

FIELDWORK AS TEXT AND CONTEXT: GRADUATE STUDENTS' NARRATION  
AND NEGOTIATION OF FIELD EXPERIENCES WITHIN AN INQUIRY  
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## **DEDICATION**

To the “Monday Night Sandwich Club” – the twelve individuals whose collective stories and experiences are the foundation for this work.

Without your time, generosity, dedication, and professional curiosity this study would not have been possible.

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **FIELDWORK AS TEXT AND CONTEXT: GRADUATE STUDENTS' NARRATION AND NEGOTIATION OF FIELD EXPERIENCES WITHIN AN INQUIRY COMMUNITY**

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Fieldwork has historically played an important role within teacher education. Most often these experiences in schools are depicted as sites for developing teachers to gain insight into the practice of teaching. Research into fieldwork as a context for teacher learning, however, has traditionally focused on the learned outcomes, and less on how teachers have experienced and self-described these places of study (Zeichner, 2010, 2012; Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005; Ball & Forzani, 2009). This year-long study explored how students in a literacy education program conceptualized the space of fieldwork as part of their teacher education program. Specifically, the study explored how students made sense of – individually and collectively within an inquiry community – field experiences in relation to coursework, to their own ongoing inquiries, and to their developing identities as teachers. I approached this work from a conceptual framework grounded within three strands: literacy as sociocultural practice; narrative inquiry; and critical feminisms. Data sources included fieldnotes, analytic memos, interview transcripts, and artifact analysis.

The research provides insights into how fieldwork is conceptualized as a space of learning within teacher education. During their participation in an inquiry group, and in individual interviews, participants routinely described their goals for fieldwork, their impressions for what was expected of them, and how classroom experiences influenced their perspectives on literacy education, urban education, and teaching more broadly. In particular I analyzed how fieldwork functioned as a space that was both integrated and separated from other spaces of learning in the teacher education program. I critically examined how these narratives were embedded within larger discourses around schooling, teacher education, and school-university partnerships; these stories offer new insights into how fieldwork experiences are integrated into teacher learning, and present a far more complicated image of fieldwork learning than is often reflected in the literature. Furthermore, the collaborative learning within the inquiry group demonstrates the importance of creating spaces for sustained, critical dialogue in connection to field experiences. The study offers new ways of conceptualizing fieldwork that takes into account the inherently relational work of these spaces, highlighting the importance of how fieldwork is integrated and framed within teacher education.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### **Introduction and Significance: Why this study? Why now? Why me?**

Talk to anyone who has attended a teacher preparation program and they will have stories to share with you about their fieldwork experiences. Ranging from the “horror story” – where student teachers were left feeling isolated, unprepared, or even humiliated by their work in the classroom – to the glorious connections when ideas and personalities clicked and true mentorship developed, these moments leave indelible marks on the perspectives and identities of teachers. From an integrated series of school-based contexts over four years, to a single semester of student teaching, to a six-week preparation period in an alternative certification program, the opportunity to work with teachers and students in classroom contexts remains a central aspect of almost all teacher preparation programs – and the nature of these experiences can have lifelong consequences on the work of teachers.

Field experiences have been and continue to be an integral element of teacher education. The notion that school- and community-based learning should occur during teacher preparation programs is so ubiquitous that it has remained almost unquestioned within the literature<sup>1</sup>. There is, however, a wide range of what counts as “field-based learning” – including how these spaces are constructed, the goals of the schools and universities, and the objectives and experiences of the students within the programs.

Furthermore, historically there have been more general shifts in how these experiences

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<sup>1</sup> Zeichner (2006; 2010), among others, takes up the de facto nature of fieldwork or practicum courses within teacher education.

<sup>2</sup> I use the phrase “teacher learner” instead of the more common “student teacher” to emphasize my perspective that learning and professional development occur across the

are structured within teacher education programs. Over the past twenty-five years or so, many teacher education programs have focused more attention on requiring teacher learners<sup>2</sup> to participate in classroom experiences early in their undergraduate programs. Within the past ten years, there has been an even more deliberate move toward refocusing teacher education, pushing for a more “practice-based” approach for pre-service teacher education (see, for example, Darling-Hammond, 2006; Ball et. al, 2009) in which field experience and “real world knowledge” are emphasized throughout and in conjunction with coursework. This shift in focus alters the ways that fieldwork is contributing as a space of learning, as well as the ways that it can and should be studied as an integral part of teacher education.

Given that schools of education, as well as other professional schools such as medicine, nursing, social work, and law, have long held an implicit and explicit focus on how learning intersects with and informs practice, there has been a strong and consistent focus on educational experiences with “the field”, often defined as the places of practice most closely associated with the professional school. Within programs of study aimed at preparing teachers and promoting professional development, there has historically been a focus on “student teaching”. Often, these experiences in the field come toward the end of

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<sup>2</sup> I use the phrase “teacher learner” instead of the more common “student teacher” to emphasize my perspective that learning and professional development occur across the lifespan of a teacher’s career. Furthermore, in many contexts – including the site of this study – emerging, early-career teachers and veterans work and study together. “Teacher learner” is a label that tries to recognize the evolving nature of this work, as well as the expertise and experiences that all post-secondary and graduate education students bring with them to the classroom. I do at times use “pre-service teacher”, “student teacher”, or “teacher candidate”, particularly when referencing the literature or common ways of approaching issues of teacher education.

the program – the assumption being that the student has learned the skills and theories needed before entering the classroom to try on or better one's practice. This model carries the notion that students need to balance class experiences in the university with practicum experiences in schools, working with teachers and students, but also that this balance must occur in a delineated step-by-step approach: first the university-based theories and coursework, then the chance to try out these roles in the field (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, Zeichner, 2010).

Although the increased focus on community-based learning (Butin, 2005; Hartley & Harkavy, 2010) has expanded research and policy attention to fieldwork, research on the theoretical construct that separates university-based learning from community-based experiences, to a great extent, has not kept pace. As such, this framework has limited how research on fieldwork experiences has been conceptualized in relation to teacher education programs more holistically. In other words, while many authors have reflected on how field experiences within a particular course have impacted teachers' beliefs or understandings about the nature of teaching and education (see, for example, Moore, 2003; Cochran-Smith et al, 2009; Zeichner, 2010), there has been less attention to how field experiences as a whole have been related to overarching program missions, goals, and mandates. And, while some authors have considered the ways in which the fieldwork components are being structured (Burant & Kirby, 2002), often the notion of "fieldwork" is taken to mean a specific and generally-understood, although rarely defined, experience. This premise has led to insufficient attention on how the students are engaging in these spaces of learning and on how they are being positioned by both the university and the

school. In addition, despite a number of articles that address the ways in which students learn from fieldwork experiences (Clift & Brady, 2005; Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005), few discussions focus on the ways in which students are making sense of themselves as teachers through their fieldwork. Given these research traditions, it is important to address how this study is framing the concept of teacher education, as well as how it conceptualizes the role of fieldwork as a unique learning context within postsecondary and graduate education, and more specifically in relation to literacy education and teacher learning. The goal of this study is to offer a more holistic perspective on fieldwork as a space of learning in teacher education, as well as to explore how the power dynamics, policy and school climates, and increased standardization and scrutiny of teacher education programs influence the experiences and impressions gained by teacher learners in their field experiences. This focus can serve the field of teacher education by helping address how fieldwork might be framed and integrated within the larger course of study in teacher preparation programs, as well as providing insights into the impact that fieldwork has on teacher learners' conceptualization of education, teaching, and themselves as teachers.

### *Defining Fieldwork*

As stated above, “fieldwork” is a term that can take on a number of meanings within teacher education. A cursory review of the websites of ten education programs – ranging from research one universities to state schools to small private colleges – demonstrates the variety of ways that these programs are organized and defined (see Appendix A). These school-based experiences vary not only in regards to when they are

scheduled, and how they are integrated – or not – into coursework, but also in how they are structured, monitored, and taught. Overwhelmingly, programs follow the standard and widely-accepted Student Teaching model where the final field-based experience is one where the teacher learner takes over the classroom for a period of time.

As I mentioned above, one of the areas of study lacking in the scholarship of teacher education is a framework for considering fieldwork as an ongoing and integrated space of learning in teacher education programs. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, “fieldwork” is a term used to designate a range of school-based experiences that the participants took part in in connection with their coursework during their time in the program. Fieldwork includes regular observations – both in in-school and after-school contexts – as part of a course, ongoing work done during a Tutorial class in small group literacy instruction, and the more traditional intern experiences in which the student is at a school for many hours per week, working with a cooperating teacher and taking part in a practicum-style course at the university. The goal of using this broader conceptualization of fieldwork is to inquire more deeply into the unique challenges and possibilities for learning in a variety of school-based contexts that are integrated into the university setting/curriculum.

#### *“What Counts” as Teacher Education and “Valid” Field Experiences*

Within research on teacher education, almost all of the emphasis has been on undergraduate, pre-service teachers, leaving questions about the role of field experiences in masters or doctoral programs where students may already be certified or may be practicing teachers. Not only does this point to a lack of empirical knowledge on how



field experiences influence graduate studies, but it also suggests an assumption about the nature of teacher education – that it is something that ends once a teacher is certified to work in the field. This construct seems to lend itself toward particular beliefs about the nature of theory and practice – namely what Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) have referred to as “knowledge-*for*-practice” (p. 255). In other words, teacher education can be seen as the period when teacher candidates receive the information they will need in order to be successful practitioners; this theoretical construct leaves many questions about the nature of fieldwork as a site of learning, and the relationship of school-based (or practicum-based) learning versus university-classroom learning. In addition, this divide between pre-service and ongoing teacher education leaves little room for teachers to see themselves as life-long learners (see, for example, Cochran-Smith & Lytle 1990; Britzman 2003; Zeichner 2010). Instead, it implies that if teachers return to the university for masters or even doctoral degrees, they should come equipped with some sort of expertise, or “completeness” from their earlier schooling. While there is no doubt that pre-service teacher learning is a unique period in a teacher’s career and development, the current framing of this field of research reasserts the novice (or apprentice)/master divide. Furthermore, this framework deeply impacts the role of fieldwork and the possibilities for engagement and learning within these spaces.

These questions are of particular importance in this time of increased scrutiny of teacher education programs. Recently the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ) - a nonprofit based in Washington, D.C. – released a report that gave 1,100 teacher education programs a grade, citing the purpose as “a consumer tool, it allows aspiring

teachers, parents and school districts to compare programs and determine which are doing the best -- and weakest -- job of training new teachers” (NCTQ Website, March 2014). The data they used centered on syllabi, student teaching manuals, and admissions standards. At no point did they observe fieldwork, either in schools or in the related university courses, but instead relied solely on the documentation of the courses. In the Literacy Research Association’s response to the report, they noted that in the NCTQ’s evaluation of literacy teacher education, “NCTQ’s methods included an evaluation of admissions standards, the syllabi of literacy-related courses, and textbooks used in these courses. There was neither an attempt to check on the quality of field-based practices nor to check on the reliability of data collected” (LRA Brief, 9.27.13). Despite the recognition of the importance of student teaching and other field-based work, there is little appreciation in this accounting for the unique and complicated ways that these efforts are taken up within the daily life of schools.

Another recent emphasis has been on standardizing the experiences and knowledge that teachers leave teacher education programs with as they enter classrooms. edTPA (Teacher Performance Assessment) – a program developed by Stanford University and the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) in connection with Pearson – is designed to provide

A uniform and impartial process to evaluate aspiring teachers. ... edTPA is transformative for prospective teachers because the process requires candidates to actually demonstrate the knowledge and skills required to help all students learn in real classrooms. edTPA is intended to be used for teacher licensure and to support state and national program accreditation. edTPA complements existing entry-level assessments that focus on basic skills or subject-matter knowledge. It is comparable to the licensing exams that demand applications of skills in other

professions, such medical licensing exams, the architecture exam, or bar exam in law (edTPA website, March 2014)

Here, while again there is an appreciation for the deep importance of fieldwork as part of teacher education, the goal is explicitly to standardized practices, emphasizing a “best practices” and clinical approach to teacher education and fieldwork. Unlike the other exams listed, however, edTPA tries to mandate specific expectations for field experiences and how teacher learners function within these spaces. While TPA started as a locally-situated approach to teacher evaluation,

The irony may be that with the TPA as a national assessment, the evaluation of teacher candidates’ work is dislocated from the local site of teacher candidates’ learning, and there are restrictions on local teacher educators’ access to and use of their own teacher candidates’ portfolios. In addition, with the national assessment, there are restrictions on teacher educators’ roles as mentors in teacher candidates’ construction of portfolio materials and on their opportunities to participate in generating assessments in keeping with their own core values and assumptions (Cochran-Smith, Piazza, & Power, 2013, p. 18).

Again, although the edTPA has a great regard for the role of teacher education and fieldwork in particular, the issue becomes who is doing the evaluation, and of the focus on these experiences as clinical learning, in which specific outcomes and experiences are expected. In many ways this approach to what counts as fieldwork narrows the scope and disregards questions of teacher identity, the importance of local knowledge and contextualization, and the deeply relational work of teaching and learning. These standardized and national assessments of teacher education echo many of the issues currently facing K-12 education, especially in regards to assessments, standards, and accountability.

*Literacy Teacher Education and Fieldwork in the Time of High-Stakes Accountability*

Public schools in the United States currently face increasing pressure to measure their success – and the achievements of the children they serve – on standardized, large-scale evaluations and tests. While many scholars have argued that these tests do not take culture into account, leading to a lack of educational equity for non-mainstream students (e.g. Darling-Hammond, 2005; Lee, 2007), answers for how to take issues of culture and diversity into account remain largely unanswered. Within this area of accountability, more research is needed to fully investigate the culture of standardized assessment itself and its impact on what counts as knowledge and progress for both students and teachers in an effort to create more socially equitable educational opportunities.

These issues are of particular importance when considering schools located within urban contexts. Historically serving a majority population of students that come from non-mainstream communities, the consequences of this inequitable culture of high-stakes assessment are even more pronounced. One of the effects of this emphasis on narrow and biased forms of assessment is the theoretical construction of “at-risk” students and communities; the over-referencing of risk frequently places the issues within the students and communities (Gadsden et. al, 2009; Vasudevan & Campano, 2009), rather than within the systems – such as the current climate of educational assessment – that create these “risky” spaces. While current research considers ways to reframe issues of equitable assessment, one aspect of the education system that has been under-researched in connection to these issues is that of teacher preparation and the impact that teacher education might have on the ways that teachers approach assessment and issues of social

justice within the classroom. As several scholars have highlighted, conflicting visions and ideologies of teaching – even with those who believe they are teaching for social justice – complicate the question of what is and can be learned within teacher education programs (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 2001).

Furthermore, there has recently been an increasing focus on the ways that teacher preparation programs themselves are assessed (see, for example, Darling-Hammond, 2006; Cochran-Smith, 2005). Teacher preparation programs – particularly schools of education housed in the university – find themselves under increasing scrutiny and increasing requirements for documentation of “effective” results. Often these metrics are based not only on how the teacher learners perform on state certification exams or coursework assessments, but also on how their future K-12 students do on standardized, mandated assessments. These issues all relate to what Cochran-Smith and her colleagues refer to as the “politics of accountability” (Cochran-Smith, Piazza, Power, 2013), wherein teacher education reform centers on the perceived change in outcomes for these educators’ future students.

While on the surface it seems reasonable to base teacher education efforts on how the graduates perform as teachers, there are several important issues with how these discussions are often framed in the research and the enacted policies. First, there is a presumption that all students, communities, and schools are equal – that regardless of where the teacher learner enters the field of education their outcomes – and the outcomes of their students – will be the same. This presumption denies the social inequities that are embedded in our educational system, placing the responsibility squarely on the shoulders

of the individual teacher and students. In addition, “student outcomes” are often assessed with the narrowest of perspectives – focusing solely on the high-stakes literacy assessments that attempt to sum up a student’s learning from a single test given on one particular week of the school year (Ghiso, Spencer, Campano & Ngo, 2013; Martin et al., 2011). I have witnessed the impact of these policies myself during my time in graduate school; twice I have been asked to assist in the completion of additional oversights and compliance requirements from the state regarding how we teach, what we teach, and how our students fare once they (re)enter the classroom. These reports have focused not only on the course requirements, but also on how our students are engaging in the field during their time in the program. Each time these requirements have sparked conversations about our goals as an institution, our beliefs about the need to teach for change and equality, and our concerns about how to simultaneously meet the state requirements while still offering the kind of preparation we believe all teachers need to address structural inequalities within our education system. Furthermore, I have experienced, in both my own career as an education student and in my current research, the myriad of ways that these simplified and quantified outcomes disregard the complicated, messy, and nuanced experiences that make up fieldwork.

#### *Urban Contexts and the Implications for Fieldwork*

In addition to speaking back to the current policy climate for teacher education, this study also offers some new perspectives into issues related to preparing teachers for urban schools. Given the location of the education program in a large northeastern city,

and its emphasis on issues related to urban education<sup>3</sup>, an important question to consider is what students learn about urban schooling through their field experiences.

An important topic of research within teacher education, especially over the past few decades, has focused specifically on preparing teachers with knowledge in urban education and preparation to teach in urban school systems (see, for example, Cochran-Smith, 1995; Lee, 2007; Sleeter, 2001; McIntyre 2002). Specific areas of focus have been on issues related to: having a predominantly white teaching population working in urban areas where an overwhelming percentage of the students come from non-white communities; concerns over how to both recruit and meet the educational needs of non-white teacher candidates; and the need for all teacher candidates to reflect on issues of race, ethnicity, and diversity more broadly during their teacher education experience<sup>4</sup>. While these are issues that relate to teaching in all contexts, they are particularly salient within urban educational settings, such as the school district that surrounds the particular urban, private, and predominately white university that is the focus of this study. In light of the larger national history of sociocultural tensions between universities and school districts – especially in larger urban contexts – as well as the more local histories that

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<sup>3</sup> This focus on urban education is made clear in many ways within the program. For example, on the website describing this particular masters program, the introduction lists the following as one of its four main foci: “It [the program] focuses on diversity and on urban settings, and the contexts of different schools, communities, families, and cultures.” (Program Website, April 10, 2010).

<sup>4</sup> In her chapter in *Review of Research on Education*, vol. 25 (2000), Sleeter discusses not only the range of topics related to diversity within teacher education, but also the range of research methodologies and theoretical approaches within this body of research. This chapter reminds us of the importance of reflecting on which lenses have been given preference in this field of study, and the implications for how the findings have been categorized.

involve this particular university and its surrounding community, questions of how teachers come to understand urban schools, urban students, and urban teachers through their field experiences are critical when considering ways to make schooling more equitable for all.

At this point, I want to address my use of the term “urban” explicitly, although not without personal conflict. “Urban” is often used as a stand-in for more sensitive words, such as “Black”, “poor”, or “uneducated”, without fully explicating what is really meant. It is also used as a shorthand way of expressing discomfort and difference from some of these issues – the “those children” syndrome (Watson, 2011). Steinburg and Kincheloe (2004) define urban schools as those that share most of the following characteristics: located within an area of high population density; high levels of poverty; high percentages of people of color; high percentages of immigrants, or people whose first language is not English. While I appreciate this very clear and stated definition, and feel it does capture a great deal of what is typically meant by “urban”, I agree with these scholars that while there are particular aspects of urban contexts that differentiate it from other contexts, there are concerns with the oversimplification that goes along with this label.

We, as a field, need to trouble these notions a little bit further. For example, within a large urban district there is a fair amount of difference between schools—from magnet schools to charter schools to neighborhood public schools – all schools in the same district that differ in their needs, populations, and histories. Donnell (2010) argues that in order to move past the deficit framework so prevalent in conversations around



urban education we must develop an ecology orientation that allows for more appreciation of the possible. One of the goals of this study was to trouble the notion of “urban” as a label, as I tried to understand how the participants and myself were making sense of the program’s commitment, and our own, to urban education through an ongoing inquiry into field experiences within these contexts.

In addition, given the range of experiences, careers, and positions with which students enter the masters program, this site offers a rich context from which to consider the various ways fieldwork in urban school settings might be experienced. Rather than trying to draw broad generalizations about the nature of learning in the field, this study instead offers the chance to gain insights into the complicated, nuanced and deeply personal ways that issues of difference influence one’s learning and identity development. But this close focus does not preclude the possibility for wide-reaching implications for other teacher education programs, or urban-based schools of education. Instead, this study aims to “mine the potency of the particular” (Carini & Himley, 2000) – to delve deeply into one context, and to understand how participants within that context make sense of the spaces of learning provided, especially those that involve the larger communities that surround them.

Yet fieldwork is a particular and unique context within a teacher’s learning and experience. Although her work is more primarily focused on pre-service teaching education, Britzman’s classic text *Practice Makes Practice* highlights the importance and complications of field-based teacher education. She argues, “to consider what it is that structures the discursive practices of those learning to teach requires a double

consciousness of persons, structures, and the discourses that join them” (2002, p. 221).

These structures and their implications are important for teachers of all levels of experience who are furthering their own education and thinking about their own roles as teachers. Student teachers in field-based experiences are engaged in community-based work that requires them simultaneously to participate and reflect on their own learning and identities within these sites. It is my belief that by exploring the stories that emerge from these experiences within an inquiry community, student teachers can simultaneously make more sense of their own experiences while also offering insights and reflections on the structures and discourses that help construct field-based teacher learning.

### **Research Questions**

As is common with ethnographic research, since the development of these questions many of my ideas and perspectives have shifted. In particular, looking back on my questions I realized that I failed to fully reflect on the role that the participants’ histories – as teachers, as students, as humans in the world – would have on our work together. Furthermore, I do not think I reflected enough on the connections between fieldwork learning and other spaces within teacher education, such as coursework on ongoing conversations with peers. These questions do, however, demonstrate where I was starting from as I entered into this study:

- 1) How do teacher learners discuss and narrate their field experiences within a regularly meeting inquiry group?
  - a. How does the experience influence their ways of thinking about literacy and education?
  - b. How does it impact the ways teacher learners think about these issues in relation to urban education and urban students?

- c. How does the context of the inquiry group create opportunities to reflect on and make sense of these experiences?
- 2) How do teacher learners describe and construct their evolving identities as teachers? How does fieldwork contribute?

### **The Story of the Question**

This study stems both from my personal histories – as a K-12 and college student, as a teacher of kindergarten, first and fourth grades, and as a masters and doctoral student – and my own political commitment to research that seeks to disrupt current inequalities within educational structures. Given my deep belief that learning is always socially situated, and always dependent on the experiences and histories that individuals bring, I constructed a research study that holds as central the narratives and sense-making of the participants themselves. Furthermore, I position myself as a kind of participant in this research, so that I am always acknowledging that the analysis and contextualization stems from my own beliefs and assumptions about the world. By taking this kind of perspective I have consistently had to remind myself of the responsibility I have to the stories and lives of the participants, which enables me to honor the trust and commitment they have given me.

On a personal level, this work is closely connected to my own practices and experiences as a student in the program this study is situated within, a context I will discuss in greater detail in Chapter Two. For the past seven years, I have been a student here – first as a masters student, and then as a doctoral candidate. It is, in a very real sense, on multiple levels, my site of practice. As a graduate of the masters program, I have a unique perspective from which to reflect on the structure of the program and the

possibilities for learning that exist within the wide range of field experiences that are part of all the core courses. I believe that it is, in part, this history that first led me to think about the larger role of fieldwork within the program, instead of simply considering each course individually. It is my belief that having some common texts – both in terms of traditional articles and books, and more widely in terms of courses and contexts – with the masters students who participated in this study helped us engage in learning together. As Cochran-Smith and Lytle have demonstrated in their work on teacher research over several decades, the collaborative nature of meaning-making, as well as the deeply personal work of reflecting on one's teaching and personal stance, requires the development of strong communities of practice (see, in particular, Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999 and 2009). As I engaged in this work with the participants, I hoped to also further my own thinking about fieldwork and its role in teacher education.

Given this history, and my general approach as a researcher, it is my belief that this study promotes an understanding of how an inquiry community can facilitate knowledge about fieldwork collaboratively, while individual perspectives and differences are respected. Although we came with different histories and held varying positions within the community, through what Nakkula and Ravitch refer to as “reciprocal transformation” (1998), it is my firm belief that the spaces created within this study had the potential to be useful and pertinent to all participants.

Not only do I have a shared history with the masters students, my work as a research assistant also involves certain relationships with the program and the individual students. For the past three years, I have been responsible for coordinating the field

experiences for one of their core courses, a course that focuses on adolescent literacies.

I have also worked closely with the practice professor responsible for coordinating the two practicum courses that specifically focus on in-depth, semester-long fieldwork experiences, helping not only with specific placements but also with drafting a fieldwork handbook that is distributed to new students each year. I have also been a teaching assistant and instructor for several core courses in the masters program, and this year – as I work on the writing of my dissertation – also participated in the masters portfolio process as the coordinator and one of the portfolio advisors. Finally, I have been privileged to participate in a series of meetings each year that involve everyone who teaches a course in the program. These meetings, structured very much as ongoing inquiries into the teaching and structure of the program, have deeply impacted my own understanding of the history and direction of the department, giving me insights into the multiple ways and possibilities for utilizing fieldwork within teacher education.

It was within this patchwork of experiences that my own questions about fieldwork began to develop. Early in my doctoral career, when I was first asked to help facilitate placements for a course on adolescent literacy, I asked what the professor wanted out of the field experience. This question started an open and interesting dialogue regarding the nature of the fieldwork – the expectations for what work it might do for the student, how it linked to the course readings and assignments, and the question of what counted as a “good experience”. These goals, of course, also had to be balanced with the necessity of finding teachers who were willing to allow visitors into their classroom for weekly observations and participation. These discussions also made it clear that while a

great deal of thought had gone into the course design, including the field component, there were also some assumptions that we as university-based practitioners were making about the role of the classroom context as a learning space for our students.

As I created spreadsheets and contacted teachers, not only did I worry about finding enough spots for all the students, but I also found myself reflecting on my own history of fieldwork. An English major with an Elementary Education minor at Vassar College, my first teaching experience in a classroom was in a public kindergarten in the Hell's Kitchen district of New York City in 2011, the fall of my junior year of college. I was taking part in the Urban Education Semester program at Bank Street Teacher's College; the program was structured so that we were in the classroom four and half days a week, in addition to taking courses at Bank Street. I was so excited to have such an in-depth introduction to the "real world" of teaching – the chance to see how a typical school year unfolds. But life doesn't always work the way you expect; 9/11 was my second day in the school. I remember the principal frantically gesturing for the teacher to come into the hall – her whispered reports to me of the tragedy. I remember waiting for parents to arrive – desperately hoping they all would walk through that door, and trying so hard not to let the anxiety and fear come across to the students. I remember my relief that the principal and other teachers immediately rallied, creating a safe and effective way to ensure we knew each child had been picked up, and by whom.

But even more than the immediate anxieties and complications, I was ill-prepared for the lasting consequences of that day. The following week was one of the Jewish holidays. When we told the children there would be no school the following day, one

burst into tears. “Something bad is happening again?” she asked. Several of the students built and rebuilt towers in the block area, each time crashing paper airplanes into them, each time asking what had happened, and why. I didn’t know how to answer, I didn’t know if I should stop them for engaging in this kind of play. My cooperating teacher, a seasoned professional, struggled personally in this aftermath, often taking one or two personal days per week, during which I was frequently alone in the classroom, as substitutes were scarce in those early weeks after the disaster. None of the classes I had taken at Vassar had talked about trauma – how to respond to personal, communal, even national moments of crisis. My reflections on this experience – witnessing the confusion, resilience, and spirit of the school - made me realize fieldwork is a far more complicated, unscripted, and rich experience than simply a space to learn “best practices” of “how to teach”.

I carried this experience with me into future educational contexts – my work as an elementary school teacher in a private school outside of San Francisco, and back into my own schooling when I entered a masters program in literacy education. The further I got from those early experiences, the more I realized that they had deeply impacted my understanding of my work as a teacher, particularly a teacher of literacy. When I began my masters, I once again was a visitor in other people’s classes, trying to make sense of these experiences and connect them to the courses and texts at the university and to my own history. As an experienced teacher, it was at times uncomfortable to once again be positioned as the novice, the outsider. When I entered the Ph.D. program, I had the opportunity to take a more critical look at the role of fieldwork through some of my

courses, such as “Fieldwork and Mentoring” and “Research on Teaching”. It was against this backdrop of personal experience and scholarly interest that the questions and frameworks that guide this study developed.

## **Conceptual Frameworks and Literature Review**

### *Theoretical Frameworks*

In approaching this work, I see my research as informed by the intersection of two theoretical perspectives: *sociocultural perspectives on literacy* and *critical feminisms*. It is not that these two theories rest individually, side-by-side, within my thinking. Instead, I hope to show in this section that it is the ways that these theories inform and – at times – complicate one another that makes each of them critical to the framing of this project.

Most broadly, I align myself within the larger framework of interpretive research. Although I do believe that a close and systematic approach to investigating a particular context or event can lead to what Erickson refers to as “concrete universals” (1985, p. 130), my focus is on learning how participants within the specific context are making sense of their experiences. Using ethnographic methods, as well as working in a site that I am deeply familiar with, has enabled me to explore and respect not only the multiple perspectives and stakeholders within the masters program, but also to acknowledge each individual’s multiple perspectives and approaches.

### *Sociocultural Perspectives on Literacy*

Taking a sociocultural perspective on literacy also acknowledges the importance of local context in relation to knowledge and meaning-making. Instead of viewing



literacy as a set of skills that can travel from context to context without change – what Street refers to as the “autonomous model” of literacy – (Street, 1984 & 2003), I conceive of literacy as a much more intimate process, one that influences and is influenced by community, history, and audience. In these ways my work draws on the traditions of New Literacy Studies, a theoretical framework that engages the importance of honoring literacy as local and contextualized. As Gee (2001) points out, this view on literacy also emphasizes its inherently situated nature; both the context and the various positionings of the participants within the settings deeply influence how literacy practices are developed, utilized, and understood. Barton and Hamilton (1999) also reflect on the situated nature of literacy, arguing that literacy practices must be contextualized within both space and time in order to fully understand the ways that people make sense of their own lives.

This focus also relates to my understanding of the relationships of theory and practice. Building from Cochran-Smith and Lytle’s concept of “knowledge of practice” (1999), I come to this study with the belief that our actions are always guided by more or less conscious ways of understanding and organizing the world. Too often theory and practice are seen as completely separate entities, with the assumption that the university is where one learns “theory” while schools are where one does “practice”. Instead I believe that, regardless of our specific context, we are always guided by our understandings as well as our previous experiences. These theories or “ways of knowing” impact how we understand our experiences, our identities, and our ways of communicating our lives.

Learning, therefore, does not involve some expert giving a novice knowledge that they previously did not have. Instead, learning can be understood as a “social and intellectual practice” (Luke et al., 2010). Just as literacy cannot be framed as a set of fixed skills that get passed from one person to another, the ways that we think about learning more broadly cannot simply be thought of as access to something decontextualized and concrete. Instead, learning must be conceptualized in such a way that it takes into account the histories, positionalities, and expectations of the participants (Ivanic et al., 2009). Gonzales, Moll, and Armanti (2013) argue that we must think of learners as bringing their own “funds of knowledge”, which deeply impact how they incorporate new information or experiences into their general sense-making. Rather than view learning as a narrow set of skills and activities that occur only during specific parts of one’s life, I instead view learning as a complex, social, and iterative process that takes into account the deeply intimate, local, and individual ways we all experience the world.

This conceptualization of literacy and learning not only argues for a close look at the local ways knowledge is generated and shared, it also argues for a wider perspective on “what counts” as literacy. While literacy cannot mean everything, it should – and, in my mind, must – involve more than what is traditionally included within school-based literacy practices (Street, 2001; Luke et al., 2010). Literacy practices relate to the ways that people read and write their lives – how they make sense of their experiences, and how they communicate these understandings. Bartlett (2008) argues for the need to consider not just what literacy does, but also what it is, and what it is not. Rather than thinking of literacy as an actor, I focus on the ways that people engage in literacy

practices and on how literacy practices are structured or valued within the contexts that surround them.

It is, however, critical to consider not just how people utilize their literacy practices, but also how they are being positioned – what practices are made available to them, and what practices are valued within various settings. Lewis, Enciso, and Moje (2007) argue that we must reframe sociocultural research on literacy to include discussion of identity and agency. In my work, I hope to not only consider how individuals are making sense of their lives and contexts, but also to consider the various ways that they are being positioned and understood by themselves and others. In other words, I hope to bring questions of power and discourse into my understanding of literacy as a sociocultural practice, particularly within the complicated sphere of negotiations that occurs during fieldwork.

### *Critical Feminisms*

Closely related to the focus on power within conceptions of literacy is my emphasis on critical feminisms as a lens for conceptualizing, conducting, and communicating my research. I draw on this lens because I believe it offers a useful way of thinking about the nature of narrative, truth, and power. While I call on particular feminist scholars and lenses, I use the term “critical feminisms” intentionally, to recognize that there are multiple ways of taking up and understanding feminist perspectives. Furthermore, I recognize that gender – and issues that have been “gendered” in society (Butler, 1990) – are only one aspect of the ways that people understand and live their identities, and that other positions related to race, age, class, religion, etc. can

and do impact how people understand their “gendered self”. I do believe, however, that critical feminist perspectives, with an emphasis on positionality and authority, offer one way of rethinking how we make sense through learning and research.

One of the most important elements of a critical feminist perspective is its focus on what counts as validity in research. Within traditional research paradigms, there is an underlying premise that “truth” is a fixed entity that exists to be uncovered. Miller (2000) refers to the “poverty of truth-seeking” in research, arguing that instead we should focus on how participants, and ourselves, are making sense of the world. Harding and Norberg (2009) argue that this focus is one of the most important contributions of feminist theory to social science research. This perspective directly connects with how I situate myself within the framework of qualitative research. What critical feminism adds, however, is recognition of the multiple ways that we are always making sense of our world. Ellsworth (1989) points out that even critical theories can end up repressive, if they carry with them assumptions about how people can (or should) understand their positions in the world. As Phillips et al. (2009) and Singh (2009) point out, critical feminism offers ways of considering the multiple ways in which we position ourselves, and does not presume essentialized qualities related to socially-constructed categories.

These multiple aspects of identity, however, cannot be seen as simply neutral aspects of how we live our lives. Instead, it is the interrelation of these socially-constructed markers that influence how we are positioned in society. These factors impact not only how we understand our own lives, but also the ways in which we are invited – or not – to narrate our own stories (hooks, 2000). Sense-making – what I might

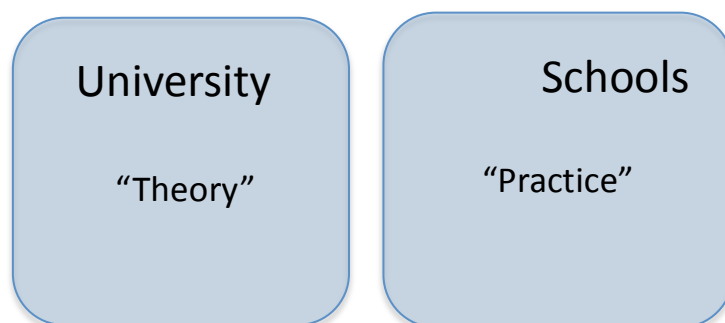
call intimate truth-telling – is a deeply personal process. It is also, however, deeply imbued in politics, power, and repression. Not all people have been invited to tell their stories within social science paradigm research. Furthermore, and perhaps more importantly, at least for this work, people's stories, narratives of their lives and experiences, have not been heard in the same ways (De Reus et al., 2005). In other words, the ways that race, gender, and other socially-constructed markers are used to position people influences the stories they tell (and to whom), and the ways that these narratives are taken up (or not). In her book *Relocating the Personal*, Kamler (2001) describes how research can act as a site of legitimizing the power of narrative, and of autobiography more specifically. By recognizing the complicated and powerful possibilities offered by making narrative central to academic work, the possibility of new stories and/or nuanced understandings can emerge.

As I approach my work from a critical feminist perspective, it is with the acknowledgment that power and positionality are always factors. Historically, different people's stories have mattered differently – some have even become seen as “truth”. In this work, I also must recognize that as a white, upper-middle-class American woman, I do not hear all stories the same way either. While not as central to my work, drawing on Critical Race Theory, particularly in connection to education (Ladson-Billings, 2014, 2013; Lynn & Dixson, 2013; Parker & Lynn, 2002, Milner, 2013, Crichtlow, 2013) has helped me situate myself and my students within a framework that recognizes the importance of history, racialization, and identity, particularly as I analyzed and reflected on the stories related to urban education (Chapter Five). This theoretical approach to

research reminds me to be humble, self-reflective, and aware of the intimate trust that is inherent in any gathering of stories, especially around issues of race, gender, and justice in the world. This awareness guides not only my theoretical perspectives, but also how I approach my methodology, my data collection and analysis, and my efforts to represent the stories entrusted to me.

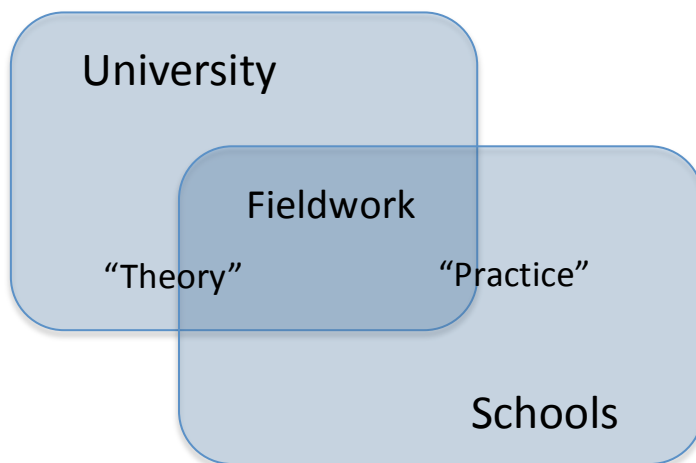
*Making sense of “The Field”: A conceptual framework for fieldwork as a space of learning*

Although much work has been done on the nature of learning in fieldwork during teacher education courses, there has been less attention paid to the position of fieldwork as its own unique site of learning. Part of my interest in this topic stems from the particular location of fieldwork in relation to both schools and universities. Universities are often seen as the home of “theory”, while schools are seen as the sites of “practice” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). This leads to thinking about these two spaces as existing in two utterly separate spheres:



Thinking about fieldwork as a site of learning, however, offers the opportunity to rethink this great divide. One of the most interesting and complicated aspects of field experiences is that they are situated both within and outside the university, and within and outside the

schools. Fieldwork, then, functions as a space that crosses borders between schools and universities:



As such, it can be thought of as a unique pedagogical space with rules of engagement, boundaries, and opportunities that are simultaneously related to, and independent of, other aspects of the course. A critical aspect of fieldwork as a site of learning is this potential disruption of the traditionally understood university/school divide. Anzaldúa (1999) discusses the importance of borders, which she claims are “set up to...distinguish *us* from *them*...A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition” (p. 25). I conceptualize fieldwork as this kind of space – a borderland where negotiations can be made more explicit, assumptions can be brought into question, and participants might need to engage in active negotiation of meanings, rather than assume unchallenged definitions. Given this unique location, fieldwork becomes a rich site from which to reflect on how teachers take up concepts from coursework and activities or understandings from the community in relation to their own histories as they make sense

of their own positions and the possibilities for pedagogical practices in literacy education. Furthermore, this framework appreciates the deeply politicized and historicized ways that knowledge production is framed within school and university contexts along the lines of “theory” and “practice”. Taking up the concept of “borderlands” means to make central and as transparent as possible issues of power, authority, and negotiation within these spaces, as well as the inherent importance of the act of crossing, as well as the various contexts.

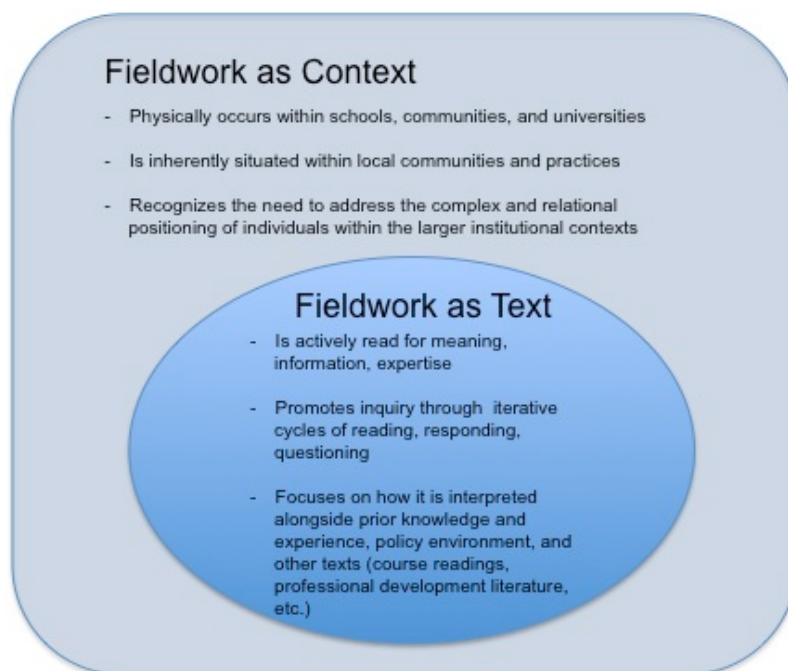
These issues are even more central when considered within the larger context of urban education. As discussed above, “urban education” is a phrase that carries with it certain assumptions about race, class, and other aspects of identity. Often, these markers are taken to represent not only the schools, but also the students themselves. The correlation between struggling schools and urban districts is often used to position students as being “at risk”, a label that Vasudevan and Campano (2009) argue stems from a discourse that implies risk is an inheritable trait, rather than as a consequence of systemic racism and oppression. Given that urban education is most often depicted as a site of engagement with “at-risk youth”, the question of how university students not only navigate these borderlands but also examine their own assumptions and experiences of these systems, students, and communities becomes critical.

### **Fieldwork as Text and Context**

This conceptualization tries to make central and significant the localized and situated nature of fieldwork, seeing these aspects not as factors that need to be controlled,



but instead as central to the relevance of this learning context. This framework shifts the conversation from a narrowed perspective of practice to a more dialogic construct that more closely mirrors how the participants engaged in fieldwork and the ways that their conversations brought together questions of practice, identity, and power:



Going more deeply into the space of fieldwork as straddling the boundaries of the university and school contexts, this visual goes deeper into the nature of fieldwork as a learning context that occurs across space and time. Below I discuss in greater detail what I mean by “fieldwork as text” and “fieldwork as context” and how this conceptualization offers new ways of approaching this space of learning within teacher preparation.

### *Fieldwork as Text*

In *Walking the Road: Race, Diversity, and Social Justice in Teacher Education* (2004), Cochran-Smith argues that thinking about teacher education as text draws attention to the importance of “examining its subtexts, hidden texts, and intertexts –

reading between the lines as well as reading under, behind, through, and beyond them (p. 89). In other words, this perspective helps conceptualize teacher education not just as a series of courses, field experiences, and credentialing criteria, but instead takes a broader look at what it means to construct a teaching profession, allowing both the development of expertise and a critique of the status quo. As Cochran-Smith highlights, this approach helps illuminate the “hidden curriculum” (Ginsburg & Clift, 1990) of teacher education, surfacing expectations, assumptions, and preconceived notions of knowledge and education. Findings from this study speak to the issues that Ginsburg and Clift note, but they also address the ways that teachers create identities and construct the text of their professional lives as they weigh the challenges and possibilities of teaching and learning. The narratives from the participants demonstrate as well the ways that the teachers’ experiences reframe fieldwork as text while providing new insights and different ways of engaging in this work.

Referring to fieldwork as text means to make central the ways that the participants in this study were reading these experiences for a range of purposes. First, they were often reading fieldwork for information; as is referenced countless times across the data, the participants frequently looked to gain specific insights into teacher practices and approaches in the classroom. Positioning fieldwork as text pushes for an approach within teacher education that welcomes these various readings, promoting the cycle of reflection, rereading, and questioning, which in turn creates more spaces for teacher learners to engage in these experiences and build their own professional identities and understandings of education.

Fieldwork as text also recognizes the deep importance of the previous experiences, readings, and histories that teacher learners bring with them to teacher education programs. Just as any reader brings to a text his or her own worldviews and perspectives (Rosenblatt, 1982), coloring the interpretation and search for meaning, teacher learners bring these personal connections and disconnects to their field experiences. These interactions complicate the notions of best practices by recognizing the role of history and personal response in development of professional identity and practices. In addition, they recognize the importance of culture, identity, and diversity in thinking about responses to fieldwork. Without space to reflect and respond to fieldwork – effectively “rereading” the moment and discussing it with others – participants’ interpretation and concerns might have been silenced. Fieldwork as text means taking into account the role of the teacher learner as a reader of context and experience, making space for critical rereading and conversation in teacher education.

Finally, fieldwork as text positions these experiences as central and integrated to other spaces of learning in teacher education, rather than seeing them as separate or “less academic”. This framework encourages an approach to fieldwork that is embedded within the rest of the program, not just in terms of timing, but also in terms of content. Fieldwork as text means an appreciation for how these experiences are being read alongside, against, and in connection to the various textbooks, articles, and trade books that students are reading as part of their coursework. This approach also emphasizes the learning that goes on beyond the “immediacy of the felt encounter” (Greene, 1984, p. 283) of classroom-based experiences, highlighting the importance of memory and

interpretation. As was evidenced in the data for this study, participants frequently were engaging in the development of “knowledge-of-practice”, drawing connections between their classes, their field experiences, and their expectations and previous experiences – even when they themselves continued to utilize a discourse that separated practice from theory. Thinking of fieldwork as a text encourages an appreciation for the ways that these experiences are read and interpreted alongside educational research, discussion of best practices, policy initiatives, and courses about instruction and assessment, shifting what might be meant by a “practice-based” approach to teacher education (Zeichner, 2012).

### *Fieldwork as Context*

While Fieldwork as Text offers some important ways to reconceptualize and reposition the role of fieldwork within teacher education, in and of itself it does not fully capture the complicated nature of this space of learning. In some fundamental ways, fieldwork is different from other texts that are read as part of a teacher education program. As discussed above, the fact that fieldwork takes place across institutional spaces and across time is an important aspect to consider. In the following data chapters, participants’ concerns with how they are perceived as a “member of the university” in the school community speaks to the complicated negotiations that teacher learners must face as they engage in fieldwork. Ellsworth (2005) argues that we must pay close attention to the places of learning – both in schools and out of them – in an effort to think of pedagogy not as a “thing made”, but instead as “in relation to knowledge in the making” (p. 2). While her work focuses on media and the role of architecture, Ellsworth’s attention to the role of place – and the pedagogies that spaces can welcome/shut out – is deeply important

to the contextualized nature of fieldwork. These spaces – and the crossing between them – require the participants to situate and resituate themselves, as learners, as teachers, as students, as visitors. Attention to fieldwork as context helps surface some of these complicated and relational aspects, seeing them as part of the professionalization and teaching of teachers.

Fieldwork as context also references how these experiences are highly situated and localized. Often, the participants in this study referenced the different opportunities and examples that each of their experiences offered as a source of anxiety, worrying that they were not getting what they needed to be “real teachers” at the end. Part of this anxiety may well stem from how fieldwork was positioned within their teacher education programs – either as a complementary track of learning or as a culminating “proving ground”. I believe that acknowledging and appreciating the importance of seeing practices, particularly those connected to pedagogy and literacy education as locally-situated and historically grounded (Street, 1984, 1997, 2003), allowing us to “specify the particularity of cultural practices with which uses of reading and/or writing are associated in given contexts” (Street, 1997, p. 50).

Finally, fieldwork as context demands that more explicit attention is paid to the ways in which school and university learning spaces are historically grounded, institutionally constructed, and inherently political. Many scholars have addressed the importance of preparing teacher learners to take seriously the knowledges and histories of K-12 students in an effort to make schooling a more equitable and sustainable practice (e.g., Lee, 2004; Guttierrez & Rogoff, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 2006). Fieldwork as context

invites in these conversations, highlighting the power dynamics that exist between school and university contexts – even those attempting to foster more equitable partnerships (Zeichner, 2010) and the importance of discussing them as part of the preparation of future educators. Murrell (2001) describes the importance of constructing a “community teacher” for urban schooling context, signifying the importance of community, history, and engagement as part of teacher preparation. In this study, as the following chapters will show, the role of context was one students struggled to make sense of as they engaged in discussion of what counted as urban, the various types of school settings (such as public, private, or charter), and the role of schools in community and society more broadly. Fieldwork as context highlights the importance of these dimensions and the need to discuss them as a central aspect of teacher education.

While both of these frameworks are important, they also are symbiotic in nature. Decontextualizing fieldwork and thinking about it in relation to other texts in teacher education does little to reposition the role of schools and school-based learning experiences in teacher education. Looking solely at the communal and contextual aspects of fieldwork does not permit enough focus on the kinds of close reading and rereading that the participants engaged in during this study. Fieldwork as text and context means approaching these experiences in a way that engages teacher learners and teacher education professionals in more sustained, dialogic, and integrated approaches to both the design and enactment of field experiences. This framework encourages recognition of fieldwork as complicated and situated practices spanning a number of institutions and, at times, communities. It provides a framework for thinking about the practice and research

of fieldwork in more holistic, situated, and interactional ways, encouraging a new approach to thinking about “best practices” and what it means to become an educator in these times.

### **Review of Relevant Literature**

Studying the role of fieldwork in a masters program at a graduate school of education offers a unique position from which to enter a number of academic conversations related to teacher development, teacher learning, and relationships between universities and schools. In particular, I see my work as relating to three strands of research: fieldwork as a specific site of learning in teacher education; issues of difference or diversity related to fieldwork; and research on the development of teachers’ learning and identity development. While all three of these research traditions have influenced how I approach my own work, there are also ways that I see this study as an extension of some of the conversations currently occurring in the field, particularly in relation to how “teacher education” has been constructed. I feel that some of the theoretical frameworks underpinning this body of research make dangerous assumptions about the relationships of theory and practice, and the trajectory of teacher learning. It is my hope that both the context of my work and my theoretical approach will suggest some new ways of thinking about the field of teacher education, and more specifically the possibilities of fieldwork in teacher learning.

Research on teacher education has traditionally been focused on pre-service teacher education, often in relation to undergraduate work. Strong evidence of this focus

can be seen in the recent major reviews of teacher education put out by AERA:

*Studying Teacher Education: The Report of the AERA Panel on Research and Teacher Education* (Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005). This text, which reviews a wide range of recent empirical work on the field of teacher education within the United States, specifically limits its scope to pre-service teacher education (2005, p. 738). While this focus is understandable, particularly given the credentialing structures and history of teacher education in the United States (see, for example, Labaree, 2008), it also carries with it particular assumptions related to teacher learning and the purposes or goals of teacher education.

There has been some movement in the field recently to recognize a wider perspective on what counts as teacher education. Zeichner (1995) and Grossman and McDonald (2008) suggest that the field needs to reconsider the relationship between research on teaching and research on teacher education. In addition, Sleeter (2001) writes more specifically about the need to relate teacher education experience with early teaching experience in order to delve more deeply into how teachers negotiate issues of difference and diversity in the classroom. As mentioned, one of the goals of this study is to take research from pre-service teacher education and relate it to graduate-level contexts, with a focus on rethinking teacher education so that it reflects the possibilities and challenges of learning across the lifespan of teachers.

#### *Fieldwork as a Site of Learning*

The importance and structure of school-based experiences in teacher education is a widely researched topic. As Clift and Brady (2005) found in their overview of research



on methods courses and field experiences, one of the main areas of investigation is how field experiences relate to university-based course work, particularly in relation to methods or approaches to teaching. In a study focused on student teachers' beliefs about teaching, Ng et al (2010) found that students in a teacher education program went through a dramatic shift after their first field experiences. While many students left their coursework feeling that classroom management was a major issue, their experiences during a practicum course shifted their thinking toward the role of relationship-building in the classroom. Darling-Hammond (2006) argued that research points to the need for deeply connected field and classroom experiences. Based on a review of several teacher education programs, she contends that, to fully prepare teachers, programs must build from pedagogies that link theory and practice in order to build strong and reciprocal relationships between schools and universities. The findings from these studies suggest the importance of reflecting not just on how learning experiences in the field are structured, but also the impact these experiences have on how teachers and teacher candidates conceptualize their own role in the classroom.

Zeichner (2006) furthers this consideration of the relationship between courses taken at the university and field experiences at the local schools in a review of research on the topic of fieldwork. In this review, Zeichner addresses the issue of connecting university-based courses with field experiences, and suggests that some of the major issues are the different kinds of knowledge and ways of knowing that are valued in these two settings. In an effort to break down this divide, Zeichner (2010) suggests that we can conceptualize fieldwork as a hybrid space, where new forms of knowledge can help bring

together universities and schools. In order to encourage this kind of hybridity, he argues that universities must make field experiences more central to their work, and give up on some of the traditional hierarchies that value academic knowledge over other ways of knowing.

Within this hybrid space, however, questions of power and relationships, particularly in relation to how university-based and school-based practitioners are seen as mentoring teacher learning, must be considered. This issue includes questions of how topics or concerns from schools and universities are relating to one another. Moore (2003) researched whether or not student teachers were able to utilize and implement the constructivist teaching theories that had been discussed during university courses. Following one cohort of student teachers, she found that the students rarely implemented the theories or inquiry-approach that the university highlighted, and instead focused on issues of classroom management (2003, p. 31). In addition, Moore found that the cooperating teachers who supervised these field experiences also counted these management issues as some of the most critical for teacher success.

A 2009 study by Cochran-Smith, Barnatt, Friedman, and Pine focused on teacher educators and their own learning through their support of student teachers. Designed as a practitioner inquiry, the goal of the study was to consider what teacher candidates learned when they engaged in classroom-based inquiry projects. The researchers suggest that as the data reflect the need for student teachers to develop an inquiry stance, teacher educators need to conduct similar inquiries into how they structure coursework and fieldwork. Nguyen (2009) examines the relationships that exist between student teachers,

cooperating teachers, and mentors. This study found that by creating an inquiry-based practicum model, participants were able to more explicitly discuss issues related to knowledge, especially in relation to breaking down the binary of novice-expert. In addition, the reflective nature of learning enabled the students to incorporate suggestions from both university-based and school-based mentors, rather than taking up a “pick and choose” approach. The findings in these studies reflect the need to consider not only learning outcomes for pre-service teachers or developing teachers, but also the ways in which field experiences are understood and structured within the university and within schools.

#### *Fieldwork and Issues of Diversity and Difference*

Issues of race, ethnicity, and difference are always in play within schools and teacher education. As urban schools are often defined at least in part by these characteristics<sup>5</sup>, however, it is especially important to consider how these concepts are engaged through field experiences. Within the field of traditional teacher education, the impact of fieldwork on prospective teachers’ understandings of “urban education” has been an area of considerable research. In her review of research on “pre-service teacher preparation for historically underserved children”, Sleeter (2001a) discusses not only the range of topics that are covered in this field, but also the great diversity in epistemological approaches. Although research related to issues of diversity and difference within field experiences make up only one area of this field, Sleeter’s work

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<sup>5</sup> As mentioned above, an example of the centrality of these issues comes from Steinburg and Kincheloe’s (2004) *Nineteen urban questions: Teaching in the city*, and the criteria they used to frame what counts as urban education.

points to the importance of considering not only what questions the authors are raising, but also how they are approaching both data collection and analysis.

In her own work, Sleeter (2001b) considers the potential impact that the “whiteness” of the teacher pool might have on teacher preparation. She reviews a number of data-based research articles that focus both on how white teacher candidates approach issues of diversity in their teacher education, and on how programs are working to increase the non-white teaching population.<sup>6</sup> While she applauds the focus on addressing the problems related to diversity, difference, and teacher education, she also warns that there has not been enough of a focus on what should be done in these environments:

The research reviewed in the remainder of this article [related to structuring teacher education] provides no clear guidance about what to do in pre-service education. This is a limitation of the research that has been done thus far rather than an indication that interventions are not needed. Continuing business as usual in pre-service teacher education will only continue to widen the gap between teachers and children in schools. Certainly research can help to inform practice; as I point out in this review, the research that exists currently is piecemeal (Sleeter, 2001b, p. 96)

As is typical of private, elite institutions, the majority of the students in the program I am researching are white, and many – if not most – come from privileged backgrounds.

There are, of course, exceptions to this general trend. It is my hope that this research will further illuminate ways that graduate-level teacher education can try to embrace the

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<sup>6</sup> While many of the pieces that Sleeter reviewed in this article were useful to my thinking, McIntyre’s work (2002; 1997) was particularly valuable as I considered the challenges and possibilities of doing this research as a white woman working predominantly with other white women. Her research reminded me of the importance of keeping whiteness as a salient point, and not allowing myself or others to presume “difference” is something that only belongs to particular racial groups or economic classes within society. I also found Lowenstein’s (2009) work on multicultural teacher education to be extremely helpful as I try to build my own conceptions of what is possible in schools of education.

diversity of experiences and histories; one of the central aims of this work is to recognize and work against the gap that Sleeter points out is dangerously prevalent in inner-city school environments, while simultaneously offering more information in the area of graduate-level teacher education.

Simply creating the opportunity to work in urban schools, however, is clearly not enough. Burant and Kirby (2002) found that while field experiences did help to illuminate some of the ways in which students were conceptualizing urban children and schools, several of the students ended the practicum with more negative and – in the researchers’ opinion – “miseducative” understandings of urban schools and communities (p. 570-1). The authors suggest that field experiences in teacher education need to be carefully considered in order to address issues of pre-service teachers’ perceptions more directly. They also recommended that university practitioners and school-based practitioners work together to reflect both on the types of experiences being offered to teacher candidates, and on how these experiences are being discussed or addressed within the university setting. Tiezzi and Cross (1997) researched the possibility of utilizing research on pre-service teachers’ beliefs in the process of developing field experiences. They worked first to examine and unpack some of the assumptions and beliefs with which students entered the program, and then to analyze field experiences in relation to how they were structured to either support or inhibit students’ examinations of their beliefs. They found that while field experiences can be a productive place for students’ to question their own assumptions, there also exists the danger that the necessary structures will not be in place for these conversations to occur.

Both of these studies speak to the need for more research on the role of field experiences in education coursework. They are, however, written from an outside-researcher perspective. In one of the few articles I found that dealt directly with graduate-level teacher education, Glazier (2003) takes up a practitioner inquiry stance when thinking about how to discuss race more openly in education classes. Although this article did not discuss fieldwork directly, because the teachers are currently practicing in the field, it seems like a useful foundation for considering my role in this research, as well as possible ways of approaching analysis. Glazier discusses her work as the founder of and participant in a book group with masters candidates who were also currently teaching. The meetings, specifically designed around texts that discussed issues of race and gender, developed out of Glazier's observations that students talked around race in class conversations. Glazier's research points both to the slipperiness of addressing issues of race – and difference more broadly – and to the need for reflection on how these issues impact current teachers as well as teacher candidates. She also highlighted the importance of time, as students slowly became more comfortable expressing their perspectives and challenging one another around these issues.

Tatum (1994) also discusses the need to give time for shifting perspectives through conversations about difference and race, specifically when taking up these issues with white teachers and pre-service teachers. In this piece, she describes the possibilities for helping white teacher education students acknowledge their own histories and biases in the process of moving through guilt or denial into a space of alignment. In other words, she offers up one possible way of thinking about how to develop white allies within

educational settings. In a more recent study, Lawrence and Tatum (2004) investigated the power of this antiracist pedagogical model in a professional development series for practicing teachers. The sessions, which occurred roughly every two weeks after school over a period of seven months, focused on assisting educators “to recognize the personal, cultural, and institutional manifestations of racism” (p. 363).

Although this program did seem to have success in helping individuals recognize their ability to function as allies, many of the students expressed concerns about how they would find spaces to act in schools that were, if not actively racist, certainly not antiracist. The authors end by urging the development of more programs like this one, and for the spread of such programs to a more institutional level. Although these studies do not specifically investigate the role of field experiences, they do suggest the importance of thinking about how individuals enter the field – as practicing teachers, pre-service teachers, or through course-base field experiences – and how to foster more open conversations about race, difference, and possible roles for the teacher in combating inequalities in schools.

#### *Teacher Learning/Teacher Identity Development in Teacher Education*

As discussed above, I approach the concept of teacher learning from the broader theoretical stance of learning as a recursive and socially constructed practice. One of the important implications of this stance is that I view learning as relating to more than particular sets of skills or experiences; instead, I see teacher learning as closely connected to “identity-as-teacher”. Given that research in the field of teacher learning covers a wide

range of topics, as well as epistemological approaches, my interest lies in how teachers come to understand their own roles and purposes.

For the purposes of this study, I am most interested in how teacher learning occurs within teacher education settings. As I discussed in my conceptual framing, I am aware of the need to reflect on what kind of learning – what kind of knowledge – is being valued. In their article on the relationships between knowledge and practice, Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) discuss the importance of valuing the knowledge teachers gain through their local contexts and individual practices. While there has been a fair bit of research on teacher learning within the field of practitioner inquiry (see, for example, Baumfield et al., 2009; Coulson, 2008; Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2008), there has been less research on the impact of field experiences on teacher identity-development or teacher learning.<sup>7</sup> Many of the studies reviewed, then, focused on pre-service teacher education, and the impact of these experiences on teacher development. Although I feel this emphasis is weighted too heavily toward university-based learning contexts, it does offer insight into teacher learning and identity-development. It is my hope that this study, with its focus on individuals' stories and experiences in the field, will help to illuminate a wider range of knowledge development than frequently occurs in the study of teacher education.

In their 2001 study, Brownlee, Purdie, and Boul investigated changing epistemological beliefs in pre-service teachers. They asked one group of students to keep

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<sup>7</sup> Cochran-Smith et al. (2009) is a notable exception, in that this study investigates how pre-service teachers take up inquiry in their own coursework and in the classroom where they student teach. This study, however, is more focused on the teacher educators, and therefore does not quite fit into the scope of this review.



a journal about their ongoing beliefs about teaching and knowledge over the course the year. The other group was asked to keep a journal, but not with a direct link to discussing belief structures. The authors found that, although students in the more specific group did talk more directly about theories of epistemology, students in both groups seemed to develop more sophisticated and nuanced understandings of the role of the teacher. They concluded by suggesting that the study highlights the need for direct and explicit discussion about the nature of learning and growth during teacher education programs.

Moss (2008) focused on a more specific issue of teacher learning in teacher education: the need to balance state-mandated assessments of pre-service teachers with the desire to foster critical pedagogical approaches within the pre-service teachers. Moss describes how one teacher educator developed a portfolio assessment of teacher learning that met state standards while also focusing on how to develop a critical lens toward classroom practices. She ends by suggesting that these findings present the possibility of integrating state mandates and teacher self-reflection to best develop teacher learning that meets the needs of an increasingly complex educational environment. This study suggests the possibility of enacting change within the conception of teacher learning – broadening it beyond particular methods or content knowledge – without sacrificing the ability to prepare teachers for the requirements of the school systems.

Walkington (2005) also uses a broader vision of teacher learning in her investigation of pre-service teachers' learning in both university and school settings. She argues that models of mentoring and fostering of teacher learning must take into account both the beliefs of the pre-service teachers, and the perspectives of university-based and

school-based practitioners who work with the students. She concludes by suggesting that a focus on reflective practice – on how various experience relate to one another – matters more than a focus on particular skills or attitudes that a pre-service teacher should gain. Levin and Rock (2003) also investigated how teacher learning occurs across various settings in their study on the impact of a collaborative action research project at a professional development school. Working with pairs of pre-service and experienced mentor teachers, the researchers discussed the different tensions and learning possibilities that occurred for the various members throughout the course of the project. This study suggests not only the importance of considering teacher learning across the lifespan, but also the importance of reflecting on the different tensions, pressures, or passions teachers may have at various points in their careers. In addition, Levin and Rock offer suggestions for how to incorporate collaborative learning and research more deeply into the field of teacher learning – a subject I hope this study will also take up through my work with masters students.

Given that the context for this study is a literacy-focused masters program, and the interconnectivity of literacy practices and identity development, it is also important to consider research that specifically focuses on literacy education and teacher learning. Hallman (2007) considered the impact of electronic teaching portfolios on the identity development of pre-service English teachers in a traditional college-based teacher education program. Through this study, Hallman found that the students struggled with how to author their portfolios so that they reflected their complex and shifting understanding of their teacher-selves. Students attempted to present themselves as

“competent beginning teachers” and as “inquisitive college students” (2007, p. 474).

The researcher suggested that by reframing teacher learning as an ongoing process, students might not feel such a great divide between their different identities, nor such disconnect with the idea of being an “expert” in teaching.

Phillips and Larson (2009) also investigated how particular discourses around learning and knowledge can impact pre-service teachers’ identity development. Using a poststructural feminist framework, the authors described how the focus on what they referred to as “comprehensive literacy” – a mastery model – did not take advantage of students’ autobiographical literacy discourses. The authors found that this perspective on learning and teacher development not only limited students’ engagement in classes, but also impacted students’ understanding of the possibilities for their own lives as teachers. They argue that teacher education programs need to critically reflect on their own practices, and ensure that instruction takes into account the individuality and experiences of the students.

In a 2009 study by Jones and Enriquez, the central question focuses on how teacher learning in teacher education is connected to how teachers understand their early years of practice. This article describes a four-year study that follows two individuals from their coursework in teacher education into their classrooms in elementary schools. They argue that teacher learning does not simply end the day the formal education is finished; instead, their findings suggest that university coursework has the possibility for long-lasting impact on first-year teachers’ understandings of their work. Not only does this article speak to the need for further research on how teacher education experiences

influence teachers' understandings of their practice, it also suggests that "theory" and "practice" – the divide so often upheld in research – are much more blurred and interwoven than often is suggested. This research also suggests that a deeper understanding of field experiences, and on how students navigate the boundaries between universities and schools, might also offer insights into how teacher learning and teacher identity-development occur within teacher education settings.

### **Overview of the Dissertation**

This dissertation is organized into seven chapters that address and expand on the topics and research reviewed above. Chapter Two describes the methodology for this study, the context – including my own positionality and that of the participants – and an overview of the ways that I approached and analyzed the data. Chapter Three explores how the inquiry group made sense of and reflected on fieldwork as a space of learning in literacy teacher education. Chapter Four addresses the ways that stories from fieldwork framed how questions of what counts as literacy and literacy education were negotiated and conceptualized. Chapter Five follows the ways that the group addressed the concepts of urban and urban education. Chapter Six examines how fieldwork experiences, and participation in this inquiry community, impacted participants' understandings of their own roles as teachers. Finally, in Chapter Seven, I offer some perspectives on what these findings might mean for the field of teacher education – with a particular focus on implications for literacy teacher education and urban-based contexts.

## CHAPTER TWO

### **Inquiry into Fieldwork: Context, Methodology, and Data Analysis**

#### **Creating an Inquiry Community: Context and Collaboration**

##### *Context*

The site for this dissertation was a masters program in literacy education at a private university in a large Northeastern city. As I described in the previous chapter, one of the reasons for choosing this site is that I have been a member of the community for over seven years, first as part of the masters program and now as a doctoral student. Given the ethnographic nature of this research, this long-standing participation within the community provided me with a more nuanced and historic perspective on the masters program, as well as some of the explicit and implicit organizational structures and practices. Also, as a graduate of the masters program, I drew on my own field experiences and histories during my participation within the inquiry group.

This literacy education masters program offers students the chance to get only a masters degree or the option of also getting state certification as a reading specialist. For these reasons, it draws a wide range of students: experienced teachers, recent college graduates (some of whom are certified as teachers, some of whom are not), and mid-career individuals who are moving into the field of education. A benefit of this heterogeneous community is that it can offer perspectives into how teachers are learning across the span of their career. This focus on intergenerational learning and discussion was paramount to the development of our group as a community of learners and educators.

### *Developing an Inquiry Community*

As the following chapters will highlight, the inquiry-based context allowed all of the participants to learn from and with each other, rather than upholding traditional hierarchies of novice/expert. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2001) argue that this type of collaborative learning and engagement is inherently necessary within inquiry-based communities:

Implicit in the construct of inquiry as stance is a richer conception of teacher learning across the professional life span than that implied by the expert/novice distinction. Learning from teaching through inquiry assumes that beginning and experienced teachers need to engage in similar intellectual work. Working together in communities, both new and more experienced teachers pose problems, identify discrepancies between theories and practices, challenge common routines, draw on the work of others for generative frameworks, and attempt to make visible much of that which is taken for granted about teaching and learning (p. 53)

While their work focused on teachers working in schools, I believe that the same holds true for teacher learners within their own educational contexts. As classmates and study participants, these students had opportunities to share their stories, ask one another questions, push for clarification, and work together to better understand their own conceptions and theories of practice as both students and teachers. Drawing on the work of Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009), the group meetings for this research project deliberately drew on the idea of “inquiry as stance”. Early in our time together I distributed two chapters from *Inquiry as Stance* and we talked openly about what it meant to work from an inquiry perspective. I deliberately introduced this term and framework for the group, as I believed that it would be a useful way for us all to better interrogate our experiences. As I will describe in more detail, especially in Chapters Three and Six,

“inquiry” became a framework for our work together, a concept that the participants themselves took up within their own work, and an approach that I took as I analyzed the data.

In addition to working from an inquiry stance as a way of reframing what counts as knowledge about education and teaching, the creation of this inquiry community also provided students with another space within their teacher education program from which to think about and negotiate their own understandings and assumptions about the nature of literacy education and urban school communities. As such, this project can be thought of as a form of action research, or what Kemmis (2009) refers to as “practice-changing practice”. In addition to using the inquiry group as a site of data collection, it is my belief that the very nature of the collaborative inquiry enabled the participants and myself to systematically and thoughtfully negotiate our perspectives and understandings of the issues that arose within fieldwork. Creating a site for these conversations to occur on an ongoing basis impacted both my analysis of how students engage in field experiences and simultaneously provided all of us a site for potential changes in perspectives to occur.

The inquiry group met every other week throughout the course of the academic year (September 2012 – May 2013), stopping only during winter break. These meetings took place at the university in a classroom at the school of education. At the first meeting, all of the participants filled out a survey that asked the times that worked best for everyone. Much to my surprise, an evening time was preferred by all of the participants. I had assumed that students would rather stay at school during the day and have their evenings to themselves. It turned out, however, that one of the main reasons for

preferring an evening meeting time was in fact their fieldwork requirements for classes. Because each student worked out her or his own schedule with the cooperating teacher, it was difficult to find a time during the day when everyone was free. We decided to meet on Monday evenings from seven to nine pm after a required course that almost all of the students were in during the fall and spring semesters. I provided dinner, which helped meet the practical need of meeting at that time, but also helped create a more informal and communal feel to these meetings.

### **Negotiating My Role(s)**

There were, of course, challenges that came up related to this site as well. With all the benefits of studying one's own space of practice come some unique issues that must be addressed. First, there was the question of my role and positionality within the group. As a doctoral student in the same program, I found that I had an almost hybrid role in relation to the masters students. On the one hand, I was another student in the school. We had some shared experiences around courses we had taken, some similar frustrations around bureaucratic issues, and often met casually in the halls and classrooms of the school. On the other hand, there were contexts where I was in a direct position of authority. For example, I was a teaching assistant for a required course for all students in the fall, and then a co-instructor of a section of a course in the spring that was required for all students planning to get their state certification. Furthermore, it was known – and/or assumed – by the students that I was in regular conversations with the faculty about the program and specific students; while I was in dialogue around certain topics or



issues that arose, I also believe that the students at times assumed more knowledge on my part than there actually was.

An example of these complications arose about a month into our work together. The students had gotten papers back from the class I was teaching assistant in a few days prior, and earlier in the day of our meeting had gotten feedback from another class in which the professor had expressed some disappointment at the level of work overall. Unlike the previous meetings where people came in, grabbed a sandwich and started talking about fieldwork, this evening everyone was engaged in an animated conversation about this feedback when I came into the room (Fieldnotes, 10.22.12). As soon as I entered, people started asking me about the papers and about how they were doing. Suddenly there was a real and pressing anxiety that affected our community – and it had nothing to do with my topic of study. I also found myself increasing uncomfortable with my role in that moment. During our inquiry group meetings I tried to position myself as another participant – albeit one coming from a different perspective, but still one of the group members like everyone else. A bit at a loss, I asked every to table this conversation, promising to leave time at the end to talk about coursework (Fieldnotes, 10.22.12). I literally felt as though I was putting on and removing hats in this moment, trying to distinguish between my role as a “participant” and my role as “teacher/instructor” within this space of practice. In a memo I wrote that evening I expressed great discomfort with this experience, noting: “It was once again a moment in this program where I am reminded that wishing power and issues of authority away is not going to be enough” (Memo, 10.22.12).

Looking back, however, I am appreciative that such a stark moment came up so early. As part of the goal of this project was to engage in something of a “critical ethnography” (Creswell, 2012, p. 94) it was important for me to stay actively mindful of issues of authority, access, and voice. My memos following this moment reflect a deeper appreciation for the ways in which my positionalities affected and directed the conversation. Frequently I found myself uncertain of where and when to turn the dialogue – at times becoming stressed that I was not getting enough data related to my research questions. While I tried to keep these concerns to myself, it was clear that this issue was also on the participants’ minds. At one point late in the year a participant turned to me and asked if I was “getting what I need addressed” (Fieldnotes, 3.11.13). This moment was one of many where I was forced to stop and directly negotiate expectations, requirements, and roles within this setting. The topics addressed in the following chapters are representative of these tensions and dialogues. The main themes that arose are very much the product of both my questions that I came to the site with, as well as the issues and experiences that most interested the participants as we engaged together in a year-long community of learning.

### **Participants and Representation of identities: A Critical Communal Moment**

#### *Negotiating How We Want to be Read*

The inquiry community that formed the heart of this study was made up of twelve students in a masters program in literacy education. This program is in some ways unique due to its mixed population along many lines – gender, race, class, teaching experience,

and other unique markers. Despite this heterogeneous nature, the majority of students in this program align with the “typical teacher” - white, middle-class or upper-middle-class women, many of whom were just out of college and relatively young. Sleeter (2011) among others has highlighted the particular tensions and issues with the fact that the United States teaching population is predominately white and female, particularly within urban areas or other locations where students and families are often marginalized along racial, class, immigration-status, and language lines. That said, there is also a danger of maintaining this status quo by designing teacher education programs that presume white, middle-class, young women as the audience. While it is imperative that teacher education programs address issues of race and class critically, providing some context for these majority students, these frameworks can simultaneously re-marginalize students who come from other backgrounds. Ingersoll and May (2011) note that in recent years there has been an increase in the recruitment of “minority teachers”, but also note that this population has the highest rate of leaving the profession – an issue that they posit might be related to teacher education programs that feel unwelcoming or unsupportive of their questions and identities. Furthermore, they recognize that despite these growths, there still remain wide disparities in the percentages of non-white teachers.

These issues facing teacher education not only impact the lives of the K-12 students – particularly those who come from marginalized communities – but also impact how educational settings for teacher education are constructed. Indeed, even in research that takes into account the cultural identities of teachers and teacher learners, there are particular assumptions that largely go unquestioned (Sleeter, 2011, Cochran-Smith, 2004).

In an effort to take a more critical approach to these issues, I attempted to deliberately attend to issues race and gender within the development of this inquiry community. During recruitment I discussed some of these issues and my perspectives, hoping this would help to encourage students who did not fit the “norm” of students in teacher education to join (Memo, 9.24.12). I was pleased when my sampling of the student population in many ways was representative of the larger program – of the thirteen students who signed up for the inquiry group, eleven were women and two were men<sup>8</sup>; the group consisted of three African-Americans, one woman and two men, one Asian-American woman, and nine white women.

When we were wrapping up our work together, I became aware that the classifications given above were my assumptions – based in part on working together for a year – about how the group members would identify. Given the importance of issues of representation and identity within narrative and ethnographic research, I decided to check my assumptions with the group. What I thought would be a quick conversation ended up being a critical moment that took a substantial part of two meetings to work through together. I mentioned that in order to provide some context to the reader I wanted to list participants’ race and gender within the dissertation, making sure everyone was comfortable with that idea. The push back was almost universal, although not in the way I had assumed. Rather than being upset that these demographic markers were being shared, the participants instead felt that these categories were insufficient to represent

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<sup>8</sup> One of the women dropped out after the first meeting. As such, she is not identified on the chart, as this was a collaboratively constructed table that the group designed during one of our last meetings. I did email her and invite her to add herself to the table, as she had given me permission to use the data from the first meeting, but she did not respond.

their identities as individuals, as members of this particular teacher education program, and as educators. Mark perhaps summed it up best when he said, “People are gonna look at this study, look at [the university] and assume I’m some rich white guy. And I’m not. You all know I’m not” (Fieldnotes, 3.25.13). Crichlow (2013) writes:

At its most uncritical moments, the discourse on culture operates according to a ‘reflection’ theory in which culture merely mirrors, for better or worse, the broader society. Questions of power are thereby rendered moot because representation is understood as a closed circle of correspondence between the object or practice and the ‘real world’” (p. 259).

In other words, rather than look at culture as a dialogic and constructed social phenomena, this perspective instead presumes culture as a static entity, thereby reducing conversations around how power is defined and deployed within learning contexts. In this example, I certainly fell into this trap. Despite my efforts to explore issues of culture and identity from a critical and collaborative lens, I still made presumptions about what was important, and why, to group members.

This conversation led to a suggestion from Emily that everyone nominate what aspects of self he or she would like represented within this work. Genevieve then added that since the focus was on fieldwork and teacher education we all share what we thought was most relevant to that topic (Fieldnotes, 3.25.13). Over the course of that hour and during the following meeting, we worked together to create a chart that everyone could live with as a representation of our identities within this context. Although it is somewhat lengthy, I feel it is important to share here within the body of this work for two reasons. First, it is representative of the collective ways that we tried as a community to engage in issues of power, identity, and culture. Second, it represents the ways that the participants

themselves want to be read as individuals. In several instances, such as religion, the decision to include a particular column grew directly from reflection on our previous conversations around autobiography and teacher identity. My hope is that by including this table here I can honor and recognize the perspectives of the participants in this study.<sup>9</sup>

*Collaborative “Identity Table” of Participants*

Name	Race	Gender	Class	Age	College, Major	Fieldwork Experience	Home	Work	Religion
Max	Black	Man	Reduced Lunch	24	Suburban private Catholic School, Marketing	7 <sup>th</sup> grade LA, Public middle school Subbing	Chester, PA	Substitute teaching, public middle school	Raised Baptist
Mark	Black	Male	Free Lunch	23	Urban Public D1 Institution, African American Studies		Brooklyn, NY		Christian
Emily	White	Female	Middle Class	29	Midsized urban Catholic school, Elementary Education and Human Development	Student teaching and masters fieldwork, public elementary school in large Northeastern cities	Souderton, PA	1 year in 5 <sup>th</sup> grade in a Catholic urban middle school 4 years in 5 <sup>th</sup> grade in a public urban K-8 school	Christian Protestant
Genevieve	White	Female	Middle Class	26	Small private Catholic suburban school, History, elementary secondary	Student teaching in social studies class in a suburban small high school Masters	Kimberton, Phoenixville, PA	2.5 years in a private special education school with adolescents Pre-K teaching	Spiritual

<sup>9</sup> Rather than focus on standardization, the group felt strongly that each person could classify along each column however she/he wanted; for example, in the “Class” column some chose more traditional markers such as “middle class”, which others chose “free lunch” or other categories that felt relevant to her/himself. Also, participants were free to skip columns if she/he wanted.

					and special ed	program fieldwork with reading specialist at an urban elementary school		experience	
Veronica	White	Female	Lower Middle Class	23	Suburban private D1, Elementary Ed and Psychology	Student teaching in an urban elementary school (1 <sup>st</sup> ) Masters school fieldwork in an urban high school and elementary school		Saturday school for 9 <sup>th</sup> grade in public urban tech charter CityYEAR in an urban 3 <sup>rd</sup> and 5 <sup>th</sup> grade classroom	Roman Catholic
Katrina	White	Woman	Upper Middle Class	32	Small Private liberal arts college, English Literature and elementary education	Student teaching in an urban public elementary school (K)	Philadelph ia and Merion Station, PA	2 years of teaching a private elementary school (1 <sup>st</sup> and 4 <sup>th</sup> ) 2 years as Executive headhunter	Culturally Jewish
Kelly	White	Female	Upper Middle Class	23	Private midsized Jesuit university suburban/urb an, Elementary and special education	Student teaching in suburban private Catholic elementary (preK-8 <sup>th</sup> ); Special ed student teaching in a suburban Catholic middle class school for students with special needs Fieldwork for masters in urban public elementary	Medford, NJ	None	Roman Catholic
Savannah	White	Female	Upper Middle Class	24	Midsized private suburban liberal arts school, Elementary Education	Student teaching in an urban 6 <sup>th</sup> grade LA and geography class Fieldwork for masters in urban K-6 school with reading	Potomac, MD and internatio nal living experien ce	2 years at a private suburban K (school was preK-K)	Baptist

						specialist (K-3)			
Amy	Asian	Female	Lower Middle Class	25	Urban public university, Early childhood and elementary education	Student teaching in a suburban public elementary (1 <sup>st</sup> ) Fieldwork for masters at urban public elementary (K) and (4 <sup>th</sup> )	Cherry Hill, NJ	Teaching at a wealthy urban early learning center Education assistant and substitute teacher at a suburban elementary school (same as student teaching)	Christian
Abby	White	Female	Upper Middle Class	23	Large D1 suburban state school, elementary education	Student teaching in a suburban public elementary school (3/4 <sup>th</sup> multiage) Fieldwork for masters at an urban charter school (5 <sup>th</sup> grade) and a suburban wealthy private school (K)	Northeast Philadelphia	None	Roman Catholic
Kai	White	Woman	South of Middle Class	32	Small private Quaker college, Peace and global studies	Fieldwork for masters at urban magnet school (10 <sup>th</sup> ) and at a public elementary charter school (with reading specialist)	Cincinnati, OH	3 summers as a Life Skills Coach 1.5 years of work in an urban nonprofit 1 years as a bookkeeper at an independent queer bookstore 6 years as an administrator at a large private urban university	Raised Christian, Buddhist
Maddie	White	Female	Middle	23	Small private liberal arts school,	Student teaching in a suburban elementary	Edison, NJ	Summer school for 5 <sup>th</sup> and 6 <sup>th</sup> graders in a	Jewish



					Business administration with a concentration in marketing, elementary ed	school (K) and 6 <sup>th</sup> grade in an suburban elementary school Fieldwork for masters in an urban public school (4 <sup>th</sup> ) and urban charter K-8 school (5 <sup>th</sup> ) & reading specialist		private elementary school	
Lila	White	Female	Upper middle class	24	Small private liberal arts college in a small town, elementary education and liberal studies	Student teaching in a private elementary campus lab school (3 <sup>rd</sup> ) and public suburban elementary school (5 <sup>th</sup> ) Fieldwork for masters in an urban charter elementary school (3 <sup>rd</sup> ) and public middle school (6 <sup>th</sup> )	White Plains, NY	1 year as a paraprofessional in a 10 <sup>th</sup> -12 <sup>th</sup> academic support class in a public performing arts charter school	None

## Methodology and Data Analysis

### *Overview of Methodology*

#### *Ethnographic Research*

In approaching this study, I first align myself within the larger framework of interpretive research. Although I do believe that a close and systematic approach to investigating a particular context or event can lead to what Erickson refers to as “concrete universals” (1986, p. 130), my main goal is to explore how participants within the context were making sense of their experiences. In particular, I believe that in classroom contexts – from K-12 education through graduate studies – teachers and students are constantly

negotiating meanings and understandings about both the content and the expectations for how to represent learning or knowledge. Given these complicated and reciprocal relationships, I believe it is important to consider both the design of the program, the specific contexts for learning and for research, and the participants' responses or reflections on those elements in order to fully appreciate the teaching-learning relationship in all its complexity. Within this study, I explore how these issues are illuminated within the context and tradition of teacher research. What I mean by this is that I am focused on understanding how teacher learners came to know and describe their own practices and learning (see, for example, Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993). Inherent in this focus is my belief that knowledge and learning are socially-constructed practices (Street, 1984, 2013), and that it is necessary to consider how teachers and students in teacher education are both positioned and understood in teaching and learning contexts.

#### *Narrative and Antenarrative*

During data analysis I focused particularly on how the group members and interviewees utilized narrative within group discourse. Gadsden and Wortham's work on how fathers represent their transition to fatherhood (2001; 2004) demonstrates the importance of reflecting closely on how participants construct narratives through the invitation to tell stories about their experiences. By analyzing the participants' narratives, I gained deeper understanding of how they were negotiating and framing the various communities and contexts that they worked in during their fieldwork. As I will describe below, I paid particular attention to the ways that narratives were constructed collectively and individually in both the inquiry group setting and during one-on-one interviews.

More specifically, Wortham (2000) argues that through the development of self through narration, an individual can actually begin to construct the self that they wish to embody through the interactional relationship between the narrator and the audience. As these relationships are at the heart of a community of learning, this narrative lens helped provide insights into how the creation and telling of narratives from fieldwork provided participants with opportunities to re-imagine their roles within literacy classrooms.

With a focus on narrative, however, it is important to consider that the data collected for this study involved the ways that participants were constructing their stories in the moment and over time. Boje (2001) argues that narrative analysis must also consider the “antenarrative”, which he defines as “fragmented, non-linear, incoherent, collective, unplotted, and improper storytelling” (p. 1). The notion of the antenarrative provides insight into how participants were engaging in social dynamics as they worked individually and collectively to construct understandings around literacy education, urban education, and teacher identity through their narratives and discussions. Rarely did students simply take turns sharing stories in a linear fashion during group meetings. Instead, given the conversational nature of the meetings, there were interruptions, questions, retractions, confrontations and disruptions as students tried to navigate how they understood their own positions vis-à-vis their field experiences, their own histories, and the stories being shared by other community members. The concept of the antenarrative helps to frame these group dynamics not as disruptions of narrative, but instead as central to the formation of particular stories and self-identifications within a collaborative setting.

Furthermore, it is important to note that individuals embody and narrate complex, contradictory and historically-grounded notions of self (Kamler 2001). As such, the narrative analysis and development of codes was not necessarily a search for a neat starting and ending point for each participant, but instead focused on better understanding how these complicated narratives intersected and engaged with one another as students reflected and described their roles as teachers of literacy within urban contexts. In other words, I explored how ideas shifted over the course of participation in the inquiry community, and in the program more broadly. Throughout I attempted to recognize not only the power of narrative, but also the complicated issues of power and identity in using other people's stories as a form of research (Lather, 2007). In order to better recognize these complicated and historicized selves, during analysis I focused specifically on the ways that the narratives that emerged through the coding of the fieldnotes, memos, and interview transcripts took up, challenged, and/or disrupted participants' previous notions of education, literacy, and engagement within field experiences, with a particular focus on the role that culture and community played in this work.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

#### *Data Collection*

I collected data during the 2012-2013 academic year (September 2012 through May 2012). While students can choose to attend the program either part-time or full-time, most students enter the program full-time and complete their degree over the course of

twelve to eighteen months (typically starting coursework in the summer or fall session and finishing in either the following spring, summer, or fall). Fieldwork, however, only occurs during courses that meet in the fall and spring semesters. In order to best capture the most typical way of completing the program, the inquiry community started in the fall shortly after the semester began. As all of the full-time students (roughly thirty students each year) take several core courses together, my hope was that the inquiry community could build on their experiences of working together as a cohort of learners.

Participation in the study was open to all students and fully voluntary. I introduced the idea of the project and the inquiry group to the students in the fall within the context of a course where I was a teaching assistant. I also emailed all the current students and invited them to come to an introductory session where we discussed some of my ideas and questions, as well as some of the goals that the students might have for such a community. While participation was voluntary and students could drop out at any time, I emphasized that the expectation for participation in this study was that the students would be at all or almost all of the inquiry group meetings. This focus on ongoing participation enabled me to get a clearer picture of how teacher learners' perspectives shifted over time; however, it also came from my belief in the need for a well-known community in order for participants to be open and willing to publicly negotiate their own ideas. I also believe that learning communities need to be manageable in size, so I planned to cap the number of attendees to approximately fifteen students. Ultimately thirteen students expressed interest and started the group. However, one member dropped out after only one session. When I emailed her to follow up on her reasons, she stated that

she was feeling overwhelmed and did not have the time to participate in this community (personal communication, 10.2.12). The other twelve students remained in the group the entire time, although two of them missed a few sessions in a row due to personal conflicts. I also had students sign a “commitment document” at the start of our work together, signifying their social contract to remain a regular participant in the community, as well as their agreement to keep group sessions confidential. In order to meet the participants’ needs and recognize their time commitment, participation in this inquiry community met their final masters portfolio requirement for professional development. Also, the goals or focus of the group meetings shifted to meet students’ needs during particular times in the semester; for example, near the end of the fall semester, the group used part of the time to discuss final papers that related to fieldwork and offered suggestions and/or feedback to one another (Fieldnotes, 11.19.12). Data collection included fieldnotes from group meetings, interview transcripts, analytic memos written immediately after each meeting, and artifacts including documents or other materials that students brought in from their field settings, as well as any articles or texts that we read together as a group.

### *Fieldnotes*

During each inquiry group meeting I took extensive fieldnotes on my computer. Because my interest was primarily on how participants narrated and reflected on their fieldwork experiences, I focused almost exclusively on talk turns, trying my best to get an accurate representation of what was said during these meetings. In some ways the fieldnotes have an almost transcription-like quality, although of course they are not word-

for-word representations of what the participants were saying during these meetings.

While it would have been possible to record these meetings, I ultimately decided that having a recorder going would be disruptive to the group setting and the dialogic nature of our work. Also, I felt that having a recorder would present some technical difficulties, in that we were seated in a large circle in one of the university classrooms; I did not want to privilege the voices of those sitting nearest to the recorder, or lose the perspectives of those who were further away. In addition, taking fieldnotes helped me to actively record and reflect on what was being said almost immediately after each session. After each meeting I would review the fieldnotes and reflect on the themes that emerged in a memo. It also enabled me to quickly bring the data back to the group members for clarification and insights.

While in many ways taking fieldnotes helped me stay actively engaged in the collection and analysis of the data, it also presented some challenges. Because I was typing the whole time – trying to capture what was said – at times it was hard for me to participate as fully. Or, if I did start participating in the conversation, I found that I would “lose” a great deal of detail in my notes, especially during my own talking. My computer open in front of me also opened the door for other participants to have tablets and laptops open on their desks, which occasionally got in the way of the group conversation. In fact, during one meeting it became an issue that was discussed, with new group norms set around the use of technology during meetings (Fieldnotes, 2.25.13). Despite these challenges, these fieldnotes provided a rich way of gathering data on the group meetings and form one of the primary data sources used during analysis.

*Interviews*

In order to ensure a sampling of data from across the academic year, I conducted a series of three semi-structured interviews with seven select students over the course of the year. These interviews occurred in mid October/early November, late January, and May. These interviews involved four of the participants from the inquiry group and three masters students who were not participating in the bi-weekly discussions. The reason for holding these interviews were two-fold: first, I believe that it is important to consider how the space of the inquiry group might have functioned as a site of learning and engagement outside of the traditional course of study within the program. As I noted above, in some ways this study can be thought of as a form of action research, in that it created new spaces for engagement within the context. By interviewing students who did not engage in the group meetings, I attempted to gain a deeper sense of how the very act of participation might be influencing teacher learners' thoughts and understandings.

My second reason had to do with the ways that participation in a group setting can influence how an individual represents his or her own perspectives and voice. As Creswell (2012) highlights in his book on qualitative methods, group settings – such as inquiry groups or focus groups – and individual interviews can offer different kinds of insights. Holding individual interviews with select members of the inquiry group allowed for these individual perspectives to surface in different ways. It also, in several cases, provided an opportunity for members to share insights and perspectives on the inquiry group experience that they might not have addressed as part of the group setting. These conversations not only allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of the ways that



participation in the inquiry community influenced these members' thoughts and perspectives, but also gave me insights into how the structure was – or was not – working for particular individuals in relation to specific issues. For example, during our second interview Mark, an African-American man, shared with me his frustration that “teacher ed always seems to be for the white girls” (Interview, 2.12.13). He went on to share his hope that the inquiry group would be “different”, but his feeling was that those voices and perspectives still dominated. Our conversation helped me to see a different dimension of our group work in relation to teacher education, and eventually emerged as a serious topic for the whole group – one I will address in Chapter Five of this dissertation.

Finally, I am aware that participation in the inquiry group was heavily skewed toward the full-time students<sup>10</sup>; yet one of the interesting aspects of the program is that it includes a widely heterogeneous group of students, including those who are going part-time due to personal reasons or due to their continued work as a classroom teacher. As I did not want to lose these voices within my data, I specifically sought out part-time and/or working students to include in the interview process. Unfortunately, very few part-time students responded to my requests for participants. Several wrote back letting me know that they were interested, but simply felt too busy. Ultimately the only part-time student who I was able to interview was Kai, a member of the inquiry community. As I

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<sup>10</sup> In fact, out of the twelve participants, only one was a part-time student. Kai frequently discussed in the group her own sense of being an “outsider”, or being out of touch (Fieldnotes, 4.8.13 among others). During one of her interviews she shared that the inquiry group was “one of the first times I really felt I knew what was going on in [the program]” (Interview, 5.16.13).

will describe in more detail below, these interviews were transcribed and then analyzed in relation to the fieldnotes, memos, and artifacts collected from the inquiry group meetings. Interview protocols are included as Appendix B.

### *Documents and Artifacts*

After each inquiry group meeting I would review the fieldnotes and write an analytical memo. These memos addressed my personal read on the discussions – any themes that I saw emerging, any frustrations that I had, any questions or clarifications that I wanted to get from participants. These memos proved invaluable in tracing my own understandings during data analysis after the collection of data was complete. These memos also helped me stay aware of my own biases and individual perspectives, which I will address in greater detail below.

In addition to my own memos, I also collected a number of documents and artifacts during data collection. As I expected, there were several times when participants brought in documents and/or artifacts from their fieldwork. These artifacts included the participants' own fieldnotes and journals, as well as work that emerged from the classrooms where they worked – such as worksheets, children's' creative writing, drawings and pictures, and communications from the cooperating teacher. One form of artifact that I had not expected but which became a regular addition to the group was the fieldwork journals and notes that students had created during earlier fieldwork experiences, such as student teaching during undergraduate work. These journals not only provided insights into the various ways that fieldwork was constructed in different university settings, but also became a touchstone for students as they reflected on the

development of their ideas and identities as literacy teachers. In other words, these documents clearly played an important role in how students recalled and constructed their academic autobiographies as teacher learners over time.

### *Data Analysis*

Data analysis occurred in two phases. The first phase was during data collection (September 2012 – May 2013). Using an inductive approach (Patton 1980; Erickson 1986), I reviewed the fieldnotes and memos after each meeting in order to begin determining emergent codes and themes. This coding strategy grew from the questions that guided this study as well as the more specific topics and questions that arose from within the group. Although the interpretive stance of this project allowed for codes to emerge from the interactions and conversations of the group, it is also important to acknowledge that I came to this study with my own focus and specific questions. Part of this first phase of data analysis was the determination of what these initial codes were and how they were being taken up within the group discussions, as well as analyzing the data for other emergent themes or topics.

The second phase of data analysis occurred immediately after data collection (June 2013 – September 2013). During this phase I continued to reflectively review and code the data from the group sessions and from the interviews for ways that participants were taking up questions of urban education, literacy education, and fieldwork as a site of learning and community engagement, focusing on the particular affordances and challenges of qualitative data (Creswell, 2012). During this second phase I maintained a running set of codes, which eventually totaled as seventeen codes that emerged through

the inquiry meetings and the interviews. Once I had established these codes and read all of the fieldnotes and interview transcripts twice, I then looked for how these codes worked together to form larger themes (Creswell, 2012; Strauss and Corbin, 1997; Corbin and Strauss, 2008) through my work to “classify, sort, combine and refine” the earlier codes that I had identified (Creswell, 1998).

At this point I began to engage more deeply in an exploration of individual narrative within the group discourse, looking not only for the emergent themes, but also for how these themes developed over time and as a construction of participants’ identities and practices (Wortham, 2000; Rymes and Wortham, 2011; Holstein and Gubrium, 2011). It is important to note that my focus on narrative did not follow closely the traditions of sociolinguistic work, wherein each talk turn is analyzed for constructions of self. Rather, I used these analytic traditions in conjunction with storytelling theory and grounded theory to uncover the development of identity and perspective over time. Using the antenarrative framework (Boje, 2001) allowed for a more nuanced perspective on how disruptions and shifts came together over time to demonstrate changes, or central concerns. Chase (2003) highlights the importance of exploring narrative along these longer time frames, particularly in relation to how larger social issues, such as marginalization, urbanization, culture and identity, play into the construction of these accounts.

## Representation, Rigor, and Accountability

### *“My read”: Representation and Bias*

Throughout my collection of data and in this dissertation, I attempted to position myself as a participant in the collective work of an inquiry community. Through the collection of data, the format of the inquiry group, and my approach to analysis, I tried to maintain what Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) refer to as an “inquiry stance”. I made an effort to embody the same principles that I looked for in the other participants – namely a willingness to listen, an appreciation for how we were all being positioned and positioning one another along cultural and social lines, and an openness to change. With that said, ultimately the work and representation within these pages is mine. While I did check in with members regularly – as I will detail below – I accept full responsibility for the interpretations and perspectives represented here. While I believe that the collaboration within the group setting was an integral part of the research, I also appreciate that I am the origin for both the framing of the experience and the ways it is ultimately being represented.

Furthermore, in approaching this work from a critical feminist perspective, I not only want to highlight the ways that issues of power and identity influenced participation, but also recognize that my telling of this story is only one way of making sense of these collective experiences. Lather (2007) writes that “in such a place of thought, inquiry is seen as social practice, and what is at stake is not so much the nature of science as its effects. Questions of accountability and responsibility are ethical and social” (p. 2). Throughout my collection of data and the periods of analysis, I have attempted to remain

open to this kind of critical uncertainty and ethical consideration. This writing represents my efforts to balance the tensions between sharing my own perspectives and close readings with an appreciation of the situated and inherently limited perspectives that I as a single author represent. As I highlighted in describing the development of the “participant chart”, attention to issues of representation and bias have been an integral part of this project. While I see this work as one perspective on the complicated communal work that happened in this inquiry setting, I also believe that this study offers important insights into the nature of fieldwork and its role as a context for learning in teacher education. This close focus does not preclude the possibility for wide-reaching implications for other teacher education programs, or urban-based schools of education. Instead, this study aims to “mine the potency of the particular” – to delve deeply into one context, and to understand how participants within that context make sense of the spaces of learning provided, especially those that involve the larger communities that surround them (Carini & Himley, 2009).

### *Validity*

While approaching uncertainty as an integral element of research offers some powerful ways of engaging data, it also brings into questions what counts as validity within the research. Lather (1993, 2007) questions the very term “validity”, arguing that it implies a certainty and narrowed concept of “truth”. While I share some of these concerns, I also share her belief that there are ways to engage in ethical and critical reflection on the data and its analysis. Creswell and Miller (2000) describe the

importance of linking measurements of validity to “the lens researchers chose to validate their studies and researchers’ paradigm assumptions” (p. 124). In other words, validity claims should align with both conceptual frameworks that guide the project and the methods and data sources used in analysis. Given that I approach this dissertation from a critical perspective, it was most important to me that I provided opportunities throughout the work for other participants’ voices to weigh in on whether my claims and interpretations seemed valid.

To that end, I engaged in three methods of gauging validity: triangulation across data sources, evidence of disconfirming data, and discussions around my analysis with participants. Triangulation occurred during the coding of the data, particularly in relation to the fieldnotes and the interview transcripts. As I read, reread, highlighted and annotated these pages, I paid particular attention to the topics that arose in both contexts. I also looked temporally at the fieldnotes I had taken, checking to see if topics and themes appeared in multiple conversations around different aspects of fieldwork. I also closely analyzed the data both for confirming and disconfirming evidence of the codes and themes that I saw as emerging from the work (Erickson 1986). Finally, during both phases of analysis, I brought my emerging codes and themes to the attention of four of the participants from the inquiry group, all of whom offered to read my thoughts over the summer after collection had ended. These email conversations worked as a form of member check – confirming whether or not my analysis made sense to the other members of the inquiry community in an effort to ensure that I was not simply imposing my organizational structures or biases on the data. While I am still uncertain about the

concept of validity within qualitative and inquiry-based research, I do believe that these member checks, triangulation across data sources, and the close attention to data that does not seem to fit the structure confirms some truths within my interpretation of the data.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter outlines the context for this study, the participants, the methodologies used in the design and implementation of the work, and offers details into how the data was analyzed and represented. In terms of context, both the larger literacy teacher education program and the specific inquiry community that formed the center of the study are described, as well as the connections between these two sites. Participation is detailed, including a chart that overviews the various identity markers that members of the study felt were important for the reader to know as their words are being read. Drawing from ethnographic, narrative, and critical feminist research and scholarship, details regarding the overarching design, the specific data sources, and the modes of analysis are described. Throughout the chapter there is a focus on issues of identity, story, and representation. These issues are central to the conceptualization, ideation, and enactment of this study, and as such run through from the frameworks used to situate this work, to the methods, to the positionality of the participants, to the analysis and final writing-up of the work.



## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **Constructing the Space of Fieldwork: Expectations, Experiences, and Enactment**

As discussed in Chapter One, fieldwork has long been an integral aspect of teacher education, and professional schooling more broadly. Historically, research and scholarship on the topic of fieldwork has focused on its integration with coursework as part of the larger program structure (Darling-Hammond, 2012; Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005). In a review of research on field experiences and methods courses, Clift and Brady (2005) found that there was a presumed agreement within the research on commonly-used terms, such as “methods course, methods instructor, early field experience, student teaching, student teachers, intern, cooperating teacher, and supervisor” (p. 314). However, as this chapter will discuss, central tenants of fieldwork – including its purposes, the roles and responsibilities of various players, and even their own titles – were not completely shared by the students within this study. Furthermore, one of the issues that this chapter will address directly is the widely varying nature of how field experiences were constructed, enacted, and experienced by the participants – both within previous programs they had attended, and even at the program they were participating in during the course of this study, as well as the impact that this variation had on how the individuals responded to their fieldwork experiences. This chapter focuses on these individual expectations and how these frameworks influenced the participants’ experiences, reflections, and integration of their fieldwork experience into their larger teacher education program.

Clift and Brady (2005) offer a meta-analysis of research on methods courses and field experiences within teacher education. In their section that specifically focuses on English and Language Arts field experiences, they share research that shows that the act of entering classroom settings alone does not promote development in teachers' understandings of the practice of teaching or impact deeply their own sense of what it means to teach (2005, p. 316). Instead, they argued that the research demonstrated:

The importance of providing support for learning and practice that includes theory as well as multiple opportunities to attempt desired practice and to ask questions about those attempts. The strength of this convergence - across researchers, grade levels, and contexts – is that we can see a trend emerging that emphasizes the importance of planned, guided, and sustained interaction with pupils” (p. 316).

They also noted, however, that there has been in the research a lack of attention to the development and role of field experiences as part of the cohesive teacher education program (p. 331). The stories taken up in this chapter reflect some of these concerns. In particular, because this study was situated within a graduate program in education, many of the students had already experienced forms of teacher education, including field experiences, and were able to take a position of reflective analysis on these experiences – something they would not have been able to do from their vantage point as an undergraduate. This chapter will explore the nature of these reflections, and what these experiences and histories offered to students as they navigated the field experiences that occurred during their masters work.

Grouws and Schultz (1996) maintain that any theoretical framework for teacher education must “take account of the complexity of becoming a teacher. ... Thus, theoretical models must consider experiences prior to formal entry into a teacher

education program, the teacher education program with its many components, the induction year of teaching, and subsequent teaching years” (p. 454). While their work focuses mainly on mathematics teachers, their insights into the complex nature of teaching ring true for literacy educators as well. I would add to these importance perspectives that any theoretical or empirical work into the nature of teacher education should also take into account the expectations that teacher learners bring with them to teacher education contexts, particularly those that are community- and school-based. These expectations include not only the nature of these experiences and their relationship to coursework but also the individual’s career goals, previous histories as a student and as an educator, and their familiarity with the community contexts in which they are placed. Sleeter (2001) also highlights the importance of considering issues of differences – in particular race, class, and gender – when exploring the nature of how one comes to understand the role and goals of becoming a teacher; this topic will be addressed more specifically in Chapter Five, which explores particular issues related to fieldwork and urban school settings.

More broadly, this chapter will explore how the participants framed and experienced fieldwork as a unique space of learning within this literacy education program. The chapter is divided into three sections. The first section describes the ways that the participants initially conceptualized fieldwork and its role in their own learning. Building mostly from a conversation during the first inquiry group meeting, this first part will describe the histories that participants brought with them, their goals/expectations for the fieldwork experiences within the masters program, and how the participants

positioned fieldwork as a unique space of learning within teacher education. The second section of this chapter takes up the negotiations, challenges, and connections that students experienced as they traversed both school and university contexts as part of their work in the field. These conversations centered on the ways that they were positioned by both school and university teachers and mentors, the tensions they sometimes faced in crossing between these two settings, and the roles of power and authority across these spaces.

Finally, this chapter concludes with an investigation into a topic that emerged as an emic concept for the group – fieldwork as a lonely venture. In both their reflections on previous experiences and their narratives around their current placements, participants again and again referenced their sense of isolation within fieldwork. This section will describe how the participants narrated these emotions and suggest some implications that these feelings have on the ways that research and teacher education programs conceptualize and construct field experiences.

### **Conceptualizing Fieldwork: Histories, Goals, and Expectations**

#### *Role of Previous Experiences in Defining Fieldwork*

When our inquiry group first started in late September of 2012, there was still a relative sense that we were all strangers. Most of the participants (eleven of the thirteen) were enrolled in a class for which I was a teaching assistant at that time. However, the course was large and had only met a few times prior to our first gathering. In order to facilitate both a chance to get to know one another and to begin fostering an environment

where autobiography and narrative would be valued as serious ways of knowing (Kamler, 2001) within an academic setting, I asked all of the participants to share any previous experiences with fieldwork and what they thought the purposes or goals of fieldwork in teacher education might be (Fieldnotes, 9.24.12). Although most of our sessions followed more of an informal conversational model, I asked that the participants go around in a circle and share their stories, as I wanted to make sure all the voices were heard. Furthermore, while the design of the inquiry group was a deliberate effort to construct collaborative and dialogic spaces of learning within the teacher education program, I also wanted to recognize the individual expectations and goals that the participants brought with them. In this section I focused on how the individuals conceptualized the role of fieldwork, looking for themes or connections across their unique perspectives.

Maddie, one of the first members to share her perspectives, stated: “Fieldwork is an opportunity to observe. You learn so much in the classroom. You see a teacher do it, try it yourself, as opposed to just learning methods” (Fieldnotes, 9.24.12). This understanding that fieldwork was the space where you tried things on was one that many of the participants touched on in their discussion. Abby mentioned that her undergraduate experiences were the spaces where she could “make mistakes, and that was okay. Because I wasn’t the real teacher yet” and Veronica agreed, sharing that she appreciated fieldwork because it was where: “I got my foot in the door, even though I’m not completely ready to teach” (Fieldnotes, 9.24.12). Building on her earlier statement that she did not feel her previous field experiences had fully prepared her, Veronica

commented that she came to get her masters because she “didn’t feel ready to be a teacher, even after all that classroom experience” (Fieldnotes, 9.24.12). Throughout these comments, they individuals seemed to be developing a shared discourse that teacher education was the space where one learned everything about teaching, and that fieldwork was the chance to apply and try out this practical knowledge.

Other students also echoed this perspective as they commented on the differences between teacher education and early career teaching:

**Savannah:** In fieldwork, you really rely on your cooperating teacher, because you don’t really know how to do it yet. One day, I’m ashamed to admit it, but I lost it with these 6<sup>th</sup> graders. It was my lowest point, but where I learned the most. I still read [the cooperating teacher’s] comments about that day; she was very encouraging, giving me tips. She helped me learn how to handle the situation I was in.

**Emily:** Yet there’s no voice like that your first year, and you still run into those moments, those low points. How cool would that be if you had a mentor like that your first year. There is such a huge different between student teaching and first year teaching (Fieldnotes, 9.24.12).

Here, Emily builds on the narrative of fieldwork as the space where the real learning happens, but also complicates the discussion by sharing her own feelings of insecurity during her early years of teaching. Emily was the participant with the most teaching experience. Prior to returning to school full-time for her masters, she had been a public school teacher in a large northeastern city for five years. She was, by many different standards, an exemplary and successful teacher. Yet she looked back on her undergraduate experience with some unease, sharing: “I spent a lot of time and money on what’s considered nationally a very good teacher education program, but I wasn’t ready. Fieldwork didn’t make me ready. But maybe that’s how it is” (Fieldnotes, 9.24.12). Here, Emily again describes fieldwork as the space of transformation from learner to

practitioner, but this time her comments address the gap she experienced between finishing her teacher education program and entering the teaching profession and the anxiety that this perceived disconnect caused. Emily was not alone in describing this concern. While the many of the participants described their sense that fieldwork was the space where one could make and learn from mistakes, many of their comments also referenced the ways that this “practice period” was limited:

**Ava:** I hope while I’m here [in the program] to, um, to become a reading specialist or literacy coach and then get hired in that position. Because once I get the job I have to, you know, know how to be that role, know what I’m doing (Interview, 2.13.12).

**Genevieve:** Student teaching I saw as this apprenticeship that I had to pass, that I had to do to become a teacher (Fieldnotes, 2.11.13).

**Lila:** Teacher education is where we need to learn to think critically about our own histories, about the scripts we bring with us to fieldwork, to work with kids. Because that’s where we learn to become teachers, and once we’re teaching there just isn’t any more time. And if you haven’t done it by then, you’re screwed (Fieldnotes, 11.19.12).

In many ways, then, the perceptions of fieldwork as the space of “getting practice” that the participants brought with them colored their actions and roles as they entered these spaces of learning, as well as their evaluation of the work they were doing in these sites. Part of what made field work a unique space of learning – the chance to explore contexts with actual children and teachers – also characterized it as a type of proving ground. Therefore, despite some discussion around the fact that this was a place where one could try things on and make mistakes, there was also the feeling that by the end of these experiences the period of trial and over would be complete. And when this sense of

completion did not occur, a lasting sense of failure or ill-preparedness colored the participants' sense of themselves as teachers.

This finding is not in and of itself that surprising. In much of the research and scholarship on fieldwork there is a shared assumption that classroom-based contexts are indeed supposed to be the location in which the shift from theory to practice occurs. Zeichner and McDonald refer to this paradigm as the “application of theory” model, in which knowledge is gained at the university and then tried on or mastered in field settings (2011, p. 45). In her seminal work on teaching and teacher education, *Practice Makes Practice* (1991, 2005), Britzman questions not only what teacher education does for teachers, but also what the impact of teachers' education experiences as they construct and reconstruct their notions of what it means to teach (2005, p. 25). She goes on to say:

Implicitly, schooling fashions the meanings, realities, and experiences of students; thus, those learning to teach draw from their experiences constructed from actually being there. They bring to teacher education their educational biography and some well-worn and commonsensical images of the teacher's work. In part, this accounts for the persistency of particular worldviews, orientations, dispositions, and cultural myths that dominate our thinking and, in unintended ways, select the practices that are available in educational life” (2005, p. 27).

One of the myths that seemed most central to the participants' ways of understanding fieldwork was the notion that by the end of a teacher education program, one had learned how to teach. In other words, one had made the move from a learner to a knower. As Alana put it, “You don't know how to do what you want to do until you do it. You sit in a classroom and learn theory, but you don't know how to put it into practice until you are in practice” (Fieldnotes, 9.24.12). As the application of theory model suggests, at least for many of these participants fieldwork was seen as the space where this leap from the



student to the expert was supposed to happen. As Zeichner and McDonald found, the application of theory model of teacher education impacts deeply the sense that students make of their fieldwork experiences as they attempt to “practice or apply what they learned in schools” (2011, p. 45). Thus, while the students at times professed differing goals for themselves or for the program, they seemed to share a sense that these field experiences were the location where the transformation would occur.

Up to this point in this early conversation, this shared focus on the role of fieldwork in the becoming of a teacher presumed that we all had the same definition for the term. When the conversation got to Mark, however, the group’s assumptions around what counted as fieldwork were in many ways disrupted. Mark shared that although he had no formal undergraduate experience in teacher education, he had worked for seven months as a substitute teacher – an experience he referred to as an “unofficial fieldwork experience” (Fieldnotes, 9.24.12). Abby immediately responded, “So you don’t have any, you know, real fieldwork experience?” Before Mark could respond, Max joined in the conversation. He pushed back on Abby’s comment, sharing his own history and entry into the world of education:

**Max:** Hold on there. Just hold on. Just because it ain’t official doesn’t mean it’s not real. I mean, it’s all about being in the community, right? Like me. I majored in marketing but by the time I graduated I had rebelled against all of it. I ended up teaching in a summer Freedom school. I was teaching there, had my own class. Kept my mind active, kept me on my feet. Led me into education. I ended up working as a sub in the same school [the following year]. Then I enrolled in another program for African-American males who want to be teachers. [My other program] was all practical. This is how you stand, this is how you do classroom management. But I knew from subbing that wasn’t all of it. I wanted to get beyond that. Here I am.

**Abby:** Oh, Sorry. I mean. I didn’t mean to imply you didn’t have experience. I just wasn’t sure that’s what we meant by fieldwork.

**Max:** I hear you. And I didn't mean to jump down your throat. It just gets frustrating, you know, when you don't have that teacher ed background. It's like people assume you don't know anything about anything.

**Mark:** Yup. (Fieldnotes, 9.24.12)

This interchange between the three participants was striking for several reasons. First, it was one of the first moments when the participants began to debate and discuss how we were using terminology or developing particular concepts together. While we had started the first meeting with some discussion around group norms and expectations (Fieldnotes, 9.24.12), there had not been any specific conversation around terminology. Much like the research reviewed by Clift and Brady (2005), I made the assumption that these terms would have shared meanings to all the participants, including myself. Yet in this moment it became clear not only that the members of the group had different ideas about “what counted” as fieldwork, but also that these ideas were at least partially mediated by their own histories and positionalities.

As the Britzman quotation above suggests, personal as well as professional history and autobiography are central aspects of how teachers enter teacher education programs, navigate contexts such as fieldwork, and ultimately define themselves as teachers. In their own research on the role of autobiography in the development of pre-service literacy teachers, Heydon and Hibbert (2010) found that using written autobiography and narrative to be one powerful way to help teacher learners investigate and critically reflect on their own practices and beliefs. Analyzing memos, they found that the participants often described moments of print-literate privilege – such as extended lap reading experiences with caregivers – without noting the very privilege that these moments denoted. While this study focused on verbal collaboration and narrative, it

connects to this work in that the sharing of stories in both contexts brings to light questions of privilege, access, and experience with regards to “what counts” in teacher education. The exchange between Max, Abby, and Mark above highlights the need for spaces in teacher education where students can negotiate their expectations and assumptions in order to develop a deeper sense of the purpose and possibility of these learning spaces.

This moment did not, however, fully engage in the work of defining “fieldwork” for the group. Max referenced the idea that fieldwork was “all about being in the community”, but that was not a shared belief by everyone else, nor did the group discuss this idea any further at that time. In the first individual interview, I asked the seven individuals with whom I spoke what they thought the purpose of fieldwork was within teacher education (Interview 1 Protocol). Their responses varied, but none of them specifically addressed the community around the school<sup>11</sup>:

**Alex:** It's just – it's just this progression of just like -- like seeing people in action, seeing what -- what styles there are, what people do, how they do it, where certain schools place importance on what at what times of the year. And it's -- you see a lot and it's a lot you -- you won't see in a textbook necessarily (Interview, 10.24.12).

**Maddie:** Fieldwork is where we learn what we're supposed to be doing, so I think the purpose is learning techniques and skills related to an actual classroom experience (Interview, 10.24.12)

**Lawrie:** I was considering fieldwork course to be the one really practical-minded course, the one giving us like bullet-pointed tips for what to do when, or um readings that are really grounded in the classroom and not in the theory, um,

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<sup>11</sup> Unfortunately Genevieve's first interview recording was lost due to a technical error. I have notes from the interview, however, that do not reference any mention of the community in relation to fieldwork.

because my other four classes I'm taking are largely like theoretically-oriented with some like forays into actual classroom practice (Interview, 10.24.12)

**Mark:** I think that to have field experience without – to have education without field experience is kinda crazy, 'cause it's, like, if – especially just based on, like, seeing some, like, of our cohort. They never really experienced working with kids, especially – whatever population you wanna work in, I think it's important that you have to see how they operate. ... Like, you can read about them in a book, but if you don't see how they operate, how they function, and – you won't really know what to do going in, um, and I do see that they are benefiting from their fieldwork, getting more practice with the skills (Interview, 11.7.12).

**Ava:** I think with field experiences it's beneficial if this person has a set of skills that you want to obtain. That's as far as the mentor/teacher. And I think that by way of the classroom it's beneficial if you are experiencing something that's different from what you've always experienced (Interview, 11.13.12).

Overwhelmingly these responses had to do with the individual's own learning, often focused on gaining practical skills. Mark does touch on the need to know more about a particular population, but then returns to a reference of specific skills and textbook-based knowledge. One exception was with Kai, a part-time student who did not have an undergraduate background in education. While she also focused on her own learning, she had a slightly different goal:

**Kai:** I guess it depends on the person, because a lot of people are coming here from having an – education undergrad majors are having already taught forever, so this might not be true for them, but for me, it's also just a lot like, "How does the school work? How does the classroom work? How do you do basic things like deal with conflicts in the classroom or transition from one thing to another?" Or – yeah, just basic things like everyday things in the classroom that might be second nature to someone else coming in who has a background in teaching, but to me, it's like an entirely new language I have to learn. I feel like I'm seeing – like, going to school and thinking about school from the teacher end of [...] to the student end, it's like I see this whole network of roots that I had never even thought about or didn't even know was there (Interview, 10.25.12).

While Kai was still deeply focused on her own learning within the space of fieldwork, she saw it as a chance to get to know schools as organizations, rather than focused directly on specific teaching strategies or lessons. In this moment, Kai highlighted the importance of her personal history within her conceptualization of fieldwork as space of learning. Much like Max and Mark who drew on their substitute teaching experience, Kai was deeply aware that her goals and perspectives might be different from the expectations of those who have more of a history in traditional teacher education settings.

Yet the assumption that everyone with a background in education during college shared the same experiences and perspectives also was questioned during this group discussion. In fact, for some this chance to discuss teacher education programs – and fieldwork more specifically – outside of the undergraduate context was the first chance to explore the variety of ways that these programs are constructed. Within the first conversation, participants with an undergraduate background in education shared stories of programs where fieldwork was integrated throughout the program, where fieldwork consisted of the more traditional cumulative “practicum” experience, and where fieldwork was comprised primarily of a year-long immersion into one school setting, much more like the apprenticeship or intern model often favored in the United Kingdom and other countries. While the research literature certainly recognizes that this wide variety of programs structures exists (Cochran-Smith and Zeichner, 2005; Zeichner and McDonald, 2011; Clift and Brady, 2005), the range of experiences described surprised the participants themselves. When students expressed envy over the dialogic journal relationship that Savannah described having with her cooperating teacher, she asked,

“Wait, isn’t that a part of everyone’s student teaching?” A few weeks later, in response to others’ curiosity, she brought the notebooks into a meeting with her, so she could share how this relationship developed more clearly (Fieldnotes, 9.24.12 and 11.5.12).

### *Role of Race and Culture in Fieldwork Experiences*

Participants shared stories, debated positives and negatives, and reflected back on their own educational histories as part of this ongoing discussion of what counts as fieldwork in teacher education:

**Mark:** The teacher has a really weird relationship with the students. ... In one lesson four kids came in the middle and he just joked with them. Super accommodating. Not like where I grew up – that was very strict. That would be a sign of disrespect, so I had trouble not reading it that way (Fieldnotes, 10.22.12).

**Mattie:** This whole applying to school thing is so strange to me in my fieldsite. My personal history is in a suburban school district. You don’t apply, you just go to school. It’s interesting to think about public school this way, as a thing you apply to.

**Savannah:** We’re putting private schools up here, public schools down here. But is that because we’re in an urban area? I’m from an affluent area, where my perception of public schools is very different. They were seen as the best. Others see public schools as lacking. I don’t have that same connection.

**Lila:** Where I grew up, it’s all about these small little lines where the taxes suddenly are raised. Schools are like private schools. They are maybe ten minutes away – we played them in sports. What the flip?

**Mark:** That’s the exception, though, isn’t it? That’s the unusual public school.

**Savannah:** Not where I grew up, in suburbia. Their view of public school is different.

**Max:** Some public schools match private schools. It happens. I think there is, I don’t know. I think that conversation needs to happen to. That the pile of money or taxes creates education quality – one of the biggest loaded statements that we don’t really investigate. I mean, I didn’t have it, but all my education wasn’t bad.

**Emily:** It’s disgusting, the disparity.

**Lila:** That critical race theory article we read by Ladson-Billings. It’s all about how it comes down to property.

**Max:** But it’s a crazy jump from how much you pay to quality of education. The more money we put into it, the more we think it’s good. So much in that that needs to be separated.

**Savannah:** That's not always true. I see a lot of things I lacked in my education that others that had less money – they had a lot more to gain in their twelve years of education than I did. A lot of ways I'm jealous (Fieldnotes, 11.19.12).

In this conversation, the participants often describe and discuss how their own schooling experiences shift what they expect to see within the field sites. Often these conversations centered around issues of access and urban education, a topic I will describe in more detail in Chapter Five. Regardless of the particular topic, given that personal history was a strong factor in how these participants engaged in their field settings, these conversations suggest the need to further explore the variety of ways that fieldwork is integrated into teacher education, as well as a better sense of how individuals experience and navigate these various forms. While this range of experiences may or may not be indicative of common experiences, what it does demonstrate clearly is that while the literature may recognize the wide variety of programs, the individuals going through these programs are often unaware of these differences between programs. It was only as they came together in a new space of learning that the participants had the chance to simultaneously reflect on their prior experiences while building up expectations for their current teacher education program. While some current literature does explore the various ways that teacher education program are constructed (Darling-Hammond, 2012; Zeichner, 2010), more specific focus on fieldwork and the role of expectation and experience are needed. Not only could these conversations help to alleviate some of the anxieties around expectations that students bring with them to the field experiences, but it also could help shift and widen what counts as “official” community-based experience in teacher education.

This focus on autobiography and narrative as participants imagined and enacted their field experiences was one that continued across the span of the inquiry group meetings. As I will discuss in greater detail in Chapter Five, issues of identity related to class, race, and gender of the participants most often became an issue of discussion during conversations around urban education and fieldwork experiences. Yet these personal narratives also framed the learners' expectations for fieldwork and the ways that they engaged in the school-based contexts. One example came from Mark, an African-American man who was working with a white male teacher who described himself as a strong advocate of critical literacy work in the classroom (Fieldnotes, 10.22.12). As Mark described his work in this context, he expressed frustration that at time he felt limited in the ways he could participate due to his race:

You know, it's hard because all the kids are Black like me. But I am not there to be a social justice advocate. I'm there for fieldwork. I don't want to mess up the hours. Nothing has been so bad that I have to say, "Oh man, I can't work with this guy." I've learned a lot from him. He's interested in the discourses I'm interested in. We've swapped articles. I don't think his intent is to be degrading. He says things and I'm like, mental note, put it in my pocket. Talk about it with friends. But never been to the point where I think "I need to report this." In 723 we talk about power dynamics. Different intersectionalities. It's interesting to see the power dynamics play out. Some of the things he says in class, I don't think it would be received the same if I said it. I feel like he has more freedom to say whatever he wants because of that racial component. Whatever comes to mind. Just weird. Certain things like that – I could never, ever, ever get away with it. He gets away with it. So I just stay quiet sometimes (Fieldnotes, 10.22.12).

After sharing this story, Savannah asked Mark if he thought the cooperating teacher was an "effective teacher" (Fieldnotes, 10.22.12). Mark replied that he tried, but that he would always be a "cultural outsider" – a term that became somewhat central for the group that I



explore in more detail in Chapter Five. Emily, a white woman, then responded, drawing on her own racial identity:

For me, It was comfortable for me to teach in a school in a low-income neighborhood. People tell you how great you are – so wonderful of you. Always wanted to do better at my job, but certain assumptions that I had that I wasn't even aware of until I came here. You know, I didn't really think that much about what it meant for me to be teaching there, a white woman in that community. We all come here with our personal experience. That was mine. I'm finding that I'm very much appreciating that – changing what I'm looking for in a classroom (Fieldnotes, 10.22.12).

Despite the students' focus on fieldwork as a space of practical skills and the pragmatics of teaching, these moments showed that fieldwork was also requiring the students to engage in a good deal of identity work – who they were in the classroom, and what they hoped to learn during the masters program. In their review of work on multicultural education and teacher preparation, Sleeter and Owuor (2011) describe the importance of taking seriously this identity work as part of teacher education. In the inquiry group settings, participants often used the stories shared by others as a space to open up these discussions and more directly address the role of race, gender, and identity more broadly in how they positioned themselves and were positioned during their classroom visits. These moments of working together highlighted the ways that individual stories and experiences were taken up collaboratively and problematized by other students – a topic I will address in detail in Chapter Six.

### *Envisioning the University Course and Its Purposes*

Personal history and identity also informed what the students were looking for in their fieldwork experiences during their masters program, particularly in regards to the course component at the university. Within this program, depending on previous

experiences, students either took one or two Fieldwork courses. These classes involved 120 hours of classroom work along with a weekly seminar in which all of the students came together at the university to discuss issues related to the practice of teaching. The Spring section of this course was required for all students in the program who were planning to get state certification as a reading specialist; the fall semester was for students seeking certification who had less than one year of lead teaching experience outside of a teacher education program. Of the twelve participants who remained in the study for its duration, nine participated in both sections of the Fieldwork course. Two participants – Emily and Savannah – were exempt from the fall semester due to their previous teaching experience. One participant, Max, took part in the fall semester of fieldwork, but then decided not to pursue his certification as a reading specialist (although he did complete the masters program) and opted out of the spring semester.

As with the school-based elements, personal histories, experiences, and expectations deeply colored what the participants hoped for and expected from the fieldwork course. Of the twelve participants, seven made comments that they wanted a space where they could debrief and discuss what happened during their school-based time while three mentioned wanting a class that focused on classroom management strategies and lesson planning (Fieldnotes, 10.11.12). Often these expectations and goals were heavily influenced by the member's earlier work in schools and teacher education programs. Savannah described her previous fieldwork experience as a "space where we could come together and complain, but also learn. It was more of a coffee hour than a class" (Fieldnotes, 10.11.12). In a one-on-one interview Maddie echoed this sentiment,

wishing at times that “[This program] was more like my undergrad, where we could – you know, just talk” (Interview, 5.20.13). Yet others felt that fieldwork classes should be more about specific content – a sentiment shared especially by students who had less formal teacher education experience. Amy, by far one of the quietest members of the group, shared that despite her background in an undergraduate education program she still felt nervous during her classroom visits. She mentioned her desire that the fieldwork course could be the place where “we come, you know, to confess and get help” (Fieldnotes 11.5.12). At times, students expressed frustration with a sense that the university course was trying to meet all of these goals at once:

Feels like everything is thrown into one. The classes speak as if you already know what’s going on. ... I don’t know what the expectation from fieldwork class is – with all other classes I can pinpoint what I’m getting out of it. I can’t pinpoint in that class. Adolescent Literacy – that’s about adolescents. Forming the Elementary Classroom – that’s work with younger kids. Multicultural Education – we’re going to deal with multiculturalism. But fieldwork class – it’s just fieldwork. What does that mean? I need help pinpointing something about fieldwork. Even title of the course – what about fieldwork are we pinpointing? Is it just anything fieldwork? (Mark, Fieldnotes, 10.22.12).

Even the way the [fieldwork course] syllabus is written, it just feels less academic, or less serious than other classes. And I think that sucks. The way everyone approaches it – it just feels like it’s not taken seriously (Lila, Fieldnotes, 1.14.13).

I guess I feel like – I feel like in [the fieldwork course] we haven’t really discussed our fieldwork at all. Often the whole conversation is a discussion of the articles. Or a YouTube video of a teacher giving a lesson. It didn’t feel like it applied. I just wanted to hear what people were up to in schools. I mean, where do we talk about that? Not just what we should be doing, but what we are doing (Genevieve, Fieldnotes, 10.11.12).

It is clear from these comments that there were not only strong feelings about what should be a part of the university course, but also that these opinions varied greatly.

Students also addressed the fact that there were field-based components in many of their

other required courses, leading them to think about how each of these experiences was structured and how it connected to the work in the university classroom (Fieldnotes, 10.8.12, 10.22.12, 11.5.12, 1.14.13). While no program is going to meet the needs and expectations of every student, the concerns brought up within the inquiry group meetings reflect some of the issues that arise when a concept like “fieldwork” – an element so central to teacher education – is taken as a given. This issue is compounded when you consider the anxieties that were discussed earlier in this chapter around a sense that fieldwork was the place to “get it” and become a teacher. Rather than being a clear-cut space of learning, fieldwork contexts are narrated as contested, complicated, and over anxiety-laden sites. These issues are only further complicated when the multiple voices, perspectives, and goals of the participants are taken into account.

Despite different perspectives, most students seemed to see the university-based component of fieldwork as the space where ideas and stories should be brought back from the schools to be shared and examined together. This expectation of the university context shifted some of the assumptions of the “application of theory model” described above. While that framework implies a unilateral movement of knowledge from the university into the schools, the seminar course connected to fieldwork offered the opportunity to disrupt that flow, bringing knowledge and experiences from the community contexts back to the academy. However, as the next section will highlight, issues of power, authority, and expectation often complicated this dialogic approach to knowledge construction and instead caused participants to feel fragmentation between the university and school based contexts of their fieldwork experiences.

## **Bridges and Roadblocks: Navigating School and University Contexts and Cultures**

### *Disconnects and Missed Connections*

In our second interview, toward the beginning of the spring semester, I asked Lawrie – an interviewee who was not taking part in the inquiry group meetings – what she hoped to get out of her fieldwork experience in the second semester. She paused, thought for a moment, and said, “I hope it feels more connected. Last semester, I don’t know. I feel like I kept expecting bridges and getting roadblocks” (Interview, 2.11.13). As we continued our conversation she shared that during the fall semester she felt that the work she was asked to do in her school setting and the expectations of the university not only did not line up, but at times directly contradicted one another. She offered an example of a time when an assignment she had for the fieldwork course was to work with a small group, but her cooperating teacher kept telling her that what was needed was one-on-one work with a struggling reader. When I asked her how she navigated that tension, Lawrie shrugged and said, “Frankly, I tried to ignore it [laughs]. I mean, I guess I tried to do both and ended up doing neither well. But ultimately – ultimately I probably was thinking about my grade” (Interview, 2.11.13).

These disconnects and tensions between school and university contexts within fieldwork have been noted and described in the literature. Many researchers have long noted the various issues that exist within practice-based settings related to how, when, and for what purposes these experiences are linked to university-based teacher education (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Valenica et. al., 2009; Zeichner, 2010). As I discussed earlier,

the importance of a conceptual framework that takes into account these intersections and spaces of practice is that it recognizes the inherently complicated roles and relationships that the students must take on as they traverse these boundaries. There was no question in our conversations that tensions around navigating these contexts and efforts to construct a sense of fieldwork as a unified space of learning were a central theme across almost everyone's experience.

While the research literature has discussed the issues with the connection of fieldwork to university-based contexts, this study highlighted some specific issues that seem simple on the surface, but actually represent some of the larger issues of power and negotiation that occur. One of the most immediate issues the students expressed struggling around was the simple issue of the different time frames of the schools and the university contexts. Although every effort was made to get the students into their field sites as quickly as possible, the university semester started several weeks after the local school district, meaning at best students were entering their field sites about a month into the K-12 school year. Many students expressed frustration at coming into the classroom at such an awkward time. Abby was particularly frustrated with this timeframe, as she has participated in an internship-model field experience during undergrad, where she spent the entire school year from late August into June at one site (Fieldnotes, 11.19.12). Others had more specific concerns about the disconnect that related to the ways that assignments were structured. For example, one of the core classes that all the participants but Kai<sup>12</sup> took in the fall was a class on Adolescent Literacy. While not specifically a

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<sup>12</sup> She had taken the class previously because of her status as a part-time student.

fieldwork course, this class did require all the students to work in a classroom for ten hours, as well as complete some specific assignments in these field settings. One of the earliest assignments was to hold an informal interview with an adolescent about his/her literacy practices. While students expressed their appreciation for this assignment<sup>13</sup> in relation to their own learning and development, they experience also made several of them uneasy:

**Emily:** I actually found it kind of uncomfortable where it's interviewing or reviewing student work. I had been there maybe three hours when I did the interview. For the kid, it felt like – oh by the way, why don't you sit in the hall today with a person you've barely met and talk to her about reading. The assignments, what I think was the purpose, don't match well with these experiences (Fieldnotes, 11.5.12).

**Savannah:** It felt very uncomfortable. While I get the purpose behind [the assignments], I didn't make a lot of meaning out of them because of the situation. It was very uncomfortable. Just repeating what Emily said, but everything that's expected of us with how many hours of experience in these classrooms for this course? I felt uncomfortable, the student felt uncomfortable. I was asking questions about home life, favorite experience of literacy. It turns out it was a loaded question for that student and I didn't know him well enough to expect that, or frankly to deal with it very well (Fieldnotes, 11.5.12).

This informal interview in many ways connected to the kinds of learning and relationships that teachers are often asked to develop with their students as a way of engaging with them and their learning individually. Yet in this moment, because of the unique relationship that a fieldwork student has with a classroom, students felt

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<sup>13</sup> It is interesting to note that the participants had widely varied reactions to being asked to observe in a classroom, rather than take on a more traditional student teacher role. Some found the opportunity to engage for that perspective quite valuable, while others felt it was not as conducive to their learning as more active engagement might have been. Interestingly, it was often the more experienced teachers who most appreciated the opportunity to function as a participant-observer in these spaces.

uncomfortable and were not sure what to do or where to talk about these reactions.

These feelings were not only in relation to this one assignment and class. In their spring fieldwork course, students were asked to engage in a “descriptive review” (Himley & Carini, 2003) of a learner from their field context. Again, while overall the participants agreed in the power and possibility of this approach, they also felt some uncertainty about their role in the classroom and their relationship with the learner in question:

**Amy:** I felt uncomfortable [telling the student why I was observing him]. Like he would think I was trying to study him or something. I don’t want that. I’ve been thinking about making up another reason, but that seems wrong too. But so he won’t ask, “why is she looking at me all the time”. I wonder how this is affecting the student this year, or socially.

**Kai:** I agree. I wanted to wait longer [to pull a student out for support], but we needed it for this class period. I didn’t know what to do (Fieldnotes, 2.11.13).

In these examples, it is clear that questions of power, relationship, knowledge, and authority are all embedded in the fieldwork context, even around what seems on the surface like a relatively simple assignment to interview a student. Furthermore, it is evident that these participants were taking seriously and engaging in the very issues that the program asks them to address, such as questions of authority, relationships between teachers and students, and the deeply intimate and social aspects of literacy practices. Yet in their efforts to engage in these questions, they also felt caught between the expectations of the university courses and the work they were doing with students and teachers in schools.

*Student Teacher? Intern? The Importance of Titles, Expectations, and Positionality*

Another example of these issues came out when students talked about how they were referred to at their fieldwork sites. Students – particularly those with a background



in education programs – felt confused or at times slighted by the labels used to define their place in the classroom. For example, Mattie vented that “last year I was a literacy intern, and now I’m back to being called a student teacher”. Abby immediately agreed, saying, “I hate that. I mean, it drives me nuts. I already did that. I am a teacher.

(Fieldnotes, 1.14.13)” When I asked why the titles mattered so much, Veronica added her opinion: “I don’t care about the title. For me it’s not a pride thing. But I do care about expectations. I don’t want them to think that I’m supposed to come in and take over the class for a week. Because that’s not what I am supposed to do” (Fieldnotes, 1.14.13). In this exchange, it becomes clear that a number of issues related to positionality are being connected through the question of what the participants are called in their field sites.

Often, these miscommunications signified deeper issues related to how the cooperating teacher and the participant understood the relationship and the purpose of the fieldwork experience. For example, the participants in this study routinely preferred field experiences in the classrooms of teachers who had graduated the same program, noting that in these classrooms the expectations and goals were clearer than in other settings (Fieldnotes, 10.22.12, 1.13.14). He (2009) found that when cooperating teachers were not adequately prepared to act as mentors, pre-service teachers or interns found it difficult to make the transition into the profession of teaching. In this context, many of the participants had experiences in classrooms – both during previous teacher education experiences and as lead teachers. For these participants, there was still a deep concern about having their own needs met, as students, as well as having their previous professional experiences recognized:

**Emily:** Going back to this idea of our role in the classroom. [My cooperating teacher] left the room the other day, and said ‘Guys, be nice to Ms. Green. You know she’s not really a teacher.’ It was hard to hear – not what I would ever say when I had student teachers or fieldwork students in my classroom” (Fieldnotes, 10.22.12).

**Abby:** in the end I liked my teacher. In the beginning she was like, “I have to train you.” I was put off. But by the end she left for the afternoon for a doctor’s appointment. I felt like she recognized my experience but also helped me learn new things, which is just what I wanted (Fieldnotes, 1.14.13).

Furthermore, the boundaries and conceptualizations of these relationships are often sites where issues of power and authority are contested (Apple, 2011; Bullough, 2011); in these moments it is critical to reflect that “whether we are speaking about a reflective stance for experienced teachers or those in training, it is important that the process be clearly seen as based on moves that actively recognize and endorse the decidedly historical, political, theoretical, and moral nature of teaching” (Smyth, 2012, p. 9). These issues of power and authority certainly impact how teacher learners are positioned within classrooms, and the roles and relationships that they develop with both their cooperating teachers and their university-based mentors.

### *Relationships of Theory and Practice in Fieldwork*

Over the course of the year the participants directly discussed the role of fieldwork in relation to theory and practice. While at first it seemed as though they were building on the more traditional perspective of putting theory into practice, a closer look at their narratives and discussions helps to explicate the ways that these conversations often connected the various spaces of learning in teacher education, leading the students to deeply reflect on their own positionality and perspectives as they learned from their own practice. Emily in particular struggled with her positionality in the classroom as a

university student. Early on in the fall, she expressed some “growing pains” about returning to school as a fieldwork student after being a teacher for five years. She described her struggles to move from the very focused and specific work of teaching to the larger questions of her work and identity as a teacher. She shared:

When I came, I wanted practical. Feel like I’m only getting theoretical. ... [As a teacher] I was so occupied in the day to day that I forgot the big picture. But it puts so much of the work on fieldwork, because it seems like that is where you should be getting the practical, with the university providing the theory” (Fieldnotes, 10.11.12).

Emily was not alone in her focus on the “practical” within field contexts; in fact, the concepts of “theory” and “practical/skill” became two codes that were routinely taken up across conversations and stories in the inquiry group setting:

**Lila:** I want the [university fieldwork course] to provide something that is going to contribute to what I’m doing in my practical fieldwork. (Fieldnotes, 10.11.12)

**Abby:** When I came into this program I thought I was going to be learning all these practical skills in practical places. But I’m not. (Fieldnotes, 10.22.12)

**Kai:** I feel like everything is so open [in Fieldwork Course] which I love, but I don’t know specific strategies. I don’t know anything about those kinds of things. (Fieldnotes, 2.11.13)

These moments, and the students’ own emic concepts of “theory” and “practice” reflect what Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) have referred to as “theories of practice”. Often ways of knowing are seen as hierarchies in which knowledge distilled in the academy is distributed to teacher learners, who are then expected to apply these theories to their daily practices and routines in the classroom. And it was clear from our conversations and the ways that the students narrated these events, the participants brought with them some norms around what was expected from the various contexts, what they could hope to get

out of these experiences, and the approaches they might take for bringing together these various sites of learning. On the surface, at first it seemed that most of the participants were drawing on a “knowledge for practice” model in which they took their new knowledge with them to field sites, rather than engaging a “knowledge of practice” that developed through the intersections of their university and school based work (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999), despite the fact that this view on knowledge was positioned as artificial and limited by the program. Again, this framework that the participants brought with them signifies the deep importance that one’s history of schooling – both in K-12 and in earlier teacher preparation programs – can have on what individuals come expecting to find. The participants’ assumptions frequently placed the knowledge of the academy and the knowledge of the community-based context within a unilateral flow from the ivory tower to the classroom, leading the participants to presume that teachers and other school-based practitioners must wait for professors and researchers to determine what counts as “best practices” with the school walls. Thus, not only are there different norms and expectations within each context, they are also deeply steeped in historicized issues of power, authority, and hierarchy between schools and universities (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, 2009; Zeichner, 2010).

Within the context of this inquiry group there were subtle ways that these power dynamics were addressed and questioned by the participants. First, while this divide seemed to be deemed acceptable to the participants in most of their classes, it is clear from the examples shared above that there were slightly different expectations for the fieldwork course. As I discussed earlier, students came to this program with the hope that

fieldwork would function as the space to bring these ways of knowing together as they continued to develop as teachers and students. The “knowledge for practice” model did seem to be a guiding force for the students – even in the ways that they conceptualized fieldwork as “something different” – but it is important to note that it was within these spaces that they first began to question this divide and wonder how the university could support the work of making sense of what they saw in the classroom. Toward the end of our work together, Mark shared that it was through some of his frustrations with the fieldwork course that he came think:

[The course] shouldn’t just be about this lesson plan or that content. There is a need for critical reflection on what we’re seeing. There’s a need for teachers to investigate what they do know, more of an emphasis on understanding the demographics of the students (Fieldnotes, 3.25.13).

Savannah shared that when she was a teacher she felt confined by the expectations of her principal; she came to the program hoping to use fieldwork as a space to:

Really think about teaching. But then – the fact that I’m the student now, I put limits on myself. I focus on the grade, on the assignments that I’m expected to do. But I think – I think some of that is in my head. I think I could prepare myself to think more about what I’m seeing, what it’s teaching me (Fieldnotes, 11.5.12).

In these moments, these participants pushed for fieldwork and its connected course to be seen as a space to bring knowledge gained from the field experiences back to the university, rather than simply accepting the notions of “best practices” as something to be applied in these contexts.

In a review of how programs structure field experience, Zeichner (2010) found:

Although most university-based teacher education programs now include multiple field experiences over the length of the program and often situate field experiences in some type of school-university partnership (e.g., professional

development schools, partner schools), the disconnect between what students are taught in campus courses and their opportunities for learning to enact these practices in their school placements is often very great even within professional development and partner schools (p. 91).

While this trend did seem to be true for the participants in this study, I would argue that there was also a further complication in the ways that the course did and did not invite students to bring their experiences and stories from fieldwork back into the university classroom. Even in the citation above, there is a presumption that the norms and expectations for enactment are first located in the university and then spread outward to the community schools. In these sessions, the participants were deeply aware of the relationships between the university and the school; while navigating these spaces did at times leave them feeling frustrated or confused, they also seemed to share a sense that both contexts were important for their learning about the nature of teaching, and the kinds of teachers that they wanted to be.

Furthermore, despite their own adamant and frequent discussions of the divide between theory and practice, my analysis of the data actually paints a slightly different story. Week after week, the stories that participants shared from their field settings sparked hour-long conversations, more often focused on issues of identity, power, and authority than on the pragmatics of day-to-day classroom life. For example, during her turn to share an experience from fieldwork Amy talked about a student in her kindergarten placement that was struggling. She discussed the fact that he had previously been diagnosed as being on the autism spectrum, but that he could not get supports in the classroom until an IEP was put into place. Amy asked the group for two things: for clarification on the IEP process and for suggestions on how to best support this child in

the meantime. She shared, “I feel he could be learning so much more. When I see one child not being able to do what the other kids are doing, it makes me feel like he’s at a disadvantage. So I’m wondering, looking for ideas” (Fieldnotes, 11.19.12).

At first, the group took up this request for specific suggestions, and Amy was given ideas to try to put in place with this learner:

**Maddie:** In my student teaching classroom, a kid was acting up a lot, so the teacher made a plan with the mom. It was a train. After every part of the day she would color a part of the train green, yellow, red. By end of the day if she had enough greens she could use a marker instead of a pencil. It seemed to help (Fieldnotes, 11.19.12).

**Lila:** Try to find something he can do that you know he excels at. I find giving activities that a kid can succeed at and you know he can succeed at can really help them take risks. It’s an internal reward. Especially for kids on spectrum – that can be very rewarding in my experience (Fieldnotes, 11.19.12).

But then the conversation changed. After sharing some tools she had tried when she was student teaching, Abby brought up the question of how to make accommodations for one child and explain those reasons to the whole class:

**Abby:** I’m thinking about Maddie’s story about the marker. In my placement last year, I was with 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> graders. 13 kids had IEPs and tried a lot of similar behavioral charts. One kid got smiley face stamps, and another got a chance to read quietly by himself. And they did work. But we had discussions all the time about how things are for you, how we all need different things, and you need to worry about yourself. How this might be special for you, and sometimes it worked and sometimes it seemed to make them feel bad. They know, especially having been with these students for 3 or 4 years by third grade. They know who gets what accommodations. We had to have so many conversations about it. I still feel like I had to say it all the time, talk about how things are different for different kids. But sometimes I worry that these accommodations make it harder for them, you know, on the assessments that really count (Fieldnotes, 11.19.12).

This led into a lengthy conversation around the nature of learning disabilities, the challenges and possibilities of accommodations, and the expectations for what counts as

“success” in the elementary classroom, including the current emphasis on literacy and math evaluations:

**Max:** We should notice we just called specials “non-academic”. ... There’s a token appreciation for specials. They are “cool”. Run around, play games, but people don’t think they are doing anything valuable for kids’ success.

**Lila:** I don’t understand why not. People go to school to learn those classes.

**Abby:** I took them. I found them some of my hardest classes in undergrad.

**Max:** We don’t value them.

**Veronica:** What do you mean by we?

**Max:** As society, as what matters in school.

**Savannah:** It makes me think about [the multiculturalism course], how we talk about learning from cultures. It seems to me that these spaces – art, music, etc. – these spaces are places where kids are invited to bring their culture. And now [the city district] is going to cut them all<sup>14</sup> (Fieldnotes, 11.19.12).

In this exchange, the participants moved from very specific conversations around techniques that might support this individual student to a larger discussion of learning differences and elementary students to engaging questions of culture and local politics. Furthermore, the participants linked their experiences and the theories that they were learning in other classes to this discussion. While I highlight one conversation here, this move from the particular and local to the broader social implications was common; frequently after an hour or so I had to ask students to wind down a conversation in order to make time for the second presenter to share her or his story with the group.

Although much of the talk around fieldwork implied a distinction between theory and practice, in these moments the participants were deeply involved in developing “knowledge of practice” that drew not only from their field experiences, but also from their understanding of their course material, their knowledge of the world, and their

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<sup>14</sup> At the time of our meetings the urban school district that surrounded the university was going through major budget cuts and school closure issues, similar to the issues facing many larger cities at this time.



awareness of the local school politics. These conversations speak to the importance of explicitly constructing fieldwork contexts where conversations of practice and the connections to theory (and knowledge production) are made central. This shift can help foster a greater sense of professionalization and prepare the students for a different idea of what counts as knowledge in the classroom. Furthermore, this shift can also help to engage students in more open dialogue around the complicated ways that students and teachers are positioned in schools, especially around topics such as learning disabilities or language use. By fostering a “knowledge of practice” stance in fieldwork, teacher education can radically shift the purpose and possibilities of the notion of “practical” and encourage teacher learners to see themselves as capable of inquiring into and drawing theory from their school-based work.

As the conversation shared above shows, it is the nature of this space of learning to engage students in questions of curriculum, pedagogy, practice, and educational theory. In the fieldwork context, teacher learners have the opportunity to engage in this type of local knowledge production, and to connect it directly to the issues and scholarship of the academy.

In their book *Inquiry as Stance: Practitioner Research for the Next Generation* Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) argue that inquiry as stance is

Both a way of knowing and being in the world of educational research and a theory of action for transforming teaching, learning, leading, and schooling. ... Both of these senses of inquiry as stance are grounded in our belief in the central position of practitioners as knowers and in the transformative power of local knowledge in justice-related efforts to improve students' learning and enhance their life chances. The conception of knowledge, which intentionally turns on its head the usual knowledge hierarchy that privileges academic over local

knowledge, has the potential to redefine power relationships between outside researchers and practitioners” (pp. 24-25).

These conversations do not mean that power relationships within the fieldwork context were made horizontal within this program; as the comments above and the negotiation over roles shows, the participants often addressed questions of authority and autonomy. But the work of this group also demonstrates the incredible power that fieldwork can have in teacher education. The question, however, is not just how we structure fieldwork alongside coursework within teacher education programs, but also how we engage and position students in these experiences: encouraging the participants to take up their own inquiries, bring their own stories and reflections back to the university, enabled them to engage in these local sites as part of their larger investigation of schools, society, and teacher education. The following two chapters will detail some of the ways that the participants engage in this kind of knowledge-making, by taking on an inquiry stance, in relation to questions of literacy education and urban schooling. These conversations demonstrate that although they did bring their “myths of teaching” with them (Britzman, 2005), they also brought their natural inclination to develop “knowledge of practice” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999) as they worked across both school and university contexts. The power of fieldwork lies in these very crossings, and the intersections of knowledge that they can produce. The “knowledge question” that *Inquiry as Stance* (2009) addresses can and should start within schools of education, within the very foundation of what it means to teach and to learn. That said, these sites are also hard to pin down entirely. As with any human-centered experience, school contexts – even

different classrooms in the same school – can offer widely varying experiences. The next section of this chapter addresses the nature of this variance, and the tensions it sometimes added to the fieldwork experiences of the participants.

### **Isolation and the Idiosyncratic Nature of Fieldwork: “A Visitor in a Stranger’s Home”**

#### *Fieldwork as a Lonely Venture*

From the outside it might seem that fieldwork – unlike coursework that requires hours of studying and reading alone – would be a place of collaboration and community, especially as it is situated within the busy and people-centered environment of schools. Perhaps due to my own construction of an inquiry community around these issues, I assumed that fieldwork would be a space of engagement and conversation. Yet from early on in our work together, it became clear that this was not the impression that the participants in this study had of this space of learning. In fact, in our very first meeting, the teacher learners identified an important issue to them: the sense of isolation that permeated many of their field experiences:

**Emily:** [My undergrad fieldwork] and first year of teaching were much the same. You’re by yourself. Just supposed to know what to do. It’s just overwhelming and exhausting. It’s just so easy in those moments to get away from the aspirations. I got caught up in the day-to-day stuff. I thought it would be better once I was the teacher, but both times I felt isolated, alone, and overwhelmed. So many friends who went through it with me – we all had these feelings. ... I feel like, you’re just tossed in the way we do teacher education.

**Lila:** I agree. Alone is a word that comes up a lot in fieldwork, especially here. I feel like I go into the classroom where I am supposed to help teaching reading, writing, literacy – but that’s my weak point. The teacher assumes I have knowledge because I’m a masters student. But I don’t feel I have it (Fieldnotes 9.24.12)

In these early moments together, the participants were already describing a sense of vulnerability in their field experiences – one that I was not expected when I envisioned this group. As Lisa describes above, often these students did not know who to turn to when they were uneasy or uncertain. Or, as Emily describes, felt that the expectation would be that they could address these issues alone. In many ways, this sense of isolation highlights some of the anxieties described in the above sections: the sense that fieldwork is the proving ground that one has “made it” as a teacher, or the concern that somehow fieldwork experiences fall both outside of the school and university culture, leaving teacher learners to find their own paths through the experience. This loneliness seemed to relate both to the fact that they were physically alone in these spaces – navigating these relationships very much by themselves – but also that they felt responsible to be experts by the time they entered schools. Again, this anxiety speaks to the issues with framing fieldwork, especially student teaching or practicum work, as the “proving ground” of capability and knowledge.

In *Practice Makes Practice* (2005), Deborah Britzman refers to this side of teaching as the “myth of the lone individual”:

An identity that bestows valor on the lonely process of becoming a teacher, but at the same time suppresses the social meanings and forces that beckon the subject as a lone individual. While individual effort is, of course, a necessary condition in learning to teach, so too are social negotiations, interactions, and social dependence. Yet the normative discourse of teacher education masks such complexity both by positioning the process of learning to teach as “sink or swim” and stigmatizing negotiation. ...For the rugged individual, any context – be it history, race, class, gender, or physicality – is positioned as if it were a mere handicap to be individually overcome (p. 235).

In these earliest moments together as an inquiry community, it was clear that these pressures were clearly felt by the participants as they engaged in their field experiences. Britzman's work highlights the ways that this emphasis on individuality reinforces the ways that education and teaching are currently structured: because teachers are explicitly and implicitly told that they are on their own, they fall back on the expectations that are most clearly laid out, or on their own memories and histories as students themselves. In the exchange above, however, it is clear that both Lila and Emily come to this masters program with a deep appreciation for these issues. They speak wistfully about the possibility of a better way – they are able to articulate in powerful ways how this sense of isolation follows them into their field sites and deeply impacts how they imagine their own work as teachers.

*Fieldwork in the "Second Classroom"*

This concept of loneliness did not dissipate after the first meeting, but became a regular aspect of our conversations around fieldwork. Not only did this loneliness have to do with often being the only university student in a particular school, it also had to do with the professional lessons that the students were learning and observing during their fieldwork. Savannah described that after finishing student teaching, as she started as a teacher of her own classroom, she had learned to "stay in her bubble and do what she was doing" (Fieldnotes, 11.5.12). Other students agreed, and Veronica went so far as to share that her cooperating teacher during her undergraduate program recommended that she "learn how to stay out of the halls. She told me not to go to the teacher lounge, or they would find me. I didn't even know who 'they' were, but I definitely stayed in my

classroom after that” (Fieldnotes, 11.5.12). Here, the participants described fieldwork as lonely not only in terms of their day-to-day experiences of going to schools by themselves, seeking places to describes these experiences with peers and university educators, but also the deep impact that this impressions or framing had on their future careers. Furthermore, participants often references experiences and narratives that lay outside of the part of the school day directly involved with instruction, focused instead on how fieldwork gave students a glimpse into the working world of teaching:

**Mark:** The teacher I was with last semester for fieldwork, he talked about a meeting with a superintendent. He didn’t listen to them, didn’t answer any questions. Now, [the school I was in is one of the schools] scheduled to be closed.

**Max:** See, this is why, I think in teacher education we should be educating in educational politics. Issues so classroom based, but we don’t go up the pipeline on how that works. Fieldwork lets you see some of that stuff too.

**Abby:** Right. It shows you the professional inner workings on being a teacher. When I was doing my internship, teachers were working without a contract. I couldn’t go to meetings, but I would hear teachers talking about issues. I had never heard about them before, never considered them. I knew nothing about unions, about being a part of teacher union. We take education policy classes, but it’s all history. Not current politics behind it all.

**Max:** That’s why I like hanging out with teachers at fieldwork, between classes – not just about how to teach, but also how to manage yourself in school. Not always in the best interest of you as a teacher, or you as a school. Even not always in best interests of your students, but sometimes in the best interests of keeping your job (Fieldnotes, 1.28.13).

These moments show that beyond the expected lessons around curriculum, classroom management, and pedagogical decision-making, fieldwork is also the space of learning quite a bit about the ethos of teaching, schooling, and learning. Frequently the students talked about the power of seeing not just classroom practice, but also school practices and culture. In describing the spaces for students and teachers to engage in the deeply personal, political, and historical work of literacy learning and practice, scholars have

conceptualized the classroom as functioning along multiple levels (Campano, 2007, Gutiérrez, 2008); Campano (2007) refers to this space as the “second classroom”, a space “that occurs during the margins and in between periods of school day. ... The second classroom runs parallel to, and is sometimes in the shadow of, the official, first classroom. It is an alternative pedagogical space” (pp. 39-40). During their fieldwork hours, teacher learners do not simply experience the curriculum and pedagogical practices that make up the instructional hours frequently thought of as “teacher’s work”, but also visit and participate in these marginalized spaces as well. These less-formalized moments also have lasting impacts on their identities and perspectives as teachers and – as the above discussion shows – often introduce topics and issues that are rarely if ever addressed in the “first classroom” focus of teacher education programs.

Beyond content area knowledge, pedagogical practices, and classroom management strategies, a critical but under-researched area of fieldwork occurs during these “off times”, when teachers talk in halls, in lounges. Frequently it is during these conversations that deep issues of power, professionalism, and teacher identity are addressed most explicitly during field experiences. Yet these spaces go largely unrecognized by the official focus on fieldwork in the university, often adding to the sense of loneliness or isolation that the participants described above. As Veronica shared above, often these moments are puzzling, overwhelming, or downright terrifying to young teachers or teacher learners. Yet they also represent the contested and political spaces of classrooms and schools. In our conversations, participants addressed the importance of these spaces in their own learning about the lives of teachers, as well as their desire to see these

moments further integrated into the larger conversations and perspectives of teacher education programs.

In addition to addressing the importance of these spaces as an element of fieldwork, the inquiry group also addressed how loneliness, isolation, and politics follow teachers into their classrooms after graduation. In particular, participants frequently worried about how and where they could gain support once they were in their own classrooms. There was one meeting where the group got into a lengthy conversation about their futures as educators, speaking openly about their experiences and concerns:

**Savannah:** You know, it's so sad when we get students who we think are behind. We think it's so sad and they are not getting support at home. We blame the kids; we blame the families. But since being in fieldwork this semester, I've changed my perspective a little bit. ... The teachers – they are just so down. I know teachers aren't solely to blame, but I've had a change of heart. What happened to them?

**Max:** I agree, but I also think, no man's an island. No teacher's an island. I mean, they operate in schools, in communities (Fieldnotes, 2.25.13).

**Emily:** A lot happens your first year [teaching] and you don't know what to do, or how to read it. But you're afraid if you ask people they will be catty, or make fun of you. But you need answers. And if you hear enough of that – that you're not doing it right but you don't know who to ask – it can weigh on you. It can burn you out (Fieldnotes, 2.25.12).

**Genevieve:** At my school, where I taught last year, there were fifteen classrooms. Before they started a mentoring program six teachers left. That was by midyear (Fieldnotes, 2.25.13).

In these moments, the participants share their deep appreciation, and apprehension, of the “lone individual” ethos that Britzman (2005) describes. They are highly aware of the politicized nature of teaching, the ramifications of asking for support, and the high rate of “burnout” for teachers, particularly those who work in under-resourced schools. In many ways, the participants viewed fieldwork as a space where one could learn about these



issues and gain support before being the teacher of record in a classroom. Yet just as frequently they described concerns bringing those issues back to the university – often referencing how the assignments for the fieldwork course focused more on specific lesson plans or assignments, rather than on these less structured spaces within school settings (Fieldnotes, 11.19.12, 2.11.13, 2.25.13).

### *The Idiosyncratic Nature of Fieldwork*

In addition to larger questions of isolation and loneliness, the participants also frequently addressed concerns about the idiosyncratic nature of field experiences. At one meeting when I asked how the fieldwork course was going, Kelly responded, “I mean, it’s ok. But you know the only thing that makes it a class is that we’re in that room together, and we all go into schools on a regular basis” (Fieldnotes, 10.22.12). These sense that each participant’s experience was unique and self-constructed became a central theme to many of our conversations:

**Mark:** The first few weeks [in my field site], the teacher was very lecture-based. I felt like I was sitting in another class. I wish it could have been a more hands-on experience. I know it varies by teacher (Fieldnotes, 10.22.12).

**Savannah:** [This semester I’m with a] reading specialist – I like that. Not just with a classroom teacher. Gives me a focus on what a reading specialist does. Already – I’ve only gone once, and I’m trying to soak up as much as I can. ... When I got to classroom today, the teacher asked me “do you know this assessment?” and listed a whole bunch of things. I didn’t know any of them. It was a little embarrassing. I felt unprepared by [this program] for that. Also on me, I guess. So far I’m pleasantly surprised with my experience. Really like the focus of what my experience is. But it depends on who your mentor is, a lot of factors go into experience.

**Abby:** What concerns me is that, walking in she asked you a whole bunch of things about assessment. That piece of being a reading specialist. That’s what frightens me. You’re lucky to have someone who is going to share that information. But how can we all get that information (Fieldnotes, 1.14.13).

**Genevieve:** It feels flawed – like, who gets what. It seems to depend on what placement you are in, the mentor you get (Fieldnotes, 1.14.13)

**Veronica:** I don't know what the deal is with student teaching, but I can't stand how it feels so random. It's so completely in control of who is observing you at that time, whose classroom you are in (Fieldnotes, 3.11.13).

As these comments demonstrate, students felt clearly the paradox of field experiences: They are a central aspect of teacher education programs, yet they also vary widely and appeared somewhat idiosyncratic in nature. This highlights the issue addressed in the research that field experiences can lead to the assumption that “good teaching practices are caught rather than taught” (Zeichner, 2010, p. 484).

For the participants in this study, the concerns around this uncharted aspect of field experiences focused on two issues: one, the content of classroom experiences, including curriculum, assessments, and pedagogical choices; and two, the nature of the context, including the personal relationships that developed, the classroom and school culture, and the level of mentoring that was received from the cooperating teacher and the university-based mentor. In particular, many students in this program worried about learning what was needed to become a reading specialist, as many of them were planning to get their state certification in addition to their masters. Their concerns centered both on issues of passing the required state licensure exams and being prepared once they entered schools as educators and professionals. The next chapter will go into more detail around how these students experienced and expressed their understanding of literacy and literacy education through these experiences, including some of their specific concerns around what they were and were not witnessing in the classrooms they visited.

Beyond these specific curricular concerns there was a deep sense of the variation within the construct of fieldwork, even within this one program. As the comments above illuminate, students were deeply aware that what was meant by “fieldwork” – a space of learning they identified as critically important to their developing ideas around teaching and learning – shifted greatly depending on the specifics of their space of practice. One of the fundamental questions that they often asked was the role of the university and of the school in designing and delimiting these spaces. Participants shared stories of cooperating teachers asking them to do assignments that were not part of the course (Fieldnotes, 10.22.12; 1.14.13), university mentors providing little feedback after observing lessons (Fieldnotes, 3.11.13); and general frustrations that there were few spaces to share notes and talk across contexts. In an interview, Ava – who did not take part in the inquiry community – shared that “often fieldwork feels like, feels like being a visitor in a stranger’s home. I’m learning the context, learning what’s expected, trying to take it all in and participate at the same time. And I just – I just wish I knew what other people were experiencing too. I feel I could learn a lot from that (Interview, 2.11.3).

In many ways this is to be expected, even celebrated, given the complicated and fundamentally human nature of schools and schooling. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2006) describe

The daily work of teachers as wrestling with the complexity of classroom life and with the constant dynamic challenge of building instruction on the cultural and linguistic resources children and adolescents bring to school (e.g., Ballenger, 1998[sic]; Campano, in press; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993; Hargreaves, 2003; Nieto, 1999). The messy realities of teaching do not lend themselves simply to the selection and implementation of curricula and methods produced by experts from

afar. Ambiguities, uncertainties, and unpredictability are the substance of teaching.

Since field experiences take place in schools and classrooms, they are inherently wrapped up in the local practices, histories, and organizational structures. As such they have the possibility to provide students in teacher education programs with the opportunities not only to observe, but also to participate in these sites of practice on a regular basis as they reflect on their own goals and identities as teachers. Rather than being seen as a negative, the construction of fieldwork as a space of learning must take into account and honor the local practices and contexts as historicized, important, and valid (Street, 1984). Although most of the participants expressed concern or anxiety over this variety, there were also times when these constructs were pushed back against by other participants:

**Max:** [Fieldwork] becomes a sandbox for me. I can try out so many different things. So many roles. When I'm there, the teacher – she's a house leader – feels free to move around a bit more. She might say, "Hey, I'm about to duck out for a second. Everyone is reading. When they're done, they can do this." Works well for me, but again, because I have relationship with school where I'm at. Last time got to do editing for writer's workshop. I think that I see benefits in having structure set for the fieldwork teachers, But I think standardizing that curriculum would limit the experiences of fieldwork for somebody like me.

**Abby:** I agree, but wouldn't it be helpful to have certain benchmarks. I mean, you're saying "I taught this lesson and this lesson." But other people don't have that chance, that experience. In fieldwork class – one lesson we had to do, but that was in. Wouldn't it be helpful to have –

**Genevieve:** A checklist or something?

**Abby:** Yeah. So you do get experiences. Because otherwise it's not guaranteed. Some responsibility to make it your own, but it would provide some guidelines. Or options at least you could give it to the teacher.

**Max:** I agree. Sort of like co-teaching experience. Would I – would I be doing that if I didn't know the teacher already. I don't know. But I do feel like there is something to be learned about coming into a space and not knowing exactly what you're supposed to be doing (Fieldnotes, 11.5.12).

Ultimately, it is not enough to end at a celebration of local practices as richly important

and worthy of recognition. As described above, fieldwork is a space that crosses contexts; students in teacher education programs are asked to carry these school-based practices and experiences with them as they (re)enter the university and more broadly as they (re)imagine their own teaching lives. Routinely these spaces are used not only as sites for observation or exploration, but also as a platform where teacher learners are evaluated as to their readiness and preparation for certification. As such, it is a critical question for the field of teacher education how to balance the inherently localized and idiosyncratic nature of field experiences with a more systemic approach to the goals of these spaces of learning, the contexts and content at both the university and the school, and the nature of the relationships across the specific sites.

It is not enough to recognize the importance of the messy and local nature of learning within field experiences. Instead, as the participants in this program addressed, there needs to be systematic and open dialogue about the nature of learning, the experiences gained, and the questions that emerge. Fieldwork as a space of learning can be strengthened when students in teacher education programs and the school and university-based practitioners are given space to engage in these sites from an inquiry stance (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 2009). When given the opportunity to engage in this type of narrative and to question and share one another's experiences, participants in this study learned not only from their own field contexts, but also from one another's. As the following chapters will show, this sharing of narratives enabled students to take a more critical look at their own understandings of literacy, urban education, and their own development as educators. As Mark shared in our final interview, "I knew – I mean, I

knew I was never going to learn it all in fieldwork. But talking about that – asking those questions and getting those head nods – that made me okay with that” (Interview, 5.14.13). Engaging in conversations about the nature of learning in fieldwork enabled students to move from a sense of isolation and fragmentation to a greater appreciation for the ways in which these experiences and narratives influenced their work and perspectives as educators.

### **Conclusions**

This chapter focused on the impressions and expectations around fieldwork that the individual participants brought with them to the inquiry group. As their narratives show, their framing of fieldwork drew heavily on their own personal experiences as students in both K-12 settings, and their previous work in teacher education programs. The dialogue around these narratives also demonstrated that some of the taken-for-granted aspects of fieldwork, such as the terminology surrounding what counts as fieldwork, as well as the labels used to describe the participants’ roles in the classroom context. Often questions around terminology or labels went far deeper than just semantic differences, highlighting spaces of tension or confusion that led students to feel a sense of disconnect between their classroom experiences and their university coursework, even around courses directly linked to fieldwork. In addition, the participants often described fieldwork as the space where they felt the need to prove themselves as capable teachers, moving from the role of student to that of expert. However, this assumption often led to a great deal of anxiety, particularly when the inquiry group members felt that they had not had a chance to try certain aspects of pedagogy or curriculum. These findings

demonstrate the need within the field of teacher education to develop more clarity around the purposes and expectations of these spaces, both within the research and within the practice of developing teacher education programs in connection to field experiences.

This chapter also described some of the ways that the participants positioned concepts of theory and practice, often falling back on a discourse that implied a theory to practice construction of knowledge. However, a closer analysis of their discussions and their frequent shifts from specific issues of practice to larger questions of teaching, schooling, and learning demonstrates that this perspective does not adequately describe how they were engaging their fieldwork, coursework, and personal histories in their understanding of what it means to teach. This apparent contradiction speaks both to the power of the common discourse around “knowledge-for-practice” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999) and to the ways that this framework does not take into account the complicated and nuanced ways that teachers and teacher learners construct meaning. This finding speaks to the importance of framing knowledge from practice in fieldwork in a way that emphasis its role in the generation of theories of teaching and of constructing spaces in teacher education for teacher learners to see themselves as the producers of knowledge and theory, rather than just the recipients.

Finally, this chapter described the idiosyncratic and at times lonely experience of fieldwork. Group members often shared stories about feeling isolated during their field experiences, with a sense that their experiences were unique and at times fragmented, especially in relation to the university courses. Often this sense of loneliness or isolation was compounded by the framing of fieldwork as a final space to prove one’s knowledge

and preparation before becoming a teacher. Participants also described the ways that describing their particular context and discussing it with others help alleviate some of these concerns, as well as their desire to find spaces to have ongoing conversations not just about instructional time, but also about conversations and experiences in the hallways and teacher lounges of the schools. These findings suggest that in many ways the idiosyncratic nature of fieldwork reflects the inherently messy, relational, and locally contextualized nature of teaching. This research points to the need for a construction of fieldwork that sees these factors not as issues to be overcome, but instead inherent facets of teaching that need to be discussed and reflected on during teacher education programs.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### **Images of Literacy and Literacy Education From the Field: “I Try to Imagine Myself There”**

One of the powerful aspects of fieldwork and community-based learning is that it takes place “in the moment”; during our meetings students routinely shared narratives of teachers and students as they faced critical questions of policy, pedagogy, and practice in connection to literacy and literacy education. The participants questioned what is possible in schools – how to advocate for students and, at times, whether or not they could see themselves in today’s literacy classrooms. While many times these images were cast in a depressing light – focused on the problems and limitations – the opportunity to talk across contexts also allowed for images of rich, vibrant, and student-centered classes to emerge. These conversations engaged individuals in the group in a deeper inquiry into what counts as literacy in school, as evidenced by the structure and implementation of the literacy curriculum in K-12 classroom settings.

Frequently these discussions emphasized the tensions between the perception of literacy as a set of “autonomous skills” versus a classroom where literacy was seen as a social practice deeply embedded within local contexts and ways of knowing (Street, 1984; Rogers & Street, 2011; Bloome et al, 2013). More specifically, the narratives shared and the conversations that followed demonstrated the multitude of ways, ranging from content to assessment to curricular planning, that field experiences influenced these participants’ understandings of what it means to be a literacy educator in schools today. Literacy instruction has long been seen as one of the central aspects of the school day,

and consequently often seen as a focus within teacher education, even in programs that are not directly literacy focused. While traditionally one of the cornerstones of elementary classrooms, recently scholarship has again turned toward highlighting the importance of continuing to focus on literacy education into the secondary years within content areas (Alvermann, 2010; Alvermann et al., 2011; Draper & Broomhead, 2010), and even in postsecondary settings (Paulson & Armstrong, 2010; Caverly et al., 2011). Although the field appears to be coming together around the idea of promoting a focus on literacy in the classroom across the learning lifespan, there remains a great deal of debate over what counts as literacy education – a debate which has significant implications for the ways that teacher education programs are framing the work of literacy educators and preparing teacher learners to enter the field. In a time of growing emphasis on standardization and normative assessments, the relationships between theory, policy, and practice – as well as those between localized and more global knowledge – are increasingly complicated and heavily influence the day-to-day lives of teachers and students in the classroom, leading to a question of what images of literacy education are seen during field experiences.

In the introduction to a recent special edition directly focused on issues of literacy policy and practice, Comber and Freebody (2013) write: “The effects of this policy redirection are playing out now; it may be that new policy emphases may have consequences for how educators think about what matters in literacy, how they can, and should, make judgments about what matters, and how they can, and should, act on those judgments” (p. 65). While their scholarship focuses on the particular context of

Australian schooling, they are quick to note, “educators in many countries have encountered increasingly intensive government moves to centralise and standardise school education”, particularly in regards to literacy instruction (p. 65). As noted in Chapter One, this movement towards standardization impacts not only K-12 teaching, but also is becoming increasingly at issue for teacher education programs. There is not doubt that the United States, in the era of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), is one of the countries currently facing an increasing amount of standardized, top-down, and distally focused policy around literacy education; furthermore, it is clear that this policy environment affects not only the content of instruction, but how teaching, learning, and literacy are conceptualized in and of themselves. Marilyn Cochran-Smith and Susan Lytle (2006) argue:

NCLB is astonishingly comprehensive. Its mandates and definitions, coupled with its explicit accountability procedures and penalties are overtaking practice and policy related to virtually every aspect of teaching – recruitment, preparation, certification, induction, licensure, assessment, professional development, school and curricular change, and all sorts of educational research related to teachers and teaching (p. 669).

This policy environment also has a strong impact on the work of teacher education, particularly given the requirement that teachers be “highly qualified” in order to work in schools (Selwyn, 2007; Altwerger et al., 2004; Cochran-Smith, 2005). Yet less has been written about how the impacts of these policies are influencing students’ fieldwork and classroom-based experiences. As the stories that the participants in this study share, these effects are worth closer consideration within the field of literacy education research.

This chapter explores how the participants reported on issues and experiences from their fieldwork in connection to literacy education, and how these experiences and discussions impacted their sense of what it means to be a literacy educator in these times. Three specific themes emerged from the participants' talk around issues of literacy and literacy education. The first section takes a broader look at the impact that fieldwork had on their understandings of literacy, literacy education, and the literacy-focused classroom. Participants routinely discussed their "read" of schools and classrooms, including differences and similarities across school contexts, grade levels, and individual teacher's choices and structures. The second section focuses more directly on the impact of high-stakes evaluation and assessment on the literacy classroom field experience. Especially in the spring semester, when state-mandated testing ramped up and schools scurried to prepare, the group regularly had in-depth discussions around the impacts that these tests were having on teachers and students, and on their own perceived paths as literacy educators.

Finally, the chapter will explore how participants took up the idea of constructing a "holistic literacy" classroom, which became an emic concept for this group. These conversations explored what counted as holistic literacy – a concept often but not always connected to criticality, as well as questions of who gets access to this type of learning and who does not, and the role of the teacher and the texts. Across all of these themes, participants tied these experiences not only to their coursework, but also to their own autobiographies as teachers and learners. It was clear that seeing literacy education "in action" had a deep influence on the participants' own conceptualizations of the field of

literacy, the role of the teacher, and their own lives as literacy educators, speaking to the importance of reflecting on the role of fieldwork in the development of literacy educators, as well as how to discuss and contextualize these experiences within teacher education programs.

### **The Role of Fieldwork in Conceptualizing Literacy Education**

#### *Prior Knowledge and Assumptions about Literacy Learning*

As is unsurprising given that the program focused on literacy education, participants often brought stories to the inquiry meetings that focused on the nature of literacy education in the classrooms they were visiting. As the previous chapter described, students came to the group with particular ideas about what fieldwork would be like – the purposes of it, the roles they would play, and the relationship and responsibilities of the school and university settings. They also came with their own ideas of what literacy and literacy education might look like in these spaces. As Lila shared in our second meeting:

I thought I would come in [to the fieldwork course] and we would all focus on teaching reading. You know, focus on how to do all that stuff. [In this program], reading and writing and teaching is all that connects us (Fieldnotes 10.11.12).

Frequently, students addressed how their understanding coming into the program was centered on the role of the teacher in preparing children to read and write:

**Lila:** I'm here because it's the teaching of reading and writing that I'm not comfortable with. How do I know how to help them, and with what? (Fieldnotes, 10.11.12)

**Kelly:** I want to learn how to assess how they are reading (Fieldnotes, 10.22.12).

**Emily:** I came into this year after teaching with a lot of questions. I thought that what I wanted answers to were practical pragmatic questions. Like, 5<sup>th</sup> graders coming reading at a 1<sup>st</sup> grade level. How can I help Jenny who is reading *Frog and Toad* and has a complicated emotional life? A really practical level I could try out in fieldwork (Fieldnotes, 10.22.12).

What was evident from these early conversations is that participants came in with a clear sense of what literacy was, and how the role of the literacy teacher in the classroom was defined:

**Lila:** My goal is to become a better reading and writing teacher (Fieldnotes, 10.8.12).

**Max:** There are things that make an effective teacher, things that we can figure out about how effective teachers are creative. Part of that is knowledge content, you know, how to teach reading and writing, not just do it. That's part of what fieldwork should help with, teaching us the skills that we can take with us wherever we end up (Fieldnotes, 9.24.12).

**Emily:** I have been a teacher, but I feel I have so much I still want to learn, especially about teaching reading and writing. Our professor brought these discussion cards to class, talked about how to use them. And I liked them so much I stole them! I would use this in my classroom – this is a strategy that really helps me (Fieldnotes, 10.8.12).

Overwhelmingly students discussed how literacy meant the teaching of reading and writing, frequently with the assumption that it was the teacher's job to diagnose students' problems and address them accordingly. These perspectives speak to what Street (1984) refers to as the “autonomous model” of literacy, in which literacy is seen as a set of concrete and decontextualized skills that can be carried from one space to another, one child to another, without attention to history, context, or culture. Rather than view literacy as a set of skills, Street pushes for more of a focus on the idea of literacy practices:

From this perspective one may ask what are the literacy practices at the home of children whose schooled literacy practices are judged problematic or inadequate. From the school's point of view those home practices may represent simply inferior attempts at the real thing; from the researcher's point of view those home practices may represent as important a part of the repertoire of different languages or language varieties. Viewing them as literacy practices can help both perspectives to address exactly what such literacy involves and, from a pedagogical point of view, what is there to be built upon if the aim is to help such people to add dominant literacy practices to their linguistic repertoire (2003, p. 81).

By shifting the conversation to the idea of recognizing literacy practices and the ways that they are historically and socially constructed and understood, Street argues that children's home lives and experiences can be appreciated and utilized, rather than seen as deficits. In the early perspectives shared by the participants in this study, this deficit orientation frequently framed the students' perspectives. As they entered their field sites the questions they were asking generally focused around how they, as perspective teachers, could learn how to fix the problems that they came across in their students. For example, upon entering her site, Lila said

It's a bit boring, but this is what I need to learn to be a teacher – you know, how to teach grammar and read their drafts for all the mistakes. You know, figure out what's stopping them from being a better reader or writer (Fieldnotes, 10.8.12).

Over time, however, as they engaged in conversations around the examples of literacy education they experienced, these perspectives began to shift. The participants began to think about literacy in new ways, critiquing and reflecting on the classrooms that they visited:

**Kai:** I've started to, to really notice the students who are struggling with special needs, or the English Language Learners. It's interesting to see the range of ability with academic English in one classroom, even at a magnet school. It makes me wonder – are we really including all these voices? Like we talk about in [the

course on elementary literacy teaching]. I didn't think about that before (Fieldnotes, 11.5.12).

**Lila:** So, so I've still got to say I don't think I'm learning as much as I need about how to work with kids on reading and writing. I feel like my views on literacy changed so much, and that was great, but I'm still worried about the practical stuff. But as part of a bigger picture now, I guess, not just in isolation (Fieldnotes, 1.14.13).

**Kelly:** I've found it helpful to go [to my fieldsite] for full days. Because the teacher does literacy through everything. I felt so lost when I tried to go just to Language Arts. Now they are getting to know me. I get to hear their story, they get to hear mine. I get to see literacy in math and science. I'd never thought about that side of things before (Fieldnotes, 10.8.12).

**Mark:** One student in my fieldwork site that I interviewed for an assignment today, he brought up the idea of graffiti as literacy. It was amazing. It really brought up the idea of literacy practices for me (Fieldnotes, 10.22.12).

Through their field experiences, in connection with their classes in the masters program, students began to explore questions of voice, identity, content area, and purpose in regards to literacy in the classroom. In some ways, field experiences seemed to allow for the participants to explore both of the perspectives Street describes above; the school-based perspective where the focus is often on more "traditional" views of academic English, and where the pressure to succeed on measures of these literacy practices can be intense; and something of an outsider role where there is space and time to question and reflect on the practices that are being witnessed. Even Kai's use of "academic English" signifies a growing appreciation for the ways that schools systematically favor certain language practices. Yet these two perspectives do not necessarily have to be seen as a binary. Through their observations and their own practices within field sites, the members of the inquiry community were able to expand their perceptions of literacy and literacy education while still remaining grounded in the daily lives and experiences of students



and teachers in schools. Fieldwork and their reflections on it provided both the chance to step back and question the definition of literacy while still exploring how best to deal with the “practical stuff” of schools that Lila references above. These shifts demonstrate the potential that fieldwork has to be a transformative experience in which students can engage both in the day-to-day practices of a literacy classroom and in thoughtful and critical reflection on these practices and their institutional histories. It is through this kind of thoughtful conversation and reflection that teacher learners can begin to reimagine the literacy classroom and their role as literacy educators.

However, these shifts did not mean that the participants entirely gave up their concerns around being prepared for specific methods or strategies. In fact, one of the more common themes around literacy in schools related to the particular assessments, curricula, or practices that the teachers engaged in in schools. Discussion or mention of specific programs were almost too numerous to count; in fact, specific programs such as Writer’s Workshop or approaches such as the Wilson Method were referenced in eleven of the thirteen inquiry group meetings (85%) and in seventeen of the twenty-one interviews held (81%) (Fieldnotes and Interview Transcripts). While these references sometimes tied into conversations that explicitly questioned the assumptions or structures of these programs, more often they were simply used as a shorthand way of describing the classroom context, going unquestioned in the group conversation:

**Lila:** I’m the Sitton spelling test person (Fieldnotes, 10.22.12).

**Abby:** It’s a guided reading classroom (Fieldnotes, 2.11.13).

**Savannah:** She does DRA pull-out services (Fieldnotes, 2.11.13).

**Veronica:** It's a Writer's Workshop school (Fieldnotes, 3.11.13).

**Lawrie:** I'm in a Lucy Caulkins school (Interview, 2.4.13).

**Maddie:** It's a Read180-based approach (Interview, 2.4.13).

In each of these examples, the comment was given as a way of describing the context and was not questioned or discussed by the group any further. In the case of the interviews, it was presumed that those descriptors would have meaning to me, and I did not take up those moments during the conversations, perhaps pointing to my own habitualization into this framework for discussing literacy education.

In many ways, through these conversations, fieldwork can be seen as a site of tension. On the one hand it offers students an opportunity to see literacy education in practice, providing a backdrop for their considerations of what literacy means, and to whom. On the other hand, it seemed easy for group members to take a somewhat reductionist approach to the complexity of literacy education, using widely-marketed and commercial programs as definitions for entire classroom and school practices. As Moore (2003) found in his study of a practicum within a constructivist-oriented teacher education program, even when there are conscious efforts to use field experiences as a connection between theory and practice, students often focus on procedural concerns, such as time management or content coverage. In their conversations around fieldwork and literacy education, participants frequently used these more widely known and concrete programs as a way of defining or sharing their experiences with their colleagues. These moments demonstrate not only the pervasiveness of scripted or marketed curriculum within the world of teacher education, but also the difficulty that students had

letting go of their perceptions of literacy education as solely concerned with students learning to read and write “better”, with the emphasis on skills rather than recognizing and honoring children’s stories and practices (Campano, 2007; Street, 2003). Fieldwork in literacy education offers the opportunity for a critical investigation of these tensions, but only if an emphasis is placed on the discussion and development of constructs of literacy education, not just the applied processes within the classroom contexts.

*Disruptive Moments: Rethinking the Possibilities of Literacy Classrooms*

That said, there were also a number of times when fieldwork provided students with a chance to see a different kind of classroom than they had previously experienced – one that defied their expectations in some way. Mark, who was placed in a comprehensive neighborhood high school, shared the following story with the group:

You know, I went in and – and to be honest the place looked like home. Like the schools I grew up around. You know, and kids looked like me. But their English class isn’t what I remembered. Last week was my first time getting involved – we were working on *Song of Solomon* by Toni Morrison. It was interesting; they would sit in class and read aloud, talk about themes. Like we would talk about a book here. That was a new style of teaching for me (Fieldnotes, 10.22.12).

In this fieldsite, Mark was given the opportunity to step outside of his own experiences as a student and reimagine the possibilities of a literacy classroom in a high school setting. Harlin (1999) found that when offered the chance to describe and work collaboratively with peers around their classroom experiences, pre-service teachers were able to shift their perspectives around literacy learning, moving toward a greater appreciation of the impact students have in setting the stage, as well as the different roles a literacy teacher can play. In the conversations around field sites, participants in this inquiry group were

able to witness, share and imagine new ways of approaching teaching and learning in the classroom.

Often these experiences were shared as disruptions to a way of thinking, particularly in relation to the participant's own autobiography as a teacher and learner. Lila, who often struggled with her relationship with her cooperating teacher, shared, "At least I get to see her do Writer's Workshop. It's very cool – I've never seen that before" (Fieldnotes, 10.11.12). In a seminal piece on the role of story within the teaching profession, Connelly and Clandinin (1985) argue that narrative is one way we create coherence and clarity within our lived experiences. As such, teaching can be thought of as an "expression of biography and history ... in a particular situation" (1985, p. 184). It was through their efforts to incorporate their experiences in field sites with their own memories and expectations for literacy classrooms that participants seemed to really begin to shift their ideas of what was possible within schools.

Even when the school practices mirrored the participants' histories, the chance to see them from a new perspective – as a teacher learner, rather than as a student or even the teacher of record – often allowed for new perspectives to develop around literacy education. For example, Amy shared a story about the lead teacher telling her to ask a student to pick a different book for Independent Reading time, since the student had chosen the wrong level (Fieldnotes, 11.19.12). This immediately sparked an impassioned conversation around the leveling of texts in classrooms:

**Lila:** Oh god, the leveling of books. I hated that. I mean, if I wanted to read a book at all it was because it was finally interesting to me. It didn't happen often, but I hated it when they took the book away.

**Abby:** Yes!

**Lila:** I know that gets to you, Abby. You were talking about that the other day.

**Abby:** So my fieldwork teacher uses colored tape on books. She told me, “These kids are orange.” I asked, “Does that mean you are not using letters?” She said, “Oh no, we’re still using them. But now the kids don’t know what letter they are. They are just a color now.” But I mean, you can see [the color] from across the room. Everyone knows what orange means.

**Max:** It’s like calling them the Dodos and the Soaring Eagles. I mean, have a little more faith in kids.

**Emily:** When I was teaching, the teacher next door said she was going to call lowest group “Harvard”. I thought that was cool, but now I’m thinking it was still a group. You know, in class we were reading that article about how kids actually can comprehend more when they are in mixed-level groups.

**Max:** I mean, we all knew as kids. Kids always know. When I’m teaching, I’m going to remember that (Fieldnotes, 11.19.12).

In these moments, experiences and narratives from fieldwork are an opportunity for the members of the inquiry group to bring up questions or critiques around often taken-for-granted aspects of literacy education, such as the leveling of texts for reading instruction. Both in the moments when participants observed new teaching styles or pedagogical practices and when something familiar was explored in a new light, fieldwork functioned as a space where the group members could actively inquire into the nature of literacy education. In an interview toward the end of the year, I asked Genevieve what she felt mattered most about fieldwork. She paused and then replied,

You know. It’s easy to talk about things in class. It’s easy to act like it’s easy and neat. But – but you go into fieldwork sites and you see teachers working really hard, trying to teach literacy and keep the kids engaged. And you see tests. And you see kids who are doing well and not so well. One day they were doing a spelling test and I thought, ‘They still do that? I hated that!’ I don’t know – I guess, I guess fieldwork kept me honest, kept me thinking, ‘What would I do here?’ But you also see amazing things – things I never would have thought to try. And that’s the same teacher. It’s different than just reading about it (Interview, 5.14.13).

Fieldwork provided the masters students with the chance to frame literacy education as “narrative-in-action” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1985, p. 184). Through their work to weave

these experiences into their coursework and their own lived histories, inquiry group members both shifted their perspectives on literacy education and/or found new evidence for the values or approaches they came in with at the start of the year. Fieldwork provided a space of learning where participants could hear and construct narratives; these “stories convey the multiplicity of ways actions and situations intertwine and thus accurately represent the complex demands of teaching” (Carter, 1993, p. 10). Fieldwork as a site of learning is based upon the premise that observations of the daily life of teaching have meaning to a teacher’s development. In this study, the participants used the opportunity to develop narratives based on these observations and experiences, as well as on their own experiences as students and teachers, to reformulate what was, for them, at the heart of literacy education – pointing to the importance of fieldwork in the development of a literacy teacher’s perspectives and pedagogical choices.

These “disruptive moments”, however, were not always taken up without question. There was also at times a great deal of resistance or concern around what was “new” or in opposition to their experiences of literacy practices in schools. Max in particular frequently drew on his own educational history and his experiences in school sites to question the ways that literacy education was framed within various schools. As I analyzed the data, it became clear that fieldwork represented a space where Max brought together his own experiences in schools, his teaching history, and his larger questions about the purposes of literacy education. Here I trace his narrative over time to demonstrate the ways that these perspectives were integrated and placed in tension with one another during his work in the inquiry group.

When talking about his own history, Max shared that teachers frequently had low expectations for him:

**Max:** When I think about high school English, I think about Mr. Hall. ... He hated me. I've always been a free spirit. Not good with rigidity. I didn't want to analyze texts the ways he wanted me too. I wanted to share my thoughts. My little sister had him, and he would say, "Don't be like your big brother, no good." When I went back and told him I was in college he said, "We all get lucky sometimes." (Fieldnotes, 10.22.12)

Max, an African American man who grew up and attended schools in a historically under-resourced town just outside of a major city, shared a common story of low expectations within his literacy schooling history (Greene, 2008; Plaut, 2009), particularly as a student who grew up during the "culture of accountability and testing as well as practices that put African American and Latino youth in American public schools under the watchful and critical gaze of the rest of the country" (Winn & Behizadeh, 2011, p. 147). As such, he carries with him a particular and historicized perspective on what it means to be seen as "literate" in school. Furthermore, an inquiry that Max carried with him throughout his time in the group was around the question of who gets access to what kinds of literacy curriculum, and for what purposes. A few weeks after sharing the above story, another group member talked with enthusiasm about observing a literacy classroom in a partnership, admissions-based school that focused on inquiry-based learning. In the class, students were engaged in deep and critical conversations around *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* by Mark Twain:

**Savannah:** The students in my fieldsite are so mature. Students were having this incredible conversation about Mark Twain and *Tom Sawyer*. They were talking about the language, and the history, and relating it to their lives. The conversations were on a level you wouldn't expect students to have in a high school. It's a great place to me.

**Kai:** I've seen kids be immature, but because of the school culture they pull it back together. They live up to the trust they're given.

**Savannah:** Classroom discussions have just been facilitated so masterfully. I mean, it's a canon text, they are supposed to read it, but the way the teacher engages it just amazes me.

**Kai:** Another thing I like – so many out kids, so many queer kids. Everyone seems totally fine with it. Teenage guys hugging guys. Ones I assume are straight. I don't know. There's a comfort of being. I'm in love with this school (Fieldnotes, 11.5.12).

This story sparked a conversation about the charter school movement, how admissions work for these schools, and whether this kind of conversation would be possible in all school settings:

**Maddie:** The students come from all over the city?

[**Abby** looks up the school online. She shares some of the website language, how the school is a partnership school. There is a conversation around funding, how it's publicly funded.]

**Emily:** I don't get how that could be publicly funded. If so few kids get to go, I don't see how it's a public school. This whole system of charters bothers me. Not sitting well with me. Precedent about talking about kids differently. "Magnet kids", "Charter Kids". School culture matters – at my school when it became a turnaround school, the kids didn't change. The principal changed. The goals changed. And it was amazing. When we set up pockets of excellence, instead of thinking about schools where all our kids go – whatever culture we deem to be excellent for student achievement. It's just sad.

**Kai:** Maybe if every school had a theme. So it wasn't neighborhood school and "schools like that."

As Max joined the conversation, he once again drew on his own experiences as he imagined his own work as a literacy educator:

If I taught there it would be hard for me not to get in a biased zone. The kids have amazing comments, sure, but I know I would be sarcastic to them. ... For me, there's a jealousy factor around who gets asked tough questions about books. It makes me – if I was being where I was in my schooling, as a high schooler, I wouldn't be asked those questions. So when I see these students, it hits me so much more. I become really envious. I know it, consciously. So I try to avoid it. But still it's there. ... My school district was very under-resourced, very burdened. But now, I put an elevated sense on coming through all of that, making it. And I know we shouldn't have to go through that. But the kids who go through that, I



privilege them. Because they didn't have those conversations, those chances to share their thoughts (Fieldnotes, 11.5.12).

In this moment, Max engages both his own history and his sense of (in)justice around what he later referred to as the “growing hierarchy of public schooling” (Fieldnotes, 11.5.12). Despite his appreciation for the amazing potential of students and the chances they get in inquiry-based classrooms to talk about books, not just answer questions about them, Max struggled to picture his role in this kind of school. This moment describes a tension around literacy education that is rarely mentioned in the literature, one built both on Max's appreciation for this kind of literacy classroom and his own concerns about access and privilege. In the stories that Max shares, exposure to new ways of thinking about literacy education does not necessarily mean a fundamental shift in his perspectives, nor does his own autobiography signify a complete rejection of these perspectives. Instead, Max's narrative through our work together demonstrated the complex ways that teachers make decisions about how they structure literacy education in the classroom, and the role that field experiences play on helping teacher learners think through these decisions.

Later in the year, after attending a conference on education and technology at a local magnet school, Max once again shared his concerns with the group around disparities around literacy education:

I heard about this conference from someone doing fieldwork at the school, so I went. One panel centered on risk and learning from failure. We talk about taking risk within educational spaces. Of course the presenter's angle was failure is necessary, that it leads to success, how to facilitate “useful failure” in language arts with technology. And I just couldn't, I couldn't – I mean, I agree with that personally. But I couldn't let that be said and not reply; in certain spaces you're allowed to take risks. ... One person at the conference said, “We don't want to

use classrooms as testing labs.” But when I look at [this particular school], it’s a lot of experimental education going on. And it’s a success. So when they say, “we don’t want to use classrooms as testing labs” – where are they talking about? Risky schools don’t take risk, aren’t allowed to take the risk. We don’t encourage risky ideas or new ideas in these spaces. They need to be proved in more privileged schools before they go to the schools that are most under-resourced, underserved. The schools in need of most educational change, they get the scripted curricula and the worksheets and the books in the canon. Policymakers say, “Hopefully if we can get past the politics of these other schools, the lower-end-of-test-results schools, the persistently dangerous schools, then we’ll bring the good conversations, the new literacies there.” But I’m coming from that community, a school that was persistently dangerous. Y’all not talking to me. You’re talking about innovation and technology, but you’re not talking about me, not talking about my community (Fieldnotes, 1.28.13).

Through his personal biography and ongoing inquiry, Max shared the importance of considering that “many deficit views are not merely a matter of individual attitudes. They are rather indicative of deeper ideological currents that circulate in larger society, and which take particular manifestation in dominant literacy policies and practices” (Ghiso, Spencer, Ngo, & Campano, 2013, p. 51). In his personal reaction to the conference and his choice to share it with the group, Max highlighted the importance of reflecting on how literacy education can, and does, privilege certain students while placing others at risk (Gadsden, Davis, & Artiles, 2009; Thomas & Stevenson, 2009; Vasudevan & Campano, 2009). In following his inquiry across multiple group meetings, it is clear that Max pushed the group to expand the conversation beyond the daily practices of literacy classrooms into a consideration of the larger political issues related to how education is structured and taken up in different contexts. As such, he repositions these “disruptive moments” of fieldwork as part of a larger conversation into the nature of schooling.

Again, it is important to consider that Max was not rejecting new ideas or

perspectives on literacy education; he frequently discussed his own personal belief in these approaches. In fact, after sharing the story of the conference, Max added:

After the conference I spent a day at the school and when I was there, I loved it. I think – I think my issue is the framing of success as getting out of communities like mine. It sort of mitigates the opportunities and things you can do in public schools, with literacy or what have you (Fieldnotes, 1.28.13).

Here, Max neither embraces nor rejects a particular way of structuring literacy education in schools, but instead engages in a complicated and honest dialogue around what he and his colleagues are seeing in schools and how it relates to his own lived experiences.

What makes fieldwork unique is that it can provide the background for this kind of inquiry, one based on autobiography, current school policy environments, and courses that explore educational theory and history. Through this type of engagement, field experiences promote a chance to expose the “hidden curriculum” of teacher education (Ginsburg & Clift, 1990) that undermines an appreciation of practitioner and school-based knowledge. Instead, what this data illuminate are the ways that Max’s experiences in schools, both as a student and as a teacher learner, are invaluable – and inseparable – to his development of a philosophy of literacy education. Although I highlight Max’s inquiry in this section, this connection-making and critical thinking occurred across the inquiry meetings and in relation to a number of topics. These efforts to critically read the experiences from fieldwork against their own histories and larger questions of school policy and pedagogy speaks to the ways that field experiences can help teacher learners develop a more critical and reflective literacy curriculum, if given the space to discuss these topics. It also highlights the complicated and at times tension-filled learning that

takes place in these moments, again speaking to the critical role of reflection and discussion as part of the fieldwork structure.

### **The Impact of High-stakes Literacy Assessments on Fieldwork Experiences**

#### *Understanding the Role of the Reading Specialist in These Times*

Although all of the members of the inquiry group were in field sites specifically centered on literacy education, there was a good deal of range regarding the specifics of their literacy-based field sites. Yet one thing that connected all of these sites was the ways in which current pressures and high-stakes accountability were discussed and integrated into the literacy classroom practices, especially in the winter and early spring as “testing season” approached. In the conversations of this inquiry group, it became clear that these issues impacted the participants’ understandings around the role of literacy educators in classrooms and schools; the nature of literacy curriculum in the era of high-stakes accountability, and the impact these structures had on the lives and learning of K-12 students. Furthermore, these images deeply influenced many of the participants in terms of their own projected futures as literacy educators, particularly around the role of “reading specialist”.

Not only did their classroom sites range in grades from kindergarten through twelfth grade, they also varied in terms of school context (public, charter, magnet, private, and parochial settings), and in terms of the role of the cooperating teacher. Some of the cooperating teachers were more traditional elementary educators who had a set class for all of the core subjects (literacy, math, social studies, and even science). Other

elementary sites had teachers who were responsible for the literacy block for the entire grade level, with children traveling to other teachers for math and social studies classes. In the secondary schools, many group members were with English teachers, but others were with social studies teachers who had a literacy-based curriculum in their classroom. Still others were with educators who did not have a classroom of their own, but instead provided support to students and teachers around literacy learning and curriculum. While the actual title varied by school setting, in general the group referred to these pull-out/push-in roles as “reading specialists” – most likely because that is the label given to the state certification for these positions.

Although participants at times appreciated this range in experiences and perspectives, there was a preference for the chance to work with a reading specialist, especially for those students who were planning to get certified. Interestingly, one of the main reasons for this interest was because of a lack of understanding of exactly what role these specialists might play in schools:

**Lila:** Right now, I’m questioning whether the reading specialist track is really what I want to be doing. But part of the problem is I’m still not sure what a reading specialist really does (Fieldnotes, 10.8.12).

**Kai:** I’ve never met a reading specialist. I don’t even know what they do. Feels like a vague thing. I feel like I’ll graduate and never know what a reading specialist does, so I’m hoping I get to work with one during fieldwork. Do they only work with people who are delayed? Do they write IEPs? Implement IEPs?

**Veronica:** Similar question. I feel like I don’t know what I’m going to be doing next year. Can you be a reading specialist if you’ve never been a teacher? Is that fair?

**Savannah:** Wish there were a way to introduce all that general information, because we’re here to be reading specialists. I wish there were a class to go over general idea of what a reading specialist does. In my experience, some work in a classroom, some have a nook. Some work in classes, some take them out. I’ve

worked in the same building as a reading specialist, but I don't know what they do when they take my kids.

**Abby:** I worked last year with a reading specialist in the building every day. The program she used depended on grade and needs of kid. That's where my issue of specific programs is kicking in. I'm familiar with those programs now, but only because of that experience (Fieldnotes, 10.22.12).

In these early conversations, group members both share a sense of uncertainty around the idea of the “reading specialist” – despite their plans to get certified as one – and also share their assumptions or partial knowledge around the work of a literacy specialist. There was a sense that there was a common practice of being a reading specialist, even though both Abby and Savannah's experiences in schools suggested a wide range of how these specialists functioned within the school setting; participants seemed to share in the implication that the reading specialist's role was to “do something” with children, particularly those who are struggling. Furthermore, there was a sense that everyone in the program was interested in at least exploring the possibility of becoming a reading specialist in his or her future work.

Toward the beginning of our time together, in the fall semester, there was no discussion of the links between reading specialists and high-stakes testing. Instead, conversations centered on the kinds of work that reading specialists did during the school day to support children with their literacy practices. Participants who were paired with reading specialists often focused their narratives within the group on the particular strategies or programs being used:

**Veronica:** I want to learn what programs they use, how they use assessments to help kids (Fieldnotes, 11.5.12).

**Kelly:** I want to work with a reading specialist because I want to know how to assess how they are reading. I also wish we were taking assessment this semester,

for the same reason. What strategies are most useful? Which programs, that kind of stuff (Fieldnotes, 10.22.12).

Comments also focused on the relationship of the reading specialist and the classroom teacher:

**Lila:** I am wondering about the connection between the reading specialist and the classroom teacher. Do they work together, or is it just pull out? I'm really reevaluating whether the reading specialist track is what I really want to be doing. I guess I assumed it was collaborative (Fieldnotes, 10.8.12).

**Mark:** When I was subbing, I could see the ways that a reading specialist worked in different spaces. Sometimes welcomed by the classroom teacher, lots of good conversations. Other times it felt like they were seen as a babysitter, a person who took the hard kids off your hands for a while (Fieldnotes, 10.22.12).

In addition, there was a good deal of conversation around the limited number of reading specialists and support staff that students were seeing in schools:

**Savannah:** I'm looking forward to the meat of it, to learning how to be a reading specialist. But still, I'm scared. I just want to learn how it all works together. Somebody told me that at their school there isn't a reading specialist in the building. Is that possible?

**Maddie:** I talked to my supervisor today and said that I wanted a reading specialist placement in the spring, since I'm working with a classroom teacher now. She said that without a car almost impossible, that there are almost none left in [this city] due to budget issues.

**Kai:** I'm in a 10<sup>th</sup> grade English class right now in a school that doesn't have a reading specialist. I don't know what I'm learning about reading specialists, but learning a lot about teaching literacy. It seems to me that I could take these experiences and apply them whether or not I end up leading a classroom or doing support work in a school (Fieldnotes, 11.5.12).

As we entered the spring semester, many of these perspectives stayed the same, with students appreciating the chance to work with a reading specialist and gain a deeper insight into the kinds of work these professionals did in schools:

**Maddie:** The reading specialist I work with just goes to the back of the room, works with certain kids. The groups seem to change often. It's nice to see that side of teaching, how it can work.

**Kelly:** I wish I were getting that opportunity too. It would have been nice to see how pull-outs work (Fieldnotes, 1.28.13).

As the year progressed, however, there started to be a different perspective on the work of reading specialists in schools. More specifically, group members began to regularly bring back stories of how preparation for the state-mandated yearly tests were impacting these practitioners in schools:

**Genevieve:** When I started at beginning of semester, end of January, I was so excited to see literacy support. But now all I've seen is two weeks of benchmark testing and then state testing. [The reading specialist] was basically in charge of organizing the entire school's distribution of the tests. Teachers are not permitted to see the tests before hand, not permitted to give the test to their class, because of cheating scandals. There's not enough resources to have someone from outside come in, so they do a lot of switching and nonsense. The reading specialist told me that for two weeks she is not seeing her groups, because she's overseeing all of that. She already only sees each group like two, three times a week for a half hour. ... It's kind of appalling that the kids – these kids who need to extra help for reading are pushed aside for these assessments. It makes me really question whether or not I could do that work.

**Veronica:** I agree. It makes me really think. You know, that's not what I pictured a reading specialist doing. I try to imagine myself there, and I can't see it. Maybe it's good I'm working with a classroom teacher after all. They do test prep, but not all day.

**Lila:** I agree. I just couldn't stand to sit by and watch kids not get what the need, all for the sake of one test. I know it's important for the school, but I don't know if I could just witness that every year, especially when I'm the one who is supposed to be helping them, a resource. That's not why I got into teaching (Fieldnotes, 3.11.13).

As the state-mandated assessments neared, students experienced real and sudden shifts in the daily practices around literacy education and support for students in schools.

Furthermore, the testing culture had a deep impact on how the participants were or were not able to take part in the school culture; in an interview, Maddie shared how state testing had impacted her experience:



I was in a great classroom, but I think [the teacher] was focusing on – well, it was [state testing] time, so she was kinda stressed at that. So, I felt like at times, I was more of a damper on her, rather than anything else. So I took a step back and just observed (Interview, 5.20.13).

These experiences had a deep impact on their own appreciation for what roles reading specialists and literacy teachers played in schools, as well as where they imagined themselves in the future, pointing to the importance of a closer look at the impact that these images of literacy education and literacy classrooms can have on the development of early career teachers and those interested in reading specialist positions.

There is no question that anyone involved in teacher education today is aware of the impact that high-stakes accountability and state-mandated assessments are having on the field of education and teaching. Scholarship in the field of teacher education in the last decade has focused on the impacts that these mandates are having on who enters the field of teaching (Selwyn, 2007; Sleeter, 2008; Cochran-Smith & Fries, 2005); how programs are being affected (Cochran-Smith, 2005, 2006; Altwerger et al., 2004); and how these policies are being addressed within particular courses (Cohen et. al., 2009). These impacts have also influenced the nature of fieldwork within teacher education as this era has increased federal and state “control of both the ‘inputs’ of teacher education (e.g., number, kind, and content of courses and fieldwork experiences) and its ‘outputs’ or ‘outcomes’ (e.g., assessments of the impact of teacher preparation on teacher learning, professional practice, and K-12 students’ learning)” (Cochran-Smith, 2006, p. 108). In addition to an increase in control over the nature of how these sites are structured as part of teacher education, the policies have deeply affected what it is that teacher learners see when they entered school sites.

Research has shown that instead of the intended goal of creating a more stable, well-prepared body of teachers in every school, NCLB has in many ways negatively impacted teacher retention, particularly in high-needs schools where meeting the required annual yearly progress (AYP) faces even more challenges (Darling-Hammond & Berry, 2005; Strong, 2005; Harrell et. al, 2004). Based on their experiences within field sites, participants in this study began the process of questioning their role in these schools even before many of them entered the classrooms as teachers for the first time. There is no doubt of the importance and impact of field experiences on how these group members imagined themselves in the classroom, or on how they conceptualized the role of a literacy practitioner in schools. These conversations demonstrate that field experiences within teacher education do not solely provide students with the chance to try on particular lessons, strategies, or approaches. They also function as windows into the complicated and politicized nature of schooling, particularly in relation to highly tested subjects such as literacy and math. As such, teacher education programs need to reflect more deeply on how these field experiences are connected with the university-based courses; where the opportunities are for students to describe and discuss the nature of these experiences and the potential impact these moments of witnessing might have on how they see their future lives as educators.

#### *High-Stakes Testing and the Implications for Literacy Instruction*

Beyond their own careers and goals, students also shared their concerns around how this era of high-stakes accountability was affecting the literacy curriculum offered to students in public schools today:

**Kai:** I am working with one student during test prep time. Because the reading specialist I work with said, “He’s just going to fail [the state test] anyway, so he might as well get something out of the time.” But it feels really awful; that that’s the reason I’m working with him and not the expert (Fieldnotes, 2.11.13).

**Savannah:** I’m working with a reading specialist, so pulling out students for a max of forty-five minutes. So while my mentor’s ideas might be great, not really possible in our setting. It’s nice to cushion lessons with fun, frilly read-alouds, but we barely have time to get through the mandated [state test] preparation. I mean, I loved doing read-alouds when I was teaching, but here – here it just won’t work (Fieldnotes, 3.11.13).

**Max:** I went back to my old high school one day and ran into one of my old teachers, one of my favorites. So I talked to her about the school and she was saying that since we’re under state control, through the pipeline they’re sending test prep, test prep, test prep. Every week they change the curriculum; she’s saying she can’t get anything done (Fieldnotes, 4.8.13).

In their field sites, students saw first-hand the deep and daily impact that NCLB and the era of accountability have on literacy education. The pressure that schools face affected how students were labeled, the opportunities they were given, and the way that critical aspects of literacy education such as read-alouds and text-based discussions were literally pushed to the margins of the curriculum, making central the goal

That teachers focus on students’ weaknesses or their lack of skills, which have been identified by tests. ... In short, NCLB and its supporting documents consistently portray good teachers as consumers of products, implementers of research-based programs, faithful users of test data, transmitters of knowledge and skills, and remediators of student weaknesses” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2006, pp. 678-9).

The ramifications of this positioning were evident in the classrooms that the participants visited, especially toward the end of the year as the “testing season” occurred. Not only did this focus limit the chance that participants had to observe and reflect on the strategies and perspectives of the literacy educators that they worked with, but it also pushed for more of a deficit-oriented perspective within their own work, making them

feel that authentic literacy experiences such as storytelling and book discussions are “frilly” extras that can be added when there is enough time. These experiences highlight the need for more research into the impact of high-stakes testing on the development of teachers, as well as a critical reflection on how this emphasis narrows the images of literacy education that teacher learners see during their field experiences.

*Fieldwork as a Space to Negotiate Power and Possibility*

Beyond recognizing that field experiences are heavily influenced by this policy environment in schools, and the real and lasting impact that these images can have on teacher learners, the question also remains of how these moments are folded into the larger teacher education program. Field experiences function very differently if they are framed as sites where students are supposed to learn and apply “best practices” or if they are seen as spaces where students can engage deeply in dialogue around the nature of teaching as a profession, and the socio-political issues that surround literacy education (Zeichner, 2010; Zeichner, Payne & Brayko, 2012). Even in programs where there is a deep commitment to the social justice aspects of teacher education, there can be a lack of attention paid to how students are drawing on their field experiences within their course of study (Cochran-Smith & Fries, 2011). An example of this issue arose when Emily shared the following experience:

In my [undergrad] program standardized tests were talked about as dumb, thoughtless, bad for children. NCLB was taken apart. But when I got to my fieldsite I was supposed to help prepare kids for the test. But I hadn’t known how, because professors wouldn’t even talk about the test. Because they didn’t align with their goals; there was a big gap. So I just ignored it and said I would do better. But when I became a teacher myself and my job depended on it, I fell back on the test prep I was handed and just tried to get through it (Fieldnotes, 9.24.12).

Here, despite an effort within the teacher education program to imagine new possibilities for schooling and to address some of the assumptions and expectations of the high-stakes accountability movement, Emily addresses a lack of space within the program to address some of the “realities” that students were seeing in their field sites. She could see what the issues were and where the inequalities occurred, but she did not know how to navigate those concerns within her own practice. These concerns around how to address high-stakes accountability within a more socially-framed literacy classroom was a theme from the beginning to the end of our work together; at our last meeting together students again referenced their field experiences and their concerns about simultaneously meeting the demands of high-stakes tests with their belief in a different kind of literacy education:

**Lila:** I’ve drank the KoolAid and I think inquiry is the best kind of education, that it honors kids and their lives. ... But I’m still confused about how I can do it, how practical it is, if the school I go to allows me to do it. And if I go somewhere and I’m not allowed to do it, I just worry I’m going to feel like a failure. ... [I believe] kids can have these conversations. I wish we had more time to put it in action. And I tried in fieldwork, but I was only there three months. I was there for a few hours and then I’d have to walk away.

**Kai:** Kind of related – how to implement this as a reading specialist, when you have twenty minutes or thirty minutes with a kid. I’ve been thinking a lot about the kinds of resources the reading specialist I worked with uses. Some are drill-like. I can see why it’s useful in certain circumstances, but I would like to incorporate more things like drama. ... The little bit of drama I did with my kids it seemed to help. I wonder how to make it more interesting than the drills. They may be learning, but it’s pulling teeth. But it’s such a short amount of time, and we’re pulling out from other classes. ... Overall the school I was in was so focused on [state testing] that it was debilitating (Fieldnotes, 4.29.13).

This conversation, toward the end of our time together, demonstrates how the participants were still struggling over how to engage their beliefs around literacy, the time-pressures of the school day, and the politics of literacy practices in schools. Moreover, their work

with reading specialists and classroom teachers helped them gain a better perspective on the specific challenges and possibilities of working in a support role in a school, rather than as the lead classroom teacher.

Within the inquiry group, over time it became clear that fieldwork was not functioning as the space where these students learned everything there was to know about literacy education, a framework many brought with them at the start. They did not end the year feeling as though they had mastered the art of pedagogy and were prepared to teach any student, anywhere. What the participants did develop through their field experiences and their conversations around these incidents was an appreciation for the complex nature of teaching, as well as the highly political nature of the work. Bourdieu (1998) uses the metaphor of the left and right hand of the state, where social welfare organizations such as public schooling and healthcare assistance are seen as the gentler, “giving” side, in opposition to the “right hand” of control as evidenced by the police, army, and so forth. But the critical point that Bourdieu makes is that in both cases these organizations are embedded within the state – within the issues of power and hierarchy. As such, it is impossible to think about education without acknowledging these political aspects or the history behind them. In their field settings, these teacher learners had a chance to appreciate the impact that these larger political and policy environments have on the day-to-day work of teachers and students, particularly around the teaching of literacy (Street, 1984; Freire, 1970; Freire & Shor, 1987; Freire & Macedo, 2013), demonstrating the potential for change and inquiry that fieldwork represents.

However, without the space to engage in dialogue around the politicized nature of literacy education during the time of high-stakes accountability, participants at times felt silenced by their own anxieties and concerns around what they are seeing in schools. Lawrie highlighted this issue during our last interview together when I asked her how she would describe her fieldwork experiences:

**Lawrie:** Um, I guess the word I would use to describe the relationship that sometimes existed between [this program] and fieldwork and should exist between a literacy program and fieldwork would be “interactive”, you know, between the school and the university. With people walking with you. Because without that – without that you are just left wondering what to do with what you saw, um, what you did. You know, how did I talk about texts, or work with that kid. Because without that – without that exchange, I’m left wondering what just happened here. Especially during the [state testing], when it felt so helpless and I kept wondering what I was doing there (Interview, 5.23.13).

Here, Lawrie discusses the importance not only of the chance to discuss issues with peers and professors, but also frames fieldwork as a space where knowledge and experience from both contexts can be bridged. Other students also commented on this sense of helplessness when critical conversations were not integrated into fieldwork:

**Max:** In my fieldsite, it was a challenge not to go into my deficit framework – with those students, with those teachers, with that school, with public schools in general. I was searching for hope and kept running into the same BS. It helps to talk about it here, because before that I was feeling like the crazy one (Fieldnotes, 4.8.12).

**Emily:** When I tell people what I do, they always ask me what I’m going to do after teaching. The assumption is that there should be a next step – policy, or administration or something. I would be horrible at that. I’m good at this. I love this. I just want to be a teacher. It brings to mind what experiences are valued – that’s something that I think a lot about at my fieldwork site, when the teacher tells the kids there isn’t time to share stories because we need to do test prep. It makes me sad. I wish we talked about that more here. I think it would help me feel like these experiences mattered, that people understood my work as a professional (Fieldnotes, 3.25.13).

When fieldwork functions as this kind of pedagogical space, teacher learners see themselves as knowledge-producers, rather than simply as passive recipients of programs and methods. Recent scholarship in the field of teacher education has documented how this “work in creating hybrid spaces in teacher education where academic and practitioner knowledge and knowledge that exists in communities come together in new less hierarchical ways in the service of teacher learning represents a paradigm shift in the epistemology of teacher education programs” (Zeichner, 2010, p. 480). Further research is needed into the ways that these paradigm shifts are in tension with the emphasis on high-stakes testing, as well as the role of fieldwork as a context where these connections must be contextualized in new ways in order to speak back to the common and deficit-oriented perspectives embedded in the culture of accountability.

In the next few years, students entering undergraduate teacher education programs who grew up in the United States will have had almost all of their formal educational experiences in the era of NCLB. If teacher education programs do not create spaces of learning where students can engage in critical conversations around the images of schooling they see, these early career teachers will have little else to provide them with a critique of the current school environment, or an appreciation for the particulars of this historical moment we are in within the United States. The role of fieldwork can and should be to function as a space where the university and the school interact with one another, as Lawrie expresses above. In our inquiry community, fieldwork became a text that we were reading together – a text that challenged our assumptions and engaged us all in both the bitter realities that face many children and teachers and the moments of



possibility and change that occur daily within schools. In these discussions around high-stakes testing and their impacts on the literacy classroom, the participants engaged in their own inquiries into the nature of schooling, their own roles and responsibilities, and their developing appreciation for how literacy is framed and taught in different school contexts.

**‘Holistic Literacy’ and Images of Possibility in the Literacy Classroom: “What We Do with It is What Matters, Right?”**

*Defining ‘Holistic Literacy’ as a Group*

While conversations around state testing and accountability were often bleak, students frequently countered these moments with narratives of possibility and promise from their time in schools. Over time the participants began to frame these images as “holistic literacy”. In our first meeting, Mark introduced the term when he shared his hope that:

Fieldwork would be about inspirations and realizations. I mean, I want to learn to be holistic when I’m teaching literacy, but also know what the textbooks say, how the students are going to react. Fieldwork and teacher education should be a way to do that, bring a positive and realistic optimism at the end of it (Fieldnotes, 9.24.12).

Almost universally framed as a beneficial way to teach, “holistic literacy” – which was at times paired with “critical literacy” – came to mean a number of things within this space but centered on an appreciation for the knowledge and experiences of K-12 students and a reimagining of the relationships between student and teacher. Although there was a great deal of variation across field sites, three emic themes emerged across these

conversations: the kinds of texts made available to students in schools; the structure of conversations and dialogue within the classroom; and issues of power and authority, particularly around the role of the teacher.

One of the central aspects of literacy classrooms that students focused on was the text that students had access to, and the ways that students did or did not have choice around how they engaged with books in the classroom. As discussed above, participants reacted strongly to the ways that access to books was limited by text leveling or by the curriculum. They countered these narratives with stories about other ways of engaging students around texts in the classroom:

**Veronica:** There are awesome conversations in my classroom. The teacher has fifteen books that she's supposed to teach, but she acknowledges that they can't talk about them deeply if they try to read them all. So instead, instead she's more holistic and gets the students involved. She has them research all the books and then vote for five they want to read with the class. It keeps them involved in their own education. ... They are so committed to it. When I was a student, I used to copy. I could succeed without reading the story. I think I would have felt differently if I was given these kinds of opportunities (Fieldnotes, 11.19.12).

Through her field experiences, Veronica had the chance to witness a different kind of literacy classroom, one where student voice and perspective were taken seriously in the development of the curriculum. Furthermore, Veronica had the chance to observe a teacher who worked to balance the requirements of the mandated curriculum with the interests and needs of her students. There was also the sense in this classroom that “talking deeply” was at the heart of literacy education, that the words, opinions, and perspectives of these children mattered not only to how they engaged the material of the classroom, but in how they shaped the focus of the classroom itself. In this way, Veronica witnessed a literacy classroom where the teacher “cultivated the affective and intellectual

bonds that enable students to recognize that they too possess valuable knowledge to bring to bear upon their educational development” (Campano, 2007, p. 16).

One of the powerful aspects of our work together in the inquiry group, however, was that the collective sharing and constructing of narratives resisted the urge to create binaries or overly simplified understandings of schools and teaching. Through the sharing across contexts, we all became more familiar with the range of experiences and contexts for learning within the greater metropolitan area surrounding the university. In very different contexts within the same city, other members offered different examples of how texts might function in a more student-centered classroom:

**Kai:** The teacher I’m with – I feel like he’s a textbook example of the kind of teaching that we learn about in this program. It’s been really cool. His goal is to have the students talk more than him. Students bring up ideas that come from them – he might tie together themes, but it comes from them. Then they pick books to read and discuss and research together, you know, so it’s more holistic. More ingrained in their lives (Fieldnotes, 11.5.12).

**Veronica:** During independent reading time they are allowed to read whatever they want. Comic books, stuff from home. One kid likes to bring in the newspaper. Unfortunately they don’t have a lot of time for it – you know, maybe only ten or fifteen minutes a day. But my cooperating teacher, he feels like it’s important. You know, it’s the time of day when they can be the boss and read what interests them. So he makes sure it happens every day (Fieldnotes, 3.11.13).

In each of these examples, participants witnessed and appreciated that the teachers were trying to do something different, trying to take into account the needs and desires of their students. But, as Kai’s example above shows, the development of a “holistic literacy” classroom was not solely around the choice of texts. Not only did the teacher in this setting shift responsibility over the content to the students, he also altered the perspectives around the role of the teacher in the class. The effort to get students to “talk

more than he did” involves a dramatic change from the vision of literacy education where the students are empty vessels waiting to be filled (Street, 1984). In this moment, the teacher also relinquished at least some of the mantle of expert, allowing students’ voices to go beyond the “right answer” or memorized fact.

The sharing of these stories also helped highlight classrooms where a more traditional power dynamic was at play. About half an hour after Kai shared her reading of the classroom where she was located, Max followed up on her point:

I’m thinking about what you were saying before, Kai, about kids having control and teachers being more holistic. In my class, we do a lot of the same things, but it’s different. I mean, I have a great relationship with the teacher. She really loves *Outsiders* – a real passion for that book. She got upset when kids were like, “huh?” We read the last line, and the kids were like “Okay, end of book.” She was like “What?!” She really got upset. She also does Writers Workshop, but she’s still in charge. One kid was trying to get his paper edited by another student – his favorite female student, of course [laughs]. Okay. So she’s talking about the paper with him. The teacher sees him over there and says, “What are you doing over there?” He says, “Getting my paper edited”. She says “I don’t see an expert in English over there. There are only two experts in English in this room, Mr. Cooper and me. We’re the only ones who should be editing.” The kids don’t say anything – just go back to their desks. But I was left, I was left wondering how much that really undermined her work trying to get the kids to love literature, to see themselves as readers and writers – I mean, it’s all based on her, you know? (Fieldnotes, 11.5.12)

Through Kai’s sharing of her classroom experience, although she does not directly reference the idea of the teacher as “expert”, Max is able to develop a more complex narrative around the practices he sees in his fieldsite. He describes a teacher who he sees as an ally, passionate about literacy and willing to put into place a literacy curriculum typically described as being more student-centered. Yet he also recognizes the ways in which she upholds more traditional models of literacy education in which students are not encourage to think of themselves as knowers or constructors of knowledge. “Holistic

literacy”, then, does not simply designate the use of a particular program such as Writers Workshop or the chance for students to read a book like *The Outsiders*, which ranked #43 on the American Library Association’s Top 100 Most Challenged Books of 1990-2000 (Kjelle, 2007). It has more to do with critical issues of power and authority around knowledge and expertise. As Mark said in a later conversation around how to navigate a scripted curriculum:

I mean, we’ve got to see that we are the ones doing the work, we are the ones who set up the dynamics. Even if it’s handed to us and it sucks. What we do with it is what matters, right?” [Almost everyone nods “yes”] (Fieldnotes, 3.25.13).

As participants shared narratives and counter-narratives that questioned the practices and content of these literacy classrooms, together the group coalesced around this idea of “holistic literacy” that framed teachers not as the voice of knowledge, but instead as facilitators in helping students come to understand and appreciate their own ways of knowing. The collaborative development of this term – and the ways that the participants used these examples as counterpoints to their more traditional experiences of literacy education – speaks not only to the importance of field experiences on the development of literacy educators, but also to the importance for sustained reflection and dialogue around these experiences and perspectives in order for literacy educators to see themselves as active participants with agency and authority in negotiating policy and practice.

#### *Moments of Discomfort: The Role of the Teacher in the Literacy Classroom*

At times, this recasting of the role of the teacher was uncomfortable or uncertain for participants. They questioned the ways that their cooperating teachers dealt with critical issues related to power and history in the classroom, even as they appreciated

these teachers efforts to engage students in more critical and generative forms of literacy education:

**Max:** I'm coming to understand the [school] culture now, so it doesn't feel so out of control with kids just talking, but it's a really new idea. A really new way of doing things. I want them to appreciate that, before they start taking those stances of this is how it should be. ... I want them to get it.

**Emily:** To recognize privilege?

**Lila:** Yes. This is what I'm thinking. For example, in my fieldwork site, they were talking about double consciousness in English class. But the teacher made it sound like it was everybody's struggle. Every student made to believe that there is something that they are struggling with in that world. And for the white straight males in that school, it's not working for me. I just don't read their comments the same way (Fieldnotes, 1.28.13).

Here, the group tried to talk through the tension between appreciating the possibility of a critical literacy education that introduces larger social issues with a concern over how these messages were being taken up by students. Lila went on to share another incident:

It happens a lot, and it's hard. In class, one student said, "Segregation doesn't exist." And the teacher said really quietly "well, it kind of does exist." And I was so excited, but it went nowhere. I think she was afraid to shut him down. ... Kids were saying crazy stuff about race, but no acknowledgment of it. ... They were saying, "For black people, Latino people" out loud but whispered "white" and I was so disappointed, but I didn't know how to bring it up with the teacher later (Fieldnotes, 1.28.13).

In these stories of the classroom, Lila highlights how both the teacher and the students – and she – are made uncomfortable as they try to engage larger issues of race in the classroom. Boler, Zembylas, and Tryfonas (2003) discuss the "emotional labor" of discomfort, particularly around issues of difference. They address the complicated ways that topics related to race, language, gender, and other identity markers do and do not get taken up within educational contexts. These moments are further complicated in literacy classrooms where teachers are trying to take seriously the perspectives of students; the

participants appreciated the ways that fear of shutting down a student was at times counter-productive to the larger goals of what they coined “holistic literacy”. While centering the lives of students in the curriculum opened up possibilities for different stories and experiences to be recognized in the literacy classroom, it also brought with it a number of tensions in terms of how these students and the teachers were heard, silenced, or contextualized.

But discomfort was also seen as an opportunity for growth, on the part of the teachers, the students and the participants themselves:

**Lawrie:** I know, um, I’m gonna be a vulnerable teacher in the first few years, if not sort of always, but, um – I’m thinking a lot about where I’ll be most effective, um, in the least dangerous way, um, dangerous to the students, where I’ll get the support I need to grow (Interview, 5.23.13).

**Mark:** When we think about arts integration into the literacy classroom – I always think, why does that make kids feel so comfortable there? I think it’s because it invites them in, invites their perspectives, you know? But it’s also uncomfortable, because it’s personal. But that can be powerful, too (Fieldnotes, 11.19.13).

**Ava:** And I told [the teacher], “I really want to find out more about adolescent males and like how they engage with literacy because I really – but I really wanted to like push my comfort zone.” Because I know nothing about them and I didn’t want to, like, study a girl who loves reading because I was – that was me in middle school (Interview, 2.11.13).

Within their field sites, the participants in the study and the students interviewed outside of the group had a deep appreciation for the role of safety in the classroom, both as a positive for inviting students’ voices in, and as a potential negative when it went unquestioned or examined. Over time, participants in this study also came to appreciate the ways that teachers could be “dangerous” to students if they could not address their own discomforts and histories. Often, it was through the sharing and comparing of these

experiences that participants developed a deeper sense of the possibilities and challenges of engaging in a more critical and democratic form of literacy education in K-12 classrooms.

In these narratives around their shared and developing concept of “holistic literacy”, the participants explored a range of images depicting what it means to take seriously the interests and abilities of children within literacy instruction. They also demonstrate the challenges that teachers face as they attempt to work within mandated curriculum, limited school hours, and classrooms with up to twenty-five students. Through these experiences, the inquiry group shifted away from a focus on best practices to a wider image of “holistic literacy” that could encompass a number of classroom practices and designs. In an article that speaks back to the notion of “best practices”, Susan Lytle (2008) asks the following questions:

What might we learn from teachers’ and students’ experiences of living with the perplexing and disturbing reality that literacy is being opened up and almost unbelievably narrowed at the same time? What might we learn about teachers’ and learners’ encounters with mandated curriculum that might suggest what’s better and complicate the “what works” and “best practices” mantras from different locations and perspectives? What might we learn from the documentation of practice by teachers and students about what “better” might look like, in specific settings? What can we learn from the “betters” of experienced teachers ... who work within and against the system to do what they know is right for students? (p. 379).

While her work in this article speaks more broadly to the need for practitioner research and a wider appreciation for the knowledge and experience of teachers, in many ways these questions get at the heart of what fieldwork can afford to teacher education. In their field sites, members of this group not only had the chance to see first hand what it can



look like to work “within and against”, but also had the opportunity to share a range of possibilities for this kind of teaching and learning.

### **Conclusions**

This chapter focused on the particular implications of fieldwork experiences for literacy educators. Through their work in literacy-based classrooms, the participants engaged in a number of critical reflections on their own futures within the field. Specifically they negotiated the various roles and responsibilities that literacy educators can take on, with a particular emphasis on developing a better sense of the work of a reading specialist. Drawing on their experiences they questioned the role that a reading specialist can play in a school context, highlighting both the relationships between the classroom teacher and the specialist and the possibilities and limitations of direct but limited time with individual students. Leading up to and during the time of high-stakes testing, the conversations shifted to a discussion of the impact that these mandated tests had on the role of the reading specialist, as participants noted the shift from diagnostic and supportive instruction to test prep and test management in the daily work of the reading specialist. These insights not only allowed for a more critical read of the impact of high-stakes tests on the literacy curriculum, but also had participants questioning their own career goals. These findings speak to the deep but under-researched impact that field experiences can have on the careers and expectations of teacher learners.

Discussion around fieldwork did not only focus on high-stakes testing, however, but also noted the possibilities for more student-centered and dialogic literacy instruction. With the development of the emic term “holistic literacy”, the participants engaged in a

sustained and collaborative development around how literacy pedagogy and practice not only involves the specific texts or materials given to students, but also involves the stance that the teacher takes in how students are invited to approach and explore these topics. While these images were usually seen in a positive light, some of the inquiry group members pushed back on these stories, discussing issues of discomfort, as well as the need to prepare students for the very real consequences of accountability and standardized testing. These findings speak to the importance for literacy teacher education programs to utilize fieldwork as a space where students can imagine their work “within and against” (Lytle, 2008) current literacy policies, opening up the potential for teacher learners to conceptualize literacy classrooms that make more central the lives and experiences of students, opening the door to more inquiry-based practices for both students and teachers.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### **“I’m Not Really Seeing It”: Images and Understandings of Urban Education**

At the heart of many of discussions in teacher education has been the role of teacher preparation on teacher retention. In recent times, there has been a strong focus within the field of education on how to address issues of historically under-served and under-resourced schools in urban contexts, particularly given the national focus on low tests scores, questions of cross-cultural achievement, and an emphasis “college and career readiness” (e.g., Payne, 2008; Darling-Hammond, 2012; Leland & Murtafda, 2011). Milner (2012) wrote, “From my perspective, there is no issue more important to improving urban education – particularly the instructional practices of teachers in urban classrooms – than the preparation of teachers” (p. 700). Yet historically the field has struggled to conceptualize and respond to challenges that seem unique – or at least heightened – within urban school context. In particular scholars have explored issues related to how terminology, such as “culturally relevant” or “community-centered” shift from context to context (Zeichner & Cochran-Smith, 2005), or how a predominantly white middle-class teaching population struggles to make sense of the urban contexts that they find themselves in after graduation (Sleeter 2001, 2008; Merryfield, 2000). This chapter explores how students navigated issues of culture, race and language within their fieldwork experiences; participants often drew on deficit-oriented language and perspectives on urban communities – perspectives that influenced the work that they did in the classrooms and the ways that they made sense of their field visits. While there was

collaborative discussion and debate around these critical issues, troubling perspectives on the role of language and culture persisted, emphasizing the deep-set nature of these discourses and pointing to the need for spaces within teacher education to hold sustain conversations around these topics. The participants also discussed the role of multicultural education in their teacher education program, leading to a difficult conversation in which I had to reflect on my own roles and positionalities within the group setting.

As I discussed in Chapter One, there has been relatively limited attention to conceptualizing and delimitating the concept of “urban”. While the distinction between urban, suburban, and rural schools appears to be a useful one in certain ways, especially around making sense of educational disparities and historicized questions of power and privilege, there is a need to think more carefully about how this term is being used – what it often stands for in terms of race, class, or difference, and how the “urban environment” is being further complicated by the increasing number of charter, special interest, and magnet schools within metropolitan areas (Lipman, 2013; Payne, 2008; Wideen, 2013). In particular, the sudden explosion of private-interest funders and founders of charter schools in the largest cities of the United States brings into question how the landscape of urban education is mapped onto larger political issues around neoliberalism, standardization, and Common Core; these issues are connected to what Henri LeFebvre (1998) conceptualized as a “right to the city”, a phrase that signifies “a terrain of struggle” over “education, housing, jobs, and health care” (Lipman, 2013, p. 5). But beyond access to these public goods, the concept of the “right to the city” also signifies an ability to

speak for one's self – the right to transform and engage in the making and remaking of these contexts (Lipman, 2013, p 165). While urban schooling has historically focused on public schooling, these shifts require the field to reimagine the world of urban schooling, thinking about how charter schools – as well as private schools, parochial schools, magnet schools, and special admission schools – constitute arenas for “urban education”.

It is within a particular example of this complex landscape of urban education that the participants in this study experienced their field sites. The city where this study took place faced many challenges that are common within large American metropolises: budget issues, low test scores, increasing standardization and control, burgeoning charter school openings – including certain larger for-profit charter organizations taking over “failing” neighborhood schools – and increasing diversity in terms of race, language, and ethnicity. Their sites included private schools, parochial schools, charter schools, neighborhood schools, magnet schools, and partnership schools. Through their conversations around these school contexts, interesting assumptions, questions, and perceptions of urban education surfaced and shifted. This chapter will trace three of the themes that the group focused on during our time together: what counts as “real” urban education; issues of race, class, language, and difference more broadly in relation to urban schooling; and the development of and belief in specific aspects of a teacher's identity that impact teaching and learning in urban contexts.

## **“Real Urban Schools”: Definitions and Discussions around What Counts as Urban Education**

### *Narrating Passionate Selves*

The masters program that this inquiry group drew from specifically focused on questions and issues of urban education as part of its mission. Consequently, many of the students who entered the program bring with them a particular interest, history, or focus on the work of teaching in urban contexts. While not universal, many of the participants shared this perspective during the group’s first meeting in September:

**Savannah:** My main passion and love is with inner-city schools, even though I have little experience with it (Fieldnotes, 9.24.12).

**Alana:** My interest comes from how community partnerships and resources play a role on the educational development of urban schools, not just in the classroom (Fieldnotes, 9.24.12).

**Mark:** Passion is teaching inner-city youth and schools (Fieldnotes, 9.24.12).

**Emily:** All my experiences, fieldwork and otherwise have been in urban schools. It’s where my heart is (Fieldnotes, 9.24.12).

**Max:** I’m here because of my experiences subbing in[a neighboring city], seeing first hand the challenges of urban schools (Fieldnotes, 9.24.12).

In our first meeting, as the participants went around the room and shared their educational histories and their reasons for being in both the larger masters program and this group, there developed a shared sense that urban education was one of the ties that brought many of us together. As can be seen from the examples above, participants frequently used words like “passion” or “heart” when describing their commitment to urban education; there was a sense among many that teaching in inner-city schools was a calling, in addition to being a career. This is not an uncommon narrative in the world of

public education; frequently teaching is described as a passion, a social commitment, or a way to “give back”, discourses that tie into the feminization of the profession (Braun, 2012; Kim, 2013; Grumet, 1988). Borerro (2011) found that, when asked why they wanted to become teachers, passion or “love” was a central theme for pre-service teachers in an urban-focused teacher education program. She also noted, however, that this discourse alone was not adequate to sustain teachers during their study and work in urban classrooms.

While the “passion” discourse was a common one in this group, there was also some resistance to what that perspective might mean to the participants as future educators. Despite acknowledging her own motivation as tied up in a belief in community building and organization, Alana also questioned how this narrative influences the political structures around teaching:

I think some of this talk about why we’re all here, it speaks to the overall profession of teachers. You know, the fact that the government gets away with so little when it comes to teaching. I mean that the profession is not well paid, not prestigious. Instead we talk about it being passion-related, a kind of civic duty. It’s a way to get people into doing it, but the kids in the cities are the ones who suffer. We have to find other ways to support people doing these jobs. Passion is fine, but it’s not enough (Fieldnotes, 9.24.12).

This pushback against the idea that a passion for urban education was enough came up across our meetings together, often as students observed troubling moments in their field sites. After spending an afternoon in the teacher’s lounge and his fieldsite, Max reported hearing two teachers talk about how miserable they were, that “they want to leave, but they have bills to pay. They feel stuck” (Fieldnotes, 2.25.13). Comments like Alana’s and Max’s represented an awareness of this group as to the difficulties that go along with the

“nurturing” narrative of teaching. The teacher learners in this group spoke openly about their concerns entering the profession, acknowledging anxieties around social and financial wellbeing. In her book *Bitter Milk*, Madeleine Grumet traces some of the ways that these issues become embedded in our social understanding of what it means to teach:

In order to understand the consequences of the feminization of teaching that occurred during the nineteenth century, we will need to examine feminine gender as a category that expresses multiple relations among people and among institutions, being most suspicious when its characteristics appear most natural. ... Although many of the economic and social conditions that accompanied the feminization of teaching no longer obtain, pedagogy and curriculum still bear the character of this era, and we carry in our bodies, in our smiles, our spasms, our dreams, responses to a world that is no longer ours” (1988, p. 46-7).

While Grumet’s work speaks to teaching more broadly, many of the concerns and realities that she outlines here were especially relevant to the participants in this study as they thought about their work in urban classrooms. It was in these spaces that the participants most resonated with the idea of teaching as an act of social commitment, a place where one could “make a difference, make something important” (Savannah, Fieldnotes, 9.24.12). As Grumet describes above, this social caring narrative was one that many of the participants in this study engaged in during our conversations. Although these teacher learners shared many of the values and beliefs around urban education as a site of transformative possibility, many were simultaneously wary of these claims. Emily shared that, for her,

In some ways it was more comfortable for me to teach in a low-income neighborhood. People tell you how great you are, how it’s so wonderful of you. Friends who taught in suburban schools were told that they could do something better, but everyone praised me. What does that say about how we view those kids, those communities? I always wanted to do better at my job, but there were certain assumptions that I had that I wasn’t even aware of until I came here (Fieldnotes, 10.22.12).



Here, Emily speaks back to the ‘social good’ discourse around what it means to be an urban school teacher, particularly as a white middle-class woman, recognizing the ways that it positions urban communities and her in a complicated and – as Grumet highlights – historicized and gendered relationship. Campano notes that urban teaching is often “ironically thought of as a ‘selfless’ profession in which nurturing individuals could become low-level technicians who executed curricula to ‘needy’ children (2007, p. 11). Here, Emily references both her own self-perception as a nurturing person, but also is deeply aware, and troubled, by the ways that others position her work in these communities. Thus, while passion and social commitment remained a focal point for many of the participants, their collective narratives around these issues became more complicated as we continued our work together, leading us into more detailed conversations around the particular nature of urban education. One particular topic – who should teach in urban schools and why – became an ongoing discussion within the group that I will go into in more detail later in this chapter.

### *Fieldwork and Narratives of “Real” Urban Schools*

As I described above, the schools where these students were engaged in their field experiences had a wide range along almost every possible dimension, other than they were all within the metropolitan area of the city where the university is housed (almost all of the sites were within the formal city limits, although a few were in the surrounding towns and suburbs). At first, students referenced this work in “urban schools” as a connection between all of us, assuming as well that we all shared an understanding of what “urban” meant in these contexts and schools:

**Savannah:** Part of the reason we are all here is to learn more about urban schools and how to work with kids in these environments (Fieldnotes, 9.24.12).

**Emily:** Urban ed gets such a bad rap, that it's so hard. But obviously there are a lot of us, like our group here, who see possibility as well (Fieldnotes, 11.19.12).

In these earlier conversations, there appeared to be a sense that what drew us all together was our focus on literacy and on urban education; this was an important point of connection for the participants who frequently discussed the difficulties of being in a program that did not focus on a particular age range or grade level (Fieldnotes, 10.8.12, 3.11.13, 4.8.13). As I began to look more closely at the participants' discussion of "urban", however, some interesting and at times challenging nuances began to surface. Across the conversations, there was an ongoing narrative theme about "real" urban schools, often in conjunction with students expressing disappointed (and, at times, relief) that they were in sites that they saw as "non-urban" in some way:

**Veronica:** I'm at [a local magnet school]. I'm so excited to be in a different kind of school. I've only been in typical urban schools before, low-performing schools. I'm excited to be in a school with more resources, to see what it's like on the other side (Fieldnotes, 9.24.12).

Here, through her recognition of a magnet school as a unique type of schooling environment, Veronica also implies a perspective on what "typical" urban schools are like, drawing on their lack of resources as a central aspect of their identity or classification. This quality of urban schools – as being under-resourced or in some other way at a deficit – became a central aspect of what the group members began to call "real" urban or city schools:

**Lila:** My fieldsite for Adolescent Literacy, it's like a real urban school; you know – they deal with the real problems like attendance, finances, violence (Fieldnotes, 10.11.12).

**Maddie:** So far for fieldwork here I've only been in charter schools, so I don't think I know what a real urban school looks like, especially since I grew up in the suburbs. So, in terms of urban education, I'm not really seeing it (Fieldnotes, 1.14.13).

**Abby:** I grew up [in this city]. My parents decided that the public schools weren't safe for me, they had too many of the problems that we talk about facing urban schools. So I went to a Catholic school a mile away, even though there was a public school across the street.

**Max:** See, I grew up here too. And there was a notion in my community that Catholic schools were better, but that they babied you. We went to the real urban schools, these mad underserved messed-up places with no textbooks and teachers who barely wanted to be there (Fieldnotes, 1.28.13).

Although speaking from a wide range of personal histories and field experiences, the participants in this group seemed to share some common understandings about “real” urban education. Almost always these conceptualizations centered on the issues and challenges faced by these schools, or the presumed lack of resources within the school or community.

Framed in this way, “real” urban education became the space where students and communities struggled most, and often referred to communities that have been perpetually marginalized by the system along racial, linguistic, and class lines. As such, these “deficit approaches to teaching and learning ... that remain in what has come to be known as ‘urban education’ have included the expectation that students will shed their cultural identities, subjectivities, and languages” (King, Akua, & Russell, 2013, p. 28). In these narratives, “real” urban education held as central to its definition an apparent lack or failure. To become a successful urban school meant, within this framework, that somehow the authenticity or validity of the school's urbanity was lost. Success, then, became in many ways framed as acculturation to mainstream markers of success and

ability (Goldenberg, 2014; Achinstein & Ogawa, 2011). This framework suggests some troubling issues related to preparing urban school teachers, including a presumption of failure as the heart of what it means to be an urban educational context. As the following sections show, this conceptualization had significant impact on how many of the participants engaged in and reflected on their field experiences.

### *The Pervasiveness of Deficit Discourses*

Given its pervasive and normalized place within commonly-held perceptions of education, it is unsurprising that students came in with and continued to grapple with a deficit perspective toward urban education. What was more interesting, especially in regards to the research questions that guided this study, was the ways that their specific fieldwork context influenced how they were thinking about the impact of these issues. At times, these perceived deficits and issues made it difficult for participants to understand why members of these school communities were still invested in them. During a time when an announcement of almost fifty school closings within the district was impacting schools, Kelly shared her perspective on this issue:

In my site, I mean, the principal is great. I see her come in all the time. I've been in different grades, and she's always popping in and out. She's very interactive and the kids seem to love her. But in terms of the school – this sounds bad, but when my teacher told me they were closing it, I was like “Thank god!” I mean – teachers don't seem to care, there's no heat in the basement, and only two bathrooms for K-5. There are kids getting beat up. They have to bundle up to eat. It's very sad. There's not even a gym. I guess – I mean, the principal and the teacher seemed so sad, but I don't see why that school should stay open. I mean, it's bad even for an urban school (Fieldnotes, 2.25.13).

Here, Kelly struggles to make sense of the perceived – and real – issues that she sees facing this school with the administrator's and teachers' dismay over its closing. But the

issues are framed as a part of urban schooling, making it hard to imagine the community-based resources or possibilities for the space. Rather than framing the lack of resources as an injustice to the community in the ways that we structure and finance education, Kelly instead places the fault within the school itself, as an example of “an urban school”, and consequently as within the community.

On the other hand, this perception of urban education led students who were not in schools that they perceived as “real urban” to examine and explore the reasons for this disconnect. Emily did her spring fieldwork at a school that serviced the community around the university itself. This school, which has a complicated and long history within the university and the community, was designed as both a neighborhood school for the catchment and as a partnership school with the university. Built roughly a decade ago, this school is seen as one of the most successful schools in the district. At the time that Emily was doing fieldwork, however, the school was at a point of crisis as the number of families wanting kindergarten spots who lived within the catchment area was far more than the number of spots in the schools. Emily described for the group the scene outside the school as the day of enrollment neared:

Last Tuesday was kindergarten enrollment day. ... The Friday before, when I was there, the first grandparent had gotten in line. Parents had been circling the school all day, waiting for somebody to get in line. Apparently they had been told not to line up until Tuesday, but nobody listened. People had relatives to come in from out of state to hold their spots in line. Registration was four days later, and it was really really cold. Parents had beach chairs. Somebody was constructing this tent out of piping. There were two Winnebagos parked, with people taking turns. They were there to stay. I mean, they were getting crazy. The first seventy people get spaces, then that's it. No more. I had never seen anything like it (Fieldnotes, 1.28.13).

Ultimately, Emily went on to say, the police broke up the line – in part due to the sub-freezing temperatures – and the school decided to go to a lottery system, which upset many families who lived in the area. Emily went on to share her perspectives on what drove this somewhat extreme behavior on the part of the families:

I feel for parents – you want to get your kids into the school, no matter what. But it's also so sad, the level of desperation. There are no other schools parents are comfortable with. I mean, in so many ways this was a way to get your kid into a (gestures air quotes) “non-urban school” in an urban district. And I also thought about who is in the line, who can afford that. ... I just think if there were more good schools then this wouldn't have been an issue (Fieldnotes, 1.28.13).

Maddie, who was at the same school as Emily, reflected during an interview that she “probably didn't have the most urban experience, being at [partnership school]”

(Interview, 2.4.13). Again, the pervasiveness of what “real urban” schools looked like colored how these students experienced and made sense of their fieldwork experiences.

Talking across these contexts, however, did enable participants to reflect critically on these differences and the potential impact on the lives of students and teachers. Lila echoed many of these sentiments toward the end of our work together when she reflected on her various contexts for fieldwork:

I was at [a charter school focused on the local immigrant community and history] and a [partnership school]. I felt like I was put in those schools because they were seen as having perfect learning environments, pedagogies, and instructional choices. I felt super useless. When I went to [a comprehensive neighborhood school] it didn't seem perfect; it wasn't the “we're doing the best job ever” feeling – it was, “We're teaching and doing our best”. I was needed in ways that felt more authentic and real, more like what's really happening in urban education and not just the exceptional places (Fieldnotes, 4.8.13).

These statements were not only about charter schools and magnet schools. Veronica shared a similar statement when she described her neighborhood elementary fieldsite in

the following way, “I couldn’t believe it was, you know, a regular urban school. I mean – the kids and teachers are so invested. It’s run down but it’s so calm. And the lessons are amazing” (Fieldnotes, 3.25.13). While many of these experiences were those of schools that meet many of the criteria often identified as belonging to “good schools”, the participants still drew on the perception that these sites were the exceptions to the rule within urban education – going so far as to suggest that this level of success or sustainability made them categorically “non-urban”. Furthermore, there is a sad and strong reality that schools were not and are not resourced equally across communities within the city. But the fundamental issue here lies in how these various spaces are conceptualized by teacher learners, and by educational research more broadly. To be a school that is functioning well, offering a sense of achievement and meeting needs – both in terms of the community and in terms of broader, more standardized measures of success – means to become in some way “non-urban”. In other words, the only “real urban” schools are those that “broken”, or – to use Max’s words – “mad underserved messed-up places”. While this emphasis can help students in teacher education programs to better understand the systemic and hierarchical inequities that are pervasive in American schools, they also deny in many ways an appreciation for the vibrant and thriving schools – neighborhood, charter, magnet, and other – that also make up part of the urban educational landscape. It perpetuates the

Deficit paradigm that is so deeply embedded in urban schools. ... Public debate and proposed solutions frequently focus on individual behavior and character. ... School practices and assumptions emerging from the deficit paradigm often hide student and teacher abilities. These assumptions are particularly power because they are unspoken. We overlook our taken-for-granted ideas and practices to an extraordinary degree (Weiner, 2006, pp. 65-6).

Weiner and other scholars (Donnell, 2006; Garcia & Guerra, 2004; Gutiérrez, 1995) argue that in order to reimagine possibilities for urban schools we first need to address what we mean by “urban” – how the deficit perspective that undergirds much of our theory and research into urban education deeply impacts not only how these sites are perceived, but also how we imagine new futures or directions for these communities. Furthermore, Watson (2011) describes how interviews with pre-service teachers demonstrated that not only was urban used as a way to code for race, but also that it presumed a lack of community and family support. The masters program that the participants were a part of took seriously the need to re-imagine how we contextualize urban education, but the pervasive notion of urban schools as sites of struggle, as “broken” education, deeply affected our inquiry community, to the point where schools that were seen as highly-functional or thriving were labeled as “non-urban”, even when they met every other expectation of urban schooling.

It is important to note here that I include these stories not to criticize the members of the inquiry group or to place blame on them for these deficit perspectives, but instead to illuminate the pervasive and complicated ways that this framework influences the work of urban school teachers, particularly those who share a passion for entering urban schools as their sites of practice. These messages both influenced how teachers were positioned by themselves and others – such as Emily’s story about how her work in an inner-city school was valorized by her friends, family, and, to some extent, herself – and how the participants imagined their futures. After her time in a local middle school, Lila shared:



I'm off my high horse. I've been able to see the real side of teaching in [this city]; the teachers are going through their day and trying to get done what really needs to get done. And that's amazing. But I don't know, I don't know if I can do it. I think about Liam, whose class I visited in the fall, and how he just got moved from one school to another with no warning, no input. And I mean, I think I'll just burn out at those schools. But I also don't want to be in those schools, where – like we talked about, where they are just so special, so privileged, even if it means I could teach they way I think we should. I thought I wanted to be an urban teacher, but now – I just don't know (Fieldnotes, 4.8.13).

Here, Lila casts herself in an impossible dilemma; to be an “urban teacher” means to work in a school that is struggling financially, academically (by mainstream standards) or along other lines. But to take a job at a school with more autonomy or community – where the curriculum and community are functioning well – means to turn her back on that identity, even if the school is within an urban context. These narratives point to the importance of thinking more critically about how we can, as a field, reconceptualize urban education in such a way that it simultaneously recognizes the larger social inequities while also appreciating the possibility for local achievement, for the successes of children, teacher, and administrators. Furthermore, these narratives demonstrate the ways in which mainstream notions of “success” become the sole markers to achievement, undervaluing the perspectives and “organic intellectual” capacities of these communities (Gramsci, 1971). Urban contexts are vibrant and complex, and the field of education does need to appreciation the challenges and possibilities inherent in these communities. But without a more critical perspective on how we frame “urban education”, we as a field will continue to perpetuate assumptions located within a deficit orientation toward schools and communities, even as students visit these spaces as part of their teacher education.

**“Ms. Sleet Smokes Weed”: Narratives around “Urban Culture”, Race, and  
Language**

*Reading Students’ Work: A Collaborative Critical Incident*

These larger narratives deeply impacted how the participants imagined their future careers and broadly conceived of urban education, but also how they made sense of the specific classrooms that they visited. In particular, students began to question the role of “culture” as an aspect of the schools and classrooms that they were visiting for their field experiences. Frequently these conversations centered on explicit issues around the role of race and language in the classroom, but there was also a larger sense of a culture that was somehow specific to the urban communities that these students were visiting. While this theme occurred over a number of our conversations and through many of the participants’ stories, one particular narrative about a school-based experience became something of a critical incident for the group. Kelly was doing her fieldwork in a neighborhood school second grade classroom near the university. One of her responsibilities was to look through the children’s journals that they wrote in every morning. She came to our meeting deeply upset about something she had come across in one journal that morning:

I went in and looked at the journal and there was this drawing stuck in there<sup>15</sup>. And it said, “Ms. Sleet [the classroom teacher] smokes weed and dutches. This is Ms. Sleet and she’s smoking”. ... It just makes me think about her [the student’s] home life, about the violence in urban schools. What are her parents doing? It makes me think about what we can do as teachers. It shocked me. I mean, seriously. I had no idea kids knew about this stuff. I told the teacher and there was a whole meeting, but the girl denies doing it, so the teacher just let it go. But I mean, she’s seven (Fieldnotes, 2.25.13).

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<sup>15</sup> See Appendix C for the image.

Kelly's shock and dismay was evident as she recounted this story. It was clear that this incident had bothered her greatly – not only because of the content of the student's entry but also because of the teacher's apparent lack of appropriate response. What made the moment even more interesting is that many of us in the group (including me) were unfamiliar with the phrase "dutches" to mean hand-rolled joints until other members of the group explained it to us, complicating aspects of culture and community as the phrase positioned inquiry group members along the lines of language and history. Embedded in Kelly's retelling of this story were a number of perspectives on urban communities and families, almost all of which drew on the same deficit perspective described above. Interestingly, this narrative took place at a time when there was a larger national debate around marijuana, as many states were beginning to pass legislature to legalize its distribution. In this instance, however, before talking to the student or the teacher, Kelly presumed that factors playing into the child's decision to draw what certainly can be construed as a mischievous image had to do with her family and the school environment. Furthermore, she fundamentally assumed that these were negative influences in the child's life, drawing on her identity as a white upper-middle class woman who grew up in a suburban area as she openly discussed how different (and, it was presumed, inferior) these perspectives were from her own childhood.

This narrative sparked an intense and impassioned conversation. Mark, an African-American man whose background more closely aligned with the students in the school that Kelly was in, countered:

Depending on the community, it could be a typical thing. It could be something her parents do, or it could just be her talking about something she sees on the steps around her. You know, it's part of the culture of the city, no big deal (Fieldnotes, 2.25.12).

Here, although Mark still allows for the role of the student's history and community in the decision to create the drawing, he reframed the community aspect as something other than a deficit, bringing into question Kelly's response to the journal entry. Max, whose identity and background were similar to Mark's, shared many of his perspectives. The three of them had an extended back-and-forth about how to interpret this drawing as evidence of the student's culture, upbringing, or perspective:

**Kelly:** I don't know. I mean, it really bothered me. It made me angry. I mean, this is not okay. When I was seven I was playing with Barbie and dolls and other things. I just think this should have led to something. Maybe a parent conversation? I don't know.

**Max:** I mean, I think it's definitely something to talk about with the parents. I don't think marijuana is such a big deal, but maybe it's worth talking about, seeing how parents want to deal with it.

**Kelly:** But this would not have been okay in the school that I student taught at, the school I went to. Why do we have different expectations at these different schools? I understand that it might be a cultural thing, but on the other hand, I want to have expectations for her.

**Mark:** I think, in my experience, this is not such a big deal. I don't know. I just feel like in the scope of things I've seen in similar communities, like where I grew up, this is actually on the mild side.

**Kelly:** Right. But why is it okay in this school and not others? How do you compare?

**Max:** I mean, she could have drawn this because she thinks smoking weed is cool, and she likes her teacher. Or she doesn't like her and she is making fun of her. Or on a dare. I don't know. I think the conversation is important. I think the important thing is why she drew it, why she thought that was okay, not the drawing itself... Also, there's a stigma around marijuana and bad parenting and the assumption that it means bad parenting techniques. In that situation, as a teacher, I would see a lot of institutional ways the school could mess with her. I would try to keep it between me and the student (Fieldnotes, 2.25.13).

This conversation was one moment among many where Max drew on his perspectives of urban culture as a positive, often in direct resistance to the more pervasive deficit orientation that frequently came up in participants' narratives. In a critique of how Black History month is often framed, Max said, "It should be about authentic tales of of people's experiences that humanize and don't stereotype. You know, stories that celebrate what's going on in cities and communities in history and now, not just jumping from slavery to 1940" (Fieldnotes, 3.25.13).

It is also important to note that perspectives on this drawing and what it did or did not imply about the community did not neatly fall along racial or autobiographical lines. Veronica, like Kelly, was a white woman who had an upper-class background; however, she drew on a slightly different autobiography as she framed her response to Kelly's story:

I didn't have a sheltered childhood, so I wasn't that shocked. I had no problem understanding differences between what you should and shouldn't do. Even though I was exposed at a young age it didn't make a difference in the end. ... Just because she sees people smoking doesn't mean that this is what she knows. It doesn't mean the child is abused, or neglected. I don't know. Like [our professor] said – how far can you take it? (Fieldnotes, 2.25.13)

From these narratives, it is clear that the ways that culture, particular "urban culture", is understood had a great impact on how the different participants view and – in many ways – welcome the perspective of the family or the role of culture or community into the classroom. What began with Kelly's relatively certain and problematic read ended in a more open discussion about the issues at hand. This conversation did not lead to a neat resolution, but instead reflected the tensions that participants in this group had to negotiate. Perhaps what is most important here for the field of teacher education is the

need for spaces to discuss these responses to students' work, as well as the assumptions that undergirded how the participants, Kelly in particular, read into the student's drawing. This moment speaks to the critical importance of creating spaces for a reflection on fieldwork that allows for both the surfacing and the disruptions of deficit-oriented perspectives on urban schools and communities.

*Negotiating Expectations For/About Children in Urban Contexts*

While Kelly's reaction to the journal entry drew heavily on her own background, as well as her sense of what is appropriate in school settings, it also stemmed from her goals for students in this school and her desire to do right by them. She poses a challenging question about the nature of expectations to the inquiry group – is relevance to the local community enough to treat this kind of moment differently in different settings? What role does culture play in how we interpret students' work? Clearly, Kelly is using this moment to work through an inquiry of her own as she tries to understand why the response to this incident is so different from what she would expect, given her own perspectives and experiences in schools.

It is important to note here that Kelly's perception of what "expectations" mean for students reflects her own background and her fieldwork experiences in schools that mirrored her own schooling history. Sleeter (2011) and others have discussed the importance of engaging in these issues with pre-service and early career teachers when there is a great disconnect between the teacher and the students' backgrounds and identities. Yet it would be unfair to dismiss Kelly as ignorant or simply prejudiced against this student's communities and experiences. Her response is far more complicated

and deeply embedded in real question of practice. In this conversation, Kelly is engaging with her peers around these issues, continuing to explore why this incident troubled her. By bringing it forward into the collaborative space, she opens herself to hearing other viewpoints and perspectives. In the end, Kelly did not have a sudden transformative response to the other perspectives, but she did begin to acknowledge her own assumptions and perspectives:

I guess I hear what you're saying. And I will say the teacher has been in this school for twenty years, so she's familiar with this culture, with these kids. It still bothers me, but maybe I tried to read too much into it. I just don't know how to balance it with what I saw in my other field sites or in the schools where I went. It still seems like a big deal, even if it is part of the culture. It's just so different from my childhood (Fieldnotes, 2.25.13).

While she did not completely give up her negative perspective on the incident, Kelly did at least begin to appreciate that her own background had an influence on how she interpreted this student's work. This response shows both the role that open dialogue with peers can have on disrupting assumptions within teacher education, as well as the need for time when dealing with complicated issues of race, class, and urbanity in school contexts. Rather than frame the "appropriate" response as a complete transformation into a pre-established norm for critically-oriented education, these conversations speak to the need for spaces where teacher educators can "struggle to unlearn racism, ... acknowledging to each other and to our students that this process would never be finished, would never be 'once and for all'" (Cochran-Smith, 2004, p. 88).

*A Sense of "Urban Culture": Silence and Discussion Around Race and Language*

While the participants disagreed about the valence of the drawing, as well as the appropriate response from the teacher, they all drew on the idea that community –

particularly urban community – has a culture of its own. The concept of an urban culture and its impact on education is not a new one; many scholars have explored how these communities and cultural perspectives influenced students’ literacy practices in and out of school (Alim, 2011; Alim & Reyes, 2011; Morell & Duncan-Andrade, 2010). But what was interesting here was how the participants, from their various perspectives, worked together and challenged each other as they made sense of the role of urban culture in the classroom, building from both negative and positive understandings of urban culture. In these conversations, each participant had the chance to bring their own perspectives to the table as they negotiated how to make sense of “urban culture” and its impact on the classroom. It is also important to note that in this moment the goal was not to come to consensus, but instead to hear one another out. This conversation and others like it complicated the ideas of what it means for students and schools to be part of an “urban culture”, simultaneously drawing on and pushing back against the deficit perspective that so frequently surrounds discussions of urban education. It represents the complicated intersections of personal history, schooling experiences, and – to some extent – ethical or moral frameworks and the ways that these aspects of identity influence how teachers enter and practice in urban schools.

Furthermore, Kelly’s narrative around this drawing demonstrates the complex purposes that field experiences can serve in teacher education. Here Kelly compares multiple experiences in different schools. While on the one hand experiences in schools that do not match a teacher learner’s own history have the potential to disrupt deficit narratives, they also have the chance to uphold or even strengthen these perspectives if



the teacher learner does not have the opportunity to engage in conversation and dialogue around these issues. In the case of Kelly's story, few if any methods or content classes in teacher education would specifically address the content that she brings up, or how to deal with these kinds of fraught questions around culture, community, and school participation. Yet these "puzzling moments" (Ballenger, 2009) that Kelly faced in her classroom experiences were the ones that helped surface her own expectations and understandings of urban education. Without a fieldwork-related space in which to address these moments through dialogue and narrative, field experiences can easily be essentialized, presumed to provide enlightenment into pedagogy or praxis when in reality these moments can function simply as exposure that furthers participants' deficit-based frameworks and assumptions. Furthermore, each participant brought his or her own understandings, histories, and experiences to play as they entered and engaged in their field sites. Constructing an inquiry community from which to explore these perspectives allowed for students to construct knowledge and push each other's viewpoints more openly, building on a "dialogic method" (Freire, 1970; Freire & Shor, 1987) that can recognize people's social and historicized locations while still working to disrupt taken-for-granted presumptions about urban culture.

While "urban" or "urban culture" was a phrase used in many of our meetings (9 of the 14 meetings), race was a term that came up far less often (4 of 14 meetings). In those four meetings, twice I was the one who introduced the question of race, although the participants then took it up as a topic of discussion (Fieldnotes, 10.22.12; 1.28.13). As Watson (2011) finds in her work with pre-service teachers, "urban" often stands as a code

for discussing poor students of color. So it is worth noticing the ways that participants in this inquiry group were willing to discuss urban culture and community but hesitant to directly address issues of race. Yet when the topic was raised within the group, there was a shared sense that race matters - both in terms of the students' identities, and the ways that the racial identity of the teacher can impact how she or he engages with students. For example, Mark described the complicated relationships he had with the students in his fieldwork site as "another Black guy" in the classroom, differentiating himself from the teacher (Fieldnotes, 10.22.12). Emily jokingly referred to herself in relation to an Onion article about "another caring white woman in the classroom" (9.24.12). These moments, however, were usually brief and rarely became the focal point of the conversation.

In discussions about the K-12 students that were in the field sites, however, race was almost never mentioned. One notable exception is the incident described in Chapter Four, when Lila was describing her own reaction to students' engagement with the idea of double-consciousness, noting that "for the white straight males in that schools, it's not working for me. I just don't read their comments the same way" (Fieldnotes, 1.28.13). In part, it seems that Lila's awareness of race (and gender and sexuality) in this context had to do at least in part with the fact that the topic itself directly engaged these issues in the classroom, as well as with her own identity as a queer woman – an aspect of self she felt made her more conscious of how questions of identity are silenced in the classroom (Fieldnotes, 9.24.12). In other contexts however, she, as with most of the other participants, allowed "culture" to stand in for a closer more nuanced appreciation of identity and community. Gloria Ladson-Billings (2006) writes

But the problem of culture in teaching is not merely one of exclusion. It is also one of over determination. What I mean by this is that culture is randomly and regularly used to explain everything. So at the same moment teacher education students learn nothing about culture, they use it with authority as one of the primary explanations for everything from school failure to problems with behavior management and discipline (p. 104).

Despite a lack of clarity around what is meant by “culture”, there is a sense that it can be used in the place of other defining terms, such as Black or Latino. Furthermore, calling something “cultural” – as can be seen in Kelly’s example above – can become short hand for placing the issue back within the community, and the individual, taking the school’s and the teacher’s expectations as “natural” without deeply or critically exploring the tensions in place. It allows everyone in the situation to glide around the uncomfortable questions of how we address difference, and more particularly race, within urban education. In other words, “One reason that students use culture as a catchall phrase is that it is often a proxy for race. The elephant in the teacher education parlor (along with America’s parlor) is race” (Ladson-Billings, 2006, p. 106). Although there were exceptions to this silence around race, most notably in regards to teacher education and teacher identity, which I will address in greater detail below, the group’s relative silence around this topic directly speaks to the ways that spaces of teacher education need to explore better ways of engaging teacher learners in these difficult conversations.

While race was a relatively silent topic within the group, questions of language were far more common, and often were used as a roundabout way of engaging in discussions of race in the classrooms the participants were visiting. In many meetings (6 out of 14), the participants specifically shared stories that addressed questions of students’ language use, most often in connection to their written work in the classroom.

Participants described the range of languages spoken within the classroom (Fieldnotes, 11.5.12, 4.8.13), how reading specialists connected with (or not) students identified as English Language Learners (1.28.13; 10.8.12); and questions of dialect or non-standard English in the classroom (10.8.12, 10.22.12, 3.25.13). While these conversations covered a number of themes, two narratives were particularly sustained and drew comments from many of the inquiry group members. In both, participants discussed issues of race and language in terms of how students were assessed and evaluated in the school setting.

During her second semester of fieldwork Maddie was placed in a bilingual Spanish-English K-8 charter school. The school's mission is to foster bidirectional language development (Dworin, 2003; García, 2011) and includes in the student population both native English and Spanish speakers. At first, Maddie was somewhat uncomfortable with the placement, although she enjoyed her time with both the classroom teacher and the reading specialist. She shared her feelings with the group:

I'm not really, you know, I don't have a background in TESOL education. So I don't know, I don't always know how to engage with the students. But it's cool. And, I mean, it's part of urban education, so it's a good experience (Fieldnotes, 1.28.12).

Again, Maddie draws on a sense of urban education that includes the concept of a more heterogeneous classroom where multiple languages and cultures can be present. While at first this made her uncomfortable, over time she came to appreciate how this setting allowed her to draw on different experiences:

So it was really interesting to see them [the Spanish speaking students] interact with one another and they would have little side conversations in Spanish and I took Spanish in middle school and high school and two years – and one year of college – so it was interesting to kind of, use my Spanish and kinda integrate it. ... So, it was a really cool experience. I was calling my mom and I was like, "The –

it's cool. I get to, like, listen to them, like, and understand it – and talk to them a little bit in Spanish.” You know, even though I'm not really bilingual, they were so patient (Interview, 5.20.13).

Once Maddie was able to give up her focus on being the expert in the classroom she was able to engage with the students in a different way, building on their resources and appreciating the ways that they were accommodating her, even if her tone of surprise continues to differentiate between Spanish and English speakers in the space. However, while the aim of the school was to foster immersion into both Spanish and English, Maddie began to notice some practices that positioned students in the classroom differently, depending on their linguistic background:

**Maddie:** I've noticed - a few kids in 5<sup>th</sup> grade who are still learning English. So sometimes the class will do independent reading, and those kids will be allowed to go on computer and do Rosetta Stone.

**Katrina:** But not the kids learning Spanish?

**Maddie:** Not in that class. Just the kids who struggle with English. I don't know about other classes, when I'm not there.

**Emily:** So in kindergarten the Spanish speakers are in all Spanish classes, but by fifth grade they are expected to speak English?

**Maddie:** I guess so. I mean, three of the kindergarten kids are really low, even in Spanish, so they are getting pulled out for English. Probably the only English they get. Maybe that's the same situation with these Rosetta Stone kids. But struggling in Spanish, that doesn't seem to really be an issue for the teachers. It's interesting. I hadn't really thought about that before. It just was the way it worked – the kids just went to the computer, so I didn't think about it much (Fieldnotes, 1.28.13).

Although Maddie appreciated the focus on bilingual education in the classroom, she also began to become aware of some inequitable practices around language proficiency in the school. In a study of a similar dual-language program, Fitts found that “even though all the adults in the school recognize that being an English language learner is qualitatively different than being a Spanish language learner, the ideology [of language equality] functions by glossing over these differences through the processes of adequation”, often

unwittingly leading students and teachers to recreate the status quo of English as the dominant language (2006, p. 349). For Maddie, her field experience provided two different functions; it offered her experiences in a dual-language context, building on her understanding of how to promote and engage in literacy practices with English Language Learners in ways that built on and appreciated their own perspectives and linguistic practices (Spencer, Falchi, & Ghiso, 2011). But at the same time, it offered a context from which to consider the nature of language ideology and its impact on classroom practices, even in schools that are attempting to recognize and respect a wider range of linguistic and cultural practices.

In addition to dealing with these issues around the use of other languages in the classroom, participants also faced concerns related to the use of “non-standard” English. At our first meeting, Lila volunteered to share a story from fieldwork the following week. At the time Lila was doing the majority of her fieldwork at a charter school located in the Chinatown neighborhood of the city that had a strong emphasis on equity and justice, particularly around issues facing the Asian community. The majority of the school’s student population (roughly 70%) was made up of Asian and Asian American students (some with citizenship status, as well as documented and undocumented immigrants), with African American students making up the other largest population (roughly 20%). When she returned the following week, Lila shared the following story about her experience:

**Lila:** When I'm there it's Writer's Workshop. So I'm looking at a student's writing and I don't know. We talk here about using AAVE<sup>16</sup>. And [the teacher] comes up and says "We allow Black English in their writing."

**Max:** With Asian students?

**Lila:** There are Black students too. And I'm like, okay, we just started talking about this in class. And I totally agree – I mean, I think we should honor home language. But I don't speak AAVE. I never will. And I feel really uncomfortable making decisions – this is what counts, this doesn't. I'm uncomfortable with this as a white person (Fieldnotes, 10.8.12).

In this moment, Lila's fieldwork experience makes real the tension between her beliefs about what should count as part of the reading and writing curriculum, and her own positionality and knowledge base as a "standard" English speaker. Lila is not alone in her struggles to understand how to best support students' home languages in the classroom (Ball & Lardner, 2005; Elbow, 2002). In their book *African American Literacies Unleashed: Vernacular English and the Composition Classroom*, Ball and Lerner share a number of teacher's stories that echo Lila's dilemma:

Teacher encounter these linguistic practices every day when they serve students who are native speakers of AAVE and many wonder how they can best evaluate or respond to these students' written texts. ... The writing of AAVE speakers, like the writing of any group of students, may indeed contain errors – features of language or organizational patterns that are, from any perspective, mistakes that need to be corrected. But sometimes what seems like an error maybe be more than that. It may be part of a linguistic code that has considerable social or cultural value (2005, p. 42).

In her field experience, Lila recognized her lack of the knowledge needed to function an editor for these particular students' writing. She also embraced the idea that a student's language, as embedded in culture and knowledge, should be seen as an asset. But she did

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<sup>16</sup> In a memo, I noted that Lila used this shorthand for African American Vernacular English in her narrative, suggesting perhaps that she expected all the other group members to be familiar with this acronym (Memo, 10.9.12).

not know what to do with this moment of uncertainty. When Amy followed up by asking Lila what she did in the moment she shrugged, saying:

I didn't feel comfortable telling the teacher I didn't know what I was doing. I thought she would think that I'm lazy or disinterested. And I'm not. So I just talked about the positives with the student and focused on basic stuff, like spaces after periods. And we don't talk about these things in the class here, because it wasn't part of the lesson plan (Fieldnotes, 10.8.12).

Because she was unsure of how to explore these issues further in either the classroom or the university space, she ended up falling back on more skills-based practices when engaging with this student's writing.

Far too often in teacher education programs there is a disconnect between a focus on theories of practice that welcome and utilize children's cultural and linguistic ways of knowing that occurs simultaneously with a lack of attention paid to the specifics of how this framework might impact practice in the classroom. Here, while field experiences provided a platform for Maddie and Lila to engage in a more nuanced critique and understanding of practice and its connection to language and culture, their relationships with cooperating teachers, their concern about being seen as unsure or lacking in the necessary skills, and the lack of space to unpack these unexpected narratives within the university setting led instead to a sense of confusion and silence. This story emphasizes the importance for teacher education programs to make issues of culture and language central in the development of both coursework and fieldwork, not just discussing the consequences of these issues in specially sanctioned spaces such as multicultural education courses. Fieldwork in particular offers an important space where these conversations can be facilitated, in that it is inherently based in real experiences and



students' reflections on practice. Constructing fieldwork programs that engage in systematic and critical reflection can help teacher learners see this work as part of the profession of teaching, and can help to combat stereotypical or deficit-oriented perspectives around language, as well as offer the opportunity to directly address real questions of practice around issues of language and culture.

### **“You Need to Know Why You’re There”: Identity, Teacher Education and the Impact on Urban Classroom Practices**

#### *Reading Classroom Practices*

As is evident in the above stories, the participants in this group frequently drew on their own biographies and experiences in urban schools as they constructed their understanding of how these educational spaces functioned. While these conversations were at times about specific subjects, such as language, race, or what is “appropriate” within a particular context, discussions also focused on the larger issue of the role and identity of the teacher in urban schools. Along with, at times, taking a deficit approach to the general idea of urban education, the group also struggled with images or experiences of teachers who they felt were in some way failing to meet the needs of the classroom. While many of the experiences that the group members had in their classroom sites were positive, it was clear across the year that they were also frequently critiquing the classroom practices as well:

**Savannah:** I’ve seen so many teachers this year who are lazy. I can’t think of another word for it. And I mean, these are the kids who need passionate and caring teachers (Fieldnotes, 2.25.13).

**Max:** A lot of teachers in cities aren't in it for the critical thing. They don't know, show, or care about what's going on in their students' lives (Fieldnotes, 11.19.13)

**Kelly:** In my field site, I was in kindergarten before I switched, and they don't even have a word wall. I assessed them all in DIBELS, more than half only know eleven letters of alphabet. ... And it's not just this population. I've been in a number of kindergartens. I've been at [private Catholic school], which is high. All kids went to preK. But I've also been at a [local charter], also been in a [local neighborhood schools]. I've never seen kids who didn't know so many letters. Just learning to sit still. The teacher is not teaching them the right things, and they are not going to get it. There was no student works on the wall, no classroom library. A lot of times you say, "oh lack of resources", but a teacher can do stuff. She was nice, but I think she was just tired of the kids (Fieldnotes, 2.11.13).

In these conversations around teachers' practices and the apparent problems with them, the participants referenced a number of criteria that they saw as being a part of working in urban schools: a sense that the teachers were caring, engaging, critically-minded, and able to meet the expectations of standardized assessment measures, even when faced with limited resources. There are, of course, teachers in schools across the United States who are struggling and who, along many lines of evaluation, probably should not be working in classrooms. Every profession – law, medicine, education, and others – has practitioners who are more or less engaged in their work, more or less prepared, and more or less successful. But what is interesting here is the ways that poor teaching becomes equated with urban schooling, a common discourse around the 'trouble with schools these days' (Kumashiro, 2012; Zeichner, 2006, Lytle, 2008). Within this framework, teachers are seen as the gatekeepers to success, with little to no attention paid to the ways that they themselves are often faced with a lack of resources and professional respect. Despite acknowledging many of these struggles themselves as they worked with students and

faced moments of uncertainty in their own practice, many of the participants continued to question the commitment or capacity of teachers they observed in their field settings.

*Discussing the “Cultural Outsider” and Who Should Teach in Urban Schools*

In addition to questions of practice, the group also discussed the question of who should be in the classroom. Early in our time together, while talking about his cooperating teacher, Mark mentioned that his cooperating teacher was:

A cultural outsider – not just in terms of race, but also where he’s from. A lot of students live in areas where he can’t really fathom what they experience. He can empathize, but can’t really know” (Fieldnotes, 10.22.12).

As I discussed in Chapter Three, Mark’s comments bring up interesting questions about the nature of authenticity and knowledge in urban contexts. In some ways this perspective would suggest that Mark’s argument is that only people from a certain community can teach in it; however, after some more talk around the specifics of his context, a conversation built around the idea of “cultural outsider” that complicated this perspective:

**Max:** The idea of the cultural outsider – that’s it. If you don’t understand that you don’t know what these kids are going through, you can’t really explain things in a way that they will understand.

**Katrina:** Can you explain that a little more? I’m not sure I know what you mean.

**Max:** It’s easier to relate concepts when you know the environments where students live. It’s the community phenomena. You built the theory from there about what they mean.

**Emily:** I taught in communities where I was the cultural outsider. ... Now, in my particular classroom where I observe, I see that a lot of what I consider dumbing down the curriculum has to do with control. It’s got me thinking about my practices as a teacher. How much were the decisions I made about keeping things in order, in control? (Fieldnotes, 10.22.12).

As they worked together to spin out Mark's idea of the "cultural outsider", Max and Emily built on each other's perspectives and experiences. Together the group seemed to accept the idea that sharing a sense of the students' culture or community mattered in terms of how you could relate to them and – consequently – teach them successfully. Yet a little later, Savannah returned to the conversation, this time directly asking Mark to clarify his stance:

**Savannah:** I have a question – based on what you were talking about, Mark. The idea of cultural outsiders. I don't know how I feel yet, but do you think it's important that a teacher or a student teacher teach in a community or school that they have experience attending, or living in? [Max and Mark shake their heads no].

**Max:** No, but my thing is. If you can't see yourself going to the grocery store in that community, showing up at the corner store and shopping there, I would be real apprehensive. If I had power to say who could be a teacher – I would be real apprehensive that you could teach those students who go to that corner store. ... If you can't have that confidence, I'm apprehensive about your ability to enact change.

**Mark:** For me it's about motive. We all need to step outside our comfort zones. Why are we in these communities? For the line on resume? Wanting to get into another prestigious community? I think you should be there when you can look at a student and see them, not a demographic. If you're willing to challenge how you perceive these students and see them as humans. From elementary to high school I was in public schools. I qualified for free/reduced lunch. Students know if you see them as human beings. They know. They talk about it at lunch table, at home with parents. They know why you're there. Because when you come in, when things get frustrating in public school system. Another standardized test, textbooks don't come in. Principal on your back because of funding. That's when you have to have what's keeping you there – if you don't know why you're there. You're going to give up, you're going to revert to who you were the first day (Fieldnotes, 10.22.12).

It is important to note here that, as with other conversations highlighted in this chapter in particular, Mark and Max were often looked to as the "experts" in inner-city community and culture. As the only two men, and the only two African Americans, in the group, their voice was often framed as the expert around these issues. While others certainly

took positions on issues related to urban education and race, there was no doubt that somehow these two men were positioned differently within the group. As I analyzed the data I found myself wondering how I, another white woman in the group, perpetuated the same assumptions around their experiences and identities within our setting. Furthermore, I wondered whether or not I should have, as the facilitator, called attention directly to the ways that we were as a group engaging in these distinctions. One critical incident, which I will address in more depth later in this chapter, had me wondering not only about my position (and positioning power) in this group, but also in other spaces within the university.

Within the conversation of “cultural outsider”, specifically, there was little doubt that Mark and Max were positioned as those with the most insider knowledge. Looking back at the data it appears that they were positioned as the ones who could define what it meant to belong – in other words, that they were “cultural insiders”. Later in the same conversation, Mark continued the sense that he was speaking from the perspective of the students by sharing a story from his own educational history:

So I have both my parents, you know, they still live in one household. But this teacher in sixth grade, a TFA teacher, she assumed that I came from a broken home for some reason; that my parents were on drugs for some reason. One day I called her a bitch under my breath. She heard me. And I knew my parents would have killed me if they found out. Not seriously, but they would have reprimanded me. I couldn't get in trouble again. She took me in the hall, and she asked me what was going on. So I told her things were rough at home, you know, I told her we were struggling and she let me go. I knew what would tug on her heartstrings, and I used it. She came to change us, but never took the time to understand who we were. Kids are smarter than adults. You have to know why you're there (Fieldnotes, 10.22.12).

In this conversation Mark twice references the idea that what is most important to teaching in urban schools is that you “know why you’re there”. It seems that in this conversation Savannah took Mark’s initial comment to mean that somehow she, or others like her, were somehow incapable of being effective teachers in urban schools. Her question appears to be a way to probe for his perspective on this topic while she figured out her own reactions to the conversation, trying to sense whether there is room for her in their concept of a “cultural insider”. Although Max and Mark were positioned as insiders in this conversation, the space of the group discussion allowed Savannah and others to gain clarity, pushing back – in quiet ways – on some of their assumptions and asking for them to expand on their comments. In their responses, Mark and Max highlighted the importance of respect and knowledge for the students and their communities, quick to agree that one did not have to be from the community to be a successful teacher within it. In her introduction to the second edition of *The Dreamkeepers*, Gloria Ladson-Billings reflects on the participants in her study, all teachers who were identified by parents, colleagues, and community members as exceptional teachers of African American students:

The most memorable thing about these teachers was that they had such few obvious similarities [other than the fact that they were all women]. ... Five of women were African American and three were white. They attended a variety of colleges and universities and came from a variety of geographical regions. After three years of working with these teachers I found two qualities that might explain their success. The first was experience. ... The second and perhaps more compelling factor was that each of these teachers could point to a transformative moment in their lives that forced them to reassess the way they did their work. ... These moments of transformation stand in stark contrast to the experiences of well-intentioned young people who come into teaching every year hoping to do some good for those “poor Black children” (2009, p. viii).

In much the same way as Mark seems to use his idea of “knowing why you are there”, Ladson-Billings argues that the main factor for being a successful teacher of African American students has to do with perspective and purpose – the ways and reasons that they entered the classroom and community. This detailed and thoughtful conversation about the purposes of teaching in urban schools was a far cry from other conversations that summarily defined teachers in field sites as “lazy” or “excellent”. It allowed for participants, individually and as a group, to begin to build a definition around what it means to be a successful teacher in a city setting, deepening and complicating some of the earlier discussion around passion or caring by acknowledging the complexities of race, privilege and power. Mark’s narrative of his cooperating teacher defied simplistic characterization, instead showing a more nuanced image of a teacher in an urban school, particularly after he was asked to further clarify his perspective by Savannah and Emily. Toward the end of this conversation, after a discussion about “tough love” and ways to engage with students that push them to succeed – a theme that everyone seemed to be able to relate to – Emily returned the conversation to Mark’s story about his fieldwork teacher:

**Emily:** I’m still thinking about your teacher, Mark, and myself – it’s easy to point fingers at obviously racist teacher. It’s easy to say, “I’ve worked with that teacher who didn’t care any more”. But you can constantly be make those assumptions and not even know it. What’s scary is that you can be - you can, you can feel like you’re not “that teacher”, the awful, not-caring teacher, but still be really making mistakes in ways that more, um...

**Katrina:** Insidious?

**Emily:** Yeah. That are more normalized within school system. You don’t realize how awful it is. In my school – tracking was a good example. It was easy to believe it was all for the “name of good”, but a lot to unpack there. I’m thinking a lot about your teacher. His intentions are good, but that’s not enough if things are being missed.

**Mark:** What he's doing in the school is revolutionary, other teachers not doing that at all. Because other teachers aren't engaging students, he stands out. I think I'm more critical on what he's doing because that's what I want to do. That's where I'm at with it. Challenging your own assumptions. Maybe I've been harsh on him for that reason. He is doing more than other teachers, but I think makes me harder on him (Fieldnotes, 10.22.12).

What began as a conversation about the ways that the teacher in Mark's fieldwork site engaged with his students turned into a lengthy and complex discussion around teaching and teacher identity in urban schools that explored how these issues often involve the intersections of experience, culture, and expectation. As with their conversations around language and identity, most of the participants avoided direct conversation of race, although Emily did wonder about her possible identity as a "racist teacher". Thus, even as they worked to unpack some of their ideas and perspectives on what it means to be a successful teacher in these contexts, the participants continued to struggle with direct articulation around some of the most complicated aspects of identity and community, most notably around the often silenced questions of race (Sleeter, 2001; Cochran-Smith, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1999, 2013). Again, this data speaks to the importance of making these issues central to discussion of education and teacher preparation, as well as the role that sustained critical dialogue can have on helping students from a variety of perspectives rethink and clarify their perspectives on the roles of race, language, culture, and difference in urban education and teaching.

### *Implications for Teacher Education and Multicultural Education*

As I mentioned above, a notable exception to this silence around race came during a discussion of what counts as multicultural education. At our second to last inquiry group meeting of the year, Emily shared a story about a student who was asked to write a



personal narrative about something exciting that had happened, and how he felt that he couldn't because – in comparison to his classmates stories of vacations and other events – he felt nothing exciting had happened to him. Emily questioned how the curriculum placed value on certain kinds of experiences, ignoring or diminishing those of other students (Fieldnotes, 3.25.13). Mark responded to her point by talking about the idea of value and curriculum in reference to teacher education:

That says something about teacher education programs. There's a problem when it's all middle class white females and classrooms are so diverse. Teachers are not prepared to deal with demographics. It's not engrained in programs. I mean, maybe there's one class in multicultural education, or just one week sometimes. I'm thinking about Tyrone Howard's work and the need for critical reflection. The need for teachers to investigate what they do know. There should be more of an emphasis on understanding demographics of students, less on teachers understanding themselves. It could be both, but as it now stands – especially in this program for me. For me in this program, multicultural education is frustrating. Does a really good job of targeting the demographic it's trying to appeal to, to the white women in the room. But students with different life experiences, we are marginalized again (Fieldnotes, 3.25.13).

Once again, the conversation turned toward the concept of culture, this time focused on its role within understanding multicultural education:

**Max:** Why do we always presume that somebody's not included in the conversation before we start? What would multicultural education look like if we were all there, or felt included? And it wasn't about working to include others in the conversation.

**Emily:** So multicultural education feels like this add on the side, rather than just like it should be, a way of seeing and viewing everything?

**Max:** It's about a way of pulling people in. It never gets to - what it believe it's trying to do is put an end to racism, oppression. That's what it's doing. But it's under the label multicultural education. Watering it down. Making it less radical. What are you really saying to people who are in the conversation?

**Katrina:** But I think some people don't want to be critical. Is multicultural education necessarily radical? What about people who don't want to change things, just want to be focused on celebration?

**Mark:** I think it's just about throwing people in. If you think of culture as self than what counts? What level? Race, culture, self? Is hip hop a culture? When you

say multiculturalism, what counts? It needs to be more specific. If you're talking about race, call it race. Say what it is. Otherwise, you're covering yourself. Or you say you're talking about race but instead you talk about other things that connect to race. Don't be misleading.

**Max:** Exactly.

**Mark:** I was looking at requirements for the secondary English certification and you need to have taken a class in British lit, European lit, Shakespeare. In an age where we're so post-racialized, we've transcended race, the requirements to be a teacher of English literature in a diverse classroom are all European. How far have we really moved? The conversations are evolving but standards aren't.

Max and Mark's narrative around multicultural education in teacher education was a particularly complicated one for me, as I had been a member of the teaching team who taught a course on multicultural issues and education during the fall semester. All of the participants except Kai had been in that class. In my mind, we had been trying to do the kind of work that Howard and Milner (2013) talk about as critical in the preparation of students for urban classrooms. Finally, I asked them directly their thoughts on the class:

**Katrina;** Do you think that's what our class did?

**Max:** Halfway. I think it was the intent, but you wanted to honor everyone's comments. You get caught up in, "hmmm, I didn't look at it that way." Rather than saying what needs to be said. That's the problem with a liberal education.

**Mark:** It needs to be smaller. Two sections. You can't have the kinds of conversations I'm talking about in a big group like that.

**Katrina:** When I teach that class, I always feel like I haven't taught it well. Like, half the people I feel like I didn't go far enough. And the other half I feel like I traumatized. Also, I've noticed that sometimes the students of color talk more in the beginning, and then get quieter over the semester. General trend. I don't know why, but it worries me.

**Max:** Like Heather's dissertation example. You're talking about me, but you're not talking to me (Fieldnotes, 3.25.13).

In a memo I wrote that evening I reflected on my feelings of anxiety and doubt in this conversation:

I can't believe this came up during one of our last meetings. I felt so unsure – what was I in this space tonight? A teacher? A facilitator? A researcher? Another practitioner in a group of practitioners questioning yet again my work in the classroom? It's nights like tonight that I simultaneously wish I had done this dissertation somewhere else and can't imagine what it would mean to do this research elsewhere. I was looking over my fieldnotes the other day and thinking about Emily's concerns that she is inadvertently "the racist teacher". I can relate (Memo, 3.25.13).

Rereading the data now, I am still deeply conflicted about this conversation. While I had shared stories and experiences with the group many times in the past, they had not been directly about our work together in other spaces at the university. Furthermore, I am embarrassed to admit that when I talk about "students of color" in my comment above I know I am directly talking about Mark and Max without mentioning them by name. I think, upon analyzing this data, that I was trying to maintain some distance, keep it less personal. But it was, ultimately, about our personal engagements within the classroom space. It was about my role as a white woman teaching a class on multicultural education that was, overall, designed with the assumption of a white middle-class and female student body. I wish, looking back, that I had followed up with Mark and Max, both to better understand their perspectives and to further my own practice as a teacher educator.

Beyond my own personal doubts and journey, however, this conversation about the role of teacher education in preparing students for urban classrooms speaks to the complicated intersections of gender, race, experience, and culture that must be addressed within teacher education programs, and how these issues are often framed as "multicultural education", without being integrated into questions of practice, pedagogy, and curriculum development (Ladson-Billings, 1999, 2013; Sleeter, 2001, 2008). This

lack of integration, the “continuing of business as usual in pre-service teacher education will only continue to widen the gap between teachers and children in schools”, often leading to an experience of student teaching “concerned mainly about surviving in the classroom” (Sleeter, 2001, p. 96).

As the narratives of these inquiry group members show, issues of power, privilege, and identity came up constantly within the urban classrooms that they visited, taught in, and observed. The individual’s racial and biographical history deeply influenced how they perceived the work of the school, as well as how teachers and students in these spaces positioned them. In her work on exceptional teacher education programs, Darling-Hammond noted, “teachers-in-training who participate in fieldwork either before or alongside coursework are better able to understand theory, apply concepts they are learning in their coursework, and support student learning” (2013, p. 96). While I take some issue with the framing of theory and practice in the above quotation, the rich narratives that the participants shared demonstrate the importance of fieldwork as a space of learning in teacher education that functions in conjunction with university-based courses. It was through their varied experiences and perspectives on school-based practices that the participants in this study were able to develop a more nuanced, if incomplete, sense of what it means to be a teacher in an urban context.

### **Conclusions**

This chapter explored the ways that the inquiry group members discussed and debated issues related to urban schooling, including how they defined and thought about the nature of urban schools. Although many of the participants described their passion as

working in urban schools, this focus often carried with it a deficit-orientation that presumed a lack or need as inherently existent within urban communities. This deficit perspective carried over in how many members of the group described “real urban schools”, in which magnet schools, charter schools, and even successful neighborhood schools were often contextualized as “not really urban”. This finding points to the need for teacher education programs to make central conversations about the nature of urban schooling, as well as the role of race, class and difference, throughout a teacher education program and particularly in connection with fieldwork contexts.

While many students came to the group with these perspectives, sharing stories from fieldwork did allow for some critical dialogue to emerge around issues of difference and how we as a group were conceptualizing the role of urban culture in relation to students’ learning and teachers’ work. Although these conversations did not lead to sudden transformations, they did create spaces for students to begin to reflect on their own assumptions and question the role of culture within the classroom. While conversations around race explicitly were rare in the group conversations, discussions of language – both languages other than English and “non-standard” discourses within English – were discussed and debated. One telling theme was the ways that the participants discussed their own concerns or feelings of ill preparedness when it came time for them to assess students in anything other than traditional academic English. This finding speaks to the ways that even teacher education programs focused on social justice or urban education often struggle to help teacher learners think critically about deficit perspectives while also learning better strategies for addressing these concerns in daily

classroom practice (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Sleeter, 2001). This finding highlights the importance of engaging in conversations of praxis, using fieldwork as a foundation for discussion of how these larger theoretical frameworks around culture and language can influence the day-to-day pedagogical and assessment choices that a teacher makes. Fieldwork can be a space of transformative learning, but only if visits to schools are paired with spaces for teacher learners to critically reflect on their observations and practices, as well as the assumptions that they bring with them to these spaces.

Finally, this chapter discussed some of the concerns with the role of multicultural education in teacher education programs. Often positioned as the space where all conversations and learning about culture and difference should occur, these classes often presume a white, middle-class female audience – at times making traditionally marginalized students feel once again pushed to the boundaries of the classroom. As part of a teaching team in a class on multicultural issues in education, I struggled with my positionality during this conversation, more aware of both my race and my institutional positioning in this conversation than I was at any other point in the inquiry group's meetings. Beyond my personal discomfort, however, this finding highlights the need for further research into the role of multicultural education in teacher education, particularly in urban contexts. When paired with fieldwork and dialogic spaces of inquiry, teacher education programs can try to foster a different approach to multicultural education that is situated within the lived experiences of teacher learners in relation to the work being done in urban schools. This framing can move multicultural education from an “add-on” class to a sustained and central aspect of teacher preparation, where all participants are

invited into dialogue and discussion. These conversations are not easy, and as Cochran-Smith (2004) reminds us never finished, but they offer the chance to transform the status quo of urban schools as they prepare teachers who are willing to address their own assumptions and question their own pedagogical and assessment practices.

## CHAPTER SIX

### **Coming Together, Talking It Through: Teacher Identity and Collaborative Inquiry into Fieldwork**

Early in November, Mark and I sat down together for our first one-on-one interview. While we had been working together both in the inquiry community and in the class on multicultural education, I had not at this point had a chance to talk to Mark personally about his reasons for entering the program. Unlike many of the students, Mark's background was not in teacher education – his undergraduate major was African American Studies. When I asked Mark why he had come to the program, he answered:

One reason, well, being a teacher – it's like, my parents were somewhat revolutionary. They sent me to a charter school for high school with an Afro-centric curriculum. Um, it was the first time that, uh, I was taught – I mean, education was taught from a whole different sphere. ... It was more focused; they taught about, like, how to empower us to be, like change agents and to go out in the community. So, much – most of my high school education was spent, like, within the community, um, and even in high school, I did a lot within schools, tutoring and stuff (Interview, 11.7.12).

Mark highlighted this early experience as a powerful moment of helping him think about teaching and education as a space of social change. Later, when asked if he still planned to be a teacher, it became clear that his fieldwork experiences deeply impacted his perception of what his identity as a teacher might be:

Um, I do. I don't know. I mean, I look at my fieldwork school. The tension for me being a teacher is that, um, I don't want to be so confined. Um, I don't want to have a scripted curriculum and if I want to teach kids, I want to teach kids from my – I don't want to say – I'm not trying to influence kids to think the way I think, but I wanna be able to – to introduce kids to different worldviews. I want to be able to, um, create intellectuals, or foster intellectuals. Like, teach them people choose who they want to be; but, um, I just don't feel like – just my experience in



the fieldwork site – most of the public school system – it's, like, I got really lucky in high school, but if I didn't get really lucky in high school, where would I be? I don't know if I see room to be a teacher like that in today's schools (Interview, 11.7.12).

In this conversation, Mark's perception of his role and identity as a teacher deeply impacted both his reasons for entering a teacher education program, and his goals for his future career. Mark was not the only participant to focus on the importance of teacher identity as part of teacher learning:

**Emily:** My undergrad left me feeling somewhat unprepared practically, but I did get to figure out my teaching philosophy, who I am in the classroom. Based on the questions I have now I think I'll keep working on that here (Fieldnotes, 9.24.12).

**Savannah:** My cooperating teacher, she openly talked about how she did not want to be there. That made it hard to respect her. But it helped me think about who I want to be in the classroom, the importance of being a teacher that cares. My first year teaching I kept that in my mind, and I think about it a lot here, too (Fieldnotes, 9.24.12).

**Katrina:** You mentioned that from a young age you wanted to be a teacher. What do you think led to that goal?

**Ava:** I just always, um, enjoyed like working with kids and working with people and in elementary school I always admired my teachers. My 1<sup>st</sup> grade teacher like just instilled this love of reading in me that I will never forget. From that time I was like, "You know, I want to do this for other people." And, um, going up through grade school and into college I realized reading was my thing and that's what I really wanted to focus on, so just from like loving it as a young child I wanted to do that when I was older. Because I saw myself as somebody who could instill that love of reading in others – that was what being a teacher meant to me (Interview, 11.13.12).

Although all of these participants had different backgrounds, both in terms of K-12 schooling, teacher education experiences, and professional experiences, they all highlighted the importance of teacher identity as something that connected their schooling biographies, teacher philosophies, and teacher education experiences, including

fieldwork. This chapter specifically explores the role that fieldwork had on how these participants, individually and collectively within the context of the inquiry community, described and negotiated their own sense of identity as educators in literacy classrooms. Over the course of our conversations three main topics were discussed in relation to how the participants perceived the work of teachers in the literacy classroom: their own emerging identities as teachers, particularly as “social justice educators”; the relational and deeply personal work of fieldwork, especially in regard to power, agency, and authority across the school and university contexts; and the role of the collaborative inquiry community as a space to discuss and reimagine the work of fieldwork and of teacher education more broadly. Across these themes that was an emergent sense that fieldwork is deeply critical to how teachers come to understand their work as educators, and on how they conceptualize larger questions of teacher learning across the professional lifespan.

### **“That Kind of Teacher”: Narrative and Dialogue Around Fieldwork and Teacher Identity**

#### *Defining “That Kind of Teacher”*

At our fourth inquiry group meeting together, a conversation arose around issues of privilege and access to critical education. There was an extended and nuanced debate regarding the nature of teaching at a school that had a critical and progressive teaching mission, versus teaching at what the participants termed a “traditional school”:

**Savannah:** I went [to the school] on Halloween and there was a guy who had better legs than I do. I was jealous [laughter]. He had a pleather catwoman suit on.

All dolled up. Heels I could not walk in. I admired it. I just watched him walk down the hallway, working it.

**Kai:** And kids are cool with it.

**Savannah:** It was awesome. A guy came up to him and said “Why don’t I see your...” hinting at his penis. And he was like, “Oh, I have x amount of underwear on”, pointing to it.

**Kai:** I’m at the same school, and my teacher dressed as a woman for Halloween. At first kids were silly, but then they were fine.

**Savannah:** But it’s not just about the chance to dress up and be silly on Halloween. It goes into the classroom, too. In my class students had a conversation about why girls feel a need to be sluts at Halloween. That’s the words they used. And they had such an amazing conversation about it. It really points to the kind of critical education that can happen when kids are allowed to bring their questions to the class. You never see that in traditional schools.

**Max:** But it’s the cream of the crop students. They come from all over the city. Most kids don’t get chances like that (Fieldnotes, 11.5.12).

While the conversation started around possibilities for more critical classrooms, it shifted to how school districts should be organized in order to provide access to quality education for all students, and the role teachers can play in this work:

**Kai:** But shouldn’t every school be set up in a way like that [school]? Where it has a purpose like that that everyone can be a part of?

**Max:** It’s exclusionary.

**Kai:** I agree. But does it have to be? Could we create a culture where it was like this for all kids? Where teachers and principals were on the same page, with a shared mission? I’m thinking about a role for teachers that starts from expectations. Students come in, no squabbling about pedagogy and standards, we’re all in this together and we’re working for and with the students. That’s what it means to be a teacher in that kind of school, not just how to diagram sentences.

**Max:** That would be great. But I don’t just want to be able to work in that kind of school; I want to be that kind of teacher, wherever I am (Fieldnotes, 11.5.12).

Over the course of our work together, it became clear that while the students were developing perspectives on the role of fieldwork as space of learning within a teacher education program – as detailed in Chapter Three – they were also making sense of the role that their experiences played in how they understood their own goals and identities as teachers; while there was no immediate follow up to Max’s comment I shared above,

his idea of “that kind of teacher” seems to relate to ongoing discussions around teacher identity and the role that fieldwork played in how these participants understood and framed their work, both during these school-based experiences and in their imagined future careers.

As I discussed in Chapter Three, the participants in this group frequently talked about fieldwork as a space of proving one’s ability to be a teacher; however, this narrative was also complicated by their appreciation for fieldwork as an arena where they could make mistakes – where they could learn and adjust their approaches to teaching. They framed this opportunity, however, as something that was unique to fieldwork, implying that once they became teachers they would no longer have the space to make mistakes and to learn from them. Again, the persistent framework of novice/expert seemed to be playing heavily into their perceptions of the role that field experiences could play in their own learning, and of the larger relationships between teacher education and the teaching profession. However, one of the specific topics where they seemed to feel more autonomy and agency was in regard to their own identities as teacher, particularly as they learned more about the profession and their roles within it. As they described their experiences in schools and classrooms, participants routinely described how they utilized this space from their perspective as students:

**Lila:** I’m going in there as a student, but I can speak for myself. I have agency around my own experience (Fieldnotes, 10.11.12).

**Abby:** I’m a student there, but it’s my chance to learn about the professional inner-workings of being a teacher (Fieldnotes, 1.28.13).

**Mark:** I go [into fieldwork] with my own intentions, so I'm not so worried about the class expectations. In the end this is my learning, so I do what I want to do (Fieldnotes, 11.5.12).

**Savannah:** The fact is, I'm the student now, not the teacher this year. Maybe if I had prepared myself for this shift mentally, I would have done better in my field experience (Fieldnotes, 11.5.12).

**Kai:** [I'm looking at] basic things, like everyday things in the classroom that might be second nature to someone else coming in who has a background in teaching, but to me, it's like an entirely new language I have to learn. I feel like I'm seeing – like, going to school and thinking about school from the teacher end of things to the student end, it's like I see this whole network of roots that I had never even thought about or didn't even know was there. It's like I'm a student again, but with a whole new perspective (Interview, 10.25.12).

Throughout our time together, the participants described the importance of these field experiences as part of their own education and learning about the teaching profession.

They regularly discussed that although they felt the pressure to balance the needs of their classroom teachers and their university coursework, they also appreciated the opportunity to explore these spaces on their own terms, focusing on their own questions and goals as they worked with teachers and students. This finding relates to Hallman's (2007) research on how preservice teachers attempted to describe their identities both as inquisitive students and as confident developing teachers. In this research, narratives around their own personal goals – how they identified as students in these spaces, and the student identities they tried to take up – complicated the ways that they described fieldwork as a space of proving themselves as capable to university mentors and their cooperating teachers. Alongside their conversation around “best practices” and apprenticeship (Bullough, 1997), the participants seemed to find more freedom in these spaces when they focused more on their own goals and perspectives as learners. Lortie (1975) refers to

this tension as an “apprenticeship of observation”, where students teachers are simultaneously expected to take up the work of leading the classroom while also observing (and absorbing) the work of the mentor teacher in the classroom, all while drawing on their own biographies and expectations of the classroom environment in the development of an identity as teacher.

Teacher identity, or what Zembylas refers to as the “teacher-self” (2003), is an area of study that has recently had a resurgence of interest within the field (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Alsup, 2005; Clarke, 2009). This focus has highlighted the importance of a teacher’s stance and sense of self in the classroom in relation to classroom pedagogy, practice, and modes of assessment, among others (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). However, “identity” has been understood in a number of different ways within the field. While traditionally the concept of identity stems from psychological and cognitive frameworks (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Van Veen, Slegers, Van de Ven, 2005), in recent times there has been more attention paid to the socio-cultural aspects of teacher identity development (Alsup, 2005; Lasky, 2005; Akkerman & Meijer, 2011). Varghese, Morgan, Johnston and Johnson (2005) offered a theoretical analysis of perspectives on teacher education by reading across three well-respected texts on language teacher identity (Tajfel, 1978; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Simon, 1995). They argue that in order to best understand the nuances of teacher identity, the field has to look across these theoretical perspectives in order to capture its “real-world complexity” (Varghese et. al, 2005, p. 40).

Across these theoretical perspectives, teacher identity is seen by many as a cornerstone of a teacher's practice in the classroom. As such, the role of teacher identity – and the development of teacher identity – is an important area of research within teacher education scholarship (e.g., Connelly & Clandinin, 1999; Zembylas, 2003; Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). While the focus of this research has primarily been on the ways that teacher education programs influence teacher identity development (Sachs, 2001; Walkington, 2005; Britzman, 1994), there has also been a recent focus on the role that current educational reforms play on how teachers come to understand their purpose and practice through their teacher education experiences (Lasky, 2005; Day, Elliot, & Kington, 2005). This focus highlights the importance of recognizing the intersections of policy, practice, and theory that exist within school contexts, as well as the need to address how these intersections are understood by teachers in regards to their own professional development. Given the apparent importance of teacher identity on a teacher's role and career, this body of research argues for the importance of exploring the context of teacher education as a factor in this development.

This kind of personal work reflects the importance the participants placed on figuring out how to be, to use Max's concept, "that kind of teacher". Fieldwork was a learning space where they could try on different ways to embody their teaching philosophies and goals, whether they stemmed from a love of reading, a fear of the literacy classroom based on a history of learning difficulties, or from larger political and social goals for teaching. Fieldwork was not, for this group, a space to conduct or learn how to be a particular kind of person in the classroom; instead, participants used this

space as a way to construct and reconstruct their identities. While often contextualized within the work of the specific school, talking across these various spaces allowed for a greater appreciation for the ways that these commitments and histories were an integral part of teacher learning. This focus on teacher identity suggests the need for greater consideration of this type of learning within fieldwork spaces, not in opposition to practice-based knowledge, but instead as an integral part of learning to teach.

*Teaching Style as Embodied Teaching Philosophy*

One focus of the group's conversations was how their individual perspectives and questions carried over into discussions of how field experiences enabled them to gain a deeper understanding of their personal "teaching style". The idea of "teaching style" seemed to be closely linked to how they understood and described their own identities as teachers. Frequently, even as they described their work as observers of expert teachers in the classroom, they also questioned how to make this work their own. Often the participants recounted specific instances where their attempts to "soak up the goodness" of their cooperating teacher, as Emily put it (Fieldnotes 9.24.12) were in tension with their efforts to better understand their own unique identities as teachers, particularly in terms of how they saw themselves operating in the classroom space. At our first meeting together, Abby shared her own experience with fieldwork during her undergraduate work, and the lessons it taught her about her own approach as an educator:

**Abby:** There's this idea that fieldwork will show you what "great teachers do". But you need to identify your own style. You can go and try to replicate, but often it doesn't work for you. Go see if it works. Like, good luck. It may or may not. I remember watching my mentor teacher. She was a great teacher, and I learned so much. But when I tried to replicate I was like, "What the heck? They listen to her



when she says it.” It wasn’t me. How are you supposed to figure out who you are as a teacher if you don’t figure it out yourself (Fieldnotes, 9.24.12).

As she entered the inquiry group, Abby came with previous experiences that led her to believe that one of the values of field experiences was to help her develop her own voice in the classroom. In the above statement it is clear that she appreciated the chance to learn for herself what worked for her in the classroom. In her description, however, it also is clear that Abby came to the group seeing this work as solitary, and ultimately profoundly internal. This perspective, however, shifted some over our time together. In a conversation with Abby about their shared background as kids who grew up in a city but who had different educational histories, Mark challenged Abby’s perspectives, pointing out the role that biography and larger questions of culture and identity can play in the development of teacher identity and teaching style:

I think the way you teach – it has to be relevant to the affordances of that neighborhood. Like, I’ve been thinking about this in fieldwork, when I go into new neighborhoods. You may have played with the students, but you didn’t go to the same school as they did. And ultimately that matters. It’s not to say you can’t be a great teacher there. But I might teach it different than you would. My style is gonna reflect that history, just like yours is (Fieldnotes, 1.28.13).

This relational aspect of “teaching style” is particularly important when considering the implications of working in classrooms where the student body is culturally or racially different from that of the teacher (Gay, 2010; Darling-Hammond, 2012). Mark’s response to Abby pushed her – and the rest of the group – to consider the ways that teaching style are always in connection to one’s history and the current context; Abby continued to address this narrative of fieldwork as a space where she was finding herself and her voice

as an educator throughout the year. In our last meeting, she reflected on the various field placements she had taken part in during the year:

**Abby:** For me, for my fieldwork – I was in [a charter school] in the fall and [a private school] this spring. On a continuum in many ways they seem like complete opposites. That’s what I thought going in. But actually I found a lot more similarities than differences, aside from geography and the break down of the demographics. I still had a diverse student population, especially, I guess, in terms of student needs. I think I went in to the spring that it would be easier, because of the resources available. And there were more resources, definitely. But even with those, it was still – I was still confronted with a lot of the same challenges as the fall. It made me realize that I am still learning, and that I can’t be the same teacher in every school, even though I also can’t totally change. It gave me perspective as a teacher that regardless of where you are, as a teacher there will be challenges, students you need to cater to and help. What I got from those experiences – it helped me remember that I have my style and my challenges, no matter the school. I have to look for balance, to make what I bring work alongside the school context (Fieldnotes, 4.29.13).

Following the thread of Abby’s narrative, it becomes clear that when she talks about “style” she in many ways is describing her sense of who she is – and who she can be – within a classroom. In many ways, this description of “teaching style” goes far beyond a traditional focus on isolated classroom management and pedagogical practices, instead suggesting more of a view of teaching style as embodied teaching philosophy. Here, Abby described how her “teaching style” was deeply embedded within her stance and goals for education. While toward the start of the year she focused more on this issue as an exclusively internal one, thinking about finding her answers within herself, by the end of the study she framed the issue as more of a dialogic one between her and the larger school context in which she was working.

As Abby’s narrative above demonstrates, “style” came to be a term that described not only a teacher’s identity or sense of self in the classroom, but also the ways that this

positioning was deeply influenced by the local school culture. During one conversation where Emily was describing the changes that had occurred at the school where she taught, she reflected:

It would have been hard to do as a teacher on my own, no matter how hard I tried, if I hadn't had the whole school behind me (Fieldnotes, 2.28.13).

Kelly agreed:

I see that at my field site. The teacher I'm with – she's great. But she's so alone in it. It really limits what she can do, because the school's goals don't match her style, what she thinks is important in the classroom" (Fieldnotes, 2.28.13).

In these moments, the conversation around “style” became more nuanced, as the participants reflected on how a teacher’s work is always contextualized by the surrounding institutional norms. These perspectives allowed the group to appreciate the issues of difference and individualization that must occur in any school setting, breaking down some of the assumptions many of them originally held about the challenges or possibilities within various schooling contexts, and with specific individual students.

Furthermore, when discussing “style”, participants often shifted the conversation from a binary of “good” and “bad” fieldwork experiences to a more detailed and complex discussion of how field experiences helped each of them explore ways of being in the classroom. As Abby described above, being with a teacher she admired was not simply about being exposed to and absorbing best practices – it was about coming to appreciate the more complicated and relational aspects of teaching. During a conversation about “tough love” and the different cultural expectations of teachers and students, Emily shared:

The difference is whether you [the teacher] believe in them [the students]. Calling them out because you believe they can do better – it's way different than a teacher calling you out because they think you're a failure. It's important to know what your style is and if it works for you. Nothing is worse than if it's inauthentic. You have to learn to be you, and that's where fieldwork can help. Even if it's a bad situation, you still have to imagine yourself there, imagine what you would do (Fieldnotes, 10.22.12).

Conversations around these kinds of negotiations and expectations were highlighted in several of our discussions:

**Mark:** [My cooperating teacher] gives me advice about my own personal teaching. He knows I'm not going to be him. And I'm not. I bring my own self to the classroom, too (Fieldnotes, 10.22.12).

**Amy:** Watching teachers doesn't always have to be a good experience. Even a bad experience can be educational (Fieldnotes, 9.24.12).

In these conversations, the participants continued to imagine fieldwork as a space where they could negotiate and imagine themselves as educators. Furthermore, these conversations highlighted that this learning is always occurring during fieldwork, even when the match with the cooperating teacher is not seamless or easy. This focus on “style” or their individual positions within classrooms and schools helped participants move from more generic or broad-strokes vision of education to a more context-specific approach that attends “to foundational knowledge not only about teaching and learning but also about culture and place” (Matsko & Hammerness, 2013, p. 137).

### **Dialogue around Being a Critical Educator**

#### *Connections Between Teaching for Social Justice and Criticality*

Returning to Max's comment about “that kind of teacher”, while conversations about style and teacher identity ranged greatly, depending on the specifics of the

conversation, there was also an ongoing theme in these discussions that related to being a social justice or critical educator. Along with a focus on urban education, the literacy masters program that the inquiry group members were a part of also had an explicit focus on criticality and issues of equity within schooling, taking on a framework for critical pedagogy that sees it as potentially “participatory, affective, problem-posing, situated, multicultural, dialogic, desocializing, democratic, researching, interdisciplinary, [and] activist” (Shor, 1992, p. 17).<sup>17</sup> This emphasis on criticality and critical pedagogy is one that I share and that I have tried to engage throughout this dissertation, both as part of the context and as an element of methodology. In addition to my own lens, many of the participants came into the first meeting with an explicit understanding of their work as teachers being related to their work as agents of change and transformation within schools (Fieldnotes, 9.24.12). At our first meeting Kai shared that one of her reasons for returning to school was because her “interest and focus was on social justice, and this program has that. Education is a very meaningful space for these discussions” (Fieldnotes, 9.24.12).

Many students agreed with her as they introduced themselves, yet there was little direct conversation about what we each meant by “social justice” or “criticality”, although these two terms were often used in overlapping and related ways. In many ways these conversations reflect the current turn in teacher education to reference social justice

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<sup>17</sup> This focus is clearly demonstrated on the department’s website, which states, “The program is committed to educational change and recognizes that educational institutions are sites in which to work for social justice, equity, and transformation.” (Program website, 2.17.14).

education, although much of the research has demonstrated how these ideas can be widely varied and often poorly defined (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Cochran-Smith & Fries, 2011; McDonald & Zeichner, 2009). As the group's discussions continued over the year together, narrating and discussing the experiences and challenges that the participants faced during their fieldwork, what it meant to be a critical educator began to coalesce around certain shared ideas or concepts.

A common narrative in the group focused on the goals of social justice education for the K-12 students in the fieldwork classrooms. The participants overall seemed to share a perspective that taking a critical stance on the world and working to be an agent of change was not just a part of teaching, but also should be a central goal of schooling more broadly:

**Kai:** Don't we agree that we want to teach students to speak out against injustice, even if people don't take it well? (Fieldnotes, 1.28.13)

**Mark:** Sometimes I think we teach students to talk social justice, but not to live it. It's a dangerous game, with tracking and all that, honors and regular. It makes some kids feel like they're inherently entitled, better than others. That's not social justice, what we're seeing in schools, even if that's what they are talking about in classes (Fieldnotes, 11.19.12).

**Lila:** These kids in my fieldwork site [a partnership school with a lottery admissions system], they have knowledge that I didn't have until college, a much safer space to explore their identities than I was ever in. But I don't think they realize that there are kids out there who didn't get that lottery pick, who didn't get that school. And that – that's the point of critical education, right? That's something everyone should be thinking about (Fieldnotes, 1.28.13).

In these conversations, there was a shared sense that education can and should be directly related to social change and questions of equity. Yet fieldwork experiences also complicated this narrative. In particular, there were serious questions around power and

agency within the various communities that the participants were visiting as they entered their field sites.

*Contextualized Criticality: The Roles of History, Community, and the Teacher*

In addition to conversations about the goals for the students, the focus on fieldwork moved the conversation around critical education to more contextualized and specific inquiries into access and power. Emily, who was placed in a partnership school near the university, sparked a conversation about the ways that social justice was a word used often by the teachers in the K-8 school, but that there was rarely recognition of the complicated relationship that the school and university had in the historically African American community:

**Emily:** There seems to be an impression in the neighborhood that it's the university's school. I mean, they see a good school and feel like they would have access to it for their kids, but the university gives its people money to buy houses and take the spots. The teachers talk a lot about social justice there, but I don't know. They don't really talk about the history.

**Max:** Social justice is like a cool word. But if we use it we always have to be thinking about power and justice and equity and access. But when we throw around that word, why are we doing it? It might sound great, but are we really there? Are we really on the ground with it?

**Mark:** Are you willing to deal with social ramifications, financial reifications that come along with this?

**Emily:** Right, and in ways that might not "Feel good". I feel like to get involved with what might be called social justice; it's going to be messy and might not feel good. It means taking a long look at yourself that might not be flattering. And I wish – I wish I was seeing more of that kind of hard talk approach in the school when I'm there.

**Lila:** I think – you can't just say you're doing social justice on the surface and not get uncomfortable with it. Even with kids, you know? What does it mean to be a teacher who really gets kids to talk about the world, and how they can change it? (Fieldnotes, 1.28.13)

It is interesting that in this conversation around social justice education, the role of the teacher and the possibilities for students reflected a common assumption that social justice education was about teaching students to recognize issues of equity and access, often framing these conversations in ways that Marilyn Cochran-Smith has termed “White theory, White practice” in relation to social justice and teacher education (2004, p. 95). In other words, the assumptions here presumed an approach to social justice education that grew from the primarily progressive and politically liberal approach to education often espoused by the majority of white, middle-class women who enter the teaching profession. It presumed that students would not bring their own critical experiences around these issues with them to the classroom, at least not explicitly. A little later in the conversation, Mark offered a different context for considering the role of social justice education and critical teaching:

**Mark:** I think, I’m thinking back to this question about how you change the world – I don’t know, but I think my field experience offered a slightly different perspective. Maybe because of the community the school was in. Because there are also social and emotional consequences for not showing kids the world the way it is. The idea of being visionaries should be important to every child, but students should know what it takes to get to that vision, by knowing the world the way it is. I think when working with students who come from poverty, young black males, things that are given. You’re going to be profiled. While I want them to be able to speak, I don’t want them to think the world is theirs and get smart with a police officer and get shot in the back and end up on a T-shirt. I want them to have a voice, but they have to know about the ramifications as well. There are sacrifices for being who you want to be. But you need to understand the consequences. Yes, I believe kids should be allowed to innovate, learn to think outside the box, but they should do it knowing what the world is. That’s the only way to truly change it. If kids think they can change the world without knowing what’s it’s really like, it’s setting them up with emotional handicaps. So our job as social justice teachers is to be honest. To be critical and open to change, but also to be honest.



**Lila:** We talk about it as though everyone has same path. But here, it's my voice as a white female, versus yours as a black male. How we are being heard, as teachers, in communities.

**Max:** But also, when thinking about teaching and us as teachers, this is an addition to what they have as their model. They already have been out there and understand what the world is. The word that comes back to me now is safe. We want safe spaces in schools, but the world is not always safe. So I need to prepare you for when it is not safe. What unsafe is, what it can mean. And maybe then we can talk about how to change it.

**Emily:** I guess – it's so different from my fieldsite. As teachers we have to think about how it's different in different schools. How we have to bring our ideas in different ways, talk about social justice in different ways, depending on the neighborhood (Fieldnotes, 1.28.13).

Here, the participants drew on their field experiences to talk back to some of the assumptions that often undergird social justice-oriented teacher education, namely that teachers must come into schools and introduce the students to larger ideas of social oppression and reality around issues of race, class, gender, and difference more broadly (Sleeter, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008). As the participants talked across various school contexts and communities, their ideas of what it means to be a critical educator became more nuanced and more context-specific. Furthermore, there was an appreciation that within certain communities, the inequalities and injustices within society have very real consequences. Through these lived experiences they began to perceive the realities of the “failure of mass compulsory schooling to distribute literate outcomes equitably in the population” (Dooley, Exley, Comber, 2013, p. 75), while also becoming more attentive to the ways that the experiences and positionalities of students and communities impact what being a “critical educator” might be in a given context. Luke and Gore (1992), citing Ellsworth (1989) offer a feminist critique of critical theory (and pedagogy) in that it often fails to represent

these very nuances and positionalities – something that the contextualized nature of fieldwork seemed to bring to the surface in this study. Through their fieldwork, the participants are able to take a more critical stance into their own beliefs around what it means to teach for social justice, building on a dialogue that spans their own unique histories and classroom-based experiences.

Another themes that emerged in these conversations was the idea that criticality directly tied to the position the teacher took in the classroom vis-à-vis the students, as well as what counted as knowledge (Hurst, 2013). There was a shared sense that the teacher's identities and perspectives had a great deal to do with how change could be enacted within these spaces. Often, these comments had to do with how teachers were positioned by schools and administrators:

**Max:** We need empowerment in order to share it with out students. Teachers can't share that empowerment with students unless we have it ourselves (Fieldnotes, 9.24.12).

**Savannah:** I want to teach my students not just to get the answers, but also to ask the questions. But I think as a teacher, in order to do that I need to be able to embrace their questions, not be stuck on a particular curriculum. I see the effect that has at my fieldwork site daily (Fieldnotes, 2.28.13).

As with Abby's shifting ideas about the nature of teaching style and the ways that it can be deeply embedded within localized knowledge of context, the participants' ideas around critical teaching were heavily influenced by what they saw in their field settings. While these experiences were not always positive, they did provide the participants a unique perspective from which to build their own ideas of what it means to be a critical educator. In many ways these sites enabled the participants the chance to engage in the realities of policy on the ground, witnessing first hand the failure of these policies to

“place schooling sufficiently in its social and political context, thereby evacuating any serious discussion of why schooling ... plays the complex roles that it does” (Apple, 2011, p. 29).

Because of its inherently embedded and in-the-moment context, fieldwork presented these participants with the chance to not only develop their own sense of what it meant to be a critical or social-justice oriented educator, but also to appreciate some of the complications or pressures that face teachers in today’s educational policy climate. It also allowed for a more context-based and community-oriented approach to teaching from a social justice stance; sharing the experiences and observations from various communities allowed all of us to reflect more deeply into what it might mean to take a critical stance toward education, and to appreciate the experiences and critical awareness the students bring with them as well. Yet fieldwork is not an inherently “critical” context; in fact, many “advocates of critical pedagogy understand that teacher empowerment does not occur just because we wish it to do so. Instead, it takes place when teachers develop the knowledge-work skills, the power literacy, and the pedagogical abilities befitting the call of teaching” (Kincheloe, McLaren, & Steinberg, 2011, p. 166). In order for teachers to develop these kinds of abilities, teacher education programs must foster this kind of identity development, both in coursework and through field experiences.

## Fieldwork as Relational Work: Navigating Roles and Responsibilities Across

### Program Requirements and School Contexts

#### *Defining and Developing Relationships in Fieldwork*

In conversations around social justice education and becoming critically-minded educators, participants often drew on their experiences and conversations with students, teachers, and families at their field sites. Often, as described above, these conversations allowed for a deeper discussion into the role that history, class, race, and other forms of difference can play in how various perspectives on social justice might develop, or be enacted in the world. These narratives focused heavily on one of the central aspects of fieldwork and its role in teacher education: the relational nature of this space of learning. From the very beginning of our work together, it was clear that the inquiry group members were deeply aware of the importance of these relationships, particularly with their cooperating teachers, in how they shaped their opportunities during fieldwork and their identities as teachers:

**Lila:** In undergrad, I was with a really nice teacher, but I was disturbed by the lack of diversity I saw in the classroom. ... I got outed by a student, and another student said if that was true he would stone me. It was super hostile, but when I talked to the teacher she just shut down the conversation. So the teacher wouldn't have those conversations, and I didn't have the choice to bring them up – with her or the students. It really shaped my experience, that relationship and feeling so silenced (Fieldnotes, 9.24.12).

**Abby:** In my undergrad, they paid a lot of attention to how you got paired [with a cooperating teacher]. We had this thing called speed dating, where we would all talk and then the teacher would choose the intern. It made me think about it almost as a marriage. Even so, I had difficult times. You're trying to learn, they are trying to teach. You're in their space, trying to make it your space. How can you make this a better match, a more compatible relationship? (Fieldnotes, 9.24.12).

**Savannah:** At first, I felt like my cooperating teacher didn't have enough time for me. But she introduced something she'd used with other student teachers – a journal where we could communicate back and forth. It was like having a relationship in a notebook. I still reread it.

**Lila:** You can tell when you're with a really great co-op teacher when they write those kinds of things. The kind that don't baby you, but support you (Fieldnotes, 9.24.12).

Within these narratives, the participants focused on both the positives and negatives that this relational aspect of fieldwork could have on their learning. Across the board, however, there was a shared sense that these relationships matter – that they are at the heart of the work of field experiences. When Abby refers to fieldwork as a “marriage”, she highlights the intimate, deeply personal, and relational work of these spaces.

In their work on the role that fieldwork can play in social justice teacher education, McDonald, Brayko, and Bowman (2013) describe relational teaching practices as the “methods and skills associated with learning about and connecting with students, families, and communities” (p. 2). Yet there is an additional layer added to these relationships when considering fieldwork in teacher education – the relationship of the teacher learner to the cooperating teacher and school administration, and to university-based mentors and instructors. Despite the central importance of this work, however, it has not been the focus of much recent scholarship within teacher education (notable exceptions are Zeichner, Payne, & Brayko, 2012; Broussard, 2000; Grossman & McDonald, 2008<sup>18</sup>); within this group, however, one of the central themes that emerged was the importance of developing relationships across the university and school contexts – with cooperating

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<sup>18</sup> While all of these authors also highlight the lack of attention to this aspect of teacher education in their work, they are primarily focused with the work of teacher education in preparing teachers to better interact with families and communities. The work is less focused on the role of relationships within field experiences themselves.

teachers, mentors, university instructors – in order to make the most of the learning that fieldwork offered.

*Relationships and Positionality: Possibilities and Limitations in Fieldwork Settings*

These relationships not only influenced the feelings that the participants had about their experiences; they also shifted what they saw as possible within the classroom. For example, Lila discussed how her cooperating teacher's lack of attention to diversity impacted her own ability to address these questions in the classroom. She again visited this question in a later meeting, where she shared:

I'm wondering about power dynamics in schools. I like feedback, but I'm wondering how little people think of me because I'm just the intern. ... I'm looking for help in trying to have hard conversations. I want to learn how to get what you want and take agency in your learning. But you have a teacher and a mentor telling you a way to be in that space. So where can I learn these lessons, develop the relationships where these kinds of discussions can take place?  
(Fieldnotes, 10.8.12)

Here Lila shares her frustrations at feeling as though the fieldwork relationship limits her ability to become the kind of teacher she wants to be. Yet she also is addressing her identity and position as a student. When she talks about being told “a way to be in that space”, she seems to be drawing on both the realities of needing to fit within the cooperating teacher's frameworks and goals for the class, while also meeting the needs and requirements as a university student. As I discussed in Chapter Three, these obligations often seemed to be at odds, creating tension for the inquiry group members. Here, Lila addresses them more concurrently, seeing both contexts as deeply relational and highly impactful on her own learning and identity work within her field experiences. Similarly, in an interview with Lawrie, a student who was not a part of the inquiry group,

she addressed her concerns over how she was “presenting herself” within fieldwork, noting her concern that these “external things, umm, might be getting in the way of my learning. You know, I feel like, like I can’t ask those questions I really want to ask” (Interview, 10.24.12). In these narratives, the participants highlighted the role of power and authority within these relationships, thinking through some of the reasons why they might have felt silenced in these spaces as both a visitor and as a student.

Often in these conversations the focus was on the participants’ unique role as teacher learners as they struggled to make sense of the expectations of fieldwork while still trying to engage in their own inquiries and identity development. As Abby put it above, they were in somebody else’s space trying to make it their own. In addition the participants described complications within university-based mentor/mentee relationships. Throughout one particular meeting where she had volunteered to share her stories, Lila continued to express frustration and concern over how these issues were affecting her, saying, “I feel judged, even though she’s supposed to be a mentor. I don’t know. I just don’t feel like she’s looking out for me as a learner and a teacher” (Fieldnotes, 10.8.12). This sparked a back-and-forth as Emily entered the conversation with a description of her own experiences working with a student teacher:

**Emily:** It was difficult, because classrooms are dynamic spaces. She was there two days a week, and I had no sense of the expectations of her classroom. At the university I mean. It felt inauthentic because my efforts to help her meet her needs got in the way of my own teaching – I was telling kids not to read a chapter yet because she wasn’t there that day. It was my first time having anybody like that. And I still had twenty-six kids whose needs it was my job to meet.

**Lila:** I understand that. But I think it should be more explicit, what I’m supposed to get out of it. I think she’s a great teacher, and I could learn a lot from her. But I don’t think she knows what to do with me, or how to help me learn.

**Emily:** It was a good learning experience for me to have someone in my classroom. I had to be critical and self-reflective around control issues, my wanting to have my finger in the pot in everything. I found myself asking why I was so obsessed with wanting to have things run smoothly – it’s scary to relinquish control to someone you just met. I was trying to perfectly orchestrate every moment in the classroom. I had to deal with a lot of issues of my own self, why was I not trusting people. But it sucks for you – it’s your experience. It feels like you should be learning from her. I see that now in my own fieldwork, as I think about what I want from it (Fieldnotes, 10.8.12).

Emily’s experiences allowed her to bring a different perspective into the group, moving the conversation from a supportive venting space to a more nuanced discussion and dialogue around the nature of learning and teaching relationships in fieldwork settings.

The fact that some of the participants in the group had been in the role of mentor teacher helped the group to think more broadly about the complicated relational work of fieldwork, acknowledging the negotiations everyone involved in this space needed to participate in together. This perspective helped to surface some of the larger issues around mentoring relationships in fieldwork, as Emily addressed the fact that “cooperating teachers usually assume responsibility for mentoring prospective teachers in addition to a full teaching load, often receiving very meager compensation in relation to the work they do” (Zeichner, 2002, p. 60) – a conversation that rarely happens among student teachers in a teacher education program.

### *Negotiation as Central to the Work of Teaching*

Conversations around these relationships and their role in shaping fieldwork were not always negative, nor were they only framed as organizational issues; in addition, the group discussed these relationships and their impact on their learning as part of the process of addressing what it means to teach. One of the key concepts that came out of



these discussions was the importance of negotiation in the world of teaching and schooling. Abby addressed the idea of negotiation as part of fieldwork at our fourth meeting together:

**Abby:** I remember being so confused about the idea of being a “participant observer” during fieldwork – was I just supposed to watch? But then I negotiated it with the teacher, and that helped us be on the same page. It helped me think about how I’ll handle these issues as a teacher too. You never know what will come up (Fieldnotes, 11.5.12).

This concept of negotiation is an important one, in that it represents a space where knowledge, expertise, and expectations from both the university, the school, and the fieldwork student her/himself all need to be taken into account; one of the potentials of fieldwork is that through this “situated engagement and negotiation with practitioners and peers in a teaching community, pre-service teachers come to define for themselves what it means to be a teacher” (Samaras & Gismondi, 1998, p. 715). In this light, these negotiations are not seen as detrimental or marginal to the work of fieldwork, but instead the relational work of engaging with peers, mentors, and evaluators is contextualized as critical to the learning that field experiences offer.

The idea of negotiation that Abby introduced was taken up again later that same night in a more sustained conversation around whether or not there should be a standardization of the fieldwork experience – if that was possible, or even desirable:

**Max:** I think that I see benefits in having structure set for the fieldwork teachers, but I think standardizing that curriculum would limit the experiences of fieldwork for somebody like me. I like being able to find my way. It keeps it more authentic, you know, in the classroom.

**Abby:** I agree, but wouldn’t it be helpful to have certain benchmarks. I mean, you’re saying, “I taught this lesson and this lesson”, and that’s wonderful. But

other people don't have that chance, that experience. Wouldn't it be helpful to have –

**Genevieve:** A checklist or something?

**Abby:** Yeah. So you do get experiences. Because otherwise it's not guaranteed. So you have some responsibility to make it your own, but it would provide some guidelines. Or options at least you could give it to the teacher.

**Max:** I agree. I'm lucky enough that my fieldwork is sort of like co-teaching experience. Would I – would I be doing that if I didn't know the teacher already? I don't know. But I do feel like there is something to be learned about coming into a space and not knowing exactly what you're supposed to be doing.

**Abby:** Essentially negotiating. I guess that ties to what I was saying before.

**Max:** For me, so many environments where what I'm supposed to be getting out of it not determined by anyone but myself, that's where my comfortable space is. Yeah. Hmmm.

**Mark:** Negotiating is important too. It's crucial, having that ability. In addition to having structure to learn about lessons, you also need to learn how to negotiate. As a real teacher you need to be able to do that. You never know what's going to happen in schools.

**Max:** I kind of feel like I'm in a space where teachers say, "Ok, you do bring something into the classroom. You do have skills we can use." I haven't really run into anyone who said, "Oh, you think you're so smart coming from [this university]. Sit down, learn how it is." I don't know if any of us have had that experience. I think we should feel privileged to be in a space where they expect you to do something. Where they trust that you know something, and that you want to learn (Fieldnotes, 11.5.12).

Here, a deep sense of the importance that negotiating can play in the learning that occurs in fieldwork came to the surface. As was described in Chapter Three, the participants frequently described – and worried about – the highly idiosyncratic nature of field experiences. Most often these concerns focused on what they perceived as the “practical stuff” – the specifics of what was being learned, and the opportunities that presented themselves in the form of teaching lessons, learning programs, or gaining expertise with assessments. But in this conversation, the focus turned more toward the group members' identities and goals within the field setting. Within this narrative thread, the negotiation

and uncertainty of these spaces was framed not a deficit, but instead a chance to develop a better sense of what it means to be a “real teacher”, as Mark put it.

Emily again explored this issue of negotiation and accountability within the nature of learning to teach when she shared:

It's so hard. Fieldwork is so relational. I had two CityYears my last two years teaching. The first was willing to make her own of whatever. She and I worked really well together. I wouldn't do well as a teacher if I was given a checklist that this person needs to do these certain things, because things are so fluid. You need to be adaptable. And she was, and it was awesome. The second year – I felt like the worst, well, I wasn't a mentor, but facilitator. He wanted a checklist. So I don't know. Maybe part of negotiating is if you feel you need concrete things, you can talk about that. He and I did eventually do that, so he felt he was getting something out of the work. But it is hard, so relational. Just like kids we all have different learning styles. Nobody needs the exact same things. You're right about needing to negotiate. You are yourself and you're not going to be the same as the student teacher from the year before. Your needs won't be the same (Fieldnotes, 11.5.12).

Here, Emily draws connections between the relationships that exist between a fieldwork student and a cooperating teacher and that between a teacher and a student. She also acknowledges that while this need for flexibility is inherent to these relationships, there are also challenges in meeting the needs of all parties as individuals with their own learning and teaching styles. Furthermore, Emily speaks to the importance of thinking about the role of mentoring within fieldwork. Here and at other points in our conversations, Emily narrated her own unease and uncertainty about her role as a mentor, an issue that has been raised in the scholarship on fieldwork and teacher-student relationships (Jones, Reid, & Bevins, 1997; Leshem, 2012; Russell & Russell, 2011). These dialogues emphasized both the importance of these elements of fieldwork and the

need for more sustained conversation around the nature of these relationships and how they can help foster a critical and inquiry-based approach to fieldwork.

*Relationships Between and Across the Spaces of Fieldwork: Working with Teachers, Mentors, and Professors*

The focus on relational aspects of fieldwork was not limited to individual personal relationships, but also reflected inquiry into the connections – and disconnections – between the various spaces that make up the learning context of fieldwork; in particular, these conversations addressed the relationship of fieldwork to both the program and the school context. As I described in Chapter Three, often in their narratives the participants situated themselves as neither fully within the school or university context, but instead conceptualized fieldwork experiences as something individualized that existed within their travels back and forth across these spaces; along with describing the loneliness that often came with this experience, there was also a recognition that this positionality gave the participants a unique perspective on their own work and learning. At one meeting I asked Lila who she would turn to for help negotiating expectations with her fieldwork teacher. She replied:

It's funny, because I'm the only one there. I mean, I guess the teacher and my mentor are there too, but really – it's just me when it comes to putting it all together. I expect the university to set clear expectations, for me and my teacher. I expect it to be well organized. But after that – I don't know. It frustrates me a lot. I wish it were easier. But it also means I have agency, and I like that. Maybe it's good to have trial by fire. Maybe I should appreciate more the chance to create the space for myself, to take up my own inquiry. But I don't know (Fieldnotes, 10.8.12).

While still expressing some misgivings and uncertainty about the expectations placed on her during fieldwork, Lila also acknowledges here the power that comes from being the “only one there”. While she saw the importance of the relationships within her field experiences, Lila felt that, ultimately, she was situated uniquely as the only person who travels back and forth across these boundaries.

Traversing these boundaries, however, was deeply embedded within the issues of power, authority, and hierarchy that traditionally exist between schools and universities. Both Max and Lila reference these power dynamics almost parenthetically in their narratives. Max describes his concern or perception that teachers at the school would view him negatively by associating him with the university, implying that he feared being framed as an university expert that dismissed the knowledge of teachers. While still troubling in many ways, this framework disrupts the standard novice/expert dichotomy that is frequently assumed within fieldwork experience, wherein the visiting teacher learner is positioned as a sponge, there to learn from the expert teacher leading the room. Instead, it highlights the historicized and real power imbalances between schools and universities, wherein “traditional knowledge hierarchies are maintained among universities, schools and communities even in situations that have been characterized and genuinely collaborative” (Zeichner & Payne, 2013, p. 8-9). As in many of his narratives, Max positions himself more as a member of the community than as a representation of the university, although he does acknowledge the fact that he brings knowledge and skills into the school setting with him, presumably from both his own history and his work in the masters program. In this particular discussion, Max highlights his concerns about how

his status as a participant in the university community might impact his role within the school and how he is perceived by the school community.

Lila, on the other hand, while also referencing both the school and the university, upholds more of the traditional approach to fieldwork, in which the university has the ability to set the goals and parameters for the teacher and the teacher learner in terms of the objectives to be mastered. As with the conversations around expectations and assignments for the university-based fieldwork course, the inquiry group members were deeply aware of the issues of power and authority when it came to negotiating tensions in expectations for their roles and responsibilities between the two sites. Often this conversation related to the requirements in order for the students to be certified as reading specialists for the state:

**Mark:** My mentor already signed my papers, so I feel like, you could get around the system so easily. I'm going to keep going, because I want to do it right, but it makes me wonder what the point is of the paperwork (Fieldnotes, 10.22.12).

**Emily:** In my undergrad, it was the mentor who brought the state paperwork, and went through it – not the teacher or the professor. It was very explicit and not so wrapped up in power dynamics. And they came to your site and to the class. So it was the person who knew you in both places that ushered you through (Fieldnotes, 3.11.13).

**Abby:** I do wonder – you know, it's the mentor who signs off on whether or not you've done enough. But really, they only see you three times. So I've been thinking about why the classroom teacher doesn't have any say in the process. I mean, shouldn't the classroom teacher be the one who decides if you know how to teach? You would think they would be the experts in that (Fieldnotes, 10.22.12).

While these discussions often focused on the positives that the relationship with the cooperating teacher could provide, there were also instances when the relationship between the classroom teacher and the fieldwork student were an issue as well. During

our third interview, Ava shared a story about a conflict that she had during one of her placements:

**Ava:** So when I was in her room um doing a descriptive review on a student, um just one day like she just said, “I don’t understand why you’ve never given me a lesson plan.” And I said, “Well,” because the first day I was in there she said I wouldn’t be teaching so I was really confused and I just said, “Well, I was asking like a lot about like what you wanted me to do and what your expectations of me were.” But she never like – I asked about like group work and like small group stuff like we were supposed to do for class, but she was very like closed off to me and it was really scary because I’m like really not confrontational. I just do whatever the teacher asks.

**Katrina:** Mmmm.

**Ava:** Because I’m like, “It’s your room and I’m not here to like step on anyone’s toes. So whatever you would ask of me I would do it.” But then I guess she had other expectations but she wasn’t telling me or my mentor about them. So it was a huge misunderstanding and um I apologized to her and she just said, “Well, there’s like – there’s no point in trying to finish.” And I was terrified.

...

**Katrina:** Okay, I know [that teacher] um so it was a bit of – like you felt like the expectations just weren’t clear and it was just a total miscommunication?

**Ava:** Oh, totally not there yeah, because I would like – I – in [the kindergarten] room I jumped right in and I was teaching like the first day I was in her room. And um I really tried to do that with [this teacher] but we were just – we were so different and a lot of things that went on in her room like were kind of like just unfamiliar to me. Just the students’ interaction with her I was just really like – I told my professor, I said, “I just don’t think that [she] and I connect well with like how we like approach students and stuff.” Because she’s very much like um I don’t want to say it in a negative light but it – the kids know like they’re labeled so like they know which ones are the proficient and which ones are below proficient and like it’s like clearly stated in front of all the students.

**Katrina:** Mhmm, mhmm, mhmm.

**Ava:** I was still thankful that [the instructor] was so understanding. She and [the mentor] like handled everything for me (Interview, 5.20.13).

In this instance, Ava highlights the support that the university mentor and instructor gave her when she was having a difficult time in her classroom setting. While this situation does again represent a situation where the university is able to set the parameters and expectations for the classroom interactions, it also shows the ways in which university-

based practitioners can function as a support system for students participating in fieldwork. Here, Ava's concerns with her fieldwork placement stemmed from two different but related issues: her more pragmatic worries about getting the necessary experiences to pass the fieldwork course; and her more philosophical concerns about how literacy instruction and leveling were handled in the classroom. Akkerman and Meijer (2011) found that while negotiating these relationships was complicated and at times painful work, these sites of tension also provided students in a teacher education program spaces from which to come to a more dialogic understanding of their own goals and responsibilities as educators. In this instance, Ava relied on her university mentors and teachers to help guide her through a complicated situation embedded in the politics of the classroom; however, she also reflected on the situation as coming to understand and support her own practices as a teacher, despite the feelings of powerlessness that she describes having during the situation.

These discussions highlight how these experiences can be an embodiment of the power hierarchies that make up the traditional structure of fieldwork in teacher education (Zeichner, 2013; 2004; 1999; McDonald and Payne, 2013). Especially when faced with the sanctioned and mandatory reporting requirements of the state certification process, group members expressed awareness and, at times, discomfort with the ways that the classroom teachers were being positioned as members of this space of learning. While presumably the participants were visiting the classrooms in order to better develop their practice as teachers, there was an unspoken but systematic way in which the knowledge and experience of the cooperating teachers were discounted as necessary for the students'



official evaluations; these inequalities persisted even when the participants and the university faculty and staff tried to appreciate the wealth of knowledge that these classroom practitioners provided (Zeichner, 2013; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005). However, despite the formal ways in which these hierarchies were upheld within the space of fieldwork, the group's appreciation for and inquiry into the relational aspects of fieldwork – and of learning more broadly – helped the participants engage in questions of knowledge, learning, and expertise. While this section has focused primarily on how they engaged in these dialogues around learning within their various field sites, the next section will focus on the particular appreciation and expectations that the participants developed for the inquiry group itself.

### **Creating Community: The Role of Collaborative Inquiry in Making Sense of Field Experiences**

#### *Constructing a Communal Identity*

When I first imagined creating a study to investigate the role of fieldwork in literacy teacher education and teaching more broadly, I knew I wanted to honor my framework of knowledge as collaborative and dialogic. The decision to create an inquiry community was a deliberate one that, I believe, offered a space unlike others centered on fieldwork in the masters program. It was my belief that this framework would not only be a methodological sound approach, but also would function as a “practice-changing practice” (Kemmis, 2009) that would provide a space to inquire into deeper and more political questions of what counts as literacy, teaching, and learning in schools, through

our collective work to take an “inquiry stance” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009) into fieldwork. For these reasons, it is unsurprising that a theme that emerged through our discussion around the relational aspects of teaching was an inward focus on our own practice as a collaborative inquiry community. Especially as our work together went on, the group members routinely described how their participation in this space of learning was different from other sites related to fieldwork; furthermore, they not only reflected on these spaces during their time as teacher learners, but also described how these experiences shifted their perceptions and goals of their future work as educators.

From the start of our meetings together, members found ways to engage with one another in fostering connections and a sense of community. During our first meeting, during a sharing of educational backgrounds and fieldwork experiences, several of the group members described their failed efforts to be accepted into Teach For America:

**Mark:** I applied to Teach For America and New York Teaching Fellows. I got to the final round of TFA, but didn’t make it. I got into New York Teaching Fellows and [this university]. I chose here (Fieldnotes, 9.24.12).

**Max:** When I graduated college, I tried to figure out how to make the transition into education. I made it to the final round of TFA.

**Savannah: (interrupts)** Me too!

**Mattie:** Me too. But the final round is a five-minute lesson. I mean, what are you going to learn in a five-minute lesson?!

**Lila:** Me too. That’s the politics of TFA though; they don’t like people who have a background in education. They choose people who aren’t automatically interested in teacher education

**Max:** It’s funny, how many of us have that history. Maybe we should call this group the “TFA rejects” [laughter] (Fieldnotes, 9.24.12)

Although we did not wind up adopting “TFA rejects” to describe our work together, this humorous moment demonstrates that from the start there was a shared commitment to fostering a collaborative space to engage in these discussions. Later in the same evening

the group got into a lengthy conversation around the goals and history of TFA, questioning how it related to their own sense equity in schooling and education (Fieldnotes, 9.24.12). This first evening – in which we both tried to set some group norms and had a lengthy conversation around equity, literacy, and education – demonstrated our collaborative efforts to work from an “inquiry stance”; this perspective enabled us collectively to:

Understand the relationships of inquiry, professional knowledge, and practice. This framework permits a closer understanding of what kind of knowledge is produced through inquiry, how inquiry relates to practice, and what teachers learn from inquiry across the professional life span and within widely varying contexts (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1998, in press). Fundamental to our notion of inquiry as stance is the idea that the work of inquiry communities is both social and political-that is, it involves making problematic the current arrangements of schooling; the ways knowledge is constructed, evaluated, and used; and teachers' individual and collective roles in bringing about change (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, p. 18).

From the beginning, the group connected their personal experiences and stories from fieldwork to larger sociopolitical aspects of education. By focusing on collaborative and critical inquiry as a way of making sense of these experiences, the participants were able to simultaneously use the space as a location from which to investigate their own personal journeys as educators while simultaneously reflected on the historicized and complicated nature of schooling more broadly.

There was, however, also a clear acknowledgement that this space was also a research site primarily designed and facilitated by me. At our second meeting Lila shared a number of concerns about her fieldsite, speaking at some length about her frustrations. When she finished, Abby jokingly asked, “Feel better?” – a comment that elicited laughter from everyone. Lila then turned to me, saying:

**Lila:** Sorry about that. But I needed to vent. I know that's not what you're here for though.

**Katrina:** This space can be a lot of things. It depends on what we want. It can be for venting, questioning, critiques, feedback, and suggestions. What do you want from us now? (Fieldnotes, 10.8.12)

While in the moment I was trying to open the space up to a more equitable and co-constructed purpose, as I analyzed my notes I could not help but notice that I quickly provided my sense of what the space should be, rather than turning the conversation back to the group. And, obviously, I did have my own questions when I started, which certainly gave some particular direction to our discussions. At our first meeting of the spring semester, during a conversation around expectation for hours in field sites, Abby turned to me and said, "I've been meaning to ask – some of us were talking earlier, and we want to make sure you're getting what you need here. So it's not just us talking about whatever. We don't want to take over" (Fieldnotes, 1.14.13). Again, it is clear that while it was usually implicit rather than explicit, everyone in the group was aware of this space as a "research site", as well as a collaborative community of inquiry.

### *The Power of "Unscripted Spaces"*

Despite these negotiations, it was also evident that this space provided a unique space for the participants that was unlike other spaces of learning and thinking about fieldwork. One of the central aspects of this difference that the group seemed to most appreciate was the chance to delve into the unexpected moments from their visits to schools:

**Amy:** During a math lesson, the teacher picked up a kid and was kind of, I don't know, dangling him to demonstrate a point. The kid seemed to love it, but it made me uncomfortable. I didn't know what to do. I didn't know how to react. Nobody else was there.

**Genevieve:** Did you ask your mentor about it?

**Amy:** No, because it wasn't a literacy block. And I didn't mention it in fieldwork class because it didn't have to do with my descriptive review kid, or my lesson. So I'm glad I can talk about it here – because it's bothering me, but it doesn't really fit in exactly anywhere else (Fieldnotes, 3.11.13).

**Emily:** Something I've been thinking about here but haven't had a chance to talk about anywhere else – the pace of my fieldsite feels so different. I think that's what I've been affected by the most, the lack of rush. It's like they have time. It's amazing. I don't know if I would have been able to figure out what it was, that feeling of time, if we hadn't spent time talking about all our schools. Sometimes when other people share, I remember that anxiety, that lack of control in an under-resourced school. I even get anxious at my fieldsite because they are so unstressed (Fieldnotes, 4.29.13).

**Veronica:** I like that we can talk about anything here. You know, anything that matters to us, or happens while we're in schools. I don't have to worry about the grade or the syllabus or whether or not I did the reading. I can just come and listen and talk. It's kind of an unscripted space (Fieldnotes, 1.14.13).

These conversations made it clear that the group did see this space as somehow different from other spaces of learning, both in the university and in the schools. The inquiry community provided these students with a network of peers with whom they could delve into the “puzzling moments” (Ballenger, 2009) from their work with teachers and students. And, through an ongoing inquiry into these moments and how they related to their own understandings and experiences of education and schooling, the group members were able to deepen their own critical investigation into schools, society, and their own roles as educators. Furthermore, Veronica highlighted the “unscripted” nature of these spaces – an important aspect in allowing for the development of their own personal inquiries and interests. It seemed that for the participants this open-format allowed for more discussion of schools as complicated and fundamentally humanistic spaces. This focus speaks back in many ways to the overwhelming pressure toward

standardization and scripted learning happening in schools, suggesting that this space was also an arena where students could engage in a different kind of learning context that provided them with deeper insights into the tensions and pressures in schools today. It suggests a need for teacher education programs to imagine fieldwork as an ongoing inquiry, both collectively and individually, into the role of identity and history within teachers' pedagogical practices.

*Collaborative Inquiry into Future Careers: Rethinking What It Means to Teach*

The participants also used the inquiry community as a space where they could explore and vocalize their concerns or anxieties – what Lasky (2005) refers to as “professional vulnerability”. She defines vulnerability as:

A multidimensional, multifaceted emotional experience that individuals can feel in an array of contexts. It is a fluid state of being that can be influenced by the way people perceive their present situation as it interacts with their identity, beliefs, values, and sense of competence. ... It can be an experience of openness and trust, which is necessary for love, experiencing compassion, learning, and relationship building. In these situations, people willingly open themselves to the possibility of embarrassment, loss, or emotional pain because they believe that they, another individual, or a situation will benefit from this openness. A person being willingly open facilitates learning, trust building, and collaboration. In short, a person feels safe in his or her environment to take the risk of losing face and experiencing loss or pain (p. 901).

The inquiry group members often took advantage of this group as a space where they could productively and safely described their own discomforts:

**Kai:** I just wonder, when I'm done here, will I be able to lead a class? I feel like I'm just making it up as I go along. What if the kids won't listen and it gets out of control?

**Emily:** I can understand those worries. I had them too, when I started. And now I watch my fieldwork teacher and she's so worried about control and management. But I see what it's doing to her teaching. She's teaching *Holes*, and it's such a fun novel. You can do so much. But she's just giving quizzes. I think she's scared. I wish she would talk about it with me, but I think she's scared to admit it. So it's

good you're talking about it, because it helps you most past just thinking about that (Fieldnotes, 10.22.12).

**Amy:** My fieldwork teacher said we have literacy four days a week, all morning, and he wanted me to be there. It fit with my schedule. I don't mind it, but it's so much with the classwork I have to do for her, with my five classes. I'm afraid – I don't know what he wants me to do with the whole group. But I don't know how to bring it up without looking lazy. I'm hoping you guys can help (Fieldnotes, 3.11.12).

In addition to being able to describe and discuss their own in-the-moment anxieties and concerns, the participants also used this space of productive professional vulnerability to delve into larger issues related to the teaching profession. In particular, the group had several conversations about the burnout that they saw happening to teachers in their school sites. At first, many of these conversations came from more of a deficit orientation, where the group spoke despairingly of particular teachers in their settings (Fieldnotes, 9.24.12; 11.5.19). Overtime, however, these conversations became more nuanced. One evening, about halfway through our time together, the group had a sustained conversation about what it means to be a “bad teacher”:

**Savannah:** At my fieldsite, there's a room full of resources. I mean, it's crazy. There is so much – all the stuff we're told teachers need. They have time, they have resources, they have it all. And there are still bad teachers!

**Max:** But, the thing is, you know when you suck. So I guess, the question for me is how do we get change, how do we address why that person is having issues, rather than just saying, “Oh, you don't want to be in Ms. So-and-so's class”?

**Emily:** Can we think about teaching as more collaborative, more community based?

**Genevieve:** Yes, but what if you try to intervene and it doesn't work? What then?

**Max:** When I was doing fieldwork, I would hang with teachers. I would hear teachers say that they thought they wanted to do this, wanted to do right by the community, but they came and they were terrible at it. And they know it. They know they suck. And they want to leave, but they have bills to pay. They want to do well, they want to open their door, but all they hear is that they suck. So they shut the door, they leave at 4:30, they do they curriculum and they go. I mean,

what would it mean to open the door to make it possible to hear more than “you suck”. What would it mean to ask for help, and not get punished?

**Savannah:** A selfish part of me thinks, I want to be in that classroom. I would be doing – different things. I don’t want to say better.

**Mark:** But people suck in all jobs. The difference here is that kids are involved, and it’s so political.

**Veronica:** Also, you went to school for it. I mean, probably your whole major was education. So how do you change jobs? I just think it boxes you in.

**Emily:** At my school, when 80% of the teachers were let go, a lot were those teachers who were terrible. Who weren’t trying. Who you knew should go. But a large chunk were trying. They were there 14 hours; they were trying. They were making effort. They just didn’t know what to do, and where to get support. The building was so crazy that you did just stay in your classroom to stay sane. These teachers – it made me sad. Because I think with a mentor, with some help, they could have done better. There were so few support structures in place for new teachers, for the people who do care and do work hard and want to do well, but don’t know exactly how. So we don’t support them and they get burnt out or asked to leave before tenure.

...

**Max:** I wonder how you can create a community where you can get support, when you can come out and admit that you’re bad. Like, most spaces aren’t like this one, where you can just talk straight out.

**Abby:** And tell people you need help.

**Max:** Yeah - be able to admit how you feel. From that space, I think you can work around that. If you want to get out, we can work together to find other job opportunities. You’re not helping anybody by remaining quiet. When I’m teaching, I have to create a community where I can get as much feedback as possible. That’s what I’ve learned from being here (Fieldnotes, 2.25.13).

In this lengthy discussion, the group goes beyond “confessing” professional vulnerability to describing the importance of honoring it within school communities. From a variety of perspectives, the participants in this discussion go more deeply into some potential reasons for teachers to continue practices that appear thoughtless, foolish, or even damaging to students. Grossman and McDonald (2008) discuss the importance of taking this kind of relational work of teaching more seriously during teacher education, in order to better prepare educators who are willing and able to address the emotional and social connections and tensions that exist in any school setting. In this conversation and across



our work together, the group members regularly took advantage of the unscripted and supportive nature of this community as they questioned their practices and beliefs.

This is not to say that there was always agreement; as the above conversation demonstrates, individuals frequently pushed each other to take a different perspective, or at least consider an incident from another light. But almost always this work was done with an appreciation and respect for one another. In part, this respect was fostered through our sustained engagement with one another. During an interview at the end of the year, Genevieve shared her perspectives on what this group had offered her:

I hope that we [the cohort of students in the program] are able to stay connected, 'cause I feel like – and especially with the group that we – that you had, I felt like that – that space that was provided to us was really, um – it was kind of stress-relieving – where we were able to, like, talk about these frustrations that we were coming up against. And we could really trust one another, because we had so much time. And it wasn't as big as some of our classes. Um, so, I think, like, I'm definitely going to, um – hopefully, I'll be able to stay connected with people through the program, but I think, like, um, finding, like, spaces either where I'm working or if, like, there's things I can find online where I can talk to people – I think, like, it's just important for teachers to stay connected and communicate (Interview, 5.14.13).

It was also clear that this space was unique in the interviews with students who were not a part of the group. When asked where they talked about fieldwork, each of the three participants who were not in the group referenced the space:

**Lawrie:** Well, I would talk about it, you know, in anecdotal ways. But I don't think I had a space where I could really go into it. Not like what I hear about your group (Interview, 5.23.14).

**Ava:** Mmm, where did I talk about fieldwork? I mean, I guess I learned about fieldwork in the class. But not, you know, as much discussion - as much discussion as it seems like the people in your group talk about having (Interview, 5.20.13).

**Alex.** The way fieldwork – the class worked is, um, every class was, like – there'd be these three groups. The class was divided into three groups and the – the teacher mentor people – the professors – would lead one of these groups and – or they'd have, like, a guest come in to talk to us about something and then, like, they – we didn't – we weren't really allowed to stray from those topics because they felt like these were the topics that you kind of need to know. and they were beneficial topics, like – like, reading recovery and running records and doing all that kinda things, but – yeah. It wasn't like I could bring up my stories. Like everyone talks about doing on Monday nights, with you (Interview, 5.21.13).

Although the group members all agreed not to discuss the specifics of our group meetings with people outside of the group,<sup>19</sup> it was clear from these responses that not only was there some talk about our work together, but that the space was seen as different from other more scripted spaces for conversations around fieldwork, often in beneficial ways that allowed for a more sustained engagement with their own inquiries and perspectives.

Beyond simply appreciating these spaces as sites of learning with teaching education, as Genevieve's comments above show, participation in this group also seemed to shift the kinds of practice that the participants imagined for themselves after graduation. As we entered the spring semester, the participants began to turn their conversations toward their future careers, often drawing on our collective inquiry as they imagined themselves in classrooms and communities:

**Max:** When I think about teaching, it's changed a lot this year. I guess that's why it's so important what we're doing here. I mean, we're talking to one another, we're hearing other perspectives. I think that's what is so important about teacher communities. About this work (Fieldnotes, 2.25.13).

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<sup>19</sup> Although it became clear that some knowledge of the group was occurring outside of the group meetings, nobody ever came to me with concerns about these breaches in silence. Often participants would come up to me in the halls of the school to chat about the group with no sign of discomfort. For that reason, I never directly addressed the issue with the group.

**Savannah:** Fieldwork and these conversations have made me really think about where I want to be. What position, what community, what type of school (Fieldnotes, 4.29.13).

Early in their work together on the role of practitioner research and collaborative inquiry in the field of teaching, Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1990) highlighted four ways that these communities can foster the production of knowledge: through the production of data based in the daily lives of classrooms; a surfacing of the issues and questions that matter to teachers currently in the field; rich cases from which to expand on the knowledge base of teaching; and as a way to provide critique and feedback on theories of teaching and learning (p. 8). They framed teachers' work as deliberate, systematic, and integral to developing scholarship in the field of education. In our inquiry group meetings, it became clear that the same principles hold true when reflecting on the work of students participating in fieldwork during their teacher education programs. By providing a space where the students could engage in authentic, systematic, and sustained conversations into fieldwork and its relationship to literacy and learning, the group members were able to come to deeper more critical understandings of their own roles as teachers, as well as engage in collaborative inquiry into the nature of schooling. It was through their participation in a collaborative inquiry community that students were able to begin moving away from their view of teaching as an isolated (and isolating) profession to one where they could see themselves as agents of collective change.

### **Conclusions**

This chapter focused on the role that fieldwork can play in the development of a teacher identity. In their narratives and discussions around fieldwork, the participants

often highlighted the ways that they were coming to understanding their own work in the classroom, often connecting coursework, fieldwork, and prior experiences in schools both as teachers and as students. As the data show, students developed a sense of who they were – and who they wanted to be – in the classroom not as a separate issue from choices of pedagogy and practice, but as an integrated aspect of imaging their futures as educators.

Historically, research into teacher education and research into teaching have been seen as two separate areas of study within the field of education (Grossman & McDonald, 2008; Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005; Grossman, 2005; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1990). In part this divide stems from the perception that there is a fundamental shift from pre-service teachers' learning and practice (the substance of teacher education) to the work of teachers in K-12 settings (who themselves are often divided into “novice” and “expert” or “experienced” teachers). This is a distinction that some scholars in the field have questioned because it positions learning and knowing within school communities as lesser or secondary to university-based knowledge production (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Cochran-Smith, 2011; Bullough & Gitlin, 1995). The data from this study show the importance of looking across these various constructs in an effort to develop a richer sense of practice and a better appreciation for the ways that teacher identity and pedagogical decision-making can influence the fundamental work of the classroom.

This reframing allowed not only for a closer internal look at the objectives and purposes of teaching, but also allowed for a more nuanced conversation around issues of criticality, critical pedagogy, and teaching for social justice (Shor, 1992, Kincheloe,

2008). Throughout our work together it was clear that within the space of fieldwork, participants were engaging in multiple discourses simultaneously as they tried to negotiate their positionality, the role of context, and the possibilities for the literacy classroom. If we want to shift the role of teaching in schools, which some argue is a necessary element to emphasize the professionalization of teachers within educational discourses (Kincheloe, McLaren, & Steinberg, 2011; Kincheloe, 2008; Giroux, 2011), we as teacher educators need to take seriously the ways that the work of teaching is represented within teacher education programs. Furthermore, with a focus on criticality and social justice-oriented education, fieldwork represents a space that can bridge teacher knowledge, teacher development and an appreciation for the knowledge and resources that K-12 students bring (Buck & Sylvester, 2013). If we want to develop teachers that honor the lives and work of their students, then we must, as a field, foster in teacher learners an appreciation and respect for their own inquiries and identities.

Yet this study also shows that identity work does not take place in isolation. The program that this inquiry group was situated within – and the structure of the inquiry community itself – attempted to complicate the hierarchies of expert and novice by engaging students with a range of teaching experiences and backgrounds in a collective dialogic space around issues related to field experience. One of the goals of the study was for this group to work together to explore teaching and teacher education through an “inquiry stance” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1990, 1999, 2009). It was my hope and belief that this framework would provide us with a:

Richer conception of knowledge than that allowed by the formal knowledge-practical knowledge distinction, an expanded conception of practice as both

practical and theoretical, and a fuller conception of teacher learning across the professional life span than that implied by the expert/novice distinction (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, p. 19).

Building on this understanding of knowledge, the goal of this study was not only to understand how fieldwork impacted the participants' sense of the literacy classroom, but also to construct a space where we could engage together around how field experiences – in conjunction with our own histories and other work – were impacting perceptions of both what it means to be a teacher education student, and on how we all were constructing and reconstructing our images and identities as teachers.

These findings emphasize the importance of developing spaces that foster sustained, dialogic, and critical conversation among teacher learners. This kind of dialogue is particularly important in reference to fieldwork, which this study has shown to be a highly contested, complicated, and – to borrow Veronica's term – "unscripted space". Even in teacher education programs where fieldwork is highly structured and more standardized, the fact that it takes place in the daily lives of schools means that it will always have unexpected moments, challenges, and possibilities. Working from a collaborative inquiry stance means that teacher learners not only have the space to capitalize on their fieldwork experiences in terms of professionalization, but also that they begin to see this kind of collaborative and practice-centered sense making as central to their work and identities as teachers.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### **Conclusions and Implications: Fieldwork in Teacher Education Practice and Research**

#### **Summary of Findings: Returning to the Research Questions**

Through an ongoing and dialogic approach to making sense of how teacher learners are experiencing and constructing knowledge through fieldwork, this dissertation has aimed to examine fieldwork as a critical, identity-defining feature of teacher preparation and of teaching. In doing so, it has attempted as well to move toward constructing a nuanced, relational, and interconnected framework for fieldwork as a space of learning in teacher education. In this section, I return to my initial research questions, in an effort to look across the themes addressed in the previous chapters to understand how the themes intersect and relate to larger questions of fieldwork and teacher learning. My two questions were:

- 1) How do teacher learners discuss and narrate their field experiences within a regularly meeting inquiry group?*
- 2) How do teacher learners describe and construct their evolving identities as teachers? How does fieldwork contribute?*

As data from the study participants suggest, fieldwork is seen as a complicated space and experience that students interpret and use differently and that they see as needing to be navigated carefully. As described in Chapter Three, many participants came into the study talking about fieldwork as an area for gaining mastery in particular skills or clinical competencies. As the earlier chapters demonstrate, participants came with strong assumptions about the relationships of theory and practice:

**Mark:** Fieldwork, it feels like everything is thrown into one. The classes speak as if you already know what's going on. We should be in two different classes – tracks for people who have already been teachers and who haven't. I think we would benefit more if those of us who have not been in the classroom got the nuts and bolts of what exactly we should be doing in terms of literacy education. I have experience working with kids, but very different from teaching experience (Fieldnotes, 10.22.12).

**Lila:** I expected that the fieldwork class would be really organized, go hand in hand with what I'm doing in the school. Not that we're all doing the same thing in schools, I guess, but that it would be well organized. I feel like I'm supposed to be learning something that is going to contribute to what I'm doing in my practical fieldwork. I don't have that expectation in other classes, because they are not fieldwork. I'm in other classes to learn about education, to carry things with me (Fieldnotes, 10.8.12).

These examples show the ways that the participants came to the program with expectations for both their classroom experiences and the role of the fieldwork course as a site for practical, clinical engagement. Yet these students were simultaneously constructing their own sense of self, their relationship to the university and the school, the importance of their own histories, their perspectives on literacy and education, and the impact of political issues such as race, class, and educational access in urban contexts:

**Emily:** Here, in this program, I feel like all the sudden after years of teaching I'm looking for universal truths about education. It's making me unsettle my assumptions about the way I teach. It's helpful, but think I was hoping for more of the practical side, nuts and bolts. Employers assume you're going to know how to do a DRA. I was panicking. I felt like I wanted the practical, only getting theoretical. My professor said something helpful. She said, for the past few years you've been in the forest; now you're getting the aerial view. There's a lot for me to learn from that. I was so occupied in the day to day that I forgot about the big picture. It's easy to think "I did that in undergrad", but I've changed so much. But it puts so much work on fieldwork, because it seems like that is where you should be getting the practical, and university is the theory. But now I'm thinking about fieldwork differently – it's making me realize that what I see as practical is part of how I think about my own theory of teaching (Fieldnotes, 11.5.12)



It is the complexity of these negotiations and narratives that speak to the need for the field of teacher education to engage in deeper and more critical research into how fieldwork experiences are constructed, positioned, and evaluated in teacher education programs. Often, students were attempting to navigate these complicated (and competing) discourses simultaneously during their fieldwork engagements. Even as they tried to think about larger questions of education and society, they were grounded in thinking about the daily practices of their fieldwork contexts. While the data chapters followed various themes that emerged during our time together, students were often discussing issues of urban education, literacy, and teacher identity at the same time.

Narratives around small moments often expanded into larger discussions that demonstrated the complicated ways that fieldwork functioned, far from the “rehearsal space” that Genevieve referenced at our first meeting (Fieldnotes, 9.24.12). For example, as Lila questioned her ability as a white woman to assess writing in AAVE, she was opening our group discussion to issues of the teacher’s role in the classroom, the role of assessment in literacy classrooms, and larger cultural issues around identity and language welcoming/silencing in schools. Emily’s experiences as an urban schoolteacher were central in her mind throughout our work together, whether she was describing a three-day stand-in in order to get a spot in a coveted public school or sharing her own concerns about the leveling of texts and how to offer support to students who came to her upper elementary classroom already “far behind”. In these moments, participants were talking and thinking about fieldwork on a multitude of levels simultaneously – pointing to the complex work that happens during fieldwork experiences.

As these intersections also show, while the data chapters follow particular themes or topics in a somewhat isolated fashion, it is important to realize that these issues were being narrated and negotiated throughout our time together. Looking at how these topics emerged and intersected over our time together points to a different way of thinking about fieldwork as a space of learning. Through the intersections of identity, practice, and theory there emerges a way of conceptualizing fieldwork that sees it not as a space for practicing or rehearsing a narrow slice of what is traditionally viewed as practical knowledge, but instead as an integrated and situated space of learning within teacher education. In the section below I describe how this study helps reconceptualize the space of fieldwork and then connect it to the larger question of the role of inquiry, and more particularly collaborative inquiry, within teacher education. The chapter then offers suggestions of specific implications for the practice and research of teacher education, with particular attention paid to the unique needs and possibilities of literacy-focused teacher education programs. Finally, lingering questions and possibilities for future research into the role of fieldwork in teacher education are addressed.

### **Taking up “Fieldwork as Text and Context”: Looking Across Data Themes**

#### *The Intersectional and Relational Nature of Fieldwork*

While each of the themes that emerged points to an important facet of work that occurs during field experiences, it is when we look across these themes and think about the various intersections and connections that the importance of fieldwork as a unique space of learning emerges. A conceptualization of fieldwork as a space of performing

“best practices” does not take into account the myriad of experiences and understandings that are being developed in that space (Zeichner, 2010; 2013); this framework not only narrows the focus toward a best practices account, but also implicitly builds on the assumption that schools are the places to put into practice what the university has taught (Zeichner, 2010; Cochran-Smith, 2005). Yet in this study students upheld these distinctions between practice and theory, complicated it by engaging in discussions of schools and society, and interrogated both their own and their classmates’ assumptions – at times simultaneously. Looking at these complex narratives, it is clear that the traditional clinical framework for fieldwork does not account for the complicated narratives and negotiations that the participants engaged in through their school-based experiences. In their dialogue around and across culture, language, literacy, and urban education, these teacher learners were carrying knowledge back and forth across school and university contexts, as well as bringing their own unique perspectives and experiences to their understandings, defying the “knowledge-for-practice” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999) that goes into the traditional clinical framework for teacher education.

The impact of this framework for knowledge and practice is not unique to fieldwork, but also relates to the larger issues addressed above about what teacher education is for, and how we as a field determine success. As Cochran-Smith (2005) highlights in her review of research on teacher education, the profession is caught between a rock and a hard place: a frequent critique is that teacher education needs to be more like other professional schools, with higher levels of consistency and consensus

around practices; however, no other professions are judged by their apparent effectiveness, nor are they held accountable to the kinds of public discourse and input that teaching demands.

Furthermore, rarely in other settings are practitioners expected to meet not only the expectations of many stakeholders – including families, administrators, politicians, and the public more broadly, but also the needs of the group of widely varied individuals that make up any one K-12 class at any given time. It is this complex world that teacher learners enter as they take part in fieldwork experiences. It is this profession that they are being prepared to join; and, as the narratives of the participants in the above chapters demonstrate, rarely is their experience of fieldwork as simple as preparing a lesson plan and getting the chance to execute it with real kids. The bafflement or anxiety that I address most closely in Chapter Three speaks to the issues of framing fieldwork as a clinical experience – this perspective leaves little room for an acknowledgement of the identity work, pressures, complications, negotiations and evaluations that take place during a teacher learner's work in school-based settings. Instead, the findings suggest the need for a more situated construct of fieldwork as a space of learning; instead of viewing fieldwork as a clinic or “living laboratory” in which observations are made and procedures are learned, the data here shows the possibility in taking up the framework is *fieldwork as text and context* within teacher education, particularly through an inquiry community setting.

### **Enacting and Engaging in Inquiry Communities in Teacher Education**

While the primary focus of this study was on thinking about the nature of fieldwork as a learning space in teacher education, another important aspect was the development of an inquiry community centered on narratives of field experiences. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999, 2009) have long argued for the need to recognize and support inquiry communities within teaching communities, effectively developing the field of teacher/practitioner research. In the past thirty years, many scholars have researched and written about the importance of these spaces within schools and professional development (e.g., Zeichner & Noffke, 2001; Jarvis, 1999; Simon, Campano, Broderick, & Patoja, 2012). Yet less research has focused on the role of inquiry communities within teacher education. Hiebert and Morris (2007, 2012) have made an argument for the need for sustained inquiry and collaborative work – what they call a focus on teaching rather than teachers – within teacher education<sup>20</sup>. Yet their work still suggests a “best practices” approach – the difference being that the best practices are in connection to certain professional “scripts” that can help to professionalize teachers (Hiebert & Morris, 2012, p. 98).

Simon (2013) has argued that literacy teacher education can be seen as a form of critical inquiry, citing his own practice as both a secondary teacher and teacher educator. He describes how engaging in this kind of work within teacher education enables his students to develop their own “theories of practice, critical readings of policy contexts,

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<sup>20</sup> It is worth noting here, however, that Hiebert and Morris do not cite Cochran-Smith and Lytle’s work on teacher inquiry – pointing again to the great divide in research on teaching and teacher education, as well as very different perspectives on practice and inquiry.

and more relational pedagogies in urban classrooms” (p. 121). This work speaks to the importance of critical and collaborative inquiry within teacher education. As the data from this study show, engaging in this kind of critical and collaborative inquiry community not only allowed participants to deepen their pedagogical and theoretical perspectives, but it also fundamentally shifted how many of them envisioned their lives as future educators.

In order to make teacher inquiry communities a sustained and central part of the practice of teaching, we must make it a central and fundamental aspect of teacher education – something that has not to date been the focus for advocates of more practice-based teacher education (Ball & Cohen, 1999; Zeichner & McDonald, 2011). The research from this study suggests the importance of these spaces and frameworks within teacher education; we must, as a field, pay attention not only to the learning structures or content, but also to how these spaces are being framed and taken up within teacher education. Engaging in fieldwork as text and context means making theory-practice connections and reciprocal conversations central, something that is also at the heart of communities of inquiry. Within this model of teacher education there is room for discussion of research that suggests particularly useful approaches to practice and assessment, but also room to discuss the situated and community-oriented nature of these practices, people’s experiences trying on various ways of engaging pedagogy, and space to critique the status quo and political issues of education, such as the framing of urban contexts, college readiness, and questions of risk and intervention. Taking an inquiry stance within teacher education means imagining (and preparing) a different kind of

professional – one who sees the work of teaching as inherently communal, political, personal, and relational.

### **Implications for Practice in Teacher Education Programs**

#### *Fieldwork in Time and Space: Structuring Teacher Education Programs*

In this study the participants often connected fieldwork and coursework in their discussions of what they were seeing and doing in schools. Despite these connections, however, the participants continued to frame fieldwork as the place where theory was put into practice. This framework limits the potential of field-based experiences and maintains a narrowed view of what can count as knowledge production within teacher education (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Zeichner, 2010; Zeichner, Payne, & Brayko, 2012). As this study demonstrates, field experiences have the potential to be spaces where students can engage in critical discussions around practice, theory, and teacher identity. But far too often these spaces are constructed in such a way that they feel disjointed from the rest of the teacher education program; furthermore, participants frequently discussed their anxieties about the ways that they were assessed and evaluated with fieldwork, leading them to feel that they needed to use these spaces to prove their abilities as teachers, not just to learn and explore classroom practice and community.

These findings speak to the importance for the field of teacher education to expand our conceptions of what counts as “practice-based teacher education”. While the goal of this study is not to suggest particular structures or ways of engaging fieldwork, taking a broader conceptual approach to fieldwork does mean making its purposes and experiences both more central and more explicit. This reframing requires more in-depth

discussion of the role of fieldwork – specifically, what we as teacher educators hope is learned within these spaces – as well as the ways that these experiences are constructed as part of the larger program. By engaging in field experiences throughout the course of study and alongside coursework and more traditional “theoretical” courses, students have the opportunity to engage in discussions and reflections on the intersections of these learning spaces, allowing for a deeper and more critical sense of what it means to teach, the importance of a teaching philosophy or framework, and an appreciation for the complicated, humanistic, and relational work of schooling.

In addition to how fieldwork is structured over time within teacher education programs, there must be significant attention paid to the *why* or *how* of fieldwork; in this study participants frequently addressed the complicated – and at times contradictory – expectations that they, the university, and the school had for the purposes of fieldwork. Constructing fieldwork from a text and context framework means making central and explicit these purposes, as well as engaging in true discussion and debate with all stakeholders about the goals and expectations. Fieldwork offers a site in which deep and critical engagement with teaching and schooling can occur. For this kind of learning to flourish, however, significant attention to the roles and goals must occur. The findings from this study suggest that in order to build on the possibilities of fieldwork as a space of learning, teacher learners need contexts at both the university and the school where they can debate, discuss, and question what they are seeing and doing as part of the classroom practice. This type of integration will foster not only more engagement



between fieldwork and coursework, but also can help develop spaces for more critical explorations of what it means to teach and learn.

### *Particular Implications for Literacy Teacher Education*

While engaging in new structures for fieldwork is important for all types of teacher education, there are particular reasons why this revamping is critical for literacy-focused teacher education programs. Traditionally, “literacy” has been seen as the focus on reading, writing, and communicating orally (Street, 1997). Often literacy methods courses have prepared teacher learners by providing them with specific methods, approaches, and assessment strategies, which consequently inform the ways that these teacher learners engage in literacy classrooms during their field experiences. As can be seen from the data for this study, these issues were present across multiple contexts as the participants tried to engage in literacy instruction and assessment during their fieldwork. Writer’s Workshop, often touted as a “balanced” or “child-centered” approach to literacy instruction, still left Lila feeling silenced or uncertain as she tried to honor the use of AAVE in children’s writing while struggling with her own uncertainties around how to assess this writing. Max questioned the ways that the classroom teacher positioned him as “the expert” during a literacy lesson, noting how this framing silenced the children and disregarding any expertise or knowledge that they brought to the class. Maddie, placed in a school that had a mission centered on bilingual education, noted how the various activities assigned to students privileged some language practices over others.

Fieldwork in literacy-focused teacher education, then, must help teacher learners to appreciate and negotiate literacy as a social practice, moving beyond instruction

around particular methods or skills to engage teacher learners in more constructive dialogues around what counts as learning in these spaces. Kosnik, Rowsell, Williamson, Simon, and Beck (2013) make a powerful argument for the need to rethink what it means to prepare literacy teachers, arguing that teacher education programs must take a critical approach in order to prepare teachers for the complex, historicized, and ideology-driven spaces of school. This kind of teacher preparation requires not only a shift in the university-based discourses, but also in how spaces such as fieldwork are constructed. In this study, participants often struggled between honoring students' voices and experiences and preparing them for the realities of high-stakes testing and college preparation. These findings suggest that literacy teacher education programs in particular need to make space for these kinds of dialogues around fieldwork, making central the complex and situated ways that meaning is constructed and teaching is enacted in literacy-focused classrooms. Fieldwork in these programs must provide students the opportunities to observe and participate in classrooms, but also to reflect on these experiences and reimagine what literacy instruction and assessment might look like. Fieldwork in literacy teacher education needs to allow for the ways in which literacy practices inherently draw on students' and teachers' identities, histories, and ways of knowing and experiencing the world. Consequently, it is not enough to imagine fieldwork in literacy classrooms as a space to simply learn classroom management strategies or best practices for learning vocabulary words. These are critical aspects of teaching literacy, but they must be framed within a larger discussion of what it means to be a literacy teacher in these times.

*Particular Implications for Urban Contexts*

Universities in urban contexts face particular challenges as they approach the role of fieldwork in the preparation of teachers. Frequently these universities have a specific focus on urban education in their programs, either as a unique focus or as an integrated approach throughout the various teacher preparation strands (Fideler & Haselkorn, 1999; Darling-Hammond, 2010; see Appendix A for teacher education program overview). Yet there are often complications in these connections. One issue lies in the mismatch between the kinds of educational approaches and theories often espoused by the university and the top-down, high-stakes assessment-driven nature of much instruction in urban schools (Zeichner, 2002). As can be seen in the data from this study, these disconnects often left the participants baffled as to how to engage with the work from their courses in their school settings, either leaving them with the feeling that their teacher education work was useless in the “real world”, or reinforcing stereotypical discourses that position urban teachers and students as lazy or incompetent (Cochran-Smith, 2004). Furthermore, as was often discussed by the participants in this study, there was a lack of knowledge about the local communities and histories within the urban district, making it difficult for teacher learners to engage in their school settings fully and often leading to a narrow and deficit-oriented approach to what counts as “real urban schools”, reinscribing discourses of risk and failure (Gadsden, Davis, & Artiles, 2009).

When dealing with fieldwork in urban school contexts it is imperative that teacher education programs make spaces for students to engage in dialogue around what is meant by “urban” – the particular challenges, possibilities, and histories of these communities.

Teacher education programs need to address issues of race, culture, and language directly if they want students to enter schools not from a drop in/drop out mentality, but instead from the stance of active and engaged inquirers willing to deal with the at-times discomfoting and complicated nature of urban teaching. These conversations need to be directly tied to fieldwork so that students have the opportunity to reflect on their experiences and the questions that arise from these engagements with schools and teachers. In these conversations there needs to be room for a period of unlearning (Britzman, 1991, 2007) in which teacher learners can actively engage in discussions around assumptions and beliefs in a sustained and critical way.

*Constructing Spaces for Collaborative Inquiry in Teacher Education*

As was evident in the data from this study, the participants valued the opportunity to work together as an inquiry community. Incidents and stories from their field experiences often served as the catalyst for deep and sustained conversations around complicated issues such as language, the role of culture, and impact of high-stakes assessment on educational opportunities in schools. As described in Chapter Six, participants in interviews frequently referenced this group as the primary space where they could discuss their field experiences, referencing the ways that these conversations changed their outlook on what it meant to be a successful teacher. Yet it was also evident that this kind of sustained inquiry community was somewhat unique within the students' experiences. Even those who described having group conversations and spaces in other teacher education settings noted that there was something unique in the "unscripted space" of this group. Building from their own stories from fieldwork allowed the students to

follow their own interests and inquiries as they delved into issues around curriculum, pedagogy, and teacher identity.

The power of this space of learning for these participants speaks to the importance of constructing spaces that foster collaborative and ongoing inquiry within teacher education programs. Participation in these kind of communities allows for a broader understanding of what it means to be an educator, and permits room for connections between course materials, personal educational histories, and field experiences. Cochran-Smith & Lytle (1999, 2009) have long highlighted the importance of these kinds of communities within schools and teacher professional groups, yet less has been written about how to construct these spaces within teacher education programs. Collaborative inquiry not only allows for teacher learners to reflect more deeply on the questions and observations that emerge from fieldwork, but also has the potential to fundamentally shift the ways that they perceive the work of teaching, and the possibilities for teaching as a collaborative act.

These spaces, however, need to be thoughtfully constructed and provide opportunities for teacher learners to think about knowledge and research from new angles. Gitlin, Barlow, Burbank, Kauchak, and Stevens (1999) found that even when engaging in inquiry-based teacher education, many programs failed to directly disrupt the idea that research was something done in university settings and handed to teachers and schools; this assumption led many students in these programs to disregard their own inquiries as sites of knowledge construction. Constructing spaces for collaborative inquiry in teacher education is not simply fostering spaces for conversations between teacher learners.

Instead, these spaces must be deliberate, sustained, and intimately connected to both coursework and fieldwork requirements and experiences. Working from the framework of fieldwork as text and context, in conjunction with the development of spaces for sustained collaborative inquiry, promotes the possibility of transformative teacher education that is grounded both in the daily work of teachers and students and in the development and refinement of theoretical perspectives.

### **Implications for Research**

#### *The Importance of Theorizing and Researching Fieldwork*

Thinking about fieldwork as text and context has direct impact both for the practice of teacher education and for ways of reconceptualizing how and where research into fieldwork takes place. As this study demonstrates, fieldwork is a complicated space that shifts greatly not only across teacher education programs, but also from course to course within one institution. While field sites remain one of the central organizing principles of teacher education, there has not been significant research on how these spaces are conceptualized or utilized within teacher education programs (Zeichner, 2006, 2010; Burant & Kirby, 2005). Yet as this study shows, participants in a teacher education program were deeply aware of the various roles they were expected to take within field settings, as well as the various ways in which they were being assessed and positioned in these spaces. Despite this awareness, the participants often felt frustrated by the implicit expectations put on them by classroom teachers and university personnel, often wondering how to balance these pressures with their own interests and objectives. This

study points to the importance of continuing to engage in research that actively and directly addresses the question of what counts as fieldwork within teacher education – what are the purposes, the possibilities, and the limitations of these spaces of learning? How does looking at fieldwork programmatically offer new insights that might be lost if the sole focus is on student teaching or another culminating school-based experience? Research into the role of fieldwork in teacher education needs to look not only at the expected or desired outcomes, but also at the goals and expectations that students bring with them.

Furthermore, the data for this study demonstrate the real impacts that a lack of clarification or conceptualization for fieldwork can have on the development of teacher learners. Without more research into the nature of field experiences – including how they are embodied and enacted through the lived experiences of students in teacher education – there continues to be a gap in what we hope teacher learners gain from fieldwork and the nature of these experiences as part of teacher education. This research is particularly important in a time when teacher education programs are, as discussed above, once again under the scrutiny of the public eye – in a time when there is an increase in the number of alternative certification programs and an increasingly complicated landscape of school contexts in which fieldwork takes place. As such, research in the field of teacher education needs to take a closer look at one of the pillars of traditional teacher preparation, fieldwork, and think about how this space can either work to limit the possibilities for what it means to teach, or become a space where school practices can be explored, observed, and critiqued.

Traditionally, teacher education research has remained squarely within the milieu of the university. Although fieldwork has been under-researched in recent years, what research does exist has primarily focused on how it functions to prepare teachers, most often taking a narrow clinical approach to practice (Ball et. al, 2009; Zeichner, 2010, 2012). Where cooperating teachers and school personnel have been invited into the conversation, it has almost always been in the role of mentor or expert (Jones et. al, 1997; Leshem, 2012; Russell & Russell, 2009), rather than as a co-researcher or constructor of knowledge. Thinking of fieldwork as text and context – recognizing not only the reality of the locally and socially constructed nature of these spaces, but also the power of these aspects – offers new ways of imagining research where cooperating teachers are seen as equal partners. Orland-Barak (2010) suggests that a focus on the knowledge and experience brought to this mentoring relationship can create a new framework for praxis that takes more seriously the role of schools in knowledge construction. Honoring knowledge of practice and literacy as social practice offers the possibility to engage classroom teachers in more democratic ways, both in the development of fieldwork programs and in the research of these structures.

In many ways, the voices of classroom teachers are somewhat silent in this study. In part this is due to the design, and to my own position within the university. But these reasons alone do not tell the whole story. As the data chapters show, when there were perceived conflicts between the classroom teacher's perspective and that of the university



mentor or professor, almost always the students felt compelled to meet the expectations of the university. This tendency comes, at least in part, from the fact that the state certification requirements rely solely on the discretion of the university supervisor to approve a candidate for certification, leaving the classroom teacher with little power, voice, or authority in the development of new teachers.

The findings from this study speak to the need to create new ways of researching fieldwork, and teacher education more broadly, that honor, welcome, and respect the voices of teachers in more dialogic and democratic ways. Zeichner, Payne, and Brayko (2012) discuss the possibility of using field experiences to democratize knowledge and reimagine what it means to be an expert in the development of new teachers. This study speaks to the need for further research that both honors the role of teachers in the development and analysis of research, as well as research that explores the possibilities, tensions, and complications of fieldwork structures that deliberately attempt to create more democratic and dialogic spaces for learning. In order to truly construct spaces within teacher education to foster a deep appreciation for practitioner knowledge, research into issues such as fieldwork must also find ways to include K-12 practitioners in the theorizing, implementation, and analysis of these issues.

### **Future Directions and Lingering Questions**

While this study offers insights into the nature of learning in fieldwork and the ways in which the participants engaged in and made sense of these spaces, the nature of the work also has some limitations. First, this study followed the lives and stories of

fifteen individuals – twelve more deeply through the inquiry group setting and (for four of them) in interviews, and three additional interviewees. As I described in Chapter Two, their identities are widely varying along experiences, race, class, age, and gender. They may or may not be “representative voices” of teacher education, although I would argue that the fact that trends and themes arose across these various identities speak to their importance within the field. Moving from their specific narratives and locally contextualized experiences to written representation that lends itself to larger implications is, in and of itself, a complicated task. I have tried, by focusing on a close reading of the participants’ experiences and narratives, to neither condemn current standards for fieldwork nor uphold these spaces as unproblematic, but instead to recognize and surface the complex ways that these spaces are constructed and enacted within teacher education. By focusing on the stories and questions that the participants brought with them from their fieldwork I have tried to highlight some of the potential of fieldwork, as well as some of the ways that it has historically re-inscribed power dynamics and deficit perspectives around schools, particularly those in urban contexts.

While this study has offered insights into the world of teacher education, helping to imagine new ways of constructing the space of fieldwork, questions do remain. One of the questions that I am left with is how teacher learners carry fieldwork experiences forward with them into their places of practice as teachers. The fifteen participants in this study now occupy a number of different positions in widely varied educational spaces, ranging from a Language Arts teacher at a private Quaker middle school to a public elementary school reading specialist to a high school teacher for a larger charter school

organization. Future research that followed teacher learners in teacher education programs into their early years as practicing educators could offer new insights into how these fieldwork experiences continue to influence their pedagogy and practice. Cornu and Ewing (2008) argue for the need to think across the gap between teacher education and early career teaching, in order to create spaces for ongoing mentoring and professional development. In our work together, Emily recalled the feeling that she had been “dropped” out of teacher education into her early years teaching, lamenting the lack of support and guidance that she had felt from her fieldwork cooperating teacher while student teaching (Fieldnotes, 2.25.13). This experience speaks to both the research gap and practical divide between teacher education and early career teaching, pointing to the need for future research into how fieldwork and early career mentoring and development might be more intertwined.

Questions also remain about how we frame and define fieldwork in the field of teacher education. In the program that this study was situated within, fieldwork was seen as any experience that occurred within a school (or afterschool) setting as part of a university course, although there was particular emphasis on the more sustained experiences that made up the state-mandated fieldwork course. Students in this program were frequently asked to participate in two or three different fieldwork settings over the course of the eighteen months to three years that they took to complete the program. While the expectations and positions within these various sites varied widely, I argue that there is merit in reflecting on how they all share certain possibilities and challenges as university-sanctioned school-based sites. Yet further research is needed to more deeply

investigate the tensions and affordances of this variation within a program. Questions remain as to the benefits and limitations of having students engage in one fieldsite for longer periods of time, versus the chance to see a number of different school contexts; in particular these questions might offer deeper insights into the questions of isolation and loneliness that the participants described in Chapter Three. I deliberately did not follow these students into their field sites, wanting to focus instead on the experiences and reactions that they themselves perceived, rather than trying to place my own impressions or frameworks on their field experiences. Ethnographic research into the role of variation and time in fieldwork settings, both within and across programs, might offer some insights into the nature of positionality within these spaces.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

In October 2013, as I was beginning the work of writing this dissertation, *The New York Times* published an op-ed by NYT journalist Bill Keller entitled “An Industry of Mediocrity” (Keller, 2013). In this piece Keller, building on then-president of Teachers College Arthur Levine’s (2006) infamous and public scathing report of teacher education programs, argues for the need for teacher education programs to follow the K-12 charter school movement and make teacher education a privately-funded endeavor, breaking away from the university and state oversight that has so long allowed ill-prepared and under-qualified teachers to enter classrooms. In January of 2014, right as I was deep into my writing of the data chapters, Mike Rose, a well-known educational researcher and scholar currently at UCLA, wrote a three-piece series on the same topic,

also citing Levine, for *The Washington Post*; while the topic was the same, the tone could not have been more different. In the third installment of this series, Rose urged both the public and those of us in the field of teacher education to take a step back, reminding his readers, “The goal [of critique] is to improve our schools, close the achievement gap, and restore opportunity and mobility. Powerful and laudable. But the criticism has flaws in it that should instill in us a little caution, not to forego improvement of teacher education and develop new ways to provide it, but rather to help us move forward on surer footing” (Rose, 2014).

As I immersed myself in my data – the stories and questions and perspectives that the participants shared with me week after week – and began to craft the story of our shared and individual experiences, as I read across the scholarship and research on teacher education, I was struck by the synchronicity of this more public discourse. I believe that part of my reason for undertaking this work was to honor the history and successes of teacher education while also helping, to use Rose’s phrase, move the field onto surer footing. As I engaged in reading these texts and thinking about this work, I was struck both by the certainty with which non-educators spoke about education, and about the lack of appreciation for the complex and situated learning that I saw in my analysis. While public discourses are not traditionally the central audience for dissertation work, the study of teaching and teacher education has always been impacted, in ways both good and bad, by the public nature of these discourses. Almost everyone in the United States has taken part in some kind of organized educational setting. Furthermore, education is positioned as one of the central ways that children are prepared for

citizenship, democratic participation, and personal career achievement (Labaree, 1997), making its structures and practices a topic of fierce debate and importance within the public sphere. Yet, as Rose reminds us in his three-part series, one of the greatest dangers of this public debate is a loss of appreciation for the complexities of teaching, including teacher education. This study is an attempt to directly explore these nuances and their impact on teacher learners' perceptions of self, literacy, and pedagogy through an investigation of one of the more complex and political spaces of teacher education – fieldwork.

Fieldwork is a unique context within teacher education. Because it is based within the daily lives of schools, the “in-the-moment” work of teachers and students, it is inherently embedded in the current educational and policy climates and the messy, relational nature of human engagements. Furthermore, fieldwork is often positioned as the space where learning is put into practice – a training ground for the profession. In their AERA report on teacher education, Cochran-Smith and Zeichner (2010) highlighted field experiences as one of nine topic areas central to the field. They noted the need for research that better represented the complex interactions within field experiences:

We also need research frameworks that go beyond simply studying teaching techniques or, on the other hand, simply studying teachers' thinking. ... These frameworks need to be more complex and be informed by sophisticated knowledge about how practice is shaped not only by what individuals may believe or hope to achieve, but also by contexts, materials, and other people (p. 16)

This study is an attempt to engage in this kind of systematic, integrated, and nuanced reflection on the role and possibilities of fieldwork in teacher education. Throughout this work I have tried to honor the stories, time, and perspectives of the participants, seeing

them not only as recipients of information within the teacher education program but also as producers of knowledge. This work would not have been possible without the candor and thoughtfulness with which these young professionals shared their stories, histories, and individual inquiries. By focusing on their narratives as part of the lived experience of fieldwork, I tried to demonstrate how they balanced their own expectations and experiences with those that they felt were imposed by both the school and university settings, as well as the ways that they took up new ways of thinking about practice and education presented to them in these spaces. These narratives are not straightforward or linear, but instead represent the complicated and iterative ways that the participants made sense of the work of literacy education and their own teacher identities through fieldwork. In addition, the work of the inquiry group demonstrates the power and possibility of collaborative work within teacher education.

This dissertation invites researchers and practitioners in teacher education to engage in a more critical reflection and discussion of how fieldwork functions as space of learning in teacher education. It urges us to think more closely about the expectations, both explicit and implicit, around what counts as learning within field experiences. To what extent do these spaces invite a closer, more critical look at the histories and experiences of the teacher learners? How are cooperating teachers and other school-based practitioners positioned within these spaces, and what does that say about the construction of practice-based knowledge? This study offers a look into the range of topics and issues that arose in relation to fieldwork, suggesting the importance of future research into this particular space and how it functions within the development of

professional identities. In addition, this study demonstrates the important role that collaborative communities of inquiry can play within teacher education, both within a cohort of learners and across school and university contexts. We as a field need to continue to engage in research around fieldwork that honors the possibilities for more democratic and dialogic forms of teacher education and builds on the knowledge that all participants – university educators, school-based teachers, and teacher learners – bring with them to these contexts.



## APPENDIX A

### Sample Teacher Education Fieldwork Comparison Chart

School Name	Type of Institution	Programs Offered	Terms used for "Fieldwork"	Basic Overview of Program of Study
Brandeis University	Private Jewish University	Teacher Education minor in undergraduate, with certification in preschool, elem, and secondary Masters of the Art of Teaching (MAT) in elementary, Jewish Day Schools, and secondary	Lab Observations Student Teaching	Observations begin in late sophomore or junior year, with a culminating full-semester of student teaching in senior year "Coursework on campus is integrated with field experience in area schools, culminating in a semester of supervised student teaching." (Brandeis Website, March 7, 2014).

Fresno State University	State School	10 undergraduate certifications Also possibility for certification through M.S. and Ed.D. programs	Field experiences Fieldwork Instructional Planning	"Coursework and field experiences are designed to prepare teachers who are reflective thinkers, problem solvers, and decision makers to meet the challenges of teaching in a rapidly changing world characterized by social, economic, and cultural/linguistic diversity. The coursework offers students opportunities to develop and refine their understanding of the teaching/learning process while experiencing the best of the world of practice. Supervised field experiences along with instructional
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				planning and evaluation techniques provide the foundation for productive and responsive teaching. In this context, all faculty promote teaching as a science and an art." (Website, 3-7-14).
Gwynedd-Mercy College	Private Catholic College	BA and certification in elementary, secondary, and special education 9 MA programs offered	Teacher Apprentice Program (TAP) Pre-Student Teaching Student Teaching	Field experiences are integrated throughout the programs, ending in a traditional intensive student teaching experience. "Students are involved in the Teacher Apprentice Program (TAP) from their first semester on campus. Through TAP, students are assigned to a variety of schools every Wednesday. This gives them

			<p>the opportunity to work with teachers in the field, observe best practices in Education, and hone their own professional skills. During the first semester of their senior year, students are assigned to Pre-Student Teaching and during their last semester, students spend 16 weeks, full time, in a classroom." (Gwynedd-Mercy website, March 7, 2014)</p>
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Harvard University	Private University Research 1 School	Undergraduate program that offers courses and certification through the GSE	Fieldwork Teacher Interns	Fieldwork an extensive part of the design and implementation of the program. "The centerpiece of the Program is extensive fieldwork in secondary classrooms that helps to integrate practice and theory as well as curricula and pedagogy. The program explicitly teaches and practices critical reflection about classroom practices, the context of education and the nature and purposes of teaching and learning. The link among subject-matter interests, curriculum development, issues of social location and
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				practice provides TAC candidates with opportunities to implement, assess, and revise curricula in urban classrooms while working under the supervision of experienced classroom teachers and, over time, to revitalize traditional materials and introduce new ideas into schools." (Website, 3-7-14)
Michigan State	Large state school Research I university	Elementary Ed Certification/BA Secondary Ed Certification/BA Elementary and Secondary Post-Bac Masters	Internship Field Experiences	School based experiences are integrated throughout the program. "The classes which you take as part of the program include practical "field experiences" which allows you to use what you learn in the college classroom and

				<p>apply it in a school setting – sometimes even the very next day!</p> <p>Finally, the program includes graduate level coursework during your internship year to help you further connect theory with actual teaching practice" (Website, 3-7-14)</p>
Oklahoma State	Large state school	7 programs/certification and BA Masters	Observation Practicum Student Teaching	<p>Gradual entry into schools, starting with observations in Sophomore year and ending with a Practicum experience and a carminative Student Teaching program in senior year.</p>

Penn State University	Large state school Research I university	26 certification programs BA/Cert in early childhood, elementary, and secondary	Early field experiences Student teaching Professional Development School	Program is entered into at the start of junior year, at which point classes are integrated with early field observations. The final semester is a carminative intensive student teaching experience. "Candidates may choose from several options for a semester-long student teaching experience during their final year. During student teaching, candidates are placed in a school setting for a semester or longer where they work closely with a student teaching supervisor and mentor teacher to gain extensive experience in
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				teaching. Students who choose the Professional Development School (PDS) option complete a full-year field experience that includes both the DI block and student teaching (30 credits total)." (Website, 3-7-14).
University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign	Large state school Research I university	BA/Certification in early childhood, elementary and special education. A Minor is available in a range of Secondary areas. MA and PhD programs offered as well	Field Requirements Field Experiences Student Teaching	No admission to the education program until junior year, although there are "pre-teacher education" courses that freshman and sophomores can take. Field experiences begin from Junior year for the traditional program, and from Freshman year for the "Pre-Teacher Education" students. "Students

			applying to the major must also provide evidence of having 50 hours of formal experience working with children or youth comparable to the age-level of students served in the program for which application is made. "(website, 3-7-14).
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University of Wisconsin, Madison	Large state school Research I university	9 BA Departments/Certifications Also offered certification as part of M.S. and Ph.D. programs	Field Work Student Teaching Clinical Experiences	Fieldwork takes place either through the "Partnership School Network" or the Urban Institute. "The Partner School Network (PSN) at the University of Wisconsin–Madison is made up of 24 schools across four local districts and various programs within the School of Education. School and University based partners are committed to the high achievement of all students, focusing on high need schools and the promotion of inclusive, equitable education. While a key function of this network is to
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			<p>prepare pre-service educators and to secure consistent, high-quality sites for clinical experiences, partnerships are established so that the School of Education plays a greater role in strengthening school communities and improving student outcomes."</p> <p>"This program [Institute for Urban Education] is designed to help pre-service teachers follow their desire to become urban educators as well as provide professional development opportunities for currently practicing teachers. We are dedicated to helping urban schools</p>
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				continue to grow the promise of urban youth and to assisting urban teachers as they develop both as teachers and learners." (Website, 3-7-14)
West Chester University	Private University	18 BA/Certification programs MA programs offered as well	Field Experiences Student Teaching	Historically a teacher preparation institution. School wide mission of "Teaching and Learning in Context" leads to a direct focus on "early field experiences" as part of courses taken in

				freshman and sophomore years. "Designated courses require early field experience to observe and work with PK-12 students in schools and other settings" (Website, 3-7-14)
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## APPENDIX B

### Interview Protocols

#### Interview 1 Protocol

##### **Topic Area: Educational History**

*Initial Question:* Tell me about your history as a student.

*Follow-up questions:*

- You mentioned feeling \_\_\_\_\_ about school. Could you tell me more about that?
- Were there any pivotal experiences in school that led you to think about going into the field of education?
- How did you see yourself as a student? Did that change at all over time?

##### **Topic Area: Teaching History**

*Initial Question:* Tell me about your decision to become a teacher.

*Follow-up questions:*

- If you have been or are planning to be a teacher, what led you to that career?

##### **Topic Area: Graduate School**

*Initial Question:* What made you decide to return to school at this time?

- What made you decide to get a masters degree and/or reading specialist certification?
- Where do you see your career path leading in the next couple years? In five years? Further along?

*Initial Question:* Why did you decide on the Reading/Writing/Literacy program at Penn?

*Follow-up questions:*

- What did you know about Penn before choosing this program?
- What did you know more specifically about the RWL program?
- Why did you decide to enter a program focused on literacy education?

##### **Topic Area: Fieldwork**

*Initial Question:* Have field or community-based experiences been a part of your education? Tell me about some of these experiences.

*Follow-up questions:*

- You mentioned that \_\_\_\_\_ was an important experience for you. Could you tell me more about that?
- Can you tell me more about your role within the field experience?
- What do you think the purposes of field experiences are in education? What about in teacher education more specifically?
- How do field experiences benefit the community? How about the university?

##### **Topic Area: Urban Education**

*Initial Question:* How would you define urban education?

*Follow-up questions:*

- What characteristics do you think make urban education unique?
- Do you think education programs should focus on urban education?
- Do you think teachers need any special experiences or training to work in urban education?

## **Interview 2 Protocol**

### **Topic Area: Graduate School**

*Initial Question:* How is your semester going?

*Follow-up questions:*

- Tell me about your classes
- What classes have a fieldwork component?
- Any concerns?
- What are you hoping to get out of this semester as a whole?

### **Topic Area: Fieldwork**

*Initial Question:* Are you in [the fieldwork class]?

*Follow-up Questions:*

- If yes, is this your first or second semester?
  - o How is it going?
  - o Tell me about your fieldwork placement.
- If no, how are your other fieldwork experiences going?
- You mentioned that \_\_\_\_\_ was an important moment for you. Can you tell me more about that?

### **Topic Area: Future Plans**

*Initial Question:* At this point, what are you thinking about doing next year?

*Follow-up Questions:*

- Have your plans changed at all during this year?
- Are you thinking about teaching any differently at this point?
- Anything else that's coming up for you?

## **Interview 3 Protocol**

### **Topic Area: Graduate School**

*Initial Question:* Tell me about your semester.

*Follow-up Questions:*

- How did your classes go?
- What surprised you? What met your expectations?



- What do you wish had happened differently?
- You mentioned \_\_\_\_\_ as a moment that stands out. Can you tell me more?

### **Topic Area: Fieldwork**

*Initial Question:* Now that you've completed the year, how did fieldwork function as a space of learning for you within the program?

*Follow-up Questions:*

- How was it different or similar from classes or other spaces of learning?
  - Were there any particular challenges about fieldwork? With the specific context you were in?
  - Where did you find spaces to reflect on what you were experiencing and learning in the field placements?
- What issues do you see as central to the work of fieldwork in teacher education?

### **Topic Area: Literacy Education**

*Initial Question:* What do you now see as the goal or purpose of literacy education?

*Follow-up Questions*

- How do these purposes connect to teacher education?
- Have your perspectives changed at all while you have been in this program?
- Thinking about fieldwork, what do you see as the purposes of fieldwork specifically for literacy teacher education?
  - o How did it integrate (or not) with other spaces of learning in this program, both formal and informal?
  - o How much do you feel the class expectations and assignments influenced how you participated and experience the school setting?

### **Topic Area: Future Plans**

*Initial Question:* What are your plans looking forward?

*Follow-up Questions:*

- Any changes?
- Who would you go to for advice or mentoring at this point?

### **Topic Area: Urban Education**

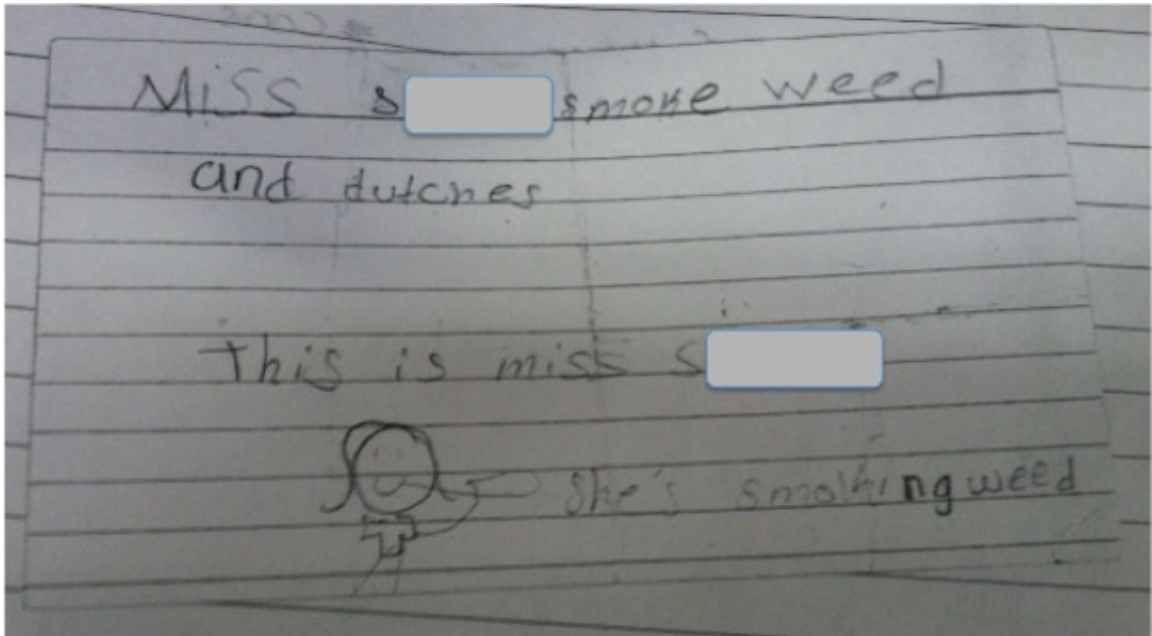
*Initial Question:* How do you now think about this program, specifically around how it defines itself as urban and social-justice-based?

*Follow-up Questions:*

- Do you think that tied into fieldwork at all? (The school experiences and the course)
  - o If so, how was it (the fieldwork context) different?
  - o Did you have space to talk about these schools as urban contexts?
  - o At this point, what aspects do you think make urban schools unique?

## APPENDIX C

## Journal Drawing From Kelly's Fieldwork



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