and wept, asking for my advice. I talked and listened and finally got some coverage for his classes and sent him home. He texted me a few minutes ago to thank me for recognizing the importance of his personal needs even as I had to be concerned with the needs of the students. I'm really trying to make sure my staff knows that their personal lives do matter to me. Not that I really want to get into all their business – but I know how important developing relationships with them are. Professional relationships, but I need them to feel cared for. Some days I think that's as important as any teaching they do.

The words above were written after a staff member trusted me enough to share a problem. When I read over them for this project, I was immediately reminded of Nina's statement in an interview how she tried to "do it all with importance and love." That's an aspect of her legacy that I feel the most connected to. It's almost out of fashion to talk about the love we have for students, for learning, for each other. But as an educational leader, I've come to understand that people respond to love and attention. They want to be heard. Nina calls it the "kindness quotient," but I think it's really more about a kindness mindset. I've learned to approach my dealings with students, parents, and teachers with kindness. And sometimes it means not always being able to say what I really want to say – sometimes it means saying what needs to be said on the other person's behalf and not my own.

Finished transcribing part of the interview – not sure how much will get cut, but I'm amazed when I look back at how Nina's been able to still show such vibrant compassion for her students. Even after 38 years, she still gets upset when she thinks they've been wronged. But I have to say, I know how she feels: my students and teachers are very personal to me.

My Own Educational Journey

The myriad metaphors Nina uses to categorize and depict her life story are both engaging and helpful. They allow me to "make sense" of how she orders things – how she views her world (especially her teaching-world). And true to most metaphors, they cause me to wonder if they also work for my own understanding of a particular topic. This is most evident as I reflected on her use of Campbell's Hero's Journey to describe her life.

> *I knew Nina would through some Campbell into this mix, but it's really piqued my interest how she's managed to use it almost like a biographical framework. Departure – Initiation – Return. Simply "boxes" to explain life's ups, downs, and sideways motions. So, I can play here in this notebook with the idea of what my own "journey" would look like: There's the Departure: leaving Small Town, going to college, getting married, and coming back to teach. Then there's the Initiation: Teaching high school, having a family, getting a master's, and moving into administration. Crossing another threshold: Working on a Ph.D., becoming a principal. And now what? Is it time to consider my own Return? I'm not sure my journey works quite as purely as Nina's, but it's an intriguing thought-exercise.*

This research and my interactions with Nina and the three co-participants caused me to do some thinking about my life as a journey. Perhaps the most powerful aspect of this is simply that it made me pause – take a step back and simply reflect. Nina's description of her life in these stages gave me the chance to ponder and wonder, something I don't do often. I recognize that qualitative research argues that the researcher should indeed be impacted by the research. Nina's "hero's journey" is certainly not my own journey, but I can now see how I'm not only a part of her journey, but that she's a part of mine as well. This has led me to understand the power of reflection and of taking stock of one's life. It's as if the journey of one simply blends into the journey of another.

Tree Rings and Legacies: What Comes Before Also Goes After

This project has really focused my thinking (and research) on generativity. Talking with Nina and seeing how DeeDee, Deaundra, Leigh, and I share such similar memories of her classes has even directed me towards considering my own legacy. Again, I return to a journal excerpt that reflected my thoughts emanating from this research and my conversations with Nina.

> *I really like Nina's use of tree rings to help us think about legacies. It uses the natural image of a tree and its internal growth rings to suggest how the past (the inner rings) influences the future (the outer, "younger" rings). I believe Nina's teaching – and probably more importantly, her relationship with me – have created their own "rings" in my life. I see how even my dissatisfaction with the corporatization of the education system is rooted in my exposure to real teaching and learning in her class. I've seen how it's supposed to be, therefore it disturbs me to see us taking creativity out of the education toolbox.*
>
> *This process also has me wondering about my own legacy. What impact have I made on my former students? Have I passed on any of Nina's legacy: her compassion, her subject matter knowledge, her use of play in the classroom, her passion for learning – has any of that made it through to my students. There's the rub, though. It's tough to evaluate your own legacy. You need someone to do it for you.*

Nina's influence on me has been profound. This study is primarily concerned with her teaching-life history. But, now that it's completed, it has also shed light on how legacies grow – like tree rings – from one generation to the next, causing me to wonder what legacies I have perhaps left for my own students. Those legacies, and how they may be manifested, is worthy of further examination. Just like legacies, even research can be generative.

Implications for Further Research

The research in this study, like most research, creates questions even while attempting to answer them. It is as if the research drops a pebble in the pond of inquiry and the concentric ripples extend out into other areas worthy of investigation. One significant area that bears further examination is the relationship between teaching and generative behaviors. As noted earlier in this paper, while generativity has long been a subject of social science research, there are scant examples involving the study of teachers and their understanding and proclivity towards leaving a legacy.

Perhaps one significant opportunity to do this could be through a more thorough longitudinal narrative study. This project would entail having the researcher explore the stories and relationships between generations of teachers and students. By searching for connections/patterns/themes between the narratives of the teachers and their former students who are now teachers (and perhaps even another generation of students-who-are-now-teachers), this research would be valuable in the field of narrative inquiry. It would provide researchers and educational theoreticians fodder for discussions on the nature of teacher development. Collecting and analyzing these teacher-student stories adds to the research body of educational generativity.

Another area worthy of additional research emphasis is the use of fictional texts as research representations. While this research paradigm is slowly expanding (see Leavy, 2013), the overall quantity of such research texts is still minimal. By actively encouraging research-fiction, social science researchers stand to increase their exposure to disparate audiences. Fiction offers unique opportunities to engage readers at a different level than traditional academic texts. This is to say that the truths and findings of important research can, when couched in a fictional milieu, spark reactions (both intended and unintended) in a reader. It is important to remember that arguing for increased use of research-fictions is not meant to

imply that the rigorous standards of qualitative research should be abandoned for a liberal anything-goes approach to academic work. Instead, depending upon the author's frankness, the reader can be allowed to "see under the hood" of the research act, giving her/him a different perspective. In other words, the fictional representation of a scholarly study can be used both to communicate the findings of the study in a different manner and to understand the processes involved in creating a research narrative.

Finally, another consideration for extending this research lies in additional development of the method itself. As narrative inquiry is predicated on the understanding of story as a valid research subject *and* tool, it is particularly well-suited for interview studies. Life histories can specifically benefit from a narrative approach. As people tend to narrate their lives, stories therefore take on immense inquiry value. Further implications for this type of research could see the expansion of reflexive fiction techniques – ones in which the research uses fiction to not only communicate the findings of the study, but one in which the fictional narrative also becomes a part of the analysis itself. For example a short story (or novel) could be generated from the research data, but the researcher might also create a way (a character, a motif, or perhaps a narrator) to *speak back* to the story. In this manner, while the story may be fiction, the reader could witness an actual "conversation" between the data and the findings. The reflexivity of the researcher could be made evident in the narrative. The use of fiction offers a wealth of opportunity for researchers to expand the world of social science inquiry.

In the next chapter, I offer one such opportunity. I have crafted a fictional narrative from the data and the analysis of said data. Appendix F offers readers the "under-the-hood" glimpse of the research themes gleaned from the data and interwoven into the narrative. It is offered as an appendix for those readers who may simply want to engage with the story on its own merits – without being influenced by an overt explanation of authorial intent. The

prologue offered at the beginning of the story explains the genesis of the story – how research

data were used to posit that fiction is really just another type of truth.

CHAPTER SIX: A FICTIONAL REPRESENTATION OF NINA'S GENERATIVITY:
A GOOD TEACHER IS HARD TO FIND

Prologue

The following section is a fictional presentation inspired by one kernel of the research data. Though the story's inspiration comes from one brief segment of an interview with Nina, I weave various themes and ideas that emerged from the study into a fictional narrative. Thus through repeated interview and artifact data analysis, I offer yet another method of distilling of the findings of this study. I posit the distinction between "research fiction" and "pure fiction" to be one concerned with the *origin* of the respective fictive representations. Whereas pure fiction may or may not have a particular agenda as it's inspiration, research fiction offers no pretense suggesting that it springs unfettered from the author's imagination. It is fictive in its narrative function; it is not fictive in its creation from a prescribed research agenda.

In the story that follows, I return again to the research questions. Specifically, I use another research medium (fiction) to examine a teacher's generative acts and their effect on her legacy. I also use the short story to expound on the idea of narrative resonance: how stories influence and create other stories. My choice of fiction as a representational method is also aimed at a further expansion of the tools available to qualitative researchers. Appendix F provides readers with underlying themes found in the story (gleaned from the research act). Some readers may prefer to access the appendix prior to reading the story, while others may choose to avoid such an explicit pronouncement of the "work behind the work." Regardless, through this work, I am intentionally proposing an alternative way to view research findings, suggesting that even in fiction, much truth can be found.

In one of our conversations, Nina related the story of former student who visited her to tell her of the fate of another former student. The first student told her that the other student was now in jail for an unnamed crime, but that he wanted Nina to know how much he appreciated her interest in him when he was in her class. She then communicated to the first student to tell the young man who was now incarcerated that she still cared for him. This anecdote offered me an opportunity to encapsulate the idea of how lives influence others – how legacies are manifested far beyond our initial interactions. Therefore, through the story presented below, Nina's generativity is portrayed through a method that engages the reader on a personal, narrative level. The short story, though fictional, becomes yet another means of communicating the powerful truths of human relations. Fiction expands the reach of social science research to broader audiences and it offers a challenge to the fact/fiction dichotomy of traditional research. Though the narrative is based on a research "snippet," it aspires to a larger goal – that of capturing a slice of the lived experiences of a high school teacher. I contend that fiction-as-research-product offers readers deftly nuanced understandings of the data. In short, fiction is as real as it gets.

A Good Teacher Is Hard to Find

"She would've been a good woman, the Misfit said, if it'd been somebody there

to shoot her every minute of her life" (O'Connor, 1970, p. 29).

The rain was coming down in sheets now, forcing Sara Brown to pull her car off to the side of the road. Perhaps, she thought, this was an omen. It was the third time she'd pulled over on this trip and each time she thought about turning around and going back home. And with the rain pelting her windshield, she reached for the letter resting in the passenger seat and once again read it.

Dear Mrs. Brown,

I hope you're doing good. You're probably surprised to be getting a letter from me. I'm sure you know about my situation as it was all over the news. Well, last week the governor signed my death warrant. That means I have 45 days to live.

I'm writing to see if you would maybe visit me before my time is up. I know that is a weird thing to ask, but I heard from my sister that you're gonna be retiring. You were one of my favorite teachers and I would love to see you one last time.

It would also be ok if you don't want to do this. This place is not a very happy place to visit. I just hope you'll think about it.

God Bless,

Jesus Ortiz

She placed the letter back on the passenger seat and glanced up to see the rain had stopped. Typical Florida weather, she thought. She looked through the windshield to see where she had pulled off and saw a road sign 40 or 50 feet in front of her. FLORIDA STATE PRISON – 5 MILES, it read. And with an audible sigh, she started the car and pulled back onto the road, passing the sign in just a few seconds.

Sara sat at a square metal table – one of 25 in the room, all exactly alike and evenly separated from one another – with other prison visitors. As they waited for the inmates to be brought in, some of the women – they were all women – were making small talk, creating a low, hushed murmur. Sara was silent, purposely so as she carefully surveyed her surroundings. The room was stereotypically sterile: white tile, over-waxed so as to reflect the harsh bright lights of the overhead fluorescent fixtures, blank walls with a clock hung on one of the room and a small window on the other. Probably the canteen, Sara thought. She'd read that you could bring in up to $50 to purchase snacks and drinks for the prisoners.

She'd come through two different checkpoints to get to this room, having been searched each time. The second search was more forceful than the first. The female guard was rougher; her hands and fingers probing her body. She reached under Sara's blouse and ran her finger under her bra strap. Sara noticed she'd been holding her breath the entire time and finally exhaled when the guard cleared her and moved on to the next visitor. Now, she was sitting in the "Visitor's Park," as the sign above the door said, and was trying desperately to think of what she might say when Jesus was brought in to see her.

She remembered Jesus specifically. He'd been one of her students, she knew that, but when the trial started, she actually had to dig out an old yearbook to place his face. After 39 years, the student's names run together, so the yearbooks help her put names to faces. Jesus sat in the front of her English class for two years – as a junior and then again as a senior. He was an average student, quiet, but attentive when he was in class, which wasn't very often his senior year. A few years after he graduated, he was arrested in some type of gang-related murder. She was disheartened, but not surprised. She'd followed the trial and his sentencing, but had simply forgotten about him. Until the letter.

After about 15 minutes, the first of the inmates entered the room. They each wore a bright orange t-shirt and baggy blue pants that reminded Sara of the hospital scrubs she sometimes slept in. Their hands and feet were shackled together so that when they walked they both shuffled and clanked with each step. Their movements were labored and intentional, obviously from much practice walking in their shackles.

When Jesus entered, Sara watched him scan the room, now filled with visitors and inmates embracing and talking. He was a little heavier, but she recognized his large brown eyes. She wanted to raise her hand – to signal him – but she couldn't make herself do it, so she sat waiting for him to catch her eye. Finally he did so, his face breaking into a large smile of recognition as he shuffled to her table.

"Mrs. Brown," he said as he she stood to greet him, "I wasn't sure you'd come."

Sara reached across the table awkwardly to embrace him. She was unsure how much physical contact was allowed. "I said I was coming, didn't I?" she answered. She had no intention of telling him how close she'd been to turning around and heading home.

They both sat. "Just so you know," Jesus said, "They allow visitors and prisoners to touch each other at beginning and the end of the visit – nothing in between."

Sara nodded. "Makes sense, I guess."

They both just sat, wordless, for a few moments, looking at each other. Jesus was the first to break the silence. "Mrs. Brown, I'm so glad you came."

"Do you get many visitors?" Sara asked, changing the subject.

"Not many," he answered. "My mother and aunt come a couple of times a month. But my father and brothers – they never come."

"How long have you been here?" she asked.

"Six years," he said and the silence between them returned.

After a few seconds that seemed like minutes, Sara finally said, "I'm sorry, but I don't really know what else to say."

"No, I'm the one who's sorry. I didn't mean to make you feel bad about coming."

More silence.

"I heard you were retiring," Jesus finally said. "That sucks for your students." Sara smiled.

"Thank you, Jesus, but it's time. I'm tired and I'm old. I still love teaching, but I simply can't do what they want anymore. It's just too much paperwork and testing and nonsense. Teaching literature isn't enough for them."

"That's too bad. I learned so much in your class."

Sara exhaled audibly. "Jesus, this is difficult for me to say, but if you learned so much from me, how'd you end up like this?

Jesus shifted in his seat and looked down at the floor, unable to meet her eyes. "I got no good answer for that, Mrs. Brown. I was mixed up with really bad people. Back then, different things were mattered to me. Money. Women. Drugs. Partying. Those mattered. Then, one day, some bad shit happened. . ." He stopped suddenly and looked up.

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Brown, I didn't mean to say that word."

Sara smiled. "It's okay, Jesus. Sometimes 'bad shit' does happen."

Jesus smiled back at her and then just as quickly lowered his head again.

"Well, we had to deal with the guys who stole our stuff. When we found 'em, they had to pay. Honestly, I didn't even know what I was doing. I just ended up shooting into the crowd, but I killed that boy."

"And now you're going to die for it. Are you okay with that?"

Jesus looked up. "Mrs. Brown, it really doesn't matter whether I'm okay with it or not, they're going to stick a needle in me in 32 days. But I do have some sense of peace about it." He looked back down at his feet and said, almost in a whisper, "I am scared though."

Sara reached out and placed her hands on his, both resting on the tabletop. Just then a guard stepped towards them. "No contact," he said. Sara quickly pulled her hands back to her lap. "I'm sorry," she said to no one in particular.

Jesus changed the subject quickly. "You know, once the governor signs a death warrant, you get all kinds of visitors: people against the death penalty, news people. I've even got a pen-pal who wants to marry me before I'm executed."

"Really?"

"Yeah, and just last weekend I had a preacher visit and tell me that I was better off than most people because I actually *knew* when I was going to die. Said I could get things in order before God 'called me home.' I told him that, given the choice, I'd rather not know."

Sara was grateful for the change in his tone. "I would think the death penalty opponents would be rallying to support you," she said.

"Actually, not so much. I pissed them all off because I told the papers that even though I'm against the death penalty, that's the price I have to pay. See, they think just because I'm Latino, that must mean I'm poor and stupid. They don't like it that I figured things out for myself and that I think I'm getting what I deserve."

"You think you deserve this?"

"A lot of people think I do. That boy's parents think I should die for killing their son." Now he made direct eye contact with Sara. "Do you think I deserve to die, Mrs. Brown?"

Now Sara shifted in her seat. "Jesus, you were in my class for two years. You know how I feel about capital punishment."

Jesus pressed harder. "But this is different. This is me we're talking about. You know me. You taught me. And I did something really bad – even I know it was really bad to kill that boy. So you still don't believe in the death penalty?

"You keep saying 'that boy.' Do you even know his name?"

"Robert Montoya," he answered without missing a beat. "I feel bad when I use his name. It's like I'm bringin' up his ghost or something."

"Maybe. But he deserves for you to say his name."

Jesus nodded silently.

Sara started again. "No, I don't believe in the death penalty. I fully believe that 'An eye for an eye will leave the whole world blind.' You're right, what you did was awful and you deserve punishment. But killing people doesn't solve anything."

"I don't think Robert's parents feel that way," Jesus said.

"And they're entitled to that, I guess. But they're the ones who have to decide if killing their son's murderer really offers them any peace."

Suddenly, a guard yelled, "Okay, inmate count. All inmates up against the back wall."

Jesus looked at Sara who was startled by the command. "It's okay. They have to do a count once every hour." And with that he joined the throng of other inmates who were shuffle-clinking their way to the other side of the room.

Once the count was over, Jesus returned to the table. "Mrs. Brown," he began, "I can't tell you how much your visit means to me. Outside of my family, you're the only one I've asked to come see me."

"You say your mother and aunt visit you. How are those visits?"

"Well, once they stop crying, we have good talks. Then it's time to go and they start crying again. It's getting worse now that I'm on watch. I'm afraid I'm going to have ask them not to come anymore – except maybe the last day."

"Not to change the subject, but what exactly is the 'watch' you keep talking about?"

"Once the governor signs the death warrant and sets your execution date, you go on death watch. They move us from our regular six by nine death-row cell down to a set of cells near the execution chamber."

"A six by nine cell?" Sara interrupted. "How can anyone live in a box like that?"

"You get used to it," Jesus continued. "Then as somebody's killed, they move you down cell-by-cell until you're in the one right next to the room. Seven days before you're scheduled to die, they take everything out of your cell and put a guard in front of your cell 24-7 to watch everything you do. Then they measure you for your burial suit, plan your last meal, even run pretend executions to make sure they're doing it right."

Sara covered her mouth with her hands. "That sounds so sinister."

"I'm okay with it – scared, but okay. I chose this destiny when I took someone's – I mean, Robert's – life."

"I really don't know if destiny has anything to do with it?"

Jesus leaned forward across the table, his words tumbling out quickly. "Sure it does. I remember in your class when we were learning about how different groups of people believed we were created. You talked about how God put the apple there not to cause us to screw up, but to show us that when we make bad choices the seeds from those apples get planted and grow just like our good 'seeds' grow. I feel kind of like I took a bite of a bad apple and now these are what my seeds grew into."

Sara appeared flustered as her own words came back at her. "That's not exactly what I meant," she said.

Jesus sat back and shrugged his shoulders. "Well, it works for me." After a brief silence, he continued. "Mrs. Brown, why did you come to visit me?"

Sara paused. "I really don't know. I guess I wanted to hear your story. To see if anything about this makes sense. And maybe I was curious to see what all of this was really like."

"I understand," he said.

"Now it's my turn. Why did *you* want me to visit?" she asked.

Jesus looked away for a moment before returning her gaze. "I needed to tell you something before I die."

Sara said nothing as Jesus continued.

"At the beginning of my senior year, I was sitting at my desk. It was between classes or something because I don't remember too many other kids in the room. You came up to me and said, 'You know Jesus, I'm glad when you're here.' That was it. One little sentence.

"And I remember, I was glad that somebody knew I existed. You weren't trying to bullshit me or make me do something because you just moved on and talked to someone else. But see, nobody ever told me that before. Not my parents or my friends. Or even my other teachers."

"I honestly don't remember that, Jesus," Sara said, again reaching for his hands, stopping as she remembered the guard's directive. "But I do remember you were missing a lot of school and I figured something was going on."

"That's when I started bangin' with the gang so, yeah, I was skipping a lot."

"Well, it's true. My days were better when you all showed up. That's when it's fun – when everyone's there and we're all learning."

"From then on, your class was the only one I hated to skip. I still did it a bunch, I just felt bad about it," he said, laughing.

Sara laughed too.

"Listen, Jesus," she said. "I brought some money with me. Can I buy you something from the canteen?"

"That would be really nice, Mrs. Patterson. Thank you."

Jesus motioned for the guard to come over and he escorted them both to the canteen window. They each got a soft drink and a candy bar and started to return to their table when the prisoner working the concessions stopped them.

"Hey," he said. "You want a picture together?"

Jesus looked at Sara and said, "No, I don't think we . . ."

"Yes," Sara said, cutting him off, "we would. How much?

"A dollar per photo. You can have up to five pictures."

And with that, Sara paid the prisoner who handed her a ticket. "Take this back to your table and there'll be a guy through in a few minutes with a camera. Give 'em your ticket and he'll take your picture."

The guard took them back to their table and true to the prisoner's instructions, a few minutes later the door buzzed and an inmate came in with a Polaroid camera. Jesus was smiling broadly, but sheepishly lowered his head, allowing Sara to motion for the prisoner to come over and take their photo. He was the only prisoner not in shackles so he glided over to their table, his prison-issue slippers sliding across the floor. Sara leaned across the table and motioned for Jesus to do the same. They both bent at the waist, with their heads almost touching as the inmate readied the camera. "Okay," he said, "Say 'cheese," and with that the flash popped.

"Here you go," the prisoner-photographer said, and tossed the still-developing photo onto the table. He moved on to the next table before Sara could thank him.

Jesus picked up the photo and stared at the milky splotches that were slowly transforming into a recognizable image. "Mrs. Patterson," he said almost absent-mindedly, "You asked me earlier why I asked you to visit me."

"Yes," she said.

He handed the photo to her across the table. "Something happened to me during my trial that changed me. It was one of those epi . . . epi . . ."

"Epiphanies?"

"Yeah, one of those. I don't know if you saw anything about it in the newspaper or on TV, but it kind of became a big deal when I changed my plea in the middle of it."

"I do remember some of the teachers at school talking about that, yes." And she took a sip from her drink.

"Well that's why I wanted to see you. To tell you what happened to me . . . because of you."

Sara placed her hands on the table in front of her. "Me?"

"The prosecuting lawyer had a witness – a lady doctor, I think – who was talking about how Robert died. She was describing the bullet going in him and how it really tore him up.

"And I'm sitting there hearing all this, not feeling nothing. I wasn't sad. I wasn't mad. Not sorry for his family – just empty inside. Then, right after she told everybody how he died from the bullet wound, I started to get sick to my stomach. My mouth got dry and all I could think about was what a piece of shit I was for killing this guy.

"But what really hit me – scared me even – was not that I was finally feeling bad for killing him. I thought that maybe I only felt that way because I was afraid of getting convicted – that only the fear of dying made be want to be good to people. And that's when I remembered you and your class."

Sara leaned forward in her chair.

"I thought about the time we were studying that Southern writer-lady . . . Fanny or Flanny or something . . ."

"Flannery," Sara said. "Flannery O'Connor."

"Yes!" Jesus said. "That's her name. And I remembered that story where the escaped convict ended up capturing this old lady and her whole family."

"That's *A Good Man Is Hard To Find*," she said.

"Right. That's it. You told us to re-read that line where the crazy convict tells the old woman she'd been a good woman if she'd a had somebody there to shoot her everyday. And we talked about how right at the very end of her life, when she was afraid of the psycho guy killing her, that's when she finally figured it out. She realized that she wasn't any better'n

anybody else and that even the escaped prisoner was a human . . . with feelings. And we all argued about whether even as a psycho, he deserved to be treated right.

"So right then I stood up in the courtroom and asked the judge if I could speak to him. My lawyer freaked out. Tried to grab my arm. But I didn't want to talk to him. The judge called us both up to the bench and I told him that I was going to finally do the right thing. I wasn't going to keep hiding behind a lie. And that I was guilty of shooting Robert. I told him I wanted to change my plea.

"He asked me why and I told him about the short story and how my teacher told us that it meant we should be true to what's right no matter how much pain it caused us. And he looked at me like I was crazy, but said if that's what I wanted, then I had that right. So I sat back down and he announced to the courtroom that I wanted to change my plea. He asked me to stand and how did I plead and I said, 'Guilty.' And the whole place went silent.

"So," Sara interrupted, "you changed your plea because you remembered the story, *A Good Man Is Hard To Find*?"

"Yes. And *that's* what I wanted to tell you. That because of what you taught us in that story, I could finally do the right thing and feel free about it. That's why I don't care so much about dying. I mean, I think it's wrong to put people to death, but I know that telling the truth about what I did gives me a clean heart.

He straightened up in his chair. "And I didn't need nobody there 'to shoot me everyday of my life' to remind me."

Jesus stopped talking then and looked down at the ground. When he looked back up tears were running down his cheeks. "Mrs. Brown, that story saved me."

Sara felt her own eyes welling with tears.

"Since that time I only take bites from the good apple," he said smiling. "And I wanted to thank you for that. And for seeing me as a real person when I was sitting in your class." He

looked around the room. "This place tries to make you into an animal . . . something not human. But no matter how bad it gets, I just remember to treat people right. I know I can't undo what I did. I can't bring Robert back. But I can do right by him if I end up being better than I was."

The tears were coming more freely now and Jesus bent his head to wipe his eyes with his shackled hands.

"Mrs. Brown, I don't want to die," he said, "but that day in the courtroom and that story from your class won't let me pretend I'm the same man who killed Robert. I've changed. But if I have to pay for his life with mine, then I'll do that."

Sara instinctively reached for her purse to offer Jesus a tissue, but it was still in her car.

"I heard you were retiring," Jesus continued, "and I wanted to thank you for teaching us all. I know what it means to be a good man. And now I know why that lady-writer said they're so hard to find. And good teachers – they're hard to find too."

Back in her car, Sara looked closely at the photo. Jesus' smiling face was almost touching her own. She placed it carefully on the seat next to his letter and then pulled slowly out onto the two-lane road. Her thoughts began to drift to Jesus and his story and she looked in her rearview mirror to see the lights of the prison glowing softly in the Florida twilight. She shook her head just slightly and whispered a prayer, "I'm not sure who saved who."

Epilogue

The preceding story hinges on data collected throughout the systematic and rigorous process of qualitative social science research. While the temptation may be to read the main character (Sara) as Nina, as the author I can confirm that doing so risks misunderstanding the organic nature of fiction. Instead it is more accurate to ascribe *some* of the characteristics of

each of the participants of this study (Nina, DeeDee, Deaundra, Leigh, and myself) to Sara. She is a composite of the data – a synthesis of the research questions. These questions examined how one teacher's (Nina) legacy influenced four educational leaders (Nina, DeeDee, Deaundra, Leigh, and myself) through her teaching and relationships. Additional questions pondered the impact of Nina's influence on all of our professional lives and whether stories have generative "powers" themselves – do they, in effect, beget other stories? The fictional story presented above offers yet another answer to those questions. Not *the* answer, but one as plausible and as real as if it wasn't fiction at all.

The use of fiction as a research technique is a valuable tool in social science inquiry. Leavy (2013) suggests it "allows us to portray people's experiences more holistically than other forms of conducting and writing research" (p. 38). It's potential to engage readers and offer alternative possibilities for making inferences from data is substantial. The postmodern understanding that factuality is subjective and contextually fluid fits fiction-as-research perfectly. Fiction as a research technique embraces the ambiguity that our lived experiences bring to the inquiry process. The crafting of a fictional narrative based in part (or in total) on the analysis of research data celebrates the researcher's positionality as but one possible interpreter of the data. The story's veracity is just as "true" as the practice of making generalized correlational statements from randomized controlled experiments. In both cases the researcher is suggesting that if you do *this* in *this* way then *this* is a possibility. These possibilities are at the heart of using fiction-based research techniques.

Stephen King, in, *On Writing*, observed, "Stories are found things, like fossils in the ground . . . [and] the writer's job is to use the tools in his or her toolbox to get as much of each one out of the ground intact as possible" (p. 163). King's notion is that writers (and, I would add, researchers as well) "find" their stories. Fiction suggests these stories we discover

represent the truth of that moment. And a fictional presentation of research is no less true

than a non-fiction one – in fact, it may be more so.

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APPENDIX A: PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

This study involves interviewing an educator about her professional experiences. It also involves collecting aesthetic materials and interviewing three of the teacher's former students to examine her educational legacy. It is therefore research.

1. The purpose of this study is to document the life of a female teacher by collecting her narratives and by interviewing former students who are now educational leaders. The research is being conducted in an attempt to chronicle Nina's educational legacy as passed on to three of her former students who are now educational leaders.

2. The study is expected to last from April 1 – August 31, 2014.

3. Four people will be interviewed: the teacher and three educational leaders.

4. The procedure of the research involves conducting interviews with all participants, collecting any documents/artifacts related to leaving an educational legacy, analyzing the data, and then presenting a life history of the main participant.

5. The interviews will be one-three hours each in length and the main participant will be interviewed three times. The co-participants will be interviewed twice. The audiotapes will be protected in my home and will be kept for three years.

6. There are no foreseeable risks to the participant and she/he may leave the study at any time.

7. Possible benefits are educational, that is to contribute to the body of knowledge about how educators leave legacies and how one teacher's life history gives voice to traditionally-marginalized groups (women teachers).

8. The participants will be completely anonymous and all names will be changed for reasons of confidentiality. Only my major professor and I will only know this information.

9. For questions about the research contact me, Daryl Ward at 863-838-2132.

10. Participation in this study is totally voluntary. Refusal to participate will not result in penalty or loss of benefits. There is no cost to participate in the study.

I, _____, agree to participate in this study with Daryl Ward. I realize this information will be used for educational purposes. I understand I may withdraw at any time and I understand the intent of this study.

APPENDIX B: IRB APPROVAL LETTER

USF
UNIVERSITY OF
SOUTH FLORIDA

RESEARCH INTEGRITY AND COMPLIANCE
Institutional Review Boards, FWA No. 00001669
12901 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., MDC035 ● Tampa, FL 33612-4799
(813) 974-5638 ● FAX (813) 974-7091

April 15, 2014

Daryl Ward
Secondary Education
Tampa, FL 33612

RE: **Expedited Approval for Initial Review**
IRB#: Pro00016160
Title: Teaching With The End In Mind: One Teacher's Legacy of Educational Leaders

Study Approval Period: 4/15/2014 to 4/15/2015

Dear Mr. Ward:

On 4/15/2014, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and **APPROVED** the above
application and all documents outlined below.

Approved Item(s):
Protocol Document(s):
Study Protocol

Consent/Assent Document(s)*:
IRB Consent Form.docx.pdf

*Please use only the official IRB stamped informed consent/assent document(s) found under the
"Attachments" tab. Please note, these consent/assent document(s) are only valid during the
approval period indicated at the top of the form(s).

It was the determination of the IRB that your study qualified for expedited review which
includes activities that (1) present no more than minimal risk to human subjects, and (2) involve
only procedures listed in one or more of the categories outlined below. The IRB may review
research through the expedited review procedure authorized by 45CFR46.110 and 21 CFR
56.110. The research proposed in this study is categorized under the following expedited review
category:

(6) Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.

(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

As the principal investigator of this study, it is your responsibility to conduct this study in accordance with IRB policies and procedures and as approved by the IRB. Any changes to the approved research must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval by an amendment.

We appreciate your dedication to the ethical conduct of human subject research at the University of South Florida and your continued commitment to human research protections. If you have any questions regarding this matter, please call 813-974-5638.

Sincerely,

John A Schinka, Ph.D.

John Schinka, Ph.D., Chairperson
USF Institutional Review Board

APPENDIX C: MAIN PARTICIPANT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

The Life Story Interview (adapted from Dan P. McAdams, 2008)

Introduction

This is an interview about the story of your life. As a social scientist, I am interested in hearing your story, including parts of the past as you remember them and the future as you imagine it. The story is selective; it does not include everything that has ever happened to you. Instead, I will ask you to focus on a few key things in your life – a few key scenes, characters, and ideas. There are no right or wrong answers to my questions. Instead, your task is simply to tell me about some of the most important things that have happened in your life and how you imagine your life developing in the future.

A. Life Chapters

Please begin by thinking about your life as a teacher as if it were a book or novel. Imagine that the book has a table of contents containing the titles of the main chapters in the story. To begin here, please describe very briefly what the main chapters in the book might be. Please give each chapter a title, tell me just a little bit about what each chapter is about, and say a word or two about how we get from one chapter to the next. As a storyteller here, what you want to do is to give me an overall plot summary of your story, going chapter by chapter.

B. Key Scenes in Your Life Story As A Teacher

Now that you have described the overall plot outline for your teaching life, I would like you to focus in on a few key scenes that stand out in the story. Consider a key scene to be a moment in your teaching story that stands out for a particular reason – perhaps because it was especially good or bad, particularly vivid, important, or memorable. Below are some prompts for you to consider as "key scenes"

1. High point. Please describe a scene, episode, or moment in your career that stands out as an especially positive experience. This might be the high point scene of your entire life, or else an especially happy, joyous, exciting, or wonderful moment in the story. Please describe this high point scene in detail. What happened, when and where, who was involved, and what were you thinking and feeling?

2. Low point. The second scene is the opposite of the first. Thinking back over your teaching career, please identify a scene that stands out as a low point. Even though this event is unpleasant, I would appreciate your providing as much detail as you can about it. What happened in the event, where and when, who was involved, and what were you thinking and feeling?

3. Turning point. In looking back over your professional life, it may be possible to identify certain key moments that stand out as turning points -- episodes that marked an important change in you or your life story. Please identify a particular episode that you now see as a

turning point in your career. If you cannot identify a key turning point that stands out clearly, please describe some event in your teaching life wherein you went through an important change of some kind.

4. Childhood memories. Describe any childhood memories (positive or negative) you can recall about schooling. Think of specific events (fieldtrips, dances), locations (schools), and people (students, teachers). What makes them particularly memorable for you?

Now, we're going to talk about the future.

C. Future Script
1. The next chapter. Your life story includes key chapters and scenes from your past, as you have described them, and it also includes how you see or imagine your future. Please describe what you see (or would like to see) as the next chapter in your career

2. Life project. Do you have a project in life? A life project is something that you have been working on and plan to work on in the future chapters of your life story. The project might involve your family or your work life, or it might be a hobby, avocation, or pastime. How does this project have the potential to impact you as an educator?

D. Challenges
This next section considers the various challenges, struggles, and problems you have encountered in your professional life..

1. Teaching challenge. Looking back over your teaching life, please identify and describe what you now consider to be the greatest single challenge you have faced. What is or was the challenge or problem? How did the challenge or problem develop? What is the significance of this challenge or problem in your teaching life story?

2. Failure, regret. Everybody experiences failure and regrets in life, even for the happiest and luckiest lives. Looking back over your teaching career, can you identify and describe the greatest failure or regret you have experienced? How have you coped with this failure or regret? What effect has this failure or regret had on you and your professional life story?

E. Personal Ideology
Now, I would like to ask a few questions about your fundamental beliefs and values and about teaching and learning. Please give some thought to each of these questions/prompts.
1. What do you feel is the most important aspect of the teacher's role?
2. What is your overarching philosophy of education in general? What is its purpose? Do you feel you have helped or hindered that purpose throughout your career?

F. Reflection
Thank you for this interview. I have just one more question for you. Many of the stories you have told me are about experiences that stand out from the day-to-day. I'm wondering if you might reflect for one last moment about what this interview, here today, has been like for you. What were your thoughts and feelings during the interview? How do you think this interview has affected you? Do you have any other comments about the interview process?

APPENDIX D: CO-PARTICIPANT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Please consider thoughtfully the following questions or reflection statements:

1. Think back on your time/experiences in Nina's class – with little introspection (in other words, quickly and responsively) think of three words you would use to describe her teaching/your experiences:

2. Is there a particularly memorable story/event that you recall that happened in Nina's class or was a direct result of an interaction with her? What stories have "stuck with you" these years after leaving her tutelage?

3. Reflecting back on your time as a teacher, can you think of any lessons or pedagogical precepts you learned from Nina? Were there any particularly meaningful examples she set for you in terms of dealing with students?

4. As an administrator, reflect back on how/what Nina taught you. In retrospection, are there any skills/practices you would recommend to other teachers that you recall her employing? How would you describe her as a teacher from an educational leader's perspective?

5. Is there anything else you'd like to add to your recollections of your time spent in Nina's high school class(es)?

APPENDIX E: CO-PARTICIPANT FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. The were a few consistent qualities listed by each of you that you ascribed to your experiences/recollections of time spent in Nina Brown's class(es). Please add any additional comments/anecdotes that you feel would further expound upon these attributes. I am especially interested in how perhaps you have used these characteristics in your practice as an educational leader:

A. Flexibility (Nina's deft use of pedagogy and teachable moments):

B. Content Knowledge (Nina's masterful command of her subject matter):

C. Acceptance (Nina's willingness to teach anyone, anywhere, at any time):

D. Compassion (Nina's genuine concern for all people):

2. Finally, If you agree that it has, please write a paragraph or two describing how you feel Nina's teaching has left a legacy in your own professional life. What have you carried with you? Have you "passed" on that legacy to others (students/teachers)? How have you honored her legacy in your practices?

APPENDIX F: RESEARCH UNDERPINNINGS IN A GOOD TEACHER IS HARD TO FIND

The following themes/concepts were gleaned from the research process and incorporated into the fictional work, A *Good Teacher Is Hard To Find*.

Frustration with the education system.

- Sara discusses why she's retiring because "I simply can't do what they want anymore."

The prison cell symbolizes Nina's fear of being "boxed in."

- "How can anyone live in a box like that?"

The apple representing the choice to do good or bad.

- "I feel kind of like I took a bite of a bad apple and now my seeds are bearing that fruit."

How teaching is generative / leaves a legacy

- "Because of what you taught us in that story, I could finally do the right thing and feel free about it."

Figure F1. Research data used in fictional research text.

APPENDIX G: SAMPLES OF "DIALOGIC POETRY"

Nina's first poem:
On Building Dovetailed Corners with August
Wilson
Dove-tailed corners
A father's advice on well-built furniture is good to remember--
(Heed)
"It's those little details that only God notices"
hidden misericords on medieval benches
resting perch for tired ecclesiastics
mid-tierce or matins amens
a high hallelujah of Latin and you hold that syllable a bit too long
a yawn in God's house
gargoyles only the dove sees cooing high above the city
one shiny patterned slice of architectural folderol
a buttonhole perfectly stitched with ruby twist
(hidden under the flamboyant Czech bohemian glass button)
Ah, August Wilson knows the perfectly finished dovecote
Or the plowed field that from above is a plumb line to God
My grandmother won't let me shortchange the art --
(perhaps that hem that is just uneven turned up material)
Blasphemy
It honors neither the fabric nor the craft
And that is the key –
Pithy intention
He cried that keening moan of knowing
"limitation of the instrument"
It's the dance of creator and creation --
That double loaded brush of Chinese calligraphy
Painted in mind before brush and paper mingle
No excitability here – pause
Square that shoulder
fret that Sufi song
Hurl hegira and intensity to the four corners
spin incense and prayer upward on the moon and star of Mary
Arch that Amish framework of plan and commit
Like the keystone in a well-made arch
This dove-tailed detail bespeaks measurement
Delineation and love of the highest order
Even God planned (both fearfully and wonderfully)
That home of his shadow
Covenant of carry and submit – ark of shape and content

Seraphim adorn its four corners and
Knit cunningly of gold
Ten tefachim in length
Tempered with four square connections with the Shekineh
A rod, a hook, and voila –
Connection –
Neatly pinned down with conviction
And all seated in a nice mercy seat
August Wilson's workbench positively hums
Neat chips of wood,
Mitered corners
Carefully chosen wood grain
Sanded tidbits gleam
Ebonized wood and inlaid veneer
Oh, this is the fiddly stuff of love
And art like a dovetailed trinity
Resides in hand, head, and heart
Threesome of predilection, patience and patter
And this, I do know, is built on mused ebb and flow
That constant swim and rhythm of pen
Keystroke keen or pencil sliver gray with neither earth nor heaven's gate-
No, this is the dovetailed box
human with that heart beat turning and spinning
Echoed in 10 plays that spoke to me in human
Human because I was . . .
I was born in Gary
grew up in Pittsburgh and then . . . the South
strange songs grow in me too
and I felt that keening rhythm in Wilson's jazz,
his front yards and back yards and open and closed fists
know this -- in heaven he heaves
his hands stretch across the wood
caress this and that moment held and he opens heaven's gate
bangs out a new rhythm for that stuff of love
that perfection of the instrument now humming God's name.

My response:
On Cutting (Dovetailed) Corners
They sit there . . . unnoticed,
with matching grain,
sanded and smooth –
tight-fitted joints: the interlocking of
Artistry and Craft.
Folded in on one another as if they are
inseparable hands of prayer.

But the dovetailed corners of teaching –
The bob and the weave;
The zig and the zag;
The warp and the woof

have been cut (we cut corners, you know?)

Replaced by a craftless metric
that is the new ruler.
And the plumbed depths sound no twain,
shallow pools reflecting the pedantic apothecary
from whence they've come –
           that prescribes
           and demarcates
how new corners are made.

They are still here . . . interlocked
But
looser – with a certain roughness
that comes from dotting I's and crossing T's
not from the zig or the zag
And the twin hands of
Artistry and Craft
are slowly unfolding – until all
that is left
is prayer alone.

The next poem from Nina:
[This was written straight out with no revision. I will twiddle with it and resubmit, but this is an immediate response to what is happening that is so nicely caught in your response. I have learned to not even look at the number. It is so demeaning and arranged so that, as in my case last year, because you must use the school's score, I missed highly effective by 4 points. I was just galled. I have enough ego left that it does matter to me, but I just had to rearrange my ego in a different way.]
Finding the Fiddly Stuff of Love
That damning number set by my teaching . . .
The toting up of point this and that . . .
Perhaps this is necessary,
Tidy,
Explicit within the implicit act,
But I always feel that the magic cannot be measured --
Like the construction of barrows in Ireland,
Great heaves of stone set together with intention
No mortar.
No arch, yet they mound like breasts upon the green.
On Solstice, they harbor that warmth
In the details " those little details only God notices"
The Sun streams in and is held.
Embraces,
Enters through the tiny stone opening above the door.
Shoots, like liquid life, to the back.
The inside has 4 chambers heart-like
(heed)
There are barrows across the land. . .
And, on that day, the light is held like creation itself

I do ask this question - boldly.
As an elder, I have earned the right.
How can the magic be measured?
There is that luminous moment we crave within our own barrow.
There is my room, my barrow of sorts - Hobbit-like and nicely crammed.
There is my heart, my warmth, my magic explicit and implicit.
How has education cobbled this coldness?
Why do I no longer have communion with others except in prescription?
Let the call resonate within the joy.
Measure the joy within this room.
Know that the corners of my heart shiver with the first total -
Know that I will not be effective.
That damns my teaching at that moment on that flat paper.
Yet, the "limitation upon my instrument,"
That shoddy world of flatland,
Is untrue. How many of us need to say that out loud?
Does anyone realize the message?
God does not yawn at this . . . He howls.
We gain soul when we resist that which hobbles our art.
We must measure our own worth and. . .
Perhaps construct roundness,
Eternal hope,
The ouroboros of possibility.
I shun the reading of flatland and choose the pregnancy of folderol.
Done.
Claimed.
Taught and retaught regardless of those "limitations on my instrument."
This is my Call and Response in God's house - my own body,
My own spirit,
My own covenant of carry and submit only to that Higher voice . . .
Bidding, demanding, blessing, beckoning the excellence of service
Service to that higher art - living.

My next "response" poem:
[*This poem represents an attempt to draw aesthetic attention to the holistic and longitudinal aspects of teaching and learning...how it is an organic exercise that involves sowing and harvesting - though not always from the same person. I think it works as an ode to how generative the act of teaching can be.*]

"I hope that I spread some seeds in the garden and that they grow nice things. Oh I'm sure there's a few nettles. But I hope they grew because then those people sow seeds." – Nina Brown
The Pedagogy of Potting Soil
Furrowed brows lead to furrowed minds...
Fresh and fertile thought-soil
And I turn it over and over and over -
No seedlings yet,
just the manure of minutiae;
just the dark matter of unplanted soil,
waiting for seeds.

And a few nettles, I suppose,
creep in, but it is not my place
to separate the wheat from the tares.
I am, after all,
a serendipitous gardener:
not knowing which seeds will grow;
which plantings need pruning;
whether the grapes of wrath are seedless (or not).
Yet I tarry, as gardeners do,
hoping for elegance in the sowing.
Such that deep roots take hold - enough to shelter
the growth from wayward winds or
restless waves of acquiescence to the mean.
The full flower - the harvest - is not mine to gather.
Though some return as thistles on a summer breeze.
Alighting long enough for me to remark about the
slender stalks of knowledge or the petals of wisdom
that have arisen from such pregnant loam.
And the sowed have become the sowers,
probing their generative dust,
for furrows of their own making.

Nina's next poem:
The Necessity of Earthworms
Consider the lowly ones asleep in pots,
Nestled in bits and dollops of home earth,
My ancestors cradled the homeland and sailed with --
Home's fragrant herb or seed pod not awakened. . .
Lumbricidae
Common night crawler,
Red worm came along for the ride.
They are of my forefather's bidding dreams:
Farmers and pastors,
Teachers and preachers.
All are farmers of a sort lifting loam or revealing that which (is buried),
Dark with sin or fragrant with possibility. . .
I remember the smells of my grandmother's tulip garden.
Redolent geosmin plant eating bacteria and algae were earth perfume.
Geosmin later labeled just loam.
Eden loam as the grandmother bent digging would call it;
This made my memory locked in deep strata.
The Latin just makes it mysterious. . .
It spaded a furrow in my mind of poking finger and earthworms;
Earthwork drudgery became exploration as I sought the wriggler --
Red or brown; they nudged away and moved earth like Hercules.
I was Antaeos, earth mother's errant giant,
Plying secrets from my mother.
Good earth requires this wriggler.
And I, the farmer, poke fingers and furrow through the dark earth,
Plant seeds and pray that the worms have done their work.

Eden earth silty loam melded into my hand's imprint.
As a child, I thought of Adam and Eve garden bound in Eden.
Fig leaves were large hollyhocks along the fence.
The worms became Satan's hook of slither lie.
The serpent.
My grandmother said no, no, no.
Earthworms are necessity;
Their casts are gold and their paths, golden trails of fertility --
Either sideways or upright, they delineated the earth's deep calling.
Bidden to burrow.
Bidden to eat and cast forth fertility.
Bidden to roll and roil and wriggle and writhe.
Unseen importance.
They are the secret to tending this garden.
Oh, we can plow and sow and predict and beg the heavens,
But the earthworm must be present.
That persistent niggle of a thought that must proceed;
Curiosity must prevail.
Yet, in that smell of good earth,
The smell after a good rain and the geosmin has perfumed Eden,
It is as transient as is creativity when visiting Michelangelo or Dante --
Mystery upon mysteries.
As strange to me as djinn, angels or fairies,
Curiosity comes and leaves, decanted at whim. . .
And yes, as we ponder my fields of 39 years,
I am left with this – I am the field and the field is me;
God bless the field and God bless me.
Even Hamlet knew "a man may fish with the worm
That hath eat of a king, and eat of the fish that hath
Fed of that worm."
My head aches ouroboros,
A cycle of linkage between that which pokes,
That which is poked and . . .
That which cycles under this poking and prodding with precision,
Leaving only something magical behind as a cast intention.
Thus, if we are "hoping for elegance in the sowing,"
Perhaps the cultivation of this unseen wonder,
Then Lumbricidae needs to join its Latin brother --
Ludo Lusi Lusum needs to be farmed too.
Ah, how we forget the joy of play.
You asked me why I teach?
Why I learn?
Why I hover over an idea like the fume of Maron's brandy did for Odysseus?
I am; therefore I think. I think, therefore I am.
I think I am.
I am as I think.
And hopefully, I have caused others to ponder the wriggle and not just the crop.
Dark run the mysteries of humankind.
Dark runs the magic of the power of worms.
Cultivate mysteries.

My final "response" poem:
Teaching Without A Net
"The impulse to keep to yourself what you have learned is not only shameful, it is destructive. Anything you do not give freely and abundantly becomes lost to you."
-Annie Dillard

The room is never silent - empty - but not silent.
Peel back the layers of lesson plans and
the parade of false communion until what remains
is nothing like what began.
Dance on that desk, righteous sister!
Write on that wall - breaking boundaries of the blackboard box
for one and all (and all for one).
It's the twiddly stuff that matters anyway:
The gentle nods, The "I-see-you" glances,
The making of persons even when the making is unbecoming.

Teaching is the delicate dance between what is and what can be:
Scylla and Charybdis with chalk in hand -
and you, a whirling dervish in the primordial mist of teeming adolescence,
kick at the goads of conformity-for-conformity's sake.
There is no net here - no security in failure,
just knowledge...the capital K in Knowledge, winking mischievously at
all of us down below.
If Dickinson dwelt in a fairer house than prose
[as if there is anywhere else to forage for ripening fruit]
then you too are perched on the high-wire of possibility.
Holding out both arms (for balance, no doubt),
you pick out a distant spot, focusing on the end,
knowing the walk is what it's all about.
And damn those trapeze artists, with their to and fro mentality.
Pick a wire, pick a spot, pick
a life . . .
and then walk, run, glide, creep until the thought of a net
isn't a thought at all.

But on some nights
you pull up the covers a tad tighter
and dream of gleaners:
rag-topped and stooped,
hovering, but not hovering
above something growing and golden -
each plucking morsels of thought from someone else's harvest.
You awake, knowing now about
plowing and planting,
pruning and picking,
but mostly
realizing that growth (knowledge?)
comes from deep piles of unknown origin.

APPENDIX H: SAMPLE PAGES OF TRANSCRIPT FROM PARTICIPANT INTERVIEW

NINA [00:44:12.09]: There's a certain pride when they bring their child into my room to meet me. And they sometimes are embarrassed that they weren't the best for me. And they want me to make their child better than they are. And I look at them and I go, "Why darling, I don't remember any bad thing you did." I really, sometimes don't. And if they were truly naughty and horrible and miserable - you'll come to this - they become nameless. I forget their names. Because it's not important to keep it. I did what I could. And by this time I think I've taught almost 6,000 people. I remember faces. I remember generalities. [00:44:53.15]. I don't remember specific naughty things. I don't have time for naughty. That's a bad tree...don't want to go there.

But I think not feeling welcome there, being on the outs for most of my life, I think that - and I don't...I'm having an epiphany...I don't engender it or look for it in an egotistical way...to be stroked. But I want to feel like my life has meant something. That I'm not weird. I'm not bad. I'm not an outsider, yet I am...

DARYL [00:45:33.29]: And that you're making a difference..

NINA [00:45:34.14]: I am who I am and if they call it weird, they'll get used to me. I'm old enough now that I'm sure enough that I really don't always fit in well. [00:45:44.12] That's alright. They'll get used to me. I'm a nice person. And they do. And I've made a difference - on that level. I make better students. And yes, their scores come up on the FCAT [said in a derisive, sarcastic tone]. But I think I make them realize something deeper - what does it mean to be human?

DARYL [00:46:06.16]: Good. Next chapter

NINA [00:46:08.18]: Wow...just wanted to think about that and I was also staring at that palm tree [glances to window] it's all green at the top and gnarly at the bottom, but it wouldn't be green at the top without the gnarlies at the bottom. And that made me think about stuff that you'd said and…

DARYL [00:46:21.15]: About the tapestry and...

NINA [00:46:22.26]: Yes and then I went "Nina, get back on track"...Umm, I want to mention the "Net of Gems." Because if you look at each experience. If we look experientially...now I'm going, probably to Victor Frankl, and a little Erik Erikson - is when we step back - to have self-reflection is an important step in becoming a human being. The Net of Gems is very Eastern. If we look at every experiences as made of these components [00:46:57.06] [makes hand gestures] they sparkle and then you make another experience and then you realize - and this is where self-reflection comes and why this [points to notes] was interesting - is looking back and seeing the pathway. They don't exist by themselves. They all reflect - it's beautiful - It's

the microcosm and the macrocosm. And I look at the stars at night, I realize that the same network is in me, making up my atomic structure...in my brain...I tell the kids all the time why I'm doing what I'm doing. I want the axon to hook into its little [making hooking gesture with hands]...there's like an indentation in the dendrite - I want it hook in there. And then I want to make a pattern to another one and another one and another one. I said, "Look at how many memes you've learned." Every once in a while we sit back and we go....how many single thoughts go with the idea of Zeus?

DARYL [00:47:55.10]: And you create this net...this web?

NINA [00:47:58.29]: The neural network. Which is a life network. Which is the cosmos. Which is, "I'm not alone." And that...in discovering that moment of humanity...I go to a tiny school. Some people would say I have a tiny life. I don't feel that way at all. And maybe that's the beauty of it all. It wouldn't matter where I went, if you stuck me in a room here, I'm going to do...

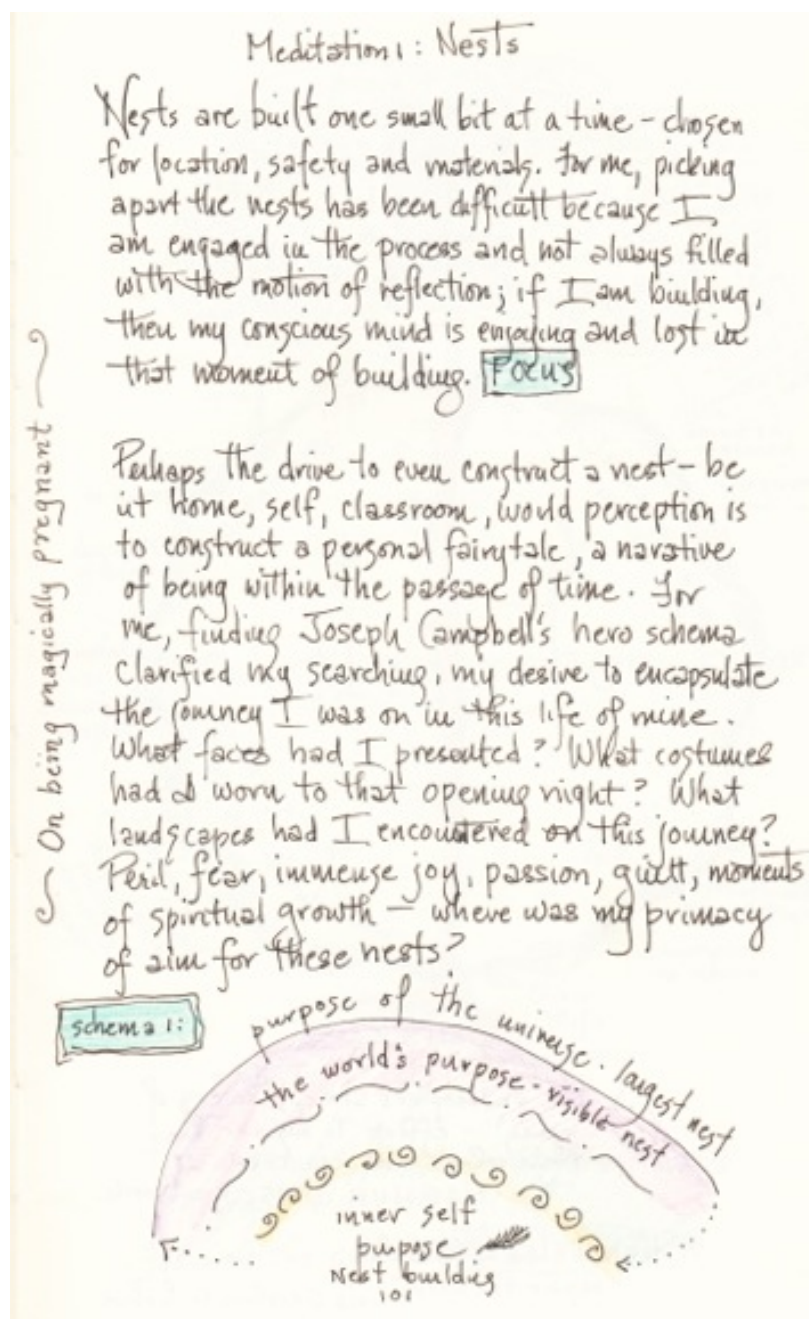APPENDIX I: SAMPLE ENTRIES OF PARTICIPANT'S JOURNAL

Figure I1. Sample Page A from Nina's participant journal.

3

I just came off teaching Tuesdays With Morrie when [he] gave me the book. I read three chapters and had to put it down, but it marinated in me. Raised up ghosts, prodded questions, sucked my joy.

I am a balloon deflating.
No more hot air?
No more soaring?
No more trajectory?

In order to begin any adventure — yes, this is my adventure — you need to make some plans, but the expectation is the belief that you get what you need for the journey. I am not one for elaborate plans; I wake each day and expect a happy day. I love a happy day and, to an extent, I can craft my day.

"Whatever the present moment contains, accept it as if you had chosen it."
Eckhart Tolle

In response to my 5 years, if that, I decided to see it as one year at a time. Later, it sifted into my happy one day equation. Just enjoying the passage of time became the soup du jour.

Figure 12. Sample Page B from Nina's participant's journal.

APPENDIX J: SAMPLE ENTIRES OF RESEARCHER-REFLECTIVE JOURNAL

4/25/14
One thing I'm curious about is how Nina will "structure" her life story. I know how fond she is of Campbell's "Hero Schema." She teaches that as a structure for understanding myths in her humanities classes, but I also know she likes its narrative feel. This idea that life is a journey with "obstacles" and "thresholds" along with "helpers" and "mentors" has long been fascinating to her. I remember learning about it in her class in high school. The idea of the "known" and "unknown" worlds also works as a nice metaphor for a life history. As we narrate our lives, we most certainly have to navigate the known and unknown components of the things that make up our life stories. How can we describe our life settings and life "plots" without encountering spaces that were unknown to us?

I suspect Nina will talk about this at length. Her life journey stands as a testament to teaching. It wouldn't surprise me in the least to see this represented in a visual manner – with the hero schema as the primary framing device for her depictions.

4/27/14 – Post-Interview Reflections (from 1st interview)
I interviewed Nina yesterday for the first time. I wanted to get down some initial thoughts prior to any transcription or review of the data. I used a modified version of McAdams' Life History Interview. This asked her to frame/construct her life in a series of "moments." It asked her to consider her life as a series of chapters, complete with titles. It also asked her to reflect on significant points in her life from a retrospective view. I was struck by how her life "chapter" titles featured elements of action: learning, flowing, growing, leaping. She also has a way of embracing nature in her descriptions (flowing water, teaching and growing).

One image/metaphor that really stuck out to me was her idea of "dovetailed corners." In the interview she talked about the idea that woodworkers created such highly-crafted and refined ways of joining wood – dovetailed corners, yet the corners were hidden – never to be seen. However, the craftsman still took pride in creating fine work despite them not being visible. Nina told a story of how her father made these corners and taught her about the work ethic of crafting fine products – even when no one sees it. She described how that influenced (and still influences) her approach to teaching and even wrote a poem about it (which she read yesterday as a part of the interview). I'm sure this idea/metaphor needs to be explored as it seems to be a powerful impetus for how she thinks, lives, and works.

She talked about significant teachers in her life (Hazel Hailey, Grace Cromer) who recognized her "weirdness" and celebrated it by challenging her to read additional works (Milton, Faulkner, etc.). I wonder if this thread of challenging students will come through her continued discussions. I know she challenged (and still challenges) me. I'm curious to see if I find more threads like this as I pore over the transcript of the interview.

I also noticed her displeasure and criticism of the bureaucracy of education today. She was extremely disturbed by what she viewed as the stunting of creativity in the classroom. Lessons were to be scripted so administrators could superficially check for fidelity to a pre-set curricular plan. At various points in the interview, I remember her making an "ugly" face when she was talking about having to abide by rules/procedures that seemed to be in place only for the sake of rules/procedures – not to improve learning. She basically views current educational practices (teacher evaluations, curricular maps, teaching to the test) as the "dumbing down" of teachers.

And finally, I was struck by how much emphasis she put on the "qualitative" side of teaching. She shared many stories and "philosophies" that suggested her belief in the authenticity of creating caring relationships with students. She talked a great deal about the power of kindness in the classroom and how that has served her well. I will make sure and examine the transcripts for further expressions of this from her teaching-life.

4/30/14
I was reviewing some notes/research today and came across a quote I found from Annie Dillard. She said: "The impulse to keep to yourself what you have learned is not only shameful, it is destructive. Anything you do not give freely and abundantly becomes lost to you." This reminded me of how generative teaching really is. I need to be sure and bring this up to Nina at our next interview. Part of what resonates with me is how Dillard honed in on how true learning begets teaching which begets more learning and so on and so on.

I've never really reflected much on my own teaching from a generative perspective, but in doing so now I can't help but appreciate the idea that what I "know" should be shared with others. My belief in relationships as being the bedrock for successful teaching (and learning) stems from Dillard's admonition to "give freely and abundantly." You can't "own" what you've learned; it only really becomes actuated when you give it away. My personal experiences with sharing "teachable moments" with my students have all revolved around the emotional connection with them when the truly "get" something – I've shared it (or given it away) and they, in turn, must do the same.

I've been fortunate to be one of Nina's students and I know that she too embraces the essence of Dillard's statement. I can distinctly remember how she took keen interest in my [juvenile] poetry and "gave away" her knowledge of how to make the poems better. Her love of art and music passed freely from her to her students – it never occurred to her to "keep it to herself." She had a joy in giving it (the knowledge) away to her students. I think now, after some reflection through this writing, that I owe a large part of my success as a teacher and administrator to Nina because she taught me that the teaching act is about letting go of the knowledge and allowing someone else to take up the reins. I'm sure Nina would say, "and letting them blossom with their own flowers of knowledge until their seeds are planted with someone else."

APPENDIX K: IRB CERTIFICATION

COLLABORATIVE INSTITUTIONAL TRAINING INITIATIVE (CITI)
HUMAN RESEARCH CURRICULUM COMPLETION REPORT
Printed on 08/05/2014

LEARNER	Daryl Ward (ID: 3029924)
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EXPIRATION DATE	08/04/2016

SOCIAL / BEHAVIORAL INVESTIGATORS AND KEY PERSONNEL

COURSE/STAGE:	Refresher Course/2
PASSED ON:	08/05/2014
REFERENCE ID:	13127318

REQUIRED MODULES	DATE COMPLETED
SBE Refresher 1 – Defining Research with Human Subjects	08/05/14
SBE Refresher 1 – Privacy and Confidentiality	08/05/14
SBE Refresher 1 – Assessing Risk	08/05/14
SBE Refresher 1 – Research with Children	08/05/14
SBE Refresher 1 – International Research	08/05/14
SBE Refresher 1 – History and Ethical Principles	08/05/14
SBE Refresher 1 – Federal Regulations for Protecting Research Subjects	08/05/14
SBE Refresher 1 – Informed Consent	08/05/14
SBE Refresher 1 – Research with Prisoners	08/05/14
SBE Refresher 1 – Research in Educational Settings	08/05/14
SBE Refresher 1 – Instructions	08/05/14

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Professor, University of Miami
Director Office of Research Education
CITI Program Course Coordinator

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Daryl Ward, is currently the principal at Harrison School for the Arts in Lakeland, Florida. Daryl received his undergraduate degree in creative writing from Florida State University and his master's in educational leadership from the University of Southern Mississippi. Prior to becoming a school administrator, he taught high school English and creative writing courses. His current studies focused on Interdisciplinary Education at the University of South Florida with an emphasis in narrative research and educational leadership.

Daryl recently presented a paper at the TQR2014 conference in South Florida. The paper, *A Greater Whole: The Mash-Up As Research Method*, discussed using multiple modes of aesthetic presentation in research texts. He is also presented a paper in April 2014 at the AERA conference in Philadelphia. That paper, *Do You Hear What I Hear? The Poetics of a Calling*, focuses on using poetry as a dialogical tool as a research method. Daryl's research interests center around the use of narrative inquiry in educational settings. His artistic passions come out when he least expects them – usually resulting in fictional parodies of the teacher assessment process or poetic condemnations of high stakes testing.