

## Chapter 2

# THE STUDY: RE-PLOTTING THE STORIES OF TEACHER DEVELOPMENT

The paths leading to this study detailed in Chapter 1 set the stage for the research of this book. Narratively speaking, the study includes characters, settings, time, and problems. Together, they detail the ways women teachers use stories dialogically and heuristically for making sense and meaning of their teaching lives through their unfolding relationships in small groups.

The study integrates key—uncommonly connected—research fields: teacher development, women (teachers), social contexts (book clubs), and narrative. It takes up issues of teacher development as both self-directed and socially constructed. It explores and compares how two groups of women teachers (experienced and novice) understand their profession, account for their experiences, make sense of their professional lives, and in the social contexts of teacher book clubs, renegotiate and reconstruct their professional knowledge.

### 1. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

Situating the study within the larger social and cultural context reveals rapidly changing educational environments that challenge all members and levels of educational communities. The social realities of new policies and programs, reduced budgets, larger classes, increased testing and demands for higher test scores, affect many school jurisdictions.

In North America, education often tops the ideological agenda of political leaders who decry the abysmal state of education on the one hand, and vaunt their abilities to cure the ails and raise national scores and the global competitive edge of students, on the other. In an *Atlantic* article, Schrag (1997) stated that *unless* politicians in the U.S. proclaimed the failure

of the educational system, they could not be elected to office. In spite of a resurgence of a Deweyan progressive thinking in the school renewal movement, governments, educational agencies, and parental groups are at odds with progressive ideologies. They respond more eagerly to media-sustained talk of raising standards and adding technology than they do to “multiple patterns of being and knowing” and to “a regard for cultural differences” (Greene, 2). The results point to a cyclical and continuous pattern of instability in school systems (the “no child left behind” of the current U.S. administration of sweeping changes is a clear example). Such accountability movements frequently replace existing programs with multiple costly initiatives, increase standardized testing, and require extensive reporting of and accounting for the results. In the face of new programs and directives, professional development opportunities for teachers are often reduced or are refocused exclusively on the new programs (Clement, 2001; R. Elmore, 1996). Teachers and students alike suffer from “initiative overload.”

The “no child left behind” policies of the current U.S. administration have overwhelmed the school systems and teachers and underwhelmed those expecting “improvements” such as higher test scores (Gordon, 2004). Teachers, caught in the maelstrom, feel increasingly pushed to prepare their students by “teaching to the test” and assuring administrators that they cover the material in the prescribed ways, on the prescribed days, using the required texts and tests. Schools are expected, by federal law, to collect and analyze data on student test scores, graduation and attendance rates, and teacher competency levels. States must report student achievement and test participation rates, identify ethnic groups, income level, special education status, and English language proficiency, as well as provide data such as the status of licensed and unlicensed teachers. Schools failing to meet the requirements are placed on a warning list and unless they comply, face possible sanctions. In reality, teachers and schools cannot cope with the sheer amount of data to be collected and therefore, face reporting delays that compromise the currency and efficacy of the results (Gold, 1996; Helsby, 1999; Hollinger, 1992).

Often, to survive is to submit. In their attempts to meet and implement the mandated standards and practices, teachers become mere technicians who follow orders and implement the prescribed protocols. Under intense pressures, some lose heart. This has serious social and professional implications. Gwen Randall, head of Framingham College in Suffolk, UK, suggests: “As teacher morale weakens in the state sector, so we, too, find it more difficult to recruit men and women into the profession” (BBC News Report, 8 July 2002). In effect, the profession as a whole is being eroded and deprofessionalized (Clark, 2001; Lieberman & Miller, 1999).

Under what some consider untenable conditions, teachers leave the profession altogether (Croasmun, Hampton, Herrmann, 1997; Heyns, 1988; Ingersoll & Rossi, 1995; US Dept. of Education, 1995). Persistent loss of teachers leads to disruption and instability in the profession. The economic toll is calculated in the high cost of both losing teachers and preparing new ones. High attrition rates and low morale also leads to difficulties in attracting highly qualified teaching candidates. Given the relationship between excellence in teaching and high quality student learning, (Ancess, 2001; Darling-Hammon, 1998; Ferguson, 1991; Printy & mark, 2004), attracting and maintaining a highly skilled teaching force is an imperative for quality learning and teaching in schools. Hence, meaningful professional development becomes a *de facto* concern for schools and school districts.

## **2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

The study uses a three-pronged theoretical framework broadly conceived as social constructivist (Habermas, 1968; Kooy, in press; Rogoff, 1994; Vygotsky, 1992), dialogical (Bakhtin, 1986; Erickson, 2004), and narrative (Atwell-Vasey, 1998; Bruner, 1986, 1990). The theoretical positions intersect along shared principles and practices including: teacher development as sustained and socially enacted; learning as social practice; stories as heuristics for making sense and constructing meaning (Clandinin & Connelly, 1999; Lyons & LaBoskey, 2002; and, collaborative learning in community (Clark, 2001).

### **2.1 Social theories of learning**

We make sense of what goes on around us—and our part in it—by actively constructing a world for ourselves (Vygotsky, 1992; Bruner, 1986). The models we create of how the world functions help us understand our lives and guides our actions. Clearly, this does not happen independent of other people, the way they understand the world, or the contexts and conditions of their learning. Bakhtin's (1986) dialogical theory proposes that thinking and learning depend on multiple voices, each stemming from the voices that came before and blending with the voices already in place. The social interactions both construct and change knowledge (Bahktin, 1986; Vygotsky, 1992). Knowledge develops and is continually modified in the light of new experiences (Dewey, 1938). New understandings emerge from this interplay (Grimshaw, 1989; Grumet, 1991; Gumperz, 1992; Rommetveit, 1992).

This progressive understanding of the dialogical and social construction of knowledge supports the theory that the most effective teacher development occurs within communities of learning (Anness, 2001; Au, 2002; Barone, 1996; Buysse, Sparkman & Wesley, 2003; Churchill, 1996; Clark, 1996; Clark, 2001; Clement, 2000). Hence, the research built on this theory is conducted with teachers in a community of reciprocal and interactive dialogue (Bakhtin, 1986; Stein & Brown, 1997; Supovitz, 2002).

I use the word “community” intentionally here (as opposed to a group of teachers) as a context for developing relationships that leads to relational learning. The opportunity to move from learning *from* others to learning *with* others allows teachers to develop new knowledge as their perspectives “interpenetrate” and “interanimate” each other. Their interpretive frameworks are modified, expanded and realized—particularly through conflict, disagreement and contrasting perspectives (Nystrand, 1997; Wertsch, 1991). Indeed, “communities” cannot exist unless participants learn to expand their views. Logically, the learning occurs most effectively over sustained periods of time (Clark, 2001; Lieberman & Miller, 1999).

The rub between theory and practice (Miller & Silvernail, 1994), teaching and learning as critical activities, centers on disciplined inquiry supported by substantial professional discourse (Darling-Hammond, 1998; Ritchie & Wilson, 2000). In a dialogic teacher community, participants take risks and engage in reflective assessment (Zellermayer, 2001). Bakhtin (1981) envisions a dialogic approach to theory, making it “internally persuasive . . . half ours and half someone else’s” (345-346). In this way, theories become dynamic and lead to productive dialogue and generative reflection (Ritchie & Wilson, 18). Such inquiry experiences lead teachers to adopt critical stances for greater understanding not only of their own work but also of the body of research on teacher knowledge and development (Berliner, 2003).

This raises new possibilities for reprofessionalizing teachers. In dialogic communities, teachers can reframe their evolving conceptions of teaching in new and powerful ways. Theory becomes a revisionary tool (Scott, 1992) and the way is open to reconceptualizing epistemologies and practices.

### **2.1.1 Book clubs as a site of teacher inquiry**

The current book club phenomenon is well documented (Forest, 1994; Grumet, 1991; Kooy, 1998b, 2000; McMahon & Raphael, 1997; Marshall, Smagorinsky, & Smith, 1995) and widely proclaimed. In North America, television host Oprah Winfrey fuelled the book club trend—particularly among women—by bringing reading and the discussion of texts to the

millions of people who tune in to watch her television show. Oprah's fans have responded to what Coles (1989) coined, "the call of stories." Regardless of critics who charge her with manipulating and directing the publishing industry, Oprah's contributions have resulted in testimonies from many readers who were inspired to revive their reading lives *because* of her. The potential for interactive dialogue and sustained learning through community experiences make the book club a viable and dynamic site for teacher inquiry and learning.

Book clubs range from the formal (leaders, lectures, canonical texts, study guides) to the informal (no leaders, member-directed discussions, popular literature). Meeting places include university classes (such as Mark Faust's graduate class at the University of Georgia), living rooms, cafés, bookstores, and myriads of other creative nooks and open spaces. Book clubs exist on public radio (Eleanor Wachtel's "Writers and Company" on CBC Radio, e.g.), television (TV Ontario's "Imprint") and online. Most operate openly, some subversively (such as *Reading Lolita in Tehran* by Azar Nafisi). Books on book clubs (Hartley, 2002; Laskin & Hughes, 1995; Slezak, 2000; Heft & O'Brien, 1999), accounts of reading fictional texts (Adams, 2001; Burke, 1999; O'Brien, 2000; Rabinowitz & Kaplan, 1999, e.g.), book club themed fictional texts (. . . *And Ladies of the Club* by Helen Hooven Santmyer, 2000, for example), and personal reading testimonies (Quindlen, 1998; Schwartz, 1996) continue to appear on the market.

Historically, and indeed, to the present time, the majority of book club members have been women. This may explain why the phenomenon has been so little investigated and recorded. In the academy, it has been generally perceived as lacking in credibility. No self-respecting academic department accepts it as intellectual or offers it a disciplinary home. Being outside the scope of traditional inquiry has kept the phenomenon invisible to scholars (Long, 2003).

In the pilot study for this research, six experienced teachers (Kooy, 1998-2000) participated in a book club. They chose books that invited complex responses. They brought their copies replete with note tags in the margins marking salient quotations or recording their reading responses. The book club met important needs that included normative, reflective discussions and at the development of important professional and personal relationships. Throughout the course of the meetings, they articulated how the textual discussions affected their professional knowledge.

Book Clubs provide a time-honored way for women to share stories in a safe place and simultaneously, to claim their own voices. Sorensen's (1997) study on women and reading has strengthened the concept of women and reading in social contexts. She writes of a co-reader: "She had a community with which she could work to build her new identity and her new

ways of looking at and being in the world. With this help, the interdiscourse in her life could be a force for the radical new interpretation she was making” (1997, 132). Transformative learning through narrative is particularly suited to the ways women think about themselves and interact with others (Hayes & Flannery, 2000). The predominance of women in book clubs and “women only” book clubs (well over half) attest to this.

Reading is essentially a social practice (Donoghue, 1998; Dressman & Webster, 2001; Emmett, 1997; Freire, 1987). Talking about a book with other interested readers is an almost universal response to reading a good book. Florio-Ruane (2001) found that book club members “appeared to mine past and current experiences for vignettes to tell in response to the themes and issues raised by the books” (2001, 69). In the shared talk, readers negotiate meaning, develop their thinking, and internalize the voices of other members. Literary texts and social reading experiences offer generous locations for the study of teaching and learning, particularly in contexts where literary readings are shared, critically interpreted, and recreated with other readers. If books can become the language through which people narrate their own experience and understand the experiences of others, book club conversations can reveal considerable insight and innovative understanding into the learning and knowledge of teachers.

In the study, I adopt the book club construct since it serves as a community of learners (Palmer, 1998; Rogoff, 1994; Vygotsky, 1992) and a site for mutual experiences. Pagano (1990) argues convincingly of the benefits and outcomes of *affiliation* that bind us into an educating community. The complex network of narratives, teachers, reading, and relationships inherent in the book club structure makes it an ideal site for teacher inquiry and learning.

## 2.2 Teacher development

Traditional teacher development, even as it loses ground in times of budget cuts and restrictions, has a checkered history in the profession. Most professional development consists of brief, “one-shot” workshops unconnected to previous or future events (Goldenberg & Gallimore, 1991). Typically, workshops are organized and conducted by experts who tell teachers about their expertise (classroom management, test preparation, new programs). Fenstermacher & Berliner (1994) note that such sessions provide little of substance or relevance for teachers. Moreover, most teacher workshops are not carefully scrutinized, evaluated, or traced for effectiveness (Clark, 2001). Traditional professional development sessions are rarely designed to improve teaching and student learning (Moon,

Butcher, & Bird, 2000; WestEd, 2000). Nonetheless, the top-down model persists.

More recently, theories and studies of teacher development are emerging (Cardwell, 2002; Clark, 2000; Cole & Knowles, 2000; Moon, butcher, & Bird, 2000; O'Connell Rust, 1999; Ritchie & Wilson, 2000; Florio-Ruane, 2001; Stokes, 2001; Lieberman & Miller, 1999) that actively involve teachers in groups sustained over a period of time (Clark, 2001; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1999). The emphasis is on self-directed teacher development in small, collaborative communities of practice (Au, 2002; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2001; Elmore & Burney, 1999; Clark, 2000; Warshauer Freedman, 2001; Warren Little, 2001; Wenger, 1998). McLaughlin and Mitra (2000) support the new social and sustained models noting that, "effective teacher development requires a community of learners to provide support, deflect challenges from the broader environment, and furnish feedback and encouragement" (10).

Revising models of teacher development implies a new awareness and conceptions of how teachers learn (Black, 1992; Bohl, 2002; Brown, 1989; Clandinin, 1993; Clark, 1996; Hord, 1997; Kooy, in press; Rogoff, 1990, 1994; Stokes, 2001). What teachers know, how they know it, and what is to be done with their knowledge remains a significant gap for those eager to learn from teachers and about teacher development. Warshauer Freedman (2001) found that: "the opportunity to learn seems to be central to sustaining the teachers' interest" (189). Greene (2000) suggested that: "Once granted the ability to reflect upon their practice within a complex context, teachers can be expected to make their own choices out of their own situations" (12). Beginning with teacher knowledge rather than transmitting knowledge to teachers shifts the emphasis toward the practitioners (Clandinin & Connelly, 1999; Hiebert, Gallimore & Stigler, 2002; Smith, 1995). Teachers, like all learners, bring, use, and link their prior knowledge to new understandings. The benefits of beginning with teacher knowledge (something similar to Vygotsky's zone of proximal development [1972] for adult learners) led some, like Clark and Florio-Ruane (2001), to "fundamentally redesign approaches to teacher/professional development and lifelong learning" (4) to rely more on teachers to invest in their own meaning-making with colleagues.

Research in teacher development increasingly focuses on small teacher groups (Capers, 2004; Clark, 2001; Hord, 2004; Rust, 2001; Warshauer Freedman, 2001) that vary widely in structure and purpose. Some use professional texts selected by the researcher/team (the extensive 1987 study done by Judith Langer and Arthur Applebee would be a case in point here). Clark (2001) and O'Connell Rust (2002) create "conversation groups" to work collaboratively through professional issues using teacher stories. What

they share in common is the formation of small groups of teachers who meet over extended periods of time with the purpose of learning and developing as teachers.

A community of learners provides a particularly suitable context for effecting teacher and school change (Fullan, 2001; Horton & Freire, 1990; Stein & Brown, 1997). Community, rather than merely a group of teachers, includes relationships (community building) developed through shared experiences, knowledge and practices—the things teachers have in common (Dewey, 1916, 5; Goodnow, 1987; Wertsch, 1993; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). The groups—Rogoff aptly names them “communities of practice” (153)—become social gathering points (hubs) for studying the ongoing evolution and restructuring of teacher knowledge, theories, and epistemologies.

The growing body of research on communities of learners in education most often occurs in individual schools (Grossman, & Wineburg, 2000; Marshall, 2001; Murphy & Lick, 1998; O'Donnell-Allan, 2001; Stokes, 2001). Among the benefits of this arrangement are: developing relationships, sharing goals for the school, and forming networks of support. Few schools, however, have access to on-site models of teacher development. The critical need for sustained teacher learning may mean creating communities outside of schools (Hawkins, 1996; Darling-Hammond, 1998; Darling-Hammond & Ball, 1997). Some theoretical and practical evidence exists to support the benefits of “distributed learning communities” (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Lieberman, 2000; Rogoff, 1994; Wilson & Ryder, 1997) consisting of teachers from multiple school sites. Given the importance of sustained teacher-driven learning (Darling-Hammond, 1998; Flecknoe, 2000; Sykes, 1999)—particularly its effects on the quality of student learning—waiting until funding is available may not prove prudent or necessary.

Authentic professional development of teachers (that is, models that bring teacher knowledge into play) lies at the core of educational reform and instructional improvement (Cole & Knowles, 2000; Gordon, 2004; Little, 2001; Hollingsworth & Sockett, 1994; McLaughlin & Zarrow, 2001; Petrie, 1990; Warshauer Freedman, 2001). Minimally, this calls upon teachers to resist what Dewey (1927) called, “the crust of conventionalized and routine consciousness” (1954, 183) and to begin *reprofessionalizing* teaching by forming communities of learning.

## 2.3 Narrative and teaching

The study of narrative grows out of such fields as literature, history, philosophy, psychotherapy, theology, and psychology (Adams, 1986; Bruner, 1990; Burke, 1957; Carr, 1986; Coles, 1989; Wortham, 2001). Long



regarded as an intellectual resource in the arts to describe and interpret human experiences, narrative highlights the centrality of story in teachers' knowledge (Carter, 1993; Connelly & Clandinin, 1986; Kelchtermans, 1993; Murphy, 1989). Carter and Doyle (1996) describe "biography, narrative and life history at the centre of teaching practice, the study of teachers, and the teacher education process" (120). Increasingly, inquiry into teaching includes narratives as legitimate and valuable research texts (Clandinin & Connelly, 1999) that provide holistic accounts of individual learning and acknowledge the interconnectedness of the intellectual, social, emotional and moral aspects of people's lives. Connelly and Clandinin (1988, 1990) show clearly how narrative provides a richness and comprehensiveness of detail well suited to the description of educational experiences.

Clifford Geertz (1973) spoke to the power of story for humans who, as "symbolizing, conceptualizing, meaning-seeking" animals, are driven "to make sense out of our experience, to give it form and order" (436). Carr (1986) found that everyday experience reflects "a certain community of form between life and written narratives [that] reveal themselves to be not distortions of, denials of, or escapes from reality, but extensions and configurations of primary features." He showed, in fact, that "full-fledged literary story-telling arises out of life" (15-16). As an essential human activity, narrative conditions understanding of the world. In other words, story is an essential as well as effective heuristic for understanding the world.

Story as social phenomenon seems naturally suited to educational inquiry (Carter, 1990, 1993; Clandinin & Connelly, 1991; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, 1986). Teachers communicate through story on a daily basis. They relate story "snippets" as they rush between classes and sit in lunchrooms. Stories are integral to the ways teachers make sense of and theorize their teaching (Carr, 1986; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Noddings, 1991; Ritchie & Wilson, 2000; Thomas, 1995). It is reasonable, then, to assume that teachers' knowledge is ordered by and best understood through story (Adams, 1986; Beattie & Conle, 1996; Elbaz, 1991).

While stories serve to explain and order, they are located in social communities. In telling stories, we become both *narrated* selves (telling the story of our own lives) and *narrating* selves (sharing interpretations with others). "We learn to tell our stories in conversation with the stories we are told," wrote JoAnn Pagano sixteen years ago (1990, 2). In professional learning communities, teacher-colleagues can put their stories next to each other so that their narratives interact and intersect (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001). As teachers negotiate meaning, develop their thoughts, and "internalize the voices of the other members, they form and deepen friendships" (Marshall, Smagorinsky & Smith, 1995, 119). A community of

learners (Rogoff, 1994) is particularly suited to learning how multiple narrative forms and experiences (including stories read and told) contribute to negotiating new teacher knowledge (Elbaz, 2002) .

The “call of stories” (Coles, 1986) draws and keeps readers invested in a reading life (the Harry Potter and *The Da Vinci Code* phenomena, for instance, are clear examples). Belsey (1993) suggests that, “Literature as one of the most persuasive uses of language may have an important influence on the ways in which people grasp themselves and their relation to the real relations in which they live” (65). Sumara found that “communal relations developed around the ritual of shared reading and discussion of literary fictions” (145). If, as Carolyn Heilbrun (1988) suggests, we live our lives through text, we can examine our lives in light of fictional works and explore their influences. In this study, literature becomes a suitable expression of how literary texts shape the personal practical knowledge we carry into our teaching.

In developing book clubs as a context for learning, this study moves toward dialogic teacher development that includes narratives from both books and teachers (Atwell-Vesey, 1998; Florio-Ruane, 2001; Jarvis, 2000). In the book club, teacher participants develop a kind of “connected knowing” (Florio-Ruane, 2001, 136) as they respond to the narratives and to one another with stories that elaborate the key themes in the book. Hartman (1991) found that as social experiences mounted, participants were able to “transpose texts into other texts, absorb one text into another, and build a mosaic of intersecting texts” (617), intertextual spaces (Lenski, 1998). Through the continuation of these experiences, the stories teachers read and tell increasingly become material to *think with* (Geertz, 1973), texts for inquiry into and analysis that lead to the reconceptualizing of teaching and teacher knowledge (Clandinen, 2001, viii).

## 2.4 Women and teaching

Since the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, women have predominated in the teaching profession (something Grumet [1988] suggests led to “the feminization of teaching”) at the rate of two to one, on average (Apple, 1985; Prentice & Theobald, 1991). Their voices, however, have been significantly muted by their male counterparts (Belenky, et al, 1997). To counter the prevailing conditions, Maxine Greene urges women teachers to take up the challenge to make contributions “after years of having their understandings dismissed” and claim their experience to be as “significant as a man’s” (1995, 22).

Despite the realities of women’s pervasive and predominant presence in the profession, studies of gender as it affects teaching (at the elementary and secondary levels) remain on the boundaries of research and literature in the

field (Scott, 1992; Shore, 2000). British writer and educator Jane Miller reminds us that while some progress has been made, shadows remain: “The periodic spasms of suspicion and criticism leveled at state education in this country [UK] are hard to understand without some sense of how gender distinctions have always—covertly as well as openly—articulated with discussions of education” (1992, 1).

Shadows also cover the ways women construct their teacher knowledge. Traditionally, what has counted as knowledge has been identified and codified in ways that contemporary educators characterize as gendered (Baruch, 1991; Belsey, 1993; Schweikart, 1986) leading to skewed perceptions and misrepresentations of teacher knowledge and development. This calls into question the androcentric bias of the production and dissemination of knowledge on teaching and the spurious claims of objectivity inscribed in a good deal of education research (Miller, 1996, 258).

The concept of “women’s ways of knowing” (Belenky et al, 1997; Hayes & Flannery, 2000; Gilligan, 2002; Heilbrun, 1999; Ruddick, 1980) has gained considerable attention. Grumet (1988) argues against the “consistent and flagrant exclusion of female experience from the organization and life of schools” (34). She warns that “the emulsifying and idealist standard of androgyny” (xix) is a way to strip the discussion of gender. The route of androgyny either falsely or naively assumes that women have “arrived” or that “teaching is teaching” regardless of gender. Gender as a non-issue may be part of a political and cultural force to ignore or even suppress women’s knowledge (LeBlanc & Witty, 1996; Rich, 1979; Scott, 1992; Stimpson, 1989). Though women teachers are far from the marginalizations common in earlier times, there is a distance yet to be travelled before these shadows on teacher knowledge have been left behind.

Moreover, men and women “vary in the pace and intensity of the transitions” (Lieberman & Miller, 1999, 66) in their careers. Women often interrupt their careers to raise children. Since over three-fourths of care giving of children involves women (Noddings, 1991), it is primarily women teachers who face both interruption and/or multiple care-giving responsibilities. This gap in their careers of maternal and childcare responsibilities have traditionally been undermined or ignored in theory and research on the nature of teaching (Acker, 1995; Apple, 1985; Clifford, 1989; Ruddick, 1980). We could, alternatively, come to see the knowledge created in this gap as personal practical knowledge for teaching. Applying Dewey’s conception of learning and knowledge (1938) suggests that all experience (and perhaps particularly maternal, child-rearing experiences) shape and direct the ways teachers understand and practice teaching. This points to conducting inquiries on teaching and learning from feminist

viewpoints; that is, integrating knowledge and theory that accounts for and implements “women's ways of knowing” (Belenky et al, 1997) in the art and practices of teaching.

I find this particularly compelling in light of most research that perpetuates a “teaching is teaching” perspective that undermines gender as a factor in understanding teaching (e.g., *Handbook of Research on Teacher Education*, 1996). In suggesting that women’s ways of teaching may be gender reflective, I do not claim to speak for all women teachers. Even though the majority of teachers in the Western world are and remain, primarily white, middle class and privileged (Apple, 1985; Biklen, 1995; LeBlanc Kohl & Witty, 1996), their students represent increasingly diverse cultures and languages (Toronto, the site of this study, for instance, is the most multicultural city in the world. It is not unusual to have more than 50 different languages represented in an urban high school). I argue for, and indeed work towards, realizing a teaching force that more closely represents the students in the schools and, consequently, includes the multicultural voices of such women teachers in this and other educational research. I fear, however, that waiting until such representation occurs will lead to untenable delays in asking critical gender questions.

I recognize that as the researcher, I am a white woman in the academy (hence, privileged). My history and journey to this research, however, began with immigration from Europe after World War II. The only immigrant in the country schools where I began my Canadian education, I learned very early how to accommodate and vigilantly maintain the boundaries between my school and family worlds. I was a daughter of a factory worker father and a homemaker mother, the eighth of nine children in a poor family. While not underprivileged (stable family, for instance), I very nearly did not have the material opportunity to attend university (none of my older siblings completed secondary school before going to work) and hence, to undertake this research journey. Although now solidly middle class and a university professor, the history that formed me as an educator informs the questions of my research. I acknowledge that my particular vantage point as person and woman, as professor and researcher, is deeply implicated in the work.

Nevertheless, I resist the monolithic claim to speak for all women in this research in the knowledge that the category “woman” is fluid. Men, like women, are constituted differently across markers of race, class, gender, ethnicity, and other signifiers that make it impossible and indeed, undesirable, to generalize or definitively mark their ways of thinking and being in the profession (Hayes & Flannery, 2000; Shore, 1999).

Albeit that the markers of gender are fluid, the problem remains that women’s voices have not been adequately represented in the discourse. We cannot wait until all women whose social class and race prohibit their voices

from being heard, have the power and privilege to do so. Nor should we defer to the limits of gender knowledge. Lesley Shore (2000) writes:

I find it unspeakably ironic that, in search for a woman-authored alternative to the education in patriarchy we have received against the backdrop of a new pedagogy of care whose founding premise is to create safe spaces for women to learn to speak, the problem of essentialism still threatens to silence many of the new voices (15).

In this research, I take the position that not only do I not speak for all women (teachers) but limit my observations to the teachers in the two book clubs. Throughout this book, the women raise their own voices. Each introduces herself in Chapter 4 and actively participates in the book club discussions of Chapters 6 through 9.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

Narrative serves both as phenomenon and as a method for understanding teaching (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999, 4). Methodologically, narrative offers a way to bring forth the stories of professional practice that teachers carry (Carter, 1990, 1993; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, 1986). Narrative inquiry investigates the ways stories are told, heard and read and the contexts in which they occur, influence and shape teacher knowledge.

Narrative methods include constructing field texts to represent aspects of field experience through interviews, conversations, dialogues, responses to texts, storytelling, reflective journals, stories of professional practice, autobiographical writings (Clandinin & Connelly, 1999; Gillard, 1996). Through narrative inquiry, I explore the ways stories are told and read in social contexts and the ways in which stories shape teachers' knowledge and contribute to their professional development (Trimmer, 1997b).

#### **3.1 Process and procedures**

Two teacher book clubs (one novice, one experienced teachers) met separately every five to six weeks over the course of three academic years (2000-2003). Each year began with a "planning session" to submit required research forms, determine schedules for interviews and book club meetings, select the texts to be read, and agree on the processes for conducting each book club session. In preparation for each session, the teachers read the selected text and in doing so, decided to prepare notes, jottings, or logs of observations, issues and questions. They took these notes and the text to

each meeting. Both groups agreed on an informal discussion model; that is, no formal leadership or preparation was required.

Interviews—both individual and group—occurred at the beginning and end of each academic year. In addition to preparing reading notes, each teacher reflected at length on her reading life in both a “literacy autobiography” (personal journeys to the reading life) and reading surveys. I participated as both researcher and book club member. Each session was either audio or videotaped (and later transcribed). I prepared field notes after each book club meeting.

### **3.2 The teacher participants**

The study included two small cohorts of women teachers. Book Club 1, a group of experienced teachers, participated in an earlier pilot project (1998-2000). Five of the original seven teachers (including me) agreed to continue into this study. Book Club 2 consisted of nine novice teachers who, at the end of their teacher education year, proposed creating a book club to maintain a reading life and continue their relationships as they entered the teaching profession.

The two book clubs consist of two groups of women teachers (Sorenson, 1998). During the pilot study, the teachers often raised the relevance of being a “women only” group. The need to meet with other women teachers, to develop relationships and socially construct their teacher knowledge became increasingly relevant and even critical to their professional development. It became important and sensible to include questions of gender in the research on teacher development. With their scant literature on women teachers in the field, this study marks a step forward.

Book Club 1 consists of experienced teachers with seven to twenty-five years of teaching experience at the onset of this study. Professionally, they work in a range of educational contexts: three secondary English teachers (Louise, Bridget, and Patricia) and two teacher education professors (Lesley who began as a sessional instructor and became a faculty member in 2001). This group joined the pilot project of a teacher book club through calls for volunteers in schools, graduate classes and by word of mouth. The women in the study are white, middle class women. In Book Club 1 (experienced teachers), two are European immigrants. I emigrated from The Netherlands in the early years of my elementary education; Bridget emigrated from the U.K. as an adult/teacher in the mid-1990s. Patricia is the daughter of European immigrants. Louise’s British and Lesley’s Jewish heritage were planted in Canada in the late 1800s.

The nine teachers of Book Club 2 entered the study as novice teachers. All secured teaching appointments; six in the urban and metropolitan area of

Toronto; one within an hour and two within two hours' driving range of Toronto. Five taught English exclusively. Four taught an second subject: two Drama (Lucy and Melanie); one Spanish (Helen); one History (Evelyn).

In Book Club 2, most teachers were children of European immigrants (Lucy, Evelyn [Italy]; Helen and Melanie [Greece]; Sandra and Liz [Portugal]. Sandra, for instance, teaches in a high school in an area known as "Little Portugal" in Toronto; many of her students share her Mediterranean culture and background. Nevertheless, although not necessarily or specifically representative of the cultural compositions of their schools, many of their histories include family stories of immigration, adjusting, and the problems and tensions of being caught between and belonging to two cultures.

### **3.3 The data of the study**

Data was collected from both written and oral sources: Interviews, surveys, literacy autobiographies, e-mail messages on the conference site, and, most significantly, transcripts of the discussions in the book club sessions. Over the course of the study, each group selected to read: *Plainsong* [Kent Haruf], *A Lesson before Dying* [Ernest J. Gaines], *Oranges are not the Only Fruit* [Jeanette Winterson], and *In the Name of Salomé* [Julia Alvarez] at different points in the research. This unpredictable opportunity of shared texts in the two groups allowed me to explore similarities and differences in the discourse, topics, and narratives of two groups of teachers at distinctive career stages.

Analyzing the data using ethnographic and narrative methodologies proved a complex process. Since academic integrity and credibility rests on rigorous and reliable interpretations of data, I present the process for making sense of the texts (oral and written) in Chapter 3. It briefly traces the evolution and development of the discourse and texts into themes, key words, and topics. Understanding the analytical process allows readers to engage more meaningfully with the subsequent chapters on the book discussions (Chapters 6 through 9).



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