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# What Matters Most? The Everyday Priorities of Teachers of English Language Learners

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What Matters Most? The Everyday Priorities of Teachers of  
English Language Learners

Johanna Boone

A thesis submitted to the faculty of  
Brigham Young University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

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## ABSTRACT

### What Matters Most? The Everyday Priorities of Teachers of English Language Learners

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Master of Arts

Teachers work within a context of competing stories, including pressures regarding English language learners (ELLs), a deficit view of teachers, and high-stakes testing and accountability, all of which impact teachers' emotions. Within this context, teachers prioritize what is most important to them. This self-study using narrative inquiry methods lays the author's stories of teaching alongside those of two other teachers of ELLs. The author conducted a series of interviews with the participants, analyzed the interviews for themes and tensions, negotiated meaning with participants, and created interim texts to represent the participants' priorities in teaching ELLs. Three teachers' priorities, as indicated by their stories of teaching, are relationships with students, and helping students continue to progress. Implications include the importance of teachers' understanding of their own priorities, which helps alleviate some of the pressure that teachers are under, positively impacting students as well. Recommended research includes future research on teachers' priorities regarding their ELL students, and further self-studies with narrative inquiry methods.

Keywords: self-study, narrative, ELL, teacher priorities, deficit orientation, high-stakes testing

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To my Heavenly Father, I express deep gratitude for encouraging me and helping me to climb the mountain of graduate school. He has been with me every step of the way and I could not have reached the top without him.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

I almost winced as I listened to Karen read out loud to me during her guided reading group time. The words came to her slowly, almost painfully, and many times she would notice the beginning sound and guess the word. I was constantly surprised that she was able to answer the comprehension questions even though her out-loud reading was mind-numbingly slow and inaccurate. Not for the first time, I felt tension between the time that I could give her and how much work I needed to do to really help her. I wished for more time so we could work on the foundations she needed to master for reading success, and wondered how I could make that happen. Truly being able to attend to Karen's individual needs as an English Language Learner (ELL), as well as those of several other ELL students, and the non-ELL students in my class seemed impossible and overwhelming. How could I ever help her and all of my other students progress at the rate that they needed to, in order to reach the standards set by the mandates of others? I could see Karen's growth and progress, but would they? Would the progress that I observed be enough to satisfy them and meet the legal mandates for progress and improvement that we were under?

This narrative, constructed from a personal experience I had in my own classroom, reveals the competing stories (Clandinin, Murphy, Huber, & Orr, 2009) that I live as a teacher of ELLs. I story myself as a teacher who is aware of and works to meet the needs of individual students. This way of storying myself is in competition with the story of needing to meet the mandates to help Karen and other students make "enough" progress to reach Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) as demonstrated by scoring



proficiently on high-stakes standardized tests. This narrative reveals my personal commitment to the success of each of my students, as well as the external pressure to ensure that students are reaching mandated goals, rather than focusing on constant progress for individual students. The difficulties of reconciling these competing stories of my personal commitment to my students with the mandates for student learning common in education, causes internal tension for me.

This pressure to ensure the achievement of these goals by all of my students, ELL and non-ELL, is certainly not unique to me or to my school. It is a pressure felt by all teachers who work with ELLs in high poverty schools across the U.S. As the number of ELL students in the U.S. is increasing (National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition, 2011), the pressure to ensure that these students are provided access to a good education, defined by making AYP on standardized tests, also increases. Teachers face pressure from schools, districts, state and federal governments to help ELLs (No Child Left Behind, 2002).

In addition to negotiating the school, district, state, and federal pressures for student improvement, teachers may also face a general deficit view of their profession. Within this view teachers are looked down on, at times deemed overpaid, and their opinions as professional educators are sometimes disregarded (Barksdale-Ladd & Thomas, 2000; Biggs & Richwine, 2013; Wright, 2002). This deficit view of teachers is incongruous with the amount of work required of them, especially teachers of ELL students.

Teachers are under a vast amount of pressure to help their students perform well on high-stakes testing which impacts them in a variety of ways. Teachers are under

pressure to use instructional time to prepare for testing (Jones, et. al., 1999; Wright, 2002), often to the exclusion of other activities and subjects that they value (Barksdale-Ladd & Thomas, 2001; Jones, et al., 1999; Wright, 2002). They can also be subject to a variety of punitive measures ranging from being paid less to actual dismissal from their teaching positions if their students do not perform proficiently enough (Amrein & Berliner, 2002; Barksdale-Ladd & Thomas, 2001; Jones, et al., 1999, Wright, 2002). This high-stakes testing environment contributes to the pressures of the context within which teachers work.

The combination of the pressures on teachers to help students, especially ELL students, achieve proficiency on high-stakes tests, within the context of a field where teachers are looked upon negatively, can take its toll on teacher emotions. Teacher emotions impact teachers' identity formation (Zembylas, 2003) and can be a contributing factor in teacher burnout (Hargreaves, 2005; O'Connor, 2008). Teacher emotions have significance for students, as teacher emotions impact their choices regarding instruction as well as interactions with students (Hargreaves, 2005; O'Connor, 2008).

In today's environment teachers face pressures regarding specifically reaching ELLs, live in a social environment which holds a deficit view of teachers, and a professional environment where high-stakes testing and accountability are the norm, which all influence teacher emotions. I have wondered what teachers prioritize within the context of these competing stories and pressures. This led me to my research question: What do teachers' stories reveal about what they prioritize as most crucial in their work with ELLs?

The competing stories and demands faced by teachers compel us to more closely examine what teachers actually prioritize in their teaching of ELLs. Hamilton and Pinnegar (2013) used the adjective *intimate* to describe research that involves stories of experience. They posited that such research allows deeper understandings of issues under consideration, and can uncover knowledge that may not come to light with other methods. In this study, I use this sort of *intimate research* to document the lived priorities of teachers who teach ELL students.

The priorities that teachers reveal as they tell stories of their practice have the potential to provide a glimpse into “what is happening in the day-to-day life of participants...(which) helps make visible the structural and historically existing contradictions inherent in complex activity systems, like schools,” (Gutierrez & Penuel, 2014, p. 20). Work of this kind provides accounts of teachers’ priorities in meeting students’ needs and learning from them. Such work can serve as a guide to other researchers seeking to understand teachers’ work with ELLs.

This study examines the stories of three teachers, including myself, who teach in a Western U.S. elementary school. While the sample size of this study is small, and the circumstances of each school and teacher within any school are unique, there are broader connections and implications that can be drawn from the experiences of these teachers. Clandinin and Connelly’s (2000) dimensions of narrative inquiry space include the dimensions of the personal and social. While focused on a small number of people, this study reanimates the participants’ experiences from the inward personal dimension, outward toward the wider context of current social and educational concerns. It provides an interesting glimpse into the priorities of teachers of ELLs who are striving for

individual student success, as well as connecting with a broader social context of mandated change. Such intimate, yet generally connectable, research may be beneficial for administrators, policy makers, and other stakeholders who are concerned with similar situations.

## Chapter 2

### Review of the Literature

The educational dilemma of how to reach the needs of students whose first language is not English is a topic of national concern. As the number of ELL students in the U.S. increases, so does the need and urgency to help these students effectively. Teachers not only feel this urgency to help ELLs, but they are under increasing pressure from schools and districts, as well as state and federal governments regarding the academic achievement of their ELL students, including student achievement on high-stakes testing. When ELLs perform poorly, and thus threaten the state of a school or district, the focus narrows to the teacher rather than broadening to include how schools and districts might act differently. The pressures regarding the achievement of ELLs, high-stakes testing and accountability, and the emotional impact of these combined with a deficit view of teachers all contribute to the context within which most teachers work. Teachers are in a unique position within this context of a deficit view and high-accountability.

Much can be observed and learned from the experiences of teachers working within these demanding parameters as they strive to live out the competing stories of focusing on individual student needs and meeting the mandates for student progress as demonstrated on high-stakes testing. Understanding teacher experiences in this context allows researchers to more fully understand the lives and stories that are lived out in schools that have social, political, and academic ramifications.

This review of literature begins by addressing the context within which teachers work. It first considers the increasing pressure teachers experience regarding ELLs specifically. Next, a deficit view of teachers is considered. A discussion of the effects

that high-stakes testing has on teachers follows. Finally, literature regarding the impact of teacher emotions is examined.

### **Increasing Pressure Regarding English Language Learners**

The number of ELL school-age children is increasing at a tremendous rate. Between 1994 and 2010, ELL school children increased from about three million to over five million in the U.S., a 63.54 percent growth (NCELA, 2011). The range of English proficiency among ELL children is widely varied, but overall there is a standing and increasing need for effective instruction for these children. The pressure from national and local fronts for teachers to provide this sort of instruction is increasing along with the number of ELL students.

One of the things that make the stakes higher for teachers of ELL students is the fact that ELL students are a vulnerable population. 2010-2011 graduation rates for ELL students across the nation show that in every reported state, the graduation rates for limited English proficient students were lower than the graduation rates for all students (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). There are several factors that increase the likelihood of ELL students dropping out of school. These factors include limited English proficiency leading to academic difficulties, the low socio-economic status of many recent immigrants, and cultural differences between the students' home and school lives (Sheng, Sheng, & Anderson, 2011).

In an effort to meet the needs of this vulnerable and ever-increasing population of ELLs, support for them is required by law. The 2002 educational legislation, No Child Left Behind, mandated that schools make annual increases in the number or percentage of children progressing in learning English, annual increases in the number of students

achieving English proficiency, and make adequate yearly progress for students with limited English proficiency (No Child Left Behind, 2002).

In spite of legislation making states, districts, and individual schools accountable for the services provided for ELL students, ultimately the demands and pressures for progress and improvement are focused on the individual teachers. Teachers may be under pressure from school and district administrators to implement certain programs, limiting their ability to make decisions regarding their students' learning. Even though teachers lack autonomy in making instructional and other decisions, they have ultimate accountability for student achievement and are the ones who teach these students day in and day out.

### **Deficit Orientation Towards Teachers**

Notwithstanding teachers' efforts to address the unique educational needs of all students (including ELL students) and to help them excel academically, there is a deficit orientation towards teachers (Benton-Borghi & Chang, 2012; Garrett & Segall, 2013; Johnson, Berg & Donaldson, 2005; Kumar & Hamer, 2013; Lowenstein, 2009; Seidl & Hancock, 2011). From this deficit standpoint, teachers are viewed as inadequate or incompetent, as evidenced by various indicators. In the following paragraphs, I discuss research that illustrates a deficit view of teachers.

Teachers are seldom granted a voice in developing standards and tests, or in deciding what kind of assessment will be used or what will count as progress. Rather, legislation mandates achievement tests as the sole indicator of student learning, and teachers have little say in the development or selection of these tests (Barksdale-Ladd & Thomas, 2000). Teachers are also seldom granted a voice in deciding how students

should be prepared for such tests, including allocation of instructional time or scheduling of tests (Barksdale-Ladd & Thomas, 2000; Marchant, 2004; Wright, 2002). In one school, when teachers volunteered unpaid time to ensure that students had exposure to science and social studies, a teacher expressed relief at being able to choose what they taught as opposed to following the rigid requirements for test preparation mandated (Wright, 2002). Some teachers have also reported feeling a lack of trust or respect and stated it as a reason they left, or would leave, teaching (Tye & O'Brien, 2002). Feelings of a lack of trust, respect, and voice all point to a deficit view of teachers.

Punitive measures as a way of increasing teacher accountability are another way in which a negative view of teachers is manifested. Rather than being commended or rewarded for the growth and progress that they are able to help their students achieve, teachers whose students do not achieve proficiency on high-stakes testing can be penalized in a variety of ways: They may not receive monetary rewards that other higher-achieving, schools and teachers receive, or they may be denied salary increases, tenure, or even be dismissed. In some cases, teacher evaluations are linked to test results (Amrein & Berliner, 2002; Jones, et al., 1999; Wright, 2002).

Amrein and Berliner (2002) found that punitive outcomes in consequence of undesirable test scores are by far more prevalent than rewards for test scores reaching the set benchmark. Thus, teachers are more often looked down on for what they are not doing than recognized for what they are doing. In spite of the difficulties of the context in which teachers work, including the pressures of high-stakes testing and the oft-times punitive consequences thereof, teachers do create their own educational priorities.



Another aspect of a deficit view of teachers is the belief that some teachers lack a desire to serve students who are less privileged, who are of a race other than their own, or who speak another language natively. There are those who suggest that some pre-service and in-service teachers are racist, or prejudiced against certain types of students (e.g., Kumar & Hamer, 2013; Seidl & Hancock, 2011). Some argue that one way in which this is evident is pre-service teachers' resistance to learning about or acknowledging issues regarding race and ethnicity (Garrett & Segall, 2013; Seidl & Hancock, 2011). Furthermore, schools with higher percentages of minority students, and low-income, low-performing schools tend to have higher turnover rates, which means they often have less experienced teachers than schools that are wealthier, higher-performing, and predominantly white (Horng, 2009; Johnson, Berg, & Donaldson, 2005). This suggests that some teachers may not want to teach minority, low-income, or low-performing students. Additionally, research points to some teachers being prejudiced against ELLs specifically, or holding a negative view of them for a variety of reasons, and such research further argues that teachers' deficit theories of students lead to a poorer education for such students (e.g., Cheatham, Jimenez-Silva, Wodrich, & Kasai, 2014; Khong & Saito, 2014; Walker, Shafer, & Iiams, 2004).

A majority of teachers and those preparing to become teachers are white, yet the diversity of the student population in the U.S. continues to grow (American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, 2013; Lowenstein, 2009). There is a widespread belief that white teacher candidates lack the dispositions, experiences or knowledge needed to learn about diversity or teach children culturally and linguistically different from themselves (Benton-Borghi & Chang, 2012; Garrett & Segall, 2013; Kumar &

Hamer, 2013; Lowenstein, 2009, Seidl & Hancock, 2011). This idea that some teachers are unable to learn about diversity and reaching the needs of diverse students is an alarming and detrimental view. This view is harmful in a U.S. context where teacher and teacher candidate demographics do not reflect the diverse demographics of their students. It promotes an image of teachers who are unwilling and unable to educate their students.

In addition to sometimes being viewed as racist or otherwise prejudiced, or as being incapable of fully reaching the needs of diverse students, teachers are at times viewed as less intelligent than professionals in other areas (Biggs & Richwine, 2013). For example, even though there is on-going and increasing evidence that this characterization is false, pre-service teachers are viewed as less competitive academically (AACTE, 2013). The research presents teachers as incapable of accurately evaluating student progress, as resistant and in need of punishment, unwilling to educate to high standards, unable to relate to those of other ethnicities and races, and not capable of learning what is needed to teach all students (Amrein & Berliner, 2002; Garrett & Segall, 2013; Wright, 2002). These various aspects of a deficit view of teachers are part of the context in which the participants of this study teach.

It is necessary to bear in mind that no teacher is perfect and that some teachers may embody some of the negative attributes and attitudes discussed above. However, instead of encouraging teachers in the difficult and demanding work that they undertake, to teach students of diverse backgrounds and behaviors, the public orientation is one where teachers are labeled as incompetent and insufficient (Biggs & Richwine, 2013). When student scores are lower than desired, or when programs and policies are not expeditiously implemented to perfection, a majority of the blame and pressure comes

back to the teachers. Rather than being recognized for the growth students are making that may not manifest itself on high-stakes tests, or the complexity of the task they undertake to reach multiple students, often across multiple subjects, while dealing with paperwork, policies, planning, grading, discipline, and countless other teacher tasks, teachers are often penalized, reprimanded, or generally looked down upon (Amrein & Berliner, 2002).

Due, in part, to the generally negative perspective of teachers, teachers' opinions and input on the types and relevance of research is not often taken into consideration. Gutierrez and Penuel (2014) maintained that in order for educational research to be rigorous, it must attend to the input of teachers and other stakeholders. Documentation showing that research is important to multiple stakeholders, such as teachers, school leaders, and students, and evidence that such research includes participation by said stakeholders is deemed necessary to make research relevant to practice. Thus, not only does an unfavorable view of teachers harm teachers themselves, and potentially the students that they serve, but neglecting to honor the experiences and input of teachers and other stakeholders can undermine the relevance of research related to educational change and practice.

### **Pressures Resulting From High-Stakes Testing**

A primary way in which teachers are held accountable for student learning, including that of their ELL students, is high-stakes testing. By association, this increases the pressures and demands on teachers in a variety of ways, including accountability based on value-added models (Caillier, 2010). Value-added assessments track and compare the growth of individual students over the years (Bracey, 2004). While this

increase in pressure and demands is clear in the literature, rarely are teachers' personal reactions, priorities and feelings about teaching, including its pressures, taken into consideration.

With the increasing emphasis placed on high-stakes tests, teachers are teaching to the test, or feel pressure to do so (Amrein & Berliner, 2002). High-stakes testing can also promote time usage leaning towards training for the test rather than teaching (e.g., Amrein & Berliner, 2002; Barksdale-Ladd & Thomas, 2001; Marchant, 2004; Wright, 2002). This pressure on teachers to train their students to be ready for high-stakes testing can result in teachers feeling that they are being asked to be unskilled workers, or are not allowed time or space to use their creative abilities or innovative ideas to teach their students (Barksdale-Ladd & Thomas, 2000; Marchant, 2004).

Another result of the emphasis on achievement scores is an escalation of the focus on tested subjects such as math and language arts (Jones, et al., 1999; Wright, 2002). Non-tested subjects and activities are pushed aside, which culminates in a narrowing of curriculum, including in some cases, the reduction or even exclusion of reading for enjoyment, science, social studies, and the arts (Barksdale-Ladd & Thomas, 2001; Jones, et al., 1999; Wright, 2002). This can also increase the pressure on teachers, as many feel that the eliminated or reduced activities are of value to their students. In response, many teachers sacrifice personal time and finances in order to provide better educational experiences for their students. Such activities can increase student motivation to learn and engage more completely in the whole curriculum. Research about teachers' reactions and feelings regarding the context in which they teach, provides a more complete picture of the ramifications of educational policies and mandates for day-to-day classroom life.

High-stakes testing also impacts teachers beyond their instructional decisions. Results of such tests have personal and workplace ramifications as well. Teachers whose students do not perform proficiently on high-stakes tests may not receive the pay increases available to those whose students achieve a certain standard. Teachers in such situations may be subject to teacher competency tests, may lose on-going job security, or be fired (Amrein & Berliner, 2002; Barksdale-Ladd & Thomas, 2001; Jones, et al., 1999, Wright, 2002). This certainly increases the pressure felt by teachers. States, districts, and individual schools are under both legislative and media scrutiny regarding testing results. Thus, student scores are often considered the only relevant indicator of success. Therefore, schools and teachers are subject to the positive and negative repercussions that result from test scores. These repercussions can include public recognition and financial rewards to schools who improve or are successful, as well as reductions in financial resources, interventions, takeovers or closures and administrator dismissals to those that do not achieve proficiency or improve sufficiently (Amrein & Berliner, 2002; Jones, et al., 1999).

Pressure resulting from high-stakes testing also comes from society at large. Test results have been available to the public, as scores have long been printed in newspapers (Barksdale-Ladd & Thomas, 2000; Marchant, 2004; Jones, et al., 1999; Wright, 2002), and are more recently accessible online. As a result, school performance on high-stakes testing can have an impact on housing prices and neighborhood quality as parents seek to enroll their children in higher-performing schools (Amrein & Berliner, 2002; Barksdale-Ladd & Thomas, 2000).

Some teachers have made the decision to leave, or have wanted to leave low-performing schools in favor of those that are higher performing to avoid negative ramifications, including increased pressure and stress (Jones, et al., 1999, Wright, 2002). Others have reported leaving the field of teaching entirely due to the emphasis on and pressure regarding high-stakes testing. In a study conducted by Tye and O'Brien (2002) testing-related pressure was listed as the number one reason why former teachers had left the profession, while teachers remaining in the field reported testing and its surrounding pressures as one of the top reasons why they would choose to leave teaching.

### **Importance of Teacher Emotions**

These pressures from multiple fronts regarding high-stakes testing impact teacher emotions. Teachers may have feelings of embarrassment and guilt about test scores and how they will be perceived as a result. Teachers may also feel that teaching in a high-stakes test environment leads to a suppression of their teaching talents and innovation and creativity, as more time is dedicated to preparation for testing (Barksdale-Ladd & Thomas, 2000; Jones, et al., 1999, Marchant, 2004). Increasingly, districts mandate the curriculum, content, and priorities of individual teachers. These mandates can be contradictory in that they demand that teachers teach in ways that research has demonstrated is not productive. They are usually coupled with higher amounts of surveillance and monitoring of individual teachers' practices.

The emotional pressures on teachers in this high-accountability context are considerable. Considering that teachers are often viewed as incompetent, and are under ever-increasing pressure from high-stakes testing in general and regarding their ELL students specifically, one may well wonder what emotions these teachers experience and

how those emotions impact their priorities and decisions. Teachers' emotions have ramifications for their own lives, and beyond, including importance for their students, education, and society at large. In the following section, I review literature that illustrates the importance of teacher emotions.

I begin this section by first considering factors that affect teacher emotions. Next, in the tradition of narrative research (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), I move from the personal, or private, to the public by addressing the importance that teacher emotions have in the lives of teachers themselves, then how those emotions influence the lives of their students. I conclude by discussing the impact that teacher emotions have on the broader educational system and the larger public.

Emotion plays an integral part in teaching (Hargreaves, 1998; O'Connor, 2008; Zembylas, 2003, 2005). Good teachers are passionate about students and subject matter. They seem to know how to assess and attend to students' academic and emotional needs intuitively (Hargreaves, 1998, 2005). These aspects of teacher emotions are essential and irreplaceable; they are among those that are within teachers' power to choose, and can be seen as part of being a competent, professional teacher. These personally controlled facets of teacher emotion have sometimes received emphasis in research to the exclusion of the influence of external forces, including institutional, political, and sociological forces, on teacher emotions (Hargreaves, 1998). Zembylas (2002) posited that teacher emotions are socially constructed. Worded differently, "emotions are made in social relations" (p. 196). Operating under this theory, anything that affects individuals' lives in their role as teacher can be seen as having an effect on their emotions.

Teacher emotions are directly related to issues of culture, politics, and power (Zembylas, 2003). Teachers live with mandates that they react in certain ways to colleagues and students, which means that, at times, they must work to react in ways that are defined by others as being appropriate. Emotion in the workplace is increasingly being managed, which causes feelings of alienation (Zembylas, 2002). The competing stories of the need to control emotions and teachers' spontaneous emotions can cause difficulties at a school level, but also has implications for teachers personally, as well as ramifications for the broader educational field.

Emotions in education are often dismissed, and their political roots ignored. Such suppression of teacher emotions leads to painful experiences and, at times, shame (Zembylas, 2003). Teacher burnout, which has long been a concern in the educational world, is one possible result of the pressure for teachers to manage their emotions (Zembylas, 2002). Thus, influence of politics and power on teacher emotions is yet another aspect of the complex context within which teachers work and live.

Teachers' emotions can be indicative of their ability to accomplish good teaching, as they view it, and are thus connected issues of teacher identity. Teachers prioritize things that are integral to their identity as a teacher. Thus, teacher emotions are influential in the ideals and priorities that teachers have. O'Connor (2008) asserted that a more complete understanding of teachers' work can be gained by considering the roles of emotions in the development of teachers' professional identities. Zembylas (2003) pointed out that, "Teachers' emotions are inseparable from issues of power and politics because they indicate teachers' capacity to achieve what they feel is good teaching" (p. 231). Thus if teachers, under pressures of high-stakes testing or other influences, are



unable to undertake teaching in a way that they feel is right or beneficial, their identity as a teacher is impacted in as well as the priorities they have in their teaching practice itself.

Teachers' emotions about and towards their students have an impact on how they view themselves professionally. In O'Connor's 2008 work, the teachers interviewed all "saw the caring work they engaged in as being in integral part of their professional identity" (p. 121). One teacher maintained, "I couldn't do what I do and not care" (p. 122). The feelings that teachers have towards their students are a considerable part of how they view themselves in their role as teachers.

Teachers are impacted by the emotions of their students and colleagues in addition to the political and cultural influences at work in the educational landscape. Teachers may feel emotions such as anger and sadness as their colleagues and students do. They may also feel the need to create a cheerful personality to help students feel positive and comfortable, regardless of how they are feeling personally (O'Connor, 2008).

Another way in which emotions influence teachers becomes apparent in considering how emotions can motivate teachers to be agents for change. Teachers work within a socio-political context (O'Connor, 2008; Zembylas, 2003), which can cause those within it to desire change. Zembylas (2003) posited that unexpected emotional behavior can occur when different emotions interact. This way of viewing the formation of identity expands the possibilities of self-transformation in that "a dynamic notion of identity can focus on aspects of change" (p. 222). Teachers' personal experiences within schools can work to change teacher selves, as teachers see themselves as sites of agency.

Teachers can develop ways of resisting and regaining power by engaging in political action, which is one way to cope with the vulnerability that is a part of teaching.

Because teacher emotions are political and moral in nature, teachers need to engage in political action to develop power and resistance (Zembylas, 2003). Teachers' political actions and resistance to mandate is played out in the ways in which they enact curriculum, or choose to give time and attention to the things that are personally most important to them.

Teacher emotions can include positive or negative feelings, such as feelings of self-esteem and confidence (Hargreaves, 2005), or feelings of being overwhelmed and exhausted (O'Connor, 2008). As Zembylas (2003) succinctly put it, "Teaching may become a main source of teachers' self-esteem and fulfillment as well as of their vulnerability" (p. 230). The negative emotions that teachers experience, and/or the overwhelming need to care for students and colleagues, can lead to emotional and physical burnout (Hargreaves, 2005; O'Connor, 2008). Teachers in O'Connor's 2008 work talked about the emotional work of caring for students being all-consuming, and the need to limit themselves in their caring in order to avoid burnout. A teacher also named emotions as the reason why she was engaged in her work, as well as part of the reason why she might not remain a teacher. The burnout and teacher attrition that can result, in part, from the emotional labor of teaching has repercussions for teachers themselves. It can also have ramifications for the students that teachers influence as well as the broader educational and public scale.

Just as teacher emotions have subtle and more apparent effects on themselves and their identity, teachers' emotions can also impact their students. For example, teachers

have cited their emotional connection with their students as a reason why students choose to do the work that the teachers ask of them. That in turn, allows teachers to help students achieve more academically (O'Connor, 2008). Knowing that this connection with students enables teachers to help them progress academically, they may choose to prioritize their relationships with their students.

Teacher emotions can also influence the kinds of interactions that teachers and students have. Teachers lacking in confidence might react differently to students challenging them than a teacher who is confident in their abilities as a teacher (Hargreaves, 2005). Similarly, having positive emotions towards students is important in establishing and maintaining professional relationships with them. Teachers' emotions can even influence the way that students engage in learning, as their emotions for subject matter and students can positively or negatively affect student excitement and involvement (O'Connor, 2008). Teachers' emotions can impact the priorities they have and the decisions they make, which have a heavy influence on student and student learning.

Teacher burnout (Hargreaves, 2005; O'Connor, 2008) has implications for the educational system and the broader public, as burned out teachers may not be as vibrant or invested. This can impact student learning and lead teachers to leave teaching. Teacher attrition is especially problematic for schools that have invested time and effort into professional development and other teacher training to overcome the challenges in educating poverty and minority students since the expertise required to meet the needs of such students is great.

Another ramification that teacher emotions have on the educational system relates to change and resistance. When teacher emotions interfere with mandated or requested educational change, teachers may choose to accept, reject, or resist those changes. Teachers may not make the required changes at all, or may be slow in enacting change (Hargreaves, 2005). Teacher emotions can also cause a teacher to resist parts of a school's philosophy with which he or she does not agree (O'Connor, 2008; Zembylas, 2003) or in other words cause teachers to enact curriculum in differing ways. Thus, teachers' emotions can influence them to have priorities that are different from those mandated or promoted by others.

### **Summary**

In this literature review I have addressed the context within which teachers work, including the increasing pressure regarding ELLs, a deficit view of teachers, and the possible effects of high-stakes testing on teachers. Finally, I examined the importance of teacher emotions for teachers, students, and the educational system and broader public. In the following chapter, I outline the method for my study. Considering teachers' and other stakeholders' input, and emphasizing the personal school experiences that teachers and others have can help researchers refocus their research to be more relevant to practice (Gutierrez & Penuel, 2014). This self-study using narrative inquiry methods is one way in which to address this call for teachers' input.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methods**

#### **Context**

This study was conducted in a school district in a Western city in the U.S. There are 12 elementary schools in the district, seven of which are Title I schools. The school in which I teach is one of these Title I schools. Student enrollment is approximately 560, with ELLs making up 42% of the student population. The majority of the ELL students enrolled in the school are Hispanic. The school has a large low-income population, (over 75% of the students are eligible for free and reduced lunch) and a middle class population. The middle class students are mostly within walking distance of the school, while many of the lower income students are bussed in. As a Title I school with a history of low scores on the statewide testing, the school is under pressure from the state, district, and school administrators to show significant academic improvement for all students. In contrast with the student population, the majority of the teachers at my school are white, middle class, English-speaking females.

#### **Methodology and Methods**

In order to achieve my goal of examining what teachers' stories reveal about what they prioritize as most crucial in their work with English language learners, I chose to employ self-study methodology with narrative inquiry methods. This blend of research traditions is a fitting choice for my research circumstances. I seek to bring to light my own priorities as a teacher of ELLs within the context of competing stories of mandated change and desires to attend to individual student needs. I also undertake to examine the priorities of colleagues who work within the same context, as revealed through their stories of teaching. Narrative inquiry methods employed within my self-study allow me

to examine and honor fellow teachers' stories to live by (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999) as I lay them alongside my own stories and experiences of teaching ELLs.

Self-study is a methodological approach that allows for a hybridity of methods, since it is a methodology that does not specify particular methods and uses strategies for data collection and analysis from other methodological approaches (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009). Pinnegar and Hamilton (2009) pointed out that “We seek to select methods that help us better understand what we hope to examine and to reveal for readers where we looked, how we looked, along with the evidence from which we will develop our analysis” (p. 106). By adopting narrative inquiry methods for my self-study, I am better able to understand my own and my participants' stories to live by (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999), as well as reveal for my readers where I procured the stories I share in this study, and how I examined and portrayed those stories in order to reveal the priorities of these teachers of ELLs.

Self-study research is focused on understanding and improving practice. It allows us to examine the “living contradictions” (Whitehead, 1989, p. 43) or competing stories (Clandinin, et al., 2009) that are a part of life and teaching. These contradictions can be discrepancies between our own actions and beliefs, or when we think of ourselves differently than others perceive us. Through self-study, we learn about ourselves and others, which can help us to identify ways in which we can change what we do in the future (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009).

LaBoskey (2004) outlined five characteristics that are fundamental to a self-study. The first characteristic is that it is “self-initiated and self-focused” (p. 842). In this self-study, I examine my own priorities as a teacher of ELLs within the context of pressures

regarding ELLs, a deficit view of teachers, and high-stakes testing and accountability, all of which impact emotions. I take up this work with a desire to improve my practice as a teacher of ELLs, which aligns with LaBoskey's second characteristic of being "improvement aimed" (p. 844). Self-study should be "interactive" (p. 847), which is apparent in this study in the interviews and negotiation meetings I conducted with my participants. Our sharing of stories and experiences, both written and spoken attend to this third dimension of self-study. The fourth characteristic of self-study is that it uses "multiple, primarily qualitative methods" (p. 849). The narrative inquiry methods I employ in this study fit this qualification. LaBoskey's final characteristic is that self-study "defines validity as a validation process based in trustworthiness" (p. 817).

Validity is ultimately decided by readers and the community, but a study is more likely to be considered valid when its methods and procedures are transparent (LaBoskey, 2004), thus promoting trustworthiness. In an effort to provide such transparency, I outline my procedures in the paragraphs below.

Within this methodology of self-study, I employ narrative inquiry methods. Narrative inquiry is concerned with representing and understanding experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) posited that because experience occurs narratively, it should be studied narratively. In this study, I share some of the narratives, or stories of myself and other teachers of ELLs within the high-pressure context in which we teach.

Narrative inquiry examines experience from a *three-dimensional inquiry space*. These three dimensions are *temporal*, *personal/social*, and *place* (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In this study, I attend to the dimension of *temporality* by discussing aspects of the

past, present, and future. I look to the past stories that my participants and I have told about our teaching as a way to improve my current teaching, and to inform my own future practice. The *personal and social* dimension is addressed as I examine my personal understandings of the stories that my participants and I told, and then couch them in the context of competing stories within the wider educational landscape. The dimension of *place* is apparent in the varied settings of the stories my participants and I told.

### **Participants and Procedures**

In explaining the orchestration of this study and its analysis, I begin by describing how I selected the participants. Next, I explain the data sources for the study. I then outline the 12-step process of data collection and analysis. I end with an examination of the ways I worked to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings.

**Participants.** In the first round of recruitment for my study, I sent an email to the teachers at my school, asking who had an ELL endorsement. When the responses arrived, I sent a second email to those who stated that they had received an ELL endorsement. In that email, I asked for a response from those who had received the ELL endorsement from the local university, or through the school district, because at that time, I intended to examine how teachers took up that professional development. There were six teachers from my school who fit these criteria and were willing to participate in my study.

I interviewed and collected narratives from all six of these teachers. However, throughout the process of interviewing and analyzing, I came to realize that the experiences of two of the participants captured the experiences of all six, and resonated



with my own experiences and stories. By focusing on an examination of the stories of these two participants, I came to better understand my own practices, priorities, and experiences (Conle, 1996). For the purposes of this study, I use three participants: myself and these two other teachers.

**Data sources.** I asked each of the six original participants to participate in a semi-structured interview and then two cycles of text negotiations. The procedures for these interviews and their analysis are outlined in the next section so as to be transparent about my data collection. The data sources resulting from these interviews and text negotiations were of five different types (see Table 1).

Table 1

*Field Text Types, Frequency, and Collection Schedule*

Data Source	Frequency	Collection Schedule
Semi-structured interviews	1 per teacher	July-August, 2012
Text negotiation meetings	2 per teacher	July-October, 2012
Teachers' written stories	2 per teacher	July-October, 2012
Research log	18 entries	Written after each visit
My written stories of teaching	3 stories	As inspired by teachers' stories

The semi-structured interviews I conducted were audio-recorded and transcribed. During the interviews, I asked participants about the ELL professional development they participated in and how that impacted their teaching. I also asked questions about their ELL students (See Appendix A for the full semi-structured interview protocol). Text negotiation meetings, or meetings to ensure that I was capturing participants' experiences

accurately, also served as a data source, as they were audio-recorded and transcribed (See Appendix B for an example of dialogue during a text negotiation meeting). During my first and second visits with my participants, I asked them to respond to two writing prompts, which asked them to reflect on their teaching of ELLs (See Appendix C for the writing prompts). I also responded to these prompts. Another data source, my research log, took the form of a word-processed reflective journal about the interactions I had with my participants. My own written stories of teaching were my final data source.

The data collected in this study are referred to as field texts. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) explained, “We call them field texts because they are created, neither found, nor discovered, by participants and researchers in order to represent aspects of field experience” (p. 92). Field texts are used as “markers of experience” (Clandinin & Murphy, 2009, p. 599).

**Data collection and analysis.** In this section, I outline my data collection and analysis procedures. As my data collection and analysis were concurrent, the analytic procedures outlined include both as they occurred. I explain the 12 steps involved in the collection as well as the analysis procedures used in the study.

***Step one: Semi-structured interviews.*** My first step in the data collection and analysis process was to conduct semi-structured interviews, which were audio-recorded and transcribed (See Appendix A for the semi-structured interview protocol). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggested that the conditions of an interview, such as the place, time of day, and degree of formality shape the interview. I had an existing colleagues-in-teaching relationship with each of the participants in this study, and the interviews and follow-up conversations took place in locations chosen by the participants themselves.

As a result, the interviews were more relaxed, open, and informal than they would have been had the interviewer been someone unknown to the participants, or had the location been one that I mandated. It is reasonable to conclude that my preexisting relationship with the other participants and the relaxed and open nature of the interviews allowed me a more comprehensive look into these participants' lives as teachers of ELLs than might have been afforded another researcher.

On two occasions my participants were asked to respond to a writing prompt. The prompts asked them to report stories of their experiences with an ELL professional development, and to describe failures and successes with their ELL students. At the conclusion of the semi-structured interview, I gave the participants the first of these writing prompts. I also responded to the prompt, and we discussed the resulting written stories during our second meeting.

After the first meeting with my participants, as well as after subsequent visits with each participant, I wrote in my word-processed research log. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) noted that seemingly insignificant things recorded during research can take on meaning and patterns. This can occur when they are interwoven with other types of field texts during the creation of research texts.

*Step two: Textual analysis of the semi-structured interviews.* After the initial interview with each participant, I analyzed the audio-files and transcripts of the interviews, using a qualitative textual analysis. Textual analysis entails identifying themes within and across the narratives of the participants (Creswell, 2007). As I listened to the audio recordings and read available transcripts of the interviews, I noted frequently mentioned phrases or repeated ideas. I noticed ideas and stories that seemed particularly

important to the participants, or that resonated with my own narratives. I also looked for overarching themes. Due to the narrative nature of my study, my intent was not to reduce participants' stories to reductionist themes or definitive conclusions. Instead, I looked for themes while remaining open to the participants' experiences and new meaning as opposed to imposing grand narratives on their experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). These first looks at the data helped me make sense of what existed in the stories and experiences that participants related.

***Step three: Tensions and bumping places.*** As I examined the data to identify themes within and across my participants' stories, I also searched for places where tensions, or "bumping places" (Clandinin, et al., 2009, p. 83) arose. In this step, I read with the intent to identify any possible tensions, including, but not limited to tensions between what a participant said in different parts of the interview, and tensions between what they were asked to do and what they felt was best, (e.g., being asked to move to a new grade level team when a participant wished to remain in the current grade assignment, being required by a policy to do things in a way that the participant felt was not in the best interests of students). These tensions also took the form of bumping places where their views conflicted those of others, or with mine. During this process, as suggested by Clandinin and Connelly (2000), my own stories in relationship to those of my participants came to mind. As I analyzed their interviews and stories, their narratives resonated with my own experience and triggered reflection and deeper understandings of those experiences.

***Step four: Interim texts.*** As I analyzed the audio recordings and transcripts, searching for themes and tensions, I wrote down these bumping places and over-arching

ideas, creating interim texts. The form that these notes took varied, but over time the majority of them came to be headings based on the themes that I had observed, with examples from the participants' stories and comments listed underneath. I also wrote questions I had about things that participants had said, or bumping places that I had noticed. These noted themes, tensions, bumping places, and questions shaped my interim texts, which I then took back to the participants (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

*Step five: Negotiated interim texts and shared written stories.* During this step, I negotiated the interim texts with my participants. To do so, I took my interim texts back to the participants and shared them with the participants. (See Appendix B for an example dialogue from this step.) I used the interim texts that I had created as a jumping off place for the second interviews. During this time, I shared with the participants the themes and prevalent ideas that I had noted in the interim texts. We constructed meaning together, as I presented the themes and tensions that I had noticed, and asked for clarification on things that I did not understand, or that had seemed to be places of tension for the participant. The participants clarified their meaning when I had not captured their ideas correctly or completely, and through this co-construction of meaning they further illuminated my understanding of the themes and tensions. During these text negotiations I also shared some of my own stories and understandings with the participants. Further, during this visit, we shared our written stories with each other and discussed them. These stories were recorded in response to the first prompt, which asked about things we had changed in our practice after having had professional development on teaching ELLs. At the end of each meeting, I gave the participants a second writing prompt, which we discussed as part of our third visit.

***Step six: Revisited interim texts and negotiated meanings.*** Next, I revisited the interim texts as well as the negotiated meanings. This step was similar to my analysis after the first interview. I listened to the audio recordings and read transcripts of this second visit, which, when combined with what I had previously gleaned from the first interview, gave me new insights into the participants' hearts and minds (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

***Step seven: Narrative accounts.*** At this stage of the data collection and analysis process, I created narrative accounts based on the most recent conversations with the participants combined with what I had learned and noted from the first interviews. These narrative accounts were co-constructed because of the iterative nature of my analysis. My initial interim texts were altered and modified based on what I had gathered from the things that I had learned and discussed from and with the participants up to this point.

***Step eight: Negotiated narrative accounts.*** Following the creation of the narrative accounts constructed from the information from the initial interview and the first negotiation meeting, I returned to the participants with these new narrative accounts to share the themes and tensions I had identified across both visits. These meetings also served to as a time to clarify any things that were not clear to me, ask questions, and together negotiate the meaning I had taken from the initial interview and our first text negotiation meeting.

***Step nine: Written stories.*** During the second and third visits, in addition to negotiating the meanings of the themes and bumping places I identified from my analysis of the first and second visits, the participants and I shared our second writing exercises with each other and discussed them together. The second writing prompt asked the

participants and me to share stories of when we felt we were able to help and ELL student, and when we felt that we had failed an ELL student. (See Appendix C for complete writing prompts).

These written texts provided insight into teachers' priorities regarding ELLs, and helped me better understand our lived experiences in teaching these students, even though the stories that I chose to quote or summarize in my study were from teachers' verbally shared stories, rather than those written by the teachers. Teachers' stories were embedded in most, if not all, of the field texts I employed in this study, and the writing pieces created during this step proved to be a specific place for stories to be told about teaching ELLs.

In sharing my writing exercises with my participants, I put myself into a position of vulnerability, as I was acting not only as a researcher, but also as a fellow teacher, exposing my own teaching practices. Clandinin and Connelly stated, "The researcher is always speaking partially naked and is genuinely open to legitimate criticism from participants and from audience. Some researchers are silenced by the invitation to criticism contained in the expression of voice" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 147). While I did experience some internal tension, feeling somewhat uncomfortable sharing my stories of failure with fellow teachers, I sought to remain open and share my heart and mind with my participants, as they were sharing with me.

In writing my own stories, I formally collected data about my experiences as a teacher of ELLs. Originally, I did this so that I could account for my understanding of my experience. However, as I shared my written stories with my participants, I also began to use my stories intentionally as a part of my research analysis. Here, then, I

began to formally collect my stories and include them in my data analysis and in the construction of my research texts.

*Step ten: Interim texts to represent findings.* While this process of sharing and reworking interim texts could have gone on indefinitely, this study involved a total of four meetings with each participant. After my third meeting with the participants, I created another set of interim texts. These interim texts were focused on what I learned through out the entire process. The stories that I used to form the interim texts took different forms and often had several iterations. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) reaffirmed that:

There is no clear path to follow that works in each inquiry. The circumstances surrounding each inquiry, the relationship established, the inquiry life of the researcher, and the appropriateness of different kinds of interim and final research texts mean that inquiry is frequently filled with doubt. The doubt and uncertainty are lived out in endless false starts. As we begin to write interim and final research texts, we may try out one kind of research text and find that it does not capture the meanings we have in mind, find it lifeless and lacking in the spirit we wish to portray, find that research participants do not feel the text captures their experience, or find the research text to be inappropriate to the intended audience. We try out other kinds and continually compose texts until we find ones that work for us and for our purposes. (p. 134-135)

The interim texts that I created for the purpose of representing my findings are found in Chapter 4. In the narrative inquiry tradition (Clandinin, 2013), for constructing



narrative accounts from field and interim texts, I represented my analysis of these experiences as vignettes, constructed letters, a dramatization and a poem.

While up to this point, I had not been consciously noting the ways in which my participants' stories and priorities resonated with my own, it was during this step that I felt myself drawn towards certain stories, and eventually came to the decision to use the stories of just two of my original six participants. Their stories resonated with my own desires, experiences, beliefs, and priorities regarding ELLs (Conle, 1996). These stories that resonated most with my own were the ones that I used to construct the interim texts for my findings chapter, presenting them in the final text alongside my own experiences.

As I examined the stories, and was drawn towards certain stories, several broader themes emerged. These repeated ideas lent themselves to two broader themes, namely the importance of relationships, and perpetual progression. I address and analyze these in-depth in chapter four.

As I found these salient threads between and across participants' experiences, and created research texts from their stories that were illustrative of those threads, I thought about my own practice as a teacher of ELLs, and began to write experiences that I had had that were aligned with those of my participants. Laying my stories alongside those of my participants enabled me to examine my own beliefs and priorities regarding ELLs, and to look to the future as I found ways to improve my own practice and dispel a deficit view of teachers. Thus, it was only after several layers of analysis of my participants' narratives that I turned to a self-study focused on tensions inherent in teaching ELLs in the current climate of schooling. The resonance that I had felt all along, pulling me

towards certain stories related by my participants was becoming apparent during this step of analysis.

***Step eleven: Contextualized stories.*** Once I had negotiated meanings with my participants and created my final interim texts, I contextualized the things that I found in my interviews, analysis, interim texts, and co-created stories by connecting my findings to the context within which teachers work. This context includes the pressures regarding ELLs specifically, a deficit view of teachers that exists, and the pressures of high-stakes testing, all of which have an impact on teacher emotions.

***Step twelve: Final text negotiation.*** In this step, I refined my research text, and checked for participant approval. After I contextualized my findings by turning from the private to the public, I refined my thesis, my final research text, making any needed changes for clarity and coherence. I then took my entire thesis to my participants to ensure that they agreed with the way that I had represented them and their experiences and priorities in teaching ELL students.

**Attention to trustworthiness.** Throughout the process of collecting and analyzing data, I attended to trustworthiness. Each time I created a set of interim texts I negotiated those texts with my participants to ensure that the themes and tensions I identified captured the experiences and beliefs of my participants. After creating and refining my final research text, which included my findings, I shared it with my participants to ensure that it adequately and accurately reflected their feelings, beliefs, and experiences as teachers of ELLs. Specifically, steps five, six, seven, eight, and twelve in my analysis were designed to promote trustworthiness. My effort to be transparent in my account of my analysis also adds to the trustworthiness of my study.

## Chapter 4

### Findings and Discussion

In order to illustrate the complexities, similarities, and tensions in and between the stories my participants and I live by, I use the metaphor of weaving a tapestry. A weaver uses many different threads to create a tapestry. The threads used may be of analogous colors, or may be composed of contrasting colors. Our lived experiences, or stories to live by (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999) can be represented by threads in the tapestry of our lives. As components of different lived experiences in a person's life or between people's lives are woven together, similar and disparate threads emerge. I am uniquely positioned to be the metaphorical weaver in this self-study of my practice, as I live alongside my fellow participants in our daily teaching.

As I examined the stories that my participants told about their lives as teachers of ELLs, I found several themes, or threads that were salient in both of my chosen participants' interviews. As I examined these threads more closely, I found that they lent themselves to being interwoven into two thicker threads. In the sections below, I present my assertions for understanding that emerged from these threads. In doing so, I follow this pattern: First, I present a constructed text based on the experience of a participant. I then unpack that experience. Next, I make a turn to self, or a turn inward (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) by discussing my understandings and wonderings about the story. I repeat this pattern for each participant, including myself, for each of the two threads. For the purpose of this thesis, I use the fictitious names of Kalee and Lori to represent my participants. All other teachers' and students' names used here, other than my own, are also pseudonyms.

## **The Significance of Relationships**

The first salient thread in my analysis is that of the significance of relationships. I use the word *relationship* to refer to any association that participants engaged in with students, other teachers, staff members, or that students engaged in with each other. This thread demonstrates the importance of teachers' relationships with their ELL students in learning to teach and teaching to learn, and is indicative of the priorities that teachers have regarding their ELLs.

**Kalee.** I present stories about Kalee's interactions with one of her ELL students in the form of two brief vignettes constructed from experiences that she related over the course of the study. These stories are illustrative of the significance in which Kalee holds her relationships with her ELL students and how these relationships play an impactful role in her identity as a teacher of ELLs. Kalee's stories of her exchanges with Jesus surfaced multiple times throughout our meetings.

It was a typical day in Kalee's class. She had been instructing the students to do something when her new student, Jesus, said, "Maestra, you just want me to do everything that you say!" Kalee was surprised by Jesus' outburst, but handled it by saying, "Yes, yes, I do. Welcome to school!" Jesus then replied, "Do you want me to get you a drink of water too?" Kalee jokingly returned, "Yes, that would be great! And make sure you put ice in it!"

Another day on the playground, Kalee called Jesus over and asked what he liked about living in Mexico, as he had been in the U.S. for less than a year. Jesus said that he liked driving. He explained that he would go with his father to the bar, and drive him home so that he did not drive while inebriated.

In the first story, we can see that Kalee cares enough about her students to form caring relationships with them. When Jesus is sort of whiney about the school expectation to do what the teacher requires, Kalee does not degrade him or become angry with him. Instead she steps back enough to remember that he has limited experience with formal schooling, and jokes with him about it, sending the message to him that the expectation is that students will do what the teacher asks, but that she cares enough about him not to get upset with him, as he is in the process of learning how to participate appropriately in U.S. schools. Kalee's response to Jesus in this situation shows that she values her relationship with him above the content that she was teaching, or a particular teaching strategy she may have been using. She allows him the space to be a child by reacting in a humorous way, and letting him learn through everyday interactions how to behave in school settings. By reacting with humor to this everyday experience and teaching Jesus to obey the teachers, which is part of the story of school, Kalee is advocating for him, prioritizing him over content and programs.

The second story also shows Kalee's commitment to forming and maintaining relationships with her students. She could have used recess that day for many other purposes, but chose to use it to get to know Jesus a little better. She is interested in knowing about Jesus' background, wanting to know what he likes and why. She takes the time to probe into Jesus' past to find out how to help him in the future in her classroom and to prepare him for life after fourth grade. Jesus's willingness to share his story of himself as an eight-year-old boy driving his father home from a bar is evidence that he feels safe in revealing what might have been a secret story to his teacher. Because of this trusting relationship, Kalee learns something about his life that changes her view

of Jesus. This story he trusted her with gives Kalee a window into who Jesus is, and the adult responsibilities that he has been given. She must now also wrestle with the moral and ethical dilemma of what to do with this information about him driving his father home from the bar. The fact that Kalee takes the time to get to know about Jesus on more than an academic level, and the fact that stories about her relationships with them surface multiple times, lend themselves to the idea that one of Kalee's highest priorities as a teacher of ELLs is her relationship with her students. She truly cares about her students as individuals, and this shows in the everyday decisions she makes both in and out of the classroom.

Kalee's stories resonated with me as a teacher of ELLs. I also believe that relationships are of great importance in being able to reach and teach ELLs and that to treat students respectfully is essential. As I thought about Kalee's first story, I wondered how I would have handled the same situation. Would I have reacted with humor, or with frustration and anger? How would those choices have impacted my ELL students? With the many demands on my time, energy and emotions as a teacher of ELLs, do I choose to respond to similar, emotionally charged, situations with acceptance and humor and prioritize my relationship with students over other things as Kalee did? Thinking about this story causes me to reflect on these and other questions regarding my own practice as a teacher of ELLs.

Reflecting on Kalee's story of taking the time to get to know Jesus also called forth wonderings about my own practice. I can point to things in my practice that show that I also care about my relationships with my students, and view them as hugely important in my identity as a teacher of ELLs. I also wonder how teachers find and when

Kalee and I make time to develop these relationships with our students with the time-constraining demands focused on students' academic achievement as demonstrated on high-stakes testing. The story further reminds me that, as teachers, we learn about our students in school spaces as we live with our students. Such spaces include recess, reading time, discipline, conversations in the hall, and any other non-instruction time.

I wonder how things could have been different had Kalee not been as focused on building relationships with her students, and how things will look in the future for both Jesus as an ELL student, and Kalee as a teacher of ELLs. If Kalee had responded to Jesus's comment about her wanting him to obey differently, or chosen not to take the time to ask questions about his background, how would that have impacted her relationship and interactions with Jesus? Would those decisions have come back to haunt her in the form of Jesus not trusting her as much, or not respecting her wishes?

I wonder how Kalee's interactions with Jesus impacted his view of teachers and school. Does he now treat teachers with more deference as an outcome of his positive and humorous interactions with Kalee? Have these experiences helped him learn the unwritten rules of school, helped him learn to win at the game of school? As he was fairly new to the U.S., and the first story suggests that he may not have had consistent schooling before arriving to our school, I wonder how Kalee's caring about him impacted his views of future schooling. Did he look to future years of schooling with hope and anticipation because he had a caring teacher in fourth grade who took the time to teach him how to succeed in school? How did that impact his willingness to work and invest in learning?

I further wonder how these experiences impacted Kalee. Knowing Kalee to be a warm, caring teacher, invested in developing relationships with her students, I wonder if she ever thinks back to these experiences with Jesus when she is trying to get to know her students, or when students challenge her. Does remembering the positive outcomes that resulted with getting to know Jesus and responding in a compassionate, humorous way that taught him, prompt her to use similar tactics with other ELLs? Or does she lean towards defusing tense situations with humor and treat her students with patience and respect without thinking about it consciously?

**Lori.** To present Lori's experience with a specific family, I use a letter that I constructed based on the interactions that Lori had with the Rodriguez family, and then later related to me during the course of her interviews. This constructed letter is from Mrs. Rodriguez, the mother of the family, to Lori Baker, who taught her son and then her daughter, and illustrates some of the dynamics of the relationship Lori has with this family:

Dear Mrs. Baker,

Thank you for taking the time to let me know about Yecenia's misbehavior at school. I appreciate you calling me and working together to address this.

I think that the fact that you were Ramon's teacher a couple of years ago, and came over to our house to get to know him has helped Yecenia trust you more than she might otherwise. I think that she feels like she knows you already, and knows that you care about your students. I know that it definitely helped Ramon. He felt so special when you came to visit, and would sometimes come home from



school and tell me that you had mentioned or used something in class that you knew about him because of that visit. Thanks for all your work to help my children progress!

Sincerely,

Silvia Rodriguez

Lori's story about her relationship with Ramon and Yecenia and their mother is illustrative of the priority that relationships hold for Lori in everyday situations and in settings both within and beyond school. She could have chosen to disregard the information she learned about Ramon during her home visit instead of using it to connect with him at school. She could have chosen to react to Yecenia's misbehavior punitively and privately rather than reaching out to Mrs. Rodriguez so that they could come up with a solution together. Lori points to her visit with the Rodriguez family and the resulting trusting relationship as being the reason why she could more easily call Mrs. Rodriguez and work together to find solutions to help Yecenia at school. The relationship fostered between Lori and the Rodriguez family is also helpful in reaching Ramon's needs as a student in Lori's class.

In Lori's account, it is apparent that everyday relationships with her students and their families are important to Lori. She takes the time to call Mrs. Rodriguez to report Yecenia's misbehavior, but also to work out a plan of how to help Yecenia. Lori does not make a complaining or blaming call. She communicates that she wants to work together to figure out the best thing to help Yecenia. Due to Lori's previous visit to the Rodriguez home when Ramon was in her class, she already has a good rapport with the family which enables her to better communicate with Mrs. Rodriguez about Yecenia's

errant behavior. Lori's willingness to visit the Rodriguez home, to relate things in class back to what she has learned about Ramon during that visit, and to communicate with Mrs. Rodriguez about Yecenia's behavior, all demonstrate that relationships are important in Lori's teaching. This story allows us a glimpse into Lori's everyday priorities as a teacher of ELLs and illustrates the preeminence that relationships hold for her.

Lori's story of relationships naturally leads me to reflect on my own practices as a teacher. While I do not do home visits on a regular basis, I do believe that the relationships that I form with my students and their families are important and have long-term consequences. When I have formed a good relationship with a student or a family, it positively impacts my future communications with other members and friends of that family. I wonder how taking the time to do more home visits and finding other ways to get to know my students better could impact my relationships with my students, and my teaching.

In looking back at Lori's experiences in getting to know Ramon, and Kalee's conversation with Jesus on the playground, I also wonder what I could do at school to have more time to get to know my students. Perhaps doing more home visits is one answer to the tension between needing to prepare students academically and wanting to spend more time getting to know my students individually. These kinds of interactions with students and families can affect students' engagement and motivation, thus improving learning.

In examining Lori's story about her interactions with the Rodriguez family, I wonder how things would have been different had Lori not done that initial home visit.

Would she have been able to develop the same sort of relationship that she had with Ramon without that visit? Or would she have achieved the same sort of rapport, just over a longer period of time? Would Mrs. Rodriguez have been as open and willing to work with Lori to figure out a plan to improve Yecenia's behavior without Lori's previous investment in getting to know the family?

I also wonder about how this story has impacted Lori's teaching. Is she more prone to doing home visits now, in spite of the many demands on her time as a teacher and in other roles in her life? If more home visits have not been a possibility, how has seeing the positive impact that her relationship with the Rodriguez family had on her teaching Ramon and Yecenia influenced her teaching and relationships with other students? Through this story, we are afforded an everyday look into Lori's life as a teacher of ELLs, and learn of her priority of relationships with both students and parents as a way of reaching and teaching to the needs of these students.

**Johanna.** In reflecting on both Kalee's and Lori's stories, and identifying the thread of the importance of relationships, I came to think about my own experiences regarding relationships with students and families. While several stories came to mind, I chose the following from my personal experiences. I present my story in the form of vignette constructed from an experience that I had about seven years ago.

It was another day of early morning bus duty, and I was outside on the playground watching my students and children in other grades play before school. A couple of my own students came over to chat with me. One said that there had been a visit by immigration officials at his mother's work the day before, but that it was okay because someone had somehow known about it and tipped her off about it

ahead of time, so she had not gone into work that day. I was thinking about what it must be like to live with that kind of uncertainty, and probably fear, as the mother and the child, when my student asked me, “Miss Boone, are you afraid that they’ll kick you out of the country?” I almost cried right there in front of my student. I was touched that my student trusted me enough to tell me about his mother, that he worried about me, yet I was also saddened and dismayed that the possibility of deportation was such a real thing for him and his family that he just assumed it was a part of everyone’s life.

This story of my student telling me about his mother’s avoided deportation provides a glimpse into my everyday priorities as a teacher of ELLs. I care about my students and their lives both in and out of the classroom, and wonder how I can improve my relationships with them on a regular basis. In this story, I take the time to listen to my student. He feels comfortable enough with me to come up and talk about what is going on in his life. The level of confidence needed to trust someone with information as sensitive as his information about his mother’s possible deportation shows that we have a relationship of trust and caring. My emotional response illustrates the level of concern and care that I have for this student, as I think about the implications that this experience has and could have on my student and his family. My everyday priorities are evident in the way that I take the time to listen to my student, and in the fact that he is willing to trust me with such personal, private information.

I wonder what I did that inspired my student to trust me with such personal information. I do not remember doing anything specific to develop a relationship with that student anymore than I try to do with all of my students. If he had not felt like he

could trust me with his stories about his family, and he had been required to move, would I ever have known what had happened to him? I also wonder how knowing that his mother could be found in violation of immigration laws impacted my interactions with him. While it was a few years ago, I hope that it encouraged me to treat him with even more patience and kindness, knowing what he was facing in his home life.

Reflecting on this story now also makes me wonder about my current and future students. Are there students currently in my class who are facing equally difficult circumstances? Have I been insensitive or impatient with students whose stories I have not taken the time to get to know? Have I made hasty judgments about students not working or trying, chalking it up to apathy, rather than what is going on in their personal lives? What can I do now and in the future to help all of my students feel safe in my classroom even when things outside of it may be difficult? How can I further develop the relationships that I have with my students? And how do I balance the time required to get to know students with the increasing rigor and accountability that students and teachers face?

As I reflect on this story, many wonderings come to mind, not only for my own practices, but also for my student's life. What if someone had not tipped off his mother about the immigration officials' visit? How would that have impacted my student? Would his mother have been deported? If his mother had been deported, would he even have been at school that day to tell me about the experience, or would he be on his way to Mexico with the rest of his family? If she had been required to go, and he had stayed with other family members here, how would separation from his mother have impacted

him? Would he have been able or willing to focus on school with such a huge burden to bear?

These stories from three teachers of ELLs, myself included, illustrate the importance of relationships for each of us. These stories allow teachers to see and assess how they are developing relationships. Kalee's disarming of a tense situation with patience and laughter, knowing that a child is learning how act in school, Kalee's seeking to know Jesus and Jesus's willingness to share his story about driving his dad, the trust evident between Mrs. Rodriguez and Lori, and my story of having my student tell me about his concerns about immigration authorities all demonstrate the importance we place on relationships in everyday situations. Relationships as a priority are evident in the safe, caring spaces we have create for our students everyday.

### **Perpetual Progression**

The second major thread that emerged from my data analysis was that of perpetual progression. I use the phrase perpetual progression to refer to improvement and change that is realized or hoped for on an on-going basis. This focus on continual progression points to teachers' desire to improve their own practices and to help their students improve over time.

**Kalee.** The following dramatization portrays Kalee's use of portfolios in her classroom to show student progress, which Kalee and I discussed several times throughout the course of the study. I constructed this dramatization based on a presentation that one of Kalee's students shared with the school's faculty.

*Setting.* A classroom filled to capacity with teachers sitting around small rectangular tables. At the front of the room is an interactive whiteboard. The principal is announcing the next faculty meeting agenda item.

*Dialogue.* Principal: Next, one of Kalee's students is going to come in and show us what the fourth grade team has been doing to help their students track data and be accountable for their own learning. This is Mikio and he's going to share with us what he has been doing.

*(Teachers listen and watch as Mikio presents)*

Mikio: First, my name is Mikio, like Mrs. M. said, and I'm in Miss Hansen's class. I'm going to show you my keynote presentation of the things that I've been learning, and explain what I put on each slide. This first slide shows a graph of my reading scores. My goal is to read 120 words per minute at a fourth-grade level. I started out reading 100 words per minute at the beginning of the year, but you can see the graph rising as I have been reading more at home and at school and have been getting better.

*(Mikio shows his progress in reading, writing, math and other subjects, as well as his progress towards a specific behavior goal).*

Principal: Well, Mikio, it looks like you've been working hard to accomplish your goals. Can you explain to us when you update this presentation, who you share it with and when you share it?

Mikio: Sure. Every time I take a test to see how I'm doing with one of my goals, or when my teacher times my words per minute, I go and update my presentation so that it shows where I am right then. I share it with my teacher each week so

that she knows I'm keeping track of my stuff, and I share it with my parents when they come for parent teacher conferences.

Principal: Thank you, Mikio.

*(Mikio leaves and teachers discuss the potential merits and possible difficulties of doing something similar in their own classrooms.)*

This dramatization illustrates a practice that Kalee shared when asked what she could point to in her teaching that would show that she had learned something from a professional development intended for helping ELLs. Her practice of holding the students accountable for their learning through the use of shared portfolios and student-led parent-teacher conferences exemplifies the thread of Kalee's everyday priority of perpetual progression. Kalee shows her own forward movement as a teacher by trying something that is new to her, a practice she feels would be valuable to her students and their parents. The student-led portfolios and conferences are not things that Kalee has been doing since she started teaching, but rather, are practices that she has adopted after teaching for a few years.

Kalee's use of portfolios in her classroom shows her everyday priority of perpetual progression for her students. When a learning goal is set, there is not an expectation of immediate achievement. In talking about helping students achieve certain learning goals, Kalee reports telling her students that it is like a baby learning to walk, saying encouraging things like, "We're not there yet, but we will get there." This idea of daily, constant effort to move forward shows Kalee's desire for her students to continually grow and progress.



Kalee's classroom practices allow for perpetual progression, in that students are given the opportunity to keep working on a learning goal throughout the year. Because students are in charge of their digital portfolios, they know their own data, know how they are doing on their various goals. As a result, Kalee can say, "Who needs to work on long division?", and the students know whether that is a concept that they have mastered, or one that they still need to work on. This is a result of charting their own data. Kalee pushes herself to progress as a teacher by choosing to use these digital portfolios and student-led conferences with the students, although they are not required by the school or district administrations. She also has high expectations for her students, pushing them to be continually progressing as well, as they chart their own data with the vision of mastering their learning goals, regardless of how long or how many attempts it requires.

Another example of perpetual progression as shown in Kalee's practice of using student-created portfolios is that students use these portfolios to lead their own conferences. Kalee no longer directs parent-teacher conferences. Now, her students present their portfolios to their parents at conferences, sharing their own growth and areas of strength and needed improvement. Another evidence of perpetual progression is that Kalee emphatically says that she would never go back to doing teacher-led conferences. The changes Kalee has made in her practice over time and her intention to keep moving forward with this practice show the recurring thread of perpetual progression.

Kalee's story about her students' portfolios points to her investment in her students' immediate and long-term progression. She expects her students not only to progress academically, but also to make strides in their accountability to themselves and

their parents. Kalee's portfolios are one indicator showing that her students' continued success is a priority for her.

Kalee's story about her portfolios prompts me to reflect on my own practices. Since being present for Mikio's presentation in faculty meeting, and hearing Kalee extol the virtues of student-led conferences using portfolios, I have begun using them with my own students. Kalee's sharing of her portfolios has helped me, and thus my students, on this journey of perpetual progression. Whereas I formerly used parent teacher conferences to tell parents about their students' work and progress, my students are now demonstrating ownership of their own learning. They create their portfolios and share their academic progress and self-constructed goals with their parents.

In addition to portfolios becoming a part of my practice as a teacher, Kalee's story has influenced me in other ways. It causes me to wonder about other ways of increasing the amount of ownership and accountability among my students. It prompts me to think about the ways in which I communicate to my students that they have done something well, or when they need to work on a certain concept. It opens the door to many additional possible practices for my classroom.

Other wonderings come to mind as I think about Kalee's story of having her students create portfolios. Mikio, while raised in a home where Spanish is the predominant language spoken, was one of Kalee's more fluent and academically advanced ELLs. I wonder how others of her students would have done in a similar situation, presenting their portfolio to the school's staff. Could they have articulated their learning and growth in the same way? Can they show their progress and goals to their

parents in a way that is comfortable or intuitive to them, or is it difficult for some students?

**Lori.** I share one of Lori's experiences illustrating perpetual progression through a poem I constructed from her perspective. It re-stories one of the experiences that she recounted in her interviews. It also employs some of the phrases that she used as she related this experience to me during the course of the study.

#### The Sea of Seventh Grade

It's time to sign sixth grade ESL students out of the ESL program.

It feels like I *have* to sign the paper, to exit them from the program,

That it's not a choice.

But the ESL director says, "You can write anything you want on it."

So I write on there, "I don't think this child should be exited."

But who reads these forms?

I sign the forms.

I guess as far as a staunch supporter of these students, I'm not doing my job.

But I really don't want to send them into the Sea of Seventh grade without that extra support that they've had.

This poem about Lori's experiences of, and tensions with, exiting ELL students out of the ESL program as they leave her classroom and the school to continue on to seventh grade, also shows the thread of Lori's everyday priority of perpetual progression. It exhibits some of Lori's tensions about signing students out of ESL support as they enter the seventh grade and reveals Lori's interest in the continuing progression of her students. She has worked with those students, monitored their progress throughout their

year with her, and wants them to continue to have a successful educational experience with the support of ESL support services as they move on. She seems to feel that seventh grade is not as personal or safe as sixth grade. The sea she is sending these students out into is not likely to be a calm one for them, but rather holds portent of storms and the possibility of becoming lost.

Lori's story also indicates a belief in and a priority of personal perpetual progression. Her indication that she does not feel that she is a staunch supporter of students shows her willingness to sacrifice her pride and humbly acknowledge that not all of her students are ready to move on to the next grade level unaided, in spite of her efforts to prepare them. She has been teaching sixth grade for several years, but shows that she still seeks to change and improve in the future, as she wishes she could do something about signing these students out of ESL services.

Lori's story of not knowing what to do to help the ELL students moving on to seventh grade from her classroom causes me to wonder about my own practices. Are there circumstances in which I feel I do not have a voice in what happens to my students in my classroom now, or in the future? Lori's feelings lead me to wonder what other policies may exist that may be in tension with a teacher's knowledge or beliefs about specific students.

I also wonder what I do now and can do in the future to advocate for what I feel is in the best interests of my students. What can I do to help encourage other teachers to do the same? I wonder if we often feel like Lori does about signing the exit papers. We know that something should be done differently, but do not always know the best way to help that change occur, or even what that change should be.

**Johanna.** These stories of the everyday priority of perpetual progression brought to mind a personal story about a former student of mine. Jose really struggled with reading. He came into my fifth-grade class at the beginning of the year and told me that he did not read, that he could not, and did not want to. During the school year he progressed from saying that he hated reading, to sneaking the book that I was reading out loud to the class so that he could read it, and even setting a goal to improve in his reading fluency in order to earn a “book pass” allowing him to choose any book as a prize for achieving his goal. I share the story of Jose and perpetual progression through a letter, written to Jose, who was a sixth grader at the time, after having been in my fifth-grade class the previous year. This letter reflects a conversation that I had with Jose.

Dear Jose,

I was talking to Miss Hansen the other day, and she told me that you’re not doing your best in class right now. We talked about how it makes us sad that you’re making that choice, because we both know, and know that YOU know, that you can do better.

Remember last year when you decided that you wanted a book pass, so you worked so hard on your reading and earned a book pass by improving in your fluency, and then earned another one by getting a great score on our end of the year test? I was so proud of you! Remember to do your very best! You can do amazing things if you decide that you want to, and you try!

Love,

Miss Boone

My everyday priority of perpetual progression is evident in the story of my interactions with Jose. My concern for his progress is evident in the efforts I made

throughout the year to help him progress. These included introducing him to interesting literature, working with him in small groups on his fluency, and motivating him with book passes. Jose's progress was disrupted by the summer break. He turned back to his old negative views of reading and his reading abilities during this time. However, his being in a different grade, and his return to past attitudes did not result in me ceasing to be concerned about him. This story serves as evidence that I was invested in his long-term progress. I did not stop caring about him and his academic achievement when he left my classroom. This same sort of investment in the perpetual progress of our students is evident in Kalee's portfolio use, and Lori's worries about sending her students to another grade in another school.

This story is particularly significant, due to the fact that Jose made huge leaps in his reading in my fifth-grade class last year but went into sixth grade evidencing the same attitude with which he had started fifth grade: He did not like to read, did not want to, and would not. When I saw him in the halls the year after he was in my class, I reminded him, as I could, that he could do better, and encouraged him to do so. This aspect of the story shows that progression is not always a steady state of forward motion. There are stops and starts, and at times painful backtracking.

As I recall my experiences with Jose, I wonder what I could have done differently to help Jose become a better reader. Is there something I could have said or done that would have motivated him to keep working on his reading long-term? The book passes that I used and the books that I read aloud motivated him to work on his reading during the year that he was in my classroom. What, if anything, is motivating him to work on his reading now? What can I use in addition to sharing my own love of

reading and using book passes as prizes for goals achieved to motivate students to read?

I wonder how Jose is doing with his reading now. Does he have the attitude that he cannot and will not read? If so, has he gone through phases, like he did in fifth grade, where he chose to read, and then gave it up again? I worry about his future schooling and vocational opportunities if he has not made becoming a better reader a priority.

### **Summary of Salient Threads**

As Lori's and Kalee's stories brought to mind some of my stories of teaching, I realized that their priorities of relationships and perpetual progression are among my own priorities as a teacher of ELLs. My stories, similarly to theirs, reveal that I prioritize relationships and progression in my teaching. I feel that forming and maintaining positive, everyday relationships with all of my students is crucial to being a good teacher. Continuing to care about and help my students grow over time is an integral part of my everyday teaching. Also, changing my own practices over time is important to me, as I want to be perpetually progressing.

## Chapter 5

### Conclusions and Implications

My story about Karen, related at the beginning of Chapter 1, is illustrative of an important dilemma that teachers of ELL students face. Karen was a struggling reader who needed additional time and attention. As her teacher, I was concerned about her reading and wanted to invest that extra time and attention, but also felt the desire and pressure to help all of my students, especially my ELL students. Karen's story represents the competing priorities teachers of ELLs constantly face. As I teach within the context of a deficit view of teachers and high-stakes testing, the dilemma I faced about what to prioritize in my teaching was difficult and emotional. With the many pressures surrounding me, what were the most crucial things to attend to in order to help Karen?

As I analyzed my own stories of teaching ELL students, as well as the stories of my two participants, I uncovered two salient threads. In the face of the many pressures that teachers encounter, the over-arching priorities of the participants in this study, including myself, are attention to the hearts and minds of students. As teachers take time to get to know their students, they are building relationships with them, thus attending to their students' hearts. This attention to students' hearts benefits students emotionally, socially, and academically. Teachers attend to students' minds by intentionally helping them progress and succeed academically, and by continuing to be concerned about students after students have left their classrooms.



## Conclusions

The opportunity to conduct this study shifted my paradigm. As a teacher, I face the many pressures discussed in this study, and sometimes fall prey to a deficit view of myself. I can see some good in what I do, but in the context of the high demands made of me, I often wonder if I am doing enough. This study helped me realize that while I may not be doing everything that could be done, I am prioritizing the things that are most important to me. I am living true to the way that I story myself as a teacher whose very identity is tied up in the care that I offer my students and the desire I have to help them progress to their maximum potential.

Another way in which my paradigm shifted throughout the course of this study, was a recognition and increase of advocacy through daily activity. Prior to this study, I did not recognize my daily actions as advocating for my students. However, the simple things that I do on a daily basis, such as taking time to get to know and listen to students, teaching them appropriate ways to act in school, responding with patience and humor, and helping them continue to progress truly do advocate for my students. Recognizing this helped me continue and increase these sorts of advocacy. Also, sharing the things that myself and others prioritize in our teaching lives has helped me advocate for myself and other teachers of ELLs.

Conducting this study also helped me learn from my colleagues' priorities and practices. While we live parallel lives as teachers in the same school, it is not often that we have the chance to share our true priorities with each other. Throughout the course of this study, I learned things that changed my perceptions and practices. Thus, my colleagues became a source of professional expertise, and conducting this study served as

a form of professional development, as it broadened my views and helped me improve my practice as a teacher of ELLs.

This study shows that while teachers are under pressure from school, district, state and federal authorities to have certain priorities regarding their ELL students' achievement, teachers have priorities that are not acknowledged or encouraged by these entities. What matters most to teachers is in collision with what policy makers prioritize. Teachers prioritize relationships with students and perpetual progression, while policy makers prioritize achievement for all students on high-stakes tests. The moral wrestling between what they prioritize in their everyday teaching lives and what they are under pressure to prioritize by policy makers creates tension for teachers. Teachers are under pressure to keep these stories as competing rather than conflicting stories (Clandinin, et al., 2009). Competing stories are narratives that teachers can balance or attend to both of, while conflicting stories are those stories that are so disparate, that they can not both be attended to, thus causing teachers to drop one or the other. The competing priorities of policy makers and teachers impact teachers' instructional decisions, as well as their interactions with their students.

Teachers are under pressure from policy makers to help their ELL students perform well on high-stakes tests. While teachers want to help students progress, their everyday priorities are on students' perpetual progression, rather than on end-of-year, high-stakes test scores or an orientation towards best practices and strategies. Teachers have a forward-looking view for their students, which expands beyond one test that students take or the one school year in which teachers have a particular group of students. Teachers' value is often measured by the results of high-stakes testing. However,

teachers also story themselves as forward-looking, focusing on changing and improving practices over time, rather than exclusively on the test results of their students.

Teachers work within a deficit view of their profession. This deficit theory rises from the competing stories of policy makers and teachers. Teachers' stories reveal that they prioritize relationships and progress. They attend to the minds and hearts of the students that they teach. These noble priorities contribute to a more positive view of teachers than is the norm and help to dispel this deficit view.

Teachers' emotions are affected by the pressures that they are under, as well as their own priorities. The competing narratives of policy makers' expectations and teachers' own priorities cause internal tension for teachers.

Seeking to understand teachers' priorities regarding their ELL students leads to a deeper understanding of the ways that teachers help their students that are not visible in the results of high-stakes testing. This helps dispel a deficit view of teachers, and relieves some of the pressure that teachers are under, thus contributing to more positive teacher emotions and less burnout and attrition.

### **Implications**

The view of teachers' priorities regarding their ELL students afforded by this study has several implications for my own practice. When I am faced with emotionally charged situations, I need to react with acceptance, humor and patience. Keeping in mind that each of my students has a back-story which influences what they do and how they do it is another important implication. I take the time to get to know my students and have more personal conversations in the classroom and in the spaces of school, such as recess, lunch, reading time, discipline, conversations in the hall. I ask questions in these school

spaces as well as in the classroom that will help me come to know my students better. In addition, I can use home visits and other means of communication to form and strengthen relationships with the families of my students as well as with the students themselves. Forming these relationships can help me use the knowledge that parents have about their children to help the students academically, socially, and emotionally. I can continue to use portfolios and student-led conferences as a way of showing students' academic growth and holding them accountable for their own learning and growth. I should look for other ways to increase ownership and accountability among students. Finally, as a result of conducting this study, I feel an increased need to advocate for students, myself, and my fellow teachers. I can do this by continuing to prioritize relationships and progress for my students, by adopting a positive self-view of my efforts as a teacher, and by continuing to share teachers' priorities in order to combat the deficit view of teachers that currently prevails.

There are many layers within the everyday stories that teachers live out in schools. Understanding the priorities revealed by the depth of these stories and making them more public can help alleviate some of the pressure that teachers are under. This positively impacts students, as students are influenced by teacher emotions. The more public these stories are, the less prevalent a deficit view of teachers becomes. For example, understanding teachers' forward-looking view of students and themselves helps dispel the deficit view that exists of teachers. Policy makers can involve teachers more in developing and using the results of the high-stakes testing that will impact them and their students, and the public can resist punitive measures for teachers, as they realize the priorities that teachers hold.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

There are several areas of study that would be of help in expanding the current research and the findings of my own study. Further research on teachers' priorities regarding their ELLs and how those priorities affect their instruction and interaction with students would contribute to the current research. Further self-studies examining teaching lives with narrative inquiry methods and other types of narrative inquiry studies would be very valuable as a way of honoring the things that occur in the minds, hearts, and classrooms of individual teachers. Teachers can resolve the competing plotlines present in their practice through examining their own practice.

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## Appendix A:

### Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

Introduction/Break the Ice questions:

- What made you decide to become a teacher? Do you have a story that illustrates how you came to that decision?
- Do you remember these charts? (after showing a set of conceptual tools that they purchased as part of their class materials for their endorsement classes)
- How have you used these ideas in your teaching?

Course-specific questions, to be given after a brief statement about each course and after providing the participant with a specific conceptual tool from those they used in their endorsement classes.

- What do you remember about the Foundations of Bilingual Education class?
- Do you remember this chart? Has it been helpful in changing your thinking about bilingual education?
- If I were to come into your class and watch you teach, what could you point to in your teaching that would show that you learned something from the Foundations of Bilingual Education class?
  
- What do you remember about the Understanding Language Acquisition class?
- Do you remember this chart? Has it been helpful in changing your thinking about language acquisition?
- If I were to come into your class and watch you teach, what could you point to in your teaching that would show that you learned something from the Understanding Language Acquisition class?
  
- What do you remember about the Assessment for Linguistically Diverse Students class?
- Do you remember this chart? Has it been helpful in changing your thinking about assessing linguistically diverse students?
- If I were to come into your class and watch you teach, what could you point to in your teaching that would show that you learned something from the Assessment for Linguistically Diverse Students class?
  
- What do you remember about the Developing Second Language Literacy class?
- Do you remember this chart? Has it been helpful in changing your thinking about second language literacy?
- If I were to come into your class and watch you teach, what could you point to in your teaching that would show that you learned something from the Developing Second Language Literacy class?

- What do you remember about the Integrating Content and Language Instruction class?
- Do you remember this chart? Has it been helpful in changing your thinking about integrating content and language instruction?
- If I were to come into your class and watch you teach, what could you point to in your teaching that would show that you learned something from the Integrating Content and Language Instruction class?
- What do you remember about the Family, School and Community Partnerships class?
- Do you remember this chart? Has it been helpful in changing your thinking about family, school, and community partnerships?
- If I were to come into your class and watch you teach, what could you point to in your teaching that would show that you learned something from the Family, School, and Community Partnerships class?

Additional questions:

- What are some of the strengths that you have seen in your ELL students?
- What are some of the strengths that you have seen in a specific ELL student?
- What are some of the policies, programs and practices that exist to help ELL students?
- How do you/can you collaborate to support learning?
- What do you do to position your ELL children to learn in your classroom?
- How does/can your teaching embody your understanding of diverse learners' commonalities and uniqueness?
- What are your moral obligations to all students?
- How do/can you apply your guiding principles in your teaching?
- What specific changes have you/will you make in your teaching to accommodate all students?
- What is another perspective that you could take?
- How can/do you develop and maintain high expectations for all students?
- What do you already know and what do you need to learn to support the learning of all students?
- How can/do you hold your learners and yourself accountable?

## **Appendix B:**

### **Example of Dialogue During a Follow Up Visit**

Researcher: One of the themes that I saw throughout our first interview was the emphasis that you place on getting to know your students. For example, in your story about Jesus, you spent time on the playground asking him questions about his life in Mexico. Does that theme match what you think about your teaching? Can you share other examples of this?

Participant: Yes, I do think it's important to get to know my students. They are better able to focus on their school-work when they know that I care about them. It is easier to motivate them when things get hard, if they know that I know them and am invested in their progress.

Researcher: In the transcript of our last visit, I saw that you said something about it seeming to be uncomfortable for some of the families to share their immigration stories. I wonder if you could tell me more about that. Why do you think that they were uncomfortable sharing?

Participant: Well, I think it may be that they were uncomfortable sharing about something that made them or their children stand out from the rest of the students. Or it could be that the discomfort of being in a new place and adjusting to life in a new country kind of came back to them as they shared it with the class.

## Appendix C:

### Prompts for the Teachers' Writing Exercises

**To be given at the end of the first visit:**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Please choose one of the following prompts to respond to. There is no suggested length, but please be thoughtful in your response.

Please tell me about a time when you changed a curriculum (a unit or other thing that you teach) during the time that you were enrolled in your ESL endorsement classes, or after you received your ESL endorsement. How did you change that curriculum? What led you to change it?

OR

Please tell me about a time when you changed a practice, routine, or procedure in your classroom during the time that you were in your ESL classes or after you had received your ESL endorsement. How have you changed that procedure, routine, or practice? What led you to change it?

**To be given at the end of the second visit:**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

In our visits, we've been talking about how you see yourself remembering and using the things that you learned in the ELL/BEEDE program in your teaching. It's important to me to learn about how you think of yourself as an ELL teacher.

In the following space, or in a separate document, please share with me one story from your own teaching that illustrates a time when you felt that you were able to help an ELL student succeed. Then tell me about a time when you failed an ELL student, or were not able to reach an ELL student's needs.

There is no formal format for these stories. They can be as long or as short as you need them to be to tell your story. This is just meant to be a jumping off point to get us talking about life as teachers of ELL students. I will also be writing stories of my successes and failures, and we'll share what we wrote with each other during our next visit. Thanks for being willing to share your experiences with me!