TELLING AND LIVING THE TRUTH: SUBJECTIVE UNIVERSALS DECLARED AND EMBODIED IN EARLY CHILDHOOD CURRICULUM NARRATIVES

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Numerous challenges face early childhood educators striving to think, speak and act democratically in American public schools. Not least of which are the dogmatic thought traditions, mastery oriented discourses, and authoritarian structures of management that are engrained into our cultures of curriculum. Therefore, for a teacher of young children to engage in practices that are consistent with the democratic rhetoric of their institutional mission statements they must think, voice and act upon non-dogmatic and thus counter-cultural ideas.

This research sheds light upon ethical commitments expressed through the truth telling stories of six public school early childhood teachers’, including myself, who work with and against the grains of their cultures of curriculum. Utilizing a critical bricolage methodology, a collective narrative, structured by Pinar’s (2012) notion of currere, was created. Simultaneously deconstructing mastery oriented discourses and reconstructing discourses of event, this research embraces an immediate empiricism that is germane to the everyday life happenings of public school early childhood teachers in the United States. Accordingly, a Deweyan transactional process of knowing was put in dialogue with Alain Badiou’s democratic ontological assumptions and notion of ethical fidelity as analytical tools.
Expressed as “subjective universals”, early childhood teachers’ reflections and articulations of events exhibited democratic qualities. The teachers testified of their fidelity to carry out the democratic virtues enunciated in their stories in daily classroom practices. Through open-ended problem solving artistry these curriculum workers demonstrate their own sense of historical agency by thinking, speaking and acting assertively, yet with humility.
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CHAPTER I  
INTRODUCING THE STUDY

Life isn’t about waiting for the storm to pass. It’s about learning to dance in the rain.  

~Vivian Greene

The storm that I will be writing about is the conditions that contextualize curriculum practices in American public schools. The contemporary conditions of American public schooling have been described by William Pinar (2012) as the nightmare of the present. Michael Apple (2012) writes about four different forms of “conservative modernization” that privilege some and disadvantage many pupils. While Pinar (2012) calls for intellectual freedoms that are sorely lacking, Apple (2012) stipulates that more equitable social conditions are a prerequisite for improving schools. The first petitions for freedom, the second justice; and they both suitably justify their demands as a fundamental principle for living in a democratic society. According to these two leading curriculum theorists, contemporary initiatives for school improvement deprive stakeholders from foundations of democratic living rendering them ill conceived from the onset.

Kliebard (2002) explains that school reform efforts are also often critiqued for flawed methods. Here the concern is not that there is something inherently incorrect with the general aims for improving curriculum practice; but that the methods for carrying out the desired change are ineffective. Andy Hargreaves (2010) points out, through international comparisons, that the latest efforts to increase accountability through heavy-handed management are the redundant continuation of a fruitless habit.
Hargreaves (2010) describes the redundancy of unsuccessful conventions of reforms as Einstein’s definition of madness: to do the same thing and expect a different result. Sahlberg (2010) simply asserts that it would be logical for American reformers to learn from Finland, a nation that is consistently achieving the stated aims.

A bleak situation for public school early childhood educators is illustrated by juxtaposing these critiques. The pervasive methods of improving schools are unproductive according to some (Hargreaves, 2011; Sahlberg, 2011). Moreover, according to others, the overall ideas behind the initiatives are fundamentally flawed (Apple, 2012; Pinar, 2012). On one hand, a loss of freedom through the standardization of curriculum strips stakeholders of their subjectivity (Pinar, 2012). On the other, common reform project are at the core wrought with racism, classism, sexism and other insidious biases (Apple, 2012; Pinar, 2012). In public schools, early childhood curriculum practices are ensconced within this problematic “perfect storm.” At once, common reform agendas are problematic because they are not working, yet also because they are working too well toward accomplishing detrimental ends of reproducing social inequalities.

Democratic and even cosmopolitan rhetoric is consistently apparent throughout the organizational structure of American public schooling. The United States Department of Education states their mission “is to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access” (http://www2.ed.gov/about/overview/mission/mission.html). My local school district professes to be guided by a complimentary mission “to Provide a 21st Century Education
Education Empowering Each Learner to Be a Self-Motivated Successful Citizen in a Global Society” (http://www.smfschools.org/site.cfm/About-SMFCSD/Mission-Vision.cfm). The rhetorical constancy of democratic sentiment in the above mission statements implies a verification that freedom, justice and global-mindedness are shared values and what American schools should be aiming toward. Kwame Anthony Appiah (2006) argues that “it is often much clearer to us what we should do than why. Disagreements regarding why educators should be concerned with these particular values bring into question the degree to which public schools can claim consistency between word and deed.

Appiah (2006) identifies three types of disagreements about values. Disagreements arise when we employ different vocabularies of evaluation, interpret the same evaluative vocabulary differently, or ascribe different weights to the same values (Appiah, 2006). The two missions above also illuminate possible disparities regarding why freedom, equality and global-mindedness are laudable aims: “preparation for global competitiveness” and “successful citizenship in a global society” can be understood as being potentially at odds. Or, perhaps, some might say that there is no disagreement at all if successful citizenship is defined as one’s preparedness for competition.

Explaining his view on cosmopolitanism, Appiah (2006) contends that these disagreements arise through “conversation between people from different ways of life… Depending on the circumstances, conversations across boundaries can be delightful, or just vexing: what they mainly are, though, is inevitable” (p. xxi). Likewise, Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery and Taubman (1995) conceive of curriculum as an “extraordinarily
complicated conversation” which is “intensely historical, political, racial, gendered, phenomenological, autobiographical, aesthetic, theological, and international” (Pinar et al., 1995, p. 847). In light of this sort of multi-faceted diversity, not only do conversations across boundaries seem inevitable, but also so do the value disagreements alluded to by Appiah (2006). Perhaps the only thing that educators can agree upon confidently is that we do not agree. It simply depends upon who is engaged in the metaphorical discussion.

Apple’s (2012) four forms of “conservative modernization,” which often act separately but reinforce one another include neoliberal, neoconservative, religious conservative, and audit culture groups. Apple (2012) argues that these powerful social factions dominate discourse on what is valued and therefore deemed good in American public schooling. Numerous scholars have argued that neither teachers nor marginalized populations have significant voice in conversations of vast moral disagreement that direct heavy handed educational policies (Apple, 2012; Apple & Buras, 2006; Miller, 1990; Pinar, 2012). Apple (2012) laments, “seemingly contradictory discourse of competition, markets, and choice on the one hand, and accountability, performance objectives, standards, national testing, and national curriculum on the other, has created a situation in which it is hard to hear anything else” (p. xii). But, so much else is being said!

Fifteen years of teaching kindergarten in a public school has taught me that being a classroom teacher with something to say about freedom or justice is often a frustrating endeavor. Several scholarly works have thoughtfully illuminated the valuable contributions of the tacit understandings of educational practitioners (Cochran-Smith &

However, the insights of practitioners striving to think and act democratically among children are rarely valued, if they are even acknowledged in the bureaucratic contexts of public schooling (Hyun, 2006). In other words, ideas for effectively enacting intellectual freedom and social justice are regularly and vigorously contested in the context of public school bureaucracies (Macdonald, 1995; Watkins, 2012). While re-conceptualizing curriculum and early childhood practices sheds light upon valuable ideas for improving the conditions and methods of educational practices, my experiences in public school have revealed that acting upon those ideas within the context of a public school institution requires not only deepening one’s understanding but also a unique and deeply personal sense of commitment.

Such commitment is recurrently put to test any time educators strive to think, speak and act democratically within a profoundly undemocratic situation. Badiou (2012a) writes, “we live in confusion, violence and injustice…We are bound to uphold the new truths in the context of their local affirmation, encircled by endless conflict” (pp. 58-59). Encircled by endless conflict with the storms of policies and mandates that perpetuate unequal conditions and ineffective methods, certain early childhood educators persevere and uphold practices for the fairness and flourishing of the children in their charge. Their professional lives illustrate Vivian Greene’s quote, “Life isn’t about waiting for the storm to pass. It’s about learning to dance in the rain.”
**Dogmatism and Authoritarianism in Early Childhood Curriculum**

The practice of teaching has been commonly conceptualized as an inherently moral or ethical endeavor (Hansen, 2001a; Hansen, 2001b). Badiou (2001a) defines ethics from its Greek roots, “the search for ‘a good way of being,’ for a wise course of action” (p. 1). Based on Badiou’s (2001) definition, early childhood curriculum work can be accurately described as an ethical challenge of professionals searching for good ways of being early childhood educators for wise courses of curriculum action. However, the ethical domain of teaching young children is a complex and polyvalent enterprise, abundant with diverse beliefs and images regarding ‘good ways of being’ teachers of young children. Walker and Soltis (1997) identify these diverse beliefs and images as the basis for constructing a “platform” for curriculum problem solving.

Several authoritative voices provide teachers of young children with numerous and sometimes competing justifications of what constitutes a good way of being an early childhood educator. Voices of authority can potentially come from many stakeholders. Policy makers, the media, educational researchers and theorists, school administrators, parents and even colleagues place demands upon early childhood educators to validate the quality of their work in particular ways (Fahey, 2012). My experiences teaching in a public school have also taught me that the vast majority of early childhood educators want nothing more than to be good teachers. However, the criteria and process utilized for evaluating a teacher’s daily practice is contingent upon the “platform” from which good teaching is apprehended (Walker & Soltis, 1997). Furthermore, it is not uncommon for a teacher to encounter competing understandings of good teaching in their work.
environment or over the course of their career (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996). Diverse voices that enact various curriculum platforms have the practical function of manifesting curriculum as an “extraordinarily complicated conversation” which is “intensely historical, political, racial, gendered, phenomenological, autobiographical, aesthetic, theological, and international” (Pinar et. al, 1995, p.847).

Through the lenses of language, power and culture Buzzelli and Johnston (2002) have conceptualized an understanding of the moral dimension of teaching young children that acknowledge these external pressures. Hegemonies of discourse, authority and dominant culture perpetuate normative features of teaching practices that “are taken for granted and remain unquestioned (that is, free from the scrutiny of moral reflection)” (Buzzelli & Johnston, 2002, p. 131). Hence, in a complicated conversation where diverse voices contribute a plurality of beliefs and images not all perspectives enjoy conditions of equality. Normative perspectives become engrained in curriculum discourse, mandates and ethos; taken for granted and not needing mention or explanation. However, counter-normative points of view struggle to be articulated, acknowledged and recognized.

There are two “platforms” from which good early childhood education is primarily apprehended in the contemporary literature on teaching young children. These two platforms are primarily informed by two philosophical traditions that represent the dualistic nature of modern empiricist/rationalist thought (Ryan, 2011). First, empiricists employ analytic methods for observing and measuring each child’s level of achievement and progress (see March & Peters, 2008; Rathvon, 2008). Empiricists use their senses to
perceive evidence from observing the external world as providing the prime indication of
good teaching. *Wise courses of action*, from an empirical point of view, are the
interactions which can demonstrate a desired and measureable outcome. Secondly,
dominant interpretations of child development, rationalize an alternative conception of
good teaching and learning (see Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Charlesworth, 1998).
Rationalists conceive of an ideal image of good teaching based upon certain dogmatic
assertions about children, as well as dogmatic assertions about the process of teaching
and learning. The construction of a dogmatic, non-transactional narrative of
“developmental appropriateness” is rooted in our Western rationalist heritage constituted
of, Ryan (2011) explains, a “self-actional” inclination to endeavor to apprehend and
control the natural world.

*Wise courses of action*, from this rationalist perspective, are activities which are
deemed “appropriately” aligned with the understandings, values and goals promoted by
the National Association for the Education of Young Children. It should be noted, the
two platforms of good teaching discussed above provide represent two very common, yet
competing, normative foundations for appraising the quality of early childhood teaching.
While these are two very different organizing problems and epistemologies, Henderson
and Gornik (2007) remind us of the overlapping nature of three problem-solving
orientations that a curriculum leader must deftly negotiate: standardized management,
best practice and curriculum wisdom.

Standardized achievement measured through test scores and managed by
top-down problem solving procedures enacts an empiricist mindset that is currently the
dominant method for curriculum development (Henderson & Gornik, 2007; March & Peters, 2008). Therefore, it is not uncommon for empiricists to justify their curriculum projects by making reference to commanding political authority. March and Peters (2008) write about eight “core elements of successful school reform.” The authors mention *No Child Left Behind (NCLB)* or politically mandated standardized testing in six. The other two allude to consistent local forms of control. Rathvon (2008) validates “evidence-based practices” in a similar manner writing, “under NCLB mandates, however, schools are required to use scientifically validated practices in order to bring all students to proficiency by the year 2017” (p. 4).

Nonetheless, dogmatic images of *good* teaching generated through “self-action” are also quite influential to early childhood curriculum practices. In fact, the origins of *Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP)* are rooted in an opposition to the alleged value neutrality of empirical trends. Bredekamp and Copple (1997) clarify their “widely applicable purpose of the guidelines was to respond to a growing trend toward more formal, academic instruction of young children- a trend characterized by downward escalation of public school curriculum” (p.v). The authors assert that the guidelines represent “current understandings, values, and goals at the time of their publication…” and a “clear commitment regarding the rights of young children to respectful and supportive learning environments and to an education that would prepare them for participation in a free and democratic society” (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997, p.v). While the previous platform tends to legitimate itself through policy, this platform justifies itself through common ideas expressed by experts in the field of early childhood education.
As stated above, Buzzelli and Johnston (2002) warn that these perceptions and conceptions of good have become dogmatic, normative features of teaching practices engrained in early childhood professionals’ non-reflective habits and too infrequently brought into question by reflective inquiry. Frank Ryan (2011) explains that John Dewey’s final writings on human experience addressed this issue of the unquestioned normative features created by the traditions of empiricism and rationalism. Ryan (2011) writes, “two prevalent cross currents extend back to the origins of Western philosophy in ancient Greece some 2,500 years ago. These crosscurrents of rationalism and empiricism celebrate our dual propensity for idealistic visions and hard-nosed facts” (p.8). Applied to early childhood education, these crosscurrents have fostered taken for granted ideas regarding good early childhood practice. The contention between dogmatic visions of universally applying DAP for all children (Copple & Bredekamp 2009; Charlesworth, 1998) and the “hard-nosed facts” propounded through evidenced-based practices (Rathvon, 2009) are conceptually rooted in the dualistic nature of traditional Western philosophy (Ryan, 2011).

In addition to evidence-based empiricism, developmental rationalism, postmodern critiques represent a third facet of contemporary thought that is found in the literature for the purpose of appraising early childhood curriculum work (Grieshaber & Ryan, 2006; Kessler & Swadener, 1992; Hyun, 2006; Lubeck, 1996; Lubeck, 1998; MacNaughton, 2005). The distinctions among these traditions of philosophical inquiry are rooted in the disparate metaphysical, epistemological and ethical assumptions of each. What is real? What can I know? What should I do about it? These are the metaphysical,
epistemological and ethical questions that constitute philosophical inquiry (Ryan, 2011). Moreover, these are the basic questions that undergird the evaluations of early childhood curriculum work, as they appear in scholarly literature.

Empiricism emphasizes the senses when defining the metaphysical reality (Ryan, 2011). Sense-based reality leads to epistemologies of mind conforming to object. For our purposes, observable and measureable aspects of classroom experiences supply the underpinnings for pedagogical decision making. Evidence-based teaching and intervention strategies offer a set of instructional techniques, which have been verified as being effective by authoritative institutions such as the U.S. Department of Education’s Institute of Education Sciences (IES) and made available on the What Works Clearinghouse website (http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/). Authors supporting evidence-based teaching refer to these bodies of authority to sanction the values of their prescriptive approaches (Rathvon, 2008). From this lens, the materiality of lived experiences in early childhood classrooms is myopically understood only in reference to only the quantifiable behaviors, which have been thoroughly researched in certain ways. Therefore, evidence-based instruction enact an ethics that validates only those activities which have been legitimated by the IES and hence the U.S. Department of Education.

Rationalism emphasizes intellect when defining the metaphysical reality (Ryan, 2011). Mind-based reality leads to epistemologies of objects conforming to mind. For our purposes, rationalized ideals of good teaching provide the foundation from which a pedagogue’s work must proceed. Developmentally Appropriate Practice offers a set of images regarding teaching, learning and child development that represents a basis of
knowledge for teaching young children, which is authoritatively endorsed by the National Associate for the Education of Young Children (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). The authors of *DAP* argue that their authoritative images of *good* early childhood education is warranted because they are derived “from reviewing the literature as well as review by many experienced, knowledgeable early childhood educators” (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997, p.v). The materiality of lived experiences in early childhood classrooms can be understood in reference to the normative images of *good* teaching. Therefore, *DAP* enacts an ethics where courses of action are deemed “appropriate” or “in contrast” (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009) based upon the degree to which they are in agreement with the normative understandings of early childhood practice that is endorsed by the NAEYC.

From a critical postmodern perspective, the universality of the “idealistic visions” and “hard-nosed facts” mentioned above have been brought into question by theory and research in early childhood education (File, Mueller, & Wisneski, 2012; Hyun, 2006; Lubeck, 1996; Lubeck, 1998; Grieshaber & Ryan, 2006; Swaedner & Kessler, 1992). According to Patti Lather (2007), postmodern “generally refers to the material and historical shifts of a global uprising of the marginalized, the revolution in communication technology, and the fissures of global multinational hyper-capitalism” (p.5). She continues, “poststructuralism refers more narrowly to a sense of the limits of Enlightenment rationality” (Lather, 2007, p.5). Postmodern thought rejects the notion of a universal metaphysical reality and considers knowledge to be socially constructed (MacNaughton, 2005). Therefore, postmodern studies of early childhood education
typically critique dominant understandings of teaching, learning and child development. A postmodern critique of DAP might argue that the images of “appropriateness” presented by NAEYC are not inclusive for everyone (Lubeck, 1998). Concomitantly, postmodern criticisms of evidence-based practices argue against the authority of political mandates that sanction instructional management as conservative modernization (Apple, 2012). Hence, Dahlberg and Moss (2005) encourage teachers of young children to enact postmodern ethics they term a “pedagogy of listening,” using schools in Reggio Emelia as a key referent.

Teachers of young children engage in a complicated endeavor of negotiating the various desires and demands of numerous stakeholders, including themselves. Further, complicating an early childhood educators’ efforts are the disparate conceptual frameworks regularly and often authoritatively applied to the appraisal of early childhood curriculum work. In other words, teachers’ daily practices are evaluated both formally and informally by various people with a range of understandings of what constitutes good teaching. While certain pervasive understandings of good teaching, such as those mentioned above, are undoubtedly and perhaps often justifiably influential to practitioners, teachers of young children need not rely solely upon the wisdom of particular authority figures and dominant understandings. This is not to say that early childhood professionals do not have much to learn from the established discourses of their field. However, it is my contention that the lived experiences and philosophical inquiries of early childhood practitioners can be drawn upon to supplement the authoritative voices of the field in a generative and previously unexplored manner.
From Interaction, Self-action and Inaction to Transaction

~wherever a human condition is working in the direction of equality, the conditions are met for everyone to be a philosopher (Badiou, 2012a, p.37).

This study takes a careful look at concerns expressed by public school early childhood educators, who are committed to living a personal philosophy of teaching. In particular, emphasized attention is focused upon these teachers’ critical encounters with the pressure from the authoritative and authoritarian ideas mentioned above.

Developmentally appropriate practice and Evidence-based practices represent in the field of early childhood education two forms of what Frank Ryan (2011) refers to as “contemporary realism.” Ryan (2011) explains that when faced with the metaphysical challenge of addressing that which is beyond what can be known contemporary realists, “keep plugging away at the problem of how mental appearances get to mind-independent reality” (p.44). On the other hand, postmodernists, “declare metaphysics in particular and philosophy in general a hopeless enterprise” (Ryan, 2011, p.44). A Deweyian scholar, Ryan (2011) asserts that Dewey’s final writings on experience offer a constructive alternative to these insufficient ways of dealing with metaphysical problems: the futility of contemporary realism and the hopelessness of postmodernism.

The constructive alternative to contemporary realism and postmodern epistemologies is to analyze teachers’ experiences from a transactional perspective informed by Dewey. To clarify the conceptual framing of this study, I will rely on two sources. First, transaction will be generally defined in reference to Frank Ryan’s (2011) explanation of John Dewey and Arthur Bentley’s book Knowing and the Known. A
“transactional knowing/known” process attends to ontological matters through, “Dewey’s metaphysical assertion that the experienced world is the real world, and not some supposed existence in itself beyond experience in us” (Ryan, 2011, p.51). Rather than understanding experience as subjective and mind-dependent and thus inescapably separated from a “true” mind-independent reality, Dewey argued that “experience…must be converted from the subjective domain of the knower into a whole inclusive of knower and known” (Ryan, 2011, p.44). According to Ryan (2011), Dewey’s argument was not one that defended either the “self-action” of rationalism or the “inter-action” of empiricism; nor, was it a synthesis of the two. Instead, experience is comprised of methods for problem solving activities and the contents of the world; human engagements in the material world that derive non-reflective common understandings as well as provoke philosophical reflection and inquiry (Ryan, 2011).

Secondly, particular curriculum theory literature will be used to conceptualize teachers’ curriculum work as something that is embodied by the teachers and expressed in their narratives. Numerous scholars have been drawn upon to define the term embodiment (Grumet, 1988; Hendry, 2011; Malewski, 2012; Miller, 2005; Springgay & Freedman, 2009). Embodiment literature in curriculum studies critiques the mind-body dualism that is pervasive in modern Western thought (Malewski, 2012). Scholars such as Grumet (1988), Miller (2005), and Springgay and Freedman (2009) have made cases for bodily knowing. Studying the narratives of gay men living with HIV, through the lenses of touch and space, Malewski (2012) writes about how embodied subjects’ encounter the bodies of others and their own bodies. On touch, Malewski (2012) writes that, “we know
through a body’s vulnerabilities to another, knowing that is always already in relation to a lived history of encountering others and how that has made us feel joy, pain, happiness, and disappointment” (p. 45). Furthermore, Malewski’s (2012) article conceives of space, not as an empty void, but as a real entity, “alive with the constitutive elements of harm and affirmation” (p.48). Hendry (2011) writes that embodied knowing, “is not a result of transcending the body, but staying embodied, trusting our lived experience…creating a space in which women and men can be knowers through trusting their experience” (p. 97).

This research examines the professional ethics expressed by six concerned early childhood educators, who embody a transactional and democratic way of being teachers of young children. Examining early childhood practices within the space of a public elementary schools as an embodied experience, where a teacher’s experienced world is considered to be the real world, is a worthwhile project for a variety of reasons. First, throughout the course of their professional lives the quality of early childhood educators’ labor is evaluated using inconsistent terms of various deficit mindsets (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996). Secondly, although some scholarly work affirms the value of practitioner voices (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Gaztambide-Fernandez & Sears, 2004), educational practitioners are often classified as a subjugated population, rather than ethical, political, or historical agents. Third, by maintaining that a teacher’s experienced world is the real world, teachers’ subjectivity can be reconsidered within a contemporary political context that either dismisses teachers’ knowledge and commitments as mere personal opinions or overwhelms them with taken for granted
dominant knowledge (den Heyer, 2010). For these three reasons, early childhood educators’ deeply personal expressions of the transactional and democratic ways of being, they embody in their daily practice will be analyzed through the lens of Alain Badiou’s (2001) ethical fidelity process, which will be explained in the following section.

**Ontology, Epistemology and Ethics**

Dewey’s (1939/1989) pragmatic notion of a strong, participatory democracy as a moral standard of living is helpful in establishing democratic aims for any practical endeavor. Henderson (2001) refers to Dewey’s democratic moral standards as the guiding principles of educational problem solving that fosters the public’s trust. “The power and promise of democracy, as he saw it, means more than toeing the party line or rubber-stamping the plans of experts. Instead, it implies the informed involvement of everyone affected by the consequences of policy decision” (Ryan, 2011, p.70). Endeavoring to involve all effected stakeholders in a process of informed decision making emphasizes the merits of warranted judgments that support the public wellbeing. Furthermore, recognizing democracy as both morally valuable and the preferred means by which curriculum decisions are made Dewey “envisioned an educational system that inspires innovation, cooperation, and experimentalism” (Ryan, 2011, p.71). It would be safe to assume that Dewey would be markedly disappointed by current trends in educational policy, which have been thoroughly critiqued for being authoritarian mandates that perpetuate the continuation of methods proven ineffective (Hargreaves, 2011) or demonstrate the interests of only a powerful few (Apple, 2012). To be in accordance with their own professed democratic values the merits of an educational
judgment in public school institutions ought to be appraised with reference to the desirability of its consequences for all children.

Badiou (2012a) interprets a paradoxical relationship between democracy, politics and philosophy that is interesting to put in dialogue with the still unrealized democratic educational vision that Dewey introduced years ago. For Badiou (2012a) democracy is a necessary condition of philosophy and also a difficult, even obscure means for emancipating politics. Democracy is a necessary condition for philosophy because anyone is equally free to take up philosophical inquiry. However, Badiou (2012a) also is quick to point out that not all ideas are of equal worth, scrutinizing the current state of democracy in the Western world for too readily embracing definitions of democracy that over-emphasize individual liberties. He writes,

To the extent that the ultimate aim of philosophy is thoroughly to clarify the distinction between truth and opinion, evidently there can be no genuine philosophical interpretation of the great democratic principle of the freedom of opinion. Philosophy opposes the unity and universality of truth to the plurality and relativity of opinions. (p.28)

Badiou (2012a) asserts that the universality of political truths is rooted in the virtues of justice, which center around an axiom of equality. Therefore, from Badiou’s (2012a) angle, the individualistic and competition-based trends in current educational policy that contextualize American public school practice and the widespread acceptance of the unequal conditions among schools across the nation are two causes that lead to what he deems to be “corruption.” First, “terror” is the pursuit individual interests that
interfere with the equitable and inclusive universality of a political truth. Second, mainstream acceptance of domestic and international social inequalities implicates a lack of the virtue of justice. Not wanting virtue or terror, according to Badiou (2012a), indicates a desire for “corruption” which he defines as, “the mental corruption which lead to a world that, while being so evidently devoid of any principle, presents itself as, and is assumed by the majority of those who benefit from it to be, the best of all possible worlds” (p.32). Applying this concept to teacher education, den Heyer and Conrad (2011) explain the nexus of privilege and ignorance, where positions of privilege allow educators avoid confronting their implication and participation in social inequality and thus maintain ignorance to the material consequences of injustices. Thus, the customs and habits of thought that constitute the crisis of modernity or the detachment of post-modernity in early childhood curriculum work remain untroubled. For Badiou, taking up a philosophical inquiry in which one becomes subject to her own truth process is the means to realize people’s capacities to affirmatively invent new realities of universal, for all, virtue (den Heyer, 2010).

Badiou (2012a) defines philosophy as “the act of reorganizing all theoretical and practical experiments by proposing a great new normative division, which inverts an established intellectual order and promotes new values beyond the commonly accepted ones” (p.13). With this definition, Badiou (2001) puts forth a ‘truth process’ which, from the angle of an axiom of equality, inverts three problematic and interrelated aspects of the established intellectual order of contemporary thought: deficit mindsets, “the Bourdieu effect” (Ranciere, 1991; Ross, 1991), ethic of other (Badiou, 2001). A deficit mindset
simply presumes a hierarchal ordering among people, which separates the knowledge holders from the alleged ignorant. The “Bourdieu effect” is Ranciere’s (1991) description of a reproductive cycle of simultaneously presuming that subjugated individuals are excluded from civic participation because they lack essential knowledge for civic participation, and that they lack essential knowledge for civic participation because they are excluded. An ‘ethic of other’ is the act of celebrating difference, but only to the degree to which said differences also respect and celebrate difference.

Enmeshed in the established order of contemporary thought, the study and practice of early childhood abound with concrete examples of these three conceptual problems.

Deficit mindsets that appraise the work of early childhood educators come in many forms that seek to resolve or fix aspects of teachers’ work that are ineffective or ill-conceived. Based on the assumption of a priori evil, school improvement initiatives typically endeavor to respond to inadequacies of school practices including “moral panics” (Taubman, 2010). Teachers may not have sufficient understanding of child development to appropriately interact with children; therefore, Developmentally Appropriate Practice provides guidelines for “appropriate” practice (Charlesworth, 1998; Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). Teachers of young children may not be equipped to decipher which instructional strategies are most effective; therefore evidence-based practices are made available on websites such as the What Works Clearinghouse provide teachers with “tried and true” strategies (Rathvon, 2008; www.whatworks.org).

Additionally, postmodern critiques are often framed on the basis of a priori evils of
insensitivity and the mishandling of subjugated groups; warranting the advocacy for practices to be culturally congruent (Hyun, 2006).

Being in contrast of developmental appropriateness, ineffectiveness and incongruity are three deficits authority figures in early childhood education have set out to fix. Pastoral relations ensue between experts of developmental appropriateness, evidence-based validity, or multi-cultural inclusiveness and the laymen laborers of school practice. Jacque Ranciere’s (1991) concept of the “Bordieu effect” offers a useful critique of the divisions between authoritative expert and laborer. Teachers of young children and the youngsters in their care are regulated by the status of victim. The only way for them to become empowered is to achieve the status of expert.

According to Ranciere (1991) the “Bordieu effect” is a lesson in inequality. To summarize the concept, “they are excluded because they don’t know why they are excluded; and they don’t know why they are excluded because they are excluded” (Ross, 1991, p.xi). For our purposes, teachers are excluded from influential forms of discourse regarding the nuances of good early childhood practice which derive “authority from the presumed naiveté or ignorance of its objects of study” the teachers themselves (Ross, 1991, p.xi). Many theorists and researchers affirm the value of practitioner voices (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Gaztambide-Fernandez & Sears, 2004; Henderson & Gornik, 2007). However, educational practitioners are regularly classified as a subjugated population in need of scholarly endorsements, or the intellectual support of more sophisticated academics (see for example Apple, 2009). Kristin Ross (1991)
reminds us that the “same temporal and spatial distance separates the pedagogue from the student as separates the ‘explicator of the social’ from the worker” (p.xix).

The third point of contention Badiou (2001) takes particularly with postmodern thought is ethics as a response to the other. Drawing on Emanuel Levinas, Dahlberg and Moss (2005) promote “pedagogy of listening” where the responsibilities of relational ethics come before the search for truth. The encounter of the other that initiates “pedagogy of listening” is an engagement with infinite difference. Infinite difference as the point of departure for early childhood pedagogues has an appealing appearance as a democratic enterprise. However, Badiou (2001) critiques that Levinas’ ethics “require that the Other be in some sense carried by a principle of alterity which transcends mere finite experience” (p.22). Ethics based on this metaphysical transcendence of an ‘Altogether Other’ offers, according to Badiou (2001), nothing more than a pious discourse. Badiou (2001) writes that Levinas’ pious discourse includes ethical orientations such as recognition of the other, ethics of difference, multiculturalism and tolerance. He writes, “this celebrated ‘other’ is acceptable only if he is a good other…” continuing on, “…that is to say: I respect differences, but only, of course, in so far as that which differs also respects, just as I do, the said differences” (p. 24). For Badiou (2001) the real question is not recognizing a transcendent ‘Altogether Other,’ but recognizing the Same.

William Pinar’s (2013) recent assertion that reproduction and resistance—the key concepts of the reconceptualization—have become intellectually exhausted run parallel to Badiou’s (2001) philosophical critique. That American public schooling is not equally
beneficial for all, that discourse is determinative and power predominates are obvious and have been adequately documented by reconceptualists (Pinar, 2013). Therefore, these insights can henceforth be presumed (Pinar, 2013). Essential to extending the extant concepts of the reconceptualization is an engagement in the public sphere that explicitly asserts equality of being, while also recognizing, indeed presuming the vastly unequal ways the present situation permits different individuals to exist. In other words, early childhood educators interested in enacting deeply democratic pedagogical practices in American public schools must work within, using Judith Green’s (1999) terminology, a “formally but not deeply democratic” situation.

Green (1999) connects the “formally democratic” situation that characterizes American cultures to the more personal qualities of individuals’ lived experiences “the existentially unsustaining and culturally unsustainable character of such a limited instantiation of democracy has recently become visible in the forms of two interactive social pathologies: existential nihilism and ontological rootlessness” (p.vii). Pinar’s (2013) concerns regarding the detachment of curriculum scholarship from the concrete reality of public education’s current circumstances parallel Badiou’s (2001a) above mentioned critique of postmodernism. Centering upon identity and emphasizing broad-spectrum sociopolitical critiques, contemporary curriculum scholarship has been removed from the public sphere and even from colleges of education (Pinar, 2013); which is symptomatic, Green (1999) might warn, of living in a formally democratic culture. Employing Badiou’s (2001; 2003; 2012a; 2012b) analytics, this study seeks to supplement the extant theories of the reconceptualists by deliberately avoiding existential
nihilism and with specifying a democratic ontological grounding. Badiou (2012b) explains that while “being” is an extensive concept, “existence” is a hierarchically ordered category, predicking the intensity of the subject. The intensification of existence of someone who has been previously inexistent in the historical moment characterizes the universal address of a truth declaration and thus the potential re-birth of history (Badiou, 2012b). Accordingly, this research will not focus upon the subjugation of early childhood teachers’ challenges navigating a hegemonic political space. Rather, my interest will be in the militant subjectivity of deeply democratic virtues intensely existing within the embodied space of early childhood teachers’ daily curriculum practice, as expressed by those practitioners.

Badiou’s (2001) position is that difference is ontologically obvious. Taubman (2010) explains, “there is only difference, both within myself and between myself and others” (p.55). Badiou (2001) doesn’t consider human differences to be a worthwhile source for philosophical inquiry and asserts that, “they amount to nothing more than the infinite self-evident multiplicity of humankind, as obvious in the difference between me and my cousin from Lyon as it is between the Shi’ite community of Iraq and the fat cowboys of Texas” (p.26). Infinite alterity is what is; and “The Same, in effect, is not what is (i.e. the infinite multiplicity of difference) but what comes to be” through a truth process (Badiou, 2001, p.27).

Alain Badiou’s philosophical project provides a conceptual framework for inverting the established intellectual orders of early childhood education and promoting, in fact “affirmatively inventing” new values beyond the commonly accepted ones (den
Heyer, 2010). First, the *a priori evil* that leads to pastoral relations and deficit mindsets is inverted by an axiom that good precedes evil. Secondly, the “Bourdieu effect” is countered with an axiom of equality that presumes and therefore practices equality and inclusion, rather than aspiring toward equal conditions for a future, which are imagined and described in reference to present circumstances of inequality and exclusion. Then, finally, what Badiou (2001) deems the pious discourses substantiated by ethics of responding to the other, will be inverted by “ethics of processes of truth” that are “indifferent to differences.” To better elucidate the axiom that *good* precedes evil, the presumption and practice of equality, and ethics of truth processes that frame this study, below is an overview of Badiou’s ontological assertions, conception of truth telling processes that corresponds to transactional epistemology.

**The Transactional Truth Telling Process**

In this study, Alain Badiou’s (2001) conception of truth telling will be put in dialogue with Dewey’s transactional perspective. Badiou makes an ontological assertion of his own. For Badiou, there is one humanity, and two disjunctive positions of experience with no third position of an omniscient moral narrator (Jottkandt, 2010). The first position of experience, from the void of a situation, a subject can formulate, declare and take up a subjective truth through art, science, love or politics. The second position of experience, from the plentitude of a situation, a subject can gain knowledge or understanding through the abundance of culture, technology, sex and management. Ethical fidelity shifts the concern from understanding and knowing to matters of attention and commitment to the potential of new possibilities for *good ways of being* early
childhood educators generated through experimentation, artistic creativity, amorous encounters and political advocacy.

Badiou’s (2001) truth process has a generic form, as do Deweyan circuits of inquiry and valuation. The provocation of a truth process is an event. Badiou’s event is “an encounter with that which defies our symbolic apprehension” thus it is linked to the void rather than the abundance of a situation (den Heyer, 2010, p. 2). An event, such as falling in love, generates the prospect of a truth process. The unknown consequences of falling in love are of course challenged by the safety and comfort provided popular opinions that endeavor to make calculated predictions and manage human experience. However, elucidating the significance of an amorous encounter, Badiou (2012b) explains, “Plato is quite precise in what he says about love: a seed of universality resides in the impulse toward love” (p.16). The seeds of universality are extended to include, alongside love, what Badiou considers the other three conditions of philosophy: art, science and politics (Badiou, 2001; Badiou, 2003a; Badiou, 2003b).

At the event a becoming subject has an experience that allows them to perceive of something absent from the dominant situation. In Dewey’s transactional terms, an event poses a problem that interrupts non-reflective experience. Invoked by an aesthetic, scientific, political or amorous truth that is absent from the popular discourse, the becoming subject must first declare the truth for which words have yet to have been used to enunciate. The declaration of a truth event plants a seed of universality that is missing from the situation as it is commonly known, understood, discussed and lived. In educational enterprises, I conjecture, declaring a truth event creates new possibilities for
curriculum work if one embraces the risks and adventures of being faithfully committed to the declared truth of the event.

An active and faithful commitment to a truth event must be guarded against *le mal*, loosely translated as evil (Badiou, 2001). Dewey reminds us that any resolution reflective experience brings to one’s problems is always tentative and subject to the revisions of further inquiry and future problem posing. For Badiou (2001), evil can come in three forms: simulacrum, betrayal and terror (Badiou, 2001). Simulacrum is the evil of being faithful to the abundance of a situation rather than the void. Simulacrum is being faithful to the abundant cultural, technological and managerial conditions serves the conservative function of preserving the situation as it is. Betrayal is essentially giving up on the truth of the event and giving in to the powerful hegemonic forces. Terror is being an arrogant or self-interested demander of a truth that impedes upon the freedom of others to become subject of their own truth processes. A crucial part of Badiou’s (2001a) conception of ethical fidelity is being cognizant that the pathway to hell can be lead by good intentions in these three ways. Badiou (2001) warns that well intended subjects often engage in the evils of simulacrum by being typical; betrayal by being without perseverance; and terror by being supercilious.

**Stating the Research Problem**

There are numerous challenges faced by early childhood educators striving to think, speak and act democratically within the context of American public schools. John Dewey (1939/1989) considered democracy to be a yet to be realized “moral standard” for daily living. Moreover, Dewey’s (1916/2008) *Democracy and Education* was
enormously influential toward initiating a sustained concern among educational stakeholders regarding the relationship between democracy and education. The recurrent use of democratic rhetoric in the mission statements across local, state and federal educational institutions demonstrates a widespread valuing of democratic principles in curriculum work. However, employing a vast array of theoretical frameworks, reconceptualists of curriculum studies and particularly early childhood education have shed light upon the numerous features of knowledge dissemination in schools as a political endeavor rather than a value-neutral, technical affair (Genishi, Ryan, Ochsner, & Yarnall, 2001).

Educational studies abound with diverse understandings of how the methods and conditions of American schools have and continue to fall short of the promises of living in a democratic society (Hargreaves, 2010; Pinar, 2011; Sahlberg, 2010; Watkins, 2012). Reconceptualizers of curriculum have been criticized for offering little advice to curriculum development and separating theory from school practice (Wraga, 1999). However, Pinar (1999) contends that if theorists revert to the role of directing the practice of teachers or “preaching” their own cherished ideals to practitioners and policy makers; they will only propagate unjust divisions of labor among academics and their school-based colleagues. James Henderson (2001b) negotiates this argument by suggesting an alternative perspective that promotes educators’ engagement in “the ‘morality’ of democratic living as a wisdom challenge,” an endeavor that requires one to inquire, enact a democratic calling and embrace professional artistry. In other words, conceiving of democracy as a way of life, rather than a conceptual ideal complicates the
challenge. Furthermore, to walk the talk of democratic living requires the perseverance of early childhood practitioners as well as their academic colleagues to act democratically in what has been extensively critiqued as undemocratic contexts.

Dominant discourses in early childhood curriculum work have been and continue to be scrutinized by numerous scholarly inquiries that bring into question widely held beliefs and images that guide daily practice (File, Mueller, & Wisneski 2012; Kessler & Swadener, 1992; Lubeck, 1996). A common conclusion between Pinar’s (1999) efforts to understand curriculum and Wraga’s (1999) interest in curriculum development is that the critical and postmodern scholarship of re-conceptualist is not making a significant impact upon curriculum practices. Michael Apple (2012) concurs writing, “competition, markets, and choice on the one hand, and accountability, performance objectives, standards, national testing, and national curriculum on the other, has created a situation in which it is hard to hear anything else” (p. xii). While Pinar (1999) refers to a “curriculum gridlock” created by broader political and cultural issues, Wraga (1999) points the finger at re-conceptualists claiming they are balking on their responsibilities to influence school practice. This point of contention, along with my own experiences teaching kindergarten in a public school, illuminates a gap in the literature on teaching young children in ways that are congruent with our democratic virtues.

My perspective is that of someone who is deeply interested in the scholarly reconceptualization of early childhood practice and concurrently is engaged in teaching young children in a typical public elementary school in the Midwest. That being said, I have been fascinated throughout doctoral studies by scholarly literature that questions
and counters prevailing theory and practices. Additionally, I have been invigorated by conversations with certain k-3 teaching colleagues who, albeit using different language, voice similar critiques when particular taken for granted ideas and practices of their school do not “work” for certain students, or are unfair to a certain group of children. Although I am fascinated by the connections that I occasionally observe between my dialogue with certain k-3 colleagues and reconceptualists’ theorizing, often my colleagues are unaware or even uninterested in the theory and research that parallels their curriculum work. Although I agree with Wraga’s (1999) assertion that re-conceptualists have enjoyed a limited sphere of influence over mainstream curriculum practice, I also agree with Pinar (1999) that it is wrongheaded for theorists to attempt to reclaim authority by assuming an elevated role of advising practice.

As Apple (2012) point out, the conservative modernization that steers our contemporary socio-cultural situation “makes it hard to hear anything else.” Though they don’t articulate it as such, the early childhood practitioners that I am speaking of are acutely aware that challenging a normative understanding can be risky business in any community of practice. Accordingly, counter narratives are “hard to hear” because they are primarily discussed only in safe, private settings among trusted colleagues. In other words, democratic curriculum work is often a covert mission even within schools with democratic mission statements. Covert and hard to hear in the contemporary situation the narratives of early childhood practitioners engaged consciously and/or intuitively in critical democratic pedagogy is examined in this study for two purposes: the insights
garnered from their personal experiences; and to shed light upon the commitment required to maintain devotion to a counter narrative of holistic pedagogy.

Practitioner inquires have revealed insightful contributions of democratic pedagogues (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). Furthermore, collaborative efforts of researchers and practitioners have concretized exemplars of complex theoretical work. However, the steadfast commitment of upholding a democratic idea in spite of the difficulties inherent to challenging a dominant discourse remains a relatively unexplored yet vitally important aspect of critical democratic pedagogy. As mentioned above the ideas and the commitments of early childhood educators are analyzed through a Deweyan transactional epistemology grounded in democratic ontological lens informed by Alain Badiou. Therefore, based upon an axiom of equality, Wraga’s (1999) notion that curriculum practice needs to be explained or guided by a theorist is rejected. Furthermore, Pinar’s (1999) desire for equal conditions among scholars and practitioners will be presumed instead of yearned for and as a result curriculum theorizing is enmeshed in rather than separated from practice, without identifying either theorist or practitioner as the “master knowledge holder.”

This conceptual lens makes several contributions to the field of early childhood education. First, the reconceptualization of curriculum has been primarily an epistemological project exploring what can be known and/or understood about curriculum. Critical and postmodern epistemologies have thoroughly uncovered pervasive problems inherent in the prevailing methods and conditions, which are indicative of habits and traditions of a socio-cultural situation that are not changing
However, the ontological grounding and ethical focus of the conceptual framework in this research shifts attention to the concrete realities of the current unjust situation and what ought to be and is being done by those interested in continuing to resist these widespread injustices. For that reason, the object of this study are the stories of early childhood educators already critical of normative curriculum discourses and unrelenting in their dedication to think, speak and act democratically among young children amidst challenging circumstances.

**Research Focus and Questions**

The focus of this research is to shed light upon “ethical fidelity” (Badiou, 2001) expressed through the truth telling stories of six public school early childhood teachers’ “transactions” (Dewey & Bentley, 1949) within their “cultures of curriculum” (Joseph, 2011). A purposeful sample of six early childhood educators was selected based on personal events that have inspired them to consider fidelity to democratic ideals, aspirations and resistances in their daily teaching practices. Working in various schools, the specific contexts and mission of each teacher are different. However, all participants share the common socio-political influences that contextualize being a teacher of young children in a public school. What follows is a brief description of the main and supporting research questions for this project.

This study will have two main research questions, each with two supporting questions. The first central question highlights the importance of recognizing the singularity of subjectivity in an ethic of truths. Badiou (2001) explains, “there can be no
ethics in general, but only an ethic of singular truths, and thus an ethic relative to a particular situation” (p.lvi). The six early childhood educators share the common situation of being public school teachers in the mid-western United States. Yet, working within different schools affords the participants their own unique institutionalized “story of school” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996). Moreover, each participant has his or her own classroom, where a distinctly personal and private story teacher story of “singular truth” is composed on a daily basis. Continuing to resist the dominant general ethic of instructional management put forth by the accountability systems pervasive to public schools, requires each teacher to negotiate their own particular community of practice that defines their situation. Hence, while the participants share in the vicissitudes common to our faithful resistance, we each have an exclusive story of singular truths.

Appreciating the singularity of subjectivity, each teacher’s narrative was examined for the encountering of event and the corresponding declarations of truths. Central to the concept of ethical fidelity, Kent den Heyer (2010) clarifies “an event is an encounter with that which defies our symbolic apprehension” (p.2). Therefore, teachers of young children must work within the context of the professional knowledge landscape that amounts to the dominant opinion and knowledge accepted by their community of practice. An event of a teacher’s lived experience supplements the stultifying consensus of a given situation, be it in terms of culture, technology, management, or disjunctive sexuated positions. Stories of teachers’ truth processes evoked “from the event, which compels us to decide a new way of being” (Badiou, 2001, p.41) are a representation of
professional excellence that is yet to be explored, recognized or attended to in educational research.

While the truth processes represented by these narratives are singular, the truths declared have for all implications that are universal (Badiou, 2003a). It is reasonable to assume that practicing early childhood educators are already engaged in an ethic of truths with universal implications for all. Universal truths of early childhood education are being realized “by every loving encounter, every scientific re-foundation, every artistic invention and every sequence of emancipatory politics” (Badiou, 2001, p.39). At the heart of the matter is the shared capacity of all people to willfully continue think, speak and act regardless of situational factors that stultify possibilities. Or, in other words, every curriculum worker is equally capable of becoming seized by an event that initiates a truth process. Creative, affirmative inventions of truths that are not yet intelligible through communal agreements, authoritative endorsements, or apathetic relativism are the object that will be explored and revealed in this study. Stories from reflective early childhood teachers telling the truth as it relates to their practice show the art of teaching in a new philosophical light. Badiou (2003b) explains that philosophy, “is a place of thought where both the ‘there are’ of truths and their compossibility is stated” (p.165).

Accordingly, the first question and its corresponding sub-questions are as follows:

- What are the truth telling stories of six early childhood educators who embody transactional knowing and a commitment to enacting democratic virtues in curriculum practices?
What events are described in the teachers’ narratives that invoke the ethical fidelity of a truth procedure?

What subjective truths are declared with the narratives and how are those truths realized in accounts of daily teaching practices?

Badiou (2001) further explains the demanding terrain of ethical fidelity to subjective universals. He writes

For what every emancipatory project does, what every emergence of hitherto unknown possibilities does is to put an end to consensus. How indeed, could the incalculable novelty of a truth, and the hole that it bores in established knowledges, be inscribed in a situation without encountering resolute opposition? Precisely because a truth, in its invention, is the only thing that is for all, so it can actually be achieved only against dominant opinions, since these always work for the benefit of some rather than all. (pp.32)

The second research question delves into the complexities of the difficult challenges a teacher, seized by the truth of an event, will encounter in the course of their professional journey. The second research question and its corresponding sub-questions are as follows:

- How do teachers’ declarations of truth and corresponding actions extend beyond the “cultures of curriculum” (Joseph, 2011) which contextualize their work?

- With reference to the participants’ experiences in their respective “cultures of curriculum” (Joseph, 2011), how do they perceive
their “ethical fidelity?” In particular, do they feel they are persevering?

- How do the truth telling narratives express teachers’ guarding against or succumbing to the ills of betrayal, disaster and simulacrum?

**Conclusion**

To summarize, this opening chapter began by defining early childhood teaching and curriculum practices as an ethical enterprise. This ethical enterprise is thus influenced by many stakeholders employ diverse understandings derived from various philosophical orientations. Then, the purpose of the study is clarified as shedding light upon “ethical fidelity” (Badiou, 2001) expressed through the truth telling stories of six public school early childhood teachers’ “transactions” (Dewey & Bentley, 1949) within their “cultures of curriculum” (Joseph, 2011).

Early childhood practitioners are identified as embodied subjects engaging in transactional knowing. Then, a conceptual framework informed by Alain Badiou’s philosophical project is introduced as the analytical tool that has been utilized in researching the following general questions: What are the truth telling stories of 4-6 early childhood educators who embody passionate public service through the professional artistry of reflective practice? How do teachers’ declarations of truth and corresponding actions extend beyond the “cultures of curriculum” (Joseph, 2011) which contextualize their work?
The chapter that follows will provide relevant literature to further clarify and support the definitions, axioms, descriptions and theoretical underpinnings discussed above. First, I will clarify the perspective from which early childhood education is being analyzed by clarifying the importance of distinguishing early childhood curriculum work and specifically the work of teachers of young children as a practice. Then, I will draw upon various authors to provide a background of conceptualizations of educational practices as an ethical undertaking too often dominated by problematic normative understandings. Next, literature on reflective inquiry through academic study and lived experience will be reviewed to provide a background for further explanation of conceiving of early childhood teachers as embodied subjects engaged in transactional knowing. The second chapter will conclude with an overview of Alain Badiou’s (2001) concept of “ethical fidelity” and how it will be utilized as an analytical tool for understanding the potential for historical agency found in the stories of early childhood educators.
CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will provide relevant literature to further clarify and support the definitions, axioms, descriptions and theoretical underpinnings pertinent to this research. First, I will clarify the perspective from which early childhood education is being analyzed by explaining the importance of distinguishing curriculum work and specifically the work of teachers of young children as a practice. Then, I will draw upon various authors to provide a background of conceptualizations of educational practices as an ethical undertaking too often dominated by problematic normative understandings. This discussion of the ethical dimension of curriculum practice will transition into an explanation of Badiou’s critique of “general ethics,” which are often applied in educational studies. Next, literature on the academic study and lived experiences that constitute “reflective inquiry artistry” (Henderson, 2001a) will be reviewed to provide a background for further explanation of conceiving of early childhood teachers as embodied subjects engaged in transactional knowing. The second chapter will conclude with an overview of Alain Badiou’s (2001) concept of “ethical fidelity” and how it will be utilized as an analytical tool for understanding an ethics of event in education.

Curriculum Practice

Recognizing the significance of distinguishing teaching as a practice is perhaps the most fundamental element of a discussion about teachers’ ethical fidelity and reflective inquiry artistry. It is important to note that teaching has been conceptualized in many different ways and the daily work of educators has been deemed a “profession, a
semi-profession, a vocation, an enterprise, occupation or calling” (Noddings, 2003). Yet, many researchers have found it useful to conceptualize teaching as a practice, especially when examining the more nuanced ethical, relational and aesthetic qualities of teaching (Hansen, 1995; Jackson, 1986; Jackson, Boostrom & Hansen, 1993; Noddings, 2003/2009).

Conceptualizing teaching as a practice calls for a careful consideration of the complex professional responsibilities bestowed upon teachers that are separate and distinct from the fixed obligations of institutionalized accountability (Hansen, 2001). In this way functioning as “educational practitioners” as opposed to “school employees” or “instructional technicians” reveals deeper seeded meanings of what it means to be a teacher. Additionally, acknowledging teaching as a practice is recognition that there are fundamental knowledge bases, skills, dispositions and activities specific to the teaching profession. After all, Dewey (1897/2009) eloquently proclaimed the demanding enterprise of teaching to be the “supreme art” of a society, “one calling into its service the best of artists; that no insight, sympathy, tact, executive power, is too great for such service” (p.40).

Accordingly, researchers and theorists have honed in on different but interrelated qualities of educational practices. David Hansen (1995) focused upon deeply personal characteristics that call individuals to the vocation of educational practice. Noddings (2003, 2003/2009), on the other hand concentrates on the broad possibilities for developing educational aims that promote happiness through what she considers the “relational practice” of teaching. Hansen’s important book, The Call to Teach, followed
a previous project where he collaboratively studied the complex, ambiguous ways that moral matters permeated a series of elementary school classrooms (Jackson et al., 1993). Noddings (2003) argument that teaching is a “relational practice” is in direct response to Alasdair MacIntyre’s (1981) depiction of teaching as merely a means of introducing individuals to other practices, such as medicine. Additionally, Noddings (2003/2009) raises concern about the limited amount of “aims talk” taking place in educational dialogue. She laments, “simply accepting the state, as it is and the system as it is (merely pushing it to perform its perceived function more vigorously) is a dangerous (and lazy) strategy” (Noddings, 2003/2009, p.426).

When placed in juxtaposition, these two different lines of inquiry provide a broad understanding of a widespread educational problem. Together, Noddings (2003, 2003/2009) and Hansen (1995) help us to think about our current state of affairs “as they are,” as well as the progressive and emancipatory hopes and inspirations that inform our visions of what “ought to be.” Conceptualizing teaching as a practice opens a substantive conversation regarding how one might begin to pursue educational aims that constitute our understandings of good teaching, an inescapably moral endeavor (Buzzelli & Johnston, 2002; Hansen, 2001). In distinct, but complementary ways, these authors are concerned about the unspoken, unrecognized nature of moral matters that can be routinely observed in the cultures of curriculum (Joseph, 2011) that dominate American public schools. Additionally, both Noddings and Hansen turn to the tacit understanding of teachers in their efforts to rediscover the moral aspects of teaching (Hansen, 1995; Noddings, 2003; Noddings, 2003/2009). These tacit understandings, also widely
unexplored, prompt the need for educators to cultivate ethical fidelity and reflective practice.

With separate focal points, these two lines of inquiry make two different but complimentary contributions to research on teaching. Some research has observed the inevitably present moral aspects of classroom activity are often glossed over or commonly go unnoticed in daily practices. For example, Jackson et al. (1993) shed light upon the current state of affairs in American elementary schools, as they conventionally are. Although moral matters are ubiquitous in any classroom attention to these issues remain sublimated by what Jackson (1968) deems “the daily grind” of life in classrooms.

In light of these descriptive accounts, Hansen (1995) has sought to gain further insight by examining the intrapersonal qualities that inspire or call a teacher to the practice. Other work has contemplated not only the current state of affairs that constitute dominant “cultures of curriculum” (Joseph, 2011) but also considered what ought to become of our schools. At the core of Noddings’ (2003/2009) appeal for educators to revive “aims talk” is her suggestion that happiness ought to be among the most common of educational aims and caring relations inherent to the most ordinary practices. Central to her argument regarding how schools ought to be improved, Noddings (2003) describes the interpersonal characteristics of teaching as essentially a relational practice. The personal and relational aspects of professional practice constitute the process of ethical fidelity and reflective teaching. In many ways one cannot be cultivated without the other.

Challenging this artificial dichotomy which has often been deem a paradox, Damon (2006) writes that a “strange mix of sociability and individuality that develops in the
course of human life can be seen as two complementary developmental functions, rather than contradictory life directions” (Damon, 2006, p.3). Furthermore, considering self fulfillment and social responsibility as complimentary functions is a fundamental mindset that will foster a flourishing modern democracy (Dewey, 1929/1999). The call to teach, “comprises a form of public service to others that at the same time provides the individual a sense of identity and personal fulfillment” (Hansen, 1995, p.2). Ethical fidelity and reflective teaching is indeed about the personally fulfilling process of promoting democracy through what Pinar (2009) referred to as “passionate public service.”

Approaching educational practice with ethical fidelity and disciplined habits of reflection eludes common notions of teaching as a mere means to a certain, clearly defined end. Passionate public service, as it is defined by Pinar (2009), is comprised of experience and academic study. Noddings (2003) clarifies the moral experience of engaging in a relational practice as “a growing intellectual enthusiasm in both teacher and student, the challenge and satisfaction shared by both in engaging new material, the awakening sense (for both) that teaching and life are never-ending moral quests” (p.249). On a never-ending moral quest, the passionate public servant recognizes education and students as ends in themselves. Conceptualizing teaching as a practice calls for a careful consideration of the complex professional responsibilities bestowed upon teachers that are separate and distinct from the static obligations of institutionalized accountability (Hansen, 2001). In this way, functioning as professional educational practitioners as opposed to taking on bureaucratic roles such as “school employees” or “instructional
technicians” opens up possibilities for curriculum workers to commit oneself to critical hermeneutic processes that cultivate the will and skill to contest the dominance of normative understandings.

**The Moral Dimension**

Teaching has been an inherently moral activity since the earliest documented occurrences of its practice (Hansen, 2001). Jackson et al. (1993) have made a comprehensive case that experiences of moral significance engulf classroom and that moral meaning is expressed even in a teacher’s most habitual decisions. Alan Tom (1980) argues that teaching can be productively understood as a moral craft. Further, the moral dimensions of teaching cannot be separated from the intellectual and aesthetic domains (Hansen, 2001; Hansen, 2004). Buzzelli and Johnston (2002) further examined the moral dimensions of teaching in terms of language, power and culture. However, the obscurity of moral components that pervade all educational practice remains a precarious and contentious topic in educational research and practice.

Recognizing that education inescapably engages in moral teaching provokes the question of what system of ethics informs the work of teachers. Indeed there are numerous ethical lenses by which a teacher or researcher may consciously or intuitively find guidance. Here, I will overview common applications of several conventional ethical lenses. Teleological ethics may steer some to justify means by the desirability of an end (Tisdale, 2004). A deontological perspective may lead educators to strive to maintain certain universal obligations regardless of the consequence (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; Tisdale, 2004). Followers of Aristotle may seek to cultivate the character of
individuals through virtue ethics (Nussbaum, 1997). Nel Noddings’s (1984) feminine ethic of care promotes a form of “covental ethics” that premises itself on special relationships (Tisdale, 2004). Critical theorists such as Habermas and Friere find special obligations to advocating for the rights of marginalized populations (Coulter, 2001; Macedo & Araujo Friere, 2001). Additionally, postmodern perspectives focus upon plurality of meanings and situate ethics within the judgment of agents of the given context and situation (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; Tisdale, 2004). There are many competing understandings of what it means to “be ethical” in educational endeavors to promote “good living,” another concept with multiple meanings. In other words the ethical dilemma faced by teachers is that there are infinite ways to go about accomplishing infinite moral ends. There are infinite differences.

**Alain Badiou**

Badiou (2001) is critical of conceptions of a general ethic that can be applied universally through some sort of grand theory of guidance. Therefore, “Ethics does not exist. There is only the ethic-of (of politics, of love, of science, of art)” (Badiou, 2001, p. 28). In the title of their book, *Ethics and Politics in Early Childhood Education*, Dahlberg and Moss (2005) handle ethics and politics as two separate entities. Through their examination of the ethics and politics of early childhood classrooms, Dahlberg and Moss (2005) advance an ‘ethics of encounter,’ using the philosophy of Emanuel Levinas as their main referent. The chief aim of Levinas’s ‘ethic of encounter’ is to be responsive to the postmodern plurality of understandings. Levinas’s project is an ethics of difference. Where Levinas and Badiou part ways, and thus where my conceptual
framework departs from Dahlberg and Moss (2005), is in how to handle this infinite amount of difference.

For Levinas difference is the source of uncertainty and ambivalence that leads to passivity. “Levinas examines how the striving towards autonomy and independence is oppressive, even violent” (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005, p.77). Based upon the impossibility of comprehending infinite differences, individuals are charged with the responsibility of appreciating, respecting and affirming the other, not the duty to know. “Levinas calls this principle the ‘Altogether-Other,’ and it is quite obviously the ethical name for God. There can be no other if he is not the immediate phenomenon of the Altogether-Other” (Badiou, 2001, p.22). This postmodern ethic is described by Dahlberg and Moss (2005) as being “characterized by uncertainty, dissensus, dissymmetry, ambiguities, interruptions, even, as Derrida has said in relation to Levinas’s ethics, impossibilities” (p.81). Badiou (2001) argues that Levinas offers nothing more than “ethics as a category of pious discourse” (p.23).

For Badiou (2001) difference must be handled on the level of ontology, where he describes infinite alterity as obvious aspect of reality. Arguing against an end of philosophy, Badiou (2001) writes, “genuine thought should affirm the following principle: since differences are what there is, and since every truth is the coming-to-be of that which is not yet, so differences are then precisely what truths dispose, or render insignificant” (p. 27). Advancing an ethics of event, Badiou (2001) identifies four essential types of subjectivities: politics, science, art and love by which a becoming-subject can engage in a truth procedure of “affirmative invention” (den Heyer,
2009). Such affirmative inventions proceed when a becoming-subject is faithful to an
event that inspires an immanent break and allows us to “become more than the situation
we are” (den Heyer, 2009, p. 442). Hence, ethical fidelity informed by Badiou is not
about transcendent reverence or a loss of autonomy and independence out of deference
for postmodern ambiguity and complexity. Ethical fidelity is about radical activism and
faithful commitment to for all truths, realized through lived events in our complex
infinitely diverse world.

Perspectives on Reflective Practice

Reflective practice elucidates the normative features of teaching. Without
reflection, teachers are either unaware of these normative features or they take them for
granted (Buzzelli & Johnston, 2002). An unreflective practice perpetuates what den Hyer
(2011) terms the privilege-ignorance nexus. Based on the psychoanalytic tradition, den
Hyer (2011) suggests that all people cling to ignorance that “implicates us as agents
directly involved in and benefiting from, albeit in unequal ways, the many horrors of the
present that privilege saves us from experiencing daily” (p.9). From a transactional
perspective, Ryan (2011) notes that non-reflective experience is our default mode of
being in the world. Reflective inquiry is the difficult undertaking that serves as our hope
for working against our own complicit privilege and ignorance.

Conceptualized as an extraordinarily complicated conversation, Pinar, Reynolds,
Slattery and Taubman (1995) assert that “curriculum is historical, political, racial,
gendered, phenomenological, autobiographical, aesthetic, theological and international”
(p. 847). Hence, reflective practices that continuously interrogate their personal and
social nexuses of privilege-ignorance are essential to overcoming unfair and insensitive educational practices. Efforts to overcome the unjust implications of privilege and ignorance are further complicated by the reductionist, linear logic used by modern institutions as the primary form of educational inquiry and evaluation. Common examples would be curriculum development informed by the Tyler rationale (1949) and the pervasiveness of educational aims geared toward improving scores on standardized tests. The white-knuckled clinging to ignorance is only exacerbated by institutional propensities to quantify educational data. In other words, much is lost when our infinitely complicated, diverse world is only understood in one particular way.

The shift from the habits and forces of normativity to the intelligence of reflective inquiry opens teachers’ work to become more than a technical activity. Indeed, Dwayne Huebner (1966/1999) suggested that, in addition to the dominance of the technical, there are four other rationales for appraising educational experiences: the political, the scientific, the ethical and the aesthetic. One is immediately reminded of Badiou’s (2001, 2003) ethics of politics, science, love and art. Despite the multi-faceted ways that educational environments, experiences and lives can be understood, there remains a persistent focus on technical rationales in educational institutions. Eisner’s (1985) criticism about the dominance of quantitative educational study, for example, was not that common methods of social science were faulty. However, he was deeply concerned about “the relative neglect of other forms of inquiry that could be useful to the field” (Eisner, 1985, p.219).
According to Badiou (2001) truth can be derived from art, love politics and science. Embracing and validating cultural differences, Hyun (2006) takes on a political rationale for her inquiry. She terms “cultural congruence” as the chief aim for overcoming the oppressive forces associated with the dominant, fixed understandings of “cultural appropriateness” (Hyun, 2006). Hyun’s (2006) concern over developmental and cultural “mismatches” mirror Dahlberg and Moss’ (2005) ethics of encounter. They are working toward the commendable end of equal “participation and representation” of diverse cultural backgrounds marginalized by the dominant discourse of Developmentally and Culturally Appropriate Practice (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). Buzzelli and Johnston (2002) commend similar projects for their attention to moral aspects of teaching through the cultural lens.

A number of other scholars, informed by critical theory, take on dominant discourses for the cause of combating social injustices (Brookfield, 1995, McLaren, 1998; Noblit & Dempsey, 1996). With warranted concerns about the manner by which common practices and method of curriculum development and evaluation, critical reflective inquiries shed light upon the way that social inequalities are maintained and perpetuated by hegemonic structures that benefit some and marginalize others. Adler’s Paideia Proposal and E.D. Hirsch’s Core Knowledge among others are thoroughly criticized for their class, gender and racial biases and used as illustrative exemplars of culturally biased curriculum projects (Noblit & Dempsey, 1996). Brookfield (1995) writes that critical reflection, “springs from a concern to create the conditions under which people can learn to love one another, and it alerts them to the forces that prevent
this” (p.26). The ethical aims are further elucidated as being “anchored in values of justice, fairness, and compassion, critical reflection finds its political representation in the democratic process” (Brookfield, 1995, p.26-27). Critical theorist and pedagogues are diligent in their work of rectifying the manifestation of social inequalities in educational institutions.

While engaging in curriculum work with a high sense of social responsibility, critical postmodernists, such as the examples given above, also often value self-examination (Brookfield, 1995; Hyun, 2006; Noblit & Demsey, 1996). Hyun (2006) makes her own case for autobiographical inquiry as she scrutinizes notions of developmentally and culturally “appropriate” practices in early childhood education. She does so by raising an important limitation in the dominant form of curriculum development informed by Tylerism (1949). Hyun (2006) writes,

those who simplistically employ the modernistic Tyler Rationale can address questions regarding instruction oriented what to teach and how to approach that. They however, have little postmodern pedagogy-based guidance when it comes to their own autobiographical complicity in this process, not to mention that of learners’ own autobiographical journeys. (p.35)

Korthagen and Vasalos (2005) maintain the importance of the concrete, technical elements of classroom practice. Yet they also assert that “core reflection” on one’s personal beliefs, professional identities and educational missions is an underutilized aspect of reflective practice. Being mindful of aspects of what he terms “core reflection” and how they impact daily decisions is a reflective process that helps teachers find their
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sense of agency (Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005). Pinar’s (2012) concept of “currere” is concerned with this sort of core reflection and is advanced in Kesson and Henderson’s (2010) argument for an additional diagonal dimension of curriculum disciplinarity. Put differently, as educators work to make sense of the ways in which intellectual history of their field intersects their current cultural milieus; they do so on a deeply personal journey of understanding. It is through this “diagonal” dimension that subjectivity is realized, ethical and aesthetic values are understood and that teaching is a human not a mechanical enterprise.

Subjectivity tunes one into what Hansen (2004) terms the poetic qualities of teaching. A poetics of teaching, according to Hansen (2004), fuses the intellectual, moral and aesthetic aspects of classroom life. The deeply personal nature of Korthagen’s and Vasalos’ (2005) core reflection is essential to becoming, in Maxine Greene’s (1971/2009) terms “wide-awake,” to the poetics of teaching that challenge the privilege-ignorance nexus of institutionalized status quos. Introspection into who one believes he is and who he hopes to become as a professional educator, fosters commitment to the social responsibility for educational missions of equality such as deep democracy and cosmopolitanism.

Helen Penn (2005a) critically examines the lives of children from a global perspective. Not letting us escape the implications of our privilege-ignorance nexus she writes, “Our toleration of the extent of child poverty on an international scale undermines any claims we might make as civilized people to care about young children” (Penn, 2005a, p.173). Through critical poststructural ways of knowing, one becomes aware that
we are all complicit to atrocities around the world related to children’s encounters with poverty and mistreatment (Penn, 2005a). Our “minority world” privilege that creates “regimes of truth” such as developmentally appropriateness is powerfully imposed upon the rest of the world as the normative understanding used to inform early childhood practices (MacNaughton, 2005; Penn, 2005b). MacNaughton (2005) asserts the poststructural idea that “the existence of truth is a fundamentally practical, political issue” (p.202). Then, she concludes her book with the suggestion of developing “critically knowing communities” of early childhood practice. Understanding that everything could be decided otherwise and yearning for a more caring and just world, MacNaughton’s (2005) “critically knowing communities” recognize the capacity of reflective inquiry to choose paths of democracy and cosmopolitanism.

Furthermore, astute scholars such as Penn and MacNaughton bring to the fore the interplay between early childhood curriculum workers’ singular subjectivities and the formulations of universal truths. The postmodern insight that truths exist as social and political constructions manifests as what Badiou (2003) deems to be two forms of unified subjectivity. First, socially constructed truths are promulgated through the common opinions, beliefs and understandings circulated by contemporary realism. Then, the cultural identity of a subject determines truth in postmodern discourse of multiple truths and realities without universals. Subjectivity is unified when a subject subordinates oneself to common knowledge on one hand and when one engages in identity politics of elective belonging or exclusion, on the other. A singular subject renders itself incapable of creatively thinking, voicing or enacting a new possibility that exemplifies a truly
all benefit if it validates itself by adhering to “what experts know” or by one’s social assignation. Unified by popular opinion or identity, the singular subject cannot reconcile itself with universal truths.

The experiences had and individual agency known by a unified subject are stultified by two dogmatic metaphysical assertions. First, under the realist presumption of a mind-independent reality, the consensus of experts overpowers the experiences of individuals. Secondly, the postmodernist assertion of the coexistence of multiple truths and realities renders anyone’s subjective experiences as being as good as the experiences of any other. Dewey’s transactional pragmatism adroitly reconciles the predominant bifurcation of subjectivity and reality with his postulate of immediate empiricism (Ryan, 1997; Ryan, 2011). Dewey’s postulate of immediate empiricism, according to Ryan (2011), “reminds us that all experienced things are equally real” (p. 59). For Dewey, the point was not to dismiss all metaphysical considerations but to reconsider metaphysics based on experimental grounds, rather than as a conception of a fixed and fundamental totality that works as the foundation of all experience (Ryan, 1997). Immediate empiricism shifts the focus from issues of cosmic reality to matters of usefulness and efficiency.

Badiou ontologically theorizes issues of reality. In particular, according to Badiou (2012a), the ontological status of truth is one of exception to the dogmatic and authoritarian structuring of the world. The exception of the deadening unified subjectivity dually promulgated by pervasive realism and postmodernism is the division of the subject. Badiou (2003) clarifies, “universalism, and hence the existence of any
truth whatsoever, requires the destitution of established differences and the initiation of a subject divided in itself by the challenge of having nothing but the vanished event to face up to” (p. 58). Hence, truth for Badiou pertains to any person’s capacity to encounter an event and apprehend a new possibility for speaking and acting for all not precluded within the dominant culture. As a divided subject, a truth teller must live thinking, speaking and acting in ways that are distinct from the dogma and disobedient to authority. Furthermore, the “for all quality” of truth telling renders matters of identity more of a rhetorical issue than central to discourse-practices.

Badiou’s onto-ethical project is consistent with Dewey and Bentley’s transactional epistemology in an important way. Just as Badiou’s ethics of event is grounded in the thinking subject’s lived encounters in the material world, Dewey and Bentley’s transactional pragmatism is also attentive to the interplay between the subject and their environment. Transactional behavior is of an organism-environment situation; thus, Dewey and Bentley (1949) explain that the transactional subject will,

treat all of his behaving, including his most advanced knowings, as activities not of himself alone, nor even as primarily his, but as processes of the full situation of organism-environment; and to take this full situation as one which is before us within the knowings, as well as being the situation in which the knowings themselves arise. (p. 131)

Returning to Badiou, this relationship between a person and their environment also defines the situation contextualizing a becoming subject. Within this situation, a divided subject is not in service of the laws of a mastery discourse, accepting dogmatism
and authoritarianism as it exists in the situation. Rather, the divided subject is seized by a process of becoming subject to an event. Negating dogmatism and authoritarianism one who is becoming a divided subject is not commandeered by the situation, but lives as a transactional embodiment of fidelity to an event’s truth by thinking, voicing and acting with ethical consistency.

Choosing democratic or cosmopolitan principles as the virtues to guide educational endeavors essentially links ethical fidelity to reflective inquiry. A democratic or cosmopolitan ideal is the basis for embarking upon a professional and personal journey of understanding that cultivates a love of wisdom. Careful examination of ourselves, our situation and our daily practices allow us to experience truth events “as becoming subjects by embodying a ‘disinterested interest’ in inherited opinions and avoiding the Evil of an easy or expected resolution” (den Heyer, 2010, p.3). Noticing ways that sources of inherited knowledge are promoting freedom and flourishing only for some people challenges the becoming subject to pursue the uncertain outcomes of a for all truth that is situated within the void of the situation (Badiou, 2001; Badiou, 2003). It is a personal journey consisting of much self-examination, but not self-interest.

Embodying a disciplined love of wisdom, a becoming subject is faithful to events that have exposed for all truths in light of the challenges inherent in proceeding within the situation of dominant culture. An excellent illustration is the cosmopolitan effort of living peacefully in our complex, diverse world (Appiah, 2006; Hansen, 2010; Pinar, 2009). Pinar (2009) asserts that it is through academic study and experience that democratic and cosmopolitan aims can be realized through passionate public service.
Hence, cosmopolitanism and democracy are ideals to live by as much as they are important issues to think about and discuss. Attuned to the aesthetic and ethical values of educational situations, teachers begin to realize the qualities that are ubiquitous in everyday life. Eisner (1991) writes, “No one leads life by randomly selecting events in order to establish formal generalizations. We live and learn” (p.103-104). The most salient attributes by which to perceive, reflect upon and represent teaching are the qualities by which they are lived. Eisner (1985) provides a cogent argument that teaching can and ought to be considered an art and therefore must be examined through an aesthetic lens.

“It is in these four senses- teaching as a source of aesthetic experience, as dependent on the perception and control of qualities, as a heuristic or adventitious activity, and as seeking emergent ends- that teaching can be regarded as an art” (Eisner, 1985, p. 177). Regarding teaching as an art was not a new idea. In fact, in 1897 John Dewey’s Pedagogic Creed raised teaching as a supreme art (Dewey, 2009). However, Eisner (1985, 1991), himself a visual artist, raised the concept of educational connoisseurship and criticism as a productive new way of appraising and publically discussing aspects of educational artistry in a fashion that parallels the appraisals of fine wines, poetry or the visual or performing arts. When done well teaching, like any other artistry, can be carried out with great skill and grace, depends upon the exercise of qualitative judgments, function innovatively to attend to contingencies and often embodies productive idiosyncrasies (Eisner, 1985). Connoisseurs of teaching are capable of perceiving these qualities and know whether it is being done well or not. Educational
criticism then communicates these perceptions in the public domain to shed light upon the observed aesthetic qualities.

Henderson (2005) considers the interdisciplinary breadth and the humanistic depth of Elliot Eisner’s scholarship to be the shoulders upon which he stands in his conceptualization of transformative curriculum leadership. The later, humanistic depth is captured by Henderson’s commitment to deep democracy “as a way of life characterized by empathy, equity, commitment and connection” (Henderson & Kesson, 2004, p.36). The former, interdisciplinary breadth, is epitomized in his creation of a complex, multi-modal inquiry artistry incorporates critical and poetic reflection into the broader aim of cultivating a love of wisdom that supports deep democracy (Henderson & Hawthorne, 2000; Henderson, 2001a; Henderson & Kesson, 2004). Moreover, Henderson demonstrates the interrelated nature of interdisciplinary breadth and humanistic depth with his broader project of Transformative Curriculum Leadership (TCL), which provides a productive alternative, or at least a qualitative deepening to the Tyler rationale (Henderson & Hawthorne, 2000; Henderson & Gornik, 2007).

Foundational to this effort is the axiom that “human affairs are best conducted through intelligence rather than through either habit or force” (Henderson, 2001a, p.4-5). However, TCL does not disregard the challenges inherent to being caught in a power situation, as Foucault (1980) would remind us we inevitably are. The pervasiveness of technical rationality in schools limits the reflective work of educators to the realm of technical reviews of “competency protocols established by educational researchers” (Henderson & Hawthorne, 2000, p.39). Such complacent bureaucratic ways of living are
never sufficient for the cause of democracy, nor do they cultivate a love of wisdom. Without reflection, teachers can easily fall into enacting the mechanical role of bureaucratic functionaries, often believing that they are doing “good work” because of their compliance to the directives of school authorities. The efforts of well intended, deliberate technical reviewers who are faithful to “an existing situations promised fulfillment (rather than the Lacanian ‘void’ at the heart of all situations)” falter by not heeding Badiou’s (2001) warning of the evil of simulacrum. (den Heyer, 2010, p.2).

Embracing a love of wisdom involves an appreciation for the interrelation of the interdisciplinary breadth and humanistic depth that inform the work. While critical theorists unveil our world’s injustices that are obscured by privilege and ignorance and poetics uncover the more affective aspects of educational experiences, TCL is a professional development challenge of enacting a disciplined form of living that is at once deeply personal and critical. This makes TCL difficult to categorize in the field of curriculum studies. The two major strands in the field are “curriculum understanding” and “curriculum development.” TCL attends to both. Or, perhaps it has created a new discourse in curriculum informed by the void at the heart of both theory and practice.

Despite their invaluable impact, poetic and critical inquiries are insufficient by themselves. Henderson and Kesson (2004) identify “poesis” and “praxis” as two of seven modes of inquiry that are “interdependent, dynamically balanced and synergetic, much like a healthy ecosystem” (p.48). Hyun’s (2006) Teachable Moments shifts early childhood curriculum conversations from developmental and cultural appropriateness based on normative referents of techne, to fostering developmental meaningfulness and
cultural congruence based on multiple interpretations of postmodern praxis and poesis. Recognizing the chaos of infinite difference as the situation that we challenged to move forward within, the art of transformative teaching also moves past technical review to scaffold the journey of teachers to include engagement in creative, caring, critical, contemplative and collegial reflective inquiries. For Henderson and Kesson (2004) the seven modes of inquiry include: techne, poesis, praxis, dialogos, phronesis, polis and theoria.

The archaic Greek names used above are an intentional reminder from the authors of ancient history of the liberal democratic tradition and hermeneutic approach of this inquiry artistry (Henderson & Kesson, 2004). Embedded within this democratic tradition are the intertwined means and the ends of the invention of new curriculum discourse, a love of wisdom, within our contemporary educational situation. Attending broadly and deeply to the multi-faceted elements of teaching, curriculum matters are appraised in fuller ways with recognition of the intellectual, moral and aesthetic qualities. Badiou (2003) writes, “The name culture comes to obliterate that of art” (p.12). Hence, engaging in a complex inquiry artistry to become more responsive to the aesthetic qualities that permeate the work of teachers contesting the audit culture that standardizes and manages instruction. It is a countercultural movement. Driven by Socrates’ notion that honesty, courage and humility are the three best moral qualities that humans are capable of enacting (Hansen, 2001), a contemporary love of democratic wisdom takes place in schools where accountability, compliance and competition reign supreme. Badiou (2003) illustrates the challenge,
What imposes the invention of a new discourse, and of subjectivity that is neither philosophical nor prophetic (the apostle), is precisely that it is only by means of such invention that the event finds a welcome and an existence in language. For established languages, it is inadmissible because it is genuinely unnamable. (p.46)

This elucidates an important distinction between a “reflective teaching artistry with ethical fidelity” and a critical postmodern approach. A key difference is the manner by which democracy is conceptualized. These different understandings of democracy lead to disparate ways of handling the pluralities of understanding associated with cultural diversity as well as people’s complex constructions of identity. Badiou (2001, 2003) and Ranciere (1991) raise concerns about the unintended consequences that group identity brings to well intended postmodern thinkers. “Notwithstanding his or her rejection of the philosopher’s authority to speak for the other, the postmodern intellectual risks forgetting that the other is already speaking, and much too easily condemns him to the sublime silence of suffering” (Mecchia, 2010, p.51).

Critical postmodernists contest the reductionist logic and normalizing forces of the Tyler Rational through the intellect of reflective teaching practices and yearn for the realization of democratic ideals. Yet, an important yet subtle distinction exists between the postmodern or multi-cultural critiques that advocate for each child, such as the example provided by Hyun (2006), and the for all nature of Badiou’s (2001) truth procedure. Both are situated within a certain conception of democracy. Critical theory, postmodernism and multi-cultural projects engage in an ethic of difference that discounts notions of universalisms. Their work often promotes careful and sensitive listening and
responsive approaches to teaching (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; Hyun, 2006). However, the focus upon cultural congruence for each child is “characterized by uncertainty, dissensus, dissymmetry, ambiguities, interruptions, even, as Derrida has said in relation to Levinas’s ethics, impossibilities” (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005, p.81). Badiou (2001) argues that Levinas offers nothing more than “ethics as a category of pious discourse” (p.23).

Badiou’s (2001) ethics of an event recaptures for all truths by seeking out how we are same. Ethical action is no longer based upon deference to an “Altogether Other” and the passive reaction of being responsible for or hospitable to our encounters with infinite differences (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005). Such encounters are simply “just what are” and amidst all of our inevitable differences we are all the same. In other words, according to Badiou (2001), we are all as equally different from each other as we are different from ourselves. Ethical fidelity manifests through perseverance of a becoming subject to remain faithful to events that represent immanent breaks from recognized knowledge. Agency is not about reacting “appropriately” or “congruently,” there is no definitive criterion for such efforts anyway. Instead, ethical fidelity is about active living that maintains committed and faithful to the affirmative invention made possible by an event.

**Ethics of Events in Education**

Badiou (2001) teaches us that the foundations of ethics are not “constituted through its relations with others, or within a symbolically organized horizon” and instead calls us to “privilege the militant subject who rejects all ‘communitarian particularisms’ in the name of her or his fidelity to a truth or an event and the arrival of its entirely unpredictable consequences” (Barbour, 2010, p. 99). Toward this end customary
elements of development such as sexuality, technology, management and culture are laid in direct opposition with his foundations of subjectivity: love, science, politics and art (Badiou, 2003). Consequently, educational research that has illuminated teaching as an inherently moral activity only provides the beginning to a dialogue on ethical fidelity to teaching (Buzzelli & Johnston, 2002; Hansen, 2001; Jackson et al., 1993). Thinking through Badiou, the conception of teaching as innately moral and thus endlessly complex is merely obvious. Exposing the morality being implicitly taught is nothing more than a description of our situation that is steered by a dominant base of knowledge wrought with elements of sexuality, technology, management and culture. Indeed, Buzzelli and Johnston (2002) examine the moral dimensions of teaching through language, power and culture. Badiou’s (2001, 2003) ethics of event challenge becoming subjects to make immanent breaks from the status quo moral knowledge of their situations through art, science, politics and love. It is “immanent because a truth proceeds in a situation” and a “break because… the event meant nothing according to the prevailing language and established knowledge of the situation” (Badiou, 2001, p. 42-43).

Current literature in educational research has not yet made an immanent break from the prevailing language and knowledge of our educational situation. Researchers have made the “moral aspects” of the situation more visible (Buzzelli & Johnston, 2002; Hansen, 2001; Jackson et al., 1993). Not immanent, these are not the accounts of children or practitioners who are proceeding in the situation. However, the intellectual exploration of morality and ethics in education represents in itself an important break from prevailing discourses that depict teaching as a technical affair. Simply being ‘wide
awake’ to elements of the ‘hidden curriculum’ such as morality, in environments that ‘de-skill teachers’ through powerful proletarianization and patriarchal forces is itself a challenge (Apple, 1986/2009; Greene, 1971/2009; Jackson, 1968/1990). “The moral dimensions of teaching are usually hard to see: They do not immediately leap out at you, but need to be carefully traced in the myriad small and seemingly insignificant events and acts that make up classroom interaction” (Buzzelli and Johnston, 2002, p. 157). Noticing the void of the ‘small and seemingly insignificant events’ of the ‘daily grind’ is the catalyst that “compels us to decide a new way of being” (Badiou, 2001, p.41).

Remaining faithful to truth events is the essence of ethical fidelity. There are important elements of ethics of event that have not yet been thoroughly handled in educational literature. For example, Buzzelli and Johnston’s (2002) efforts to reveal “the moral foundations of classroom events and the moral purposiveness of teaching” embraces abundant ambiguity and complexity of classroom interactions. Their concept of purposive moral teaching is a call for moral perception, reflection and imagination that make it “possible to discern and clarify principles that can serve as guides for practice” (p.130). Through these deliberate attempts toward moral perception, reflection and imagination one challenges normative dimensions of teaching practices that “are taken for granted and remain unquestioned (that is, free from the scrutiny of moral reflection)” (Buzzelli & Johnston, 2002, p. 131). Buzzelli and Johnston’s (2002) concerns about the acceptance of normative views without reflection is shared by Badiou (2001, 2003). However, an important distinction made by Badiou (2001) not present in Buzzelli and Johnston (2002) is that events are not mere catalysts for reflection that spark imagination
of complex diversity, as valuable as that attribute might be, but events have the capacity to serve as the catalyst for invention of *for all* truths that are “indifferent to difference” (Badiou, 2001, p.27).

In fact, for a *for all* truth to be worthy of its designation it must in fact be “indifferent to difference.” Badiou (2001) explains, “truth in its invention, is the only thing that is *for all*, so it can actually be achieved only *against* dominant opinions, since these always work for the benefit of some rather than all” (p.32). For, Badiou (2001) the invention of truth happens not because of the way that an event sheds light upon a situation but in the way that it exposes the void within it. While Buzzelli and Johnston (2002) guide their readers to embrace the uncertainties of their complicated situation, Badiou (2001, 2003) suggests that such advice is itself a dangerous normative idea, a “dominant opinion,” represented by ideas such as critical theory, postmodern philosophy and multi-culturalism. Finding a void in this critical, postmodern, multi-cultural situation, Badiou (2001) implores us to consider the same. He writes, “The Same, in effect, is not what is (i.e. the infinite multiplicity of differences) but what *comes to be*” (Badiou, 2001, p. 27). Badiou (2001, 2003) is arguing for an *immanent break* from postmodernism that allows becoming subjects to come to be faithful to material events through the declarations of their truths. This is how we can, in den Heyer’s words “become more than the situation we are” (den Heyer, 2009, p. 442).

Badiou (2001) also offers an argument that “evil is that from which good is derived, not the other way around” (p. 9). Evil is categorized in three forms: betrayal, disaster and simulacrum (Badiou, 2001). For Badiou (2001), evil is a possibility that
abounds our human affairs, such as our systems of education, because the good that can come from truth procedures can drift astray in the form of these three evils. Betrayal is nothing more than “giving up” on a truth process. Disaster occurs when a truth process get warped into a new dominating discourse. Simulacrum is the mistake of “embracing a teleological fantasy of an existing situation’s promised fulfillment,” such as taking on abundant ambiguities of infinite difference as the catalyst for truth inventions (den Heyer, 2010, p.2). In a critique on behaviorist psychology and in defense of his concept of post-conventional moral stages being the pinnacle of moral development, Kohlberg (1981) was equally concerned about what he called a logical fallacy of using “what already is” as a basis for considering what “out to be.” Now Badiou (2001) directs us away from “what already is” (infinite difference) and toward the void that is in every situation. Kesson and Henderson (2010) explain, “Badiou situates his ethics at the edge of the ‘void’- at the edge of an ‘I don’t know’ that recedes into infinity” (p.71).

Engaging with the world as a diverse, complex place filled with uncertainty is no longer a puzzle to solve but an obvious reality of our circumstances to which we must become cognizant. Kesson and Henderson (2010) are models for how one can be intellectually accustomed to living in situations that are “always already, leaking into infinity” with their practical advice that, “we cannot be wise; we can only engage in a disciplined love of wisdom” (p.71). Engaging in a disciplined love of wisdom will be discussed more thoroughly in the next section. Yet, it is important, at this point to remember that Badiou (2001, 2003) raises science, art, love and politics as the disciplined ways of loving wisdom. David Hansen (2004) conceptualizes of “a poetics of teaching”
that fuses the intellectual, aesthetic and moral aspects of classroom practices. Curriculum wisdom advanced through transformative curriculum leadership is a sustained project working toward a disciplined love of wisdom that will also be a key referent in the next section on reflective curriculum practices (Henderson & Hawthorne, 2001; Henderson & Kesson, 2004; Henderson & Gornik, 2007).

Applying a disciplined love of wisdom to educational endeavors is a rigorous undertaking that involves teachers acting as what Pinar (2009) called “passionate public servants.” Teaching as a form of passionate public service is “the art of thus giving shape to human powers and adapting them to social service is the supreme art; one calling into its service the best of the artist; that no insight, sympathy, executive power, is too great for such service” (Dewey, 2009, p.40). Hansen (2004) explains “a poetics calls attention to how teaching can enrich the life of the teacher, even as he or she seeks to deepen and broaden the knowledge, understanding, and outlook of students” however he also warns that the rewards of this love of wisdom “emerges only if the teacher is receptive to it” (p.119). Henderson and Gornik (2007) concur in that the professional artistry of transformative curriculum leadership is invitational in nature to motivated educators interested in cultivating the disciplined openness of a life-long journey of understanding, a love of wisdom.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has drawn upon literature in various strands of educational and cultural studies to situate this research among extant scholarship. The research problem as well as the key concepts of the proposed research are clarified and contextualized by
the literature review provided above. In the next chapter, I will introduce a methodology for the purpose of shedding light upon “ethical fidelity” (Badiou, 2001) expressed through the truth telling stories of six public school early childhood teachers’ “transactions” (Dewey & Bentley, 1949) with dominant “cultures of curriculum” (Joseph, 2011).
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This research is a critical qualitative inquiry using a bricolage approach to apprehend “ethical fidelity” (Badiou, 2001) expressed through the truth telling stories of six public school early childhood teachers’ “transactions” (Dewey & Bentley, 1949) with dominant “cultures of curriculum” (Joseph, 2011). As will be clarified below, the notion of truth telling, which is central to each of the research questions, is derived from the singular subjectivity of an individual’s experience and universally addressed for all.

Setting out to study teachers’ truth telling stories, necessitates the decision to engage in a detailed examination and thick description of a small sample of four to six practitioners, rather than deducing individualized implications from the broad analysis of a larger sample.

I used a critical bricolage approach to this critical study based upon Kincheloe’s (2001) suggestion that the bricolage enables one to “make use of positive contributions of disciplines while avoiding disciplinary parochialism and domination” (p. 684). An eclectic, as well as a creative approach to inquiry, bricolage values the diverse knowledge and understandings produced from both social science and humanities-based research. At the same time, the bricolage maintains a critical stance, vigilantly concerned about how any solitary basis of generating knowledge and understanding can devolve into what Badiou (2003) terms a “discourse regime” subordinating practitioners’ subjective position.
Critical Bricolage

Kincheloe, McLaren and Steinberg (2011) contend that a project that, “aspires to the name ‘critical’ must be connected to an attempt to confront the injustice of a particular society or public sphere within society” (p.164). Further, the authors aspire toward critical research distinguished by two attributes that Yvonna Lincoln (2001) deems to be essential to the work of bricoleurs: a commitment to methodologically eclectic research practices that unfold in relationship to contextual circumstances; and an engagement with Foucauldian genealogy/archeology of the disciplines. Studying stories of teacher’s personal and professional lives, I am interested in taking a critical look at the complex reality of early childhood curriculum practice without engaging in either oversimplification or unending criticism. Examining teachers’ truth telling, I am interested in the pragmatic utility and the liberating potential of ideas teachers hold to be true, which are not promulgated by a hegemonic regime; but invoked by their experiential encounters. Furthermore, as a critical bricoleur, I am mindful of the necessity to develop coherence between the methodology I used to analyze curriculum practice and the metaphysical stance that informs the way I construe reality. Alain Badiou’s (2001, 2003) concepts of truth processes and ethical fidelity have been employed as the analytical tools to interpret stories of early childhood curriculum practice. Ryan’s (2011) explanation of John Dewey’s transactional perspective informed an apprehension of the complex existential reality of early childhood curriculum practice. Next, I will clarify the logical consistency among the transactional perspective of reality, the analytical tools and the critical bricolage methodology that undergird this research.
Transactional Knowing, Democratic Ontology, and Ethical Fidelity

Frank Ryan’s (2011) recent explanation of John Dewey’s (1949) transactional perspective provides the interpretation of reality that informed the methodology of this study. Dewey’s metaphysical assertion, according to Ryan (2011), is “that the experienced world is the real world, and not some supposed existence in itself beyond experience in us” (p.51). Dewey’s transactional view rejects contemporary realists’ dual notions of unattainable mind-independent realities of empiricism and rationalism, as well as the corresponding consensus-based determinism. Additionally, for a transactional knower, the worldly complexities observed by postmodernists are no longer matters of individualized perspective that lead to tendencies toward existential nihilism or ethical relativism. From Dewey’s transactional perspective, reality “is what it is experienced as- a metaphysical claim about existence” (Ryan, 2011, p.44) that empowers subjects with the agency to engage in the valuation of the reality that they have experienced and/or are experiencing. Thus, the transactional knower works to actively shape the reality that affects their daily experiences.

My decision to employ a bricolage approach was also informed by Joe L. Kincheloe’s (2003, 2005) scholarly insights that have emphasized ontology. St. Pierre (2011) defines ontology as, “the branch of metaphysics concerned with what exists (what ‘is’), with being and reality and how entities are organized” (p.615). My interest in taking a critical look at the complex reality of early childhood curriculum practice is akin to Kincheloe et al.’s (2011) description of the bricolage. The authors underscore their
description of the bricolage emphasizing notions of “critical ontology” (Kincheloe, 2003) as well as a “double ontology of complexity” (Kincheloe, 2005; Kincheloe et al., 2011).

Construing reality to be polyvalent and in flux, this study resonates with Kincheloe’s (2005) conception of a double ontology of complexity: “first, the complexity of objects of inquiry and their being-in-the-world; second, the nature of the social construction of human subjectivity, the production of human being” (p.334).

Additionally, this research sees eye to eye with Kincheloe et al.’s (2011) defining characteristics of critical inquiry: aiming to be used as a form of social criticism, confronting pervasive injustice in the public sphere of early childhood curriculum practice in the United States “unembarrassed by the label ‘political’ and unafraid to consummate a relationship with emancipatory consciousness” (p. 164). However, the transactional metaphysical perspective and the analytical tools used in this research differ from Kincheloe’s (2003) brand of criticality.

Kincheloe’s (2003) vision of a critical ontological stance aims to enable curriculum workers to become more conscious of how they came to be as they are and why they think as they do. With Kincheloe’s (2003) critical ontology the, “line between knowledge production and being is blurred, as the epistemological and the ontological converge around questions of identity” (p. 49). The version of criticality offered by Kincheloe et al. (2011) is grounded in a refined interpretation of the “post-discourses,” centering around the impact social and historical forces have on the way individuals understand themselves and the world. True to their philosophy, Kincheloe et al. (2011) are explicit that their particular way of fusing complex and critical ontological positions
offers one contemporary subjective analysis of criticality. The authors qualify this
disclaimer with an invitation for disagreement and proliferation of multiple critical
perspectives. While finding invaluable guidance in Kincheloe et al.’s (2011) leadership
in critical research, this study maintains critical distance from the “post-discourse”
doctrine and concept of ethical fidelity were utilized as analytical tools.

William Pinar (2013) has recently written that reproduction and resistance- the key
concepts of the reconceptualization, which have focused upon matters of language, power
and cultural identities are now intellectually exhausted. The determinacy discourse, the
predominance of hegemony and the multiplicity of perspectives inherent to an infinitely
diverse humanity are established ideas among curriculum theorists. However, Pinar
(2013) contends that notions of social reproduction and political resistance have become
theoretical abstractions, removed from the public sphere and lacking influence in the
realities of daily practice. Offering an alternative to “post-discourse” criticality, this
study applies key concepts of Alain Badiou’s philosophical project highlighting the
material specificities of lived experience to apprehend ontological and ethical aspects of
curriculum practice.

The Critical Bricoleur

In their introductory chapter of the latest edition of *The Sage Handbook of
Qualitative Research* Denzin & Lincoln (2011) suggest that a “qualitative researcher may
be seen as a bricoleur, as a maker of quilts, or in filmmaking, a person who assembles
images into montages” (p.4) In the same volume Kincheloe et al. (2011) elaborate, “the
critical researcher-as-bricoleur abandons the quest for some naïve concept of realism, focusing instead on the clarification of his or her position in the web of reality and the social locations of other researchers and the ways they shape the production and interpretation of knowledge” (p.168). In the spirit of the evolving criticality of the bricolage that encourages hybridity, I embrace my multiple responsibilities as a curriculum worker. Therefore, I have included autobiographical stories of my experiences as a public school kindergarten teacher in the data collection process. However, I have simultaneously rejected labels of hybridity, such as teacher/researcher scholar/teacher (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Kincheloe et al., 2011) that imply the desire of egalitarian partnerships between the intellectual emancipator who supports curriculum inquiry and the emancipated workers whose inquiries are supported. For Badiou (2001), the infinite ways our differences can be described through culturally inscribed social assignations is obvious and not a worthwhile point of departure for declaring truth with a universal address. Therefore, our sameness is the focal point and our equality is assumed, not desired. The interest we share of making our common curriculum aim of benefitting all children a reality in classroom practice renders positions of status meaningless, as every person shares an equal capacity to become subject to their own truth process.

In studying public school early childhood teachers’ truth telling narratives, I am interested in calling attention to our steadfastness to actively shaping the reality of our own professional practice, as our contextualizing situation concurrently influences us. Examining our personal and professional stories, I have created a mosaic representation
of our various declarations of truth events and the corresponding ethical commitments implicated in our professional lives. As a critical bricoleur grounded in Badiou’s notion of truth telling, I appreciate the importance conceptualizing truth as a process, specifying the metaphysical and ontological axioms for construing reality, and the ethical fidelity of critical pedagogues as essential dimensions of this research. Each of these essential dimensions will be further clarified below.

**Truth Processes in the (Post)Modern World**

Truth is important but often neglected concept in contemporary thought traditions (Frankfurt, 2006). On one hand, contemporary realists deem truth claims to be mere approximations of an mind-independent reality (Ryan, 2011). On the other, critical postmodern responses rejection of an objective reality refutes all truth claims as matters of perspective (Frankfurt, 2006; Ryan, 2011). However, Frankfurt (2006) insists that experiential facts implicate, “a dimension of reality into which even the boldest- or the laziest- indulgence of subjectivity cannot dare to intrude” (p. 26). Kincheloe et al. (2011) clarify their position on truth the following way

Critical research traditions have arrived at the point where they recognize that claims to truth are always discursively situated and implicated in relations of power. We do not suggest that because we cannot know truth absolutely, truth can simply be equated with and effect of power. We say this because truth involves regulative rules that must be met for some statements to be more meaningful than others. Otherwise, truth becomes meaningless and, if that is the
case, liberatory praxis has no purpose other than to win for the sake of winning (p.172)

Alain Badiou’s (2001, 2003) philosophical project provides the regulative rules of truth claims for this study. Badiou (2001, 2003) conceptualized the notion that truth is a process that begins with a significant event; and that an individual becomes subject to a truth process by declaring the truth of an event and then by being faithful to this declaration. Badiou (2003) explains that there are four “requirements of truth as universal singularity” (p.14). First, becoming subject to a truth process necessarily begins with an event rendering authoritative status from all preceding social assignations insignificant. This is an axiomatic claim that implies all people are equally capable of becoming subject to a truth process. Secondly, truth is entirely subjective causing it to be unable to be substantiated by recognized laws of or knowledge. Thus, it initiates a new discourse through the naming of the truth of an event and hence the possibility of new possibilities. Third, truth is manifest from an enlivening three pronged fidelity process of declaration, militant address and a dislodgment from the status quo. This process of triumphant self-creative affirmation is distinctly not a clarification of the details of an incident or an explanation of an experience. Finally, truth is indifferent to the abundant opinions that constitute the state of the situation. After all, the copious opinions of the situation are nothing more than the culturally and technologically infused and hegemonic imposed knowledge and polices that precede the event.

As mentioned above, Badiou (2003) names three important components that constitute the subjective process of maintaining fidelity to a truth’s declaration. After
experiencing an event, the becoming subject is infused with a faithful conviction at “the point of declaration.” Defying the securities of calculated knowledge that dominates the situation, to declare possible an unheard of possibility of a truth is indeed a risky enterprise that can only be initiated with faith and conviction. Next, the convictions of this declared truth is carried out through subject’s loving militant address. As will be discussed in further detail below, Badiou (2001) is adamant that a subject’s militant address must avoid three forms of evil: simulacrum, betrayal and terror. Then, a hopeful sense of certainty characterizes the subject “according to the force of displacement conferred upon him through the assumption of the truth procedure’s completed character” (Badiou, 2003, p.15). A subject’s faithful conviction, charitable love and hopeful certainty is essential because, as Badiou (2003) reminds us, declaring the truth of an event is necessarily without proof or visibility among the known discourses; and hence “emerges at that point where knowledge, be it empirical or conceptual, breaks down” (p.45).

The complexity and worldliness of an object of inquiry, which for our purposes is early childhood curriculum practice, comprises the first component of Kincheloe’s (2005) double ontology of complexity. The metaphysical and ontological groundings of our object of inquiry, early childhood curriculum practice, have been widely circumvented by contemporary thought traditions. The mind-independent reality of contemporary realist points of view offers only approximations of truth, restricted by the limitations of human beings sensory perceptions or intellectual capacities (Ryan, 2011). On the other hand, postmodern viewpoints do not provide a basis for which a statement can be held true; but
in fact reject truth altogether. According to Ryan (2011), postmodern perspectives consider metaphysics a hopeless enterprise and Frankfurt (2006) explains that, “postmodernists rebelliously and self-righteously deny that truth has any genuinely objective reality at all” (p. 18). Therefore, truth about early childhood curriculum practice is typically either broadly disregarded by postmodernists as conceptually untenable or prefaced by realists with the phrase “as far as we know.”

The nature of reality is defined in this study by Dewey and Bentley’s (1949) metaphysical assertion that “experience… must be converted from the subjective domain of the knower into a whole inclusive of knower and known” (Ryan, 2011, p.44). Dewey’s logic usurped without abandoning fundamental questions of being and existence. This transactional metaphysical stance is put in dialogue with Alain Badiou’s ontological position. For Badiou, there is one humanity, and two disjunctive positions of experience with no third position of an omniscient moral narrator (Jottkandt, 2010). The first position of experience, from the void of a situation, a subject can formulate, declare and take up a subjective truth through art, science, love or politics. The second position of experience, from the plentitude of a situation, a subject can gain knowledge or understanding through the abundance of culture, technology, sex, and management. New possibilities for good ways of being early childhood educators generated through experimentation, artistic creativity, amorous encounters and political advocacy can potentially be garnered through attending to the first position of human experience.
Ethical Fidelity

The second component of Kincheloe’s (2005) double ontology of complexity is concerned with the socially constructed aspects of subjectivity. The social construction of subjectivity in curriculum theory and practice has been thoroughly documented by reconceptualists’ key concepts of reproduction and resistance (Pinar, 2013). Speaking on behalf of contemporary reconceptualists of curriculum, Pinar (2012) writes

curriculum theorists do not regard our task as directing teachers to apply theory to practice, a form of professional subordination, in positions (as southern Baptists once described wives’ relations to their husbands) of ‘gracious submission’.

Rather, curriculum theorists in the university regard our pedagogical work as the cultivation of independence of mind, self-reflexivity, and an interdisciplinary erudition. (p.85)

Yet, Pinar (2012) is also quick to point out that under the guise of “accountability” corporate interests and policy makers continuously ensure that “like the public schools, schools of education are forced into positions of gracious submission” (p.97). Forces of law and taken for granted knowledge do not necessarily cause the subjectivity stultifying dutiful acquiescence to taken for granted moral absolutes. Badiou (2003) challenges, “Grace, consequently, is not a ‘moment’ of the Absolute. It is affirmation without preliminary negation; it is what comes upon us in caesura of the law. It is pure and simple encounter” (p.66). Following anti-philosophers such as Saint Paul and Nietzsche, Badiou (2003) contends that gracious experiences are neither encounters with the supernaturally divine, nor the grounds for unfettered relativism. He writes
let us posit that it is incumbent upon us to found a materialism of grace through the strong, simple idea that every existence can one day be seized by what happens to it and subsequently devote itself to that which is valid for all, or as Paul magnificently put it, *become all things to all men.* (Badiou, 2003, p.66)

An active and faithful commitment to a truth event, invoked by a materialism of grace must be guarded against *le mal*, loosely translated as evil (Badiou, 2001). Evil can come in three forms: simulacrum, betrayal and terror (Badiou, 2001). Simulacrum is the evil of being faithful to the abundance of a situation rather than the void. Simulacrum is being faithful to the abundant cultural, technological and managerial conditions serves the conservative function of preserving the situation as it is. Betrayal is essentially giving up on the truth of the event and giving in to the powerful hegemonic forces. Terror is being an arrogant or self-interested demander of a truth that impedes upon the freedom of others to become subject of their own truth processes. A crucial part of Badiou’s (2001) conception of ethical fidelity is being cognizant that the pathway to hell can be lead by good intentions in these three ways. Badiou (2001) warns that well intended subjects often engage in the evils of simulacrum by being typical; betrayal by being without perseverance; and terror by being supercilious.

At the crux of Badiou’s (2001,2012) description of *le mal* is his insistence that the virtue of an egalitarian norm is the primary regulative rule of a truth process. The *for all* principle of democracy is foundational “at the source and endpoint of philosophy” (Badiou, 2012, p.36). Attentive to the centrality of identity, “post-discourse” doggedly defend individuality and freedom of opinion in a justice depraved society. Democracy, at
the source of philosophy, recognizes the universal capacity of every individual, regardless of their socially constructed status, to generate ideas and affirmatively invent truths. However, while philosophy is for all people and all people are equally capable of declaring a truth unknown and unarticulated in the world; not all ideas, assertions are of equal value. The equality and universality of the choices and consequences that correspond with a given idea evaluate the virtue of a truth process at the endpoint of philosophy. Next, I will explain how my research questions engage in an ontological-ethical inquiry, axiomatically assuming equality at both the source and address of philosophy.

Research Questions

Engaging in a critical bricolage, my inquiry into the truth telling stories of public school early childhood educators is concerned with both particulars located in the lived experiences of each individual teacher as well as the common generalities germane to being situated in an American public school context. Accordingly, I have created two main research questions. The first highlights the singular subjectivity foundational to the universal address of any truth process, as described by Badiou (2001, 2003, 2012a, 2012b). The second question underscores the challenges Badiou (2001; 2012a) considers inevitable if one is being true to egalitarian norms and democratic virtues of a truth process. As I introduce these two primary research question and their supporting questions below, I will explain how each question has been carefully constructed to elucidate early childhood curriculum work through an ontological-ethical lens of complexity and criticality informed by Badiou’s conceptualization of truth telling.
The Foundations of Truth: Singular Subjectivity and Material Grace

The first primary research question asks, “What are the truth telling stories of six early childhood educators who embody the transactional knowing of democratic virtues in curriculum practice?” The examination of teachers’ truth processes accentuates both the ontological and ethical domains of professional artistry in important ways. As transactional embodiments of the realities of curriculum work, teachers’ practical experiences provide a sense of material specificity and thus an ontological grounding. Additionally, the for all quality of democratic virtues offers an evaluative criteria- an egalitarian norm- for appreciating curriculum work as an inherently ethical enterprise (Hansen, 2001) at the onset of truth process. Furthermore, this question is supplemented by two supporting questions.

The first supporting question asks, “What events are described in the teacher’s narratives that invoke the ethical fidelity of a truth process?” Searching for events that invoke fidelity rather than acquiescing to authority figures or the conventions of professional knowledge is the point of departure for any truth process in reference to the conceptual framework. Events, as such, are material encounters with grace that inspire “the self-overcoming, self-creating individual, who forges new values, who makes and artwork out of his life” (Conard, 2001, p.73). Gracious submission to, “moments of the Absolute” (Badiou, 2003, p.66) promulgate the abundance of subordinate, unimaginative, compliant individuals who are inculcated to conform to public school life. Demands from signs of authority and questions answered by monolithic, reductionist descriptions of cosmic order are characteristic of gracious submission to moments of the Absolute, a
non-reflective experience of curriculum practice. Declarations of the truth of an event are distinguished by a material encounter with grace that cannot be articulated with a hegemonic discourse regime. One who is seized by an event and declares its truth creatively makes an immanent break from hegemony infused discourse regimes and generates an affirmation of life with newfound possibilities for reflectively experiencing curriculum practice.

The second supporting question asks, “What subjective truths are declared within the narratives and how are those truths realized in accounts of daily teaching practices?” This question explores the actual truth claims and the corresponding curriculum actions those truths attach to reality of daily practice. In Badiou’s (2012b) terms, by declaring the truth of an event a becoming subject name, “what is actually the collective presentation of humanity…” or “the fact that, over and above their vital interests, human animals are capable of bringing into being justice, equality and universality” (p.87). Additionally, this question connects the ideas of one’s declaration rooted in the singularity of a particular event to her localized tactics critical democratic curriculum action and the corresponding universality of her militant address to curriculum workers everywhere. For a becoming subject, being seized by an event is not only an intellectual exercise, but also the foundation for carrying on differently in the situation; through both word and deed.

Truth’s Consequences: Virtues of Justice

The second primary research question asks, “How do teachers’ declarations of truth and corresponding actions extend beyond the “cultures of curriculum” (Joseph,
2011), *which contextualizes their work?* The examination of public school teachers’ truth processes and particularly their fidelity to the truth of events are necessarily contextualized by dominant discourses perpetuated in American public schools. As transactional embodiments of the realities of curriculum work, teachers of young children can be invoked to reflect upon and consider new possibilities for practice by an evental encounter. However, the vicissitudes of engaging in such reflective artistry are often challenged by the allure of quick fixes, easy answers and maintaining congenial relations among co-workers. This set of questions seeks to illuminate the democratic qualities of truth processes primarily at the endpoint of truth telling process.

The first supporting question asks, “With reference to the participants’ experiences in their respective “cultures of curriculum” (Joseph, 2011), how do they perceive their “ethical fidelity?” In particular, do they feel they are persevering?” This question underscores Badiou’s (2001) assertion truth manifests from the void and not the abundance of the dominant situation. Badiou (2001, 2003) is clear that the conditions of a truth process- art, science, politics and love- work against the dominance of culture, technology, management and sexuated positions. Thus, being faithful to a truth process in the context of a public school is a counter-cultural endeavor that contradicts technologies of knowledge used for managing standardized curriculum. Furthermore, ethical fidelity to the truth of an event defies the gendered positions of “gracious submission,” which often oppress curriculum workers. This question concentrates upon democracy as a form of action; “a means for finding the political truth” (Badiou, 2012, p.35).
The second supporting question asks, “How do the truth telling narratives express teachers’ guarding against or succumbing to the ills of betrayal, disaster and simulacrum?” This question explores the vicissitudes a teacher of young children will likely experience by choosing to remain faithful to an encounter with grace rather than assuming a position of gracious submission. In the midst of an oppressive policy environment and pervasive reductionism, the daily challenges of ethical fidelity can become overwhelming. Badiou (2001) is clear that ideas satisfy the axiom of equality at the point of address only by avoiding three existential problems: betraying one’s truth to conform to hegemonic expectations; finding fulfillment of one’s truth in a monolithic discourse extant to the abundantly corrupt situation; or when one’s truth process liberates oneself but precludes the liberation of others. Here, the militant address of a truth process is held to an egalitarian norm and evaluated for its virtues of being democratic or its vices of corruption or terror.

**Participant Selection**

I have been a public school kindergarten teacher for over a decade in northeast Ohio. During my professional career, I have been a graduate student and mentor to numerous student teachers. I have also been an instructor and teaching assistant for graduate level courses. Therefore, in addition to building collegial relationships within my own school building and district, I have enjoyed interacting and befriending diverse public school early childhood educators in a variety of settings. Informal conversations among “teacher-friends” often lead to the unguarded sharing of personal and professional stories. Hence, over the course of time, I have shared my research interests with many of
my “teacher-friends”; garnering a range of responses. Public school early childhood educators, who express interest in critical perspectives and a willingness to bend bureaucratic rules to benefit children, were invited to participate in the study.

Six public school early childhood educators, including myself, expressed a provisional interest in participating in this study. Two individuals that expressed interest have been co-workers at my school; one formerly and the other currently. These two teachers are teaching colleagues with similar job descriptions as mine and I have never held any form of positional authority in our work relationships. I became acquainted with the other potential participants through other forms of professional activity. Serving as a “mentor teacher” for one prospective participant during his student teaching experience and acting as the course instructor for another during her graduate coursework temporarily placed me in an authoritative role with two participants. At the time of the research, the student teaching assignment and the course had been completed and I was no longer in a position of authority with either participant. A fifth early childhood educator was identified by a university professor as demonstrating critical and creative insights and exceptional dedication to reflective practice.

As alluded to above, I chose to include myself as one of the six research participants for three reasons. First of all, it is important to point out that I met all of the criteria for participant selection throughout the duration of the study. Secondly, my decision to include an autobiographical component to this research is consistent with the propensities for boundary blurring inherent to critical bricolage methodology. I adamantly value the solidarity of egalitarian partnerships among early childhood
curriculum practitioners, a group with whom I identify myself. Towards this end, I am intentional in contesting pastoral relations associated with assigning identities to myself and others that distinguish who is a researcher and who is being researched. Third, as a critical bricoleur, incorporating an autobiographical component to this study serves a reflexive purpose. Rather than carrying out traditional researchers’ proclivities to “cling to the guardrail of neutrality,” and veiling the affect of my interpretative and representational decisions; I instead followed the lead of critical researchers who openly, “announce their partisanship in the struggle for a better world” (Kincheloe et al., 2011, p.164).

Creswell (2007) explains that qualitative researchers utilize the concept of purposeful sampling by selecting, “individuals and sites for study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study” (p.125). In the process of selecting six public school early childhood educators, I employed various qualitative sampling strategies. One strategy, convenience sampling, is often criticized as lacking credibility (Creswell, 2007; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Indeed, being a full-time public school teacher, not only qualified me as a participant in my own study; but also made choosing participants who are in close proximity and readily available a necessity for feasibility purposes. However, my professional activities, as a public school kindergarten teacher, enabled me to bring a unique and I would contend advantageous vantage point to this study.

As I looked to gain access to early childhood educators’ earnest expressions of their perspectives on curriculum work in American public schools, I was not doing so as
a “stranger” or “outsider.” Furthermore, I had an existing sense of rapport between myself and the other participants. This sense of rapport resulted from relationships where my primary role had been that of a colleague/friend; a more intimate alternative to researcher/expert. With the convenience of selecting participants with whom I am already acquainted, came the accessibility/rapport benefits of them already being acquainted with me and recognizing me as one of them; a peer with whom viewpoints can be expressed authentically and candidly. To further promote sincerity and openness in the sharing of individual’s perspectives all data collection took place outside of our places of employment.

In addition to choosing participants who were in close proximity and readily available, I also made use of criterion and variation sampling (Creswell, 2007; Miles & Huberman, 1994) as strategies for choosing participants. The criterion for considering prospective participants was twofold. First the individual had to be a public school teacher of young children, defined as teaching grades k-3, in a public school setting. Secondly, early childhood educators were chosen to participate in the study because of an overt demonstration of their willingness to the bend rules of their dominant “culture of curriculum” (Joseph, 2011) for the purpose of benefitting children. Desiring variability among participants, I intentionally selected both male and female teachers of young children who work in both urban and suburban public school settings. Additionally, one of the participants is a special educator who teaches deaf children. Characteristics of the six participants are outlined in Table 1.
# Table 1

**Characteristics of Participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name (Pseudonym)</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Years of full time teaching in a public school</th>
<th>Educational Background</th>
<th>Ethnicity and Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bonita</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>2nd grade teacher</td>
<td>14 years &amp; previous experience substitute teaching</td>
<td>B.S. Criminal Justice</td>
<td>Euro-American female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 Suburban school</td>
<td></td>
<td>B.S. Elementary Education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dan</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Kindergarten Teacher</td>
<td>15 years</td>
<td>B.S. ECE</td>
<td>Euro-American male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2 schools in same suburban district</td>
<td></td>
<td>M. Ed ECE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenna</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>3rd grade teacher &amp; previously 2nd grade</td>
<td>13 years &amp; previous experience tutoring</td>
<td>B.S. ECE</td>
<td>Euro-American female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2 schools in 1 suburban district</td>
<td></td>
<td>M. Ed Literacy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joey</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>3rd grade &amp; previously Kindergarten</td>
<td>6 years &amp; previous experience tutoring</td>
<td>B.S. ECE</td>
<td>Euro-American male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2 schools in 1 Urban district</td>
<td></td>
<td>M. Ed ECE/Literacy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>K-3 deaf education</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>B.S. Deaf Education</td>
<td>Euro-American female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3 Urban districts in 2 states.</td>
<td></td>
<td>M. Ed ECE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stacy</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>Kindergarten teacher</td>
<td>20 years &amp; previous experience in a private school.</td>
<td>B.S. ECE</td>
<td>Euro-American female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 suburban school</td>
<td></td>
<td>M. Ed Literacy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher Leader Endorsement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Data Collection**

The critical bricolage methodology of this research incorporates a variety of approaches to qualitative inquiry, using interviews as the primary source of data collection. Blending the genres of narrative, phenomenological and ethnographic inquiry is my particular rendering of an attempt to, “capture the evolving hybridity endemic to contemporary critical analysis” (Kincheloe et al., 2011, p.164). The impetus for exploring teachers’ truth telling stories in this multi-perspective fashion was to garner ontological and ethical insights of early childhood curriculum practice. Attending to my main and supporting research questions necessitates the simultaneous study of teachers’ individual narratives, the phenomenon of engaging in practical wisdom needed to enact critical democratic pedagogy and the contextualizing culture of American public schooling. With this genre blurring in mind, I met face-to-face with each participant three times over the course of four months to collect data. I also concurrently engaged in an autobiographical inquiry by reflecting with other participants and writing a currere narrative (Pinar, 2012).

**Interviews**

This research encompassed three data collection sessions, including both in-depth and oral history methods of interviewing (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006). The first two interviews were broadly focused with open-ended questions (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The third interview employed a more narrowly focused semi-structured format raising more specific questions related to the themes, concepts and patterns deciphered from the previous interviews (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2006) explain that
in-depth interviewing “assumes that individuals have unique and important knowledge about the social world that is ascertainable through verbal communication” (p.119). From a transactional perspective, the reality of public school early childhood curriculum practice is only accessible only through those experiencing its practice. Through the intimacy of real experiences, teachers of young children in American public schools have unique and important knowledge that enable them to engage in truth telling, as a form of professional ethics. Infusing an oral history interview into the study recognizes that ethical fidelity to a truth process is not derived purely from professional knowledge and ethical commitments garnered from classroom experience; but rather often come to be “as a part of their life process” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006, p.152).

Each of the three data collection sessions were structured employing Rubin and Rubin’s (2005) concept of “responsive interviewing,” endeavoring to develop “conversational partnerships” between myself and the interviewees. This method of data collection underscores my interest in building of collegial relationships where, “issues of mutual interest are explored in depth” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 128). From critical bricoleur vantage point, Kincheloe et al. (2011) draw upon Paulo Freire’s invariable commitment of, “involving people he studied as partners in the research process” (p.164). Freire ensured that everyone engaged in his research “joined in the process of investigation, examination, criticism, and reinvestigation…” and through such partnerships were invited to, “see more critically, think at a more critical level, and to recognize the forces that subtly shape their lives” (Kincheloe et al., 2011, p.164). These
qualities of responsiveness and partnership are important to this study because they are consistent with the axiom of equality that is foundational to my conceptual framework.

Ethnographic interpretive and elaborated case study strategies of interviewing were employed in the first interview to initiate a broadly focused examination of early childhood teachers’ curriculum practices in American public schools. Rubin & Rubin’s (2005) concept of ethnographic interpretive interviews will be employed to elucidate how selected early childhood educators understand the culture of public school curriculum practice that contextualizes their work. Questions will ask participants to “describe the key norms rules, symbols, values, traditions, and rituals” of their school community and explain “how they fit together” to influence daily practices (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 7). Upholding the principles of conversational partnerships germane to a responsive interview approach I drafted preliminary questions, but was also interested in issues and topics that teachers choose to share, which I had not anticipated.

Rubin and Rubin’s (2005) concept of elaborated case study interviews were also used as a strategy during the first interview. The elaborated case study approach revealed how participants experience what they define as their community of practice. Questions focused upon what in reality happens, why it happens as it does, and what are the broader meanings ascribed to these happenings. Additionally, I was very interested in listening to participants discuss their ways of negotiating tensions between their critically informed daily practices and normative understandings encountered within their public school community.
Beginning with ethnographic and case study interviews gained some insights into the situation that contextualizes participants’ daily curriculum practices and their particular ways of engaging with that situation. The first interview transpired in a casual setting, where it was audio recorded. Interview conversations did not exceed two hours. Participants were offered a transcription of the conversation and invited to submit clarifications and further comments.

Life history interviewing was employed in the second interview to initiate a broadly focused examination of deeply personal qualities of the images, beliefs and commitments that participants bring to their professional practices. Rubin & Rubin’s (2005) conception of life history interviews were employed to shed light upon significant events of participants’ lives that underscore their way of being early childhood educators. Life history questions guided participants to “provide a narrative about the stages of their life, their childhood, education, jobs, marriages and divorces, children, illnesses, and other crises they have weathered, as well as the good times” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 8). Follow up questions strove to inquire into what assertions participants hold to be true as a result of experiencing these significant life events. Furthermore, we conversed about ways that we can infer that these truths are or could be upheld in the context of early childhood curriculum practice.

Again, each interview was audio recorded and was approximately one to two hours in length. Participants were offered a transcription of the life history conversation. Participants were invited to rejoinder with clarifying remarks, and further comment on their perception of the relationship between events shared in their life history interview
and their professional practice. Sensitive to the deeply personal nature of this content, I made myself available to participants for additional face-to-face meetings or telephone conversations.

An exit interview concluded the data collection process. The exit interview had a more narrow scope, focusing on the potential consequences of maintaining fidelity to participants’ truth processes. Participants were asked to reflect upon their own personal challenges of ethical fidelity in professional practice. Additionally, participants and I collaboratively imagined the declaration of their truth as a form of mass political action. Participants were invited to respond with clarifying remarks and comments twice. Their first opportunity to reply was at the time that they receive the transcription of our conversation. I again invited their rejoinder to a statement of my analysis of their truth process.

**Autobiographical Component: Currere Composition**

As mentioned above, this study possesses an autobiographical component. Pinar’s (2012) method of currere composition was used to draw attention to the “temporal structure of the autobiographical- that is, self-situated- study of educational experience” (p.105). Incorporating my currere narrative into this study inquired about the mutual influence of my academic studies, including this dissertation research, and my experiential understandings of daily curriculum practice on my ongoing self-formation. The method of currere has four steps: the regressive, the progressive, the analytical, and the sythetical (Pinar, 2012). These four steps guide one to re-experience the past, look forward toward what is not yet, determine ways that the past is infused in our present
situation as well as our future aspirations, and finally address one’s present situation as a passionate public servant. Including a currere narrative provides a detailed account of my own truth processes innate to this research project as well as my daily curriculum practices. Furthermore, the currere method galvanizes my free indirect subjectivity, as I endeavored to express the early childhood educators’ truth telling narratives through this research project. Pinar (2012) explains this as a form of political intransigence, “ensuring boundaries between self and subject matter would not remain blurred but creatively redrawn as they were portrayed in public” (p.112).

Working “from within,” the writing of a currere composition can ensue at anytime. For the purpose of this study, the writing of my currere narrative was carried out throughout the process of data collection and analysis. Drafts were periodically shared with the advisory team of this project. Consciously cultivating “conversational partnerships” between myself and participants, as is explained above, I also shared portions of my currere with other participants. This sharing was done conversationally, mostly in verbal rather than written form.

**Data Analysis**

Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2006) explain the analysis and interpretation in qualitative data as the process of turning my observations into intelligible accounts. Empirical observations collected throughout the study were prepared for analysis by audio-recording and transcribing interview conversations, writing research memos and collecting drafts of my currere narrative. Moreover, analysis and interpretation transpired throughout the process of collecting and preparing of data. Analyzing data as it is
collected and prepared is a well documented strategy for supporting a researcher’s efforts to raise evocative questions and the foster meaningful conversations during data collection sessions (Cresswell, 2007; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006). This section will make clear the analytical procedures that were employed in this study to transform my empirical observations into meaningful representations of early childhood curriculum workers’ truth telling accounts.

Data was initially explored with descriptive codes and subsequently with interpretive codes. Descriptive coding examined what is literally said during data collection conversations, in search of statement that are relevant to teachers’ truth telling. More focused interpretive coding relied upon insights that I applied to literal statements, which “allows for the building and clarifying of concepts” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006, p.352). Key concepts of Alain Badiou’s (2001) notion of truth processes were applied as an analytical tool for developing categories during focused coding. The data was coded by hand and the interpretive findings generated by the coding procedures explained above were then represented through a critical storytelling montage.

Thomas Barone’s (1992) advice regarding critical storytelling as qualitative problem solving accounts for five phases which “constitute the pattern of inquiry that inhabits the creation of any work of art” (p. 144). Creating a montage of critical storytelling commenced with the two tasks mentioned above. The procedure began with descriptive coding decisions regarding which pieces from interview conversations and my currere narrative demand further attention. Then, I proceeded with more focused coding to interpret tentative relationships that emerged in the data. While these two
initial phases highlight common to social science research, Barone’s (1992) next three phases for creating a critical storytelling montage point toward the interdisciplinary methodological pluralism advocated for by critical bricoleurs and arts based researchers (Barone & Eisner, 2012; Kincheloe et al., 2011).

After the beginning phases of descriptive and interpretive coding, Barone (1992) suggests that one is ready to identify the pervasive qualities that emerge from the data. The aim of this study, to create a montage of critical stories, was open to the possibility of a single metaphor that emerged across teachers’ narratives; as well as the weaving together of particular metaphors unique to each individual teacher. This decision was made in the fourth phase, where I represented teachers’ truth telling through the composition of a critical storytelling montage. Barone (1992) advises to not allow the composition to become episodic in the sense that descriptive and interpretive details deter the reader from the central theses of the montage. In the fifth phase the work is deemed complete and is deemed to characterize the “evocative nature of artistic form” where symbols of representation adumbrate rather than denote early childhood educators’ truth telling (Barone & Eisner, 2012).

Credibility and Limitations

Denzin and Lincoln (2011) define qualitative research as, “a situated activity that locates the observer in the world” and therefore, “consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible” (p.3). Interweaving multiple methods of interpretation germane to both the social sciences and arts-based research, the bricolage approach of this study intentionally incorporated a wide variety of interconnected
interpretive practices each of which, Denzin and Lincoln (2011) remind, “makes the world visible in a different way” (p.3). Hence, the credibility of the research is exhibited in the gestalt effect produced by the simultaneous presentation of multiple images of teachers’ truth telling in a montage of critical stories. As a bricoleur, I utilized methods and insights both from traditional approaches to social science and arts based research to exhibit the credibility of my research.

In this study, I used two strategies for ensuring credibility that are commonly suggested in qualitative research literature; member checking and peer debriefing (Creswell, 2007; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006). Additionally, efforts toward credibility were supported by the insights of arts based researchers (Barone, 1992; Barone & Eisner, 2012; Eisner, 1991). As mentioned above, I engaged in member checking during the early stages of data analysis and representation. Peer review or debriefing (Creswell, 2007) ensued in the final three phases of analysis and representation, which constituted the composition of the critical storytelling montage.

Elliot Eisner’s (1991) concepts of structural corroboration and consensual validation provide criteria for determining credibility, which were attended to in the early phases of data analysis and representation. In the first phase of creating a critical story, the literal coding of raw data and search for patterns and repetitions sought structural corroboration, that Eisner (1991) describes as the “confluence of evidence that breeds credibility, that allows us to feel confident about our observations, interpretations, and conclusions” (p.110). Sharing transcriptions and my interpretations of conversations as they developed with my conversational partners, I employed the member checking
technique in these early phases and garnered their input. By bringing the data back to
each conversational partner, I also ensured credibility through consensual validation in
the first two phases of constructing critical stories with “an agreement among competent
others that the description, interpretation, and evaluation and thematic of an educational
situation are right” (Eisner, 1991, p.112).

Creswell (2007) recommends peer review or debriefing as a meaningful technique
for providing an external check of the research process. Meetings for debriefing with
members of my advisory committee occurred throughout the process of data collection,
analysis and representation. During debriefing sessions, committee members provided
methodological advice, as well as feedback regarding emerging interpretations and the
aesthetic quality of critical stories as they emerged. In the final three phases of data
analysis and representation, advice and feedback from these debriefing sessions were
used to ensure Eisner’s (1991) concept of referential adequacy as a criteria for gauging
credibility. The referential adequacy of the critical storytelling montage will be judged
based upon the extent to which the montage allows readers to encounter the reality of
early childhood curriculum practices as it is truly experienced by practitioners. To be
deemed referentially adequate the critical storytelling montage must reveal aspects of
teachers’ experiences as curriculum workers that typically remain veiled.

Numerous authoritative voices in contemporary qualitative research explain that
the greatest virtues of methodological pluralism are not necessarily the promulgation of
internal and external validity claims through methodological triangulation (Barone &
Eisner, 2012; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Kincheloe et al., 2011). According to Barone and
Eisner (2012), arts-based researchers advance their credibility not through proving uniformity between representation and observation; but instead by the degree to which representations disrupt the monotony of a taken-for-granted status quo and simply make conversations more interesting. This study engenders this disruptive value of troubling normative assumptions with its focus upon early childhood teachers’ truth telling, which I contend is a salient, yet often ineffable, facet of daily curriculum practice.

Seeking credibility through expressive forms of representation rather than literal descriptions offers a means for reconsidering how to overcome the hurdles of pervasive bureaucratic structures that impersonalize and oversimplify the realities of teachers’ daily practice. Barone (1992) raises honest “scrutiny of the world around us” as an essential feature of fostering a credible critical story (p.142). In this study, such honesty is concretized by introducing readers to early childhood curriculum workers through our truth telling stories, enabling the reader “to hear, if you will, each other’s heartbeats” (Barone, 1992, p. 142). Rather than reducing the realities of practitioners to an array of variables, expressive forms of representation recognize the affective aspects of human experience, thus providing a more complete, honest and credible portrayal of practice as it is truly experienced. Barone and Eisner (2012) explain, “Truth is not owned simply by propositional discourse; it is also owned by those activities that yield meanings that may be ineffable ultimately but that nevertheless ring true in the competent percipient” (p. 6).

The degree to which the findings of this research are deemed transferable is dependent upon the conceptual paradigm from which one chooses to perceive the critical storytelling montage (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011). The aim of inquiry in this study
is well articulated by Eisner’s (1991) concepts of educational criticism. Through a montage of critical storytelling, the early childhood curriculum workers, like literary characters, “are implicated in matters that “transcend the particulars of who they are” (Flinders & Eisner, 1994, p.352). While not all teachers of young children are like the six participants in this study, the singular truths they declare and stories they tell constituted in the montage can, from the standpoint of effective educational criticism, exemplify instructive patterns for all teachers. As Barone and Eisner (2012) remind us “in the particular resides the general,” and the rigorous criterion of educational criticism discussed above support “generativity” in creating a montage of critical stories representing an $n$ of 6 that has implications for all public school early childhood educators in the United States. Or, in Badiou’s terms, from a singular subjectivity declarations of truth take on a universal address.

**Trustworthiness of the Data**

Three interviews served as the data sources for constructing teachers’ narratives. Three different forms of interviews, informed by Rubin and Rubin (2005), were utilized to capture various aspects of the participants’ perspectives on curriculum work. Triangulation of data occurred by utilizing multiple strategies for conducting “responsive interviews,” as suggested by Rubin and Rubin (2005). The first interview, as mentioned above, was based on a strategy that would focus the conversation on the participants’ perceptions of the cultures of curriculum that contextualize their work. The second interview highlighted more personal aspects of teachers’ lives that potentially inspired and/or informed their daily practices. The third and final interview employed a strategy
that garnered a more narrow concentration on the participants’ regarding the implications of their persistence and perseverance.

As mentioned in the previous section, the teachers’ stories garnered credibility through Elliot Eisner’s (1991) notion of “structural corroboration.” Participants’ insights regarding their cultures of curriculum, significant life events and fidelity processes were substantiated across the three interviews. Instances of structural corroboration uncovered patterns and repetitions in the data during the coding process that Eisner’s (1991) concept describes as the “confluence of evidence that breeds credibility” (p.110). Hence, the teachers’ narratives represented in this study accomplish a degree of trustworthiness, in that they are told through the entangled lens of various relevant vantage points that constitute their deeply personal experiences. Indeed, the topics of teachers’ perspectives on their cultures of curriculum, their personal life histories and their current pedagogical practices interwove themselves throughout the three interviews engendering confidence in the patterns being observed and interpreted in the teachers’ narratives.

**Reflexivity**

Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2006) write about the process of reflexivity as a tool to assist researchers’ efforts to study across difference. Employing strategies such as memo writing, engaging in the reflexivity process documents an evolving recognition and examination of a researchers’ understanding of how matters of identity and social positioning impacts their study. On the importance of reflexivity, Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2006) assert, “Difference needs to be explored not disavowed” (p. 141). I concur that reflexivity is important and difference must not be disavowed. However, in this study,
reflexivity is not important for the epistemological purpose of exploring difference for understanding. Instead, reflexivity is imperative for the ontological purpose of recognizing that infinite difference is an obvious feature of reality.

As mentioned above, I included myself as one of the six participants of the study. Deciding to write in a reflexive style means that I have made considerations regarding how I will represent myself and my point of view in the research process. In addition to the ontological assumption that human difference is ontologically obvious, this study will presume the equality of all people. Accordingly, I have decided to present myself as one of six early childhood teachers contributing to a montage of critical truth telling stories. In doing so, I make explicit my values and perspectives that affect the research process and montage creation.

Limitations

The participants of this research are all public school teachers from northeast Ohio. Both males and females participated in the study. However, the participants represent a homogenous group in regards to race, ethnicity and class; each identifying themselves as middle-class Euro-Americans.

Ethics

Since, I was already acquainted with the participants of the study the process of building rapport had already begun, before the research commenced. However, a conscious effort was made to maintain a sense of trust between myself and the other participants. First, I gave details to each participant regarding the purpose and procedures of my research. Secondly, I explained my plans for protecting their
anonymity throughout the course of the project. Plus third, I made it clear to each individual that they may at anytime choose to not participate in the project without explanation or penalty. Approval from the Institutional Review Board was attained before the study began.

Providing details about the purpose and procedures of the research included a variety of details. To start with each participant was informed about my research interest and my reasoning for inviting their participation; their professional commitments to benefitting children amidst the challenges innate to public schooling. Being explicit about my focus upon what I consider to be an attribute of *good* teaching was an important acknowledgement of these teachers’ professionalism that reiterated and reassured respect in a time when immense scrutiny of teachers’ work has become the norm. Upon agreeing to participate, teachers were given a timeline for impending interviews. Additionally, I explained that our conversations would be audio recorded and transcribed. Light refreshments were made available during data collection sessions as a gesture of my appreciation to them for taking the time to participate.

Protecting the anonymity of each participant of each participant is recognized as a very important ethical responsibility. Interviews locations were mutually determined by conversational partners and were selected with consideration to privacy and convenience. Conversations were transcribed, renaming each participant with a pseudonym. At the conclusion of the study the audio recording were erased.

It is understood that the individuals who were invited to participate in this research live busy lives and portions of data collection process asked them to reflect upon
and share deeply personal matters. For these reasons, participant may have decided to withdraw from the study without any negative consequences. I explained to each participant that they may choose to not participate in a portion of the study or may choose to cease their participation altogether should they have wished to for any reason. I also made it clear that the participant should not feel obligated to explain their reasons for withdrawal and that their decision would not have had any adverse impact on their relationship with me.

This research also offered meaningful benefits to the teachers who chose to participate. This study is inspired, through Kincheloe et al. (2011), by Paulo Freire’s tradition of critical pedagogy. Accordingly, participants were perceived as partners in the process of critical inquiry. As mentioned above, these egalitarian relations have the mutually beneficial potential of allowing participants, myself included, to “see more critically, think at a more critical level, and to recognize the forces that subtly shape their lives” (Kincheloe et al., 2011, p.164).

This study met the required protocol as dictated by the University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB), a committee formally designed to approve, monitor, and review research involving humans to protect the rights and welfare of the participants (see Appendix 2). All participants agreed to have each of their interview sessions audio recorded. Informed of their right to remove themselves from the study at any time without penalty, it was explained to each participant that confidentiality would be maintained by assigning pseudonyms to conceal the identities of the participants and the institutions in which they are employed. Pseudonyms were assigned during transcribing
and writing process. Only the participant and the researcher were aware of the identity corresponding to a pseudonym. This study met the required protocol as dictated by the University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB), a committee formally designed to approve, monitor, and review research involving humans to protect the rights and welfare of the participants (see Appendix 2).

**Conclusion**

With an ontological and ethical focus, this critical research used a bricolage approach to enunciate the truth telling stories of six early childhood educators through an expressive form of representation. Using Alain Badiou’s (2001) conceptualization of “truth telling” as the key referent for analyzing teachers’ stories, I attended to the contextualizing situation of their public school work environment, significant events within their life histories, and their transactional dealings with each. The ontological-ethical insights sought after in this study make important contributions to both curriculum theory and practice. A recognized leader in the field of curriculum theory has decried key concepts of the reconceptualization- social reproduction and political resistance- to be intellectually exhausted (Pinar, 2013). Furthermore, daily practice is pervasively scrutinized with reductionist standardization that offers only fragmented images of reality. This research seeks to extend extant concepts of contemporary theory with an ontological-ethical focus and initiate practical discourse that proffers a holistic image of the reality of early childhood curriculum practice as an embodied and lived experience.
CHAPTER IV
REFLECTIONS AND EVENTS

In this chapter I introduce the reader to six public school early childhood educators, one of which is myself. In the previous chapter, I provided an overview of William Pinar’s (2012) currere method. The composition of a currere narrative is a deeply personal endeavor and a constructive means for fusing my experiences of research and practice in this study. To be clear, my dual roles as researcher and participant will not be bifurcated in this study. Part of my effort to shed light upon early childhood educators’ truth telling narratives is to advance upon my own story.

Therefore, my personal narrative will be enunciated alongside and intertwined with the accounts of five other early childhood educators, who will henceforth be collectively referred to as my “teacher friends.” Interested in teachers’ fidelity processes, and having truths of my own to declare, I am attempting to purposefully and creatively redraw the boundaries between self and subject matter, instead of allowing them to remain blurry. While we obviously have different stories to tell, I shall tell them together, deliberately intransigent to the false dichotomies that demand one choose to either speak as a teacher/participant or as a researcher/scholar.

The overview in previous chapter also detailed the four key components of Pinar’s (2012) currere method. This chapter will focus upon the re-experiencing of our life histories. Significant events of participants’ lives that underscore their way of being early childhood educators will be recounted through three life stages: childhood and adolescence, pre-service years, and in-service years. The narrative material highlighted
in this chapter was chosen because it demonstrates participants’ transactional knowing through either the engagement in a cycle of reflective inquiry or the process of a truth procedure. However, before commencing with our narratives, I will first take a moment to introduce myself and then my teacher friends.

My teacher friends and I are simply a collection of individuals who experience the stultifying effect of the dominant structures of curriculum work and are well aware of their pervasiveness in American public schools. Nevertheless, my teacher friends and I keep going, determined to persevere and benefit the children in our care despite any challenges we may face. Assuage from the confines of the dominant paradigm is found in our ability to “keep going,” despite the challenges. It is my contention that conscientious early childhood educators, like my teacher friends, who “keep going” possess the capacity to affirmatively invent possibilities for care and justice in their classrooms. Further, I contend that this capacity is routinely overlooked in the appraisal of early childhood curriculum and pedagogical practice, including esoteric critiques. Therefore, it is with great pleasure that I introduce my teacher friends.

As shown in Table 2, Bonita, Joey, Jenna, Karen, Stacy and I are experienced public school early childhood educators in the Midwest. To be a bit more specific, our schools are located in two different Midwestern states. Bonita, Jenna, Stacy and I teach in upper-middle class suburban districts. Joey and Karen work in urban districts. Stacy and I teach kindergarten. Bonita teaches the second grade. Joey and Jenna teach third grade. And, Karen is a deaf educator and works with children from kindergarten to third grade. Bonita has worked in the same classroom, teaching the same grade level for
Table 2

*Introducing My Teacher Friends*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name (Pseudonym)</th>
<th>Teaching Positions Reflected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bonita</td>
<td>2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; grade in a suburban school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joey</td>
<td>Kindergarten and 3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt; grade in an urban school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenna</td>
<td>3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt; grade suburban school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen</td>
<td>K-3 Deaf Education class in an urban school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stacy</td>
<td>Kindergarten in a suburban school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dan</td>
<td>Kindergarten in a suburban school</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

several years, as has Jenna and Stacy. Joey has worked in two building in his urban district; he taught kindergarten in his previous building. Karen has worked with young children as a deaf educator in three different large urban districts. I have taught kindergarten in two different building in the same suburban district. I became acquainted with each of my teacher friends at different professional activities, and to my knowledge they have never met one another. For a variety of reasons, I maintain a high level of respect for each of my teacher friends both personally and professionally.

I have known Bonita for a little over ten years. She is married and the mother of two grown children. Although she is a self-described “homebody,” I would never characterize Bonita as a shy person. Rather, I would explain that she only speaks up or speaks out publically when she deems it necessary. Bonita’s well-organized classroom and employment of traditional teaching methods may make some observers believe that she and I have little in common. However, over the years, we have enjoyed many
excellent conversations uncovering common ground and respecting differences. Bonita challenges me to consider the underlying beliefs and principles that inform my curriculum and pedagogical practices.

Though I first met Jenna several years ago, she and I have gotten known one another much better over the course of the past few years. She is married and the mother of young twins. Her laid back demeanor at once exudes confidences and affability. She is well liked and respected among her colleagues. In my opinion, she provides an outstanding model of a constructivist classroom, which is what initially provoked our collaborative conversations. Jenna often pushes me to think about the technical details that we employ in efforts to support meaningful learning experiences.

Joey and I first met seven years ago. He is married and the father of two young children. He takes the study and practice of early childhood education very seriously and enjoys engaging in intense dialogue. As a male early childhood educator, Joey is content not fitting in. Yet, the limits of his collegial social acceptance should not be reduced to merely a matter of gender difference. He is assertive and sometimes brash in his hesitation to allow any set of assumptions to be taken for granted. Joey likes to rock the boat; he is good at it and that is why we became friends.

I first met Karen three years ago, as she was completing her master’s degree in early childhood education. She is not married nor is she a parent. She is a careful listener who will often wait to participate in collegial until she is asked to share her point of view. Karen’s passion for the field of deaf education is evident and she is comfortable introducing her field to early childhood colleagues who do not possess her background
knowledge. She teaches me a great deal about deaf education and routinely offers a fascinating critical perspective in the process of doing so.

Stacy and I were introduced just a few years ago by a mutual friend. She is married, has two grown children from her first marriage, as well as a step-daughter and step-granddaughter from her current marriage. One might guess that she is a kindergarten teacher, as her mannerisms consistently express the kindness of a nurturing caregiver. Stacy is dedicated to the profession of early childhood education and she holds multiple master’s degrees as evidence of her dedication to engaging in lifelong learning. She is an easy person to like and she often takes on leadership roles among her colleagues with her seemingly innate ability to honor the diverse experiences teachers of young children bring to their curriculum work.

In Stacy’s words, “All of us have that winding and broken path that gets us to where we are.” And, so a collective journey begins. The stories of my teacher friends and I will be intermingled through three sections. Where We Are Coming From will tell our stories from childhood to adolescence. Then, Becoming Teachers of Young Children will recount our experiences after high school and before teaching. Finally, Being Experienced Early Childhood Educators will express our narratives of public school teaching. The “winding, broken path” of each unique story will be brought together to tell a cohesive story of where my teacher friends and I “currently are,” as public school early childhood educators.
Where We Are Coming From: Our Coming of Age Stories

To some degree, childhood memories were a part of each of our truth telling narratives. Stacy and Karen spoke about their childhood only in very general terms. However, Bonita, Jenna, Joey and I specified particular events from our youth that initiated truth processes. Here, our accounts from childhood, which took place in different times and places, will be retold together. Beginning with general descriptions and moving toward specific moments, this retelling in this section will begin with recollections of elementary school, then progress through the middle and high school years.

Three of my teacher friends were raised by educators. Stacy and Bonita referred to memories of their mothers being key role models who demonstrated what constitutes a good teacher. They both enjoyed wonderful relationships with their families and especially held their mothers in high esteem. Stacy respected the advice her mother provided at various stages of life. Stacy expressed her appreciation for her parents; succinctly stating, “I’m grateful that mom and dad were that vested in my future.” She also admits that despite her admiration, she was hesitant to follow in her mother’s footsteps.

I don’t remember specific times where I thought that I might be a good teacher. I think that I might have discounted it for a while because that’s what my mom did. We lived in a small town. Most of the time, when I was growing up she was a substitute teacher. It was only when we went off to college that she secured again a full-time job and she retired being a middle school math teacher. She taught
before we were born. She taught first grade. She had fifty kids in her classroom!

I’ve seen pictures, 1963 or 1962. I said, “mom, there was nothing in your classroom but desks!” She said, “Yep. Wall to wall desks.”

Bonita considered her mother to be a model of fairness, explaining that she expected Bonita and her siblings to each work to the best of their abilities and was willing to accept their differing levels of achievement. Further, Bonita’s mother demonstrated to her the virtues of care giving, thus becoming for her an image of an ideal caregiver.

My mom and dad... I had an awesome mom and dad. My mom taught. She didn’t go back to teaching until I was in- in fact, she didn’t get her degree until- she taught fifth grade. My mom would- I can remember, whatever a child needed... because down in that area, it is kind of poor. We’re kind of hicks and kind of poor and stuff. She would go to the store and buy underwear for kids. I know that sounds...really, whatever a child truly needed. She wasn’t going out and buying toys, although she would if they didn’t have... And, we didn’t have a lot of money. She always made sure that the kids had things. She had a special connection.

As I listened, I couldn’t help but notice the similarity between the Bonita that I had come to know and the description of her mother that she was sharing. As I continued to listen, I learned that Bonita’s mother also saw such a connection.

A lot of my friends from where I grew up, their kids went there and they wanted to have my mom, because she just had a really good heart. And, actually, my mom died on a Saturday and on the previous Thursday, she called and told me that she
loved me and said what a great kind, caring person I was and how much that meant to her because that who mom was.

Jenna represents the third consecutive generation educators in her family. Her grandfather coached basketball for decades at an urban high school. Her mother taught at an elementary school in the same district, while her father was an administrator in an affluent suburb. Jenna certainly acknowledges the influence of her family and the comforts of supportive home and school environments.

I grew up in a family of educators. The majority of my family were in education in some form or administration. I’ve definitely been around it my whole life. I saw a lot from my parents. My dad worked in a very affluent district. My mom worked in an inner-city environment. I always wanted to help people. I consider myself a helper. Being able to relate well with children is why I think I got into early childhood education. Seeing the excitement of watching them experience something for the first time, their innocence, connections they make- its exciting. Maybe, for the first time understanding why something is as it is. It is rewarding for me to see that. I know that sounds cliché but its true. I obviously knew that I wouldn’t be making millions. But, I like to connect with people and having them rely so much on you. Yes, there is pressure with that, but it’s also a good feeling when you can feel successful about something you accomplished together. I like things to be a teamwork atmosphere; rather than being an authoritarian and having them just sit there.
I want to make this an environment as safe for them as possible, loving like a family. Because, especially now, these days, this might be the only time in their day where they feel loved or safe. So, it’s more than just teaching them academics. I want them to feel at home and peaceful.

Continuing, Jenna remembers her days at school fondly. She considers herself fortunate to have experienced a warm nurturing atmosphere, something she strives to replicate for her students.

I think growing up, that’s how my house was. But, it might just be how I’m wired as a person. Growing up and going through school, it’s what I experienced. I went to a smaller school. Things were more intimate. People got to know you really well, your likes, dislikes. You know, ‘how you tick’. That was important to me and I always wanted to bring that element into my classroom. So, they could experience it too. No matter, where I got hired... Having a kid realize that you took the time to really get to know their background and really get to know them to make that individual feel special.

Less emphasis was placed on education during Karen’s and Joey’s childhoods. When talking with Karen, I speculated that she may have been bored. Karen quickly dispelled this notion, explaining that school was fine; she just had a different set of values.

I wasn’t bored. I was just lazy. I wanted to be with my friends. I think school challenged me. I wasn’t a kid who was way ahead of the group. But, I was very... Like I said, I always wanted my time to be meaningful and if right now I
wanted to talk with my friends that’s what I did. I didn’t try very hard. My parents didn’t value grades. I never once talked to my parents about grades, as a kid. So, I didn’t think it was important. If I didn’t get the A on a report, it didn’t bother me.

Part of it comes from my parents not pushing education. My mom’s philosophy always was, “I only get to be a kid once.” I had a job in high school. She did want me to be in all kinds of organized activities because that would waste my time. So, it kind of comes from her.

Joey’s childhood experiences at school were considerably more tumultuous. His story positioned the school curriculum at odds with his lived experience.

I think for me as a student going through public education... public school didn’t work for me. I think it didn’t work for me because it didn’t mean anything for me, but I could figure things out on my own at home. I’ve been able to that all my life. I could learn better without the interference or interruption of a teacher. I could figure these things out without those workbooks or without having to do... I just remember those packaged workbooks all the time. They just really didn’t connect to what I was going through in my life because I wouldn’t describe myself as middle class. We were lower economic status. We didn’t grow up in a really big house. I guess my dad wasn’t in tune with schooling or anything like that.

Over time, Joey learned to navigate the challenging terrain of his school experience. Perhaps, the greatest difficulty recounted in his narrative was the meaning he ascribed to schooling in the moments of his childhood. The event of looking back and
reflecting on this negative experience from the empowered position of an “educated” adult enables him to now transform the distressing ordeal into a story of success and perseverance.

So, when the curriculum didn’t connect with me, I didn’t grow and my teachers made me feel like I was stupid. I honestly believed that I was stupid all the way up through, I’d say, my second year of college. Then, looking back on it now, I realize that I wasn’t stupid. I was going home at night teaching myself algebra, algebra 2, geometry, pre-calculus, all that stuff because during the school day in high school I’d be in the wood shop. I chose to stay in the wood shop and build things because that’s what I was interested in. My teachers in high school, my last two years of school would let me do that, because all I would do is go into the classroom, ask the teacher what we were studying that week, go home at night read from a book and study it on my own and try to figure it out on my own.

Then, I’d come in and take the test.

So, going from elementary, to middle, to high school... in high school I finally had a little bit of wiggle room to make something connect to what I wanted or what I was interested in, which was woodworking because my grandfather did it.

Eventually, the meaning Joey ascribed to his childhood experiences were no longer constrained by the predominant discourses and practices, which propagated a marginalized view his intellect and agency. Now, based upon the event of reflecting on his own childhood, Joey sees a different reality of what truly happened in his youth.
Further, he notices children suffering similar school experiences to be a widespread issue. With devotion to enacting the reciprocity of developmentally meaningful and culturally congruent pedagogy, Joey boldly declares a truth from his eventual reflections.

*I think that’s my main drive. I know what it’s like when the crap that we’re learning or the crap that their doing just doesn’t connect with you. It sucks because you are made to feel like you are stupid and you’ve got all of these kids going through school. Their teachers are making them feel like they are dumb. Really they are not dumb, they’re just disinterested. They are not interested in what the teachers are teaching.*

Without the anonymity of a pseudonym, I will refrain from divulging too many embarrassing personal stories in my autobiographical vignette. My family resided in an upper-middle class suburb in northeast Ohio. My parents expected my sister and I to “do our best,” but rarely nitpicked over grades. They encouraged me to try new things and for the most part let my interests guide the selection of activities. Foreshadowing my engagement in doctoral studies, my father bemuses that, even as a young child, I tended to either attend to a task with a near obsessive focus, or to pay it no attention at all.

Though schoolwork was rarely the object of my full attention, I was able to get by with adequate grades and frequent goads from teachers to consider “what I could accomplish if I applied myself.” It will suffice to say that my childhood and experiences through elementary and middle school contained relatively little stress or adversity.

Unfortunately, this was not the case for Bonita. She told me of the following tragic event that occurred during when she was a junior high school student.
When I was growing up my mom and dad’s best friends’ family were big on being majorettes. They were going to a competition and they didn’t have room in the car for their son Ted because they were taking several of the girls. Ted was about 13 and he was killed that night on a bike. And, how do you not make room? I will never. There is not a day in my life that I don’t make sure. I never say there is no room. I never say that. He wanted to go. Not that it would have changed. I do believe, your life is: there is a start and there is an end when you are born and when you die.

I just feel that I can always make room; even at my house. I’ve had people and our house is not huge. But I’ve had 50-60 people. Now, I will say that afterword we say that is way too many. People couldn’t move! (laugh) But, everyone could come and feel welcome. I’ll never say, “I don’t have room for you.” Never ever.

The truth of this tragic event that Bonita so eloquently declared, is: There is always room to include everyone, just as they are. Despite the common practice in her building setting a limit on the number of parents and grandparents who attend holiday celebrations, Bonita employs a policy of “the more the merrier.” The father of a former student who is now in high school continues to visit her classroom and conduct science experiment with the children. Pre-service teachers facilitate math activities in her classroom to complete field experience requirements. Residents of a nearby nursing home read with her students once a week. Additionally, Bonita volunteered to organize a Right to Read Week for the entire school and shared the responsibility of greeting
numerous community members with her 2nd graders. There is always room in their classroom and in their schedule to include everyone to welcome all comers.

Jenna’s recollection of her days as a middle school student included a gleeful event, which was comprised of an ordinary occurrence that had an enduring impact.

I was in 7th grade, which was a really weird time for me. Middle school is just a weird time all around. But, I had a seventh grade teacher who was actually one of my favorites. It was the first time that I had male teachers, which was a little intimidating too. Things were a little harder. They were preparing you for high school. There was some anxiety.

After that school year, he didn’t say anything to me. But, wrote a letter to my parents and sent it to the house. It was a beautifully written letter that was pointing out all of my successes and everything that I did well, things that he looked up to me for. My mom actually framed it and it’s still hanging at my mom’s house. I’d never had anyone, besides family, tell me those things and be so genuine about it. That feeling coming from someone who doesn’t have to love you unconditionally or show you that kind of respect—because you’re not family or their kid—but would take the time to do that and make it personal.

Talk about a compliment that made me feel good about myself. He was a busy guy. Middle school teachers have so many students, class after class. So, to take the time to do that!

I tried to be the best student. I was never someone who wanted to bring attention to myself. I was almost a little shy. I was pretty confident because I was
a good student. I tried hard, did my homework and never got into trouble. I tried to please the teacher, whatever. I got nice comments on papers. But, that was the first time someone really went out of his way. It made such a big impression on me.

I’ve taken that with me my whole life. I try to remember that. Sometimes kids are difficult to crack emotionally or academically. Some days it’s hard to find something positive. But, I try to remember that because there are things about them that I don’t know, things that make them more than what can be seen at that moment.

I was what 12 or 13? I know he didn’t do it for every kid. I always tried my hardest. But, yeah I think it was really cool that he would do that, so I try to remember.

In contrast to Bonita’s story of a tragic event from her early adolescent years, Jenna declared the truth of a joyful event: Teachers have the capacity to influence students’ lives in extraordinary ways through what they do and say in their daily practice. With this truth Jenna takes on the awesome responsibility of the potential impact of her words and deeds can have on students. In an era of public education characterized by the micromanagement of instruction and holding teachers accountable for student outcomes, the truth garnered from receiving an inspirational letter of encouragement from a middle school teacher continues to empower Jenna. The letter has invoked to attend to relational aspects of her curriculum work that routinely goes unrecognized in the quotidian of discourse and practice.
As I alluded to above, my childhood and early adolescent year was for the most part uneventful. Unlike Joey, I did not experience discord between the commonplace routines of school and being my personhood. To be sure, I had awkward phases. In middle school, I found acceptance among my peers as a jovial class clown and an above average basketball player. In high school I embraced a “meathead” identity, putting a love of basketball and parties on display for all to see, while keeping a fascination with matters of spirituality and theology under wraps neatly hidden behind a C average. Peer pressure took prominence over being genuine and I was embarrassingly willing to consent to and even perpetuate misconceptions of myself for the sake of acceptance.

To this day, I don’t know if I acceded to the label of “big dumb guy” because it was an identity that garnered peer acceptance; or because over time come to believe it. For some reason, I seemed to think that this was the best way to proceed through life. I wouldn’t have articulated it this way back then, but I was keenly aware that going along with what those around me expected provided the path of least resistance. I was going along and getting along, staying the course in hopes that one day I would find myself in the safe confines of an allegedly predictable future. It seemed clear to me that life had distinct stages and I conceived of my adolescence as merely a necessary stepping stone to the hopefully more promising future stages of college and adulthood. I was biding time and coasting, patiently waiting for a future context that would empower and invite personal freedom and flourishing. My problem seemed to be that I was waiting for an invitation.
In any case, an event interrupted the taken for granted means by which I apprehended the world around me. Here, I will name it: The Chris Event. It was the Friday night of an early week of my senior year. I anticipated a typical evening with my closest friends, a group of guys with whom I quite literally grew up. As I walked into the back door of my friend’s house, I immediately sensed that something was going on, a serious problem. They filled me in right away without wasting time with any superfluous greetings or salutations. Our friend, Chris, who had been out of school sick the past couple of weeks, had cancer. Malignant tumors on his liver made an organ transplant a necessity for his survival. The news knocked the wind out of me. We were young, strong and healthy. I knew he was sick but figured that it had to be something simple and easily remedied, like mononucleosis.

The year that followed taught me a lot about life and about myself. My priorities dramatically shifted in a way that was not always readily apparent to many outsider observers. In an incredibly frightening time, my friends and I developed an unforgettable camaraderie. Frightened by the realities of being confronted with a possible death, we became determined to live life to its fullest. Regularly planned evening and weekend gatherings with friends and a spring break road trip were complimented by what were sometimes carefully coordinated gatherings and other times spontaneous days of skipping school. Sometimes we went on carefully planned road trips. Sometimes we played cards and watched movies all day long, and every so often we just piled into a car to see where the highways might take us for the day. There were so many rules that I had taken for
granted for so long, which now seemed from my perspective to somehow no longer to apply to us.

Well meaning adults often found it necessary to confront me with concerns regarding my lack of productivity. My basketball coach accused me of “throwing away my senior season.” He was made his disapproval clear to me regarding my choice to not play because I considered myself to be too busy for basketball. A science teacher conscientiously let me know that he was available “if I needed to talk,” before confronting me about my lackluster attendance. He seemed somewhat appalled when I clarified to him that I could miss up to 12 days without risking being deemed truant or losing course credit. Though these educators had ample evidence and reason to interpret that they were observing warning signs of underachievement, they seemed bemused by a more fundamental issue that the Chris event brought to the fore of my attention.

Though I may not have articulated the truth of the Chris event at its moment of encounter, the truth to be declared was clear: Since there is no way of knowing what the future holds, visceral experiences in the present warrant our immediate and focused attention. For me, searching for knowledge with enduring value became a very spiritual matter. At school I had become quite intellectually disengaged, socially aloof and even physically absent. Perhaps, it was a good thing that my friends and I would soon part ways to explore new horizons at various universities. At home and at school, I was inculcated to go immediately from high school to college. Therefore, I knew that I was going to college; but I had no idea why. Without a carefully considered purpose or direction, but with a new found commitment to be present and genuine in the moment, I
set off for college with the good fortune of being so profoundly lost both intellectually and spiritually lost that I didn’t even know that I was lost.

**Becoming Teachers of Young Children: Our Pre-service Stories**

I diverged from what seemed to be the educational paths commonly chosen by my friends, ones that were deemed promising for one to accumulate wealth and prestige in the future. Instead, I wanted to pray, study, and find ways to help people. As flakey as it may sounded, I wanted to spread joy and make the world a better place. I wanted to be happy and fulfilled in my present circumstance and live life with enthusiasm. I didn’t want a “normal education” that would prepare me to take up a mundane, albeit potentially well paying, future enterprise. I wanted to move myself forward in apprehending aspects of living that were universally and enduringly important. With that, I set out for Lynchburg, Virginia to attend Liberty University with intentions of becoming a missionary or pastor. Although at the time I was convinced that I was on the road to altruism, my good intentions and desires to live a virtuous life were eclipsed by my abundance of naïveté.

Friends and family members, who knew and recognized my sincerity, often expressed that they didn’t always agree with me but assured me of their love and support no matter what. Needless to say, those who doubted my decision were right. This plan of becoming a pastor did not come to fruition, nor did my plan of attending Liberty. At Liberty, I was miserable in an extraordinarily beautiful part of the country. By engaging in outdoor activities and finding places in downtown Lynchburg that were unchartered by Liberty students I often found brief moments of reprieve from a campus life which was
dominated by pious rules. At the time, I may not have seen the significance of my experience at Liberty. In fact, because I was not learning or growing in the ways that I had anticipated, I erroneously presumed that I wasn’t learning or growing at all. Nonetheless, those months in Virginia were signified moments that remain impactful for me to this day.

I came to Liberty intent on inquiring about the mysterious and complex aspects of the universe that human beings can never fully comprehend. However, much to my dismay inquiry at Liberty was swiftly circumvented by quick answers and rules. Moreover, unwillingness to accept quick answers at face value and the open expression of disagreement were frowned upon positions for anyone to maintain at Liberty. Questions and discordant perspectives were often stymied with the condescending response, “I’ll pray for you.”

I remember being annoyed and even angered by the pretense of certainty and pious rebuke that these four words seemed to convey and disheartened by the apparent obligation so many Liberty students seemed to hold in upholding the façade. Indeed, the consequences of monetary fines and disciplinary action set by the university’s strict code of conduct, entitled The Liberty Way, were quite effective in coercing students to cloak their dissenting ideas. Further, I was unable and perhaps unwilling to even begin an attempt of reconciling my perception of the stark contrasts between the humility expressed through the words of Christ’s teachings and the arrogant words and deeds of religious fundamentalism, which I saw as being pervasively embraced on campus. I wanted to know, see, feel and understand the unknowable, imperceptible notion of God.
No matter where I looked at Liberty, all I seemed to find was rules and certainty. All that I felt was frustration and disappointment at the obstructions these rules seemed impose against anything that looked or felt real.

As a side note for interested readers, Kevin Roose (2009), a journalism student from Brown University, authored a candid book chronicling a year he spent as a student at Liberty in a book titled, *The Unlikely Disciple*. However, the tone and cadence of my Liberty memories would be much less tongue in cheek than those shared by Roose. My decision to subject myself to the pervasive ethical inconsistencies and contradictions at Liberty was done in an earnest, albeit naïve, effort to make sense of reality. Roose, on the other hand, was a politically savvy and well informed ethnographer at the time he encountered the realities of life on campus at Liberty University. He did an interesting intellectual experiment that enabled him to share a compelling narrative about the culture of Liberty University. Indeed, he told the story well and his memoir provoked my own remembrances of my days in Lynchburg.

In no way do I intend to demean his experience. Yet, there is an important difference that I’m unwilling to gloss over. While his attention was often focused on appraising the academic rigor of his courses, or analyzing various attributes social dynamics that seemed unusual for those of us with more a mainstream experience. He was really there, but I was being real in my “being there.” In other words, he was being a journalist or an ethnographer. I was being myself. He and I knew our context differently.
Roose’s (2009) book ended with him returning to Brown, leaving his friends behind. Midway through the fall semester at Liberty, the majority of my friends were deciding not to return for the spring semester. Some were struggling academically. Others were collecting enough disciplinary demerits to risk expulsion. My grades were fine but not dazzling; and though I violated the regulations of *The Liberty Way* on a daily basis, I managed to fly under the radar. I finished the semester with mostly C’s and a nonchalant 2 demerits: one for an unmade bed and another for falling asleep during chapel. Then again, the enduring lesson I garnered from Liberty University had nothing to do with these measured outcomes of academic achievement and personal conduct. Rather, it was the cursory process of measuring students’ knowledge and behavior that took place at Liberty, which constituted the Liberty Event.

When I selected this unusual environment for my college experience, I had faith that the value of spiritual prescriptions that Liberty claimed to offer would outweigh the social restrictions *The Liberty Way* demanded. However, my trust in this form of discipline was soon thwarted in a course titled, *Biblical Ethics*. Anticipating a thorough analysis of biblical texts and deep discussions regarding various implications of contemporary living, I was sorely disappointed. What I encountered was fill in the blank study guides to be completed during lectures in preparation for multiple choice tests. I yearned for an unpredictably exciting existential and spiritual voyage of self discovery, but I was experiencing a mundane calculated outing where my tour guide demonstrated how to live one’s life *The Liberty Way*, without asking questions.
Then, one day my curiosity or perhaps malcontent got the better of me. After briefly referencing 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, a New Testament passage that metaphorically describes a believer’s body as the temple of the holy spirit, the instructor proceeded to admonish anyone who would claim to be a believer in Christ and still engage in the consumption of drugs, alcohol and cigarettes. “No excuses or exceptions!” he commanded authoritatively in the lecture hall. “You’ve just heard God’s word. It is there in black and white. Your body is a temple for the holy; and therefore, you cannot put unholy garbage whether its cigarettes, alcohol, or drugs into a temple you claim to want the Lord to inhabit.”

I raised my hand. Although I didn’t recall the class ever opening up for discussion or even a question and answer session, something compelled me to become participatory. At first, I thought that my outstretched hand was going to be disregarded. However, the fully extended arm of a six foot four man seated in the middle of a lecture hall proved to be disruptive and difficult to ignore. The lecturer gestured toward me and said, “Yes, you have a question or comment…”

“I was just thinking about how you were describing our physical bodies as temples for the holy-spirit. Wouldn’t this verse also imply that we have a responsibility to just generally take care of our physical bodies? For example, we should avoid overeating and exercise regularly.”

The lecturer smiled smugly and seemed to welcome my participation as reinforcement and not reject it as an unnecessary tangent. “No. This verse doesn’t imply that we should be disciplined in regard to diet and exercise. It demands it! Never forget
that a sin is a sin is a sin! Those of us who have allowed our bodies to become
overweight should feel as convicted. Whether it is drugs, drinking, smoking or
gluttonous eating we are talking about sins against God!”

I raised my hand again. This time the lecturer’s acknowledgement of my hand
seemed to carry with it a mixture of appreciation for my engagement in his course and a
readiness to move on. He had little else to say on the matter and numerous other blanks
for us to fill in on the study guide. So, I got right to the point.

“When are you going to talk to Reverend Falwell about this?” I sarcastically
mused pointing toward my stomach.

Half of the lecture hall laughed at my joke. The other half was appalled.
Unfortunately, the instructor was part of the appalled half and he abruptly told me to
leave, which I did. Though brief, this incident was symbolic of what I found so troubling
at Liberty. Thus, I declared, “following disciplinary rules offers only a myopic view
of reality.” Such is the case, in my opinion, even when it comes to sarcasm. But, at
Liberty those weren’t the rules.

Ironically, the “rules” that initially drew me to Liberty are also what compelled
me to be eager to leave. I came to Liberty optimistic that the disciplinary structures
served as avenues to truths with timeless and universal value. In other words, I trusted
that authorities set the demands based upon knowledge and understandings that I did not
yet possess; and that these rules would guide my own process of coming to know and
understand. I was trying to get serious and I was willing to toe the line. However, my
willing compliance was driven by aims to become more enlightened, not a yearning to
please authority figures. Being at Liberty helped me to realize how being in a position of authority is not automatically an indication that one’s knowledge and understanding is inherently vast or desirable. Certainly, authority figures at Liberty, such as the one mentioned briefly above, were knowledgeable people. Nonetheless, their commitment seemed to me to be more about upholding their own authority and not enlightening students. This sort of demand was stultifying to my own process of becoming. I genuinely would not and perhaps could not cease thinking for myself. The instructor’s unapologetic wielding of authority did provide me with one enlightening piece of insight. It was, indeed, time for me to leave.

In high school I may have been too concerned with fitting in. Then, at Liberty, perhaps I wasn’t concerned enough. In my formative years I was willing to disrespect myself by playing dumb for the benefit of garnering social acceptance. During my first semester at Liberty my intellectual and emotional honesty was upheld to the detriment of maintaining respect for others. In the years leading up to her becoming a teacher, Bonita cared for her own children as a stay at home mother. As a mother, she gained the insight through her son’s struggle to fit in.

*You know my Josh. He was in the gifted program, so he was always very bright. But, he is not what we would call normal. He thinks differently. He is out of the box. I always said he is that round peg that isn’t going to fit into a square hole. I didn’t want anyone to ever force him into that. That’s why I would never change anybody. Josh is Josh. How he is, makes him who he is. Now, if he had bad behavior, we’d need to change that. But, who he is, I do not want to change.*
am not going to force any child into a little mold, so that I have the “perfect class.” My class is perfect with you in it! I feel that way very strongly.

Josh had teachers along the way who tried to fit him into a mold of who he was never going to be, never. When you stop and you think, if my Josh were gone tomorrow, I would miss every one of those annoying different things that make him him. Not bad behavior. But, I would definitely miss the parts of Josh that makes Josh Josh. It think that with these guys. That’s what makes you who you are.

Many may choose to interpret the above comments to represent Bonita’s beliefs, or perhaps the intersection between her mother and her professional identity. While matters of teacher beliefs and professional identity are important, the analysis of teachers’ narratives will have a different emphasis here. The focus will be on how these insights were emboldened, and perhaps to some degree evoked, by a truth event that conveys **Bonita’s maternal love**. It was a frightening event, involving the health of her son, Josh, who needed to undergo neurological surgery. Bonita reflects,

*Josh has a different drummer. He just always has. Through Josh’s brain tumors, when he had a possibility- you know, when they work on your brain your whole personality can change- I wanted every single thing that drove me up the wall to be back; because that is what made Josh who he was. You know, behaviors, yeah I want to change them if you are not following the rules and life is tough with you because of it. But who you are, I don’t want to change you.*
Even that kid who talks out all the time, there are certain times to do it, but I want to hear you talk all the time. You have to learn the rules of society and you can’t just talk at certain times. But, I want to know that.

It is important to note that many of Bonita’s colleagues credit her success with “difficult to reach” children to her having a “structured” classroom. Indeed, Bonita’s classroom is carefully organized and she runs a tight ship. Yet, the truth of the Josh event underscores all of her efforts with a deep sense of respect for each child. The truth of the Josh event can be encapsulated with the declaration: You might need to guide, teach and change behaviors; but never change the person.

Issues regarding social belonging were also quite relevant during Karen’s pre-service years. Here, she ponders the potential alienating effect that could result from speech pathologist intervention. Additionally, she notes that she did not foresee herself as an individual who was a “good fit” for a career in teaching or speech and language pathology.

I started learning sign language when I was in college. I just took it because it seemed fun. Then, I switched my major to speech pathology, thinking that would be where I would be used really well. That program, I didn’t like it. I met a kid who was deaf and was coming for speech therapy. In college we did clinicals, but we were supervised by someone. And, so I was watching my supervisor work with my child. That is where I started to hear that there was this deaf world. It’s not a big fancy story. It is that experience. I saw this kids and wondered why is he
talking? Why would we have him talk? He keeps signing to his parents but then we have him talking. Now, I see the purpose of it, but at the time I saw it as cruel.

So, I got very heavy into sign language at that college and I wrote a paper about deaf ed... I didn’t know that deaf ed existed. I thought teaching was terrible. I didn’t want to be a teacher. I hated kids. I didn’t like children. I had little patience and I didn’t want to be that kind of person. Then, I decided to move to Kent. It was really quick. I decided in November and I was there in January.

Karen’s aforementioned story of her own school experience highlighted the tensions she felt between the structures of schooling and her values of being free to use her time in activities of her own choosing. Because of this vantage point she brought to the clinical experience, she understood it in a particular way. In other words, for Karen, this ordinary speech and language intervention constituted a truth event. It is an understanding that has since changed, as Karen became a more experienced educator. After all, she herself said, “Now, I see the purpose of it, but at the time I saw it as cruel.” However, this clinical experience occurred prior to her “seeing” of “the purpose.” Hence, she saw a problem that triggered inquiry. First, she inquired, how much of the child’s life is being consumed by this intervention therapy?

I interviewed them about what kind of time they were putting into speech and going to therapy. At the time it didn’t really resonate with me, but now I get it. This kid was going to speech two times a week during the school day...

Then, she considered what he was not doing, because of the time spent in therapy and...
...being pulled out of core. You know, being pulled out of that academic time to learn how to talk when he already had a perfectly good language. He was also not going to...

the parents said they struggled with him not being in sports because he had to be in speech therapy. So, he would go to speech therapy about twice a week after school. That bothered me. They miss so much during that time that is spent learning how to talk. Next, she appraised the quality of experience the child encountered in speech therapy.

And, its just drill, when you are working on speech only. They work on articulation. So, the speech therapist would take a language sample and say, “alright this kid is close to getting that /t/ sound.” Then, they have all kinds of techniques and signs they use to teach how to make the sound- where your tongue goes and do you have to touch this. There are all kinds of techniques to use with them. In conclusion, she proposed a possible alternative that she considered to be more desirable.

Let him be social. Don’t make him miss math. Let him sign. It’s not a big deal. Now I get it. But, it’s still a problem that we struggle with. My kids get pulled out for speech. It’s still a struggle, but I understand the purpose now.

The event of the speech intervention, invoked Karen to declare: I don’t like to waste my time and I don’t want to waste theirs.

Karen’s commitment to not waste time resonated with my memories of being eager to leave Liberty University. However, unlike Karen, I failed to imagine a clear
alternative to how my time would be better spent. After leaving Liberty, I was going to remain lost, such was life. For better or worse, the next several major life decisions and happenings occurred as the result of circumstance rather than my possessing any sense of purpose or direction. I elected to enroll in the next closest state university, or secular university, as they called them at Liberty. I transferred to Kent State. Despite being close in proximity to my home town, I rarely came home to Akron. I was completely engrossed with campus life. I enjoyed meeting and building friendships with diverse people who held a wide variety of interests. Some of my new friends and I shared obvious things in common. Others, whose life experiences were different than mine, were able to broaden my horizons and teach me something new about myself, society or ideas that I hadn’t previously considered. These relationships were important to me.

At this point, in our pre-service lives, Karen, Bonita and I were not enjoying constructive relationships with positive teacher role models. My teacher at Liberty, Karen’s mentor educator during a field experience, and Bonita’s son’s teacher seemed intent on upholding a hierarchal order that caused us each concern. I believed that my instructor was narrow mindedly stultifying my education. Bonita worried that some of her son’s teachers were inhibiting his opportunities to be himself at school. Karen was concerned that speech therapy was compromising a young boy’s opportunity to take pleasure in a rewarding social life. On the other hand, Stacy’s reflections on this stage of her becoming a teacher included the recollection of teachers who had an extraordinarily positive impact on her.
The first year that I went from being a camp counselor to camp cook, the person who was in charge of the camp that summer his wife was the head cook. I was an assistant cook. They were both teachers. That’s why they did this in the summer. She taught home economics. She had a GRADS program, not then but later. GRADS was an acronym for, I don’t remember, but it was a program for high school girls who were pregnant or had babies. They actually brought their babies to this daycare center at the vocational center.

This lady, Kathy, was the head cook and we worked together side by side, every day, all day long. So, I saw her in the mother role. She had her kids with her that summer. They were like: 3, 5 and 7. But, she was a teacher also. I just thought she was the most well-rounded, loving, funny person. All of us on staff were college students. She was 10 or 15 years older than all of us. She was kind of like everyone’s mom that summer. I just always respected her.

We became friends. I was already on the path to become a teacher at this point. It was my second year of college. I respected her a lot. I would even call her for advice sometimes as an adult.

Then, I really respected a couple of key teachers in high school. I became close with them. I only remained friends with one of them. He was our music teacher, the choir director. So, I just respected and admired them a lot. I enjoyed my time under their instruction. So, there were teachers that were major influences in my life.
These special teachers served as models of caring pedagogy for Stacy and made a lasting impression.

*A value that is important to me: that one is genuine. I believe each of them very much were. They are not… they don’t take themselves so serious. Being with them in whatever the situation was fun. There was a fun component. But, there was still that separation of which I just had respect for them. We weren’t completely on common ground because of course there was a difference in age and it was mostly a student-teacher relationship. I just respected them and I think that respect had to be mutual for me to have held them in such high regard. They respected me as a person, a learner, as a student.*

*The genuine nature of their character... their desire to create an enjoyable environment... I think they were also very well versed in what they did. They just looked very professional to me. They weren’t wondering, “oh, I don’t know what to do...” I perceived a confidence, that they had a confidence in their craft and that they had a confidence in executing whatever it was that they were doing. That impressed me and is something that I saw in each and every one of them.*

In contrast to Stacy’s memories of special teachers leaving lasting impressions, my teachers had not made a lasting impression to this point. As enjoyable as this phase of exploratory learning and divergent thinking may have been for me, it couldn’t last forever. Eventually, I was confronted with a regulatory aspect of higher education that I had all but forgotten about. In order to graduate, I needed a major course of study, lest
numerous accumulated credits would lead to no credentials and my college years could have been considered a waste of my time.

My struggle wasn’t a difficulty in finding an interest; it was the challenging process of narrowing my divergent interests down and committing to one path. What would you be happy doing in your 40s? In my 20s, this imposable question seemed as daunting as to query about the will of God. It might be fun to talk about; but, seriously, how the heck was I supposed to know with any degree of certainty? I was calmed by routinely hearing the common advice, “no one actually does what they majored in” from my elders. Not wanting my university attendance to be for naught, I wanted to graduate with a degree in something, really anything; but, saw no real reason for comprehensively learning a discipline. To me, many were interesting but none stood out as wildly fascinating.

With that, I set off to find a major in a manner that mirrored Stacy’s experience. Despite the deep respect and even admiration that characterized her relationships with special teachers in her life Stacy, like myself, did not anticipate a career in teaching. Rather, teaching was something that Stacy “fell into.” She recalled,

*I just thought it would be so cool to work at Sea World. Zoology would get me there. I went to my first science class and the professor said, “I assume you all know how to use a microscope.” Biology wasn’t required when I was in high school. I had chemistry. I had physics and general science. You needed 3 hours of science. I had never taken a biology class, because the bio teacher was just known to read the paper, have hissy fits and ignore his class. I decided, yeah I’m*
not going there. So, I didn’t know how to use a microscope. I was in college and I had never used a microscope.

So, I told my boyfriend at the time and he said, “come with me, we are going to go talk to Dr. Shaker.” So, we walked into his advisor’s office, because he was in education. He said, “Stacy wants to be a teacher.” I’m telling you it’s a crazy winding path… Perry was already in education. He took me to his advisor and just said, “go ahead and go into education.” That’s how it happened!

Without the unambiguous disciplinary structures of Liberty, I was enjoying a bit of intellectual and social freedom. However, in light of my scholastic wonderings and wanderings, I had no clear purpose or direction toward completing a degree. I enjoyed courses in the social sciences and taking a course in family and consumer studies that required me to visit a toddler classroom at the university’s laboratory school. During my first visit, the children were as curious about me as I was them. We played, laughed and had a wonderful time. Towards the end of the semester, I felt a bit melancholy that my scheduled time at the center was nearly completed. I thoroughly and earnestly enjoyed the children, the classroom and school.

The lead teacher in the toddler classroom must have sensed this. She brought me an application to be a student employee and suggested that I could work in her classroom. I filled out the application immediately and began working at the center the following fall semester. I was engrossed in the goings on at the center and in the toddler room. I was fascinated by the children’s social, emotional, intellectual and physical development and
the teachers’ ability to facilitate experiences that were engaging for the children and thoughtfully supportive of each child’s developmental abilities. It didn’t take long for me to realize that I had found more than a part-time job. I had discovered a career aspiration.

I had so much to learn and at the lab school I was in the perfect place to begin. The lead teacher facilitated her classroom in such a way that the atmosphere exemplified elements of care, engagement, thoughtful organization and joy. Beyond that, she multi-tasked with such adeptness that she made it all look easy. I knew that I was working alongside a very knowledgeable and skilled professional. Additionally, the teacher fully embraced the culture of the laboratory school, deliberately welcoming and mentoring students, like myself, inviting us to participate in discussions and ask questions. I wanted to learn how to teach young children and this was clearly an ideal environment for such a journey to commence. Watching and participating, I learned a lot from following the lead of more experienced others. Quite simply, the Child Development Center was a fun place to spend my mornings and a dynamic environment for learning about the complex world of teaching young children. To this day, I find it almost providential that my crazy winding path directed me to the center.

In this formative stage of becoming a teacher I was fortunate to find a stimulating environment and a capable mentor. Stacy and Karen also found wonderful mentors at this stage of their pre-service experience. Stacy remembers Mrs. Alice,

*Dottie Alice was our instructor. She taught in a neighboring district. When she came for our first class there were 4 or 5 of us in the class.*
She said, “Here is what I’m thinking, girls. Tell me what you think about this. Instead of us meeting here in this college classroom with all of these desks, what would you think about coming to my classroom? We’ll just have our meeting in my kindergarten classroom. It will be so much more meaningful to you.”

That’s what we did and I loved it! She could bring out her centers. She would show us how she set things up. She would walk out into the hallway. I will always remember when she brought us out into the hallway to show us artwork and said, “look at this person’s, and this person’s and this person’s... I will never tell a kindergartner to make their picture look like mine because they are individuals.”

Mrs. Alice would say, “so what if there are purple trees and and blue grass”.... The way it came out in chapter 9 was allowing children to have their own individuality. If that is the picture that they want to draw or how they are choosing to express themselves, then we are just squelching them if we are saying, “that’s not good enough” or “that doesn’t’ look like mine.”

She has since died of breast cancer. She probably passed 15 years ago. Her words and the experience of looking at children’s artwork in her hallway frequently surfaces when I’m in my classroom and I’m watching kids do work. If I’m there, I ask, “What would Mrs. Alice say?” I might say, “tell me about that” then, I will even say as I’m walking around looking at kids’ journals and trying to motivate those who aren’t working yet or haven’t thought of their idea, “this is
person is writing about cookies! She loves cookies!” or “this person is going on an airplane”; “I like this purple dog with green spots”... Celebrating what they are doing. She inspired me with what she said to me and she probably never knew how often her words come back. I just think that’s what our kids need. That’s what they need to hear from me. They need to be inspired and validated. I need to be inspired and validated.

Karen recalls Dr. Kroegan who welcomed her into the field of deaf education, after she had decided that speech and language pathology was not for her.

I was really lucky. I met a great professor, Dr. Kroegan. Kimberly Kroegan really took me under her wing right away. I don’t know why. We ended up having a really good relationship. I was a student worker for her. Then, I was her grad assistant. In my graduate program, many of my classes were independent studies that she made just for me. She liked me and she wanted me to be good. I was incredibly lucky because then I had someone to hold me accountable.

She really taught me how to want to do better. Before that no one had ever held me accountable for anything in terms of my education. So, I wanted to impress her and I wanted her to like me. I wanted to do really well. Through that I developed a passion for the field. It became my own.

When we started working together in ways where she treated me more like a colleague than a student, that drove me even more. I felt respected. I really found a lot of drive in that relationship and I got very involved. It helped me
develop a passion, which I don’t know if I would have if I were just a student floating around in the program. You don’t really get that kind of passion from just taking classes. You get it from experiencing and talking to people in the field. She gave me all of those opportunities.

... She does a lot of research in math. Math ed for deaf students and practical math. She got me to see that side of education that is so important... that students experience things and it’s not just drill and it’s not just teaching and instruction. It’s about the experiences you give them.

As soon as I started graduate school, she wanted me to start writing research with her. But, I was so bored with it. For me, math was boring! I wanted to write about language and I want to learn about language. And then, we started to kind of separate. I mean, she still supported me but she said, “go for it. That’s your thing. Language is going to be your thing.” I really tried, my whole undergrad, I was like, “yeah. Math is great.” Then, I started to come into my own and realize that I was really bored with it and explore other areas.

I asked Karen, “She pulled you in by sharing her interests but then let you take your own path as well?” To which she replied,

There were a couple months where I was learning how to do research, you know, learning how to compile all of the articles. It was awful. After a couple of months I went into her office and said, “you know, I hate this.” She said, “I know. Keep going. You’ve got to get through it.” And, I said, “no. You don’t understand. I can’t do it anymore.”
We laughed about it. She asked, “what’s your interest.” I talked to her about it. She helped me go in that different route. She also, really pushed me to go do my student teaching at a school for the deaf that was out of state. At that time, they didn’t send students from Kent State to out of state locations. They had designated places. She said that she wanted me to experience the Kansas School for the Deaf. It is the best language model school in the country.

I had to really petition to get into it. Then, it was a couple of weeks before, I told her I didn’t want to go. I said, “I have cats and can’t leave.” I emailed her at 3:00 in the morning and said that I was sorry to not take this opportunity but I have a cat and she is too important to me. Karen really got on me. She said, “you know that’s pathetic. You can come back to the cat in four months. You’ll both be fine.” She really pushed me and I’m glad she did because the experience that I got at KSU was unlike anything that I could have gotten in the Cleveland area. I would’ve been in a place like the schools that I worked in.

It was Dr. Kroegan’s mentorship that led Karen to a student teaching placement that provided for her an ideal professional learning environment. Karen seems to feel inclined to direct accolades toward the school at which she student taught, in a similar fashion to my praises of the child development center. Though her learning experience was quite different than mine, it too was one with enduring value. When asked about her student teaching site she explained,

Yeah. It was huge! It was. I had never seen anything like it. It was a bi-lingual, bi-cultural school, which means that they teach ASL only, with English in a very
particular way. There is a training that they put all of their teachers through. There is only a couple of schools in the country that do this training. But, their kids come out pretty good. They learn their English.

Their philosophy is that if you give them a base language, then they can learn a second language, which is very common sense. So, I student taught in fourth grade. It was nice to be surrounded by deaf adults who were well-educated. I did not have that experience in the area that I was studying. A lot of the deaf adults are graduates of the local school districts. So, to be there and to work with deaf teachers who are experts in that field was really great. It was very different.

It was different because most schools where I’ve been... it’s just you get your degree and your thrown in. Whatever philosophy you have, you use. At their school, they had the ability to say, “we want all of our teachers to have this training. Then, we are going to monitor how they are going to use that training in their classroom.” And, it’s just a really good model.

So, my experience was great. In terms of what I saw and experienced, I was with an older, hearing teacher. She was one of the only ones. No one else wanted a student teacher. So, I was kind of stuck. She was nice, but she never let me take over the whole class. It was just kind of a control issue. She wasn’t a very good model for me because I had gone to see the deaf model and she was a hearing teacher that kind of was grandfathered into the role.
... Kim is a certified teacher. She has gone through the training to be able to teach it, but she has never been able to teach it. She did an independent study for me, so I could learn the bi-lingual, bi-cultural philosophy. So, I'm able to use that all the time. I actually just shared the materials from that course with my program director, because I feel like we have the claim that our program is a bi-lingual, bi-cultural program, but we’re not by any means.

Karen learned a great deal from the culture of this unique school. She looks back and sees the value of their particular philosophy. The culture of the Child Development Center was also infused with a particular pedagogical philosophy, which had a lasting impact on my thinking about early childhood education. However, here I would like to focus upon an event that occurred one day, during one of my first weeks at the school. There were a two little boys, one was the youngest in the toddler room the other an English language learner, who were having a particularly difficult time transitioning to the school environment. I often provided them with individualized attention in efforts to console them when they were upset or frustrated. I regularly tried to engage them in an experience alongside their peers when they appeared to disassociate themselves from the rest of the class. This work was challenging and on some mornings, I was more successful than others. I wanted to help the boys find ways to more actively participate in the classroom by devising a plan for action that was both developmental meaningful and culturally relevant.

Wondering what I was doing wrong or what I should be doing differently, I approached the lead teacher seeking answers to a series of pertinent questions. I was
anticipating her to suggest some strategies, tips and tricks. However, instead of imparting her own expertise or explaining a detailed plan, she invited a conversation with a simple question, *an inquiry event: “I don’t know. What do you think?”* Her unwillingness to respond to complex series of questions with simple answers taught me a lesson with enduring value. **Professional inquiry is a humble process of collaborative and recursive problem posing and solving.** That day, I learned that being candid about what is unknown, open to considering others’ points of view, and steadfast in one’s commitment to persevere despite not knowing can and perhaps should constitute the key components of experienced, knowledgeable and talented teaching.

**Being Experienced Early Childhood Educators: In Service of the Public**

Upon completion of our teacher preparation programs, it was time to say goodbyes to the special mentors and places that we held dear to pursue our own careers in new places. Although I had grand visions of securing a position teaching young children in a beautiful coastal location, an opportunity presented itself in an unanticipated place. It was the spring of 2000. I was completing my kindergarten student teaching assignment in a neighboring school district and preparing to graduate. It was a nice school and I was enjoying my nine weeks there as a student teacher. The staff was friendly, frequently offered positive feedback and encouragement, which I appreciated. Besides, I had little interest in making waves and debating about differing ideas and approaches to teaching. I would do as I wish when I attained my own classroom. Moreover, I was primarily looking ahead and envisioning my future classroom in a new, exciting and picturesque place. Such fantasizing was soon interrupted.
A kindergarten teacher down the hall notified the staff that her husband was being transferred. Therefore, she and her family were relocating and she would not be returning the subsequent school year. Right away, staff members were asking me if I was interested in the position. I was indeed looking for a teaching job. Before I knew it, administrators were observing my teaching and interviews were scheduled. When all was said and done, I was offered a teaching job before I had officially graduated. Moreover, I would be working at a nice elementary school with an affable staff located less than two miles away from my apartment. It seemed like too good of an opportunity to pass up.

I accepted the position and spent the next twelve years teaching kindergarten in that elementary school. I took pride in the quality of the relationships that I built among the children and their families. Nonetheless, I often felt disconnected among my colleagues. Most of the time, our interactions were congenial, yet rarely collegial. Gender was occasionally raised as an issue and speculated to be an underlying reason that my thoughts and practices didn’t conform to the building norms. I knew that the majority of my colleagues were not interested in my ideas or in having their ideas challenged. Sometimes I chose to speak out and challenge taken for granted ideas anyway. Other times, I would retreat to my classroom and find creating an alternative space for and with children behind closed doors. Although I was often recognized as a good teacher, I stuck out like a sore thumb and that wasn’t always appreciated. I didn’t belong there.

Joey concluded our first conversation with the statement, “I didn’t imagine it would be so difficult just to do or teach the way that I want to teach, or the way that I feel
is best to teach. I don’t know. It’s frustrating. That’s the only thought that I have right now. Why is it so difficult to teach what research tells us to do?” As will be highlighted in the next chapter, Joey’s ideas regarding “what research tells us to do” often placed him in an adversarial position in relation to the administrators of his urban school district. In comparison to Joey’s accounts of intense conflict with his culture of curriculum, the collegial interactions I experienced early in my career could be described as negligible disagreements. However, I stories provided by Karen and Stacy will serve as exemplars of early childhood curriculum workers who adeptly work across differences. Working in her third urban school district, Karen is beginning to take on the role of **curriculum leader in an atmosphere of cooperation**. Furthermore, with several years of experience teaching kindergarten in the same building, Stacy seems to be able to in many ways circumvent conflict altogether and **cultivate a community of collegial friends**.

For me, graduate school became somewhat of a reprieve from the normative assumptions of my school. As a young, enthusiastic man working at an elementary school, I was initially encouraged to go into administration. Yet, early on an observant professor bemused that I had the characteristics of a “young buck,” who naively thought that I “didn’t have to play ball.” She was right. I was not at the time interested in perpetuating the normative assumptions, even with strategic purposes. I wanted to challenge the status quo, not uphold it. I wanted learn more about people, like myself, for whom school structures and norms didn’t always work. For these reasons, I found myself studying gifted education and maintaining a focus in early childhood education.
In the final semester of my masters’ degree program, I remember experiencing melancholic feelings similar to those I felt in my first field experience at the Child Development Center. How could my coursework be ending when I had more questions than I did beginning of the program? I had become enamored by academic study much in the same way that I had become drawn to the profession of early childhood education. So, I kept going and pursued doctoral studies. I decided to continue teaching kindergarten and to keep studying the field of early childhood education. Through experience, I had already garnered a strong understanding of dominant trends in public schooling and was familiar with the “best practices” customarily recognized in the field. Now, I wanted to better understand why the prevalent trends and understandings were as they were.

My teacher friends and I possess many stories of alienation and reconciliation that have ensued during our experiences studying and practicing of early childhood education. Often these stories arise from the challenges inherent to bringing together disparate ideas and values. As mentioned above, Karen’s student teaching took place in a dynamic school for the deaf, which taught her to value bi-lingual and bi-cultural settings. Yet, once she began teaching deaf children in an urban school, she quickly realized how rare such an environment truly is for young, deaf children. She explains…

So, the situation is that I came out of college with a head-strong thought that all deaf students needed ASL, making them talk is horrible, it’s not appropriate to do any kind of auditory training, I didn’t need to worry about their hearing aids and equipment- that wasn’t important. Then, I went to Arlen [pseudonym for Katy’s
2nd urban district] and I started to see the other side. I started to meet kids that were in the middle and were stuck and were on the other side of that deaf culture perspective. Usually, a program has kids who are being trained to voice and there are a couple of deaf kids who needs ASL and they are kind of left behind. And, you feel so bad for them. Then, I came to this school in Arlen and I realized that my perspective would have left other kids behind who really needed auditory training and benefited from it.

I never realized that you could be deaf and be an auditory learner. That was something that was so bizarre. I am not an auditory learner. I’m completely visual. Many people are. But, I see. Most people are visual learners; that’s common knowledge. But, there are kids who I didn’t know until I went to Arlen. I had a student who had this auditory memory that was incredible. He was hard of hearing, he wasn’t deaf. He preferred voicing. He struggled with sign language. His auditory memory was incredible. It was better than most hearing kids that I’ve tested. Which means that you read them a sentence, they hear it and say it back to you, for example. He read it perfectly.

So, I developed this method with him of using his auditory memory to help him learn, rather than expecting him to sign all of the time and know what I am signing and look at pictures and diagrams- all of that overwhelmed him. He just wanted me to tell him verbally. After he would read something himself, he might struggle with it; but if he read it out loud to himself with one of those pipes into his ear, he did a really good job. He always comprehended much better.
So, I learned that from Arlen. My method was just the other side of the continuum. They were each saying, “all kids were this way.” They were just saying very different things.

So, I think that it was a good experience in Arlen to come here and be able to see that these two different kinds of kids exist and they are in all programs, everywhere.

... There is a whole other side of speech pathology, which is the language side. The problem was that I hadn’t gotten into those classes yet. (Laughter) So I was still working on articulation and all of that. Had I stuck with it, I probably would have.

The experience of teaching in Arlen challenged what Karen referred to as her most “headstrong” ideas. Having diversified her way of looking at language development, she enhanced her own capacity for curriculum leadership in her community of practice. In other words, she found reconciliation with the approaches to language learning typically employed by speech pathologists and audiologists. Rejecting the notion of “all kids” being any particular way, Karen repositioned herself as a lead learning professional. However, it goes without saying, that a willingness to engage with others’ disparate ideas does not automatically indicate that others’ will engage with your ideas. I came to know this all too well in my attempts to disrupt the pervasive behaviorism, which underscored habits of instructional and classroom management, that uncommon ideas are easily disregarded.
For me, the estrangement that I felt among my teaching colleagues was tempered by the professional communities I engaged with as part of graduate studies. However, where I found reprieve in academic studies, Joey only found more frustration. In addition to expressing his concerns regarding the various obstacles at his school that inhibit teachers efforts to transfer research to practice; Joey expressed what he perceived to be a separation between the research and researchers he encountered in his coursework and the context that situated his practice.

*I mentioned earlier how at the University we learned the constructivist approach and I really focused heavily on Reggio Emilia. I just got caught up in that whole philosophy and a lot of the professors were into that philosophy and that way of being for teaching children. So, I took that with me when I went to Canton. I honestly felt that was the way that all good teachers had to approach teaching, in that way of someone once called it, a “fly free, be free” type of teaching.*

*When I got to Carson, I realized that the philosophy wasn’t really mixing well or working well with my actually teaching approach or just teaching in the classroom. I began to feel like I wasn’t a good teacher because what I learned at the University about how to teach and how good teaching takes place in a classroom wasn’t exactly working with the students I was encountering and I was teaching in my classroom.*

*The teaching books and the curriculum books or specifically teaching reading, whenever they talk about the urban setting or the difficult students- the only advice that we’re really ever given in those books was just to take a little bit*
more time to get to know those students. I found out that didn’t even come near to what I needed to do to be an effective teacher with those students.

Joey was beginning to lose trust in the advice provided by professors of education. When I directly asked him if he still felt that they had something to offer, his terse response was, “no, they never experienced that, as a teacher. If they did experience it, it wasn’t for a very long time.” Then, he continued,

I came to find out that a lot of the professors taught for maybe 5 years, or a little bit more of a suburban setting, or that a lot of their urban experiences were as researchers during their PhD studies. So, they kind of had a different scope of an urban experience than say a practicing teacher would every day in the classroom.

Whenever that kind of conversation would come up in the class- I remember that when we were doing our student teaching our professors would tell us, this is the way that you need to approach curriculum and developing curriculum and implementing the curriculum in the classroom. My classmates who were student teaching in an inner-city school setting were telling the professor, “this is what’s happening while I’m teaching and what you’re telling me to do here isn’t quite working with my students.” A lot of the responses from the professors’ responses were, “you need to take more time getting to know those kids. You need to take more time to really understand them.”

Joey and I experienced the interplay between study and practice in very different ways. He lamented that his professors “never really focused on, ‘here are some strategies. Or, here are some things that you need to do in the classroom to be more
effective’. It was all, stick true to what we are telling you to do. Take more time to get to know the kids and eventually it is all going to work out.” He contended that an abundant amount of study with a scarcity of practical experience makes one incapable of providing practical solutions. I, on the other hand, experienced something quite different. My concern was that practical experience without study seemed to lead to habituated decision making processes, rather than reflective inquiry. While I was turning to academic study, Joey was turning to practical experiences to address the pressing issue of how we could understand the children in our classroom and the educational process in more meaningful ways.

Feeling dually isolated in both his communities of study and practice, Joey turned to a colleague, Mrs. Hilton, for the assistance he was not finding from educational scholars. He explained,

There was a fourth grade teacher who had lived in that neighborhood almost all of her life and she was teaching at the school. She had great rapport with the families. She was African-American. She was loud and outspoken. She was able to connect with the parents in a way that I couldn’t and a lot of the other teachers couldn’t, because we don’t live there, we aren’t African-American.

She was able to talk to those kids and families in such a way that there was no way in hell that you or I could, or even act that way with them. Those families knew Mrs. Hodge. “You know Mrs. Hilton. She lives in the neighborhood.” She was a tough teacher, but she was able to get a hold of some of those students that were the toughest to get a hold of...
Joey admits that, initially, he did not recognize Mrs. Hilton’s expertise. But, he soon changed his mind when he experienced unanticipated difficulties in his classroom.

*I remember at first, when I first started teaching there she came down to my classroom to give me advice. All I could think of is, “you know, thank you for the advice. But I know how to reach these kids. I am a constructivist. I went to a great University. I’ve been to Reggio Emilia.” I had no idea! I think it was about three months into it I finally went to her and said, “I need to know how to connect with these kids. What am I doing wrong? I am not connecting.”*

So, she would come down to my room and say, “okay, when this student is acting this way, this is why, because I know what is going on at home. So, let me tell you how to react or let me tell you how to handle this student in the best way for them.” So, I’d have her come to my classroom and show me what to do sometimes. I didn’t know how to begin with some of these students. She would help me figure out what I am going to do.

I asked Joey what lesson he learned from Mrs. Hilton most benefitted his classroom. To which, he quickly responded, “*How to interact with the kids and the families.*” Then, he elaborated,

*One day she came in during her lunch and she just watched me teach. I forget what happened, but she looked at me and said, “you’ve gotta learn how to talk different. You sound ridiculous to these kids.” I didn’t know what she was talking about. I asked her what she meant.*
She said, “you gotta talk, like they talk. You gotta talk like they talk at home. So, all-this-per-fect-eng-lish-that-you—are-speak-ing-right-now... Get rid of it.” She was very animated. “Talk the way they talk so you can connect with them. You can teach them the perfect English, but when you are talking with them and being with them, you need to talk the way they talk.”

The first year I learned, “Common baby girl. Whachu cutting up for? You done lost your mind?”

So, if I wanted to call a kid out who isn’t behaving properly I quit saying, “excuse me, please...”

I’d say, “Ah, baby girl. You done lost your mind. You best get right. You best get your head right”

She would talk to me and teach me how to talk to the kids, so that not only did they understand me but they could connect with me a little bit better.

My culture of curriculum presented challenges that differed from Joey’s. Although, I didn’t find a mentor, like Mrs. Hilton, my studies broadened in an effort to deepen my understanding. I became captivated by curriculum theorizing texts. I was enlivened by the challenge in my coursework to read everything critically and to compose responses to research and theory that argued with and against texts.

Furthermore, I became a voracious reader of philosophy. From ancient Greeks such as Plato and Aristotle; to existentialist such as Kierkegaard and Sartre; to the American pragmatist, John Dewey; to poststructuralists such as Foucault and Derrida, I read philosophy. I was fascinated by the various ways one could conceptually frame and
educational situation or any other social phenomenon. I was engrossed with the endeavor of trying to understand and articulate my own conceptual framework. Then, I encountered a study event: reading the philosophy of Alain Badiou.

What is one to do if the pervasive demands of policy trends and the established understandings of recognized “best practices” were themselves products of the dominant structures? How am I to carry on in my kindergarten classroom if the system that I am working within is effectively reproducing inequalities? If all actors within this system are complicit to these injustices, how can I take on the responsibility for ensuring that my endeavors resist the trends of which I do not approve? How can I foster a democratic classroom and teach for freedom and flourishing within structures that stultify my ideas?

Reading Badiou pushed me to consider the ontological framing that underlies the epistemological framings that curriculum scholars have employed in their efforts to uncover injustices and correct inequalities. Badiou’s ontology declares: Equality can be presumed, rather than desired; and truth is a creative process, rather than a mind-independent reality to be perceived or understood.

Badiou’s axiom of equality is for many quite a radical idea. Nonetheless, the presumption of equality is an essential feature of teachers’ endeavors to enact caring or emancipatory pedagogy. Speaking of the benefits of participating in a Teacher Leadership Cohort (TLC), Stacy critiques the hierarchical relations that are often taken for granted.

The freedom is the common thread. Also, the confidence to say, “we have a lot of tools in our tool box and we know how to use them.” I think many teachers feel
like, “my administrator must be smarter than me, and his administrators must be smarter than him, and I teach those who I’m smarter than.”

It’s not about being smarter or better. We really need to work at the picture of a team and everyone having different roles and not feeling a superiority. That was a different mindset for me.

First of all, one must resist the common tendency to act as a bureaucratic functionary merely adhering to the directives of superiors. As Stacy explains above and will elaborate below, many teachers have grown accustomed to seeking the “right answers” within the dominant paradigm of thought, the standardized management of instruction. Then, as will be the focus of the next chapters, a teacher wishing to engage in caring, emancipatory pedagogy must act in ways that are consistent with their commitments, even when facing the challenges inherent to working against the grain of their dominant culture of curriculum.

*Beyond the learning... When it would go to application when we’d go back to our districts, we were very much engrained in living the experience of top-down standardized management paradigm. If that’s all you know and that’s how you’ve been working... I remember one of classmates saying, “how do you want us to do this, or this?” We were used to asking, “am I doing this right? Please, give me positive reinforcement and tell me if I’m doing it right so I can give you more.”*

*That’s not what it was like. We took that and really applied that to our jobs and decided- it was the wiggle room thing- “I don’t have to ask for*
permission. I don’t have to ask someone to give me this list to go, check, check, check- I’m a good teacher. Or, say, “smile when you are proud of me.”

We took that experience and applied it to our teaching. We realized that that top-down, standardized management paradigm is not really the best way to work. It is not what we have to work under. We can wiggle around that. That was empowering too.

Stacy’s additional assertion is that hierarchies, which assign identities of being “smarter” or “better” to some at the expense of others, work against a mindset built upon teamwork and cooperation. Karen testifies that the impossible task of expecting any teacher to be all things to all students warrants a team mindset. She comments on the value of fostering cooperation among an eclectic group of professionals.

I work really well with that teacher who always wants to maintain an academic focus. So, it might be a really nice balance to have that person and a community person and the family oriented person and to have it all in the same place. Then, you are able to support kids in all areas. It would be nice if in a school like that you were allowed to define yourself as that person, in a way. Right, now I’m kind of struggling to be everything, to be all of those things. It is almost like we have to butt head a lot because I’m not doing my job. She may see that I’m not including subjects. Another teacher might see that I’m not bringing parents in every week to teach them sign language and that is so important. And, it is! One person can’t possibly focus on all of that.
It would be so nice to have a dream school where we are all allowed to define ourselves and say, “my focus is this. I will try to touch upon everything, but this is what I am really good at.” I’d like to be able to do that in an appreciated way.

It would be just fantastic to have a big school and to get rid of this grade level nonsense with my deaf students. I’d like to sort our kids based on their levels in these major content areas. Then, have everyone have a chance to work with them. That way kids will get that well roundedness. That would be the ideal school, where they’re not stuck with me for three years and only me. That’s dangerous. I feel like I’m a pretty good teacher, but at the end of the day, there are things that I don’t give kids that they need and I know someone else does. If they could have that more well rounded schooling, it would be really amazing for them.

I suppose, in order for it to be well-rounded, it is about who is there, what their strengths are, what experiences they bring. That way, students aren’t stuck with one frame of thought, one philosophy or one focus. I think it is important that we touch every corner.

Maybe well-rounded isn’t the best word, maybe it’s more like a polygon. All these different points that meet and we want to get every single point met. Just to be able to have as many people as possible with different experiences and philosophy, but everybody has a job. Instead of all teachers are all the same. Instead, I can be the language focused teacher. She can be the math focused
teacher, because she is really good at that. This other one might focus on home-school communication. It would almost be like we could all teach our content through one these different focuses with different teachers, so they get every single point they need to get. Whereas, right now, I feel like say last year I feel like I met maybe 60% of these students needs. If we were to stay the same this year, as we did last year, I would have the same kids and we would still be touching on only that same 60%. Whereas, at the school I’m envisioning, they would get what I can give them, plus what Julie can give them and also what Tonya can give them and really hit every point.

Maintaining productive collegiality among various and often competing ideas is a challenging undertaking for obvious reasons. Certainly, my teachers friends and I have found fruitful collegial relationships in different places. Jenna told me about respectful and passionate disagreements that occur among the faculty at her school; however she reserves the greatest amount of trust for a few very close collegial friends. Bonita is respected by all, but explained that growing up in the country she’d learned to “keep her circle small.” My circle gravitated toward academic studies, while Joey’s toward a more experience teacher at his school. Karen described herself as an outsider, recurrently playing the role of “the new teacher,” working alongside teachers who have become friends after having been together for a long time. Also, she explained her becoming comfortable with the coexistence of competing ideas.

I am able to bring both sides of it and not really be upset anymore. I think that comes with experience and maybe with maturity. I don’t know. I’m not upset
about not having it my way all the time. I can understand that there are reasons for different philosophies.

Among all of us, Stacy seems to interact the most with probably the largest network of colleagues. She enlightened me regarding her deep appreciation for the interconnectedness of teachers’ personal and professional lives.

*Where is the free time in the day to get together to talk with your colleagues?*

*Tonight we’re getting together to talk in Hudson, a group of teachers. It is so great that our teachers, we are such good friends and we do so many things together like this. Or, I’ll have a patio party at my house. It isn’t every teacher; but there is a group, it could be anywhere from 4 to 12 of us. We get together for these. So many people are supporting me and praying for me on Friday for my surgery. I know that people are going to come and visit and bring things. Those are people that I work with. We’ve worked together and come to know and like each other so much that we invest time together in nonschool related things.*

*We have a teacher who left at Christmas, had a surgery on January 7 and she is still recovering. It was a surgery gone bad and she needed second surgery. About 8 teachers, while I was in North Carolina, went out and weeded her flower beds and did her yard and things like that, because we have personal friendships and relationships with those colleagues, and that’s great. There’s not always time in the day to do that. But, we take those relationships beyond the school day and yeah we talk about school a lot. But, we also talk about our families and we*
just have fun together. Besides, you can’t drink wine at school, but you can on my patio!

It is only appropriate that Stacy shared a personal account to clarify the centrality of relationships in her efforts to work effectively among her students and colleagues. To elucidate the nature of collegiality and camaraderie that Stacy enjoys among people at work, she told me about what I will call the **Allison Event**.

*My husband and I have been married for 3 years and when I married him, his girls were in their early thirties and now there is a 3 year old grandchild. So, I was 45, he was 60 when we got married. At first they were like, what’s her deal? What is her plan?*

*I said to myself and my husband, “I can always and only and ever be myself. They’ll come to learn that I have no agenda.” That relationship has to develop and it has. But, I knew that. I knew it wasn’t going to instantly be a relationship. It wasn’t going to be me proving something to them, or being fake with them, or going overboard to say, “I really just love your father and nothing more.”*

*There aren’t just going to automatically fall in love with me, a relationship has to be established. It has just become very... that’s been a major focus of mine for the last couple of year. With Addison, my granddaughter, everybody says, “Susan is so great with Allie and it’s because she teaches little kids.” And, then, her other grandma... not so much. But, I say, “no, it’s not. It’s because I made a point to have a relationship with a person. It is not because this*
is a skill. It is a desired relationship and I work on that relationship. We have such a great relationship because I invest in that relationship and I talk to her and I know her well and I do things that I think will engage her. There might be a kid that walks in here that I don’t have an interest in developing a relationship with…

From the Allison Event, Stacy was able to declare, “it’s not magic and it’s not just a skill set that I know how to relate to little kids. That’s what I try to tell people. It’s a relationship. That’s what it is.” Furthermore, with relationships come certain responsibilities, which Stacy described as a discipline.

I will take the responsibility and say that I can maximize my time with better discipline, myself. So, I’m not putting that entirely on the structure of the day saying, “because of them, I cannot do this.” That’s not my stance exactly. I do have to be… I recognize that with more discipline on my part I could accomplish more. There are days that I’m more productive than others. And, it does just take a commitment to do the things that I suggested. Plan it, do it, check it off, hopefully experience success and that would encourage me to have the stamina to continue it.

Again, she turned to a personal narrative and shared the following example of how and why one must be disciplined and responsible for maintaining relationships.

My son came over and it’s the first time I’ve seen him in 4 weeks. I don’t think I’d seen him for 4 weeks. He lives in Goodpark Hills. Usually we see each other on weekends. He doesn’t talk on the phone much. I can’t let too many days go by
without calling him to say, “hey, how are you doing?” and not just “hey, do you have your rent? You’re a little bit late.” I don’t want to it to be that I’m just calling to get the rent, because I know that my kids are sensitive. I don’t want Joshua to think that I don’t have time for him anymore, because I got married and moved into a different house, and he works now, and we live in different towns. Because, he is kind of sensitive, a tough guy, “I’m 22 years old and on my own”... my point is: I still have to be disciplined in that obvious, natural relationship of mother/son.

I have to discipline myself to make sure that if I have 80 things to do on Sunday, but Sunday is the day that I stop at his house after church and I visit with him, or take him cookies, or play with his dogs. I have to do that, because if I’m selfish with my time and it is always all about me, those relationships are going to be stagnant or they are going to suffer.

One example of a rewarding collegial engagement was Stacy’s experience with a cohort in graduate school. She spoke of,

… the immediate experience with the other three women in my cohort, with whom I worked so closely on all of our projects. We worked well together, we were learning alongside one another, we were inspiring one another. I respected them as teachers and what they brought to the group. I respected their experiences, the resources we shared with one another. That was very liberating and it’s endless. The sky is the limit. What do you want to do?
Stacy’s aptness to experience such amity is certainly a special and unique quality that she possesses. Put simply, she is a friend to everyone. My other teacher friends and I share Stacy’s commitment to foster positive, caring relationships in our classrooms. However, as mentioned above, we have been much more guarded with our friendships among colleagues. The blurred line of personal and professional relationships that Stacy depicts is described much less ambiguously by Bonita, Karen, Joey, Jenna and I.

An example of the potential burden of maintaining such artificial boundaries became apparent during one of my interviews with Jenna. Preceding our scheduled interview, we greeted one another with pleasantries and began talking as friends. We asked about one another’s families. I thanked her for taking the time to meet with me. She assured me that she was glad to help a friend and congratulated me on moving closer toward my goal of completing a PhD. Then, the interview started and Jenna put her best professional foot forward. She spoke about technical aspects of her classroom and she spoke as she might in a faculty meeting. She referred to her best friend, Deanna, with whom I am also acquainted as her former teaching-partner. Her insights were astute and revealing of her professional acumen; but also, somewhat impersonal.

We finished the interview. I turned off my audio-recorder and another transition occurred. Jenna ceased speaking as a professional educator addressing a researcher; and she began speaking to me as one of her teacher friends. She told me why she will never give up on a student and to do so she spoke about her infant twins. Since these remarks were off the record, I requested Jenna’s permission to recall and retell our conversation. The following is my retelling of Jenna’s Twins Event.
Jenna told me that she experienced very little adversity in her life. Things always just seemed to come easily and life unfolded as planned in a series of successful progressions. However, a few years ago Jenna received what was for her devastating news. She was informed by her doctor that she would be unable to have children. This was the first time in her life that she recalls being told that the life that she had envisioned for herself was simply not going to become a reality. She related this to students who are labeled “at risk” or “not on track.” For these children, she explained, the consensus among experts might indicate that odds of “success” are limited or even that certain obstacles are impossible to overcome. She was told by experts that it was impossible for her to mother a baby. Though no one would have predicted it and much to the surprise of said experts, Jenna gave birth to twins. **The truth of the Twins Event emboldens Jenna to declare:** *Remain hopeful. Even the most unlikely and unexpected outcomes are possible.* Therefore, despite the predictions made via test score data or expert opinion any child can find educational success and she will continue to do anything and everything she can to help.

In conclusion, this chapter has brought together the reflections of six public school early childhood educators, including myself. In the process of gathering, analyzing and retelling their stories intertwined with my own, I have shared our reflections teaching young children. Also, I have engaged in the creation of truth telling narratives by recounting a series of events and declaring that since “this has happened” we must proceed in the world with a corresponding commitment. The writing of my
teacher friends’ narratives has, for me, itself been an event with a truth best articulated by Stacy’s comment below.

_Those friendships... it’s like a garden. If you plant a garden and let it go, the weeds are going to take over and you’re not going to have a garden any more._

_The gardens that do well are the ones that are well tended, they are weeded and watered. They are given attention._

**Conclusion**

The next chapter looks forward and imagines what is not yet in early childhood curriculum work and determine ways that the past is infused in our present situation as well as our future aspirations. The literature review from chapter two will be continued, permeating this chapter. Stories of fidelity will address our present situation from the lens of Alain Badiou’s (2001) notion of ethical fidelity and le mal.
CHAPTER V

INVENTING A FUTURE IN CHALLENGING CIRCUMSTANCES

The prior chapter took look back into my teacher friends’ and my personal and professional narratives that exhibited a transactional process of knowing. The narratives put forth the first two steps of currere composition (Pinar, 2012): a “regressive” look into the past and a “progressive” look toward corresponding futures. Shedding light upon past provocations of reflective inquiry and events that invoked truth processes deliberately brings the past into the present contemplations of curriculum workers. Highlighting the tentative ideas, hypotheses, and objects of inquiry cycles as well as the truths declared from events lays bare the ways that my teacher friends and I are looking forward and imagining possibilities for a future of holistic education in relation to these past provocations.

Putting on display the reflections and commitments that childhood curriculum workers bring to their professional practice is in itself a worthwhile endeavor. Indeed, my teacher friends represent a sampling of early childhood educators for whom I have a very high level of personal and professional respect; just as I assuredly take pride in the quality of my own work. I find my teacher friends to be smart, attentive and dedicated early childhood curriculum workers. Through years of study and practice, my teacher friends and I have honed our insights as “connoisseurs and critics” (Eisner, 1994) of early childhood curriculum work. My teacher friends are professionals who demonstrate at least an intuitive capacity for curriculum leadership. However, to limit our currere narratives to regressive and progressive glimpses into the past and future would be to tell
half truths about the realities of our experiences as early childhood curriculum workers. It would be a Pollyanna preview of our experiences made through rose-colored glasses without honest recognition of the substantial challenges that occur both within each of our selves and amid our cultures of curriculum. Hence, this chapter will delve into the next two steps of currere composition: the analytical and the synthetical.

**The Analytical and Synthetical Moments**

William Pinar (2012) advances the analytical moment, following the regressive and progressive moments, as the next important step of composing a currere narrative. Attempting to understand the present is the chief enterprise of the analytical moment and will thus be the focus of this section. Pinar (2012) warns that curriculum workers’ present is shaped by a substantial history of anti-intellectualism. Here, the anti-intellectual circumstances of my teacher friends’ and my cultures of curriculum will be scrutinized. This scrutiny will carefully attend to the often pervasive acts of authoritarianism traditionally enacted by carrying out dogmatic concepts derived from Western thought traditions. For public school early childhood curriculum workers in the United States, subtleties of Western dogmatism are both inculcated within our subjectivities and amidst the professional landscapes that contextualize our curriculum practices.

Conscientious of the realities of the culture of Western dogmatism that is constantly nipping at our heels, I will begin this analytical moment of narrative construction by reiterating past events, which were experienced in such ways that they provoked reflective inquiry or initiated a truth procedure. As was demonstrated in the
previous chapter, these events are accompanied by tentative ideas, hypotheses or commitments that inform and/or inspire visions as to how one might proceed, which is a progressive look forward. Now, in the analytical moment, the interrelations among past, future and present will be brought to bear as memories of events from the past, images that articulate our ideals, beliefs and commitments are juxtaposed with descriptions of our cultures of curriculum.

This study is framed by presumed critical distance from the dominant paradigm of thought that undergirds cultures of curriculum practice in the United States. Western dogmatism has indeed birthed several real and thoroughly documented curriculum problems such as the standardized management of instruction (Henderson & Gornik, 2007), conservative modernization (Apple, 2005), anti-intellectualism (Pinar, 2012) and bad educational science (Winfield, 2012) to begin name a few. Indeed, stories of the material realities of curriculum practice provided by my teacher friends and I will often confirm the significant conceptual problems mentions above. However, within the discourses and structures that constitute our cultures of curriculum our narratives also point out observations of “wiggle room” that provide opportunities and leverage points for holistic pedagogy. Furthermore, despite the lack of systematic support and even obstacles the dominant discourses and structures of our cultures of curriculum, my teacher friends and I continue to find ways to remain committed to the 3s gestalt of holistic curriculum and pedagogical practice.

The synthetical moment, which follows the regressive, progressive and analytical moments, is the final step of currere composition (Pinar, 2012). After the reflection and
contemplation, that has taken place during the first three steps, the synthetical moment is one that invites us to reconstruct ourselves as passionate public servants charged with the responsibilities of educating young children in public schools. Pinar (2012) explains that in the synthetical, “etymologically syn means ‘together’; tithenai means ‘to place’- one re-enters the lived present” (p.109). However, the act of “re-entering the lived present” is, for my teacher friends and I, a routine undertaking. The lived present of public school early childhood curriculum work is a situation that is concretized by the realities of people and local circumstances. It is a situation with which my teacher friends and I are never fully disengaged; spending 8 hours a day and five days a week being there, among those people and amid those circumstances.

In the synthetical moment of composing our currere narrative I will rethink and slightly revise Pinar’s analysis that “public education structures self-formation and social reconstruction while, in its present deformation, its destruction blocks both” (pg. 47). It is my contention that the stories offered by my teacher friends and I demonstrate that in its present deformation, the destruction of public education may hinder but doesn’t fully block self-formation and social reconstruction. My teacher friends and I are on personal and professional journeys of self-formation and social reconstruction; and we are interested in creating opportunities for our young students to embark upon parallel journeys in these undoubtedly very challenging times. Therefore, we are concomitantly engaged in the critical interrupting of “school deform,” which serves to destroy public education (Pinar, 2012) and creating opportunities for public ideals of self-formation and social reconstruction. Hence, the synthetical moment will be comprised of our stories of
fidelity, highlighting how we perceive the tentative ideas, hypotheses, and objects of inquiry cycles as well as the truths declared from events are and are not effectively put into practice.

**Our Truth Telling Narratives**

Since this dissertation research is a scholarly pursuit, it seems appropriate to begin the analytical piece of my currere composition autobiographically with the study event highlighted towards the end of the previous chapter. What this study event and all of the events, which will be detailed subsequently, have in common is that they effectively interrupted non-reflective experience. Posing a problem that troubles what had been taken for granted provokes inquiry and inspires one to engage in a reflective mode of experience. In other words, problem solving ensues with the aim of coming to know a resolution for the problem at hand. However, in light of the “whole inclusive of knower and the known,” events also disturb the very essence of a knower’s habitual way of being in the world. Badiou (2001) refers to this as an “immanent break” from the status quo. As the points of departure for telling our individual and collective stories, these events signify key “moments of disruption.”

Hence, the previous chapter began to address the first research question: “*What are the truth telling stories of six early childhood educators who embody transactional knowing and a commitment to enacting democratic virtues in curriculum practices?*” I named our moments of disruption and began to articulate the disruptive idea or commitment, which could be declared from experiencing each event. Our truth telling stories will now be made more complete in this chapter by adding the analytical
and synthetical moments. The analytical moment primarily focuses upon the second research question: “How do teachers’ declarations of truth and corresponding actions extend beyond the “cultures of curriculum” (Joseph, 2011) which contextualize their work?”

Therefore, this analytical step of currere composition will include three parts. First, I will identify the moments of disruption created by events by reiterating the event and its visionary declaration. Then, in the second part, I will address the sub-question: “With reference to the participants’ experiences in their respective ‘cultures of curriculum’ (Joseph, 2011), how do they perceive their “ethical fidelity?” In particular, do they feel they are persevering?” This will be done by reactivating the past events and corresponding truth declarations into the present situation and situating them within the culture of curriculum, which presents challenges and/or opportunities. Third, I will attend to questions of how those truths are realized in accounts of daily teaching practices and how the truth telling narratives express teachers’ guarding against or succumbing to the ills of betrayal, disaster and simulacrum. Ethical fidelity will be the aspect of the narratives underscored in this third component.

To reiterate the study event and its corresponding declaration of an envisioned future, I will begin by recalling the non-reflective mode through which I was experiencing the study and practice of early childhood curriculum. I entered doctoral studies as an experienced and highly critical practitioner. In fact, an impetus behind my continued study was my desire to garner a more robust understanding and a heightened capacity to articulate the many frustrations I experienced with public school practices. I
was fascinated by the various ways one could conceptually frame an educational situation or any other social phenomenon and deeply disappointed by the narrow conceptual rigidity I experienced as a practitioner.

I was experiencing a fragmented professional life, where study and practice were bifurcated. In the daytime I would, to the best of my ability, strive to enact a caring, emancipating, culturally relevant pedagogy in my kindergarten classroom. In the evenings I was engrossed with the endeavor of being a graduate student, trying to understand and articulate my own conceptual framework. This clear demarcation between study and practice allowed my experience of each to adhere to predictable routines. Critical studies provided endless critiques of the various ways that the public system of education in the United States reproduces social inequalities. Being in the classroom supplied a constant reminder of the reality that I was working within a system that often seems too vast to be impacted, even in the most modest ways. My pessimism was on the verge of becoming nihilism. Then, I encountered a study event: reading the philosophy of Alain Badiou and Frank Ryan’s (2011) analysis of Dewey’s final words on experience.

I will first attend to the analytical and synthetical moments of this particular study event as the organizing moment of disruption that prompted this dissertation research. Then, in a similar manner, I will highlight each of the moments of disruption identified in the previous chapter to compose my teacher friends’ and my collective truth telling narrative. This chapter will conclude with discussion of the implications and limitations
put forth by our collaborative imagination or reconstructing early childhood curriculum work.

**The Organizing Moment of Disruption: A Study Event**

Reading a collection of Badiou’s works and Ryan’s (2011) *Seeing Together: Mind Matter, and the Experimental Outlook of John Dewey and Arthur F. Bentley* sent my mind in motion with questions. What is one to do if the pervasive demands of policy trends and the established understandings of recognized “best practices” were themselves products of the dominant structures? How am I to carry on in my kindergarten classroom if the system that I am working within is effectively reproducing inequalities? If all actors within this system are complicit to these injustices, how can I take on the responsibility for ensuring that my endeavors resist the trends of which I do not approve? How can I foster a democratic classroom and teach for freedom and flourishing within structures that stultify my ideas?

Reading Badiou pushed me to consider the ontological framing that underlies the epistemological framings that curriculum scholars have employed in their efforts to uncover injustices and correct inequalities. Badiou’s ontology **declares**: Equality can be presumed, rather than desired; and truth is a creative process, rather than a mind-independent reality to be perceived or understood. Then, reading Ryan’s recent book reinforced my building discomfort with the metaphysical notion of a mind-independent reality and offered the non-dogmatic alternative epistemology of transactional knowing. Ryan (2011) asserts that “experience,” as explained by Dewey and Bentley, “must be
converted from the subjective domain of the knower into a whole inclusive of knower and the known” (p.44).

**Moments of Disruption Within the Present Challenges and Opportunities**

Transactional knowing provided and epistemological stance that stood in contrast to the epistemological assumptions that predominant in my disparate communities of study and practice. At my school, as would be the case in most practical settings, contemporary realism held the reigns when situations called for explanations for what is, beyond what we can know. In my academic study communities, postmodern deconstructions were often in vogue, which rendered such metaphysical considerations to be futile endeavors.

Steeped in the traditions of Western thought, the cultures of my two different professional communities both seemed divorced from reality in problematic ways. Accounting for “what is, beyond what we can know” with approximations of alleged mind-independent realities of best practices or measurable student growth trajectories, my school community seemed impervious to the reproduction of social inequalities that transpires through such logic. Then, the endless supply of subjective deconstruction proffered by communities of postmodern scholarship seemed disinterested in the realities of practical problem solving associated with being a curriculum worker in a classroom. The transactional point of view extends an epistemology where my experiences of study and practice can be reconsidered as intimately intertwined, rather than mutually exclusive endeavors.
This study event served as a moment of disruption, which unsettled my apprehensions of how early childhood curriculum work could be studied and practiced. Through Frank Ryan’s analysis of Dewey and Alain Badiou’s oeuvre, I imagined a reframing of early childhood curriculum work based upon a “transactional epistemology,” grounded in a “democratic ontology,” and carried out with “ethical fidelity.” The event provoked an “immanent break” from the realist dogma that insists that curriculum is either created by the self-action of subjective ideas or understood by interacting with it in the natural world. Rather creating an alternative conception of curriculum that conforms to what I have in mind or becoming more mindful of the nature of curriculum as it occurs in public schools, I became interested in “minding” public school early childhood curriculum.

Ryan (2011) elucidates thin notion of “minding” clarifying that, “anything we can discern or talk about depends upon our ability to work with and think about it” (p. 48). With key concepts of reproduction and resistance, the reconceptualization of curriculum has exhaustively made the case that public schools in the United States are plagued by dogmatic thought traditions (Pinar, 2013). Nonetheless, without detracting from how accurate and important these indictments are, critical studies in education have routinely rationalized their own form of counter dogma. In other words, the ability of critical theorists to interrogate public school curriculum from diverse conceptual lenses is a worthwhile endeavor that unfortunately overlooks and therefore habitually excludes the experiences of potential practitioner allies working in the field.
From a transactional point of view, I can no longer choose to speak as a scholar or a practitioner. I am decidedly both. Frank Ryan (2011) offers a concise explanation: “Transaction ‘sees together’ nature in experience as a method of objectivity and experience in nature as a physical process. From these twin perspectives, rationalism and empiricism now appear not so much wrong as incomplete.” (p. 49-50). However, this is not solely an autobiographical study. Just as I lean on knowledge garnered from literature in the fields of curriculum studies and early childhood education as well as the insights of past and present philosophers, I too rely on the achievements of my teacher friends. In collaboration theorists and practitioners can make use of their distinct vantage points to bring together “experience as a method of objectivity” and “experience in nature as a physical process” to co-create a transactional perspective of knowing.

Transactional knowing attends to the metaphysical concept of what Dewey and Bentley termed the “cosmos of fact,” which is deliberately “encompassing all that is, or can be inquired into” (Ryan, 2011, p. 50). Dewey and Bentley extended the etymological explanation, “[t]he Greek word Kosmos originally meant a world made intelligible as order is brought to chaos” (Ryan, 2011, p.50). Additionally, they reference to Latin root of factum “something done or made” (Ryan, 2011, p.51) to make clear the transactional spirit behind their term “cosmos of fact.” Asserting the metaphysical concept “cosmos of fact” implicates a democratic ontology. Transacting in the cosmos of early curriculum includes what one has come to know, what others’ know, what only experts know, things that are not yet known and possibly things that are unknowable.
An appreciation for the different journeys encountered by each and every individual is nicely articulated by Stacy. She comments, “That’s right. We did not walk down the same path and we did not see all of the same trees and meet all the same people and grow up in the same towns.” Individuals’ distinctive journeys not only make each person possess unique qualities; but also, make each person’s potential contribution of ideas or practices irreplaceable. Rendered as potentially irreplaceable, each person possesses the capacity to think for themselves (Ranciere, 1991) or to become subject to their own truth procedure (Badiou, 2001). Regardless of one’s social assignation, a person can have ideas that deviate from dogmatic traditions of thought. Further, one may engage in practices that exceed what is deemed possible within the dominant culture of curriculum, regardless of their position in bureaucratic hierarchies. In fact, the process of becoming “experienced,” attaining or maintaining expert status or ranks of authority may at times actually work against one’s earnest effort to freely think or act in ways that diverge from tradition and habit.

Indeed our cultures of curriculum uphold various social hierarchies that work against an axiom of equality. Stacy and Joey commented on their observations of how hierarchical orders can stultify the free thought and action of early childhood curriculum workers. They point to institutional hierarchies within a school, credentialing procedure within the profession, the level of one’s credibility being dependent upon the relevance of one’s vantage point, and the marginalized status of the early childhood profession amidst greater society. To illustrate, I will turn to the comments of two of my teacher friends,
beginning with Stacy’s reflections regarding the institutional hierarchies within a school. She commented,

*I think many teachers feel like, “my administrator must be smarter than me, and his administrators must be smarter than him, and I teach those who I’m smarter than.” It’s not about being smarter or better. We really need to work at the picture of a team and everyone having different roles and not feeling a superiority. That was a different mindset for me.*

She continued, explaining her perception of the relationship between roles that teachers play and the status of holding credentials.

*I had a similar experience. My first position in this district was a tutoring position. So, I didn’t have a “teacher” title. I was a tutor. After I worked there for several months, one of the other teachers, a classroom teacher, asked, “do you have a teaching degree?” She thought that I was just there in a supportive role, I was an LD tutor. Yes, I played a support role but it was a requirement that I was a teacher that I had credentials. So, I did have a feeling of, “you must not have credentials. You must not have completed your degree. Otherwise, you’d be a teacher.”*

Stacy went on to explain, the perception that there are “lesser roles” carried out by people with fewer credentials is a commonly held public opinion. Moreover, she expressed her exasperation with the common opinion that her role of teaching kindergarten is a “lesser role.”
Then, when I was working on my graduate work, a friend of my husband came over. I made apologies for my dining room table. It was covered with books, a computer and papers. I said, “I’m working on a paper for my master’s degree right now.” He said, “what will you be able to do when you get your master’s degree? Teach a higher grade?” I said, “no, I’ll get a pay raise and I will be a better teacher.”

It was just this sense of I must not have been a good teacher or have very many credentials because I’m just teaching kindergarten. I’m sure you’ve heard people say, “it’s just kindergarten.” That’s kind of deflating. First, it is insulting.

Joey was also vexed by the notion that teachers of young children play a “lesser role.” However, the focus of his critique was calling into question the elevated position of outside experts. He explained,

Once I started teaching, I had professors come and they would talk about their urban experience, or whatever they did in an inner-city. I came to find out that a lot of the professors taught for maybe 5 years, or a little bit more of a suburban setting, or that a lot of their urban experiences were as researchers during their PhD studies. So, they kind of had a different scope of an urban experience than say a practicing teacher would every day in the classroom.

Whenever that kind of conversation would come up in the class- I remember that when we were doing our student teaching our professors would tell us, this is the way that you need to approach curriculum and developing
curriculum and implementing the curriculum in the classroom. My classmates who were student teaching in an inner-city school setting telling the professor, “this is what’s happening while I’m teaching and what you’re telling me to do here isn’t quite working with my students.” A lot of the responses from the professors’ responses were, “you need to take more time getting to know those kids. You need to take more time to really understand them.”

The answers never really focused on, “here are some strategies. Or, here are some things that you need to do in the classroom to be more effective.” It was all, “stick true to what we are telling you to do. Take more time to get to know the kids and eventually it is all going to work out.”

When I got into the classroom that wasn’t working for me. I had to really adjust and re-adjust with my students and what I thought was good teaching and what I thought was bad teaching. They really started mixing together. I didn’t feel like I was prepared to step into the urban setting that I was in because anybody that I had either a class with or any of my classmates ever truly experienced what I was doing as a teacher. They really never saw that part of society or those children.

Joey’s remarks remind us that expertise is a contextual matter. His concern is that the perspectives of early childhood practitioners are routinely subordinated to the “expert opinions.” His words serve as a reminder that multiple vantage points are required to foster the practical wisdom necessary for curriculum problem solving that underlies teaching for holistic understanding. Further, in the context of our dominant culture
practical wisdom garnered from the classroom experience often takes a backseat to abstractions devised from theory and research.

Stacy’s expressed a concern regarding the marginalization of teachers’ perspectives, which is different from Joey’s. Her concern lies in marginalized status of the early childhood profession amidst greater society. She is unsettled by what she has observed to be the common perception that her work as a kindergarten teacher is something that could be carried out by anyone.

*I had a student who qualified for our remedial program, our intervention, this year. His mother didn’t want him in the public school to begin with, but allowed it to happen because it was only a half day program. So, when I said that he’d really benefit from this and that he has skills that need to be advanced... she said, “I don’t want him here all day. Tell me what he needs to do.”*

*I started to talk about letter recognition and sounds and sight words. She said, “so, he needs to know sight words.”*

*I said, “Yes, but he also...”*

*She continued, “just tell me what he needs.” There were probably 3,000 things that could have told her, but she wanted it narrowed down to just a few things so she could say, “we’ll just help him at home.” She said if it were fourth grade she might have been more willing to do it, but this was just kindergarten.*

*He needed prescriptive teaching and professional support. He didn’t get it at home. He didn’t pass kindergarten with flying colors. That is frustrating*
when I’ve spent the bulk of my career in kindergarten and in literacy and I’m not valued because “it is just kindergarten. I could do this. Anyone can do that.”

What do you do at home, mom, if the set of flashcards doesn’t help him.

That isn’t the only tool to have in the toolbox, flashing flashcards and rote strategies. There are also fun ways to do it. There are ways to build on his successes. Those are things that parents do not always teach. I am creative and prescriptive in my instruction. That is something to value. People who aren’t in it may not value because they are ignorant of it. They don’t know what is involved and how complex it is.

Story of Fidelity

This study strives to construct a narrative of transactional knowing, democratic ontology and ethical fidelity for early childhood curriculum work. Since such a narrative runs counter to the dominant discourses and practices that structure the study and practice of early childhood curriculum work, my teacher friends and I must guard against the ills of simulacrum, betrayal and disaster. Simulacrum occurs at the point when a moment of disruption is not in fact disruptive but instead promulgates dogmatic images of thought already prevalent in the dominant situation. Betrayal transpires at the point of declaration and analysis when individuals either give up in the face of adversity, or accept the explanations of dogmatic logic to explain away the moments of disruption. Terror arises at the point of fidelity when individuals impose their personal and professional accounts in the form of dogmatic counter-narratives.
Since the construction of this narrative of early childhood curriculum is an earnest attempt to move away from the dogmatism that pervades our dominant culture, every moment of disruption and the story that it initiates is open for critique. These critiques can take place at any of the three phases of narrative construction. Accordingly, a moment of disruption falls into simulacrum if it fails to be transactional, when it instead exhibits the qualities of empirical interaction or rationalist self-action that typify the dominant Western traditions. A declaration of the image or beliefs created from an event is reduced to a moment of betrayal it falls short of being disruptive and instead conforms to the dominant discourse and structures of the dominant culture of curriculum. Moreover, fidelity to a moment of disruption becomes an act of terror or disaster if it does not succeed in being democratic and succumbs to inclinations to impose a competing form of authoritarianism. By these criteria, I hope to create a non-dogmatic story of my teacher friends and my early childhood curriculum work that advances holistic educational aims. I leave the duty of critical appraisal to any and all interested readers.

**Our Collective Moments of Disrupting Early Childhood Curriculum**

Nowhere is the dominant discourse and structures of curriculum work more coherently articulated than in Ralph Tyler’s (1949) rationale for curriculum development. Early childhood curriculum work is no exception to this rule. As previous chapters explained in detail, the most popular trends in early childhood curriculum development—“evidence based” and “developmentally appropriate” practices—enact each side of
contemporary realism through the allegedly neutral procedures of the Tyler (1949) rationale. Herein lays the impetus for our narrative construction.

The alleged value neutrality of Tyler’s (1949) procedure welcomes any set of epistemological-ontological assumptions to structure the activities of curriculum workers. While at first glance, one might feel inclined to celebrate Tyler’s reluctance to dictate an epistemological-ontological stance for curriculum workers; his alleged neutrality ensures that dominant cultural assumptions will take hold. In other words, the Tyler Rationale embrace the qualities of empirical interaction or rationalist self-action that typify the dominant Western traditions. A moment of simulacrum, the Tyler Rationale doesn’t serve as a moment of disruption for early childhood curriculum workers; instead it promulgates ideas and practices as they already are.

My teacher friends and I have provided our accounts of eleven transactional moments that have inspired and/or informed democratic ideas and courses of action, which we strive to carry out with ethical fidelity to their virtue of embodying a for all quality. Hence, our collective narrative will endeavor to disrupt the rigidity of each of Tyler’s four steps and reformulate them into actively evolving processes. Our will not strive to be neutral. Rather, it will make every effort to consistently demonstrate transactional knowing, democratic ontology and ethical fidelity. Accordingly, our collective narrative will utilize Henderson’s (2015) scaffolding for reconstructing curriculum development that embraces progressive, emancipating pedagogical artistry. Truth processes will be represented in a way that highlights how our daily practices can extend beyond the predominance of Tyler’s technical rationality and work in ways that,
“draws on the heritage of emancipatory philosophy, critical social science, the arts and the humanities” (Henderson, 2015, p.16). In particular, our collective narrative will be structured with reference to key moments of disruption that qualitatively deepen The Tyler (1949) rationale (see Table 3) with the intent of teaching for holistic understanding (Castner, 2015).

Table 3

*Deepening the Tyler Rationale*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Tyler Rationale</th>
<th>Disrupted and Reformulated</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Purpose: learning outcomes and objectives</td>
<td>Aims Talking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience: self-action and interaction</td>
<td>Pedagogical Transacting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization: scope and sequence</td>
<td>Creative Designing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation: measured outcomes</td>
<td>Critical Appraising</td>
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**Disrupting Evaluation by Critical Appraising our Culture of Curriculum**

Our collective narrative will begin with Joey’s recollection of woodworking with his grandfather during a time when public schooling didn’t work for him. He felt disconnected from the various goings on at school and attributed socioeconomic status to be the impetus of the divide. In an environment he perceived to be created for middle class kids, who lived in bigger houses with families more attuned with schooling, Joey’s interactions with the culture of curriculum created cacophony negatively impacting both himself as a knower and the content being known. He recalls, “when the curriculum didn’t connect with me, I didn’t grow and my teachers made me feel like I was stupid. I
honestly believed that I was stupid all the way up through, I’d say, my second year of college.”

In time, Joey’s self-image changed, looking back on it now, I realize that I wasn’t stupid. I was going home at night teaching myself algebra, algebra 2, geometry, pre-calculus, all that stuff because during the school day in high school I’d be in the wood shop. I chose to stay in the wood shop and build things because that’s what I was interested in. However, this negative experience served as a source of inspiration for future curriculum work. Joey explains, “I think that’s my main drive. I know what it’s like when the crap that we’re learning or the crap that their doing just doesn’t connect with you. It sucks because you are made to feel like you are stupid and you’ve got all of these kids going through school. Their teachers are making them feel like they are dumb. Really they are not dumb, they’re just disinterested. They are not interested in what the teachers are teaching.”

Clearly, Joey remembers negative school experiences that were destructive toward his engagement in a holistic educational process. His self-image was compromised, as were his developing images and beliefs regarding society. Furthermore, he recollects finding little to no interest or meaning in the disciplinary content being taught in the classroom. Nonetheless, he also had an affirming encounter in the woodshop allowing him, perhaps quite literally, to reconstruct all that had been previously destroyed. Joey reminiscence follows.

The first time that I took algebra, I failed it. I wasn’t into wood shop classes at all at that time. Then, I got into the wood shop program in high school. My teacher
really forced me to say, “okay, you need to figure out how to build this project, or you need to figure out how to build this jig.” If you need to figure out how to do this, that take math. You need to learn that math and apply it to what you are doing.

When I was a senior I build a sea kayak. You would be amazed at how much math goes into just the design of a sea kayak. I had to learn that math to do it. I had to learn the physics because I had build a platform to raise or to lower my kayak down every day to work on. Because it took up so much space in the shop, I had to build this platform on pulley systems and I could lift it at the end of my class period- so there would be room for other students to work. I had to work with my physics teacher looking at pulleys and weight distributions and pivot points to figure out how I would best build this platform. That got me interested in that science and that math.

In geometry I had to figure out the formula of an ellipse because- you might have seen it in my living room- I built an oval tilt-top table. There is a formula that you need to know how to make a perfect oval or an ellipse. I needed to know how that formula works so that I could build a jig to make a tool to make that perfect oval.

So, in high school when I brought my interests into what I had to do in my other classes, that’s when everything started connecting.
Critically Appraising Within the Challenges and Opportunities of Evaluation

Joey describes the barriers present within his culture of curriculum as an “iron curtain” that forms between the school and the children, families and community it allegedly serves. The divisions of class experienced in Joey’s childhood, are palpable at his school, subjugating the vast majority of children and families. He articulates,

*The students walk into the school and it’s like there’s an iron curtain that goes down between school and home. Teachers control that side of the Berlin wall for that students’ life. Parents dare not cross that line or they are going to get shot in “no-man’s land.” To be an effective teacher, you really need to be able to bring parents and the lives of the students into the classroom. So, it’s not all about the mandates of down-town administration. You need to find a way to bring students’ lives into the classroom in a meaningful way.*

Here, the memory of Joey’s past encounter with his the personal interests being finding no space for existence in the classrooms of his youth are palpable as he expresses his professional beliefs. To “be an effective teacher,” he contends, one must find a way to be inclusive to the interests, values and experiences of one’s students. He explicitly positions this professional stance to be in direct opposition to the agenda of his “down-town administration,” providing the following illustrative example from his present culture of curriculum.

*That curriculum that was based on whatever the district bought that didn’t relate to my students… that’s where the iron curtain starts to form. That curriculum-the stuff that we have to teach in school- doesn’t coincide with those kids’ lives*
and experiences and their families values. When you try to bring the families in and bring those experiences into the classroom, you are not allowed to because that curriculum is going to teach the kids what they need to know to do well on the test. Not so much that it’s going to teach the kids something about life.

Is it going to help them connect things in their lives to other things in their lives or help them live fuller lives? No, it’s going to teach them what they need to know on the test and anything beyond that needs to stay away, because it is just a distraction from the curriculum. So, that is the iron curtain, the separation.

Joey goes on continuing to admonish the bureaucratic management he experiences at his school. He expresses his frustration with what he interprets to be the fickleness and lack of continuity among administrators who implement a multitude of curriculum initiatives.

We’re constantly every single week, every other week, every month coming up with the new plan of curing this problem of students not being able to read in our district.

Being reactive, I can’t even remember how many new initiatives we did this year alone. I’d say over 25 new initiatives. That’s how often there is something new from district, building leadership, “here’s what we are going to do because of the TGRG or behavior issues district wide…”

Moreover, Joey finds his supervisors’ heavy-handed approaches of enforcing the “downtown mandates” to be counter-productive. The dire situation created by the accountability culture, from his perspective, only distracts teachers from carefully
thinking about their practices. Furthermore, like so many of his teaching colleagues, Joey struggled to overcome the “culture shock” of teaching children with economic disadvantages, as the experience of living in poverty was one that they did not share. The already difficult enterprise of understanding and honoring the experiences children and families were bringing to his classroom was further complicated by adding the authoritarian style of management to his already challenging job. Joey described it as mentally and physically exhausting and leading to the fostering of adversarial relations and high levels of teacher burnout.

*The building’s literacy rates were 20 to maybe 40 percent of kids reading on grade level. We had 89% poverty rate and 96% free and reduced lunch. So, it was really a culture shock for me. Being in that school, I explain it to others as being in World War III every single day. If you weren’t dealing with a crisis from the students’ perspectives, something going on at home, you were dealing with a crisis from the administrative perspective, our test scores are so bad that we are about to be taken over by the state.*

*Every single day the administration was coming down on us; saying, “we need to do something to get these test scores better and we need to do something to make sure we don’t get taken over by the state.” So, it was a helter-skelter atmosphere. Teachers rarely talked about their practice. They talked mostly about how burnt out they were and how they couldn’t stand being in that building.*

What seemed to stymie Joey more than anything were the ethical inconsistencies, which he encountered during his interactions with his supervisors’ authoritarian styles of
management. These ethical inconsistencies occurred most explicitly in two instances. The first occurrence involved administrators’ demand to maintain *fidelity* to a “research based program” for literacy instruction to improve student test scores. Though they claimed to define their desired outcome as improving student test scores, their actions seemed to indicate that they were more concerned with the outcome of teachers compliantly adhering to their selected program. Joey found his *fidelity* to ensuring that children transact with a personally relevant curriculum at school to be in direct opposition with the district’s “*fidelity to the program, fidelity to the curriculum.*”

*At the time, my district was preaching fidelity to the program, fidelity to the curriculum. The curriculum had no relevance to my children’s lives at all. So, I tried to bring in that relevance.*

*We’d have to read about say farmer Joe or something like that. These kids have no experience with farming at all. But, I would bring in a book about city life or kids in the city and that kind of stuff. So, it wasn’t a book from our curriculum package. All the other books and materials just focused on stuff that didn’t really connect with my kids.*

*So, I would try to find materials that I felt they connected more with. I brought in more of the parents input. I had a dad come in. He was a scrapper and he actually taught a lesson on magnets and metals. I had an artist come in from the community and worked with the students. We actually went downtown to study art downtown because they had talked a lot about, “did you go and see the*
duck sculpture or did you go and see this sculpture?” Canton has a great arts
district that they were exposed to.

I was doing all of this in my classroom and I was approached by
administration that they know that I’m not teaching to the curriculum and I’m not
showing fidelity to the program. So, they weren’t sure that I was a good fit for the
district.

So, I had to for those two years prove that what I was doing in my
classroom worked and I did that with my literacy scores. We had district
mandated tests that we had to do and my students were scoring at 97% on grade
level in a building that averaged from 20% to 40%. I remember, I’d put my
scores outside my door. Every time they were there, if administration would
question what I was doing in the classroom I would walk outside, point at my test
scores and say, “I believe this is what you are concerned with are my scores. I
will continue doing what I am doing in my classroom.”

I inquired, “Did they accept that?”

I think they eventually left me alone. They kept sending me to the
curriculum program training over and over again. I was retrained at least 3
times.

“But your test scores were through the roof!” I insisted, “Weren’t they interested
in finding out how you were getting 97%, when they were accustomed to seeing
classrooms with only 20%-40%?”
97% of my students, mind you, I was teaching the K-Dis program—so 1/3 of my students had disabilities. They were specifically shipped to my room because they had mental, physical or behavioral issues. So, 97% of my students were reading on or above grade level.

They just kept just saying, “let’s see what happens on the next test.” They really felt that the next test would finally prove that, because I wasn’t being faithful to the program, I was missing something and it would eventually show.

Stopping to commiserate for a moment with Joey, I commented on the aggravation he must have felt when his supervisors wrote off success achieved in his classroom as a fluke. Rather than attributing it to the capabilities of children or the implementation of thoughtfully planned, developmentally meaningful and culturally relevant pedagogy, they said, “let’s see what happens on the next test.” I wondered aloud how detrimental it must be for the authority figures at a school to keep such tight reigns on conversations regarding how curriculum workers may work to benefit children.

Despite his supervisors disinterest in engaging in a complicated conversation, Joey kept talking.

Yep, and they sent me to training! (laughter) They would always say, “well, this is a research based program.”

I asked them, “have you ever actually looked at the research? What are the dates from the research? I’ve looked at the research that this is based off of. Did you know that this research, I think the most current is 20 years old? Are you
telling me that this is good practice based on 20 year old research and nothing newer?”

I would always save a binder on everything that I did and the research behind it. Whenever administration would come to my room I would show them, this is my research, here is an article from 2008, 2009, 2007. Here is a chapter from a book that was published in 2006.

The authority figures of Joey’s culture of curriculum explicitly and repeatedly defined success in terms of improving student outcomes as measured on standardized tests. However, the high scores achieved by Joey’s students were of no interest to his supervisors. He shared a second account of ethical inconsistency in his culture of curriculum regarding their alleged shared goal of using technological devices in classrooms. He recounted,

The latest one was getting all of the chrome books for my classroom. For the last five years, I’ve been trying to write grants for technology for my students. My school system wouldn’t let me. So, I went around the system and I raised the money myself. We raised over $5,000 to buy each student in my class a computer. I had to work with a couple people in administration before they would even let me buy anything and put it in the classroom. I had to get special approval. What I had to do was give all of the money that I just raised to the district and hope that they would purchase what I wanted and let me use it in my classroom. Every year, they question me, “what will happen with your chrome books next year?”
Pretty much saying, they are the property of the school system and they can do whatever they want with them.

Although the common rhetoric in his culture of curriculum repeatedly indicated a desire for improved test scores and abundant access to technology, Joey experienced actions that demonstrated a narrow interest on power and control. He explained that his supervisors wouldn’t allow any device to be used in his classroom, until their power was preserved by identifying the device as school property.

They wouldn’t let me bring them in. The other thing is the district. To get onto the wireless internet, you have to have special approval from downtown administration. So, the chrome books or anything else wouldn’t be good for anything in the classroom without that special approval.

It should be noted that in lieu of the challenging ethical inconsistencies mentioned above, Joey found an opportunity for support within his culture of curriculum in a colleague named Mrs. Hilton. As illustrated in the previous chapter, Mrs. Hilton provided leadership and understanding in a situation dominated by management and regulations. With her as an ally, Joey was able to appraise the possibilities for enacting pedagogical artistry to counter his dominant culture of curriculum.

**Joey’s Fidelity to Critically Appraising**

In his critical appraisal of his dominant culture of curriculum, Joey has found a way to uphold his commitment to what he identified as his main drive. He remains attuned to knowing, “what it’s like when the crap that we’re learning or the crap that their doing just doesn’t connect with you”; and feeling that, “It sucks because you are
made to feel like you are stupid and you’ve got all of these kids going through school.”

An intransigent symbol of this memory hangs above the smart board in his classroom. It reminds him of the significant personal event he encountered when he taught himself everything he needed to know to build a kayak. He invokes this memory as he proceeds professionally, as an early childhood curriculum worker declaring, “their teachers are making them feel like they are dumb. Really they are not dumb, they’re just disinterested. They are not interested in what the teachers are teaching.”

*Figure 1. Joey’s Intransigent Symbol*
Joey described his culture of curriculum in such a way that one can undoubtedly infer that he works within the most challenging situation among all of my teacher friends. Maintaining fidelity to the event brazenly symbolized by the giant kayak hanging on his classroom wall calls for noncompliance with demands in his culture of curriculum to demonstrate fidelity to curriculum programs and bureaucratic hierarchies. Sometimes his fidelity takes form of what appears to be willful disobedience, or is perhaps better conceptualized by Herbert Kohl’s (1994) term “creative maladjustment.”

Joey acknowledges his own defiance as he reflects upon decisions he made to insist that his students experience the local art scene in a meaningful way, and acquire access to technology. Here, he explicitly describes himself as being in direct opposition with the dominant culture of curriculum.

So this whole time that I’ve been talking about how the district works, I feel like I go against everything on how the district works. I don’t ask for permission. I don’t ask for approval from anybody. The time that I took my students downtown to study art, and when I had the artists come in; I never asked for approval. Though, I was supposed to.

I did it that way because it was a way for me to work around my school system’s system to get a field trip. I wasn’t allowed to take them on a field trip. But, if I took them on a Saturday and just had the kids come and their parents come, the school district couldn’t tell them that they can’t go out on a Saturday.

That’s what I try to combat, when I bring projects into the classroom... the art walk project and all of the stuff that went with the art walk project... or,
getting technology into the classroom and having students take on a leadership role in doing that. All of the things that I do that goes against pre-packaged curriculum... That’s my way of trying to be an effective teacher.

On the other hand, Joey’s “creative maladjustment” is put on display when he recalls opportunities for working with the structures that dominate his culture of curriculum. The highly prescriptive reading program, which Joey mostly rejected as lacking cultural relevance, provided one such opportunity. He recalls,

*There was one time that one of the books that I had to read to the kids did work for us because it talked about a bakery. There was this bakery right down the road, Norschesters. So, let’s go down to Norschesters and talk to those people. Everybody knows Norschesters. We’d go get cookies and they would talk to us about how their family has been in the neighborhood and it’s their mother’s mother... The kids were really able to connect to Norschesters. So, that was one of the very rare opportunities where the prepackaged curriculum worked for my kids at school because there just happened to be a baker, right down the street from the school.*

Another opportunity arose within his culture of curriculum, when Joey noticed that a gateway existed in what he described as the “iron curtain” separating the school and families. Wanting to build meaningful connections with families, Joey decided to follow the lead of a teaching colleague who was a recognized member in the community, instead of a person who held positional authority in the school.
Mrs. Hilton would have parents in all the time and she would have people from the community in all of the time. I think that was another sore spot between her and the office. The parents would know where Mrs. Hilton was and they’d go right to her. They would go to her more often than the principal to solve any type of conflict, even in other classrooms.

Then, they started coming to me as well. If say I had a sibling in class, but they were having an issue with the second grade teacher. They’d come and talk to me about it and want me to help them solve the situation, instead of talking to the principal. They would come to us, Mrs. Hodge mostly, to have any type of problem solved in the building.

As time went on, Joey became increasingly adept at navigating his culture of curriculum in ways that allowed him to remain true to his commitments to provide his students with a meaningful and culturally relevant classroom. Sometimes, he and allies such as Mrs. Hilton were reminded of their limited sphere of influence, when their best efforts were shut down by administrators. Joey told many stories of innovative principals being let go when they diverged from district protocol. Despite her capacity for taking on a leadership role as a highly respected figure in the community, Mrs. Hilton was often perceived within the culture of curriculum as a boisterous trouble maker, according to Joey. Therefore, she was transferred to another building where she would have a less substantial vocal presence. Eventually, Joey was also transferred to a building within the district with more affluent families and higher test scores.
Joey believes that his school’s best administrators were “driven out” for the disruptive activity not abiding by the organizational structures put forth by district bureaucracy. Mrs. Hilton, on the other hand, was “driven out” because of discursive disruption created by her speaking out. Joey presumed that he was transferred to for the potential disorder he may cause by garnering high student test scores in a low performing building without fidelity to the sanctioned curriculum program. On his perception that district officials were seeking a less disruptive sight to contextualize his students’ high test scores, Joey said,

*What if I kept being successful at that school? What would happen if I kept putting up the high 90 percent test scores doing what I was doing at there, showing what I am doing is working instead of what they are trying to make us do. But, if you send me to a school that is already getting 80-90 percent, I just blend in.*

People can be displaced, voices can be silenced and practices can be undermined. The manner Joey and his colleagues were treated should not be surprising. Perspectives that run counter to dogmatic thought traditions and authoritarianism have been historically marginalized, throughout the course of Western civilization. To think, speak or act in ways that contest is indeed risky business. Perhaps, Joey sees it as a moral obligation or at least as a professional responsibility to continue to think, speak and act in the service of his students. Either way, he steadfastly keeps going.

*I told them about my idea to raise money and buy my own computers and they said, “no, that it wasn’t going to work because we are not going to give you the*
password to get on the internet.” I said, “fine, then I’m going to find another way to get internet into my classroom.” Really it wasn’t until I said, “I don’t care what you think or what you are planning on doing. I’m still going to do it.” It wasn’t until then that they would finally work with me.

Joey met with his kindergarten students and their families in the art district on a Saturday afternoon, to circumvent his inability to get a field trip considered for approval. He posted his students test scores outside his classroom door, which were the highest in the building, to confront his supervisors’ illogical demand that he must demonstrate fidelity to the reading program in the interest of improving test scores. He welcomed families into his classroom to send a message to children and their families that he does not endorse what he calls the “iron curtain” at their school. He engaged his class in fundraising to put a Chrome Book in each of his students’ hands when he was notified that insufficient technology was a reality of working within a financially strapped district.

Despite the challenges of these confrontations with dogmatism and authoritarianism, Joey preserved his sense of professional agency. Certainly, his culture of curriculum influences the curriculum work that emerges on his desk. However, refusing the status of victimhood, he, my other teacher friends and I creatively find ways to serve as curriculum leaders, whose curriculum work also influence the culture of their school. However, true to form, Joey provided a symbolic example of another possibility. When the desk his school provided him didn’t suit the needs of his classroom, he designed and built a new one. While Joey literally built a new desk better suited for his classroom, the metaphorical “desk building” I am suggesting my teacher friends and I
take up is akin to Decker Walkers (1971) notion of construction a curriculum platform, a process by which one’s images and beliefs are recognized as the basis of curriculum work.

*Figure 2. Construction of a Curriculum Platform*

**Connecting Critical Appraising to Transactional Knowing**

As our collective narrative continues, I will pause to elaborate on one particular aspect regarding Joey’s process of critical appraisal. My interpretation of his account of posting his students’ test scores in the hallway was that he was choosing to highlight the ethical inconsistency of his supervisors, rather than make an epistemological claim that
the test scores truly represented a full picture of his students learning. To make this
distinction more explicit, I will bring into play the Liberty Event from my
autobiographical narrative. From that event, I declared, “following disciplinary rules
offers only a myopic view of reality.” Indeed, progress monitoring young children’s
development as beginning readers through standardized assessments appeals to
disciplinary rules, which offer only a myopic view of the true realities of their learning
and development.

Juxtaposing this event blends Joey’s critical appraising into the process of
pedagogical transacting that will be the focus of the next section. Verifying one’s
curriculum practices are “successful” with standardized test score data is as dogmatic as
validating developmental appropriateness by adhering to the doctrine of a best practice
manual. I will revisit the Liberty Event in the following section by narrating how it
manifested itself as a moment of disruption in my own curriculum practice. For now, I
hope to unambiguously clarify one point. The forms of empirical evidence and
rationalized tenets of “best practice,” which constitute the predominant accountability
systems pervading methods of evaluating early childhood curriculum work, are
insufficient for apprehending holistic understanding. The next section will explicitly
connect the knower with what is being known through a transactional way of knowing.
Transactional knowing is implicit in Joey’s above story of critical appraising.

**Disrupting Educational Experience With Pedagogical Transacting**

Jenna told me about a particular transaction with a teacher that she will never
forget. A middle school teacher wrote her a powerful letter, which recognized not only
her accomplishments in the classroom but also her unique qualities as a human being. Just as Joey’s kayak adorns his classroom wall, Jenna’s letter is framed and still prominently displayed at her parents’ house, serving as an artifact of the event’s enduring value. Coming from a family of educators, Jenna implied that there is a common understanding she shares with her mother and father. This letter is representative of who she was as a young adolescent, as well as who she is and continues to become as an early childhood educator.

Jenna remembers her teacher as a role model, declaring, “Teachers have the capacity to influence students’ lives in extraordinary ways through what they do and say in their daily practice.” Additionally, she recollects her own vulnerability that she now knows to be commonplace among middle school students. Furthermore, this transactional moment reinforces her connection to others and solidifies her commitment to proceed carefully with her potentially vulnerable young students. Framed and on display at her parents’ home is a symbol of why Jenna chose this profession, her commitment to in her own words, “see beyond the surface” and “make it known” to young children that “their teacher cares enough to listen.”

Stacy, Karen and I were each inspired by great teachers, who we encountered during our teacher preparation programs. For Stacy, it was Mrs. Alice, a practicing teacher who taught a methods class from her kindergarten classroom. She remembers Mrs. Alice having an incredible ability to draw upon her vast wealth of professional knowledge to offer practical advice, while also supporting her students to envision their own classroom. For Karen, it was a professor who took her under her wing and invited
her to assist her research. In the process Dr. Kroegan, encouraged Karen to discover her own passionate interests as a curriculum worker. For me, it was a mentor teacher at a university laboratory school who taught me that teaching is an enterprise wrought with complexity and ambiguity. When I was asking questions looking for definitive explanations, she included me in collaborative inquiries with evolving understandings. Each of us realized that, “great mentors and teachers know that professional inquiry is a humble process of collaborative and recursive problem posing and solving.”

Transactional knowing involves converting our subjective experiences and the external world into a “whole inclusive of knower and the known” (Ryan, 2011, p. 44). Also, it involves the reflective experiencing of circuits of inquiry (Ryan, 2011). Next, the challenges and opportunities for pedagogical transacting present in Jenna’s, Stacy’s, Karen’s and my accounts of our cultures of curriculum will be considered.

**Pedagogically Transacting Within the Challenges and Opportunities of Experience**

Jenna contrasts what she perceives to be a supportive collegial community in her school building with an obstructive state policy environment to describe a complex culture of curriculum. At her school, Jenna engages with other professionals who she considers to be passionate about benefitting children and respectful of one another. Among her building colleagues is her best friend, Deanna. She and Deanna are not only close personal friends, but also critical colleagues who push each other’s thinking. Jenna considers a year in which she team-taught with Deanna to be the best year of her career characterized by the joys of learning from each other and collaboratively teaming up to teach their students. Furthermore, Jenna finds support from significant
organizational structures within her school. On the benefits she experienced from an inquiry-based program for curriculum design, which has been implemented at her school, Jenna comments:

I just didn’t know that there was a framework or program that reigns it all in even more. It gave me some new words to describe what I was already doing and it helped me to think about taking certain thing further this way. I remember telling my principal, this is why I got into teaching... This is how we were already teaching, maybe not to this degree. Maybe we weren’t extending things the way the program has taught us how to. We’ve been very vocal about, even if they take the program away, we are still going to teach in this way. We have from the beginning. But, it is useful and makes us better.

However, Jenna explains that the greatest challenge of sustaining the collaborative curriculum work is that it must be carried out within the context of current trends in state policy. She perceives the foundation of good work enacted in her building and district to be directly at odds with state policy.

So much is out of the hands of the district. A lot of best practices are in jeopardy because of this. So, I was talking about all of the demands especially this year from the state; and then you have your yearly demands from the district. It’s very easy to lose your purpose because you are trying to make sense of all these new rules and regulations, new programs that your district wants you to do. So, yeah, you can lose sight of your purpose very easily, especially when here in 3rd grade you have a class that has all of these needs and comes to you far below grade
level. My purpose at the very beginning of the year was to re-teach them a lot from second grade. Three of four years ago, I didn’t have to do that.

She provided an example of a recent state policy that requires schools to place students who did poorly on standardized tests on a Reading Improvement Plan (RIMP). Further stipulations require that children who are “on RIMPs” must be taught by a teacher who is credentialed with a graduate level “reading endorsement.” Further, Jenna suggests that the implications of this policy are less significant in her suburban school, when compared to many of less affluent districts in neighboring communities.

In this situation they (district officials) couldn’t do much better. It was the best that they could. They knew they would have to move teachers around. One elementary building only had one teacher, who was technically qualified to teach reading to RIMP kids. It wasn’t necessarily a lot in this district. But, I know of districts that had to literally turn buildings upside down to accommodate the state.

Jenna feels her best efforts of pedagogical transacting for holistic understanding are hindered by the context of state policies. Jenna explains that she feels the pressures of state accountability systems.

That’s what I want to do every day and what should be done. What’s happening is that you feel the pressure from these standardized tests and it feels like the only way to get them to pass is to teach to the test, which is the completely the antitheses of what I believe in. Completely!
So, especially in high-stakes testing years, like 3rd and 4th grades, you know that your purpose needs to be something that is engaging that makes them want to—something that heightens their curiosity and makes them want to learn more about things. But, then there comes a point where you realize these tests are not developed that way. They aren’t asking questions that way.

To be specific, the state accountability system thwarts Jenna’s commitments to fairness and each child’s personal journey of meaning making. The cumbersome pressure to teach each child to perform successfully on a standardized test is not circumvented by the discourse or structures at her school. However, she sees the ubiquitous desire to have her students validate their knowledge on standardized test, as getting in the way of her broader goal of facilitating meaning making.

So, ethically too, there is a battle in my mind. Ok, they’ve seen it this way from me because I think it is the most purposeful way and the most meaningful way to teach and learn. Yet, you are being tested over and over again in a very standardized way, a very dry way that they don’t get from me on a daily basis. Is that fair? No.

Is the way that the tests are set up and the way they are asking the kids questions purposeful? No. I don’t agree with it. It lacks meaning. It’s not even the way that I would present the material to them. It’s not the way that I would ask question or the way that I would have them answer.

Worrying about unimportant formalities of test taking holds Jenna back from doing her best curriculum work. Indeed, focusing on instructing her young students on
how to perform on a test deters her attention from providing them outlets for expressing themselves. Her ethical dilemma of how to properly navigate this thorny political terrain, balancing her desire for her students to be recognized as successful and honor personal meaning making, remains without obvious answer.

*I think the test get into a lot of formalities that don’t matter. For example, you can only write your answer in this box. Where I’m telling them, “tell me, show me everything you know and I don’t care where you put it or what you put it on.” But, here, if you write your answer or any little part of it, even a letter, outside the box, it will be counted wrong. That’s what we are getting tied up on and I think it is completely ridiculous!*

*I have a struggle in my own mind, most often at the end of the year, over what my purpose is. Because, I need them to feel confident and successful, we need them to pass the test. But, also, I hate teaching to it- in the way that I know they are going to see it on paper on test day. It is the complete opposite of they’ll see it in my classroom.*

Since accountability through standardized testing has been instituted as a federal mandate, Stacy’s culture of curriculum is contextualized by similar policy structures. Also, like Jenna, she enjoys the support of harmonious personal and professional relationships among her colleagues at her school. However, teaching kindergarten as opposed to third grade, removes Stacy from the persistent demands of state testing. However, her culture of curriculum presents a complicated dynamic of support within challenges outside of her school. Within her school community, Stacy feels that her
professional knowledge is recognized and valued. Moreover, in her colleagues she finds mutually beneficial opportunities to collaborate. She explains,

I am a chair person of various committees of curriculum and leadership- I just think that collaboration is huge. We help one another. You just can’t be isolated.

That’s how I feel. When you are trying to teach in isolation or kind of do your own thing, I just don’t see the greatest of benefits there.

Although the collaborative work of Stacy and her colleagues may be recognized and appreciated, by their supervising administrators, their efforts are not supported by the organizational structures of the school. Stacy clarifies how this exhibits a challenging aspect of her culture of curriculum.

We want to be consistent in our grade level, in our district and administration wants us to be too. They admire our work. There isn’t another grade-level in the district that does this and the administrative team knows our work, recognizes it, appreciates it and says that it is a model situation they with other would prescribe to... But, the majority of the work is all on our own time. It’s not like we have a lot of paid time to do this.

Stacy is very conscientious of the complexities of early childhood curriculum work. Accordingly she takes her ongoing professional development quite seriously. Stacy considers herself well prepared for handling the implementation of new state policies, because of her engagement in professional development activity. She expressed confidence in her ability to navigate a new teacher evaluation system, because of her participation in a Teacher Leader Program (TLP). Self-assured that she “knows her
 stuff,” Stacy is convinced that the evaluation system will work itself out and that she will have no problem securing the highest score.

*Going through the TLP and doing my master teacher this past year and having to work with the professional teaching standards more closely- even though they have always been there, I think we don’t all have them all hanging in our room and say oh I’m doing this today, I hit all seven- because I worked with them more closely with my graduate work recently, it wasn’t completely new, overwhelming or threatening to me. Some people are just throwing their hands up and saying we can’t take on one more thing and this is going to be so monumental. I’m not the best teacher in the world. I don’t have all of the strengths that some of my colleagues have. But, I know that I know my stuff. I’m accountable to what I have to teach. I don’t know if my goal is to buck the system or prove that someone can be accomplished; but I’m not going to be happy if I spend hours and hours. As I wrote my master teacher portfolio, I looked at the rubric and decided I’m writing to perform at this level, a two.*

The positive feedback she has long received from her principal and the leadership roles that she often takes on at her school, provide reasons for Stacy to be sure of herself. The unmistakably hard work involved in teaching kindergarten is noticeable to most observers. Stacy points out, when parents come into the classroom, 80% leave saying “I don’t know how you do this every day.” However, Stacy also notes that the fact that not all stakeholders are regular observers of the goings on in her classroom fosters the
misconception that her work is easy or something that doesn’t require professional expertise. She provided the following example.

_I had a student who qualified for our remedial program, our intervention, this year. His mother didn’t want him in the public school to begin with, but allowed it to happen because it was only a half day program. So, when I said that he’d really benefit from this and that he has skills that need to be advanced... she said, “I don’t want him here all day. Tell me what he needs to do.”_

_I started to talk about letter recognition and sounds and sight words. She said, “so, he needs to know sight words.”_

_I said, “Yes, but he also...”_

_She continued, “just tell me what he needs.” There were probably 3,000 things that could have told her, but she wanted it narrowed down to just a few things so she could say, “we’ll just help him at home.” She said if it were fourth grade she might have been more willing to do it, but this was just kindergarten._

_He needed prescriptive teaching and professional support. He didn’t get it at home. He didn’t pass kindergarten with flying colors. That is frustrating when I’ve spent the bulk of my career in kindergarten and in literacy and I’m not valued because “it is just kindergarten. I could do this. Anyone can do that.”_

_What do you do at home, mom, if the set of flashcards doesn’t’ help him. That isn’t the only tool to have in the toolbox, flashing flashcards and rote strategies. There are also fun ways to do it. There are ways to build on his successes. Those are things that parents do not always teach. I am creative and_
prescriptive in my instruction. That is something to value. People who aren’t in it may not value because they are ignorant of it. They don’t know what is involved and how complex it is.

Karen’s description of her culture of curriculum differed from all of my other teacher friends because she has worked in multiple schools. Her journey began when Dr. Kroegan noticed that Karen was passionate about learning about language as it relates to educating deaf children. Wanting to give her an opportunity to further develop her inquiry into language, Dr. Kroegan arranged for Karen to have a special student teaching experience and gave her an extra motivational push when needed.

She really pushed me to go do my student teaching at a school for the deaf that was out of state. At that time, they didn’t send students from the university to out-of-state locations. They had designated places. She said that she wanted me to experience this particular school, because it is the best language model school in the country.

I had to really petition to get into it. Then, it was a couple of weeks before, I told her I didn’t want to go. I said, “I have cats and can’t leave.” I emailed her at 3:00 in the morning and said that I was sorry to not take this opportunity but I have a cat and she is too important to me. Kroegan really got on me. She said, “you know that’s pathetic. You can come back to the cat in four months. You’ll both be fine.” She really pushed me and I’m glad she did because the experience that I got at that school was unlike anything that I could have
gotten in the area public schools. I would’ve been in a place like the schools that I worked in.

Above, Karen alluded to how the school for the deaf, where she worked as a student teacher, was a unique experience. She goes on to explain the bi-lingual and bi-cultural identity that she had the pleasure of experiencing during her student teaching.

Yeah. It was huge! It was. I had never seen anything like it. It was a bi-lingual, bi-cultural school, which means that they teach ASL only, with English in a very particular way. There is a training that they put all of their teachers through. There are only a couple of schools in the country that do this training. But, their kids come out pretty good. They learn their English.

Their philosophy is that if you give them a base language, then they can learn a second language, which is very common sense. So, I student taught in fourth grade. It was nice to be surrounded by deaf adults who were well-educated. I did not have that experience in the public schools. A lot of the deaf adults are graduates of their local public schools. So, to be there and to work with deaf teachers who are experts in that field was really great. It was very different.

Also worth noting, Karen observed a sense of continuity among the educators at the school for the deaf. There is consistency in how teachers are trained and expected to implement that training. Her account of the culture of curriculum of this school seemed to vacillate from the benefits of the curriculum workers providing stability for children and the rigid implementation of a uniform system. Seeing and appreciating the many
obvious strengths of the school community, Karen also sense what she called “just kind of a control issue” in her classroom.

"It was different because most schools where I’ve been... it’s just you get your degree and your thrown in. Whatever philosophy you have, you use. At their school, they had the ability to say, “we want all of our teachers to have this training. Then, we are going to monitor how they are going to use that training in their classroom.” And, it’s just a really good model.

So, my experience was great. In terms of what I saw and experienced, I was with an older, hearing teacher. She was one of the only ones. No one else wanted a student teacher. So, I was kind of stuck. She was nice, but she never let me take over the whole class. It was just kind of a control issue. She wasn’t a very good model for me because I had gone to see the deaf model and she was a hearing teacher that kind of was grandfathered into the role.

Also, it is important to point out that Karen explicitly states that her experience at the school for the deaf was dramatically different from her subsequent experiences in three different urban school districts. Her experience at Shadow Valley School for the Deaf aligned to the ideas that she encountered in her teacher preparation program. However, as a practicing teacher, she encountered very different cultures of curriculum derived from a very different school of thought.

"In college I was in a program that really stressed deaf culture and ASL, I never really got to see the other side of it... of supporting all kids and their needs. I had seen and heard from several professionals, “ASL and deaf culture is the only way
to go and when we fail kids it is because we fail to give kids their culture and their language. I was very passionate about it.

That is really just one school of thought. I went to Shadow Valley School for the Deaf and had that validated, that this school of thought was the right way to go. Seeing there that there were there were deaf students whose parents had chosen to put them in a program like that, it was all selected for those kids. There were also kids who didn’t make it in the public school program. So, it was a very specific population of students. It worked out really wonderfully. It was a very magical place. It really made me feel backed up in that belief that I held in college. I still think that is very true. It almost sounds negative the way that I say that in college I felt this way and now I’m different. But, it is still very important. For those students it is absolutely the only way to go.

So, I left there and got a job in a large urban district. It was really discombobulated. I had no idea what I was doing anyway. So, I didn’t really have much time to think about my philosophies. I went into that job in city school feeling like kind of a big shot: “I know the best way to educate kids and I’m going to do it.” I struggled there because it was a different kind of kid that I was teaching there. It was kids from all over the city. Hardly any of them knew much sign language. There were no deaf teachers. There wasn’t really a language model and I truly felt that it was a terrible place for these kids.

But, then my next district had absolutely no sign language and they actually didn’t want their kids using sign language. It wasn’t really that big of a
deal to make sure that you have a signing teacher. It was a really strange way to go in this school. But, over the two years that I was there, I learned so much from the audiologist about the other side: students who are barely deaf or who are losing their hearing or whose parents truly want them to voice and they have a lot of the skills. So, it was a really interesting other side. I didn’t have any of the ASL, none of my philosophy. I still felt like, “this is a terrible school. What are they doing? They are horrible.” But, in the end I came out with a really strong understanding of the audiology side.

Now teaching in a new school, the third of her career, Karen encountered yet another culture of curriculum. In her current school, Karen’s work as a teacher of deaf children is compartmentalized within special education services. Therefore, classroom is comprised of a mixture of deaf children with very typical cognitive abilities and deaf children with multiple disabilities (MD). Karen explains that this situation puts forward many obstacles that interfere with her enacting curriculum work that fosters opportunities for cultivating each child’s holistic understanding.

*I struggled with having MD mixed in all year. I had one student who wasn’t pulled from the program until toward the end of the year, but his parents did not want him there for a variety of reasons. One of their reasons was that he was a very typically functioning kid. His peers were not. He didn’t really have the opportunity to get to know any peers who didn’t have down’s syndrome or other severe cognitive delays. So that was one struggle that they had and they ended up pulling him from our program for next year.*
I ended the year, looking over my IEP data. I noticed my students who were what we call “deaf-plus,” which means deaf with multiple disabilities, they are the ones who progressed. My typically functioning kids didn’t really make much progress. That’s a really terrible and embarrassing thing. I reflected on that and they really just sat in the room a lot, while I handled behaviors. They were given a lot of busy work and folder-work. It isn’t what I wanted to do but in the end it was better than not having anything for them.

In our conversation, I suggested the term “deaf-typical” to help distinguish between her deaf students such as the one mentioned above and those with multiple disabilities who were ascribed with the label “deaf-plus.” I inquired about the makeup of her classroom.

I would say that it was about 50-50. But, then remember in the “deaf-typical,” that is a good label, they ranged from first to third grade and they ranged in terms of age-level. But, then, my third grader was working on a pre-k grade level. So, he is typically functioning, but is still very delayed academically. Then, I had a second grader who is reading on a second grade level. They are all over the board.

Having students “all over the board,” as she described them, made pedagogical transacting very difficult for Karen. She describes her struggle.

We would have some time where we could work together. But, every time I tried to have a whole group experience, we never got to get to the goal. For example, if I had a group of students who were working on sentence editing, I would have
all of these great ideas and plans for how I was going to hit all of these complex
highs and lows. But, we would end up focusing on how big a period should be,
because my kids who are really low would go up there and draw a big circle.
It would take 30 minutes for things that should take 5 minutes. I would start to
separate the kids out because, you know what, it’s not fair for them to have to sit
through this.

We were really asking those “deaf-typical” kids to be patient way too
often. I could have done things a lot better. I realize that. But, in the interest of
time, you just kind of have to have backups. So, I had what I called folder work,
which was leveled working in terms of reading and writing. So, that if something
came up, I could say, “okay, kids, time for folder work.” And, move kids on so
they were still getting something done and I could focus on whatever was in need
of my immediate attention.

Working with students who fell under umbrella of special education brought
about obstacles of a different kind within my culture of curriculum. For me, it wasn’t the
challenge of addressing the diverse needs of children with multiple abilities. What I
struggled with was the systematic expectation of special services to implements to engage
in a process called Respond to Intervention (RtI). When a child was identified as having
a behavioral problem at an RtI meeting- at which teachers, intervention specialists, school
psychologists and the principal would all be present- a plan for intervention would be
developed. The plan would not be derived from a meaningful discussion of the child or a
partnership with his or her family. Rather, it would be selected from an inventory of
“evidence-based” strategies. For an example of such an inventory see http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/ provided by the Institute of Educational Science at the U.S. Department of Education.

My transactional commitment was to see together a child and his coming to know how to be in my classroom and at our school. However, this commitment stood in opposition to the demands from individuals with positional authority conducting the RtI meeting who insisted that teachers interact with children in accordance with a behavior plan. Much like the Liberty Event, I was faced with a problem of a dogmatic thought tradition centered on “following disciplinary rules” that “offers only a myopic view of reality” for informing pedagogical activities. To illustrate this dilemma I will share a story about a former student named Mark.

Mark came to my classroom mid-year as a transfer student from another school in my district. His explosive outburst in his previous classroom were brought to my attention, by his former teacher who reported that he cleared her desk yelling ‘fuck you’ on the first day of school when she asked him to take his seat. Before his first day in my morning class began, Mark’s mother brought him to my classroom to introduce him to me. She explained that Mark was diagnosed asperger’s syndrome and had been kicked out of numerous preschool and childcare programs that were ill-equipped to meet his needs. I reassured her that I had several years experience working with children with autism with the support of an excellent intervention specialist who taught children with multiple disabilities.
As we talked, I observed Mark. He was an adorable and precocious little boy who enthusiastically explored the classroom showing that he knew all of his letters and how he especially loved to count and do math. At the conclusion of our conversation, Mark’s mother seemed to feel at ease, knowing that I was prepared for and enthusiastic about working with her child. The bell rang, indicating the beginning of the school day. Mark and I said goodbye to his mother as his new classmates entered the room ready to meet their new classmate.

Once the room was filled with 23 kindergartners, Mark’s lagging social skills and emotional competencies became apparent. Greeted with welcoming gestures from his classmates, which included some children offering friendly hellos and others giving him hand-made gifts, Mark’s reaction surprised us. He shrieked, spit and attempted to slap the other children. I quickly intervened and gathered the class at the carpet. “NO!” Mark shouted, “I’m not coming to the carpet.” “That’s fine.” I promptly replied, for the moment satisfied with knowing his classmates were outside the reach of his aggression.

Mark seemed appeased either by the increased physical proximity between he and the crowd, or by my disinterest in confronting his behavior. I proceeded to address the class, while Mark listened. I told them that I knew they were attempting to do a nice thing by welcoming their new classmate. Then, I suggested that, perhaps, what our friend needed or desired was space, rather than our enthusiastic greeting. Reminding the class that our goal is to make him feel
welcome, I advised that we respect his wishes and be sure not to crowd Mark, because he sure did not seem to like that.

In the weeks that followed, we learned a great deal about Mark and he learned a great deal about how to be in the classroom in a socially adaptive way. Knowing Mark, the children and I knew when and how to give him space when he needed it. Additionally, as Mark got to know us, he understood that we would not place unfair demands upon him by insisting that he engage in situations for which he was not prepared. Realizing that he could on his own terms engage in activities that allowed him to demonstrate his academic abilities, prompted him to participate in activities alongside his peers. When the behavioral specialist visited our classroom to develop a behavioral plan to address his explosive outbursts and oppositional-defiant behavior, she was unable to pick him out of the crowd.

I expressed my own opposition and defiance, refusing to answer what I experienced as an insidious question from the specialist: “Which student do I need to be taking notes on regarding oppositional-defiance and explosive outbursts?” I told her that once she observed oppositional-defiant behavior or an explosive outburst, her note taking could commence. “If you continue to see neither,” I demanded, “then the time elapsed with a lack of opposition, defiance and outbursts should be reflected in your notes.” My point of view was rejected and the behavioral specialist complained to the principal about my uncooperativeness. Without any interest in the point that I insisted on making, the
principal mused, “Perhaps, it is my oppositional-defiant kindergarten teacher who needs a behavior plan.” Then, much to my dismay, the behavioral specialist demonstrated that she didn’t need to know, meet, or even observe Mark before writing his behavior plan.

Our Stories of Fidelity to Transacting

Jenna’s fidelity to the event of receiving the letter from her teacher is manifested in her commitment to pedagogical transacting in four key ways. Inspired and informed by remembering the event of that letter, she maintains a commitment to: seeing promise in each child, adopting listening and caring as fundamentals of her pedagogical practices, appreciating the intimate intertwining of building relationships and academic learning, and acting as a curriculum leader at her school. First, Jenna described how the letter inspires her to see the promise in each of her students.

I’ve taken that with me my whole life. I try to remember that. Sometimes kids are difficult to crack emotionally or academically. Some days it’s hard to find something positive. But, I try to remember that because there are things about them that I don’t know that make them more than what can be seen at that moment. I was what 12 or 13? I know he didn’t do it for every kid. I always tried my hardest. But, yeah I think it was really cool that he would do that, so I try to remember.

What I like to do at the end of each school year. I do a newsletter every Friday. They know to look for it to find information. The last newsletter of the year I do, “your teacher has learned a lot too in third grade:. I do a recap of
what we did throughout the year, take pictures, you’ve definitely learned a lot. Remembering those good times and rough patches. Then, I name each kid individually and mention one personal thing that I learned about them this year—not related to academics at all. So, I’ve learned that Jacob will be a great cartoonist or illustrated and I will want a copy of first book. I read it out loud to the class. So many of them will say, “how did you know that about me.” They’ll be grateful for one or two sentences.

And, by the end of the year it is really easy to do. If you spend a whole year trying to get to know kids, it is so easy to do. I try to leave them with that at the end of the year. Building a rapport and maintaining it as they go to fourth grade. Hopefully it will make some kind of impression as they get older. It’s little things like that.

Jenna’s commitment to see promise in each child informs her adoption of listening and caring as key fundamentals of her pedagogy. She articulated these fundamental professional beliefs the following way.

I’ve had to take kids aside because they were literally falling apart. Sometimes it’s misdirected anger and has nothing to do with anything that even happened in here. It was more about needing to get something off their chest. There have been a few extreme cases where I’ve just needed to take them away and chat. I’m thinking of one student whose home life was so bad with mom and dad arguing, and there was domestic violence going on and verbal abuse. He couldn’t even function in here. So, we had to do our best to get that as straight as straight could
be for him before he could even focus on what were for him ‘the menial things that I was asking him to do’. For him, I was asking him to take a spelling test when he was watching his world crumbling around him. That was an extreme case but it came to mind.

If you are asking them to do things for you, sometimes you need to listen first. Sometimes they just need to unload before they can get back to business. We need to just listen... to just listen to them. I’ve needed to play that role more and more often in the last few years. It seems like often times that is all they need because there isn’t a lot of listening going on. When there is a lot of yelling, talking, verbal abuse and all of that they don’t get a word in edgewise. Then, they come in here and I’m asking them or telling them to do things. They’ve almost lost their identity because everyone is talking at them, making requirements for them.

In light of her commitment to see the promise in each child by building relationships and carefully listening, Jenna does not lose sight of her responsibility to teach academic content. However, she resists the temptations to be drawn into what she sees as the narrow-minded approach to academic learning put forth by current trends in state policy. Rather, she conceptualizes her endeavors to facilitate students’ learning of academic content to be thoroughly entangled with her efforts to build positive relationships and be a listener for her students. She reflects on the personal challenges faced by some of her students, which impact their academic performance.
So, I think a lot of that is sort of swimming around that they just can’t think clearly. School and home can mesh together as one negative thing and we don’t want that to happen. Just letting them get it out builds a relationship between me and the student. Afterwards, they often times then do want to work. The kids realize that getting work done and doing their best gets them positive reinforcement from me. The feel good about themselves and what they are doing in a way that they, maybe, aren’t getting anywhere else.

I try to build relationships with kids, especially when they are going through that kind of thing. Then, they will want to work for you and when I say that there might be some intrinsic things that are going on with the kid that feeling good about themselves just for getting work done or positive feedback that I give them. But, if I’m asking them to get an assignment done, something that I need graded, it’s impossible if that relationship isn’t built, or without that trust.

Even if the assignment isn’t done or an A+, I need to show them that it is appreciated and respected. That’s the kind of feeling that you want to have about them because then they will want to perform.

Jenna’s professional commitments are not secluded to the borders of her classroom walls. Advocating for all children, she acts as vocal curriculum leader among her colleagues at her school. To this end, she finds ways to work within the extant organizational structure of the school, to initiate dialogue that pushes the boundaries of those structures. For example, Jenna explained how she brought a building wide effort to encourage authentic assessments into a “data conversation” at an RtI meeting. She began
by discussing her reflections an aspect of authentic assessment, which was a shared value within her culture of curriculum.

_I know that our building is working a lot on assessment and reflection and I’ve been trying to integrate that in a little bit more into anything, even how they are feeling today. I’ve come find out, that I know a lot less than what I think I do in a school day from just sort of taking the temperature of how their attitude is today._

_For example, I was just doing a little reflection after an activity how they felt. I kind of peeked over some shoulders and one of my students who is really bright wrote, “I don’t want to share because I don’t want anyone to laugh at me.” I thought, “Wow, that’s pretty eye opening” because she comes across very confident and she is very bright and has it together. But, there is something inside that is not saying that to herself._

Then, in light of this shared value of authentic assessment, she raised a critical point regarding what counts as data at an RtI meeting. Subtly, she suggests that the empirical progress monitoring data garnered from standardized assessments provides an incomplete picture. She brings into play a consideration of how important data can be gathered by listening to children. Here, she intuitively insists on the consideration of a transactional perspective in a setting that routinely embraces empirical knowing. Moreover, she adroitly goes about it in a manner that has meaning and value in her culture of curriculum.
Well and you know the picture of the tree hanging in my classroom, “what number are you on the tree?” I’ll have them number themselves at different points of the day, just to kind of get a grasp on where we are going with things. One of my students who is struggling, felt successful with something. It wasn’t something that I had envisioned as “success for him.” But, that little piece of something that made him feel successful or that he was able to get correct, meant the world to him.

I felt like “wow, I don’t want him to get frustrated. He really forgot about himself.” You can kind of get the opposite reactions, just by reflecting on that and taking that information and maybe grouping them together, or bringing that data to RtI. This kid is telling me something, whether it be emotionally or academically, and we need to address this!

Another component of Jenna’s curriculum leadership is that her insight into the structures that help and hinder her curriculum practices. Just as fervently as she critiques the hindrances of state policy, she vocally promotes structures that she believes benefits teaching for holistic understanding. Accordingly, she has been a vocal proponent for continuing an inquiry-based model for curriculum design, which has been a point of controversy in her district. In her words,

I’ve been very vocal and I know so has Deana. This is how we were already teaching, maybe not to this degree. Maybe we weren’t extending things the way this inquiry based program has taught us how to. We’ve been very vocal about,
even if they take the program away, we are still going to teach in this way. We have from the beginning. But, it is useful and it makes us better.

Stacy’s Fidelity to Transacting

Stacy’s commitment to transacting emulates Mrs. Alice’s above mentioned ability to draw upon her vast wealth of professional knowledge to offer practical advice, while also honoring the visions, beliefs and abilities of others. Stacy exhibits many of the attributes that she noticed in her description of Mrs. Alice and others she considers to be great teachers,

The genuine nature of their character... their desire to create an enjoyable environment... I think they were also very well versed in what they did. They just looked very professional to me. They weren’t wondering, “oh, I don’t know what to do...” I perceived a confidence, that they had a confidence in their craft and that they had a confidence in executing whatever it was that they were doing.

That impressed me and is something that I saw in each and every one of them.

A well versed early childhood curriculum worker, Stacy is often a leader among her colleagues. For example, her experience with the TLP, allowed her to remain poised regarding the teacher evaluation system which made so many of her colleagues insecure. Noticing that, Stacy takes on the role of advice giving. She states, “We, the people who know more about it, are trying to be reassuring. It’s going to be okay. You are already doing a lot of this stuff. It’s just that you will keep track, having a conference, writing stuff about it.” Yet, her leadership role does not preclude her from learning from those
she advises. Stacy articulates her esteem for the different strengths and contributions offered by her colleagues.

*What is so beneficial to our practice is that we are all very strong in different place. My colleague, Sue, is just so meticulous. Whereas I am a little less organized but I’m really creative. They rely on me for things related to technology. Another teacher has some inner-city experience and brings a whole other view. That focuses on three major people that do a majority of the work, as an example. Then, another just sort of does her own thing. But, when we do get to talk to her we realize that she just has the whole thing streamlined. She is not wasting any time or any words. It is just simple and sweet. I respect her as a teacher as well.*

Karen, like Stacy, has seen the value in the diverse contributions various colleagues have to offer. Working with Dr. Kroegan, Karen discovered that she was passionate about making a contribution to educating deaf children in the realm of language development. By inviting Karen to assist in her research, Dr. Kroegan introduced her to the process of inquiring into topic of their field for evolving, rather than static, understandings. Additionally, Dr. Kroegan set up an ideal student experience to set her inquiry into language in motion. It is important to note that student-teaching at Shadow Valley was the first of many important experiences for Karen. She continues to see value in providing a bi-lingual/bi-cultural educational environment for deaf children, a “best practice” which was modeled at Shadow Valley. However, Karen no longer views
these “best practices” as complete answers for apprehending how to support the education of all deaf children.

Now in her third urban school district, Karen has experienced what she considers to be both ends of the spectrum. According to Karen, on the one hand, there is the “best practice” camp who promotes American Sign Language and deaf culture to provide a bilingual and bi-cultural educational experience for deaf children. On the other hand, there is the audiology-based camp, whose intervention methods were introduced to her through professional development from a University Hospital. Karen entered the professional dogmatically aligning herself with the “best practice” camp she learned about in college and experienced at Shadow Valley.

Negative experiences in her first school district, which lacked the tenets of bilingualism/biculturalism, did not challenge her conception of “best practice.” However, her second district’s embracing audiologists’ advice for intervention broadened her horizons. The audiologists were not antagonistic to deaf culture or ASL. Yet, they approached curriculum problems from a differing point of view. Moreover, working collaboratively with service providers at her school, Karen saw their genuine intentions and efficacy first hand. Making a note of how her ideas and practices have changed over time, she said, “It almost sounds negative the way that I say that in college I felt this way and now I’m different.” Perhaps the greatest difference in Karen’s perspective from then to now is that she has become more prone to shy away from absolute answers that apply to all kids all the time. Now, less ideological, she has become more prone to inquire into
what each particular child needs and how those needs could be addressed from a wide array strategies.

Karen’s stepping away from the non-reflective experience of “best practice” dogma was prompted by her inclinations to engage reflectively in the process of problem solving as issues arise. While addressing practical problems on a daily basis, she was engaged in a more general circuit of inquiry regarding her identity as a deaf educator as well as what and how she knows about deaf education. Karen is no longer a rationalist touting conceptions of “best practice,” though she sees many benefits in such practices. Also, she is not an empiricist pushing for audiology-based interventions for every child. Karen has become a transactional knower who recognizes that there is no perfect school or classroom. She comments on her first experience with contrasting schools of thought for teaching deaf children.

*It was just a different way. It was a different philosophy and was very contrary to my beliefs. The first year there, I really struggled. It was really hard. The second year I started to understand. Some students were not being serviced, because of the lack of sign language and the audiology aspect. But, other kids were getting an amazing education.*

*After that I looked back on my experiences from practicum in college, or my experiences at Shadow Valley School for the Deaf even, and found that there were kids in all of those places that weren’t getting the right service. The majority benefitted from my philosophy but a couple didn’t. Then, I see now, they*
might have benefitted from the audiology program. It is just all about placement for these kids.

Next, Karen spoke to the diverse learning needs her students have brought into her classroom over the years. Crediting experience and maturity, she now values philosophical eclecticism more than any one school of thought.

I’m very grateful to have had that experience with the audiologists because it challenged me and educated me. So, now I’m in a place where I really have a lot of freedom. It is accepted that students sign, but we also have an understanding that some of our students are not signers and some of our students are auditory learners, as shocking as that sounds.

I am able to bring both sides of it and not really be upset anymore. I think that comes with experience and maybe with maturity. I don’t know. I’m not upset about not having it my way all the time. I can understand that there are reasons for different philosophies.

Being eclectic in her approach to addressing the educational needs of deaf children, according to Karen, made her better equipped to teach for holistic understanding in her current culture of curriculum. Looking back, she recalls students from Shadow Valley who she suspects would have benefitted from an audiology-based intervention. Plus, she reflects upon some of her former public school students who would have thrived in a school for the deaf. As an early childhood curriculum worker in an urban public school, she recognizes that economic circumstances often limit the amount of schools, which are feasible options for her students’ families. Having students with a
wide variety of needs and narrow pool of options, heightens the need for philosophical
eccentricism from Karen’s vantage point.

Now, with more experience, I can pick out those kids that were struggling there,
at Shadow Valley. At the time I was told and I believed that those were kids who
were struggling and they have other things going on. Now, I think about the
experience and know if I had that kid in the audiologist’s program with all of the
resources and philosophies there- he might not have struggled as hard. Adding a
second language for all people is not always the best option. It might clutter his
brain more.

I see that now. Like I said, at my second school I had two girls in my class
who would have fit in so well at a school for the deaf. They were signers, as much
as they could be. I signed with them primarily, because I thought that was the
best way to go with them. It kind of broke my heart to think that they didn’t
really have a choice. They were at this school because they live within a few
miles of it.

My Fidelity to the Liberty Event

My fidelity to the Liberty Event manifested itself in my unwillingness to address
Mark’s lagging social skills and emotional competency with a predetermined behavior
plan comprised of rules, rewards and punishment. As I mentioned above, the behavior
plans put into place by the team of specialists were evidence-based strategies pulled from
resources such as What Works Clearinghouse. The specialist didn’t need my input, much
information about Mark’s interests and abilities, or knowledge of his progress in the classroom to craft a behavior plan for him.

I received a “draft” of the plan the day before Mark’s IEP meeting. Putting the word “draft” between quotations is appropriate, because the expectation that there would be no revisions was made abundantly clear. In a correspondence that was not intended for my eyes, one team member wrote to another, “Thanks for putting together a great plan. If Mr. Asshole wants to change it, he can write it himself.” I was Mr. Asshole. But, unbeknownst to the team, I took the memo as an invitation more than I took offense.

Trying to negotiate a productive alternative that would benefit Mark, I took that behavior plan home and studied its language and structure. It was comprised of five sections, titled: 1. Educational Targets; 2. Environmental Adaptations; 3. Reinforcement Strategies and Data Collection; 4. Anticipatory Responses; and 5. Situational Strategies.

I drafted a revision to bring to the IEP meeting. I used the same section headings and much of the same language. However, I infused what I knew about Mark and the strategies that I had found in my classroom that seemed to help him behave adaptively in my classroom. Knowing that the team prided themselves in being “research-based,” I attached an additional page detailing research supporting “Collaborative Problem Solving” (Greene, 2009). My revised draft is included (see Appendix A).

At the beginning of IEP meeting, I provided the plan that I drafted (Appendix A) to each team member included Mark’s mother. While the parent seemed appreciative of my suggestion to consider all options to best meet the needs of the child, the administrative team shot glaring looks of resentment at me for breaking protocol. Initially, they tried to
demean my work, which I combated with quick retorts. They began by saying, “what you may not understand as a classroom teacher is that these plans need to be research based.” To which I responded, “yes, my citations begin on page 3. Where are yours?” I asked Mark’s mother to compare the plan of rules, rewards and punishments to the plans Mark experienced at his previous schools that resulted in expulsions. I provided data, which recorded the reduced frequency of Mark’s explosive outburst and documented the likely triggers on his bad days. In the presence of Mark’s mother, I provided the more compelling argument. Had I circumvented the dogmatism of rules based empiricism with a transactional perspective or had I prevailed with my own counter dogmatism?

Before discussing the critical question that I posed above regarding my own curriculum work, I will turn to the insights provided by Stacy’s reflections on her process of building a relationship with her step-granddaughter, Avery. From this event, Stacy declared: “it’s not magic and it’s not just a skill set that I know how to relate to little kids. That’s what I try to tell people. It’s a relationship. That’s what it is, a relationship.”

Following an analysis of how the commitment from the Avery Event is contextualized by Stacy’s culture of curriculum and a retelling of her fidelity to the event in practice, I will identify qualities from Jenna’s, Stacy’s and Karen’s narratives that were lacking in my story of maintaining fidelity to transacting. Then, I will connect Stacy’s Avery Event to the next phase of early childhood curriculum work.
Connecting Pedagogical Transacting to Creative Designing Through Relationships

Stacy’s discussion of relationships ensued with her telling me about the comments of many people who observe her rapport with her step-granddaughter, Avery. Stacy reflects,

*With Avery, my granddaughter, everybody says, “Stacy is so great with Avery and it’s because she teaches little kids”… But, I say, “no, it’s not. It’s because I made a point to have a relationship with a person. It is not because this is a skill. It is a desired relationship and I work on that relationship. We have such a great relationship because I invest in that relationship and I talk to her and I know her well and I do things that I think will engage her. There might be a kid that walks in here that I don’t have an interest in developing a relationship with…*

Reluctant to speak of her own positive qualities, Stacy shares what her longtime acquaintances perceive her. They have said, “*How could you not be a friend to Stacy? Stacy is a friend to everybody. Stacy would do anything for you.*” This holds true throughout every facet of her personal and professional life. She speaks of close family bonds, such as her relationship with Avery. After mentioning that her first group of kindergartners graduated this past summer, she exuberantly shared, “*I went to five or six graduation parties. They were so thrilled and honored that their kindergarten teacher came; and I was so honored to be included in that all these years later!*” Her positive rapport among her colleagues was highlighted in the previous chapter. Speaking as a friend to everyone, Stacy proclaims that nurturing relationships are essential to early childhood curriculum work. However she also is quick to clarify,
Those friendships... it’s like a garden. If you plant a garden and let it go, the weeds are going to take over and you’re not going to have a garden any more. The gardens that do well are the ones that are well tended, they are weeded and watered. They are given attention.

When asked about the primary obstacles she faces as a childhood curriculum worker wanting to build meaningful relationships, Stacy had a quick response.

I would say two big ones are time and size. The time in the day and the sheer number of kids... So, I have 45 kids and that is anywhere from 45 to 90 parents. A relationship involves, it requires communication. So, the time that it takes to communicate with all of those people and communicate information or to communicate to them, “hey, I found something out about your child that is really cool; or something happened with your child that you really need to know about.” That is a constant job to be talking to, interacting with, communicating with, emailing with, stopping in hall and talking to these parents.

Then she followed those comments by explaining that relationships are not the primary focus of all educational stakeholders. She explains how accountability systems measure success through standardized test not through interpersonal connections, thus distracting many authority figures. Also, Stacy acknowledges that not all individuals have affable personalities.

Often the superintendent sees test scores and is pleased. Isn’t that what we are all operating on? We are a data district. We are a data state.
I think the challenges come along with the personalities; because there are personalities that really exhibit an intolerance of understanding—and this will take us back to relationships—of “how do I work with this person who doesn’t understand where I’m coming from?”

Making matters more complicated, Stacy laments that we live in an unsafe world, where trust, even for teachers, is in scarce supply. Though conscious that one must proceed cautiously, being an explicitly warm and caring teacher of young children is something that Stacy will not alter in her daily practices.

We have to be so careful today about how we interact with kids—what we say to them and physical interaction. When people say you can’t hug your kids today, I get 20 hugs before the school day starts. I have first, second, third and fourth graders come—because they come past my room first—they’ll come and they’ll give me a hug. I think that people think that we need to have this sterile and distant relationship from our kids. I think that’s a challenge. That’s not ideal and it’s really not possible with five year olds to say, “Alright, here’s the desk, I’m the teacher and you’re the student”… It can’t be distant like that. It’s about trusting relationships and getting close—getting close both literally and metaphorically. So, there’s a challenge.

Stacy’s Fidelity to the Discipline of Forming Relationships

It isn’t always easy, she admits, but Stacy makes a point to connect with each and every child’s family. Sometimes she creates structures to organize and remind herself to make contact via notes or emails. She sees this as an important responsibility, which she carries out in her personal life, reminding herself to make time for member of her own
family or a friend. Routinely making contact and not losing touch are essential components to maintaining relationships.

So, time is a big thing. The size of just the sheer number of people with whom I need to communicate, that’s challenging. I drop the ball sometimes. Another thing that I said that I wanted to do— and I know teachers who do this— make so many contacts. Say, “I will call 6 parents this week. For better or for worse, I will make a voice contact with 6 parents this week.” They just have a checklist. That is huge because how many personal contacts is that over the course of a semester, over the course of a year. That’s dedication. That’s commitment and discipline to be able to do that. To build those relationships, it takes a commitment like that, a discipline like that. That’s one person’s. I could make it emails. I could make it notes home, 4 notes home every day. So, it’s a time thing. It’s disciplining myself to make that communication happen, because a lot of times with parents, I’m going to be the one to spur that. They might just be sitting back and waiting, “well, she doesn’t communicate much. So, I’ll just see what comes home.”

Stacy continues by explaining a strategy she uses to make herself available for one-on-one time with her students. Here, she reminds that it is important to consider not only the quantity, but also the quality of time that she offers.

So, here is another idea that I have to work on that. I wanted to do it this year and I didn’t. Just, lunch with Mrs. Stacy. I have 50 minutes. No teachers have 50 minutes except for me, because my morning kindergartners leave and the then
the new group comes on the bus for the afternoon class. So, I need to have a sign up and how fun would it be just to sit with that child for 30 minutes, just us and we’re just eating sandwiches. Not every kid could do it, because some have to go to day care and they don’t have anyone who could take them there. There are some that could. That is something else that I thought about. I know that there would be value in it and it would be worthwhile. I’d only have to give up one period a week, or maybe two friends could come together for one lunch period.

Moreover, despite having built wonderful relationship among her colleagues, Stacy recognizes the frustration of not being understood. She considers this part of being among any group of people. We have different life experiences that inform our diverse points of view. Stacy isn’t always fully understood in her culture of curriculum; but, she is okay with that.

*If we can get past the intolerance and try to have an understanding relationship with the person, the colleague that you are trying to work with. It’s about communication and trying to say, you know if you could not understand… You know, I have a passion for feeding people because when I was younger, married and in college there were times that I didn’t eat because I didn’t have money. When I was first married and my husband was in the navy and I was living by myself, there was a time that we were struggling financially and because I wasn’t working- and my mom didn’t know this- but, I wouldn’t eat. So, now my heart breaks when somebody doesn’t have food. All of my experiences lead me to to*
have... Anybody who comes to my house, I’m throwing food at them. I’m baking cookies all the time. I give cookies to everybody.

Somebody who doesn’t have the same background that lead me to that isn’t going to understand why I might give Otis a pop-tart or a cereal bar when he comes in the morning and not to anyone else; because I know that child doesn’t eat.

Someone might say, “you know that he is going to come in every day and he is just coming in because you are giving him food.”

“Okay, and I’m okay with that.”

So, that is just an example of how people will view a situation differently.

It’s not always going to be about pop-tarts and hungry kids. It’s going to be about how you teach a lesson, how you take the kids down the hall. It’s going to be about serious, big issue things.

Underscoring what Stacy has deemed the discipline of building and maintaining relationships, sheds light upon an element of my fidelity to pedagogical transacting that distinguishes it from my teacher friends narratives. In light of Stacy’s Avery Event, I will now revisit the question: “Had I circumvented the dogmatism of rules based empiricism with a transactional perspective or had I prevailed with my own counter dogmatism?” My answer is, perhaps, both. I upheld my commitment to pedagogical transacting to help Mark find success in my classroom. However, among my colleagues I countered their dogmatic ideas and adversarial comments with hubris and sharp words of my own. Where Jenna, Stacy and Karen were able to share stories of professional
collaboration across differences, my story was one of winning an argument. While I may have experienced an immediate victory by winning an argument, my teacher friends positioned themselves better to make an enduring impact through curriculum leadership. Therefore, in the spirit of upholding my fidelity to pedagogical transacting, I hope to learn from my teacher friends and correct course in future endeavors.

Additionally, the Avery Event and the corresponding concept of the discipline of cultivating relationships, transitions us nicely into the focus of the next section. In the following section attention will be centered on two events. These two particular events disrupt common organizational structures with my teacher friends’ endeavors of creative designing.

**Disrupting Organization With Creative Designing**

The organization of curriculum often takes form in the linear sequencing of preplanned learning objectives. Scope and sequence charts, as well as pacing guides are standard tools used by early childhood curriculum workers to put learning activities in order to correspond with time tables for reaching learning objectives. Conceptually speaking, Elliot Eisner (1994) disrupts the notion of an organized curriculum with his dual concepts of “expressive activities” and “expressive outcomes.” As is often the case with art, some educational outcomes are and ought not to be predetermined and predictable. Therefore, this section will consist of two stories from my teacher friends, which illustrate the disruption of curriculum organization by early childhood workers’ engagement in creative designing.
To begin I will compliment the time and discipline Stacy associates as essentials for relationships with a recounting Bonita’s Tom Event. The truth of this tragic event that Bonita so eloquently declared, is: There is always room to include everyone, just as they are. While this may seem like simple advice, finding or perhaps making room for all comers is a complex enterprise in early childhood curriculum work. Above, I have documented an instance where my best efforts fell short. I found room for Mark in my classroom, but not for my colleagues in my process of curriculum problem solving. What is more, Joey metaphorically spoke of an “iron curtain” that separated the order of a highly regulated instructional atmosphere with the perceived chaos of the children’s families and community. Bonita speaks about how her commitment to be inclusive to all families interacts with the common orderly images of how schools should be in her suburban elementary school.

I think here it is all school and academic related. It is related to scores. I think that is sad. I said last week and again this week- now, you know that I am supportive of the staff here. It is just, like the Halloween party, they wanted to limit the number of people. A parent asked me about it and I said, I don’t really know how the staff feels. I don’t often feel the same way as others. I’m just a little ‘eh’ on that stuff, but I very much respect others opinions and feelings on things. There are a lot of opinions. For me, it is the more the merrier. I don’t care. But, I can’t speak for everyone.

While Bonita emphasized inclusivity as a guiding principal for her professional artistry, the focus of Karen’s creative curriculum work was her devotion to make
meaningful use of one’s time. The event of the speech intervention inspired Karen to declare: I don’t like to waste my time and I don’t want to waste theirs. She often reflected upon how her students’ time was wasted, when instead of attending to meaningful, expressive learning activities they days were overwhelmed by chasing predetermined objectives set forth by the dominant organizational structures of schooling.

Karen’s dismay for deaf children’s time being wasted in a non-reflective pursuit of normative learning objectives surfaced in the previous chapter. Reminiscing about the boy she observed being taught to speak by a speech therapist, she recognized that educational outcomes are not a one size fits all construct. She wondered if his time was not wasted endeavoring to learn to speak, when American Sign Language already provided him an effective means of communication. Before her first formal engagements in the study and practice of deaf education, Karen’s mind was inundated with critical questions from this event. Why not embrace his language? Why not allow him to enjoy spending his time in a manner that allowed him to express himself socially, to be among his peers? What did the extended amount of time teach the deaf teen about himself and the world in which he resided? Was it cruel?

Now an experienced teacher of young, deaf children, Karen was no longer perplexed by the disparities between advocates of ASL as part of deaf culture and proponents of what she calls audiology-based interventionists. She no longer queries if speech therapy is a waste of time or cruel. However, for Karen, whether or not it benefitted that particular student in a meaningful way will remain open for discussion.
Listening to her reflect upon the dynamics of her classroom in her current school, one can see that Karen’s abiding concern about wasting children’s time has lingered.

In her current classroom, she questions her own efficacy teaching deaf children whose cognitive abilities parallel their counterparts in general education classrooms. The time consuming endeavor of attending to the needs of children with multiple disabilities, lead her to ask those students with average cognitive functions “to be patient way too often.” She did organize “folder work” to ensure that times spent “being patient” weren’t completely wasted on having the children sit a wait. But, by her own self-criticism, that was not enough. These “deaf-typical” kids also deserve a learning environment that cultivates their holistic 3S understandings. And, that requires a teacher who is able to be attentive.

**Creative Designing Within the Challenges and Opportunities of Organization**

According to Bonita, one of the primary obstacles hindering early childhood curriculum workers for aptitude for creative designing is the scrutiny of evaluation systems. When facing the consequences of being evaluated, Bonita says that her colleagues favor the order of predictability. She implies that many fear that the messiness of facilitating expressive activities and valuing the unpredictable expressive outcomes exhibited by diverse stakeholders can be perceived by evaluators as disorder. Following the linear sequence engrained in us by traditional thought: disorder implies unpreparedness and unpreparedness implies incompetence.

Bonita commented on the tension felt among her colleagues regarding a new State Teacher Evaluation System. She said, “*I know it is an ugly thing that people are getting*
worked up about with the whole State Teacher Evaluation System thing.” However, refuses to allow the implementation of this new policy to impact her pedagogical artistry. She expressed her self-assured approach to the systematically heightened scrutiny saying “but, I say to the principal, ‘just come in, because it’s not going to be a dog and pony show’. He’s tried to come in three different times for the walk through thing.” Bonita went on to explain that her principal’s attempts to conduct walk through observations repeatedly encountered her facilitating activities alongside volunteers from the community. On such occasions, the principal notified Bonita that he would “come back when she was teaching.”

Bonita laughed about the principal letting her know that he would “come back when she was teaching,” though she laments that he was unwilling or able to recognize that she was indeed teaching. Reflecting upon how, “everyone gets very nervous about him coming in. When he came into my room, I was sorting through the junk cart for a paper that the kids asked me for.” Bonita grasps the orderly image of curriculum work her principal expects to see. Yet, she is fully comfortable with the messiness that is comprised of being inclusive and finding room for all stakeholders, just as they are. According to Bonita, such is life and she has no interest in pretense that suggests otherwise.

And, this might not be my best lesson, because my best lessons aren’t all day long.

There are some things that you just do because they are what you have to do.

Some of them are not as exciting as others, but this is how we are covering it and this is what we have to do. So, I kind of put it in the category with, “you may stop
at my house and I am a very great housekeeper; but, you may stop and my house might be really clean. Or, you may stop and my house is a little messy at that point. And, that is just how life is. And who is that probably going to bother the most is me, because I like everything to be just perfect, but I’ve learned to roll with that.

It is no different than when I first had kids. I like everything nice and clean, but at the end of the day there would be hand prints, when they were toddlers on the windows. That’s okay. I’d clean them when they go to bed. That’s just how it is going to be. I think that is what you have to learn in life: a little bit of “you have to roll with it.” You don’t know. Honestly, you don’t know minute to minute, day to day, week to week. You know they could change all kinds of things.

Karen experiences two challenging barricades that obstruct her educational imagination: her district’s structures for developing Individualized Educational Plans (IEPs); and her district’s organizational structure that placed deaf education under the umbrella of special education. Her first concern regarding the structure for developing IEPs is an intuitive expression of how learning objectives can hinder expressive outcomes (Eisner, 1994).

What I see now is tons of bored kids. I have kids that are so far behind that the garbage we have to teach them is so irrelevant. That’s boring to them and it’s also detrimental. It’s terrible to spend my time focusing on a kindergarten checklist for a kid in fifth grade with down’s syndrome. He’s been on this math
kindergarten checklist, since kindergarten. It’s terrible to have to face his mother. She comes in for his IEP meeting and she asks, “are we ready to move on to the first grade?” And, we’re not because there are things on the checklist that he can’t do.

Unfortunately, in my current district, we are not able to write individualized IEP goals. Crazy! At my old school, I was able to sit down and say, “this student needs this, so here is the goal I will write.” I’d track the data the way that it needed to be tracked and report it to parents. It worked out so well. I come here and this district has been out of compliance and fined so much money that they decided to write a manual of sequenced goals. So, instead of saying for example this student needs to work on counting money, it was needs to work on the kindergarten standards based checklist.

Her second concern centered on the district’s placing deaf education under the umbrella of special education. As such, deafness was treated as a disability, rather than a communicative difference. The consequence, according to Karen, was that it called for teachers of deaf children to methodically impose a fixed curriculum upon a diverse group. Recognizing deafness as a communicative difference, she advised is more comparable to serving children for whom English is a second language, than to serving children who have less cognitive capacity. Therefore, Karen’s agenda was find the means for creatively designing curriculum, tailored to attend to the unique abilities of her individual students and provide the accommodations they need to fully participate.
Fidelity to Creative Designing: Inclusiveness and Educational Imagination

Bonita acts as a gracious host in both her personal and professional life. Whether at her home or in her classroom she makes sure that everyone feels welcomes. She unambiguously explains,

*I just feel that I can always make room; even at my house. I’ve had people and our house is not huge. But I’ve had 50-60 people. Now, I will say that afterword we say that is way too many. People couldn’t move! (laughter) But, everyone could come and feel welcome. I’ll never say, “I don’t have room for you.”* Never ever.

*I never, ever, ever will exclude anybody, ever. I will rent another car, or... I want everybody to know that everybody can come. Even at my house, I don’t care how much it cost extra. I’ll have sloppy joe instead of buying the more expensive food, if I need to so everyone can be there. I want to make sure that there are no hurt feelings and nobody is left out. There is no reason to go about things otherwise. The more the merrier.*

Bonita remains committed to being inclusive in her professional practice in her efforts to find space for parents’ points of view, which she contends is often overlooked by those upholding a bureaucratic order.

*I understand rules and limits at school. But, some of these issues... Sometimes, some parents just want to be heard. They don’t want you to change the world or even necessarily what you are doing. They want you hear and understand. And, I*
can appreciate that. I don’t always make changes because what they say but I will always listen and take what they say into consideration.

Additionally, Bonita is sure to find space for members of the community. She put forth the following reflection, when I mentioned how she obviously sees community involvement as an important professional responsibility.

Right. We’ll make room for you if you want to come in. Honestly, they are our bosses. The parents, the community. I’m not doing it for that. But, I was a parent. If I did all the things that I was supposed to do, the fingerprinting, getting the badge and I went through all of the steps. And, this is a public building where I let my child come in. If I did all the steps I should be allowed to come in. The building is theirs it is for them. And I want them here. I want to have a good relationship with them. If it is important- and for some people it is and for other people its not- I want them to be able to come in. I feel very strongly about that.

Since Bonita’s classroom is a space she willingly shares with field students, a former parent and residents from a nearby nursing home, her evaluating supervisor experienced difficulty in his effort to observe her teaching by herself. Bonita reflects on the steady flow of volunteers coming in and out of her classroom.

Once I had the Kent State kids in doing math groups. It is the most wonderful enrichment. They are doing little games taking certain concepts to the next level. You look around and I’ve got six small groups going on because of these Kent State math students.
Then, he tried to come in once and... I still have Mr. Campbell. He comes in because he was doing machines for force and motions.

Then, we have nursery home coming in reading to kids. I love the community being a part of things. I guess I’m good at delegating when I see people have a way to do show the kids something that going to get through to them in a different way. It’s just a matter of making it click for them.

While Bonita’s creative designing of curriculum centers upon a commitment to being inclusive Karen’s fidelity is to enacting her “educational imagination” (Eisner, 1994) in practice. Karen’s educational imagination maintains critical distance from the organizational structure of her school and the perspectives of many of her colleagues. However, she also humbly upholds recognition of her own limitations. Her assertions regarding how to proceed as curriculum workers are not based upon dogmatic images and beliefs; but rather, she argues that curriculum work can be enhanced by bringing diverse ideas and talents together. When asked if she could envision her “ideal culture of curriculum” Karen remarked,

*I can imagine that perfectly. However, I also know that it would be an incredibly difficult task to get a whole group of people on board seeing the same vision. But at the same time, having a balance can be really nice. I work really well with that teacher who always wants to maintain an academic focus. So, it might be a really nice balance to have that person and a community person and the family oriented person and to have it all in the same place. Then, you are able to support kids in all areas. It would be nice if in a school like that you were allowed to define*
yourself as that person, in a way. Right, now I’m kind of struggling to be everything, to be all of those things. It is almost like we have to butt head a lot because I’m not doing my job. She may see that I’m not including subjects. Another teacher might see that I’m not bringing parents in every week to teach them sign language and that is so important. And, it is! One person can’t possibly focus on all of that.

Applying Bonita’s aforementioned value of being inclusive, to curriculum workers’ deliberative processes, Karen suggests holding conversations among stakeholders to consider ‘why’ we are teaching ‘what’ we are teaching. Teaching disciplinary content is important, according to her, but it is important to different children for dissimilar reasons. She wonders why we cannot creatively design curriculum that is attentive to these diverse purposes.

So, I would say, what we need to do is almost start fresh every year and not even have a mold. We should have really flexible guidelines that we’d look at and say, “in these huge areas of need, how can we best help each kid and kind of define what they need? …And, hear parents and hear from the kids, and hear from the teachers who have worked with them and siblings and the whole thing... just know and try to sort them that way. Then, we can start thinking about what we are trying to teach and what avenues we would use.” The way that I feel school should be is- the shift has focused on academics and performance- whereas I feel like the content areas are the avenues where we teach everything else.
I’m teaching math for a reason because there are a lot of functional needs and a lot of ways that we use math in the real world, but also to teach thinking, higher order and abstract thinking and I’m using it to teach language, talking about these real world things that we have to do with math. But, the shift is not focused on that. We are focused on getting the scores to prove that we are meeting the standards of grade level. So, that’s why I’d say just forget about all of that.

Critical of the dominant structures of her culture of curriculum, mindful of each teacher’s inevitable limitations including her own and determined to bring disparate ideas together, Karen puts in our mind's eye a picture of her “dream school.” Very different from any culture of curriculum in which she has ever worked, she imagined a situation where curriculum workers could explicitly be valued for their own strengths. Moving away from uniform objectives pervasive in grade-level standards, Karen yearns for unknown expressive outcomes that could result from children being with an array of curriculum workers with diverse strong suits. “We are wasting our time and our students’ time,” Karen might say, by not allowing each child to benefit from the varied contributions of her colleagues’ distinct ideas and interests.

It would be so nice to have a dream school where we are all allowed to define ourselves and say, “my focus is this. I will try to touch upon everything, but this is what I am really good at.” I’d like to be able to do that in an appreciated way. It would be just fantastic to have a big school and to get rid of this grade level nonsense with my deaf students.
I suppose, in order for it to be well-rounded, it is about who is there, what their strengths are, what experiences they bring. That way, students aren’t stuck with one frame of thought, one philosophy or one focus. I think it is important that we touch every corner.

Maybe well-rounded isn’t the best word, maybe it’s more like a polygon. All these different points that meet and we want to get every single point met. Just to be able to have as many people as possible with different experiences and philosophy, but everybody has a job. Instead of all teachers are all the same. Instead, I can be the language focused teacher. She can be the math focused teacher, because she is really good at that. This other one might focus on home-school communication. It would almost be like we could all teach our content through one these different focuses with different teachers, so they get every single point they need to get. Whereas, right now, I feel like say last year, I feel like I met maybe 60% of these students needs. If we were to stay the same this year, as we did last year, I would have the same kids and we would still be touching on only that same 60%. Whereas, at ‘the Karen School,’ they would get what I can give them, plus what Jill can give them and also what Tracy can give them and really hit every point.

It should be noted that Karen’s words hint at the possibilities for pedagogically transacting with students. A key aspect of which is creatively designing curriculum in ways that allow for children’s ways of knowing to be included within considerations of what is to be known. Recognizing that knowledge functions differently for different
children, Karen’s creative acts of curriculum designing push back against the dominant organizational structures.

* * 

* A big problem with our school is how much of it is in the school. I actually just got okayed to do a weekly field trip to Quick Trip— which is a gas station across the street— with my low-functioning math group; so we can collect money all week and count that money, get used to having money and spending it wisely and learn those kinds of lessons of, “I have $5, so I can buy candybars”; or, “our classroom needs this, so we should buy this.” I want them to experience making those kinds of decisions. That’s why a weekly trip will be nice. That is why I like to get out of the school as much as possible.

Her image of restructuring deaf education at her school took humble steps forward through her work as a curriculum leader. Karen is able to collaborate productively with her program coordinator. She credits the coordinator’s lack of allegiance to any particular philosophical dogma for her willingness to not engage in authoritarian managerial tactics.

I’m able to say, “look at Stewart. Stewart really isn’t benefitting from this. Look at my data.” And, she is able to say, “oh, yeah. I think that you can go ahead and do these other techniques that you shared with me.” Instead of saying, “we’ve got to hammer in these skills because that is my philosophy and the program philosophy.”
Therefore, when Karen observed that preset learning outcomes were not benefitting her students, her supervisor was open-minded enough to listen to her proposal. She recounts,

*I didn’t think that was appropriate. So, I changed it. I was able to talk to our district IEP coordinator and petition to get these alternate checklists. I think they need to work on things that are relevant and stop worrying if he can count from 1-90 from memory. He’s not going to do it. We’ve been trying for five years.*

Hence, Karen was able to extend conversations in her culture of curriculum to extend beyond predetermined learning objectives to consider potential expressive outcomes. She said,

*I have a student right now. I’m not trying to sound pessimistic. I’m trying to sound optimistic. I have a student right now who is never going to read past a level E. It is just not going to happen. That is okay. I feel like having that academic view of “here is what he has to learn and here is what we are going to do to teach him that” is really detrimental to everything else that he has to learn. I’d like to teach him how to use that level E reading skill functionally.*

Furthermore, Karen has lead a conversation at her school about restructuring the deaf education program, based on identifying students needs and abilities. Promising changes have been made possible through Karen’s leadership.

*I feel like this coming year we will have more structure because of how we are sorting kids differently. I’ll be working with the deaf group for language time. There is a group of kids that are more hearing, so they are going to work on*
auditory training. There are kids who are very low functioning and they are
going to be working on their goals. It is a very different set up this year. The
structure will be there.

However, Karen sees this as only a humble first step working toward the potential
of her envisioned ideals for curriculum designing. Realizing such a vision will require
sustained collaborative problem solving among her colleagues, which she acknowledges
will be a challenging, yet beneficial process. She explains and then reflects upon both the
challenges and the promise of her curriculum leadership platform,

I’d like to eventually sort our kids based really on the way that we have started
doing here …based on their levels in major content areas. Then, have everyone
have a chance to work with them. That way kids will get that well roundedness.
That would be the ideal school, where they’re not stuck with me for three years
and only me. That’s dangerous. I feel like I’m a pretty good teacher, but at the
end of the day, there are things that I don’t give kids that they need and I know
someone else does. If they could have that more well rounded schooling, it would
be really amazing for them.

…I feel like in my program currently, I struggle or I have a challenge with
my need to embed language in everything is almost overwhelming to others.
There is another teacher in my building, deaf ed, who wants everything to be
really compartmentalized. From 9:00 to 9:30, we are working on math. I am not
worrying about language, I am working on math. Then from 9:30-10:00 it’s this,
we are focused on science and that’s it.
So, when we have collaboration meetings we can kind of butt heads because I might say, “for my language time I’m going to do a science experiment.” Then, we have a big discussion about how that’s a waste of my language time. Because, how could I be doing language if I’m doing science? Talking about wanting reading and math, and also ASL- how I like to mix that up, it’s really important to me. That can be a struggle for some people, mostly because that one teacher is so focused on getting her students on grade level and she is great at it. While I disagree, she is really great at her job.

We’re getting these kids where other people have said, “oh, we need to focus on a family component.” She is saying, “whoa, whoa, whoa. My point is to get them through school.” That is one example.

Another teacher at my school is really focused on having more deaf adults in the classroom: volunteers, associates and teachers; and being good positive deaf community examples. We’ve really been able to merge that together. We can have during our language time specifically that community component as well. We can work together well to mix up our interest and our areas of expertise and really provide a good bubble for those kids.

**Connecting Creative Designing to Aims Talking**

As highlighted in the previous chapter, the Chris Event inspired me to declare, “Since there is no way of knowing what the future holds, visceral experiences in the present warrants our immediate and focused attention.” This event draws creative designing together with aims talking. An appreciation of our not knowing what the
future holds naturally leads one to be skeptical of fixed learning objectives that claim to allegedly prepare young people for a future characterized more by mystery than predictability. Further, an unwillingness to suppress visceral life experiences that poetically interlace our most earnest thinking, feeling and acting lends itself to an interest in expressive activities and openness to their corresponding expressive outcomes.

Having the life of one of my best friends cut short, I learned that life is inherently risky and cannot be predicted. Learning this lesson was a moment that disrupted both the way that I organized and ascribed purpose to my life. The shock of his diagnosis made apparent the reality that the future holds no guarantees that it will unfold as we anticipate. Our only certainty is that life is as it is in the present. Chris rarely talked about the prospect of dying. Rather, with laser focus, he embrace each day for what it had to offer, whether that be a fantastic road trip, an outstanding meal, or watching a movie in his living room. In fact, it was often the small pleasures in life that consumed his interest. I recall him spending hours tinkering with his stereo and taking delight in changes too subtle for me to perceive. Damn, he loved that! And, with him I was able to enjoy being fully present in the reality that was momentarily at hand.

However, this learning experience was not a call for carefree living recklessly gaining pleasure in the present moment without concern for the direction one is heading. Quite the opposite is the case. Living carefully and being attentive to the course of one’s summons up another memory of Chris. We were 23 years old and were talking in his driveway. I was enjoying my first year teaching kindergarten and asked him if he ever gave serious thought about getting back into school to pursue a career in engineering.
That was his major, before dropping out. His response shook me. “Nah,” he said. “That would be worthwhile if I were harboring illusions that I would someday turn thirty.”

“What the heck!” I responded. “That’s pretty pessimistic from Mr. Live for Today!”

“I am living for today. You’re just forgetting that I’m living on borrowed time.” he retorted. “School and a career just doesn’t make sense for me, like it does for you.”

With that, I became convinced that it is senseless to try to conceptualize the past, present or future separate from one another. That is the essence of the problem of defining purposes of curriculum work with learning objectives. Learning objectives are assumed to be signposts of adequate progress on a trajectory toward a predetermined future endpoint. But, what if that endpoint doesn’t prove in the future to be as desirable as it is assumed to be in the present? What if one’s past or present calls attention to something more meaningful than the current point on the fixed trajectory? Furthermore, as Chris bluntly brought to my attention, the different realities of our present situations provoked different desires aims for the future.

Life, as Stacy told me, “is a crazy winding path.” Each of us has our own unique journey that has lead us to become who we are in the process of becoming. Being present in the moment allows one to be attentive to the unanticipated possibilities that life is offering. For example, Stacy, Bonita, Karen and I each have shared stories of how we “fell into teaching,” though we didn’t foresee ourselves becoming educators when we set off for college. Venturing down a crazy, winding path it is important to be attentive to one’s present situation as well as mindful of where one is going. Bonita’s John Event
will disrupt the habitually established purposes of early childhood curriculum work with aims talking.

**Disrupting Purpose With Aims Talking**

Nel Noddings (2013) conceptualizes a form of aims talking that embodies what she calls, “ecological cosmopolitanism.” As the term implies, finding natural balances in our processes of living as citizens and coming to know about the mysteries of the universe constitutes this approach to aims talking. Noddings (2013) explains that the field of ecology is undergoing a significant shift, from a focus on growth to emphasizing sustainability. Further, she argues that curriculum workers should be mindful of this shift, moving away from goals centering around competing in the global marketplace and moving toward “looking at the holistic life domain to study patterns of interdependence” (p.86). For this, Bonita’s story of the John Event provides material specificity.

Never losing sight of either the knower or what is to be known, Bonita’s John Event declares: *You might need to guide, teach and change behaviors; but never change the person.* Standard learning objectives set signposts for growth trajectories that predict the gradual changes individuals undergo, eventually achieving fixed endpoints that allegedly represents social, emotional and intellectual readiness. Bonita opposes notions of changing or conforming individuals to meet standards. Rather, form a more transactional point of view she sees differences among her students to be indicative that they are not only unique, but they are irreplaceable. Therefore, Bonita embraces the potential contributions of each young individual in shaping the world as the world shapes each young individual in her classroom.
You will never catch her speaking about the “good” or “bad” kids in her class. Nor, has she ever complained about having a bad class. To her, such things do not exist.

*I would never. Even from my own children, I believe very strongly, I don’t want to change these kids. If their behavior is not good behavior and it is going to cause them problems along the way, and it’s causing other students problems and its causing me problems- I want to change that. But, I don’t want to change them or who they are, because nobody is just rotten. Nobody is just good. Nobody is that.*

Bonita’s fidelity to be inclusive comes into play in her aims talking too. Focused more on finding a convivial place for each child than ensuring that particular learning objectives are achieved “on time,” she allows for the preservation of who they truly are. Not only does she offer her students opportunities to learn in her classroom; but each child’s interrelated thoughts, feelings and actions living are ascribed meaning and honored contribution within their classroom community. In this way, Bonita’s “aims talking” is consistent with the pedagogical transacting highlighted in the section above. In other words, she walks her talk.

**Aims Talking Within the Challenges and Opportunities of Clearly Defined Purposes**

Bonita effectiveness as a teacher is recognizing within her culture of curriculum. However, that is not to say that it is readily understood. Bonita reflects on what has become her role of facilitating communal relations for challenging students in her culture of community.

*Dan, you know, I always have a huge behavior issue. This one was slated for me.*

*He was coming right for me from School Psychologist. She said, “you are going*
to be perfect and I’ve told the parents.” Not to say at first, when the chairs were being tipped over and pencils were being broken and the desks were being pushed- I’m thinking “not again.” But then I told myself, “You know what? There is a reason. There is a reason he’s here. There’s a reason that I’m here for him. And, I’ve got to figure this out.” And, slowly, we got to a very good place. I mean he absolutely love being in here, feels he is respected and feels that he can do the work and he wants so much to please me. It is from making that connection.

Within her culture of curriculum, Bonita is presumed to be effective with challenging children because she is a “strict and structured teacher. Though she is not overtly critical of the strategies for classroom management that she most commonly sees used, Bonita doesn’t adhere to all of the dominant ideas and practices in her culture of curriculum. Finding a way to strictly uphold high expectations without succumbing to behaviorism, she has developed her own approach to guidance in her classroom.

I make it clear from the beginning. I say, “you are never going to win in this class with bad behavior. I win every time. You have to follow the rules.” So I set those guidelines right up front.

I’m not a big clip-chart person. For other people, I guess they work great. But, for me, you get a warning- get your act together. Then, after that, you are missing 5 minutes of recess; but, you can earn it back if you can make it better or get busy working, you can earn it back; unless you have lied, cheated, stolen then you’re done. So, they should have a chance. I don’t have a chart. They will ask
me, “did I earn my recess back?” And, sometimes I forget that they’ve lost it. Not only do they quit horsing around and get back to work, but they are also responsible and honest enough to remember.

Bonita alludes to have perceived a subtle difference between herself and her colleagues regarding the values being emphasized. They share the desire to keep their students focused on responsibly completing the academic tasks at hand. However, she implies that her colleagues and their use of behaviorist “clip-charts” seem to be narrowly paying attention to their students’ levels of compliance. Bonita, on the other hand, underscores the values of responsibility and honesty in the child taking ownership over their own behavior. Further, she suggests that children should be “given a chance” to take actions to redeem their mistakes, making their momentary and minor matters of noncompliance not a big deal.

Distinctions between Bonita’s values and those which are dominant within her culture of curriculum are made most explicit when she reflects upon how time is spent at her school. She reflects, “I honestly think that at our school, teachers give an extraordinary amount of time to do their best. But it is mostly about the curriculum stuff, standards.” For Bonita, teaching and therefore curriculum work is primarily about people not about content. She distinguishes her thinking from what she perceives to be the dominant perspective in her culture of curriculum.

For me curriculum is on the bottom. All these state mandates. The accountability. It will happen if you do these other things. You will get the best
out of kids if you do all of these other thing first, if you make that connection and build relationships.

Bonita sympathetically acknowledges that most of her colleagues are continuously trying to prove themselves. They do this competitively through test scores and questing for favorable performance reviews from their principal. Bonita gives the impression that she is self-assured and above the fray.

*I told my principal, “your paper next year isn’t going to show me anything that I don’t already know. I know when I’ve had a good day. And, I know when I haven’t had a very good day. I know when my lesson have been awesome and I know when my lessons flop. Nobody needs to give me a paper about it.”*

The curriculum, yeah that’s what we’re here for. But, you can’t shove it down their throats. There has to be a process of finding a way to get there. This is my way of getting there. If I were to ask or think about what as teachers we would say our goal is here. It would not be that personal side. It would be especially a lot to do with state department lately, all curriculum stuff. How many times do we re-do how we are going to cover the standards. Everyone is freaking out about the core.

**Fidelity to Aims Talking**

Bonita models aims talking as much in deed as she does in words with a strong commitment to the idea: *You might need to guide, teach and change behaviors; but never change the person.* Her story centered on one particular student, who presented challenging behavioral outbursts.
This year, I don’t know what it was. I’d go home and I’d be a little teary eyed. Kids come in and for me they are just like little first graders coming in. And, I’ve got to be really tough... After only a few days, I told myself, there had to be a reason this kid came here and came to my class. I do believe and have strong faith. I’m not an outward person about it, but I very much believe that he was put here form me to help him. I knew I could. And, to understand him a little bit. Sometimes those kids just need a little understanding.

When she met this student, he was primed and ready for confrontation. The non-reflective habits of Bonita’s culture of curriculum attributed his chair tipping, pencil breaking, desk pushing outbursts to be indicative that he lacked the social, emotional knowledge he needed to competently conform his behavior to the expectations of his learning community. Perhaps, Bonita acknowledged some degree of accuracy to such assertions. However, she was also able to see the problem from another angle. Presuming the child to be competent, she questioned the degree to which the learning community adequately accommodated her student’s thoughts, feelings and actions. While many had been ready to interact with the purpose of modifying his behavior, Bonita was ready to have transactions in her classroom that allowed the boy to connect with his learning community in ways that invited him to influence and be influenced. Bonita spoke about the value she places on connecting with her students.

They don’t want me to be disappointed in them. You gain that respect when you connect with them. And, I give them respect back. I don’t expect them to be perfect. Even if they do something wrong, they will be in less trouble if they tell
me instead of waiting for me to find out. It is just that making connection with the kids and gaining their respect and respecting them back. I feel that you can really teach them. Even if you have kids with learning disabilities that connections is so important. They want to do well because they want to do it for you and for themselves.

Each year I get a little bit of extreme behavior. It think it is because I do take the time to figure out what we need to do to make things work. It isn’t going to be push and pull all year. I can’t have that and no one is going to benefit, including the other kids in the classroom.

Accordingly, her main goal for this child was to connect with him by building a relationship. In that relationship, Bonita was tough. She held him accountable to high expectations by insisting that he take responsibility for his own behavior. Progress really ensued both socially and academically, according to Bonita, once a meaningful teacher-student relationship was formed.

So, I had a student with huge behavior issues and my goal wasn’t right away to teach him and argue with him when he wasn’t doing what he was supposed to do. Truly, I wanted to connect with him and find little steps that he was making; so we could find that good spot. And we are in that. We were doing a behavior notebook everyday, morning and afternoon. My big thing was making that connection with him and we stopped the notebook last week. Not saying that it can’t come back.
Bonita clarified that her student was responsible for his behavioral choices and “responsible to her.” Reciprocity is a key attribute of the transactional teacher-student relationship that she describes.

_He went through a phase when he would behave for me but not in gym or math class. But then he realized that he was responsible to me for that. We have really made that connection. Now, I’m more on him about his assignments; not that I wasn’t asking for that before. It’s like anything else in life, where you have to pick your battles._

A woman of strong faith, Bonita depicts herself as a “black and white” thinker. However, just as her strict “black and white” thinking influenced her student; her thinking was altered by her commitment to helping the child. Hardnosed habits of high expectations were modified to a willingness to “pick your battles.”

_I just really believed that something lead him to my classroom. That he needed me and for whatever reason, I needed him. That does drive me. It drives me to see that it all happens for a reason and there is a purpose behind it all. I very much so believe in God and have a strong faith._

_And, I would say because of my faith, I’m very black and white. Not that I don’t accept grey area. But, I do think there are certain things. Like with behavior, there is a right and there is a wrong. There isn’t a big grey area there. Not that we can’t make it right when we are wrong. But there isn’t a big in between. You are either behaving or you are not._
I think sometimes with behavior and with certain kids, it is sort of a pick your battle thing. I finally had to tell myself, don’t be quite as black and white, still black and white, but let a couple things go and make little tiny steps.

Indeed Bonita proved herself willing to let a couple of things go if it meant that her student might make progress. The black and white detachment of clearly stated behavioral objectives took a backseat to her dedication to aspiring get him on the right path. She explains, “even a kid who is making a lot of mistakes might be showing progress and be on a positive path.” She continues to explain how counterproductive it can be to admonish every mistake. She said, “On the positive path kids are going to stumble along the way. It is about picking the times that are most important and call him on those; to keep him on the right path.”

The picking of one’s battles associated with helping him find his way to the right path is not to be mistaken with permissiveness. Bonita is adamant about teaching children to take ownership of their own behavioral choices. Moreover, she employed a strategy of explicitly discussing successful periods of time where the child behaved in an adaptive fashion, which often goes overlooked.

But you do have to make choices and sometimes kids have to learn that.

Sometimes you’ve been on a wrong path for so long that it is just a habit for you and you don’t know any other way to do it. When finally I started to make a connection with him and I would call him up to my desk and say, “do you see how much better your morning, or you hour was?” He realized it. We just talked about it last week when we decided not to do the notebook, do you see how much
better your day is for you. It is better for me too; but that isn’t what he sees; and he did. He is doing really well. Now, he can focus on his work more and I can focus more to teach, because that behavior sure can get in the way.

And I told him, and I believe this is very strong, “you start fresh everyday.” Because we’ve all done things. If the next day is going to be worse then why get up in the morning. If you do something at the end of the day you might have a punishment in the morning. But you do start fresh every day.

It was more than a matter of personal preference that steered Bonita away from the “clip charts” which she identified as a popular strategy for classroom management at her school. Rather, her holistic aims talking are disruptive to the purposeful behavioral and instructional management that she sees as predominant in her culture of curriculum. The basis of Bonita’s curriculum work is not a demand for compliance among students to sustain uninterrupted instructional time without dilemmas. Instead, her aims talking is relationships characterized by care and mutual respect. The basis of her disciplinary actions is interest in children current and future well being, not obedience to fixed rules. Bonita describes her aim for her class to “look out for each other,” in a culture of curriculum where teachers’ common purpose is to look after children.

They know that I only have their best interest because they respect me and I respect them. They know that I care about them. They know parts of my life and I know parts of their lives. We do, I know it is cliché, but we really do become a little school family. We look out for each other. They know that if they pick on
anyone or if anyone picks on them, I’m going to have a chat. They know that I have their backs and they know that they better treat people nicely.

It is indeed often necessary to look out for children within the predominant purposes of public schooling in the United States. Bonita spoke about what she makes out to be her colleagues putting pressure on themselves and on each other to maintain the “perfect classroom.” In her culture of curriculum the “perfect classroom,” according to Bonita, is about the uninterrupted teaching content standards. Therefore, disruptive students can create a great deal of consternation by simply not adhering to academic or behavioral expectations. Metaphorically describing a process of fitting children into prefabricated “molds” or “square holes,” Bonita eschews her culture of curriculum’s defining purpose and expresses her commitment to carefully proceed with “round pegs.” Not everyone will fit that mold and I’m not going to force a round peg into a square hole. Instead Bonita insists, “My class is perfect with you in it.”

You know my Josh. He was in the gifted program, so he was always very bright. But, he is not what we would call normal. He thinks differently. He is out of the box. I always said he is that round peg that isn’t going to fit into a square hole. I didn’t want anyone to ever force him into that. That’s why I would never change anybody. Josh is Josh. How he is makes him who he is. Now, if he had bad behavior, we’d need to change that. But, who he is, I do not want to change. I am not going to force any child into a little mold, so that I have the “perfect class.” My class is perfect with you in it! I feel that way very strongly. Josh had
teachers along the way who tried to fit him into a mold of who he was never going to be, never.

Bonita’s dedication to aims talking in a culture of curriculum focused on defined purposes is rooted in who she is. The deeply personal John Event occurred long before she became a teacher and it shapes who she is as an early childhood curriculum worker. Her insightful commitment, “You might need to guide, teach and change behaviors; but never change the person” is inspired and informed by an amorous encounter between Bonita and her son. The truth that this happened is carried out in daily practices, not only because of her encounter with the event; but also because she has maintained fidelity to it.

When you stop and you think, if my John were gone tomorrow, I would miss every one of those annoying different things that make him him. Not bad behavior. But, I would definitely miss the parts of John that makes John John. It think that with these guys. That’s what makes you who you are.

I hope that my teacher friends I can keep going and persevere for children, for our profession and for ourselves. As Bonita’s fidelity to the John Event illustrates, the parts of our curriculum work that would be surrendered should we ever throw in the towel would be those aspects that makes us who we are, and makes our curriculum work what it is. In the closing discussion that follows, I will maintain consistency by invoking a truth telling story from one of my teacher friends. However, it may be important for me to clarify that the forthcoming truth telling was initiated with more of an emphasis on friendship than on professionalism. I conclude with this particular narrative as a means
to underscore both the hopeful promise implicated by our collective narrative, as well as the warranted concern for the pervasive state of affairs that obfuscates narratives such as ours.

Concluding Discussion

Jenna’s Twins Event inspires and informs her to “Remain hopeful. Even the most unlikely and unexpected outcomes are possible.” I chose to close with this particular truth telling story for three reasons. First, it ties together an essential quality of all of the other truth processes and reflective problem solving activities that constitute our collective narrative. The Twin Event calls attention to our affirmative inventions, the possibility for birthing (metaphorically and literally) new possibilities. Secondly, and building off of the first reason, each event could be reconsidered as a disruption of a different moment of curriculum work, or used independently as a provocation for all four moments of aims talking, pedagogical transacting, creative designing and critically appraising. These four moments of curriculum work are not isolated endeavors but interwoven. Third and finally, the Twins Event is an explicit rebuke of dogmatism.

Each truth telling story is situated “within the void,” what is absent in one’s non-reflective experience of their culture of curriculum. During taken for granted steps of curriculum work, where the culture of curriculum had engrained habits of how to think and act, my teacher friends’ narratives expressed something else. The manner by which Jenna shared this story with me exemplified both the obstacles and the fruitful potential of such “doing and thinking differently.” During the first two interviews, intending to be helpful to me, she exuded a professional veneer. An experienced and well informed
professional, Jenna’s answers were technical and in quick supply. Then, after our second interview ended, the audio-recorder was turned off and we were packing up to call it a day, her deliberate air of professionalism faded. She spoke to me as her friend who also teaches young children; rather than a researcher for whom she was providing data. To the best of my recollection she said,

“Do you know why I am that way about not giving up on kids? I think that a small part of me understands what it is like to be shaken by thinks that are beyond your control. I was a mess when the doctors told me that I would never have kids. For the first time in my life, I was being told that a major part of how I had always envisioned my life unfolding wasn’t going to happen. And, I was being told by people who knew what they were talking about, experts, doctors. But, you know, things don’t always turn out the way that they are expected to. I wasn’t supposed to have children. Obviously…” Jenna smiled as she stopped talking and gestured toward a framed picture of her adorable children that sat on her desk. There was nothing left to say.

Speaking as an experienced and knowledgeable teacher of young children to her friend “the researcher” she explicated various purposes, experiences, organizations and evaluations of early childhood curriculum work. Engaging in a conversation between teacher friends, Jenna’s discourse was more genuine and she talked about “something else.” Her capacity and willingness to discuss something other than the dominant activities and understandings of her daily practice makes the affirmative invention of new discourse-practices for early childhood curriculum work viable. Jenna reminds us that saying and doing something other than what is deemed possible within the discourse and
structures that dominate our situation is a feasible option. Simply by being able to declare, “this really happened, so therefore I…” Jenna provides material specificity for a slogan of May 68: “Be realistic demand the impossible” (Brault & Naas, 2010, p. xii).

Generally positioned as a step away from technical rationality, the Twin Event draws attention to the linearity through which our collective narrative was constructed. This was indeed deliberate as I wanted to explicit and ample attend to the dominant culture within which our stories are situated. However, it is imperative to note that each of the teachers’ stories could be interpreted as a provocation to disrupt the discourse-practices of various moments in curriculum work. Additionally, it is possible to disrupt multiple moments of curriculum development using any of the narratives independently. Thus, it will be worthwhile to follow this study with the re-telling, re-describing, re-organizing and re-appraising of these individual and collective narratives.

Jenna’s story of the Twins Event nicely represents all of the narratives as an explicit rebuke of dogmatic images of thought and authoritarian forms of management. Coherent among all of the moments of disruption are the deliberate use of gerunds in naming our stories of fidelity. Our collective narrative does not offer an alternative to the Tyler Rationale, though it does engage in a process of disrupting the taken for granted structuring of early childhood curriculum work provided by the rationale. This study documents my teacher friends and me thinking and acting in ways that are qualitatively different from what is taken for granted in our cultures of curriculum. Thus, our narrative ironically separates us and our work from the contexts in which our curriculum practice is
embedded. Thinking, speaking and acting in such counter-dogmatic and anti-authoritarian terms is an inherently complex and strenuous enterprise.

Alain Badiou’s (2001) ethical framework is helpful for deliberating the implications and limitations of early childhood curriculum workers’ truth telling stories. Contemplating one’s ethical fidelity takes into account three pivotal checkpoints: the point of encountering an event; the point of declaring the truth of an event; and the process maintaining consistency in word and deed to the democratic quality inspired and informed by an event. These three checkpoints structure the truth telling narratives in this study.

First, we highlighted our immanent breaks from the dogma that structures the discourse and practices of dominant culture that were provoked by the encountering of events. Next, we spoke of our events’ significance, declaring the truth that has been derived from the encounter. Then, we proceeded on with our early childhood curriculum work in a manner that was consistent with the immanent breaking and truth declaring that had ensued. At each of the three checkpoints is the quandary of an ethical crossroad.

The crossroads signify whether my teacher friends and I exhibit a humble love of wisdom embodied by a becoming subject or the subjective hubris of people who considers their selves to be wise. At the moments where we encounter events the quandary is one of event or simulacrum. In other words, were our moments of disruption, indeed disruptive to dominant dogma? For example, Jenna’s discussed a simulacrum of her curriculum work by focusing on mundane technical aspects, before bringing the Twins Event into play. Our declarations of the democratic truths of these
events can become manifestations of truth or betrayal. Can my teacher friends and I persevere and not betray our truth declarations? Can we keep going without giving up or giving in to taken for granted understandings or the demands of our cultures of curriculum? Lastly, our earnest efforts to walk the talk can take form of fidelity or disaster. Do we uphold the democratic ideals about which we are thinking and speaking in our daily discourse and practices? Can my teacher friends’ and my truth processes ensue without inhibiting others’ capacity to think, speak and act freely?

In conclusion, this research examines the collective narrative of six public school early childhood curriculum workers in the Midwestern United States, which includes myself. We presented numerous moments of disruption that interrupt the dominant discourses and practices of early childhood curriculum. Following these disruptive moments, truth telling ensued, as well as reflections regarding how truth telling is realized in our corresponding curriculum practices. In this study, I have encountered early childhood curriculum workers’ events, enunciated their truths and provided concrete exemplars of their fidelity in practice. Now our collective responsibility is to, as Badiou might say, “keep going” and to do so with fidelity and not disaster or terror.
This dissertation opened with Vivian Greene’s quote: “Life isn’t about waiting for the storm to pass. It’s about learning to dance in the rain.” In this concluding chapter, I revisit Greene’s words to encapsulate a brief summary of the study as a whole. Additionally, drawing on this poetic image I will discuss the various contributions offered by this research. Now that I have expressed in the pages above a representation of our dance in the rain, I will clarify the various implications concerning teaching, research and the process of teaching teachers as well as the implications for me as a teacher, researcher and teacher educator. I will bring this chapter and therefore the dissertation to a close considering my original research questions, and the remaining unanswered questions which are possible future dances for which I can foresee myself taking part.

**Early Childhood Curriculum Workers Dance with Democracy**

Enacting caring and emancipating pedagogy, which constitute key elements of democratic curriculum work, is indeed a complex endeavor of professional artistry. As our symbolic quotation implies, public school early childhood educators’ artistry, their dance, takes place amidst less than ideal conditions. Despite the abundance of democratic rhetoric that infuses institutional mission statements, profoundly unequal conditions remain a salient, longstanding and well documented feature of public schools in the United States. Moreover, undemocratic instructional management practices are the norm, rather than the exception (Henderson & Gornik, 2007).
As I established in the first chapter, the absence of freedom and justice in American public schools is conceptualized in many ways. The prominence of contemporary realism and the dominance of bureaucratic hierarchies promulgate a storm of dogmatism and authoritarianism. While much has been done by critical scholars to understand the storm that encumbers the artistry of curriculum workers, the storm is habitually presumed to preclude the possibility of dancing. Rarely has it been acknowledged that regardless of the circumstances within which we work, not all early childhood curriculum workers are dogmatic or authoritarians; nor, are we necessarily victims of circumstance. In other words, this study set out to shed light upon the non-dogmatic ideas and utterances that correspond to democratic practices. As such, expressions and enactments shared through early childhood curriculum workers’ narratives were sought out from individuals who demonstrate the capacity to dance-thinking, speaking and acting on their own accord- in the face of the storm that characterizes their situation.

Metaphorically speaking, contemporary realism and the crisis of modernity subsume each individual dancer, taking control over each and every step. The relativism that could be considered “the crisis of postmodernity,” on the other hand, allows dancers their autonomy but renders each one of us a helpless victim against the raging power of the storm. My teacher friends and I are not willing to submit to the forces of the storm by reducing our dance to a series of predictably choreographed motions or idly waiting for the clouds to clear. Spending our days in the great outdoors, my teacher friends and I do not require a sophisticated explanation of the weather conditions, though such
explanations are in ample supply. Further, this research has brought to bear an expression of the dance we do daily, which has not been represented in the research literature. It is a dance that these dedicated early childhood educators doggedly continue regardless of the projected forecast.

Certainly there is no shortage of perspective regarding how early childhood curriculum workers ought to proceed in of their daily practices. It is important to note that each participant in this study exhibited practical understanding of common approaches to teaching. Each spoke about employing both evidenced-based and developmental appropriate practices in their classrooms, which were widely used in their cultures of curriculum. However, my teacher friends and I utilize these recognized “best practices” as guidelines to be followed only when proven to be beneficial. Realists’ advice is indeed sometimes helpful toward keeping our bodies moving to the beat; but on other occasions, it is stultifying to the point of providing arrows directing us to move as if we were playing the video game *Dance, Dance Revolution*. Critical postmodern deconstructions call attention to the problems of dogmatically adhering to best practices. Yet, the pragmatic value of such discourses of negation is limited, as they eloquently identify “what not to do”; but routinely fail to address the obvious follow up question: then what? The artistry of caring and emancipating pedagogy comes not from discounting “best practices”; but rather, from knowing when to take heed of them, when to disregard them and what to do instead.

Researching early childhood curriculum workers’ democratic dance is buoyed by a critical awareness of pervasive dogmatism and authoritarianism garnered thoroughly
from reconceptualizations of early childhood curriculum. Yet, participating in the dance that is the object of my study served as a constant reminder that inactive deconstruction is not an adequate substitute for the interactive empiricism or self-active rationalism. Insufficient on their own, the modernist ways of constructing knowledge as well as epistemologically diverse postmodern deconstructions prove useful in particular contexts. In the pages above, my teacher friends and I have demonstrated a creative process of deconstructing and reconstructing. Our democratic dance is animated by an epistemological eclecticism that constitutes the practical wisdom of knowing when to accept the choreographed moves common knowledge, when to stop and deconstruct them and when it is time to innovate or improvise.

Drawing on Ryan’s (2011) analysis of John Dewey’s late career thoughts on transaction, this research introduces a new conceptual framework to the field early childhood curriculum. The transactional epistemology employed in this study mediates the bifurcation of subject and object dually promulgated by empiricism and rationalism. Applied to this research, the curriculum worker (the dancer) and the curriculum work (the dance) are, as Ryan (2011) says, seen together as constituting, “a collection of useful yet fallible human practices open to ongoing modification” (p.39). Dancing together, my teacher friends and I possess the capacity to convey stories of early childhood curriculum work not based on approximations of an alleged, fixed, mind-independent reality, but from Dewey’s postulate of immediate empiricism. Early childhood curriculum work is neither a fixed external reality we can’t fully access, nor is it a reality that our minds have constructed. Rather, early childhood curriculum work exists as it is truly experienced.
Postulating immediate empiricism, this research inquires into the truths of the dance that only the dancers on stage can tell us about.

Juxtaposing Dewey’s postulate of immediate empiricism with Alain Badiou’s philosophical oeuvre, this research presumes a democratic ontology to ground transactional knowing and elucidates transactional embodiments apprehended through Badiou’s (2001) notion of ethical fidelity. As such, principles of inclusiveness and equality are axiomatically assumed rather than merely acknowledged as desirable yet deemed untenable by through dogma of Western thought traditions. Building off of the political concepts key to the reconceptualization of curriculum, which William Pinar (2013) asserts have been intellectually exhausted, this research examines the expressions of ethical stances my teacher friends and I take in the world in our dance as curriculum workers. Accordingly, this study set out to answer the following research questions.

First, I inquired into what is known from this vantage point of immediate empiricism, asking: What are the truth telling stories of six early childhood educators who embody transactional knowing and a commitment to enacting democratic virtues in curriculum practices? With supporting questions I examined the source and the substance of transactional knowing. Inquiry into the source of how a curriculum has come to know about a matter that warrants their devoted attention is buttressed by asking the first supporting question: What events are described in the teachers’ narratives that invoke the ethical fidelity of a truth procedure? Moreover, clarifying what is known and faithfully attended to in curriculum work is emphasized by the second supporting
question: *What subjective truths are declared with the narratives and how are those truths realized in accounts of daily teaching practices?*

With reference to our opening metaphor, the second research question acknowledges the Western dogma that permeate our cultures of curriculum, the weather conditions that are beyond our locus of control. Since my interest is in the ethical fidelity of walking the talk, this study explored ways that teachers of young children defy the status of victim and through their curriculum work engage in what Alan Block (2008) has described as taking an ethical stance in the world. The second research question asks: *How do teachers’ declarations of truth and corresponding actions extend beyond the “cultures of curriculum” (Joseph, 2011) which contextualize their work?* The ethical consistency or our narratives are expounded upon with the two supporting questions. First, I looked at the degree to which my teacher friends and I find ourselves circumventing the effects of the storm can have on dancing, asking: *With reference to the participants’ experiences in their respective “cultures of curriculum” (Joseph, 2011), how do they perceive their “ethical fidelity?” In particular, do they feel they are persevering?* Secondly, our narratives were analyzed in regards to the cumbersome influence that the storm often has on democratic curriculum dancing. I asked: *How do the truth telling narratives express teachers’ guarding against or succumbing to the ills of betrayal, disaster and simulacrum?*

This study illustrated the dance of democratic curriculum work my teacher friends and I routinely perform in the storms of the undemocratic situations that constitute our cultures of curriculum. We take responsibility for the quality of our dancing and take
pride in our performances, regardless of the weather conditions, which are beyond our control and we often not to our liking. This study attends to the questions mentioned above by illustrating the complexities of dancing in the rain. In our narratives there are demonstrations of our dancing proceeding unaffected by the rain, examples of instances that our dance becomes encumbered by the rain and occasions that we creatively incorporate the rain into our performance. Therefore, this study supplements the political analysis thoroughly provided by reconceptualists with an ontological-ethical analysis of curriculum work as it is truly experienced. The intellectual exhaustion of key concepts of the reconceptualization (Pinar, 2013) has proffered detailed understandings of the stormy conditions that contextualize public school early childhood curriculum work. This study appreciates this critical understanding and extends new concepts to examine the dance in the rain performed by early childhood curriculum workers such and my teacher friends and I who intransigently think speak and act as historical agents, regardless of the weather report.

**Calling the Dancers to the Stormy Stage**

I decided to employ a critical bricolage methodology to address the questions detailed above in a manner that is conceptually consistent with the democratic ontology, transactional epistemology and ethical fidelity that constitute my conceptual framing. I specify that this research is critical study because of it is a deliberate effort to confront injustices of dogma and authoritarianism that subtly manifests in early childhood curriculum practices. A bricolage approach is an appropriate methodology for this research because I employed an eclectic research practices that unfolded in relationship to
contextual circumstances; and engaged with Foucauldian genealogy/archeology of modernist dogma. Kincheloe’s conception of a double ontology of complexity was utilized from a transactional perspective. The complexity of objects being in the world was seen together with the process of a subject’s becoming in the world to apprehend early childhood curriculum postulating immediate empiricism. This research further deviates from Kincheloe’s (2005) model by shifting focus from political to ethical analysis; as well as diverging ideas to declarations of universalisms, instead of converging them around matters of identity. The onto-ethical analysis of this research is represented by a montage of critical storytelling montage.

The transactional point of view advanced in this research maintains critical distance from the presumption of mind-independent reality propagated by dominant paradigms of thought. This perspective aligns with the work of a critical bricoleur that emphasizes one’s “position in the web of reality and the social locations of other researchers and the ways they shape the production and interpretation of knowledge” (Kincheloe et al., 2011, p.168). Yet, the openness of bricolage methodology to hybridization has allowed this study to fuse the ideas of John Dewey and Alain Badiou to create a conceptual framework that is new to educational research. Seeing curriculum work from a transactional perspective, grounded in a democratic ontology and embodied through ethical fidelity is a new vantage point for apprehending our dance in the rain. At once attending to the rain of the socio political context and the deeply personal narratives of the dancers, the performance is apprehended as a transactional process incorporating the knower and the known.
As a teacher of young children who is dedicated to dancing in the rain, I am well aware of the riskiness of engaging in this countercultural dance. Over the years I have encountered many colleagues who acquiesce to the weather and expect or even demand others to do the same. However, I have met a few, such as Joey, who dance defiantly for all to see and brazenly speak about the experience for all to hear. But most dancers that I know are like Bonita, Karen, Jenna and Stacy reserving their graceful moves for times when it appears as though no one is looking, speaking openly about their dancing only when in the safe company of their most trusted collegial friends. After 15 years of teaching public school kindergarten, dancing in the rain has left me saturated with stories that have afforded me the opportunity to build trusting relationships that deems me to be safe company among many of my fellow dancers. Therefore, this research brings together six narrative expressions of performances, some of which have deliberately flown under the radars of most onlookers.

Fortunate to reside under the radar, I have been made privy to these stories and feel compelled to share them alongside my own. Every bit as much a participant as I am the researcher, these stories have been interpreted and represented with a sense of solidarity. Including a component of autobiographical inquiry is an intentional choice to work alongside my rule bending teacher friends. Engaging in a collegial dialogue with each individual and discussing our study and practice of early childhood curriculum work I resisted implications that would separate me as the researcher from the other participants being researched. I approached and engaged with my teacher friends as their peer, which is how we were already acquainted. Then, I conscientiously sought to
maintain a tone and tenor that demonstrated the axiom of equality and postulate of immediate empiricism central to this study.

The methodological hybridism encouraged by the bricolage approach lent itself to the transactional point of view advanced in this study. I engaged as a conversation partner in three in-depth, responsive interviews (Rubin & Rubin, 2005) with my teacher friends, while composing my own currere narrative (Pinar, 2012). In the first interview, Rubin & Rubin’s (2005) concept of ethnographic interpretive interviews was employed to elucidate how selected early childhood educators understand the culture of public school curriculum practice that contextualizes their work. Additionally, the first interview utilized Rubin and Rubin’s (2005) elaborated case study approach to reveal how participants experienced what they defined as their community of practice. Life history interviewing guided the second interview to initiate a broadly focused examination of deeply personal qualities of the images, beliefs and commitments that participants bring to their professional practices. The second interview shed light upon significant events of participants’ lives that underscore their way of being early childhood educators.

The third and final interview had a more narrow scope, focusing on the potential consequences of maintaining fidelity to participants’ truth processes. Participants were asked to reflect upon their own personal challenges of ethical fidelity in professional practice. Additionally, participants and I collaboratively imagined the declaration of their truth as a form of mass political action. I composed a currere concurrently with the process of engaging in the interview conversations. Incorporating my currere narrative
into this study brought to bear the mutual influence of my academic studies, including this dissertation research, and my experiential understandings of daily curriculum practice on my ongoing self-formation. In conversation with myself as well as with my teacher friends positioned me nicely to fuse our experiences and create a “montage of critical storytelling” (Barone, 1992).

**Why We Dance: Inspirations, Reflections and Declarations**

The first research question is answered thoroughly in chapter four. *The truth* telling stories of six early childhood educators who embody transactional knowing and a commitment to enacting democratic virtues in curriculum practices comprised two parts. First, truth telling stories were invoked by subjectively encountered events. These significant events were come upon during different phases of life. Since my teacher friends’ and my lived experiences have developed exclusively from one another, our stories do not share a common time or place. Therefore, chapter four organizes our truth telling stories according to the life phase in which the event was encountered. Such phases included childhood, pre-service teacher preparation and practicing teacher.

The second component of our truth telling stories are the enduring values enunciated by a universal address set in motion by events and informing curriculum practice. Though events are fixed in time and place the declaration of their truth are timeless and universal. Thus, this research resuscitates the notion of truth, which realist consider untenable and postmodernists deem nonexistent. My teacher friends’ and my truth declarations are exemplars of subjective universalisms. Moreover, clarifying what is known and faithfully attended to in our curriculum work answers the second
supporting question: What subjective truths are declared with the narratives and how are those truths realized in accounts of daily teaching practices?

Four events occurred in phases of our lives that long preceded our knowing that we were going to teach young children. Despite the absence of a material trace associated with being moments in our distant pasts, these events were made explicit when we reflect and articulate our professional beliefs and images in a private conversation between friends. (See Table 4.)

Table 4

Truth Declarations and Childhood Events

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Universal Truth Declaration</th>
<th>Singular Subject</th>
<th>Childhood Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students have painful experiences when they do not connect with the curriculum.</td>
<td>Joey</td>
<td>Eventually looking back</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is always room to include everyone, just as they are.</td>
<td>Bonita</td>
<td>The Event of Ted’s Tragedy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers have the capacity to influence students’ lives in extraordinary ways through what they do and say in their daily practice.</td>
<td>Jenna</td>
<td>The Letter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Since there is no way of knowing what the future holds, visceral experiences in the present warrant our immediate and focused attention.</td>
<td>Dan</td>
<td>The Chris Event</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Five events happened in our years as undergraduates. Some events occurred as part of our teacher preparation. Others involved our finding teaching as our vocational callings. Still other events came before our teacher education experiences or were related to deeply personal matters. Therefore, referring to our undergraduate years, the
following are our pre-service events in the order that they appear in chapter four (See Table 5).

Table 5

*Truth Declarations and Pre-Service Events*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Universal Truth Declaration</th>
<th>Singular Subject</th>
<th>Pre-service Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Following disciplinary rules offers only a myopic view of reality.</td>
<td>Dan</td>
<td>The Liberty Event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You might need to guide, teach and change behaviors; but never change the person.</td>
<td>Bonita</td>
<td>The John Event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t like to waste my time and I don’t want to waste theirs.</td>
<td>Karen</td>
<td>The Intervention Event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life has a crazy winding path.</td>
<td>Stacy</td>
<td>Falling into teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional inquiry is a humble process of collaborative and recursive problem posing and solving.</td>
<td>Dan</td>
<td>The Inquiry Event</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Three events that occurred in our years of professional practice were revealed in our narratives. Again, both personal and professional encounters were represented as events that took place in teachers’ lives, while they were practicing early childhood educators. The following are our in-service events in the order that they appear in chapter four (see Table 6).
Table 6

*Truth Declarations and In-Service Events*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Universal Truth Declaration</th>
<th>Singular Subject</th>
<th>In-service Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Equality can be presumed, rather than desired; and truth is a creative process, rather than a mind-independent reality to be perceived or understood.</td>
<td>Dan</td>
<td>My Study Event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s not magic and it’s not just a skill set that I know how to relate to little kids. That’s what I try to tell people. It’s a relationship. That’s what it is.</td>
<td>Stacy</td>
<td>The Allison Event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remain hopeful. Even the most unlikely and unexpected outcomes are possible.</td>
<td>Jenna</td>
<td>The Twins Event</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tables 4-6 provide an overview of the events that have inspired my teacher friends and me to dance in the rain. As the charts indicate, events can arise at any phase of one’s life. Furthermore, events can transpire in any facet of one’s life. What is common to each event is that they have all come to pass yet maintain an enduring value in their teacher’s subjective-universal address. Addressed universally, shedding light upon the events that have inspired us to dance can and hopefully will provoke other to dance or consider their own inspirations. The application of truth declarations to daily public school curriculum practice are expressed through our stories of fidelity.

**How to Keep on Dancing: Stories of Fidelity**

This research contests dogmatic and authoritarian approaches to early childhood curriculum work. Accordingly, the limitations of dominant approaches derived from contemporary realism are critiqued outright. Additionally, postmodern deconstructions of curriculum are recognized as important but critiqued for being an incomplete vantage
point for the practical endeavors of early childhood teachers. Looking carefully at the
truth processes of early childhood curriculum workers, this research provides a useful
form of reconstruction to supplement the critical deconstructions that have constituted the
re-conceptualization of curriculum.

To express our stories of fidelity, our critical truth telling montage relied upon
Henderson’s (2015) open-ended framework for disciplined study and practice, which is a
contemporary re-conceptualization of the Tyler (1949) rationale. This research provides
a detailed analysis of one important aspect of curriculum development dedicated to the
enactment of the caring, emancipating pedagogy that inspires Henderson’s (2015) work.
As exemplars of the fidelity process, my teacher friends and I demonstrate a form of
professional leadership that works with and against the grains of our dominant cultures of
curriculum.

Deconstructing dominant discourse-practices that embody the dogmatism and
authoritarianism inherent to Western traditions of thought, Henderson’s (2015)
conceptualization to curriculum work is critical. Yet, Henderson’s (2015)
reconceptualizing of curriculum development also outlines the practice of disciplined
study as an alternative to the technical rationality that pervades as the non-reflective way
of being a curriculum worker. In that text, I articulated a process of deconstruction and
reconstruction that centers around “moments of disruption” (Castner, 2015). Subjective
moments of disruption, some of which are truth events, interrupt non-reflective habits of
adhering to the technical rationality of the Tyler (1949) rationale. Then, reconstructive
problem solving, provisional as our solutions may be, ensues in the interest of enacting
democratic curriculum-based pedagogy through reflective inquiries and fidelity processes. Aims talking, pedagogical transacting, creative designing and critical appraising present a more open ended framework for curriculum development (Castner, 2015). Hence, these concepts structure stories of fidelity mosaic expressed in chapter five.

Our dance in the rain, provides one concretized example of Henderson’s (2015) theory of reconceptualized curriculum development. Focused on our fidelity to truth processes, our montage of critical storytelling demonstrates a new possibility within our dominant cultures of curriculum. Further, it calls to other dancers to consider how their inspirational events can serve as moments of disruption to the rain (the dogma) that contextualizes their practice. Our stories of fidelity call dancers to consider the implications of their truth events in daily curriculum practices; and hopeful summons them to join us in dancing in the rain.

**Future Dancing**

Thus far this chapter has detailed the implications this research has for early childhood curriculum work, educational research and teacher education. Indeed, this research provides some detailed answers to the research questions raised in the first chapter. However, true to the philosophy that frames this study, the “answers” that have been provided are not presumed to be of the fixed variety that exist in a mind-independent reality. While putting forth a novel view of public school early childhood curriculum work form a transactional perspective, the inquiry cycle of transactional
knowing is never complete. Here, I will suggest four additional inquiries that may productively follow this research in the future.

First, I chose to supplement the political concepts that have pervasively comprised the reconceptualization of curriculum with ontological and ethical concepts. In doing so this study is situated within the Western dogma that dominates U.S. culture. An interesting future endeavor would be to supplement the intellectually exhausted concepts of reproduction and resistance with an international perspective. How might the dogma, authority, moments of disruption and fidelity processes differ for early childhood curriculum workers in other cultures?

Secondly, this critical bricolage took form as a narrative study. As mentioned above, our critical truth telling montage deconstructs and reconstructs the frameworks that inform our thinking, discourse and practicing of early childhood curriculum work. In other words, this work illuminates promising possibilities for dancing in the rain. In future studies a phenomenological methodology may be employed to illuminate essence of being a dancer.

Third, since this research only handled matters of identity theoretically, future inquiries would benefit from studying a more ethnically diverse group of early childhood curriculum workers. Though both male and female teachers working in urban and suburban schools are represented in this research, all participants including myself are of European-American descent. This is recognized as a limitation of this research that will be conscientiously remedied in future projects.
Fourth, the implications of putting the ideas of Dewey and Badiou in dialogue, as I have done in this research, remains unresolved and warrants further inquiry. Though I may not have realized it at the proposal phase, the committee supervising this research afforded me a great deal of latitude. Allowing the research to proceed with an unresolved conceptual framework, the committee permitted me to work within a context of discovery, rather than one of verification (Donmoyer, 2001). Hence, my experience conducting the research was quite consistent with the phenomena of learning through experience that was the focus of the study. Moreover, working within a context of discovery indicates that I have embarked upon journey of understanding, animated by preliminary findings and humbled by the countless miles left to travel ahead of me.

As the journey moves forward, my efforts to shed light upon early childhood teachers’ persistence in engaging in curriculum problem solving from a transactional perspective could be described as an exercise of disciplined inquiry into ethical fidelity as defined by Badiou and informed by Dewey, which sometimes felt as though I were stumbling in the dark. The learning experience has included both exciting discoveries and some bruises. Throughout the course of the study, I have gained a deep appreciation for the intricacies involved in bringing together concepts from two different philosophers. Having engaged in the enterprise of eclectic theorizing, I have garnered a greater understanding of both Dewey’s and Badiou’s ideas, as well as greater discernment regarding my own efforts of utilizing their ideas to engage in initial curriculum theorizing on the importance of personal processes of fidelity and inquiry in democratic education.
Before I further elaborate on this journey, I will briefly reiterate why I have decided to put these two sets of ideas in reciprocity. At the onset of the study there were a number of common attributes that lead me to presume that the two concepts could be fused without any problems. The process-orientation and the “for all” quality of their concepts have impressed me as being potential compatible aspects between Dewey’s and Badiou’s oeuvres. Additionally, I remain fascinated by each of their insights regarding the relationship between an individual’s experience and broader notions reality. This is addressed by Dewey’s postulate of immediate empiricism and Badiou’s notion of subjective universalism. However, I have come to see that putting these ideas in dialogue to frame educational research is much more complicated than I realized. In future studies it will be important to be mindful of such complexities.

Over the course of the study, my enthusiasm for working in a theoretically eclectic fashion has become tempered by a cautious sense of humility. One element of this humility is expressed through language. At the proposal phase and beyond, as I explored the relationship between distinct concepts, I made bold philosophical assertions that I was ill-equipped to defend. For example, I often speculated that one series of thoughts could be grounded in another, or that certain ideas extended others. Having made these claims uncritical of the significant consequences that they often held, I now possess a greater appreciation for the nuanced use of language in the discipline of philosophy. Therefore, I now realize the importance of using more humble choices of words. Careful revisions have been made to convey that this research puts ideas “in
dialogue” or “in reciprocity” with one another, rather than claiming one idea “grounds” and/or “extends” another.

Revisions that move toward more humble language more appropriately convey the scope of expertise that I bring to the conceptual framing of this study. Put simply, my background in curriculum and instruction and early childhood education does not qualify me to participate in the formal epistemological and ontological arguments, which is work of more appropriately left to academic philosophers. Therefore, it is imperative that I am upfront in recognizing that I do not provide an authoritative analysis of Dewey, Badiou or the relationship between the two. Nor, am I qualified to make such an attempt. Thus, while these conceptual matters are unresolved within the scope of this dissertation, a conversation has been initiated within the field of early childhood education centering on the concepts of transaction and ethical fidelity. As I work toward advancing these concepts as fruitful points of inquiry in early childhood teacher education, it is vital that I articulate that the relationship between Deweyan transaction and Badiou’s notion of ethical fidelity are speculative at best in this dissertation. This will be attended to in future research and will be addressed as I continue to refine my line of inquiry as a curriculum scholar and teacher educator.

Toward this end, I have come to realize that working within a context of discovery with an unresolved conceptual framework initiates a conversation that is wrought with ambiguity. In other words, I have gained an appreciation for the implications and limitations that the broad perspective brings to educational inquiry. Therefore, future inquiries may benefit from applying the key concepts of either Dewey
or Badiou, separate from one another. Engaging in a future study exclusive focus upon the key concepts of transactional knowing and having, for example, will likely provide more clear analysis of the practical wisdom and evolving understandings that teachers bring to their work. On the other hand, a future study that concentrates only on ethical fidelity will likely offer a more lucid and detail description of the inspirations and perseverance that constitutes teachers’ unwavering commitments.

In closing, this study benefitted from the patient support and guidance of a seasoned curriculum theorist and the expertise of an academic philosopher. Such guidance proved to be invaluable to my efforts as an educational researcher. The cogency of their influence concomitantly allowed and even encouraged the free exploration of eclectic theorizing, while also bringing issues of conceptual inconsistency and ambiguity to my attention, when they arose. Future works that strive to engage in these sophisticated philosophical matters will warrant collaboration with colleagues of similar scholarly expertise.

In conclusion, the transactional point of view that frames this research compels me to consider how this research has been impactful on me. All scholars hope their research impacts their field. However, as a transactional knower, I also recognize that this dissertation study has influenced who I am and am becoming. Completing a terminal degree may in fact lead to my tenure as a public school kindergarten teacher being brought to a close. Such a change brings several unknowns for my future dances in the rain. In future studies, will I feel the same solidarity as I did with my teacher friends? Sure I can continue to share my own stories in conversations with fellow dancers, but I
what will be sacrificed when I cannot speak of my current or anticipated dance moves. Now, that this dissertation is reaching its conclusion, I can fully apprehend how the process of proposing, conducting, representing this study has itself, for me, been an event. Compelled to keep going, how can I maintain fidelity to the egalitarian partnership that I enjoyed among my teacher friends? I move forward into the risky world of unknowns faithfully dedicated to become a teacher educator with a conviction to be educated by teachers. My aspiration is to do so with fidelity to learning through experience.
APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

BEHAVIOR PLAN FOR MARK
Appendix A

Behavior Plan for Mark

Revised Draft 1/5/09

1. Educational Targets
   a. Mark needs to be able to consider a range of solutions to a problem.
   b. Mark needs to be able to express concerns, needs or thoughts in words.
   c. Mark needs to be supported during anxious moments with environmental adaptations that encourage his participation and capacity for problem solving.

2. Environmental Adaptations
   a. Mark will have a daily schedule posted for each class, which will be reviewed at the beginning of each class time.
   b. All transitions will be announced ahead of time.
   c. A visual timer will be used during each of the class periods, so that he has a visual reminder of the time remaining.
   d. Sensory breaks are a proactive strategy as noted by the occupational therapist, to help him deal with environmental stimuli.
   e. Social stories should be written by adults to promote positive behaviors for situations that tend to cause distress, such as changes in routine or having a substitute teacher.
   f. When he is in an agitated state, during verbal interactions with Mark reduce the volume and intensity of you voice and allow “breathing room.” Interacting in a calm, quiet, in control manner helps during difficult times. It will at times be necessary for the adult to temporarily remove or delay an expectation to address a problem effectively. Once he is calm, efforts for collaborative problem solving (2g), a sensory break (2d) or a social story (2e) can ensue.
   g. The 3 steps to Collaborative Problem Solving
      1. Empathy
         a. Mark’s unskilled attempts to express concerns, needs or thoughts in words are heard, respected and validated through reflective listening. This helps calm Mark and reassures him that his concerns are recognized.
2. Defining the problem
   a. The adult restates Mark’s concern juxtaposed to the adult concern.

3. Generating mutually agreeable solutions
   a. Adults working with Mark must be cognizant of the unskilled way that he manages anxiety and articulates thoughts/feelings and not take offense. Using environmental adaptations 2a-2f, help him express his concerns, needs and thoughts and find a pro-social and mutually agreeable solution to the problem at hand. He can then more successfully participate in the classroom work and play activities, which is an intrinsically rewarding reinforcement.

   h. Each class should offer an alternative seat away from the group to allow choice in where Mark will complete his work, or participate in class activities. Mark may choose or the teacher may suggest the secondary work area at any time. Mark will be sent to the Intervention Specialist’s (IS) room only if his behavior presents a safety risk or if it significantly disrupts classroom instruction. The teacher will call the office to request an adult’s assistance in escorting him to the IS room.

   i. When sent to the IS room to regroup, he will have a quiet area with a book, drawing materials etc. After he is again in control of his behavior, the IS can initiate collaborative problem solving (2g), a sensory break (2d) or a social story (2e).

   j. Once he returns to the general education setting, the adult will help transition him back into the classroom and get him acclimated to the activity in progress, fading out of the classroom, as appropriate.

3. Reinforcement Strategies and Data Collection
   a. Mark has demonstrated a developmentally appropriate understanding of school rules and adult behavioral expectations. Lagging socio-emotional and communicative skills have made it difficult for him to consistently enact that understanding at school through adaptive behavior. For this reason it is important to identify that Mark does not need to be externally motivated into compliant behavior but instead guided and supported toward adaptive behavior that allows for the internal rewards of successful involvement in classroom work and play activities. Data will be collected in the following way.

      a. The teacher will keep daily anecdotal records describing:
         1. Expectations that were delayed or removed
         2. Problems that were solved in a mutually agreeable way
         3. A day where all behavioral expectations were met
         4. Unusual incidents that required removal from the classroom setting
b. Anecdotal records of delayed/removed expectations and problem solving will be collected daily with a copy sent home weekly. Incidents that present a safety risk or significant interference with instruction will be documented using Unusual Incident Form and will be sent home and to the other school personnel listed on the form within 24 hours.

4. Anticipatory Responses:
   a. As described in 2h, Mark will need to be removed to the IS room if his behavior becomes a safety concern or is significantly disruptive to instruction. If he continues to escalate in the IS room in a way that presents a safety risk or significant disruption to instruction then the IS will call the office for additional assistance. The school psychologist or principal will remove him from the IS room and take him to either of their offices. Once calm, efforts for collaborative problem solving (2g), a sensory break (2d) or a social story (2e) can ensue. An adult will return him to the classroom and assist him as necessary with the transition to the classroom activity.

5. Situational Strategies:
   a. If Mark’s behaviors ever cause him to be a safety risk to himself or others, a person trained in non-violent crisis intervention will utilize an appropriate restraint until he is able to demonstrate control. If restrained, an Unusual Incident Form will be completed and distributed to the parent, as well as to the other school personnel listed on the form.
   b. If negative behaviors persist, the school team will reconvene to discuss current behaviors, antecedents, and consequences, with a subsequent change in his current behavior plan.
APPENDIX B

IRB APPROVED CONSENT
Appendix B

IRB Approved Consent

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Study Title: *Truth Be Told: An Ontological-Ethical Analysis of Early Childhood Curriculum Narratives*

Principal Investigator: Daniel J Castner

You are being invited to participate in a research study. This consent form will provide you with information on the research project, what you will need to do, and the associated risks and benefits of the research. Your participation is voluntary. Please read this form carefully. It is important that you ask questions and fully understand the research in order to make an informed decision. You will receive a copy of this document to take with you.

Purpose:
The overarching purpose of this study is to shed light upon deeply held professional commitments expressed through the narratives six public school early childhood teachers’ dealings with predominant evaluative discourses and practices. The proposed study will underscore the ways prevalent ideas teachers encounter within their professional landscape can both help and hinder their ongoing efforts to enact caring and emancipating pedagogical artistry. The realities of early childhood educators’ lived experience, expressed through their stories, will supplement conventional frameworks frequently used to appraise teachers’ work.

Procedures
In the proposed research participants will asked to participate in three interviews. The first two interviews will be broadly focused with open-ended questions (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The third interview will employ a more narrowly focused semi-structured format raising more specific questions related to the themes, concepts and patterns deciphered from the previous interviews. Interview sessions will not exceed two hours. Interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed for analysis. Participants will be invited to comment upon the researcher’s interpretations of interview conversations.

Audio and Video Recording and Photography
Interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be used for the purpose of this research project and related publications and conference presentations. Participants will be given the option of listening to the recordings and receiving a copy of transcriptions.
Benefits

The potential benefits of participating in this study may include an opportunity to reflect upon one’s own professional practices.

Risks and Discomforts

You will be asked to reflect upon and converse about your personal and professional experiences in a private setting. There are no anticipated risks beyond those encountered in everyday life.

Privacy and Confidentiality

(Describe how you will maintain confidentiality, anonymity, and privacy of subjects and their data, i.e. coding of data, storage, and disposition of data after study completion. Address all written, audio, and video data collected. Specify whether data collection will be confidential or anonymous. All procedures should be consistent with those stated in the IRB protocol application.)

All identifying information will be kept confidential at all times. At the time of transcription, subject’s names and any other details that would allow them to be identified will be protected through the use of pseudonyms. Audio recordings will be erased at the conclusion of the study. Your study related information will be kept confidential within the limits of the law. Any identifying information including the audio recordings will be kept in a secure location and only the researchers will have access to the data. Research participants will not be identified in any publication or presentation of research results.

Your research information may, in certain circumstances, be disclosed to the Institutional Review Board (IRB), which oversees research at Kent State University, or to certain federal agencies. Confidentiality may not be maintained if you indicate that you may do harm to yourself or others.

Voluntary Participation

Taking part in this research study is entirely up to you. You may choose not to participate or you may discontinue your participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You will be informed of any new, relevant information that may affect your health, welfare, or willingness to continue your study participation.

Contact Information

If you have any questions or concerns about this research, you may contact Daniel Castner at 330-338-9469 or Martha Lash at 330-672-0628. This project has been approved by the Kent State University Institutional Review Board. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant or complaints about the research, you may call the IRB at 330.672.2704.
Consent Statement and Signature
I have read this consent form and have had the opportunity to have my questions answered to my satisfaction. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I understand that a copy of this consent will be provided to me for future reference.

__________________________________  ________________________
Participant Signature                              Date
REFERENCES
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