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Abstract

Teacher inquiry communities are an essential part of the teacher research movement. They allow teachers to see new possibilities for themselves and students, often within constrained policy environments. These communities have at their heart the generation of knowledge for improving practice and are sometimes posed as a powerful form of professional development. However, it has been argued that viewing inquiry communities within some of the most prevalent professional development frameworks common in schools limits their transformative potential (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009).

This study builds on existing research about inquiry communities to conceptualize inquiry as transformative adult learning. It uses participatory and practitioner methodologies to offer an account of an inquiry community, comprised of five teachers and me, focused on adolescent literacy education. The conceptual framework for this study was drawn from adult learning theory (e.g. Brookfield, 1986; Mezirow, 1991); emancipatory traditions (e.g. Horton & Freire, 1990; McIntyre, 2007); feminist pedagogies (e.g. hooks, 1994; Weiler, 1991); and teacher inquiry (e.g. Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Campano, 2009). Data for this study were transcripts, field notes, interviews, a research journal, and artifacts from the group. A combination of analytic approaches, including ethnographic coding, narrative analysis, and case studies, were used to arrive at a multi-dimensional view of this learning community.

The three major findings from this study were: 1) Transformative learning occurred through both the structured and open spaces. 2) Teachers' stories were a central text for learning in the group and performed different kinds of transformative work. 3) Viewing inquiry communities through an adult learning framework allows for consideration of the personal, political, and professional dimensions of teachers' lives; the relationship between their past and present experiences; and analysis of how they direct their own learning. This study offers "proof of possibility" (Cochran-Smith et al., 1999) for teachers, teacher educators, researchers, and school leaders trying to create meaningful learning environments that position teachers as autonomous learners and agents of change.

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**TEACHER INQUIRY AS TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING: THE WORK OF
AN ADOLESCENT LITERACY EDUCATION STUDY GROUP**

Kathleen Riley

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in

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ABSTRACT

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Kathleen Riley

Susan L. Lytle

Teacher inquiry communities are an essential part of the teacher research movement. They allow teachers to see new possibilities for themselves and students, often within constrained policy environments. These communities have at their heart the generation of knowledge for improving practice and are sometimes posed as a powerful form of professional development. However, it has been argued that viewing inquiry communities within some of the most prevalent professional development frameworks common in schools limits their transformative potential (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009).

This study builds on existing research about inquiry communities to conceptualize inquiry as transformative adult learning. It uses participatory and practitioner methodologies to offer an account of an inquiry community, comprised of five teachers and me, focused on adolescent literacy education. The conceptual framework for this study was drawn from adult learning theory (e.g. Brookfield, 1986; Mezirow, 1991); emancipatory traditions (e.g. Horton & Freire, 1990; McIntyre, 2007); feminist pedagogies (e.g. hooks, 1994; Weiler, 1991); and teacher inquiry (e.g. Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Campano, 2009). Data for this study were transcripts, field notes, interviews, a research journal, and artifacts from the group. A combination of analytic

approaches, including ethnographic coding, narrative analysis, and case studies, were used to arrive at a multi-dimensional view of this learning community.

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PREFACE

In April of 2010, I sent an invitation to English/Language Arts teachers in the Philadelphia area, asking them to join me in a teacher inquiry group. Five teachers from different schools joined me and together we formed a group that met twice a month over the course of one year to discuss issues related to literacy and their work as teachers. My intent was to participate in the group and document its work to see what I could learn about adolescent literacy education and the process for making sense of it. .

Our meetings occurred in a cozy lounge of a student center on my university's campus on weekday evenings or at my apartment on Saturday mornings. They were characterized by expressions of impassioned beliefs and frustration, stories from the teachers' work and lives, endless questions, tremendous support, careful listening, and periods of contemplative silence.

Part way into our work, I sat down with Becca, one of the teachers, to interview her about her experiences in the group and her views on literacy education. One of the questions I asked was *What do you think about the idea of literacy and how it matters?*

I include her response here, uncut but arranged in the form of a "data poem" (Richardson, 1997). I believe it captures the essence of what was included in our discussions and the palpable passion with which the teachers often discussed their work:

(10 second pause)

Gosh, I mean, because it matters so much
it's almost hard to say why I think it matters.

And when I think of it,
when I think "literacy,"
I just think about how students identify themselves
and how they understand the world around them
and how they view their place within the world around them.

And I can't think of anything that's more important than that?
I mean that's like, that's your whole life,
that's how you like,
feel happy or sad.

I mean, that's hu-
(sigh)
that's gigantic!

And it's how you get things that you need
or ask for things that you need.
And it's how you plan for what you want for yourself
or for your family
or for your children
and then make those things happen.

I mean it's, it's gigantic. Um...
So yeah, that's like the heavy stuff,
but then it's also just like:

the way you learn about other people's experiences to enrich your own.
Or just make you a better person
or make you a better citizen.

I kind of think I sound like my grandmother,
but that matters,
that stuff matters.

It matters to be able to be empathetic
or to learn that way.

So I think that's why it matters.

And then I think it matters to talk about it because those things are so personal.
It's not objective.
It's so subjective

and I think you have to be talking about it
to be responsible
and ethical about how you're doing it.

I'm sure math teachers disagree,
but it's not math.
There's not something that, like, "This is what it is. It's this."
It's one plus one is two.
That's the only answer,
that's the only way to get the answer.
I mean I know math gets more complicated, but:
it's not this discrete set of like, etched in stone facts.

It's so much more, large and crazy than that,
that there's so many more opportunities
for things to be done hurtfully?
Or in a way that like, damages people
or hurts people's feelings
or leads people in the wrong direction that,

I don't know, it's just,

It needs to be talked about so you don't

screw it up.

(Becca, interview, 7-20-2010)

In her response, Becca defines literacy in broad terms. She reminds us of the human dimension of literacy and its connection to power, relationships, empathy, and possibility. Her impassioned tone, which built over the course of her answer, is a reminder of just how deep literacy education can be if one chooses to think of it in such expansive ways. Becca also reminds us of the complexity of the work of English teachers, who must contend directly with a subject that is so "large and crazy" that it comes with risks of things being done hurtfully.

Also worth noting about Becca's response is how quickly she shifts from referring to "students" to talking about literacy using the generic "your," a linguistic subtlety that I also noticed in our group conversations. When it came to the issues that mattered, I noticed a tendency to shift from discussing literacy in terms of "teachers" and "students" to how literacy affects *all* of us as people. The distinctly human and relational nature of literacy education makes it all the more urgent that teachers are able to bring everything they have to their work as they create opportunities for their students to develop and use what they have learned.

Like Becca, I believe that literacy education is too complex, too messy, too full of life's big questions – questions of self-confidence, self-determination, relationships, and opportunity – to consider in a vacuum. I believe that English teachers contend daily with the vastness of literacy and all the ways it plays out in the classroom. I believe that in today's educational climate, there are too few opportunities for teachers to, in Becca's words, "talk about it" – with "it" being literacy, teaching, learning, students, schools, and the complexity of the work. This dissertation tells the story of this group – the space we created, the processes we used, and the learning that came out of our work.

CHAPTER 1: Introducing the Study and the Literature

Background

This study focuses on one group of literacy educators – five English/Language Arts teachers from different middle and high schools in a large urban area – who came together to collaborate with each other and me, a university-based doctoral student and literacy researcher, over the course of one year. These teachers responded to a call, sent out over email, to closely examine their practice and inquire into the topic of adolescent literacy education. In the initial email, I introduced myself, invited teachers to meet regularly to discuss topics in adolescent literacy education, and mentioned that we would grapple with issues together. The group explored topics like building relationships with students, creating spaces for student talk, understanding language and identity, and contending with school policies that constrained possibilities for student engagement. These issues became the focus of our work.

Inquiry communities like this one are part of the teacher research movement (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999), an intellectual movement that intersects with other progressive movements with similar social change agendas. Teachers in inquiry communities theorize practice from the location of the classroom and generate rich sets of frameworks, questions, and insights that empower them to improve practice. They are also engaged in ongoing questioning of what “improvement” means, keeping the purposes of education intentionally open for discussion. In these communities, teachers participate in

transformative educational practices that shape their world views and their approach to their work. It is the transformative work of teachers that is the focus of this study.

Studying the intellectual, personal, professional, and political (Noffke, 1997) work of teachers who come from a range of urban schools, how they read, write, think, and what they bring to learning, can help us understand the work of teaching better. It can also help us understand the nature of some of the challenges in literacy education in these times of increased standardization, tightly controlled curriculum, high-stakes assessment for both teachers and students, and discourse on student deficits and anti-social or criminal behavior. By documenting this group's work, I offer both an example of an inquiry community and a new set of frameworks for thinking about teachers and the contexts in which they work.

This study is intended to be useful to teacher educators, school district leaders, and those responsible for teacher professional development. It offers an example of some of the challenges and possibilities of creating a democratic, transformative learning space; a greater understanding of the resources that teachers bring to teaching and learning; an analysis of practices that support transformative learning; and a description of the kinds of insights possible through inquiry. It also offers English teachers, in particular, a new way of seeing themselves as transformative intellectuals (Giroux, 1985).

The Stories of My Questions

I originally designed this study to respond to the conflicting discourse and troubling trends in adolescent literacy education. Noting the discord among policies that aim to, in Comber's (2002) words, "pin literacy down" (p. 16) despite a growing body of research that theorizes literacy as situated and dynamic, my goal was to design a participatory research environment in which teachers could make sense of these competing ideas. I invited a group of teachers to join me in "critical world making" (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2003, p. 303) by identifying key issues in their work, envisioning alternatives, and taking action in service of their vision. I saw this study as an opportunity for me to simultaneously explore two of my areas of interest: adolescent literacy education and teacher inquiry communities. I was interested to learn about *both* the subject of our work (adolescent literacy education) *and* our method for understanding it (teacher inquiry).

In keeping with a central assumption of the practitioner inquiry movement, that teachers are generators rather than consumers of knowledge, I initially used knowledge generation as the framework for my research questions, asking *How is this group working as a site of knowledge generation?* I drew on Kincheloe's (1991) theory that knowledge does not exist separately from the knower to conceptualize knowledge generation as an individual's *change of view*. As I designed this study, I realized that as a teacher, I had never considered myself to be a knowledge generator. In the section that follows, I explore some of my early experiences to show how this study is, in many ways, a revision of my own past experiences as a teacher.

Questions from the Classroom

The questions for this study have roots in my experiences teaching public school in two different school districts: Washington DC Public Schools and Fairfax County Public Schools. In this section, my intent is to tie this study to issues I experienced that persist in schools today, such as the difficulty of teaching across racial and ethnic groups, the challenges of working in urban schools, and the need for professional development that addresses the *real* questions in teachers' lives, questions related to race and identity, school policies and cultures, and the struggles they experience in their classrooms.

In my first years of teaching in a public school in Washington DC, I struggled daily to create meaningful opportunities for my students in the face of challenges common to urban schools, such as low expectations, a prison-like climate, high-stakes tests, and deficit discourse on students, families, and communities. Within the smaller context of my classroom, I also struggled with relational challenges that prompted questions such as: *How do I, as a white teacher who is not from the community, build trusting relationships with my African American students and their families? How do I create an engaging classroom community in a chaotic school climate? How am I making teaching choices in relationship to my students' use of African American Vernacular English?*

While questions such as these arose daily, I had no formal contexts in which to explore them. In search of better professional development and a more stable school culture, after two years of teaching in DC, I went across the Potomac River to teach in Fairfax County Public Schools.

I arrived in Fairfax County, a national trendsetter in school reform (Duke, 2005), at a time when collaborative professional development opportunities were proliferating across the district. I participated in Professional Learning Communities, Critical Friends Groups, teacher book groups, and collaborations with instructional coaches. I quickly came to realize that voluntary groups generally seemed more meaningful than the required ones. And over time, I felt a growing uneasiness with the discourse on students and learning at my school. I needed a place to talk about issues that were silenced or buried, such as the political nature of teaching, issues of race and culture, and school policies and practices that constricted opportunities for students to learn. I also wanted a place to talk about my practice – what was going on in my classroom and how I could make it better. I entered graduate school with questions about teacher learning that intersected with questions about social justice: *How do teachers find ways to talk and learn about issues of identity and culture in their classrooms? Where do they go to find answers to the real questions about their work? How can they work with their colleagues to make their classrooms better?*

Questions from Graduate Studies

In 2007, I decided to pursue graduate study at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia. Here, I encountered a framework for teacher inquiry (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993; 2009). The idea that teachers could theorize practice from the classroom provoked a paradigmatic shift within me as well as a growing sense of curiosity about this intellectual movement and its possibilities. I became increasingly curious about the ways that teachers in inquiry communities made sense of their practice: *What does it*

really mean to theorize practice? To question assumptions? How do members of inquiry communities learn together? What are the struggles, negotiations, and possibilities in forming inquiry communities?

The notion of an inquiry community helped explain my dissonance in the PLCs in Fairfax, offered a new image of how teachers might work together to improve practice, and enabled a critical view of what “success” means and how to measure it. It also allowed me to identify some past experiences where inquiry did happen. For example, re-reading my past through the lens of inquiry allowed me to realize that, while the PLC format did *not* facilitate inquiry, I *was* engaging in inquiry when I met with two of my colleagues at *Busboys and Poets*, a local establishment that was part progressive bookstore, part café, and part public meeting space. I realized how, in that space, I had encountered new ways of thinking about students through reading books, attending lectures, and discussing ideas with my colleagues over dinner. I distinctly remember my view of students shifting as a result of reading Sonia Nieto’s *The Light in their Eyes* and attending a lecture she gave. I also remember, after reading a book on tracking, a particularly challenging conversation with a colleague over dinner in which I gained a greater understanding of the relationship among tracking practices, a meritocratic society, and the growing wealth gap. Viewing these experiences *as inquiry* made me realize how I was seeking professional development outside of the system to address issues otherwise silenced or ignored.

In graduate school, I participated in two related research projects that allowed me to explore my interest in adolescent literacy education. Collaborative Inquiry into Adolescent Literacy and Learning (Project CALL) was a teaching and research collaboration comprised of doctoral students and a faculty member that documented and systematically studied a master's course on adolescent literacy education. This project deepened my understanding of the possibilities of critical inquiry-based pedagogies and collaborative research. Through this project, I also cultivated an interest in adolescent literacy education. I encountered frameworks for thinking about adolescent development (e.g. Nakkula & Toshalis, 2006), rich images of critical inquiry-based English/Language Arts teaching (e.g. Fecho, 2004; Christensen, 2009), and policy analyses that exposed the challenges of teaching adolescents amid an approach that framed adolescent literacy education solely in terms of acquiring technical skills or workforce preparedness (e.g. Stevens, 2006). As an outgrowth of that project, I worked with another graduate student to initiate, participate in, and systematically study a Reading Inquiry Group (RIG) made up of master's students in the adolescent literacy education course. Each week, this small group read and discussed one course text selected by the members. The group became a reading community in which we theorized practice, explored our identities, became aware of our unique perspectives, and posed questions to each other. Participating in ProjectCALL and the RIG led to the conceptualization of this study. I was excited about the challenges and possibilities of creating a group of teachers who engaged in critical inquiries the graduate students had. I wondered: *What would happen if a group of committed, engaged teachers of adolescents came together to educate themselves by discussing short readings over time? What are the most important issues, dilemmas,*

ideas, possibilities, and questions that would arise? What knowledge could such a group generate about adolescent literacy education that would be useful to others?

Fueled by my own dissonance in the urban context of DC, my dis-ease in the suburban context of Fairfax, my excitement by alternate images presented by practitioner inquiry, the realization that I was *doing inquiry* across my professional career in unofficial ways, and the questions that arose out of ProjectCALL and the RIG, I designed a study to address some of my questions in February of 2010. I solicited participants in March, and we started meeting in April. From then until April of 2011, I met with the teachers two times per month and acted as a facilitator, participant, and researcher. Throughout this time, I transcribed our meetings, analyzed the transcripts, conducted interviews, and took field notes in pursuit of insight into the following question: *How is this group functioning as a site of knowledge generation about adolescent literacy education?* I continued this analysis through the summer of 2011.

Questions After Encountering Occupy

In October of 2011, as I was analyzing the work of the group and beginning to write this dissertation, I had an encounter that altered my thinking. In the fall of 2011, the Occupy movement exploded onto the national scene, beginning in New York City, as a protest movement that unified multiple groups around shared concerns, in particular corporate control over nearly all areas of political and civic life, the privatization of public institutions, a rapidly increasing wealth gap, joblessness, and social inequality. A central component of the movement were “tent cities” that popped up in public spaces around the

country, where citizens came together to live in democratically organized learning and working communities. In these communities, activists expressed their disagreement with the status quo and practiced alternatives. They held direct democracy General Assembly meetings, distributed basic resources according to egalitarian principles, spoke across social and political differences, and made space for creative expression.

I first visited the site of Occupy Philadelphia in October of 2011. The Philadelphia faction of the movement was made up of an encampment of about 300 residential tents in front of City Hall and included a *People's Library*, information booths, a food tent, and a first aid tent. During one of my early visits, I saw a cardboard sign that said “trainings” and listed reading groups, instruction on non-violent resistance, study groups, creative arts sessions, and a homeless walking tour. In addition, the encampment offered opportunities to participate in dozens of working groups, as well as a General Assembly meeting each night in which participants made decisions about the movement by enacting the principles of direct democracy.

I stood in front of the “trainings” board, amid the colorful tents, the hum of strumming guitars, provocative signs, and clip-board carrying petitioners. In an instant, the entire space came into focus for me as a generative site of adult learning. Participants took responsibility for their own education (on issues not taught in formal schools), everyone was both a teacher and a learner, person-to-person dialogue occurred across differences, and participants practiced genuine listening. People's feelings were validated as a wisdom source, art was used to generate new ideas, creativity was fostered, and the gifts

of time and talent were put to use to create a community. In Gandhi's words, the activists were *being the change they sought*. This was voluntary learning, learning connected to life. The participants read, wrote and learned, in the words of Adrienne Rich (1993), *as if their lives depended on it*.

My encounters with Occupy opened up new sets of questions for me to ask of the group: *What are the possibilities of thinking about the teacher study group as an example of adult self-directed learning? Since the study group is part of the teacher research movement, how is it like and unlike learning groups in other movements for social change? How do the discourses of critique and possibility live together in such groups? What are the relationships between individual and social change? What are the dialogues like in Occupy's working and learning groups and how do they compare with the dialogues of the study group? Where do adults go to learn what they do not learn in school?* It also reminded me of questions that have been with me since the study's conception: *What counts as action? What counts as change? How does the teachers' voluntary participation in inquiry communities influence their practice and professional lives?*

These questions helped me reframe this study in at least four important ways. First, Occupy helped me see the big picture. Viewing education within the Occupy framework reminded me of my concerns with dehumanizing practices and neoliberal discourse that shape policy on both teacher and student learning. This discourse measures the worth of a person in terms of what can be measured, controlled, or standardized. Second, I was

reminded of the study group's location within a *movement*. Experiencing the energy, urgency, hope, and anger within the Occupy movement reawakened within me emotions – thrill, excitement, anger, hope, and fear -- that are characteristic of social movements. This re-awakening allowed me to see the study group within the inquiry movement's commitment to changing the status quo. Finally, I began to wonder about the analytical possibilities of viewing the study group as a case of *adult learning* by juxtaposing it with other adult learning communities. At the time, I had a gut sense that this re-framing would be generative. Subsequent forays into the literature on adult learning have allowed me to more concretely articulate what kinds of new meanings this re-framing opens up.

Conceptual Framework

My experiences as a teacher led me to questions about contexts for teachers to make sense of the *real* questions from their classrooms. My learning in graduate school opened up this line of inquiry for me as a generative exercise in imagining communities of teachers working together to improve their work and professional lives. My encounters with the Occupy movement led me to re-think teacher inquiry in relation to other adult learning communities. Together, these experiences have cast teacher inquiry in the light of transformative learning.

Teacher Inquiry as Transformative Learning

The central concept of this study is transformative learning. I borrow the phrase from Mezirow, who defines it as “the process of making a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of an experience, which guides subsequent understanding, appreciation, and action” (Mezirow, 1990, p. 1). This definition implies that learning is grounded in personal experience, that experience is open to revision, and that learning changes the way people understand the world and act upon it. I augment this definition with my initial concept of knowledge generation as *coming to see differently*. This phrase, with its focus on shifts in vision, comes from the assumption that teachers theorize practice by forming and reforming conceptual frameworks, posing new questions through which to view practice, and questioning their assumptions (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). I conceptualize transformative learning as changes in a person’s perspective, the way she sees things, and her relationships to other people, the world and ideas. Conceptualizing teacher inquiry as transformative learning starts from a multidimensional view of teachers as adults with personal, professional, and political lives that are overlapping and mutually informative. In the sections that follow, I will elaborate on this initial definition by discussing five overlapping influences on my conceptual framework. These influences are: *Adult learning theory, Emancipatory Education and Research Traditions, Feminist Pedagogies and Practices, Teacher Inquiry, and Direct Experience.*

Adult Learning Theory

Adult learning theory contributes to my understanding of the work of the study group by focusing on the multidimensional aspects of adults as learners. This multidimensional

view includes their range of experiences that adult learners bring and highlights the reasons adults have for learning. Theories of adult learning foreground the *adult*. Focusing on the adult (rather than a person's professional identity, such as teacher) opens up space to consider how the personal, political, and professional aspects of one's life might relate. Brookfield (1993), for example, notes the importance of connecting private troubles to public issues in adult education. In addition, adult learning theory foregrounds the relationship between a person's past experiences, current learning, and future action. Unlike adolescents and children, adults have more life experience, including experience crossing institutional boundaries. These experiences become both the impetus and material for critical reflection. Another contribution of adult learning theory is the concept of "self-directedness." Self-directedness, when interpreted as an emancipatory ideal, implies "a democratic commitment to shifting to learners as much control as possible for conceptualizing, designing, conducting and evaluating their learning and for deciding how resources are to be used to further these processes" (Brookfield, 1993, unpaginated). Self-directedness assumes a sense of agency not only in terms of what is to be learned, but also how it is to be learned (Brookfield, 1993; Mezirow, 1997).

Emancipatory Education and Research Traditions

The second major body of scholarship that informs my conceptual framework is *emancipatory education and research*, an intellectual tradition that includes an explicit social change agenda. Emancipatory traditions include popular education (Freire, 1970; Horton & Freire, 1990) and participatory action research (McIntyre, 2007; Kemmis &

McTaggart, 2005), both of which resist tidy distinctions between frequently used dualisms such as knowledge and action, teaching and learning, theory and practice, and education and research. Emancipatory traditions contribute to the conceptual framework in several ways. They include the marriage of “language of critique” and “language of possibility” (Giroux, 1985). In other words, in these contexts, there is *both* a coming to awareness about the barriers to democracy, equality, and justice *and* the space to envision what it might look like, be like, and feel like if things were different.

With their focus on *action*, these traditions are concerned with changing social structures, in addition to changing the participants themselves (McIntyre, 2007; Horton & Freire, 1990). Participatory action research, for example, aims to “help people recover, and release themselves from, the constraints of irrational, unproductive, unjust, and unsatisfying *social structures* that limit their self-development and self-determination” (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005, p. 567). They are inherently collaborative processes in which participants are “actively engaging in critical dialogue and collective reflection” (McIntyre, 2007, p. 1). Emancipatory traditions foreground reflexivity. Reflexivity includes active attention to the roles of the differently-positioned participants, such as researchers, teachers, students, and participants. It also assumes that the learning space is an end in itself. For example, Horton describes the significance of creating a racially integrated space during the early years of Highlander School: “We made our speech about social equality without saying anything, but by *doing* it” (Horton & Freire, 1990, p. 164). Emancipatory learning comes from real-life problems, so conversations remain experience-near and there is an emphasis on storytelling and testimonial.

Feminist Pedagogies and Practices

While feminist practices overlap with emancipatory traditions in their valuing of personal experience and emphasis on creating change through education, the feminist tradition comes from a different set of social conditions and foregrounds different aspects of learning processes. Like emancipatory traditions, feminist practices draw from a long history of valuing personal experience as a source of knowledge (Evans, 1979).

Awareness of these experiential resources historically occurred through practices such as consciousness raising groups, which, according to Evans, became “a kind of phenomenological approach to women’s liberation” (Evans, 1979, p. 214). More recently, feminist teachers in university settings have theorized and practiced feminist pedagogies that assume students bring personal experiences and multiple facets of their identities into the classroom that can be used as a basis for knowing (hooks, 1994; Weiler, 1991). Feminist pedagogies and practices legitimize feelings as a source of knowledge. Lorde writes: “I don’t see feel/think as a dichotomy. I see them as a choice of ways and combinations” (Lorde, 1984, pp. 100-1). This perspective has led to the legitimization of aesthetic ways of knowing within teaching and research contexts, such as poetry, narrative, and language play.

More recently, black feminist perspectives have focused on interlocking forms of oppression (Collins, 1991), and intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991), while feminist pedagogues in the post-structuralist tradition have challenged themselves to re-examine oversimplified notions of personal experience, reconsider their position in various

circumstances, and learn to help students critically view experience within institutional constraints (Hesford, 1994; Britzman, 1999). Britzman, for example, writes about the role of “institutional biography,” which allows teachers to gain a critical distance from their own assumptions and resist unconsciously reproducing educational practices.

Finally, feminists assume that understanding the world is situational, rather than universal, and amplified by multiple perspectives that can help us gain a sense of how we experience life from our particular social location. Richardson conceptualizes crystallization, which she describes as providing us with a “deepened, complex, thoroughly partial understanding of the topic. Paradoxically, we know more and doubt what we know” (Richardson, 1997, p. 92). The feminist perspective augments my conception of teacher inquiry as transformative learning in that it opens up frameworks for considering how our autobiographies shape our learning and multiple perspectives can be leveraged to create meaningful new insights. It also legitimizes feeling and empathy to make them valuable sources of knowledge.

Teacher Inquiry

As discussed earlier, frameworks from teacher inquiry have shaped my understanding of the study group from the outset and continue to inform my concept of transformative learning in multiple ways. The teacher inquiry movement offers perspectives on transformative learning that are unique to teachers in U.S. schools. At the heart of this intellectual and social movement is the assumption that teachers can generate knowledge through systematically examining their teaching practice (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). This idea positions teachers’ practice as a central text for learning. The concept of

“literacies of teaching” (Lytle, 2006) provides a framework for considering how teachers transform practice by reading and writing the world-texts of their lives. It is a “critical framework through which classrooms, schools, districts, and communities are viewed as texts with multiple possible interpretations and the potential to become generative sites of inquiry” (Lytle, 2006, p. 258). Other contributions of the teacher inquiry movement include frameworks for considering how inquiry can be a method for mediating the feelings evoked by a career that involves working in close relationships with young people and communities each day (Maimon, 2009) as well as a way to keep the human element of teaching alive in schools that are increasingly characterized by standardization, scripts, and competition (Campano, 2009).

A defining feature of teacher inquiry is the idea that new insights become possible when one gains a critical distance from practice through systematic study. Within the fast-paced culture of schools, the teacher inquiry movement has included specific practices for slowing teaching down in order to study it, including processes for describing students and teaching (Carini, 2001), narrating critical incidents (Himley, et. al., 1997), “stopping time” through recording classroom dialogue (Ballenger, 2009), and analyzing classroom discourse (Rymes, 2009). All of these analytical tools were essential to both the work of the study group and my methods of studying it.

Direct experiences

The way I conceptualize adult transformative learning communities is inevitably shaped by my experiences. The purpose of this section is to elucidate some of the ways my own experiences in adult learning communities have shaped my assumptions about what they are and what they might be. Over the course of this study, I have been a participant in transformative adult learning communities, including inquiry-based graduate classes, an affinity group for white people who are committed to understanding white privilege, a *sangha* that comes together to meditate, read, and discuss Buddhist texts, a queer book club, and a teacher inquiry community. In this section, I will briefly describe each of these groups before discussing the themes they highlighted for me as I approached my work with the study group.

White Students Confronting Racism (WSCR) was a student-organized group that came together to better understand our own privilege and blind spots inevitable in a racist society. The group adhered to explicit norms and members took turns facilitating conversations that were meant to push us into the uncomfortable work of becoming aware of racism. At the end of each meeting, we wrote intentions for what we would do differently as a result of the conversation. *Dharma, Practice, and Sangha* (the *sangha*, is a group that meets at a local Buddhist center to meditate, read Buddhist teachings, and discuss in small groups how the teachings relate to life experiences. *Reading Queerly* is a book club that gets together monthly at an independent gay bookstore to read different texts with LGBTQ themes. As is typical of book clubs (Long, 2003), the group usually talks in a free-flowing way without much structure. *The Philadelphia Teachers Learning*

Cooperative (PTLC) is a group of teachers that has been meeting since 1978 to use the Descriptive Processes developed by Patricia Carini to look at students, their work, and their teaching practice. This group is characterized by a predictable set of structures in which a teacher presents a student's work and the group engages in rounds of oral inquiry that open up multiple ways of viewing the issue.

I brought my experiences in *WSCR*, *the sangha*, *Reading Queerly*, and *PTLC*, among others, to my leadership and analysis of the study group. These direct experiences gave me a sense of the range of possibilities for adult learning communities, their practices, and the kinds of changes they can provoke. My participation in these groups has heightened my awareness of various participant structures (Philips, 1974; Schultz, 2009) that enable transformative learning, allow me to consider the limitations and possibilities between structure and openness, and the role of different modes such as writing, dialogue, and silence. Participation in these groups has also heightened awareness of my purposes for participating in group-based adult learning – the groups provide a feeling of connection to larger communities, push me to understand my position in society, heighten my sense of responsibility for making changes in my life, to get support for taking the risks I want to take to grow, feel energized, and learn from others. Although I often leave these meetings feeling re-energized, it is usually not until later – through encounters in my daily life or time for reflection – that the learning from these communities comes to fruition. Participating in these groups has pushed me to think deeply about the relationship between learning and action, as I consider how each group changes me in different ways and compels me to do things differently in my life. Through dialogue with

other members in *WSCR*, especially, I have been inspired to reflect at length about what counts as action.

My positive and negative experiences with these groups also shaped my approach to the study group. For example, while I value both structured conversation and more open dialogue, I tend to prefer structure to openness because it allows me to more fully listen to the ideas of others and feel assured that I will have a chance to hear from everyone and get my own chance to speak. I have also developed a belief in the value of actively reflecting on group norms, as these conversations have led communities in which I'm a part to clarify values and name aloud what they want from the group. Despite these preferences, conversations with others have made me realize that my experiences and preferences are not universal. I believe that the range and variation of my experiences has afforded me a diverse repertoire of possibilities for what transformative learning communities might look like and how groups evolve over time.

Research Questions

I began this study with the question *How does this teacher inquiry community function as a site of knowledge generation about adolescent literacy education?* The question that now drives this study is: *How does this teacher inquiry community function as a site of transformative learning?* Transformative learning or *changes in view* attends to the subjective nature of knowledge and learning (Kincheloe, 1991), assuming that inquiry provokes change in the individuals. Therefore, my questions have essentially remained the same: I am still interested in how the study group provided a context for *change* –

change in the teachers' view of themselves, their practice, and their lives. Referring to this change as “transformative learning” rather than “knowledge generation” brings to the fore the change element of knowledge generation.

I address the overarching question in three ways. First, I focus on the space of the learning by asking, *How did we create a transformative learning community?* Next, I focus on the transformative possibilities for the teachers in the group as they publicly presented their work by asking *What transformative learning occurred during the process of going public?* Finally, I turn my focus to the less visible or readily observable learning that occurred in the group by addressing the question: *How did transformative learning occur in the margins of the group?* Together, these questions allow us to see three central elements of this inquiry community, offering a multifaceted view.

Review of Relevant Literature

In this review, I start by offering an overview of research and theorizing on adult learning that includes a summary of important contributions of adult learning theory that can inform our understanding of teacher inquiry communities. Next, I turn to a cross-case analysis of three popular types of adult learning communities: political groups, support groups, and book groups. Together, these cases provide a frame for understanding teacher inquiry groups, and I discuss these connections in the final section.

Adult Learning: An Overview

Historically, adults in the United States have learned in formal and informal communities through groups such as the Lyceum Societies of Philadelphia (Brookfield, 1983), the Highlander Folk School in Tennessee (Adams, 1975), and the Women's Literary Clubs that emerged after the Civil War (Long, 2003). In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Knowles popularized the term "andragogy," a term that a) highlighted the self-directed, autonomous nature of adult learning and b) conceptualized the teacher as facilitator, rather than presenter of content (Knowles, 1980). He differentiated the term from "pedagogy," which he defined as the art and science of teaching children. While this idea has undergone significant criticism partly because it attempts to make tidy distinctions between the learning processes of adults and children (e.g. Brookfield, 1986), Knowles's theory did significant work in establishing adult education as a field of study and enabling scholars studying adult learning in a range of contexts to find connections across their work. As a field, scholars of adult education engage questions such as: *What makes adult learning unique? In what contexts do adults learn? What drives adults to seek learning opportunities?* This shift allowed a field, which was previously limited to formal educational settings through study of "continuing education" or "lifelong learning," to expand its focus to ways adults learn in a wider range of contexts, both inside and outside formal schooling. Brookfield (1986) illustrates the breadth of what counts as a context for adult learning when he writes:

We can argue that a T-group workshop for managers, a volunteer literacy effort, a staff development workshop for school principals, a course on collective bargaining for shop stewards, a tenant's action committee preparing a submission to the rent tribunal, a single parents' support group collectively exploring their

experiences, and men's or women's consciousness-raising group dealing with sexism, are all adult learning efforts (p. 2)

Because of this more expansive concept of adult learning, scholars have expanded their methodological tools for understanding adult learning as a culturally embedded social practice, using ethnographic and phenomenological methods to explore learning in various settings. These social, cultural, and political views have replaced purely cognitive and individualistic concepts of adult education, with many scholars drawing on communities of practice frameworks (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and critical theory rooted in a Freirian perspective (e.g. Foley, 1999) to conceptualize adult learning.

Contributions of Adult Learning Theory

Despite the justified skepticism of making tight distinctions between learning in adulthood and learning in childhood or adolescence, there are several characteristics that make learning in adulthood unique. First, adult learning theory focuses on the dynamic relationship between one's past, present, and future. Adults have accrued more life experiences than younger people, which become "valuable curricular resources" (Brookfield, 1984, p. 2). However, rather than using these experiences uncritically, critical adult education scholars highlight the importance of adults gaining learning to see how these experiences shape their assumptions. Mezirow (1990) calls adulthood "the time for reassessing the assumptions from our formative years that have often resulted in a distorted view of reality" (p. 5). Second, the multiplicity of roles and responsibilities that adults hold is a significant factor in their learning (Smith, 1982). Throughout their lives, adults navigate personal, professional, and political spheres. Learning opportunities

in one sphere have the potential to inform the others, and the complexity of these simultaneously held identities can add richness and new possibilities to learning (Foley, 1999, p. 45). Third, adult learning theory emphasizes the problem-driven motivation for learning, which is often understood as “self-directedness” (Brookfield, 1986) or self-education (Verner, 1964; Little, 1979). While motivation to learn is certainly not unique to adulthood, in the absence of compulsory schooling, adults have the opportunity to intentionally chart their own curriculum in a wide range of settings. Finally, because of this decoupling from school, researchers more often attend to the various spaces of learning in adulthood, as well as the kinds of spaces and practices that support adult learning (Brookfield, 1986; Horton & Freire, 1990; Mezirow, 1997). Taken together, these factors open up new ways of thinking about teacher inquiry through an adult education framework.

Teacher inquiry has often been analyzed either as a form of professional development or an alternative to it (e.g. Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Stokes, 2001). These conceptions have opened up spaces for inquiry as professional development in a range of settings. I also view teacher inquiry as both a form of and an alternative to professional development. In this review, however, my aim is to explore what it would mean to frame teacher inquiry as adult transformative learning. Viewing teacher inquiry as adult transformative learning raises new sets of questions about inquiry communities, such as: *What is the relationship between teachers’ pasts, their present learning, and the future they imagine for themselves and their students? How do teachers see the relationships*

between the political, professional, and personal? What drives teachers to seek inquiry communities? What are the spaces and places in which teachers learn?

Adult Learning Groups: A Cross Case Analysis

In the remainder of this review, I frame teacher inquiry communities within the context of voluntary, self-organized adult learning groups in various settings. In theorizing action research, Noffke (1997) offers three dimensions – the personal, professional, and political. She shows how, while overlapping, these dimensions provide a useful way of thinking about the multiple goals and outcomes of action research and understanding some of its complexity. Numerous accounts of teacher inquiry communities conceptualize it as a form of professional development (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; 2001; Stokes, 2001). These conceptualizations rightfully highlight the professional aspect of teachers and the ways that participating in inquiry communities changes practice. In this study, the desire to *change practice* in positive ways was at the forefront of the agendas of all the teachers, and they came together around their shared identities as teachers. That said, as our group evolved, it became clear that other dimensions of the teachers' lives were intertwined with their professional role as teachers. It is in order to better understand these dimensions that I construct this review as a cross-case comparison of three common types of adult learning groups that foreground the political and personal dimensions of adults' lives. I juxtapose inquiry communities with these other adult learning groups to suggest that viewing teacher inquiry communities in relationship to three classic types of adult learning groups - political groups, support groups, and book groups – opens up space to analyze purposes, practices, and outcomes of inquiry

communities that are often not considered when juxtaposing them with traditional forms of professional development.

Political Groups

Accounts of learning within social movements highlight the relationship between learning and social change. Social learning practices such as teach-ins and study groups have a long history within various progressive social movements. Foley (1999) draws on multiple case studies to frame social practices within the social movements *as learning*. Drawing on the concept of “learning in the struggle” (p. 37), he uses case studies of social movements to attend to the range of learning that is embedded within social action, including both concrete skills and broader lessons such as “authorities can be influenced,” (p. 42), “direct action is flexible and creative,” (p. 42) and “activism is stressful, it’s important for activists to support each other” (p. 43). His account depicts people “learning that they *could* act, and learning that the action that they took made a difference” (p. 26). In many cases, adults gather in learning groups with the intention to create social change, with synergistic relationships between how change occurs within self, communities, and the greater world. One of the best-known cases of group-based learning within social movements is the consciousness-raising groups of the women’s liberation movement. Evans (1979) documents the role of these groups in enabling the feminist movement to gain force:

The focus on the personal experience of oppression, moreover, led to the creation of small groups within which women could share with mutual trust the intimate details of their lives. Formed almost instinctively at first as radical women gathered in each others’ living rooms to discuss their needs, these small groups

quickly became the primary structure of the women's revolt. They provide a place, a "free space," in which women could examine the nature of their own oppression and share the growing knowledge that they were not alone. The qualities of intimacy, support, and virtual structurelessness made the small group a brilliant tool in spreading the movement. (p. 215)

With this image, we see how the experience of oppression drove women to groups, where they created communities in which they were able to connect their personal experiences to others' experiences and larger structures. In these intentionally non-hierarchical groups, citizens took responsibility for educating themselves on issues of sexism and raising their collective awareness of how these issues impacted their lives. With the case of consciousness raising groups, we see how the "structurelessness" created space for women to explore issues and connect themselves to greater structural issues. With Evans's account, we also see how these groups served *both* a change function *and* a support function, as women came to greater awareness of the nature and magnitude of their struggles. In the section that follows, I focus on groups that come together for the express purpose of support.

Support Groups

In the United States, participation in support groups is widespread. A 1991 Gallup poll found that forty percent of all Americans eighteen and older are involved in "a small group that meets regularly and provides caring and support for those who participate in it" (Yalom, 1995, p. 482). Reasons for joining include encouragement, hearing others' views, receiving care, and feeling as though they are not alone (Yalom, 1995, p. 482). Within these support groups, adults see their challenges in new ways with the help of the

group and learn new ways to act. The concept of universality refers to the “powerful sense of relief” (Yalom, 1995, p. 6) that participants feel when they realize they are not alone, which allows them to “feel more in touch with the world” (Yalom, 1995, p. 6). In these groups, learning occurs through the way that adults are able to “re-see” themselves in relation to their problems, with a renewed sense of hope and possibility.

Adult learning through support groups takes different forms. The Quaker tradition of *Clearness Committees* focuses on one person at a time and emphasizes the posing of questions to bring out the inner wisdom of the individual. (Palmer, 1999). Another example is the writing group. Research has found that while the express purpose may be to improve texts, the benefits of writing groups extend far beyond the written texts and learning occurs through support from encouragement, technique, and authentic reader responses (Moss, Highberg, & Nicholas, 2004).

In support groups, members seek the group context for help with individual challenges. In each case, the group is there to help individuals see themselves (their habits, their challenges, or their writing) with critical distance, to imagine alternatives they had not considered, and to take action within their own lives. Because the primary purpose of these groups is to support the individual along a path of self-determination, ideological differences are minimized. Structures that support this kind of work include turn-taking and work-shopping individual situations.

Book Groups

Reading books together has historically been an important cultural practice for women in the United States (Long, 2003). In the past two decades, an increased number of middle-class women have joined reading groups and these groups have been an important cultural form of intellectual and social support (Long, 2003). Despite their popularity, little research has been done on the social practices of book clubs. In Long's (2003) comprehensive study of book clubs in the Houston area, she found women sought out these groups for complex reasons:

Reading groups still serve middle-class women as time spent for self-improvement, for personal fulfillment, and for exploration of personal identity, but most particularly as time for the development of a self that is engaged with the literary imagination and dedicated to the discussion of ideas, meaning, and values in the company of equally dedicated companions (p. 73).

With this account, we see how book groups resemble *both* support groups *and* political groups as a place for members to get help with “the lacunae, complexities, and contradictions in their lives” (p. 72). Long's analysis also suggests that these groups have a political function, in that they “allow members to think about themselves and the social world in ways that, if not collective, can often provide critical purchase on the dilemmas facing contemporary women” (p. 72). Despite these supportive and political functions, Long suggests that book groups' popularity may be explained by their insistence on remaining in the liminal space between the two, in that they are “centrally focused on books and ideas” (p. 73). Long's analysis suggests that books play a mediating role in providing women with a socially sanctioned means through which to talk about their personal struggles or political lives. She suggests that herein lies book groups' popularity

– they provide both supportive and political functions while remaining, in name, focused on books.

Teacher Inquiry as Transformative Adult Learning

While teacher inquiry has sometimes been described as a powerful form of professional development, the review of case studies above offers new ways of thinking about the purposes and practices of inquiry communities, as well as the relationships among teachers learning in groups and the public action they take. Political groups, support groups, and book groups provide rich contexts for adults to learn and highlight the various reasons adults seek other adults to engage in self-directed learning. As people come together to share their experiences, focus on a problem, create social change or read together they organize themselves and their discussions to support their purposes. If we are to assume that, within these groups, adults are learning, this collection of cases offers a broad definition of *learning*, as defined as *coming to see differently*. These cases show how adults come to see themselves differently, to see themselves in relation to their problems and to realize new opportunities for social change.

Teacher inquiry communities have at their heart the improvement of practice. However, viewing the outcomes of teacher inquiry communities too narrowly risks missing some of the other functions of inquiry communities and the learning that occurs within and around them and the relationship between the professional, political, and personal dimensions of teachers' lives. Changes in practice do occur, but are broad and require a wider view of both “change” and “practice” than is traditionally considered in traditional forms of

professional development. Changes documented by inquiry communities include seeing students in more human ways (PTLC, 1984), engaging in difficult, yet important, conversations with students and colleagues (e.g. Blackburn, 2010; Meyer, 1998), channeling the strong feelings inherent in teaching in productive ways (e.g. Maimon, 2009), and questioning school policies and practices (e.g. Stokes, 2001).

Teachers in inquiry communities make *collective change* as they go public with their work at professional conferences and take action in various policy arenas. Inquiry-into-Action Groups (ItAGs) (e.g. NYCoRE, 2012) provide an example of how teacher activists organize for transformation on a personal, community, and political level. As part of the New York Collective of Radical Educators (NYCoRE) and other urban teacher activist groups, ItAGs come together to explore a particular issue that integrates teaching and social justice. These groups conclude their work with some form of action that is decided upon by the group. Similarly, the Pink TIGers (2010), an inquiry community dedicated to combating homophobia through literacy education, came together for the primary purpose of social change. Through individual and collective inquiry, educators in this group made changes in their schools, each other, themselves, and their practice. In addition, teacher inquiry communities provide places for teachers to explore their identities as researchers, scholars, or activists, as well as their identities along lines of race, class, gender, and culture and how these influence their work and their relationships with students.

As the cross-case comparison of adult learning communities reveals, the reasons adults seek learning communities are varied, multiple, and changeable. This view of teacher inquiry communities - as groups that offer support, raise political awareness and a sense of community, and provide space to explore new identities - frames this study.

The Organization of the Dissertation

The remainder of this dissertation is organized into five chapters. Chapter Two covers methodology, methods, and context. Chapters Three through Five explore three facets of the work of the study group. Chapter Three focuses on the space of learning. I draw on frameworks from the emancipatory, feminist, and practitioner inquiry traditions to analyze the learning space we created in our early meetings in the spring of 2010 and through our commitment to looking closely and systematically at practice. I make the argument that group cultures are shaped by the participants through conversation and facilitation. I also suggest that transformative learning communities are characterized by multiple but related purposes: The need for support, the hope for change, and the desire for community. In addition, Chapter Three shows how the group combined teacher inquiry questions with Descriptive Processes developed by Patricia Carini at the Prospect School to analyze practice. I argue that a close and systematic look at teaching has a *humanizing* effect on practice by fostering curiosity, evoking empathy, and forcing participants to contend with multiple perspectives. Together, these sections make the argument that creating a space for transformative learning takes time and intention and occurs in both planned and spontaneous ways.

The focus of Chapter Four is the group's process of going public. In this chapter, I conceptualize going public as collaborative writing and collective action to show the opportunity to contribute to a larger professional community provoked new identities for the group and its members; provided opportunities for re-reading themselves and their classrooms; and prompted the teachers to adopt a theorizing stance about adolescent literacy education. I foreground the voices of Lucy and Joel to argue that this process allowed the teachers to re-see themselves as professionals; re-see their learning in the group; and re-see the project of teaching in a different context.

Chapter Five draws on three case studies – Becca, Melissa, and Mary -- to show how learning occurred in spontaneous and unplanned ways, which I call *learning in the margins*. These three cases offer examples of teacher learning not usually visible within the public inquiries. I make the argument that the changes that occur as a result of inquiry communities cannot be predetermined or planned and would remain invisible under traditional definitions of “outcomes.” I suggest that three genres of teacher talk – policy talk, race talk, and weird dynamics - created the context for the particular kinds of learning in the margins that occurred in this group.

In Chapter Six, I outline three key findings from this study, discuss these findings, and offer implications for teacher educators, facilitators of teacher learning communities, teachers, and school leaders. Ultimately, this study makes the argument that viewing teacher inquiry as transformative adult learning offers a powerful framework for considering the work of inquiry communities. It makes the claims that learning in this

study group occurred in both structured and unstructured spaces and that these spaces can be shaped with intent by differently positioned participants and analyzed in terms of their limitations and affordances. This study also shows how stories did work in this learning community. Together, these frameworks and findings offer “proof of possibility” (Cochran-Smith et al., 1999) for teacher inquiry communities in other contexts.

CHAPTER 2: Methodology, Study Design, and Context

Introduction

This study was a collaborative research project in which I assumed that the teachers and I would inquire together into the topic of adolescent literacy education. It was my intent to create a group that was co-constructed by the teachers and myself and I expected my role to shift over time. I also wanted to create a research setting in which the teachers brought their questions and perspectives to our discussions. I assumed our process would bring us to a collective awareness of the central problems and questions in the teachers' work, an exchange of views that would help us see the problems in a different light, and action in the form of changed practice and public sharing of our work. These research arrangements are characteristic of participatory action research (McIntyre, 2007; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005) and practitioner inquiry (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Zeichner & Noffke, 2001). I locate my study within these two traditions.

Our collaboration included an understanding that I would represent the group's work in a single-authored public research report. While we all inquired together and the teachers used the group's conversations to inform their practice, I had the additional role as researcher *of* the group. I approached this work from an ethnographic perspective, by observing the culture of the group and attempting to understand the experiences from the participants' perspectives. However, I also thought of myself as a co-inquirer *with* the group, and expected that my own knowledge of teaching, research, literacy, and learning would be altered through our ongoing dialogues.

These multiple roles placed me in an ever-shifting, sometimes conflicting, set of roles and relationships with the teachers. My role as a group member positioned me as a co-inquirer with the teachers, but my role as researcher placed us into a researcher/researched relationship. Since I had convened the group, I was positioned as the group's leader. However, my intent to create a collaborative context led me to evaluate and negotiate this leadership role throughout the project.

This chapter provides the methodological framework, design, and context for this study. First, I discuss some key tenets of Practitioner Inquiry and Participatory Action Research before using these traditions to unpack key aspects of the methodology. With these methodological underpinnings as a framework, I will describe the design of the study, which includes methods for data collection and approaches to analysis. I will conclude with a description of the context of the work. First, I will focus on the teacher participants in the group – how I solicited them, key demographic information, and brief vignettes of each one. Then, I will describe the four phases of our work together and how our work changed over the course of our year together.

Methodology

Practitioner Inquiry

Teacher research emerged in the late 1980s as a social movement that re-cast the role of the teacher within and against traditional notions of theory, research, and practice. Over the past thirty years, the movement has been broadened to include insider research (Anderson & Saavedra, 1995) conducted by a wide range of practitioners in local

contexts, including school leaders and university researchers who collaborate with teachers in various ways. In Practitioner Inquiry, practitioners in local settings aim to understand their practice and make change based on their ongoing sense-making (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993; 2009). In this tradition, research is conceptualized as “a significant process of coming to know one’s own knowledge and understanding how knowledge is constructed” (Lytle & Cochran-Smith, 1992, p. 459). Practitioner inquiry emphasizes the role of communities in generating knowledge (Lytle & Cochran-Smith, 1992; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009), as groups of practitioners come together to “engage in joint construction of knowledge through reading, writing, and oral inquiry” (Lytle & Cochran-Smtih, 1992, p. 459).

I locate this study within the research tradition of Practitioner Inquiry for several reasons. First, as a teacher educator, doctoral student, former public school teacher, and researcher, I am a literacy education practitioner. Second, I view my role as facilitator of the group as a practice, and intended to change my approach to facilitation based on what I was learning from my ongoing analysis of our meetings. Third, I wanted to create the conditions for the group to become an inquiry community in which we posed questions based on experiences, systematically analyzed data from classrooms, dialogued with each other, questioned our assumptions, and raised critical questions about the purposes of our work as teachers and researchers.

Participatory Action Research

This study also bears a strong resemblance to Participatory Action Research (PAR), which is an emancipatory research paradigm that grew out of community-based research in the developing world (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005). Like in Practitioner Inquiry, researchers attempt to disrupt some of the problematic aspects of traditional social science research, such as the guise of neutrality and the objectification of the research “subjects.” In PAR, it is common for a university-based researcher to invite participants to join her in a research project to better understand a problem through ongoing dialogue and take action (McIntyre, 2007). McIntyre (2007) outlines three characteristics of PAR: “the active participation of researchers and participants in the co-construction of knowledge; the promotion of self- and critical awareness that leads to individual, collective, and/or social change; and the building of alliances between researchers and participants in the planning, implementation, and dissemination of the research process” (p. ix). Participatory Action Research follows a cycle of exploration, reflection, and action (McIntyre, 2007), but the emphasis is on the dialogic process for problem-posing, which has the potential to impact people’s actions, relationships, values, and interpretations (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005).

I draw from this tradition because, in many ways, it best represents my relationship with the teachers. I was an outsider who conceptualized a general problem and invited community members (in this case members of the greater Philadelphia teaching community) to explore the dimensions of the problem and take action in the form of changed practice and public sharing of the work. I am aware that the use of a

methodological approach from the developing world may assume, on some level, that the teachers are a marginalized community. While a group of white middle class teachers in the United States may not seem marginalized in the greater world context, federal and local policies position teachers as passive consumers, rather than generators, of knowledge. Therefore, within the current context of United States, teachers' voices have been marginalized from policy and research discussions.

Practitioner Inquiry and Participatory Action Research: Key Features

Practitioner Inquiry and PAR share many assumptions and values. They both begin with the assumption that research arises from and informs local problems and that knowledge is generated through dialogue. Both challenge the “politics of conventional social research” (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005, p. 560) and are situated within social change agendas that assume research has the potential to lead to tangible improvements in people's lives. Both traditions make the role of “researcher” an intentional subject of inquiry, seeing the reflexivity of the researcher as having epistemic potential. Finally, both research traditions challenge traditional binaries associated with research (such as research and practice; theory and practice; researchers and researched; knowledge and action) and position the tensions inherent in these binaries as epistemological resources. Below, I use these two research traditions to unpack four methodological features of this study: *action and going public, researcher roles, collaboration, and ethics and subjectivity.*

Action and Going Public

Both Practitioner Inquiry and Participatory Action Research are concerned with changing existing conditions, rather than merely representing them. Practitioner Inquiry is primarily concerned with improving practice, while PAR assumes that generating knowledge will lead to “individual, collective, and/or social change.” (McIntyre, 2009, p. ix). Making research public, as a form of taking action, is another common tenet of both traditions. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993) theorize the public aspect of practice to be an important part of the practitioner inquiry movement (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993; 2009). I formed the study group with the assumption that the inquiry would lead to changed practice (both for the teachers and me), the possibility of going public, and the potential for action in other forms. I did not pre-determine what would count as action, but rather began the study with an inquiry into the concept of action, wondering how the group members would conceptualize action and what changes might occur as a result of the work. In the end, the group went public by sharing our work at a local conference. While I regard teaching itself as a daily form of action, I also came to see action for the teachers as including sharing vulnerable aspects of their practice, opening themselves up to the perspectives of others, and responding to each other in ways that both affirmed and pushed their thinking.

Researcher Roles

Both Practitioner Inquiry and PAR call for an expanded definition of practice. Not only did I draw on this expanded notion of practice to broaden what counted as worthy topics of inquiry for the teachers, but I also used it to broaden my views of my practice as a

researcher. While I was always enacting multiple roles, my predominant role shifted over the course of the study and I actively inquired into the following three facets of my practice:

- A fellow literacy educator – My practice included my former experiences as an elementary literacy teacher and a current teacher educator in a literacy education master’s program. To understand literacy education, I also drew on my experiences as a former student and my autobiographical experiences with reading and writing my world.
- A study group facilitator – I attended to my own facilitation of the study group as part of my practice. Kemmis & McTaggart (2005) problematize the role of “facilitator” as more than merely a technical role, noting that not only are facilitators often practitioners in other contexts, but are also “animateurs” of change, rather than simply technical advisors (p. 570). They suggest that viewing the facilitator as a technocrat or neutral position risks missed opportunities to connect research practice to policy and other areas in which the facilitator has influence. The facilitator, by nature of her different position, brings epistemological resources from other contexts. In the case of this project, I felt myself enacting the role of an *engaged* facilitator who had strong beliefs and visions about literacy education.
- A researcher – I was engaged in an ongoing inquiry into my own practice as a researcher, which included my approaches to sense-making, navigating relationships in the group, and responding to ethical dilemmas.

Throughout this study, I wanted to share my beliefs, leverage my different position for the betterment of the group, and use my position as a doctoral student to disseminate knowledge generated in the study group to different audiences. At the same time, I wanted to take an inquiry stance (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009) within this project, and remain open to new beliefs and frameworks that were generated through our dialogues. Learning about the nature of my multiple roles, like taking action, was an open area of inquiry for me throughout this project.

Collaboration

Both Practitioner Inquiry and PAR foreground the collaborative, social nature of knowledge generation, emphasizing participants' reliance on each other to expand and reform frameworks for understanding a problem or phenomenon. Collaboration contributes to trustworthiness, as gaining multiple perspectives is a way to better understand one's own unique position. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) foreground the importance of overlapping and nested inquiry communities in generating knowledge of practice. Kemmis & McTaggart (2005) highlight the role of the collective as an often underemphasized aspect of PAR. While I intended at the outset for the group to be co-constructed, as the group's leader, I was interested in learning about how co-construction would occur within our particular research context. The data chapters that follow provide images of our collaborative context.

Ethics and Subjectivity

Participatory research conceptualizes an inseparable relationship between knowledge and ethics. Lincoln & Guba (2003) summarize this relationship by saying, “The way in which we know is most assuredly tied up with both *what* we know and our *relationships with our research participants*” (p. 281, emphasis in the original). McIntyre (2007) provides a helpful set of ethical guidelines for the complicated work that arises when differently-located individuals engage in a shared research enterprise. These guidelines include an ethic of transparency of the researcher, sharing the intent to publish at the outset, keeping the participants’ best interest in mind, and using accessible language. I view the relationship between myself and the teachers as connected both to epistemology and ethics and therefore actively raised questions of relationships and ethics throughout the study.

Although at various times I took on less of an active role in terms of voicing my perspectives, never in this project did I pretend to be neutral. I brought aspects of my own personal history and social position as I participated in the meetings and made sense of the data. While these elements of my subjectivity were always at play as I interacted with the teachers and interpreted our work, there were particular aspects of my own background that emerged repeatedly as salient. My position at the university became salient at various times during our discussions, especially when the group critiqued research arrangements between universities and schools. Additionally, my social location as a white woman with anti-racist intentions and lesbian who has experienced curricular marginalization in literacy education influenced how I participated in the group and made

sense of data. My position as an insider and outsider in relationship to the teachers was relevant – there were times when I felt like an insider as a fellow critical literacy educator who was trying to understand and improve conditions in U.S. urban language arts classrooms. However, as the teachers came into our meetings after a full day of teaching in urban secondary schools and I walked in after a day spent at an elite university, I sometimes felt very much like an outsider. As a former public school teacher, I could relate to some of the struggles that the teachers faced, and, especially early on in our work, I drew upon these experiences. However, I came to realize that, while I identified strongly with the identity of teacher, the teachers often did not see me as an insider. Ultimately, one of the most authentic (and surprising) ways that I found myself relating to the teachers was by drawing on my own experiences as a student – both past and present.

With the methodological underpinnings described above, I designed a qualitative study that allowed me to systematically document and analyze the work of the study group. In the section that follows, I describe my design in terms of methods of data collection, measures of trustworthiness and reciprocity, and data analysis.

Study Design

The teachers' inquiries were intertwined with each other's and my own, as we all raised questions, posed problems, and theorized practice together. However, I had the additional interest of studying the processes of the group. In this section, I describe my methods of data collection and analysis, including the methods for documentation and analysis that the teachers and I used together.

Data Collection

The study group met a total of twenty-five times between April 2010 and April 2011. At the beginning, I asked the teachers to commit to attend at least twelve meetings. After the ninth meeting, when it became clear to me that the group was gaining cohesiveness as the fall approached, I conceptualized a second phase of work that would go through the fall and winter and culminate with a presentation at the Ethnography in Education Research Forum in February of 2011. From a research design standpoint, I conceptualized two phases of data collection and analysis.

The first phase of work occurred from late April through August and included eleven meetings. I transcribed all of these eleven meetings by the end of the summer. Because I knew these meetings would be transcribed, I focused my notes on the non-verbal interactions in the group and my own reflections about what happened. The second phase of work occurred from late August through April and included fourteen meetings (including the presentation at the Forum and a debriefing session). I did not transcribe all of every meeting for this phase, and instead selected segments of five meetings that

represented a range of variation in terms of topics and formats. To account for the absence of full transcripts, I took more detailed field notes in which I attempted to account for more of the talk turns and descriptive detail than in the notes I took in the first phase.

My data sources were transcripts of the group meetings, two semi-structured interviews with each teacher participant, artifacts that were used and generated in the group, field notes, one collaborative data analysis session, and my own research journal. I systematically organized the data sources by storing electronically versions in labeled files on my computer and printed versions in a binder, organized by the meeting with which it was associated. I kept a log of all of the meetings, noting the date, participants, artifacts, and general topics of discussion. I describe each data source in more detail below.

Transcripts of study group meetings

I audio-recorded and transcribed the first eleven meetings, plus segments of five additional meetings, for a total of eleven full transcripts and five partial transcripts.

Because I believed that closely listening to the study group sessions would inform my facilitation and ongoing understanding of the knowledge we were generating, I selected episodes that were puzzling (Ballenger, 2009) to transcribe within two weeks.

Semi-Structured Interviews

I conducted two rounds of interviews with each participant. In the first round of interviews, which took place in June through August of 2010, I asked the teachers about their expectations for the study group, their journeys to becoming teachers, their current questions and views, their students, and their teaching contexts. In the second round of interviews, which took place in May through October of 2011 (after the group had finished meeting), I focused primarily on the opportunities and challenges of the study group; particular moments that stood out to them from the work; their experiences of closely looking at practice and presenting at the conference; and ways that the group's dialogues influenced their practice (see Appendix A and B for interview protocols).

Artifacts

I collected and catalogued all artifacts from the study group including texts that we read, wrote, and shared; charts; and artifacts that the teachers brought in. These artifacts included a shared Google document on which we posted questions and stories; teacher-authored poems and narratives; a chart paper of group norms and values; emails (which were mostly from me to the teachers, but occasionally initiated by the teachers); artifacts that the teachers brought in (e.g. books, assignments, websites); and the Ethnography Forum proposal that I wrote and shared with the group.

Field notes

At all of the meetings, I made jottings with paper and pencil that I later typed up as field notes. In the first phase of data collection (meetings 1-11), my notes

focused on elements of the environment and interactions that could not be captured through audio-recordings, such as the physical space, gestures, group seating arrangements, texts that are present, and my own impressions, feelings, and reflections about what occurred. In the second phase of data collection (meetings 12-25), my notes took the form of formal field notes (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). In this phase, I attempted to capture as much of the talk as I could, and I frequently wrote up segments of these field notes with the aid of an audio-recorder.

Practitioner Research Journal

Throughout this project, I kept a practitioner research journal, in which I recorded reflections, research and practice dilemmas, and my own evolving questions. This journal included my experiences in the study group as well as experiences outside of the group that influenced my thinking, such as school board meetings, news events, political demonstrations, or conversations with colleagues.

Collaborative Data Analysis Session

During the sixteenth meeting, instead of focusing on one of the teacher's data and inquiry, we focused on my data and inquiry. The first half of this meeting took the form of a data analysis session. In this meeting, I shared one transcript segment and one analytic memo and facilitated a discussion that included descriptive rounds (Carini, 2001) and open dialogue. In addition to this formal collaborative analysis session, I was able to get feedback on my ongoing analysis in other ways that were built into the structure of our work. For example, the Ethnography Forum proposal that I wrote in October served

as a chance for the teachers to respond to my ongoing analysis. Throughout our meetings, I often offered my own impressions of the current and prior meetings, shared patterns that I noticed or topics that stood out, and was able to get feedback on these ideas through the course of naturally occurring conversation. In the spring of 2012, I assembled the study group again to consider my emergent findings. During that meeting, the group members affirmed my initial analysis, offered new perspectives that I had not considered, and raised questions about my conceptualization of the study, all of which I have considered as I represent the group's work.

Trustworthiness and Reciprocity

I do not seek to claim discovery of a single truth through this study and therefore do not wish to claim validity. I do, however, seek a standard of trustworthiness and took several measures towards this aim, as suggested by Creswell (1998).

- Extended time in the field and thick description – This study took place over the course of a year and I continued to conduct interviews and analyze data for an additional year. I did all of the transcribing myself. This time period not only allowed me extended time with the data, but it also allowed the group to develop trusting relationships, in which we became increasingly comfortable sharing more vulnerable aspects of our practice. I wrote extensively during the analysis process in the form of detailed field notes, analytic and methodological memos, and practitioner researcher reflections. I viewed this descriptive and reflective writing as a method of inquiry (Richardson & St. Pierre, 1994). Writing with thick

description ensured that I attended to various influences at play in a given moment and consider meanings I had not previously considered.

- Triangulation/crystallization – I collected artifacts, interviews, field notes, transcripts, and my own practitioner researcher journal. These multiple data sources allowed me to see how themes and patterns emerged across various data sources. Richardson (1997) offers the standard of crystallization as an alternative to validity and triangulation. Crystallization seeks to view data from multiple angles with an “infinite variety of shapes, substances, transmutations, multidimensionalities, and angles of approach” (p. 92). I interpret this process to mean viewing data from multiple angles, with ever-deepening and emergent new understandings.
- Peer review and debriefing -- I met regularly with several peer debriefers. I asked them to act as “devil’s advocates” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). One was a member of the study group, two were colleagues in the field of literacy research, and a fourth was a colleague in the area of math education. I also regularly shared my data with my dissertation committee members. These differing perspectives allowed me to see my own assumptions. In addition, I presented my ongoing analysis and received responses at conferences and in graduate seminars where I presented my work.

From the beginning, I sought natural opportunities for reciprocity. The teachers devoted large amounts of time to the group and, while they often spoke of the ways that it benefited them personally and professionally, I wanted to find ways to give generously and authentically to the teachers. I was able to offer ACT 48 continuing education credit for recertification requirements in the state of Pennsylvania. In addition, I found other ways to give. I volunteered at one teacher's school as a Senior Project judge. I offered professional guidance and references for two of the others. I made myself available before and after meetings for any support I could offer in the form of a thinking partner or simply a listener. I secured a small grant to supplement the cost of a shared text that we purchased and made food for each meeting. Overall, however, I continue to see the personal and professional benefits of the group that the teachers reported as the real measure of reciprocity.

Approaches to Data Analysis

As described earlier, this study shares aspects of Practitioner Inquiry and PAR. I drew from multiple interpretive research traditions to use a mix of analytic methods for sense making including ongoing and recursive open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), a discourse analytic perspective on the data (Gee, 1997; Rymes, 2009; Philips, 1974), narrative analysis (Chase, 2005), case study analysis (Yin, 2003; Stake, 2003), and critical incident analysis (Tripp, 1993). The teachers and I also drew from methods of analysis that are frequently used within the Practitioner Inquiry tradition, including stopping time (Ballenger, 2009), dialogue (Freire, 1970), oral inquiry (Himley, 1991; Carini, 2001), and use of Descriptive Review Processes (Carini, 2001).

Throughout our work, I transcribed and analyzed audio-recordings of our meetings. During this time, I took an ethnographic approach to analysis, conceptualizing the group as a culture sharing group, allowing themes to emerge inductively, and trying to understand the data from the point of view of the teachers. However, I was also listening to the data from the perspective of a practitioner/facilitator. Therefore, I selected “puzzling moments” (Ballenger, 2009) to transcribe between the meetings. I also brought my emerging understanding to the group in formal and informal ways. I shared themes I noticed in the context of our conversations or at the beginning of the meeting. I also conducted one collaborative analysis session in which I shared a research memo and a segment of a meeting and guided the group through an adapted descriptive process.

Early on in the data collection and analysis, I attempted to understand the group’s social practices broadly, while also attempting to narrow and refine my research questions. In order to accomplish these goals, I attended to key features of the discourse, evidence of turning points in the group, the resources of the teachers in the group, the reading and writing practices of the group, and topics related to adolescent literacy education. I also wrote in my research journal frequently, writing as inquiry (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2000), in order to become aware of my emerging understanding. I attended to “puzzling moments” (Ballenger, 2009), where it was unclear to me what was happening. Frequent writing allowed me to gain new insights.

In the winter of 2011, when data collection was almost complete, I had narrowed in on four areas of inquiry, all of which spoke to my overarching research question. I then used

these areas as guides to re-read the field notes and transcripts and write a memo about each meeting. In these memos, I attempted to capture the talk in narrative, episodic form and construct what Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995) call “episodes” and “field note tales” (p. 87-89), which connect events and interactions using narrative structure. In order to respond to each meeting systematically, I started by recording my general impressions (in which I wrote anything that stood out as interesting as well as noticed any patterns that were emerging), followed by a general progression of the discussion (in which I attempted to describe the meeting episodically in terms of shift in topic or participation). Next, I wrote in response to each of four areas of inquiry: Changes in the group, the resources of the teachers, the ways the group theorized practice, and questions and insights related to adolescent literacy education (see Appendix C for a sample structure of these memos). This stage of analysis was informed by the Descriptive Review Processes (Carini, 2000; 2002), narrative analysis (Chase, 2005) and discourse analysis (Rymes, 2009; Gee, 1999). This systematic memoing enabled me to analyze the data both inductively and deductively. It facilitated my ongoing and recursive analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1994) as I looked for key themes that were related to my research questions, while also allowing themes to emerge from the data.

Next, I loaded all of the data into the qualitative data analysis program AtlasTi and I began coding the data. I coded it based on key themes and emic concepts that I noticed emerging from the data (such as “It’s hard” and “weird dynamics”). I also attended to my own moves as a facilitator. Eventually, I started to see how the group went through four phases, which roughly corresponded with the seasons (spring, summer, winter, fall).

My understanding of how the culture changed over these seasons became deeper over time and I began to ask different questions of different seasons. I then did another round of coding that focused on these questions and looked at larger talk patterns and participant structures. Throughout the analysis process, I created data displays, charts, and graphics to represent my emergent understanding and allow me to see new patterns in the data. For example, at one point I created a note card for each “text” (broadly defined, including stories from practice) that the group discussed for a sustained period of time. I then categorized these note cards in different ways, such as by phase, author, genre, and function.

My overarching question started as: *How did this group function as a site of knowledge generation about adolescent literacy education?* As described in the previous chapter, in the fall of 2011, after my own encounter with the Occupy movement, my question shifted to *How did this group function as a site of transformative learning?* While the semantics of the question changed, my focus on the group as a site of change for the teachers remained constant. I started this study with many sub-questions with the assumption that I would select some based on my emergent understandings of the group. The data chapters that follow focus on three sub-questions: *How did we create a transformative learning community? What transformative learning occurred during the process of going public? How did transformative learning occur in the margins of the group?* These questions each focus on different phases of the group’s work and I used different data sources to address each one. For the first one, I drew on transcripts, field notes, and artifacts from the first four meetings and the fall meetings. For the second question I

focused my analysis on the final five meetings in which the group prepared to present at a conference. For the third question, I took a case study approach in which I focused on three teachers during the *close looking at practice phase* and augmented these data sources with other relevant data that provides context for the case. For each of these analyses, I also drew on interviews and my research journals.

Context

The Philadelphia Context

This study's location in Philadelphia is a significant aspect of the context of this study. Philadelphia is viewed as a hub for teacher inquiry and social-justice-focused education with several institutions providing the context for overlapping and nested teacher inquiry communities. At the time of the study, five of the six participants in the group were affiliated with The Graduate School of Education at the University of Pennsylvania (PennGSE). PennGSE has been described as having an "unusual strength in anthropology and education" and being "a center from which teacher research emanated" (Lagemann, 2000, p. 244). This research is supported by an annual conference, the Ethnography and Education Forum at PennGSE. This conference is unique in that it includes a Practitioner Inquiry Day that provides a venue for practitioner researchers to make their practice public and is free to Philadelphia Public School teachers. Several of the teachers had attended or presented at this conference. Within PennGSE, the Reading/Writing/Literacy (RWL) and Teacher Education (TEP) Programs have strong orientations towards inquiry and social justice. Within these programs, teachers are

exposed to frameworks and practices of teacher inquiry, including the Descriptive Processes developed at the Prospect School in Vermont (Carini, 2001) and the cultivation of an inquiry stance through engagement in inquiry communities within and outside their coursework. All but one of the teachers were current students or alumni of one of these programs. The teachers' involvement in the Philadelphia Writing Project (PhilWP) is another significant aspect of the context. A partnership between PennGSE and the School District of Philadelphia, PhilWP is a particularly active branch of the National Writing Project, and has a social-justice and inquiry focus. At the time, two of the teachers were affiliated with PhilWP. The Philadelphia Teachers' Learning Cooperative (PTLC) is a group of teachers that has been meeting in Philadelphia every Thursday since 1978 and uses the Descriptive Review processes developed at the Prospect Center in Vermont (Carini, 2001). While none of the teachers in the study was a regular participant of PTLC, this group has had a longstanding presence in Philadelphia and has created synergistic relationships between PhilWP, PennGSE, and other teacher organizations (such as the Teacher Action Group). This snapshot of the Philadelphia context is meant to provide an introduction and overview of the unique geographical context of this work, suggesting that, because the participants in this group were already involved in multiple, overlapping teacher communities, Philadelphia was a unique place for studying teacher inquiry and thus represents a site of intensification. The table in the following section provides specifics about the group members and their affiliation with various teacher inquiry communities and other adult learning groups.

Soliciting Participants

In the early spring of 2010, I sent out an email to English/Language Arts (ELA) teachers in grades 6 through 12 in the Philadelphia area inviting them to participate in an adolescent literacy education study group (see Appendix D). I sent the email through several local teacher networks: Penn alumni lists, the Philadelphia Writing Project, and the Philadelphia Teachers Learning Cooperative. I also sent the email to personal contacts and asked them to forward it to ELA teachers that they knew.

In the initial email, I introduced myself and invited teachers to meet regularly to discuss adolescent literacy education with a focus on equity and social justice. I wrote that I hoped the study group would be a space to “grapple with issues about language and identity, critical literacy, linguistic or culture diversity, or building literacy-rich environments in the face of constraints.” I also posed some questions to cast a vision and give the teachers a sense of what I was curious to learn: *What would happen if a group of committed, engaged, teachers of adolescents came together to self-educate by discussing short readings over time?... What are the most important issues, dilemmas, ideas, possibilities, and questions that would arise?*

I included some of the advantages of joining the group, such as the chance to ask questions in a supportive environment and discuss the dilemmas of teaching; form relationships among other teachers; and engage in an intellectual community. I also shared a little bit about how I envisioned my role and my hope that the group would become more co-constructed over time. Lastly, I said that the group would be the focus

of my dissertation research and that I would ask participants to agree to allow me to document and make public the work of the group and participate in two interviews regarding the experience of participating.

Within this initial email, I communicated several important aspects of this experience: First, I positioned myself as a group member, referring to “opportunities for us” to address “issues in our classrooms.” I also conveyed that I wanted the group to be co-constructed, suggesting that, after the first few meetings, I hoped that the group would take responsibility for selecting texts and topics. I also referred to issues of equity and social justice and mentioned the idea of critical literacy, revealing that the group would be a *critical* literacy group. Finally, I used language like *grappling* and *pose questions*, which communicated that the group would be an inquiry group. By making my own position visible and sharing some of the non-negotiable aspects of the work of the group, I undoubtedly shaped the kinds of people who responded.

The method described above represents purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2007), in that I selected participants because they could “purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon of the study” (Creswell, 2007, p. 125). Since this study focuses on teacher inquiry into critical literacy education for adolescents, I selected teachers of adolescents who were interested in generating knowledge about critical literacy through dialogue about their practice. While I was initially open to including teachers from a range of disciplines, I targeted teachers of English/Language Arts because ELA teachers are most self-consciously engaged in thinking about reading

and writing, and are traditionally associated with “literacy education.” Thus, the study became an inquiry into literacy education in urban English/Language Arts classrooms. This solicitation method led to a group of teachers who were exceptionally committed to their students, their own professional development, teacher inquiry, and critical literacy education. Therefore, the sample could be considered an “intensity sample” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 28) in that the group was an information-rich site for understanding teacher inquiry and literacy education. The table below provides an overview of the participants:

Overview of the Group

During March and April of 2010, I fielded emails from teachers and sent follow-up emails asking how they heard about the group, why they were interested, and what their scheduling preferences were. By late April, I had heard from enough people to hold the first meeting. During the group’s first three meetings, group membership fluctuated considerably, with ten different people attending at least one meeting. I began to consider this period similar to an “add/drop” period for a university course, where teachers were trying the group out and seeing if it fit with their goals, work, and schedule. During these meetings, I communicated the importance of regular attendance for those who chose to continue. By the fourth meeting, group membership had stabilized at six teachers. One teacher stopped coming after the sixth meeting and the group membership remained steady at five teachers plus me for the remainder of the study. While it is not possible to make conclusive remarks about the kinds of teachers who stayed versus the ones who departed, the teachers who remained were ones who had experienced rich

collaborative learning in the past, felt dissatisfied in some way with the professional development at their schools, and were seeking a space to do some particular kind of personal, professional, or intellectual work.

TABLE 1: Adolescent Literacy Education Study Group Participants

Name	Years	Type of School & Courses Taught	Students' Race and Income	Teachers' Race and Background Marked as Salient in Discussions	Additional Institutional Affiliations
Lucy	9	Program for 18-21 year olds returning for high school diploma English	Mostly African American, low-income	White Rural background	Diverse teaching experiences, including community college instructor; Applying to doctoral programs in education
Becca	10	College Preparatory Charter School Grade 8 Literature AP English	70% African American; Asian, white, and other, low-income	White Southern background	Penn RWL Master's Alumna; Instructor in Penn Teacher Education Program
Joel	2	Large Public Neighborhood Grade 10 English	Mostly African American, low-income	White Suburban	PhilWP; Penn RWL Part-Time Master's Student
Mary	4	Small Public College Prep Magnet Grade 12 English/Senior Projects; AP Literature	Mostly African American, low-income	White Catholic School	PhilWP; Penn Teacher Education Alumna
Melissa	3	K-8 Public School Grades 7 and 8 Language Arts	African American; low-income	White Lancaster, PA	Penn RWL Master's Alumna

As the table above indicates, this group of teachers represents maximum variation (Patton, 2002; Miles & Huberman, 1994) with regard to type of urban teaching context because the teachers represented a wide range of school type, each of which had different discourses, missions, school cultures, programs, and course arrangements. Four of the teachers taught in Philadelphia public and charter schools and one taught in a nearby urban district. All of them were English or Language Arts teachers, but their grade levels ranged from seventh grade through twenty-one-year olds. The subjects that the teachers taught varied, as did their roles and the scope of their work. For example, at Becca's school, literature and writing were separate classes and so her primary focus was literature and writing *about* literature. Joel was an English teacher in a school that had several required scripted programs that focused on reading. Melissa was a language arts teacher in a K-8 elementary school. This diversity created a situation in which group members needed to make many aspects of their work explicit to one another, especially early on, and ultimately allowed for particularly fertile ground for questioning assumptions and attempts to connect specific situations to universal issues in literacy education. From a research perspective, the diversity of context, as well as the need for teachers to articulate how their practice worked within or against school environments, prompted more aspects of practice to become visible in the group.

The teachers also represented diversity in terms of stage in their careers. Three of the teachers were in their first three years of teaching and the other two had ten years of experience. While this diversity of teaching experience was not something that was explicitly discussed at length by the teachers, there were times when one of the more

experienced teachers was called upon to share knowledge based on that experience and, over time, I began to see how the diversity of experience influenced how various teachers' perspectives were viewed in the group. Despite some of these differences, the teachers had much in common: They were *all* interested in becoming aware of and revising their teaching philosophies, looking self-reflexively at their practice, broadening their perspectives, and ultimately improving their practice and their students' opportunities to learn.

Racially, all of the teachers were white, making the group an all white space. Since their students were primarily students of color, issues of teaching across racial and cultural difference came up frequently. While the teachers did not all explicitly identify as coming from middle class families, all received postsecondary education in middle class social and cultural spheres and exist in these spheres today, while many of their students were from working class and low-income families.

Because this study focuses on transformative learning through our collaborative conversations, it's also worth noting the teachers' other institutional affiliations. All of the teachers except for one were in some way affiliated with PennGSE and the Philadelphia Writing Project. Both of these institutions have long traditions of teacher inquiry and advocate for holistic, student-centered, critical literacy education for students. They were quick to adopt an inquiry stance (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009), and assume an advocacy role on behalf of students.

Teacher Profiles

In this section, I offer a brief profile of each teacher who was in the study group. The profiles include how the teacher learned of the group, where each one taught, why each decided to join, and my impressions of how the teacher interacted in the group.

Lucy

Lucy taught at an alternative charter school for students who had left high school and were returning to earn high school diplomas. She learned of the study group because the director of instruction at her school forwarded my email to the staff. Lucy came to the study group because she wanted to find others who were asking similar questions and with whom she could “gauge her thought process in relation to others” and “be confronted” on her beliefs. She had been developing a Translation Wall that focused on various forms of English. She was in the process of writing about this project, and was seeking a supportive group of colleagues for a “publishing push.” When other group members posed an issue or dilemma, Lucy responded with caring, open, and non-judgmental demeanor. While she rarely initiated a new topic without explicit prompting from someone else, she participated wholeheartedly in whatever issue or concern was on the table at the time.

Becca

Becca learned of the study group because she and I were acquainted already through a mutual friend and I emailed her directly to tell her about the group. She taught at a college preparatory charter school with a school culture that was marked by rigid

standardization and tight control. Over the years, she had earned considerable respect, trust, and formal leadership roles at her school and she struggled with how to reconcile these roles with the dissonance she felt with her school's philosophy. Becca joined the group because of this sense of dissonance that she felt in her work. She had been teaching for ten years and had recently made the decision that she wanted to remain in teaching for the rest of her career. She joined the group to re-establish herself in her own beliefs about education and the reasons she started teaching in the first place. Becca craved learning about other people's teaching practice and wanted to expose herself to their ideas through reading, videos, and listening to other people's stories. She often shared detailed stories from her classroom that exposed the complexity of relating to students and administrators and engaged issues of race, culture, and beliefs that ended with a question or dilemma.

Mary

One of my advisors at PennGSE knew Mary because she had recently graduated from the Teacher Education Program. The advisor recommended that I invite Mary to participate in the group because of her commitment to thinking deeply about her practice. Mary taught senior English at a small magnet school, a role that included British literature and guiding the seniors through the process of writing and presenting Senior Projects. She was a participant in PhilWP, a TEP alumni, and frequently read teacher research and other educational research on her own and brought these perspectives into the conversations. Mary tended to call our attention to how ideas were framed, and raised questions about language use. Early on, Mary shared that, although she is often quiet, it

doesn't mean that she's not thinking and learning. She described how she often comes to new insights based on our conversations during the car ride home.

Joel

The group was recommended to Joel by a classmate of mine who was working at his school. Joel was in his first year of teaching when the study group started. He had studied English Teacher Education in undergraduate and his program took a critical inquiry approach to teacher education and a sociocultural/critical approach to literacy. Influenced by literacy theorists like Gee, Delpit, and Freire, Joel came to the study group eager to continue to relate theory and practice. He participated in PhilWP's Summer Institute during the summer and then started the RWL master's program in the fall. These discourses influenced his participation in the study group, as did his experiences teaching abroad in Korea and Sweden.

Melissa

Melissa was a former student of mine in the RWL Master's program. I emailed her directly because I knew that she taught middle school-aged students in a K-8 elementary school in a nearby urban school district. She was in her third year of teaching when the group started and was finishing up her graduate coursework. Early on, she commented on how good it felt to have "professional conversations" with others who taught adolescents. In addition to the professional conversations, Melissa joined the group, in part, to try to work out her own philosophy of practice. She was aware that the RWL master's program was inquiry and social justice focused, and she wanted to explore

whether these views were actually what she believed. Melissa was also a coordinator of the statewide professional affiliate of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE).

A Year in the Study Group: Four Seasons of Work

Early on in my analysis, I began to see how our work fit into four phases that loosely corresponded with the seasons. My early analysis revealed that each season had a distinct feel and implicit projects. This section provides an overview of the evolution of the study group. It describes, from my perspective, how we inquired together across four seasons of work.

Table 2: Four Seasons of Work in the Adolescent Literacy Education Study Group

PHASE	ESTABLISHING GROUP MEMBERSHIP & NORMS	EXPERIMENTING WITH TEXTS AND TALK	LOOKING CLOSELY AT PRACTICE	GOING PUBLIC
SEASON; MTGS	SPRING 2010; MTGS 1-4	SUMMER 2010; MTGS 5-11	FALL 2010; MTGS 12-18	WINTER 2011; MTGS 19-25
OVERARCHING FORMAT	Discussion Group	Discussion Group	Data Analysis Descriptive Review	Working Group
MY PROJECTS	Establish stable membership and group norms that make space for inquiry Communicate my values and goals and hear the teachers' values and goals	Experiment with texts and talk Co-construct the group with the teachers Figure out common projects or interests	Make space for systematic classroom inquiry Generate knowledge of adolescent literacy education	Provide a Forum for teachers to present their learning Share knowledge about adolescent literacy education

TEACHERS' PROJECTS	Get to know others, their perspectives, and their schools Decide if they want to be in the group	Design curriculum and classroom spaces for the fall Step back from practice Figure out common project or interests	Generate knowledge to improve practice	Share knowledge about professional development <u>and</u> adolescent literacy education Be affirmed
MY PROMINENT ROLES	Facilitator	Participant	Chair for descriptive reviews	Glue

The table above shows the predominant format, the teachers' and my projects, and the prominent role that I occupied across the four seasons of work. From reading my practitioner researcher journal and meeting notes, I came to see how my projects changed over time. My early analysis helped me see that the teachers' implicit and explicit purposes and projects evolved over time and were sometimes overlapping with my own. While my role shifted within and across sessions, the final row of the table notes the predominant role that I took on during each season. I was *always* both a facilitator and participant, but the nature of my facilitation and participation shifted across the seasons. In the spring, I took on a more active facilitation role – framing conversations, prompting the group with questions, and determining the topics and readings. In the summer, the teachers took on more responsibility for determining topics, texts, and formats for the meetings. Throughout the summer, I participated *with* the teachers, finding ways to answer the prompts and contribute from my experiences as a literacy researcher, teacher educator, and former K-12 teacher. In the fall, my role shifted to primarily that of chair, as I provided the structures our close looking at practice. In the winter, two teachers took

on the primary facilitation role within the group as the group prepared to present their work at a conference.

Spring: Establishing Group Membership and Norms

In this phase, which I refer to later as simply *the early meetings*, I facilitated a series of conversations, mostly focused on shared texts that we read. During these meetings, the teachers shared information about their purposes for being in the group, discussed a series of shared readings together, and told and responded to stories from their practice. While I usually came with a fairly detailed agenda, the agenda was often revised significantly during the beginning of the meeting or abandoned when a spontaneous conversation felt more interesting than what we had planned. In an interview with Lucy, she said she felt as though the group resembled a salon in which people can bring up any issue that they find worthy of discussion.

I started meetings by proposing an agenda (usually agreed upon during the previous meeting) and then revisiting written reflections from the previous meeting. Then, I usually offered an opening question about the shared reading. The readings included ones that I believed represented multiple perspectives on adolescent literacy education (e.g. Appleman, 2009; Christensen, 2009; NCTE, 2007; Nakkula & Toshalis, 2006; Stevens, 2006). Meeting four marked a turning point in that it was the first meeting in which a teacher recommended a shared text in response to questions that the group raised in the discussion. The fourth meeting was also the meeting in which we explicitly

developed group norms and values, a conversation that will be described in more detail in Chapter Three.

Summer: Experimenting with Texts and Structures

The meetings in the summer took on a wide range of issues, texts, and formats. In the meetings in June through August, the teachers and I wrote “critical incidents” that illuminated a central question in our work, did a descriptive review of a piece of student work, explored our teaching roots through the writing and sharing of *Where My Teaching is From* poems, read and discussed *The First Day*, a short story by Edward P. Jones that dealt with an educational theme, viewed a video of a local teacher teaching a writing lesson, brought in and analyzed artifacts from practice, and acted as a writing group in response to one of the teacher’s draft of a document she wanted to submit for publication. A backdrop to all of these discussions was a list of *Things I’m Thinking About This Summer*, which existed as a living document on Google Docs in which we kept track of our inquiries over the course of the summer.

The summer had a relaxed, experimental feel. With a group firmly in place and membership stable, I felt confident to “play around” a bit with various structures and shared texts. The teachers, who were free from the daily grind of the classroom, came with a sense of openness to giving various texts and structures a try. During this phase, one meeting led naturally to the next, as the questions that we ended with in one discussion seemed to lead naturally to texts and formats for the next. I would usually open the meeting by asking how the group wanted to organize the discussion.. Based on

the nature and purpose of the texts that we had read or written, the group would come up with an agenda and we would go from there.

By the end of the spring, I began to see that my best contributions were ones when I spoke from my position as a graduate student, former teacher, or teacher educator. As spring turned to summer, I made an intentional choice to participate more frequently from these roles. I was teaching a masters' course in the literacy education and brought my dilemmas and experiences from that context into the group. I did each of the writing prompts (both in-the-moment writings and writing that occurred between meetings), developed and shared inquiry questions, and participated in the discussions. My decision to participate as a literacy practitioner (rather than solely as a facilitator) also allowed me to experience the group from the perspective of a participant/practitioner, make some of my own questions and uncertainties as a practitioner visible to the teachers, and express some of my own theories of literacy, learning, and education. The summer meetings are not included in the analysis in the chapters that follow because, based on the teachers' interviews, these meetings were less meaningful than the ones in which they looked closely at their practice. However, these seven meetings were ones in which the group got to know each other, developed a shared history, sense of community, and deepened sense of trust.

Fall: Looking Closely at Practice

In the middle of the summer, I realized that the group was starting to gain a sense of cohesiveness and momentum. We had developed a shared set of experiences and the

teachers shared with me that the dialogues were generative, energizing, and useful. I created a proposal for the group based on feedback I had received from them that they would be interested in pursuing their own inquiries and also presenting their work at the Ethnography Forum. I sent out an email invitation to continue to work together in the fall (see Appendix E) in which I invited the group to continue to meet regularly to systematically look at practice in relationship to inquiries that they would develop. All five of the teachers responded that they wanted to continue.

During the first two meetings, each member of the study group narrowed in on an individual inquiry and group members took turns presenting and analyzing texts from their practice. Meetings in the fall followed a more regular format that became increasingly formalized as I started to become aware of the patterns that worked well for our purposes. Each meeting focused on one teacher's inquiry and data from practice. Before each meeting, I would meet with the focal teacher to determine a structure and focusing question for the Descriptive Review. We started each meeting with a brief "check in," which I later came to see as a sort of oral journal entry in which the teachers went around and shared an update about their work. There was usually a short period where others would respond, and then we would follow an adaptation of the Descriptive Review Process (Carini, 2000) for one individual teacher. Each Descriptive Review session started with the presenting teacher giving context about his or her question, followed by a collective reflection on a key concept, followed by several descriptive rounds, questions for the focal teacher, recommendations, and occasionally stories written in response to a particular issue (such as "stories about being stuck" and

“examples of classroom community”). The final thirty to forty minutes of each meeting were spent debriefing the process and engaging in an open conversation.

In the fall, I intentionally decided to take on the role of timekeeper and chair for descriptive review. I also decided *not* to participate as often, but to devote myself to facilitating the descriptive review process, providing “summations” during the oral inquiries, and support for the teachers in their inquiries. I made this decision in part because I felt that my own inquiries often confused matters or got in the way of the momentum of the teachers’ inquiries. Additionally, I was guided by conversation that I had with one of the longtime members of PTLC, who helped me see the importance of one person “holding some headspace” for keeping track of the inquiries and themes of the group’s oral inquiries (Wice, personal communication, June 12, 2010). Additionally, in October, I took on the responsibility of drafting a proposal for the Ethnography Forum. The proposal was called *Inquiries into Teaching English/Language Arts: Dialogues with a Philadelphia-Area Teacher Study Group on Adolescent Literacy Education*. I shared drafts with the teachers, both at a meeting and over email, and got their feedback.

Winter: Going Public

In the winter, we shifted our focus to planning for our presentation at the Ethnography Forum. During the final meetings, the group prepared to present at the Ethnography in Education Forum and the public sharing of the work prompted the group to search for what was common across the inquiries, come to consensus around a shared sense of purpose for presenting, and agree on a presentation format that would make an impact on

the audience and prompt meaningful dialogue among other educators. Because it was important for me that the presentation was collaboratively developed, prior to the winter, I had asked two teachers to volunteer to facilitate the meetings in the winter. Lucy and Melissa took on this role. I asked the group what my role should be for the presentation and they suggested that I function as “glue” by introducing the presentation, the group, the teachers, and sharing themes.

During the meetings leading up to the Ethnography Forum, the group brainstormed possible structures for presenting, wrote individual narratives, and combined them together to create a dramatic reading that included rich images of their work in combination with reflections on their questions and philosophies.

Summary

In this chapter, I have discussed the methodological underpinnings of this participatory research study, showing how it is informed by practitioner inquiry and Participatory Action Research traditions. I have also made visible the study design and my approach to analysis, which incorporates multiple qualitative modes of analysis. Finally, I have provided context for the data chapters that follow by describing the local context of Philadelphia, providing background about the teachers, and giving an overview of the seasons of work in the adolescent literacy education study group. Both the location in Philadelphia, a hub of teacher inquiry, and the dispositions and experiences of the teachers in the group made this research context a site of intensification for understanding

the work of a teacher inquiry community. In the next chapter, I analyze the space of the group during two of the seasons to show some key features of the community.

CHAPTER 3: The Space

Introduction

It is a crisp Saturday morning in February, Practitioner Inquiry Day at the 32nd annual Ethnography in Education Research Forum, and the six of us are gathered in the lounge at the University of Pennsylvania's Graduate School of Education. There is an electric energy in the air for me, a sense of excitement, pride, and curiosity about what is to come. We huddle up like an athletic team preparing for a big game. We pull our chairs close together in a circle and bow our heads over our scripts, which Lucy has just printed in the computer lab and handed to us. "Can I run through what I'm going to say, real quick?" I ask. I am nervous. I feel a responsibility to represent this work well, to frame the presentation in a way that is true to our work as a group and does justice to the five teachers whose work I have come to love and respect.

Five minutes later and it's show time. We move out of our huddle and into the classroom where we will present. I open with my prepared words:

We've written poetry and discussed literature. We've read short stories and viewed videos of classrooms. We've re-read our pasts, our journeys into teaching and we've imagined the kinds of futures we want for students and ourselves. We've drawn from our knowledge of social theory, literature, philosophy, pedagogy, language, and culture, among other disciplines. We've used formal structures, such as an adaptation of the Descriptive Review process, as well as more "open conversations" in which we discuss, share, push, and affirm each other, zooming in and out from big ideas to specific moments, mapping the most routine tasks and decisions onto broader questions, such as the purposes of education, what counts as learning, and how to justify our choices.

Throughout all of our work together, stories from the classroom –stories that are so thrilling, exciting, troubling, or disturbing that they can sometimes keep you up at night– have been a central "text" of our work together.

I then invite the audience to reflect on their own experience, presenting them with a prompt that was developed by the teachers and me a few nights earlier at a Friday night meeting at my apartment at which we had our final rehearsal:

Write a "literacy education moment" that stands out in your mind, one that has kept you up at night. Possible reasons for keeping you up might be that it's memorable, meaningful, puzzling, blow-your-mind haunting, paradoxical, joyous, victorious, defeating, or painful.

During the few minutes of silence, I take a moment to look up and experience the audience. They are people I know and people I don't know. They are students,

teachers, colleagues, retired teachers, and friends. There are former students of mine, who are now teachers and practitioners in various contexts. There are fellow graduate students who have been thinking partners for me along the way, whose journeys have enriched my own. I reflect for a moment on the open-endedness of this presentation, wondering what each person will take away.

After a few minutes of silence, I extend another invitation to the audience, “Now, we invite you to sit back and listen to some of the stories and questions that came out of our work together. What you are about to hear is a sharing of threaded narratives of the story of the lives of the questions that each teacher has been pursuing.”

As I speak, the five teachers move from their panel-style positions in the front of the room to locations around the perimeter. They begin, sharing their interwoven narrative, their words weaving together with each other – sometimes echoing with resonance, sometimes leaving us with unsettling contradictions, sometimes sounding like one person’s words naturally leading to the next’s.

I watch as the audience members’ heads swivel around to face the changing speakers. I feel a sense of pride, responsibility, and awe. I am also aware of my own silence, sitting at the front, alone. I am now an audience member, taking in their stories with reverence and care. I am not a teacher, but I am a member of this group. This is a familiar contradiction.

The teachers finish and the room, full of about 30 people, falls silent. I break the silence awkwardly, another familiar feeling. I offer a list of themes that resonated throughout the stories. I am conscious of my position as the university-based researcher, having the final word in this presentation, sharing the last analysis on stories that – in some ways – are un-analyzable.

This opening vignette offers a window into the culminating activity in which the study group engaged – a conference presentation in which we made our work public to an outside audience. This vignette shows many aspects of the group - the collaborative spirit, the centrality of stories from the classroom, the complexity of the work, as well as the multiple roles that we inhabited. I offer this image of the end before turning back to the beginning. In this chapter, I start with the group’s early meetings to analyze the space of our learning. From the beginning, I wanted the group to be co-constructed, but I also

had images for what the group would be like. In a memo that I wrote prior to the group's work, I described the intellectual community that I hoped to create:

I picture lively conversation, that is characterized by silence, debate, question posing, overlapping talk, the sharing of interpretations that are similar and different, the sharing of experiences, the posing of theories, the interrupting of theories, the naming of positions, and connecting ideas across contexts. I picture making questions – both big and small – public to ourselves and one another. I believe that these kinds of dialogues will generate knowledge about adolescent literacy education.

I draw heavily on the idea of “critical friend” to inform my understanding of intellectual community. A critical friendship is characterized by care, but not blind care. A critical friend offers rubs, resistances, other perspectives. A critical friend offers a push. (Memo on My Vision for the Study Group; February 10, 2010).

This image encompasses an implicit definition of an intellectual community that includes many features of transformative learning as I understand it: the integration of multiple perspectives, an emphasis on problem-posing, silent space to imagine new possibilities, and the balance of safety and risk inherent in the term “critical friend.” It was this initial image, one in which members of the group supported each other in taking an inquiry stance (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009) towards practice and related to each other by providing both support and challenge, that I carried with me as I solicited participants, set an initial meeting time, and began to construct a learning space with the group. However, no matter how strong my desires, I also knew that our group would be a negotiated space that would change over time. In this chapter, I focus on the space of learning in the study group by asking: *How did we create a transformative learning community?*

In the first chapter, I described how my understanding of transformative learning is shaped by theories from feminist, emancipatory, inquiry and adult learning traditions. I highlighted the centrality of using feelings as a source of knowing (hooks, 1994; Weiler, 1991), questioning assumptions (Brookfield, 1986; Mezirow, 1990), posing problems (Horton & Freire, 1990) and imagining alternative ways of being in the world (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 1985). However, Brookfield (1995) argues that the work of critical reflection “is also something we instinctively resist, for fear of what we might discover. Who wants to clarify and question assumptions she has lived by for a substantial period of time, only to find out that they don't make sense?” (p. 2) Work in teacher inquiry communities emphasizes the importance of creating a space for “honest talk” (Lieberman & Miller, 2008) in which struggles are normalized (Little, 2003). Because of the risk and discomfort required, close analysis of the space in which we worked is central to understanding the way the group functioned as a site of learning.

In this analysis, I evoke images of learning spaces that are characteristic of the consciousness raising groups (Evans, 1979) and problem-posing sessions (Horton & Freire, 1990) that have roots in the feminist and emancipatory traditions respectively. In both traditions, problems are viewed as the starting point for learning. Freire (1990) describes how students come to learning experiences “full of things” – hopes, desires, expectations, and knowledge, which they got “by living, by fighting and becoming frustrated” (p. 156-7). Because the teachers in the study group came to the group “full of things” based on their lives as teachers and because problems and struggles were the

starting point for learning, it is important to consider the way that we organized ourselves and the space we created.

The remainder of this chapter is organized into two parts. In the first part, *The Early Meetings*, I show how, during the first several meetings, the group's culture was shaped by the participants through spontaneous and planned conversations and through facilitation. This analysis suggests that transformative learning communities are characterized by multiple related purposes: The need for support, the hope for change, and the desire for community. In the second part, *Looking Closely at Practice*, I show how during the fall meetings, the group combined inquiry questions with Descriptive Processes developed by Patricia Carini (2000) at the Prospect School to look at practice closely and systematically. In this part, I argue that closely and systemically looking at teaching is a *humanizing practice* in that it fosters a stance of curiosity, evokes a sense of empathy, and forces participants to contend with multiple perspectives. Together, these sections make the argument that creating a space for transformative learning takes time and intention and it occurs in planned and spontaneous ways.

Part I: The Early Meetings

The following analysis of the group culture that we created was based on the first four meetings, with a specific focus on the third and fourth meeting. During the third meeting, the group read a chapter I selected about building relationships with adolescents from *Understanding Youth* (Nakkula and Toshalis, 2006). In the fourth meeting, the shared text was a chapter that Becca selected from *Is this English?* (Fecho, 2004) in which he

grapples with issues related to his position as a white teacher of primarily African American students. While these texts do not feature prominently in the conversations shared below, I believe their themes are important in that they legitimize particular topics (e.g. relationships, race, and identity) and ways of talking about teaching (e.g. challenging, complex, imperfect).

Establishing a Group Culture Through Talk

This section describes three ways that the teachers and I created a group culture through dialogue. These three themes – *it's hard*, *affirmations*, and *permission to push* -- show how the group became a space that included both pushing and affirming.

It's Hard: Affirmations

Throughout the first several meetings, the teachers repeatedly discussed the nature of the challenges of teaching English/Language Arts in their schools. They articulated the complexity of teaching and raised collective awareness of the inherently human nature of the work. “It’s hard” became a common refrain as the teachers shared concerns, struggles, and questions. The reasons for teaching being hard included the following:

- Teaching is complex work with no easy answers.
- Teaching adolescent literacy requires being in close relationship with students.
- Teachers of adolescents feel the responsibility to prepare students for college, which sometimes requires that they focus on skills and use pedagogical practices that they would not otherwise agree with.
- Literacy education has a messy human quality, which leaves lots of “grey area.”
- Teachers and students are navigating multiple roles and identities in literacy classrooms.
- It is challenging to negotiate one’s deeply held beliefs about literacy education with the demands of other stakeholders, school cultures, and policies that promote passive learning and standardization.

- It is challenging to teach students across differences of race, class, and language.

Drawing on examples from their classrooms, the teachers raised collective awareness of the magnitude and dimensions of the struggles. For example, in a discussion about a chapter on the relational work required in teaching adolescents, Becca starts the conversation by saying she felt the chapter made the case that building relationships is important, but she felt the chapter didn't go far enough and there is so much that teachers don't know. She said:

I mean if it were as simple as like “know that there's more to the story,” then, we would all. It would be so much easier. But even when you know that there's more to the story, it's still really hard to build the relationship with the kid. And I wish there was a lot more about the relationship work between a teacher and a student because like that's actually the harder part than just recognizing that you need to recognize that you can mis-read a student.

After this comment, the teachers moved into a lengthy conversation about the various reasons it's hard to build relationships with students and different ways that they think about relating to students, such as defining relationships broadly to include small gestures like recommending a book and the idea of always being *open* to students, even if they don't necessarily reciprocate right away. With this conversation, acknowledging the difficulty led to a collective agreement of the challenge, as well posing different ways of viewing the issue.

From the outset, the group was characterized by a palpable spirit of affirmation. When a group member shared a concern or issue, he or she was often supported by others with “yeah,” “hm mm,” and “right.” When an issue was put forth into the group, there was often a “piling on” effect in which one teacher would express an issue and the others

would add to it with similar examples. These examples often served to affirm the example and also slightly reframe it or add an additional factor to show how the issue is even more complex than originally proposed.

In addition to supportive language, the teachers affirmed each other by actively validating the asking of difficult questions. When Becca mentioned the challenge of forming relationships with students, Joel responded:

Well I think that just puts you ahead of the curve in terms of a lot of mechanical teachers. Recognizing that a relationship is so important to educating a student. I just kind of wanted to point that out.

With this comment, Joel validates the idea that even engaging the question of how to form relationships with her students puts Becca ahead of most teachers. He offers support as she struggles with this question. This kind of comment also came up in the group's conversations about raising issues of race, class, and language in the classroom. The fact that "you're even asking the question" was cause for validation among the group members. Through these kinds of validations, the teachers created a vision of good teaching that included asking the hard questions.

Despite differences in their school context, grade level, and orientation to literacy instruction, the teachers showed a clear commitment to supporting one another from the very beginning. Little's (2003) research describes how a school-based teacher study group engaged in practices that "normalized struggle" that allowed for the teachers to open up and share the dilemmas of practice. With these examples, we see how the

teachers in the study group, through their affirmations, were carving out a space where struggle was normalized and sharing of stories that revealed uncertainty, vulnerability, and failure was valued in the group's work.

While I first assumed that creating this culture of support was the prerequisite to the “pushing” that was at the heart of transformative learning, an interview with Becca helped me see how affirmations themselves could be transformative. When I asked her during an interview about “ah-hah” moments from our early meetings, her immediate answer involved finding someone else who had questions similar to her own:

One night, we were talking about academic writing and personal writing and I felt like Mary and I understood something in the same way. The conversation actually moved on, and it was actually okay that the conversation moved on. But I felt like, “Yes, okay.” I could tell that Mary [understood]. She nodded. It was the most relieving thing in the world to be like, “Yeah. Someone else has made this observation...”

Becca was able to see her problem differently – as a collective problem rather than an individual one – and she was able to see herself in a community with Mary, who was also trying to figure out how to address the problem. As Becca notes, the conversation moved on and that was okay, but just seeing that someone else was living with the same question was valuable.

Permission to Push

While the affirmations created a collective sense that “we’re all in this together” and a shared commitment to supporting each other’s challenges, all of the teachers had come to the group because they believed they had the opportunity to make positive changes in

their classrooms and wanted the group's help in making those changes. In this section, I describe two early conversations in which the teachers expressed their commitment to making change and their desire to be pushed by the group. In the first conversation, *Why are You Here?*, sharing their reasons for joining the group allowed the teachers to define what change meant to them individually. In the second conversation, *Developing Group Norms*, I show how the development of group norms provided a chance for the teachers to share how the group could support their efforts for change and develop a collective group vision.

During the third meeting, Mary asked why everyone joined the group. She wondered why each person *self-selected* to be there. The teachers then engaged in a spontaneous go-around in which each person's answers centered on changes they wanted to make in their work. I include an extended excerpt of the transcript of this conversation to highlight the way the teachers built upon each other's ideas and expressed multiple reasons for joining the group. As the excerpt shows, their reasons for joining included tensions and challenges they were experiencing at their schools, a vision for new possibilities, a desire for professional conversations, and a *need* for a space in which they could "figure things out":

Becca: There's this belief in my building by our administrators that you are either teaching the skills, "get your kids ready for college" Or you're doing this like, identity, social justice stuff. And you can't possibly be doing both at the same time.

Joel: Mm. Mm.

Lucy: Your administrators, that's their?

Becca: And I feel very strongly that you can do both at the same time but I feel like the longer I stay in the building and the louder I hear that voice, the more I question myself, “God, can I not do both at the same time?”.... And because I believe that I can do both at the same time and I know that I haven’t been in the way that I want to be for the past three years, it’s really important to me to stay in these conversations so that I can like, hold true to [these beliefs]. ... For me this group is a way to sort of explore that and make sure, again, personal accountability, that I’m like holding myself to that in my classroom, and that I’m willing to work with that grey area with my school and abuse the license that I’ve been given because I’ve been there for five years and nobody bothers me. I’m taking advantage of the fact that nobody opens my door.

Lucy: Yeah. Well said (6).

Kathleen: Lucy, what do you think? Because you...

Lucy: I got really impassioned right now to be like “If this is not the group that solves your problem, then we will make a group to solve your problem.” Cause I feel that wholeheartedly and there is a way to marry the two in a lovely, beautiful marriage. There is a way and we can find that way. I don’t know, that’s such an idealist perspective.

Earlier in the conversation, talking about relationships, there are days when I feel really cold hearted because sometimes I just go home at the end of the day and completely shut my kids out... From this conversation today, I’m just feeling like the pull again that I do prioritize relationships...

Someone apologized for venting earlier and I enjoy that venting (slight laughter) because I connect to that as well?

And I come for the ride and the ride being the balance of us talking practice and theory.

I’m presenting at the NCTE, too, on just linguistics stuff. I have a strong linguistic platform and pretty much, the layman’s term is how code-switching is played out in the classroom through instruction, through curriculum, and all that stuff and I do it very explicitly with translation walls and stuff and my goal is to turn that into a larger piece, so the publishing push would really be helpful as well. (10)

Joel: Why did you sign up?

Mary: Right. (others laugh) Since I asked the question. I think it’s sort of similar to what people have said. This is my third year and I was miserable my first two years, I was absolutely miserable.... [Last year,] I took grad classes in the evening. What I loved about that year was that I was in school in the day and

then I had a place to go figure it out with a group of people who also cared about figuring it out. And that was like so lacking my first two years... I've tried to choose things that will give me that space to figure it out.

Melissa: I suppose I originally came into it with that same idea of knowing that I can go somewhere each week and like sort of make sense of what happened in the past week and make sense of why I'm doing what I'm doing in my classroom. Can I support what I'm doing or not? Because if I can't, I need to change that. Either change the resources I have available to me to understand what I'm doing or change what I'm doing. And so, I originally came in with that idea of "I need this space to make myself feel like I'm a more plugged in teacher... But as we sort of continue here and see the benefits of doing this... I think that now I want to take this back to my school. And I want to find a way for not all of my colleagues because I know that all of them won't, but some of them want to have that space in our building and talk....

Joel: Yeah, well, I guess I'll say. I mean I've been really eager to be a part of something like this because I'm doing PhilWP this summer and I'm starting my master's in the fall at Penn, and I spent last year travelling so I didn't have this type of space.

This conversation shows a range of reasons that motivated the teachers to join the group. Becca, Lucy, and Melissa's comments highlight the importance of the group as a space to work out philosophies that did not align with school policies. Becca "strongly believed" that social justice education and college preparedness were not dichotomous, and Lucy knew she wanted to prioritize relationships. Melissa, a newer teacher, was less sure of her philosophy, but she wanted a place to continue to explore it. This conversation also included "discourse of possibility," (Giroux, 1985) as Lucy noted her "idealist perspective" that, yes, there is a way to incorporate "social justice stuff" while also preparing students for college. In this conversation, there were multiple references to "the space," as the teachers articulated the kind of space they wanted: One in which they could figure things out, work with the grey area, and feel more plugged in. Mary

compared the study group to a graduate course. Later, the teachers would compare the group to a salon-style conversation, a group of friends, and a therapy session. A point that did not figure prominently in this conversation, but was a frequent topic of discussion in other meetings of the group, was that many of the teachers were highly dissatisfied with school district professional development, thus highlighting the *need* for this kind of space.

With Becca and Melissa's comments, we also see how the teachers saw themselves within their schools: Becca wanted to "abuse the license she'd been given" as a successful, veteran teacher, and Melissa hoped to create similar learning contexts at her school. While Lucy is the one who mentions how the group can support her in pursuing publication based on her intellectual interests, in other conversations, Joel and Melissa shared the desire to use the support of the group to make work public. Melissa noted in her comment that her reasons may change, and other comments demonstrated how each person had multiple reasons for joining the group. Through expressing these desires and purposes, they were laying the groundwork to ask to be pushed in the direction of their goals – they wanted a space to "hold true" to what they believed, justify their choices, push them to publish their work, and "figure it out" with others who felt similar commitments. By expressing their goals and desires to each other, they were sharing the kinds of changes they hoped would occur as a result of the group and making it clear that they wanted the group to push them in new directions or hold them accountable to their beliefs.

In the fourth meeting, the group discussed group norms based on the question: “What can I do, and what can others do, to support my learning in this group and make it a place where I can take the risks I need in order to grow?” The result of this conversation was a written set of group norms based on the three values of *risk*, *honesty*, and *accountability*. While the previous conversation highlights the teachers’ various reasons for joining the group, the conversation about group norms illuminates the *social change* aspect of the group. There was a collective sense that the teachers in the group wanted to use the group to change their practice. With the quotation that follows, Joel conveys his feeling that learning from the study group comes with a responsibility to change practice:

We’re in a really good place where we’re thinking in really productive ways, but yet, it’s really important for us to attach it to practice. So that we can, achieve that praxis or whatever.

Becca shared that she wanted to “be really open to making big changes and seeing it through,” clarifying that these changes were actually risky and not just “playing it safe.” In addition to articulating a desire to make change, they offered ways that the others could help them do this. Lucy shared that others could ask her:

“How was I stagnant today?” Because sometimes I feel like I’m a little stagnant right now and almost content.”

There was a shared desire among the teachers to hold each other and themselves accountable for learning in the group entering their practice; for questioning their own and each other's ideas; and for viewing the space as one for "figuring things out."

During our discussion of group norms, individuals shared relevant aspects of their learning histories. Becca said she felt uncomfortable with disagreement and would like to get beyond this discomfort. She noted that the space felt safe for her to share struggles from the classroom and she hoped it would stay that way. Mary shared that she often needed time to process things, with many of her insights coming to her in the car ride home, and she shared that she thought that writing emails to the group or occasional journal entries would be helpful for her. Melissa told the group that she often has good ideas but was concerned about her lack of follow through. Lucy said she appreciated when someone offered a different interpretation of a reading than she had. She said she wanted more of that. With these comments, group members had a chance to note how they have learned in the past, how they could push themselves, or how others in the group could push them. Throughout this conversation, the words "push" and "accountable" were prevalent. The group norms that were established included *honesty about difference in opinion, honesty about classroom practice, holding each other and ourselves accountable for having our dialogues enter our practice, and questioning each other's ideas and practices*. Through these specific actions, the group was offering a vision of what it meant for them to push and be held accountable in this space.

These two conversations—*Why are You Here?* and *Developing Group Norms*—show how, while the teachers enacted an affirmative culture, they also expressed a desire to change their practice and be held accountable for the work they did in the group. Through these two conversations, one of which was spontaneous and one of which was planned, the teachers named individual goals, formed a collective vision for the group, developed a shared sense of the kinds of changes that might be possible in the group, and imagined how the group might push them to make those changes. Together, the teachers and I developed a vision for the group, deepened the budding sense of trust, and gave each other permission to push. These conversations also conveyed an “expanded view of practice” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009) that encompasses the teachers’ identities with multiple communities, as researchers, change agents, authors and leadership role holders in their schools. They also allowed the teachers to define their own goals for their learning – while all of them wanted to do things “differently,” the desired change was different for each person. Becca, for example, had specific goals related to acting in line with her philosophy, Lucy had publishing goals, and Joel wanted to make changes in his classroom based on his philosophy of practice. There was also a sense of being, in Lucy’s words, “along for the ride,” knowing that learning might happen in unexpected ways.

Establishing a Group Culture Through Facilitation

In the previous section, I showed how the group *established a group culture through talk*. I demonstrated how, through conversations that were spontaneous and planned, the teachers and I developed a culture that both affirmed the challenges of the work and

pushed the teachers to see and do things differently in their classrooms. As a differently-positioned group member, I participated in these conversations by sharing my own experiences, desires, and views. However, I was also facilitating the group. My facilitation practice was shaped by some of my experiences in adult learning groups described in the first chapter, as well as my extensive reading in the area of teacher inquiry communities. These experiences populated my mind with images of what was possible in adult learning groups, awareness of some of the challenges, and concerns based on my experiences. In this section, I turn the analytic gaze to my own facilitation practice to show how I attempted to *establish a group culture through facilitation*. I describe and analyze three aspects of facilitation practice: *Making space for everyone*, *establishing connections*, and *normalizing silence*. This analysis is based on transcripts and field notes of our group's early conversations and is augmented by interviews and analysis of the later meetings. I've selected these three aspects of my facilitation because the teachers noted them as important or they proved to be significant elements of the group during later meetings.

Making Space for Everyone

In my role as facilitator, I saw it as my responsibility to create a democratic space where all voices were heard. Based on my experiences in other adult learning groups, I realized that I appreciated groups in which participation was distributed across multiple people and where everyone had space to talk. Because of these experiences, I often made moves to create opportunities for each person to share and sometimes invited those who hadn't spoken to say something. The practice of sharing in a turn-taking format, which our

group came to refer to as “go-arounds” or “check-ins” offered each speaker a time to speak without being interrupted and listeners a chance to listen without anticipating an immediate response. In an interview, Mary shared that she believed the check-in was “important for the group community.” With my moves, the open conversations, and the check-ins, I intentionally made space for everyone through facilitation.

Establishing Connections

In addition to feeling a responsibility to make space for everyone, as the convener of the group, I also felt a responsibility to develop a shared sense of the collective. In the early meetings, I used my facilitation role to establish a sense of cohesiveness in the group.

One way I attempted to do this was through our shared readings. I suggested shared texts on adolescent literacy education, authored by teachers, researchers and professional organizations. I believed these readings would provide shared texts from which we could start, but I soon realized that the most important texts for the teachers were the stories and images that they shared with each other about their classrooms. While the readings themselves were not a central focus of the group’s early conversations, the topics they addressed were, and they served to legitimize some of the issues the teachers were facing.

For example, the group engaged in extended conversations about the topics of *relationships in teaching* and *the salience of a teacher’s race and class* that were prompted by chapters from *Understanding Youth* (Nakkula & Toshalis, 2006) and *Is This English?* (Fecho, 2004) respectively. While I viewed these readings as falling under the category of “multiple perspectives about adolescent literacy education,” the teachers viewed them as images of practice to use as starting points to talk about their own

classrooms.

Another way that I engaged in the project of establishing connections was by synthesizing ideas and noticing themes. I offered my own impressions and also frequently asked the teachers if they noticed “general impressions, themes, or connections.” This synthesizing role was formalized later in the group’s work together when we looked closely at practice and I acted as “chair” for our Descriptive Review sessions. Also, prior to the group’s public presentation, the teachers asked me to be “glue,” sharing that they liked when I noticed themes and drew ideas together. The practice of synthesizing allowed the group members to see themselves in relation to larger issues. In one of our last meetings, for example, Mary reflected aloud on the experience of reading the conference proposal that I wrote about the group in which I listed many of the major themes from our discussions. She said that something shifted for her when she read the word “teacher role” and came to realize that this was a major theme for her own learning that she hadn’t seen before. Despite the expressed value of the role of synthesizer, this role was also a source of constant uneasiness for me, as I often wondered if I was simplifying complex issues or providing syntheses that were overly shaped by my own views and conceptual categories. I was also aware of my different positions as outsider and researcher and felt it was important to keep our conversations grounded in the teachers’ words.

Normalizing Silence and Slowing Down

I entered my work on this project with a question about the role and value of silence, pause, and quiet reflection in learning communities. This stemmed in part from a question posed in my dissertation proposal hearing about the role of silence in generating new knowledge (Schultz, personal communication, March 31, 2010). My interest in silence and learning also came from my own experiences in adult learning groups that included planned and spontaneous periods of silence for thinking, reading, and writing. Because of these pre-dispositions, my facilitation practice included normalizing silence in various ways. In the early meetings, we *started* with a period of silence as we read written reflections from the previous meeting. I also used silence during the flow of conversation by occasionally asking the group if we could stop and think about an idea by stopping the conversation to invite the teachers to write reflectively. When formulating my own ideas, I often took some time to think. In her interview, Lucy called this the “pregnant pause,” and described my facilitation style as “patient.” She added that the “free-writing that happened to gather our thoughts” was an important aspect of our group for her.

Later in the group’s evolution, silence took on various forms. It occurred during the slow, methodical Descriptive Review processes and also spontaneously during weighty conversations. While the conversations often took on a fast pace, there were also times when the silence was noticeable. In one of the later meetings, I noted how silence worked to add weight and reflection time when discussing a difficult question. In my field notes, I wrote:

There was a long silence after someone raised the question: “How can we support these adolescents as they try to hold both in their minds: Loving their families and wanting to be different?”

While it’s impossible to tell whether this kind of contemplative, spontaneous period of silence was a result of my intentional efforts to normalize it, it is worth noting the role silence played throughout our work. At one of our last meetings, when I asked the group to think of themes to develop at the Ethnography Forum, Becca said, “Can we have a second to think?” after which point the teachers naturally turned to their papers to write. This request, along with the ease with which the teachers moved into reflection and writing, suggests this practice had become normalized in the group. Silence played an important role during the group’s presentation. As the teachers rehearsed the threaded narrative for the presentation, I urged them to include “dramatic pauses” and we thought together about where to include them. Later, an audience member said that these pauses were meaningful and wished that some had been longer because it was hard to transition so quickly between the powerful stories.

Summary: Making Space for Transformative Learning During the Early Meetings

Analysis of the first several meetings reveals that the teachers and I were co-creating a learning space through talk and facilitation. Through talk, the teachers created a space in which struggles were normalized and began to raise collective consciousness of the magnitude and complexity of the problems they faced in their work. They also established an environment characterized by support, while simultaneously expressing a desire to push themselves and be pushed by others to ask new questions and do things

differently in their classrooms. As the facilitator of the group, I was engaged in the projects of creating a democratic, cohesive learning space that included moments for quiet reflection.

Part II: Looking Closely at Practice

In the previous section, I describe how the teachers created a space for transformative learning that was characterized by a culture of affirmation and allowed them to bring up the struggles they were facing. The teachers developed a collective understanding of how difficult it was to teach adolescent literacy in these times and also collaborated to understand many reasons that contributed to this difficulty. In the early meetings, the teachers' talk was characterized by a "piling on" of the dimensions and magnitude of the issues and an exploration of multiple issues related to their work. In the remainder of this chapter, I will describe and analyze the space of the group during the fall when each teacher chose just one problem to focus on and examined it systematically and with deliberate intent. This narrative account will set the stage for Chapter Four, in which I analyze the transformations that occurred during the process of going public with our learning.

This analysis starts from the assumption that teaching practice includes forming and reforming conceptual frameworks (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). In our group sessions, we collectively interpreted the "texts of teaching," (Lytle, 2006) which included key concepts, problems of practice, artifacts of practice, and stories that were written and told. This analysis also incorporates a feminist perspective in that it reveals how feelings

and multiple perspectives (Richardson, 1997) amplified our learning. Analyzing how we read the texts of teaching through feminist perspectives allows us to see how these sessions provided a structure for the teachers to do transformative work.

“Our Spin” on Descriptive Review

The Descriptive Review Processes (Carini, 2000; 2001; 2002) were developed by Patricia Carini and her colleagues in the Prospect School in Bennington, Vermont. They are a set of processes for groups of parents and teachers to look closely at students and their work in order to arrive at a way of viewing children as complex and changing individuals. While these processes have always offered an alternative to the “assessment frame” (Carini, 2001) that is so common in schools, they have gained increased urgency in these times of increased standardization. The Descriptive Review Processes are a highly structured form of “oral inquiry” (Himley, 1991) in which the group commits to responding to an object of focus by following a set of rounds. These processes also involve specific roles. There is a “presenting teacher” who presents something related to her practice, such as a student, an artifact, a problem, or a classroom environment, and also a “chair,” whose role it is to summarize each round and be sure that the group follows the processes. Descriptive Reviews often have a focusing question. Rounds usually include reading work out loud in different voices, taking turns paraphrasing segments, sharing general impressions, and asking questions.

The processes are slow and methodical, but they are meant to open up particular ways of looking at children and new ways of thinking about schools. They are based on the assumption that looking at one child closely and systematically with other people allows us to see all children differently. They allow teachers to develop a “practice” of looking at children in terms of their strengths, which is often not the habitual way of looking at students in schools. Carini (2001) notes that since teachers can sometimes become “stuck in a way of thinking that isn’t productive or perhaps even really clear to themselves,” (p. 5) doing a Descriptive Review can *unfreeze* them, “allowing them to see the child or situation from many points of view, to have new ideas and images to work with, to flesh out new meanings, to imagine possibilities – and so to get the teaching going again” (Carini, 2002, p. 5). These processes have at their heart keeping the *humanness* of teachers and students ever at the forefront of our minds when thinking about education and schools.

While “Descriptive Review of the Child” is the most common process used by groups of teachers and parents, “Our Spin” on these processes drew from some of the variations such as: *Descriptive Review of an Issue* (Carini, 2002) and *Descriptive Review of Teaching as a ‘Work’ and ‘Art Form’* (Carini, 2002). In our group, each teacher presented an issue, question, and artifact of teaching. The artifacts of practice that we viewed included collections of student work, an audio recording of a conversation, and an email exchange between two teachers. One of the teachers called this focus on teaching problems rather than student-centered problems “our spin on Descriptive Review.”

In our group, I took on the role of “chair” for every meeting. I met with each teacher prior to the group’s meeting and, together, we decided on the focusing question, the kind of context the teacher would give, the artifact we would examine together, and the set of rounds. For example, when it was Joel’s turn to present on his inquiry related to community, he shared with me that, while community is an important part of his philosophy, he hasn’t been thinking about it very much recently and wondered how he was building community in his classroom without realizing it. He decided that his focusing questions would be: *How can I build community through reflective practice? How is community being built when it is and isn’t explicit? When it’s not explicit, what’s going on in terms of community in this assignment?* We decided that he would share some examples of student work from the beginning of the year, when *community* was an explicit goal, along with more recent examples, when it wasn’t as explicit of a goal. Joel and I came up with the following rounds:

- 1 Reflection on a word: goals (other possibilities discussed: community, reflection, purpose)
- 2 Joel spends 15 minutes describing the two activities: One that he designed with *community* in mind and the other one not, and sharing his questions and the student work.
- 3 General impressions/what stands out (two rounds)
- 4 Questions (two rounds)
- 5 Others write a responsive/related story from their own classrooms and share
- 6 Open conversation, reflection on the process

This example of Joel’s review is meant to provide a window into the structure that we put into place for one of the Reviews. Other presentations included reading work aloud in multiple voices, selecting smaller segments to focus on together, paraphrasing, and addressing the focusing question.

While the Descriptive Review Process was the central activity of our meetings in the fall, by *Looking Closely at Practice*, I refer to the entire process we underwent during those meetings. The teachers chose topics of interest from their classrooms and carved out related questions they could explore over time. We held workshops around these questions during the first two fall meetings, with the teachers presenting their topics and getting feedback from the others. Below is a brief vignette from one of our workshop sessions:

It is the first meeting of the fall and the teachers and I have gathered at my apartment on a Saturday morning. In preparation for this meeting, the teachers have written questions on a group's shared Google document. I start by asking the teachers to do some reflective writing by posing the following question: What is the heart of what you want to understand? The teachers write in silence for a few minutes, then go around and share. Each teacher shares his or her question, with responses from the others which come in the form of questions, suggestions, and new ways of framing the issue.

Lucy starts, saying that she's interested in self-labels and self-identities versus those ascribed by the outside. She discusses a theory of Fanon regarding the self, home, and society (and draws a diagram), noting that she thinks that students are navigating the school and home contexts.

The other members of the group ask questions and make suggestions: Mary notes Lucy's word choice, "measurable change" and "wonders about that." Lucy responds that she wants students to have a "metacognitive understanding of identity." Becca suggests that perhaps students come in already aware of identity and then it's more about what to do about it. I agree, noting that it's also a

question of agency – where are the possibilities for students to act on their world and create their identities?

After two meetings that took on this work-shopping format, each teacher developed and explored a question. Five subsequent meetings in the fall took the format of Descriptive Review sessions, in which the teachers took turns presenting some aspect of their work to the group and having the group engage in Descriptive Review¹. Before each meeting, the presenting teacher met with me to plan how to present her or his artifact to the group. Each meeting included opening check-ins, the teacher’s presentation of the issue, descriptive rounds (which included reflection on a word, general impressions, questions, paraphrasing, and occasionally the writing and sharing of stories on a theme). The meetings ended with debriefing of the process and approximately thirty minutes of free-flowing conversation, which were usually focused on the topic of the review. This table shows the teachers’ questions, the key concept they selected for collective reflection, and the artifact from practice that they used.

TABLE 3: Overview of Teachers’ Descriptive Review Sessions

Teacher	Question	Key Concept	Artifact
Lucy	What can we learn about students’ identity and linguistic awareness? How can we change our approach to language at my school and learn more about how students are navigating different language spheres?	language	audio-recording of alumni conversation about the word “jawn”

¹ There were two fall meetings that did not take on this structure. In one of the meetings, I conducted a collaborative analysis session based on my ongoing analysis of the group’s work. In the other meeting, we changed our plan in order to collectively process a recent traumatic event that occurred in Joel’s classroom.

Becca	How are students experiencing the discussion? How are they approaching the written reflection?	discuss	student written reflections after a class discussion
Joel	How can I build community through reflective practice? How is community being built when it is and isn't explicit? When it's not explicit, what's going on in terms of community in this assignment?	goals	student work from two different points during the year
Melissa	How are students taking up these two questions differently (the one done in class, the one done at home)? What is the connection/relationship between science and language arts?	homework	homework and class work of several students
Mary	How do you keep your passion, do your best, and care for yourself too?	stuck	email exchange with a colleague

The questions in this table represent the teachers' questions at one moment in time.

While the questions themselves changed over the course of the fall, for the most part, the topics remained the same (You will read about how Mary's topic changed in Chapter Five). The questions and topics in this table reveal a range of approaches to looking at practice. Joel, for example, wanted to think about how goals work in his practice. He inquired into how the idea of *community* was working in his classroom when it is and is not an intentional teaching goal of his. Lucy wanted to learn about students' experiences of language and identity for the purposes of changing her practice on a classroom and a school level. Becca noticed some puzzling trends in the reflection sheets that her students completed after a class discussion that raised questions that she wanted to explore in the group – why, for example, didn't the written reflections include very much about the topics that got the most time in the discussion? Melissa was simultaneously trying to understand how students are experiencing homework in her classroom, while

also trying to understand her role as a language arts teacher and how it related to other subjects. She wanted to justify her inclusion of science themes to her administrators, who draw tight distinctions between the subject areas. Mary's question was driven by her own feeling of "stuckness" in her practice. Through her work in the study group, she had come to realize that she has been feeling stuck with one of the major aspects of her work – supporting students through the process of senior projects and acting as de facto gatekeeper for this project, which was a graduation requirement. With this collection of questions, we see how the teachers used the space of the study group to make changes on multiple levels – individual, classroom, and school. They reveal a combination of foci on teachers and students, as well as a range of different artifacts of teaching that became relevant, including artifacts that allowed for a view of practice across time and student. In the section that follows, I will show how the space created a context for the teachers to explore these questions from a stance of noticing and wondering and through multiple perspectives.

The Space of Group During *Looking Closely at Practice*

My analysis of our practices during this phase reveals that this space was one in which participants adopted a stance of noticing and wondering; questioned assumptions; and saw practice from the perspective of students and other teachers.

Noticing and Wondering

The general impressions, questions, and paraphrasing rounds of the Descriptive Review Processes prompt a stance of noticing and wondering among the teachers. During these

rounds, the words *noticed*, *stands out*, and *wonder* were prevalent. The round of “general impressions” in which I prompted the group with the question “What stands out?” led the group to notice specific details, such as the way a student uses a particular word or the language a teacher uses to frame an issue. The “questions round” prompted teachers to ask the focal teacher questions from a place of genuine curiosity.

During these rounds, the teachers noticed details about students, their practice, and themselves. When Lucy presented the conversation among the alumni at her school about the word “jawn,” Becca made the following observation about the students, which I recorded in my field notes:

Becca noted that their knowledge was extensive and complex. It made her really see how language is intuitive, not learned. She wondered, then, when it is academically learned, what is happening? It’s “interesting to me.” The nuances, they’re very small and sophisticated.

For Becca, this noticing led her to a new insight about language and prompted her to wonder about how people learn language. The tone of her comment is one of interest and curiosity. Many times, “noticings” led to “wonderings,” as the details were followed by an expression of curiosity or a question. For example, Mary noticed that the students in Lucy’s alumni conversation said there were no restrictions on the word “jawn,” but then said it depended on context. This noticing led Mary to then wonder, more broadly, how students viewed the rules of language. The turn-taking nature of these rounds allowed each comment to stand on its own, without any pressure to come to a defined conclusion.

In addition to noticing details about students, the teachers noticed aspects of each other's practice. During the general impressions round that focused on Joel, the teachers reflected Joel's practice back to him. Lucy noticed that there were more organized units, noting that she remembered it was a goal for him earlier in the year, and Mary called his question "really reflective." These comments focused on Joel's strengths and progress as a teacher, allowing him to see himself through other people's eyes and in the context of his own trajectory.

Through these rounds, the teachers also noticed new things about their own practice. When recounting a video that she showed her students about wolverines, Melissa said that she noticed that it included a lot of similes and metaphors, before wondering how this video may have been experienced by her students. Upon re-reading her students' reflections, Becca realized that there were moments of "beautiful writing," where it really sounded like the student, but other times when it didn't seem to reflect the students' voice. This noticing prompted her to question how she was "rolling this out" to the students.

During the "questioning round," the wondering was turned towards the focal teacher. The questioning round prompted the teachers to take a wondering stance towards each other, as the focal teacher was now positioned as the only knower in the room. The following is a list of questions that the group asked Joel during the questioning round:

- How do you define community? Is it like this (shows non-moving fist) or like this (shows movement towards something). Basically, I'm asking if it's a noun or "a process."

- You said that in writing workshop, some students were into it and others weren't. Does that vary by class?
- And are there any times or places in your experience that you've experienced community in a way you would describe as near ideal, that consciously or subconsciously, you believe is informing your idea about community?

The questioning round allowed the teachers to see their practice within differing sets of relationships between ideas and with different amounts of context. For example, these questions allowed Joel to see his practice in relationship to his own definition of community, his autobiography, and across classes. These rounds took on characteristics of a *Clarness Committee* (Palmer, 1999) as the teachers asked the focal teacher questions to which they could not possibly know the answer. The stance of noticing and wondering allowed the teachers to view students and practice with a stance of openness and view students as complex individuals. The following section reveals how viewing practice through multiple perspectives supported a stance of empathy and the questioning of assumptions.

Viewing Practice Through Multiple Perspectives

In addition to fostering a stance of noticing and wondering about students, practice, and classrooms, *Looking Closely at Practice* also allowed the teachers to access the multiple perspectives of others. The Descriptive Processes create the situation where one object of focus, whether it be an issue, a piece of work, an artifact, or a word, is held still and the group brings their multiple views to collectively describe it. In this section, I will make visible some of the ways that the multiple perspectives facilitated by the Descriptive

Processes allowed the teachers to read practice empathetically and question their assumptions.

Looking closely at practice allowed the teachers to see it from the perspective of students. The slowing down and close looking, along with the rounds that included “what stands out” and “questions” moved the teachers into a curious, questioning mode and resisted certainty. The close noticing of the language that students used allowed us to wonder how they were interpreting practice. This theme was most prevalent during the “reflection on a word” component and the “open discussion” after the reviews. The reflection on a word round allowed us to share our associations with a key concept – discuss, goal, homework, language, stuck. We wrote down our free associations with these words that were based on our own autobiographies. Since this round came early-on in the process, it immediately personalized the practice, forcing us to *put ourselves in* to the room. These words have feelings and memories associated with them. Some examples are the warm feeling of having a discussion with family and the cold feeling of being silenced during a discussion. This round set the stage for us to connect in a new way to the practice that was about to be presented.

The empathetic stance came back into the conversation at the end as well. When I analyzed the field notes, I was interested to see that the free conversations at the end included many instances when the teachers and I spoke from our own personal experiences to discuss the topic at hand. For example, after Lucy’s presentation on

language, the teachers drew from their own experiences to understand how language was working in the multiple contexts of their lives, past and present.

In addition to fostering empathetic readings of classroom situations, the Descriptive Review sessions, allowed for each participant to become aware of the uniqueness of his or her perspective or, *see how they see*. This phenomenon happened in at least two tangible ways during the descriptive review sessions. When Becca had the group reflect on the word “discuss,” she heard Lucy read her list, which included “listen, silence, waiting for someone to finish, comfortable, beautiful comfort in the silence sometimes.” After hearing this reflection, Becca immediately broke from the process to say, somewhat sheepishly and with fascination, that her reflection was “so different.” She then went on to read her own, which included the ideas of controversy, disagreement and debates.” As the conversation went on, Becca came to realize that her images of what makes a “good discussion,” include an element of debate, where two sides are trying to convince each other of their points. This image of a “good discussion,” she realized, came from her memory of conversations at the dinner table growing up, where the topic was often politics and it was important to defend a perspective and be “right.”

The other way that this process helped the teacher question assumptions is that it allowed multiple people to bring their own experiences to practice. For example, during the questioning round, Becca had the chance to experience her practice through the perspectives of Lucy and Mary. Lucy asks about the two students that didn’t talk. She wonders, “Why?” Becca responded that she had different theories for each one’s

reasons. One is confidence; the other is that she doesn't think the discussions matter.

Mary then raises the issue of what counts as participation, asking if they are engaged with listening or note taking. She follows up with: "That was totally me in high school."

With this short exchange, Becca has a chance to see her practice through the eyes of Lucy and Mary. Lucy, presumably speaking from the position of teacher, raises a question, about the silent students, forcing Becca to contend with this question. Mary, then, grounds her comment in her own experiences as a student, allowing Becca to view her practice through the eyes of a quiet student.

Coming into contact with the perspectives of others around a shared topic of focus allowed the teachers to see the uniqueness of their own views or how their pasts may be unconsciously shaping their practice. During the round of questions for Joel's session, I asked him if there were any times in his life when he experienced community in a way that was "near ideal" that may be shaping his view of community. His answer included several adult learning communities, at which point Mary responded by saying "It stands out to me that all of those things you described are not "classroom communities" - what features can be transferred and which ones can't?" With this comment, Joel was able to then reflect on how he could make his classroom a space where "students want to be."

Summary: Creating a Context for Transformative Learning Through *Looking Closely at Practice*

The second part of this chapter focused on how *Looking Closely at Practice* broke down habitual distinctions between *student* and *teacher* and allowed us to imagine practice

from a more universal human perspective. It allowed the teachers a chance to see practice from the perspective of a student, foster an empathetic stance, recognize the uniqueness of their own perspective, and question their assumptions. It left the teachers with new questions, a sense of new possibilities, and a chance to see how other teachers and individual students might experience practice. Close looking at practice also encouraged a wondering stance about students, classrooms, and ideas, allowing the group to understand students and concepts in more complex ways. All of these modes of thinking led us to break down barriers between *teacher* and *student* and view the literacy classroom from a human perspective.

Conclusion

This chapter focused on the space of learning in the study group. I drew on frameworks from the emancipatory, feminist, and practitioner inquiry traditions to analyze the learning space that we created through our early meetings and through our commitment to looking closely and systematically at practice during a series of meetings in the fall of 2011. I showed how, during the early meetings, the group established a culture through spontaneous and planned conversations, as well as through facilitation practices. I then showed how, during the fall meetings, the group combined teacher inquiry questions with Descriptive Processes developed by Patricia Carini at the Prospect School (Carini, 2000; 2001; 2002) to look at practice closely and systematically. In the first part of this chapter, I make the argument that the group culture was shaped by the participants through spontaneous and planned conversations and through facilitation. This analysis suggests that transformative learning communities are characterized by multiple purposes that are

related: The need for support, the hope for change, and the desire for community. In the second part of this chapter, I make the case that closely and systemically looking at teaching is a *humanizing practice* (Campano, 2009) in that it fosters a stance of curiosity, evokes a sense of empathy, and forces participants to contend with multiple perspectives. These sections work together to make the argument that creating a space for transformative learning takes time and intention and it occurs in planned and spontaneous ways.

CHAPTER 4: Going Public

Introduction

In February of 2011, the study group gave a presentation during Practitioner Inquiry Day at the Ethnography in Education Research Forum, a local conference that attracts a broad audience of K-12 and university-based practitioner researchers from around the country. This presentation marked the culmination of the group's work together and was the only time that the group "went public." In this chapter, I focus on the learning that occurred for the teachers through the process of going public. I draw on frameworks from emancipatory research and feminist writing practices to conceptualize going public as a collaborative process and political act. I analyze the process of going public in three ways. First, I present a narrative account of the meetings leading up to the conference to show how the process of going public prompted *changes in the group*. Next, I draw on two of the teachers' narratives and the responses of the group in order to show how the process of going public provided opportunities for *re-reading*. Finally, I present the results of a thematic analysis of the meetings leading up to the conference to show how going public provoked *theorizing*. Together, these analyses make the case that the practices embedded within the process of going public were transformative in that they altered the relationships in and purposes of the group and allowed the teachers to see themselves and their practice in new ways.

Going Public

Making local knowledge public is a central component of the practitioner inquiry movement (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). As local groups make their knowledge public, they connect with other professionals around shared interests and agendas. They are also able to see their own work within new constellations of ideas. For teachers, making local knowledge public opens up new identities, such as writer, author, researcher, activist, and presenter, which allow them to see themselves within new communities. In addition to creating change within individuals, the process of going public also changes groups (Meyer, 1998; Moss, Highberg, & Nicholas, 2004; Stokes, 2001), as members take on new roles and form new relationships both within and outside of the group.

While theory within the practitioner inquiry movement suggests that going public offers transformative possibilities for teachers and communities, and that it is essential to keeping the movement alive, up-close accounts of groups doing this work are rare. A notable exception is Meyer's (1998) account of how his school-based study group changed from a "researcher-inquiry support group" to a "researcher-inquiry-writer support group" as they pursued the project of co-writing a book. He documented some of the challenges that this process created, such as the changed group dynamics when some group members decided not to write, the changed view of writing from process to product, and the labor-intensive nature of writing for a public audience. However, he also documented the possibilities of collaborative writing:

The teachers were getting a lot out of the writing, whether it was their own or another member's: it taught them about themselves, it was affecting their relationship with each other and their understanding of children, and it was shaping curriculum decisions and enactment. It helped them compose themselves and helped make sense of the disruption that they felt within, among, and beyond the group, and it did the same things for me (Meyer, p. 159).

Meyer's analysis suggests that the process of writing for a public audience not only offers opportunities for the teachers to take on new roles outside of the classroom, but that it also affects their teaching within it. He also suggests that the process of writing for a public audience may allow teachers to make sense of their struggles, both by writing about them and seeing them from different perspectives. Finally, Meyer's account provides a window into the challenges and possibilities of a group writing for a public audience. In this chapter, I focus on the study group's collaborative writing processes as we prepared to take action and go public.

Going Public as Collaborative Writing

Since this chapter depicts the process that the group underwent in co-writing a group presentation, I draw on the notion of writing as a collaborative process. Following Richardson (1997), I define writing broadly, to include "the integration of academic interests, social concerns, emotional needs, and spiritual connectedness" (p. 5). With this broad definition, texts become a way of "making sense of and changing our lives" (p. 5). Feminist perspectives on writing emphasize the importance of writing as a process, rather than a product, and draw attention to the collaborative spaces in which writing is created, whether co-authored (Ede & Lundsford, 1990) or authored by individuals (Moss, Highberg, & Nicholas, 2004; Richardson, 1997). Writing occurs within particular

political and social contexts and, though rarely discussed, the actual labor of writing is a social process that occurs across time and locations. Writing shapes and is shaped by the writer. To make the activities that happen around the writing visible, I draw on Richardson's (1997) concept of "writing stories," which are the stories that occur *around* the writing. For this analysis, I focus on the writing stories that surround the text of the conference presentation.

Going Public as Taking Action

Going public is a form of action that assumes that knowledge generated in local contexts can be useful in other contexts (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). In PAR, *action* includes responding in "humanizing and authentic ways" (McIntyre, 2007, p. 47) to issues of concern. This process serves to "concretize local knowledge" (McIntyre, 2007, p. 47) for the purpose of making change. PAR projects start with participants looking inward to "get a handle on the ways their knowledge shapes their sense of identity and agency" (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005) and reflecting on how this knowledge affects their current actions. In this way, PAR projects give participants the chance to change "*practices* themselves, *understandings* of these practices, and *situations* in which they live and work" (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005, p. 565 emphasis in original). While the teachers in the study group were taking action in the form of changing their practice, the public presentation was the one form of collective action that the teachers took *as a group*.

Going Public in the Group

I analyzed the meetings leading up to the group's public presentation, the presentation

itself, the written narratives that the teachers shared during the presentation, and the teachers' reflections after the presentation with the following questions: *What transformative learning occurred during the process of going public?* In this section, I provide an overview of the process that the group underwent as we prepared to present at the conference. Table 4 gives an overview of the group's final meetings.

Table 4: Overview of the *Going Public* Meetings

Mtg.	Location	Attendees/ leaders	Format	Purpose and Activities
21	Lucy's house	Everyone/ Melissa, Lucy	Brainstorming; Planning	Lucy and Melissa facilitated a meeting in which the teachers shared their conference experiences and brainstormed format ideas. There was a discussion of whether to focus on the group's processes or the learning that came out of the group. The group decided to write narratives to the prompt "document the life of your question" and to weave them together in a "threaded narrative."
22	University	Everyone	Writing Group; Sharing and Response	Each teacher read his or her "life of the question" narrative out loud and the others responded. The group then thought about the most important ideas that their narratives, as a set, showed.
23	University	Lucy, Melissa, Kathleen	Working Meeting	Lucy and Melissa "threaded" the narratives together to form a dramatic rendering of all of the "life of the question" narratives.
24	Kathleen's Apartment	Everyone/ Lucy Melissa	Rehearsal	The group met to rehearse the threaded narrative and finalize the plan for the presentation. There was disagreement about the length of the dramatic reading segment and also whether or not the group would provide written scripts. The group decided on how to frame the dramatic reading.
25	Conference	Everyone	Presentation	The group presented at the conference to an audience of about 30 people, which included university-based researchers, teachers, and graduate students. The audience asked questions about the impact the group had on relationships with students, how it influenced practice, and what it was like to learn from other teachers.

This table illustrates how the process of going public put our group in new physical spaces and in new formations as a group. Up until this point, all of our meetings were either at the university or at my apartment. During the last several meetings, our group met in two new places – Lucy’s house and at the conference itself. While there had been talk of the group meeting at someone else’s home before this process, it was around the time when I asked other group members to take on the leadership role for going public that Lucy offered to host a meeting. The table also outlines our shifting purposes. Our primary purpose was no longer to explore and learn from the teachers’ inquiry questions. Rather, we were organized around a different, collaborative goal: to create a public presentation that would teach others about our group’s process and the learning about adolescent literacy education that came out of it. To support this new purpose, this table shows the new *forms* that our group took. During the process of going public, our discussions took on more goal-oriented formats, such as brainstorming, planning, writing, and rehearsing. It was with a heightened awareness that change was happening during this phase of our group, as well as the belief that the process of collective action is an essential, yet under-theorized aspect of the teacher inquiry movement, that I ask: What kind of new learning occurred during this process for the teachers? What kinds of changes happened in the group? How might our public action have changed others? The remainder of this chapter engages these questions in three sections, *changes in the group*, *re-reading*, and *getting to the core*, each of which offers a different window into the transformative learning that occurred through the process of going public.

Changes in the Group

In this section, I present a narrative account of the group over the course of the four meetings prior to the public presentation and the presentation itself. I choose a narrative to present this analysis because it shows how the group and the roles of those within it changed over time. Throughout this narrative account, I reveal how the going public process provoked two different kinds of changes in the group – *new roles within the group* and *new group identities*. After presenting the narrative account, I analyze it through these two lenses.

The Process of Going Public: A Narrative Account

Preparations for Going Public. In October, I submitted a conference presentation proposal. While I solicited feedback from the teachers, and some of them gave small suggestions, the proposal was authored by me. Although I had wanted the group's process to be collaborative, I also knew that co-writing is laborious, and we were just beginning to incorporate our new structure of closely looking at practice using the descriptive processes. During the process of writing and submitting the proposal, it was important to me that the teachers felt invested in this presentation and that it would ultimately be based on what the teachers wanted to do. Therefore, around the time I submitted the proposal, I asked if two teachers would volunteer to take leadership roles by facilitating the meetings leading up to the presentation. Lucy and Melissa volunteered, and when it came time to prepare for the conference, they stepped into the facilitation role.

Presentation Conceptualization. When the time came to prepare for the presentation, Lucy and Melissa facilitated a meeting to conceptualize and plan it. This meeting occurred at Lucy's house, and was the only meeting that was at one of the teachers' homes. Group members shared their experiences at conferences and discussed how our work connected to the conference theme. During this meeting, the teachers took on the role of teacher educators, expressing their desire to engage the audience in meaningful ways and to show a window into the group's process. There was much dialogue about whether the presentation should show the content or process of the group, with several of the teachers believing that it was important that the audience gain an understanding of our unique processes for working together. They wanted the audience to get "a picture of the kind of community we've created," our "innovative" approach to descriptive review, the "way different kind of professional development that we're doing." I, however, felt that the teachers had something to offer the field by sharing the *content* of their learning. When Mary reminded the group that the theme of the proposal was related to adolescent literacy education and shared that reading the proposal had prompted her to re-read her experience in the group, I stepped in to recommend that the teachers reflect on what their current questions are and how their questions had changed over time. Lucy, with the input of others, suggested that each person "document the life of your question" and that we thread the narratives together to create a dramatic reading. The plan after that meeting was for each group member to write a narrative, using whatever form felt best, that they would share at the next meeting.

Sharing and Response to Individual Narratives. At this meeting, the group took on the format of a writing group, with each person reading his or her narrative aloud and the others responding. At the beginning of this meeting Lucy set the agenda, for each teacher to share her or his inquiry “in their own voice” and begin to notice themes for the purpose of threading the narratives together. She opened by saying, “Before we share, how are we feeling? I feel like we had a hard time separating this from the logistical planning for the presentation.” She asked how the group felt about holding off on the decision between focusing on content or process. Joel said “that’s fine” and Becca noted that it was necessary. And then Joel said “Yeah, because I think we’re learning a lot from just doing this.”

After each teacher read her or his narrative aloud, other group members noticed what parts stood out; posed questions to the reader; distilled major insights from the narratives as a set; responded to the content of the narratives by asking questions and making observations about individual students; and made connections to their own practice. There was an effort to come up with commonalities across the texts while also paying attention to the details of each teacher’s work. After everyone had shared, there was time to write for a few minutes about cross-cutting themes, and then each person shared their themes.

After the collective sharing of narratives, there was a sense that the teachers’ inquiries themselves would be valuable to share with others in the field. Joel, who had previously

felt that the presentation should focus on the *process* that the group underwent, had a change of heart after the sharing of narratives. He said:

After this discussion... it would be a shame not to show off what we've talked about and the depth that we've gone into, talking about these themes and what we've discovered through our process. It would be powerful for others to see what we do.

With this comment, there's a sense that Joel is coming to awareness of the depth of knowledge that the group generated and realizing that they have something to offer the field.

Threading the Narratives. Each teacher emailed revised versions of their narratives to the group, and Melissa, Lucy, and I met as a subcommittee to "thread" the narratives together. Although I attended that meeting, I contributed little to the threading work, which was done primarily by Lucy and Melissa, who became immediately engaged in the project of coming up with a unified, threaded, dramatic narrative. They then emailed the threaded narrative, which had been translated to the form of a script, to the group.

Presentation Rehearsal. During this meeting, which occurred at my apartment on a Friday evening, the teachers rehearsed and timed the narrative by reading it out loud. The group discussed how to structure the overall presentation, which raised many different kinds of questions (Can we assume the audience members have all been teachers? Is the script too long? Do we need to provide lots of framing or just present the stories? How can we engage the audience? Do we need visuals?). The group members put themselves in the position of the audience at this point to try to imagine

what kind of experiences would be most generative. During this discussion, there was a notable instance of explicit disagreement in which it became apparent that group members had different assumptions about what the presentation would be like. Joel had assumed that the audience would have written copies of the transcript of the dramatic reading, while others had assumed that they would not. He was also concerned about time – he was surprised that we would ask the audience to listen to talking for thirty or more minutes without a break. Mary and Becca responded with strong feelings that they did *not* want the written versions of their inquiries to be in the hands of the audience. Eventually, other group members made the case to Joel that this reading would be more like theater than traditional presentation and, therefore, the longer length and lack of a visual aid would be okay. We came up with a structure for the presentation, and the teachers each prepared and rehearsed their individual introductions. We talked about a handout and Melissa volunteered to prepare it. The group also decided that the best role for me would be “glue” in that I could hold the presentation together and share common themes across the narratives. It was during this meeting that the teachers solidified the importance of stories to their work. They decided that they wanted to frame the entire presentation with the centrality of stories to the group’s work and invite audience members to write about a “literacy education moment that’s kept you up at night.” As I wrote out what I would say, the teachers peppered me with a list of possible reasons that a story might keep a person up - “memorable, meaningful, puzzling, blows-your-mind, haunting, paradoxical, joyous, victorious, defeating, and painful.” There was a sense of energy as the group added more and more dramatic adjectives that called attention to the range of emotions associated with the work of teaching English/Language Arts.

Ethnography Forum Presentation. I framed the presentation by providing some context about the group and sharing the concept of “literacy education stories that keep you up at night.” The presentation consisted of a written reflection by the audience, group member introductions, a dramatic reading, and a question and answer period. During the dramatic reading of the threaded narrative, the teachers stood around the room, and there was a powerful aesthetic effect and range of emotions evoked during the reading (See Appendix F for a script of the threaded narrative). The audience, which was made up of about 30 practitioners/researchers in different roles and positions, sat in rapt attention and there was a period of silence after the reading was finished. Audience members then asked questions about the process of the study group, the value of looking closely at someone else’s practice, and what work this collaboration would do in the world. Specifically, there were questions about how this work would impact others in the teachers’ schools; how it influenced their relationships with students; and how I would communicate this vision of teacher-intellectuals through university-based research. In addition to questions, audience members shared insights, such as the idea of teachers-as-translators, trickle-down inquiry, the expansion of “intellectual” to include compassion, and the role of silence in the presentation itself.

New Roles Within Group

During the process of going public, people took on new roles and relationships within the group. Melissa and Lucy took up the facilitation role and group members other than me were, for the first time, emailing the group for logistics, creating agendas, and preparing materials. Additionally, the teachers took on roles as presenters and teacher educators.

Although group members expressed that they did *not* want to position themselves as experts, there was agreement that the group had something to offer by sharing their stories, learning trajectories, and insights and by sharing them in this interwoven form. During the presentation itself, the teachers took on new roles and re-saw each other in new ways. In her interview, Lucy reflected on the experience of presenting by sharing a response she had when she saw the other teachers in the group in front of the audience. She shared that one of the group members made a comment that prompted her to realize that she was seeing the other teachers' "performer selves." She said, "I was listening to other people tell their stories, as they answered the audience's questions, I was thinking 'Is that who they are as a teacher?' ... I hadn't been privy to our performer selves. This comment reveals how the teachers were seeing each other in new contexts and in new roles.

Solidifying Group Identity

In addition to taking on new roles and identities *within* the group, the process of going public also solidified the identity of the group itself. In the meetings leading up to the conference presentation, the teachers had to come to consensus about what the group had to offer and what it stood for. There was also collective agreement that the group had something to offer in terms of its approach to teacher learning and later, the group came to see itself as having knowledge to share about adolescent literacy education. While the group members agreed on the essence of the ideas that they wanted to convey, the way of conveying them was a source of the group's first overt conflict that needed to be resolved. While the teachers disagreed about ideas throughout the course of the group's

work, in the context of preparing for a unified presentation, this conflict needed to be addressed directly and resolved.

During the question-answer period with the audience, the teachers characterized the group aloud: Becca said that each week someone was able to have their “burning question” considered by the group, and Joel said that food was really helpful, as was connecting with others around shared interests. He told the audience that he sees students in more complex ways than he did before. Lucy compared the group to her experience supporting other people with their writing, noting that, like when she’s stuck in her own writing, it’s sometimes nice to “put my question away,” rest, and focus on another person’s question. It “unsticks” her sometimes, she said, to think about another person’s issue. Melissa shared that she felt the opposite, that her classroom was always in the back of her mind. Becca, then, compared the group to “free therapy,” saying that she was able to share the “intense, not-great things that happened [in her classroom].”

Through this process, the teachers also defined the essence of the group’s methodology by identifying *stories from practice* as the element they wanted to focus on most primarily in their presentation. During one of the preparation meetings, Becca shared that she felt we needed to highlight the “eternal teacher feeling which is sometimes defeatist and sometimes positive. What we learn from our mistakes and failures.” Mary added, “troubling moments, failures, whatever we want to call them, what we learn from those moments.” During the presentation, stories were prevalent throughout the threaded narrative, as the teachers told these stories from their positions around the room, often

punctuated with dramatic pauses. After the presentation, an audience member responded that the “geography of the presentation, with everyone around the room” was connected and free-flowing and highlighted the multiple perspectives. He said that he circled the word “translation wall” in his notes and then said, “That’s indicative of what we’re doing, translating.” He said he thought that this idea of translation trickled down to students and he called it “breathtaking.” This first part of this comment is representative of the way many audience members shared that the dramatic reading had an aesthetic effect. People commented on how the effect of the pauses, the multiple voices, and the dramatic nature of the stories impacted them emotionally. The second part of this comment, where the person offers the insight about the word “translation,” suggests that the presentation offered others new frameworks and concepts for viewing their practice. Another audience member later shared with me that, when Mary shared about how her identity was so strongly organized around being a “good student,” it led her to wonder, “Is that true for me too?” These comments suggest ways that, through their public presentation, the teachers were transforming other practitioners’ views of themselves and their practice by prompting them to use new metaphors and ask themselves new questions about themselves as teachers.

As this section shows, the process of going public created the context for new roles within the group; new group identities; and solidified the essence of the group itself. Out of this process, the group came to see itself as a supportive community where stories were central, and where they learned from each other’s struggles. Through the process, the teachers took on roles as leaders, facilitators, presenters, researchers, experts, and

members of a greater community of practitioner researchers. These new roles allowed them to see themselves and talk about their work in new ways and offer frameworks for others in the field.

Re-Reading

In addition to making changes in the group, the process of going public prompted multiple opportunities for re-reading. It gave the teachers chances to re-read their old writing, reflect on their practice, revisit moments from their classrooms, and re-consider how events that occurred within and outside of the study group may have influenced their work. These re-reading experiences allowed the teachers to see themselves and their practice in new ways. One central opportunity for re-reading was the “life of the question” narratives, which the teachers approached in different ways. Becca, Lucy, and Melissa used a series of classroom moments to illustrate their classroom struggles over time and the questions their struggles raised. Mary’s narrative focused on moments from the study group meetings that facilitated her own learning. Joel’s piece focused on his evolving questions about the idea of community, and how his learning over time has influenced how he saw the reality of possibilities for his classroom community. In this section, I draw on the narratives of two of the teachers, Lucy and Joel, to show how the process of going public prompted two different kinds of re-reading to occur: *Re-reading classroom moments* and *re-reading selves*.

Re-reading classroom moments

As discussed earlier, the group saw classroom selves as a central source of knowledge. The process of going public created a context for stories that had already been told to be re-read and re-told in new ways and for new purposes. In one of the meetings, the teachers shared their narratives, which were followed by a group response. Many of the stories in the narratives were ones that the teachers had already shared, heard, and collectively discussed. Even though the primary purpose for this meeting was to “establish common threads” in order to compose a dramatic reading, the teachers’ responses to each other’s narratives often focused on the details of the stories. They mined them for new meaning, wondered about students, raised new questions for the teacher who shared, noticed aspects of the classroom space that created the conditions for the moment to occur, and made connections to their own classrooms. In addition to the opportunity to re-read each story on its own, re-reading collections of classroom stories provided opportunities for the teachers to juxtapose stories in new ways, establish new relationships between stories, view stories in relationship to larger narratives, consider how particular stories shape the study group’s collective understanding, and realize the role of particular stories in individual teacher’s learning trajectories.

The following vignette is reconstructed from when Lucy shared her narrative, which included several detailed and emotionally-charged stories from her classroom that illustrated the complexity of the dynamics of language, race, power, and identity in her classroom, as well as the sometimes painful reality that there are no easy answers for teachers as they relate to students amidst these complexities. In the writing of her

narrative, Lucy revisited three stories and put them together to illustrate her evolving questions about language in her classroom. The episode includes one of the stories that Lucy tells, a story in which one of Lucy's female students stands up, goes to the chalkboard, and uses a visual to make an emphatic point about the word "jawn." While this story was one that Lucy had not previously shared in the group, she has included it in her narrative with another story that she did share – conversation with a male alumnus in which he shares the importance of the word "jawn" to him. In the meeting, she re-reads them again with the audience of the teachers, allowing her to see them again through the eyes of the other members of the group. The other teachers also have a chance to re-visit stories from Lucy's classroom, some new and some already told, and analyze the new relationships that Lucy has presented through her narrative. What follows is my own reconstruction of an episode from our meeting.

It is Lucy's turn to share her narrative. She tells the group that she has organized hers into four versions of her inquiry question, along with four moments that were triggered when she thought of the question. One of her stories is this:

As the students enter, I tell them it is circle day. Some celebrate and some groan. We put the chairs in a circle, and I write a word or phrase on the board, which serves as our focal point for the circle discussion. Today's word: jawn. This word plays a complicated role within my classroom. First, it's one of the first slang words that became an entry on our "Translation Wall" where students post words that other people might not understand based on locality, age, or other factors. Students translate these words into more formalized or "Mainstream" English. "Jawn" had been translated into a word to replace any noun. But I had noticed over the weeks since it made its way onto the wall, that the students never referred to a man or boy as a jawn. I mostly heard our male students use the term, and usually for a thing or a woman, but not a place or a man.

I called this circle day in hopes of addressing the layered dynamics within this word.

We began the conversation very objectively. Students shared their use of the word; one student from Oklahoma said she has yet to incorporate the word into her own vocabulary because it still sounds so “made up”. Keisha, from Brooklyn, said that she found this word to be incredibly offensive and refused to let men say it to her. I stopped and asked someone to reflect what Keisha had said. Shanika repeated Keisha’s idea and said that she fully agreed. I became excited at the conversation, and how quickly the students took it to the gender issue. The conversation grew heated as students agreed and disagreed about the use, when finally one quiet female stood and walked to the board.

She drew a diagram as the others continued to talk. When she was done, she got their attention and said, “Look. Here are two boxes: Box #1: the “jawn” box: you can put shoes in this box, a notebook, a sidewalk, a car, a house, a pile of shit, and a woman. Here’s Box #2: The things-you-can’t-call-“jawn” box: Men. MEN!! BOYS!!”, she yelled. Again, we are things. You treat us like things. You talk to us like things. We are not things!!”

The room was silent.

Lucy goes on to finish by sharing one more story, and then the group responds. Melissa responds aesthetically – “the section where the girl stands up? That’s powerful. That’s stunning.”

Becca raises a curiosity about the students’ experience of the event. She would love to know if three or four hours later, the boys in the room would have any remembrance of what had happened earlier in the day. Joel attends to the space: “Just designing or positioning students where something like that would happen. That’s not something you taught, but a context that you created where that was possible. That’s pretty amazing.” Melissa shares that, in her classroom, that would never happen.

Lucy responds by noting that she’s still curious – “Why did Keisha feel the need to go to the board and draw a box? Did she feel like they had to see a visual? That she couldn’t get her voice heard otherwise?” Lucy recalls her own feelings at the time. When Keisha said “pile of shit and woman,” she was thinking “Yes!” but didn’t say it.

I note the juxtaposition that Lucy leaves us with, since the story that follows is one that describes a male alumnus, Tyrek, who compellingly shares the deep positive meaning that the word “jawn” holds for him – from his perspective, it is a source of self-determination, an important territory marker that establishes a sense of community, and it’s a way for him to communicate ideas to other people within his community.

The responses to Lucy's narrative show how the teachers re-read her stories from various perspectives. They started by talking about their own and others' feelings. Melissa shares her own feelings about Lucy's text, calling it "stunning, powerful." Becca wondered how male students felt during the moment when Keisha ran out of the room and then later imagined how Tyrek must feel to be craving a word so much. These aesthetic, empathetic responses allowed us to connect with the moment. Lucy herself, then, wonders about the moment in her classroom from the perspective of the student – what made her feel a need to write on the board? Re-reading these stories by processing various peoples' feelings provides Lucy the chance to re-visit that emotional moment in her classroom with the support of her colleagues and with the acknowledgement that these stories carried emotion.

After some of these feelings were shared, the teachers start to make connections within and between the stories. Becca turns the attention to Lucy's inquiry question, and evokes Tyrek's response to the word "jawn" to remind herself and the group just how "complicated and layered" it is. At the end of the vignette, Joel and Becca work together to re-read Lucy's narrative in relation to ideas that the group has been discussing over time – the ways that students navigate multiple power-laden spheres of language and the skills required for such navigation.

This episode provides an example of how stories from the classroom were read in new contexts by the teachers – aesthetically, empathetically, from the perspective of various students, in relationship to the trajectory of the teacher, and in relationships to the collective group knowledge.

There is also evidence that the process of writing the narratives provided the teachers with a chance to re-visit events from earlier in the year. Before sharing her narrative, Becca shared with the group that, in preparing to write it, she had gone back to watch the video of her students' conversation that was the focus of her descriptive review session. When watching the video, she had noticed for the first time "the discussion before the discussion," in which she realized that certain boys wanted to be in the same group. Seeing this event then prompted her memory of the class before the discussion, which was an important piece of context that she did not originally share with the study group. Becca had already experienced this classroom moment several times, through her initial documentation and then again through the multiple perspectives of the group during her presentation at the descriptive review session. Writing her narrative offered yet another chance for Becca to re-see this one conversation again. Interestingly, this discussion did not even have a place in her final narrative that she read aloud to the group, a detail that highlights how the *writing process itself* provoked re-readings of practice that were invisible in the final product. Some curiosity must have compelled Becca to re-watch that video and, in the watching it, she re-saw new contextual elements that she hadn't seen before. The examples of Lucy and Becca reveal how the writing process provided a time to slow down, mine past experiences for new meaning, and gain an even deeper understanding of classroom moments.

Re-Reading Self

In addition to providing a chance for teachers to re-read moments from their classrooms, the process of going public also provided the teachers with a chance to see themselves in new ways. It provided a stopping place, a reflection point, a chance to take stock of where they had been and where they were headed, recounting the changes they had undergone over time. In addition to seeing themselves in relationship to their own professional journeys, the teachers also saw themselves in different relationships to ideas, students, colleagues, schools, and greater communities. In other words, the “self” was re-contextualized in new ways, both temporally and spatially.

The previous section drew from the primary example of Lucy to show how the process of going public provoked different kinds of re-readings of classroom moments. In this section, I draw on excerpts of Joel’s narrative and the group’s response to show how he used the written narrative as a chance to re-see his own learning during the course of his work in the group. I first present excerpts from Joel’s narrative itself before presenting some of the dialogue that came after.

Since the beginning of our study group, I was concerned with community at my school. Reflecting on my own positive educative experiences, I knew that I learned the most when I participated in a meaningful community. These were usually courses or extra curricular activities that were outside of the traditional classroom experience. As a writing tutor, a member of a small student-teaching cohort at Penn State, a member of a tight-knit group of ESL teachers in Korea, and as participant in the Philadelphia Writing Project I learned an incredible amount about myself and about teaching.

At the end of my first year of teaching at Overbrook, I had time to reflect on the many failures that I had as a first year teacher. I was overwhelmed, and suffered from emotional and intellectual exhaustion almost every day. I was a cultural

outsider in this urban school, even though it was so close to where I had grown up. I grew up in suburbs that existed just 10 minutes from this school. I couldn't comprehend how a different world could exist so close to my home.

Among the many failures that I had a chance to reflect on during the beginning of our study group was the lack of community in my classes.... Therefore, in the study group, my question began as, "What does it look like when my focus as a teacher is on developing a community of learners with high standards and expectations for themselves, each other, and me?" During my featured study group session, I realized that while community building was an explicit objective of my teaching early in the year, it had not been on the front of my mind now. During that session, I asked, "How is community being built in my classroom when it is and is not explicit?" When we had a chance to reflect on our question more recently, it had become, "How do I implicitly and explicitly build community in my classrooms that values high standards for learning, respect for each other, and has inquiry and social justice at its core?"

This last version of my question focuses my inquiry in a more nuanced way and includes my concerns for integrating social justice into my curriculum. Additional questions have surfaced during the process of reflecting on community in my classroom. I've asked, "How do I position myself within this classroom community?" and "How am I positioning my students to be participants within this classroom community?" I want to know my students. I want to know how I can be a meaningful teacher for them.

Within his narrative, we see how Joel re-reads himself in various ways. He locates himself within different communities, including the study group and several other adult learning groups. He also sees himself in relationship to his own culture and describes the dissonance he feels based on his own autobiography as he navigates his home and school worlds. With these connections, Joel highlights multiple factors that might be at play for him as he tries to establish a classroom community.

In addition to locating himself in multiple spaces, he also locates himself temporally, in relationship to his own teaching trajectory. In his narrative, he writes about how he felt

overwhelmed at the beginning, had a chance to reflect, and then decided to focus on community in the study group, where his questions became more nuanced. He highlights various points of his inquiry along the way, noting how his thinking about community has changed over time – from one that assumed that there was no community, to one that assumed that there was a community, to one that asked about how he could create the kind of community he envisioned through his intentional efforts. The later versions of Joel’s questions, with the shift from “what does it look like” to “how can I,” marks a shift in his own agency. Joel uses his narrative to re-read his past and write himself into his own story in a more agentic position. His list of “more nuanced questions” at the end includes questions about positioning. “How do I position myself and students?” These questions suggest that Joel is trying to create a community where he and his students are aware of more options for participation. This re-reading of his own journey gives Joel agency over his own story as he presents it to a public audience. While he had experienced failures during his first year, he is able to position himself as learning from them, ever-changing, and realizing new things with each experience.

In addition to the re-reading that occurred in the writing of his narrative, Joel is able to re-read himself through the eyes of the group. The following vignette is reconstructed from the conversation following Joel’s narrative, and highlights how the group helped Joel engage in re-reading himself. In the response to Joel’s narrative, we see how the group actively drew on Joel’s multiple experiences – a recent moment in his classroom when he felt a spark of community during a lesson that he hadn’t planned very rigidly in which he allowed students to work on projects in a workshop format, the positive experience he

described from the previous night at a meeting at the literary club that he advises, his learning in his graduate courses, his written narrative, and his own philosophy - to make sense of this idea of community and consider how he can create genuine community in a mandatory classroom setting.

Mary recalls an issue that came up during Joel's Descriptive Review session, the idea that Joel's own vision of community comes from his experiences in self-selected groups. She continues to raise questions – as the group did at that previous meeting – about the transferability of this idea into compulsory school contexts.

Becca calls attention to Joel's idea of a “shared purpose” and wonders if the “task for teachers” is to work to create a shared purpose, asking: What would have to happen to create a shared purpose in a classroom setting?

Melissa notes that she was drawn to the exact same idea – the idea of shared purpose - and says “But that's not going to be found in a traditional classroom. If you want a classroom community of learners? You use that phrase too, “community of learners” – they have to be choosing.”

Becca offers a counterpoint to this stuck place that Melissa has presented, reminding Joel of the story that happened earlier in the meeting, in which he shared that he had had a very successful lesson in his classroom today when he let his students work independently on their work. “Maybe not everyone needs the same shared purpose every day”

She then offers an alternative image: “Maybe these folks are together doing this” and “these folks are together doing this” and these folks are together doing that” and overall the shared purpose is in this space, we get to be more...”

She trails off. “I don't know, I feel like there might be a link in why today was effective as well.”

Joel quietly whispers “the space.”

“so it's unique-“

He says he's glad everyone's bringing this up, the idea of self-selection, and he thinks “at least as a teacher, I can strive for something where they do feel it's more democratic and there's more of a sense of shared purpose.” He then poses a new question:

“How in a mandated space, where it’s my job and it’s kind of their job, how can we create a space for genuine community?”

Joel then refers to another story he told earlier in the group – about his experience last night in the literary club at his school and how he felt a real sense of community. He shared that that experience was really refreshing to him as a teacher. He thought “Okay, I can go back tomorrow and see the big picture again and I’m more balanced instead of being on edge and pissed.”

He shared that he wrote a poem, “A Letter to an Ungrateful Student” and he was really upset when he wrote it and the kids helped him out. Since he was telling all of the students that they needed to step out of their comfort zone and be vulnerable, he said “okay, I’ll do it also,” even though he’d never done spoken word before. He said that it felt really good to get it off of his chest and the students were supportive and helped him edit it.

Lucy draws the attention back to the written narrative: “You had three very specific things that you’re looking for when you build your classroom community, high standards for learning, inquiry, and social justice at the core. I wonder if you’re aiming for those things in the literary club community.”

Joel says “Yeah, absolutely. I’ve found myself explicitly talking about ourselves as a community. Last night, I was saying ‘this is a community, we have to support each other and give each other critical feedback.’ “

There is a long period of silence before we switch to the next narrative.

In this conversation, we see how the group’s response offered Joel a chance to see himself in ever-changing relationships to experiences and ideas. Early-on, Mary reminds Joel of his learning journey by recalling an earlier insight that Joel had in one of the study group sessions. Then, Melissa, Becca, and Joel spend some time working together to theorize classroom space, thinking together about how community could be created within a mandated classroom space. There is a moment of pause, when Joel whispers “the space,” before he excitedly makes a connection to his experience at the afterschool literary club at his school, a group of students and teachers who come together to write

poetry. He describes the feeling he had in that space, then analyzes what made it possible, before Lucy helps him analyze the experience in relationship to his own philosophy of community: “How does it relate to the three specific things you’re looking for?” Again, there’s a moment of pause, as Joel reflects on the relationship between his theory of practice and the events of the literary club meeting the night before.

The conversation following his narrative allowed Joel to connect multiple experiences across time and space: the literary club, his lesson that day, his past experiences in learning communities, learning from graduate classes, and his written narrative. The study group members helped him see new connections between things that were happening across different times (past and present) and places (school, graduate class, the study group, after school club).

As a set, the written inquiries expressed a greater sense of teacher agency. There was a sense of open-ness and possibility, despite the reality of the challenges. The process of going public allowed the teachers to position challenges as resources, rather than unsolvable obstacles. These trends suggest that the teachers were re-reading themselves and re-positioning themselves in more agentive ways.

Getting to the Core

“The core” was a phrase that came up repeatedly during the meetings leading up to our public presentation, as the teachers shared insights about “the core” of their own philosophies, the work of the group, or the role of English teachers. The process of

creating a public presentation forced the teachers to articulate the essence of their learning. During our meetings, the teachers were learners and inquirers. However, in the context of the presentation, they would stand before their peers with something to offer the field. After the initial debate about whether to focus on process and content had been resolved, the teachers got to work thinking about “the core” of what they hoped to communicate about their classrooms, questions, insights, and philosophies. In various ways, the process of going public prompted the teachers to theorize adolescent literacy education by coming to consensus about “the core” of adolescent literacy education and what they learned together.

I use the term “theorizing” to refer to the statements that the teachers were willing to stand up for amidst the questions. Theorizing included the ways that the teachers spoke in visionary terms to articulate the kinds of classrooms spaces, relationships, and images of teachers and students they believed were important. It also included their philosophies of practice and beliefs about themselves as teachers. The process of going public moved inquiry out of the mode of question-posing and into a mode of taking a stand on behalf of some ideas over others.

While our conversations were previously marked by question-posing, the meetings leading up to the presentation included more statements, which the teachers revised together through conversation. Theorizing also replaced the practice of noticing general themes and connections. Throughout our work, we often shared single words or short phrases to establish connections across ideas: *identity, relationships, learning from*

students. During the process of going public, the tone of these connections changed, as the teachers used their classroom narratives and their experiences in the group to get specific about their beliefs about literacy education and the process of learning about it.

The process of going public provided a chance for each individual teacher to come to clarity about his or her beliefs about the issues in their inquiries with the support of the group. While their narratives included questions, they also included visionary statements, belief statements, and statements of philosophy. For example, while the draft of Joel's narrative included sketchy notes about some ideas he wanted to include, after he shared and discussed it with the group, his ending included the following declarative statements:

- There must be a shared vision for our class in order for community to develop.
- How we perceive our students affects their perception of themselves. How the students perceive us affects our perception of ourselves.
- I believe the highest standard I can hold for my students from a critical literacy perspective is as individuals who can participate in many different communities and to have a multi-layered personality. An individual who has an open stance to other cultures and to their own identity.

Joel significantly revised his narrative after the group met and shared responses, suggesting that each of these statements was generated, at least in part, through the conversations of the group. In addition to prompting Joel to develop his individual narrative, throughout the meeting leading up to the presentation, the group collectively theorized about various aspects of adolescent literacy education. This theorizing had to do with their role as teachers; the importance of recognizing student complexity and individuality in standardized environments; the responsibility of creating meaningful and agentive classroom spaces; and the importance of teachers' perception of their students.

Theorizing the Teacher Role

Early on in the study group meetings, the concept of “multiple roles” for teachers became a useful alternative to seeing teachers as having “multiple faces.” The idea of role conveys a sense of agency for the teacher – once aware of her roles, a teacher can change his or her role depending on the situation. This concept had staying power with the group and appeared in many of the written inquiries. The written narratives reveal a range of ways that the concept of “role” was useful as the teachers theorized themselves within their classrooms: *Who am I here? How can I shift who I am to facilitate student learning? How are students positioned in this classroom? How do they view me and how do I view them?*

Interestingly, in the teachers’ written inquiries, many of the “evolved” versions of the questions include the concept of “role.” The inquiries include the following, all towards the end:

My questions haven’t really changed.... What has changed about my question has more to do with how I’m looking for this in my classroom, my role in making it happen, how my students comfort with these changes is impacted by the culture of the building, and how the steps necessary for making these changes have to do with my role in the building and my relationships with colleagues (Becca)

I noticed that over the course of our time together, I have been doing a lot of thinking about the role of teachers. I’m left wondering, how my beliefs about teaching and learning ultimately affect my students’ growth (Mary)

Additional questions have surfaced during the process of reflecting on community in my classroom. I’ve asked, “How do I position myself within this classroom community?” and “How am I positioning my students to be participants within this classroom community?” (Joel).

Becca is thinking that her role conveys a sense of her responsibility as a teacher, both within and outside of her classroom. Her inquiry about classroom talk has shifted over time to focus more on her role in making it happen, as well as her role in making more widespread change in the building. While Mary's vision of her role is less clear here, the concept has proven useful to her in connecting multiple, seemingly-unrelated moments in her own learning, and ending with the conclusion that part of her role as a teacher includes reflecting on her own assumptions about teaching and learning. Joel talks about his role through the concept of positionality. His questions have moved from questions that start with the stem: "what does community look like" to "how is community being formed" to finally asking about his role and how he positions himself and his students within his classroom. He wants to position himself in ways that allow students to be positioned as participants in the community. With these examples, we see how the teachers are theorizing the role of the English teacher in broad ways – as having particular responsibilities to students and as a way of positioning themselves and students in more agentive ways. Collectively, these "evolved" versions of the questions suggest that "role" is a useful framework for thinking about the role of the English teacher. Thinking about a classroom with the framework of "role" prompts an analysis of the teacher's part in classroom stories as they unfold. It puts teachers in an agentive position, one in which their role can shift, as they become aware of their choices for relating to students, colleagues, and knowledge.

Theorizing Students as Complex, Agentic Individuals

As we saw in the previous chapter, the process of looking closely at practice facilitated a stance towards students that was characterized by openness, curiosity, and wonder. The empathetic readings and stance of noticing and wondering that the descriptive processes facilitated allowed the teachers to see the classroom from the perspective of students. This process allowed for us to look closely at how individual students were experiencing classroom moments and view the classroom from their perspective. Through the process of going public, the teachers put words to the stance that was fostered during this process, by theorizing students as complex, agentic, individuals. Lucy's narrative, presented earlier, highlighted the complex ways that students experience language in her classroom by juxtaposing several moments in which teachers and students experienced language together in discordant and unsettling ways. The following excerpt is drawn from the continuation of that conversation and illustrates part of the teachers' process of theorizing students as complex, agentic individuals. The teachers are commenting on Lucy's recounting of a conversation that a group of alumni from her school had about the importance of the word "jawn" to them, as well as a moment that Lucy shared in which she inadvertently used "cop discourse" with one of her students:

Becca draws our attention back to one of Lucy's earlier questions – about how students navigate discourse shifts in different environments, noting that “their different reactions make it very clear that you can't lump people together... It's very very very very very individual how people navigate that path.” This word means different things, it's so complicated and layered.

Comments then shift to a collective grappling with the complexity of this word. Becca gets inside the head of the male student, imagining how easy it might be for someone to ignore the negative impact of a word that has so much positive meaning: “He's craving the experience. Craving. This is awesome, now we can

communicate something that we couldn't communicate before, we needed that!"

Joel connects Lucy's stories to a larger issue that he has been building through earlier parts of the meeting – The idea that students can participate in multiple communities and still have a consistent sense of self. "You can have a complex, multi-layered identity," Joel says. He notes that he had always thought of himself as progressive, but realizes that there are some ways that he's just getting over his stereotypes of African Americans.

Becca builds on Joel's idea of complex identities, sharing that with Tyrek, "he's aware of it. He is aware of his ability to do this and it's effortful. He's intentional about the way he lives in both worlds and he knows he can."

The conversation then turns to Lucy's first story, in which she describes a moment when she unintentionally upset one of her students by using the word "resisting," a word that she did not realize that her students affiliated with "cop discourse." The group collectively marveled at the notion that one word can either build community or rip it down, and noted that Lucy just didn't know.

Lucy shared that, because she felt she had a strong relationship with this student, this interaction was especially hard. "I was like 'Lucy, you don't know shit. You know what I mean?'" Becca quietly says "That's not true." Then Lucy reflects "It felt like it was a blow."

*There are about ten seconds of silence, before I quietly say "alright."
"Onward," Joel says, and we move onto Melissa's narrative.*

With this excerpt, we see the teachers coming to collective agreement about the complexity of students' experiences, the individual ways that they experience language, and the awareness and agency that they have over their lives. During the meetings leading up to the presentation, when it came time to name some of the most important ideas that the group had to share, many comments focused on the importance of conveying the complexity of students. Melissa, for example, shared a common theme that she noticed across the stories was the idea that identities aren't one person that is stationary, but "we're evolving all the time and how you relate to one student one day might be very different from how you'll relate to that student the next day." Joel

expressed the importance of viewing students in human ways, as “vulnerable thirteen year olds who want to learn something” despite working within an “environment that sees students as test scores.” With these comments, the teachers express the need to view students as complex, evolving people, despite pressures to view them in standardized or stagnant ways.

Theorizing Adolescent Literacy Education as Relational Work

From the beginning of the study group, the concept of student identity was consistently identified as common theme of the work of the group. In the third meeting, the teachers read a chapter from *Understanding Youth*, in which they explored the importance and complexity of student and teacher relationships. Co-authorship is central to that piece – the idea that students’ and teachers’ identities are interdependent (Nakkula & Thoshalis, 2006). Through that conversation, the teachers grappled with questions like: How do you form relationships with so many students at once? What are some ways of thinking about “relationships?” While “relationships” was a key theme in the group from early-on, the notion of teacher perception and how students and teachers see each other became more solidified during the process of going public. By the final meeting, the teachers were making statements about the importance of teachers’ and students’ perceptions of each other. When Lucy asked the group to reflect on common themes, the word “relationship” was used repeatedly to describe the essence of the work. Close looking at the elaborations of this concept reveals that “relationships” is operating as a proxy for the idea of teachers’ and students’ beliefs about each other, as the teachers’ comments included ideas like “how my beliefs affect students’ growth,” and “convincing my

students that they are able to do the work I'm giving them." Becca's inquiry concludes with the reflection that "step one" for her as a teacher is to understand how students "see themselves in relationships to school." In the end, Lucy repeated the following comment, which was made originally by Melissa:

You said a line that I think has to do with everything, "how students perceive us affects how they perceive themselves" (others affirm that's a good line). That could be our umbrella.

This idea of teacher perceptions, offered first by Melissa and emphasized by Lucy, ultimately made it into Joel's final inquiry, suggesting its importance in the group's collective theorizing.

Theorizing Classroom Spaces

The teachers' responses to Lucy's inquiry, displayed how the group analyzed the space that Lucy created in which a particular event was possible. Later in the chapter, we noticed again how the teachers, together, grappled with the notion of "space" in relation to Joel's inquiry, wondering how a teacher might create a shared vision for a classroom, a *space* in which students felt as though they were doing meaningful work. The importance of classroom space, and how students and teachers are positioned within it, was prevalent throughout the written inquiries, and Becca highlighted this point when the group collectively identified themes:

And with everything that we read tonight, I don't think a space can be defined as vulnerable, so maybe what I mean is spaces that elicit vulnerability, we are vulnerable and our students are vulnerable and everyone's vulnerable, that's really awesome and fragile" (Becca).

These comments suggest that one of the primary roles of the English teacher is fostering spaces where students can be vulnerable, have meaningful relationships, and express themselves.

The examples in this section on theorizing show *both* the content *and* process of the theorizing. We see how, through dialogue organized around the ultimate goal of going public, the teachers came to clarify their deeply held beliefs about their roles as teachers, their beliefs about students, and their responsibilities of relating to students and creating meaningful classroom spaces. As the teachers theorized teaching, students, relationship, and classroom spaces, they created a broad and encompassing vision of teaching. This vision of a good teacher included questioning their perceptions of students, forming meaningful and trusting relationships with them, creating classroom spaces in which meaningful work and relationship were possible, and resisting the discourses that view students as test scores.

Conclusion: Going Public as Transformative Learning

As we have seen in this chapter, the process of going public provoked changes in the group, opportunities for the teachers to re-read themselves and classroom moments in new contexts, and the chance for the teachers to theorize, or identify the “core” of what it means to educate adolescents in these times. They were able to re-see themselves in different perspectives – in new communities, over time, and in different relationships to classroom problems. They were also able to re-read moments from their classroom,

connecting and contextualizing them in new ways that allowed for unified personal narratives and connections to greater statements of vision.

Through the process of co-writing a presentation, the teachers took action that set them in a different set of relationships with each other and to the field. As it reconfigured itself to create a public presentation, the group solidified and re-read their stories, ideas, and themselves. With the preparation and the act of going public itself, the teachers engaged in transformative work in which they saw themselves and their practice in broader contexts.

CHAPTER 5: Learning in the Margins

Introduction

Chapter Three focused on the space of the group. It showed how our group became a space where support was given, pushing was invited, and the struggles – the *hard* parts - of teaching were repeatedly legitimized. This group culture, in which the teachers and I practiced our values of *risk*, *honesty*, and *accountability*, created a venue that allowed the teachers to talk openly about some of the questions in their professional lives that were particularly difficult and grapple with issues that were not regularly addressed in other learning spaces. Chapter Three also showed how close looking at classroom practice facilitated a stance of noticing and wondering; allowed teachers to see the classroom through students' and other teachers' eyes; and enabled them to question their assumptions by accessing the perspectives of others. Together, these humanizing practices fostered a stance of curiosity, empathy, and the universal ways that we experience ideas such as language, stuckness, and community.

Chapter Four focused on the group's process of going public. In that chapter, I showed how the opportunity to contribute to a larger professional community created the context for new identities for the group and its members; provided opportunities for the teachers to re-read themselves and their classrooms; and prompted the teachers to adopt a theorizing stance about adolescent literacy education. I foregrounded the voices of Lucy and Joel to argue that this process allowed the teachers to re-see themselves as

professionals; recount the trajectory of their learning in the group; revisit their practice for new purposes; and re-see the project of teaching in different contexts.

In this chapter, I focus on the other three teachers in the group – Becca, Mary, and Melissa – to describe and analyze three cases of teacher learning that were *not* visible within the public inquiries, learning that I call *learning in the margins*. I engage the following questions:

- How did transformative learning occur in the margins?
- What did the teachers see, ask, or do differently as a result of the work in the study group? What did they realize?

I explore these questions by 1) Extending the discussion of the space of the group that I started in Chapter Three by illustrating three characteristics of group talk – *policy talk*, *race talk*, and analysis of *weird dynamics* - that created the context for learning in the margins; 2) Presenting the cases of three teachers – Mary, Melissa, and Becca, each of which shows how learning occurred in spontaneous and unplanned ways for them; and 3) Discussing what these cases as a set allow us to see about the function of unofficial spaces in this inquiry community, relationships between various dimensions of teaching practice, connections between the talk in the group and the learning that occurred, and the nature of learning that occurs in unplanned ways.

In this chapter, my aim is to explore the learning that occurred that might remain invisible if one were to look only at the official meetings, the official inquiries, or the public

documentation of the work. In a policy climate that is increasingly concerned with “outcomes,” which are often defined narrowly in terms of increases in test scores or graduation rates, teacher communities are increasingly under pressure to define their work in terms of these measures. In discussions of teacher professional development, “outcomes” are often measured by the ways teachers improve their practice that increase student achievement on standardized tests. In this chapter, I show how, despite its elusiveness, much of the learning that happened in the margins actually dealt with the major issues in the teachers’ lives, such as navigating constraining policy environments; having uncomfortable conversations about race and language with students; and managing the demands of their work lives.

I argue that this learning would not be captured by simply analyzing the official meetings or the official inquiries. I define learning broadly – to include changes in how the teachers saw themselves, their work, or their practice; the new kinds of questions they asked; and different actions that they took in their classrooms. To see this learning that is in many ways “off the books” requires an expanded view of practice.

Expanded View of Practice

A central assumption of this chapter is an *expanded view of practice*, which Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) describe in this way:

When practitioners are regarded as activists and generators of knowledge, practice entails expanded responsibilities to students and families, transformed relationships with colleagues and other professionals in school settings, as well as deeper and altered connections to communities, community organizations, and school-university partnerships (p. 135)

With this definition, *practice* extends beyond what happens in the classroom and includes teachers' other professional responsibilities, their relationships with colleagues, and their commitments to various communities that inform how they think about their students and their teaching. Noffke's (1997) analysis of the *personal*, *professional*, and, *political* dimensions of action research provides an additional framework for analyzing how the teachers brought the personal and political dimensions of their identities to their work as professionals. In the case studies presented later in this chapter, we see how the personal and political dimensions are at play as the teachers grapple with the issues in their work.

Another aspect of an expanded view of practice is the emotional and relational elements of teaching. In her study of urban veteran teachers that stay in teaching over a long period, Nieto (2003) theorizes teaching broadly, as inclusive of intellectual work, hope, anger, and love. She highlights the synergy between hope and anger, two seemingly opposite emotions, suggesting that they work together to energize teachers to stay in teaching despite the challenges. Maimon (2009), too, theorizes the emotional aspects of teaching. She describes how systematic inquiry allowed her to "feel her work more deeply" (p. 215), and ensure that she would be able to come back each day. Therefore, for this analysis, transformative learning is inclusive of changes in the teachers' feelings about themselves, their students, and their work, as well as insights and actions that come out of these feelings.

To conceptualize "the margins," I draw on Campano's (2007) concept of the "second classroom," which he defines as an "alternative pedagogical space" (p. 40) that "occurs

during the margins and in between periods of the school day” (p. 39). For Campano, the second classroom exists as a physical and ideological space, and includes the “emotional labor and relational work of teachers that often remained invisible and uncompensated” (p. 39-40). In the study group, the second space, which I refer to as *the margins* occurred during the time before and after the official meetings, in car rides home, and occasionally over email. During the fall, when our agenda was more structured and centered on the descriptive review sessions, the marginal space included the check-in time and open conversations that occurred before and after the official descriptive reviews. During the process of going public, “the margins” included elements of the work that the teachers chose not to make public to an outside audience. In other words, “the margins” are the spaces outsiders might not see when determining “outcomes” or learning in the group, but where important insights and changes were occurring.

In addition to analyzing the learning that occurred in the marginal space, I also suggest that talk that happened in the “official” group meetings created the context for the activities in the margins to occur. In the section that follows, I revisit the discussion of the space of the group that began in Chapter Three. First, I describe the study group as a feeling-ful space. Next, I describe and analyze three genres of talk that emerged repeatedly in the conversations over time – race talk, policy talk, and weird dynamics.

The Space Revisited

A Feeling-ful Space: The Emotive Dimension of the Group

The study group was a space where feelings were legitimized as a valid topic of discussion. These feelings included frustration and anger with school district policies, as well as hope and passion for students and the project of teaching. The teachers often spoke of the group as an energizing space where they left *feeling better* about their work. Melissa described how knowing she could “really open up” with a small group of people was “motivating” and “energizing.” She said:

It made me feel good about what I was doing and it made me feel like even though my district or my administration maybe had different ideas about what education should look like or feel like or be like for the students, it made me feel like I was doing the right thing.

Similar sentiments were expressed by others, suggesting that part of the benefit of inquiry communities – and I argue part of the learning that occurs within them – involves the ways they change how teachers *feel* about their work. The teachers were able to get in touch with the bigger picture, spend two hours engaging with the kinds of people who made them think deeply about their practice, give life to the questions that often didn’t get space in other places, and take the time to think things through. They were also able to express their frustrations, anger, and despair at the policy climates at their schools and in the greater system. Through these dialogues, the teachers deepened their sense of what they believed was important in a space outside of their schools. In other words, they were able to gain legitimacy for their beliefs *about* their beliefs. The teachers often talked

about what they knew “deep down,” in their “heart,” or “their gut.” This group was a space where those feelings were taken seriously.

New Genres of Teacher Talk

When Mary responded to the call to join the study group, she wrote to me that what she was looking for was “that space and group of people where I can engage in real inquiry about something, rather than just complain or suggest cookie-cutter ‘strategies’ that might temporarily solve the problem but do nothing to get at the issue.” With this response, Mary suggested two genres of teacher talk that are archetypal when groups of teachers get together: complaining and strategies. In the study group, these genres were notably rare. Instead, the teachers’ talk was characterized by analyzing practice, posing questions, telling stories that allowed for collective analysis of concepts, and strategizing various forms of responses. In the section that follows, I offer three of the genres of talk that occurred in this group that pose a counter-image to the image of teacher talk implied above.

In Chapter Three, we saw how the teachers used the early meetings to raise their collective consciousness about the nature of the struggles of teaching. The group’s consensus about the nature of these challenges, along with its supportive culture, opened up space for the teachers to reveal elements of their practice that are often not exposed in traditional teacher learning environments. Over time, these stories became increasingly risky and explicit. That is, they increasingly revealed perceived failures on the part of the teacher, exposed moments when they might not have done the “right” thing, and allowed

others windows into their confusion or uncertainty. During our study group sessions, the following three types of sharing were common:

- Stories that illustrated frustrations they had with school policies and cultures that made it difficult to do what they felt was best for students;
- Stories when racial, linguistic, and cultural differences were perceived to be at play, including moments when there were misunderstandings between the teachers and their students about issues of race;
- Interactions with classes or groups of students that were puzzling or confusing.

In the remainder of this section, I characterize these three types of stories as *policy talk*, *race talk*, and *weird dynamics*. These three types of stories provide context for the case studies that follow.

Race Talk

Talking about race in society generally and within educational context specifically is a topic of scholarly and practical concern. There is general agreement that it's both important and difficult to talk about issues of race in the classroom (e.g. Bolgatz, 2005; Michael & Conger, 2009; Pollack, 2004). As English teachers, issues of race and language inevitably came up in their classrooms and the individuals in the group – to various extents and in various ways – believed that discussing issues of race and culture were important, even though these discussions were uncomfortable. Early on, the teachers used the space of the group to express their questions and concerns. Because all

of the teachers were white and taught primarily students of color, the specific details of the race talk in this group involved grappling with their own white identities in relationship to their students' identities and considering how to approach discussions about race, identity, language, and culture with their students.

While issues of race were often raised and discussed in the meetings, there were two early instances in which the teachers engaged in extended conversations *about* talking about race, which allowed for the group to deepen their collective commitment to keeping issues of race on the table, even when it was difficult or uncomfortable to do so. One conversation occurred during the fourth meeting. For this meeting, the teachers read an article by Bob Fecho, a white teacher who, in his written accounts of his teaching, grapples with his white identity in relation to his students' African American identities. During this meeting, the teachers took turns sharing stories about how their race and culture mattered in their teaching and affirmed the importance of raising questions about racial dynamics.

Another time that there was an extended conversation *about* race talk was during the seventh meeting, after the teachers had written *Where My Teaching is From* poems. During this conversation, Joel reflected upon his experience in a race relation project in his undergraduate work and shared how important it is to talk about race, but he also shared that he hadn't had the "guts" to talk about white privilege with his students. Becca affirmed that this is a "huge thing." Others shared brief stories about students not wanting to talk about race with them. During this time, they also analyzed why it's so

difficult to talk about race. Issues explored included 1) They did not share experiences of racial discrimination with their students; 2) The power difference between teachers and students made it difficult for students to disagree with their teacher; and 3) It is important to actively consider the *purpose* of talking about race so that students have a sense of why it is important.

Becca shared a detailed story about a student, Desiree, who told her that, as a white person, she should never use the word “Black” to refer to African Americans. The teachers then analyzed this story together by asking Becca questions. Through asking Becca follow-up questions, the group learned about Desiree’s reasons for not wanting Becca to use the word “Black” to refer to her race, which were related to the history of associations between “black” and what is evil or bad. Through these initial conversations, the teachers in the study group affirmed the importance of talking about race in the classroom and also contended with some of the challenges. The study group became a venue to grapple with issues that arise in English classrooms when white teachers and students of color talk about issues of race, language, and culture.

Policy Talk

School cultures and policies that constrained student learning were a constant topic of conversation throughout the meetings. Discussion of school policy and culture occurred both inside and outside of the official meeting time. Before and after the meetings, the teachers often shared news and expressed concern about new district policies or told

stories that illustrated the constraints of their schools. During meetings, frustration with school policies came up in relation to whatever topic was at hand.

The teachers taught in different contexts, each of which had distinct challenges. In addition to differences in the schools themselves, the teachers also had different roles and reputations at their schools and were at different stages of their careers. Because of these differences, they experienced policies differently. For example, within her school culture that was characterized by tight control, much of the tension Becca felt was related to how to use her status as a school leader, mentor, and well-regarded teacher to make changes in her classroom and possibly outside of it. Melissa's school was also characterized by constraints, such as scripted programs, a culture of test-taking, and tight delineations between the different subjects. However, as a relatively new teacher, Melissa's tensions centered on whether or not she was "doing right by her kids" and how she could justify her choices to her administrators.

While the policy challenges were different across the schools and the teachers related differently to these challenges depending on the specifics of their situations, some issues were universal. One of these challenges was the "no I rule," which was a policy that, in academic writing, students were not allowed to use first person pronouns. When Mary brought the "No I Rule" up at an early meeting, it led to a long discussion about the various dimensions of this rule – how it had come about; what it means about knowledge and power; when they believe it is and is not appropriate to use the first person in their

own writing; what their own beliefs about this rule are; and how to teach in the context of this rule and deeply held societal belief.

Together, these examples illustrate that, while the details differed, the teachers had a shared concern about how school policies often constrained students' opportunities to learn (Stevens, 2006) and that these concerns were frequent. Another common issue across all of the teachers was their concerns about students' history of experiencing a "banking model" (Freire, 1970) of education that had conditioned them to come to their classrooms expecting this kind of education in their classrooms. For example, during the "no I rule" conversation, part of the challenge the teachers described was overcoming *student* beliefs about the use of "I" in academic writing. Even when they wanted to encourage students to use "I," the students were not used to having their own views legitimized within their writing. This socialization made it difficult for students to break out of their traditional roles, even when the teachers were trying to do things differently.

Weird Dynamics

While the phrase "weird dynamics" was only used a few times by the teachers, I use this term to refer to interactions with students or classes in which something surprising, strange, or even troubling happened, but it was unclear what was going on. Rymes (2009) shows how telling stories in group contexts can be a risky endeavor that requires trust, as a person is opening up her own experience for interpretation of others, giving up control of its meaning. *Weird dynamics* stories are particularly so, because the dynamics that were playing out are unknown by the storyteller and therefore it's uncertain what

might come up. At one of the early meetings, the teachers each wrote “critical incidents or puzzling moments” and shared them with the group, which set the context for these kinds of open-ended stories to be told. These stories also emerged spontaneously. For example, during one of the early meetings, Becca shared the following story about her students’ surprising response to stereotypical images. I have reconstructed from the meeting transcript:

Becca shared a political cartoon for the purpose of defining the word “stereotype” with her students in preparation for reading a book in which stereotypes would be a major theme. The cartoon that she showed depicted exaggeratedly-racialized faces of Cleveland Indians, followed by similarly overly-stereotypical faces called Cleveland Africans, Cleveland Asians, Cleveland Hispanics. The students in the first class “got it,” but she was perplexed by the fact that the students in the second class “didn’t get it.” They didn’t see anything wrong with the political cartoons.

In this case, Becca *thought* she was telling the story to show how unpredictable students’ responses were in a general way. However, her telling of this story opened it up to analysis of the group and she eventually came to new understandings of this story – that maybe her students *did* get it, but they weren’t willing to be vulnerable in that way right then with her. This story provides an example of the risk inherent in telling a story in which it is unclear what is happening in the classroom. In the context of the all-white space of the study group, it is important to note that many of the *weird dynamics* stories may have had unnamed racial dynamics at their core. The relationship between issues of race and *weird dynamic* stories is a possible area of future analysis in considering these stories.

Getting Real

As Mary noted in her initial email, she was looking for a place to do “real inquiry.”

These three types of talk provide a way to view the group as that kind of space.

Together, they show three genres of talk that represent divergence from what is typically discussed in school-based teacher learning. The cross-contextual nature of the group may have allowed these genres of talk to emerge and deepen. Because the teachers each came from different contexts, the group afforded a venue to more openly express disagreement or concern with school policies and cultures; talk about difficult subjects such as race; and open their practice up to the interpretations of others.

What the *race talk*, *policy talk*, and *weird dynamics* genres have in common is that they represent difficult issues that are often *not* legitimized in other places. They also all have the potential to create dissonance – *Am I a good teacher? Did I do the right thing?* They are disorienting kinds of talk, through which people can lose a sense of control or knowledge of what is right. Policy talk is risky because it brings to the surface differing ideological beliefs about practice and therefore puts the teacher at risk of being labeled a “bad teacher.” Stories about race reveal vulnerable moments when the teachers were unsure of whether or not they did the “right thing.” The articulation of *weird dynamics* opens up one’s classroom to interpretation by others – allowing the group to collectively ask “what’s going on here?” For teachers, this kind of opening up is a vulnerable move because they are inviting others to help them see their assumptions or blind spots. While these three genres of talk are risky, the cases that follow suggest that they are also

energizing and affirming because they allow the teachers to work out some of the *real* issues in their practice that are often not given space in other places.

These genres of talk, along with the analysis of the emotive dimension of the group, provide context for the case studies of *transformative learning in the margins* that follow.

These cases suggest that the learning that occurred in marginal spaces was enabled and enhanced by the kinds of talk that was legitimized in the group and the kinds of difficult issues that were allowed to surface.

Transformative Learning in the Margins

In this section, I will present three case studies of *transformative learning in the margins*.

These cases will include some of the major issues that the teachers dealt with in the course of the group that may not have been documented if one were to only consider the official inquiries and conversations. I present each case, offer a discussion about each one, and conclude with an analysis of what the cases as a set illuminate about the nature of transformative learning in this group.

Becca

Becca's reasons for joining the group included that she wanted to make "big changes" in her classroom and make sense of the dissonance she was feeling between her school's policies and what she believed was right. The culture at Becca's charter school was one of extreme structure and tight control, with a mission of preparing every student for college. When it came time to choose a topic for her official inquiry, Becca chose to focus on making more space for student talk and analyzing what happened when she

made these changes. A big part of her inquiry was how to create spaces for talk in an environment where students haven't had many opportunities to talk in class. Students had also internalized narrow beliefs about the purpose of talk, viewing talk as representing finished, individual thoughts, rather than as a means for developing new understandings in collaboration with others.

In the margins, Becca was also managing her frustrations with her school culture and raising questions about what she should do in her leadership roles. She frequently used the check-in times and some of the individual writing prompts to share stories regarding her feelings about school policies. For example, at one of the check in times, Becca shared that she hasn't done much with her inquiry because of the recent tests. She said she thought that what they do with this testing stuff is "criminal." The teachers and students, she said, are constantly anxious about performance. She noted again something she had shared before: That she loves the people at her school, but feels frustrated with the way things are done. She also used the check-ins to tell specific stories about interactions with her administrators, usually related to student talk. One time, Becca shared a story from a day in which students were talking to each other in the computer lab. Although Becca was "100% sure it was highly relevant" to what they were doing, the principal came in and questioned her about the talking. Becca shared that she was glad she was allowed to defend it, but then thought: "Should I really have to justify to you why this is valuable? You're a principal, you should see for yourself that this is valuable." This story reveals how, as Becca began to make changes in her practice that

made more space for student talk, she was experiencing tensions in her school with administrators who believed that learning happened best in quiet classrooms.

In the next meeting, Becca shared another encounter with a school administrator during one of the regular short observations in which teachers were evaluated based on a series of short visits with a point system. She was teaching a lesson in which students were sharing ideas aloud and she did not get all of the points because the administrator said their activity wasn't rigorous enough and the students were talking, rather than writing. Becca shared that she was really upset because she felt like it was a good lesson and she was doing the right thing but they thought she was doing things incorrectly. In other observations, she hadn't cared if she got all of the points, but with this one she felt like it was unfair.

When it came time to share her work publicly, Becca shared with the group that the "thing she's gotten most" from the group, was the questions she's raised for herself about "what it means to work in a system that she doesn't agree with." She shared that she had come to realize that she needed to either start doing things differently, even if it's against school policy, or decide to go somewhere else. This aspect of her learning, Becca shared, will be "notably absent" from her public narrative.

In her initial draft of her public inquiry, she included a note to herself at the bottom. It was a list of "What I still need to add/say more about" that included three things: the school culture, what this means for her willingness to "do things she's not supposed to,"

and how she can dissent as a person in a leadership position without seeming disloyal or appearing to undermine the system. These items were expressed in veiled terms in her official inquiry, with a brief allusion to her questioning her role within the building in increasing student talk, as well as a reference to how she “can’t help but think” that a “school culture that in some ways has labeled student talk problematic” may be making her students hesitant to talk.

Her public inquiry did not include some of the major issues that she discussed throughout our work together: Consequences that she experienced as a result of her commitment to allow students more spaces to talk; frustrations that she felt with the climate at her school; the constant tension she felt between her love for the people at her school and her own disagreement with how things were done; and deep concern about the pressures that her students felt around test-taking and performance. These issues emerged during the check-in and other unofficial times and provided side-inquiries to Becca’s official inquiry about student talk.

Discussion of Becca’s Case

Becca’s case illustrates how inquiry sometimes causes changes in a person that lead to uncomfortable interactions with others. Meyer (1998), in his account of a school-based teacher study group, uses the framework of “composing and disrupting” to understand the process that teachers go through when they compose new lives for themselves through changed curriculum, relationships, and identities. These changes create disruptions within the school environment and disruptions within themselves as they navigate

unchanged environments as changed people. Becca's case shows how inquiry can cause such disruptions, and how the inquiry community then becomes a space to work out some of these disruptions.

Becca's case also highlights the role of anger and frustration in her learning. She experienced constant tension between her love for her students and colleagues and her disagreement with school policies. As she focused on a specific aspect of her practice to change, she became increasingly frustrated with the ways that school culture and policy constrained her work. Nieto (2003), suggests that anger is a very real part of teaching, and that it's important to make space for teachers to process this anger and transform it into more productive emotions. Becca's case suggests that the study group worked as a space for her to air some of these disruptions – vent them, make sense of them, and gain support in the legitimacy of her own feelings.

Melissa

Melissa joined the study group most primarily for the “professional conversation.” As a relatively new teacher who taught seventh and eighth grade language arts in an elementary school, she was excited for the chance to talk with other teachers of adolescents. She was in a school climate that was characterized by multiple scripted programs and an intense culture of testing. Within her classroom, she was being instructed to use a scripted program plus test preparation packets for the forty days leading up to the state tests. Early on, she identified two central issues in her practice. One was classroom management, which she defined as “organization of the classroom” so that students felt a sense of community and knew what to expect so wasn't always a

surprise. The other issue she described as “that struggle between what I want to do in my classroom and what I can do against what my administration is providing me with, or wanting me to do.”

In the group, Melissa sometimes told stories about administrators questioning her practice on the grounds that it wasn't literacy or it didn't fit within the mandates of her school. For example, she once told a story about how she designed a unit around literature and cultural values that included writing, public speaking, and critical thinking. She wanted to invite a guest speaker from a local college, a Korean woman who studied multicultural adolescent literature. However, her principal did not approve of this speaker because she said it was “a cultural thing and not a literacy thing” and that it would be perfect for a social studies class, but not a language arts one. This led Melissa to wonder if she was “thinking wrong” or if it was actually that she was right and her principal was “not there yet.” It caused her to wonder if she cared too much or if she was just pushing her own agenda. After a pause, she said she knew she valued it and believed what she was teaching was valuable.

Melissa rarely if ever shared aloud her beliefs about her own racial or cultural position and how that may be influencing her students' relationship with her or the content. While she did talk about integrating cultural themes into her curriculum, she rarely talked explicitly about race. However, during one of the conversations in which the group was discussing the importance of having honest conversations about race, she told the group that she had only had one conversation explicitly about race in her classroom and it had

to do with “the way we use language and the way that certain languages are preferred over others.” She said she used that to breach the subject. She used this story to make the point that she believed discussions about race needed to have a clear purpose for the students and they needed to see what they were taking away from the conversation. Melissa decided to focus her official inquiry on the issue of homework, which she initially framed as an inquiry into which kinds of homework students completed and which kinds they didn’t. In an early presentation of this topic, the group tried to help her broaden the scope of her inquiry a bit to include more dimensions of the issue of homework (e.g. the relationship between homework and class work). At one point, I even suggested that she change her inquiry altogether to focus on her efforts to include cultural themes in her classroom. She stayed with the topic of homework, but, over time, started referring to her question as “too narrow.” During the check in times Melissa gave very brief updates about homework in her classroom or sometimes “traded her time” to make announcements about professional events that were happening in the state or readings she had encountered.

Her Descriptive Review session focused on a lesson about wolverines in which she integrated science themes into her classroom. Her questions about this lesson were a hybrid of wondering about how students were experiencing this language arts lesson that integrated science and also wondering how students were taking up the homework and in-class parts of the lesson. As the group was standing up and putting away dishes after this session, Lucy asked Melissa if she had any more lessons coming up on wolverines, to which Melissa responded that there was one more, but then went on to tell Lucy about

these “amazing discussions” about Countee Cullen’s poems that she had with her students, concluding her brief story by noting that it was “off topic” and “has nothing to do with homework.” I made a note of this response in my field notes, noting the energy in her voice, but didn’t think much more of it.

Six months after the conclusion of our work together, in an interview with Melissa, I asked her to share moments that stood out to her. She shared that the study group led her to open up more space to talk about race in her classroom. She shared that issues of race were hard for her, and that Lucy’s inquiry into issues of race and language, along with the other discussions, helped her to be more “comfortable with the conversation.” Having a place to talk about race in the group made it easier to talk with her students. She then told a detailed story about a conversation that she remembered with her class in response to group of poems that she had assigned, which I later realized was the “amazing discussion” that she told Lucy about in my kitchen after her Descriptive Review. Below, I include excerpts from Melissa’s account of this conversation.

Melissa: At first I could tell that they were hesitant, and they didn’t really want to say what they were going to say, and then eventually they came out and they started talking about how White people, or how they feel White people tend to view them, which was hard for them, because I was a White person in the classroom, the only one. And we were talking about discrimination.

And so one of the boys in the back, who was usually very silent... He either made the generalization that all White people are racist or he said it specifically about me? And you know what, I think he did say it about me... and the kids stuck up for me, they actually defended me.

And in that defense, they were actually grappling with all these ideas about what racism is and “Can you say ‘all X people do this’ or ‘all Y people do that?’” And I saw them start to sort of change. When I would make the distinction between

myself as a White person and the White race, I saw them starting to make distinctions too. Just not being as general.

When I first started working there, they would make those generalizations all the time, like “Oh, you’re racist.” They would actually use the phrase, “White people blah blah blah.” And after we started having these kinds of conversations, I actually saw their language change a little bit, the way that they approached it changed, a little.

Kathleen: Yeah, like more specific and descriptive-,

Melissa: Yeah, and they were able to articulate what they felt better. I feel like when they were making generalizations, ... they didn’t really have the language that they needed to talk about those issues. Or they didn’t know what they were trying to say. And since I was about to give them the space in my classroom to talk about it and to talk freely, because I never reprimanded [the boy] or anything, I actually stood up for him and said, “He’s entitled to that opinion as long as he can defend that opinion.” And giving them that space to talk let them sort of mess up and figure out different ways of talking. That’s what we always did in our group. In our sessions, we would always talk and if I felt like I [said] something stupid, I would just revise it, you know?

And so I think getting that structure there and being able to talk so much there, made me come back into my classroom and put more talking into my classroom. Which, if we go back to the district policy, administration is not going to walk into my class, see my kids sitting there talking to me, and think that I’m educating them. But I was. So.

Kathleen: Wow.

Melissa: Yay.

Kathleen: What stands out to me about that story is that it sounds like your comfort talking about race in general was increased, which allowed the conversation to happen.

Melissa: And I think I used the talk about language to get to the talk about race. Because to me, talking about different dialects and different versions of English language is a way to kind of come into that conversation that I wasn’t comfortable with about race. (whisper) Yeah, that’s all.

When I asked Melissa if there were any more “ah hah” moments, she said that for her, the changes were “gradual.” She could “feel herself changing,” becoming more confident

and better able to verbalize more clearly what she “felt about teaching.” She went on to share how affirming it was for her to know that the other group members felt the same way, knowing that they did not agree with the blanketed programs and skill-based learning at their schools. It helped reassure her that she wasn’t wrong for feeling that way, and the study group helped her see ways that she could not just circumvent and blatantly disregard what administrators were saying, but blend her ways with what was required.

Discussion of Melissa’s Case

Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) differentiate between “inquiry as project” and “inquiry as stance,” a distinction that suggests that viewing inquiry as a project often leaves out important contextual elements of the questions and leads to functional solutions to specific problems, rather than shifts in teachers’ broader philosophies, theories-of-practice, or vision. By her own admission, Melissa’s official inquiry into homework was “too narrow” and could be classified as “inquiry as project.” However, she was using the space of the group for other projects that were more transformative, such as connecting with other professionals, gaining a sense of her professional philosophy, finding ways to justify her practice to herself and others, and practicing talking in new ways with her colleagues and then with her students.

Melissa’s story about the “amazing discussion” that she had with her students reveals how the study group was an important space for Melissa in several ways. First, it was a place for Melissa to get practice talking about race, which then allowed her to stick with

the difficult conversation about race in her classroom. Secondly, her participation in the study group, which included close, systematic looking at individual students, may have allowed frameworks for Melissa to see her students' talk in new ways. For example, she noticed that they were making fewer generalizations, talking about their feelings, and using talk as a way to process unfinished ideas. Melissa's experience as a learner in the study group became a source of knowledge about the kinds of learning spaces that she could offer her students. Because of her experiences in the group, she was able to see value in the kind of space where it was okay to "sort of mess up and figure out different ways of talking" and was in turn able to offer a similar type of space for her students in which their ideas were open to revision. Finally, with Melissa's emphasis on how her students were able to articulate what they felt better suggests that the inclusion of feelings as a valuable source of knowledge in the study group may have led her to value feelings more in her classroom as well.

Mary

Mary joined the study group because she was searching for something that she experienced in graduate school - a group of other educators with whom she could "think things through" and try to make sense of issues that were arising in their classrooms. Mary taught in a small magnet school with a social justice theme. Her role as the Senior English teacher included two major challenges that came up during our meetings. One was the challenge of making the AP English curriculum relevant to her students' lives. The other challenge was teaching, facilitating, and supporting students through the process of completing their Senior Projects.

Senior Projects were a graduation requirement, making Mary the de facto gatekeeper for graduation. These projects had strict requirements in terms of format and there were detailed rubrics for successful completion. The school and district level administration often became involved in enforcing deadlines and determining how the projects would be assessed.

Because Senior Projects were such a big part of her identity, Mary talked about them frequently and chose them as the focus of her official inquiry. She framed her questions in terms of a change she had recently noticed in the past two years in how students felt about the projects. In past years, Mary had noticed students taking on a “no one gets left behind attitude” and that she and the seniors “grew closer together through senior projects.” However, in more recent years, Mary had been experiencing increased tensions with students around the deadlines and requirements. Mary shared several stories with the group about conflicts and tensions she had with both individual students and classes regarding the students’ frustrations and disappointment with the Senior Project. These stories included a multi-day upheaval with an entire class in which students collectively refused to do work, as well as stories of students and parents expressing anger and disappointment around missing a deadline or feeling they were unfairly assessed. Mary stated at one point that she hated that her conversations with her students often revolved around deadlines and requirements.

Despite these challenges, Mary saw the Senior Projects as a site of possibility for meaningful learning for her students. Her initial inquiry question was: How can we, my

students and I, make Senior Projects a place where students can bring their passion and interest, while also providing them with the skills needed for life after high school?

Despite the visionary and hopeful nature of this question, during the fall meetings, Mary rarely brought up Senior Projects in any depth during the check-in time. Instead, she often made general comments about challenges with district policies. She later noted that she didn't want to "contaminate the space" with Senior Projects.

After one of the meetings, Mary stuck around to talk with me after everyone else had left. During this conversation, Mary shared that "it's been a tough week and it's only Monday" and then shared about an ongoing tension at her school in which there was the belief that teachers fell into "two camps" – ones who were committed to social justice and ones who were more traditional and text-bookish. The teacher who had her students for three years before her is extremely on the "social justice side." In his class, not only do students not read the textbook, but they actively critique and primarily read texts by non-white authors. When she had the students during senior year, Mary felt as though she needed to expose them to the mostly-white authored literary canon. This dynamic caused her students and colleagues to view her in the "traditional camp." This situation was hard for her because it made her feel uncertain about her identity and who she is as a teacher. As a graduate of a program with a strong inquiry and social justice focus, she had always seen herself as a teacher with a social justice perspective, but also felt as though she needed to prepare them for college and expose them to textbook work. This situation was also causing tension between Mary and her students. The students really loved the other teacher, and so their negative feelings about her felt strong too. In the

past, when students didn't have this teacher for the previous three years, she felt that they oriented towards her differently.

At the next meeting, the group's primary activity was not a Descriptive Review session, but a shorter collaborative analysis session for my research, which prompted about an hour of open conversation afterwards in which I told the teachers that we could talk about whatever they wanted. During this time, Mary shared with the group the problem she had told me about after the previous meeting. She focused on her strained relationship with her class. The group coalesced around this issue for the rest of the meeting, asking Mary questions, sharing similar experiences, collectively trying to find ways for Mary to address this challenge. The group raised general questions like *What do students need and how do I know?* They also had specific questions for Mary, such as *Have you talked about the tension explicitly with them?*, *Has this come up in the past?*, and *Are there noticeable leaders?* Eventually, the group moved naturally into strategizing possible responses, wondering aloud about different options that Mary had available to her, such as trying to have an explicit conversation about the tension or having the students read canonical texts through the eyes of their favorite character or author. Near the end of the conversation, Becca shared, somewhat reflectively, "I would have a really hard time not being angry at the other teacher," sharing that she would have to work hard to manage that response within herself and find a more productive way of addressing the issue. In my field note reflections after that meeting, I called the conversation "fascinating" and noted that it "felt like a real situation with a lot of important issues at play," and that the questions and comments felt "empathetic, engaged, and real."

During the next three meetings, when it came time for someone else to volunteer to present their inquiry at the Descriptive Review sessions, Mary always allowed someone else volunteer. After every other person had presented, it was Mary's turn. Prior to the meeting, I emailed her to check in about what she'd like to present. In her response, Mary said that she could share something about Senior Projects, but then said that the group had "pushed her in some pretty hard ways" about where she was in terms of teaching and it "hit her" that she was enjoying talking about everything else while feeling pretty stuck exploring the topic of Senior Projects. She realized that she was just "getting through it" this year. This realization was hard for her for a host of reasons, including that she felt like it was all she had been talking about for the past four years and it felt out of control. She suggested that perhaps, instead of presenting about Senior Projects, it might be interesting to "unpack a bit why I'm feeling the way I am, although it isn't directly related to my initial question." She wrote that the group could review an email that she wrote to another teacher about how she was feeling as her data for the Review and think together about being stuck and overcoming it or feeling burned out.

I told Mary that I thought that would be a good idea and Mary's presentation of data ended up being about how she was feeling stuck as a teacher. Mary's focusing word was "stuck" and her framing question was "How do you keep your passion and do your best and care for yourself too?" Mary shared that she wanted balance in her life and felt that teaching takes over.

During the Descriptive Review, we read the email exchange between Mary and her colleague that Mary wrote when she realized she was feeling stuck. In that email, Mary wrote about how some of the study group meetings highlighted for her how much she was enjoying thinking about issues in education that had nothing to do with Senior Projects, which then led her to realize how much she dreaded them. She wrote “I want it to be fun again. I want to feel like I’m pushing myself and learning and thinking. And I feel like I’m stuck with Senior Project. I know I’ve said that in previous years, so I’m not sure why it’s different now.” In the next email, she elaborated on her feeling of being stuck: She felt desperate, out of control, guilty. She also felt self-blame, and as though she was letting down the students and wasn’t doing enough.

During the descriptive rounds, the teachers asked Mary questions and wrote stories about feeling “stuck.” Becca shared that she felt “brainwashed,” had “no voice,” was in multiple roles, and wanted to do things differently, but didn’t know how. Lucy told us about the pressure she felt as the person people look up to and how she had to say “no” to three additional responsibilities this week. She shared that her students were really cool people and she wished she had more time to get to know them.

Later, when I interviewed Mary, she elaborated on how the meeting in which she shared the struggles she was having with her seniors that “had nothing to do with Senior Projects” made her see how stuck she was feeling with Senior Projects. She shared that the conversation was a “huge moment” for her because she left that meeting feeling “so energized and excited.” She said “we just talked about my class and education and I was

feeling energized,” and then four hours later, the magnitude of not wanting to talk about Senior Projects hit her.

Mary’s narrative for her public inquiry was about her learning in the study group over time and her identity as teacher. She included her realization in an early study group meeting in which the teachers shared *Where My Teaching is From* poems, that her identity had always been organized around her success in school, first as a student, then as a teacher. In the presentation, she also reflected on how the “renewed energy and hope” from the study group conversation about her class led her to realize how she was feeling stuck. She also shared part of this experience of focusing on Senior Projects, having an energizing conversation, and then realizing she was stuck. She shared that she “ultimately ended up presenting about that idea of feeling ‘burnt-out’” and used the email to her colleague as “data” for her inquiry. She called her Descriptive Review session a “true confessions” session, and wrote that it helped her notice that she’d been thinking about her role as teacher.

Discussion of Mary’s Case

In the meeting in which we developed group norms, Mary shared that she was often quiet in meetings, but often had some of her most important insights on the car ride home from inquiry group meetings. The idea of the “car ride home” gained some currency in that conversation, as we all paused to reflect together about how often the most important realizations occur *after* the discussions. Mary’s case shows how the figurative space of “the car ride home” became an important marginal space for her, as she shared that it was

about four hours after a meeting that it “hit her” that she was feeling burnt out.

Additionally, for Mary, the conversation that she had with me after one of the meetings was another important marginal space in which she was able to share her concerns with one person before later bringing them to the attention of the group. The relationships between Mary’s discussions with her colleagues and her work in the study group also illustrates the way that teachers work in multiple inquiry communities that constantly inform one another. Mary’s ongoing discussion with her colleague was marked by a “professional intimacy” (Lytle, 2006) that allowed her to explore the most difficult aspects of her practice. Mary’s discussions and emails with her colleague became an initial space to express her feelings of being stuck before bringing this issue into the space of the study group.

We also see how the professional, political, and personal are intertwined. The “small school politics” led to tensions in Mary’s relationships with her colleagues and students. The feeling of energy and hope led to a realization that she was burnt out. The burnt out feeling is intertwined with her history of identifying strongly with her identity as a “good student” and later a “good teacher.” In Mary’s case, we also see how a *weird dynamic* story played a central role in her learning. Her willingness to open her practice up for the interpretation of others led to an energizing conversation in which the teachers were collectively analyzing and strategizing around a problem that had resonance for others as well.

Conclusion: Analysis of the Three Cases

While each of these cases illustrates different aspects of the role of marginal spaces in transformative learning, they also offer opportunities to come to new understandings by viewing them as a set. In this section, I analyze these cases in terms of what they allow us to see about expanded views of practice, the space of the group, their relationship to the group's discourse, and the nature of learning in marginal spaces.

These cases help us see how unofficial spaces have important functions in teacher inquiry groups. When there are predictable structures and planned topics of focus, open spaces allow other issues to surface. Because teachers are dealing with multiple, related issues all the time, the open spaces provide ways for the teachers to make sense of some of the reverberations from their inquiries or issues that arise separately from them. Together, these cases speak to the importance of marginal spaces in transformative learning and the relationships between the marginal spaces and the official inquiries. They open up analysis to include the email exchanges, informal conversations, and “car rides home” that relate to the official time in the group. They also highlight the value of open and unplanned conversations in inquiry communities, even ones that adhere to structures. These cases show how the marginal spaces are related to the official activities of the group in interesting ways. For example, in Mary's case, it was in one of the open conversations that she was able to raise an issue that, on the surface, “had nothing to do with senior projects,” which led her to use her Descriptive Review session to talk about the *real* issue of feeling burnt out. For Becca, sharing her frustrations during the check-in time became a related aspect of her official inquiry. While Melissa's official inquiry was

about homework, being part of conversations over time in which race talk was legitimized and literacy was conceptualized in broad terms allowed her to be more confident making changes in her classroom. The space of the group was one in which she was considering her practice and what she believed.

They also show how normalized features of the group's discourse – the inclusion of the personal and emotive aspects of teaching, as well as the three new genres of teacher talk – created openings for some of the *real* issues to be addressed for the teachers. With Mary, the “weird dynamic” story became the catalyst for her to come to a profound, yet unsettling, realization about her “stuckness.” She was also able to bring the highly personal nature of her stuckness that included concerns about taking care of herself in the face of teaching challenges into the space of the group. With Becca and Melissa, we see how policy talk and race talk, respectively, figured prominently into their learning.

As a set, these cases offer specific examples of what might be included within expanded views of practice, suggesting a wide range of activities that may inform the interactions with students within the official classroom space. All three cases illustrate how regular conversations with colleagues about the real issues in teaching are an important element of practice. In addition, these cases suggest that practice might be broadened to include the political dimension of how one navigates the micro-political (Ball, 1987) climate of a school as well as how one processes emotions and makes choices about responsibilities to ensure the ability to remain in teaching for the long haul (Maimon, 2009; Nieto, 2003)

Finally, these cases suggest that inquiry and learning happen in unexpected and unplanned ways. We must broaden where we look for learning to include the marginal spaces. We must also broaden our definition of what counts as learning if we are to allow space for teachers to contend with the *real* issues of their lives. For Becca, she was learning what it felt like to change practice in a way that bumped up against her school's policies, processing how she would continue to make changes she believed were important, and considering how she could use her role to make them. For Mary, she was learning more about what she needed to sustain herself in the teaching profession – meaningful discussions with colleagues about the big issues in education and about problems in the classroom. She was also raising questions about her role at her school and seeing that she was not alone in her stuckness. For Melissa, she was learning to have challenging discussions about race in her classroom and revising her initial assumptions about the function of talk in her classroom. None of these lessons would be visible if we were only to look at the official inquiries or the public presentation of the learning.

CHAPTER 6: Findings, Discussion, and Implications

Introduction

In Chapter One, I introduced the framework of transformative adult learning as a generative lens for understanding the work of teacher inquiry communities. I drew on research from various adult learning contexts to explore how adults seek learning opportunities in response to a range of situations in their lives and within various institutional contexts. I offered cases of self-organized groups of adults coming together as political groups, support groups, and reading communities. In Chapter Two, I described the methodological underpinnings of this study, highlighting how I intended to create a collaborative participatory research site where the teachers and I learned together. In that chapter, I described the Philadelphia context as well as the rich repertoire of resources and experiences in other inquiry communities that the teachers brought, which made the group a “site of intensification” for understanding teacher inquiry. In Chapter Two, I also began the work of conceptualizing my role as an engaged facilitator, or animateur” of change (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005) within this PAR/Practitioner Inquiry context. I opened questions about how my different position would play out in the group, as well as what would count as “action” within our context.

In Chapters Three, Four, and Five, I analyzed the spaces of this group, the work the teachers did and the learning that occurred as a result of this work. Chapter Three, which focused on the space of the group, offered a window into how our group culture developed through a series of discussions and facilitation moves early-on. This chapter

also showed how later we engaged in systematic looking at practice using the Descriptive Review processes (Carini, 2001; 2002). In that chapter, I analyzed how the teachers created a group culture by raising collective consciousness about the nature of their challenges and offered both affirmation and pushing. The more systematic processes that we used in the Fall fostered empathetic ways of viewing classrooms through noticing and wondering and leveraged the multiple perspectives of the group to make sense of practice. Chapter Four, which focused on the transformative potential of the process of going public, showed how co-writing a public presentation was a transformative and solidifying process. It provoked changes in the group and its members; it also provided opportunities for the group to solidify its identity and for the individual group members to solidify their own philosophies. In Chapter Five, I used the concept of *learning in the margins* to show how learning within the study group occurred in planned and unplanned ways. I suggested that a group space that validated feelings as a valuable knowledge source, as well as three genres of teacher talk – *policy talk*, *race talk*, and *weird dynamics* – created the context for particular kinds of learning in the margins to occur. These chapters offered frameworks for analysis of teacher communities and windows into our work. In this chapter, I summarize three key findings, discuss these findings, and outline implications.

Findings

There are three key findings from this study:

- 1) We created this space in planned and unplanned ways, and transformative learning occurred through both the structured and open spaces.

- 2) Teachers' stories were a central text for the transformative learning in the group and the stories did different kinds of work for the teachers.

- 3) Viewing the work of the group through an adult-learning lens provides a powerful framework that allows us to see the richness and depth of the learning that occurred in the group that might be invisible within traditional professional development frames.

Discussion

Below I discuss each of the three findings in turn. In the first section, *Structured and Open Spaces of Learning*, I will present a table that summarizes the spaces of learning across three phases of work in terms of the modes of thinking and changes that they provoked. Next, I will use the case studies of Mary, Becca, and Melissa to discuss the structured and open spaces of learning in the group. I will conclude that section by making visible some of the tensions I experienced facilitating these spaces. In the next section, *The Work of Stories in the Study Group*, I will explore the role that stories played in the study group by highlighting different kinds of work that stories did for the teachers. In the final section of the discussion, *Adult Learning as a Framework for Teacher Inquiry*, I will discuss the ways in which an adult-learning perspective offers a powerful framework with which to understand teacher inquiry by showing the conditions and practices of learning and then turning to a discussion of transformative learning as a humanizing practice.

Structured and Open Spaces of Learning

Ellsworth (2005) theorizes *pedagogy as design*, which assumes that learning spaces are shaped with pedagogical intent. She starts with an image of the learning self *in the making* (p. 29), which acknowledges the risk that is necessary for one to let go of old beliefs and open oneself up to new meanings. Ellsworth draws on examples of public spaces of learning, such as museums and memorials, to show how various structures allow learners to put themselves in relation to others and to new ideas without necessarily guiding or dictating how they make meaning of these spaces. Maya Lin, architect of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, DC, describes the places she creates as “places in which to think, without trying to dictate what to think” (Lin, 2000, in Ellsworth, 2005, p. 54). Expressing a similar idea, Ellsworth describes the idea of a “good-enough holding environment,” which provides “invitations that carry the potential for transitional experience” (p. 60). In other words, spaces of learning are *potential spaces* that are created with intent but are left open in terms of the meanings that might emerge. In this discussion, I will elaborate on how the study group became a space that included both structure and openness, and I will discuss how these structured and open spaces were designed with intent but also with the understanding that the unimaginable might emerge.

Structured and Open Spaces in the Study Group

This table summarizes some of the spaces of transformative learning that formed across three phases of the group’s work. It makes visible some of the spaces and structures (open conversations, texts as thinking partners, writing prompts, Descriptive Review) and

their relationships to some of the modes of thinking and transformations that occurred within them.

Table 5: Spaces of Transformative Learning Across Three Phases of Work

Modes of Thinking	Transformative Learning	Structured Spaces
In Early Meetings		
Affirmation	Seeing themselves as not alone Validation of “heart” and “deep down”	Open conversations with texts as thinking partners
Permission to Push	Seeing self as learner	Conversations about group norms and purposes (against the tide)
In Close Looking		
Noticing & Wondering	Slowing down, curious stance, non-habitual ways of looking	Descriptive Review (against the tide)
Multiple Perspectives	Questioning assumptions Empathetic views of classroom	Descriptive Review
In Going Public		
Re-reading classroom moments	Seeing stories in new relationships	“Life of Question” narrative
Re-reading self	Seeing progress	“Life of Question” narrative
Theorizing	Solidifying stance Writing self-into-future	Public Presentation

This table reveals how the spaces in the various phase contain different kinds of structures and different kinds of openness. The structures worked in ways comparable to what Ellsworth (2005) calls “armatures” for learning. She unpacks this metaphor in terms of the core that holds clay as it is being sculpted or the shell that protects the “softer, vulnerable tissues” (p. 94) of a turtle. They act as a “framework that protects as their users ‘go outside,’ and they provide supports for standing between realities and for

being in transition during the time that the old self is lost and the new self is in the making” (p. 94). In the early meetings, for example, the thinking partner texts and explicit conversation about group norms provided structure. Later, the Descriptive Review processes and the task of preparing a public presentation were the structures for the group’s “good enough holding environment” (Ellsworth, 2005). These structures provoked different kinds of changes in the teachers. They saw themselves differently; they practiced new, non-habitual ways of viewing practice; and they solidified and validated their beliefs. The following table displays the transformative learning by focusing on the three teachers from the case studies in Chapter Five.

Table 6: Case Studies of Transformative Learning in the Spaces of the Study Group

Person	Transformative Learning	Some Key Spaces
Becca	Breaking the norm at her school; Considering how to deal with constraining school environment	Descriptive Review “Check-in” Public Presentation
Melissa	Talking about race in classroom	After meeting Open discussions Being in community with Lucy
Mary	Realizing and sharing that she is “stuck”; Seeing role as a useful framework	Presentation proposal Open conversation about her class Systematic looking (her turn)

This table shows how various combinations of learning spaces that occurred within and around the group created different learning opportunities for the teachers. I do not intend to suggest that the learning only occurred in the spaces presented here, but rather to provide a working visual map of the synergistic relationships between different spaces

where learning occurred and the unexpected paths that teachers took within the group as they transformed themselves and their practice.

The “transformative learning” column suggests a broad definition of transformative learning that includes changes in classroom actions, sense of self and agency, and adoption of new frameworks for viewing practice. In the cases of Melissa and Becca, changes occurred in terms specific classroom actions. However, changes also included the adoption of new metaphors and frameworks to guide practice, as well as changes in the teachers’ sense of agency. For example, for Mary, the new concept of “role” helped her see herself differently as a teacher and Becca began to see herself in different relationship with those in her building as she grounded herself in her own beliefs about her work and took new actions that aligned with those beliefs. Importantly, this analysis suggests the need for a definition of “outcomes” for teacher learning communities that include changes in guiding frameworks and sense of agency, in addition to changes in classroom practice. These tables provide the context for the following discussion, in which I address three additional points about the learning spaces.

Intentional Design of Unexpected Learning

One of the aspects of inquiry that makes it distinct is that it is systematic and intentional (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). This study reveals how transformative learning occurred in systematic and intentional ways *and also* included intentional design of spaces for unexpected learning to arise. For Mary, making the choice to select a question of focus for a systematic inquiry and then the arrival of her time to present her work in

the Descriptive Review session “provoked an encounter” (Ellsworth, 2005) that forced her to come to the uncomfortable, even painful, realization that she was stuck. In this way the planned space worked like a prompt for her to face a realization that she had not yet faced. The unplanned spaces, such as the supportive context that was created and deepened early on, as well as the open conversation that allowed her to have an “energizing” conversation, provide the support and trust to feel comfortable bringing her “stuckness” to the group. Mary’s case also shows how the structure within the public presentation created the opportunity for a transitional experience (Ellsworth, 2005). As she re-read the conference proposal, which included a discussion of the theme of “teacher role,” she realized that she had been thinking about her teaching in terms of “role” and solidified the value of that metaphor for viewing her practice. This case suggests that, while learning happens in systematic and intentional spaces, it also occurs in unexpected ways.

This study calls attention to the importance of keeping, as Oliver poetically described, some room for the unimaginable when designing learning opportunities for teachers. The spaces that were left unplanned allowed Mary to bring her current problem to the group, Joel to process a recent crisis that occurred in his classroom the previous day, and stories that express “primordial concerns” (Rymes, 2009) to arise. Structured spaces, such as the Descriptive Review processes and the explicit discussion of group norms, created other kinds of transformations in the group and its members. Open spaces that allow issues to emerge *and* structured spaces that provoke encounters and allow participants to practice looking at practice in new ways are *both* important.

Pushing and Affirming

Transformative learning requires both pushing and affirming, and this study shows how some of the learning occurred when the teachers were pushed and other learning happened when they were affirmed. In the conversation about group norms, we engaged the question: “How can this group support me to take the risks I need in order to grow?” Implicit in this question are the assumptions that learning involves *both* being pushed *and* being affirmed. The discussion above suggests the ways that some of the structured spaces provoked encounters that pushed teachers outside of their comfort zone as learning selves *in the making* (Ellsworth, 1995). However, this study also highlights the importance of affirmation and support in spaces of transformative learning. It suggests that validation and support *are part of* learning, rather than a prerequisite for learning. Becca’s case, for example, suggests that having a space where her work was validated in the face of a school environment that was telling her that her classroom activities were wrong suggests that the affirmation was an integral part of the changes that she was able to make, as well as her sense of self as a teacher. Ellsworth (2005) calls for “pedagogies that both facilitate and alleviate the crisis of learning,” (p. 90) acknowledging that “putting self in relation” (p. 90) is uncomfortable and risky. This tension highlights the importance of considering the relationship between pushing and affirming.

Building a Feeling-ful Learning Community

This study makes the case that feelings and energy matter in spaces of transformative learning. The space that was created, at least at times, allowed the teachers to gain more clarity about what they knew “in their hearts” and “deep down.” It also provided a space

to “vent” and express anger and frustration. In these ways, they were able to “feel their work more deeply” (Maimon, 2009). The role of energy in the group is also significant. For Melissa, being part of a group where she got “that conference feeling” was a motivation for returning each week. In the case of Mary, one particularly energizing conversation about her practice made her realize that she was stuck. Palmer (1985) conceptualizes community as “a capacity for relatedness within individuals,” (unpaginated). This capacity to know oneself honestly allows individuals to extend outward and relate to others, ideas, and the world. In the study group, which provided the space to express and process feelings, group members reconfigured their relationships with themselves, their schools, their pasts, and their roles as teachers.

Facilitating the Study Group: Managing the Tensions of Structure and Openness

As discussed in Chapter Two, I occupied multiple roles within the context of the study group, and my role shifted over time. Despite the shifts, I remained in some form of facilitator role throughout the group’s work, and I conceptualized my role as *a practice*. I actively inquired into my evolving role and approach to facilitation by writing in my research journal. In this section, I draw on data from my journal to discuss the ongoing tensions that I experienced in facilitating the space of transformative learning throughout *the early meetings*, *closely looking at practice*, and *the process of going public*.

Lampert (1985) conceptualizes the teacher as a “dilemma manager” who sees tensions as a “tool of her trade” (p. 188). Instead of managing a problem in the traditional sense of solving it, Lampert manages dilemmas by making do through improvisation, acknowledging that tensions between competing demands will not disappear. According

to Lampert (1985), a dilemma- managing teacher “debates with herself about what to do, and instead of screening out responsibilities that contradict one another, she acknowledges them, embraces the conflict, and finds a way to manage” (p. 190). As the facilitator of the study group, I found myself constantly managing the tension between structure and openness. While the details and intensity of this tension changed, it was always with me. The following discussion provides windows into how this tension manifested during three parts of our work in which I took on the roles of “menu offerer,” chair, and glue. Ultimately, I suggest that while the details of the tension will differ, facilitators of transformative adult learning spaces must be prepared to manage the tensions between structure and openness.

Menu Offerer: Managing the Tension During the Early Meetings

In the early meetings, the tension of structure versus openness manifested itself in terms of choosing shared readings, developing an agenda, and making in-the-moment decisions about whether to stick to the agenda, modify it, or abandon it altogether. We developed the agenda and shared readings through the group members responding to and selecting some of the options that I offered to them. I came to see my role as “menu offerer” during this phase. While we co-constructed the agenda, we rarely followed it. As the facilitator, deciding whether to adhere to the agenda or allow the conversation to go in another direction was an ongoing tension. The following excerpt from my research journal, which I wrote after listening to the transcript of the second meeting in which the group went around and “shared thinking partner texts” reveals how the agenda was a sticky point for me:

During the "go around and share thinking partner texts" I think I was basically incapacitated because I was so worried about "moving it along" and keeping to the agenda... In retrospect, I realize that I really wasn't very present with what was happening. Strangely, this incapacitation kept me out of the conversation, which actually might have been a fortunate outcome! I'm listening now and realizing that there was lots of "work" and "thinking" and "orienting" going on in all of those little exchanges.

This excerpt reveals one of my frequent waves of realization that the group was doing important work on its own that was unplanned. It also reveals my internal experience as facilitator as I allowed the group to abandon the plan. In addition to the agenda, the selection of shared readings was another area in which I managed the tension of structure and openness.

I thought about the readings as a way to negotiate the group ownership. I had selected the readings for the first three meetings, but decided intentionally *not* to select them for the fourth. I wrote that I felt "relieved" when Becca offered to pick a reading for the fourth meeting. During the early meetings, I frequently urged myself in my research journal to "let go" and to trust the power of the teachers themselves to generate their own questions, select their own readings, and act in ways that were useful to them.

Chair (or "Talk Police"): Managing the Tensions During Looking Closely at Practice

As the group moved from the relatively unstructured conversations that were characteristic of the early meetings to the more structured processes of developing inquiry questions and participating in Descriptive Review processes, I moved into the role of "chair" for the Descriptive Reviews. No longer would I participate as frequently

by sharing my own views, but rather I would “hold some head space” (Wice, personal communication, June 12, 2010) to track the themes that emerged from the group’s conversation. I experienced tensions related to our new structure during the first meeting of this phase in a significant way. We were planning on beginning the Descriptive Review sessions using Lucy’s inquiry, and Joel came to the meeting having experienced a crisis in his classroom. He came to the meeting distraught and told me when he arrived that he would want to talk about it. During the check in time, he shared the situation with the group. I wrote:

During “check in” time, Joel shared that yesterday, one of his students had been jumped in his classroom. He was very upset and at a loss about how to respond in the upcoming days. The group immediately responded with empathy, sitting with the situation in silence and acknowledging the magnitude of the event. They started asking questions to understand the multiple dimensions of the situation, including Joel’s feelings about himself as a teacher, and helped Joel brainstorm possible responses.

Throughout this time, I was feeling panicked about sticking to “the plan” – forty five minutes had ticked away and we still hadn’t even come close to thinking about Lucy’s work. At one point, I looked at Becca – “Do you want to do your check in?” I asked. “I could,” Becca responded, “but I think we need to honor what just came up.”

For the rest of the meeting, we focused on Joel’s crisis, which led to some weighty conversations about school cultures and big questions such as, *How do you, as a teacher, support students to take different pathways from their families while also affirming their familial bonds?* Despite the strong sense of support, intense energy, and engagement with big, universal questions about teaching that occurred during that meeting, I was left wondering if we were ever going to get to the Descriptive Reviews or if something would always come up.

Throughout the fall, I was in the role of facilitating the structured oral inquiry practices. I felt what I called a “tug between staying with the Descriptive Processes and breaking into ‘open’ conversation.” I sometimes questioned whether Descriptive Review was the best way to use our time together, and I looked to group members to help affirm the value of these processes for them. During Joel’s Descriptive Review meeting, I noted that he helped me stick to the process when the conversation seemed like it was moving in generative directions and I was tempted to break from the descriptive rounds. At several points, I asked Joel if he wanted to keep going with the process and he said he did. I also felt uncomfortable in my role as the “talk police,” noting that it was hard for me to tell teachers “No, you can’t ask a question.” Throughout this time, I reminded myself of the value of these processes. At one point, I wrote in my journal, “I must have faith in this practice.” Later I started to feel more comfortable in the role as the teachers affirmed that the processes were useful. Even as I became more confident in the value of the processes for the teachers, I still had doubts, especially when the process felt very slow. I wrote, “There were a few times when I wondered – especially when it felt very slow with the paraphrasing – and I thought ‘Gosh, these teachers are here at 7:30 pm on a Monday night, this better be good for them!’” Since open conversations felt generative during the early meetings, creating more structured (e.g. silence, conversation about group norms, Descriptive Review processes) sometimes felt “against the tide.” However, these processes were developed to allow teachers and parents to practice non-habitual ways of looking at students that are markedly different from ways that are common in schools.

Glue: Managing the Tensions During the Process of Going Public

As discussed in Chapter Four, during the process of going public, I shared the facilitation role with Lucy and Melissa. This was another uncomfortable transition. The following excerpt is from my research journal after I asked teachers to volunteer to facilitate the meetings leading up to the conference:

This is really scary for me - However, I urge myself to trust that what comes out of this will be exactly what is meant to. I like the idea of the study group members taking a lead on this - I think it's important. This is not *me reporting my research*. This is our group sharing our learning. It will be interesting to see how these different roles play out.

With this entry, I acknowledge that I have particular visions and accept that they may not play out. I am also coming to clarity about my role, noting that my role as researcher *of* the group is not a central feature of the group's presentation.

During the process of going public, the tension of structure and openness manifested itself in my own reflections on how much "analysis" to do of the group. I wrote in my journal that I didn't know how much "framing" to do and what kind of framing: "Any 'frame' I put on the work feels somewhat constraining, but at the same time, the group has asked me to be the 'glue' for this presentation and shared that they like when I notice themes and draw ideas together." Here, again, we see how I use the journal to talk to myself, but here I am convincing myself of the need for more structure, in the form of analysis, rather than less.

This discussion of my shifting roles over time and the ways that I experienced tensions of structure and openness over the course of the group's work is meant to offer a window into my experience as facilitator of the group and highlights my ongoing process of both "letting go" and allowing the unexpected to arise in open spaces, while also creating structures, which often felt "against the tide." One of the unexpected aspects that emerged within the open spaces was the stories that the group members told. These stories, like the spaces, evolved over time. The following discussion elaborates on the various work that stories did for the teachers.

The Role of Stories as Texts in Transformative Learning

The second finding of this study relates to the work that stories did in the study group. Stories have long been recognized as a powerful means through which meaning is made for both individuals and cultures (Bruner, 1991) and a way for humans to organize and make sense of their experiences. Rymes (2009) writes of both the possibilities and risks of telling stories in groups. She elaborates on stories' potential to build a common shared narrative, to generate more stories, and to allow tellers and listeners to make sense of themselves and the world. According to Rymes (2009), stories illuminate individual and social difference, while at the same time connecting us to our "universal humanity" (p. 163) and "universal primordial concerns" (p. 177). Stories can also put the storyteller in an agentive position, as constructor of meaning, and have a visionary potential in which people write themselves into their futures. As Rymes (2009) points out, "Because our narratives portray us in our best light they can, if heard, also give us something to live up to" (p. 183). However, as Rymes observes, sharing stories within groups can be risky:

“If a narrative provides a way to make sense of our own complex experiences, opening that narrative up to the possibility of being shaped publicly can be threatening” (p. 173). Despite this threat, risky stories can create the context for more risky or vulnerable stories to be told, contributing to a sense of group identity and valuable opportunities to learn from them.

Within the context of a teacher inquiry community, Himley (2000) discusses the function of stories for the political moments study group, which was a group of college writing instructors who came together regularly to tell stories in which the teller believed “the political” was somehow at play. Himley (2000) describes how the stories “fueled the group and kept it moving” (p. 204). In addition to creating the group, stories also became a valuable text within it. They allowed participants to connect micro-moments to the larger issues, making these macro-dynamics of teaching “readable and talk-able” (p. 204). In the political moments study group, analyzing stories closely allowed the people within the stories to become more real, rather than being viewed with quick labels such as “male student” or “new teacher.” Himley elaborates that stories allowed group members to “understand the episode and then to re-imagine [their] role/s in it” (p. 204). Analyzing stories by considering their role allowed participants to imagine new actions that may never have been imagined.

In the case of the adolescent literacy education study group, stories did different kinds of work. In preparing for the public presentation, the teachers felt strongly that they wanted others to know how important stories were in the group. The group created an image of

the kind of group that we were by describing the kinds of stories we told: Stories that can keep you up at night because they are “thrilling, exciting, troubling, disturbing memorable, meaningful, puzzling, blow-your-mind, haunting, paradoxical, joyous, victorious, defeating, or painful.” With this collaboratively developed list, the group created a public group identity as a story-telling group. This introduction conveyed the message that this was the kind of group that used stories to work with the important issues of teaching. This section discusses four kinds of work that stories did in the group.

Stories for Problem-Posing

The group used stories for problem-posing, and the form and nature of the problem-posing changed over the course of the group’s year of work together. Early-on, stories worked as they often do in consciousness-raising groups or in emancipatory teaching and research contexts: as a means by which tellers and listeners come to a) better understand the nature and dimension of individual struggles and b) establish connections between stories, thereby seeing stories in light of greater macro-political structures. In the early meetings, stories became a medium through which the teachers raised a collective agreement that “it’s hard” to teach adolescent literacy in these times, and the stories the teachers told became a means through which they could share and explore some of the dimensions and reasons for the challenges.

During the *Close Looking at Practice*, story-telling for problem-posing became more structured and disciplined. Each teacher wrote “story of the question” narratives and

shared them with the group for feedback. Stories emerged in these conversations that illustrated the issue at hand and helped the teachers refine the questions that they wanted to ask about their practice. Later as the teachers took turns presenting an issue of practice, stories became a means through which they presented and shared the issues for review. These stories were usually constructed more as a narrative or collection of moments rather than as a single moment from practice. During the public presentation, stories became a means through which the group exposed – in an aesthetically powerful way – the nature of the challenges of teaching adolescent literacy. Lucy’s stories, for example, expose the sheer complexity of the relationships among race, language, identity, and power and how this complexity creates an extremely challenging set of factors for literacy teachers to negotiate.

Stories as Building Blocks for Larger Narratives

In the going public process, especially, stories became building blocks for larger narratives. The teachers grouped stories together, often ones that had already been told, in order to create narratives about themselves, teaching, and the group. The example of Joel’s “life of the question” narrative illustrates how he constructed an image of himself as an evolving teacher-intellectual who learned from his struggles. He ended on a hopeful note, posing a new set of generative questions (e.g., How am I positioning myself and my students within this community?) and ending with a new image for himself and his practice by repeating the phrase “I want”: “I want to know my students. I want to be a meaningful teacher to them.” This narrative suggests that Joel is writing himself into the future, making a public commitment by standing up for what he wants. This public

commitment suggests that narrative may be functioning to give Joel something to live up to (Rymes, 2009). Becca, too, delivers something of a publicly witnessed contract with herself as she includes “I want” statements in her narrative as well:

I still want my classroom to be less teacher-centered, and for the life of the class to come from student talk, from their voices, ideas, and interactions with each other. I still want to guide my students to use talk to deepen and build on their understandings of texts, and I want the nature of talk in my room to be something that invests kids, something that engages them.

Within the context of Becca’s school culture, this statement is a radical departure from business-as-usual. The public sharing of her philosophy about talk and her desires for her students serves as a commitment to the work of creating spaces for student talk, despite the fact that the voices at her school are telling her it is wrong to do so. With the examples of Joel and Becca, we see how public narratives can be a building block for a larger narrative – a way to connect past, present, and future.

Stories for Theorizing

In the early meetings, stories became a means through which the group gained a collective consciousness about the nature of the challenges of teaching adolescent literacy. In *Looking Closely at Practice*, stories served a deepening function, becoming a “shared focus of inquiry” (Himley, 2000, p. 200). During the process of going public, stories became a way to theorize practice, as the teachers solidified their stances and beliefs about literacy education and their role as English teachers. Chapter Four shows how the discussion of both Joel’s and Lucy’s stories allowed the teachers to hold several related stories in focus at the same time, establishing connections between moments across time and space and creating new meanings in the spaces between them. In that

discussion, we read about how Joel came to new insights about the spaces of classrooms when he quietly reflected, “the space...” before coming to the realization that there was something about *the space itself* that was creating a chance for community in his classroom. With this example, we see how the juxtaposition of multiple stories together allowed for new knowledge to emerge. It was also during this process that the teachers developed the shared theory that “how we view students affects how they view themselves,” which was a result of the *collective* stories of the group and the prompt to come up with “themes across” the inquiries. These examples suggest that stories in combination with the formal task of going public – we see how stories provide the grist for theorizing practice, developing new frameworks for thinking about teaching.

Stories as a Means Through Which to Give and Receive Support

Finally, stories became a means through which the teachers gave and received support. Looking at the study group through the lens of a support group allows us to see how the stories served a supportive function in various ways. Early-on, with the constant affirmation that came with the refrain “it’s hard,” the teachers used stories to gain a sense of collective struggle. With Becca’s description of it being “the most relieving thing in the world” to find someone else who shared her struggles, we see the power of these teachers finding each other – other people who want to engage in the struggle, think about things deeply, and feel similarly frustrated and constrained by school policies. Stories became a medium through which the teachers could experience “universality” (Yalom, 1995), as they found great relief in finding others who shared their concerns.

Later we saw how *race talk*, *policy talk*, and *weird dynamics* stories offered a way for teachers to share vulnerable or difficult aspects of their practice and to receive support from the group. Often teachers shared one of these types of stories, and then the group coalesced around the teller by asking clarifying questions that served to deepen the sense of context and allow for collective analysis of the issues at play. During these times, the group took on a supportive role by focusing on the story teller and her or his situation. I noticed this pattern early-on in the open conversations and began to refer to these as “lightning rod stories” because the story quickly attracted the attention of the other group members, who shifted their focus to the story-teller and her or his issue. Mary’s dilemma with her seniors, presented in Chapter Five, is an example of this kind of episode. The patterns embedded in these “lightning rod story” episodes bear resemblance to the patterns of a Clearness Committee in which group members ask the teller questions to help her come to clarity about the dimensions of the issue at play and how she might respond. I noticed the absence of advice-giving and the diversity and depth of questions during these episodes. There was a sense that the group could not *solve* anyone’s problem, but rather help him or her see it in a different way, open up new meanings, and put the teacher in touch with her own wisdom in solving it.

During the process of going public, the group took on some of the characteristics of another kind of support group, a writing group, as the teachers organized themselves to support each person in constructing his or her “life of the question” narrative. Writing groups’ primary function is to help individual writers engage in making individual texts better through “acts of revision” (Moss, Highberg, & Nicholas, 2004, p. 2). In the

meeting in preparation for the public presentation, interestingly, the work of revision came not in the texts, necessarily, but in the theories and practices that underpinned the texts. In other words, the teachers used the writing group not to engage in text work in the sense of improving the individual narratives, but to collectively theorize and improve the *practice* that these texts represented.

The various stages of the study group and the various types of support groups that it emulated reveal how stories went from supporting teachers in feeling less alone to supporting them in making sense of problems of practice to supporting them in taking action, both in their classroom through improved practice and also by sharing their insights with the field, that would be meaningful and impactful.

Adult Learning as a Framework for Teacher Inquiry

When the students come, of course, they bring with them, inside of them, in their bodies, in their lives, they bring their hopes, despair, expectations, knowledge, which they got by living, by fighting, by becoming frustrated. Undoubtedly they don't come here empty. They arrive here full of things. In most of the cases, they bring with them opinions about the world, about life. (Freire, 1990, p. 156-7)

In Chapter One, I presented adult learning theory as a generative framework through which to understand the learning that occurs in teacher inquiry groups. Specifically, I laid out the following four aspects of adult learning theory:

- Includes consideration of the political and personal, *as well as* the professional, dimensions of adults' lives (Brookfield, 1993; Noffke, 1997)

- Draws on the rich and varied life experiences that adults bring, including experiences in various educational and professional roles within multiple institutions over the course of their lives
- Foregrounds the self-directed, problem-driven nature of learning and aims to give adult learners control over what is to be learned and how (Brookfield, 1993; Mezirow, 1997; Verner, 1964)
- Attends to the space and facilitation practices of adult learning communities that aim for democratic and transformative means and ends (Brookfield, 1986; Horton & Freire, 1990; Mezirow, 2002)

Taken together, these aspects of adult learning create a picture of adults who come to learning, in the words of Freire, “full of things” (Freire, 1990, p. 157). I drew on Mezirow’s (1990) conception of transformative learning to inform my own working definition, *coming to see differently*. Saavedra expands this definition in the context of a teacher study group:

Through understanding their world and themselves within their world, teachers engage in the process of creating and shifting knowledge, meanings, ideologies, and practices, and thus transform themselves and the conditions of their lives. (Saavedra, 1996, p. 272)

This broad definition of learning encompasses practices as well as ideologies and acknowledges the ever-shifting nature of knowledge generation. It suggests that teachers are changing themselves, and the emphasis on “conditions of their lives” suggests an expanded view of practice that extends beyond the activities that occur during the official classroom hours.

Conditions and Practices for Teacher Transformative Learning

The past decade has been marked by a series of reform efforts meant to improve and measure “teacher quality,” resulting in increased standardization and monitoring of the teaching profession (e.g. Nieto, 2003). Within this context teachers’ work has become increasingly regulated, scripted, and narrowly defined (e.g., Ingersoll, 2002), and initiatives such as merit pay and scripted curricula leave little autonomy to teachers and increase cultures of isolation. In this climate, professional development often relies on outside experts coming into schools to deliver “best practices” that teachers are encouraged to follow. This trend ignores the resources that teachers bring to their learning, rendering invisible both their knowledge and the non-linear evolution of their development.

In contrast, the teacher research movement, and the communities embedded within it, provides a counter-narrative to these trends. This movement recognizes that viewing “outcomes” narrowly in terms of changing teaching actions in the classroom misses some of the *real* in teachers’ lives today. Recent work on inquiry communities with transformative (Saavedra, 1996), inquiry-based (Blackburn et al., 2010; Meyer, 1998; Nieto, 2003), or emancipatory (Luna et al., 2004; Souto-Manning, 2011) underpinnings provide powerful counter-examples to these trends in that they define practice and outcomes broadly. Nieto (2003), for example, offers a vision of teaching that includes evolution, love, autobiography, anger, hope, intellectual work, democratic practice, and shaping futures. Similarly, adult learning theory provides a lens for viewing teacher inquiry that is broad and encompassing of the multiple facets of adults’ lives. These

facets include the personal, political, and emotive aspects of the teaching profession.

Transformative adult learning, as a framework, provides a powerful lens for looking at the work that occurs in teacher inquiry communities because it focuses on the transformative, or *change-oriented*, potential of the learning that occurs within the communities. The following figure summarizes some of the conditions and practices that occurred within this community:

Figure 1: Conditions and Practices for Transformative Learning in the Adolescent Literacy Education Study Group



This figure displays the diversity of practices and conditions that caused changes in the group members, their teaching practice, and their sense of selves. It reflects many of the tenants of adult learning theory in that these practices and conditions allowed the teachers

to use their past experiences, integrate their knowledge from multiple contexts, and direct their own learning. While this figure is more of a collecting place than a framework to be replicated, it offers a snapshot of the various ways that the adults in this group learned together.

These practices and conditions take seriously the idea that teaching is personal, political, intellectual work. They highlight the kinds of rich learning spaces that keep teachers for the long-haul who, like the teachers in the group, are dedicated to advancing their own knowledge. They do this work despite working within school cultures that are not only constraining, but often dehumanizing. In the following section, I highlight how the transformative learning in the group was *humanizing work* that offered a counter-space to the often dehumanizing practices of schools.

Transformative Adult Learning as Humanizing Work

It takes vigilance – hard, recursive work – and it takes educating ourselves in the largest sense of the word to keep alive this awareness of human complexity. It takes an active attunement to the fullness of passion in each person, to the driving desires of each person to make and to do, and to the strong, basic need of each of us – and all – to be valued and valuable. (Carini, 2000, p. 131)

In the preface of this study, Becca talks about why literacy education matters so much, positing that it encompasses issues of self-worth; self-actualization, capacity for empathy, and ethics. She calls it “gigantic,” “heavy stuff” and “large and crazy,” with the potential to damage people if it is done hurtfully. Her comments remind us of what is at stake in literacy classrooms and why it’s important for literacy educators to have conversations

that keep their humanness alive in the face of constraints. Campano characterizes teacher inquiry as a “collective struggle for humanization” and calls attention to the “everyday invisible political work of teaching” (p. 334-5). In the context of the study group, the teachers were engaged in the “hard recursive work” of educating themselves and keeping alive a sense of their human complexity and that of their students in the face of constraining and dehumanizing school policies.

The framework of adult learning allows us to see how teachers bring the political, professional, and personal dimensions of their lives to their learning. It also highlights the histories that adults bring as well as their visions for their futures. The teachers created that context with the experiences, stories, knowledge, and ideas that they brought to the space of the study group. Becca came to the group with a concern that she was becoming brainwashed or losing sight of what she believed. Mary craved intellectual conversation and chances to “think things through” with other committed educators. Melissa wanted “that conference feeling” where you leave feeling light, energized and excited. Joel experienced inquiry communities in graduate school and wanted to always keep inquiring into his practice with others. Lucy joined “for the ride,” valued the salon-style nature of the discussions, and wanted the group to help her meet her professional goals of publishing her work and applying to do graduate work. Together this group of teachers and I created a space to enact humanizing practices. From eating together to examining student work; from expressing frustrations to committing to look at one thing for a whole hour together; from listening, to supporting, to pushing, to affirming; the

teachers were committed to engaging in what was real for them in their lives and in their classrooms.

Teacher inquiry groups are inherently concerned with making changes on classroom, school, and societal levels. Teaching is a political act, and teachers are professionals who are making changes in their classrooms. Foley's analysis of "learning in the struggle" posits that one of the most powerful kinds of learning is the increased awareness of agency that comes with political action as people learn "that they *could* act, and learning that the action that they took made a difference" (p. 26). Teachers have been theorized as "cultural workers" (Freire, 1998) and public intellectuals (Giroux, 1985). They are political people with strong beliefs and *feelings* about how they and their students are positioned in schools, investments in the communities in which they live and work, and care and concern for the well-being of both their students and themselves.

This dissertation reveals that one of the reasons that teaching English is so *hard* is that teachers are often up against constraining school policies that differ from their own visions of "good teaching" or what is "the best" for students. Becca wondered early on "why is it so hard to do what you know is right for students," and she feared becoming co-opted by the standardization regime at her school. Mary was up against tight regulations for Senior Projects and student writing which constrained both her relationship with her students and their opportunities to learn. Lucy's case reveals how a single word can carry strong and divergent meanings for different students and the complexity of teaching students across racial and cultural difference. Becca highlights

just how *personal* literacy education is, and the stories of the constraining policy contexts in which the teachers found themselves foreground the *political* nature of literacy education as well. Together these examples call attention to the messy human quality of literacy education.

Implications

In the long run, environments developed by and for teachers that facilitate their professional development benefit students' learning. The most important aspect of the study group is that it provides time for teachers to reflect, analyze, and critique practices together. Teachers can consciously interrogate and change classrooms and schools, thus working toward their transformations (Saavedra, 1996, p. 273).

This quotation from Saavedra describes three aspects of teacher learning communities that I wish to highlight in this section. First, it suggests what others have also suggested (Vasquez, 2004; Nieto, 2003; Saavedra, 1996; Meyer, 1998); that students' opportunities to learn are dependent on their teachers' opportunities to learn. Second, it corroborates recent work on teacher learning communities that argues for the importance of *making time and space for learning* (PTLC, 1984; Carini, 2000; Himley et al., 1997; Ballenger, 2009; Nieto, 2003; Meyer, 1998). Finally, it suggests that *the teachers* are in charge of their own learning. This study builds on these three ideas. The following implications are for teacher educators, professional development facilitators, teachers, policy makers, researchers, and school leaders. They are implications both for creating transformative learning communities for teacher learning, fostering school environments that support this kind of work, and theorizing and researching teacher inquiry as transformative adult learning.

Creating Spaces of Structure and Openness. Transformative learning occurs in both structured and open spaces, and these kinds of spaces have synergistic relationships. Rather than prescribe a set of practices that characterize “structured” and “open” spaces, I instead suggest structured and open spaces as a framework for designing and enacting transformative learning communities. As the analysis of my facilitation shows, these structures shift and change over time and so facilitators must adopt an *inquiry stance* (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009) towards facilitation of these spaces. Areas of inquiry might include the role of shared texts, the function of agendas, the ways the group culture is formed early-on through planned and unplanned conversations, facilitation moves that open up certain kinds of space, the role of silence in the learning community, and the limitations and affordances of looking at practice in disciplined ways.

Defining “Outcomes” Broadly. Chapter Four showed how the *process* of going public prompted the teachers in the group to analyze and theorize practice. Chapter Five illustrated how the learning occurred in unexpected and unplanned ways and that this *learning in the margins* was a space where teachers were able to engage with some of the *real* issues in their practice. This study suggests that school leaders must think broadly about outcomes for teacher development initiatives and must look for and recognize learning in unexpected places. For facilitators of learning communities, defining outcomes broadly means looking for learning in unexpected places and considering the enactment of a democratic learning community as an end in itself. Melissa’s case highlights that participation in this community where talk was a form of learning allowed her to expand the opportunities that she offered students. This case, along with the other

data from this study, highlights the unexpected ways that learning occurs in these kinds of groups. Defining outcomes broadly includes adopting an expanded view of practice that includes the personal, political, professional, and emotive dimensions of teaching, the real problems and concerns that teachers bring, as well as how their past experiences shape their learning.

The Role of Stories and Shared Texts. This study suggests that stories do meaningful work in transformative inquiry communities. They can be a way to establish a group's culture, pose problems, build larger narratives, theorize, and a means through which support can be offered and received. Facilitators of teacher groups can analyze stories to understand how stories function in the group, and they can create both planned and unplanned structures for story-telling. While shared texts by outside authors did not figure prominently into this group in the later months, this analysis suggests that the texts may have been a mediating object in the group, with the themes in the texts themselves opening up particular kinds of stories.

Making Time and Space for Meaningful Learning. Schools are rushed places where the fast pace of "NCLB time" (Genishi & Dyson, 2009) can make it difficult for teachers and students to engage with each other in authentic ways. Within these communities, teachers do not have ample time to sit face-to-face and talk together about practice. Transformative learning involves feelings, questioning long-held beliefs, grappling with the nature and dimensions of the *problem itself*, and *imagining possibilities*. Stokes (2001) shows how multiple formats for teacher learning communities allow for differing

levels of depth of inquiry and highlights the challenges of creating these trusting spaces within school environments, as making oneself vulnerable within the workplace is risky. Schools must provide space for teachers to *get real* about their practice by offering teachers the chance slow down and gain a sense of what they feel “in their hearts,” “in their guts,” and “deep down.” It requires allowing space for the difficult subjects to come up – subjects that are risky and vulnerable, such as discussion of race, policy, and open issues of practice.

Consideration of the Well-being of Teachers. Teacher turnover remains a concern in the field (Ingersoll, 2003) and scholars have called attention to the need to diversify opportunities for teachers to grow intellectually within the teaching profession (Johnson, 2007; Nieto, 2003). This study suggests that school leaders need to find ways for teachers to lead intellectual lives that do not require them to leave the teaching profession, but instead allow them to experience meaningful intellectual conversations with other colleagues while remaining classroom teachers. In addition to sustaining the intellectual lives of teachers, school leaders must consider the professional and political dimensions as well. hooks’s (1994) concept of engaged pedagogy asserts that teachers must be “actively committed to a process of self-actualization that promotes their own well-being if they are to teach in a manner that empowers students” (hooks, 1994, p. 15). She draws on Buddhist peace activist Thich Nhat Hanh, who emphasizes the importance of people within the helping professions first caring for themselves before they are able to care for students (hooks, 1994). This study, especially the case studies in Chapter Five, suggests the urgency with which we must create school contexts that allow teachers

opportunities for self-actualization, intellectual stimulation, and commitment to their own well-being.

Cross-Contextual Learning Opportunities for Teachers. At several points in this study, the teachers shared that a large part of the reason that they spoke so honestly about their feelings and the difficult moments in their classrooms was that our group was comprised of teachers from different schools. In addition to making space for risky stories, the cross-contextual nature of the group provided an opportunity for the teachers to do the intellectual work of contextualizing their stories within their school environments when they shared their practice with the others in the group. In her interview, Becky described that making some of the taken-for-granted aspects of her teaching context visible to others allowed her to see her practice in new ways. It also provided the intellectual opportunity for the teachers to theorize common themes across different schools. This study points to the value of cross-contextual learning opportunities, such as cross-visitation and teacher learning communities that are made up of teachers from different schools.

Living Research. In this study, we co-created a participatory research context that met over the course of one calendar year. During the course of this year, the group had a life that changed over time. As the group changed, my research questions and frameworks changed as well. The teachers in the study group changed the way I thought about research and literacy. Richardson (1997) suggests that the research process itself can change the researcher. As soon as I conceptualized this study, I started seeing the world

differently and also allowed the world to inform my work with the study group. For example, attending a meeting of the School Reform Commission in Philadelphia after meeting with the teachers just a few times changed how I experienced that event and that event changed how I saw the teachers in the group. Hearing teacher testimonies in protest of the scripted curricula, I became even more disheartened by the environments in which teachers were working, while at the same time becoming more committed to the work of keeping meaningful learning spaces alive for teachers and students. Even after the study group stopped meeting, my frameworks for thinking about the group changed significantly based on my engagement with new events and ideas, such as the Occupy Movement and my own experiences in various learning communities. This suggests that participatory research contexts not only *living research* contexts, but also that the researchers' engaged in the work of research are *living research* through their interactions with the world.

Adult Learning Theory and Teacher Inquiry. This study has shown how adult learning frameworks are a generative way to view teacher inquiry communities. Future analysis might point to how practices and theories from the teacher inquiry movement may inform adult learning theory. While facilitating adult learning spaces that foster critical reflection has received some attention in the literature (e.g. Brookfield, 1986; Mezirow, 1997), as a field, adult learning could benefit from some of the practices of teacher inquiry that facilitate questioning assumptions and developing a collective sense of the nature of the problem.

Appendix A: Interview Protocol, Round 1

This was the semi-structured interview protocol for the first round of interviews, conducted in the summer of 2010, after the first few meetings of the study group.

The purpose of this interview is for me to have a chance to talk to you one-on-one and ask you some questions about your experience in the study group. You don't need to answer anything that you don't want to and please ask me if you have any questions or concerns.

General Questions About Teaching Context – 10 mins

What grades/subjects do you teach? (*only if I don't know*)

How would you characterize your school?

Follow up: What is professional development like at your school?

Can you talk to me a little bit about your students?

Could you briefly tell me why you decided to be a teacher? Why an [English/Language Arts/Social Studies] teacher?

Could you briefly tell me why you chose to work with adolescents?

What other teacher (or other) communities are you involved in or have you been involved in that inform your work?

Teachers' Beliefs about Teaching Context – 10 mins

I know you've talked in our group meetings about some of the issues and concerns you have in your context. In addition to what you've already said, what are some of the dilemmas, problems, or concerns you have right now in your teaching context?

What are some of the most promising or exciting possibilities that you see in your teaching context?

Teachers' Expectations, Hopes, and Initial Questions About the Study Group- 10 mins

How did you hear about the study group?

Follow Up: What did you think when you first heard/read about it?

What are your hopes or expectations for the group?

What, if any, concerns do you have about the group?

What other experiences have you had in groups like this?

Follow Up: What did you gain?

Follow Up: What were the challenges?

Generating Knowledge about Adolescent Literacy Education – 15 mins

In our meetings so far, have there been any “ah-hah” moments for you? Moments that stand out for some reason?

Ask follow up, such as: Why do they stand out?

Since this study group is about the topic of adolescent literacy education, I’m wondering what you’re thinking about your own or others’ thinking about the idea of literacy and how it matters.

Follow Up: Can you recall any turning points in your thoughts about literacy? or literacy education for adolescents?

How have your beliefs about [adolescents, literacy, education] changed over time?

What do you want to know about adolescent literacy education?

Are there any particular aspects of yourself or your experience that you find you are bringing to our conversations?

Literacy Practices and Social Practices in the Study Group – 10 mins

As you know, part of what I’m trying to document and understand is how each of us experiences this group. In the next few questions, I’ll be trying to get a feel for what your perceptions are of the group.

How would you describe the group?

Follow up: Ask about roles

How would you describe the kinds of conversations we’re having?

What has been most useful for you?

What has been least generative or useful?

Appendix B: Interview Protocol, Round 2

This was the semi-structured interview protocol for the second round of interviews, conducted in the fall of 2011, after the study group had finished meeting.

Intro: The purpose of this interview is for me to get a sense of what some of the most meaningful moments and interactions were for you in the study group. I'm especially interested in exploring some key moments, moments that stand out for some reason or led to a shift in your thinking.

Culture of the Group

What would you say our work was mostly about? What was our shared project over the year?

How did members of the group support and push each other?
Can you give an example?

What were some of the most important ideas that we discussed?

Could you tell me about your own inquiry? What knowledge did you generate about your topic?

Resources

What knowledge, perspectives or experiences do you feel you brought to the group?
(LP)

What knowledge, perspectives or experiences do you feel others brought? (LP)

Moments that Stand Out

I want to invite you to reflect back on your experience in the study group.

What was the most important insight or lesson that you gained from working in the group?

What were some of the most meaningful moments or conversations, ones that stand out?

Moments when:

- You saw something differently afterwards
- You felt some sort of conflict or tension
- The conversation was particularly memorable
- You got a new idea
- You had a realization
- Were a turning point in terms of your own inquiry

What was the experience like? What was it about that discussion/moment that made you see things differently? What did it feel like?

What were some of the most meaningful things you read, readings that stand out?

What were some of the most meaningful things you wrote, writing that stands out?

(ask follow ups to get the person to elaborate on the moment)

Generating Knowledge About Adolescent Literacy Education

What has changed as a result of your thinking about your topic?

What has changed as a result of you thinking about others' topics?

Possible Follow Up:

Could you tell me about any ways that your work in the study group changed your practice? Interactions with colleagues? Students? Self-perception?

Reflect on the various participation structures:

How would you describe the different ways we talked?

Which were most useful in generating new knowledge for you?

What were the biggest challenges and benefits from working in the study group?

Reflect on norms and values:

(Show norms and values): Here are the norms and values that we developed in meeting 4. Could you reflect aloud about them? What stands out? What did each value look like or feel like? Did we enact them? Where was there room for improvement?

Appendix C: Sample Structure for Analytic Memo

This Memo provides an example of the structured that I used to prompt my analysis of the work of the group. I used these prompts to facilitate my ongoing analysis. Over time, the questions changed slightly as my analysis became more focused. This memo is from my the seventh meeting.

General Impressions, What Stands Out

Changes Over Time

What happened in our teacher study group and how did the group change over time?

What happened at turning points, critical incidents, or moments of tension? What were some of the participation structures and invitations? How did the group members offer and receive support over time?

Where We Are From:

What are the resources that the teachers bring to the group as they read? How did reading positions change over time? (What were they giving and getting from these readings?)

The Culture of The Group in Action

How did teachers make meaning, theorize practice, inquire, through language?

What are some of the reoccurring patterns and key features of the discourse? How did the resources come to life and comingle in the group? What work is the talk doing? What is the role of these key features (stories, key words, silence, questions)?

Adolescent Literacy Education: Teachers' Perspectives

What are the prominent or enduring challenges, possibilities, ideas, and questions related to literacy education for and with adolescents? What are the questions that won't go away?

Appendix D: Email to Teachers, Inviting Them to Join the Study Group

This is the original email that I sent through teacher networks in the greater Philadelphia area in the winter of 2010.

Dear Teachers:

I would like to invite you to be part of a study group in which we will meet regularly to discuss texts from the field of adolescent literacy education with a focus on considering issues of equity and social justice in literacy education. If you are a grade 6-12 teacher of English, language arts, humanities, social studies, or other literacy-related subject, this group might be for you!

I am a former teacher, instructor in the literacy program at Penn, and graduate student. I am a strong believer in the power of self-directed, collaborative, intellectual learning spaces that teachers create to deal with dilemmas in their classrooms. I have recently started and participated in a reading inquiry group on adolescent literacy with graduate students here at Penn who are former and future teachers. We meet weekly to read and discuss texts, grapple with dilemmas of practice, and get feedback on our ideas about literacy education. I am finding the conversations in the group to be really generative and useful to the participants, but I keep finding myself feeling disappointed that there are not more spaces like this for current teachers of adolescents to have similar kinds of discussions. I wonder: What would happen if a group of committed, engaged, teachers of adolescents came together to self-educate by discussing short readings over time? What ideas from these texts would get tossed around, taken up, resisted, wrestled with, or challenged by a group of teachers? What are the most important issues, dilemmas, ideas, possibilities, and questions that would arise?

This study group will be a space of multiple opportunities for us, including the chance to:

- ask questions and present dilemmas of teaching in a supportive environment;
- think about issues of equity and social justice in our classrooms;
- form relationships between and among other teachers;
- engage in an intellectual community;
- read and discuss puzzling and provocative texts about literacy education;
- take up topics, readings, and ideas of interest to us;
- earn ACT 48 credit.

I will suggest some short, thought-provoking shared texts for our first few meetings. Over time, I am hoping the group will take responsibility for suggesting texts and topics. For example, we might read/view things like a news articles from *the Notebook*, an education-related documentaries such as *First Person*, young adult novels, policies that we want to understand together, student texts, or chapters by social justice educators like Linda Christensen or Bob Fecho. We might grapple with issues about language and

identity, critical literacy, linguistic or culture diversity, or building literacy-rich environments in the face of constraints.

This group will be the focus of my dissertation, a qualitative study in which I describe the work of our group. I ask that you be willing to consent to participation in the study, allow me to audio-record the group meetings, and participate in 2 short one-on-one dialogues about the experience of participating in the group.

I realize your multiple commitments and I will work to accommodate your schedule and needs. I am flexible in terms of meeting times and locations. I'm also open to discussing different kinds of possibilities, including working with a school-based group of teachers who are interested in this kind of study group. Please email me or call (202-441-3383) if you are interested (even if you're unsure about your ability to commit right now) and don't hesitate to ask me any questions that you may have!

I look forward to learning with and from you,
Kathleen

Appendix E: Invitation to Continue to Work in the Fall

This is the email that I sent to the teachers who were already in the group in the summer of 2010, inviting them to continue to participate in the fall and offering a possible set of structures for the fall work.

July 23, 2010

Subject: An Invitation to Continue to Work in the Fall

Hi ---- [teacher's name],

As promised, I'm emailing to get a sense of your desires and wishes around the study group for the fall. I want to offer an invitation to continue to work through the fall. I also completely understand that each person has multiple commitments and this kind of focused study group may or may not fit into your life come fall. I have an emerging idea that I'd like to propose so that you can decide if it's the kind of work you'd like to do. Each part of this idea is negotiable, but I'm offering it as a starting point.

While there are so many ideas that we've discussed over time, there are some topics, such as writing and teaching writing, seem to be a shared areas of inquiry that continue to circle into our conversations. The Ethnography Forum at Penn in February includes a Teacher Research Day where groups like ours often present. Members of the group seem to be interested in systematically researching/studying practice and also reading various perspectives in the field. Given all of that, I'd like to propose the following loose plan for the fall:

- We meet regularly throughout the fall (perhaps 2x per month).
- Our meetings would be a little more focused on a question around a common topic (perhaps writing and teaching writing). We could develop a big, overarching question that we all pursue, with individuals developing sub-questions within this larger question.
- A possible format might be that our meetings include both reading perspectives of others on our topic of interest and also bringing in data from our classrooms to analyze (student writing, transcripts/notes of class discussions or conferences, teaching journals, lesson plans, policy documents, assignments, etc.) I'm thinking we also might do some writing at many of the meetings to trace our thinking about our questions.
- We would together develop a more long-term (yet somewhat flexible) plan for this work that includes topics and readings for each meeting. I could draft a "skeleton" plan and we can fill in readings, topics, and activities.
- We would write a proposal to present our work at the Ethnography Forum in February.

If this is something you're interested in, it would require a commitment to attend meetings regularly in September (or October) through February, to prepare for the meetings by (reading, collecting data/artifacts, sometimes writing) the desire to focus on a topic (writing or another), and the intent to present at the Ethnography Forum. While I can imagine other "spin off" projects and forms of collaboration emerging, those would

be the common commitments and interested people could negotiate the details together.

I am offering to act as a resource and participant and organize/facilitate aspects of the work of the group (such as the kinds of things I've been doing - organizing meeting times, etc.) I would ask for your ongoing feedback about the kinds of ways you'd like me to organize, participate, facilitate, and act as a resource. I would also like to continue to record our sessions and use them for my dissertation study.

Very importantly, I want this work to be voluntary. I have really loved getting to know you and others in the group and I'm so deeply appreciative of all that I learn at each of our meetings. I would love to continue our work together in a more focused way. However, if no one wants to continue to meet, I would feel completely satisfied with the work we've already done and I certainly have enough data to complete my dissertation. Please take some time to think about it, respond or call with questions, and if you could let me know one way or the other by the beginning of August, that would be great (if you need more time, just let me know). If there are a few of you who are interested, it would be great to continue our work together.

Take Care,
Kathleen

Appendix F: Script of the Threaded Narrative Presented at the Ethnography Forum

This is the script of the teachers' threaded narrative, which was presented in the form of a dramatic reading in February of 2011 at the Ethnography in Educational Research Forum.

Threaded Narrative

Part I: Melissa

Where can I begin to describe my continuous inquiry and curiosity into my own classroom? I started my focus much too narrowly by questioning the value of homework and the potential forms it could take. I drew students into my inquiry by asking them to put some real thought into the types of homework they tend to do eagerly (and which types they do not). Since I rarely get all homework assignments turned in, and sometimes I will only get a handful of assignments turned in, it was important to study this issue and take notice of what kinds of homework were capturing their attention and which kinds were not.

Part 2: Mary

March 29, 2010

We had set a strict deadline for the final senior project paper. I had to have it by 3:06 on March 29 or we would not accept it. Everything throughout the year was accepted with a late penalty, but this final draft (the third one they should have written) had to be in on time.

As the day wore on, I became anxious. At 2 pm I was still missing fifteen papers. By 3:06 I was still missing thirteen. At about 3:15 the principal and department head came and we shut door.

Some of them started banging on the door. Some tried to shove their paper under the door. Parents came up. The principal held her ground that day and the next few, which were filled with many parent meetings and phone calls as well as district involvement. We held to this arbitrary deadline, rightly or wrongly, and for the most part the district supported us.

At about 3:30 on March 29, Samir came to my door. By appearance, Samir does not look like a star student with his tattooed face and baggy clothes. His behavior and attitude leave a lot to be desired as well, often coming into class significantly late or unwrapping a hoagie in the middle of class. He rarely turned in assignments and often slept through class work and discussions.

But that day, he stood in my doorway senior project paper in hand. He asked again whether it was true that we weren't going to accept it. I told him that it was too late. As his eyes welled up and his voice choked he told me, "But I worked so hard on this. Harder than I have ever worked on anything in my entire life."

He was probably right.

So who am I to tell him that he just didn't work hard enough?

<Pause>

A few days after this incident when I got an email from Kathleen I jumped at the chance to participate in this study group, a space that I hoped would allow me to try to work out and think through the challenges I face in the classroom and particularly those associated with senior project. How can I make senior project a space where my students can really bring themselves and their passions while also providing them with the skills they will need to succeed after high school?

Part 3: Becca

The story of my question: Sometimes my class feels too quiet. My students are normal kids, they talk plenty, and I ask them lots of questions during a class period, but I still feel like we're missing the quiet – and sometimes not so quiet – hum of noise that to me is a sign of work or learning, of engaging, of it all meaning something.

My school definitely values the kind of hard work that looks quiet. Students at desks, looks of concentration, furious reading or writing. Over time, however, we are learning that our students, despite great results on the PSSA (ha!) may not be college ready. I think part of this has to do with the message our school has been sending about what it means to learn and to know.

There's the growing sense of urgency at my school that we need to change something so that our students truly leave high school with the ability to make choices about their own future, with every opportunity still a possibility to them. I am also aware that my school leadership trusts me and listens to me, and that I'm in a position to change what I do in my classroom in a way that impacts the school.

And last, but terribly importantly, I worry that my class is boring. I worry that my students like me but don't feel connected to the content, and that this compromised or dilutes what they learn. They care about pleasing me or getting good grades, but I don't think they always care about what we're actually doing.

So, I want to look closely at student talk in my classroom. I want to look at the way students use "talk" to learn and figure out what they know.

If you were measure or quantify student talk, I want their voices to be equal to mine.

I believe that it needs to be structured enough that all students feel comfortable, not just the dominant, extroverted personalities

My questions haven't really changed. I still want my classroom to be less teacher-centered, and for the life of the class to come from student talk, from their voices, ideas, and interactions with each other. I still want to guide my students to a place where use student talk to deepen and build on their understandings of texts, and I want the nature of

talk in my room to be something that invests kids, something that engages them. And yes, I want it to be fun, I just hope it's fun because they're learning.

What has changed about my question has more to do with how I'm looking for this in my classroom, my role in making it happen, how my students comfort with these changes is impacted by the culture of the building, and how the steps necessary for making these changes have to do with my role in the building and my relationships with colleagues.

Part 4: Joel

Story of my question: Since the beginning of our study group, I was concerned with community at my school. Reflecting on my own positive educative experiences, I knew that I learned the most when I participated in a meaningful community. These were usually courses or extra curricular activities that were outside of the traditional classroom experience. As a writing tutor, a member of a small student-teaching cohort at Penn State, a member of a tight-knit group of ESL teachers in Korea, and as participant in the Philadelphia Writing Project I learned an incredible amount about myself and about teaching.

At the end of my first year of teaching at Overbrook, I had time to reflect on the many failures that I had as a first year teacher. I was overwhelmed, and suffered from emotional and intellectual exhaustion almost every day.

Part 5: Lucy

Spring 2010: How as a teacher do I foster a learning environment that helps students navigate the identity shift that occurs in transitioning between their home life and their school/academic life?

The story of my question: I am a teacher, a learner. I am a researcher, and an inquirer. And still, after all these years, I am a farmer's daughter in the big city. As I teach, and as I learn to teach, what happens to my identities?

As my student's leave their homes and communities and enter the school environment, and then the English classroom environment, what happens to their identities? What is the effect of school on their home identities? What is the effect of home on their school identities? Which of these identities are legitimized or delegitimized in which space or domain?

Many of my students are different people when they are not in my classroom. Instead of the quiet and compliant DeAnna I witness in class, my male teacher colleagues witness an outspoken and stubborn DeAnna who becomes explosive when either of them touch her on her shoulder. I stop at a traffic light in South Philly as I commute from my school one day and catch sight of four boys in jeans and white tank tops walking in front of my car. The one closest to me has a swagger I'd label as arrogant, leader-like. I see his face and it is Hafiz, a student who in class presents himself as fearfully shy. And then come last Fourth of July, I head home after the fireworks, walk down Fairmount Avenue and see Ken from a distance. I stop and watch for a minute or two; he is sitting on a Metro newspaper stand with his buddies around. His bigger-than-life, jolly mannerisms I see in that moment match exactly what I see of him in class. I intentionally cross the street because I realize that I am not me. If he saw me in this tank top and my too-short-

for-a-teacher red shorts, holding my partner's hand, he would see the other me, the one I don't bring to class. Because we are human, I realize it is natural to wear more than one hat in various circumstances, but how are these hats chosen and classified? And how do students understand which identity to bring to class and which to leave at home?

Part 6: Joel

I was a cultural outsider in this urban school, even though it was so close to where I had grown up. I grew up in suburbs that existed just 10 minutes from this school. I couldn't comprehend how a different world could exist so close to my home.

Among the many failures that I had a chance to reflect on during the beginning of our study group was the lack of community in my classes. It seemed that without trust and supportive relationships in the classroom, little learning was possible, especially from my perspective of knowledge as a social construction.

Part 7: Mary

May 3, 2010

For today's study group meeting we had to bring in a "thinking partner text." I brought in a really short article from the newspaper about a shooting that recently occurred at a school in Philadelphia. The article states that the student found a small gun on the way to school and it accidentally went off as he tried to put it in his locker. Thankfully no one was seriously injured. I can't help but think about my school. Our scanner has been broken for most of the year and everyone knows it. Though certainly possible, I can't imagine my students bringing a gun to school. I'm struck by the immense trust that I have in my students and that I hope they have in me. I'm reminded again about the role of relationships in teaching. While I trust my students completely, I often cite the lack of trust among the staff as one of the problems preventing my school from moving forward. How can a school function without that trust? How can we expect learning to occur without it?

Part 8: Becca

Moment(s) 1: My seniors: We're reading *Wuthering Heights*, and I'm struggling to mask the lack of enthusiasm I feel for the book. My students on the other hand, Advanced Placement seniors, are more than willing to take on the challenge; they think of themselves as "smart", but as they get ready to head to college, many of them carry this anxiety that they don't quite know what they're in for. Reading "hard" (in my mind that just reads "boring") books make them feel like they're preparing for this challenge, so they dive in willingly. We decide that every other Friday, we'll have semi-student-run discussions on the text. The format is as follows: we have the discussion in two rounds, half of the class going at a time. I provided the questions in advance, and students have a day in class to prepare answers and find supporting text. On the day of the actual discussion, I sit outside the circle and the students lead the discussion. They decide which question to start with, when to move on, when to clarify, etc.

The day before our first discussion, they're preparing answers to questions in pairs, when

a mini-impromptu debate/discussion erupts between two groups. There is heated disagreement over what exactly Heathcliff's motivation is. Is it love? Power? Revenge? The two groups spend nearly twenty minutes talking this over, disagreeing with each other and trying to convince the opposition. As we break into groups for the discussion the next day, the boys want to make sure they're in the same group so they can continue the debate. Once their group gets going, sure enough that question dominates the discussion, and 10 of the 12 students throw in their ideas. Eventually the question evolves into a larger discussion of whether or not we feel sympathy for Heathcliff, whether or not Bronte intends us to, and why.

We have two more discussions after this one, all good but not quite as energizing as the first. There's nothing quite juicy enough for students to really get excited about. Two weeks after the last discussion, students are in the computer lab typing up their final papers. Despite a looming deadline and the fact that this is an independent assignment, I can't stop them from talking to each other about their ideas, and I decide not to try. After all, they each constructed original thesis statements; they're talking to each other to flesh out their ideas, to ask if a supporting quote really means what they think it does.

My Response:

What questions really get them going, and how can I get them to write those questions themselves? When this went well, it seemed to without my having a hand in it. How can I replicate that? What, besides interest and desire, makes them so willing to talk? How can I foster the interest and desire when it doesn't come naturally?

Part 9: Melissa

I remember one assignment from the first semester that almost every 8th grade student turned in. There was a buzz in the room, and they were excited to share their work with each other. I knew this assignment was different from what I normally offered, but I wasn't expecting the students to like it so much. It was an activity based on the 20 Questions game where one person is interrogated, and the other has the opportunity to ask up to 20 questions before guessing what the first person is hiding. In this case, we were studying the mystery and detective genre, so I told students to go home and think about their main character – their detective. What are 20 questions you would want to ask this person? How would he or she (or they) respond? Of course, many students started with the typical, "What is your favorite color?" questions, but then they launched into questions of character, personality, and background. The writing itself was not intensive or grammatically correct, but the thought they put into developing their main characters impressed me.

Part 10: Becca

Moment(s) Two: Oh, my 8th graders. Until this year, I have considered middle school my *thing*. I get middle schoolers. I can talk to them. I can be tender when they need tenderness, and I can be hard when they need to know they've let themselves down, and I know how to tell when they need what. Or at least I could until this year.

My 8th graders this year have been identified as reading below grade level, and few scored “proficient” on the PSSA, and the 7th grade teachers have made no secret of their readiness to pass this group on. This is nothing new; I’ve taught kids labeled as such before. But this year has felt different. There’s not enough joy in the room, and the student-teacher relationships that have been at the heart of my success in the past are not coming as naturally. And I think it’s because, for the first time, I feel.... pressure. I’m supposed to be one of the strongest English teachers in the building, so the assumption is I can work magic with this class and have them reading James Joyce by May. And even though I don’t believe the PSSA is the most fair or effective way of assessing my kids, I have to admit that I do like the accolades I get when my kids do well on it. And I get worried that this year, it’s not going to happen. Does that make me a bad teacher?

Part 11: Mary
Jun 21, 2010

As usual, I am scurrying to our study group meeting and arriving just in time. Despite the fact that we start our meetings at 6:30 and school ends for me at 3:04, I have a hard time getting out of the building. Today my thoughts are filled with anxiety. As someone who is pretty shy and incredibly protective of my own writing, sharing our “Where my teaching is from” poem at this meeting is going to be tough. We decided to read our poems out loud. Unsure that I would be able to get through reading something so personal, Jenny volunteered to read mine for me. She began:

(Jenny reads)

“I am from homework at the kitchen table

With Mum standing over me:

“That could be neater” or “No that’s not what they want, do it again.”

I am from Saturday morning tears

When Dad lost his patience trying to help me.

I am from being angry at myself when the returned assignment read 89

And not 90

From my own cries of “Can someone please check this?” and “Are you SURE I did it right?”

I am from my obsessive perfectionism

As my ability to do well in school became the defining factor of my identity...”

The rest of the poem goes on to describe my education in more detail. But I didn’t hear any of that. This time, I am struck by the last line in the second stanza: “As my ability to do well in school became the defining factor of my identity.” When I initially wrote that line it didn’t seem any more significant than the rest, but now it seems important. I begin to wonder how my strong identification with school as a student impacts my identity now as a teacher. Is this why I throw myself into my work and almost always neglect other aspects of my life? Is this why I get so frustrated with my “failures” and become consumed with doing it “right”? Is this why I simultaneously

complain about not having a life outside of school, while joining as many teacher groups as possible?

Part 12: Becca

My students feel my anxiety I think, and that hurts our relationship. They view reading and writing as a punishment, as a task to get through. They don't get into the novels we're reading. They resist. They even...misbehave. One day, they ask me why they can't ever just talk about things, and while I recognize this question as a diversionary tactic, and while by "things" they mean what everyone saw or posted on facebook last night, I realize that it's time to get them talking more with each other about our books. I'd been putting off trying new things all fall, afraid they would backfire, and now I had nothing left up my sleeve.

So I decide to start with a think-pair-share routine. I decide we'll do this 1-2 a class period for a few weeks, and then we'll build up to something bigger. I explain the routine. I make posters and handouts. I have them explain the routine. And then we try it, and... crickets.

"So you're actually SUPPOSED to talk to each other at this point, guys. Turn to your partner and share your ideas. I actually want to hear you talk! Really!"

Again, nothing. So I model it with a student, and with a fair amount of prompting, I have two students model it, and then we try it again. Still, barely a peep. From the class that normally can't stop talking.

We try it for a few more days, without much success, until one student says, "This feels weird. Can we do something else?"

<pause>

My Response:

I'm totally willing to accept responsibility for this failure. There are lots of things I can do differently, and will do next time when we try it again. I can work with more engaging texts, I can ask better questions, I can give them more time to write first, I can make sure they're comfortable with their partner. But I can't help but think that some of their hesitation comes from a school culture that in some ways has labeled student talk problematic.

Part 13: Joel

In our school, there did not seem to be any pride in being a member of the Overbrook community.

Part 14: Becca

I worry that my students have come to think of learning as a passive activity. Therefore, even though they have lots of ideas and opinions on their own, they're

uncomfortable doing so in a sanctioned school setting.

Part 15: Joel

Therefore, in the study group, my question began as, “What does it look like when my focus as a teacher is on developing a community of learners with high standards and expectations for themselves, each other, and me?” During my featured study group session, I realized that while community building was an explicit objective of my teaching early in the year, it had not been on the front of my mind now. During that session, I asked, “How is community being built in my classroom when it is and is not explicit?”

Part 16: Lucy

Summer 2010: How as a teacher do I foster a learning environment that helps students navigate the discourse shift that occurs in transitioning between their home life and their school/academic life? What is my role in this discourse transition? (Pause)

The students and I waited for Bianca to walk to the front of the room in order to practice her Exit “Transformation” Interview, a presentation-style interview our students must pass in order to graduate, but she refused to budge. Usually amiable and willing to speak in front of her peers, she sat in her seat, arms crossed over her chest, head down. I stood up and went to her chair; I knelt down next to her, and said again “I need you to stand, walk to the front of the room, and practice your presentation. We will start with just one minute of speaking time for you.” She didn’t move. I moved closer to her and asked, “Why are you resisting?” (pause)

She looked at me as if she didn’t know who I was, stood up and walked out of the classroom. As I stood up confused at her exit, one student asked me, “Miss Lucy, why did you say that?” When I asked what they meant, they replied, “You said ‘why are you resisting’. Why did you say that? That’s what the cops say to us when they stop and frisk.”

Part 17: Joel

When we had a chance to reflect on our question more recently, it had become, “How do I implicitly and explicitly build community in my classrooms that values high standards for learning, respect for each other, and has inquiry and social justice at its core?”

Part 18: Mary

July 12, 2010

I finally read *The Dreamkeepers* in its entirety about a week ago so it seemed like the natural “thinking partner text” to bring to this month’s study group meeting. I’ve read parts before for various courses and meetings, but this is the first time I read it from cover to cover. I’ve been thinking about it a lot especially in relationship to Linda Christensen’s new book, which I read a few weekends ago. And I’m feeling similar reactions to when I first read Fecho and Campano. I recognize the importance of connecting with our students and wonder how we as teachers truly do that. In the course of my teaching career, I have never taught a white student, a fact that I had never consciously thought

about until now. I have never taught someone who looks like me. How does that shape and inform my image of students and education?

Part 19: Lucy

Fall 2010: How do I incorporate a balanced and celebratory language/discourse study into my classroom curriculum that, without de-legitimizing their home discourse, allows students to gain fluency in the discourse(s) that will allow them success in post-secondary environments?

As the students enter, I tell them it is circle day. Some celebrate and some groan. We put the chair in a circle, and I write a word or phrase on the board, which serves as our focal point for the circle discussion. Today's word: jawn. This word plays a complicated role within my classroom. First, it's one of the first slang words that became an entry on our "Translation Wall" where students post words that other people might not understand based on locality, age, or other factors. Students translate these words into more formalized or "Mainstream" English. "Jawn" had been translated into a word to replace any noun. But I had noticed over the weeks since it made it's way onto the wall, that the students never referred to a man or boy as a jawn. I mostly heard our male students use the term, and usually for a thing or a woman, but not a place or a man.

I called this circle day in hopes of addressing the layered dynamics within this word.

We began the conversation very objectively. Students shared their use of the word; one student from Oklahoma said she has yet to incorporate the word into her own vocabulary because it still sounds so "made up". Naja*, from Brooklyn, said that she found this word to be incredibly offensive and refused to let men say it to her. I stopped and asked someone to reflect what Naja* had said. Tamika* repeated Naja's idea and said that she fully agreed. I became excited at the conversation, and how quickly the students took it to the gender issue. The conversation grew heated as students agreed and disagreed about the use, when finally one quiet female stood and walked to the board.

(slow this part down, read with dramatic pauses)

She drew a diagram as the others continued to talk. When she was done, she got their attention and said, "Look. Here are two boxes: Box #1: the "jawn" box: you can put shoes in this box, a notebook, a sidewalk, a car, a house, a pile of shit, and a woman.

Here's Box #2: The things-you-can't-call-"jawn" box: Men. MEN!! BOYS!!", she yelled. Again, we are things. You treat us like things. You talk to us like things. We are not things!!"

(pause)

The room was silent.

Part 20: Becca

(pause)

Sometimes my class feels too quiet.

(pause)

Part 21: Melissa

So now I know that my students tend to shut down when they don't understand or when

they feel the challenge is too great for them. They could decide to complete *something* and turn it in, but they get so caught up in whether or not they are doing the assignment right, that they shut down and refuse to do the work instead. This is a problem. At this point I started to wonder why they just give up. Why don't they at least try *something* so they don't fail? Don't they care?

Part 22: Joel

This last version of my question focuses my inquiry in a more nuanced way and includes my concerns for integrating social justice into my curriculum. Additional questions have surfaced during the process of reflecting on community in my classroom. I've asked, "How do I position myself within this classroom community?" and "How am I positioning my students to be participants within this classroom community?" I want to know my students. I want to know how I can be a meaningful teacher for them.

Part 23: Melissa

Oh. Then it dawned on me. Maybe some of them don't have the resources and strategies to push through a challenging academic task in order to feel successful. Maybe they haven't built up a strong enough repertoire of independent academic success yet. There are a lot of strong, talented teachers in my building, and they demand positive results from their students. I see myself as a capable teacher, but I can't compare myself to them yet. I have to be able to convince my students that they are able to do the work I'm giving them. My confidence in their abilities has to be strong enough for the students who lack a personal, academic confidence to be able to carry home with them.

Otherwise, if the possibility of success is not reinforced, then those students will begin to see the possibility of failure and shut down.

Part 24: Joel

At my literary club at school, I have been able to develop a sense of community more easily. Through our study group, the other participants pointed out that I tend to talk passionately about educative experiences that I have been involved where the participants self-select to be present. Since we are in a compulsory education system, there is no authentic way to fully replicate the educative environment of individuals who choose to study and learn at a place. I've realized the importance, however, of developing a shared purpose and vision in a traditional classroom. There must be a shared vision for our class in order for community to develop.

These issues of community have related to our group's discussion of identity, especially through language. Can our students be participants in many communities?

Part 25: Lucy

Winter 2011: How does explicit and intentional language study within the English Language Arts classroom affect students' relationship with and understanding of their own discourses and identities?

Tyrek, a student of mine from last year, along with two former classmates popped in at the end of a school day last fall, and because I was in the middle of reflecting on a classroom language study of the word "jawn" I asked if I could record their thoughts of

the word. Tyrek had been a star in his class, one of those students who was respected by both teachers and his peers. When Tyrek spoke, people listened. I was excited to hear what he had to say regarding the word. While he was a student at school we had delved into colloquialisms prevalent in the classroom, “jawn” being one of them, so my asking Tyrek to reflect on this word was not new to him, but I never expected the depth of reflection he gave.

After about ten minutes of going back and forth on “jawn”, Tyrek spoke of a personal connection with the word. He said:

I just think it’s something good that’s happening where we can make up our own word and we can add our own meaning to it and we still know what type of contexts it’s in, to where we ain’t gotta go out and use another language that people don’t know. It’s kinda like when I was in the classroom at Community [CCP] this summer and I was taking a psychology class, but the stuff that I was learning and when I go back to my neighborhood and talk about certain things, I mean, I ain’t going to lie: I had to use “jawn” sometimes because some of them didn’t actually know what I was talking about in the language that I was talking about. But I think it’s a good thing that we could create a word like that and have it be so big and have it be so broad that we can use it for many different things. But ya’meen, the thing that make me mad is when that, when somebody take that as negative.

Part 26: Joel:

Through our discussions, we saw ways in which student and teacher identity are tied to each other. How we perceive our students affects their perception of themselves. How the students perceive us affects our perception of ourselves. I believe the highest standard I can hold for my students from a critical literacy perspective is as individuals who can participate in many different communities and to have a multi-layered personality. An individual who has an open stance to other cultures and to their own identity.

Part 27: Mary

November 1, 2010

Small school “politics” strikes again! The past few days at school have been rough. I’m having a hard time with the seniors this year and they are having a hard time transitioning to me after having the same English teacher for the first three years of high school. While I certainly respect my colleague and his beliefs, we are two different people with two different teaching styles and some of the seniors are quite resistant to that. A colleague also recently told me that he thinks I am “one of the few people at our school that has been given power and I use it for my own self-promotion and interest” and he questioned my commitment to “project based learning.” The past few days have just left me questioning some of my beliefs about education so I’m glad I had a chance to talk about it at the study group today. Do I really believe in social justice, inquiry based, student centered, progressive, education? Or do I just think that is what I believe because that is what my own coursework promoted? Do my every day lessons truly reflect these ideas about education? What kind of teacher do my students’ and colleagues’ view me as

and how does that affect how I see myself? Ultimately, these questions will probably be good and allow me to re-clarify my position, but it leaves me in a really unsure place right now.

Part 28: Melissa

I feel anxious when I think about the students who just don't care about their education.

What is going to happen to them? What if they never feel a desire for learning or once again find that inquisitive nature that they *must* have had as a child? Why are they no longer curious? I have three boys in my class who do very little academic work even when I have the advantage of standing over them and requiring them to do the work.

How can I make them want it for themselves? How can I get them to care about the long-term ramifications of not investing in their own education? In learning? In questioning everything that is going on around them in their community and their world?

Part 29: Mary

January 17, 2011

Tonight was my night to present at the study group meeting about my inquiry. The November meeting, despite leaving me unsure about some of my core beliefs about education, was insightful in a completely unexpected way. On the drive home, I realized that every time Kathleen asked who wanted to present next, I would secretly hope that someone else would volunteer. I thought back and realized that I rarely talked about Senior Project during our check-in rounds. It was almost like I didn't want to contaminate this space, these meetings, with talk about senior project anymore. I slowly came to realize how much I was enjoying talking and thinking about other issues in education at these study group meetings and it had nothing to do with Senior Project. That realization was incredibly hard for me to handle.

Ultimately I ended up presenting about the idea of feeling "burnt-out" with senior project. After the November meeting, I had tried explaining to another teacher at my school how I was feeling and ultimately started crying every time I tried to explain myself to her. I ended up sending her an email and that was the "data" that I used at the meeting tonight to present my "inquiry." The email was essentially a bullet point list of thoughts that I typed up as quickly as possible and hit send before I could change my mind. It read:

- In some ways it feels so desperate to say "I've spent the past four years thinking solely about Senior Project and I don't want to do it anymore." That feels so out of control.
- I partly feel guilty about it; that I'm somehow letting down the kids.
- I think it ties into some of the thinking I've been doing about "progressive/inquiry /social justice education" and whether I can actually do it.
- I worry that I'm not working hard enough.
- I feel bad about putting myself first and thinking about taking care of me.
- It somehow seems like I'm quitting on something I've worked so hard on.
- Or admitting defeat. Maybe I just can't do it.

- I worry that it makes me a "bad teacher."
- Senior Project is so much a part of who I am and how I define myself; it's so weird to not want to do it or talk about it.
- It is scary to feel so completely burnt out by something- something that I used to believe in so fully. And I wonder what I else I will eventually feel that way about.

At the meeting, we used our version of the descriptive review process to read and discuss the email I wrote. While this "true-confessions" session didn't directly address my initial inquiry question about senior project, I noticed that over the course of these study group meetings, the moments that stand out to me and that have had the biggest impact on me involve my thinking about the role of teachers. I'm left wondering, how my beliefs about teaching and learning ultimately affect my students' growth.

Part 30: Becca

The difference between my 8th graders and my seniors is not just their age, but the way they see themselves in relationship to school. My seniors view themselves as smart, and therefore able to contribute to a class discussion. I'm not sure my 8th graders feel that way.

So that's probably step one.

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