

GROWING INTO THE SIZE OF YOUR FEET: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY INTO THE ROLE  
EARLY EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES PLAY THROUGHOUT LIFE

A Dissertation

by

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This dissertation meets the standards for scope and quality of  
Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi and is hereby approved.

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## ABSTRACT

American education is situated in the space between politics and policies on one hand and scholarly voices on the other. The latter think about the curriculum and the purpose of school in terms of what human beings are capable of; the former set up curricular praxis to meet behavioral objectives in a one-size-fits-all approach. This negates the notion that education is the journey of the self (Huebner, 1993/1999). As such, the true measure of the curriculum lies in how people live their lives after graduation (MacIntyre, 2002). Thus, this study explored how people interpret their early educational experiences and the role these played throughout their lives.

This is a qualitative study employing narrative inquiry. Narrative inquiry is based on the idea that people make meaning of their lives by thinking of experiences in form of stories. These are synthesized with focus on the meanings assigned to experiences and reflect how a person understands him/herself. Purposeful sampling was employed to choose three participants in their 70s who perceived of themselves as having lived personally and professionally successful lives. Data was analyzed through diverse coding cycles and represented in a combination of analytical narratives and arts-based pieces. Trustworthiness was established through member checks, peer reviews and continuous reflections on the researcher's subjective interpretations of the data.

Four overarching concepts emerged from the participants' narratives: self-awareness arises in the space between one's social existence and one's aloneness, tension is a necessary means for becoming, agency is a prerequisite for intentionality, and learning is a process of self-awakening.

These findings contribute answers to questions about the purpose of school and what it means to be an educated person. The findings show that an educated person is one who understands him/herself as a creator of the world. Thus, curriculum theory and praxis must enable those engaged in curriculum to critique existing conditions and to imagine possibilities for the local and global communities they are part of. Then learning becomes the process of awakening, and education bears the possibility of a social existence characterized by freedom, which is a fundamental aspect of the purpose of school.

## DEDICATION

Für Monika Varbelow  
and because of Tom and Sydney.

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*“The need for reason is not inspired by the quest for truth but by the quest for meaning. And truth and meaning are not the same.”*

(Arendt, 1978, p. 15)

## **Chapter I: Introduction**

This dissertation illuminates how people make meaning of experiences, the way this process influences how they make decisions and, ultimately, how they live their lives. In this study I focused on the role early educational experiences play in this process. Dewey (1934) told us that anything we know, we know through experience. This gives rise to the question how educational experiences contribute to a person’s understanding of self not only at the time these experiences were made but throughout life as they are iteratively interpreted. In other words, in which ways do early educational experiences influence how a person perceives of him/herself and makes decisions about his/her life long after graduation?

### **A Long, Long Time Ago – School Stories**

Two years ago I was introduced to a group of men in their 60s and 70s who have in common two fundamental aspects: (a) their early educational experiences, those made between kindergarten and 12<sup>th</sup> grade, were characterized by academic and/or social difficulties and (b) today they are successful people, both personally and professionally. Their sometimes social difficulties with their peers in those years arose from their academic difficulties, which were the result of what is known today as phenomena like dyslexia, dyscalculia, and strengths in multiple intelligences other than the mathematical-logical or linguistic one (Gardner, 1993). I met these men through their narratives, which were a collection of individual memoirs about an educational experience that they selected as influential. They titled it *Schools Stories Project* (Rose & Griffith, n.d.). The collection is introduced with a foreword in which Arthur Danto, one



of the authors, expresses wonder regarding the fact that they survived school and became the people who they are now. Danto (in Rose & Schilling, 2004) wrote,

Something went right in every case, the original choices<sup>1</sup> were made, whatever the frictions with the institutions we all came through. And we all managed to come through, schooled as well as educated. What a miracle. (n.p.)

I consider them professionally successful people because they have spent their lives deeply engaged in a discipline of their interest. Their engagement with the field they chose has led them to become highly respected among their peers. I also consider them personally successful people, evidenced to me through their outlook on life as reflected in their memoirs and in personal conversations. When I engage in their oral or written narratives, I am left with a sense of contentment they have for their lives.

What stood out to me was how these men, as they reflected on their lives, went back half a century to make meaning of the experiences they made between grammar and high school. I reflected on my own school experiences and wondered what role they played in my life and my understanding of self. For me, these experiences were framed by the ideological and political doctrines of a socialist government because they took place in East Berlin during the Cold War. This meant that in school, I was told what to think and why to think it, who I was supposed to be and what my life's goals were. I was taught not to doubt but to believe. It was my mother who raised me to think for myself and to wonder if whatever people state or claim is based on an agenda that might not be my own. Had it not been for her, I might have experienced a similar kind of identity crisis that overcame many East Germans when the Berlin Wall fell in 1989. This

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<sup>1</sup> *Original choice* is a term introduced by Sartre (Sartre, 1956). It refers to a basic existentialist decision made at one point in life, which determines all future decisions. However, it is important to note that Sartre pointed out that the original choice does not happen in an instant but repeatedly and over time as one becomes more aware of oneself with each choice.

identity crisis was caused by an almost total loss of direction and purpose. But because my mother raised me to question institutionalized truths and to make decisions based on my own thinking, I was prepared to live my life without the predetermined structure imposed upon me externally by a system that no longer existed. I believe this is what enabled me to decide to come to the United States in 1993 as an exchange teacher. This was a brave move for an East German who grew up thinking of this country like Americans might think of Planet Mars: it exists, but I will never actually go there. I never left the States, except for visits home. I spent the first 14 years teaching high school English and the past eight as an instructor of curriculum and instruction for pre-service teachers at a South Texas university. My professional life has always been that of an educator, and in this way I consider myself a successful person as well.

Like the participants of the *School Stories Project*, I wondered whether I became the person I perceive myself to be today despite or because of my early educational experiences. I also wondered whether there were other people with similar questions. Parents send their children to school to get an education with the hope that it enables them to live meaningful and content lives. Based on my own experiences, I believe that I can live a meaningful life only if I have selected purpose for myself. This means that I must be able to create goals for my life and design plans to achieve them. In order for that to be possible, education must enable me to gain self-knowledge and understand myself and my place in the bigger picture, which comprises of the local and the global worlds I live in.

Fully aware that these are highly subjective views about the purpose of education, which derived from my personal experiences, I began to wonder how other people made meaning of their educational experiences in terms of their perception of self and their lives. At this point, the narratives of the participants of the *School Stories Project* seemed like a gift to me. I decided to

find out if one of them was interested in exploring the questions from the original project further. I was lucky and found an interested participant. The project that evolved shaped into a pilot study in which I explored how the participant made sense of his social and academic difficulties in the years between grammar and high school. The major outcome of the pilot study was that the nature of the experiences is secondary to their interpretations. This finding presented the intellectual seed for the current research project.

I then wanted to find more participants from among the 18 men, but they represented a specific ethnic group, namely that of White males. While I knew I wanted to continue working with this participant, I felt that an ethnic characteristic presented a limitation to me for which I was not ready to plan. Once again my subjectivities led me to what might be perceived as the naïve and romantic attempt to search for some sort of “universal truth” about what it means to be human. So in order to broaden the scope of this study, I decided to search for participants who didn’t share these two characteristics, but whose early educational experiences also occurred about 50 years ago and whom I perceive to have lived personally and professionally successful lives.

And so the parameters for my dissertation project were established. I am cognizant of the fact that this study is grounded in my deeply rooted constructionist views. I believe that a researcher’s quest for knowledge is an authentic endeavor. This means that his/her areas of interest usually derive from personal questions or insights that are the result of the way the researcher exists in the world, or to use an analogy, of his/her individual set of lenses through which s/he sees and understands the world. As a constructionist, my quest for knowledge is driven not by questions about what the world is like but by how people perceive it.

## **Rationale**

The conceptual framework for this study is curriculum theory because its focus is on educational experiences, which curriculum theory explores. The theoretical lens is narrativity as it is applied to make meaning of experiences.

## **Issues in Curriculum Theory**

Educational experiences have always been at the center of curriculum thought (Dewey, 1938; Greene, 1988; Pinar, 2004), albeit in distinctly different ways throughout the history of the field. The history of curriculum theory, which will be elaborated more thoroughly in Chapter II, can be divided into three moments: developing curriculum 1918 - 1969, reconceptualization 1970 – 1980, and contemporary curriculum theory 1981 – present. During the first moment, Bobbitt (1918) and Tyler (1949) suggested to design specific experiences that prepare children for the “adult world.” Their business-oriented ends-means approach to educational experiences stood in contrast to Dewey’s (1938) progressivism, which focused on the quality of educational experiences made through social interactions. For Dewey (1938) the purpose of school was not to prepare students for later life but to understand the experiences made in school as part of life. During the period of reconceptualization, the focus of educational experiences shifted from content in the form of a specific body of knowledge to understanding what role educational experience play in students’ lives. A fundamental aspect of this paradigm shift was to view education as the journey of the self (Huebner, 1993/1999). This gave rise to a scholarly discourse about understanding the self in terms of one’s existence within the relations with Other and world. This idea has been furthered in the contemporary scholarship of curriculum theory, which is understood as the interdisciplinary study of educational experiences (Pinar, 2004). Pinar (2008) explained, “Through the curriculum and our experience of it, we choose what to

remember about the past, what to believe about the present, what to hope for and fear about the future” (p. 6). Hence, the purpose of contemporary curriculum theory is to understand the processes by which early educational experiences influence how a person becomes who s/he is. However, as the review of the literature in Chapter II will show, current curriculum praxis is reminiscent of the first moment, developing curriculum, and hardly reflects the idea of understanding education as the journey of the self.

### **Narrativity as a Lens to Make Meaning of Experiences**

People make sense of their world by interpreting their experiences. Dewey (1934) asserted that life happens in and because of a person’s interactions with his/her environment. At the same time, Bruner (1991) stated that meaning-making is the principal function of the mind. Hence, making personal meaning for one’s life means to make meaning from social interactions. One way to explore the relation between meaning-making, self-understanding and purpose is through the lens of narrativity. Narrativity is situated in the constructionist paradigm and based on the idea that people lead storied lives (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). This means that people make meaning of their experiences by thinking of them as stories that have a point (Phoenix, 2008; White, 1980). By electing how an experience fits with other experiences, people create individual narratives; by deciding how their individual experiences make sense in relation to each other, they create their personal grand narrative. This story reflects who a person creates and perceives him/herself to be, which influences his/her decision-making (Bruner, 1991). In this way, narrativity has the potential to explore the processes by which a person develops an understanding of self. An important aspect of illuminating these processes through the lens of narrativity is the fact that it takes into consideration a person’s relational existence. For example, sharing individual narratives with those of others illuminates how people’s stories fit with those

of others. When sharing narratives, one reinterprets experiences anew as one learns how another person makes meaning. MacIntyre (2002) explained that seeing the lives of others and one's own as embodying narratives is to understand each individual life as an answer to the question "What is the ultimate human good?" (p. 10). To think about the meaning of "human good" represents one aspect of what it means to be human. An important notion of this understanding is that it is relational rather than individualistic, which potentially gives insights into how to prevent the rampant individualism and self-centered search for success Huebner (1975/1999) and Greene (1988) warned of. This seems particularly significant given the fact that those are characteristics often used to describe the Millennials – the generation of children born around the turn of the century (Hoover, 2009).

Aoki (1992/2005a) furthered the idea of relational self-understanding by describing education as the most human of all endeavors because at its core are the relationships between teacher and students. In this way, their meeting is a coming together of individual narratives each of which can illuminate the narratives of others, which can be understood better because of it. Aoki (1992a/2005) asserted that removing these relationships from the center of education and replacing them with a ridged curriculum is to dehumanize education because it denies teachers and students their ways of knowing. These ways of knowing are the result of an individual's personal practical knowledge (Clandinin, 1985). Clandinin (1985) explained that experience is a form of knowledge whose meaning is derived from a person's experiential history. It is the result of reflecting upon and iteratively interpreting one's prior experiences. For educational praxis, this means that teaching and learning is the process by which teacher and students make meaning together as they interpret lived experiences. In this way, one aspect of thinking about education as the journey of the self is to become aware of how one person's ways

of knowing are dis/similar from those of others. This awareness includes an understanding of how s/he has come to know in these particular ways and what these ways are. This is a fundamental prerequisite to becoming aware of the possibilities and limitations that one's ways of knowing entail. A key curriculum questions in the United States is *what knowledge is of most worth* (Pinar, 2008). Examining this question through the lens of narrativity opens the possibility to think about knowledge not as a prestige to be measured in degrees but rather in terms of kinds of knowing to be measured in qualities (Aoki, 1992b/2005): by understanding how I don't know, I can know differently. As a result, I can know better.

### **Research Purpose and Questions**

The concept of narrativity has been used for more than two decades to understand educational experiences. In the 1990s it was employed to explore the autobiographies of teachers in an effort to bridge the gap between theory and the knowledge offered by practitioners (Pinar et al., 1995). This research illuminates how personal practical knowledge (Clandinin, 1985) affects classroom structures and teachers' interactions with students (Johnson, 1989). In the past decade, an impressive body of scholarship has emerged using narrativity to understand how students make meaning of their classroom experiences and how these influence their understanding of self. This research explores how students form a sense of self by reflecting on educational experiences (Han, 2009; Huber, 2008; Moon, 2011; Simon-Shohan, 2005; Vincent, 2000). The knowledge gained from these studies adds valuable insights to the relationship between classroom experiences and relational self-understanding as these experiences are still ongoing.

However, MacIntyre (2002) reminded us that the true measure of education is how students live their lives long after they have crossed the graduation stage. MacIntyre (2002) said,

The test of curriculum is what our children become, not only in the workplace but also in being able to think about themselves and their society imaginatively and constructively, able to use the resources provided by the past in order to envisage and implement new possibilities. (p. 15)

This means that research must explore the role educational experiences play in later life in terms of a person's understanding of self and world and the way in which s/he uses this understanding to make choices. A much more limited body of research exists examining these processes and relationships. A few studies explore how specific groups of women interpret the role early educational experiences play in their self-understanding as adults (German, 2008; Gombach, 2006; Mageehon, 2004; Ndivi-Hill, 2008). Additionally, Reider (2011) examines how GED recipients make meaning of their educational experiences during adulthood. Ponce (2002) situates his studies within the Chicano culture while Penland (2007) explores the narratives of Native Americans who attended school in the 1950s to answer the same question. While all of these studies explore the relationship between early educational experiences and a person's self-understanding in later life, each chooses an ethnographic focus for exploration in order to draw practical conclusions regarding particular groups of students.

In order to fill the gap in the existing scholarship, there is need for research that explores these relationships not with focus on culture or gender characteristics but instead with focus on the relation between the nature of the experiences and how they are interpreted and influence a person's understanding of self and decision-making processes. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore how participants who conceive of themselves as having lived personally and professionally successful lives interpret their early educational experiences and the role these played in their lives. Specific research questions guiding this study are:



1. In what ways do participants describe their early educational experiences?
2. How do participants interpret their early educational experiences?
3. What role do their interpretations of early educational experiences play in their personal grand narrative?

### **Operational Definitions**

For the purpose of this study, the following definitions will apply:

*Early educational experiences* – experiences made between kindergarten and 12<sup>th</sup> grade in and outside of school, with and without school personnel and peers.

*Professional success* – job or career satisfaction and fulfillment (Heslin, 2005). For the purpose of this study, indicators for professional success are participants' sense of personal engagement, meaning and autonomy in terms of their professional lives (Olsen & Shultz, 2013).

*Personal success* – contentment with relationships and life (Citi, 2013). For the purpose of this study, indicators for personal success are participants' perceptions of contentment with self and satisfaction with live. These can be evidenced by accomplishments that participants point out as meaningful and important and through positive comments on aspects of the relations in which they exist.

*Personal grand narrative* - a person's story of self that reflects how he understands him/herself by weaving together the stories of his/her life into a meaningful whole that reflects who s/he is and influences his/her decision-making (Bruner, 1991).

### **Methodological Framework**

This study is based on the notions of interpretivism and situated in the framework of constructionism. The methodology employed for data collection and data analysis is narrative inquiry.

## **Theory Statement**

This study is grounded in interpretivism, which “attempts to understand and explain human and social reality” (Crotty, 2004, p. 66 f.). Interpretivism developed out of the work of the German philosopher Immanuel Kant and was later expanded by Max Weber, Thomas Schwandt and others (Glesne, 2011). Kant’s philosophy is based on idealism, which claims that the world cannot exist outside the human mind (Weber, 1949/2011). The underlying epistemology for interpretivism is constructionism. According to Crotty (2004), constructionism focuses on the idea that people construct their own meanings. Since a researcher’s questions are based on his/her assumptions regarding truth and reality, interpretivist researchers are interested in understanding someone’s experiences and attempt to explore those in an in-depth manner. In this research paradigm, ontology and epistemology are closely intertwined since the former is approached as “the way one understands the nature of a person’s reality based on multiple social interactions” (Crotty, 2004, p. 43). People create their reality when they interact with other people. These interactions take place in social situations. The way human beings make sense of their experiences evolves from these interactions and situations.

The basis for one’s meaning-making process is one’s reflectivity. It encompasses the way human beings interpret their interactions with others. Crotty (2004) claimed that “all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context” (p. 43 f.). Therefore, meaning is neither objective, since it does not exist outside the human mind, nor subjective because it is not created by the mind and then superimposed upon an outside reality. People construct meaning as they engage with the world and make sense of it. Crotty’s claims give rise to the question of

whether there is a reality as such, e.g. one truth, or if reality is the result of individual perception and therefore existent in multiple truths. This question is approached from different vantage points in the natural and the social sciences. Crotty (2004) stated that the former are nomothetic, concerned with laws and consistencies, whereas the latter are ideographic and concerned with the individual case.

Max Weber (1949/2011) distinguished the two approaches as being interested in *Verstehen* (understanding) and being concerned with *Erklären* (explaining). Shils and Finch (2011) described Weber's struggle with what he referred to as the *Methodenstreit* (fight of methods): Weber and his colleagues were "perplexed trying to reconcile human initiative with the search for stable regularities of conduct" (p. xvi). This *Methodenstreit* is the result of different epistemologies, which generate different interests in phenomena and different research questions. This notion rests on the idea that human action is accessible to us through processes that are not applicable to natural phenomena (Antonio & Sica, 2011). For example, we understand human action through reliving (*Nacherleben*), which enables us to interpret experiences in contexts of meaning (*Sinnzusammenhänge*) (Weber, 1949/2011). This emphasizes that human reality is contingent and multifaceted and cannot be approached with the goal to comprehend one total theory. The way one can begin to understand fragments of its many facets is by reliving others' stories. Weber's idea was furthered by Alfred Schultz (in Goldkuhl, 2012) who claimed that any scientific knowledge in regard to social sciences is grounded in the researcher's understanding of that knowledge. This understanding is brought about as a result of a personal, reflective meaning-making process. Goldkuhl (2012) stated, "The natural world of matter is meaningless until the scientist imposes his meaning-constructs upon it" (p. 3). Goldkuhl (2012) continued by explaining that social reality is co-constructed by shared

subjective meanings. Hence, the purpose of interpretivist research is to explore how humans construct their realities, give meaning to them and make sense of experiences.

## **Methodology**

The methodology employed for this study is narrative inquiry. Narrative inquiry is based on the idea that human beings lead storied lives (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). The power of stories consists in the fact that the reader identifies with them in most individual ways. Any narrative, fictional or nonfictional, allows the reader to elicit meaning from it based on his/her unique prior experiences and knowledge. In this way, s/he connects the narrative with his/her own story. Griffith (2008) asserted that all discourse takes the shape of story as our personal narratives graft onto the narratives of others. In this way, the individual stories replace the grand story of all human experience and history. The point Griffith (2008) makes is that the notion of one grand story is not a useful concept because it diminishes the importance of the individual stories by totalizing them in order to fit into a bigger picture that is external to the narrator. This bigger picture looks different for every individual depending on how s/he reflects upon his/her experiences and history. Narrative inquiry allowed me to explore how the individual stories of the participants' lives connect to their individual grand narrative, which in this case is their perception of self.

There are three vantage points from which a story or narrative is looked at: temporality, sociality and place (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Temporality supposes who we are results from who we were in the past, which projects into the future because who we will be evolves from who we are in the present. Sociality entails an individual's environment, e.g. his contemporaries as well as his attitudes, feelings and values. Place pertains to the effect locale has on an individual's perception. Each of these three vantage points is located in the tension

between the researcher's and the participants' individual temporality, sociality and place. These tensions open up a space to construct social realities.

Narrative inquiry offered me an opportunity to understand how the participants perceived their early school experiences and the way they made sense of them. In an attempt to explore their narratives from the three vantage points described above, I collected their stories in interviews, conversations and e-mail correspondences. In addition, I used written memoirs and participant-selected objects as data sources. Other data collection methods involved photos and other obtainable documents as well as observations.

### **Limitations and Possibilities**

Each well-crafted study offers possibilities for the human search for knowledge and is defined by certain limitations. Both are caused by the design and its implementation: the frameworks employed to explore a phenomenon simultaneously illuminate it while confining the possibilities of a study to the parameters of the frameworks. Both possibilities and limitations of this study are outlined below.

#### **Limitations**

This study is situated in the qualitative research paradigm, which means that it aimed to understand a phenomenon in depth. As is the case in most qualitative studies, this understanding is limited by the researcher's ability to analyze and represent the data in ways that reflect the co-constructed truths of both researcher and participants. This notion has two implications. One, as the researcher, I had to make sure to keep limitations presented by my subjective worldview at a minimum while simultaneously uncovering them. I did this by analyzing and by continuously pointing out how my social-existentialist set of lenses influenced data analysis and representation. Additionally, I repeatedly shared the findings with the participants of this study

to assure that I did not represent an authoritarian voice (Chase, 2008). I gratefully incorporated their feedback, which added trustworthiness and rigor to the study as outlined in Chapter III. The second implication is that the findings of this study cannot directly and immediately be transferred to people other than those who constructed them. It will take the reader's interpretations to make them transferable. To this point, Barone and Eisner (1997) suggested understanding the findings of qualitative studies as a chance "to see educational phenomena in new ways, and to entertain questions about them that might have otherwise been left unasked" (1997, p. 96). This means that the findings of this study are not final but rather individual truths that can serve as a source of criticism and imagination (Huebner, 1979/1999).

In Chapter V, I offer suggestions for further research. These suggestions are designed to extend the limitations posited by the theoretical and the conceptual frameworks and by my subjective worldviews.

### **Possibilities**

The possibilities of this study are threefold. By understanding how people make sense of educational experiences throughout their lives, we can gain insights into the role these experiences play in their self-understanding and so in their decision-making. Bruner (1991) stated,

I cannot imagine a more important psychological research project than one that addresses itself to the 'development of autobiography' – how our way of telling about ourselves changes and how these accounts come to take control of our ways of life. (p. 694 f.)

A great deal of the processes Bruner describes above take place during kindergarten and 12<sup>th</sup> grade. Since this study is not framed in psychology but in curriculum theory, it opens up a space

for critical conversations among educators and policy makers about the purpose of school and what it means to be an educated person.

A second possibility of this study lies in its potential to learn from the past. Pogrow (2006) expressed his concern that as educators we do not seem to learn from history but rather come up with educational fads and request millions of dollars of funding to implement them, e.g. scripted curriculum, standards movement, etc. These fads represent Band-Aid approaches to educational problems and lack the historical analysis that is a prerequisite to understanding the possible effects of a phenomenon. This study offers the possibility to interpret similarities and differences in curricular praxis and curricular thinking between the 1950s and today, which can help us to understand how educational experiences brought about by particular approaches to curriculum influence students.

Finally, this research contributes to curriculum studies by offering different ways of knowing. With narrative inquiry as its methodology, it has given the participants a voice as they lived, relived, retold and reflected upon their experiences (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). To engage in this process offered ways to imagine different possibilities to the participants, to me as the researcher, and to the reader. By understanding how a person makes sense of these experiences as s/he rewrites his/her individual narratives to fit his/her personal grand narrative, we can gain insights into the processes by which educational experience shape a person's becoming in later life. In this way, this research informs our thinking about curriculum and provides an ongoing answer to the question what knowledge is of most worth. Peshkin (1993) stated, "When we understand the processes by which a life ... takes on its particular character, we understand something of value" (p. 24). Peshkin emphasized the idea that each life is unique,

which means each individual's story represents one fragment of what it means to be human. It is my hope that this study represents one such fragment.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this chapter was to describe the landscape that is the background for this study. I showed how the research questions evolved from how I make sense of personal experiences, which is done through a deeply constructionist view. Constructionism is grounded in interpretivism, which rests upon the idea that reality is constructed in meaning-making processes that are individual to each person. The concept of narrativity was used as a lens to understand these meaning-making processes. These ideas represent the foundation for understanding how people interpret educational experiences throughout their lives, which was one of the purposes of this study. Since the focus of the analysis of these processes was on understanding the long-term roles educational experiences play, this study addresses a gap in the research, which focuses mainly on the immediate influence of these experiences. The findings of this study were examined within the concept of curriculum theory. In this way, the findings open up a space for critical conversations about the purpose of school and curriculum praxis. Since the participants for this study were mature adults whose early educational experiences date back half a century ago, this study also offers the possibility to learn from the past.

In the next chapter, I will review the literature as it pertains to the research purpose of this study.



## **Chapter II: Review of the Literature**

In this chapter I will review the literature as it pertains to the theoretical and conceptual frameworks for this study in order to offer ways for thinking about the role early educational experiences play throughout life. I will explore these ways of thinking in terms of the conflicting views on the purposes of school thus contributing to the discourse on curricular thinking. The theoretical framework for this study is narrativity. In the first section of this chapter I will show how the ideas of narrativity fit into the concept of interpreting experiences and into educational research. The conceptual framework is curriculum theory. In the second section, I will review the purposes of school as they are reflected in current curriculum praxis and use curriculum theory as a lens to understand possible implications of current curriculum praxis. The third section will show how narrativity can be used as a framework for curricular thinking.

### **Making Meaning of Experiences through Narrativity**

*“The sense of an extensive underlying whole is the context of every experience and it is the essence of sanity.”*

(Dewey, 1934, p. 202)

Narrativity is a lens that can be employed when thinking about what makes a person who s/he is. It is used as a paradigm to think about self-representation (Battersby, 2005) in a variety of disciplines, e.g. philosophy (Battersby, 2005; Strawson, 2004), psychology (Bruner, 1991; Hoshmand, 2005; Polkinghorne, 1988), history (Waters, 2014; White, 1980), sociology (Hubble & Tew, 2013; Somers, 1992), anthropology (Borisenkova, 2012; Gee, 1985; Geertz, 1988) and in education (Barone, 1992; Goodson, 2012; van Manen, 1994). I am using the lens of narrativity to explore the role of educational experiences in a person’s understanding of self.

While each discipline reconceptualizes narrativity within its own parameters, the underlying idea across all disciplines is that people lead storied lives (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). This fundamentally constructionist view rests on the notion that human beings construct their own meanings and themselves. To live a storied life means that a person understands, creates and communicates himself<sup>2</sup> by weaving together the stories of his life into a meaningful whole that reflects who he is. It is done by arranging events in a pattern that, like a story, has a beginning, a middle and an end. In choosing this arrangement, which is not primarily chronological but driven by an elected conflict, the author reveals a structure that was inherent in the story all along and signals the point of the story (Phoenix, 2008; White, 1980). Conflict adds an element of reality for the person who tells his story because it reflects what he perceives to be the importance of an experience. The idea of narrativity is that through my individual stories I create my personal grand narrative – the story of me, which reflects who I perceive myself to be.

### **Living Storied Lives**

The idea behind living a storied life is that I understand my experiences as my personal grand narrative, which consists of multiple, individual stories. By placing them into the greater

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<sup>2</sup> Much deliberation was given to the use of the personal pronoun to talk about meaning-making. I began this section by using the masculine pronoun “he,” but it was quickly pointed out to me that this was not inclusive enough. I then tried to use the more inclusive “s/he,” which ended up making the already complex idea of self-understanding textually (but not conceptually) more complex. I very briefly considered the use of the pronoun “we” but abandoned the idea immediately since it implies an assumed voice for someone other than myself. I finally decided on using “I” and “he” as representatives for “person” with no regard for gender. It seems fitting because it undergirds that the focus is on people’s humanness rather than on their particular gender characteristics. “I” and “he” are then used to represent human beings. This choice also furthers my aim toward the universality of the topic. The idea of universality is based on Dewey’s (1934) differentiation between the universal and the general: the former contains the possibility for singular or individual truths whereas the latter pertains to the idea of the collective, which is generic rather than individual.

picture, I am creating my self<sup>3</sup>. The narrative of my life is the story of my past and present, which projects into my future. This view presupposes that I understand myself as a temporal being and as a narrative being. Understanding myself as a temporal being means to know that I am emergent, in other words I am but not yet. Huebner (1967/1999) stated,

Time is not a dimension in which we live ... The very notion of time arises out of man's existence, which is an emergent. The future is man facing himself in anticipation of his own potentiality for being. The past is finding himself already thrown into the world. It is the having-been which makes possible the projection of his potentiality. The present is the moment of vision when Dasein<sup>4</sup> ... projects its own potentiality for being. (p. 138)

In other words, my present results from my past but not arbitrarily. The point is I am not just thrown into some present situation; I have created potentiality for myself. My potentiality for being in the here and now exists in my interpretation of my past. Sarup (in Pinar, 2004) explained, "It is the way in which we understand our past which determines how it determines us" (p. 126). My potentiality projects into my future through my meaning-making of the past-present. To understand myself as a temporal being means to live in the past-present-future simultaneously. In other words, I collapse my past and my future into my present through my interpretations of the past and my decisions for the future. In terms of narrativity, I create the stories of me not with focus on their chronology but with focus on my potentiality, which is

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<sup>3</sup> The spelling of "my" and "self" as two separate words is used to show intention rather than an inherent quality in the relationship between subject and object as is the case when spelled as one word.

<sup>4</sup> The German word *Dasein* translates as being-in-the-world and represents a philosophical concept that entails notions of one's existence based on self-understanding, purpose and meaning (Gadamer, 1976/2004; Heidegger, 1953/1996). In other words, one does not simply exist as thrown into one's current situation; one's existence is the result of choices, so the concept of Dasein assumes intention and agency.

independent of time and directly related to my interpretations. Understanding man's temporality in this particular way makes narrativity possible.

But not everyone employs this view. Strawson (2004), for example, approaches the idea of temporality by positing people in two ways: they are either Episodics or Diachronics (Strawson's capitalization). In Strawson's (2004) view, an Episodic does not figure himself "as something that was there in the (further) past and will be there in the (further) future" (p. 430). This view is based on the idea that one cannot step into the same river twice. In other words, something that I did in my childhood was essentially done by a person different from the one I am today. While an Episodic has a clear understanding that he has a past, he does not remember it as a part of the story of his life. Equally, he does not interpret the meaning of past experiences in terms of a more or less coherent whole. This is not to say that an Episodic does not connect particularly emotionally charged experiences, e.g. embarrassing or frightening ones, to certain dispositions he has in the present. But overall the experiences of his past are episodes rather than parts of a continuous story. As such, they do not project into the future, which will be episodic in nature as well. In Strawson's view, the temporality of man contains no potentiality; instead, time is a dimension, and man moves along a temporal arrow.

By contrast, a Diachronic understands himself "as something that was there in the (further) past and will be there in the (further) future" (Strawson, 2004, p. 430). According to Strawson (2004), Diachronics understand their past-present-future existence as a continuum, which allows them to interpret past experiences as parts of a continuous story. By positing people as Episodics and Diachronics, Strawson (2004) makes the point that narrativity as a concept to think about the self is useful only for the latter while the former lack the temporal

understanding of themselves that makes narrativity possible. In other words, Episodics are non-narrative beings.

At first sight, it appears that Bruner (2004) seems to undergird Strawson's idea when he stated, "stories happen to people who know how to tell them" (p. 691). This seems to make the point for the argument of Episodics and Diachronics: if Episodics are non-narrative beings, stories do not happen to them. However, I am offering a different interpretation of Bruner's idea. As a person who, like Strawson, only has episodic memories of her past, I disagree with his argument. If asked to tell the story of my life, I would probably present a historical annal rather than a spell-binding narrative that consists of many different chapters all of which are woven together in the grand finale that is my temporary present. But even though I qualify as an Episodic rather than a Diachronic in Strawson's terms, I choose to understand my self in terms of my decisions, which are the results of my re/interpreting of past experiences regardless of how episodic or incomplete my collection is. I understand my self in narrative terms then, not because I arrange individual experiences in a particular order, but because I make meaning of them holistically. My narrative will lack the exquisitely descriptive elements I love in the works of Steinberg and Tolstoy, but it will have a point or moral, made abstractly or metaphorically, like in a short story. In this way, I understand myself as a narrative being, living a storied life, Episodic or otherwise. As a human being, I constantly revise the stories or episodes of my life in a reiterative meaning-making process. This means that I reinterpret each experience as I make new experiences in order to make them fit into my personal grand narrative. Bruner (2004) poignantly observed, "we *become* the autobiographical narratives by which we 'tell about' our lives" (p. 694), even as Episodics.

## **On the Question of Reality**

Bruner (2004) argued that “‘world making’ is the principal function of mind” (p. 691). As narrativity is situated within the constructionist paradigm, the question of reality is explored from the angle of how people construct their reality (make their worlds) and themselves. As noted earlier, this is done through re/interpreting experiences that occurred in and because of social relations. It follows that narratives originate as experiences in social interchange and change as they are retold in different social contexts (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990). For example, if I tell the story of a car accident in reply to my friend’s story of the paperwork nightmare she encountered after a fender-bender, I might focus on my victories over insurance companies. But if I talk about the same accident in response to a story whose narrative theme is “innocent victim,” I might shift the focus of my own story to that same theme. The point is that I change my story. For some, this might give rise to questions about the validity of my narratives. To this point, Gergen and Gergen (2011) offer a distinction between singularity and multiplicity as different premises to think about narrativity. In the former, people understand themselves as a coherent story, which changes as new experiences are added. In the latter, the story changes based on the situation in which it is told, which points to the sociality of narrativity. Gergen and Gergen (2011) noted that coherent singularity is more readily accepted because it seems more trustworthy; multiplicity, on the other hand, seems too fragmented to be considered valid. However, meaning-making is a relational process. This means that memory is not an individual possession but something that requires participation in social and relational processes of sense-making (Dewey, 1938).

Where does that leave the question of reality? Let me point out again that situating narrativity within constructionism means that the purpose of the narratives is not to seek general

veracity. In fact, the multiplicity of the incomplete, individual stories belies a grand narrative in the Lyotardian<sup>5</sup> (1984) sense because they replace it. Scott (1991) asked, “What could be truer, after all, than the subject’s own account of what he or she has lived through?” (p. 777). So the question how valid or true an individual story is, is not the point because whatever else may be true, this story is true for the person who created it. It reflects how an experience makes sense to him. But if the story lacks general truth, how useful is it for others? Its usefulness consists in its transferability and in its universality. Transferability means that by understanding how one person comes to make the choices he makes, I think analogously about how I would have felt or decided or what experiences of my own life compare with his story. In this way specific narratives make it possible to think about experiences and social concepts concretely. Dewey (1934) referred to this idea as the universal, which has the potential for individual truths. This means that the interpretations of my social interactions are always approached from a relational point of view. So the question of reality is simultaneously the question of how my individual stories make up my personal grand narrative and of how both fit with the narratives of those with whom my stories have become related.

## **Section Conclusion**

A person’s individual grand narrative is his singular story, which reflects the individual ways in which he synergizes the experiences of his life into a complex, meaningful whole.

Dewey (1934) stated, “The sense of an extensive underlying whole is the context of every experience and it is the essence of sanity” (p. 202). What Dewey (1934) referred to as sanity is

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<sup>5</sup> The grand narrative or metanarrative is the story of a common history, which it legitimizes. It represents the totality of knowledge and meaning as objective truths (Lyotard, 1984). Lyotard (1984) criticized the reliance on scientific knowledge if it replaces individual meanings and suggested to understand individual narratives as a kind of knowledge to overcome subject-object dualism.

the space a person creates for his existence. Without it, without his narrative, he would be fragmented. The space is created in reflections upon experiences that happen in social interactions. It exists through his personal grand narrative whose theme reflects his perception and his understanding of self. The relationship between a person's narrative and his understanding of self is iterative in that the story derives from the individual ways in which he reflects on and re/interpret his life's experiences, which in turn influences how he lives his life. Engaging in people's individual and grand narratives offered me the possibility to learn about the role particular experiences, namely early educational experiences, play in their understanding of self and in the ways the authors have lived their lives.

### **Curriculum Theory as a Concept for Understanding Educational Experiences**

*“Curricular practice is not simply concern for the construction of the educative environment; it is also concern for the human events that occur within that environment.”*

(Huebner, 1975/1999, p. 125)

Curriculum theory is the interdisciplinary study of educational experiences (Pinar, 2004). This means that the individual experiences of teachers and students are at the center of the study of curriculum theory. Clandinin (1985) argued that experience is a form of knowledge, namely personal practical knowledge, which is “imbued with all the experiences that make up a person's being. Its meaning is derived from, and understood in terms of, a person's experiential history” (p. 362). In other words, personal practical knowledge is gained in the process of reflecting on and making meaning of personal experiences. This knowledge is shared through narratives in which it is simultaneously refined and reconstructed. In this way, narrativity, which is a fundamentally social-relational endeavor, becomes particularly meaningful in classroom situations. The interactions of teachers and students in these situations happen through narratives



as teachers and students communicate themselves through their stories, which constitute their personal practical knowledge. In this way, narrativity and curriculum become the medium in which teachers and students become aware of their personal practical knowledge. This is a fairly recent view of curriculum, which has evolved over the past 25 years. In order to better understand how educational experiences can be explored through curriculum theory, it is useful to show which aspects of its history have made narrativity possible for curricular thinking today.

### **From Developing Curriculum to Understanding Curriculum**

The story of curriculum theory as a discipline is characterized by three historical moments: curriculum development (1918 – 1969); the reconceptualization of the field (1970s); and contemporary curriculum theory (1980s to present), which resembles the fundamental shift from prescribing curriculum to understanding it.

During its first moment, curriculum theory focused on developing a plan to teach a predetermined body of knowledge. The Classical Curriculum was based on memorization and rote learning (Pinar et al., 1995). Opponents of the Classical Curriculum were followers of Herbart, Pestalozzi and Parker, who proposed a child-centered curriculum (Tanner & Tanner, 1975). The basic assumption for this approach was that the child's mind is not passive but active, and curriculum must take into consideration children's educational and prior experiences. The proponents of the child-centered curriculum understood education as a moral enterprise (Schubert, 1986). Their ideas marked the progressive education movement of the 1920s through 1940s, whose most notable scholar was John Dewey (Pinar et al., 1995). Dewey's death and the launch of the Sputnik in the 1950s signaled a return to the Classical Curriculum. But the assaults on curriculum for its seeming inability to give the U.S. the needed advantages during the Cold War facilitated a paradigm shift that eventually led to the reconceptualization of the field. The

decisive text that ended the first historical moment in the field was published by Joseph Schwab in 1969, in which he declares the field of curriculum theory moribund for its mistaken reliance on theory (Schwab, 1982). The paradigm shift that followed is characterized by reconceptualizing the field from developing curriculum to understanding it.

The period of reconceptualization was marked by an effort to conceive of the field through a diverse discourse that was based on historical, philosophical and sociological foundations which gave rise to phenomenological, post-modern, poststructuralist, feminist, auto/biographical, international, racial and political approaches to curriculum theory (Pinar, 2008). New intellectual ways to think about curriculum changed the concept of the field from developing “effective” curricula to understanding curriculum as a process that is influenced by the people who engage in it, e.g. students, teachers, scholars. At the same time, similar paradigm shifts commenced in other disciplines of the social sciences (Somers, 1992). What made these paradigm shifts possible was an acknowledgement of the post-modern condition, a fundamental aspect of which was Lyotard’s (1984) critique of the metanarrative - the grand narrative of a common history and its sociological legitimization. Now there existed the possibility of acknowledging the singular narratives of people’s individual histories, which simultaneously replace and illuminate a common history. For example, White (1980) observed, “historical analyses without narrative are blind” (p. 10). The blindness that narrativity dispels is the general, distant veracity of the story by making it available, so to speak, and close enough to empathize with through the personal narratives. In terms of curriculum theory, the paradigm shift brought about in the decade of reconceptualization gave rise to the diverse discourses that characterize the field today. The theme of these narratives shifted from prescribing a curriculum to understanding it as an endeavor to which “the ‘self’ remains crucial” (Pinar, 1998, p. xv).

Contemporary curriculum theory is the interdisciplinary discourse in which curriculum is viewed as an ongoing project of self-understanding (Pinar, 2004). In this regard, educational experiences are explored through autobiographical studies, including existential and phenomenological scholarship, feminist theory, post-modern and poststructuralist curriculum studies (Pinar et al., 1995). Curriculum is thought of as an autobiographical experience which influences people's beliefs about the past, the present and the future. One narrative theme of the contemporary discourse in curriculum theory is to understand these interpretive processes. As such, narrativity takes a central role because exploring curricular phenomena through the lens of lived experience allows educators to think about curriculum both subjectively and sociologically. Clandinin and Connelly (1990) asserted, "narrative is a reconstruction of a person's experience in relation to others and to a social milieu" (p. 4). This undergirds the social-relational nature of narrativity as a lens to understanding the self and as a valuable medium through which to explore the processes curriculum theory is concerned with.

### **Curriculum in the Space Between Theory and Praxis**

American education has always been situated in the space between political decisions and scholarly voices. This causes tension between the theoretical lenses with which to look at curriculum and the situational conditions under which it is implemented. It is in this space that questions about the diverse purposes of school are negotiated. The tensions arising from the discourse between those two opposing sides are part of the impetus that moves education forward.

It is important to understand the relationship between curriculum theory and curriculum praxis. These two terms are often, albeit falsely, posited as dichotomies. In this circumstance, curriculum is separated into curriculum-as-plan and curriculum-in-use (Aoki, 1986a/2005). The

former is designed by people far removed from classrooms and implemented hierarchically from top to bottom (Aoki, 1986a/2005). This linear approach to curriculum does not take into consideration the complexities that are involved when working with human beings. The result is a Tyler Rationale-like<sup>6</sup> tool that focuses on results and alienates those who are forced to work with it. However, it would be equally inappropriate to turn the hierarchy upside-down and prioritize the individual when thinking about curriculum. For example, Huebner (1961/1999) argued,

The content of our curriculum should be the vehicle by which we help the child establish ties to the rest of the world. A curriculum focusing only on the child's interests, or on individual needs, is a curriculum which fosters egocentricity and selfishness. A curriculum focusing on skills, concepts and understanding is one which fosters estrangement and schizophrenia. (p. 13)

One point here is that a dichotomous approach to curriculum theory and praxis is a binary view which focuses on either extreme and excludes the potentiality of the space that lies between the extremes. The other point is that curriculum theory and praxis are not two approaches to the same phenomenon but two ways of knowing educational phenomena (Aoki, 2000/2005). As such, none of them can be prioritized. Bateson's (2002) analogy of stereo vision makes the point - prioritizing theory over praxis or praxis over theory is like deciding which one of my two eyes I

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<sup>6</sup> Published and widely accepted in 1949, the Tyler Rationale (Tyler, 1949) is a curriculum theory that bases learning on a priori objectives around which learning activities and assessment are organized. The scientific behaviorism reflected in the Tyler Rationale stands in sharp contrast to the child-centered and democratic curriculum approach of progressivism advanced by Dewey at the time (Pinar, 2004). Born during times of global and national insecurity, it has been an easy tool to use for social engineering and is advocated for by those who believe that the purpose of school is the advancement of society. The question that cannot be answered with the Rationale is what *advancement* is to mean; instead, the way it is used in schools shows who gets to decide on that point.

should rely on to see the world. By giving preference to one instead of using both eyes, I would lose an entire dimension, namely that of depth.

Based on understanding theory and praxis as two ways of knowing a phenomenon, I will now review the literature on how curriculum is currently implemented and then employ curriculum theory as a lens to understand current curriculum praxis in terms of educational experiences.

### **Politics, Policies and Curriculum Praxis**

For the past three decades, political decisions have changed American public education into a system of accountability, which measures the performance of its agents through standardized test scores. Based on these scores, funding for schools is either granted or withheld, and teachers are either extrinsically rewarded or put on probation. It has reduced teaching to teaching-to-the test and learning to passing it. This accountability movement is the driving force for U.S. schools.

It has its roots in the 1983 report *A Nation at Risk* by the National Commission on Excellence in Education (Sadker et. al, 2008). Issued during the height of the Cold War, the report raised concerns about America's economic position in a global market and falling standards as expressed through the country's mediocre ranking on international test scores (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). The response to the report was the beginning of the accountability movement, which intended to raise standards and hold schools, teachers and students accountable. As a result, the first President Bush issued *Education 2000*, which was furthered and renamed *Goals 2000* under the Clinton Administration, as a plan to propel the U.S. internationally into first place in science and math by the turn of the century (Sadker et al., 2008). This was to be accomplished by implementing standards whose fulfillment would be

evaluated with standardized tests. It started a procession of high-stakes testing that became the foundation on which public schools still operate today. Although the standards movement had clearly failed in all aspects, e.g. political, economical, educational, the second President Bush released the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*, which represents the culmination of the high-stakes testing approach to education (Ravitch, 2010). Its hallmark is that it bases funding for public schools on their report cards, which comprise of test scores for individual groups of students, e.g. Hispanics, special education students, etc. As a result, schools that meet what is referred to as Adequate Yearly Progress receive funding while the neediest schools are placed on probationary status and lose funding.

For the past two decades, scholars have raised concerns about the detrimental effects high-stakes testing has on the curriculum and so on students and teachers. For example, Lissovoy (2007) stated, “public education is increasingly in the grip of a hyper-reductionistic ‘accountability’ movement which impoverishes the curriculum” (p. 355). The curriculum is the basis on which students and teachers negotiate their relationships with each other. The language employed to talk about curriculum reflects how the different forces that influence it think about the purpose of school because it simultaneously exposes and defines how students and teachers are related to each other and the world (Huebner, 1966/1999). Language exposes their relationships because it is the medium through which they make sense of their experiences and share their narratives. It defines their relationships because it also reflects the environment students and teachers create for themselves. Curricular language that is driven by technicalities and objectives reflects a reductionist approach to education that denies the constructionism which lies at the heart of teaching and learning in contemporary curriculum thought. Such language expresses the notion that meaning is to be discovered rather than made, which

undergirds the idea of the metanarrative as a superimposed, robust history whose themes or meanings are predetermined. With that, the purpose of education seems to be to discover objective truths, which are a fallacy (Crotty, 2004; Lyotard, 1984). Under these conditions “mysteries are reduced to problems, doubts to error, and unknowables to yet-to-be-discoverables” (Huebner, 1966/1999, p. 104). In other words, the language of standards and measurable objectives turns teaching and learning into institutionalized activities designed to achieve extrinsically imposed goals. The importance of the language employed to speak about curriculum consists in the fact that it reflects the purpose of school and the environment of the classroom in which people make and interpret experiences, where they become educated, in other words, where they are transformed.

The language of politics and current policies leaves no room to think about curriculum and education in terms of transformation. For example, at the 2009 Governors Education Symposium, newly minted U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan enthusiastically announced the following directions for American education:

The president called on us to produce more college graduates than any other country in the world. ... Your standards must be rigorous and they also must be tightly focused on the most important things students need to know. ... We must limit standards to the essential knowledge and skills our kids need so teachers can focus in depth on the most important things their kids should know. ... Once new standards are set and adopted you need to create new tests that measure whether students are meeting those standards. ... We need tests that measure whether students are mastering complex materials and can apply their knowledge in ways that show that they are ready for college and careers. (Duncan, 2009, n.p.)

Duncan's language of curriculum reflects the business-like character that lies at the core of what education it is today. School is an institution that "produces," that limits standards to "essential knowledge and skills" and that measures and tests. While there has always been a need to evaluate the effectiveness of schools, centering the purpose of education on competition in a global economy is counter-productive to what it means to be an educated person. Educating a generation cannot be reduced to enabling people to find a job, which seems to be the purpose of education. At the moment, schools implement a one-size-fits-all curriculum to get every high school graduate ready for college (Barton & Coley, 2011). While this might be an arduous and worthy goal, it is not working because only 75% of all high school students graduate and yet fewer enroll in college (Barton & Coley, 2011). This approach does not take into consideration either students' interests or post-high school plans nor their ability to make well-informed decisions about those plans.

Societal needs are broader than getting high school students ready for college or career, so the purpose of education cannot be reduced to economic gains. It takes other skills to do well in life and additional skills to seek a profession, get employed and hold a job. This gives rise to the question what is left out of a curriculum that narrowly focuses on "essential knowledge and skills." Ravitch (2010) voiced her fears that such a minimalist curriculum trains, not educates, a generation of children who lack the cognitive and social skills to think for themselves and to make decisions. What might be the possible implications of training a generation instead of educating it? Ravitch (2000) warned, "A society that tolerates anti-intellectualism in schools can expect to have a dumbed-down culture that honors celebrity and sensation rather than knowledge and wisdom" (p. 466). As long as a nation's primary goal for education is to outdo other



countries on international tests like the PISA<sup>7</sup> or in the global economy, this goal cannot be achieved. It is a catch 22 because its short-cut approach belies the fact that education is a process and not a result. Moreover, a nation consists of communities, which are made of individual people. So educating a nation means to educate individual people in ways that enable them to share their constructed knowledge for the good of their communities, small and large (Kincheloe, 2008). In order for that to be possible, the reward and punishment system of evaluation must be changed to one that allows teachers, schools, and districts to use evaluation methods honestly in order to analyze strengths and needs. However, Duncan (2009) stated the need for “robust data systems that track student achievement and teacher effectiveness” (n.p.). This focuses the purpose of school once again on producing higher test scores, which creates an oppressive teaching and learning environment that results in teachers’ and students’ surrender of their agency (Torres, 2012).

An old Chinese proverb warns that if we keep going in the same direction, we end up where we are headed. Block (1998) has illustrated this idea in terms of education as a business enterprise. Block warned that if education is based on teaching students how to arrive at predetermined answers, it can be likened to leaving a trail of breadcrumbs behind that students can follow to come home. In other words, if education is evaluated by measuring the size of the gap between a priori objectives and how close a learner has come to missing them, the best outcome can be a reproduction of what has been. Even if that had been sensational, it would make progress all but impossible. An educated person is not one who can simply answer question but one who can use his answers to raise new questions and to imagine possibilities.

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<sup>7</sup> Program for International Student Assessment: The PISA tests the reading, mathematics and science skills of 15 year-olds from 65 to 70 countries every three years. In the 2012 PISA, the United States ranked in 36<sup>th</sup> place (OECD, 2013). In the previous test, the U.S. ranked in 17<sup>th</sup> place (OECD, 2010).

This is an arduous undertaking when one is part of a corporation that is focused on immediate profits to be accomplished in an ends-means approach. In circumstances like these, one is compelled to comply with existing ideologies, morality and authority in order to not get fired or not to fail. Kincheloe (2008) warned, “in high-stakes test-driven curricula ... competitive ethic is dominant” (p. 1). This is true all throughout the hierarchy of the education system from superintendents to principals, teachers and students. Curriculum praxis, which is reduced to simple test preparation by designing lessons around release tests borders on institutionalized cheating (Ravitch, 2010). At the moment, American schools are data-driven rather than data-informed, which creates a disconnect between curriculum theory and curriculum praxis. The experiences made in this environment will be reflected in the narratives of those who lived them. They represent one way of knowing educational phenomena. Using curriculum theory as a lens to analyze these phenomena presents another way of knowing and potentially helps to understand possible implications of current curriculum praxis.

### **Understanding Educational Experiences through Curriculum Theory**

In stark contrast to the voices of politicians and the language of policies regarding the purpose of school stand those of curriculum thinkers. While politicians seem to approach these questions exclusively with an economic orientation, curriculum scholars think about it in terms of what human beings are capable of achieving for themselves as individuals and for the societies they are part of. For example, for Kincheloe (2008), education should enable people to become “empowered, learned, highly skilled democratic citizens who have confidence and the savvy to improve their own lives and to make their communities more vibrant places in which to live, work, and play” (p. 6). These are the ideas of critical pedagogy at the heart of which is the notion that education means to enable learners to actively question and negotiate existing

conditions to be able to understand themselves as critical agents. A fundamental prerequisite for that is to think about education as a process that leads to self-formation and to transformation for both students and teachers, which necessitates autobiographical understanding (Pinar, 2004). In this way, curriculum is a biographical experience that enables those who engage in it to understand themselves locally, globally and historically through lived, educational experiences.

All learning happens through experiences, but not all educational experiences lead to learning. For Dewey (1938) the difference between an educative and a mis-educative experience consists in its result: the former leads to growth while the latter arrests growth. This notion is based on the concept of continuity, which means that every experience influences those that came before and those that will come after (Dewey, 1938). An experience that arrests growth might give rise to a lack of empathy and makes impossible richer experiences in the future because it isolates the learner in his relationships with others and world, which limits the possibility to understand himself locally, globally and historically. This is the case because each new experience is interpreted in its reflection with prior experience, which means that it simultaneously also forms the basis for how future experiences will be interpreted and so influence decisions. The educational experiences provided through curriculum as described above are mis-educative since they further competitive ethics, which gives rise to egocentrism (Kincheloe, 2008). In this way, students' and teachers' social relationships become competitive, which causes their private spheres to evaporate or to become narcissistic (Pinar, 2004).

An educative experience, on the other hand, is one that promotes intellectual and moral growth in ways that enable learners to contribute meaningfully in a democratic society. For Dewey (1938), the purpose of school is for the individual and for society to be successful in a changing world. This entails notions of freedom and moral development, whereas freedom is

associated with the ability to frame purposes and to fulfill them. Because every experience is related to past and future experiences, educative experiences must entail reflection. For example, Dewey (1934) observed,

Zeal for doing, lust for action, leaves many a person, especially in this hurried and impatient environment in which we live, with experience of an almost incredible paucity, all on the surface. No one experience has a chance to complete itself because something else is entered upon so speedily. (p. 46)

Incredibly, Dewey made this observation in 1931 and still describes the world some 80 years later. The point is that it is not sufficient to make an experience; learning does not happen until one has reflected upon the experience. Out of those reflections arises purpose, and based on the purpose, an individual makes decisions. A curriculum that focuses on reflection and self-elected purpose offers an opportunity for continuous self-development under always changing conditions based on iteratively gained cognition. This means that curriculum praxis cannot simply be focused on measurable knowledge and implemented in an ends-means fashion with economic concerns because educational experiences are more than a means to an end (Huebner, 1966/1999). Through education, people can become aware of their presence in the world (Macedo & Freire, 2005). To learn means to change, and to teach means to enable change (Huebner, 1963/1999). This change is reflected in ways of thinking and acting. Curriculum praxis as it occurs right now in the classrooms does not make this kind of change possible. Its focus on accountability renders teachers unable to teach and both students and teachers unable to understand their self-formation within society and the world (Pinar, 2004).

Another aspect of education that the accountability movement makes all but impossible is character education, which Dewey noted as the central mission for the youths (Sanchez, 2005).

For Dewey (1938), the directionality of an experience determines whether it is educative or mis-educative. In other words, it is the quality of an experience that determines its influence on future experiences. Mis-educative experiences are those that further egocentrism and narcissism (Dewey, 1938; Greene, 1988; Huebner, 1961/1999). Thus, when thinking about the purpose of school and educational experiences, character or values education cannot be left untouched. However, it appears that this is a difficult discourse in the U.S. because it is often simplified by boiling it down to one question – whose values should be taught and who gets to decide (Sadker et al., 2008). It is an irrelevant question, though, because the focus of values education is not on a particular set of values but on how to enable children to moral thinking and critical reasoning. Interestingly, this is a fundamental aspect of the Australian school curriculum. The *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians 2008* lists self-awareness, personal identity, personal values and an understanding of values to live healthy and satisfying lives as major educational goals (Broadbent & Boyle, 2013). These goals stand in stark contrast to the ones outlined by Arne Duncan above. In the U.S. there seems to be the misconception that spending classroom time on character education takes away time for test preparation. However, values are taught either way, if not explicitly, then implicitly. To be educated means to be transformed, which includes character transformation. The ability to think critically in order to establish personal values is part of that transformation. Sanchez (2005) pointed out,

We cannot expect our students to develop good character through wishful thinking or the hope that someone else will do it (though if we foolishly rely on the latter, the media will continue to step forward as the most influential institution). (p. 110)

In other words, character education happens with or without the institution school. The question is whether children are enabled to reflect on their experiences critically so that their experiences

can be educative and lead to character growth. A key aspect of values education is to teach how to reason and how to make choices in order to develop personal values while understanding other views (Kohlberg, 1975). Current educational praxis offers no space for values education because it is centered around the notion that curriculum needs to be designed based on measurable objectives whose fulfillment is evaluated through standardized tests. This ends-means approach is like putting the cart before the horse, and it decenters the discourse on the purpose of school in ways that are reminiscent of the first moment of curriculum theory and the Tyler Rationale.

While it is clear that current curriculum praxis does not reflect contemporary curriculum theory, it is necessary to point out that not all scholars agree on what the purpose of school is or on how to think about it. For example, for proponents of critical pedagogy, the primary purpose of school is social transformation (Kincheloe, 2008). In this way, teaching and learning is primarily a political act; its goal is to enable people to liberate themselves from political, economical and ideological oppression (McLaren, 2005). Macedo and Freire (2005) explained what this means in terms of narrativity and experiences:

The sharing of experiences should not be understood in psychological terms only. It invariably requires a political and ideological analysis as well. That is, the sharing of experiences must always be understood within social praxis that entails both reflection and political action. In short, it must always involve a political project with the objective of dismantling oppressive structures and mechanisms. (p. xvii)

Most scholars would undoubtedly argue that education must lead to a betterment of society and that the sharing of experiences must be understood as the social, not the individual, construction of reality. However, not everybody might agree that educational experiences must be reflected upon through a primarily political lens. There is no argument that teaching is a political act;

however, first of all it is a social act. At its core, education is a humane and a humanist endeavor, which means that it must first focus on the becoming of the individual as a person rather than as a member of a social class. If the starting point for progress is reduced to but one concept, there exists the danger of yet another metanarrative. For example, McLaren (2005) passionately criticizes the market orthodoxy prevalent in education:

If we wonder how it is that here in the twenty-first century we are witnessing the steady erosion of human rights and civil liberties, the trammeling of the freedom to make history, the abandonment of the poor to the ravages of capital, as well as the devastation of our ecosystems, we only have to examine the extend of our political denial and its implication for miseducating our citizenry. (p. xxviii)

McLaren no doubt describes undeniable aspects of the current state of affairs, but his analysis of its causes is simplistic if it focuses exclusively on the concept of oppression as a result of political ignorance. Is it not possible that the absence of character and values education has equally led to exactly that ignorance by inhibiting self-awareness? Moreover, superimposing one specific set of lenses on students and teachers, namely an ideological one, seems counter-productive to the idea of education as the endeavor to enable human beings to make choices for a purposeful existence within their communities. For example, Greene (1967) urged, “Young people must be enabled to invent identities for themselves in an open world, without viable patterns, models, guarantees” (p. 17). The idea that the immediate purpose of education is to become a political agent, which is what McLaren seems to suggest above, limits one’s choice to invent an identity. Social transformation, which is the central notion of critical pedagogy, begins with the individual. Hence, one first has to become aware of oneself as an individual rather than

as a member of an oppressed social class before one can contribute to the progress of society as a social agent.

The diverse discourse among scholars on the question about the purpose of education reflects the importance of the question. The idea is not to reach consensus but to offer different approaches to thinking about it. One aspect on which most scholars will agree is that as an educator and as an educated person, one must be able to design ways in which one can exist meaningfully in a democratic society and care about contributing to its progress.

### **Section Conclusion**

American education is situated in the space between curriculum praxis and curriculum theory, the space between politics and policies on one hand and scholarly voices on the other. The discourse on the different purposes of school takes place in this space. The tensions that exist here directly influence the educational experiences of those who spend much of their lives in school – students, teachers, administrators. Huebner (1975/1999) noted, “Curricular practice is not simply concern for the construction of the educative environment; it is also concern for the human events that occur within that environment” (p. 125). Current curriculum praxis with its focus on accountability leaves no space to reflect on what it actually means to be human in a classroom with fellow humans. The themes of the narratives created from these educational experiences reflect boredom, fear, and meaninglessness (Zion, 2007). This gives rise to the question what role these experiences play throughout people’s lives long after graduation, which is the focus of this study.



## **The Potentiality of Narrativity for Curriculum**

*“Education is the lure of the transcendent – that which we seem is not what we are for we could always be other.”*

(Huebner, 1985/1999, p. 360)

Education is the journey of the self (Huebner 1993/1999). It is the process of one’s becoming over time. This journey is influenced by the experiences made in the process and the ways in which they are interpreted. All experiences happen in social environments. Thus, to be an educated person means to understand oneself in relation to all one is part of (Greene, 1988). This understanding is the prerequisite for one’s freedom, which is one’s ability to make autonomous decisions within one’s social-relational existence.

### **Relational Self-Understanding**

When people meet, their lives’ stories come together, and they are changed as a result of it (Huebner, 1963/1999). This humanness, which lies at the very core of what education is (Aoki, 1992a/2005), comes to light in the interactions among teachers and students and is realized in their narratives. This means that it is both made real and brought to their awareness through narrativity. If curriculum is a project of self-understanding (Pinar, 2004), and if narrativity is a social-relational endeavor, it follows that both teacher and students must have relational self-knowledge. For the teacher, relational self-knowledge is achieved through doubts in his idea of self as a teacher (van Manen, 1994). This means that, as a teacher, I must simultaneously understand myself as an individual and as a self that stands in relation to those with whom I share a space in time, namely my students.

To understand myself as an individual is to re-enact my self in the classroom as an authentic person. Huebner (1962/1999) explained, “A master teacher maximizes his

individuality, stands out as a person and continues to search for his own meanings and significance” (p. 26). These meanings are part of my personal practical knowledge (Clandinin, 1985), which is the result of the form of reasoning through which I create my narratives. This means that by weaving my individual stories into my personal grand narrative, I create my unique epistemology which serves as the lens through which I view the world. This also means that my knowledge is personal, so I cannot claim to know things but only share what they mean to me (Greene, 1967). In other words, my way of knowing the world is singular, and so is everyone else’s. In this regard Bateson (2002) suggested to “approach the whole matter with less epistemological arrogance” (p. 127) because only when I understand that my way of knowing is no more and no less than *a* way of knowing am I open to doubt. My epistemology is transcendental because it changes in my encounters with others, which change me. Huebner (1963/1999) reminded us “that relating to others is the sine qua non of human existence” (p. 74). The isolated individual is not the origin of meaning. Meaning exists in the space between, e.g. between knowing and doubting, between teacher and students. To understand my self in relation to my students then means to realize that people do not grow from within but from their relational contexts (Dewey, 1934; van Manen, 1994). Buber (1816/1986) summed up this idea best:

- What, then, do we experience of *Thou*<sup>8</sup>?
- Just nothing. For we do not experience it.
- What, then, do we know of *Thou*?
- Just everything. For we know nothing isolated about it anymore. (p. 25)

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<sup>8</sup> Buber (1816/1986) contrasts the “I” in the I – Thou relationship with the “I” in the I – It relationship. Only in the former is the “I” open to the Otherness of the other, which allows for an empathic relation that makes self-understanding possible (Smith, 1986).

In other words, I can never know how another human being knows the world because I cannot experience it in the singular way in which he experiences it. Even in shared experiences, each of us creates his own meaning by nesting the experiences with those that came before. However, by simply understanding this fact, I already know myself better because I understand that I am essentially alone in my reality. Simultaneously, I merge my reality with that of the other with the understanding that each of our ways of knowing represents an infinitesimal part of a shared, socially constructed reality. This means that as a teacher my job is to force my students into an awareness of what things mean to them so they can re-enact their authentic selves in the classroom and construct their shared realities.

Van Manen (1994) stated that a great teacher is one who made it possible for a child to conceive of his sense of self and continuously do so long after the experience occurred and now without the teacher's influence. Self-awareness is made possible through narrative self-reflection of one's social-relationality. In other words, to become aware presupposes questions such as: What does this mean to me? How do I fit into this? How does this fit into my personal grand narrative? In these questions, "this" refers to any phenomenon or experience the narrator has encountered. About the relationship between narrativity and self-knowledge, van Manen (1994) noted,

Self-knowledge not only assumes that one can establish one's own personal identity by means of stories, but also assumes that one can be accountable narratively for how one has developed as a person – for how one has become what one has become. By means of stories we justify the manner in which our character, wishes, and interests have grown and changed as a result of past circumstances, decisions, and formative experiences in specific situations. (p. 159)

In other words, no individual life can be understood as a story in itself, and all personal grand narratives are somehow connected with each other. My personal story comes into reflection when I listen to the stories of others. To make meaning of my own story is only possible when I examine it in the context of other personal stories. More importantly, however, my individual narrative is more than the story of me: the significance each of us assigns to our stories creates a space for universal aspects about what it means to be human. It is in this space where the potentiality for narrativity in curriculum resides.

### **On Matters of Tension**

The process of creating my individual stories or my personal grand narrative amidst those of others is characterized by tension, of course, because all I have understood up until this moment is temporary and destined to change with my very next encounter. This change might not undo my previously written story, but it illuminates it in a different light and so makes it more clearly visible. What I can now see is a distortion, a lack of coherence, for which I have to make adjustments. My narrative resembles my epistemology, my personal way of knowing the world. When people meet, their epistemologies meet. The disquietude that this meeting causes and the sudden incoherence in my narrative which results make it possible for me to question what I have known so far. This is often a difficult process because I do not easily give up on the transitional meanings I have chosen to weave the whole story together. But if I do not resist the breaking up of connections between my individual narratives, I have the chance to know better. Aoki (1981/2005) explained, “the meaningfulness of one understanding comes into view illuminated by the whole context; and the meaningful of the whole comes into view illuminated by a part” (p. 228). In this way, disquietude causes me to transform my narrative and so resembles a chance to transform my self.

Transformation is a fundamental aspect of humans' transcendent existence. This idea presupposes an understanding of self as a temporal being. Recall that my temporality consists in my past-present-future being (Huebner, 1967/1999). My past is the shared past of those with whom my life's story has become intertwined; my present is shared with those whose epistemologies I am encountering. To understand my potentiality for transcendence, I must first understand which aspects of my past make possible which aspects of my future and then project them as potentiality into my present (Huebner, 1967/1999). In this regard, transformation is the process of making my personal grand narrative more coherent. Since this is no easy task, I will not do it until I am forced to, which is the possibility that disquietude promises. Dewey (1934) noted,

Life itself consists of phases in which the organism falls out of step with the march of surrounding things and then recovers unison with it ... And in a growing life, the recovery is never a return to a prior state, for it is enriched by the state of disparity and resistance through which it has successfully passed. ... Equilibrium comes about not mechanically and inertly but out of, and because of, tension. (p. 12 f.)

This is reminiscent of Hegel's dialectic whose idea, simplified, is that the contradictions manifested in mind and spirit are the impetus to their ultimate integration on a higher level (Hegel, 1816/2010). Nothing is permanent; everything becomes whereas becoming is the self-development of mind and spirit. Dewey (1934) pointed out the importance of tension to create purpose, which opens up the very possibility for transformation. As a result of changing along with the changing external conditions, I am finally able to incorporate the conflict into my narrative. I have adjusted for the lack of coherence while making my story more complex and

once again meaningful and orderly. And like the previous draft of my narrative, my now logical, undistorted story is a temporary one.

The always temporary nature of my narrative is a most important aspect in regard to my self-transformation. Like with any story, it is the element of openness that leaves room for interpretation, which in narrativity is the iterative meaning-making of experiences. In the absence of openness, “reality wears a face of such regularity, order, and coherence that it leaves no room for human agency” (White, 1980, p. 24). Human agency is the necessity and the freedom to make my own decisions. The reality of the classroom, with its coming together of narrative epistemologies, makes this openness possible. However, if curriculum, which is the medium in which narratives are created, is misunderstood as a plan to teach, human agency is eliminated. This means that curriculum must contain an element of randomness so that it resembles rather a base line that leaves room for improvisation (Aoki, 1990/2005; van Manen, 1994). When curriculum is the medium for the improvisation of temporary narratives, the tension that accompanies the process is the potentiality that narrativity offers for curriculum. How meanings are made of educational experiences in the process is the focus of this research.

### **Section Conclusion**

The terms “teacher” and “student” are reductive designations if they are used as a fundamental definition of the relationship between these two people. They overlook the primary nature of the relationship between those who meet in a classroom - that of fellow human beings who share a space in time. Huebner (1966/1999) referred to this relationship as a fraternity, which he viewed as the ethical side of classroom life. Huebner (1985/1999) illuminated the importance of this view when he stated, “Education is the lure of the transcendent – that which we seem is not what we are for we could always be other” (p. 360). To this point, teachers and

learners must continue to engage in the project curriculum whose potentiality lies in bringing to consciousness their own. This means that each, teacher and learner, must continuously choose, refine and redefine his own project or purpose. Their coming together as people is the foundation for that because from their shared experiences they create their individual and their personal grand narratives.

### **Summary**

This study explores the role early educational experiences play in a person's later life in terms of the ways in which these experiences influence his understanding of self. The theoretical framework employed is narrativity, which is used as a lens to understand how people make meaning of experiences. The conceptual framework for this study is curriculum theory because its central focus is to understand educational experiences. A review of the literature showed that through their narratives, students and teachers make meaning of their social interactions, which potentially present mis-educative experiences. This is the case because curriculum praxis reflects mainly economic purposes and competitive ethics rather than enabling students to self-understanding. A key aspect of the purpose of school, if thought about as a preparation to live a satisfying, successful life, is to become aware of one's relational existence in order to elect purpose for oneself.

In the next chapter, I will present the methodology for this study.

### **Chapter III: Methodology**

Recall that the purpose of this study was to explore how participants, who conceive of themselves as having lived personally and professionally successful lives, interpret their early educational experiences and the role these played in their lives. Specific research questions guiding this study were:

R 1: In what ways do participants describe their early educational experiences?

R 2: How do participants interpret their early educational experiences?

R 3: What role do their interpretations of early educational experiences play in their personal grand narrative?

#### **Methodology**

In order to understand what roles early educational experiences play in the participants' lives after high school, I approached this study from a qualitative research paradigm. The methodology employed to gather, analyze and represent data was narrative inquiry.

#### **Qualitative Research Paradigm**

With this study, I attempted to understand something about the processes by which a person makes sense of his/her experiences. Since this is an infinitely complex and highly singular process, this study was approached from a qualitative research paradigm. Peshkin (1993) asserted that qualitative research allows the researcher to explore “processes, relationships, settings and situations, systems, and people,” to understand or clarify their complexity (p. 24). Peshkin (1993) went on to explain that this is done through descriptions whose purpose is to understand the depth and breadth of how a participant experiences particular phenomena. In this way, qualitative research provides exemplifications rather than categorizations. Crotty (2004) illuminated Peshkin's idea by explaining that qualitative research



offers a chance to ascertain how people arrive at their subjective meanings and what those meanings are. Based on the notion that all experiences and interpretations thereof are important for the person who makes them, I used qualitative research methods to explore how meaning can be constructed.

The epistemological framework for this study is constructionism, which focuses on the idea that people construct their own meanings (Crotty, 2004). This is done through social interactions with other people and the environment. Constructionism rests on the idea that meaning does not reside in objects but is constructed within a social context. In this way, reality is both a shared and an individual construct. This idea is grounded in interpretivism, which is often traced back to Max Weber but has its origin in idealism and was first introduced by Kant and furthered by Hegel (Glesne, 2011). Idealism focuses on the idea that reality does not exist outside the human mind since it is always interpreted through experience (Dilthey, 1989). Kant asserted that if reason is not united with experience, it results in theoretical illusions (Dilthey, 1989). Hegel (1816/2010) furthered this idea by stating that subject and object must become a synthesis. Only in this dialectic, which goes beyond observable essences, can reality be understood more fully (Hegel, 1816/2010).

While Weber et al. (1991) supported idealism, they also left room for realism as a paradigm from which to contribute to knowledge. The researchers distinguished between two research approaches: a nominalist approach for natural sciences and an interpretivist approach for social sciences. According to Weber et al. (1991), the former is concerned with rational relations and causal explanations of facts (Erklären) and uses nomothetic approaches, which are those focused on large populations and generalizability. The latter is concerned with understanding human conduct (Verstehen) and employs an idiographic approach with focus on

individual cases. Dilthey (in Crotty, 2004) asserted that the nomothetic and the idiographic are in fact two different kinds of realities, which require different methods.

Since I attempted to explore how the participants make sense of their experiences, clearly, I was concerned with Verstehen rather than Erklären. Grounding the study in the theoretical framework of interpretivism allowed me to explore these individual meaning-making processes.

### **Narrative Inquiry**

The methodology employed for this study is narrative inquiry. Narrative inquiry is based on the idea that people make meaning of experiences by thinking of them as stories. It is fitting for this study because people's stories give insight into how a person represents his/her own life (Phoenix, 2008). This is the case because narratives are more than the sum of their parts; they are the result of an individual meaning-making process that reflects aspects of how a narrator understands him/herself. Narrative inquiry is a way of thinking about experiences, which happen as fragmented events (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). In order to make sense of their experiences, people use stories (Bruner, 2004). The sense-making process consists in electing which events are significant and in organizing them into cause and effect relationships. Bruner (2004) stated meaning making is the principal function of the mind. In this way, the stories a person tells about his/her life are a cognitive achievement (Bruner, 2004, p. 692). In other words, people interpret and reinterpret lived experiences to make meaning of them. The focus is not on what was but on how what was matters.

In an attempt to understand how a narrator assigns significance to experiences, narrative inquiry explores his/her life's stories from three vantage points: temporality, sociality and place (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Temporality reflects the notion that human existence is

emergent; sociality pertains to the idea that meaning is created in social interaction; and place takes into consideration the influence of the environment in which experiences are made and recalled. Connelly and Clandinin (2006) pointed out that it is important to understand the complexity that temporality, sociality and place bring to narrative inquiry since the narrator transitions through many of these strata simultaneously. For the purpose of this study, this means that I had to explore the participants' narratives with the understanding that meaning-making is done retrospectively and therefore emergent from the temporal, social and local contexts in which the experiences were made and the narratives were shared.

Narrative inquiry is appropriate for a study on the role early experiences play in later life because it has the potential to give insights into how a person re/constructs his/her understanding of self. That is why this methodology has been effectively employed for studies whose research purpose relates to educational experiences and identity. For example, Mitton (2008) used narrative inquiry to explore how classroom curriculum making is shaped by the individual identities of students, their families, the teacher, etc. Mitton (2008) analyzed the stories of three participants, children in the classroom that served as the principal research site for her study, to understand how the relational identities of the children with their families and the teacher shape educational experiences. Mitton (2008) explored the research question multiperspectively by analyzing the narratives of the individual participants while paying close attention to the ways in which her participants' meaning-making influenced her own interpretations of experiences.

Similarly, Hunsburger (2008) employed narrative inquiry to uncover how three teacher participants understand inquiry learning and their roles in this teaching/learning approach. By analyzing the participants' narratives, Hunsburger was able to learn how these teachers reconstructed an identity for themselves in their role as co-learners and that this identity is

integral to how they live their lives. Hunsburger (2008) employed narrative inquiry because it allows to “not only understand how [people] have experienced something but how they constructed their understanding of that experience” (p. 75). In this way, the possibility of the text created through narrative inquiry exists in leaving space for the co-constructed social realities of the researcher, the participants and the reader as self-understanding is created through shared stories and reflection (Hunsburger, 2008).

Mitton (2008) and Hunsburger (2008) used narrative inquiry to understand the role participants’ experiences play in their construction of self while these experiences are still ongoing. In contrast, Penland (2007) explored the educational experiences of American Indians who grew up in the 1950s and 1960s through narrative inquiry. In this cross case analysis of eight American Indians' narratives of their educational experiences, Penland (2007) attempted to understand how the participants made successful career choices in later life despite adverse educational circumstances during childhood and adolescence. Penland (2007) used narratives to learn how educators can make more informed choices for a culturally responsive curriculum by gaining insight into how participants make meaning of their educational experiences.

I employed narrative inquiry to learn what role early educational experiences play in the participants’ understanding of self in later life. In this way, this study adds to the discourse on curriculum theory as it relates to the purpose of school. The frameworks I selected gave me the opportunity to learn how three mature participants make sense of their early educational experiences, which occurred 50 years prior to this study. From their narratives I gained insights into how these experiences contributed to their understanding of self. After understanding what role school played in the process, I was then able to explore the findings of this study in terms of their significance for curriculum studies.

## Research Design

This study was conducted with three participants over a period of six months. Data was collected from multiple sources as outlined in the next section. Data analysis took the form of narrative analysis, specifically paradigmatic cognition. Primary data collection and data analysis went on simultaneously and were completed within the six months. Secondary data collection continued beyond this point. Analysis is an ongoing process that will probably continue even after the last page of this dissertation is written. Part of the data collection and analysis processes were numerous member checks (Glesne, 2011). This presupposed a close and continuous relationship with the participants for a time beyond the initial data collection period, a relationship we had established. This research project and all aspects of its design have been approved by an IRB (see Appendix A *IRB Approval Letter*).

## Participant Selection

The idea for this study evolved from the *School Stories Project* (Rose & Griffith, n.d.), which is a collection of memories of early school experiences of 18 highly successful, mature men. These were later collected into a book-like art piece titled *Where Do We Start?* (Rose & Schilling, 2004), which consists of drawings, text, audio components and photographic images. It is not being sold but exhibited in the Library of Congress in Washington DC, the Whitney Museum in New York City, and other art galleries. The idea for this project was conceived when two of those 18 men met late in their lives and noticed certain commonalities between their lives' stories. For example, besides their personal and professional success, they shared the fact that their lives in grade school were dominated by social and/or academic Otherness. The *School Stories Project* started as the participants' meaning-making process with focus on their academic difficulties during their early school years. While working on the project, their focus extended to

making sense of the role these early educational experiences played in their becoming and in their perception of self throughout their lives. I analyzed autobiographical narratives and poems written by those participants, some of which went beyond childhood experiences (Varbelow, 2012) and was intrigued by how these men in their 60s and 70s remembered and made sense of school experiences that occurred to them between the ages of five and 18. It is from the work on that project that I conceived of the research question for this study. For the present study, I was able to work with Thomas, who is one of the participants from the *School Stories Project*, and two participants, Julio and Wahini<sup>9</sup>, who share similar characteristics but are also different from each other. The similarities are that they are mature adults who have lived personally and professionally successful lives. But while the participants from the *School Stories Project* are all White males, I decided to invite two participants who don't match these two criteria in order to not limit this study to one specific ethnic group. Wahini is a Japanese-Hawaiian female, and Julio is a Hispanic male. Glesne (2011) referred to this form of participant selection as purposeful selection. Patton (2002) explained that purposeful sampling allows the researcher to study a phenomenon in depth because s/he can "learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of research" (Patton, 2002, p. 230). Based on that idea, purposeful participant selection was a main priority for the design of this study.

The idea of narrativity focuses on the value of a singular life story. For example, Chase (2008) stated that "narrative discourse highlights the uniqueness of each human action and event rather than their common properties" (p. 65). However, I chose to work with multiple participants to explore the research question from multiple perspectives. Yet instead of looking for common properties, I illuminated the narrative of each individual participant with that of the

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<sup>9</sup> The names Thomas, Julio and Wahini are pseudonyms the participants chose for themselves.

other two, which enabled me to reach deeper levels of insights for each individual story. The choice to work with multiple participants also furthered the idea of the universality of the topic. As explained in Chapter II, Dewey (1934) stated that individual truths have the potential for transferability because they make it possible to think about experiences and social concepts concretely.

In order to achieve depth when exploring the participants' narratives and to understand the nature of their uniqueness, I opted for three participants rather than working with a larger number. This made it possible to collect a great amount of diverse data from each participant as shown below in Table 1 *Data Inventory by Participant*. Working with three participants enabled me to reach saturation for each individual participant, which put the focus of the study simultaneously on the singularity and the transferability of the individual narratives rather than on collective properties and generalizability.

Table 1

*Data Inventory by Participant*

Data Type		Thomas	Julio	Wahini
Historical Documents	Report cards	-	-	3
	Award certificates	-	-	4
	Newspaper clippings	-	1	1
	Memoirs	2	-	3
Interviews	Informal	2	5	2
	Structured	3	3	3
	Member check	2	2	2
Artifacts		1	-	-

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## Research Site

Glesne (2011) stated that the research site depends on the study's purpose and that some research problems do not call for a specific site at all. The research sites for this project varied. Two of the participants live in cities different from mine. The interviews with Thomas, who lives 1,300 miles away, were conducted via Skype. This was an unconventional research site, but I prioritized purposeful participant selection over site. Gaining access to a participant living that far away from the researcher would have been by far more difficult in the past. Technology today allowed me to really focus on purposeful participant selection, and it does so in a cost- and time-effective manner (Block & Erskine, 2012). Julio, who lives 350 miles away, regularly visits the city I live in, so interviews with him and with Wahini took place both in my work and home offices and in public spaces such as restaurants. I always made it a point to let Wahini and Julio choose where they wanted to meet so they could be comfortable with their surroundings. The Skype conversations with Thomas took place in both our work and home offices. The participants and I spent at least six hours talking to each other during various kinds of interviews as outlined in Table 2 *Complete Data Inventory* below.

## Membership Role

Because of the geographical distances between researcher and two of the participants, my role was that of a peripheral observer (Adler in Baker, 2006) or non-participant observer (Spradley, 1980). According to Adler (in Baker, 2006), a peripheral observer engages with the participants but does not engage in their activities. Usually the researcher takes this role either in order to preserve a detached perspective for data interpretation or if the researcher determines



that she does not wish to participate in the activities of the participants (Adler in Baker, 2006). Neither reason pertained to this study. My role was determined by purposeful participant selection, which resulted in the fact that two of the participants are geographically out of my reach. Moreover, observation was not used as a primary data source.

As the researcher, my initial role consisted in outlining the research purpose to the participants. Further, it was my responsibility to schedule all interviews and to share the results of my sense-making process in a timely manner to give the participants a chance to work with me in a stress-free environment. In addition, I was responsible for keeping all information confidential. Finally, I outlined the participants' roles to them and informed them that they could leave the research study at any time. Their roles consisted in making themselves available to provide me with information; in reviewing my data analysis process in order to give me feedback during member-check interviews; and in sharing with me any questions, concerns or interests that arose during our work on this study.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

Data collection consisted of primary and secondary data sources as delineated in Table 2 *Complete Data Inventory* below. Glesne (2011) stated that when selecting data sources, it is essential to allow for triangulation. This term refers to the notion that multiple data sources potentially yield thick or rich descriptions that might offer different angles from which to analyze the data while simultaneously allowing the researcher to understand the data's limitations. Different sources of data offer an opportunity to note inconsistencies when analyzing complex concepts such as a person's understanding of self. Richardson (2008) furthered the idea of triangulation by referring to it as crystallization. According to Richardson (2008), the term triangulation carries with it the idea of validation - data is triangulated to find a fixed point.

Crystallization, on the other hand, implies the idea of multidimensionality and transmutation (Richardson, 2008). Instead of searching for a fixed point and to explore possible findings from different angles, I opted to “see” how the narratives, like prisms, offer different perspectives of themselves. Thus, I collected data from diverse sources for each individual participant in order to be able to crystallize it.

Primary data was collected in form of electronic mail; conversational, semi-structured, structured, and member-check interviews; memoirs and other written work; objects and photographs. Secondary data consisted of researcher’s reflections, analytic memos, and peer reviews. Table 2 *Complete Data Inventory* provides an overview of the data I collected.

Table 2

*Complete Data Inventory*

Data Source	Frequency	Pages	Total
Current documents (email conversations, text messages)	continuous	About ½ page per week for 24 weeks	12
Historical documents (report cards, award certificates, newspaper clipping, memoirs)	14 documents	About 2 pages per document	28
Informal interviews	At least 6 ten- to	2 pages summary	12

	thirty-minute interviews	per interview	
Structured and semi-structured interviews	9 one-hour interviews	About 40 pages per interview	360
Member check interviews	6 one-hour interviews	About 40 pages per interview	240
Artifacts	1 object-elicitation	2 pages per object- elicitation	2
Photographs	6 photo-elicitations	1 page per photo- elicitation	6
Researcher's reflections	continuous	About 5 pages per week for 24 weeks	120
Peer reviews	7 reviews	2 pages per review	14
			Approx. 794 pages

## Documents

Part of the data consists of different kinds of written documents produced by the participants. These are divided into current and historical documents.

**Current documents.** One data source was e-mail correspondence, another was text messages. Glesne (2011) stated that for “a society that venerates the written word ... notes ... are potentially useful documents” (p. 87). In a time when electronic mail and text messages are a basic means of communication, these notes were an essential source of data since they were part

of the participants' daily routine. I used e-mail correspondence mainly to establish rapport, and I used both e-mail and text messages to stay in contact and arrange meetings with the participants. This data was used as a form of personal conversation.

***Historical documents.*** The historical documents used for this study were report cards, a newspaper clipping, award certificates, two memoirs and a poem that the participants created in the past. Glesne (2011) stated, "To understand a phenomenon, you need to know its history" (p. 85). One premise for this study is that reflectivity contributes to self-understanding. Reflectivity can only happen in retrospect; therefore, any document that precedes the time of the interviews offered potential insights into the process or into the emergent aspect of self-understanding. Another premise of this study is that reflectivity is time and space/place based (Pinar, 2004). Hence, it is appropriate to use documents that were created by the participants under circumstances different from those in which the interviews were situated. I was able to obtain two different types of historical documents: those created *by* the participants and those created *about* the participants. Thomas shared two memoirs with me that he wrote over a decade ago. Wahini shared a short story about a school experience and a poem about herself, both also written ten years ago. She also retrieved for me the type of historical documents that was created about her, namely report cards with teachers' comments and award certificates issued to her in high school. Julio shared a newspaper article with me that was dedicated to him during his early college years.

## **Interviews**

Glesne (2011) claimed that interviews are a valuable data source because they allow the researcher to pursue a specific purpose. Informal interviews in the form of casual conversations, including phone calls, are useful to establish rapport, to gain trust and to stay connected

throughout the data collection process. Structured interviews have the potential to elicit spontaneous responses for prepared questions. Semi-structured interviews include some prepared questions but leave enough room for emergence. This means that questions might be replaced during the interview or that the conversation proceeds into an unplanned direction. Glesne (2011) and Denzin and Lincoln (2008) pointed out that the narratives gained from an interview are the result of the relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee. This becomes important during the analysis process when the researcher must consider both parties' subjectivities in regard to the content as well as in regard to each other.

Interviews were conducted independently with each participant. The first interview was used to establish rapport and to get a general idea of who the participants are. For this interview I had an agenda but no specific questions. This made for a relaxed atmosphere and allowed each participant to decide what to talk about, which gave me an idea of his/her basic views regarding the topic. Since one purpose of this first interview was to establish trust, I did not ask permission to record our conversation, but I took notes. After the interview, I expanded those notes for later analysis.

The second interview with each participant took the form of a structured interview. I began each one of these interviews by formally outlining the parameters of qualitative research and asked for permission to record our conversations. I asked the following questions:

1. When I ask you about your school experiences, can you tell me how you feel about them?  
For example, did you like going to school when you grew up?
2. Tell me about a time when you did not want to go to school.
3. Can you think of some things that made you feel comfortable in school?
4. Can you tell me some typical things that children

5. Can you tell me some typical things that teachers said to you?
6. Can you recall a memorable educational experience?
7. How would you describe yourself?
8. Was there ever a time when this description would have been different?

The order of the questions was determined by the way the interviews proceeded. I was also ready to change or withhold questions as needed, but this proved to be unnecessary. Interview questions for all subsequent interviews varied widely among the participants because they were determined based on data analysis and the particular kind of relationship we had established. For example, I talked with each participant about literature and movies. All of them recommended books and movies which were significant for them. I made it a point to read their books and watched most of their movies. In subsequent meetings, part of our conversations then revolved around the book or movie and the ways in which it resonated with them.

### **Artifacts**

Artifacts are objects “bestowed with meaning and history by the people in that context” (Glesne, 2011, p. 85). They allow the researcher to perceive of relationships of ideas and give insights into how meaning is constructed (Glesne, 2011; Anderson-Levitt, 2006). For this study, I collected two different kinds of artifacts. One is participant-created visual data, such as photographs. Photographs allow the researcher to learn about the past of participants’ lives in a special way. This was done through photo-elicitation (Glesne, 2011). The word elicitation refers to the idea of “invoke[ing] comments, memory and discussion in the course of a semi-structured interview” (Glesne, 2011, p. 83). The participant-chosen photographs opened the conversation to topics that might not have been considered otherwise. It also offered the participants a chance to “gain voice in the research process” (Glesne, 2011, p. 84). Additionally,

one of the participants, Thomas, is an artist, and I used a book-like art piece that he created specifically to reflect on memories of his grammar school years for object-elicitation.

### **Secondary Data Sources**

Secondary data sources included a researcher's notebook, analytic memos and peer reviews. Glesne (2011) recommended keeping a researcher's journal at hand for the duration of the study to collect field and mental notes that should later be expanded. In addition to these notes, my researcher's journal contains expository pieces, which were part of my meaning-making process. In regard to the analytic memos, Saldaña (2009) advised to "stop whatever you're doing and write a memo ... immediately" (p. 33) whenever anything related to the study comes to mind. I initially recorded my memos on post-its, paper and as voice recordings on my smartphone, whichever I had at hand, but in order to keep them organized and easily accessible during the data analysis process, I made it a point to transcribe them routinely electronically. Peer reviews are additional data sources. Since my primary intent for including them was to maintain academic rigor and trustworthiness, these sources will be elaborated in the corresponding section below. During the process of data analysis, the secondary data sources developed into a fundamental tool to make meaning of the primary data and changed the analytical process from being inductive and linear to becoming complex and multilayered.

### **Data Management and Analysis**

As shown in Table 2 *Complete Data Inventory*, I gathered a large amount of data from different sources and in different forms. In order to explore all of it effectively, it was fundamental to be highly organized throughout the study.

## **Data Management**

Although many of my analytical memos started out as notes on paper or voice recordings, I eventually stored all data electronically with the exception of one artifact. I worked with hardcopies of the transcripts during data analysis, but I was adamant about storing the results electronically. Keeping electronic records of the analytical process greatly facilitated sharing my progress with the participants through e-mails. All folders were saved in Dropbox and backed up on my personal computer and a flash drive, all of which are password protected.

I created an electronic folder for each participant with subfolders for three of the four data sources as they pertain to each of the participants: interviews, historical documents, and artifacts. In order to assure the participants' anonymity, I did not to use any personal information in the titles of the folders and their contents. However, since they did use their names in our e-mail correspondences, I kept the folders for this data source separate from those of the other three. I added transcripts, coding, and field notes to the corresponding folders. In addition, I created three more folders for each participant: a researcher's journal, an analytic memo folder, and a literature review folder. The latter contains journals in which I explored how my findings make sense when examined from the angle of the literature in regard to the research purpose. Additional folders were created as needed, e.g. during the process of categorizing and theming.

## **Analysis of Narratives**

The data analysis framework for this study is paradigmatic cognition, which is one approach to analyzing data collected through narrative inquiry. Polkinghorne (1995) differentiated between two basic approaches to narrative inquiry – narrative cognition and paradigmatic cognition. Both approaches have in common that the data consists of stories. The main difference consists in their representation: what he describes as narrative cognition



produces stories while paradigmatic cognition produces taxonomies based on categories. For this study, I employed paradigmatic cognition in the form of an inductive process. Polkinghorne (1995) stated that this approach to narrative analysis brings order to experiences by understanding how they are similar and form patterns. This process is outlined in the next subsection.

When analyzing narratives, Phoenix (2008) suggested looking for the “key narrative” in the form of a recurring theme. “Participants construct themselves as having particular philosophies and habitual ways of dealing with the world that constitute a projection of identity” (Phoenix, 2008, p. 67). The particular philosophies are the result of how a person makes sense of experiences and that self-understanding is projected through the choices a person makes. Both the experiences and the reasons for choices are expressed in the narratives. Since experiences and choices are continuous, the way a person makes sense of his/her experiences is a recursive process, the result of which is an emerging and emergent story of his/her life. Hence, I made it a point to listen to the participants’ narratives in a manner that allowed me to get a sense of their key narratives. During data analysis and through expository writing, I was able to represent each of them in a way that made their key narrative the theme of their story. The write-ups of these stories were then member-checked and revised based on the participants’ feedback until they felt that I had portrayed them accurately.

One aspect of this kind of narrative meaning making is that stories are always told to a particular audience (Phoenix, 2008), which means that the narrative is always a co-construction between at least two people. Therefore, when analyzing narrative, the researcher must also understand the intersubjectivity at play. This intersubjectivity consists in the relations between the researcher’s subjectivity toward the participants and the topic as well as in the participants’

subjectivity toward her in regard to the topic. For example, in one of the first e-mails to Thomas, I briefly shared the nature of this study with him, focusing on professional success despite of experiences of Otherness during early academic years. At that point, all I knew about Thomas was that school was not a good experience for him; all he knew about me was that I was a doctoral student in a college of education. Thomas replied, “Reading your proposal/proposition, I am struck by how ordinary it is, ordinary in the sense of the concept of otherness — and how the range is narrowed by the concept of success.” I reflected on this reply and wondered if, based on his early educational experiences, he compared me to the educators of his childhood thinking I was looking for a one-size-fits-all “fix” for education. During our first, informal interview, I was able to clarify the purpose of this study better for him. I did so by showing my appreciation of his candor, which set the parameters of the rapport we quickly established to be defined by openness and honest collaboration in our combined search for truths.

But the relationship between the researcher and the participant goes beyond intersubjectivity. Denzin and Lincoln (2008) asserted that while the narrator constructs the experiences of his life into a meaningful whole, both he and the researcher gain an understanding toward their own actions and those of others. This comes about when the researcher focuses on how the narrator understands his biographical experiences rather than on what these experiences are. In other words, through verbalizing an experience, the narrator makes sense of it; by learning how another person makes sense of an experience, the researcher gains insight into herself. These insights determined the structure of the next chapter, *Data Analysis and Representation*. While I originally planned to represent the participants’ narratives in a detached way so as to give them voice, I quickly realized that this was nonsensical because I was interpreting the data through my own personal practical knowledge (Clandinin, 1985).

Moreover, this approach contradicted my intent to continuously uncover my subjectivities, which present both a possibility and a limitation for the study as outlined in Chapter I. Thus, I reflected the iterative process of co-constructed meaning-making in the following chapter by making overt how my subjective worldviews influenced data analysis and representation.

## **Data Analysis**

I began the analytical processes in a rather linear fashion by analyzing data first for each individual and then from across all data sources for each participant. This was done in form of an inductive analysis process. The process consisted of several coding cycles, which yielded categories for each data source. I then elicited themes from across all data sources for each individual participant. Glesne (2011) recommended coding the data to get an idea of how the stories presented by the different data sources for each participant connect with each other. According to Saldaña (2009), researchers disagree on how much of the data gets coded. I starting the coding process with the interviews and then proceeded with the other data sources as they were offered to me by the participants. In the end, not all of the written data was coded, e.g. email conversations and text messages. After all data was collected, coded and themed for each individual participant, I proceeded to represent the three individual narratives. Writing is a form of data analysis, and as I composed the individual stories, four overarching concepts emerged.

***First cycle coding methods.*** For first cycle coding methods, I began with Descriptive Coding to get a general idea toward what the data is about (Saldaña, 2009). This means that I divided the transcript of the interviews into thematic sections, to which I assigned headings. If the data contained small stories, I coded those separately. According to Phoenix (2008), small stories are told in passing and give insight into how people build their narratives. Phoenix (2008) explained that they help to understand how members of society represent their own and

others' lives. Therefore, small stories were a valuable data source that needed to be analyzed separately. Below is an example of a small story told by Julio during our first structured interview:

My father had PTSD from WW II but we didn't know. Nobody knew. We just knew that he drank a lot. So he drank a lot of the money, and my mother would make me go out and climb the ebony trees to collect the seeds so she could boil them so that we could eat. And so I started having that mentality that a person could actually eat and feed themselves from the natural world. And I got into rabbit hunting, when I was in junior high. I got into fishing - my father loved fish - and bringing in food for the family from the natural world.

This small story has an exposition, rising action, a climax, falling action, a denouement and a moral. Based on the moral, I titled it *An Acquired Mentality*, following Saldaña's (2009) suggestion to use titles as categories.

Next, I employed In Vivo Coding. "In vivo" derives from the root for "live" and refers to words and phrases from the actual language of the participants in qualitative data (Saldaña, 2009). For this kind of coding, I collected all words and phrases that resonated with me particularly and then sorted them into thematic units. I then assigned a title to each set of quotes, which became a category. Figure 1 *In Vivo Coding* below shows one set of codes from across all data sources for Wahini.

### Memory Discrepancies

- And I don't remember that. So my memory and what was ...
- Yeah, because my memory is very different.
- By myself (quietly). Yeah, I was ... sort of looking back it's like I was very ... Was I lonesome? ... I was ... no ... I did most of the stuff by myself.
- My memory of myself doesn't jive with some of the stuff.
- Sonja (reading teacher's comments on report card): "Careless and untidy sometimes. Tends to work too fast and talks a little too much."
- Wahini: See, and I don't remember talking.

*Figure 1* In Vivo Coding

I titled this set of in vivo quotes "Memory Discrepancies," a title that started out as a category and, upon further data analysis, uncovered a perceived inconsistency in my understanding of the data collected for Wahini. Seeming inconsistencies in the data provide an avenue to think about it more deeply and to avoid coming to superficial conclusions too quickly.

The coding technique I used next was Emotion Coding in combination with In Vivo Coding. Emotion Coding is employed to "explore intrapersonal and interpersonal participant experiences and actions" (Saldaña, 2009, p. 87). Experiences and actions give insight into the participants' choices and motifs, which should be examined in a study that explores self-understanding. Table 3 *Emotion Coding* below is an example for In Vivo and Emotion Coding from the transcript of my first structured interview with Thomas. The quotation marks around the codes in the right column indicate in vivo quotes.

Table 3

*Emotion Coding*

And so no matter how much I studied <sup>1</sup> or	<sup>1</sup> RESIGNED
whatever, I never could get a hundred on a	
spelling test.... and so part of it was	
intimidation <sup>2</sup> and, you know, a sense of	<sup>2</sup> “INTIMIDATION”
feeling of being on the spot <sup>3</sup> or being put	<sup>3</sup> UNEASY
on the spot.	
We went to movies and ... came back to	
the back yard and built Indian villages <sup>4</sup> and	<sup>4</sup> ADVENTUROUS
all kinds of other stuff, and TVs and made	
bows and arrows, you know, and sort of	
tomahawks and all kinds of stuff <sup>5</sup> .	<sup>5</sup> HAPPY
It was enjoyable <sup>6</sup> to do these things and it	<sup>6</sup> “ENJOYABLE”
wasn’t a matter of analyzing what ...	

Through Emotion Coding, I got a sense of how Thomas felt when he talked about different ways of learning.

In addition, I used Values Coding, a technique that requires sorting the data into attitudes (A), values (V), and beliefs (B) (Saldaña, 2009). Saldaña (2009) claimed that a person’s attitudes, values and beliefs offer insight into his/her perspectives and worldviews, which are part of how s/he constructs meaning. Table 4 *Values Coding* is an example from the transcript of my second structured interview with Thomas:

Table 4

*Values Coding*

... there is an element of ... whininess or complaining <sup>1</sup> ... in some of the stories.	<sup>1</sup> A: SOME PEOPLE WHINE/COMPLAIN
But then again everybody responds to things differently <sup>2</sup> .	IN DIFFICULT SITUATIONS <sup>2</sup> A: PEOPLE RESPOND DIFFERENTLY
... those things we all go through and survive. I mean those are the inevitable <sup>3</sup>	TO CONFLICT <sup>3</sup> B: DISAPPOINTMENTS ARE
disappointments of childhood, nobody, no matter what system, ... can avoid <sup>4</sup> .	INEVITABLE AND UNAVOIDABLE <sup>4</sup> B: DISAPPOINTMENTS CAUSE US TO
... hurtful things often cause us to ... overcome other, you know, sort of other problems <sup>4</sup> or sometimes difficulties sort of create for us obstacles that we then overcome.	OVERCOME
encouraged ... some exploration <sup>5</sup> . ... And we let our daughters ... use the car and go off on camping trips ..., go on concerts ...	<sup>5</sup> V: PARENTS MUST PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES FOR EXPERIENCES

By getting an idea of some of Thomas' values, beliefs and attitudes, I gained a better understanding of the framework of his narrative.

After each coding cycle, I engaged in expository writing. In my researcher's journal, these entries are titled *Preliminary Understandings* and *Research Focus*.

***Second cycle coding methods.*** After applying the different coding methods described above, as expected, I ended up with an overwhelming amount of codes. In order to crystallize the data and understand its inherent complexities (Richardson, 2008), these codes needed to be organized and reorganized to form thematically similar units. The desired result of second cycle coding is to arrive at hierarchies or concepts. Saldaña (2009) suggested different kinds of second cycle coding methods to eliminate redundant or less salient codes. I used the focusing technique Saldaña (2009) called “The top ten list” (p.186) to eliminate less salient codes. I then employed Focused Coding (Saldaña, 2009) as a way to search for the most significant codes. After these coding cycles, I re-sorted the codes again and wrote about them as a further form of data analysis. This made the hitherto somewhat linear data analysis process multidimensional and iterative. It allowed me to become aware of what, up until then, I had known only intuitively about the data and the participants’ narratives. In the writing process, themes and key narratives for each participant emerged based on which I composed the analytic narratives presented in the next chapter.

***Arts-based inquiry.*** In addition to using the different coding techniques described above, I also used arts-based educational research (ABER) to analyze and represent the data. A fundamental idea of ABER is that instead of focusing on bottom line findings, the data as well as the educational issues under study are explored from a different angle (Barone & Eisner, 1997). While this kind of research approach is often marginalized (Denzin, 2003), it complements traditional research by looking at issues from the inside rather than the outside for possible answers. In that way, arts-based research can be likened to a kaleidoscope that shows a pattern made of a handful of pearls. Each time the kaleidoscope is turned, a new pattern emerges made



up of the exact same pearls. The patterns are beautiful and unexpected and come about by combining the same parts in new and different ways.

Barone and Eisner (1997) stated that this kind of research offers a chance “to see educational phenomena in new ways, and to entertain questions about them that might have otherwise been left unasked” (p. 96). Cahnmann (2003) offered examples of how the use of poetry during the data interpretation process can help the researcher to see “contradictions, dualities, and paradoxes” (p. 33). The choice of medium depends on the purpose of the study (Saldaña, 2003) and the researcher’s comfort zone (Cahnmann, 2003). I composed a short story, an in vivo poem and a vignette to analyze and to represent the data.

*Analytic memos.* Saldaña (2009) stated that using analytic memos for visual data allows for a holistic and interpretive approach. Hence, analytic memos were particularly important when I analyzed the artifact and the memory transcripts of spontaneous phone calls I received from Julio.

Alongside the data analysis processes described above, I continuously reflected on temporary findings and insights in form of entries in my researcher’s journal and analytic memos. I followed Saldaña’s (2009) suggestion to write analytic memos to keep track of how the study evolves. This process facilitated my reflections on how I related to the participants and the research questions; on personal and ethical dilemmas; on emergent patterns, categories and themes; as well as on emergent and existing theories (Saldaña, 2009).

## **Data Representation**

It was important to me not to represent the data as final co-constructed truths but to make overt the process by which meanings were constructed. For this reason, I attempted to relay the participants’ narratives in ways that included my ever-temporary dispositions to the data. This

made it possible for me to show how my subjectivities influenced the way I perceived of and interpreted the data.

At the same time I was cognizant of my voice as the researcher. Chase (2008) distinguished among three researcher's voices when representing narrative data: authoritative, supportive and interactive. The authoritative researcher's voice represents data and findings by reciting long excerpts from transcripts followed by an analysis that separates the researcher's voice from the participant's, often prioritizing the former. I was determined to avoid this because it leads to a distortion of meaning and is discrepant from the fundamental idea of qualitative research that truths are co-constructed. The supportive researcher's voice also separates itself from that of the participant, but this time by pushing the latter to the forefront, almost romanticizing it as authentic (Chase, 2008). In this way it is equally counterproductive to the co-construction of truths. I attempted to employ an interactive researcher's voice by examining how the participant's and my meanings are refracted in our conversations. Chase (2008) warned that a researcher's interactive voice might lead to self-indulgence. While I represented the data with both our voices interwoven, I hope to have avoided this pitfall by adding precisely those of my experiences and views that led to subjective interpretations, at which point it was essential to bring them to light.

I found that the best way to represent the participants accurately was to structure each narrative based on the three research questions. I had carefully scaffolded these questions from concrete to abstract to address the research purpose. So I began by relaying the participants' early educational memories as they were shared with me followed by how they interpreted them and finally synthesized everything into their personal grand narrative. In this way, I was able to relay their key narratives while simultaneously showing how these key narratives were

constructed. The focus is on process as much as it is on result, or findings, so as to reflect the fragmented, nuanced and ever-emergent nature of self-understanding. In order to communicate how each participant expressed him/herself, I used copious direct citations from the transcripts. I decided to leave the participants' dialect in tact but reduced the data by eliminating interjections usually present in oral speech, e.g. such as "uhm," "uh," "you know," etc. These interjections seemed much more distracting in writing than they were during the actual conversations. I feel that by using this data reduction technique, I represented the participants more accurately than I would have if I had left the interjections in their speech.

As described above, I also used ABER to analyze and represent the data. I concluded Thomas' narrative with a short story which I composed to reflect and to exemplify what I perceived to be the essence of his personal grand narrative. To give the best possible representation of Julio, I chose to preface his narrative with a poem composed of in vivo quotes from across all data sources he provided me with. And I resorted to writing a vignette to explore seeming discrepancies in the data collected for Wahini. All parts of data representation in the following chapter were repeatedly member-checked and approved by each of the participants.

### **Reciprocity and Ethics**

Glazer (in Glesne, 2011) defined "reciprocity as 'the exchange of favors and commitments, the building of a sense of mutual identification and feeling of community'" (p. 177). The participants' time and resources were literally invaluable to me, so the best way to reciprocate for me was to make this study personally meaningful to them. As explained earlier, I chose the participants based on their interest in the study. Glesne (2011) stated that if my "questions identify issues of importance ..., interviewees will invariably both enjoy and find useful their roles as information providers" (p. 178). Glesne (2011) continued by saying, "By the

quality of your listening, you will provide context for personal exploration by your interviewees” (p. 178). I do believe that as I posed questions and listened to the narratives of the participants, I offered them an opportunity to gain an additional aspect of self-understanding. Further, I conducted numerous member-checks, as outlined in the next section, to address a continuous ethical concern of mine, which revolves around the danger of unintentionally misrepresenting the participants to further my ideas or of using their voice to deliver my views.

### **Academic Rigor and Trustworthiness**

Academic rigor was accomplished by working with diverse kinds of data sources and analytical techniques to allow for triangulation and crystallization. As shown in Table 2 *Complete Data Inventory*, the study was based on multiple data sources. This made for rich and thick data because it allowed me to explore emerging categories and themes from different angles. The data was analyzed by employing a variety of methods, which enabled me to analyze the data more deeply while providing me with the opportunity to explore inconsistencies and contradictions in the findings (Glesne, 2011). In this way, triangulation made obvious the inherent complexity of the data. As explained earlier, Richardson (2008) furthered the idea of complex data analysis by referring to it as crystallization rather than triangulation. “Crystals are prisms that reflect externalities and refract within themselves, creating different colors, patterns, and arrays casting off in different directions. ... We do not triangulate, we crystallize” (Richardson, 2008, p. 478). The variety of data sources and the inductive analysis combined with ABER enabled me to see the different patterns, externalities and internalities of the data. In this way, crystallization also contributed to the trustworthiness of this research.

Other ways in which I maintained trustworthiness were peer reviews, member checking and subjectivity explorations (Glesne, 2011). A peer review is the process of inviting a person

outside of the study to look at the data and the ways in which I have analyzed it up to that point. I conducted seven peer reviews with two different peers, which helped me to explore the data from points of view external to my own. This helped me to uncover connections between the data that I might not have seen otherwise. Moreover, the peer reviews were effective in pointing out discrepancies and superficialities during the process of categorizing and theming. For example, a preliminary finding during the process of data collection and analysis with Thomas was that perceived Otherness is essential to self-understanding. When I shared an early draft of the analytical narrative for Thomas' story with one of my peer reviewers, she simply asked whether Otherness is good or bad. Based on this preliminary finding, my first instinct was to explain to her that it is a good thing. But the more I contemplated my explanation, the deeper I thought about the idea as a whole. As a result, the peer review process eventually enabled me to develop this initially superficial conclusion into a fundamental idea for two of the four concepts that represent the major findings of this study. These are explained in the next chapter.

Member checking is the process of inviting participants to review the data analysis process. This is done by sharing the results of the data analysis with each participant to ensure that I did not misinterpret the different data or misrepresent the findings. Member check interviews were absolutely essential. They were the only way to learn whether I had understood the participants' narratives correctly. Moreover, in qualitative research, understanding and truths are co-constructed as described earlier. This presupposes an iterative process of sharing and meaning-making, which can only be done through continuous member checks. This is one way to assure ethical decision-making during qualitative research. Furthermore, both peer reviews and member checks gave me opportunities to recognize my subjectivities toward the study, the participants and the topic. I began this process by sharing my subjective background and views

based on which I became interested in the research question and which guided me in the design of the study in Chapter I. As expected, my subjectivities were emergent throughout the study; hence, I made sure to identify and explore them continuously.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, I explained the methodology I employed to conduct this study and to answer the research questions. The purpose of this chapter was to delineate the methods of the research process from participant selection to data collection, analysis and representation in an effort to show that the findings of this study are based on academic rigor and trustworthiness. In order to achieve this goal, I gave detailed explanations of how I employed narrative inquiry to gather and interpret data. In the next chapter, I will detail the findings of the narrative inquiry.

## **Chapter IV: Data Analysis and Representation**

In this chapter, I will represent the data with focus on the three research questions. Recall that the purpose of this study was to explore the role early educational experiences play throughout life and how they influence the ways in which each participant authors his/her personal grand narrative. The chapter consists of four parts. The first three parts are designed to show how each participant describes memories (R1), interprets them (R2), and places these iterations in the bigger picture of his/her life (R3). In this way, I will relay the personal grand narrative, as it relates to early educational experiences, of each individual author. Working with three very different participants has allowed me to focus on different vantage points of narrative inquiry such as place, temporality and sociality (Clandinin & Connelly, 2006) and crisis of representation (Schwandt, 2007) as explained in the previous chapter. For example, my conversations with Wahini opened my eyes to how memory is reconstructed in conversation, which is one aspect of the sociality commonplace in narrative research (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). Julio has given me most insights into how the dimensions of temporality and place influence how narratives are composed (Clandinin & Connelly, 2006; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008), and my work with Thomas made me most aware of the crisis of representation every qualitative researcher faces. In order to bring these aspects of narrativity to light and also to communicate a sense of how the participants narrate themselves, I will relay their stories with focus on process rather than result by presenting them in present tense. As explained in the Chapter III, the excerpts from the transcripts used in the narratives below contain the participants' original dialect, but I employed a data reduction technique to eliminate non-essential and distracting interjections usually present in oral speech. This chapter will conclude with four overarching concepts that emerged when analyzing each individual grand narrative. These concepts

represent the major findings of the study and provide transferable answers to the research questions.

### **Growing into the Size of Your Feet: Thomas**

#### **Memories**

I met Thomas through the *School Stories Project* (Rose & Griffith, n.d.). A major theme of this project was that participants had made it in life not *because* of school but *despite* of it. I had read Thomas' memoir of his grammar school experiences, a short, autobiographical story specifically composed for that project. He writes, "As soon as regular hell got out, I was to start at the next lower level of hell." He is referring to the summer after fourth or fifth grade when he had to attend summer school to finally learn how to read. Picturing Thomas as an elementary student, I was reminded of a Tears for Fears song, *Mad World* (Orzabal, 1982, B-side):

Children waiting for the day they feel good

Happy birthday, happy birthday

And to feel the way that every child should

Sit and listen, sit and listen

Went to school and I was very nervous

No one knew me, no one knew me

Hello teacher tell me, what's my lesson?

Look right through me, look right through me.

So I am surprised when he tells me school was "ok." "I was a happy kid. I had a really great childhood," he says and explains that he was outgoing, had lots of friends. He smiles mischievously when he recalls how they played outside of school, making tomahawks, hanging out at the railroad yards and being gone from morning until night getting in all sorts of trouble



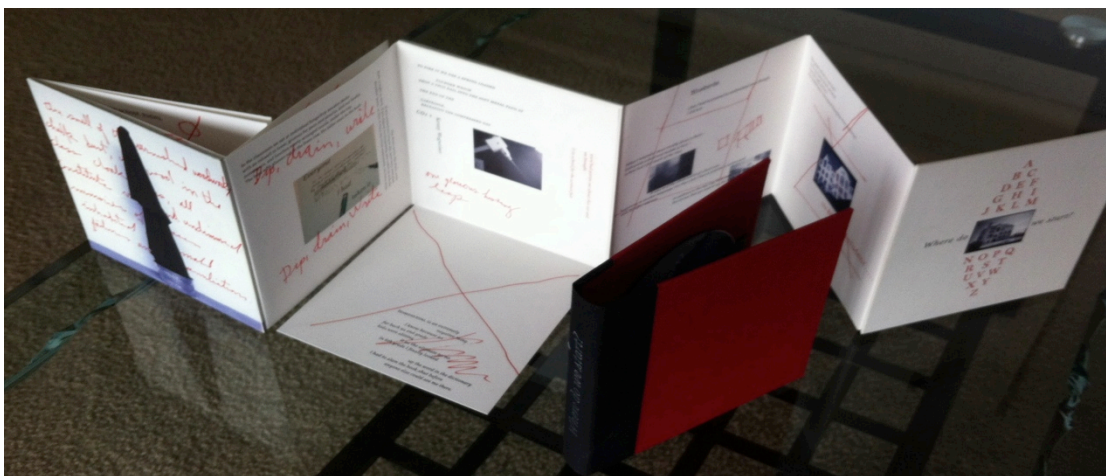
his parents would never find out about. He tells me about his interest in guns and the day he got injured and threw his bloody underwear away so his parents wouldn't know. This is how he learns, he says, by doing. Thomas is a visual artist who works with metal and glass and through photography. I'm intimidated because I have always felt that I don't understand art well, so it is difficult for me to make meaning of the objects I see when I explore his online exhibitions. One exhibit stands out because at first sight it looks familiar – a table. Its four icy silver legs are topped with a thick frosted glass plate, seemingly floating in the air, that holds two rectangular prisms, one vertical and one horizontal, fixed on a metal rail (Figure 2). We are Skyping, and I apologize for not understanding his projects. He asks me about the painting that hangs behind me in my home office. I tell him it's a Rothko, my favorite painter, whom I also positively do not understand but love because his paintings make me feel either absolutely jubilant or incredibly sad. "You're the perfect consumer then," Thomas insists, "because art is not meant to be understood; it's to be experienced."



*Figure 2 Sites*

And suddenly something else is starting to make sense to me. Thomas had sent me the art piece he designed for the *School Stories Project*. He referred to it as a book that's meant to reflect the often intimidating and desolate nature of the early educational experiences of the

participants of that project (Figure 3). I remember just trying to open this three-dimensional object was an altogether confusing affair because nothing worked as I expected. As I turned the dark red hard cover, the contents of the book came lose. I was shocked knowing that what I was holding in my hands was an expensive art piece that is not even for sale but exhibited in the Library of Congress and other major art galleries. When I turned the first page, I landed somewhere deep inside the book, unable to find the beginning. Pages started to open from the bottom, and I messed the thing up like I do when I try to put a map back together. Nothing about this book made sense to me. But when Thomas says that art is to be experienced, I understand that this is what school must have been like for him – confusing, intimidating, as if he had missed the introductory lesson in which they taught everything.



*Figure 3 Where Do We Start?*

And yet, school was “ok.” I ask him what he liked about school, and he ponders, I can’t think of anything I liked about it. Hm, maybe shop class. If I think about that, I think I liked stories. I liked history. Well, I mean I couldn’t spell and I couldn’t read very well, so when I go to the chalkboard to solve a math problem, a lot of my concentration just goes out the window because I’m concerned about other people. So it was a feeling of intimidation and of being put on the spot.

He remembers that he often felt vulnerable and exposed, which is the feeling I got from his memoir. Although he had good teachers in grammar school, he spent a lot of time worrying about school. He tells me about his granddaughters and how excited they are about learning. He compares their experiences with his own:

I was not a good kid when it came to learning in a kind of classroom sort of way. I'd cry and whine and drive my parents crazy. I never really had any sort of fun with school. I wished I had had fun with it.

Thomas' early educational experiences took place mainly during the 1950s, a time before conditions like dyslexia and dyscalculia were recognized. He describes himself as having "some dyslexia" and that he sometimes doesn't remember well, especially numbers. He muses, "I'd be the worst spy ever because I'd always have to write everything down!" And I understand that Thomas is nothing like the Tears for Fears song.

### **Interpretations**

The seeming discrepancy between a great childhood and having spent much of it worrying about school, which Thomas referred to as "regular hell" in his memoir, is dispelled by his interpretations of those memories: "Those things we all go through and survive. I mean those are the inevitable disappointments of childhood. Nobody, no matter what system, can avoid them. Those hurtful things often cause us to overcome." This notion is the thread that runs through the narratives of Thomas' life. Through those experiences, he understood that his sense of inadequacy, evoked when asked to do things he knew he was not particularly good at, pertained to certain skills and not to others. He learned that he was not good at performing under pressure and that making things in shop class was "very good" for him. He decries the inconsistency in ever failing one-size-fits-all approaches for education, which, once a new fad

had emerged, were quickly replaced. Thomas says, “I think education, in terms of its struggle to find that one answer, failed a lot of children largely because not everybody learns the same way. I learned by making.” Today Thomas teaches art at a large research university. Looking at learning through the eyes of the teacher, he observes that his students “are all in slightly different places, so it’s sort of difficult to expect everybody to come out with the same thing.” He talks about a student in his class who seems really smart but appears to struggle with a particular project because of his individual way of experiencing it. It feels like both he and I are picturing Thomas, who then offers an explanation of what might be happening:

There was this guy in Chicago, I can’t remember his first name, but his name was Dewey, and he had this theory about education, which was experienced-based.

Experiential learning as we know it today was pioneered by Dewey going back to the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This was pretty much part of my grandfather’s and father’s educational system as well, you know, learning by doing as well as in the classroom.

And so a lot of what I was doing was making models or building things. I mean my interest in structure really arrives out of my interest in making things, building things, doing things.

Since Thomas’ area of expertise is art and not curriculum or pedagogy, these insights must have derived from his continuous reflections on his own early academic experiences. In fact, the idea for the *School Stories Project* was conceived as participants tried to make meaning of the role these experiences played in their self-understanding throughout their lives. Within these reflections, Thomas created a place in his narrative for his curiosity of how things work. He refers to it as “what ifs.” He talks about how he explored his grandfather’s laboratory and how he was fascinated when experimenting with a magnifying glass and fire. He remembers those

moments as magical because of the mystery he was uncovering and the feeling that he had learned something. He wrote a short autobiographical piece titled *Mysteries of Place*, in which he explores how early experiences of place connect people with the world. He conveys the image of his grandfather's house with great detail to its architecture creating a mood of mystery and wonder. He writes, "The Bunsen burners in the basement lab enriched my life with danger and with fire," and he describes how he watched "in shocked surprise and terror" the blazing fire he had accidentally created by pouring wax onto a pot of flaming paraffin. Thomas describes learning as an awareness rather than knowledge, which, according to him, can be brought about only by experiencing something. He says that he is glad that his parents always encouraged a certain amount of curiosity and points out that he and his wife had raised their daughters in the same way – encouraging exploration, e.g. letting them use the car for camping trips.

As one of the most significant experiences of academic learning, Thomas recalls his summer school experience described in the *School Stories Project*, when he finally started to uncover the mysteries of the written word. I ask him about the "next lower level of hell," as he had referred to it in his memoir, and he remembers,

The epiphany came when I came out of that school and I had some sense that I had actually learned something. I couldn't verify, at that time, what it was. All I knew was that I felt differently about it. I felt better. I was aware that I had learned something.

That in and of itself was rather amazing.

When I read the memoir, it elicited a mood of desolation and darkness with the possibility of hope when Thomas was beginning to read. But in our conversation about this experience, he interprets it as an epiphany, which he explains as something that happens when two or more experiences are perceived as making sense with each other and create a new idea in the

individual, which he can then act upon in the future. No doubt, this way of interpreting a childhood spent worrying about school bridges Thomas' early educational experiences and his Tom Sawyer-like childhood narratives.

### **Grand Narrative**

When I ask Thomas what words or phrases he would use to describe himself, his immediate answer is, "Happy, positive, enthusiastic." I wait several seconds for an elaboration, but none is coming. I offer my next question in reply: was there ever a time in his life when those words would not have applied to him. He answers simply, "No, probably not." At the time of the interview, I am still trying to find the synthesis between the worried grade school boy and the contended man I am talking to, so I bluntly probe for what might be the bridge that divided the two in my perception. Thomas' insights are profound:

Sometimes it's a matter of how we remember [experiences] or how we write about them. ... It's great to be unpopular, nerdy or whatever early on and then you sort of grow into the size of your feet and you become something as a result. You just become more mature and you're ready for it.

With "it" Thomas means life or, more precisely, the next experience. He uses the phrase "more mature" to refer to the self-trust one gains through an added understanding of oneself. And it feels as if he uses the word "feet" instead of "shoes" as a metaphor for what one is, for the "self." To me, feet are something I come with, something that is part of me; shoes are something external and exchangeable. I grow into me as the result of not rendering my self to an experience, of not becoming someone different. Thomas is a successful artist. According to him, artists experience 90% rejection. Thomas continues to be an artist. This is the existence he chose for himself to relate and contribute meaningfully to the world he lives in. This level of

self-understanding stems from his self-trust, which he gained from his experiences and his singular ways of interpreting them. Thomas tells me that the best teachers he had were the ones that left him alone to figure things out for himself because this allowed him to learn what he is interested in and concerned with. He explains,

You're in a sense trying to write the world in terms of your own vision, and so, to some extent, it takes a while to figure out, well, who am I? And what is the nature of my voice? What is it that I particularly want to explore or explain or deal with? And that takes a certain amount of being on your own.

These existentialist questions are the very ink used to write one's personal grand narrative. Thomas uses a different metaphor, though. He compares one's existence in time and space with a house. He says we're not *in* the house but we *make* the house; it is part of us, and no one can experience it the way we do. This worldview gives him the existential freedom to interpret his memories in ways that further his individual evolution on his terms. Thomas' early educational experiences, as they pertained to classroom learning, sent a clear message to him – you are inadequate. He says it took him until he was 50 years old to not care whether others thought his comments were “stupid.” While I was working with Thomas, there was a period when I thought how easy it would have been for him to think of himself as someone who has overcome almost insurmountable obstacles. But the more we talked, the clearer it became to me that nothing could be further from the theme of Thomas' personal grand narrative. During one of our last conversations, he says, “I don't believe in public memorials very much. I think there's a lot of things that people should just forget or move on. Well, you can remember it, but essentially you keep going.” It seems that the tension the experiences of Otherness carried forced him to continuously deal with questions as those above. Note that the word “tension” does not have the

negative connotation of the words “problem” and “conflict.” Hegel (1816/2010) describes these tensions as the dialectic contradictions manifested in the mind, which are one’s impetus to reach a higher level or, plainly, to become. The alternative to becoming would be to surrender the existential self. The essence of an experience is that one survived, both physically and existentially, which furthers one’s understanding of the self. Because of the recursive nature of self-perception, it follows that one emerges on a higher level of self-understanding and being. In short, experiences of tension contribute to one’s becoming by affording one to know what it means “to be oneself.” The other aspect of crafting the protagonist of one’s individual grand narrative is the particular way in which one makes sense of the experiences it is composed of. For example, Bruner (2004) stated that how a person portrays himself depends on the “characterizations of the forms of relationships between an intention-driven actor and the settings in which he must act to achieve his goals” (p. 698). In other words, the process of making sense of one’s experiences is a series of reflective iterations during which a person decides upon the significance of an experience and the place it occupies in one’s story. These decisions are the foundation for consequent choices and actions. In Thomas’ case, they play a profound role in his existence as a teacher. He shares that he has had many students with difficult backgrounds whom he is trying to help by simultaneously ameliorating their academic anxieties while challenging them in positive ways. He explains,

There are some kids that are smarter, there are some kids that are better looking, there are some kids that are richer or poorer or whatever and to some extent it’s the idea that they are together, and in some way they learn something from each other by being together and by being involved. And I think what a teacher can do is try to bring kids together and



involve them in each other's lives on some level so that they learn something of what the other one is thinking, what the other one is feeling or experiencing.

This view of student-teacher relationships is reminiscent of Huebner (1966/1999), who refers to classroom encounters as a fraternity of mankind. It redefines the roles of teacher and students in that the teacher is no longer confined to being the one possessing knowledge and power, and the student is no longer the receiver of knowledge who follows a predetermined path. This opens the space for an encounter of people, a space in which their epistemologies, their ways of knowing the world, are valued. In fact, this view of the student-teacher relationship makes each of them necessary for the other in their journey of the self. According to Huebner (1985/1999), I am who I am in the ways in which I am not the other. This makes my being as I am a possibility for the other, without whom I cannot be me. The possibility exists because our encounter presents the question why we each are the way we are and how that is. In other words, the individual ways in which we both know the world are not just valued but essential to a dialectical understanding of self/other and self/world. When I allow for these questions, I make relational self-understanding possible.

In Thomas' case, it is clear that his relational self-understanding is grounded in his early educational experiences. Their conflicting nature drives the theme of his personal grand narrative. As he weaves together the individual stories of his life, he does not arrange them chronologically but by the significance he assigns to them. In the ways in which he chooses the moral or point of each, he has created possibility for himself, which arises out of the tensions they presented him with. In his current work as a teacher, Thomas re-enacts his narrative by making sense of how his stories fit with the narratives of those with whom they become intertwined. What I learned when working with Thomas is that it is not primarily the nature of

the experience that matters. The significance of an experience consists first of all in the fact that one has made it and second in the way in which one makes sense of it. In this process of continuous self-understanding one writes and rewrites one's personal grand narrative. The impetus for this process is the becoming of the existential self.

I will conclude Thomas' narrative by trying to illustrate these ideas in form of a short story through the use of literary devices. To me, the protagonist of the story represents what I think of as the essence of what I learned from and about Thomas.

### **Obligations**

Another thunder was rumbling as he paid for his food. The truck stop waitress looked tired, but because of the generous tip he was leaving, she felt obligated to make conversation.

"So you're a truck driver, Mister?"

"No, Ma'am. I don't even have a car."

"Huh? Then how did you get here?"

"The first bit I walked, then took the bus for a spell, and then hitched a couple of rides."

"Hm ... Well, where're you going?"

"That way. I think," said the stranger, lifting his arm to point into a direction.

"You *think*? Well, where're you headed?" asked the waitress, puzzled.

"I'm not sure," the stranger replied thoughtfully.

"Well, then how do you know that you got there when you did?" she replied with some exasperation.

"I'll just know," the stranger answered.

The diner door opened, and a man walked in. He wiped the rain off his jacket before hanging it on the coat rack.

“Hi there, Johnny! Is it raining yet? What can I getcha? The usual?”

“The usual would be great, Bessy. How are ya?” The man sat into an empty booth.

“Doin’ good, Johnny. Doin’ real good.” The waitress turned her attention back to the stranger. “Now look here, Mister, you seem like a nice enough guy, and I’d hate to see you out there in the rain getting all soaked and all. That there is my friend Johnny. Real nice fella. He just finished his round and is headed home. I’m sure he wouldn’t mind giving you a lift. Would ya, Johnny?”

“Not one bit. I’d like the company.”

The stranger asked, “Where’s home for Johnny?”

“This way,” the waitress pointed.

The stranger got up and walked over to the coat rack. He retrieved his jacket from behind Johnny’s. Then he turned around,

“Much obliged, Ma’am, Sir. But that’s the wrong direction.”

He zipped up his jacket and stepped out into the rain.

### **From Here But Not of Here: Julio**

I am prefacing Julio's narrative with a poem composed of in vivo quotes to portray an overall image of him before relaying his story. This in vivo "poem" came about when I used an arts-based approach to synthesize key findings in a way that might allow me to look at the data, with which I had become intimately familiar at this point, in a new way (Cahnmann, 2003).

### **From Here But Not Of Here**

I grew up here, about five blocks east of here on Taylor Street

But all my friends were in the same boat

Friends in the neighborhood

Shared how to learn English.

To the levee right where the golf course is or maybe half a mile that way

I came from the same place that they came from

La 421, the neighborhood gang

Raza schools.

I had the power with words, and he had the power of being physical

Every person is different

I'm getting out of here

This is what I want.

If I had stayed at home, I would have been lonely

They had nobody to help them get out of here

I escaped that house through literature

My whole world was there.

I thought I had a difficult time. I thought I suffered.

I didn't. But I thought I did.

It's not important

Just let it go.

The Boy Kings of Texas

Machismo, inadequacy, fear

My loyalty is to humanity

I'm from here, but I am not of here.

## **Memories**

Julio enters my office for our first meeting, and before I even have a chance to explain the consent form to him<sup>10</sup>, he says,

Let me tell you a story. When I grew up, I had a cousin who ended up spending 15 years in prison. He was a cocaine dealer and was caught with a million dollars in his home. He got out in the 1990s at the age of 50. I saw him at a family reunion around that time, and I asked him, "Primo<sup>11</sup>, why did you make your money the way you did when you lived just a few blocks away from the community college?!" And he said, "Porque yo tengo muchas problemas para leer. Because I have a lot of problems with reading."

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<sup>10</sup> I later received his permission to use and share this story.

<sup>11</sup> Cousin (Spanish)

This small story (Phoenix, 2008) carries fundamental themes of Julio's narrative: reading is the key to opening the world, and education is the way out of the place one was born into. For Julio, this place was a traditional Hispanic family in the years immediately following World War II. His father, a D Day veteran, suffered from PTSD, clearly undiagnosed at the time, and self-medicated with alcohol; his mother was a "typical subservient Mexican woman." Julio observes, "I escaped that house through literature. ... And it allowed me to put up with a lot of turmoil at home cuz I wasn't there. Mentally I wasn't there." Education had an important place in his upbringing; it was both empowering and limiting. For example, he fondly recalls how his parents would always drop him off at the magazine section when they went grocery shopping, and so, at a very early age, he became enamored with the mysteries of the written word. He could not wait to go to school to learn how to read. The year before Julio was to start kindergarten, his parents managed to save enough money to send him to a private school for a year. But he was bullied by an older boy, and so, on the second day, he ran away from the school to the place where his father worked and declared that he wasn't going back. His father was relieved because of the money they would save and did not argue with his son. A year later Julio was finally able to go to school. He remembers,

I loved school! When I went to first grade, I only knew two words in English, so when I first got there, it was a little bit difficult to figure out what the teacher wanted. But all my friends were in the same boat, so we shared how to learn English.

Bilingual education during the 1950s was in its Restrictive Period, which was characterized by its English-only approach in order to keep out foreign ideologies and promote Americanization (Sadker et al., 2008). Julio remembers how he "got a couple of whacks" from the principal for speaking Spanish during a baseball game. So referring to what could not have been easy

experiences as “a little bit difficult” reflects how he chooses to interpret them, which can best be summed up with his words “Just let it go.”

Julio loved to read and excelled in school. He beams, “I LOVED reading! I loved reading! I still remember, it must have been in third grade, standing at the library, looking up at the top shelf and seeing *Dragon’s Teeth* by Pearl S. Buck. I wanted to know about dragons’ teeth.” By the time he was in sixth grade, he was reading books on fishing and hunting. To support his family by “bringing in food from the natural world,” he borrowed a rifle from his uncle, went rabbit hunting with his friends and read more books on how to make use of the rabbit skins. Teachers liked and encouraged him. He particularly remembers his sixth grade teacher:

In sixth grade it’s a delicate situation cuz you don’t know which way you’re gonna go.

She encouraged us, especially me, to go on and not stop there. And she showed so much caring and so much love for each one of us.

Teachers told him that he was very intelligent and should keep studying after high school because he was good at it. With a playful smile, he adds, “I didn’t pay attention to a lot of teachers because I had the book from class and was reading my own science fiction books.” By the time he was in high school, he was reading Ayn Rand and Robert Heinlin’s *Stranger in a Strange Land*. “That was a very powerful book for me,” he says. The title might be reflective of how, as Julio excelled academically, he grew distant from his peers. He says, “I was constantly reading things where I was not in ... in my mind. I was traveling somewhere else through my reading.” When talking with Julio, the idea of place seems ever present in both a literal and a metaphorical way. For example, during our first interview, Julio shared with me many small stories about how he grew up in school and at home. Every story had a very specific setting, e.g. the name of the street or the school, whose exact location he then explained to me in relation to

the place we were at the moment – my office. He speaks of all those places with great affection and yet, it is clear how much he wanted to be elsewhere when he grew up. I ask him if he had friends in school, and he shares,

I was kind of a loner. Except in elementary. My elementary school friends never judged me. I was just one of them. But when I got to high school, some of the athletes recognized that I was able to do stuff ... with words ... and so I would do homework for one of the big football players. And he would protect me from everybody else. I was a scrawny little kid and so that was how we traded power. I had the power with words, and he had the power like being physical.

Julio is a social person, and while friends were important to him, popularity was not. His impetus was his conviction that “in knowledge, in books, is power.” In school, he felt the most comfortable in the drama club and when he sang in the choir because he “could feel the power of music.” He smiles, “I LOVED being an actor because that was pulling me out of where I was here, from this town, and being somebody else.”

Although Julio would eventually go on to an ivy league university to get his Ph.D. in Biology, this was not the place he was assigned in life by his traditional Mexican-American upbringing. While his parents valued education for their children, their vision for their first-born son was quite clear – finish high school and get a job. So he did. After he graduated from high school, he went to work as an auto parts salesman, a job he got through his father. Julio refers to this time of his life as the semester when he had “dropped out of school.” I learn about it in reply to my question whether there had ever been a time when he did not want to go to school. He explains,



My father kept saying, ‘What are you doing reading? You get to work. Don’t be wasting your time reading. You need to work.’ But see that was the deal. I wanted to not go to school, I wanted to work, make money, get a nice car, do the things that, you know, normal people do.

At that time, Julio lived only a couple of blocks from the community college, and upon a friend’s insistence, the following semester he enrolled and joined an environmental club, which took him to explore the mountains of Mexico. He remembers, “It was like OH MY GOD! This is where I got to go! This is where I could do the stuff that I dreamed about! I said, ‘The hell with the cars and that stuff.’” It seems to me that Julio had finally come home to a place that eventually enabled him to be “normal” beyond the culturally determined borders constructed by the community he had grown up in.

### **Interpretations**

Julio understands himself wholly as a product of public education. In fact, it was because of this image that mutual friends of ours suggested I invite him for this study to which he readily agreed. He suggests, “What I think is happening is that back in the 50s, women were not as career-minded as they are now. And so a lot of very intelligent, resourceful, powerful women became schoolteachers. And they were MY teachers.” We talk about how education has changed since then, and he confesses how disappointed he was when he compared his education in this town with that of his two children. Once his children had reached school age, Julio and his wife made the decision to move back home. First of all, it was important for him to raise his children biculturally in a way that empowers them. He explains,

If we had stayed here [central Texas town], our children would be considered less than equal because of their last name. So we decided to go back for our children to be

bicultural and bilingual. And it worked, but there was a big price to pay. The educational experiences I had going through here were very high quality, I thought. But the ones that my kids went through weren't as high.

His children went through school during the 1990s, a time when standardized testing had already begun as a result of the 1983 report *A Nation at Risk* (Sadker et al., 2008). When I ask him what price they had to pay, he says,

They suffered through the regular public schools here. And I think that any child who is looking at the world and observing and feeling things at a deep level, will have problems. In any school whether it's at the super fancy school or just the *raza schools*<sup>12</sup> here. The other children around them will pick up that this kid is different.

Although he is talking about his children's experiences at the public school, he is also making sense of the social aspects of his own early educational experiences. Julio continues,

I thought I had a difficult time because I was in the chess club instead of the baseball team, I was in the choir instead of the football team, you know? I thought I suffered. I didn't, but I thought I did. At that time I thought I did.

At the time of our conversation, I'm uncertain where this interpretation is coming from. I'm still thinking he must have suffered from social Otherness because I have come to know Julio as a social person. For example, although as a scientist who relies on proof he is not religious, he made it a point to join a local church at his current hometown "just for the social interaction because there are some very nice people." The idea of temporality in narrativity might serve as a bridge between Julio's interpretations of his social Otherness and my

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<sup>12</sup> *Raza school* is slang for a neighborhood school located in an area of particularly low socio-economic status. The Spanish word *raza* means *race*. The term *raza school* denotes that poor neighborhoods are mainly populated by Spanish-speaking Hispanics or recent immigrants from Mexico.

interpretations of it. Temporality supposes that who people understand themselves to be results from how they interpret their past and then project it into the present and the future (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). This is simultaneously a limitation and a possibility in narrativity because the experiences are recalled against the metanarratives of the present but happened against the metanarratives of the past. They are interpreted in all time zones. The possibility of narrativity is two-fold: one, the metanarratives of the present illuminate experiences with a different light, which allows the one who recalls them to reinterpret them based on new information. Two, by listening to how other people make meaning of their experiences, I reflect on my own meaning-making. The limitation of temporality is that I interpret the other's stories against the metanarratives of my own past and present because the best I can do is to engage in the other's story based on my own experiences. I am listening to Julio's stories, and I hear them differently because I come from a different time and a different place. So temporality in narrativity is like being in three time zones, emerged in three different metanarratives, at once – Julio's Mexican-American past, my East German past, and our temporary present, which pertains to the very moment at which our conversations take place.

Julio opened a gate into the metanarratives that were completely foreign to me when he asked whether I had read *The Boy Kings of Texas*, a memoir written by Domingo Martinez about growing up in Julio's hometown. At the time we were talking, I had been living in this town for 20 years. During those two decades, I had often contemplated (but not really struggled with) feelings of displacement and non-belonging, which are the very fabric that makes up the metaphorical carpet every transnational walks on. Until I followed Julio's advice to read Dominguez' memoir, I had interpreted every conversation we had through my personal set of

lenses, which I thought was first of all that of a fellow human being. So I thought to have felt a sense of social Otherness as I was trying to grow up along with him through his stories.

Martinez (2012) prefaces his book by alluding to a corrido, a Mexican ballad, about which he writes, “Here was the source code for everything I was trying to escape: the generational compulsions and impulses of alienation, narcissism, self-destruction, emotional blackmail, and a profound conviction that everyone else in the world is wrong – *wrong!*” (p. 10). I didn’t read this book, I devoured it, because suddenly not only did my 20 years of experiences with high school and university students started making sense to me on entirely new levels, I also felt that for the first time I was somehow “seeing” Julio. Dominguez’ narratives made clear to me that I had visualized him (and all the people with whom my stories had become intertwined in two decades of teaching in this town) through the eyes of a White, female immigrant living in a border town. Of course, intellectually I always understood that my meaning-making was tainted or illuminated by this particular view, but I had not really known it until I read *The Boy Kings of Texas* while simultaneously talking with Julio. Until I did, all I knew was that my metanarratives simply weren’t his. So in the best sense of narrativity, both his and Dominguez’ individual stories shaped my own personal grand narrative - for the first time in my life, Critical Theory made sense to me on an emotional level and not just an intellectual one because I was beginning to see how I was culturally blinded. I am once again reminded of Huebner (1962/1999) who declared that a child can draw and label and dissect a flower, but he won’t ever “know” flower” until he has seen it through the eyes of van Gough or the words of Tennyson.

What Julio was dealing with was not social Otherness. It was so much bigger than just being different. It seems to me that he was trying to negotiate both the walls and the doors posited before him by his traditional Mexican-American upbringing in a border town. And this

is how he interprets the role of education in these negotiations: “That’s the only way I could get out of here.”

### **Grand Narrative**

Julio shows me a brittle newspaper clipping, edges torn, that depicts him at the age of 20 studying zoology at Texas Tech University. The headline reads “A Salute to a Leader ... President of Beta Beta Beta, Biology Honorary. In 1968 Julio received the Lee C. O’Neil Scholarship Award.” He offers, “The reason I think it’s important is because when I was there, there were 18,000 students and 16 Hispanics. One six.” He was not abiding by the metanarratives of his time. From the one chance he had, public education, he had created possibility for himself. Early on he understood that his powers of the mind were his asset, which he needed to protect and develop. He remembers his college peers experimenting with drugs and says,

And I thought to myself, the only thing that I have going for me is my mind, and I’m not going to screw it up. Then I’ll be right back in this town selling auto parts like my dad. I have to keep myself open so that the knowledge I have is useful to me so I can advance myself because I know where I came from. I said no more of that – I’m getting out of here!

After completing his Ph.D. at an ivy league university, he took a teaching position at a top tier university in Texas. Though he told me that one reason he came back to his hometown was his desire to give his children the gift of being bicultural, I still cannot quite understand why he would re-enter the confines of his childhood. Without hesitation, Julio says,

I felt this strong desire to give back to the community that I was raised in because I saw everybody leaving. All my school friends left and never came back. And I felt a strong connection with the other students that had nobody to help them get out of here.

At this point, the confines I was envisioning did not exist anymore for Julio because he had created potentiality for himself. According to Huebner (1967/1999), this potentiality results from the individual-world dialectic in which the confrontations between self and world are the springs for a person's self-understanding. Huebner (1967/1999) refers to this as man's "moment of vision, as he projects his own potentiality for being in terms of the 'having been'" (p. 138). For Julio, this potentiality seems to lie in the fact that he was able to break out of the culture he was raised in, not to get away from it, but to be free in that very culture. He had returned to his community with experiences that made him safe in his knowledge that there exists a place for children who are "looking at things differently" – a lesson he extended to his university students. About his teaching experience here he says it was "great, mainly because I could relate to them culturally. I came from the same place that they came from. All it takes is some dedication and discipline."

Julio understands himself as an example for the possibility that education contains. This understanding is the result of the tensions he experienced between the cultural narratives of his upbringing and the extent to which he felt displaced within them. As described in Chapter II, one composes one's personal grand narrative not with focus on the chronology of one's life but with focus on the chosen importance of an experience (Bruner, 2004; Pinar, 2004). Since the importance of an experience is the result of one's interpretation, one's potentiality is not a constant reality but an interpreted truth. Julio interprets his experiences with an attitude that reflects genuine optimism, a mood that runs through his entire narrative. For example, he says,

I can be happy anywhere. I was happy here, I was happy when I lived in California, even when I was in the Army, I was happy. I don't have time to be depressed. I mean, I do, but I think anything like that is not a good thing to feel. There's some things I choose not to remember because it's not important.

This notion reflects the extent of agency Julio assigns to himself when placing himself in the larger story of his narrative and when choosing the importance of his experiences. As we talk about people's individual beliefs, he says that his beliefs are strongest in science. He adds,

If there is something out there, it is not something I can understand or relate to on an emotional level. Prayer should not be used to change the rules of the universe. Prayer is for strength to endure what you are experiencing, so you can carry on 'til the end of your life. To pray to a supreme being to remove the burden from you doesn't make sense.

The burden is your burden, and you just have to deal with it yourself. Maybe with the help of others, with the help of friends.

In this way, Julio takes complete agency for the decisions he makes. An important aspect of how he interprets his experiences in order to make decisions lies in his idea about truths. He says that truths tell us how we fit into the universe and that there are people who never find them. These people, he explains, are prejudiced, racist, religious fundamentalists, etc. He says, "They are that way because they're not intelligent enough." What he means by "intelligent" becomes clear when, at one point during our conversation, I tell him that I'm a very gullible person who believes everybody. He suggests that gullibility might have to do with one's level of intelligence, which, according to him, includes one's ability to look at a phenomenon from someone else's point of view. So if I am able to allow another person to just be by accepting his or her ways to make meaning, I am both intelligent and gullible.

Huebner (1963/1999) refers to this view as man's fourth and highest encounter with man. This view of relational self-understanding is based on the idea that the essence of man's existence is solitude, which is difficult to reconcile (Huebner, 1963/1999). He then went on to describe the four levels of encounters between people, each of which is designed to come to terms with one's existential aloneness. According to Huebner (1963/1999), man's first encounter is to join a collective, so that the "problem" of aloneness is not brought to consciousness. The price is to give up one's freedom and individuality. The second encounter is one's failure to acknowledge the other by thinking of him in terms of stereotypes. The third encounter is to "overcome" one's aloneness by making oneself subservient to someone else, which leads to a parasitical relationship in which both forfeit their freedom. The dominant part of this relationship seeks to overcome his aloneness by keeping the submissive one in his control. Huebner (1963/1999) stated, "The possessive individual denies the other's freedom and his own, for he is not open to the other but is walled off by his own self" (p. 76). The fourth encounter consists in man accepting his solitude and that of others while seeking transactions that maximize the freedom of both. A fundamental part of this fourth encounter is conversation, which is different from communication: while the latter is based on handing out and receiving knowledge or information, the former is based on the open-mindedness that one is changed as a result of it (Huebner, 1963/1999).

Our conversation about truths took place when Julio and I spoke on the phone while he was driving through his current hometown to help a friend whose car had stalled. As he was ending the phone call, I thanked him for it, at which point he replied that he enjoys talking to me because he feels that I "get him." The importance of this information consists in how it connects to his idea of my intelligence, which, according to him, would be my ability to allow him to be.



It reflects Julio's view on education: its purpose is to counter ignorance, which is a prerequisite for becoming a moral being since un-educated people might become racists, etc. It also is the path to become free. He explains,

When I grew up, I didn't consider myself a citizen of here. I considered myself a citizen of the world. I am of all people and of all living things. There are people I know who are ... that's where racism comes out. They feel that only their little group is the best and they defend it. And me, I am of all groups.

So for Julio, freedom consists in not "needing," e.g., needing to be part of a collective whose views one must adopt and defend, and in one's ability to place oneself in the world, which is precisely what education has enabled him to do. I will conclude Julio's narrative with his words, which poignantly summarize its theme as it is driven by his relational self-understanding: "My loyalty is to humanity. I'm from here, but I am not of here."

### **From Stubbornness and Courage, Endurance and Surviving: Wahini**

When I invited Wahini as a participant to this study, I explained to her its purpose – to explore the role early educational experiences play throughout life – and let her know that I would like to talk with her because I consider her a person who has lived a personally and professionally successful life. She emailed me back with her modest reply: “Dear Friend, Sounds fascinating. Am honored to be considered. Would be willing to participate with the understanding that you have the option to eliminate me if I don't meet your needs. Lol, Wahini.” The humility of this statement belies the accomplishments of the seven decades that span her life and represents one of the themes of her personal grand narrative. Wahini grew up on Hawaii as a descendent of Japanese ancestors. While she thinks of herself as having “mixed cultural traditions,” she does not like to be referred to as Japanese American because, according to her, all Americans have ancestors who started out as immigrants. Her story is one that shows how chance can be found amidst obstacles put before her by the cultural constraints of her time, particularly for a woman growing up in Hawaii. Her simple response to making the most of every chance is, “I never said no.”

It is remarkable how, along the way, she has remained a member of many of the communities she was part of throughout her moves across the country. For example, she still has friends from grammar and high school and stays in touch with them between class reunions. She spends time with her first college roommate and the friends she has made before retiring from her professorship at the local university, including those who have moved away. She is deeply engaged in her local community where she is regularly called to participate in charity events. She jokes that since she has retired, she has no free time at all anymore because she cannot turn an invitation down with the excuse that she has class. It seems to me she still never says “no.”

In this way, she simultaneously creates purpose for herself by enriching the communities she has chosen to be part of.

However, this realization does not seem part of her grand narrative. Throughout my conversations with Wahini, one thing stood out: she was continuously surprised about how different her image of her younger self seemed from the data she provided through her stories. For example, she describes herself as “very, very shy” and says that she would watch other children do things because she was “not very outgoing.” Such a statement might then be followed by a story about how she got in trouble with the teacher for talking too much during class. Since the latter statement seemed to disprove the former, I often felt that I did not understand Wahini’s narrative correctly. When I asked her for clarifications, she repeatedly answered, “My memory of myself doesn’t jive with some of the stuff.” In an attempt to understand this seeming discrepancy while exploring how memory is constructed for the purposes of one’s personal grand narrative, I will represent the first two parts of Wahini’s story, *Memories and Interpretations*, in the form of a vignette that is a fictitious conversation between her older and her younger selves, composed from her stories by using mainly in vivo quotes. “Wahini” (W) is a self-chosen pseudonym. It is the Hawaiian word for *woman*. Since Wahini grew up in Hawaii, I have chosen the Hawaiian word for *girl*, “Kaikamahine (K),” as a pseudonym for her younger selves.

### **Memories, Interpreted**

K: When I hear you recalling our memories, I sometimes think we’re not even the same person.

What do you mean when you tell Sonja that we were “run-of-the-mill?” How is it you're your memories are so different from my perceptions of us when we grew up?

W: But we were just sort of a mediocre student. Do you remember the reading teacher giving us more flash cards than anyone else? She pointed to Helen and said, “Look, she’s in that other group, and she did better than you.”

K: But we also were in the Honor Society. You showed Sonja the certificate.

W: I guess we must have been ... I don’t know. Doesn’t look like it on our report cards. They don’t show that. Oh, our daughter made fun of us! We didn’t have a clue what school was about. We didn’t know how to study, how to prepare for tests.

K: That was just for math and science, though. We were very good at oral and written English. Don’t you remember our first visit to the library? It was our haven! We were like, “Wowwww ... all those books!” We didn’t even know where to begin, so we’d just sat in this corner and started with the orange books. Remember?

W: They were really orange! We pulled them out and looked at the pictures, but they were too hard for us. But a few years later, oh, we read almost every single one of them. Remember?

K: We just went one after another. They were biographical fictions of historical people. I think we were in fourth grade then. And we just couldn’t wait to go back to the library!

W: But then we moved from the Valley to the Heights, so we had to walk at least a mile, maybe longer, down the trail, through town, to the library. And we would check out a stack of books!

K: And then we’d carry them all back home again!

W: Through the red dirt roads! Oh, those roads! Do you remember the day we wore our new Mary Janes to school?

K: Brand-new, shiny, black patent Mary Janes! Oh, we got in so much trouble! They were supposed to be only for good.

W: But what was “good?” We never went anywhere. So early one morning, we just put them on and slipped out of the house.

K: But it must have rained the night before because the roads were all muddy and our brand new shoes were all caked with red dirt.

W: Not so shiny anymore! And we tried to wipe them with our bare hands, and that just made it worse! We finally cleaned them the best we could with our dress right before we reached school.

K: So we saved it then. Until nap time ... Oh, we were good nappers, though. We always got the chocolate milk, remember? And only the good nappers got chocolate.

W: But not that day! Because we flat out refused to take off our beautiful Mary Janes for the nap. And no one would have noticed either if it hadn’t been for Dennis. Remember, when he tattled to the teacher, and she told us to take them off?

K: SHE’S NOT DOING IT, MS. KAYYYYYY. SHE’S NOT DOING IT.

W: And so it was off to the bathroom with us. What a punishment. Having to spend time in the bathroom of all places?

K: Effective, though, because the oiled floors looked so black, I thought they’d swallow us up. Shudder ... And we were in there for hours!

W: Or at least it seemed like hours. I thought for sure the teacher had forgotten about us. Eventually, she sent for us. No chocolate milk that day!

K: We took naps until fifth grade. I liked that. I liked the whole structure of school.

W: Yeah. Plus the other kids were there. We lived in the Valley, and there were no neighbors, so there were no other kids to play with. We had to entertain ourselves. But in school, we had people to play with. We were comfortable there. It was some sort of familiarity.

K: I know! Then why did you tell Sonja that we were very, very shy? You even said we were an observer rather than someone who participated!

W: But we were shy! That's why Dennis teased us all through first grade. Do you remember how he would wait for us on the other side of that rickety hanging bridge across the Hanapepe River just to taunt us?

K: KAIKAMAHINE, AHI OR WEENY<sup>13</sup>! And then he'd make that swinging bridge sway! God, how we wished that we could avoid that boy!

W: And then one day we did. We avoided him and everybody else along with him. Remember how we snuck out of the house really early, way before it was time to leave for school?

K: The whole town was still asleep. Not a single kid on the way to school. Not even the two old men were out on the porch smoking; the barbershop doors were still closed. Remember?

W: The winding red dirt paths that led up the hill were dead. And when we finally reached the school, the classroom windows were dark and silent. So we thought there was no school. Maybe it was the weekend or a holiday. And we turned around and went back home.

K: When Mom noticed, she told us to hurry up because we were going to be late for school. So we knew there was school that day.

W: And back again we went through the town, across the bridge, up the hill along the empty path leading to school, and when we got there, we still heard no children laughing and talking.

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<sup>13</sup> This is not an in vivo quote because Dennis' actual expression rhymes with Wahini's last name, which is not used since it would be an identifying marker.

K: But we could see them through the windows. And so we walk into our classroom, and Dennis hollers ...

W: ... THERE SHE COMES! We could hear him clear across the playground!

K: A fine job we did trying to avoid that boy! He wasn't that bad, though, after we survived first grade. And we had to spend 12 years with that kid!

W: A very nice kid, actually. We never did find out what became of him. When we decided to see him after over 50 years at class reunion, they tell us he had died, of complications from diabetes nonetheless. So many Hawaiians have complications with diabetes. Must be their diet.

K: It was pretty brave of us to walk through the empty town twice.

W: It sure was.

K: And you tell Sonja that we were obedient and submissive!

W: But we were! Do you remember when we were in high school and Julie asked us to write her essays? She would always get Cs, and we'd get As, and so she talked us into writing them for her. God knows we didn't want to do it! But we did. Twice! Because we didn't stand up to her. We were not very good about standing up, Kaikamahine. It stopped when she got Bs and accused us of making them purposefully not good enough. Then she never asked us to write another one for her.

K: Which makes my point: we were not as run-of-the-mill as you remember us. Apparently we wrote some pretty good papers.

W: I don't know ... I bet Mr. Sutchia would disagree. Remember our George Washington speech?

K: Ninth grade, freshman English! We were supposed to memorize a speech, and oh, we were nervous! And so we go up there and recite the whole thing flawlessly ...

W: ... all the while rocking back and forth and back and forth, and when we're finished, Mr. Sutchia goes ...

K: DO YOU THINK GEORGE WASHINGTON WOULD HAVE BEEN STANDING UP THERE ROCKING LIKE THAT?! God, we felt so small.

W: That was embarrassing! He cured us, though. No matter how nervous we were, we did NOT rock anymore. Oh, but we were really good at diagramming and grammar. Remember when he told the class, "You need any help with that, you come see HER!"

K: I sure do. That was the only time a teacher did anything like that. The others just sort of ignored us and gave us assignments and grades. Teachers didn't talk to us a lot. I think we tried to just keep a low profile so they didn't notice us because then we'd be in big trouble.

W: It's probably part of the culture. Kids were to be seen and not heard. Even at home we didn't talk a lot with our parents. Maybe that's another reason why we just loved going to school. We loved school! Oh, do you remember the time in third grade when we had a crush on this boy Harry? We always had the girls' line and the boy's line, and we had to hold hands with whoever would be our line partner. And we always tried to be Harry's partner. You know he never married? Poor Harry.

K: Poor Harry! See, that's how I remember us. And yet you tell Sonja that we could go through a whole day without speaking a word and that we had a poor self image. At one point you were even wondering if we were lonesome. Where do you get these impressions, Wahini?



W: I tell you where. Remember recess during grammar school? In the playgrounds, we had teams, and we were always one of the last ones to be picked.

K: That's because we weren't athletic.

W: And what about the years when everybody thought we wanted to be better than them because we obediently spoke Standard English and refused to speak Pidgin?

K: That just speaks to our strengths in English again. Ugh, Wahini, we are talking in circles.

But I will give you this: our grammar school years were different from our high school years. In high school, we were captain of the campus police, and they made us director of the senior play.

W: How is it that we were selected to be the director of the senior play, I wonder ...

K: We were a journalist for the local paper and ...

W: You should not call us a journalist. It was just the weekly column.

K: In the local paper. And I'm sure you will remember our first boyfriend?

W: Freshman year! We were only 14. And we ended it at the end of that year.

K: Yeah ... why did we do that? We didn't really date. We just met each other at social events.

W: I think it was just the intensity of a relationship, you know? I mean he was our first ... But, yeah, I guess you're right: by the time we moved on to high school, we had come a long way. Look at the teacher's comments on our 8<sup>th</sup> grade report card: Kaikamahine "is highly dependable and has good self control. Her constant talking hinders her work." You see, and I don't remember that. But I guess I can't argue with evidence. And we were a "duly elected member of the honor society" according to this certificate. Maybe we just found activities that we could participate in and felt comfortable doing.

K: That's right. And yet, when Sonja asked you to describe yourself in your current time, you go again with the run-of-the-mill image. So tell us what you make of our early educational experiences then, Wahini.

### **Grand Narrative**

"I don't know. Not a lot," Wahini decides at the end of our second interview after I remind her that the purpose of this study is to understand how experiences made in school influence one's later life. The reason I did remind her is because during our first interview, I had asked her if she had any written documents, report cards or photos of herself when she was younger. She said she did not because she had moved so much. When we met for the second interview, she presented me with three report cards, four grammar and high school certificates, two writing samples based on school memories, and two photos of herself. By complete chance, I learn that it had taken her considerable effort to retrieve these documents. She was happy to be able to share them with me and did so by repeating twice, "I don't know if any of this is useful to you." It was not the first time she had said something to this extent. For example, at the end of our first interview she mentioned that she wasn't sure that she was of much help. Similarly, when she felt unable to answer a question during our conversations, her voice grew pensively quiet every time she answered, "I don't know." It took me time and an astonishing amount of analytic memos and expository writing to make meaning of this particular way in which Wahini seems to compose her personal grand narrative. I was only able to do so after stepping out of my relationship with her in my role as a researcher, which the process of writing had allowed me to do. In the year before I began my work on the dissertation project, we had become close friends, and it somehow felt unethical to me to use the ways in which I have known her as a friend as data. But since one can never really un-know a thing, I find it essential to explore her story in

the only way I can know how, which is from the shared experiences in both of our relationships – that as researcher-participant and that as friends.

In narrative research, much has been said about intersubjectivity or the dimension of the sociality commonplace, which pertains to how the relationship between researcher and participant shapes the ways in which reality is co-constructed, as explained in Chapter III (Clandinin and Rosiek, 2007; Connelly & Clandinin, 2006; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Glesne, 2011; Phoenix, 2008). It is based on Dewey's (1938) notion that all experiences take place and are reflected upon within their social and situational contexts. For example, Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) stated, narrative inquirers

cannot subtract themselves from relationship . . . Nor can they pretend to be free of contextual influences themselves . . . In narrative inquiry, research questions and texts are ones where inquirers give an account of who they are in the inquiry and who they are in relation to the participant. (p. 69 f.)

Hence, I cannot continue with Wahini's story without offering my understanding of what the contextual influences for our conversations are. For me, they are predominantly characterized by my feelings of friendship and respect toward her, which have deepened throughout the process of data collection. These feelings run parallel to the ways in which her stories, unlike any other, remind me of aspects about my own life which I had not thought about in decades. I had forgotten how painfully shy I was in grammar school and how bad I felt when I was always the last one to be picked for sports teams; I had forgotten Herr Meier, my 8<sup>th</sup> grade math teacher who, much to the detriment of my self-image, debated with my peers whether I was worthy of an A or just a B in his class; forgotten how that "cured" me: from then on I made it a point to prove to him and all subsequent math teachers that I was worthy (although I never fully regained my

confidence for math). Wahini reminded me of these experiences by the similarities I drew about the situations we found ourselves in, but even more so by making me remember that I had made these experiences. The importance of this information lies in how it influences the ways in which I reflect on the data, which, inevitably, is by placing it in the landscape of intersections between both our early educational experiences.

So for me, the contextual influences underlying my understanding of Wahini's narrative reside in the parallels between our experiences and in our coming together as friends. This insight freed me to approach the data from two different vantage points: one, it enabled me to think about her as the complex person I have come to know rather than limit my understanding to the fragmented image revealed to me by newly collected data; and two, it allowed me to distance and bracket myself in relation to how she composes her own personal grand narrative from her individual stories. In the process, I have come to understand that Wahini's personal grand narrative seems to be not primarily driven by her role in the bigger picture, although this must undoubtedly remain the theme of one's narrative, but by what she is able to do for the people in the communities in which she resides. When I call her a journalist in response to the fact that she wrote for the local paper, she giggles,

You shouldn't call me a journalist. I just had a column in the local paper, and it was funny how I got it because my girl friend is the one that had it. And one time she couldn't do it, so she asked if I could do it, and so I thought, god, I don't know what to do. So I read and read hers and re-read them, and I saw what she did. So I wrote one and then I don't know why I kept doing it. If she decided she was tired of it?

It would make sense to interpret this experience by taking credit for having worked for the local newspaper at the age of 16, but in the way Wahini relays this story, the focus is not on her

accomplishment or this possibility she had created for herself through her obviously well known writing abilities, but on the chance of it. This idea becomes yet clearer when she talks about her professional life after high school and college. By the time Wahini applied as an instructor at the local community college, she had been accepted into Delta Kappa Gamma, an organization for women educators. Membership is an honor and individually offered through a local chapter. According to Wahini, she got the position because

... the chairman of the English department asked [a colleague] if she knew who I was, and she said, “Oh, yes! She’ll be wonderful.” We had only met one time, but because I had become a member of Delta Kappa Gamma, that was all the recommendation she needed. They saw themselves as pretty elite.

Once again the theme of this small story is *chance*. Phoenix (2008) stated that small stories, told in passing, allow the researcher to gain insight into what motivates particular ways of telling the self. These ways are reflective of the light in which the storyteller sees him/herself. In Wahini’s case, the element of *chance* seems to be one fundamental pillar on which she builds her personal grand narrative, which is reflective of the humility with which she talks and thinks about herself. Webster’s Dictionary defines the term *chance* in three ways: as “something that happens unpredictably without discernable human intention,” as a “fortuitous element,” and as “opportunity” (Chance, 2003, p. 205). All three definitions apply to Wahini’s narrative. While she accepts her accomplishments as such, the focus is not on their attainment but on how lucky she was to have been offered this opportunity in life. For example, as I was listening to the chronology of her professional life, I was astounded by the enormous diversity of settings in which Wahini worked as a teacher. While she majored in high school vocational home economics, she started her teaching career at an elementary school in Central Washington. She

then taught kindergarten and a combined group of 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grade advanced children in South Washington. From there she went to teach a small group of elementary life skills students in Alaska before teaching middle school reading in Texas while working on her master's and finally her doctoral degree. This must undoubtedly have taken a great deal of adjustment skills.

Wahini sums this up as follows:

I was always getting picked to go to workshops, special workshops, and I was picked to participate in this new school they were building doing team teaching. So I had opportunities for lots of different teaching experiences, which, you know, I benefitted from.

When engaging in Wahini's stories, I do not get the sense of a plot revolving around a protagonist. Instead, I see a world in which she participates by sharing a space in time with others in the best ways she knows how.

I asked her how she would describe herself today, and she laughs,  
Run-of-the-mill. I don't know. Retired. And I think satisfied with how my life has gone. You know, in my life and my career, it's just ... I just felt very fortunate. No matter where I was, I always had opportunities, and then I took advantages of those opportunities.

Because her early educational experiences occurred during the 1950s and early 1960s, taking advantage of opportunities for Wahini meant to break all molds. She remembers a career counselor in high school telling her,

Your score is high enough, but because you're female, you can be a teacher, you can be a nurse, you can be all of these things, but teacher is the best of all of them because then

you're going to get married and have kids, and you can teach until the kids come and then go back to teaching.

Her reaction to this kind of counseling was, "So I'm gonna be a teacher. It's the highest available for me." While it was understood in her family that she would go to college, it was assumed that, like everyone else, she would attend the University of Hawaii in Honolulu. The fact that she applied to a school on the Mainland is an example of how far she stretched the opportunities offered to her, or more accurately, she had created for herself. She explains,

I knew I wanted to go to school on the Mainland. I just felt that I needed to get off the island and get exposed to the Mainland. I wanted a school that did not have a large population from Hawaii because what I had learned was that students from Hawaii congregate together and not mix with anybody else. So they're not out being exposed to the rest of the world.

In the early 1960s, the Oregon university she was accepted at did not know what to do with her and the other two students from Kauai, so they placed them in the foreign student club. Years later she met a faculty member from that campus when presenting at a professional conference and learned that by that time a Hawaii club existed at the school. She laughs, "I mean, you know, it's like we opened the door and everybody found out where that was and they came. So that was good." Wahini continuously pushed open doors for herself "because times had changed and opportunities became available." We talk about how education was changing, too, and she tells me how alarmed she grew in the 1980s when standardized testing had begun to change the curriculum in schools. She remembers, "And then in '85, I quit and went to [the community college], and in '86 I decided I think I'll go work on a doctorate. See, none of these were in my career goals, right? It was just something that happened along the way." To me, these

interpretations exemplify the second fundamental pillar that supports Wahini's personal grand narrative. As noted above, the first one seems to be the element of *chance*. The second one appears to be her ability to carve out a space for herself and then to stretch the limits it presents to her until they give way to openings. She does so matter-of-factly, completely void of gratification or self-regard: this is how it's supposed to be; do what is asked of you, and do the best you can.

We are looking at a photo of her and her husband, and I ask her to tell me about the girl in the picture. She replies, "We got married when I was 20. That's too young to get married. I didn't know who I was or what I wanted out of life." Some 45 years later, five years prior to this conversation, Wahini wrote a poem titled *Where I'm From*. It was to serve as an example for a writing project she did with her university students. The line that stands out is "I am from stubbornness and courage, from endurance and surviving." I ask her what she means by "stubborn." She confesses, "When I made up my mind, I wouldn't change it! As a child, too. Getting me in trouble. If I didn't like what they wanted me to do, I just didn't wanna do it." I'm reminded of the shiny, black Mary Janes and Dennis. It seems to me that her stubbornness and courage were the tools she employed to create a place for herself everywhere her curiosity and life's circumstances took her, and along the way, she found out who she was and what she wants from life. There exists the idea in qualitative research that something ordinary is made extraordinary by adding the researcher's understanding to it (Bhattacharya, personal communication, October 6, 2012). I hope to have been able to do this, thereby reiterating a fundamental idea of narrativity, which is that the story becomes extraordinary because of the singular ways in which meaning is created when it is told, retold and reinterpreted in conversation. In this way, I hope to have added my variation on the theme of humility in Wahini's narrative, by adding the idea of



self-determination and strength to create change within the communities she has been part of.

Not so “run-of-the-mill,” Wahini ...

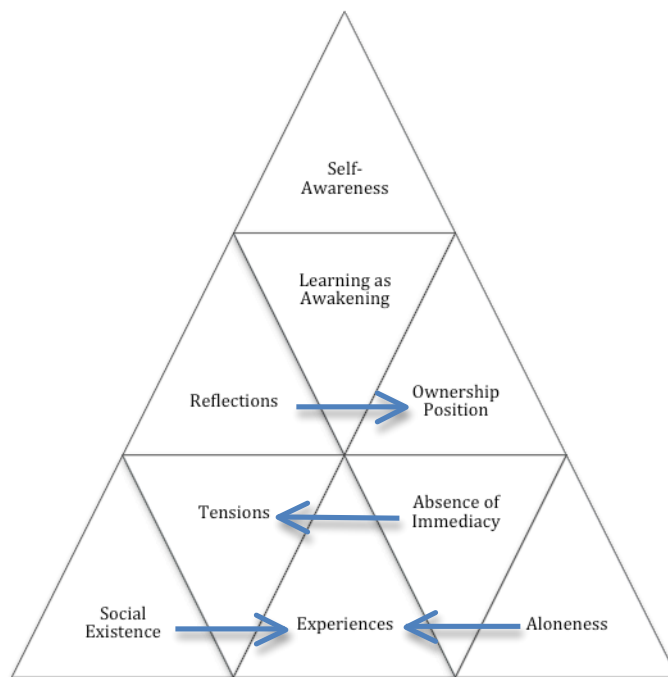
### **Catching Up With the Self through Education**

*“What is education? I should suppose that education was the curriculum one had to run through in order to catch up with oneself, and he who will not pass through this curriculum is helped very little by the fact that he was born in the most enlightened age.”*

(Kierkegaard, 1941/1954, p. 57)

This study explores the question to which measure school experiences influence one's becoming throughout life. It is grounded in Dewey's (1938) principle of the experiential continuum, which presupposes that each experience is interpreted based on each prior experience. I employed the theoretical framework of narrativity because through their narratives, participants implicitly and explicitly paint a picture of themselves. In the previous sections, I have tried to provide a facsimile of these portraits. It can only be a facsimile because, though I have used the participants' words to relay their stories, it is I who has chosen how to synthesize their words. While I have made sure through member check conversations that I got the facsimile right, the very activity of sharing it with the participants already changed their story because it contains my added understanding of their narratives, which contributes one aspect to their own understanding. The point is that my very entanglement with their stories already changed them as they, in turn, changed my personal grand narrative. They did so by undergirding those aspects of my worldview which led me to conduct this particular study and no other, an idea that was explained in Chapters I and III and referred to as subjectivity. This notion becomes particularly significant for this section of data analysis and representation, which addresses overarching concepts. The four concepts that I have identified are reflective of the beliefs which are the themes of my own personal grand narrative. In this way, the question of how educational experiences are interpreted in the greater scheme of a lived life is illuminated,

rather than answered, by the insights the four of us have to offer. Figure 4 shows the synthesis of those insights, which I will elaborate in the sections that follow.



*Figure 4* Synthesis of Overarching Concepts

While the pyramid shows the concepts neatly contained and organized in levels, naturally, the process of becoming self-aware is not a linear one. Instead, it is both iterative and simultaneous, which means that the result of the preceding iteration is used as a starting point for the next one while other iterations are going on as well. This means that the following four sub-sections, in each of which I elaborate one of the four overarching concepts, should not be understood separated from one another.

### **Self-Awareness through Experiences**

All experiences happen within one's social existence (Aoki, 1990/2005; Clandinin & Connelly, 2006; Dewey, 1934; Dewey, 1938; Huebner 1963/1999). For Thomas, his early educational experiences were characterized by academic Otherness, which influenced his social existence with his peers. He felt "vulnerable" and "put on the spot." At the same time, he

explored his curiosity outside of school, e.g. in his grandfather's basement and when playing with friends, which added an aspect to his social existence and led him to discover his interest in structure and architecture. About his life as an architect and visual artist, he said, "My interest in structure really arrives out of my interest in making things, building things, doing things."

Julio's educational experiences were also characterized by academic Otherness albeit on the other end of the spectrum. For him it was his academic strengths that eventually separated him from his peers in his later school years. During his grammar school years, he explored his curiosities with his playmates, discovering his interest in the natural world. As he increasingly withdrew into literature, he separated himself from his peers who felt drawn to things that did not interest him, e.g. athletics. In contrast, Wahini's grammar school experiences were characterized by her shyness and her obedience. While she continuously reached increasing academic requirements, she became more involved with her peers through the interests which she discovered for herself, e.g. writing for the local paper and the vocational home economics club.

All three participants became aware of themselves by negotiating the positions of their selves in relation to others and world (interests) as well as to themselves. These negotiations required them to explore their social existence in regard to their aloneness. Aloneness is the extent to which they understand their Otherness, which pertains to their peers and their interests (world). The space between their social relations and their Otherness is the space in which they could come to terms with what is true and what is false for them. False should be understood as that which is externally imposed on them, detrimental or out of character. True should be understood as that which allows them to further their selves, to become. Thomas made the point perfectly when he stated that the best teachers were those who left him alone to figure things out. It is in this space that the process of becoming self-aware takes place, a process which is

continuous and life-long, and it happens in the specific ways in which the participants interpreted their early educational experiences. Thomas' self-awareness led him to think of himself as someone who learns "by doing" and that we are all "in slightly different places." Julio became aware of how the cultural constraints kept him unfree until he overcame them to become and led him to think of himself as being from here but not of here. Wahini's journey from "very shy" and "obedient" to engaging in every opportunity offered to her and stretching its limits to the maximum of the cultural paradigms of her times led her to perceive of herself as enduring and courageous.

In the space between their social existence and their aloneness, Wahini, Julio and Thomas became aware of their dispositions to themselves, which enabled them to start constructing their guiding principles for their being and becoming. Kierkegaard (1941/1954) referred to this notion as one's own supervision, Emerson (1841/1993) called it self-reliance, Lord Byron (1816/2008) declared, "I stood among them, but not of them" (p. 137), and Shakespeare (1603/2012) demanded, "To thyne own self be true" (p. 45). Nietzsche's (1883/1978) Zarathustra sums it up best: "'This is *my* way; where is yours?' – thus I answered those who asked me 'the way.' For *the* way – that does not exist" (p. 195). To *design*, rather than to *find*, one's way is essential to self-awareness and possible only in the space between one's social existence and one's aloneness. With this self-awareness, one can then determine one's relationships to Other by one's relationship to self *before* determining one's relationship to self by that to Other.

### **Tension as a Necessary Means for Becoming**

All three participants experienced tensions or conflict as a great part of their early educational experiences. For all three, these tensions existed between self and Other, self and world, and, as described above, within their selves. The obvious tensions for Thomas were those

caused by his seeming lack of academic abilities. For Julio, they consisted in his unfreedom posited by the cultural narratives of his times. Wahini's tensions emanated primarily from her shyness, which led her to think of herself as having had "a poor self-image." In all three narratives, tensions with Other and world initiated tensions with self. By engaging in those tensions, the participants were simultaneously forced and enabled to continuously face their dispositions to self. In this regard, Thomas concluded, "It's great to be unpopular, nerdy or whatever early on and then you sort of grow into the size of your feet and you become something as a result. You just become more mature and you're ready for it." Julio stated,

When I was growing up here, I had a few friends, but in high school I knew I was not ...

I mean I didn't come to the realization until I got to high school that I was not like the rest of the people that were there. I was from here but not like them.

And Wahini reflected on her perceptions of social tensions by saying, "I wasn't part of a clique. I don't know if there were cliques. I was not so concerned about it or affected by it." In the whole of Wahini's narrative, this statement is reflective of her notion to not focus on what does not work but instead to find something that works. In this way, the tensions they experienced led them to face their aloneness out of which they designed "their ways" in Nietzsche's sense.

Both Dewey (1938) and Kierkegaard (1941/1954) stated that an experience of tension is one that is not immediately enjoyable. In other words, repeated instant gratification, which is the lack of tension, can have a detrimental effect on one's becoming. Dewey (1938) said, "An experience may be immediately enjoyable and yet promote the formation of a slack and careless attitude ..." (p. 26). Dewey voiced his concern for how immediately enjoyable experiences are potentially mis-educative by encouraging a habit that opposes self-control. Kierkegaard (1941/1954) went yet farther when he stated,

She [Mary] has no need of worldly admiration, anymore than Abraham has need of tears, for she was not a heroine, and he was not a hero, but both of them became greater than such, not at all because they were exempted from distress and torment and paradox, but they became great through these. (p. 76)

The point is that it is out of the tensions that reside in the space between one's social existence and one's aloneness that self-knowledge is made possible. "Worldly admiration" or sympathy is rather counter-productive in this process. As one is forced to face one's dispositions to self, one becomes aware of oneself. For example, Thomas said, "It's often the conflict or the assumed conflict or whatever one wants to call it that made him think more about it and caused him to think about it in another way." With "him" Thomas was referring to another participant from the *School Stories Project* (Rose & Griffith, n.d.), which, as described earlier, focused on the participants' explorations of their difficult early educational experiences. Julio said something similar to this extent: "For them, high school is the epitome. That's it. You have nothing after that. For me, that was just a stepping stone to the next ... whatever the next." He made this statement as we were sitting in a restaurant for our second interview and a former high school peer of his walked over to our table to greet him. With "them" Julio was referring to those of his former peers who either unquestioningly accepted or questioned unsuccessfully their position within the metanarratives of their times. He deplored the missed chances of some of his peers who never left their hometown. Recall that one of the reasons he returned to his hometown was to help others to get out. His point regarding the necessity for tensions is that he might have continued to "be normal" and sell auto parts after graduation if this existence had not caused him conflict. For Thomas, Julio and Wahini, the experiences of tensions allowed them to place

themselves in the greater scheme of their social existence while putting them in a position to learn what is important or *true* to them.

### **Agency and Ownership Position**

One thing that stood out as I invited Wahini, Julio and Thomas to reflect on their lives was the way in which they positioned themselves in relation to their experiences. Each of them assumed an attitude of ownership, which was expressed in an active rather than a passive voice throughout their narratives. In other words, none of them talked to me about what *happened* to them; instead, each talked about what they *did*. For Wahini, her growing up in the 1950s placed a multitude of gender limitations on her possibilities. On these, she reflected in two ways: one, she talked about choosing “the highest available” to her, which led her to start her professional life as a teacher and finish it as a professor of literacy. And two, she described her life as having taken every opportunity she had created for herself while having gone one step further than the road ahead of her. For example, she decided to attend a college on the Mainland, and she chose one that had no Hawaiian population in order to be “exposed to the rest of the world.” At the same time, she pointed out, she refused to do what she did not want to do, e.g. when she grew concerned about the test-driven school curriculum in 1986 and left teaching to pursue a doctoral degree. She summed up her ownership position when she said, “No matter where I was, I always had opportunities. And then I took advantage of those opportunities.” The point is that the manner in which Wahini interpreted her experiences composed a narrative with focus on possibility rather than on impossibility, on what she *could* do rather than on what she *could not* do, in short, on her agency.

While Wahini never really talked directly about the tensions she undoubtedly experienced, Thomas and Julio did so matter-of-factly, never emotionally, and only after my



continuous probing. For example, after having sent Thomas my first draft of his story, which at that point still reminded me of the Tears for Fears (Orzabal, 1982) song, he commented,

I don't know if my feelings are quite as negative. A lot of what I was writing, I wrote it with a certain tongue-in-cheek. I mean if I look back on it and I re-read it, it's there ... I'm trying to figure out a way to talk about the issue without necessarily getting fixated on all the negative things. I mean the negative is sort of funny actually.

The way Thomas chose to interpret his experiences adds the notion of ownership of interpretive position to the idea of agency. While I was focusing on his resilience, painting a picture of victim/survivor of him, he made clear to me that none of the educational experiences I perceived as traumatic defined him. Moreover, he pointed out that it was he who defined the nature of these experiences, a nature that instead of traumatic was "sort of funny" and useful because those experiences "cause us to overcome." With that understanding, I revised the draft of his narrative by changing the theme from resilience to one of agency and interpretive ownership. In the member check interview that followed, I asked Thomas if I understood him correctly when I portrayed him with a reflective attitude of get-over-it-and-move-on. Thomas replied,

That is really where I am right now. I think in so many ways people hold on to these things, and they dwell on them, and worry about them, or they have all of this regret. I don't believe in public memorials very much. I think there's a lot of people who should simply forget it or move on. Well, you can remember it, but essentially you keep going.

The idea to not have regrets and to "forget it," which means not to focus on negatives rather than literally forgetting an experience, undergirds the notion of double agency. This double agency consists in the way in which Thomas takes ownership of the decisions he made and in the manner in which he chooses to interpret experiences.

Interestingly, Julio used similar wording to reflect on his experiences of tension. He, too, suggests shifting one's focus away from negatives, but he actually proposes to forget negative experiences. Below is an excerpt from our second structured interview:

**Julio:** I can be happy where ever.

**Sonja:** How do you do it?

**Julio:** I don't know. I don't have time to be depressed. I mean, yeah, I do but eh... it's ok. I think that if we have depression or something, anything like that is not a good thing to feel.

**Sonja:** But we don't choose being sad. It's not like we can help it.

**Julio:** No, we can't, but you can choose to keep going. Or you can just say, you know what? I gotta go do something else, you know?

**Sonja:** Yeah. Doesn't always work, though. There were two years of my life that I was severely depressed. Extremely sick. So bad that, mercifully, I don't have memory of those years.

**Julio:** Oh, good! That's excellent! That is beautiful! That's how I do it. There was ... several years I was like that, too. I don't concentrate on ... I guess I forget things easily. I don't pay attention to the heavy stuff. I'm focused on what stocks are going up with population problems, I'm focused on the books, I'm focused on different things.

I continued this conversation by pointing out to Julio that it seems to me he has eidetic memory since he recalled experiences with astounding detail. He admitted, "I do have good memory, but there's some things I choose not to remember because it's not important." This adds a third component to the concept of agency and ownership position, namely that of selected importance. Julio does not only own his decisions and the ways in which he interprets memories, but he

makes a clear point for a fundamental idea of narrativity – to compose one’s personal grand narrative based on the importance one places on any experience. This goes beyond weaving together one’s stories in one’s singular way to deciding whether an experience should be included at all. In Wahini’s narrative, potentially depressive or traumatic experiences were not included. This is either a choice she made when relaying her stories to me or one that she made in the past, and as a result of it, those memories are displaced from her personal grand narrative.

The concept of agency and ownership position was transparent in the narratives of all three participants. Their stories are those of agents who act and narrate their lives with focus on intentionality.

### **Learning as Awakening**

This study investigated what role participants’ interpretations of early educational experiences play in their personal grand narrative. In their narratives, Julio, Wahini and Thomas told their educational experiences as a form of awakening to themselves and to the world. For Julio and Wahini, this happened in large part through their ability to read and through their love of stories. Stories, so Pulitzer Price winning author Adam Johnson (2012) noted, have the unique ability to draw us out of our private lives in which we are stuck as a limitation of being human by communicating to us the private lives of others. Wahini called the library her “haven,” and by 4<sup>th</sup> grade, she was reading biographical fiction books that enabled her to *see* the world beyond the island she lived on. It is conceivable that her experience with stories played a role in her decision to choose a college away from the island, seeking exposure “to the rest of the world.” Since she chose a school that did not have a Hawaii club, she was placed in the Foreign Student Club, about which she said, “We had fun. They were interesting people.” Julio interpreted his experiences with stories similarly. When I asked him if he experienced some

form of culture shock when leaving his hometown for a college that had 16 Hispanics among 18,000 students, he replied, “No. Maybe because I had read so much about other cultures.” He shared how he read books whose characters were African-American and how he tried to read their phonetically written speech out loud. In contrast, Thomas’ inability to read until after 5<sup>th</sup> grade led him to awaken to the natural world first by following his curiosity about how things work. He said,

It was enjoyable to do these things, and it wasn’t a matter of analyzing what happened when I took a piece of old glass and put it on top of a piece of sensitive paper and took it out in the yard and let the sun turn it into a picture. And then it goes dark and it was just cool. It was just really neat. So it was the mystery or the magic of it or the wow kind of thing. Or you take a magnifying glass and then heat something enough to set it on fire. I mean that in and of itself is pretty magical. You know, the sun and the light and so on focused in this way?

For Julio, this kind of awakening to the natural world happened in a similar way though it was not primarily driven by curiosity but by need. He explained,

We would ride out here to the levee, and we would shoot the rabbits there, and then we would be able to ride home with two or three rabbits, and we would skin them and my mother would cook them. I read a lot about rifles and the bullets and the knives and what to do with the skins. It’s how to use the little brains, to tan the skins when we needed to. Julio became a biologist, Thomas a visual artist and photographer, and Wahini, who spent many years engaged in home economics activities in the 4H Club, became a vocational home economics teacher.

The early educational experiences as described, interpreted and placed in the narratives of the participants illuminate how learning awakened them to themselves and to the world they live in. This kind of awakening enabled them to understand the individual ways in which they know the space and the time they inhabit, and how they know differently from those with whom they share that space and time. With this understanding, they were able to locate themselves in the greater scheme of things. To this extent, Julio noted, “I try to see the meaning and the significance of actions that we do today get set in the larger picture and what it means for the future, and what it means for today.” This idea can be likened to a photomosaic: it is necessary to locate oneself in the picture to see one’s immediate surroundings, and it is equally necessary to be able to zoom out and grasp the whole image of which one is part and to which one contributes simply by existing. Through one’s awakening to the manner in which one exists in the world, self-awareness is made possible as one’s relations to self, Other and world are illuminated. This particular kind of awareness is the prerequisite to devise one’s singular ways to deal with one’s realities. It is the foundation to owning one’s freedom to continuously decide how to place oneself in the world.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

What is the measure of school in the narrative of life? It is not, in its essence, a period of 13 years since thinking about school in terms of time would reduce its role to the linearity of a cause-effect chain. As explained in the preface of this section, the process of becoming self-aware is iterative, and many iterations are going on simultaneously. For example, when one deals with tensions and one’s dispositions to self and makes choices out of those situations, one learns something about the self. At the same time, these choices and those that led to the situation one is facing are the results of experiences.

About education, Kierkegaard (1941/1954) noted that it is “the curriculum one had to run through in order to catch up with oneself, and he who will not pass through this curriculum is helped very little by the fact that he was born in the most enlightened age.” Thomas, Wahini and Julio passed through this curriculum when they made experiences in the space between their social existence and their aloneness and as they reflected upon these experiences by owning them and their interpretations. They began to catch up with themselves, or to find themselves out, as they awakened to their existence in the immediate and the distant realities of time and place. This initial self-awareness enabled them to make decisions that led to higher levels of self-awareness, which tightened their agency role and ownership position in their personal grand narratives.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, I have represented the findings of the narrative inquiry that I conducted with three participants. The purpose of this chapter was to relay their stories with focus on how their early educational experiences influenced them throughout their lives. I narrated the individual stories of each in ways that show how the participants placed them in their personal grand narratives. Since the purpose of this study was to explore how their experiences influence their becoming throughout life, it was important to tell each story in a way that gives the reader an idea of how the owner of each personal grand narrative, the participant, perceives of him/herself. I then used my understanding of their narratives and the manner in which they were composed to share four overarching concepts of how early educational experiences influence one's becoming. The findings show that they commence the process of awakening and, through the singular ways in which they are reflected upon, lead to self-awareness, which is the prerequisite to be free in one's choices.

In the next chapter, I will explore the significance of these findings within the conceptual framework for this study – curriculum theory.

## **Chapter V: Implications and Conclusions**

*“[E]pistemology is always and inevitably personal. The point of the probe is always in the heart of the explorer: What is my answer to the question of the nature of knowing? I surrender to the belief that my knowing is a small part of a wider integrated knowing that knits the entire biosphere or creation.”*

(Bateson, 2002, p. 82)

The purpose of this chapter is to suggest implications for the four concepts described in the last section of Chapter IV for curriculum theory and praxis. Bateson’s quote above frames my suggestions as an infinitesimal part of a wider knowledge that is significant because it adds the temporary results of one person’s singular meaning-making process. The best I can hope for is that the suggestions are useful as a source for imagination and critique. I will begin this chapter with a brief comparison of curriculum theory in the 1950s, the time during which the three participants were schooled, and today. This will be followed with suggestions regarding the implications of each of the four iterative concepts. I will end this chapter with directions for further research and the conclusion of this dissertation.

### **Implications for Curriculum Theory and Praxis**

The purpose of this study was to explore the role early educational experiences play throughout life. The research questions guiding this study were:

1. In what ways do participants describe their early educational experiences?
2. How do participants interpret their early educational experiences?
3. What role do their interpretations of early educational experiences play in their personal grand narrative?



These questions were answered in the first three sections of the previous chapter. The question that remains is what the implications of the findings are for curriculum theory. In order to not so much answer that question but rather to make it bigger (Bateson, 2002), I will explore how each of the four concepts adds to curricular thinking.

### **Curriculum Theory in the 1950s and Today**

I should preface this by addressing what might seem, albeit falsely, like an obvious first conclusion: the three participants all made their early educational experiences mainly during the 1950s, and they have become personally and professionally successful people. The question now becomes whether their stories make the case for curriculum theory and praxis of that decade. As described in Chapter II, the 1950s, in terms of curriculum theory, were marked by two major events: the death of John Dewey in 1952 and the launch of the Sputnik in 1957. The former gave rise to a debate that argued for a 20<sup>th</sup> century version of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Classical Curriculum, which was based on memorization and discipline. Opponents argued for the life adjustment curriculum, which reduced the accomplishments of the progressivists to focusing the purpose of school on vocational training (Pinar et al., 1995). It was attacked for its anti-intellectualism (Bestor, 1953), and proponents of the life adjustment curriculum would lose the debate by the end of the decade. The result was a “scientific curriculum” organized around the Tyler Rationale and Bloom’s Taxonomy, which focused on the planning or prescription of specific learning experiences. The Tyler Rationale begins with a definition of learning objectives for which appropriate learning experiences are created. These are then implemented and evaluated (Tyler, 1949). Bloom’s Taxonomy is a scaffold of six cognitive levels designed to guide learners from lower- to higher-order thinking skills (Bloom et al., 1956). It dovetails nicely with the rigidity of the Tyler Rationale since it requires to plan learning around

measurable behavioral objectives. This prescriptive approach to curriculum was exacerbated by the launch of the Sputnik near the end of the decade, an event that cast doubt on U.S. schools in comparison to Soviet accomplishments in the first decade of the Cold War.

Despite of the many changes curriculum thought and educational policies have undergone in the past 50 years, which I outlined in Chapter II, the similarities between curriculum implementation in the 1950s and today are strikingly obvious: the curriculum is defined by measurable, a priori objectives; it is created with results in mind, rather than with humans, and implemented hierarchically from top to bottom. It resembles an economist's approach to education with an eye on the money or outcome rather than on process. Instead of thinking about learning as a way of becoming, people are reduced to human resources. The major difference between curriculum implementation in the 1950s and today is that in the 1950s, curriculum design still focused on teachers' engagement (Pinar et al., 1995) whereas today it is test-driven and designed by people far removed from classrooms.

The essential fallacy of a Tyler Rationale-like approach to curriculum consists in the fact that it presupposes the notion that one can predetermine experiences. But this would mean that it were possible to be in control of how another person, teacher or student, experiences anything and, further, of how s/he makes meaning of an experience. And if such control were indeed possible, which, thankfully, it is not, the outcome of school would be the production of uniform graduates who can be plugged into society to fill gaps. And yet, Wahini, Julio and Thomas were schooled based on this illusory notion of control and went on to live content, fulfilled and meaningful lives. This is a salute, not to the education system of their day, but, as has become clear through their narratives, to their ability to choose themselves amid a system intent on control. The idea of choosing oneself is Sartre's (1956), who stated that "we are perpetually

threatened with choosing ourselves – and consequently with becoming – other than we are,” (p. 598), which means more of ourselves. The overarching concepts of the three narratives illustrate how the participants chose themselves through elements of experiences, tension, agency and different levels of self-awareness, which I will elaborate in the sections below.

### **Experiences and the Original Project<sup>14</sup>**

Recall that the idea of this concept is that in the space between one’s social existence and one’s aloneness, one is forced to come to terms with one’s dispositions to self. In this space, one designs (not finds) one’s own way, which means to choose oneself. Sartre (1956) noted, “One must be conscious in order to choose, and one must choose in order to be conscious” (p. 595). In other words, one must be conscious of oneself, or have a certain level of self-awareness, in order to choose oneself. No one else must make the choice; such an experience does not lead to self-awareness until it is consciously accepted or denied. Further, without self-awareness one cannot choose oneself. For the three participants, this space was provided by their non-conformity. For Wahini, social non-conformity was caused by her lack of interest in fitting in. For Julio and Thomas, it was their inability for academic conformity that caused their social non-conformity. Clearly, I am not suggesting here to create experiences of Otherness for students. Rather, the idea is to enable students to face their dispositions to self by allowing them to reflect on whatever experiences they make when learning. In this way, the experiences that can be noted in a pre-planned curriculum must include those of choice, autonomy and reflection as opposed to

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<sup>14</sup> One’s *original project* is an idea introduced by Sartre (1956). It refers to one’s becoming through the choices one makes. Sartre (1956) suggested that an individual is the sum of his/her decisions, which in turn determine who s/he is. In other words, I am the person who made these decisions as much as I become that person. As an example illustrating this notion I offer the character of Walt White in the series *Breaking Bad* (Gilligan, 2008). Although White’s initial decision to cook and sell crystal meth was primarily motivated by his desire to provide for his family after his impending death of cancer, his choice to break bad initiated his becoming a successful drug lord who, with each subsequent choice, acted increasingly more like one.

being exclusively defined in terms of measurable behavioral objectives. This is an extraordinarily difficult task since the teacher, whom I expect to adjust a priori objectives to allow for choice, autonomy and reflection, acts based on his/her personal practical knowledge (Clandinin, 1985), which probably consists of learning experiences based on the notion of control. I am reminded of Ivan Illich's (1971) suggestion to de-school society.

The connection to Illich is grounded in my own personal practical knowledge of 23 years of classroom praxis, the last eight of which I have been an instructor of pre-service teachers. In the beginning of each semester, my students look at me wholly absorbed in what I say, taking everything as the Truth. I am afraid of the possibility of creating a generation of future colleagues to whom it does not occur to question me, and I am perturbed by their lostness, which causes them to take everything I say as truths to be lived by. I tell them about Bertolucci's movie *The Conformist*, poignantly illuminated for its connection to curriculum theory by Carlson (2002). The film tells the story of an "enlightened" professor who was eventually assassinated by his star-student to whom he had been a mentor. The movie is set in the times of Mussolini's fascism. The professor expatriated to France where he worked with the Resistance. The student, Clerici, lost without his academic father, turned to the next best authority to tell him what is good and right and valuable and became an obedient fascist who completed his mission to murder his former mentor. It takes all of the semester, every semester, for my students to come to terms with the idea that the professor just replaced one truth with another - his. It takes much longer to grasp the idea that education is that which enables a person to question long-held beliefs and to design ways to live under one's own supervision. I often feel that I have one semester to de-school my students so that they become more aware of themselves, their beliefs about the world they exist in, and the cultural narratives in which those beliefs are grounded. With this

awareness, they can design their individual, ever-temporary definitions for the purpose of school and what it means to be an educated person. In this way, they have the possibility to choose their place in the world rather than be placed in it.

Huebner (1993/1999) stated that learning is the journey of the self. This journey must revolve around one's original project. Hence, it is useful to think of curriculum as that which makes it possible for those engaged in it, students and teachers, to choose themselves over and over again. And if curriculum implementation is based on making this choice not in individualistic and egocentric ways, the dangers of which have been outlined thoroughly in Chapter II, there exists the chance that one's meaningful social existence can become part of the journey.

### **Tension, Original Choice, and Key Experience**

I introduced this study with a quote from Arthur Danto, a participant of the *School Stories Project* (Rose & Griffith, n.d), who reflected that school, no matter how hard it tried, was not able to suffocate the participants' original flame for becoming themselves; the *original choice* was made by all of the 18 men (Danto in Griffith & Schilling, 2004). As explained in Chapter I, Sartre's (1956) concept of the original choice entails that at one point in life a basic existentialist choice is made from which all other choices emanate. Sartre (1956) points out that this is not an instantaneous event but one that initiates a person's consciousness of his/her original project and then reaffirms or changes it every time the person chooses him/herself.

Julio, Thomas and Wahini made their original choice, and, according to their personal grand narratives, it proved to be the foundation of glimpsing their original project. Their choices led up to a key experience based on which they designed their professional paths. Julio spent his early childhood hunting rabbits with his friends so his mom could cook them, and later, as he no

longer fit in socially, he withdrew into books. His key experience happened when he started college and enrolled in the environmental club. He described this moment exclaiming, “It was like OH MY GOD! This is where I got to go! This is where I could do the stuff that I dreamed about! I said, ‘The hell with the cars and that stuff.’” Julio made this experience after he had “dropped out” and worked as a car parts salesman satisfying his father’s request to work after graduation. For Thomas, the original choice experience happened throughout his years of explorations in his grandfather’s basement and was most explicitly brought to consciousness when the dean of the college he attended suggested he take a drawing class. Up until this point, Thomas had been attending college merely because it was simply expected of him as a White middle class male, the exact opposite expectations from those for Julio. Once Thomas took the drawing class, college started to make sense to him. Wahini’s original choice seems evident in her reply to the guidance counselor: “So I’m gonna be a teacher. It’s the highest available for me.” Stretching the limits of opportunity, which was one fundamental theme of her narrative, she chose a college on the Mainland. As described in Chapter IV, it is conceivable that this decision was a result of her years of reading about the world beyond the island she grew up on.

The way I described it, the original choice for each of the three was first repeatedly reaffirmed over years and at some point culminated in a decision that would become their lives’ paths. From the beginning, Wahini’s way of breaking through barriers, Julio’s withdrawal into books and Thomas’ fascination with structure and illusion were the result of their inability to live up to or be satisfied with how they were expected to function among others. In other words, the tension between what was expected of them and how they were, caused them to design ways of existing that bridged the gap between their selves and the world they existed in. Julio described himself as a loner and a person who “was looking at things differently,” Thomas said he “was

not a good kid when it came to learning in a classroom sort of way,” and Wahini described herself as “very, very shy” and an “observer.” By designing their individual ways to address the tension between self and world, they made original choices. The alternative would have been to not choose themselves but to change themselves in an attempt at conformity. Once again, this is a salute to them rather than one to the system that schooled them. They came through it not *because* but *despite* of it.

If curriculum is the ongoing project of self-understanding (Pinar, 2004), it must make possible the original choice. This gives rise to the question in which ways curriculum can offer useful tension. The kinds of tensions it currently offers are based on competitive ethics, which lead to egocentrism (Kincheloe, 2008). In this way, they are what Dewey (1938) described as mis-educative experiences since they cause narcissism rather than a self-awareness that enables an individual to place him/herself in the world by designing a meaningful existence in the communities s/he is part of. Bateson (2002) stated, “Today we pump a little natural history into children along with a little ‘art’ so that they will forget ... the aesthetics of being alive and will grow up to be good businessmen,” which he likens to giving “either weapons to ego or toys to fancy” (p. 133). I suggest here that useful tensions can be caused by a rigorous and *complete* curriculum. By *complete* curriculum I mean the opposite of the current fragmentation into the explicit, invisible, extra and null curriculum (Sadker et. al, 2008). The explicit curriculum pertains to that which is taught directly and based on the learning objectives prescribed by the state. Through the invisible curriculum, children are taught values and orientations by observing behavior, e.g. punctuality, school pride, etc. The null curriculum catches controversial topics, which are hence avoided; and the extra curriculum consists of school clubs, sports, etc.

A complete curriculum allows for experiences in more than just the “core” subjects. It offers rigor for subjects that are exiled to the extra curriculum or were abandoned altogether to spend more time on test preparation. These subjects engage all senses and multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1993) and so open the possibility for an aesthetic education (Dewey, 1934; Greene, 2000). According to Dewey (1934), something is aesthetic when means and ends as well as form and material coalesce or harmonize. Another requirement is that both creator and consumer are engaged with the aesthetic thing in wholesomeness. Finally, it must leave room for possibilities. Therefore, it cannot have a priori goals, e.g. it cannot be so authoritative that it dictates what to see, think, feel, remember, etc. According to Dewey’s (1934) definition of aesthetics, today’s curriculum is a rather unaesthetic thing. A challenging, diverse curriculum might overcome the prevalent separation of thinking from doing (Crawford, 2009) as has proven to be true for Wahini through her engagement in the home economics 4H club, Thomas’ experiences in shop class, and Julio’s love for the drama club, about which he fondly said, it “was pulling me out of where I was here, from this town, and being somebody else.”

Further, useful tensions can be brought about through the null curriculum by engaging students in controversial topics such as religion, gun control, sex, politics, or any of the countless issues teenagers are educated on by the media. The null curriculum also includes values and ethics education as well as the reading of primary sources on history in order to come to one’s own conclusions instead of blindly adopting absolute traditional values and metanarratives. If these topics were part of a complete curriculum, they would offer the chance for conversation. Recall that Huebner’s (1963/1999) definition for conversation is that it makes room for the possibility of change. This does not mean that the purpose of the conversation is to change another person’s mind. That would be a debate. The change a conversation can bring about is



personal. By reflecting on another person's way of thinking about a phenomenon, my way of thinking about it is illuminated. As a result, I can know the phenomenon, the other person and myself better.

In order to learn this kind of openness to an Other, to the world and to self, tensions are necessary. They are an underlying element in the process of choosing oneself and so contribute to one's original project as it leads up to a key experience, which can then be recognized as such.

### **Agency as a Connector Between World and Self**

The concept of agency derived from the fact that Thomas, Wahini and Julio never narrated their lives' stories by saying what *happened* to them; they spoke about what they *did*. Moreover, they made it clear that their experiences were neither good nor bad but a matter of how they interpreted them. In this way, they own their lives' choices and the persons they have become in the process. This kind of agency is not innate or acquired; it must be given birth to. For this to be possible, one has to come to terms with one's dispositions to self. As explained in Chapter IV, facing one's dispositions to self is necessary to construct one's guiding principles for being and becoming. At the same time, one's dispositions are not just a prerequisite but also a result of the "birthing" process for agency as is agency itself. Emerson (1841/1993) illustrated this iterative process as follows:

I remember an answer which when quite young I was prompted to make to a valued adviser who was wont to importune me with the dear old doctrines of the church. On my saying, "What have I to do with the sacredness of traditions, if I live wholly from within?" my friend suggested,--"But these impulses may be from below, not from above." I replied, "They do not seem to me to be such; but if I am the Devil's child, I will live then from the Devil." No law can be sacred to me but that of my nature. Good and bad

are but names very readily transferable to that or this; the only right is what is after my constitution; the only wrong what is against it. (p. 33)

The point Emerson makes is two-fold. One, he needed to have composed his own “constitution” in order to be able to determine what is good and bad, both for himself and in terms of world. In other words, he faced his dispositions to self to be able to make these determinations. Two, based on his dispositions to self, he owns his choices instead of passively adopting a “constitution” external to him. Should personal and external principles coincide, he would conceivably not reject the latter. If they don’t, however, through his agency, he would follow what he describes as the law of his nature. In short, the ability to face one’s dispositions to self and the ability to assume agency for those dispositions as well as the choices one makes simultaneously cause and give birth to each other.

And what if one’s “constitution” is that of “the Devil’s child?” Hannah Arendt (1964), after interviewing Adolf Eichmann during his trials in Jerusalem, concluded that it was not evil motives that led Eichmann to become a major organizer of the Holocaust. She (Arendt, 1978) wrote, “I was struck by a manifest shallowness in the doer that made it impossible to trace the uncontestable evil of his deeds to any deeper level of roots or motives” (p. 4). Eichmann functioned well as long as he was given rules designed to follow an external structure. This worked for him in Germany under the Nazi regime as well as in the Israeli prison system during the trial. But in situations for which no routine procedures existed, Eichmann was helpless. Arendt (1978) concluded that it was his lack of “firm ideological convictions” (p. 4) and *thoughtlessness* that led him to become a human being who organized genocide. *Thoughtlessness* is the absence of reflectivity. Every event, experience, fact, etc. requires a person to reflect upon it before acting upon the subsequent one, which is impossibly exhausting;

hence, rules and external structures facilitate an individual's way of dealing with reality (Arendt, 1978). But in lieu of any individual guiding principles and dispositions, one adopts those of the next best authority and becomes its widget. In Chapter II, I elaborated on the consequences of the lack of values education in the U.S. I explained that values education cannot be based on inculcating children into society by imposing absolute values on them since the best we could hope for then would be that children act virtuously out of fear of punishment. It can be assumed that as soon as the threat of consequence no longer looms, virtuosity goes out the window. If it is thoughtlessness that makes possible the birth of evil, a key aspect of values education is to teach how to reason and how to make choices based on reflections of how one's choices affect Other and world.

In this way, to assume agency is to give meaning to the world. Agency entails the notion that one is both producer and product of the world one exists in. Sartre (1956) noted, "We choose the world, not in its contexture as in-itself but in its meaning, by choosing ourselves" (p. 596). In other words, because I am an infinitesimal part of this world, I am also its creator. The world does not exist in itself so much as it exists in the ways I give meaning to it, which I do through my singular set of lenses. Carlson (2002) stated, "Through the process of reflecting on our everyday lives and the beliefs and rituals that guide us, we become more conscious of ourselves as the creators of truth and value" (p. 64). This kind of consciousness does not come by itself. In fact, I want to suggest here that it is a fundamental aspect of what it means to be an educated person; hence, cultivating it needs to be part of education. It can be initiated through conversation that brings the private into the public sphere, which allows students and teachers to understand how others view their beliefs and how they question them. As a result, all can understand more deeply how those beliefs are grounded in culture, tradition and experience. In

this way, students and teacher continuously check and re-check their dispositions to self while reaffirming their agency. The purpose or goal of the conversation is not to resolve opposing truths by reaching some consensus but to make those truths visible. Arendt (1978) claimed, “we are of the world and not merely in it” (p. 22). In other words, we are makers of the world whether we choose to or not; therefore, the question becomes what we want to make of this world. Part of what it means to be an educated person then is that one has to have thought about this question and designed conditional, continuously revised, unfolding answers. Being ignorant toward one’s existence as a maker of this world or to refuse this mission because it is an uncomfortable one, especially for a teacher, might help to create a world characterized by conformity in which schools function as a means of reproduction simply by default.

### **Self-Awakening and Zarathustra’s Three Metamorphoses**

Thomas, Wahini and Julio narrated their early educational experiences as a form of self-awakening that enabled them to locate themselves within their relations to self, Other and world. In the process, and as a result of it, they designed their individual ways to exist in the world, no thanks to the system that schooled them but regardless of it. But this is precisely what education should make possible, not just for those whose external conditions or ways of being in the world are conducive to making original choices. I noted above that it is not useful to educate for consensus. I want to propose here that understanding consensus, on the other hand, is essential. That is, it is crucial to understand the metanarratives that form the structure of the institutions one exists in. The idea is to enable students to see the ways in which their beliefs are rooted in their culture and traditions so they can question the very roots and imagine different possibilities for themselves and for the world of which they are makers. This presupposes a kind of

uprooting, which Julio, Thomas and Wahini experienced as a result of their inability for conformity. Carlson (2002) explained this kind of uprooting as follows:

The purpose of education is not to give people a sense of a coherent history of progress of the 'human spirit,' nor to lead the journeying subject toward unification of all truths and the resolution of all difference. Rather, its aim is precisely to reveal the self as lost, beyond recovery of some authentic self it once thought it was, and without an internal coherence or unity. The self only finds itself in the play of difference, in being different from others ... [T]he Zarathustra myth suggests a pedagogy designed to promote difference rather than conformity or uniformity. (p. 101 f.)

The necessity of experiencing the self as lost and different was elaborated in Chapters IV and V above; I described the significance of the space between one's social existence and one's aloneness and the importance of tensions at length. However, the narratives of the three participants disprove Carlson's (2002) idea of lostness beyond the point of "some authentic self." In fact, had Thomas, Julio and Wahini experienced the complete absence of an "internal unity," they might not have been able to repeatedly make their original choices, even if unconsciously, which led to their key experience. What Carlson (2002) called the Zarathustra myth, though, is very relevant for education and does not necessitate the loss of one's sense of an authentic self.

Nietzsche's (1883/1978) Zarathustra speaks of the three metamorphoses of the spirit - "how the spirit becomes a camel; and the camel, a lion; and the lion, finally, the child" (p. 25). The camel bends down to load itself with knowledge and tradition. It understands the consensus communicated through the metanarratives. It learns as much as it possibly can about what is considered true and virtuous by those who decide on the dominant truths. But the camel cannot act upon its knowledge. It must become the lion in order to question these truths and the power

of those who constituted them. And just like the camel could not doubt existing paradigms, the lion cannot create new ones. For that, it needs to become the child, who dreams up new possibilities and speaks “a sacred ‘Yes’” (Nietzsche, 1883/1978, p. 27). The “yes” is an affirmation of one’s self-awareness as a maker of the world. Further, it affirms one’s beliefs in the possibility to create change. The lion and the camel are still part of the child because the metamorphoses are not unidirectional events. They are a constant, never-ending process, which means one must always be open to become the camel, the lion and the child again.

Zarathustra withdrew from a world he could no longer exist in to reflect, carrying his “ashes into the mountains” (Nietzsche, 1883/1978, p. 10). He rejoined humanity a decade later as a teacher because he felt the need for “hands outstretched to receive [his wisdom]” (Nietzsche, 1883/1978, p. 10). What he wanted to teach people was the concept of the *Übermensch*, or overman, who creates purpose for himself in the now and here instead of depending on someone or something to choose purpose and meaning for him. But the people he encountered were no easy students. There were those that preferred sensationalism to his lectures. The beckoning of instant gratification lulled them into thoughtlessness. And then there were those that looked up to him, mistaking his “wisdom” as gospel because they had no “wisdom” of their own. They were lost beyond a sense of an authentic self. As Zarathustra, the teacher, begins his life among people again, he begins his education. He engages in conversations, shares his thoughts, listens to the people’s views, and reflects on how they perceive his “wisdoms.” The teacher becomes the student and is educated in the process of conversation and social reflection.

The personal grand narratives of Thomas, Julio and Wahini show that learning as an awakening to the self is a never-ending process. The metamorphoses do not come like a natural course of action as the events of one’s life unfold. Instead, they are induced through tensions in

the space between one's social existence and one's aloneness. The participants became metaphorical lions when their inability for conformity led them to question the metanarratives of their times. Julio displaced himself from his culture to return to it with the hope of enabling others to free themselves by stepping beyond cultural boundaries. Thomas, an arts professor today, is a harsh critic of a one-size-fits-all approach to education. And Wahini left kindergarten-12<sup>th</sup> grade teaching as a refusal to implement a test-driven curriculum. All three imagined, created and realized possibilities for themselves and their worlds. Their narratives reflect that their second and third metamorphosis occurred consciously only after their graduation from high school. I propose here that curriculum be utilized, rather than implemented, as a means to induce the metamorphoses.

### **Section Conclusion**

*"[I]n the crowd they could not deem me one of such; I stood among them, but not of them; in a shroud of thoughts, which were not their thoughts, and still could, had I not filed my mind, which thus itself subdued."*

(Byron & Lord Byron, 1816/2008, p. 137)

Education has no beginning and no end; it is one aspect of the way in which a person exists in the world. It is the process that enables a human being to engage in his/her original project, the project of him/her, conscientiously. Education must make possible one's original choices through a curriculum that offers experiences one can reflect upon. The purpose of education is to counter ignorance and thoughtlessness so that one can be cognizant of oneself as a maker of the world and choose one's place in it. In the quote above, Byron describes education as a forging of the mind that allows an individual to think his/her own thoughts instead of

forfeiting one's chance of choosing oneself by living under a shroud of thoughts of an unknown owner with an unknown agenda.

Nothing can guarantee that education leads to self-awakening because when working with people, there are no guarantees. And yet, curriculum praxis and educational policies seem to be based on the need to control the results of education. This might be a very human characteristic, but control facilitates thoughtlessness. As a teacher and as a human being who exists in relationships with other human beings, I realize that I cannot control how people create meaning for themselves. I cannot tell students, or anybody for that matter, what anything *means*. I can only tell them what anything *means to me* and so cause them to engage in their own thoughtfulness and create meaning and knowledge for themselves. Huebner (1962/1999) warned,

Any form of knowledge is essentially a prejudice ... The prejudice cannot be avoided – the pitfall accompanies the advantage. The disadvantage is overcome when man uses knowledge with humility and tempers it with doubt; willing and eager to entertain other ways of knowing that which is beheld, but using the existing knowledge with courage.  
(p. 38 f.)

To me, as a teacher and as an individual, to know with humility means to understand that my knowing is a small part of all knowing. To know with doubt is to invite social reflection so I can understand how my meaning-making fits with that of others. And to know with courage is to create meaning for myself.

### **Conclusions**

In Chapter I, I noted that there was a gap in the research regarding how early educational experiences influence self-understanding throughout life. Up until now, the relationship between



these experiences and an individual's self-understanding had been studied with focus on culture and gender characteristics to draw practical conclusions about education for specific groups of students. The present study serves as an academic contribution because it explored how one's interpretations of early educational experiences influence a person's becoming, self-understanding and decision-making processes iteratively throughout life. The findings contribute to curricular thinking by offering insights into how educational experiences were interpreted by four people – the participants and me. The conclusions of those interpretations for curriculum theory were outlined above.

### **Directions for Further Research**

Because I am the researcher who analyzes and represents the data, the suggestions I make above come from a deeply personal place. My social-existentialist worldview simultaneously illuminates and limits the academic contributions offered with this study as noted explicitly in Chapter I and repeatedly throughout this dissertation. This kind of research would benefit if conducted through a different set of lenses, e.g. that of critical theory. I presume that scholars who construct their worldviews mainly based on the contributions of critical pedagogues might disagree with my interpretations by arguing that the suggestions above do not address the needs of the most under-privileged students whom the system arguably often fails. This is not to say that Thomas, Julio and Wahini were privileged. Thomas suffered through school unable to read until 5<sup>th</sup> grade, Julio had to overcome cultural barriers, and Wahini's opportunities in the 1950s and 1960s were limited by her gender. However, each of them had at least one advantage: for Julio, it was his academic abilities; for Thomas, his curiosity and White, middle class maleness; and for Wahini, her interest in stories and her parents' expectations for her to go to college. Less privileged students would be those for whom academic abilities, chances for social upward

mobility and gender represent multiple, inter-connected obstacles. Hence, it would be useful to conduct this study with participants who meet those requirements with critical pedagogy as a conceptual framework. This would contribute to the research by exploring how original choices and key experiences are made possible under these circumstances.

Further, Wahini, Julio and Thomas narrate their lives with a sense of contentment. In fact, I chose to work with people whom I perceive to be personally and professionally successful. A similar study conducted with participants who feel that they did not realize dreams for themselves might illuminate under which conditions one's original project is hindered by educational experiences.

And finally, this kind of research needs to be conducted with life history as a theoretical framework. The difference between narrativity and life history consists in the fact that the latter situates participants' personal grand narratives within a broader historical and sociological context (Goodson & Sikes, 2001). Goodson and Sikes (2001) asserted that moving from life story to life history means to "confront issues surrounding the changing contexts of time and space" (p. 17). Such a study can potentially illustrate how participants' personal grand narratives are located in and compare with the metanarratives of the times, which can offer most useful insights to further curricular thinking.

### **Epilogue**

I frequently visit the city of Houston. On my last trip, much to my dismay, I had to go to the Galleria mall. I do not enjoy shopping. The high-end stores like Gucci, Vuitton, Armani, De Beers, etc. resemble embodiments of a common binary: the images of those who shop there stand in stark contrast to the realities of the people who work in these stores. I am once again reminded of the fact that I am privileged. I am making my observations, I am viewing the world,

and I am writing this dissertation from a place of privilege. I live a comfortable life supported by a job that is not work but a form of self-actualization, a job that gives me the luxury of time and the physical energy to think about the world and write up my thoughts. My privilege is my education, both formal and informal. My *formal* education is the institutionalized schooling I received; my *informal* education consists of experiences that de-schooled me. Taken together, they made up the curriculum of my early educational years. It might be the most significant difference between the shop assistants and me, possibly also between some of the trademark shoppers and me.

How did I get so lucky, so privileged? One of the advantages of growing up in East Berlin is that I grew up in a class-less society. As long as one showed academic ambitions and convincingly pretended to support the system, one could go to college. As almost everything in East Germany, opportunity was based on (seeming) political conviction, not on financial means. I wanted to study English and French to become an interpreter in hopes of one day being able to travel and see the world outside the Eastern bloc. But that was not allowed. I was offered to study English and Russian literature and language to become a teacher instead. I was reluctant because as a teacher, it was much more difficult to pretend since one actually had to teach dominant truths or be in danger of being punished for political disobedience. To me that meant I was expected to further the demagoguery I had experienced in school. It was offset only by a few memorable, honest and courageous teachers and by my mother. She urged me to learn anything and as much as I could because what I learn is the only thing no one can take away from me. Born in 1942, my mother's personal practical knowledge (Clandinin, 1985) entails experiences of how a person can be stripped of everything, from possessions to dignity and anything in between. What no one could take from her were her thoughts and the way she made

meaning of experiences. The soundtrack of my childhood is a German folk song titled *Die Gedanken sind frei*, which translates into The Thoughts Are Free, a song performed in English by Pete Seeger (Seeger, 1967). My informal education, which was centered around the diverse ways in which my mother de-schooled me, put my formal education into perspective. Her constant demand to question any institutionalized truths and think my own thoughts has become my guiding principle in life. Once I finished my master's degree, the Berlin Wall fell. It was the way in which my mother had de-schooled me that enabled me to dream up possibilities for myself and choose my place in the world under these new circumstances. In Chapter I, I explained how, while I was engaged in my original project, many East Germans experienced a kind of identity loss because the truths they lived by had suddenly become un-truths. The challenge was to not search for replacements but to make meaning for themselves. My formal education served to actualize the possibilities I was and still am dreaming up for myself and my worlds, but I attribute my ability to dream to my informal education.

I am passionate about education; to me, it is the one thing that contains the possibility for one's freedom to be and to become. I am cognizant of the fact that my thinking is deeply engrained in the culture I was brought up in and in my experiences. As a German, based on my historical heritage and my experiences of growing up in East Berlin, I had to come to these conclusions. This study is about my beliefs that my informal education needs to be an essential part of everybody's curriculum. In my personal grand narrative, it resembles an armor that protected me against choosing the crowd instead of myself. This study is about arming everybody so people can live privileged, like me. I fear that at the moment, U.S. schools severely limit the possibility for self-awareness and reproduce existing social conditions by default. I do not believe that it is the school people or the politicians who are demagogues or

who are incompetent; it is the fact that they might be enslaved to ideas that remain unquestioned. For example, can the measure of education be reflected in one's ability to shop at Gucci, Vuitton ...? Enslavement to an idea happens because of thoughtlessness, and one becomes a widget in the process. To me, the measure of education is reflected in one's freedom to create purpose for one's social-relational existence and one's ability to contribute meaningfully to the local and global communities one exists in. It is what education has made possible for me. It is what education should make possible for everyone.

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Appendix A

**IRB Approval Letter**



OFFICE OF RESEARCH COMPLIANCE  
Division of Research, Commercialization and Outreach

6300 OCEAN DRIVE, UNIT 5844  
CORPUS CHRISTI, TEXAS 78412  
O 361.825.2497 • F 361.825.2755

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Human Subjects Protection Program  
Institutional Review Board

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APPROVAL DATE: February 20, 2014

TO: Ms. Sonja Varbelow

CC: Dr. Bryant Griffith; Dr. Amy Aldridge Sanford

FROM: Office of Research Compliance  
Institutional Review Board

SUBJECT: Initial Approval

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Protocol Number: #28-14

Title: Growing into the Size of Your Feet: A Narrative Inquiry into  
the Role Early Academic Experiences Play Throughout Life

Review Category: Expedited

Expiration Date: February 20, 2015

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**Approval determination was based on the following Code of Federal Regulations:**

Eligible for Expedited Approval (45 CFR 46.110): Identification of the subjects or their responses (or the remaining procedures involving identification of subjects or their

responses) will NOT reasonably place them at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the their financial standing, employability, insurability, reputation, or be stigmatizing, unless reasonable and appropriate protections will be implemented so that risks related to invasion of privacy and breach of confidentiality are no greater than minimal.

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Criteria for Approval has been met (45 CFR 46.111) - The criteria for approval listed in 45 CFR 46.111 have been met (or if previously met, have not changed).

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- (7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.  
(NOTE: Some research in this category may be exempt from the HHS regulations for the protection of human subjects. 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2) and (b)(3). This listing refers only to research that is not exempt.)

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#### Provis

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ions:

Comments: The TAMUCC Human Subjects Protections Program has implemented a post-approval monitoring program. All protocols are subject to selection for post-approval monitoring.

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This research project has been approved. As principal investigator, you assume the following responsibilities:

1. Informed Consent: Information must be presented to enable persons to voluntarily decide whether or not to participate in the research project unless otherwise waived.
2. Amendments: Changes to the protocol must be requested by submitting an Amendment Application to the Research Compliance Office for review. The Amendment must be approved by the IRB before being implemented
3. Continuing Review: The protocol must be renewed each year in order to continue with the research project. A Continuing Review Application, along with required documents must be submitted 45 days before the end of the approval period, to the Research Compliance Office. Failure to do so may result in processing delays and/or non-renewal.
4. Completion Report: Upon completion of the research project (including data analysis and final written papers), a Completion Report must be submitted to the Research Compliance Office.
5. Records Retention: Records must be retained for three years beyond the completion date of the study.
6. Adverse Events: Adverse events must be reported to the Research Compliance Office immediately.
7. Post-approval monitoring: Requested materials for post-approval monitoring must be provided by dates requested.

## Appendix B

### Direct Participant Email Solicitation

#### Growing into the Size of Your Feet: A Narrative Inquiry into the Role Early Academic Experiences Play Throughout Life

Dear (name withheld),

My name is Sonja Varbelow. I am a doctoral candidate at Texas A&M University. I am contacting you to find out whether you are interested in being a participant in my dissertation project. I am interested in exploring the role early educational experiences play in later life and how they influence self-understanding. I am attaching a brief rationale for the project, which is a work in process.

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to engage in interviews. Over the course of the study, I will interview you for approximately an hour on two separate occasions and follow up with you to review data, to check for accuracy of transcription, verification of meanings made, and verification of findings. I will ask you for permission to audio-record our conversations. If you do not grant me permission, you can still be a participant in this study. I will also ask you to share any other documents with me such as memoirs or artifacts pertaining to this study.

There is no risk expected; however, if you experience discomfort or stress during our conversations, you may choose to discontinue your participation in the study without any penalty. If you are interested in being a participant in this study, please contact me at the information provided below. I look forward to hearing from you. Thank you for your consideration.

Thank you,

Sonja

Sonja Varbelow  
Doctoral Candidate  
Texas A & M University Corpus Christi  
[Sonja.Varbelow@utb.edu](mailto:Sonja.Varbelow@utb.edu)  
956.408.0707

## Appendix C

### Consent Form

#### Growing into the Size of Your Feet: A Narrative Inquiry into the Role Early Academic Experiences Play Throughout Life

##### **Introduction**

The purpose of this form is to provide you information that may affect your decision as to whether or not to participate in this research study. If you decide to participate in this study, this form will also be used to record your consent.

You have been asked to participate in a research project studying how early educational experiences contribute to the perception of self and the formation of identity. The purpose of this study is to explore how participants who conceive of themselves as having lived personally and professionally successful lives interpret their early academic experiences and the role these played in their lives. You were selected to be a possible participant because I perceive you to have lived a personally and professionally successful life.

##### **What will I be asked to do?**

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to be interviewed and to review analyses of the data gathered during the interviews. This study will take approximately 15 weeks during which you will be interviewed two times. Your participation will be audio recorded. In addition, you will be asked to share other documents, such as memoirs, journals, or artifacts, e.g. photographs and objects that have special meaning to you. You will decide what you want to share, or you may decide not to share any such documents.

##### **What are the risks involved in this study?**

There are no foreseeable risks or specific benefits to the participants of this study. All data and information pertaining to this study will be kept confidential. However, it is possible that the participants might experience emotional discomfort. In the event the participants feel distress or discomfort, they are free to leave the study without penalty.

##### **What are the possible benefits of this study?**

The possible benefits of participation are benefits associated with reflections on prior experiences.

##### **Do I have to participate?**

No. Your participation is voluntary. You may decide not to participate or to withdraw at any time without your current or future relations with Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi or the researcher being affected.

##### **Who will know about my participation in this research study?**

This study is confidential. Your name will not be used. The records of this study will be kept private. No identifiers linking you to this study will be included in any sort of report that might be published unless you specifically request otherwise. Research records will be stored securely.

Only three people will have access to the records: the principal researcher, Sonja Varbelow, the dissertation chair, Bryant Griffith, and the methodologist for this study, Amy Aldridge Sanford. If you choose to participate in this study, you will be audio recorded. Any audio recordings will be stored securely and only the three people named above will have access to the recordings. Any recordings will be kept for three years and then be erased.

**Whom do I contact with questions about the research?**

If you have questions regarding this study, you may contact Sonja Varbelow at 956.408.0707 or at [Sonja.Varbelow@utb.edu](mailto:Sonja.Varbelow@utb.edu) and/or Bryant Griffith at 361.825.2446 or at [Bryant.Griffith@tamucc.edu](mailto:Bryant.Griffith@tamucc.edu).

**Whom do I contact about my rights as a research participant?**

This research study has been reviewed by the Research Compliance Office and/or the Institutional Review Board at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi. For research-related problems or questions regarding your rights as a research participant, you can contact Erin Sherman, Research Compliance Officer, at (361) 825-2497 or [erin.sherman@tamucc.edu](mailto:erin.sherman@tamucc.edu)

**Signature**

Please be sure you have read the above information, asked questions and received answers to your satisfaction. You will be given a copy of the consent form for your records. By signing this document, you consent to participate in this study. You also certify that you are 18 years of age or older by signing this form.

\_\_\_\_\_ I agree to be audio recorded.

\_\_\_\_\_ I do not want to be audio recorded.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Please sign two copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.

## Appendix D

### **Interview Protocol**

#### Growing into the Size of Your Feet: A Narrative Inquiry into the Role Early Educational Experiences Play Throughout Life

The following are the interview questions guiding this study:

1. Tell me about a time when you did not want to go to school.
2. Can you think of some things that made you feel comfortable in school?
3. Can you tell me some typical things that children/teachers said to you?
4. How would you describe yourself?
5. Was there ever a time when this description would have been different?