ARTICULATING A BETTER PRACTICE

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to my students—past, present, and future.

I have always loved language, and when I began my teaching career, I thought I already knew the power of words. With each passing year, however, you teach me the true impact of my words—poorly or wisely chosen.

Thank you.

May I one day be someone who always chooses wisely…for your sake, and for mine.

Abstract

This project deals with the nature of discourse about, around, and in the teaching profession. It begins with the researcher's impressions that the amount and the severity of the negative, demeaning, and disheartening language in this context is alarming and potentially damaging to a healthy professional identity and, consequently, to the professional reality of practicing teachers. The researcher sets out to discover how teachers in her division experience this language and whether an awareness of the effect of language could help assuage professional harm and difficulty.

A study of the fields of narrative inquiry, critical discourse analysis, and appreciative inquiry are at the core of the project. These three fields form the theoretical framework for the researcher's ideas around the power of discourse awareness.

An online forum was built, and seven volunteer secondary teacher participants and the participant researcher began discussions surrounding the nature of language and the specific words and phrases that each found to be demeaning and/or uplifting to their professional identity. As a final discussion, participants chose three to five "words to lose" and three to five "words to use" in their practice.

The researcher performed a critical analysis of the discussions, paying attention to critical discourse and the potential transformative powers of narrative and appreciative inquiries. Her findings and conclusions point to the resilient and adaptive teaching professional as one who has found ways to navigate the minefield of personal, collegiate, and public discourse with courage, determination, and grace.

Acknowledgments

I wish to publicly thank some key people for making this project possible.

First, Leah Fowler, who has been a mentor since I first walked in her Language in Education class in the fall of 1999. If I can be counted as a teacher of any measurable quality, it is due in no small part to her influence over the years. Leah's own research and teaching practices have provided me a path that I hope to walk with half the dignity she has shown in paving it.

I also thank Robin Bright, Wayne Street, and all the other university hands that touched, eyes that read, pencils that corrected, and words that directed this project.

I deeply appreciate the volunteer participants who opened up about their professional realities, even though they knew I was investigating their every word. I am so grateful for the trust you showed me. I hope I have done justice to your experiences and your ideas.

Thank you, Dad, for teaching me to love words.

Thank you, Mom, for teaching me to love people.

My husband is an unwavering support. I think Barry believes in me and in my ideas more than I do, and I am so grateful for that.

And, finally, thank you to my little buddy, Ryker, my chief distracter. Your messy handprints are all over this project. Without you, it likely would have been completed so much sooner (and may have even been of better quality), but it would never have mattered as much.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Statement of Purpose

The intent of this project is to investigate the discourse used about the teaching profession (from both within and without the profession) as it is experienced and perceived by teachers. It includes the author's personal experiences and observations, as they are at the core of the abiding premise for undertaking the project, which premise is that negative language about teaching is prevalent. Moreover, that it can cause great harm to the individual teacher's professional identity, but that her/his deliberate attention to her/his own language can help heal the identity and restore morale for that individual. Further, the author is interested in whether a change in the tone of language can effect tangible change in teaching realities, not just perceptions of the profession.

The project begins by outlining the author's personal experiences and beliefs regarding the power of our discourse, and a thorough review of related literature surrounding the fields of narrative inquiry, discourse analysis and appreciative inquiry was completed. With these three foci, the author establishes her emerging ideas surrounding what she terms *discourse awareness* and advances theoretical groundwork, and subsequently, the methodology for the conversations she sets out to have with teaching professionals.

A secure online forum was constructed, and seven volunteers of certified teaching staff, currently working in grades seven to twelve in a rural Western Canadian division contributed to a conversation about the language they encounter and use in—and related to—their professional lives. Also, when the online forum proved problematic or was perceived as not being private enough, participants contributed their thoughts and

experiences through one-on-one conversations with the researcher and private emails. This collected data was then collated, coded, and analyzed through the investigative and interpretive lens of discourse awareness.

Rationale

In my thirteen years of teacher training and teaching experience, I have sat with colleagues through countless hours of talk about education. Whether we have been in a university classroom, a staff meeting, a professional development opportunity, a conference with administration, or a quick chat around the photocopier, the tone of these conversations can, unfortunately, tend to take an ominous tone. In these venues, we speak and hear of the critical incidents of our colleagues, we review dismal research, we receive the bad news of changes to the structures we have become familiar with, we learn of the shortcomings of our system, and we commiserate on the difficulties of teaching.

It stands to reason that the rhetoric around education as an institution, educational practices, and the profession of teaching often takes a decidedly negative quality (perhaps, in part, due to our training as critical practitioners), but I have begun to wonder about how healthy such conversations are. The pessimistic words and phrases I have both heard and spoken have had a profound effect on my own practice, and I often see my peers similarly struggle with keeping positive—even satisfied—in their own professional spheres of influence.

Ironically, the teaching profession is full of people trained in constructive pedagogies, but it is my belief that we often fail to use the same modes of building upon success, supporting the struggling, and invoking latent strengths when we work in the realms of critical change to our practice, our institutions, or our teaching selves. My

radiant questions, then, revolve around ideas of using the same tenets of praise, encouragement and other constructive discourses that we know work in behavioral therapy to our professional practice, our staff rooms, and our professional development. Could individual teachers alter their professional realities simply by choosing to speak differently of them? Could we enact quicker, more profound, and more lasting change to our staff morales, our practices, the structures of our institutions, and the ideologies of our educational system if we framed current concerns and shortfalls in proactive rhetoric? Would such an approach facilitate the evolution of education, rather than (what I see as) the current norm of trying to revolutionize it with critique?

My Personal Journey to this Study. The personal genesis for this project actually happened a number of years ago, when my husband and I endured a very difficult experience together that involved false accusations, great financial strain, a loss of trust in other family members, and a very public and humiliating fight to protect my husband's business and our personal reputations.

At that time, we found ourselves dumbstruck. How could something so undeserved happen to us? We felt we had followed all the perceived golden formulas for a happy life—those prescribed to-do lists that society, family, religion, and culture had led us to believe would result in a relatively problem-free life. We had been generally obedient and courteous children, we had avoided major rebellion as teenagers, we had both put ourselves through university, after which we made personal sacrifices to plant ourselves firmly on the rungs of our respective career ladders. We had married not too young and not too old; then we waited an appropriate amount of time to provide the most stable environment for children. We went to church, we served our community, we loved

and trusted our families, we were concerned and engaged citizens, we worked hard and consistently in pursuit of admirable goals, and we were honest in our dealings with others. In short, we deserved better than this injustice.

As we lamented our bad fortune together, we realized that the true problem with our situation lay not only in the injustice we were suffering; it was also in the fact that we had actually been taught to—and had chosen to—believe a lie. Namely, we believed we would get what we deserved in life. All around us, friends and family members—good people who deserved better—were divorcing, getting sick, losing loved ones, and suffering any number of other personal tragedies. Natural disasters were striking at random, wiping out homes and lives without prejudice. Entire races across the globe were suffering from human rights violations. Proof that bad things happen to good people was all around us, yet we had believed that because we were "deserving," we would be spared pain. We were not the only ones to be so naïve.

We became very aware of how often the word "deserve" was bandied carelessly about. Advertising practically reeked of the sentiment—an effective sales pitch. (Even Wendy's touts that "You deserve a better burger.") We heard it, explicitly and implicitly, over the airwaves, across pulpits, around the water cooler, and in conversations with friends and family. It was spoken by politicians, spokesmen, clergy, supermodels, teachers, parents… all of society's trusted leaders. It seemed to us that the sense of entitlement we had to a relatively problem-free life was the biggest roadblock to personal happiness, as it engendered nothing but self-pity.

Left unchecked, the word "deserve" had torn the fabric of our identities, so we decided to rid ourselves of the problem. We banned the use of the word in our speech and

writing, and—eventually—it left a smaller mark on our thoughts and psyches. Once we felt the difference a change in vocabulary made in our lives, we formed two lists of words for our married/family life: one list for "deserve" and other words we wanted to ban from our lives, and the other list for words we wanted to use more frequently, words that engendered positive growth. Each of us also began making personal lists, as well. The process became perception altering, and consequently, life altering.

Around this same time, I was a few years into my teaching career. I'd done three temporary contracts before accepting the junior high language arts position that I was doing. But now I had been given a continuing contract and had been long enough at one place to begin to emerge from the self-absorbed fog that plagues a new teacher. I joined others in the staff room for lunch. I had more time to chat around the photocopier, and I was making friends with my coworkers.

I had expected to find that my fellow staff members were like-minded, that they generally enjoyed their profession, that they had a deep and abiding respect for their students, that they were stimulated by challenge, that they welcomed new strategy… that they were happy. Unfortunately, I found that many of them were bitter, that they spoke of students and fellow professionals with very vicious vocabulary, and that they often sounded defeated.

In all fairness, I was also beginning to discover that there was a lot more difficulty in the profession than I had anticipated. Teachers had some very legitimate gripes. Classroom work was taxing and, at times, demoralizing as we worked to juggle each student's individual needs with the pressures of the programs of study and the seemingly constant rush of new ideological practices that we were expected to incorporate.

Additionally, teaching generally meant working with the reality that nothing was ever perfect, yet perfection was often our goal. We all seemed to be working hard toward the best possible lesson, team, school climate, culminating event, assessment, etc. Parent concerns were ever present in various degrees of perceived legitimacy, but always forefront in the teacher's realm of concern and responsibility. In-school support, from support staff and from administration was also imperfect, especially difficult in its inconsistencies. In short, I was realizing just what it meant to be working in a world of human variables.

Moreover, I was becoming quite involved in our division's ATA local (eventually becoming Vice-President and Local Communications Officer), and I was becoming more and more aware of the language used about teaching by the public and in government correspondence. I attended the Annual Representatives Assembly in 2007, during which then Education Minister Ron Liepert scolded the assembly for maintaining solidarity in the face of his proposed sliding scale solution to the issue of the government's portion of the unfunded liability in our pension plan. I had never felt so insulted as a professional. The tone of his address was completely combative and patronizing, besides showing blind disregard to all the issues at hand and the previous years of teachers paying down their portion in good faith. At times, it felt like we couldn't win—there was no way to please all of our numerous bosses: the government, the public, the parents, our local administrations, and (most importantly) the students.

In the summer of 2008, I began my M.Ed. studies at the University of Lethbridge. I expected that here, at last, I would find a sense of positive regard for the work of teachers and for the school, an institution I loved, despite its shortcomings. My

undergraduate work had seemed so positive, so encouraging, so up-building. I did not

consider, however, that graduate work meant courses with fellow working teachers,

people who lived in the difficulties and needed to address them. The very nature of

people there to obtain a M.Ed. in general studies was such that they intended to

investigate the difficulties.

Some had the attitude that difficulty was a part of the job, but not an

overpowering element. In fact, many seemed to relish the challenges that the imperfect

nature of the profession presented. While they dealt with the negatives, they did it with

positive language and attitudes and, generally speaking, to positive ends. Others,

however, seemed intent on simply complaining, sometimes in ways that felt baseless. In-

class conversations bemoaning how schools were failing to keep up with technology, for

example, failed to match my reality: I was working on an AISI project that meant my

students each worked on a school-provided laptop; the high school English courses I was

teaching now had online content, instruction, and student activities on a course

management system; and I was finally taking part in PD opportunities I had been offered

for several years on how to operate the SMARTboard in my classroom. (This discussion

seemed all the more laughable considering that we were being told we would be

handwriting our final in-class essay exam for the M.Ed. course in paper booklets.)

One fellow-student in my cohort was fond of saying that, "Schools ruined

children." This sentiment may have some merit from her experiences, but for those of us

who sincerely cared for the children we taught and who worked tirelessly to make our

schools safe and effective places of foundational learning and emotional growth, her

words cut deeply. Grown men cried in defense of their work, and post-class discussions

boiled with fury and frustration, often because we knew that her comments and point of view were indicative of what many believed, and it felt like unjustified criticism of teachers, not just of public institutions.

And some of those many who seemed overly critical included our instructors. They were the ones initiating and leading these uncomfortable discussions, after all. Moreover, their own research was usually the foundation for course content, and was appropriately rooted in the difficulties with education. But they and their premises often seemed detached from the reality of what was happening in my classroom and the schools I had worked in. Specific words that I found particularly damaging were popping up repeatedly, and in 2009, I wrote about my own thoughts on my personal blog, citing the ways that issues in education and society at large had been presented in class:

> …the nature of my M.Ed. so far has been a little disconcerting, and it reached boiling point today. Much of what we have had to read over the last year or so is disguised as critique, but is really blatant criticism, and much of what is discussed is disguised as constructive, but is blatant bitching. Well, I'm tired of the negativity.
>
> As individuals, we are human and fallible. It stands to reason that our institutions, being comprised of compounded human weaknesses, are exponentially more fallible. We should all recognize that, but that recognition is not license to label all institutions and all epochs of history (including our own) as "dark" or "destructive." Religion has done some terrible things, but churches are not evil places. Education had been used to advance some troubling agendas, but schools are not ruining our children. Globalization and

technological advancement are moving at frightening speeds that sometimes

damage our cultural sensitivities, but that does not mean we are spawning a

generation of people who need saving from themselves.

Besides which, if one REALLY wants to enact change, shouldn't we do

the same for an institution as we do for a human? Shouldn't we decide what

we love about it and build on that? Shouldn't we recognize that negativity

does not breed change, that hope and promise are the most powerful, change-

provoking tools? (July 8, 2009)

With this entry, the seeds for my culminating project were planted. I found myself

increasingly aware of the ways that teachers, professors, consultants, supposed gurus, and

a myriad of concerned stakeholders were attempting to reshape education. While most

had the eventual progression of the field at the heart of their work, it seemed to me that

some had a medium of overly-critical and revolutionary language that precluded their

message.

Revolution, in fact, seemed to be a common theme in education. For example, in

the January 28, 2011 joint statement from Alberta Education, the Alberta Teachers'

Association and the Alberta School Boards Association concerning a halt in contract

discussions, it was stated, "We recognize that transformation of the education system is

critical to student success…" (Government of Alberta, 2011). When I read this, I was

deeply affected by accompanying innuendo: student success is not currently happening;

education is broken, as it is not meeting the needs of our students; and the only solution is

completely changing the system. I remember reading this at home while I was on

maternity leave—rather distanced from the issue, yet this statement deeply and adversely

affected me. I could not help but protest the language. My professional self lives in this supposedly broken system. Daily, I help make it what it is, and I thought I had seen—dare I say even wrought?—numerous student successes. But apparently, my employers at the board and provincial levels, as well as my own professional association did not see and love the work as I did.

To my thinking, a system is the work of the system and the people doing that work. It is not an entity of itself. So the idea of revolutionizing, even transforming, a system is illogical and needlessly injurious. I began wondering at the validity of so much of the rhetoric we were exposed to about change to education. Undoubtedly, there is and always will be a need for change in education. Times change and society's needs change. Moreover, as already acknowledged, education is the work of imperfect people and, therefore, demands a constant progression to overcome our individual and collective foibles. But were talk of revolution and transformation really going to invoke thoughtful, progressive change? Not to my thinking. Instead, I find more validity in the idea of a careful evolution within the education system.

But as I had learned from personal tragedy, it was more effective to begin with ideas of change and bettering my situation by looking within, by examining my own language, my own responses to the language around me, and my own power to alter my experiences through the language I used to frame them. So I began thinking deeply about how all my experiences with language—personal and professional—tied together. I culled through my memories (from as early as my childhood) instances of negative rhetoric about teaching that I could now see had affected my teaching identity. I even began daring to look at how I may have let words affect my reality, how I may have

altered my practice. I was concerned by what I found. When, in my personal journaling, I answered the initial questions I later asked of the participants in the online forum constructed for this project, I found the answers made me uncomfortable.

In closing this section, I share those questions and my response. First, the questions, as they came to be for the forum participants: I would like to talk about the language people use about teaching, both in the profession and out. Is this language generally positive, generally negative, or neutral? Consider each of the following non-student contributors to your teaching reality: coworkers (certified and non-certified, and including administrators), trainers (i.e. in a PD setting), parents, the public, and the media. Are there instances of negative rhetoric from them that you feel have adversely affected your teaching?

My response from my personal journaling from September 14, 2010 (later shared with the participants of the online discussion) follows:

In the span of my short career, the tone of the rhetoric around teachers and teaching seems to go in waves. I hear a great deal of positive for a while, but later find myself inundated with negative stuff. Maybe the time of year or the introduction of a new task affects this? Maybe I just become more sensitive to it at different times... I'm not sure.

I grew up in a home that was highly critical of teachers (I think there was a deep jealousy about the perceived lifestyle of a teacher), so I find myself trying to prove to family, friends, and anyone I think of as being the 'public' that it is a valid profession, one that is certainly not simple or easy. My father-in-law tells me I have half the year off... and no, he's not just teasing me, so

while it isn't really affecting my practice necessarily because I would be doing the extracurricular stuff and bringing home marking or prep work no matter what, I do find myself wearing those tasks as a badge of honor. I speak of them often, as a way of defending myself.

I cannot deny that there have been days when I've spent some time commiserating with a colleague around the photocopier that I've gone back to my classroom in a more foul mood, that I've altered the day's lesson to address some problem that we've just ridiculously built into something bigger than it really is, or that I've felt justified in my poor perception of a student because it was just reiterated by someone else.

I've also let past negative experiences with certain groups affect my dealings with anyone from that group... specifically, I think of my first parent-teacher conference in this division. I'd worked a few temporary contracts in other divisions and had had some very difficult conversations with parents. I had come to believe that all parents were looking for the nearest scapegoat. That evening, I had many parents begin the conversation with the dreaded, "Well, I was shocked at my son's/daughter's mark in your course," and I immediately steeled myself for a confrontation. Most everyone, though, followed up with a friendly and effective comment such as, "What can we do at home?" or "So I took a look at some of their work, and I think you're right." At the end of the evening, I felt pretty sheepish for the cold and standoffish attitude I'd cloaked myself in.

I once had an administrator commend me for being tough with a class (i.e. I was very unkindly berating...okay, I was hollering). He was kind of a "Kids these days..." complainer. I had not seen him as a model of effective classroom management, so this made me think twice about how I was handling that. Conversely, though, I've also experienced some strange and deflating comments from admin, too...a lot of comments that color education as a battlefield and the administrator as a leading general, who at times was "not going to die on that hill", and other times was "taking us into the fray". Honestly, these comments or the many other times my very pressing concerns have been dismissed by admin as being unworthy of their attention have led me to have a sort of mistrust, especially in any circumstance in which I want/need someone to "have my back". I have, therefore, changed my practice in that I rarely go for help or even advice... on issues of management, at least.

Having worked on six different staffs (not including schools that I've substitute or student taught in), I find that each staff has a different chemistry, and some are more acidic than others. In some places, there has been a palpable atmosphere of discontent, of complaint. At times, I found this cathartic... other people were experiencing the same problems and challenges as I was. In some places, it ended there - people vented for a bit, then changed the tone, and finished the conversation with productive and positive thoughts. But I also found that unless the 'venting' chatter turned to proactive solutions, continuing the conversations for too long just damaged my moral, made me feel more impotent, and made me less enthusiastic toward my practice. And

do I believe this affected my classroom? Absolutely, because there's no way I had the energy for or interest in innovative and enthusiastic planning or presentation like I might have otherwise.

One last thought: I've sometimes been frustrated with the tone of professional development (PD). I think that the way things are presented to us as being revolutionary, such as "something that will completely change the way you teach" carries the unspoken message that we're doing things all wrong, and I find this insulting. I think most every teacher is in the profession because we love working with students, and we each do our very best to have the student at the heart of our teaching. Any perceived criticism (especially of our practice as a whole) makes me (and most all of my colleagues) defensive. No doubt this defensive attitude is often ridiculous: we're not afraid of improving our practice, nor are the PD measures really threatening, but the way they're presented can be. For example, while I like most of what Ken Robinson has to say, I am put off by his catchphrase, "Schools kill creativity." That's very strong wording, and it's directly attacking an institution that I am quite fond of, so I'll read his stuff and listen to his talks, but I am loathe to fully embrace it.

There are times I've been with a small group of teachers in a PD opportunity, and our conversations lead to our general boycotting of the opportunity. We sort of abstain because we've built on each other's distaste for PD through our complaining and moaning about what we'd rather be doing, what terrible result we had from our last forced PD, how there's no way this is

applicable in the 'real' classroom, etc. I wonder how my practice has suffered from these missed opportunities. (February 8, 2011)

In these questions and my frank response, I found that I cannot remain unaffected by negative language, nor am I remarkably good at refraining from negative discourse with my fellow professionals. Perhaps such conversation provides us with needed catharsis, but even so, perhaps it is more damaging than helpful. In the following sections, I aim to investigate what light research in discourse analysis and in appreciative inquiry can shed on my own and my fellow educators' experiences with the language we encounter and use in and about our profession. I set out on this research, interested in whether my fellow teachers felt repercussions of this same language and whether as a group we could develop a discourse awareness—similar to that which had effectively healed my past personal wounds—which might help remedy some of the repercussive damage and engender a deeper appreciation for our profession and our professional selves.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Narrative Inquiry

As this project was spawned by the researcher's own personal stories and experiences, the role of narrative inquiry in educational research is the most appropriate place to begin an examination of relevant literature and practices.

As reflective practice is at the core of most teacher education, there is a great deal of formal and informal research already happening that seeks to inform practice through narrative research. Of particular note is the work of Canadian scholar Fowler (2006), who concentrates on using narrative inquiry as a means of reaching a "quiet celebration" over the fact that one can live well "amid the difficulties a (teaching) life presents in this new century" (2003, p. 165); one can recognize a system in difficulty, but also see the power of self governance, of "reconstituting [one's] theory, which is [one's] practice", and then "work[ing] with others in difficulty, with a durable, intelligent, wise, humble, generative, compassionate self" (p. 166). Fowler's work resonates with specific relevance to this project because of its dealing with teachers experiencing difficulty, but more importantly, because of its poetic and hopeful outcomes.

In her work, Fowler gives voice to her own narratives and those of others by creating fictionalized accounts. She admits that the narratives took the fictional form as a way of securing the trust of the participants in her research; teachers were reticent to have their stories published and immortalized for others to judge (personal communication, April 28, 2011). The necessity for such a format proves revealing about teachers' struggles with identity and their reticence to open themselves up for critical viewing by peers, employers, academia, and the public. Grumet (1987) voiced the importance of the

story format as a revelatory tool: "Our stories are the masks through which we can be seen" (p. 322). While wearing such a mask may inhibit the most accurate interpretation, the need for the mask reveals a great deal about the wearer—and in this case, I would argue, the nature of the profession—that might not otherwise be known.

Maggisano's (2008) work, conversely, speaks to the process of narrative inquiry as a practice of crafting a teacher identity, rather than revealing it. She identifies the central theme that dominates her work as "the complex relationship between self, school and society" with such foci as "educational policy and program development (and the images of teaching embedded in these policies and practices) and teachers' identities" (p. 1). Like me, Maggisano "moved from an introspective on [her] personal life, to a more focused introspective on [her] professional one" (p. 3). In this context, narrative inquiry acts as a means of understanding self, rather than investigating the nature of— specifically, the difficulties in—teaching, as Fowler's work does. One must be careful, then, in understanding that the openness of a teacher involved in narrative inquiry may depend on the intent of the research.

Maggisano "consider[s] how teachers' identities are storied by themselves and by those who inhabit the educational landscape"(p. 1). Moreover, this realization enabled her to see narrative inquiry as a self-shaping tool, one that gave her the option of writing her story. The identity—its essence and realness—came through her relations, but was shaped by her telling, and the shaping was also elemental. Admittedly, her "tendency initially was to blame others for my story, and not necessarily consider how I had contributed to my own story" (p. 4). But through the "work" of writing/telling, she found it "necessary to understand who the storyteller inside the teacher really is. Which stories

are really ours insofar as we actively choose to construct and tell them? Which perceptions do we own?" (p. 9).

Additionally, Maggisano found she could inform the development of her professional identity: "Given the setting and characters involved in my life right now, what are the stories I could construct in my future?" (p. 9). In her self-study, she could not only access active knowledge—things we learn as "observers and 'experiencers' of teaching and learning situations," but could also tap into deeper understandings: "Resonance in joint self-study and narrative forms of expression have proven useful in efforts to recognize, express and work on tacit practical knowledge" (p. 5).

Maggisano asserts that her experience with narrative inquiry helps in understanding historical implications, as well: "Narrative inquiry helped me bridge the gap in my understanding that what lies 'out there' historically, exists 'in here' presently, in the self" (p. 6). Referencing Greene (1993), she contends that the self was once considered more of a separate, individual entity, one perhaps even subject to predetermination, but today we are more prone "to think of selves as always in the making. We perceive them creating meanings, becoming in an intersubjective world by means of *dialogue* and *narrative*" (p. 3) [emphasis added]. The connection seen between these two entities is the very connection that informs this project, with the extended theoretical basis that such connection and such making of selves in an intersubjective professional context consequently help shape perceptions of the teaching profession from within and without.

Likewise, Schwind and Lindsay (2008) submit that narrative inquiry is not self-indulgent, but because experience is socially embedded, personal stories are socially

relevant. In framing our own stories, "We reveal the process of living in awareness, conscious of choices and their consequences. As the technical and interpersonal tensions of our practice situations shape our identities and actions, we are knowledge-makers and ethical actors who are capable of awareness and thoughtfulness in professional practice" (pp. 116-117).

Johnson and Golombek (2002) also offer a view of narrative inquiry as a progressive concept in research: "For more than a hundred years, teacher education has been based on the notion that knowledge about teaching and learning can be 'transmitted' to teachers by others" (p. 1). Moreover, as relates to educational research, they claim that, "Teachers have been viewed as objects of study rather than as knowing professionals or agents of change…Teachers have been marginalized in that they are told what they should know and how they should use that knowledge" (p. 1).

They point to a shift in the valuation of the teacher in their own professional development over the past thirty years: "The bulk [of research since the early 1980s, which attempts to change this structure] argues that what teachers know about teaching is largely socially constructed out of the experiences and classrooms from which teachers have come. Furthermore, it argues that how teachers actually use their knowledge in classrooms is highly interpretive, socially negotiated, and continually restructured within the classrooms and schools where teachers work (Bullough, 1989; Clandinin, 1986; Grossman, 1990)" (pp.1-2).

Further citing Clandinin and Connelly (2000) whose work, like Fowler's includes re-storying experiences jointly constructed by teachers and the researchers who "offer narrative interpretations based on teachers' stories" (p. 3), Johnson and Golombeck assert

that, "Narrative inquiry, then, has the potential to create a 'new sense of meaning and significance' (p. 42) for teachers' experiences and thus brings new meaning and significance to the work of teachers within their own professional landscapes" (p. 3). Consequently, narrative inquiry becomes valuable particularly because it expresses experiences that occur within "other lived experiences…in order to capture their temporal nature and their personal and social dimensions, and to see them as situated within the places or sequences of places in which they occur and from which they emerge" (p. 3).

Arguably, The most natural way to reflect and understand our experiences is through our own stories. As Johnson and Golombek further contend, "Narrative has been constructed as a mode of thinking and as particularly valuable for representing the richness of human experiences" (p. 4). But it also holds the potential for a richer understanding of our contexts. Narrative inquiry also reveals a moral dimension within teacher experience, especially since "dilemmas often serve as catalysts for inquiry, teachers' narratives embody emotions such as frustrations, fear, anger, and joy, and they center on the caring emotions and actions of trust, dialogue, [and] feelings" (p. 5).

Specifically inherent to the goals of this project was the idea that it include a weaving of multiple narratives, allowing for a body of evidence and a breadth of experience to inform the process and the analysis. More than the moral dimension, I wanted to see the actual literal contexts of experience and expression of those experiences. Consequently, the work of another group of Canadian scholars and writers (Hasebe-Ludt, Chambers, & Leggo, 2009) becomes noteworthy. They use narrative research to form a metissage, a braiding, of their experiences and voices to create a deeper, more true and comprehensive narrative. They term their narratives "life writing",

which (as opposed to autobiography) involves "complex concepts of identity and subjectivity" because it recognizes context—the "concept of identity in relation to the political, philosophical, and geocultural movements" (72). This awareness to external voices in the creation of the narrator's voice is integral to comprehensive discourse analysis. It is also in keeping with Connelly & Clandinin's (1999) perception of the elemental aspects of telling life stories, inherent in their own metaphor: "We view the landscape as narratively constructed; as having a history with moral, emotional, and aesthetic dimensions" (p.2).

Mann (2002), who writes of his own experience in a collaborative narrative inquiry project (which is examined in greater detail later), explains, "As teachers, we are on the receiving end of a potentially confusing amount of knowledge, facts, and opinions. We hold on to some of this received knowledge amongst a whole jumble of things we believe, think we know, and value. However, we do not fully own something if we have not articulated it for ourselves….For me, the process of articulation forms the shape of my experiential knowledge" (pp. 198-199). It follows that such tangible shapes of experience, identity and knowledge create a definitive thing for study by the researcher, and if articulation is the medium for the shape's construction, the articulation itself is equally valuable as a research tool.

Critical Discourse Analysis

At the core of narrative inquiry is the idea best expressed by Johnson and Golombek (2002): "What teachers choose to inquire about emerges from their personalities, their emotions, their ethics, their contexts, and their overwhelming concern for their students" (p. 6). So while, it may be valuable to study the stories, the words

used to frame those stories are often the most revealing when it comes to what the story *means*. And so we enter the world of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA).

According to Rogers (2004a), CDA in education recognizes that "discourse is a system of meanings or 'systematically organized set of statements which give expression to the meanings and values of an institution'" (p. 5, citing Kress, 1985). In a consideration of language use as always being social, she asserts that "discourse both reflects and constructs the social world and is referred to as constitutive, dialectical, and dialogic" (p. 5), but agrees with Gee (1996, as cited by Rogers) that it is "not merely a pattern of social interactions, but is connected to identity and the distribution of social goods" (p. 5).

The worlds of narrative inquiry and critical discourse analysis merge in interesting ways. This idea of an allocation (and perhaps even exchange) of social goods falls in line with Maggisano's (2008) discovery that, "Narrative inquiry has heightened my awareness of the worlds I inhabit: political, bureaucratic, practical, academic; and the negotiation of identity that occurs as I navigate my way through this variegated landscape" (p. 2) Moreover, Johnson and Golombek (2002) point to Gee's assertion that our narratives "are deeply embedded in sociohistorical discourses (1999), and thus represent a socially mediated view of experience" (p. 5). Conclusively, "narrative inquiry allows individuals to look at themselves and their activities as socially and historically situated" (p. 5).

Gee (2004), himself, is perhaps the best starting point for fully understanding the "critical" of CDA. He notes that in education, discourse analysis has become a watered-down term, "sometimes mean[ing] no more than anecdotal reflections on written or oral

texts" (p. 20). The term critical discourse analysis, then, seeks to exclude approaches "that avoid combining a model of grammatical and textual analysis (of whatever sort) with sociopolitical and critical theories of society and its institutions" (p. 20). Especially in education, Gee asserts that there is often a push to "combine aspects of sociopolitical and critical theory with rather general (usually thematic) analyses of language not rooted in any particular linguistic background or theory" (p. 20). Such investigations would also be considered critical discourse analysis. In short, CDA can be long on the critical aspect.

Gee explains that discourse analysis requires an understanding that "any word or structure in language has a certain 'meaning potential'—that is, a range of possible meanings that the word or structure can take on in different contexts of use" (p. 21). Thus a word, depending on its context, might signify an actual object, a thing of abstract meaning, or an idea (any of these being what Gee terms a *situated meaning*), and the placement of that word in a sentence (as, for example the subject, as the object, or in the passive position) helps to convey the power the speaker assigns the situated meaning and the emotive response the speaker hopes to evoke surrounding it (p. 21).

He also makes a distinction between native language—that which is biologically and instinctually acquired and which is equal to all other native languages in its ability to communicate in the vernacular style of language—and social languages—those nonvernacular words and constructions (*patterning*, as Gee terms it) which we learn for the purpose of enabling communication within a social group. The acquisition of a social language, he argues, can not be through learning alone: "It seems that immersion in practice and participation with those who speak and write such social languages is still

crucial" (p. 25). Consequently, it stands to reason, that an analyst of discourse in a social language need also be fluent in that language herself.

Moreover, Gee admits to problematic validity issues when one attempts to go beyond the analysis of utterance-type meanings (investigating how the form and function of the discourse relates) to analyses of situated meanings. In the case of the latter, the researcher must admit that, "any aspect of context can affect the meaning of an (oral or written) utterance. Context, however is indefinitely large, ranging from local matters…through people's beliefs, to historical, institutional, and cultural settings" (p. 30). He refers to this as a frame problem, and concedes that an analyst must cut off the consideration of context at some point, and can only be expected to justify the aspects of context that were considered in light of the immediate relevance to those discourses being studied and beyond that, those most pertinent to the purposes of the analysis. He also suggests using *cultural models* as an analytic device to deal with the frame problem as they "help people determine, often unconsciously, what counts as relevant and irrelevant in given situations" (p. 45).

Beyond these two layers of discourse analysis, adding a third layer (associating utterance-type meanings and situated meanings with social practices) is the step at which critical discourse analysis diverges from noncritical approaches. The concept of social practices has implications beyond social relationship structures. A critical discourse analysis will "also treat social practices in terms of their implications for things like status, solidarity, distributions of social goods, and power" (p. 33). Because of these implications, social practices are inherently political, and because social practices involve

language—often a specific social language—language itself is inextricably political. And this is where the chief concern of the critical discourse analyst resides.

Specifically pertinent to the field of education and critical discourse analysis there is the concept of *learning*, which Gee defines as "changing patterns of participation in specific social practices" (p. 38). This measurable and sociologically-concerned definition is in keeping with the critical discourse analyst's emphasis of political/social over the psychological. Moreover, this view of learning concerns itself with communities of practice, "that is, groups of people ongoingly engaged in (partially) shared tasks or work of a certain sort" (p. 38). "Such communities of practice produce and reproduce themselves through the creation of a variety of characteristic social practices, and within these they apprentice new members" (p. 39). That is to say, they perpetuate their social languages and they provide for learning—a change in the individual's social practices by his/her inclusion, for example.

Cohen, Manion, and Morrison help to crystallize things in their explanation that, "Discourses can be regarded as sets of linguistic material that are coherent in organization and content and enable people to construct meaning in social contexts" (p. 389). They cite Habermas' (1970) claim that, "utterances are never simply sentences that are disembodied from the context, but, rather, their meaning derives from the intersubjective contexts in which they are set" (p. 389). They point to Edwards and Mercer's (1987) work as good case study material for this intersubjectiveness and the objective that "discourse analysts treat that language as action" (p 389): "Various developments in discourse analysis have made important contributions to our understanding of children's thinking, challenging views (still common in educational

circles) of 'the child as a lone organism, constructing a succession of general models of the world as each new stage is mastered' (Edwards, 1991)."

They explain that Edwards & Mercer (1987) used discourse analysis to understand classroom learning processes: "Rather than taking the classroom talk as evidence of children's thought processes, the researchers explore it as 'contextualized dialogue with the teacher. The discourse itself is the educational reality and the issue becomes that of examining how teacher and children construct a shared account, a common interpretive framework for curriculum knowledge and what happens in the classroom' (Edwards, 1991)" (Cohen et al., p. 391). Given Rogers' (2004a) claim that, "Researchers using CDA can describe, interpret, and explain the relationships among language and important educational issues" (p. 1), similar strides in understanding teacher's professional development processes within the context of their social practices seems equally viable.

Fairclough (2004) offers a technical vision of social practices as "intermediate organizational structures" (p. 226) between social structures (an abstract entity such as a social class or a semiotic language) and social events (a concrete entity or observable part of the social world to be "analyzed separately as well as in terms of their relation to each other"). In the case of this project, then, the social structure would be the collective identity of the teachers involved. The social practice would be the orders of discourse (concerned with particular combinations of language elements, or words) or, as Gee (2004) might frame it, the specific social language used. Finally, the social event would be the chosen text of communication (the online forum, the interview, the conversation,

etc.). Thus, we study the concrete text, through the orders of discourse, in order to understand the social structure, the teaching identity.

Fairclough also concerns himself with semiosis (signs) in social practices. Specifically, he delineates between genres (ways of acting, such as writing or interviewing), discourses (ways of representing, such as the semiotic matter or social language used), and styles (ways of being, such as the type of language or grammatical structures used to self-identify), becoming progressively more personal/individual in consideration (p. 228).

Interestingly, as things become more personal and individual, the teacher's experience with "difficulty" (Fowler, 2006) becomes apparent through such semiosis within the social structures and the social events. Specifically, Rogers (2004a) notes that the "top-down model of business (and classroom) leadership has been abandoned for a 'community of practice' model characterized by flattened hierarchies, the construction and distribution of knowledge, joint problem solving and flexile and creative workers" but policies at national and state levels "reminiscent of factory models of education" [produce] an innate contradiction and source of frustration" (p. 1).

Rogers sees a hope of sorts emerge from CDA, however, as it can "demonstrate how [such contradictions] are enacted and transformed through linguistic practices in ways of interacting, representing, and being" (p. 1). But, perhaps more importantly, she asserts that "in the process of conducting [critical discourse analysis], researchers and participants' learning is shaped...thus offering possibilities not only for critique, but for social transformation that arises from critique" (2004b, p. 246). This potential for social transformation is where the ideals of appreciative inquiry come into play.

Appreciative Inquiry

The field of appreciative inquiry is lesser explored in education than the research methods we have previously discussed. Much of the available literature on the subject comes from the corporate setting, decidedly the setting with the largest body of work in this ideologically-rooted method. Here Cooperrider and Whitney (2000) specialize in enacting appreciative inquiry (AI), and they do so with a refreshing attitude, calling AI "an adventure…an exciting direction in our language and theories of change" (p. 3).

Speaking of the growth of AI within organizations worldwide, they "believe the velocity and largely informal spread of the ideas suggest a growing sense of disenchantment with exhausted theories of change, especially those wedded to vocabularies of human deficit. This also suggests a corresponding urge to work with people, groups, and organizations in more constructive, positive, life-affirming, even spiritual ways" (p. 4).

They inform their investigation of AI, admittedly still in its infancy and a bit of a fledgling method, with guiding questions that they argue "will be a source of learning for many years." Of particular note to my experience and to the outcomes of this project are the following: "What would happen to our change practices if we began all our work with the positive presumption—that organizations, as centers of human relatedness, are 'alive' with infinite constructive capacity?" and "How can we better inquire into organization existence in ways that are economically, humanly, and ecologically significant, that is, in ways that increasingly help people discover, dream, design and transform toward the greatest good?" (p. 4).

Recognizing the synonyms for "appreciative" include "esteeming" and "honoring", it is the my belief that the ideals of AI mesh nicely with the process of narrative inquiry. Perhaps in that meshing, Johnson and Golombek's (2002) belief that "narrative inquiry enables teachers to not only make sense of their professional worlds but also to make significant and worthwhile change within themselves and in their teaching practices" (p. 7) finds a process. Most of the literature around narrative inquiry reveals this change potential, often in the poetic and empowering discourse, such as Magissano's (2008) declaration, "Herein lays our own sense of authority, authorship. Embedded in this notion is the sense that self-knowledge promotes choice and action in restructuring oneself socially." (13) But the goals of expanding one's vision with others' multiple perspectives and creating professional development through crafting the story of self are merely ideals without structure. For this, the "whole" of AI functions as "a philosophy of knowing, a normative stance, a methodology for managing change, and an approach to leadership and human development" (Cooperrider & Whitney, p. 5).

If AI provides a potential methodology, then, it is important to understand the basis for Cooperrider and Whitney's practice, which include five principles and scholarly streams (pp. 17-20):

The Constructionist Principle: "Simply stated—human knowledge and organizational destiny are interwoven. To be effective as executives, leaders, change agents, etc., we must be adept in the art of understanding, reading, and analyzing organizations as living, human constructions." This is particularly meaningful in validating narrative and action research, as traditional means of supposedly 'objective' data is undermined by the very definition of an organic organization. It also means that

language and discourse in all its forms (words, metaphors, narratives) are needed to approach any ideal of truth in inquiry. Inquiry becomes intertwined with action, and the purpose of research evolves from understanding history to articulating potential in the future.

The Principle of Simultaneity: This principle underlines importance of the radiant question. "Here it is recognized that inquiry and change are not truly separate moments, but are simultaneous. Inquiry is intervention." The act of questioning is not simply the means of producing data for analysis, but is the genesis of change. Interestingly and of particular note to the desired outcomes of this project, the researchers argue that it therefore stands to reason that, "Alterations in linguistic practices—including the linguistic practice of crafting questions—hold profound implications for changes in social practice."

The Poetic Principle: Operating on the premise that "an organization's story is constantly being co-authored", the narratives of that organization "are endless sources of learning, inspiration, or interpretation". Because of this, the topics we choose to research "are themselves social artifacts, products of social processes (cultural habits, typifying discourses, rhetoric, professional ways, power relations)." Therefore, social and institutional gains happen when we link the means with the ends in our inquiries.

The Anticipatory Principle: This principle points to the "collective imagination and discourse about the future" as a guiding force in the current behaviour of any organism, including an organization. The future becomes a mobilizing agent for the present. It follows, then, that positive views on the future will enact positive action. Arguably, negativity in the present is the direct result of a negative view of the future.

The Positive Principle: The researchers describe this principle as being "less abstract", namely because it evolves from their "experience that building and sustaining momentum for change requires large amounts of positive affect and social bonding—things like hope, excitement, inspiration, caring, camaraderie, sense of urgent purpose, and sheer joy in creating something meaningful together."

Basically, at the core of AI is the belief that our realities are a product of our perceptions. Cooperrider and Whitney contend that within the problem-solving paradigm of most research methodologies, the organization ceases to *have* problems. Instead, they are perceived as *being* problems. Also, they use statistical data in various professional fields to argue that as our vocabularies around human deficiency grow, the perceived needs—and sense of human misery—also expand exponentially. Our resulting solutions, then, become prescriptive, rarely healing and certainly not regenerative.

Bushe (2000) argues that a "dominant theoretical rational" for appreciative inquiry is that "there is nothing real or true about any social form. All social organization is an arbitrary social construction. Our ability to create new and better organizations is limited only by our imagination and collective will" (p. 100).

Bushe points to Cooperrider's (1990) "heliotropic hypothesis", which holds that "social systems evolve toward the most positive images they hold of themselves" and that these images serve to "affirm" the group identity. "When these images are out of step with the requirements the social system faces the group will experience itself as dysfunctional and rational attempts to fix itself will not work until the underlying 'affirmative image' of the group is changed" (p. 102). If the work of this project holds to the same hypothesis, there are numerous images of the teaching professional that seek to

inform or affirm the individual teacher's professional identity. Consequently, if the social system of education is to evolve to the most positive of these images, the professionals themselves must learn to "hold" the most positive of these images. And yet we often see ourselves as dysfunctional. Perhaps this is because as Cooperrider and Whitney (2000) contend, "deficit based change approaches have an unfortunate propensity to reinforce hierarchy, wherein 'less than ideal' individuals, who learn to accept what sometimes becomes a lifelong label, are encouraged to enter 'treatment programs' under expert supervision" (p. 22). In this format, which describes many professional development endeavors—instituted from a top-down prescriptive perspective and mediated by the expert in a work-shop type setting—the teacher's image is that of the problem, not the change agent with a history of measurable success.

Bushe cites AI as having evoked for him three theories of change, the first of which he calls "changing the organization's inner dialogue" (p. 103). This theory directly relates to—even mirrors—the abiding premises of the project at hand. Using the layers of an individual human's consciousness as a metaphor, he explains that an organization will have layers of awareness, ranging from the conscious/rational/official layer to the confidential/interpretive/perceptive 'inner dialogue' layer which informs the former through the patterns of thinking and judgment that operate there.

Therefore, his theory of change has as its basis three essential elements (p. 104):

1. "Organizations have an inner dialogue made up of the things people say to each other in small confidential groups that are undiscussible in official forums of the organizational business."

2. "This inner dialogue is a powerful stabilizing force in social systems that accounts for the failure to follow through on rationally arrived at decisions. It is here where people's real thoughts and feelings about what is discussed in official forums are revealed and communicated."

3. "This inner dialogue is mainly carried through the stories people tell themselves and each other to justify their interpretation of events and decisions. The change theory is: If you change the stories you change the inner dialogue. Nothing the 'rational mind' decides it wants will actually happen if the 'inner dialogue' is resistant to it."

Bushe cites appreciative inquiry as effective as a change agent because it "focus[es] attention on where things are working and amplify[ies] them through fanning" (p. 108), fanning being a practice in appreciative process, which holds the belief that you get more of whatever you pay attention to, especially as it pertains to behaviours of those around you. Therefore, the more encouragement there is for spreading encouraging stories, the more encouraging stories will emerge, and the more actual positive change will be measurable.

Further, in the field of appreciative inquiry as related to discourse, Ludema (2000) contends that "the purpose of social and organizational inquiry ought to be to create textured vocabularies of hope—stories, theories, evidence, and illustrations—that provide organizations and communities with new guiding images of relational possibility" (p. 265).

Ludema outlines "core principles of appreciative inquiry that support the creation of [these] vocabularies" (p. 265), as opposed to "vocabularies of human deficit produced by

the critical and problem-oriented approaches to social and organizational inquiry." Such deficit vocabularies, he proposes, "fuel the progressive enfeeblement of society" (p. 269), making the "critical and problem-focused methods of contemporary social science" responsible for "a growing cynicism about the future of human institutions and [a deepened] despair about its own potential to be a catalyst for positive change" (p. 267).

From his own "extensive literature review of the topic [of hope] from the fields of theology, philosophy, history, political theory, art, music, literature, medicine, psychology, and sociology" (citing Ludema et al., 1997), he develops an understanding of "four enduring qualities that give hope its power as a source of social and organizational transformation" (p. 271). Further, he ties these qualities to six intellectual traditions of Western thought: Greco-Roman, Judeo-Christian, Enlightenment, Psycho-Analytic, Radical Humanist, and Modern (cognitive) Medicine and Psychology.

Ludema concerns himself with not only an academic understanding of the characteristics of hope itself, but with a framework for creating hopeful vocabularies. "These four qualities of hope—that it is (1) born in relationship, (2) inspired by the conviction that the future is open and can be influenced, (3) sustained by dialogue about high human ideals, and (4) generative of positive affect and action—can be seen at play in the creation of textured vocabularies of hope" (p. 279).

Textured vocabularies of hope are by their nature "linguistic constructions that create new images of positive relational possibility, illuminate fresh avenues for moral discourse, and expand the range of practical and theoretical resources available for the construction of healthy social and organizational relationships" (p. 279). These

vocabularies are linked to professional, organizational, and even social transformation in six different and progressively consequential ways (p. 280):

1. "Inclusive communities of inquiry are formed and select positive topics for collective inquiry and action."

2. "Communities of inquiry create vocabularies of hope by searching for positive example and 'best practices' in society and organizations."

3. "Communities of inquiry consensually validate vocabularies of hope through moral dialogue."

4. "Communities of inquiry disseminate vocabularies of hope to the general public through multiple channels."

5. "Vocabularies of hope are absorbed into common language; organizations and society learn how to be hopeful and to innovate."

6. "Vocabularies of hope are expanded and fuel social and organizational (re)construction."

In the realm of educational research, Ludema points to "Kolb's (1984) experiential learning which revealed and affirmed multiple ways of knowing" and "Friere's (1994) pedagogy of hope which championed dialogue and advanced the concept of full voice" (p. 281) as recent examples of emergent vocabularies of hope that have been generated through research in social sciences.

Ludema concludes:

If the premise that hope is a primary source of positive knowledge and action in organizational life is accepted, and the tenets of social constructionism—that knowledge is a social artifact, that language is the means by which knowledge is

developed, that there is an inextricable link between language, knowledge, and action—are embraced, then it can be concluded that the creation of textured vocabularies of hope may well be the most powerful tool available to us if our aim to generate constructive organizational understandings that open new possibilities for human organizing and action. (pp. 283-284)

The Emerging Theory of Discourse Awareness

It may now be apparent that there are common elements in the three areas of educational research I have covered thus far: narrative inquiry, critical discourse analysis, and appreciative inquiry. My interest in formulating this project is in how the three of them could work in tandem as a means creating more than just an area of research. It is my belief that if proven theory and methodology of each is used in one concentrated effort, an actual practice can develop. This means a process of self and group reflective dialoguing; a study of the discourse in a way that allows for the individual teacher and the group to become conscious of their power to shape professional identity; and an experiment with the tools to do so in a productive, empowering, and healthy way, such that an actual change in a teacher's reality might occur.

Narrative inquiry, critical discourse analysis, and appreciative inquiry each has incredible value in its own right, and I have a deep academic appreciation for that. But as a working teacher, doing my best to function wholly and healthily in the classroom and under various professional strains and pressures of 'real life', I often find myself looking at research and its methodology and asking what it could actually *DO* for me. I submit that in the cross-section of these three areas, there is a lot of potential for *DOING*, for the creation of an action research paradigm that makes a difference in my professional world,

and potentially, radiates outward. For the purpose of this project, I call this *discourse awareness*.

Discourse awareness allows for my cognitive bridging of the places where one research method leaves off with a hopeful conclusion and the other picks up with a practical application. To support this bridging, the structural underpinnings are the findings within each method, so we return to the literature to support the basis of discourse awareness.

Narrative inquiry serves to help us to formulate the body of professional knowledge and experience that becomes the core of a teaching identity. Johnson and Golombek (2002) assert that it points to a "broad-based movement among school professionals to legitimatize knowledge produced out of their own lived realities as professionals" (p. 3). Thus traditional knowledge becomes infused "with 'insider' knowledge: the complex and multilayered understandings of learners, culture, class, gender, literacy, social issues, institutions, communities, and curricula that teachers possess as natives to the settings in which they work" (p. 3). Schwind and Lindsay (2008) conclude that the collection of narrative inquiry examples and research "shows how personal experiences, when reconstructed in awareness, inform our professional life. We become aware of how our professional identities and practices are constructed" (p. 116).

While teacher participation in narrative inquiry consistently proves to provide insight into teacher knowledge and, consequently, to articulate a professional identity (guiding the professional from 'this is what I know' to 'this is what I do' to 'this is who I am'), it generally goes further in that the teacher usually finds the power to shape that identity *through* the storytelling. According to Maggisano (2008), "…as we tell these

stories we are actually shaping our self-image, and either breaking or reinforcing the 'self' others have shaped for us by the stories we have grown up with" (p. 9). She expands, claiming that the narrative may begin as a tool of reflection or self-awareness, but it is also a way of interpreting our professional practices and social structures, and from there, the natural inclination is to use the power of story as a change agent within that professional context. "Narratives are integral to how we construe our participation in culture or our profession through professional socialization", and, she claims, they factor heavily in "choices [individuals] make as they strive to construct their own personal or professional identity, or to assume the identities that culture, or profession constructs for them." Further, such narratives and their associations with all the various socializing structures and relationships "serve to frame and orient action" (p. 11).

With this realization of the shaping power of the stories themselves comes the inherent value of the words, the conversations, the dialogic units that are the stuff of the stories. There is a common theme, then, between narrative inquiry and critical discourse awareness of the transformative power of the words used. Rogers (2004b) argues that "Educational research sets out to study what views of learning are important, what counts as important knowledge, what methodologies are worth pursuing, the relationship between the researchers and the researched, and how education is positioned within other disciplines" (p. 246). She then positions critical discourse awareness as important to this body of study because it "contributes to an understanding of learning, a primary issue in educational research", and it does so in two ways: "[CDA] allows one to understand the processes of learning in more complex ways… [and] in the process of conducting CDA,

researchers and participants' learning is shaped...thus offering possibilities not only for critique, but for social transformation that arises from critique" (p. 246).

Meanwhile, on the front of narrative inquiry, Maggisano (2008) sees an interesting connection between language and the formation of our attitudes. She references Sotto (1994) and Conle (1997) and the idea that we learn attitudes "the way we learn our first language or the way we learn to play a game by playing it." Attitudinal knowledge, then is subconsciously encoded, and we find ourselves responding when "feelings are engaged" and in "a global or holistic way, not holding what is being learned explicitly in mind; not naming it." Later, we find ourselves uncomfortable with our response and the way those feelings may have prompted us to act. That is when we discover what is inappropriate and when "we can work toward attitudinal change" (p. 5).

The vision or actual path of this transformation is not necessarily within the realm of either of these methodologies, however. It appears that the researcher can see the potential of the narrative and its discourse to enact change, such as Stevens (2004) saw in her work (which will be examined more carefully later as a model for the methodology of this project). She claimed there is a "potentially transformative promise of CDA in educational settings" (p. 219). As researcher and subject began sharing a metalanguage that helped connect language and ideologies, the subject could show at least "an impermanent awareness of the connections between some of her language choices and the social relations in her classrooms" (p. 219). Stevens admits, however, that within the scope of CDA itself, there would be great difficulty in tracking how fully this awareness would translate into change practice.

Some are reticent to fully embrace the transformative power of discourse, or social texts, to alter our social constructions. Fairclough (2004), for example, contends that while social structures and social practices create the event, or text, the text need not be considered as simply a product. It can also be important in meaning making, in that "texts have causal effects (i.e., they bring about changes) that are mediated by meaning making" (p. 229). Here, he refers to theories of social constructivism and takes a moderate view that the social world and its institutions are textually constructed. Basically, he argues that "…once constructed, they are realities that affect and limit the textual (or discursive) construction of the social" (p. 230). The text may no longer *construct* the social, but it may be a *construal* with a potential for construction. We may textually construe a social world (by imagination, for example), but that does not automatically—only potentially—change the social construction of that world.

Bushe's (2000) work in appreciative inquiry would almost counter Fairclough's moderation with the claim that, "Rather than seeing language as a passive purveyor of meaning between people, post modernists see language as an active agent in the creation of meaning. As we talk to each other, we are constructing the world we see and think about, and as we change how we talk we are changing that world" (p. 100).

Where narrative inquiry and critical discourse analysis leave off with a recognition that personal and social change is possible, appreciative inquiry picks up with a structure for enacting it. Cooperrider and Whitney (2000) contend that AI fosters an organizational life that can present itself in storytelling modes or in interpretive and analytical modes, and it puts stories and insights into constructive use by attempting to find the convergence between the actual and the future. Essentially, it assigns value to the

lived experience, as it becomes a visionary property. AI still concerns itself, however, with an invitation "to challenge the status quo as well as common assumptions underlying the design of the organization" (p. 13).

This seems in keeping with Johnson and Golombeck's (2002) encouragement that within narrative inquiry there be a "process of stepping back, description, reflection, and analysis" as a means for teachers to "link and clarify tensions that seem, at first glance, to have no relationship to one another [because] when teachers inquire into their own experiences, such inquiry propels them to question and reinterpret their ways of knowing" (p. 6). There is a naturally occurring action aspect of narrative inquiry which comes into play, as teachers are empowered to "act with foresight. [Inquiry into experience] gives them increasing control over their thoughts and actions; grants their experiences enriched, deepened meaning; and enables them for be more thoughtful and mindful of their work" (p. 6).

I believe that at the heart of all three methods, there is a proclivity to use research as a change agent and a concern that it be done with careful and progressive momentum. Maggisano (2008) speaks specifically to the "resonances" found in her work and how, "Within these 'resonances' lie the possibilities that can bring about an awakening in the form of inquiry, arousal of feelings of anger and loss. These resonances encourage us to explore, 'Can things be different?', 'Do things have to be this way?', 'Is this the only possibility?' Stories show these possibilities, so do our responses to them" (p. 10). She finds herself encouraged by her finding that, "When we begin to break with the character of the victim and our passivity, we begin to end our complicity in writing stories that are harmful and limiting to others" (p. 10).

Citing Dewey's ideas of *habit* versus *continuity of experience* (1938), Johnson and Golombek (2002) note that in order for experience to be informative and transformative, we must "change the conditions under which new experiences are understood so that a person's abilities, desires, and attitudes are changed. Inquiry into experience, in this sense, can be educative if it enables us to reflect on our actions and then act with foresight" (p. 4). They believe narrative inquiry needs to be done using a set of attitudes that mirror Dewey's (1933) ideas (which Johnson & Golombek characterize in parenthetical clarifications) of "of *open-mindedness* (seeking alternatives), *responsibility* (recognizing consequences), and *wholeheartedness* (continual self-examination)", thereby "recogniz[ing] the consequences of their beliefs, knowledge, and experience" (p. 5).

Cooperrider and Whitney (2000) seem to provide a forum or a structure for such understanding, attitude and action in their claim that, "AI seeks, fundamentally, to build a constructive union between a whole people and the massive entirety of what people talk about as past and present capacities: achievements, assets, unexplored potentials, innovations, strengths, elevated thoughts, opportunities, benchmarks, high point moments, lived values, traditions, strategic competencies, stories, expressions of wisdom, insights into deeper corporate spirit or soul, and visions of valued and possible futures" (p. 5).

As an undergrad, I once created an interactive art installation in which layers of story and meaning were manipulated by the viewer. There were numerous color photocopies of a wide variety of objects done on transparent sheets. Each participant would stack the transparencies such that the superimposed images created something that

appealed to him/her. When I formulate my ideas of discourse awareness, my mind

hearkens back to this installation. I believe there is great potential in creating something

meaningful, even beautiful, in the act of superimposing our research methods for the

practical application I, like many teachers, am most immediately interested in.

Superimposing the material and momentum provided by narrative inquiry with the

direction and hopeful vision of appreciation inquiry and filtering the work through the

focus provided by critical discourse analysis, is how I see discourse awareness working.

    As a step-by-step, layer-by-layer explanation, discourse awareness invites

teachers to tell their stories. Not only are those stories open to critical discourse analysis,

but they can even be about discourse—or language—used by and around the teachers. As

discussion develops, the teachers are asked to pay attention to the words they use, to

develop an appreciative, kinder focus in their language choices, and to reflect on whether

the awareness of discourse creates a shift in their professional realties.

    To further illustrate (and in support of these ideas) I offer an investigation of one

teacher's experience with a structured forum and a process that he terms *development

discourse.*

    An Informative Case Study: Mann and "Development Discourse". Mann

(2002) worked as part of a group of teachers and teacher educators who created a forum

for "articulat[ing] our current thinking on personal teaching and research issues." They

wanted to get away from their traditional teacher meetings, which were "agenda-driven"

and "geared to producing outcomes at a group level" and create "a different sort of talk in

which, as teachers, we could work with something that was perhaps tentative, troubling,

incomplete, partial, or emergent" (p. 195). In the course of this inquiry into experience,

he explains "the process…helped [him] to better understand [his] dialogic and reflexive relationship with [his] teaching context" (p. 195).

He notes that his experience leading up to this group inquiry was that in a setting where teachers talked about teaching, they went out of their way to prove that they 'knew what they were doing', but the nature of this "cooperative development work" (p. 195) demanded that the participants be willing to admit areas of difficulty. For example, Mann dissects one of his emergent concerns that his communications skills in teaching seemed adversely affected by abundant planning, the opposite of what one might expect.

Participants took turns in the role of Speaker, the educator who had the floor for 25-35 minutes, while others acted as Understanders (those who would consequently restate the Speaker's thoughts in nonjudgmental terms, in Resonances). There would then be a follow-up session in which "the group, using critical extracts recorded from the first meeting, discussed the nature and value of the moves made during the first meeting, drawing on the experience of both the Speaker and Understanders" (p. 197).

The group recorded their meetings, and Mann contends that, "Looking back and listening to the tapes a year later, it is obvious to me that these sessions provided space and time for articulation. It is also apparent that the other individuals in the group helped me articulate my experience in ways that would not be available in other kinds of meeting and teacher talk" (p. 198).

This was clear in his account of the session in which he, as Speaker, addressed his concerns about over-planning, and how that hindered his perceived ability to communicate effectively in his lessons. Through the course of the session and because of the Resonances formulated by the Understanders, he was able to form seven cogent

connections to experience and "outcomes" that help him to "articulate something that I think has been an important part of my teaching since the mid-eighties. However, I had not been able to fully form or 'justify' this position" (p. 202). Namely, Mann's position is that as a teacher, he performs best when he is "prepared," but this is a separate idea than that of being "planned"—in that planning feels too scripted and tense, restricting his communication skills and making it more difficult to respond reflexively to student needs. Essentially, he felt less natural and less capable of improvisation.

On the role of Understander, Mann explains, "Once you got used to [the structure of the sessions], it was liberating to really listen to and follow someone else's opinions, positions, and perspectives that do not normally have the space for such full articulation. It was also positive to see specific outcomes for those involved in their own practice and their own understandings of their practice" (p. 206).

In the follow-up sessions, or Metadiscussion, Mann notes that, "Retrospective group discourse analysis has increased our group understanding of the complexity of group interaction. An example of this understanding is the realization that retrospective discussions make evident occasions when what is said, what is meant, and what is understood as meant do not necessarily agree" (p. 207).

Mann distinguishes between two types of evaluation inherent in speaking about our teaching practices: "On the one hand, we have evaluation as a sustained search for judging the effectiveness and appropriateness of our professional practice. On the other hand, we have evaluative orientation in professional talk" (p. 207). The second of these, he contends, needs to be limited, as it is "pervasive," "intrusive," and "causes argument"

(p. 207). The ideal outcome of these teacher talks is to "eliminate argument *about* to make maximum space for argument *that*" (p. 208).

He concludes that within their group, "there is a unanimous feeling that this experimentation with our way of speaking to one another is a valuable addition to existing in professional talk" (p. 208).

Chapter 3: Methodology

A Basis for Subjectivist Approach

It must be acknowledged that the methodology chosen for this project is a direct result of the personal beliefs and attitudes of the researcher, as according to Burrell and Morgan (1979, as cited by Cohen et al, 2007), all research strategies are. All educational researchers hold assumptions about the nature of social science that Burrell and Morgan break into four categories: *ontology, epistemology, human nature*, and *methodology*. Concerning ontology, if one "contends that objects have an independent existence and are not dependent for it on the knower" (p. 7) (and these objects include objects of thought, specifically words), then one takes the position of a *realist*. Concerning epistemology, "to see knowledge as personal, subjective and unique…imposes on researchers an involvement with their subjects" (p.7) and forms the perspective of the *anti-positivist*. Concerning human nature, especially the relationship between the individual and his environment, *voluntarism* portrays human beings "as initiators of their own actions with free will and creativity, producing their own environments" (p. 8). Concerning methodology, once one has assumed the three previous subjectivist views, one will search for a subjectivist methodology, one in which "the principal concern is with an understanding of the way in which the individual creates, modifies and interprets the world in which he or she now finds himself or herself" and where "emphasis…is placed on explanation and understanding of the unique and the particular individual case rather than the general and universal" (pg. 8). Such approaches may be termed *idiographic* and are considered largely emergent.

One of these approaches is the paradigm of *critical educational research*, which is influenced by the early work of Habermas. At its core is the purpose "not merely to understand situations and phenomena but to change them" (Cohen et al, 2007, p. 26) Moreover, critical educational research encompasses the practices of *ideology critique* and *action research*. Citing Geuss's (1981) assertion, "The task of ideology critique is to uncover the vested interests at work which may be occurring consciously or subliminally, revealing to participants how they may be acting to perpetuate a system which keeps them either empowered or disempowered" (p. 26), Cohen, Manion, and Morrison explain Habermas' (1972) suggestion that ideology critique is accomplished through a four stage reflective practice (p. 28-29):

1. "[A] description and interpretation of the existing situation—a hermeneutic exercise that identifies and attempts to make sense of the current situation…"

2. "[A] penetration of the reasons that brought the existing situation to the form that it takes—the causes and purposes of a situation and an evaluation of their legitimacy…[which can] be liberatory and emancipatory…Critique here reveals to individuals and groups how their views and practices might be ideological distortions…"

3. "[A]n agenda for altering the situation—in order for moves to an egalitarian society to be furthered."

4. "[A]n evaluation of the achievement of the situation in practice."

As will be revealed, the structure of the discussions and the subsequent analysis both follow this pattern of ideology critique. The project as a whole is also designed as action research, "research that impacts on, and focuses on, practice" and "accords power"

(Cohen et al, 2007, p. 29) to those who operate in the contexts of practice being studied.

Further inherent to the critical educational research paradigm (Cohen et al, 2007), this project is designed as "small scale research" with a participant researcher. It carries an intent to critique "the specific" with the particular practices of "understanding, interrogating, critiquing, [and] transforming actions and interests". It is founded in an "emancipatory interest" (p. 33) for the betterment of groups and individuals, and all of these details are defining characteristics of this particular subjectivist approach.

Borrowing from the Work of Others

The literature studied in preparation for this project was elemental in forming its overall structure, beginning at its core: the idea of teachers talking. Here there was a need to incorporate narrative inquiry in the way that Maggiasano (2008) sees it, as a "research process or a 'tool,' as it were, that helps to teach me the importance of not forgetting about the individual" (p. 2). It was also apparent that as a critical discourse analysis, which according to Rogers (2004a) "is both a theory and a method" (p. 2), the project could be based on a set of simple conversations between professionals.

From Fairclough's (2004) conclusion that "critical research in education, often motivated by agendas for learning and/or social transformation, has to be concerned with structural character of the group of learners and with the individual agency of each participant. Moreover, this agency seems prone to contest the political/power apparatus that makes the individual a part of the structure" (pp. 233-234), I founded my own conclusions that project participation needed to fully voluntary, as in a typical research setting, it would not be uncommon for the individual teacher to be more resistant to learning if the structural character of the research activity seems imposed by a non-equal,

a concern that was in keeping with the intended transformative intent of the critical theory at the heart of this work.

Yet, Fairclough also notes that the researcher who is a member of—or has a history within—the social practices he or she is studying, runs the risk of not being as effective at seeing the semiotic aspects of the discourse, as they are too natural (p. 234). Here it seemed appropriate to weigh this possibility against Johnson and Golombeck's (2002) belief that in the narrative inquiry setting, "teachers voices are validated through the collaborations and interpretation of researchers" (p. 4).

Further, there were accounts of using critical discourse analysis in an educational setting in which the researcher's facility with the language seemed integral. As a literacy expert, Stevens (2004) visited a science teacher's classroom weekly, noted the discourse within the classroom setting, and then held follow-up interviews with the teacher about her practices and views of content area literacy instruction. Key to the purposes of this project, she concludes that, "CDA afforded unique opportunities for learning about educational-related ideologies, for both myself and the research participant" (p. 208). She also noted that, "Using CDA with participants in educational settings requires high levels of trust and a willingness of both parties to engage in learning and acquiring a metalanguage to explore various plausible descriptions, analyses, and interpretations of discourse" (p. 208). This was one of the reasons I chose to conduct this work within my own school division, as all of the willing and voluntary participants would more likely already have a relationship of trust with me. I was very aware of Cohen, Manion, and Morrison's (2007) guiding principles for discourse analysis, including "mutual understanding between participants, freedom to enter a discourse, an equal opportunity to

[contribute], discussion to be free from domination, the movement towards consensus resulting from the discussion alone and the force of the argument alone (rather than the position power of the speakers)" (p. 389).

Sharing Johnson and Golombek's (2002) conviction that cognition is highly and fundamentally social, the 'talk' of the teachers needed to be in conversation. This proves difficult when another overarching goal is maintaining anonymity for participants, so the format chosen for the conversations was an online forum, which will be further discussed in a forthcoming section. For the critical aspect of this work, a full dialogue was needed, in keeping with Maggiasano's (2008) "understanding that community is the nature of reality (Palmer 1983/1993), that is, the individual in relation to others" (p. 4) and the anti-positivist nature of the project. It was also hoped that the participants would have similar responses to Maggiasano, who found that reading or hearing another's story can "corroborate feelings or perspectives that I have felt but was isolated in" (p. 10), especially given that the project was attempting to broach a subject of relative delicacy.

From there, the question of how to frame the conversations was answered in the organic desire to pose radiating questions and provide prompts. But this practice can prove problematic in that it could be construed as too subjectivist. Such problems, in part, are solved by referencing Mishler (1975) and his decidedly more naturalistic, even objective, approaches to discourse analysis. He studies the Interrogative Unit: "The complete IU is constituted by the sequence of Question-, Response-, and Confirmation-utterances. There are two types of incomplete IUs: unanswered questions and a question-response exchange that lacks a verbal confirmation" (p. 32). From this, it seemed most appropriate to frame the discussion prompts as questions and to be sure to acknowledge

each response, in order to complete the IU as well as encourage as much dialogue as possible. According to Mishler, "A question is usually thought of as having a social-demand quality; a response is required in order to complete the social act" (p. 38), making the research question not only guiding, but elemental.

Further on the subject of questioning, and given that so much of this project existed in places of emergent theory such as appreciative inquiry, it became important to consider Cooperrider and Whitney's (2000) contention that "one thing is evident and clear as we reflect on the most important things we have learned with AI: human systems grow in the direction of what they persistently ask questions about and this propensity is strongest and most sustainable when the means and ends of inquiry are positively correlated" (p. 6). This enforced the need for careful, precise questioning.

Specifically, the questions needed not only to prompt informative responses, but they needed to encourage story, as well. Like Maggiasano (2008), I found it important that the added element of voluntarism be open for study. "Since stories are not objectively given, but instead are constructed, they have intentionality because stories are chosen to be told" (p. 9). Stories are not only how we communicate experience and knowledge, but how we store our collected history, and this is also important for appreciative inquiry. According to Cooperrider and Whitney (2000), AI concentrates on memory, rooted in the belief that memory is expanded within an interview setting that inquires into an appreciable world, rather than a world of "amnesia, or a problem-to-be-solved" relationship to an individual's or organization's history (p. 10).

Story is the natural vehicle for imparting so much of the information the project sets out to discover, readily apparent in Maggiasano's (2008) claim: "I have used a

narrative inquiry framework to develop the perspective that would assist the restructuring of how we understand our teaching identity. How do I know what I know? What images have influenced or shaped my identity formation, both personally and professionally?"(p. 12-13).

For the analysis of discourse, however, the question and answer format is not enough, for as Mishler (1975) finds the question-response exchange that lacks a confirmation of response in some form is still an incomplete interrogative unit: "…a question not only 'demands' a response, but the response demands a further 'response' from the questioner. In brief, an answer to a question does not terminate an exchange in any meaningful social sense. It is terminated by a 'sign' on the part of the questioner that his question has received a response, adequate or inadequate, appropriate or inappropriate" (p. 32). Thus, the forum setting allowed for the researcher to acknowledge the receipt of a response, and largely that was done in the form of re-questioning, formulating new requests for details, anecdotes, and clarifications. Thus, the project was working under Mishler's (1975 assertion that, "Discourse is an extended series of Dialogue units" (p. 33) and that each conversation should not end after one single interrogative unit. In all his testing, Mishler did find that there was a rate of decline from complete IUs to second questions of 33.3% and from second to third questions of 49.3%, the mean rate of decline being 39.6% (p. 41-42), so it was anticipated that the bulk of conversation would be tied to the initial question. Here, again, the format of the online forum seemed highly practical as it allowed for fresh initial conversations, for new threads of discussion at scheduled intervals.

In this way, the project could also be designed as more of an experience for the participants, rather than simply a series of interview questions or a set of conversations. This also coincides with Johnson and Golombek's (2002) vision of narrative inquiry as enabling learning from colleagues. They cite Cobb and Bowers (1999) and Wenger (1998) as they explain that, "…the processes of learning are socially negotiated, constructed through experiences in and with the social practices associated with particular activities, in particular social contexts" (p. 2). While this is conducive to critical theory, it is also valuable for professional development. I agree with their assertion that, "Teacher learning is understood as normative and lifelong, built of and through experiences in social contexts: as learners in classrooms and schools, as participants in professional teacher education programs, and as members of communities of practice in the schools where they teach" (p. 2). If structured correctly, the forum could function as a place to mine valuable information about teacher learning, but could also be a place to test theory and promote professional change, since "professional development emerges from a process of reshaping teachers' existing knowledge, beliefs, and practices rather than simply imposing new theories, methods, or materials on teachers" (Johnson & Golombek, 2002, p. 2).

Of course, there lies a danger in becoming overly altruistic, so it was necessary to take precautions against Bushe's (2000) "concern that some practitioners, especially graduate students, can develop a zealous attention to 'appreciation' without any theoretical rhyme or reason to their practice." He cautions against "promoting appreciation where there has been little" (pp. 99-100) and acknowledges that jumping straight into asking research participants to speak appreciatively without giving

opportunity to recognize and articulate the problems is never productive. Thus, the forum questions begin with establishing what the participants find the tone of discourse around teaching is, and another discussion allows for the recognition and storying of negative speech and stories. The project attempted to build a base of cooperatively articulated norms from which to develop theory, action, and appreciation.

The idea of forming emergent professional development is inherent to all three of the adopted methodologies. In critical discourse awareness, Stevens (2004) acknowledged that as researcher, she was the one in the position of learning, but as the metalanguage grew, the conversations allowed for "reactions with reflections from [the subject's] vantage point" (p. 220). One of the elemental tenets of discourse analysis is that "…discourse should seek to be empowering and not subject to repression or ideological distortion" (Cohen et al, 2007, p. 389), so the structure of the discussions was intended to allow for participants to address the questions without being overtly exposed to the ideological intentions of the researcher.

In the realm of narrative inquiry, Johnson and Golombek (2002) find that, "Since the early 1990s, the reflective teaching movement (Lockhart & Richards, 1994; Schon, 1983, 1987; Zeichner & Liston, 1996), the predominance of action research (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988; McNiff, 1993; Somekh, 1993), and the teacher research movement (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Edge & Richards, 1998; Freeman, 1998) have helped to establish the legitimacy of teachers' experiences and the importance of reflection on and inquiry into those experiences as a mechanism for change in teachers' classroom practices as well as a forum for professional development over time" (p. 2). They further contend that, "Through inquiry, teachers frame and reframe the issues and problems they

face in their professional worlds…and as theorizers, they look less for certain answers and more to rethink what they thought they already knew" (p. 6). This leads them to their assertion that inquiry based on experienced stories *is* professional development, not simply *about* professional development.

Likewise, appreciative inquiry follows a flow, or a cycle, which Cooperrider and Whitney (2000) argue must circle around an Affirmative Topic Choice, or a guiding question that asks what you want to achieve in the long run of the cycle. It is affirmative in that it is not framed in a 'problems we wish to fix' vocabulary, but in a format that communicates what things would look like without the problem. Then the cycle flows between Discover, or the act of appreciating; Dream, the act of envisioning results; Design, the act of co-constructing; and Destiny, the act of sustaining (p. 7). While the labels and the actions may seem, overly hopeful or prescriptive—perhaps even fantastical, especially in the realm of research as objective critique—terms like this are exactly why the concept of AI seems to match the objectives of addressing negative discourse in education. Further, Cooperrider and Whitney point out that AI is longer on the idea of inquiry than what might initially appear, but that framing inquiry in the appreciative context "can get you much better results than seeking out and solving problems" (p. 9). From these premises, I attempted to design the questions, prompts, and flow of subsequent online conversations to an end of growth and insight for participants and researcher alike.

The Use of the Online Forum

"The selection of a form…not only influences what we can say, it also influences what we are likely to experience" (Eisner, 1991, p. 8).

There were several considerations taken when choosing how to facilitate the discourse necessary for this project. As explained earlier, it was necessary to keep anonymity, to have a question-prompting component, and to promote extended discourse. Equally important to me, I wanted participants to be able to access the conversation at their convenience, to contribute as much or as little as they felt comfortable (believing that the volume of the responses might also reveal something about the participants' feelings about the topics), and to allow for multiple conversations at spread out intervals without the strain of gathering all the participants each time. The most likely choice seemed to be the online forum, especially considering some recent experience I had moderating online discussion groups in my classroom.

According to Runte (2008), who researched specifically to use of blogs in arts-based qualitative research, online environments in educational research "allow researchers to establish virtual communities with those sharing their specialization, track developments in their field, manage sources, brainstorm with colleagues, document their priority in the formulation of key ideas, pace their own work, and rapidly disseminate results" (p. 314). Further, he cites Van House (2004), who found that online work was surprisingly conducive to a high degree of self-disclosure, and Runte theorized that this effect "…may be even more pronounced where bloggers retain anonymity or conceive their primary audience to be contained within a sympathetic discourse network" (p. 317), which were two components to the forum I endeavored to create for the participants.

Runte also sees the online blog as generative in nature, both for the individual poster, "As one posts one's thoughts…and ideas begin to build on upon the other, the evolution of one's thinking becomes more explicit…", and for the online community,

"…motivat[ing] everyone to meet their project commitments, but also generat[ing] as synergistic energy…" (p. 320). According to other researchers, the use of voluntary online surveys (which include forum-type settings or online interviews) can mean an increased danger of high participant dropout rates than with traditional gathering methods (Cohen et al, 2007, p. 239). They suggest using dropout as a dependable variable and enacting a few simple strategies, such as gathering personal information at the beginning to help participants feel more invested and to use 'warm-up' (simpler, straightforward questioning) early on and progress to more complex questions (p. 240). I also made it a point to allow for other forms of submissions from volunteers to help with dropout contingencies.

Cohen, Manion, and Morrison also see inherent benefits to the use of online submissions. Of particular note, they claim that, "They have a high degree of voluntariness, such that more authentic behaviours can be observed" (p. 240), which is of special benefit, considering they also acknowledge that as a solely written medium, "intonation, inflection, hesitancies, non-verbal cues, extra-linguistic and paralinguistic factors are ruled out" (p. 239).

In short, considering that no single form could ever meet every idealistic aim, the online forum seemed like the one that could meet most of them. And every endeavor was made to use this form to its best capacity.

Role of the Participant Researcher and Structure for Analysis

As the researcher but also the moderator of the online forum, the definition of my role and the subsequent parameters for analysis needed to be thoughtfully developed. I helped to create the discussion, but would also be analyzing it, so I looked to guidance in

the research of others. In Rogers (2004b), I found reassurance in the range of motion afforded the analyst: "Although there are no set rules for conducting CDA, it is important for the analyst to consider each aspect of the CDA—the 'critical,' 'discourse,' and 'analysis'" (p. 253).

Stevens (2004) expressed difficulty with her own shifting role as the analyst. She contends that while the orders of genre and discourse were consistent, the style or way of being for the researcher shifted as she struggled to be a "linguistic researcher that is at once analytical of the discourse" (p. 210) while also being someone who tried to guide the conversation to differing and alternative views. She found herself using excessive modalities (Halliday, 1985) to couch her own ideas or beliefs in potential topics that the subject might take up (p. 214). With this in mind, I armed myself with my own collection of modalities (I wonder, perhaps, I'd like to know) to help draw out further detail and conversation without directing it. There is, however, a point in which according to Stevens, the analyst is best to reveal her "perspectives and subjectivities…in a collaborative stance, one that allows for mediation and negotiation of power and knowledge by both the researcher and participant" (p. 222). Thus, when the third and fourth discussions were begun, participants were informed that I wanted them to "try" a possible tool in their own professional practice. I did not try to hide the intent of the conversation, hoping that a "level of reflexivity in the researcher-participant collaboration" would be helpful in "offer[ing] an opportunity for a dialogic process between researcher and participant" (p. 222). Such a structure to CDA conversations, Stevens feels, could ultimately allow for the analyst's work to be less structuralistic, as the participant(s) have the chance to inform the interpretation to some extent.

Further, I took cues from Bushe's (2000) findings that addressing a problem, especially with an intent of positive transformation can be psychologically difficult for all involved. He observes that there is "a lot of repressed yearning" in our systems, and "anyone who names what is yearned for is sure to be ridiculed and shamed as a defense against experiencing that yearning" (p. 101). Thus a difficult, but necessary task of the researcher is to acknowledge that the means of inquiry will generally impact, if not entirely create the ends, or what she 'discovers'. Because of this, the researcher must learn to inquire "with the heart" or locate her motivations, and while this may sound overly simplistic or sentimental, for Bushe, it results in a "consistent, profound healing effect on [his] interactions with others" (p. 101). He contends that with the head is only concerned with analysis, which by definition is the breaking apart of things for examination of their parts, while inquiry with the heart is concerned with wholeness and healing. This idea of inquiring and analyzing with the heart became a focus in the project and allowed for some reflexivity.

Central to the actual process of analysis, Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2007) explain that, "Discourse researchers explore the organization of ordinary talk and everyday explanation and the social actions performed in them" (p. 389). From this, I envisioned my analysis as necessarily operating on two planes, the first being the study of the language used by participants as they posted to the forum. For this, I needed to call upon any and all experience and expertise I had in language formation, diction, syntax, connotation, and subtext. "Discourse analysis requires a careful reading and interpretation of textual material, with interpretation being supported by the linguistic evidence. The

interactional aspects of discourse and discourse analysis suggest the need for the researcher to be highly sensitive to the nuances of language" (Cohen et al, 2007, p. 390).

On the second plane would be, as Rogers (2004a) puts it, the analyst's "need to understand the relationship between language form and function, the history of the practices that construct present-day practices, and how social roles are acquired and transformed" (p. 1-2). This would require an abiding adherence to Fairclough and Wodak's (1997) eight foundational principles of CDA, including "CDA addresses social problems" (in this case, the prevalence of negative discourse around and in teaching); "Discourse constitutes society and culture" (for the purpose of this project, how the teacher's identity is formed both internally and as a public figure, and how these perceptions form teaching realities); "Discourse does ideological work" (in this case, seeks to improve said realities); and " Discourse analysis is interpretive and explanatory and uses a systematic methodology" (as cited by Rogers, 2004a, p. 2). This final principle needed some further clarification.

According to Rogers, traditionally, the component of "critical" in CDA is concerned with power relations. CDA eschews deterministic theory of the individual and "instead argues for a dialectic between individual agency and structural determinism" (p. 3) Corson (2000, as cited by Rogers, 2004a), for example wrote that the aim of his work in CDA was to "explore hidden power relations between a piece of discourse and wider social and cultural formations" and therefore, as Rogers points out, "The intentions of the analyst always guide the theory and method of CDA" (p. 3). I find that my intentions are best suited to a systematic methodology found in what Charmez (2010) calls a *constructivist approach to grounded theory*.

It is my intent that my study follow narrative research and grounded theory to a productive and poetic end, that my research do as Charmez outlines: "fosters the development of qualitative traditions through the study of experience from the standpoint of those who live it" (p. 195). While I admittedly have a personal theory that an awareness of and a change in our deficit vocabularies to vocabularies of hope can and will have a profound effect on teachers' identity, practice and environment, I did not structure this project such that it tests a hypothesis. Instead, I attempted the constructivist approach to grounded theory, in that my project recognizes that "the viewer creates the data and ensuing analysis through interaction with the viewed..., [that] researcher and subjects frame that interaction and confer meaning upon it..., [and that] what a viewer sees shapes what he or she will define, measure, and analyze" (Charmez, 2010, p. 197).

I set out to create a discourse about discourse in a safe and caring way that engendered honest and revealing narrative and conversational data, which I could then code and analyze in memo format (Charmaz, 2010) for emerging themes and metaphors, such that my "analysis tells a story about people, social processes, and situations. The researcher composes the story; it does not simply unfold before the eyes of the objective viewer. This story reflects the viewer as well as the viewed" (p. 196). This was in keeping with the discourse analysis theory that once a researcher uses coding to discover patterns, she "can then re-examine the text to discover intentions, functions and consequences of the discourse… [the intent may be] to impart information, to persuade, to accuse, to censure, to encourage, etc." (Cohen et al. 2007, p. 390).

I was an active participant in the research as I worked to observe, document, and take part in what could occur from our online discussions, and my subsequent analysis while being exceptionally aware of this, embraces it.

Intended Format

The aim was to have anywhere from five to ten volunteer participants, with the hope that they would represent a variety of backgrounds, teaching specialties, ages, and years of experience. There were seven who consented and set out to be a part of the online discussions. I gathered their personal information and various helpful statistics from them by private email, the same way I had sent out the call for volunteers.

There were five potential discussions, each beginning with a carefully crafted question prompt. The idea was that once this was posted, participants were to post their initial responses in the first week of that discussion thread. I would follow up with acknowledgments and follow-up queries, and all were encouraged to interact with each other. I was to give them a second week to develop each of the discussion threads in ways that they felt comfortable with, ideally sharing narrative accounts to illustrate their initial posts the previous week.

Participants were logging on to a password-protected private forum and were each represented by a screen name they had chosen themselves. The sit provided a main page with each discussion thread as a topic that could then be clicked on, leading to the discussion itself. If individual participants felt more comfortable sharing their thoughts in other forms, that was allowed. It was not expected that everyone would feel confident in the online forum, especially if they weren't that familiar with the format. It was also a

distinct possibility that individual sensitivities might make individuals more comfortable sharing with only me through a private email or a face-to-face conversation.

Once sufficient time had passed to undertake analysis from a more objective place than I might be immediately following the closing of a discussion thread, I returned to the forum to make field notes. Once all discussions closed, I printed them all and began a process of coding the conversations, both for the purposes of discourse analysis and for finding emergent themes.

Unexpected Opportunities

The life cycle of this project has proven to me a universal truth that if everything always went as planned, we miss out on a lot of unexpected opportunities. According to Friere (1996), "It is not possible to create without serious intellectual discipline; likewise it is not possible to create within a system of fixed, rigid, or imposed rules" (p. 169). Fortunately, there was nothing incredibly rigid about the format of the project.

Some participants had difficulties logging on to the private forum. While this was undoubtedly frustrating for them, it allowed opportunity for me to have direct correspondence and face-to-face time with them as we tried to trouble shoot the technical problems. In those times, I was able to have some interesting and frank conversations related to the topics in the forums, and I made field notes surrounding these.

The forum proved to be less-than-ideal in other ways. Some experienced a time-out function on their posts. They would type up a long, detailed response to the question, and when they hit the "post" button, the text would disappear because the text box only remained active for ten minutes one it was opened. After this, I suggested to everyone that they always type their responses on a separate document and then paste into the

window, but the initial, detailed, and thoughtful responses lost were never recovered. No one had the energy or time to rewrite them with the same care. Additionally, most of the participants read the forum format as a survey. They wanted to answer the question and move on to the next one. There was a surprising and often alarming lack for responses to follow-up queries and there was very little conversations between participants, which made the discourse analysis more problematic than expected.

Time was an issue. With none of the questions did all of the participants post in the first week. Entire discussion threads became quite spread out, and it became apparent that the participants' energy for the discussions was waning. The fifth topic/question, then, was discarded, which was unfortunate from the appreciative inquiry perspective as to that point, there had been limited questions leading in that vein of inquiry. There was no opportunity for a storied appreciative discussion to emerge. It also seemed advisable to merge the third and fourth topics/questions in order to abbreviate the perceived burden of the posts. This discussion thread asked participants to list three to five words or phrases of negative connotation that they would like to strike from their own vocabulary and three to five words or phrases of positive effect that they wanted to use more frequently. It was my express hope that having double the information—indeed two perspectives—and having a more open-ended response would result in a more generative discussion and interest in other members' posts, but this was not the case.

Perhaps the biggest setback to the process occurred when I attempted to print the discussions for coding and analysis. I discover that all but one post from the entire first discussion thread was gone from the forum. After contacting the administrator, I was told that there was an automatic "pruning" feature to the site we were operating on. After 90

days, the content was deleted. At this point, I had made some field notes on the first discussion, but (foolishly) I had not saved or printed any other copy of the original text, the very words I was to conduct a discourse analysis of. There was no way to regain that specific data. I was forced to sheepishly admit to the participants what had happened and ask anyone who was willing and with whom I could arrange a mutually convenient time, to sit with me for taped conversations or for conversations I could make further field notes on in an attempt to obtain some more complete responses to that initial question/prompt.

Interestingly, when I did sit with these participants, I found that they opened up much more about their experiences in that more informal setting. I was able to obtain more frank and detailed examples of the language each teacher found himself/herself using and/or exposed to. The loss of the initial conversation became a mixed blessing, then. The interrelated discourse was all but gone, but a set of more open and complete individual narratives emerged.

Chapter 4: Forum Response and Analysis

Participant Summaries

There were eight participants (including myself, the moderator with the screen name Waddayathink) involved, in one way or another, in the discussion. The seven other professionals who offered up their time and thoughts range in age, gender, experience, and personal perspective. Here I endeavor to introduce each participant and his/her background and current teaching assignment. I also include any information or impressions that I deem pertinent to the remaining analysis. In alphabetical order, they include:

Flames. Flames is 54 years old, with 29 years of teaching experience. She works as a division III learning support teacher, as well as teaching junior high English Language Arts and Computers. Over the years, she has worked in all grade divisions.

Her posts were always upbeat, and usually included detailed explanation of how confident she was in her work and her words. She was, with the exception of one time, always the first to post an initial response in each discussion, and she submitted the most follow-up threads of any participant. She was eager to share her thoughts on the subject matter, but would rarely admit to any difficulty, unless it was in private conversations. She seemed to be a very solution-oriented professional.

As did most participants, Flames chose her moniker, and I assumed it was because she is a hockey fan. Interestingly, on each of her online posts, she signed off as "Going down in, Flames", which made me wonder further at the choice and if there was perhaps something more to it.

Home. Home is a 45-year-old woman with three years of teaching experience. She works in a junior high as a language arts and art teacher. She was the first to volunteer to participate, and she was quite quick to respond to each new discussion thread. She was one of the few who responded to each of them and who would post something in response to questions I had about her initial posts.

Home was a mother of students and had worked as a volunteer coach for school sports teams long before becoming a teacher, so this brought some interesting perspective. In conversations about the online forum, she expressed concerns about sounding "smart enough" when she posted. She admitted to feeling intimidated by the format, but also by the words she felt others had that she did not. She hoped that she was able to give me "what I wanted." I found this particularly interesting, given the fact that Home's posts often spoke to how, as a newer teacher, she had felt very supported by her colleagues.

Patriots Suck. Patriots Suck had the unique perspective that came from being an administrator, as well as a classroom teacher. At 55 years old, he is in his thirtieth year of teaching. His work has been predominantly with junior high and high school students, in social studies and numerous option courses. Uniquely, he also had some experience with kindergarten.

He seemed a natural at thinking of the big picture. He was the first to bring up the influence our own school experiences had on our current realities, and he offered insight into the thoughts and words of our students and our administration teams, those that we admitted to sometimes being pitted against. He had the other side of the story always in mind.

Readtoescape. Readtoescape has eleven years of teaching experience, all in kindergarten to grade nine levels. She is 35, and currently working as a junior high language arts teacher.

Perhaps because I know her very well as a close friend, Readtoescape was the first to really open up and admit to sometimes feeling inundated and, consequently, affected by negativity. She seemed the most trusting of the online forum format, and was able to write about her family's comments and experiences. Her husband and mother had also been teachers, an added dimension to her thoughts. Her posts were very candid without being dismal.

Teacher 101. Teacher 101 is a junior high science teacher in her early fifties with almost twenty years experience. Her contract is part-time, which seemed to make her more acutely aware of the perspective of teachers who often do not get as much respect or as big a say in things as they may deserve. She wrote of the things we often say to a substitute teacher, for example.

After experiencing a great deal of trouble with the online forum, she posted to the first discussion a few weeks later than the others. After that, she decided to simply type up her thoughts related to the topic, her "story" and "what [she had] wanted to share", as she called it. She emailed it to me, and I found that she was most eager to discuss what she had seen in her own classroom, how she had seen positive change in her class management when she had made conscious decisions surrounding ideas of negative and positive behaviour.

Tuttle. Tuttle is 35, and has four years of teaching experience. He works as a high school science teacher, specializing in physics. He has also taught English. Tuttle brought

his scientific training to bear, as he was willing to provide what I perceived as the most direct and concrete ideas. He often did research before posting. It may not be surprising, then, that Tuttle was the most willing to bring up the idea of ambivalence toward educational "buzz words."

Wanderer. Wanderer is a 50 year-old Spanish and French teacher at the high school level. His 24 years of experience have been almost exclusively in division IV, but over the years, he has deliberately moved from teaching science (especially Chemistry) to teaching option courses.

Wanderer also encountered difficulties with the online format, so he and I sat down for a recorded interview after all the discussions were done. He first gave me his answers to each prompt, and then after reading the other participants' responses, he commented on any additional thoughts he had. Personally, it was important to me that I had his voice in this project, as Wanderer is the teacher I would readily identify as being the most positive I have ever come in contact with. It is of no small importance that in previous conversations with him, he has credited his attitude, in part, to his decision to avoid teaching core subjects.

His answers tended to be philosophical in nature, and he spoke to a unique idea that had not yet been addressed: the effect of words that signify either permission or resistance, and how a person in power over another can effect more than just our ideas with those words.

Discussion Threads

Each of the following discussion synopses and analyses begins with the prompting question posed to the participants, presented here in italics. From there, I

endeavor to summarize the conversation and to analyze the discourse used. The title of each is the actual title of the forum discussion thread as it appeared online.

Feb 7: Question 1. *In our online discussions, I would like to talk about the language people use about teaching, both in the profession and out. Is this language generally positive, generally negative, or neutral? Consider each of the following non-student contributors to your teaching reality: coworkers (certified and non-certified, and including administrators), trainers (i.e. in a PD setting), parents, the public, and the media. Are there instances of negative rhetoric from them that you feel have adversely affected your teaching?*

Perhaps there was an inherent flaw in the wording of this first question because it appeared that many participants were loathe to answer both portions of the question or they reworded a portion in a way that suited a particular message. On the other hand, these like-patterned responses may point to something more meaningful. Most who did answer the first question chose to focus on one group: teachers themselves, usually in a broad sense. "We're pretty positive," one said, and another claimed that "in general", he perceived "the profession" to be "positive, happy". The use of qualifiers (*pretty* and *in general*) was interesting. It seemed to support the impression I had by the end of the discussion that many participants were leery of jumping right out of the gates with strong opinions. There was a bit of a wait-and-see air to the responses.

One participant, after listing situations where she had seen consistent negative speech, seemed eager to write a second paragraph twice the length of the first, which outlined how she had "felt supported" as a new teacher and how her "in classroom work never felt affected by the critique", but she did "sense" a feeling of "defensiveness" when

it came to "public perception" of teachers. Here, the diction denotes a strong sense of internalized ownership over the consequences of the language she was surrounded by. Her verbs revolve around emotional/intuitive responses, such as feeling and sensing. I wondered if this was an obsequious or defensive way of addressing the issue, a sort of professional 'It's not you; it's me' logic that avoids confrontation or censure.

This response is also one of a few examples of language communicating a strong desire to make it known that classroom circumstances were "never" affected. Another respondent began her entire entry with the statement, "Negative language does not affect my practice", immediately addressing the final question in the prompt, rather than tackling it in the order it was asked. This answer was followed by an accounting of the ways she keeps negativity out of her life. In a later post to the same discussion, she even spoke of the support and positive energy she enjoyed from her home life, using an anecdote for illustration.

She was not the only one to offer up information about the relationship(s) between home life and professional life, nor was she the only participant to immediately offer strategies to combat negativity. Another, one who 'chunked' the prompt question (repeating each section before answering it) and would not say which of the three options he found language to be (except to remark that, "Language is rarely neutral"), answered the initial question with "if" statements and a profound analogy of meeting a neighbor on a country road. "If" the neighbor's language was negative about a person or situation, this participant had a two-step strategy for addressing and dispelling the negativity. He would "soften the negative" (to avoid the neighbor "see[ing] his response as a confrontation) and then he would "offer a positive". His hypothesis was that "We have enormous

control of the language that is used by others in our life." In his experience with his strategy, he claimed, "It's almost impossible to continue talking negative with someone that's positive." Then he addressed the next chunk of the prompt as he saw it: the list of people who may contribute to the language about teaching, providing examples of how he could soften and offer a positive to the most common negative comments from each of those educational stakeholders.

What I found significant is that most of the initial responders offered their ideas without first acknowledging the negative language, without fully answering the first question. Also, most seemed to want to offer strategy, explanation, or dismissal. One commented that he "chose to surround himself" with the members of his staff who were more positive; another claimed he had "develop[ed] thick skin," so negative comments did not affect him. Yet another wrote about how it was best to concentrate on what successes could be found in the classroom than to worry about what people said outside of it.

I am not faulting their responses on any level when I point out that the questions did not ask for strategy or solutions, but rather a simple accounting of what types of language they encountered and whether they had ever felt affected by it. The abundance of responses in this solution-oriented vein do, I believe, illustrate the individual teacher's drive to teach, to impart of his/her wisdom and experience. I fear, too, that it shows an unspoken taboo in the profession, that one cannot speak openly about a problem without having, first, a solution.

To keep discussion generative and focused, I offered my own answer to the question, as was shared in the introduction of this document. I felt it was a good way to

encourage some more detailed responses, documenting actual types of language. Also, by this point, I was able to post follow-up queries that many were responding to (and not just on their own threads). For example, one post dealt with the idea that most teachers were teachers because they had enjoyed a pleasant school experience, to which I asked whether anyone had encountered someone in the profession who had gone in to teaching because of a terrible experience, perhaps with a calling to change the system. A different person posting than the original gave a detailed account of interactions with a teacher at a few provincial committees meetings. That teacher was determined that there was "nothing good" in the current system, and no amount of "help" with teaching tactics or "success stories" she offered wavered his resolved to revolutionize the system. She outlined how he had been "moved around from school to school in his district" until they found a place where he could work largely alone and do less "harm". I found this account to be ironic, as it is questionable how much revolutionizing he is able to accomplish when he is so isolated. Others posting to this thread noted 'people like this' become marginalized almost naturally by their peers.

Another thread that developed quite nicely was one about whether the rural nature of our communities within the division had any bearing on the instances of negative language in public discourse. As discussion progressed, various participants theorized about how our small communities have relatively few professionals outside of teachers, doctors and dentists. Many of the more affluent community members are in agriculture, are entrepreneurs in 'blue collar' industries, or are tradesmen. A teacher's work will not likely readily compare to their work realities, nor do many seem willing to consider the teaching profession on par with the value of professionals in healthcare. Consequently,

the teacher seems more likely to be lumped in with an hourly wage earner. So when

many teachers make a gross salary of $90,000 or more, the public feels something is out

of joint. It also leads to a perception that they a teacher's time. Some participants gave

examples of brazen comments made to teachers in settings outside of school, wherein

people questioned whether the teacher should be outside of the school at that time of day.

In the initial posts that followed mine, there were many specific examples given

of language and its consequences. One participant spoke of being "taken aback" (another

seemingly euphemized statement) by the language of some of her coworkers. She

admitted to avoiding the staff room and certain staff members, especially if they were

prone to complaining about students. Others began writing about professional peers who

"often put others down." Interestingly, the one specific example of this that was offered

dealt with teachers criticizing others for when they leave the school after work,

concentrating on how many hours their peers are working. One participant was frustrated

with the way he felt teachers "obsessively" compared workloads and "complained about

things not being fair".

Another participant spoke to the identity robbing language we often use with

substitute teachers, asking them "Who are you today?" instead of "How are you today

and who are you subbing for?" She also heard unnerving comments about substitute pay,

such as "Here comes easy money" or a comment from a contract teacher related to

bargaining priorities for the EPC committee, claiming, "It didn't matter what subs were

paid because they were mostly women working for a second salary."

Another interesting point that emerged was how parents and the community could

be hard on coaches or "trash" the extracurricular work teachers did. This poster felt a

deep frustration about this, largely because it showed ignorance on the part of others about where a teacher's duty ends and his/her volunteered time begins. Some participants related anecdotes of family members teasing them for being overpaid or for having excessive time off.

As concerns discourse analysis, I was struck by the prevalent use of "I believe" and "I feel" statements, as opposed to 'I see' or 'I experience', almost as if participants were avoiding putting full trust in their individual perceptions as being indicative of 'true' events. From a critical standpoint, perhaps we do not realize how much we are affected by the tone of discourse about education in the public sphere. In our discussions, we were able to identify our frustrations with the expressed public opinions, and we identified instances of critique amongst peers, but no one pointed out that the basis of teacher on teacher criticism was the same as the public's: questioning the time and pay of the professional.

Feb 28: 2nd Discussion. *Are there specific phrases or words that you hear (or use) in teaching (or related to teaching) that you feel are demeaning to the profession, could be potentially harmful to one's teaching identity, or might make it more difficult for you (and/or your colleagues) to do your work as an educator? Conversely, are there particular words or phrases that you find are a boon to your professional practice and/or to teaching in general? Feel free to think outside of general terms or descriptors to words that may have a connotative meaning different from their intent when they're considered in your teaching context. (For example, a teacher in the U.S. might feel that the phrase "No Child Left Behind" has a negative or positive effect, depending on his/her circumstance.) Please explain your answers with as much detail and explanation as you*

feel comfortable offering.

In this discussion, I wanted participants to begin exploring significant words and phrases, to in a sense, act as critical discourse analysts themselves. In keeping with Bushe's (2000) suggested structure for finding appreciation by first acknowledging where there might be very little (but then moving forward to co-develop theory action and appreciation), I also desired to shift the focus away from attitudes and tone, hoping that now that we had established the problematic nature of these, we could objectively identify the building blocks of our teaching identities and realities: the words we use and listen to that shape us.

For this discussion it is most helpful to divide all the responses into three categories of discourse: negative, positive, and ambivalent. In each of these, I list the common words and phrases. With each of these, I counted how many participants included these in their initial posts or commented on or agreed with the initial poster. Next, I include the most interesting, timely, pertinent and/or encapsulating explanations of each answer. Finally, I include any analysis I can offer on the developing or revealing nature of the conversations.

Negative. Participants found the following negative language.

1) *"All you teachers…" / "All teachers…" / "You teachers…" (discussed or referenced by five participants).*

One participant believed that this was voiced "mostly by parents or detractors of education," and she characterized the statement as one that makes her "bristle." For another, "nothing gets [her] goat like that statement." Clarifications on what was so demeaning about these comments included, "It is the generalization of all teachers as a

group behaving in the same manner," "I know so many teachers that don't fall into the parameters one way or another," and "Nobody wants to be stereotyped or lumped all together."

Interestingly, there is nothing directly derogatory in any of the three versions of this phrase that participants gave. When actually spoken, the descriptors would follow, but there is an automatic acknowledgement that most anyone who is willing to make a sweeping statement is not going to be making an uplifting one. They are likely to deal in stereotypes, and the insinuation here by the participants is that most stereotypes of teachers are unflattering. In this case, there may also be an interesting profession-sabotaging element at play. I think most teachers are embarrassed by the few who do give us a 'black eye' and are quick to distance ourselves, to the point that we may even try to set ourselves up as not being like 'all those other teachers,' thus perpetuating this particular dangerous phrase.

2) *"You became a teacher for the holidays" / "Teachers only teach for July and August" (discussed or referenced by three participants).*

Participants seemed interested in the root causes of this statement. One claimed that in some ways, it is "brought on ourselves" and cited an example of teachers sighted on the golf course at 3:15 in the afternoon. One commented that there was "a little bit of jealousy" on the part of anyone saying that (and I submit in analyzing this statement that this participant deliberately used understatement to avoid seeming too callous about their feelings). Another pointed out that "there are 200 days between those two months," a valid defensive case, which followed the acknowledgement, "I know teachers who went into the profession so they could be involved in athletics/sports forever, but I don't know

anyone who became a teacher for the holidays."

Again, I am left wondering if the participants' reactions are indicative of teachers' reactions to criticism. Are we so accustomed to the criticism that we have become self-deprecating, do we readily malign our own to elevate our professional identity, or are we analytical enough to be so forthcoming about our realities?

3) *"Teachers have it easy." (discussed or referenced by two participants).*

This was believed to be in reference to both the perception of our minimal working hours and our being "overpaid". This comment was characterized as a "dig" and as "disheartening," as if the speakers have malicious intent. It is counterintuitive that members of the public would seem to want to bring down their servants. It seems counterintuitive.

4) *"Those that can, do. Those that can't, teach." (discussed or referenced by two participants).*

One contributor believed that "a lot of times, this is said by those who possibly had a negative experience in their own schooling" or by those who "see school as a babysitting service". Here, too, the perception is that there are people who would drag teachers down without realizing the disservice this does to their own futures.

5) *The expressed belief that an older teacher 'needs' to retire (discussed or referenced by two participants).*

One participant claimed, "School boards offer retirement incentives to older staff not out of respect and admiration for what they have done in their career but rather to make way for someone younger and reduce the payroll." This perceived reality is echoed in the ideas that "the system" has a fondness for new teachers, seeing them as

"refreshing" and as doing new things. The 'old' has consequent diminished value, yet ironically, as one participant points out, older staff is asked to mentor new teachers.

6) *Complaints that we are "taking summer jobs away from those who really need them" (introduced by one participant).*

7) *"Some other teachers don't…" or other "references to teachers in a context where everyone sees themselves as experts as regards school" (introduced by one participant).*

Positive. Participants found the following positive language.

1) *Comments about teachers "who have made a difference in [people's] lives" (discussed or referenced by two participants).*

One contributor listed three potential situations in which feedback reveals teacher concern for students: "Mr. Jones helped me realize I had the potential for greatness," "Mrs. Terrance was always so kind to me, " and "I wouldn't have made it through high school without Mrs. Frank." These are the kind of things that one "always enjoys hearing" because they are "evidence" of teacher good.

2) *Being asked to attend and speak at class reunions and kind comments in yearbooks (introduced by one participant).*

This participant gave voice to what I believe is a chief motivator in human nature: the desire to be remembered fondly.

3) "I don't know how you can teach kids that age—I could never do it" *(introduced by one participant).*

This post demonstrated ability to twist a wry comment into a doubly gratifying compliment. The participant acknowledged that the comment is often "said with some

degree of awe" (again, this is wording that I see as deliberate understatement). It is

refreshing to feel like some see teaching as a difficult thing: "I am filling a role that

maybe some couldn't and to add the icing on the cake, I really enjoy teenagers."

  Ambivalent. Participants had ambivalence about the following language.

  1) *'Feedback' given to teacher coaches (introduced by one participant).*

  Here this contributor makes the point that some teacher coaches are non-athletes

who find coaching "daunting, but when administration requests [their] help, [they]

comply." She juxtaposes being "accosted" by parents "who don't realize that [she] didn't

ask for the job" with other parents who "can't say enough good" about a teacher coach

who has "given their child a healthy focus." She reasons, "The natural man is quick to

judge, whether that is negative or positive remains the choice of each individual."

  2) *"A student has the right to fail" (discussed or referenced by four*

   participants).

  Most respondents expressed an undecided view of whether this statement was

harmful or helpful; the one who first brought the statement up was "trying to decipher

how [she felt] about [it]." Three respondents characterized the teacher's role as someone

to "help" (one respondent used all caps for emphasis) students succeed, and one

expanded on what that meant to him: "do[ing] all in our power to help students develop

work ethic, good study habits, and independent learning…" He, like others, immediately

followed this definition of teacher role with a 'but' statement, also making use of all caps:

"…but we can't MAKE students achieve."

  All respondents on this particular statement used the word "responsibility" in their

posts. One, after "hear[ing] this phrase uttered at many meetings and in many casual

photocopier discussions," was in a divisional meeting when a colleague "mentioned this phrase." The facilitator was "aghast," uttered "strong opinions on why that statement was flawed…indicat[ing] that a student should never fail and that as teachers, it is our responsibility to make sure they don't." Her response in this situation was, "…maybe I needed to take more responsibility for my students' success. I thought I was trying hard, but maybe it is not hard enough." In this narrative, the participant reveals interesting attitudes about leadership, exchange of ideas, and teacher buy-in. The incident appears to be a direct censure on the part of the facilitator, but she describes with very careful language that "this person" (not ever using pronouns to reveal gender) "went on to give" "opinions" and "indicated" (remarkably 'soft' verbs, considering the obviously strong, even accusatory, statement about teacher responsibility). This person was in a position of power, and in her language, the respondent defers to the power. She also questions herself immediately, expressing a due diligence to this deference. Remarkably, though, she dismisses the event ("this was said by someone who is no longer 'working in the trenches'") and summarily, the idea ("our system is not a utopia").

For another respondent, "responsibility" was seen as a student concern: "the most successful students are those who have learned how to be independent learners and take responsibility for their own learning (as well as success and failure)." Another expressed "annoy[ance]" at "the implication that for every student that fails, we have a responsibility." Here, his frustration seems aimed at the absolute in this idea, the 'every', as he goes on to question all the "…things we don't control. What part does family play? Or socioeconomic circumstance?" This discourse is concerned with what another posting termed "onus" on the teacher.

There was also conversation that likened this statement about the "right to fail" to ideas outside of education. The "…classic line from Mythbusters: 'Failure is always an option'" was quoted, and the cartoon character Megamind was paraphrased: "The advantage of being the loser is you get to learn from your mistakes." And a post ended with reference to "another statement that we hear often in education, 'to prepare students for the real world'" to justify the stance that "a little dose of failure is actually quite healthy." This final line, with its medicinal metaphor was quite encapsulating of the oft expressed attitude that not allowing for failure was actually a disservice to students.

In essence, the discussion itself proved that discussions about attitudes in education can be very difficult. As I journalled in response to this thread,

> It's interesting that we have traditional concepts that seem to make sense to many of us, but yet the words attached to them become dirty words if a new ideology arises. Then the rhetoric around the ideology almost takes on a tone of disdain for anyone who doesn't buy into it wholeheartedly. It's almost like there's a class system in education, and those who haven't embraced every new idea are lower class. Even worse, there's an innate charge that they don't care about their students as much.

I afforded myself much stronger language here than the other participants dared use, but in my 'offline' conversations with them, many were inclined to agree and to express frustration with structures and ideologies that claimed to have an interest in being 'grass roots' but are in reality, 'agenda driven' by the 'higher ups.' This leads into the final phrase to be addressed in this analysis.

3) *The idea of "buzz words" and their stifling influx (discussed or referenced by*

two participants).

This topic will be addressed later as part of the emerging themes section of the analysis, as it popped up at numerous points in all three discussions and in meetings with participants. In this particular context, teachers were wrestling with the inundation of professional development and top-down initiatives for classroom practice. While not being dismissive of the need to constantly improve practice or the potential for invaluable knowledge through research, there was a distinct wariness around research. As one participant voiced, "Unfortunately, the phrase 'research says' just means that a group of people all agree on this idea and that it isn't necessarily the answer to my situation, my needs, and my students."

When considering the entirety of this second discussion thread, it may be of significance that four participants did not post words or phrases that were purely positive, while only one person did not characterize a particular word or phrase as being purely negative. Much of the discussion on this thread evolved from the idea of complex discourse that depended on the tone of the speaker and the attitude of the listener for its connotation.

My usual experience with professional "rants" or "vents" (as many came to call them in our interviews), is that they could engender an outpouring of like-minded complaints or related examples. At the beginning of the online forum, the participants were leery of admitting to the difficult language they encountered. In my field notes, I wrote, "The forum is anonymous, but I still get the feeling that the majority of them are writing like they're applying for a job: 'I leave that negativity at the classroom door,' or 'I just surround myself with positive people' kind of stuff." Once I took the prescribed step

away for some time to allow for more effective analysis, I was clearly able to see a surge in the way participants were willing to opening up about difficulty, especially in this second discussion. Here, difficulty seemed to be the stronger focus compared to the responses from the first discussion. I see this as an example of how negativity can find momentum when it finds traction. Again, it may be helpful to be able to rant for a while with someone who is like-minded. The trick seems to be throwing on the brakes before you build the proverbial runaway train momentum.

March 21: 3rd (and 4th) Discussion. *So far, we have been concentrating largely on the language we are subjected to in our profession. As some have pointed out, our greatest tool against demoralizing discourse may be to concentrate on our own teaching 'bubble'. With that though in mind, please identify three to five words or phrases that you think would contribute to significant change in your self-perception and your practice if they were struck from YOUR teaching vocabulary (i.e. in your classroom, but also in any conversation about schools or teaching). Conversely, please identify three to five words that you believe would also result in significant positive change if YOU used them more often in reference to your profession and you work relations. Please elaborate on your choices as much as you can.*

One item of note in this discussion is that two respondents (the first two) posted lists of phrases they did or did not want as a part of their teaching reality, but they were still things that *others* say. They had misread the intent of the discussion. Again, it is highly possible that this was due to problems with the question, but I also have to acknowledge the possibility that once the participants began opening up about the language they 'dealt with', there was a floodgate of sorts. One participant inserted

emoticons is her list, including a two devilish ones next to the parent comments "What did you do to make my child behave like that?" "When you have children you will understand what it is like to be a parent," and "You forced my child to lie because the assignment was too hard." It was fairly apparent that this teacher was still struggling with angry feelings about such hurtful comments. It is my hope that sharing them and expressing that anger, even just with the use of little yellow faces, was cathartic and healing.

In the following sections, I provide a list of all the significant words and phrases that the participants offered about their teaching discourses. I set them (in the order they were posted) under the subheadings coined by one of the participants: "Words to Lose" and "Words to Use". For each, I account for the various explanations that some of the posts provided, and then I explain significance related to the ensuing conversations and potential epiphanies surrounding this discussion—both for the participants and the participant researcher.

Words to Lose. The following words and phrases are those that participants recognized as being particularly damaging to their teaching practices.

- *"kids" as opposed to "students"*
- *some student vocabulary: all FACEBOOK slang*

These first two came with an explanation that teachers "need to become ONE WITH our students, not ONE OF them." He used effective imagery to illustrate his point: "It's hard to lift students to higher ground when you're at the same level." This touched off affirming responses from others.

- *I'll never catch up on this marking…*

- *I can't stand that kid.*

- *Administrative/Central Office decisions are all political*

Another participant based her list on a series of things she believed she just needed to be willing to admit were a part of her reality. Lamenting them would not change them ("Will I be able to better teach this student by regularly vocalizing the fact that our personalities clash? I think not."), so it would be healthier for her to avoid "creat[ing] a cloud of negativity" and accept that "Marking is my reality…I love teaching English, and to do what I love, I have to deal with marking," or that "It is easy to blame a whole gamut of educational problems on the ones in charge."

- *That student is starting to annoy me!*

- *I can't believe that that teacher lets students call him/her by only their last name.*

- *I don't feel like I'm connected to the other teachers much.*

This teacher concentrated on sentences that signaled an absence of considering all perspectives. She shared a troubling story about seeing a student in serious distress one evening and then seeing her at school the next day. Consequently, the participant included the resolution to "always approach an annoying student with the question, 'What has this student been through in the last 24 hours?'" In this, she was not only losing words, she was replacing them with words that forced a new mindset.

- *The kids now just don't seem to care.*

- *I wish they would just leave me alone. I have been teaching successfully for a long time, and I know how to do this stuff.*

- *We need to crack down on these kids.*

This next post seemed to pick up on the idea of finding a better perspective, as he recognized that students, like teachers, do not deserve to be "generaliz[ed]", "categoriz[ed]", or "stereotyp[ed]." He also admitted that he was not much "better" as a student himself. Like the previous post, his progressed to a conclusion to replace the difficulty with proactive thought and/or behaviour: "If we could only remember that people care about what they feel is important, then we could do a better job of understanding how to teach them."

His other items on the list were statements in which he found inherent folly. The idea of being above "study[ing] their practice" indicates one is foolishly believing they "must be doing perfect", which is "silly". And his experience had taught him that helping students "understand the importance of taking responsibility and acting responsibly…[was] not done most effectively through detention." Here, I believe he illustrates a common occurrence in our discourse around difficulty: we sometimes dwell in ideas we do not even believe, perhaps because it is one place we find a voice for the difficulty.

- *Did you hear?*
- *You know what I don't like?*
- *I don't care what you think.*

This teacher's explanation included an acknowledgement that some things are "never followed with anything good," in fact, they are often "nasty". He also saw his last item on the list as a cop-out, usually used somewhat jokingly in the classroom as a means of avoiding explanation of the "why" for an activity. He admitted that his students questioning him in this way was "legitimate", despite being irksome.

Words to Use. The following words and phrases are those that participants recognized as being particularly helpful to their teaching practices.

- *individual needs*

- *formative assessment*

- *engage*

- *from the student's point of view*

- *positive learning environment*

- *resonance: pushing students at the right time to achieve new levels of success; knowing when to push and when to wait*

- *genuine concern*

- *saying "students" instead of "kids"*

These came with no explanation, not that any was necessary. I was apparent that this teacher was professionally focused—very intent on better practice.

- *You can do this!*

- *Which would work best for you?*

- *What can I do to help?*

This post seemed to deal with a trifecta of difficulty by focusing on the self (the teacher), the student, and colleagues. She saw these utterances as ways of providing "pep talk", "maintaining autonomy", and letting "good things" happen by "get[ting] beyond my bubble of wants in my school or classroom."

- *Good Job*

- *Can I help?*

- *I'm impressed!*

This post also concerned itself with seeing beyond oneself. In her explanation, she expressed desire to praise "both students and colleagues…[to] bring a positive influence into my classroom", to change her foci of concern, and to "let those I associate with know that I am aware of them and like to be around them." Interestingly, she had previously expressed concern that her peers did not seem interested in getting to know her. Perhaps this led to a realization that she, too, had not been as professionally warm as she could have been.

- *Let me think about that for a while.*

- *Let's work this out together.*

- *I apologize.*

This post struck me as particularly humble. His explanations acknowledged that for both teacher and student, there was great benefit to "stop[ing] and think[ing] for a while." He continued with along this vein of measured response with the idea that most school problems "are brought about because people don't express what they really feel effectively", so "talk[ing] things out before acting excessively" was the quickest road to resolution. He saw a need for his words to help relationships, "and relationships are what school and, indeed, our lives are all about."

- *Do you know what we should do next time?*

- *I've got an idea.*

According to this contributor, "'Next time' assumes that we don't give up on anything", so it's a "great way to start [something]." Rather than verbally and literally trashing something that did not work as planned, a question can promote "ideas" and ways to "make things better". Ideas were important to him. Concerning his second

sentence, he expressed sadness about people "who reach a point in their lives where there's just no ideas; there's nothing left to try."

In considering all posts, I think it is significant that although we did not get to the intended fifth discussion and despite not having a truly measurable chance to practice appreciative inquiry, the ability for the dialogue to shift with the influence of a positive focus was profound. Even when finding their words to lose, the participants were looking to the ways the loss could impact their teaching and their persona. And many were looking to fill the verbal void with proactive words and ideas. The entire thread became an opportunity to reframe the vision they had of themselves, of their professionalism, their interactions, and their realities. I felt like it was possible to see the articulations as building blocks for a more promising future.

From this research, it appears that there is a very emotionally and professionally healthy benefit to accepting the difficult realities of our jobs—the whole idea of not dwelling on them in a way that depletes our energies and our passions. There is also, however, something to be said for focusing on these realities in order to enact change. Perhaps it is a balancing act, a matter of 'choosing your battles' (a war metaphor I hear a lot in the profession, especially from administrators). This conversation seemed to be an exercise in finding that balance and in being 'choosy'.

The discussion also touched on how we can sometimes overstate in teaching. It is an emotional profession. We get wrapped up in how much we care about our students' success, and we can lose perspective, even lose sight of what is realistic and reasonable. A more measured and humble—even teachable—voice is necessary to reach our optimum effectiveness.

Post-Forum Interviews and Conversations. It seemed to me that as I went around to verify the content of the now-missing first forum discussion, I was greeted with an interesting openness. In this context, more participants were willing to divulge specific incidents, people, and/or or groups who spoke of teaching or used language in conversation with the teacher in ways that were memorable and sometimes difficult for the participant.

Over and over, the perceived opinion of the public was brought to bear. "The public thinks that we're underworked and overpaid," was one such utterance. That same contributor, however, believed that teachers help their public perception by being involved in large volunteer projects (camps, Summer Games, sporting clubs, charity building events) during summer months. Seeing teachers in this context oft reminds others of our "slack" summers, which can "annoy" people, but will ultimately be positive because we're willing to help.

In spoken conversations, one contributor was eager to explain that she simply did not "let" negativity into her life and profession. This word choice indicated an interesting notion that detrimental influences have to be 'allowed' in order to affect one, that one could simply refuse 'permission' to the influence. Even in an unavoidably bad situation, she claimed she could always find a "bright spot". And she believed that her staff "as a whole" "definitely" tried to do the same thing.

But it seemed there was no denying that we can be our own worst enemies. One contributor told the sad story of a neighbor who commented that the participant "seems to be the only teacher that likes teaching." Likewise, another participant who had also previously been quite adamantly concentrated on the positive, reluctantly admitted that

there were individuals who "dwelled in their negativity", but that those were the people with whom one was likely to "disassociate". She did not really see those people as 'counting' or mattering. She noted, too, that these very people are not likely people to participate in our project.

Family stories seemed to be touchstones. One teacher has a brother who did not graduate from high school and has "done very, very well". Consequently, he thinks that school did very little for him, and is often belittling of his brother's career choice. Another spoke of how difficult it can be to endure criticism of teachers, schools, or the division from extended family members. She explained that it would not be acceptable for her to malign their professions or work place is such a way.

I was told very frankly that if I was interested in pursuing further research in this same avenue, I could concentrate simply on professional development (PD). Currently in our division, there is "a lot of negativity" concerning the new cohorts and professional learning community (PLC) initiative. Teachers were feeling "very threatened" (in that they were being "forced" to share things and felt much too "open to critique") and their rhetoric surrounding this work was reflective of their deflated attitudes. The discourse used by the project participants to explain this phenomenon also seemed to reveal some interesting attitudes toward the "higher-ups", that if such "critique" were to happen, it would not be fair or helpful.

Usually, however, the conversations turned to all that was best about the profession, and at the core of that are the students. One contributor used the word "amazing" repeatedly to characterize the phenomenal feat that we manage to teach "as many students as we do as well as we do", despite our professional diversity and how

impossible it is to please all the stakeholders in education. While any profession has its detractors, teaching is unique in its sheer volume of public context and scrutiny because of the tens or hundreds of personal contacts per day that are involved in the profession. Often while trying to please one group, "you are ticking off" another. So negativity is unavoidable because we are open to critique and anger. Learning to temper that and to acknowledge that "even with all that, we still manage to do our jobs" is "amazing".

One participant relayed a defining narrative about realizing what mattered in the profession. After being "raised in an environment of negativism – I think a lot of it went with the age. You improved people by correcting what they did wrong – so you were vigilant in finding everything they did wrong and telling them to change it and now," and after experiencing school from a place of constant correction as a student, she bought into a theory of classroom management she picked up in her university training that if you could not intrinsically motivate students, you could create an environment in which "the students were so afraid of the teacher that they would behave and do what was required of them." Her teaching, parenting, and "who knows what else" were altered by a PD activity in which the presenter "taught us to always look for the positive, and ignore the negative…It is just as easy to come into a classroom and look for those students who are doing what you tell them and comment on that as it is to look for the negative and reward those students with attention." I found her narrative particularly poignant as it located the heart of why we teach—the student—and demonstrated how our choice of focus impacts not only our professional reality, but our students' learning reality, as well. She also illuminated potential with the remark that "teaching has become so much more fun since discovering this!"

Chapter Five: Emergent Themes and Conclusion

In the work of this project, there developed three clear themes that seemed to run like undercurrents through the responses, discussions, and conversations. I call them the *struggle to be perceived as a professional*, *ideology as less than ideal*, and *the sphere of personal control.*

The Struggle to be Perceived as a Professional

The discourse studied was rife with references to professionalism, especially in the context of concern over how teaching is viewed or not viewed as a profession. Phrases such as, "Where else do you see or hear a profession looking to…," 'In the business sector," and "I don't think any other profession gets the amount of…," popped up often in reference to the difficulties the participants experienced, especially concerning the ways that the public characterizes teachers: "The public does not seem to see us as a profession as they do doctors, lawyers, accountants, etc. Apart from a few lawyer jokes, I don't hear a lot of negative jargon directed toward these professions."

It is a common practice to compare ourselves to other professions, and one area where there would appear to be a lack of alignment is the respect the teacher perceives he/she receives as a professional. One contributor told the story of a doctor once commenting about how teachers are overpaid. She then made comparisons between the medical and educational professions, including hours "put in", years of education, and even the "impact on people's lives" both professions have. "I, too, can make decisions that can be of great benefit or catastrophe," she wrote. In these conversations, it appeared that no single participant wished to tear down any other profession; each just wanted to be elevated to the same level, to be "accept[ed] as a fellow professional," and as a

collective group, that is what we feel our skills and our tireless work for the benefit of society warrant.

Comments that seem inherently questioning of our professionalism are often the most difficult. Even the chatter about our holidays would denote that our worth comes not from our skills and knowledge, but from the time we log. Perhaps our profession is unique in that, as one contributor pointed out, most everyone has been in a classroom as a student, observing teachers, and that often leads to the belief that anyone could do what they see being done.

This project set out with a core concern about the individual's professional identity. It was believed that the perception (or lack thereof) of teachers as professionals as expressed in the language about, around, and in education was harmful to this identity. The discussions and discourse confirm that, but also serve to provide the example of a group of teachers (and I would submit, a sample group, not unlike thousands of others) who still soldiered on in the quest for professionalism in productive and meaningful ways. The discourse may knock us down from time to time, but it does not defeat us or define us.

Ideology as Less Than Ideal

Discussion about professional development becoming an area of difficulty was also common and insightful. It could be assumed that the type of teachers who would willingly volunteer their time and voices to this project are not the type of professionals to take their professional development lightly. Each proved to be, in my estimation, a thoughtful practitioner of the craft, intent on improvement and concerned with the value of research as an informative tool. Yet each commented on issues and difficulties related

to professional development, citing it as one area in which the language was perceived as harmful, even demeaning or deflating.

This was seen in the discussion that evolved around "buzz words in education". As the original posting read, "Depending on the research climate and the current issues, the vocabulary amongst educators, test publishers, researchers, administrators, and other stakeholders is continually changing, and the irony of some of these buzz words is that they are used without fully understanding what they actually mean."

It is difficult to keep up to all the new and improved practices and theories. Consider comments such as, "My struggle is sifting through the new ideas and directions from my local administrators and divisional superintendents." It is my observation that if because of that struggle or because we have decided that something is not appropriate for our particular classroom situation, we are not practicing or engaged in the latest thing, we can sometimes feel shamed.

It would appear that amongst the teachers surveyed here, this seemed to undermine their self-perception as professionals. It was expressed, "I feel driven to be constantly aligning myself with this ideology or that directive." For most teachers, his is a reality that "hinder[s]" their "ability to teach".

As a new teacher, I was glad for anything I was introduced to because it was something when I had nothing. Now that I have a full curriculum, some experience, and some favorite tactics and activities, I often feel threatened by the new stuff, like I am being told that what I do—even who I am—is not good enough. I have to wonder, though, is that really the message, or am I just choosing to take it that way? Am I wanting to stay comfortable when I should maybe stretch myself?

Most teachers, I would argue, are similar to the participants in the study who are certainly not opposed to or afraid of professional development. "I am not against many of the principles and ideas associated with these buzz words," wrote one. I just find that there seems to be so much research suggesting this method or that method of teaching is superior that if I'm not careful, I can get lost in trying to adapt it all."

There is also the implication in the way that much of PD is presented that we are 'obviously' NOT doing the new thing already. Yet, it often seems that ideology and its practical applications are renamed or repackaged, so that (for example) all the things I am told should be happening in my classroom if I am concerned with developing students' critical thinking skills, are actually already happening because I have been concerned with developing metacognitive skills. It can even feel sometimes like we are not given credit for the years of university training we have, like every concept in education is new, and we have been fumbling in the dark with however we have been functioning in relation to that concept in the past.

There is also the really sticky issue of PD being imposed, rather than springing naturally from the needs of our classrooms. In discussions, especially private face-to-face chats, there was a sense of acrimony around PD that was initiated at the division level. Many felt that "Central Office" had little knowledge about what was already happening in our classrooms and/or that they seemed intent on forwarding an idea without consultation with stakeholders (especially teachers) about what was needed.

The "only time" one participant was met with "truly negative" language—what he saw as language that actually stopped his ideas and excitement—was when he was "met with 'No'" from central office. When asked to clarify if this was no to an idea or

was negativity about teaching practice, he explained that his perception was that there was an educational agenda already planned for at this level, and anything that did not fall in that purview was summarily dismissed.

Another contributor spoke to how teachers generally are "excitable", liking new things and ideas. We are naturally "interested in things", but the allure of new is wearing thin with increased realization that rarely is a teacher given the opportunity to "see through" an idea before another one comes along that either negates or precludes. Participants recognized that there is a population of teachers who have decided that they can ignore a new idea or initiative because its fleeting nature means that they may never be required to account for its integration. "Next year, it will be something else."

The Sphere of Personal Control

During this study, the posts were often structured in an interesting way. Contributors would answer the prompting question directly; they would list, story, and/or lament the difficult words or situations; they would explain what was so frustrating, difficult, or unnerving; and then as a final step, they would do something that always impressed me. They would question themselves, or they would draw a conclusion that gave them comfort, or they would share how they dealt with that particular difficulty.

It seemed like the participants were already doing what I had hoped the project would help them do: they were making sense of difficulty, and they were stretching themselves professionally, adapting where necessary and standing more firm in their resolves where appropriate. They were using their knowledge, skills,

and attitudes to create and recreate themselves in progressively productive ways. They were being professionals.

From the very first posts, to the final conversations, and even into my ongoing interactions with my colleagues well over a year from beginning this work, I am encouraged to find that most teachers see themselves as the biggest variable in developing a professional identity. It seems that most have already developed their own strategies for coping with the demeaning language that is a part of the job.

It was a relief to discover that while the perception of teachers as professionals may be in public jeopardy, and while teachers perceptions of how they are perceived can cause frustration and disillusionment, the reality is still that we persist in doing what we do in ways that satisfy the rigorous standards we set for ourselves and that meet the satisfaction—if not approval—of our peers, parents, administrators, students, and all other stakeholders. In my mind, this is the very definition of professionalism.

Closing Thoughts and Next Steps

At the conclusion of this work, there are many things I have learned about my professional peers. As has hopefully become clear in my analysis of their conversations, I have a very profound respect for who they are, what they represent, and how I can learn from them.

As concerns the actual crafting of the project, there are a few final notes.

In consideration of the online forum itself, it was more cumbersome for participants than I anticipated. Admittedly, it was frustrating to me when a participant remarked in conversation that there was not a lot of discussion happening on the forum, but very few

of the participants (and not one of them consistently) posted responses to follow-up queries or commented on others' posts like they were encouraged. It is not clear if this was a problem with the forum or the online environment, a question of time constraints on each teacher, or a disinterest in the topic(s). It is clear, however, that I would rethink that method for future research. It was also expressed by one of the participants that larger sample, the chance to hear from people outside of our division would be ideal. I agree, and if time and circumstance allow, that would be an option for further research.

I have a deeper appreciation for the moral character and courage it takes in a professional to share stories—even just words—of difficulty. The realm of sensitive research (Cohen et al, 2007) is relatively new to me. According to Lee (1993, as cited by Cohen et al), sensitive research falls into three main areas, one of which is "intrusive threat (probing in to areas which are 'private, stressful or sacred')" (p.120). Those who volunteered for this project were subjected to this threat, and I cannot say enough about the respect I have for those willing to do this. In collecting and interpreting their contributions, I have endeavored for follow the advice that a researcher "consider [sensitive research] to be far from a neat, clean, tidy, unproblematic and neutral process, but to regard it as shot through with actual and potential sensitivities" (Cohen et al, 2007, p. 131).

I find that at the conclusion of this that my eyes may have been bigger than my stomach. Unfortunately, I feel like because of this, I got a lot of vegetables (valuable, even nutritive, information about discourse in education), which is great, but I was not able to fit in dessert (a viable exercise in appreciative inquiry). Considering Bushe's (2000) claim that "The key data collection innovation of appreciative inquiry is the

collection of people's stories of something at its best, [and]…these stories are collectively discussed in order to create new, generative ideas or images that aid in developmental change of the collectivity of discussing them" (p. 99), I wish there had been the opportunity to move into collecting these stories from my participants.

A far more extended study would be necessary to accomplish the entire scope of what I set out to do, to end with a complete appreciative inquiry, rather than a small foray into the idea of it. Decidedly, that is where I would like to head next.

My most pressing thoughts, and indeed, my most lasting impressions from this work center on a new-found intellectual and professional humility. I almost feel sheepish over my initial bravado in this work. I had an idea, and I thought I had an answer to a problem. My work with the participants here has shown me that the profession is full of people who have already found answers. The teacher, I believe, is by nature an action-oriented person. While we all have to deal with difficulty, very few choose to dwell there and to wallow in the mire of negative discourse. Most are able to see the difficulty and adapt. Most have already found coping mechanisms for their struggles with demeaning language. Most have weathered the struggles with healthy professional identities intact, and none of them need my strategies. I am glad I shared them, as I believe any good practitioner should be willing to do, but I recognize that my colleagues have done so many other interesting and profound things by way of developing their teaching identities through language and action that I my ideas are just a drop in the bucket.

Now that I have dropped into that bucket, I hope to dwell there. My next step, should there be one, is actually going to be a swim. I wish to swim in the words, strategies, and realities that teachers have beautifully and sometimes unintentionally

created. I wish to see and hear and write the stories of teachers who have found the better practice I strive for in my theory of discourse awareness.

Perhaps I am like Maggiasano (2008), in that this work has "heightened my awareness of what goes on around me and has facilitated professional growth that helps bring me full circle in living, telling, reliving, only to return to the retelling once again" (14). From here, I hope to return to the retelling of something, of teaching and professionalism. I hope to articulate it at its best.

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