TEACHER CONCEPTUALIZATION OF TEACHING: INTEGRATING
THE PERSONAL AND THE PROFESSIONAL

DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

This investigation explores how in-service teachers conceptualize teaching, integrate the personal and the professional dimensions of their lives, and develop teacher identities. This instrumental case study of 10 teachers builds on the previous work regarding personalization of practical and professional educational knowledge. All teachers studied were teaching in a single urban charter school guided by an experiential philosophy. This qualitative investigation lasted for one school year and included extensive time observing and interviewing the teachers.

This study found that major resources for these foundational processes are relational experiences, both informal and formal. A metaphor of a *black box* is used to describe an inner collection of influential and remembered events and is a place where the personal and professional meet. The black box emphasizes the relational aspects of teaching and is found to respond to two major influences: (a) biographical experiences, including K-12 experiences and personal qualities, and (b) the exploration of *self as teacher*, including developing perspectives of what it means to be a student. Other less defined qualities of the black box are passion and motivation, both linked to the main characteristic of the relational.
This investigation reveals that teachers responding to a school’s educational philosophy still conceptualize teaching through their own personal experiences.

The study informs teacher educators that they must recognize how individuals develop their identities as teachers, rather than simply focusing on what teachers need to know to be teachers. The study found that preparation programs had limited impact on teacher development. Teachers emphasized a need for active learning that encourages taking the perspective of student and teacher.

Further research on the personalization of teacher knowledge is needed to further develop the idea of the relational quality of teacher conceptualization and to identify how the personalization process operates in other kinds of school contexts. Also important is the impact of these findings on the concept of “classroom management” as relational. Teacher educators will want to learn more about how organized educational experiences and reflection on those experiences can be developed and what impact such short-term experiences can have on teachers’ black boxes.
DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my family, reaching back to Grandpa C.F. Yake who taught before I was born, and forward to my nieces and nephews Chris, Jenn, Zak, and Ali, who will be a part of the educational world well into the future.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Teacher preparation programs are centrally and critically positioned in the national agenda to improve K-12 schools (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Future, 2003). The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) ("No Child Left Behind Act of 2001," 2002) mandated that all K-12 schools have highly qualified teachers in every classroom. Placing quality teachers in urban and rural schools is a particular goal, as many of those schools are deemed ineffective by NCLB standards. While such a well-intentioned goal seems straightforward and clear, making it a reality is full of challenges. The problems begin with the lack of research on how teachers are prepared for teaching and how such preparation relates to teacher success in schools (Houston, Haberman, & Sikula, 1990; Munby, Russell, & Martin, 2001).

In 2005, the American Educational Research Association (AERA) published a long awaited special report in response to the pressures applied on teacher educators to improve teacher preparation. *Studying Teacher Education: The Report of the AERA Panel on Research and Teacher Education* (Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005) was a major work that took a broad and extensive look at what was currently known about preparing teachers, what lines of research were promising, and what more was
needed. Notable was the paucity of knowledge about the impact of pre-service teacher preparation programs on the professional lives of in-service teachers (Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005). Educational research, for example, has identified many teaching practices effective for educating diverse students, yet does not understand the necessary in-service teacher knowledge, or preparation experiences for pre-service teachers, required to become those effective teachers researchers have described (Cochran-Smith & Fries, 2005; Hollins & Guzman, 2005).

This investigation was designed to address this gap in educational research and to lay some groundwork for further research about teacher knowledge and teacher knowledge development. The goal was to explore both how individual in-service teachers currently conceptualized the task of teaching, and how they developed those concepts that they indicated were foundational to their work. Additionally, moving from a view of teacher preparation that for a long time focused on the processes of teaching and its impact on students, to a study of teacher preparation that focuses on the teacher as learner and the teacher’s knowledge and skill development will require better theory (Grossman, 2005). This research aimed for a deep and worthwhile look into the foundational thinking of teachers in order to open up vistas for new and necessary theoretical development of how adults develop into the high quality teachers we want for our children.

A Disconnection Between the Academy and the Classroom

The bridge connecting the knowledge and skills valued by teacher preparation programs and emphasized to pre-service teachers, and the knowledge and skills
actually needed and used by in-service teachers, may not be as closely connected as those interested in preparing teachers assume. A few critical case studies looking at this bridge have already made this argument.

Research on pre-service teachers revealed the complexity of learning the profession of teaching. The complexity continued to exist even when pre-service teachers were supported by well-intentioned professors, supervisors, and cooperative teachers. Britzman’s study (2003) described how individual pre-service teachers developed, envisioned, and managed the role of teacher. She found pre-service teachers to be in great personal conflict. Both personal values and concepts held by the pre-service teachers and educational concepts learned during teacher preparation programs conflicted with the realities and practical demands of the everyday classroom. This sea of conflict was not what disturbed Britzman as much as how teacher preparation programs did not allow pre-service teachers to recognize and accept the world of teaching as inherently multi-variant in the ways in which theory and praxis were combined. “The problem is to distinguish how we come to know what we know . . .” (Britzman, 2003, p. 215). Britzman argued that the personal and professional identities of those preparing to be teachers were not integrated in pre-service programs.

Schoonmaker (2002) followed one teacher for 10 years to research how that teacher initially constructed her knowledge of teaching as she moved from being a pre-service teacher to a novice teacher, and then to an experienced teacher. Schoonmaker found that preconceptions and implicit theories held by pre-service and
in-service teachers based on long-ago events influenced how teachers learn to teach. Critical, but frequently missing from teacher preparation programs, was how a teacher’s personal life played into his or her professional life. The histories and desires of individual teachers were real factors in their development as professionals. “Learning to teach is also, perhaps even primarily, learning about self” (Schoonmaker, 2002, p. 44). Schoonmaker cautioned that “Teachers are left with little professional support for nourishing their own sense of being as knowing, thinking, acting, feeling, and striving individuals” (2002, p. 43).

Kagan (1993) explored the connections and disconnections between teacher preparation and the teaching profession through a case study of two celebrated high-school teachers and how their understandings of teaching matched the views of two professors of education. Kagan’s exploration of pedagogical beliefs and practices revealed several clear distinctions between the practicing teachers’ understanding of teaching and the education professors’ understanding of teaching. Three themes emerged.

One theme centered on whether teaching is a science or an art. The education professors in Kagan’s study (1993) understood teaching and the knowledge needed to teach more as a science. This view of teaching considered teachers’ professional knowledge as theoretical and abstract. Learning to teach was cumulative and required the retention of knowledge to be used as needed in the classroom. In contrast, the classroom teachers viewed teaching as much more of a participatory, creative activity
of self-expression. Individual teaching styles developed from the teacher’s personality and from personal experiences and personal histories.

Another disconnection Kagan found between the classroom teachers and professors of education was their understanding of the mechanisms for student learning. While both teachers and professors emphasized the utilization of teaching methods in the classroom, the classroom teachers emphasized the importance of their relationship and interactions with their students, even within the actions of classroom instruction such as demonstrations. Additionally, the classroom teachers emphasized their role in organizing large amounts of information clearly for students. A third difference was found in the objectives of instruction. According to the professors, teachers were responsible to get students involved in the learning and to be sure the students succeed in acquiring that knowledge. The teachers, on the other hand, viewed learning as the job of the students, and that students must accomplish certain tasks to be successful. In identifying student responsibility for learning, the teachers emphasized the social factors at work in the classroom process. The classroom teachers also emphasized more than the professors the importance of teaching to tests so that students can succeed in the school system and the state.

The Research Problem: How Teachers Conceptualize What It Means to Be A Teacher

The research on how individual teachers conceptualize teaching is still in its infancy. Of the major works, which all approached this question through small qualitative case studies, only five total teachers were studied, and only three of them...
were in-service teachers. The other two subjects were pre-service teachers. Nonetheless, what the researchers found showed a significant gap between what teacher preparation programs taught and believed was valuable for teachers, and what teachers actually used and valued in their classrooms. If long-term impact of teacher preparation programs and instruction on the professional development of classroom teachers is truly what is needed, as described by the AERA (Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005), further preliminary studies are necessary to develop understanding and improve theories regarding how professional teachers both conceptualize teaching and how professional teachers have individually developed. This investigation studied a single urban school with a rich and forward-thinking mission for its teachers and students. The study looked at how individual teachers conceptualized the task of teaching and how they integrated their personal identities with their professional identities. Each teacher was understood to be situated in his or her own journey and was expected to have different educational experiences, values, skills, beliefs, and knowledge. A careful, in-depth look at how individual teachers within a similar context conceptualized various aspects of teacher knowledge should prove beneficial for understanding both how pre-service teacher preparation impacts teachers becoming practicing teachers, and how teachers continue to learn as teachers.

Questions that guided this investigation included:

1. How do individual teachers integrate their personal identities with their professional identities? To what extent are teachers influenced by what they
learned in their preparation programs as they live and act as teachers on a daily basis (Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005)?

2. How do individual teachers frame knowledge as they transition between preparation programs and the classroom? How do teachers evaluate the many pieces of pedagogy and practice?

3. What personal dispositions, characteristics, and qualities that emerge in school settings do teachers value? Why are those qualities the ones that are valued? How do individual teachers acquire or develop these qualities, and where and how does that development occur (Haberman, 1996)?

The Scope of the Study

The goal for this study was to expose how teachers conceptualize teaching and integrate the personal and professional knowledge that they use in the classroom. Working with in-service teachers in their school context, rather than pre-service teachers without the full responsibilities of the job, was important to adequately explore professional teachers’ voices and perspectives. Limiting the selection of teachers to one school allowed for some generalizations to be made about the teachers investigated, as all worked in the same school context.

This collective case study approach (Stake, 2000) required that the object of study facilitated exploration of the topic. To that end, a small urban charter school, Walkabout High School, was chosen for this case study because it had several characteristics that indicated its usefulness.
Walkabout High School was guided by a forward-thinking vision regarding the goals of education, and believed high school activities needed to better prepare students for participating in the larger community as adults, citizens, and workers. The teachers were encouraged and expected to engage in many roles and relationships with students in addition to classroom teaching, including (a) supervising students in a weekly experiential program with off-site partners, (b) regularly advising students regarding school life and community goals, and (c) providing academic counseling.

A major challenge for American schools and for teacher preparation programs is the growing problems associated with urban schools. Walkabout High School was a public, open enrollment school centrally situated in a medium-sized mid-western city. The school was committed to urban students, and though not having as high a percentage of poor or minority students as some urban schools, its student body matched the demographics of the population when the entire county was considered, including the older suburbs that surround the inner city.

Walkabout High School encouraged teachers to reflect on the processes of education, not just educational content, through numerous hours of professional development each month.

The Walkabout High School faculty had differing years of experience as teachers, including teachers with no experience, teachers with two to five years of experience, and teachers with more than five years of experience. This provided opportunity for gathering information about how teacher preparation programs impacted teachers’ thinking in the short-term, with novice teachers’ perspectives, and
in the long-term, with experienced teachers’ perspectives. However, the only minority teacher on the staff chose not to participate in this study, so this case study did not provide the opportunity to learn about teacher knowledge from a racially diverse perspective.

This kind of qualitative instrumental case study demanded time to adequately observe and interact with the school community, as well as to observe, interact, and interview individual teachers. Working with 10 teachers provided rich opportunities to explore similarities and differences between teachers, unlike the more restricted numbers of subjects in the previous case studies mentioned. To have included teachers from another school to accomplish a comparative case study would have required extensive time studying two school contexts, and would have made this study unwieldy, perhaps losing the insights available by focusing on only one school with a clearly articulated vision. A comparative case study was beyond the scope of this investigation. This study only compared and contrasted findings regarding teachers within a common context.

The Limits of the Study

It is useful to identify from the outset the limits of this study. Understanding its limitations can improve clarity for what the investigation attempted to accomplish, as well as not accomplish, plus indicate the findings’ limitations.

While the purpose of this study was to increase research knowledge of how teachers conceptualized the task of teaching, only a small number of teachers were studied, and all of them from a single, and non-traditional, school. However, the
uncommon and unconventional qualities of the Walkabout High School should not be considered wholly problematic; a look at what may be more unusual can sometimes open our eyes to the details of the more conventional and common. The reader should not expect findings that are generalizations that can be applied to all teachers. Considering how these findings may apply to other contexts may be a natural response by a reader, but must be done carefully. Further investigations of teachers in various contexts were needed to further reveal the scope of these findings. I am hoping that this investigation would lead to better understanding, perhaps better theorizing, about other teachers in their distinct contexts (Stake, 2000).

The purpose of this study was to explore how teachers conceptualize teaching. It did not evaluate teachers’ various preparation programs, Walkabout High School, the teachers, or the students. The investigation’s goals were to understand how teachers conceptualized teaching, how they developed as teachers, and how their teacher preparation impacted their development. It was not an evaluative study (Stake, 2000). Observations and descriptions of teachers’ actions and behaviors were not to evaluate teachers’ effectiveness or to evaluate how well they accomplished what they said they wanted to accomplish. The close observation of teachers’ actions was primarily to support in-depth discussions and follow-up questions regarding teachers thinking about their work.
Roadmap to This Document

This study argues that a process of personalization was significant for these teachers’ conceptualizing of teaching, and that major resources for this foundational process are relational experiences.

Chapter 2 provides an historical perspective on how research in education has only recently turned its focus to understand how teachers learn and construct knowledge. The chapter also locates this investigation in the relevant literature.

Chapter 3 describes the methods for the research along with a supporting explanation for use of the particular methodology.

Chapter 4 describes the findings. The chapter is constructed in several sections to organize key aspects of teachers’ conceptualization of teaching. First, I describe the school. The description provides necessary background and contextual information for the more specific findings about teachers’ thinking about teaching. Second, I describe a theoretical tool useful to understand the findings— the metaphorical black box. Each teacher conceptualized teaching through his or her own black box. The black box was the meeting place of the personal and professional, and the processes of the box emphasized the relational aspects of teaching. The third, fourth, and fifth sections of the findings chapter describe influences on this black box, including biographical influences, preparation program influences, and the Walkabout High School’s influences respectively.

The paper argues that teacher thinking and development can be understood by looking at influences on this black box. The two main influences found were (a)
biographical influences, including informal experiences as teachers and K-12 schooling experiences as students, and (b) the exploration of an understanding of the self as a teacher during teacher preparation programs.

Chapter 5 presents the implications of such findings for teacher educators, directors of professional development, and state departments of education, as well as for continued research of how teachers conceptualize teaching.
Anthropologists of education also must look squarely at how culture is learned and used, and this means conceptualizing a place for an active and inventive individual in the processes of cultural reenactment and change. (Eisenhart, 1995/2000, p. 369)

The purpose of this study is to explore how individual teachers conceptualize teaching and integrate the personal and the professional. As constructivism has gained wider acceptance in the field of teaching and learning, some educational researchers are asking how teachers construct knowledge. This construction of teacher knowledge, however, seems to occur with more difficulty than originally thought. For example, what teachers believe about teaching has been identified as significantly impacting how they teach (Pajares, 1992), and teacher beliefs have been found difficult to disrupt and change (Bullough & Baughman, 1997; Easter, Shultz, Neyhart, & Reck, 1999; Gregoire, 2003; Middleton, 2002; Munby et al., 2001; Putnam & Borko, 2000). Some educational researchers looked for this construction of knowledge as occurring not so much in the individual as in the larger community of practice (Cobb, McClain, Lamberg, & Dean, 2003; Floden,
But, still educational researchers continued to struggle to understand how teachers know how to teach (Kagan, 1992; Munby et al., 2001; Shulman, 2000).

Occurring at the same time was NCLB’s ("No Child Left Behind Act of 2001," 2002) mandate to prepare teachers capable of teaching all children. Teachers must learn to educationally guide students who come to school with cultural and economic resources different from the teachers’ background and experience (Banks, 1991/1992; Cummins, 1993/1986; Ladson-Billings, 2001). Increased self-awareness about one’s culture and beliefs is needed (Ladson-Billings, 2001; McCarthy, 1993; Tellez & Cohen, 1996). This need for teachers’ self-awareness to guide diverse classrooms connects with the broader question of how teachers conceptualize their knowledge of teaching in general (Bruner, 1996).

A Historical Perspective

Educational research that seeks to understand how teachers think about and conceptualize their task as teachers is relatively new. However, research on cognition and learning has a longer history. A look at the history and development of cognition research will provide insight into where teacher research stands today, and possibly provide insight as to where it is headed.

The historical review of research on cognition as it relates to teaching and learning generally begins with Thorndike (1903) and his studies in educational psychology. Thorndike’s intent was to use the processes of
science to improve classroom instruction and learning. Thorndike conceived cognition as the learner making associations and committing facts to memorization. Therefore, drill practice was highly valued by researchers and practitioners alike. Masses of people needed the knowledge and skills necessary to work in the new industrial complex of the early 1900s and scientists sought efficient methods of getting facts quickly and efficiently into the minds of students. Researchers attempted to accomplish this through the lab-based study of learning. This behaviorist understanding of cognition and learning dominated research in America until mid-century, though alternative educational viewpoints were present that focused on connecting students with a complex meaning-filled world (J. Dewey, 1938).

However, the behaviorist view of learning was inadequate to explain how students learn complicated skills. Utilizing more careful observation of children, Piaget (1929) theorized that learning was not an associative process, but rather was more complex and developmental in quality. Piaget understood cognition to be about developing structures of information. In this rationalist view of cognition, learning develops as a result of construction by the learner. Student cognitive growth required the correct input, and researchers sought the basic concepts that could be presented and taught to children as they grew developmentally. Research during this time viewed learning and cognition as information processing, operating much like a machine. But as individual children were observed and the value of intuition and prior experience were
acknowledged, more complex theories of cognitive constructivism developed. Learning as the development of structured concepts (Bruner, 1960) became more widely accepted. Helping individual students make sense and meaning of what they were learning became the role of the teacher.

However, this rationalist view of pedagogy had limitations, too. Cognitive constructivism did not satisfactorily explain how the critical factors of engagement, motivation, and social relationships impacted an individual’s conceptual development. Vygotsky’s social constructivism pushed these boundaries (Vygotsky, 1962). His research revealed learning and cognition as directly related to social interaction. His concept of a zone of proximal development pushed cognitive researchers to look more carefully at the location of learning, and the role of motivation in learning. This research laid the groundwork for others to consider emotion and belief as factors in learning (Bandura, 1993; Zins, 2004).

Another way of looking at cognition developed – one that looked more broadly at the context of learning. This situated learning perspective considered the complex relationships of people and tools that surround communities of knowledge. Lave and Wenger (1991) suggested that individuals learn a community’s knowledge, skills, and processes when situated in a community of practice and when given the opportunity to participate in that community via multiple roles and a multitude of activities.
However, there are difficulties in applying this view of teaching and learning in schools. Key components of situated learning are difficult to create in most school contexts. For one, what is the practicing community with its experts that provide the students support and guidance the classroom? Is it the larger school community? Is it the extended community of parents and local community members? And, what are the tools critical to a group’s knowledge that are relevant to students in classrooms? Authentic learning attempts to bridge these challenges by supporting students in school activities similar to craft apprenticeships, with added focus on the social aspect of situated learning (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989; Palinscar, 1998).

All of these historical stages in the research of cognition and learning brought increased understanding of cognition, teaching, and learning. Each provides a window of understanding into important aspects of cognition and learning, including understanding how knowledge and learning can be (a) a gathering of facts, (b) an active personal construction of a complex framework of information, and (c) an embedded, social activity within a group. Though research engaged in exploring cognition and learning decades earlier, researching how teachers learn came only more recently.

A Look at Conceptual Knowledge

Teacher knowledge is not easily captured, but when attempting to describe how teachers think about teaching, the terms concepts, beliefs, personal knowledge, and practical knowledge arise. In this investigation, each
of these terms proves useful at different points, but they are all understood to be concepts. Concepts, for this study, will be considered broadly as internalized understandings.

If we consider teacher knowledge as containing three general domains, (a) knowledge for practice (i.e. theoretical and formal knowledge), (b) knowledge of practice (i.e. information of something observed or considered secondhand, and (c) knowledge in practice (i.e. learning about teaching by teaching), as McLaughlin did when writing of teacher learning (2002, p. 584), the notion of conceptualized knowledge is in knowledge of and knowledge in practice. The abstract, formal, theoretical knowledge is established on rationalized evidence, and is not established on the internal meaning-making of an individual. Abstract, formal knowledge, of course, can be synthesized into the personal and practical conceptual knowledge, but that changes the basis for such knowledge; with the change it becomes based, not on evidence of argument, but on a more personal level of understanding.

Schoonmaker (2002) supported her theories about the importance of both pre-service and in-service teachers’ conceptions of teaching by noting how pre-service teachers come to college with pre-conceptions, and that those pre-preparation conceptions frequently impacted individual pre-service teachers and what they learned about teaching. A pre-service teacher’s knowledge of how to be a teacher evolves, then, through integrating the personal knowledge that he or she brought to the program and the professional
knowledge gained during teacher preparation programs. A teacher’s early conceptions and beliefs are thought to be quite stubborn and long-lasting (Pajares, 1992), often not changing during teacher preparation programs. The expectation that pre-service teachers would automatically change when presented the professional knowledge of teachers was unrealistic. Even when change in thinking about teaching seemed to have occurred, it often had not changed, and was only assimilated into one’s previous conceptions (Gregoire, 2003), or, eventually returning to one’s previous conception at a later date when teaching in one’s own classroom, perhaps when stressed (Gregoire, 2003; Middleton, 2002).

Another factor that has been explored was whether concepts are conscious or unconscious constructs, or both. Pajares, in his extensive review of research on beliefs, stated that beliefs must be inferred (Pajares, 1992), and indicated the need for careful analysis of stated beliefs in light of behavior. Zozakiewicz, Writer, and Chavez, in studying multicultural practices of new teachers through case studies, identified and gathered conscious and unconscious conceptualizations through dialogue and observation of teachers (Zozakiewicz, Writer, & Chavez, 2002). What the study showed was that teachers are able to hold concepts about teaching that they do not practice. A teacher’s practice may also exhibit a concept, yet not be articulated by the teacher in dialogue and reflection. While this conflict between
conceptualization, beliefs, and action is possible, it does not seem to be dealt with directly in discussions of teacher knowledge (see Munby et al., 2001).

De Vries’ study of how to identify how teachers conceptualize good teaching identified three domains of teacher conceptions (de Vries & Beijaard, 1999). While the methodology may have limited teachers’ responses to what de Vries and Beijaard considered the three critical domains, their findings are useful. The three aspects considered were (a) conceptions related to the objectives of education, (b) conceptions related to the content and curriculum of education, and (c) conceptions related to teaching and learning. This third domain included conceptions of the roles of teacher and student in the learning process. Their findings indicated that while concepts varied in all three domains, the third domain gathered the greatest variation by far. They summarized that teachers’ concepts are important in understanding good teaching, but need to be considered along with the complexity stemming from differences between individuals and the complexity of those individuals interacting in context. According to de Vries and Beijaard, “Characteristics of the teaching situation like its multi-dimensionality, simultaneousness, immediacy, and unpredictability are difficult to include in such a knowledge base” (de Vries & Beijaard, 1999, pp. 375-376).

Practical and Professional Knowledge

While research on learning has not emphasized a distinction between personal and professional knowledge, some current researchers are
considering this approach to provide valuable insight into learning and knowledge. Kagan’s study of in-service high-school teachers and college education methods professors revealed how personal knowledge and professional knowledge can be at battle, with new teachers needing to forge peace on their own when they become teachers with their own classrooms (Kagan, 1992, 1993). Other education researchers are also interested in how new teachers build bridges between their personal, experiential knowledge and their professional, formal knowledge (Connelly, Clandinin, & He, 1997; Schoonmaker, 2002). Connelly et al. (1997) described a difference between personal and professional knowledge, but focused more on how the knowledge domains relate and support each other rather than how they are disconnected. They described professional knowledge as a complex landscape within which personal knowledge is placed and integrated. Through the synthesis of both, one can begin to understand how an individual teacher is conceptualizing, or understanding, his or her world. So, for example, if a teacher is in a discussion with an administrator and trying to make her point she may use artifacts of knowledge from one location on the professional landscape (e.g. abstract and formal), but if trying to talk with a teacher about how to proceed with a lesson to be taught in a few minutes she would use another kind of knowledge artifacts from another location on the landscape (e.g. informal and concrete).
So the disconnection between the academy and the classroom, as described here, seems related to teacher knowledge. A closer look at teacher knowledge and conceptions will provide further understanding about how teachers think and act as professional educators, and how they became who they are as teachers.

Teacher Knowledge and Beliefs

Since the time Pajares struggled with developing a meaningful working definition for belief (Pajares, 1992) and Bandura explored self-efficacy as a significant belief for educators (Bandura, 1993), belief has probably received the most investigation of any educational conceptualization.

Teacher educators and researchers developed a keen interest in understanding the power of beliefs in affecting both teachers’ learning to teach and their practices of teaching. The 1996 edition of The Handbook of Research on Teacher Education (Sikula, 1996) assigned one entire chapter to the role of belief and attitude in learning to teach (Richardson, 1996). Beliefs were described as impacting how one behaves, but they also function as filters that alter how one perceives something and assimilates it into one’s conceptual understanding. Richardson indicated that the function of beliefs should not be viewed as operating only in one direction, but should be perceived as interactive with one’s actions. In that way, beliefs can impact action, which impacts beliefs, which again impact action, and so on. Beliefs are structured on, and by, our personal experiences.
Kagan noted that teachers cannot be approached and asked to identify and share their beliefs, but that their beliefs can be gathered only indirectly (Kagan, 1992). One reason for this is that beliefs are held tacitly. These tacit beliefs hold together like an internalized map that provides the teacher guidance and support in dealing with a complex and isolating place of chaos and uncertainty, a place described by Kagan, as having an absence of truth (Kagan, 1992). Without enough truths on which to base decisions, beliefs become increasingly more important, particularly for isolated teachers with little peer support and dialogue--a common reality in our schools. Thus, beliefs provide an internalized map of how to maneuver through the challenges of teaching. They also filter new information, generally to fit the current internal map, rarely to alter it significantly.

Teacher Knowledge and Social Relationships

Teacher conceptual knowledge is also impacted by social relationships. Vygotsky’s theories encouraged studies of learning and knowledge based in social constructivism (Palinscar, 1998), and now education researchers also ask how teacher knowledge is impacted by social relationships.

Looking at schools and teachers’ professional lives from a socio-cultural perspective reveals several relevant points of teachers’ professional lives often overlooked in process-product minded professional knowledge but common in cognitive views of teaching and learning. Schools are a rich place
of cultural processes (Bruner, 1996). Students and teachers are situated in a context rich in cultural processes, learning cultural knowledge valued by the larger public, learning skills of society, and being a part of the youth culture in its constant changing forms. Interpersonal factors are critical components of learning, as they are constantly present in the daily actions and attitudes of, both students and teachers. Interpersonal contact can be both between students and between teacher and student. Teachers are constantly maneuvering through this social webbing and making decisions regarding them.

Teacher-to-teacher relationships have not generally been considered in teacher knowledge. Perhaps this is due to the reality that teachers in America have few hours of their workweek available for interacting with other teachers. Those few education researchers interested in teacher conceptions find teacher-to-teacher relationships and teacher-to-administration relationships important. Rosenholtz (1989) studied the school as a workplace and was particularly interested in how teachers organize and interrelate. She described schools as “high consensus” and “low consensus” schools. High consensus schools were communities in which principals and teachers communicated well and where school goals seemed to be a part of each teacher’s identity. Collaboration and support were pervasive. By contrast, schools on the other end of this continuum—the low consensus schools—were not places of collaboration and goal sharing. A study of the teachers’ beliefs identified that high consensus schools had teachers with high self-efficacy beliefs. Self-
efficacy is an internalized teacher conceptualization that the students can learn and the teacher has the power to positively impact student learning (Bandura, 1994).

It seems that when teachers are organized and empowered to make collaborative decisions, the teachers’ conceptions of their students and their relationship with students (i.e. efficacy) improves (Reames & Spencer, 1998; Rosenholtz, 1989; Ross, 1992).

Teacher Knowledge and Self

Some researchers have found personal identity and professional identity to be critical aspects of a teacher’s life. Preparing teachers, then, should include helping individuals to explore and integrate these identities as they prepare for classroom teaching (Korthagen, 2004; Schoonmaker, 2002). Exposing core personal concepts, qualities, and values, while simultaneously learning how such inner concepts and qualities mesh with teaching concepts, should be an intentional aspect of teacher preparation programs. Schoonmaker (2002) used reflective dialogue regarding personal and professional knowledge to carefully research how one teacher developed her practical knowledge. While only studying one teacher for a seven-year time period, the analysis revealed a need for teachers to work extensively with their own personal knowledge as they take on professional knowledge and develop a usable practical knowledge in the classroom.
Classroom teaching is a tension-filled task that often leaves teachers feeling isolated, schizophrenic, detached (Korthagen, 2004), and overwhelmed with anxiety and uncertainty (Britzman, 2003; Provenzo, McCloskey, Kottkamp, & Cohn, 1989). Preparation programs are not adequately preparing pre-service teachers for this task and a reduction of the educational distance between colleges and classrooms is needed (Tiezzi & Cross, 1997). While narrative, metaphor, and symbolic mapping seem to be ways for educators to reduce disconnection, new internalized conceptions still need to be connected with experiences such that pre-service teachers will be able to see and understand those conflicts with a more useful perspective (Tellez & Cohen, 1996). Language is not a replacement for practical knowledge, but it remains a powerful educational tool.

Learning to teach is a struggle for many reasons. One reason is that teaching is full of contradictory realities (Britzman, 2003). What had seemed easy from the students’ perspective now seems difficult from the pre-teachers’ perspective. Pre-teachers are to interact with students individually to support their academic growth, yet must manage twenty to thirty students at a time. Students are learning to be independent, yet must follow the teacher’s authority (Britzman, 2003).

Another reason is that everyone who is a pre-teacher had once been an observer of teaching for twelve years (Lortie, 1975). That experience, now located in an individual’s memories, has been found to significantly impact a
teacher’s conception of teaching (Lortie, 1975). Teachers’ memories of their student experiences are not the only aspect of themselves that they bring to the practice and knowledge of teaching. Researchers have found the personality and identity also are important factors.

Some researchers discuss teacher knowledge as divided into the separate domains of personal knowledge and professional knowledge. Korthagen (2004) did this by discussing the onion model of levels of change. The model described the qualities of mission, identity and beliefs as the core of a person’s self, and found that those qualities are difficult to change. Outer core qualities, consisting of a person’s behavior and environment, are changeable, but are also difficult to change due to their connections to the center qualities. Professional knowledge and self knowledge must be integrated as much as possible for an individual to become a good teacher (Korthagen, 2004). Korthagen (1993; Korthagen, 2004) stressed the need to help pre-service teachers make inner qualities explicit so that they can be considered carefully and can be integrated with other aspects of oneself and one’s developing teacher identity.

Schoonmaker followed one teacher for several years, exploring how a new teacher synthesized professional knowledge through careful, thoughtful reflection on her personal knowledge (Schoonmaker, 2002). Schoonmaker’s findings support the understanding that personal knowledge, such as described in Korthagen’s identity model, is persistent, adding that early teacher beliefs
tend to last. But Schoonmaker also added that social interactions are also critical in developing professional knowledge, thereby leaving a point of tension in describing which is more significant in pre-teachers’ knowledge and identity construction: personal characteristics or social relationships.

Craig developed the concept of the significance of one’s social context into the theoretical need to learn about one’s self from multiple perspectives (Craig, 1999). New teachers need to experience different educational contexts in order to become better acquainted with how their individual identities are complex and have varying qualities that are context-dependent.

A teacher’s emotions and affects are always present, as with all of us (Gregoire, 2003; van den Berg, 2002). Gregoire notes that emotions and motivation play out around one’s identity, and that all of these are critical factors in understanding how any teacher develops and grows (Gregoire, 2003). Van den Berg takes the affective model further. He states that “emotions and cognition are closely linked to each other” (van den Berg, 2002, p. 584). He is concerned that teachers’ identities are frequently stressed to the point of experiencing existential conflict. Teacher education must assist new teachers in preparing one’s self-identity and self-conceptions for the teaching profession.

Getting at the deeply personal and making it understandable has been the interest of several researchers who use narrative approaches (Britzman, 2003; Connelly et al., 1997; Kagan, 1993; Schoonmaker, 2002). Teachers’
voices are central, but those voices are difficult to understand without knowing context. De Vries and Beijaard attempted to get teachers’ voices identifying key teacher conceptions without the narrative, but concluded that their findings were limited due to the lack of personal and contextual information. To understand how teachers conceptualize their knowledge requires, as Connelly et al. stated (1997), understanding the story that lives inside of each teacher. Both the personal story and the contextual story must be told to begin to understand a teacher’s professional knowledge. Listening to the two begins to convey how a teacher conceptualizes his or her professional knowledge (Craig, 1999).

Conclusion

Current research on cognition and learning for both students and teachers strongly indicates that individual, social, and environmental factors all play important and critical roles in knowledge development (Bruner, 1996; Greeno, Collins, & Resnick, 1996). Continued studies into teachers’ concepts of knowledge should prove useful and valuable for educational researchers because teachers’ voices continually remind us of the importance of these intertwined factors, while also providing us insight into how teachers think about teaching.
CHAPTER 3

METHODS

It has not been customary in anthropological or educational research to think of individual learners as actively constructing social or cultural categories—that is, as engaged in a social, cognitive, and emotional process in which one works to interpret the past, construct the present, and launch the future. To do so is to expand the traditional subject matter of educational anthropology. (Eisenhart, 1995/2000, p. 374)

The purpose of this research was to expose how teachers construct the professional knowledge they use in the classroom. The research problem evolved from an academic interest in the teacher as learner, with additional interest in the contextual and situational nature of knowledge (Bruner, 1996; Cochran-Smith & Fries, 2005; Greeno et al., 1996; Lave & Wenger, 1991).

The following questions guided the research:

1. How do individual teachers integrate their personal identities with their professional identities? To what extent are teachers influenced by what they learned in their preparation programs as they live and act as a teachers on a daily basis (Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005)?

2. How do individual teachers frame knowledge as they transition between preparation programs and the classroom? How do teachers evaluate the many pieces of pedagogy and practice?
3. What personal dispositions, characteristics, and qualities that emerge in school settings do teachers value? Why are those qualities the ones that are valued? How do individual teachers acquire or develop these qualities, and where and how does that development occur (Haberman, 1996)?

These questions were decidedly human and complex, and created epistemological and methodological challenges.

**A Research Model: Listening to Teachers Talk About Teaching**

A teacher’s role, primarily an instructional role situated in a single classroom with many students, is quite complex for many reasons, but especially because of its highly social nature. The teacher, and each and every one of his or her students, has the power to interact with the group to alter the ongoing, and constantly produced, classroom culture (Eisenhart, 1995/2000). A teacher’s lesson objectives are constantly pressing, while individual student interests, needs and unpredictable classroom issues, are equally present and pressing. Within this classroom culture, teachers think and act quickly on their feet for hours at a time every day. A teacher’s goals and daily plans are continually adjusted to the realities of the immediate and concrete moment. In the zone of the present, a teacher’s world is a highly social event as teacher and students negotiate what will happen with teaching and learning in that particular moment. To analyze how a teacher thinks about such a moment required an epistemological grounding that recognized and clarified social and cultural realities and factors. A positivist approach could not be employed because the complexity of
the moment-in-context combined with the uniqueness of each individual made positivist outcomes impossible (Wolcott, 1994). Instead, a qualitative study that considered “the immediate and local meanings of actions” (Erickson, 1986, p. 119) was needed.

The overall interpretive paradigmatic framework used in this study was constructivism (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). In the constructivist paradigm, individuals construct meaning from interaction with their worlds. Because of the intensely social aspect of this study, socio-cultural constructivism that emphasizes how people understand and act within a socially created and interactive system (Bruner, 1996) was particularly useful. Meaning-making is central in this paradigm, with individuals constantly constructing meaning in context (Berger & Luckmann, 1966/1967). This interconnected system is frequently considered to be culture, and while it is constantly changing, culture is something that permits communication and understanding between people.

Coming from a psychological perspective, Bruner described how culture is at play in our classrooms and how it determines how teachers teach and students learn (Bruner, 1996). Two key tenets from his book, The Culture of Education (Bruner, 1996), describe how education works in the classroom: (a) each person creates meaning relative to a perspective or frame of reference, and (b) education is an interaction and thus the notion of the separation of teacher and student is problematic.

While educational research once focused primarily on the behaviors and processes of teachers and the appropriate lessons to teach, educational research now
recognizes the need to consider how teachers think about their work (Pajares, 1992). This shift required an epistemological framework that understands human meaning-making (Berger & Luckmann, 1966/1967; Bruner, 1996; Wolcott, 1994).

The recognition that knowledge is situated was important in understanding the social aspects of constructivism (Connelly et al., 1997; de Vries & Beijaard, 1999; Lave & Wenger, 1991; McLaughlin, 2002). Individuals learn contextually and through interaction with others (Vygotsky, 1978). This construction of knowledge by the individual within a group meant that to understand an individual or to understand a group of individuals a researcher needed to be close enough to them to understand their meaning-making perspective (Bruner, 1996; Wolcott, 1994). It was necessary to look at the subjects and their context holistically so as to capture the subtlety of the situation (Peacock, 1986). A naturalistic, ethnographic research method placed the researcher in a position to observe directly, yet holistically, the teacher in context.

To gain insight into how a teacher develops and holds practical teacher knowledge for daily interactions in a complex classroom and school required the study of social and cultural knowledge and behavior. Erickson wrote of the need to consider the “immediate and local meanings of actions” (Erickson, 1986, p. 119). Teachers’ decisions are based not on individual contextual factors, but highly complex contextual systems. Classrooms and schools are dynamic locations of human interaction with the social and personal interests of a sizable group of young people constantly present, accompanied by the simultaneous need for the teacher to teach a
course which may, or may not, interest the students. Lesson objectives are constantly pressing, as are individual student needs and unpredictable classroom issues.

Within these ever changing and evolving social processes are individual teachers who are unique. *Propriospect* (Wolcott, 1994) is a concept that helps convey the uniqueness of individuals and complexity brought to social situation. *Proprius*, Latin for *one’s own*, conveys that each person has a unique and highly personal history that cannot be duplicated or accurately described, and that this personal view is constantly present and impacts experiences, ideas, and actions. Bruner also understood this complexity of an individual’s history (Bruner, 1996). He recognized how each individual in a classroom makes meaning from his or her unique perspective.

Other anthropologists provided useful insight into social and cultural dynamics present in classrooms. Bourdieu’s concept of *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1977) recognized the embodiment of individuals and the development of action and ways of being that are repeated in life without having to be thought through and reconsidered each time. The concept of habitus can illuminate why classroom systems have some predictability. Perhaps teachers are not conceptualizing about their teaching as much as they are engaging in some system of habitus that drives their activities in ways that are predictable for both them and their students. These repeated patterns of knowing and acting may develop during teacher preparation programs, or perhaps only after several years of teaching experience.
Another cultural concept important for this study was the power of language to effect how people understand their worlds. Whorf studied language’s meaning-making impact on people and revealed language’s impact on cultural views of what is occurring socially and how words influence people’s social interactions (Whorf, 1956). A community’s use of words and a teacher’s use of words and the meanings infused in those words are significant and need to be carefully observed and analyzed.

The teacher’s voice is a valued aspect of the socio-cultural constructivist paradigm (Palinscar, 1998) because it represents vocalization of an individual’s meaning-making and his or her conceptualization of ideas. However, a tension exists because a speaker’s attempt to communicate must still be interpreted, and the interpretive task is far from a perfect system. Nonetheless, voice, as understood in narratives, provided a rich context for studying and identifying what was being communicated (Casey, 1995-1996).

Narratives collect and gather information in useful ways for communicating (Craig, 1999; Viney & Bousfield, 1991), and can help express contextualized knowledge (Connelly et al., 1997). But the concept of voice has limits and is problematic in research (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). For example, what is spoken is not necessarily what is believed.

While constructivism generally does not focus on issues of power and control, power is prevalent in the profession of education (Rabinow, 1984). The cultural educational hierarchies among student, teacher, and administrator, and K-12 teachers and college professors, may influence how individual teachers conceptualize their
teaching knowledge. It may also influence how teachers are willing to talk about knowledge and practices of teaching with researchers. Teachers may feel vulnerable and threatened when revealing their personal or professional views, values, and concepts regarding education (Gregoire, 2003).

The researcher’s influence and power throughout this investigation, as for example in directing interviews and enabling conversations (Lincoln & Guba, 2000), was significant, and therefore important, to constantly evaluate. In addition to the teacher’s power, a socio-cultural epistemology includes the knowledge that all individuals are constructing meaning in a situation (Yon, 2000). The positivist’s dream of identifying a de-contextualized truth about social and cultural realities was not attempted, only a more situated understanding of teachers’ thoughts: the postmodernist’s dilemma of the deconstruction of knowledge. This chasm was not crossed or bridged thoughtlessly in this study. A reflexive awareness of the role and influence of the researcher was present throughout the observations, interviews, data coding, and analysis.

In the analysis of the findings, issues of power were again present as the researcher made choices such as whose voice to hear and whether to hide or reveal the researcher’s voice and the researcher’s influence in the study (Pillow, 2003; Rhodes, 2000).

The Basic Methodology: Ethnographic Case Study

This study of professional teachers’ knowledge and development was grounded in a postmodern perspective which recognized that people are not simply
living in a monolithic culture, but are moving through, and participating in, multiple communities of identity and discourse. Ethnography was selected because of its ability to work within this philosophical foundation with sensitivity towards (a) context, (b) the individuals operating within the context, and (c) the impact of the researcher on the study.

While ethnography has struggled with postmodern understandings because of ethnographers’ long-time reliance on the now-weakened concept of culture, ethnography was still useful for exploring human behavior and human interactions because the approach is one of respect and understanding for how individuals construct and make sense of their worlds (Eisenhart, 2001; Gewertz & Errington, 1994). Gewertz and Errington valued ethnography, but warned that traditional approaches may not pay attention to contemporary concerns of subjects (Gewertz & Errington, 1994). Listening to what subjects valued and were interested in was an important quality of this study.

This investigation acknowledged the postmodern critique of ethnographers, that ethnography is not free from subjectivity. I did not assume my personal experience of teaching for 10 years in a public school was unimportant to how I interacted with participants. Instead, I used my personal history and knowledge to more fully participate in the teachers’ lives and to enter into the school community. I was open about my past with the teachers during conversations, and during analysis of my data I reflected on how my past influenced my thoughts.
The study also acknowledged the postmodern desire to validate the tensions and differences between members of a community rather than the traditional ethnographic approach of seeking common meanings of participants. In this investigation, differences and disagreements between teachers were valued even though identifying similarities and commonalities was specifically desired and stressed.

The structure of this study was an *instrumental case study* (Stake, 2000). An instrumental case study is a bounded study permitting a researcher to explore a particular set of themes or concepts within clearly defined boundaries. Its purpose is to provide insight into something not understood. The case itself is actually of secondary interest in an instrumental case study.

This investigation of how teachers conceptualized teaching used the organizational framework of an instrumental case study. Because 10 teachers were studied comparatively, the study was also a *collective case study*, which is a collection of multiple instrumental case studies (Stake, 2000).

In a collective case study, comparative work is accomplished that can lead to a better understanding, and possible theorizing, about a larger collection of similar cases, in this case teachers in general. A collective case study’s design enables the researcher to look at the particulars of several cases for the purpose of exposing details and for comparing those cases for similarities and differences.

A case study does not attempt to describe how something operates throughout all contexts. It is the responsibility of the readers of the study to construct how the
case, or cases, might be understood in another context (Stake, 2000). To aid in that construction of meaning by the reader, this study provides descriptive material, propositional statements, and numerous voices of the teachers themselves.

Research Design

This investigation spanned one school year beginning with the Walkabout High School teacher orientation week in August and ending with the graduation ceremony in June. I organized my involvement in the fall of the year around the goals of (a) becoming a part of the community life, (b) gathering knowledge of how the community functioned, and (c) studying changes that occur across the school year. During the fall I attended many key staff events and also participated with students by attending student and staff community events and meetings. My contact with the school included 26 visits totaling about 82 hours.

For the second half of the school year my focused shifted. From January through June I organized my time around 10 individual teachers, observing and talking with them about their practice and their thoughts about their work.

During that time I organized most of my time around individual teachers’ schedules and their work with students, rather than teacher meetings and other school community events. I normally spent approximately three and a half days each week for about 169 hours on site during that time. I spent about four class sessions with each teacher for detailed observation, followed by a 50-minute interview with that teacher. I repeated this again two months later.
Total investigative time at the school, including all observations and interviews, was about 250 hours. A rough breakdown of that time would include the following:

30 hours observing teacher orientation meetings in August
14 hours observing staff meetings
18 hours attending professional development meetings
40 hours learning about the experiential program
19 hours observing January-term classes (month-long focused studies)
88 hours observing classroom instruction
17 hours observing miscellaneous community events
20 hours leading recorded interviews

Questions were prepared for each set of interviews. The questions were designed to open the minds of the teachers to thinking thoughtfully about how they conceptualized teaching and how they learned the skills needed to teach. Discussions were allowed to wander when what teachers were sharing seemed truly valued and important to them and was on the topic of teacher conceptualizations of teaching. I used extensive observational knowledge of each teacher during these rich interviews to respond to their comments and answers, and to guide them towards deeper inquiry into their work and away from simplistic answers.

See Appendix A for the list of questions discussed.
Setting and Sample

To facilitate efficient gathering of data, I selected a school that seemed to have numerous qualities that would inform this research. Walkabout High School had qualities and aspects of a traditional school as well as aspects that might signal how schools of the future will operate. Two of those qualities were: (a) it was a school community that encouraged teachers and students to interact in multiple roles, and (b) the school community offered frequent opportunities for professional development and staff interaction.

Walkabout High School was a small, *experiential* charter school that focused on preparing students for college. The school was situated in a medium-sized urban community and attracted students from the urban center, the older suburban neighborhoods, and from more distant new suburban neighborhoods. One notable part of this school was its experiential program that comprised more than 50% of their school year. All students and teaching staff participated in regular classroom courses and in the experiential program.

The vision for the experiential component of the school was to help students learn about their role in community, including personal goals and visions. For two full days each week the teachers and their students went off-campus to work in the community.

In the 9th and 10th grades, small groups of students worked at selected group sites, such as community kitchens and museums, with a teacher in the role of
supervisor and instructor. Students learned about community life and how to take responsibility.

In the 11th and 12 grades, students selected or found on their own off-campus sites at which to work and learn, unpaid. This was a time for increased exploration of their role in community and in becoming more responsible for their actions. For these increasingly independent students, mentors from the job sites became more influential and important. However, Walkabout High School teachers maintained significant involvement and contact with the students on a weekly basis, continuing the school’s vision of advising and mentoring students as individuals. During the final year, seniors did in-depth experiences called walkabouts. It was a time of intense learning about becoming an adult and leaving the supportive school community.

The following qualities of Walkabout High School were identified as beneficial for exploring the research questions central to this investigation:

- Teachers were encouraged to relate with students in various roles at Walkabout High School. This may be atypical for many schools, but I intentionally chose such a school in order to gather the richest knowledge possible about teacher conceptions.

- The needs and issues present at Walkabout High School were comparable to those found in most urban schools, though generally not as extreme as at some schools. This was another desirable characteristic because urban issues have been of significance in teacher preparation (Haberman, 1996; Zeichner & Hoeft, 1996).
• Working at one school site allowed for studying how various teachers were impacted by a single school context. Because teachers construct meaning and knowledge through interaction with their school community (Floden, 2001; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Little, 1982), studying various teachers learning within a single community provided opportunity to observe social interaction and meaning construction.

• Working at one school also enabled more time on-site to observe and talk with teachers.

• Teachers had a variety of teaching experiences, with several in their first year of teaching.

• Walkabout High School administration seemed outwardly supportive and encouraging of teachers to be both reflective on the educational processes of the school, and empowered the teachers to act on those insights.

While Walkabout High School had many of the characteristics desired for this study, one desirable characteristic was notably absent. The teaching staff of eighteen had only one non-white individual working full-time, a Hispanic woman who had taught at the school for many years, and she did not participate in the study. Racial diversity in the sample would have been beneficial since racial differences and racial awareness are critical issues in many K-12 schools, as well as in schools, departments, and colleges of education. Such diversity can provide the opportunity to hear from multiple perspectives, potentially revealing critical cultural factors not
otherwise as easily noticed (Ogbu, 1987). However, the subjects were all white European descendents.

Thirteen of Walkabout High School’s 18 teachers agreed to participate in the study. I spent some time with each of them, particularly at the beginning of the year, but when intensive observations and interviews of individual teachers commenced I reduced my contact load, for reasons of time, to focus on the 10 full-time classroom teachers. The three not intensively studied were a special-needs instructor and two teacher-administrators working with the experiential program.

Working with 10 teachers provided an opportunity to learn about similarities and differences between individual teachers, each with unique qualities, personal histories, different teacher preparation experiences, and different roles and responsibilities in the Walkabout High School community.

The teachers interviewed had the following characteristics:

- 3 were first-year teachers
- 2 had more than 10 years experience teaching, though for one that included college teaching and professional development instruction
- 7 were men, 3 women
- 1 worked with special needs students as a resource room teacher, and as co-teacher in regular classrooms
- 1 novice had not attended any teacher preparation program
- 1 novice had recently changed careers, and was licensed
- 6 had a Master’s degrees in education
• 1 had a doctorate degree
• 1 was prepared in a Masters of Arts in Education internship program
• 7 had undergraduate degrees that were not regular education degrees
• 3 had completed preparation programs for teaching either elementary or middle school or both, rather than high school
• 4 were in their first two years of teaching
• 3 had taught for 3 or more years at Walkabout High School, which was only 5 years old

This diversity of teaching histories was beneficial in providing insight into teacher particularities. See Appendix B for details of each teacher.

The research sample included a mix of men and women. Since the lack of perspective of male school teachers’ experiences and interpretations is a “serious deficit in our educational knowledge” (Casey, 1995-1996, p. 240), this opportunity to hear from male teachers should prove valuable.

Descriptions of each of the 10 teachers are in Appendix B.

Data Gathering Methods

Participant Observation

A study of how teachers think about their daily work required an approach sensitive to inferences in teacher thought and meaning-making (Bruner, 1996; Palinscar, 1998). Walkabout High School administrators accepted me into their community with an invitation to attend and participate in most meetings. Of course, I also needed permission of the individual teachers when I was with them in smaller
groupings. At times I was useful to teachers and students (Yon, 2000), but generally was viewed as an interested but silent participant. Everyone was informed of the reason why I was present at the school, especially the students, who were informed that I was interested in learning more about the school, especially how teachers teach.

Observations occurred over the course of one school year. From the August teacher orientation through the end of the first semester in December, I visited 26 times for a total of 82 hours spread out over the four months. This interaction with the school staff and community was important because in the second half of the year I engaged individual teachers more intimately, and needed to both understand the context of the school they lived and worked in, and also to have a comfortable relationship with them that permitted and encouraged more meaningful, in-depth talk.

I took extensive field notes on a regular basis, and visited and observed all teaching contexts, such as teacher meetings and classroom instruction, at different times throughout the year. I followed the note-taking with summary write-ups describing what was observed and with regular analysis to aid the development of thought and questions for continued observation (Erickson, 1986; Pillow, 2003).

Casual conversation throughout the school with teachers and students, including in hallways, at lunch, in the classroom before and after school, and at experiential sites provided opportunities to gain knowledge about school processes, the school community, school learning goals, and the individual teachers’ views and concepts of teaching. Participating in this casual way was valuable for developing a relationship of understanding and trust necessary for honest and thoughtful responses.
during individual interviews that started in the 6th month and continued until school was over in June, the 10th month. These informal encounters enabled direct and inferential checking of developing ideas about the school and individual staff members.

*Interviews*

Interviews were constructed to encourage individual teachers to explore how they thought of teaching—interests, concerns, concepts, beliefs, goals, challenges, etc.—and how they may have learned to be the teacher each had become. Specific open-ended questions were prepared to give focus to the interview, but once the conversation started the teacher had considerable impact on how the interview developed. I did not want teachers to tell me what they thought was expected of them to say, but sought to get teachers to speak honestly about their experiences and their personal beliefs, values, and concepts (Hollway & Jefferson, 1997). Frequently, the research questions were answered, but in an indirect fashion. I checked with the teachers to confirm that I understood what the teacher said both during initial interviews and during follow-up interviews (Prior, 2003). Interviews generally ran for about fifty minutes per interview.

As listed in the Research Design section, interview questions were pre-written and guided the interview. However, communicating the intent of the questions was of a much higher priority than reading the questions to the interviewee. Flexibility was important for gathering the particular thoughts of individual teachers.
In addition to answering questions teachers were asked to draw or sketch how they viewed teaching. Drawing is useful because it reveals a non-language view of teaching and can assist the uncovering of concepts, values, and beliefs not well-articulated (Prior, 2003). Drawing is also useful as an interview tool for asking follow-up and probing questions about concepts inferred or directly presented by the teacher (Brilhart, 2005; Davis, 1997; Hodder, 2000; Prior, 2003). This drawing, however, was not assumed to match directly with how a teacher thinks or makes decisions (Atkinson & Coffey, 2003). It was one window into understanding a teacher; direct observation and follow-up discussions were still vital to understanding what the teacher was communicating in the drawing. The drawing did, however, frequently provide insight into what I later learned when talking with and observing individual teachers.

I encouraged the teachers to talk about their understanding of teaching in several ways, but a narrative approach helped reveal contextual details that are often critical to understanding social situations and social behavior (Britzman, 2003; Casey, 1995-1996; Craig, 1999; Viney & Bousfield, 1991; Wax, 1971/1985).

*Time with Individual Teachers*

I spent four weeks with each of the 10 teachers, two weeks in late winter and two weeks in spring. Each two-week period included approximately four classroom observations with a lengthy interview during the second week. For many of the teachers this was not the first time I was in their classrooms. It was also generally not the first time we discussed education. It was, however, a time of particular focus and
interest in what that individual teacher was doing and thinking as a teacher. Observations were for different lengths of time, but always had some sense of a beginning and ending, for example an entire class period, a complete advisory meeting, or a substantial portion of an experiential workday.

Data Management

The corpus of materials gathered in an ethnographic study can be overwhelming. Data reduction was essential. I analyzed data for significance and categorized seeking patterns and themes (Erickson, 1986). The raw notes and gathered materials often called data were used more for rekindling the experience at the research site or with the teacher.

I used analytic memos throughout the study, but particularly as I extensively analyzed and revisited the notes and transcripts. After I completed all observations and interviews, collected data was coded using HyperResearch, a coding software program. Coded text, documents, and drawings were then analyzed, followed by further coding and analysis. As my coding developed, analysis and analytic memos became an increasingly important part of the data analysis. I sought “recurrent and significant patterns” and “evidentiary warrants” in this manner (Erickson, 1986).

I treated data, coding, experiences, analyses, and questions as pieces of a larger puzzle. A dialogue between pieces of data helped further understanding and the cohesion of concepts. As I found linkages, I wrote them into an analytic memo and subjected the memo to scrutiny and analysis using all the data (Corbin, 1986).
It was important in analyzing data that discrepant findings in the cases were intentionally sought in the data. Discrepancies revealed possible limits to the analysis and provoked careful analysis. Transparency of both supportive data and data that stands in opposition to the analysis were valued.

*Interpretation and Analysis*

One significant goal for this study was to give teachers voice so that those who prepare and support teachers can learn the art and science of teaching from those who do it every day (Britzman, 2003; Kagan, 1993; Schoonmaker, 2002). Interpretation, in this sense, was grounded in the uniqueness of individuals’ identities. The post-modern view of knowledge and understanding recognizes that even when something that was critical and valued for one person was identified, it need not be the same for another. This uniqueness of situation, or the unrepeatable aspect of a person’s life or perspective, was not considered a weakness (Wolcott, 1994). The extensive use of longer quotations in the findings section is one way to continue to give the teachers voice.

Critical for the study was to identify how individual teachers thought about teaching and to confirm those findings through repeated observations of the teacher working with students, talking and interacting with other teachers, and communicating with me formally and informally. An inductive process of seeking patterns and themes was continual, both during observations and interviews, and during analysis of data. Constant comparison of generalizations and data fleshed out useful findings. As these descriptions and understandings of individuals developed, it
became possible to compare teachers. Tendencies and anomalies alike could be studied and considered. Analysis of the tendencies and anomalies then provided opportunity for further findings and development of analytic data (Erickson, 1986). Thus I used an iterative process, moving back and forth between description and analysis.

Also recognized throughout the study was the role of the researcher. An iterative process of thinking about my place in the group, and then participating in the group, was necessary. I relied on both my notes and my participation. I experienced what the notes pointed toward and described (Wax, 1971/1985).

Writing is a gateway to what I learned and experienced (Van Maanen, 1988). I hope this preliminary study will assist other researchers in effectively theorizing and developing more researchable questions about teacher thinking and development. A second desire is that the teachers’ voices and my findings will help teacher educators, teacher leaders, and teacher administrators support teacher development, be inspired to provide meaningful and relevant activities for pre-service and in-service teachers, and to gain further insight into what individuals preparing to be teachers need for optimal growth.
CHAPTER 4
SOURCES AND PROCESSES OF TEACHERS’ CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF
THE TASK OF TEACHING

Background: The School and Its Culture

Walkabout High School’s founding vision, and continually renewing vision, of experiential education strongly influenced all aspects of the school, including weekly organization, academic and developmental goals for students, teacher and staff roles, and expectations of teachers’ instructional approaches and styles.

Walkabout High School was an urban charter high school founded on the Deweyan vision of experiential learning (John Dewey, 1916/1944). The school’s motto emphasized this: Encounter the World, Engage the Mind. The school’s founder was also inspired by Maurice Gibbon’s educational vision of walkabout (Gibbon, 1974), in which students are supported in going out into the community to work and learn in the real world—the world outside school. The Walkabout High School educational vision was based on the concept that learning should not be disconnected from the real world, and that individuals should struggle with the challenges and questions presented in real life situations and contexts. Such encounters with the world must be active and reflective, with individuals constantly considering what is
happening and what they might learn from their experiences. A significant goal in Walkabout High School’s educational vision was for students to develop processes of action and reflection such that they would be empowered in any encounter they had in the world as they moved from youth to adult.

This vision had profound organizational impact on the school. For one, students learned, and teachers taught, outside of traditional classroom settings for approximately half the school year, including every Tuesday and Thursday, when students were off campus at their experiential sites and teachers supervised that learning experience. Also, during the month of January the school offered a short academic term during which students selected one intensive, hands-on study of a topic or subject. During this month, regular classes did not meet and the Walkabout High School teachers took on the non-traditional role of supervising and instructing one course for an entire school day, three days a week for the entire month. Multi-day trips were frequently incorporated into a few courses during this January term.

*Academic and Developmental Goals for Students*

To assist the Walkabout High School students in processing their experiences and developing from young adults into fully capable members of the adult community, the school created student advisory groups for all students, organized by grade level. Each teacher was responsible for an advisory group. The role of the teacher-advisor in those groups was (a) to connect with individual students to provide long-term guidance through the school year, and (b) to work as a group on skills, values, and attitudes not easily taught in regular courses. These skills, values, and
attitudes included developing skills of organization and collaboration; valuing responsible risk-taking and creative and critical thinking; and encouraging attentive and supportive attitudes when working with others.

The advisory group functioned as a bridge between the off-campus experiential learning and the school, with lots of discussion and reflection focused around what students were thinking, feeling, and learning at their complex real-life experiential sites, perhaps most easily described as a job site. Advisory groups also explored certain skills with students depending on their grade level. Those skills were focused on and developed throughout the year using a specific set of essential questions.

During the 2005-2006 year the following framework of essential questions guided the work of advisory groups:

9th grade – What is community?

10th grade – What is work?

11th grade – What is leadership?

12th grade – What is risk?

Using each of the essential questions, various concepts, skills, and personal characteristics were explored, such as self-knowledge, reflection, and attentiveness. The culmination for all of this exploration of self through experiential learning and through advisory group was each student designing an independent senior walkabout experience. At the conclusion of the walkabout students presented to the school community what they did, what they learned, and how they grew as individuals.
No student’s personal or academic development, from his or her initial learning about community in 9th and 10th grades through their self-designed walkabout experience as a senior, was identical.

*Self-directed Learning*

Conveying the social qualities of Walkabout High School was difficult because the roles and expectations of the students and teachers were many, and frequently nontraditional. Describing the school’s ideal that students be self-directed in their learning may provide some clarity.

This ideal was pervasive throughout the school culture, though not necessarily implemented in all facets of the organization, nor encouraged or articulated by all teachers, and definitely was not accomplished by all students at all times. During the first of four days of teacher orientation at the beginning of the school year, the academic dean of the school shared a taped radio interview with Dr. Mel Levine. Key ideas conveyed by Dr. Levine included that schools need to help prepare youth for the real world by providing opportunity to individually and personally explore what the working world is like and how they might participate in it. Such exposure requires that youth become more introspective about who they are, what they value, and how to realistically achieve one’s goals. Dr. Levine argued that educators and society must recognize that we are developing naïve children and must combat this by providing youth the opportunity to explore and evaluate the real world and to learn to develop initiative.
It was in this orientation gathering that the ideal of self-directed learning was first presented and discussed during the 2005-2006 school year. The staff’s discussion centered broadly around which skills, knowledge, and dispositions they wanted Walkabout High School students to embody when they graduated, and how to better assist students in learning from experiential learning opportunities. One experienced Walkabout High School teacher shared his personal struggle to achieve what he desired for his students – which he indicated was comparable to Dr. Levine’s ideas for student growth. The school academic leaders and the experienced Walkabout High School teachers brought the school’s values of student initiative and self-directed learning to the forefront of the school community from the very beginning of the school year. As it was only the first few hours of their new job, the 30% new and mostly novice teachers listened attentively to the formal and informal leaders of the school, with minimal active participation.

One initially striking organizational feature of Walkabout High School that indicated how strongly the school valued self-direction as a quality to develop in students was the weekly Town Meeting. This was generally a student-run forum “where school proposals are presented, debated and voted upon regarding matters of the school other than health, safety and academics” (p. 6, The Walkabout School Student and Parent Handbook: 2005-2006 School Year). All members of the community, including students, teachers, staff, and administration, had one vote per person. While those meetings of about 200 people seemed overwhelming and
disruptive upon first look, it was a time for the youth of the school to explore the tensions inherent in democratic groups.

Every Tuesday and Thursday all Walkabout High School students went off campus to community locations that had partnered with the school. This experience was what was often referred to as the *experiential learning* part of the program, though the experiential concept was really broader than simply going to partnering sites. Students had increasingly more independence each year. Freshmen worked in closely supervised groups at community service organizations such as homeless shelters and food banks. The following years students had increasingly more say in the selection of their partner sites. Ideally, placements were based on what goals the individual student, in consultation with his or her advisor, had chosen for her or his Personal Education Plan (PEP). The goal was for students to develop increasing ability in being self-directed in their learning while also learning more about themselves and the world around them.

*Expectations of Teachers’ Instructional Approach*¹

The Walkabout High School community, including the administration, expected the larger school vision and ideals, such as self-directed learning, to impact classrooms, too. Teachers’ instructional approaches were to be driven by teacher interest, knowledge, and passion for the subject, and not to what would be on the state graduation test. Students were to be engaged in meaningful ways. Students were

¹ Brief descriptions of each of the 10 teachers are in Appendix B.
expected to learn the knowledge and skills necessary for passing the state mandated graduation test, but teachers were not asked to design their instruction based on the test. Courses should be designed to encourage interest and engagement on the students’ behalf.

This was clearly identified in Adam’s retelling of his interview for the position of science teacher:

Because the first thing they asked me about when I came in is: Would I have a problem not teaching to the test. Basically. That was like one of the first things I got asked about when I came in for my interview. And I said, "Well, no, I wouldn't have a problem. Why would I have a problem with that?" So that was kind of interesting that that was the first thing--I mean I knew charter schools is going to have--will be unique and a little different, but it is kind of weird to have someone ask you that right off the bat. And of course that isn't to say that they don't want us teaching the kids the right material, but it is the approach to how you teach it that they are looking at here. (Adam, recorded interview, May 8, 2006)

In a later conversation, Adam continued to explain what he thought was meant by the interview committee’s question about not teaching to the test. Note that Adam did not use the phrase *self-directed learning* despite its use in school-wide conversations, but the concept was present. Referring to what Walkabout High School expected from his teaching:

Are the students learning about how to handle themselves in the future, so when they go to college, or when they go on to a job, are they going to have

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2 When quoting the subjects of this study, I used the following convention: three dots or periods without spaces between them indicate a pause by the subject, and three dots or periods with spaces between them indicate that I have deleted some material.

3 *Recorded interviews* were recorded digitally and transcribed at a later time. *Observation notes* were written during or immediately following observation in the field.
the skills that they need to know how to jump right in? Do what they are supposed to be doing? Know their responsibilities? Fulfill their responsibilities? Trying to get them to understand some of those things in the classroom. If you can teach them those skills in the classroom, then they can take them out and apply them in the real world afterwards--be it college or job or whatever. (Adam, recorded interview, May 8, 2006)

Adam’s response, typical for Walkabout High School teachers, was to design unique courses that presented concepts and skills that Adam was passionate about, including the courses Rock’n and Roll’n, about the geologic history of the planet, and The Real Jurassic Park, about the history of early life on Earth. Other teachers taught classes such as What’s Goin’ On?, a study of the social unrest and change of the 1960s through a historical look at rock music, and Food, Shelter, Brita, a course to develop a global perspective on human needs and human rights.

Though not understood by most, and mentioned only infrequently and obliquely by experienced school leaders through statements such as: our goal is “self-directed learning. Leadership starts with me and my own sense of empowerment” (Academic Dean, observation notes, August 29, 2005), teachers designing unique courses modeled initiative and self-directed learning for the students.

A more obvious indication, to both the teacher and the student, of the school’s vision for the students becoming self-directed learners was the frequently used pedagogical tool of the course project. Many Walkabout High School courses employed this pedagogy, having one or two projects due each course and frequently giving in-class time to work on them. One freshmen student explained to me how there were two kinds of work at Walkabout High School: (a) the homework kind, which generally required reading and summarizing an article and was described as
easy, adding that teachers do not assign it very often; and (b) course projects, which are big and very important and hard to do (student, observation notes, March 30, 2006). This particular student gave the strong impression that the project was not considered homework, though she indicated that projects required immense amount of focus and work on her behalf. She indicated that she was proud of her project accomplishments.

Administration Empowering Teachers

As a charter school with its own board of directors, Walkabout High School had flexibility. The administration recognized this and openly acknowledged it to the group. They also acknowledged that the ability to change quickly could be problematic for an organization. Beginning with the initial orientation meeting, it was clear that both new and experienced teachers were expected to respond positively to this characteristic of the school and to take on the various values of the school, such as becoming self-directed and accepting leadership and responsibility as needed.

Flexibility and adaptability were frequently called upon. Examples included (a) covering other teachers’ classes rather than hiring substitute teachers, (b) participating on various school committees, including a curriculum committee and student discipline committee, and (c) covering a variety of problems and challenges that naturally arise with supervising students who are based off campus two days each week.

The weekly staffings, when the entire staff gathered to discuss the lives of individual children, was one situation that conveyed the administrations commitment
to empowering teachers. Each week a different teacher prepared to talk about students he or she advised. This provided feedback to the advising teacher, but also informed everyone in the community how to be supportive of each student. Everyone participated in considering how the entire school community could best interact with the student for the student’s benefit. This included supporting students as whole people, not just academic learners. Frequently discussions centered on personal qualities and personal struggles of individual students but always with the question and goal of *How can we help?* In this highly positive and supportive communal setting held every week and attended by all teachers, both staff and teachers conveyed a desire that not only the students should be cared for and empowered, but the teachers should be, too. Just as students were being given what they needed to succeed, the community was committed as a group to give each other what each needed to succeed.

However, ultimately the parties did not have equal power. This was all too clear on the day I interviewed a teacher who had recently been told by an administrator that she did not fit in with the school, indicating that she would not be asked to teach again the following year. The administration had the power to decide who stayed and who left.

*Unique Role in the Community*

Walkabout High School was a public chartered secondary school that opened in 2000, five years prior to this study. It was open to all students in this mid-western state, with priority given to the students of the Public City School District within
which it resided. The make-up of the school reflected the diversity of both the urban and suburban populations of the surrounding community: it did not look like either an urban school or a suburban school, but had qualities and characteristics of both.

Parents selected this school for their children for various reasons. All students could register and attend if space were available. Through conversations with parents, students, and staff, several reasons seemed most prominent. Some of the parents, but not many, selected the school because of the school’s philosophy of learning from action and reflection – experiential learning. This may have influenced more parents in the first few years of the school’s history, but now parents seemed to be attracted to the school because of the individualized attention that teachers and staff gave to students. Students regularly shared with me how they struggled to feel accepted at their previous schools. Frequently students commented or joked about how Walkabout High School students were all misfits. Another common reason parents selected Walkabout High School was that the school was known as a good school for students who had previously been home-schooled. One parent of a home-schooled student told of how she wanted her child to learn to relate to teachers, as this would be important in college.

While the Walkabout High School staff did not focus on the state graduation test, the school had been praised for its high proficiency test scores and had received
an *effective* rating from the state the previous two years, one level below the highest state rating of *excellent*.4

As with many charter schools at that time, Walkabout High School was struggling financially. High-school sports and music programs common to other schools were not affordable. The need to attract more students to the school to bring in more state funding was a yearly struggle. If the school failed to attract more students, it would collapse financially. The school anticipated opening a second school both to spread its vision of education elsewhere, but also to help bring financial solvency. Teachers regularly participated in efforts to increase the enrollment of the school. Success in maintaining the school, of course, was also job security for them.

The purpose for providing the above description is to give useful and valuable context for understanding the teachers studied, whose thoughts and knowledge are expressed in the following sections.

The Black Box: Where Personal and Professional Identities Meet and Mix

Teachers must make many, mostly instantaneous, decisions during the course of a school day. Additionally, teacher emotions must be managed as teacher-student interactions are always fluid and frequently challenging and taxing, and the expectations and demands for students to learn is often filled with pressure on the

4 Of the Walkabout High School students who took the March 2006 10th Grade proficiency test, the following percentages scored proficient or above: Reading--94.5; Math--76.4; Writing--94.5; Science--69.1; Social Studies--74.1; All Five--51.9.
teacher to be effective. To gain insight into how teachers think about and process so much so quickly, I spent many hours with individual teachers when they interacted with other teachers, when they were with students, and in one-on-one conversations. I found that observing teachers with their peers revealed insights regarding the goals and purposes of the community (information described in the first section of this chapter), but that the time spent listening to individual teachers share what rests beneath the surface of their constantly challenging task of educating students provided especially fruitful findings.

When teachers were given ample time and opportunity to talk about themselves, they revealed teaching to include a process of personalization. Their conceptualizing of teaching and the tasks of teaching was a deeply personal process that engaged personal knowledge, experiences, and identity. This personalization process included the integration of personal and professional aspects of individual teachers’ lives in hidden, and seemingly mysterious, ways.

To describe and elaborate my findings, and to begin demystifying this process of personalization, I refer to this process metaphorically as the *black box*. The black box as a metaphor should be viewed as having organic qualities, not mechanistic behavior. The mysterious, yet very personal, ever-present box held what is personal for later use (especially rich, value-filled memories), and processed and integrated memories, emotions, images, concepts, and professional knowledge such that the task of teaching could be conceptualized and understood.
This personal place provided clues and understanding as to why teacher preparation and development are such difficult tasks. Each teacher had a black box that assisted in the development of and integration of personal and professional knowledge that collide in the task of teaching.

My findings, which focused only on teachers and teachers thinking about the tasks of teaching, not on other aspects of individuals’ lives, indicated that the teacher’s black boxes had overwhelmingly relational qualities. Memories of relationships were primary to teachers, especially memories of experiences in teacher-student relationships or leadership roles. Professional knowledge and teacher tasks were processed through this black box that continually organized using a relational component—a component that asked how could this be understood within a relationship of teacher and student.

The educational concepts impacted by this process included, but were not limited to, learning styles, educational goals, classroom communication, student motivation, classroom management, curriculum, and pedagogy. In each, the concept was personalized and conceptualized through a relational understanding.

The following section describes some of the findings that reveal the basic relational quality of this black box. The first findings are the revelations of a novice teacher regarding relating. The novice teacher learned that the youth in his classroom were not what he expected and that he needed to rethink how to relate. The second discussion focuses on how the conceptualization of teachers who were not novice, yet still somewhat new to teaching, revealed an increased awareness of the relational in
teaching, but not with a complex understanding. Finally, teachers with significant experience are described as having a sophisticated sense of the relational in teaching. Their thoughts were more complex as revealed in variegated detail.

Two other related findings are then presented: how motivation and engagement were strongly connected to what was described in the black box, and how passion was generally deeply woven into the relational framework described.

The Relational Aspects of Being a Teacher

Is There a Teacher if There is No Student? A Novice Teacher’s Dilemma

Randy had music from an Asian Internet radio station playing as students entered his classroom. He greeted them while he jotted a few notes at his table. Students seemed to know what Randy expected, but he reminded them to pick up a newspaper on the way in and to get started with finding an article to read and then to write about in their journals. Some of the students began working as requested, many seemed to do so with half an effort, and a few openly choose not to do it and talk. Randy, at the front of the crowded room, frequently tossed positive words of encouragement to the class hoping that positive words would motivate students. These positive comments were mixed with a few pointed comments to those not working, especially when student actions or words disrupted others in the class (Randy, observation notes, February 3, 2006).

Randy appeared to be taking on a leadership role as if trying on a new suit. He seemed uncomfortable, but was acting on what he believed—or wanted to believe—would improve student motivation. He frequently talked of this confusion about his
role in the classroom and what it should look and feel like when discussing his understanding of teaching and how he was trying to figure it out, how to get everyone learning.

Randy’s drawing of how he viewed teaching, and his accompanying talk about that drawing, revealed that he was unsure of how to think about his relationship with the young adults in his classroom. At the beginning of the school year he imagined that he would be more like a partner beside them as they learned together. He drew a picture of what he thought of teaching at the beginning of the year. The drawing had him standing in a group with the students in his class, with all of them looking at the thing of interest to be studied and learned. His classroom, with music playing and everyone reading the newspaper together, reminded me of this vision of teaching.

But his second drawing, he explained, was more accurate for revealing how he viewed teaching midway through the year. In that drawing, the teacher was standing in front of the students, in more of a leadership role. He explained that he was not happy with this relationship, but that the students demanded it.

Randy’s struggle to figure out who plays what role in the classroom revealed an essential quality of the task of teaching: teachers think about many teaching tasks in relational terms. Essential for any teacher is the question of how can any concept or value involved in the task of teaching be conceptualized, and hopefully acted on successfully, in a relational context of teacher and student.
This exploration by Randy, a teacher with no formal preparation for working in K-12 classrooms, to understand what his relationship would be with his students helped me see in other teachers this foundational framing of teacher thinking in relational terms. It was eye-opening to realize that the young adults who come to class are not necessarily *students*; but are only students because of a relational stance. *Student* as a term indicates that the young adult has come to *relate* as a student. The teacher-student relationship must be co-created by both teacher and student. Randy seemed to understand this when he said how he was “trying to have them be a student” and that he was surprised everyday by “how different all the kids are,” indicating that a one-type-fits-all kind of relating would not do (Randy, recorded interview, February 15, 2006).

**Teacher and Student As Co-Creators of Their Roles?**

The more experience a teacher had as a teacher, the more developed the relational framework in his or her black box. For one, teachers had to address and manage the reality that the classroom social structure of teacher-student was not solely created by the teacher, but was a co-created relationship with the students. Students cannot be commanded into a role; they must fill the role at least somewhat willingly. Thus teachers’ black boxes contained an ever-increasing understanding that individual youth must be invited to participate in the teacher-student relationship, and the relationship must be a construction effort by both, not just the teacher.

Gary, a first-year teacher with otherwise little experience with youth, had ample experience as a manager of adult groups, and was not overwhelmed by the
leadership position of a classroom teacher. The middle-aged businessman-turned-math teacher, however, still struggled in the classroom especially in understanding his relationship with students. His black box posed one especially problematic relational question: Who is responsible for student failure, the teacher or the student? And, what is his relationship with students who are not particularly hard working (Gary, recorded interview, May 25, 2006)?

Gary described how he grew during the first part of the school year in the area of self-understanding regarding how to navigate between teaching to students learning the least, and teaching to the ones learning the most. The students, he said, were not like his peers in the business world. In his previous job everyone shared the value of meritocracy, with individuals desiring to succeed, and once at “the table” would be grateful and continue to work hard (Gary, recorded interview, May 25, 2006). With Gary’s confusion about who was responsible for student failure, he developed a “laissez-faire” approach in the classroom that underscored his personal view that if a student put forth an effort in his class the student would succeed, otherwise the student would fail (Gary, recorded interview, May 25, 2006). Gary was not happy or satisfied with this attitude, or conceptualization, about his students, but it helped him continue operating during this, his first year of teaching.

The other way that Gary revealed that he was developing social and relational aspects of his teaching was expressed in his statement about learning to deal with the great differences among the students in his classroom, and how he was better understanding and relating to them. Gary spoke with modest pride of how he could
now speak to a student on one side of the room, then quickly turn and communicate an appropriate comment to a student on the other half of the room.

Gary was struggling to make sense of the part of teaching that is prevalent, but rarely noticed or described: the relational quality of teacher thought and knowledge. Gary’s reference to how teaching at school was different than leading groups in business also revealed how Gary’s personal identity and knowledge continued to influence his professional teaching identity at Walkabout High School.

Teachers with only a few more years experience in the classroom also conceptualized much of their teaching through a mostly hidden framework of teacher-student relating, but now with a framework more developed and integrated into their concepts, values, and beliefs about teaching. These teachers had developed, whether consciously or not, their teaching, or at least their conceptualizations of teaching, as more socially interactive with students.

Mary, an English teacher who did much of her internship work at Walkabout High School, but with only one full year of classroom teaching, revealed a more evolved, yet undeveloped, view of relating. Mary described her view of teaching metaphorically as a “handshake” (Mary, recorded interview, March 3, 2006), and talked of how she thought of teaching as a two-way relationship, with both student and teacher bringing life experiences to the classroom to share and discuss. She spoke about establishing and maintaining relationships of “trust” (Mary, recorded interview, March 3, 2006). However, Mary’s hesitant and wandering comments indicated a
still-developing conceptualization of how relating fit into her understanding of teaching in general.

But...it seems that they, they know that I am there for them...that I will advocate for them and I do it often. I do it at [off-campus experiential learning] sites. I show them. I tell them. And so, they trust me and I trust them. And we have a pretty open relationship...open communication when it comes to that kind of thing. We can talk about our academics. We can talk about what we need to do. We can also talk about things that are going on at home that aren't going well, or relationships with other students. Or things like that. And, yeah...I guess I have this sort of friend kind of role. But never to the point that it's like I'm totally, I am just hanging out chilling. (Mary, recorded interview, March 27, 2006)

Mary was very attuned to relating to students as an important aspect of being a teacher at Walkabout High School. She also indicated that relating was an important foundational quality of her thoughts about classroom teaching. But apart from a simple understanding of sharing, Mary’s view of teaching as a relational activity was still evolving.

An Increasingly Complex Model of the Task of Teaching

Ethan, a teacher who had been teaching for several years, revealed a more sophisticated conceptualization of teacher-student relationships, one that was deeply centered in caring and listening. However, his internal model for relating with students had developed contingencies and limits. Ethan’s conceptualization was not a simple view of relating.

But, I think that with the idea of the caring and the supporting and listening and everything, I think there is still an understanding of, you know what...I am still the teacher. There are things that you do, and don't do. I don't feel like I am threatened at all by power struggles, or people taking advantage of that. And if they do we sit down and talk about it and get that cleared up pretty quickly. (Ethan, recorded interview, February 15, 2006)
Ethan had clearly developed a conceptual view of teaching that included a more complex view of relating. When describing how he viewed the task of teaching, he wrote a list of roles that he utilizes that included “mentor, role-model, ear, cheerleader, actor, welcoming, and conduit for knowledge seeking” (Ethan, recorded interview and notes, February 15, 2006). In talking about teaching, Ethan described key aspects of the task as “caring,” “supporting,” and “listening.” Ethan was deeply aware of a need to have open, two-way communication with students, but notably added an addendum to this stating, “I am still the teacher,” (Ethan, recorded interview and notes, February 15, 2006) as if there had been power struggles when the two-way relationship had become problematic due to issues of power. In the four years Ethan had taught he had learned much about the teacher-student relationship, including that limitations on that relationship is an important part of it.

Ann taught for a similar number of years to Ethan, but was a first year teacher at Walkabout High School. Unlike Ethan, who received his graduate degree at the same time he got a teaching degree, Ann’s graduate degree was completed after she taught for a year. Ann used graduate school to continue the process of becoming a teacher. She said she had not been satisfied with how she thought about teaching and wanted to develop her understanding of teaching to more fully match with her goals, experiences, and values. During graduate school Ann designed what she called her Caring Model of teaching. Ann, understandably, had a more extensive and fully organized language and ability to talk about teaching as grounded and framed in
teacher-student relating than Ethan and others, because she had spent graduate study
time organizing her ideas around teaching as a caring activity.

Ann described her way of relating with students in her class.

it is anywhere from much older sibling style relationships, to, it really just
depends on what a kid needs. Let’s say I am like a big sister, 10 years older,
which is about right, I guess. It is someone who listens and is a friend, but
doesn't put up with the dangerous crap that's going on--we have a limit there.
But some kids kinda need, they respond to having an authority. And, I don't
like doing that. But some of them really respond when you take away their
book, whack 'em on their head with it and tell them pay attention and to speak
up. So I have to say I really try to focus in on what each of them needs.
Really, on a day-to-day basis I function as a facilitator of knowledge.
Somebody who they can come to get answers, to think through ideas. And,
like I said, I occasionally have to tell them to shut up or quit doing this or
what are you thinking, all sorts of things. But on a day to day, they trust me to
know more than they know. And I give that to them as they need it--to
structure things as they need them to be structur
(Ann, recorded interview, March 21, 2006)

Ann’s quote revealed a complex and well-developed conceptualization of the
teacher-student relationship, including how Ann structured a teaching activity as a
“facilitator of knowledge” (Ann, recorded interview, March 21, 2006) around what
individual students needed. She also compared the relationship that she had with
some of the students as that of an older sister to younger sibling. In comparison to the
power-filled relationship generally connoted in the term teacher, Ann’s choice of the
metaphor big sister revealed an understanding that power is present but limited, and
in her case, filled with a sense of caring and responsibility. Randy and Gary’s first
year struggle to understand teacher power in their relationship with students was not
present in Ann’s conceptualization of teaching.
Guiding Principles of Relating Distilled from Experience

For highly experienced teachers, the black box of teaching was still present and organized around the framework of relating to students, but now the teachers spoke in phrases as if the teacher could consciously name their key guiding principles of their view of teaching. What had once been complex and difficult to name was becoming distilled. For example Frank, with 25 years combined experience in the teaching of children and adults, spoke of his relationship with students he was advising. “With advisees, ultimately, my goal is to get to trust and honesty--[those] are the two fundamentally important things there” (Frank, recorded interview, March 1, 2006).

Frank’s comment and numerous conversations revealed that he had struggled with understanding how teaching is an initially awkward struggle of conceptualizing the highly interactive relationship that accompanies teacher-student relationships but that he now only needed to keep trying to improve what he does as a teacher, and not focus as much on understanding the complex social basis of teaching. The social foundation of teaching seemed to be conceptually integrated such that it was no longer the focus or underlying issue of his view of teaching, though it was still highly valued as a part of teaching. Frank regularly spoke to other less experienced teachers about the importance of understanding how relating impacts all of teaching. Experienced teachers such as Frank were mostly only thinking about the so now what? part of being a teacher. They did not need to muddle through any black box of
disorganized conceptualizations of what the task of teaching looks like. They were only focused on how they could get the job done.

Cindy, with 15 years of experience, also revealed that she did not dwell on the social aspect of teaching – that was simply assumed. She stated matter-of-factly that she is a “social constructivist” (Cindy, recorded interview, March 13, 2006), and then proceeded to describe in her drawing of her view of teaching as a complex collection of the actions or qualities of thought that would be found in the social construction of knowledge, particularly within her math classroom.

The black box’s impact on the teachers drove, encouraged, or required them to think of teaching as a relational activity. My argument is that many, if not all, teacher conceptions (de Vries & Beijaard, 1999; Munby et al., 2001), teacher knowledge (Husu, 2003; Shulman, 2000), and teacher beliefs about teaching (Middleton, 2002; Pajares, 1992; van den Berg, 2002; Woolfolk Hoy, Davis, & Pape, 2006), are somehow impacted by this black box. In my interactions with teachers I found two prominent teacher concepts that expanded and developed this theory of the relational in teaching. The first has to do with student motivation, and the second with relating with passion.

Motivation and Passion as Critical Ingredients

Individual Teacher-Student Relationships are Key for Motivating and Engaging Students

Many teachers’ conceptualization of teaching included an important component that considered how students were motivated to learn. More specifically, a
teacher’s conceptualization of teaching incorporated an understanding for how both teacher and student relate such that motivation is present and students are engaged in learning. And, although teaching superficially appears to be an activity consisting of one teacher relating to a group of students, the underlying social conceptualization of the teacher is really frequently a one-on-one relationship. Many teachers indicated that they have this conceptualization of closeness with individual students even though when teaching it may not be easily observable by others. For example, when a class is having a whole-class discussion, conceptually the teacher would also be thinking about class interactions in a more personal, singular, one-on-one way.

*Connecting* with individual students, *respecting* individual students, and *trusting* individual students were themes revealed by many of these teachers as they talked about their underlying personal concepts of teaching and their understanding of how or why students are motivated to learn or engaged in learning. Connecting is two-directional in that once connected there is an inherent quality of togetherness; there is no connection between two people if both parties do not enable it. Respect and trust between two people is difficult to imagine without a somewhat mirrored response. Respect and trust can begin as a one-way act by the teacher, but will not likely be maintained or developed without a student responding in kind to some degree. While no teacher elaborated on this idea of reciprocity, many of their actions seemed to recognize the socially interactive quality necessary to maintain these teacher-student qualities.
For example, Mary and Dave, who co-taught a literature course, selected a series of short stories for students to read and discuss in class. They were careful in their selection of stories and then utilized much of class-time for students to respond in personal ways to the provocative ideas and themes stirred up by the readings. A discourse of respect was evident in both of the teachers’ comments toward, and interactions with the students. Students, while engaged at various levels, generally mirrored back an appreciation of trust and respect to the teacher who addressed them.

This respectful dialogue, intended to engage and motivate students, matched what Mary described as her vision of teaching: the handshake between student and teacher. The handshake symbolized a respectful sharing of personal ideas, thoughts, experiences, and opinions, with the goal of both gaining from the interchange.

Ann also valued this kind of interchange between teacher and student for how it engaged and motivated students, but conceived of the respected-sharing as more of a starting place for feeling empowered both as a student in the class and eventually as a citizen of the world.

Trust was also important to Ann’s conception of teaching. Here she spoke of how she learned about trust in teaching from a previous class she taught at another school:

And, they fought me really hard. . . . actually tested me to see if I'd stick around. They were tough kids who said "I'm going to push you to your limit, basically, and see if you will still care about me, and you will still teach me, or if you are just going to pass me a long again, like I've been passed along." And, I hung in there. And then I got their total loyalty and respect. After about a semester of putting me through it they said, “Alright.” I learned that that's what they want more than anything, somebody stable, somebody to be there, somebody to not give up on them. And that was the real structure, the bones,
the skeleton of teaching there. And the intellectual stuff I do as English is not as important. (Ann, recorded interview, March 21, 2006)

Several teachers expressed in detail this quality of trust as openness between teacher and student. While for a few of them this openness included sharing of subject or topical interests including interest in arts (e.g. photography), sports (e.g. basketball), and pop-culture (e.g. anime movies), more prevalent and pervasive was the notion of students having an openness and trust in what the teacher was bringing to them. Ethan expressed this when he described how he tried to develop the same feeling in his high school students that he felt from his college teachers when they opened their homes for meals and conversation to him. Ethan felt empowered by this kind of relationship and said he tries to do the same with his students. If he gained a student’s respect Ethan said he felt that the students were more willing to take academic risks that promote better learning.

I think that the way I wanted to relate to students has to do with actually some of my college professors from [college]. It was kind of like…small school, they really got to know us: we go over to dinner and have classes there. But I felt much more empowered and much more interested to, I don't know, to learn or to read the books that they assigned. Because I felt like they were also invested in me. And so, that made the entire experience more enriching. It made me take it more seriously. And so I think that's part of where I want to go with students also. And then also at the school that I taught in Pittsburgh there were definitely some teachers that also had some great fun rapport with students, but also were able to clearly define boundaries and, you know, what those are and what their role was between student and teacher. And I thought that was pretty cool. (Ethan, recorded interview, April 11, 2006)

One student revealed to me Ethan’s impact as a teacher. This particular student, who concerned both his mother and other teachers because of his lackadaisical attitude to school in general, described to me just how great a teacher
Ethan was and how he, the student, had enthusiastically written a really lengthy and in-depth paper for a history course that Ethan taught.

Frank also worked with the concept of student risk-taking in teaching, though he never used that phrase. Frank conceptualized a teaching and learning space that was emotionally safe and secure for students. With that zone of safety he then invited students to enter it and choose to learn. Ideally it was at that point the teacher provided as meaningful an activity for the student as possible. Once engaged, Frank explained that his relationship becomes simultaneously trusting the student, while also pushing the student to take risks and reach as high as he or she can, or wants, with the project. Frank’s role included providing the technical support, support that he considers a key component of his role in the task of teaching.

the best thing you can do is leave the horizon open and keep pushing people. And, generally speaking they exceed anything that I would have ever set for them. Not everybody, obviously, but a lot of students. Especially motivated students. It's incredible what they can do. (Frank, recorded interview, March 1, 2006)

Motivating students is a key component in the professional task of teaching and teachers thought of it in relational terms. The following section builds tangentially on the concepts described above: (a) the relational foundations of teaching, and (b) the motivational foundations of teaching. It is the importance of passion in teaching.

The Importance of Teacher Passion

Most of the teachers in this study talked about how passion is a part of their conceptualization of teaching. While the previous findings that relating is a key but less articulated component of teachers’ thinking about teaching, the importance of
passion in teachers’ lives was more visible, especially in their discourse about
teaching. This visibility resulted, perhaps, because of the numerous teachers’ use of
the same term, *passion*.

The passion that teachers indicated was a key part of their conceptualization
of teaching was not the passion that our current culture accentuates, that of individual
desire; instead, it was a passion woven into the social fabric of interactions and
community life. This passion, found within and between interactions, was not a
sexualized passion, but a life-affirming energy.

Ethan revealed how important this quality of relating was to him, telling how
he left his first teaching job after one year despite it being a wealthy and well-
respected district because of how difficult it was to be in a school where he could not
express his passion.

It was an awful experience. It was just awful. I was handcuffed in the
classroom. I had to teach very specific curriculum--to the books. Teach to end
of the year tests. The AP class that I taught was a little bit different, but again
it was--you covered a mile, an inch deep. But I didn't find it very rewarding. I
felt like I couldn't be very creative. I couldn't infuse my passion for the history
subjects as well as I wanted to. I really felt handcuffed. (Ethan, recorded
interview, February 15, 2006)

While Ethan told of how the lack of opportunity to “infuse my passion”
(Ethan, recorded interview, February 15, 2006) drove him away from a school, other
teachers at Walkabout High School generally did not have problematic stories of
passion. Walkabout High School teachers conveyed that the importance of passion to
their teaching had mostly to deal with modeling it to students. Reasons for modeling
passion included (a) a teacher’s passion is contagious and motivates young adults’
engagement in the subject, and (b) young adults need the opportunity to see passion-
filled adults and this may be the only place for the young adult to see or experience that. Each is discussed more fully below.

I intentionally use the term young adult instead of student for two reasons. For one, to convey how this concept of passion was frequently oriented toward motivating a young adult to take on the identity and role of student. And secondly, to convey how the teachers were thinking about impacting the young adults’ life well beyond the years of being a student, when the student becomes a mature adult.

*A Teacher’s Passion is Contagious and Motivates Student Engagement*

Many teachers shared vivid memories of their own life as students in a class in which a teacher motivated them through passionate interest in and expression of the material. Walkabout High School teachers indicated they now value passion in their own conceptualizations of teaching and wanted to motivate students through its expression. In the following quote Ernie tells of his deep-seated memories of learning under the guidance of a passionate teacher.

[my] 7th and 8th grade year. I had the same guy. And he was really influential in terms of me developing a passion for science. When I got into high school I took every science I could by the end of my sophomore year that I could take at that point. (Ernie, recorded interview, March 24, 2006)

Ernie expressed in this recollection that he understood that he now needed to be that kind of passionate teacher for his students.

Adam also thoroughly identified with the importance of passion to motivate students. He told of how he recognized passion’s educational importance during his teacher preparation classes. He found, however, that such passion sometimes requires dramatization by the teacher.
I feel like we also do a lot of acting. I like storytelling. I like acting out things. I like...I think part of the challenge as a teacher, too, is that sometimes you need to act a certain way. As far as you know, you listen to, you need to be concerned or two seconds later you need to be excited about a subject. Or the next class you need to be completely somber about an issue, or the next class you got to be talking about something completely different. So I think that there is a need to be able to change your face and your emotions, at time, which is draining for me in particular, but I think that that also helps, it helps convey the importance of different lessons or different things that you are trying to get across to people whether it be concern or caring. (Ethan, recorded interview, March 15, 2006)

Though this concept of passion can be understood as motivating students in the short-term, teachers were frequently thinking about long-term impact that comes from their modeling passion, just as their own stories above suggest. 

*The Importance of Modeling a Life Filled with Passion*

Teachers also revealed a desire to introduce to students to the possibility of a passion-filled life. In the quote below, Ethan articulates this quite specifically.

I want to convey my passion for social studies, history, art--whatever it might be. And hopefully by demonstrating that passion the students can see that it is ok to be passionate about something--it doesn't have to be history or social studies--but that it makes life more enjoyable. I think that that gets into the role model. I think teachers are role models and that we do need to model things. (Ethan, recorded interview, February 15, 2006)

Each time I observed Ethan teach he was a great ball of passionate energy, despite the quiet and calm students cozy in the living-room-like ambiance of soft chairs and indirect lighting. Students told me in various conversations how much they loved Ethan’s classes and his teaching, and how Ethan got them excited about ideas. This was true for all students I spoke with, whether the students were generally highly motivated about school or not.
Other teachers conveyed a similar value for passion, but not always as directly. Frank talked about sharing his passion with his students. His desire and educational goal was for all students to develop a “learner’s gaze” (Frank, recorded interview, March 1, 2006) towards life—the gaze being a metaphor that included passion and exploration. Frank said he shares his own personal passion, photography, with his students and considers such personal revelation valuable.

But, it is an important thing for me and feel like I should share that stuff with them, feel like I should share a lot of who I am and what I am with them. I share my photography, up to a point, so that they understand that I take it seriously. It is a passion for me. (Frank, recorded interview, March 1, 2006)

Ernie also recognized the need for students to have passion in their lives and indicated he wanted to be a link in the appropriate development of passion in students’ lives. Ernie’s view was that he must help the student thoughtfully consider, contemplate, and act on passions, particularly passionate ideas. Ernie’s conceptual drawings were especially creative and revealed how he thought of students as already highly involved in life but needing guidance and support. His first drawing was of a student constantly moving and making decisions. Ernie described how he could guide students, but that they were making decisions on their own.

The students here at the middle, hanging out. And all these things are being fed into them. All these things coming in from these areas into his head. Then the student makes decisions. The student...you know... “Am I going to go?” “Am I going?”... And this can be a spectrum on various stages. This can be a spectrum on ideas of religion, ideas of passions and beliefs and interests and ideas. They can choose to go, or they can choose to then proceed that way, or that way…. But then they make the decisions based off of what they encounter and what they think about things. (Ernie, recorded interview, March 24, 2006)
Ernie’s second drawing conveyed this in a creative way. He drew a picture of the President’s West Wing and described how he was like the Chief of Staff who actively monitored what the President was given to think about. However, the decisions were always the President’s decision (i.e. the student’s), not the Chief of Staff’s decision. Again, the sense of passion was included in what Ernie wanted for his students in the long-term.

Teachers thought relationally when thinking about teaching. Motivation and passion were related to that relational quality. The following section explores how teachers were influenced at this black box level of thinking and processing teacher knowledge.

Biographical Influences on a Teacher’s Black Box

The last section described the foundational qualities of the black box. The black box, hidden from observation when studying teachers, was described as a constantly present mechanism that frames the conceptualization of teaching in relational terms. However, the black box was unique for each teacher. This section explores some of those distinctions and reveals how individual teachers developed conceptualizations in the black. Several influences are described, attributable to personal biographical factors unconnected to teacher preparation: informal experiences such as working as a camp counselor; the experience of being a student in K-12 schools; and personal motifs that have been present in individuals for many years. These mostly informal influences will be discussed, followed by a discussion of the influence of teacher preparation on individual teachers’ black boxes.
The study found that teachers’ thinking about teaching was rooted in many personal experiences and individual qualities. Only infrequently did teachers directly or inferentially attribute their conceptualizations to more formalized, theoretical, or work-required influences. The black box seemed to be a place that the personal and the professional met and attempt to integrate conceptually.

This section on influences discusses how the personal aspects of individuals’ lives impact the professional aspects of their lives. In the last section I will uncover how the school context, a much more professional aspect of teachers’ lives, impacts their professional conceptualizations.

Notably, the theme of relating continues to be strong in the influences of teachers’ conceptualizations. In the following discussion, the personal experiences that seemed most influential were explorations of what a leader looks and feels like.

**Informal Learning about Being a Teacher**

Many Walkabout High School teachers indicated that informal experiences, either during the past few years or long ago, significantly influenced how they currently conceptualized the task of teaching.

Teachers often connected with long-ago, informal experiences to explain how they developed the ability to relate to students. Several kinds of experiences were noted, but most were leadership positions in informal settings, such as youth camps. These will be explored further in the following.

Dave strongly indicated that several informal experiences were central to how he developed as a teacher. They included various leadership roles in Boy Scouts of
America through middle school and high school, and later in another job as a camp counselor. He described how his development, understanding, and the skills of connecting with different youth in the camp counselor job were especially important in informing him of what he does now.

I guess in some ways you could look as far back as when I was in Boy Scouts. I had a variety of leadership roles there. And part of what Boy Scouts is, is to try and develop leadership and skills. And part of being a leader is being an educator as well. We would teach each other certain skills. So that is kind of an informal way of developing. . . .

I worked at a camp for kids, a fitness camp. And I taught activity courses, and basic exercise physiology and weight training courses with the kids and I was a camp counselor as well. Learning how to relate to the kids. One thing I did everyday that I still…I see…heard about it in my formal education training and also in other (like through Outward Bound and stuff). Working with Outward Bound it is like a daily check-in. And that was really helpful for me. And it was one of the most rewarding parts of my day. Actually was at the end of the evening. I almost everyday I would stop in and talk to my guys...my group and to see what was going on. Sometimes it would just be really informal just to listen to them socialize. And sometimes I went in with greater intent and little bit more intentional. I found that to be a very valuable teaching tool technique. (Dave, recorded interview, March 22, 2006)

Dave said that throughout his formal preparation for teaching his professors valued this kind of connecting with students. It is important to note, in this case, that Dave was not recollecting the formal educational experience as influential, but the informal experience of check-in time at camp.

Randy, with no formal teacher preparation leading to licensure, could only rely on informal experiences to inform his teaching. It is important to understand that the experiences that occurred even when Randy was not thinking of becoming a teacher could still be influential on his current conceptualizations. For example, Randy apparently reviewed his memory for experiences and personal concepts that
could be mined for knowledge, skills, or other pieces of information regarding
teaching when he talked during his interview. His initial response to the question of
where or how he developed his ideas about teaching was that they developed as he
taught improvisational theater at a college, which he did for many years. But, midway
through an interview he quickly moved his thoughts to another informal experience
that he thought was more influential now that he had been teaching for a few months.

A big experience that I think really helped me, especially with the population
of kids we have here, is I worked in Utah with a wilderness therapy group. At
the wilderness therapy, kids going out--kids usually from a privilege
background and often there problems stemmed from money, you know, the
parents had too much money the kids had no control. No one controlling
them, or giving them parameters, I should say…the kids got into drugs and a
lot of defiance issues and a lot of law. They are sent out into the desert to
work with people and there I learned, not only I learned wilderness and
survival skills training, but I also was teaching those kids constantly because
they had actually had Utah, state of Utah, curriculum. And it was all set up
and taught in little curriculum units, so that whenever the kids came into the
program they could just grab the units and work with them. And it was
astronomy--let's see curriculum units--and this was astronomy, and English,
and earth science, and social studies kinda cultural studies, history. And I had
to teach it to them and I didn't have a whole lot of background with it, but it
was more about just being the teacher, you know, being a leader. And really
working on my leadership. (Randy, recorded interview, February 15, 2006)

Mary also described valuable experiences outside of formal teacher
preparation that she referred to as leadership experiences for her, saying that they
prepared her for how she now thinks about teaching, as well as provided some of the
skills and knowledge she now uses.

I think my time in the [National] Guard has really prepared me in a lot of
ways. Taught me a lot of leadership skills. Helped me to be more assertive,
and just more vocal about a lot of things. I think it helped me get a little more
discipline in my life. I wouldn't say that I'm all, you know (laugh), on top of
everything because of it. But I would say that I am doing a lot better because
of it. It helped me get back in school and everything. Get back on track. So, I
did a lot of teaching there. We were...we had to teach classes. I was a sergeant so you had to develop your troops and train. So that really helped, too. And, it helped bring experiences to the classroom that a lot of the students have really, I think, bonded with me in some ways because of that experience. And I wouldn't say, I wouldn't say that characterizes my whole, you know, me as a person. But it is a nice part and if I can connect with kids on that level because of it, that's good. And I think I worked at Krogers for 10 years before I did this job. And, I think that helped also. I was a leadership role there. Not manager, but sort of at that level leader. I worked at the front office and was in charge of a lot of things: the front-end where the cashiers where and the baggers and, you know, all that stuff. So I was always training and working with younger kids, too. Because we had a lot of younger kids working there. But, yeah, I mean, I just...I don't know...I've always enjoyed working with people and helping people. So I think that brought me here as well. (Mary, recorded interview, March 27, 2006)

Mary also revealed how these informal experiences influenced her ability to relate to people who were different than her, particularly urban people, as she was from a small, sheltered town.

I think that's where the Guard experience (maybe) and the Kroger thing comes into here, because . . . . I think the Kroger thing more than anything because I came to [the city] from a smaller town. Not...I mean Findley is not tiny. But, when I was growing up it wasn't as big and I was closed off to a lot of things. I felt kind of sheltered in a sense. And, when I got to Kroger I worked in 7th and High. It's not your Dublin Kroger, it's not your whatever. This is like the city people. (Mary, recorded interview, March 27, 2006)

While Mary revealed that the experiences described above were important to her, she frequently reminded me that the opportunity she had to do her observations and student teaching at Walkabout High School, the school she is now teaching in, was especially helpful. She articulated that Walkabout High School was particularly influential because the school allowed her to try out concepts she was learning in her teacher preparation classes.

Cindy talked extensively about how she developed an understanding of teaching and how to relate to students through her years of studying and teaching
violin. She described how she was tutored from early childhood through post-college, at which time she became a tutor for other violinists. Cindy said that while her experience of the tutorial approach to learning and teaching the violin was influential in her conceptualizing teaching, one tutor stood out. She cited this tutor frequently as influential in how she thought about relating to students.

Studying with (master teacher), a violinist in the Cleveland orchestra, taught me a lot about teaching.

And he was just this marvelous man who truly worked with you as an individual. [He] Was very interested in developing the technique through the music, and just the whole interaction was just the most positive thing. And I'd be driving back from Cleveland afterwards and I'd just be reflecting on that whole process the whole time and it was just always good stuff. (Cindy, recorded interview, March 13, 2006)

Cindy’s classroom technique revealed the desire to work with students as individuals, just as a tutor might work. Frequently classes were organized so that individual students were working on what they needed to learn, regardless of what other students needed to learn. Cindy would get the class started and on task with individualized projects or varied assignments and then move through the class talking like a tutor to individual students.

Cindy also told of an experience with her older brother in a school system that made Cindy critical of the traditional American education system.

I was in this really, really horrible dynamic in my family were I was this little straight-A student who had this incredible IQ and skipped a grade and then my brother who is about a year and a half older, could not comply in school. Just could not do it and would not do it and ended up going back a grade and we ended up in 4th grade together. No 5th. We ended up in 5th grade together. And there is no way you could convince me that I was smarter than he was and I think that that really shapes what I think about in terms of learning and students and all that too, because it is so unfortunate that so many students feel dumb, feel stupid. And I'm not going to blame it on everyone else. It is
not entirely everyone else's fault. It is just systematic. (Cindy, recorded interview, March 13, 2006)

Cindy’s understanding that she as a teacher must value students for who they are, and where they are academically, seemed to be strongly supported by this informal experience of the school system not knowing how to educate her brother.

While Cindy’s informal, influential experiences seemed to have less to do with leadership than the other teachers, her current conceptualization of leadership was different than most teachers, too; Cindy led more like a tutor working with a small group.

Informal experiences influenced teachers’ conceptualizing of teaching. Informal experiences were frequently found in teachers’ hidden black boxes, giving direction and meaning to teachers’ thinking. Usually the informal experience was a teacher’s memory of a leadership position, and therefore fits well into the argument that the teachers’ black boxes processes thinking through relational qualities.

The next section will continue to explore influences on teachers’ black boxes, but the next influences will be memories of the experience of being a student, not a leader.

Classroom Learning about Being a Teacher as K-12 Student

Teachers frequently talked about their memories of their K-12 years when sharing thoughts about the task of teaching and how they developed their concepts and skills of teaching. For some teachers, just the opportunity to think reflectively seemed to open long-term yet useful memories from when they were in K-12 schools. Teachers seemed to value the relational quality of the memory. In the following cases
the memories were often that of an experience in a classroom that had to do with relating to the teacher as a student.

Again, similar to the biographical memories described before, this memory provided a window into the possibilities for how teachers and students relate. Knowing how to relate involved understanding who you are relating to, and the other person’s perspective.

Teachers’ experience in K-12 classrooms as students was significant. It was a special kind of informal learning for teachers because it was like an apprenticeship by observation (Lortie, 1975). As students, the teachers had been constantly exposed to a role that they never played, that of teacher. At the time of this research they looked back with a new and informed perspective: now they were the teacher.

The following findings reveal how the events of K-12 learning, or the memory of that time, influenced the Walkabout High School teachers. Teachers were not told to tell stories from this time in their academic career, but only asked to explain how they developed as a teacher. For a few teachers there was no, or minimal, reference to any K-12 experiences as a student. For other teachers, memories of K-12 teachers elicited admiration and valued relational and pedagogical detail.

These memories were personal memories as each teacher recalled them as framed in his or her biography. And as with many other personal memories, some teachers were able to describe the classroom in surprising detail. For most of the Walkabout High School teachers, it was memories of how their K-12 teachers treated them as students that proved valuable to how they now thought as teachers. At times
the Walkabout High School teachers seemed to recall memories of previous K-12
teachers clearly enough to bring them up as if a recorded case study, able to be
viewed at any time, and for any educational purpose.

In this study, the teachers that mentioned their pre-collegiate schooling
presented memories of experiences for the apparent reason of either placing value,
positive or negative, on the event, or because the memory provided a rich, complex,
real-life, lived, vision for how a classroom might be conceptualized. In either
scenario, each teacher’s current conceptualization of teaching was significantly
influenced by remembered experience.

Adam’s memories of a particular high school science teacher were positive.
Adam was well liked by the teacher, did well in his classes, and particularly enjoyed
the course activities and projects. But the reason the memory was important for
Adam’s teaching was that this positively remembered teacher regularly used projects
in his courses. Adam indicated that projects were now a basic part of his teaching,
and how he conceptualized good teaching. Adam mentioned personal experiences
other than this high school teacher that supported why he used projects, including the
use of projects during his undergraduate science studies and his graduate teaching
degree. Adam’s ability to recall his involvement in projects in multiple parts of his
life seemed to help him understand how they might be used in his teaching. Adam
used them in every course he taught his first year.

Ernie said he was influenced by a 7th-grade science teacher and recognized
that he was using that science teacher’s Socratic teaching style even though the
teaching style was not what Ernie was taught during teacher preparation, nor what he really wanted to use as a teacher. Note in the following quote that Ernie uses the term pedagogy when thinking of teaching that was not Socratic or lecture-oriented, but more hands-on as he was taught in teacher preparation courses.

I think there is something wise about pursuing the pedagogy. Because I felt like the last couple years I've . . . discussions have dominated my sort of teacher repertoire in terms of engaging students and subject matters. And I think that is a result of . . . what's the basis? You get to know something and then you got to teach it. So you just tell . . . So I'm just going to tell. I'm just going to transmit it. We're going to debate...we're going to discuss...Socratic method. Socratic method is what I've been doing for the last three years [brief laugh]. I'm well versed at Socratic method. I am not as good with the labs, in debriefing labs, and stuff like that. Which is something I really want to work on. (Ernie, recorded interview, May 24, 2006)

Though Ernie praised his education professor for effectively teaching him that actively engaging students was best for instruction and learning, Ernie explained that he still used the style of teaching he experienced in 7th grade because of his lack of time to prepare for class. Ernie’s internal struggle revealed that teachers sometimes conceptualize teaching and act on those conceptualizations when they do not prefer to do so, but would rather think and act another way. Ernie functioned as a teacher performing in way that he would prefer not to perform, but in a way that he strongly remembered experiencing in a science course in middle school.

Ernie was not happy about this, but seemed to take comfort in his teaching style because he still followed something his educational professor taught him which was know your students, and give them what they need, and demonstrate and model it if possible (Ernie, recorded interview, May 24, 2006). Ernie said he accomplished this through thoughtful engaged discussions about scientific topics that he believed were
valuable for students to understand, or more importantly, were discussions that revealed to the students the importance of thinking about critical issues of science.

Sometimes memories of being a student in K-12 schools did not directly related to classroom memories. Frank told a deeply personal memory about something that happened during middle school, and how one of his teachers responded to Frank’s crisis. He offered the following story to explain what may have influenced how he thought of teaching.

I guess I'll tell you a story and you can take it for what it's worth. I think it is also relates to my own childhood and my own experience with teachers. When I was 13, eighth grade, my father died. And, it happened really near Christmas time, it was like December 11th. And of course I probably had my schoolbooks at home, but you can imagine—that probably was not an important thing. And it wasn't for me. We (I?) got back to school somewhere in the second week of January. I didn't go back the first week--I just wasn't ready. And, my English teacher wanted to know where my homework was. I said, "My father died." He said, "You still got homework to do." And it is like, you found at that time, more teachers- most of them were sympathetic and the forgot about whatever homework I missed and were more interested in helping me get reengaged - no doubt. But, most of them were just indifferent (to be honest). I mean, I don't even know if half of them even knew. She is the only one that insisted that I do this work. Well-basically I blew English off from that day on because I said F.U., I'm not doing that homework. You can kiss my ass. I never said that to her, but I said that to her. And, I think that shapes the way I think about how I want to be as a teacher. It's not that I want to be peppy the clown or someone. I want the kids to feel comfortable up here. I think the more comfortable the feel the better they are going to perform. (Frank, recorded interview, March 1, 2006)

Frank’s story of how an uncaring, cold teacher influenced his teaching did seem to explain his current view of teaching. Frank’s teaching approach was to positively interact with all students so that everyone would experience Frank’s classroom as an emotionally safe environment in which to accomplish their best learning. Frank’s experience of his middle school teacher, and the lingering memory
of it, seemed to be deeply embedded in Frank’s black box. Notably, Frank’s doctoral studies may have developed for him an increased awareness of this interior life he spoke about in telling this story.

Another teacher, Ann, communicated very straightforwardly how much two of her high school teachers impacted her, and continued to influence her as a teacher. Of her sophomore teacher she said:

I've used some of his creative writing prompts, like to do an essay on a word, like a creative response to a word. I've used that. I've even used...I mean I've flat out ripped off some things (he doesn't mind, I've talked to him some)... Plus he was just goofy and he'd like wear a biking hat and just not talk about it. And I don't, and I'm not, like I can't do that--I don't think. You know I can't pull that off. But I'm kind of goofy my own way. And he reminded me to be goofy because people really like it. I don't think I can pull off the biking hat like he did. (Ann, recorded interview, May 11, 2006)

Ann had strong positive memories of being a student in that high school class and wanted her students to experience much of the same in her class. She also identified how she used the very same activities used by that teacher, as well as a second, well-remembered teacher. Ann’s gentle, fun-filled classroom interactions could have been viewed as a chip-off-the-block considering how she described those two teachers.

These findings of Walkabout High School teacher’s valued reflections on K-12 experiences were overall strong and important to the teachers. I was surprised as a researcher how much these distant memories, described by professional teachers who had been professionally prepared, were revealed as if they had been experienced recently. And I was surprised, again, by how the teachers did not seem to need their professional knowledge to interpret their K-12 experiences. Getting these kinds of
strong memories to the surface for processing may be more important than many understand (Korthagen, 1993, 2004).

**Personal Motifs: A Key to Understanding Professional Life**

When the teachers were invited to talk about their professional development as teachers they frequently indirectly shared interests, passions, and values that had been a part of their lives for a long period of time. I call these findings *personal motifs*. These personal motifs are interests or values important in a person’s life that are repeated over time and in different settings. The following section explores the importance and place of such personal motifs in the everyday lives of the Walkabout High School teachers, and discusses how personal motifs integrated with their professional lives.

Personal motifs were initially identified as a powerful part of teachers’ lives when teachers shared stories of who they were and how they got there. Analysis of teachers’ descriptions of learning to teach, teaching goals, concerns they had as teachers, and what they were most pleased to have accomplished as teachers, combined with careful observation of each teacher working with peers and students, revealed the personal motifs teachers brought to their professional lives.

Many of the teachers revealed one or two motifs, with each motif influencing their black boxes and views of teaching in a unique way. These personal motifs made a significant impact on the overall composition of a teacher’s conceptualization of teaching. The findings indicate that personal motifs were deeply etched into the
professional identities, and it is difficult to imagine these 10 teachers without their personal motifs after uncovering the importance the motifs played in their lives.

*A Motif of Empowerment*

Empowerment was an important motif for some teachers. Each teacher had the desire for self-improvement that emphasized voice, power, and being at ease in groups and in community. This motif of empowerment was found to influence how those teachers conceptualized their work as teachers. The following will be a description of one of these teachers, Ann.

Ann’s personal motif of empowerment was about confronting problematic self-consciousness. Ann desired and worked on becoming more confident, powerful, and capable of speaking with a strong voice in community. Ann also had a strong theme of caring that generally coincided with her desire to speak in community. I will focus on Ann’s motif of empowerment also as a motif of finding and claiming *voice*. In the following quote Ann talks about how she changed during her first year at Walkabout High School.

I mean I've changed as a human being, as a person, and as a teacher here [at Walkabout High School]. It seems like I've had more personal growth than anything, but it probably translates into teaching. . . . I guess I've learned to be more genuine in my interaction and expression. And, that's by watching people who have been here...like I'd say Ethan and Ernie when I'm in conferences...Mary...watching them. They just state things in a very frank manner. And it is so genuine and it is so useful . . . (Ann, recorded interview, May 11, 2006)

Ann’s telling about her self, her development as a teacher, and her current concepts, values, and beliefs about teaching provided information beyond the current school year. Ann shared several times how much she valued two high school teachers
she had as a student. She was aware of some of her conceptual connections with these
teachers’ classrooms and often spoke of their influence on her. Ann described some
class activities she currently used that were based on what she remembered from
those high school classrooms, but more significantly she spoke of powerful memories
of the classroom atmosphere and the way the teachers related to the students. The
following reveals how Ann remembered feeling “awkward and self-conscious,” yet
wanting to eventually “bloom” (Ann, recorded interview, May 11, 2006).

we were sophomores, at our most awkward and self-conscious phases, and I
don't think I ever did anything great in that class, myself. Cause at that point
in my academic career I didn't take it seriously, but he'd...out of sophomores
he got beautiful pieces of writing. And you got to know your peers and how
deep they were and it was amazing. He could draw that out of people. I don't
think I did very well, particularly, but, like I said, I was listening and paying
attention. And there was some amazing writers that bloomed in his class. And
he never...even though I wasn't doing well, he didn't hold it against me. He
still treated me like everybody else. You know. The next year I went up to
honor but that was a difference between a sophomore and a junior. So I wasn't
terrible or anything. But you know, he just inspired a lot of creativity
and...And actually it kind of made me feel like a jerk sometimes when other
people would do awesome things and I hadn't. He didn't have to say anything.
I was just like--ahh--I could have taken the opportunity, but I didn't. (italics
added) (Ann, recorded interview, May 11, 2006)

The following quote is Ann’s talking about her own teaching life, at least four
years following her time with her high school teachers described above. Again, Ann
revealed the motifs of confidence and voice, this time using the metaphorical phrase
“out of my shell” (Ann, recorded interview, May 11, 2006). While the motif’s
appearance during high school was connected to her teachers, now she viewed
empowerment as a gift from her students. “Cause I'd have to say my students, over
the years, have taught me quite a bit about life. Challenged my stereotypes. Made me
come out of my shell in a lot a ways” (Ann, recorded interview, May 11, 2006).
As a rather new teacher Ann also became a student in a graduate program that required her to travel out of state for intensive 10-day coursework. Ann recalled the following from that experience.

"it was the first dinner I had. It was an off-site program where I would go to Vermont every six months. So we were sitting down at dinner because it was a residential program for 10 days out of the six months. And, it was the first dinner I had there and I was sitting with my professor - this guy that written the book. And, I entered into the dialogue with people who I thought, "wow, they know what they're talking about" but then I found out that "oh, no I'm part of this dialogue" which is why it stood out. Like that first dinner kind of showed me that what I say matters. My experience matters. (Ann, recorded interview, May 11, 2006)

Here, again, Ann’s personal interest and value in feeling empowered was found to have been important.

In Ann’s talk about her current ideas about teaching the motif of empowerment was still found, but she now discussed it using the concept of voice. Notably the voice she referenced was not her own, but her students’ voices. Her personal motifs were integrating with her professional concepts.

"The look on the kids’ faces when they take the risk, raise their hand, say something, and you say "no." I like to try and find something useful and positive in their comments and to tell them that, so that they feel like what they had to say was a piece of it. They will figure out when I get the answer I was looking for. Then I put it all together. Only if they're way off. I don't even usually say, “no, actually you were trying to answer this piece of the question.” I really try to understand which part they were coming from and validate it. To validate what they say to make them comfortable to do it again and to kinda use their voice. Cause a lot of them are so self-conscious. So that is one way I've done it, to try and not be this whole keeper of knowledge one that knows everything. (italics added) (Ann, recorded interview, May 11, 2006)

Other comments from Ann about her teaching revealed how she continued to integrate this notion of voice into her conceptualization of her role as an English
teacher, but that her personal views for what to teach and the traditional curriculum of English did not always mesh perfectly. However, Ann’s description for how they do mesh sounded closely connected to her personal motif of empowerment of voice described above. In the following quotes, notice the use of the terms referencing speaking and communicating, and how closely they resemble Ann’s previous valuing of voice.

They are two separate pieces. I have not totally melded them yet, entirely. I use to say, you know, people would ask me what I teach and I would say "English." Now I say, "people," "kids," "students," you know. But English, I picked because English it is not just reading and writing, it is speaking and listening. . . .

Boy, do I love reading and writing, but you have to value speaking and listening. And that is a part…connection…connecting to each other, connecting to their wider communities. They have to be able to speak and effectively listen. So I would say English fits because of the communication part of it. (Ann, recorded interview, May 11, 2006)

Ann’s personal motif of becoming empowered, and as she said, “more genuine in interaction,” (Ann, recorded interview, May 11, 2006) was not new for her. It had significantly influenced her development as a teacher both past and present by influencing her conceptualizations of teaching. It was difficult to imagine Ann not employing this personal motif in her teaching, as it had been a part of her life for a long time.

A Motif of Passion for a Subject

Adam had been interested in science and enjoyed science projects longer than he had been interested in teaching science. This ongoing interest was a personal motif, and had influenced his conceptualization of teaching in more ways than simply
guiding him into the study of the subject matter. The following quote reveals this passion and some of the qualities of the motif, including doing projects.

definitely in high school, my Earth Science teacher was the first person who really got my attention focused on what it was that I wanted to learn about in college. So I didn't really know if I wanted to be a teacher, or anything like that. But I knew what I wanted to study. And it is because my Earth Science teacher was so passionate about his topic that I...and I already had an interest in it, but he really helped to foster that along. And I [was] real into everything we were doing in class. I loved the projects he came up with and everything. And he was the first one that got my interest, and motivated to the point where I was really wanting to go on a learn more about all this stuff. (Adam, recorded interview, May 8, 2006)

This personal passion for science and working on science projects was a motif for Adam that I found influenced his conceptualization of teaching in two ways. For one, Adam thought of science teaching as a pedagogy of providing students exciting projects, and two, he recognized the importance of modeling passion for a subject just as he had experienced it. The following quotes reveal these connections between his personal motif, his preparation to be a teacher, and his pedagogy.

The first one is Adam recalling a graduate teacher’s class demonstrating the importance and value of science inquiry projects for K-12 instruction. “There was a class where we had a professor and it was up my alley because it was more about science, science inquiry, and stuff like that” (Adam, recorded interview, May 11, 2006).

Adam ultimately synthesized his personal motif of interest in science projects into his own pedagogy in which passion and enthusiasm became a part of his conceptualization of teaching.

That is one of the things, I think, that really keeps me going is when I'm learning from other people that have enthusiasm for their topics. And so, what
I got from that is you got to show enthusiasm. So when I'm in my classroom I'm trying to be as enthusiastic as I can. Most of it comes pretty naturally about all these topics. The kids are like "You are such a dork." But, you know they are saying it because they are paying attention and they know I'm interested in it. And it really does get them interested in it. (Adam, recorded interview, May 8, 2006)

Adam’s personal motifs, an interest in science and science projects, were integrating with his professional knowledge. Because the integration occurred without being seen, and because it stayed with the teacher for a lengthy duration, I argue that this integration occurred in Adam’s metaphorical black box.

A Motif of Caring for Others

Many teachers had a personal motif I describe as caring for others. Ernie’s personal motif was specifically about helping each individual think about the complexity of issues present in human life, and supporting students in self-discovery and making personal choices and decisions about such complexities. Ernie seemed to delight in both the complexity and wonder of life as expressed in his love of biology and science, and in relating with others in such a way as to support them in making wise personal choices. A closer look at Ernie’s thoughts about his past and how those experiences connected to his current view of teaching further revealed Ernie’s caring for others as an enduring personal motif.

Ernie talked about helping others in multiple ways and conveyed that this was an important part of his background.

In high school I did a lot of community service type stuff. But one of [those] was helping out a kid...I was tutoring him in something--who was a peer--he was in my same grade, but I had already done the class the year before. . . .

When I got into [college] I got into . . . a program called [City] Initiative. Worked with elementary kids, middle school kids, and we basically
mentored and tutored them. The emphasis was on mentoring. To get strong relationships built between us, as college students, and them as kids. (Ernie, recorded interview, March 24, 2006)

This outward manifestation of caring was also more internally manifested when he commented about how important people in his life treated him in a caring way – specifically stating that they cared for him by not making decisions for him, but supporting him in making decisions. “I've had adults in my life who've allowed me to draw my own conclusions--who have not said to me to decide. Or, “Here's what we are talking about here” (Ernie, recorded interview, March 24, 2006).

In college, the same theme of others supporting him in thinking and decision-making, continued to be important for Ernie. Towards the end of this quote Ernie revealed how these personal values were now a current part of his teaching style.

And then I had a mentor in college who is with the chaplain's office up in [college]. You know he never tipped his hand to me. He never told me what he thought. We talked about evolution, intelligent design, and we had this debate back and forth because he is a real science guy. And he's got this theology component. And, well like what do you think? Give me your thoughts here, cause you're just asking questions all the time. He's like, well if I tell you my thoughts then that will influence your thinking and I want you to come to your own conclusions. I was like: “Yeah, yeah, yeah, ok tell me your thoughts. You know, whatever about that. So he--actually to this day, I still don't know what he actually thinks about it. I have some ideas about what he thinks about it, but...No, giving them a chance to work it out, but also allowing them to be like...you got to be patient with yourself in this procedure, that, it is a process of really asking questions, drawing conclusions, debating. (Ernie, recorded interview, March 24, 2006)

Ernie was particularly visual and descriptive in his drawing of his view of teaching. He drew several pictures as he tried to get at what was really his approach, finally drawing one that excited him very much as it seemed to fit a lot of what was in his mind. It was a drawing of the President’s Oval Office. Ernie explained that he is
like the Chief of Staff and the student is like the President. The President will ultimately make the decisions, but the Chief of Staff, Ernie, will frame the issues and provide critical ideas and questions to the student and in this way be useful and helpful to the student.

  But, all these things feed into the kid, and then they make decisions about who they are. It is self-discovery. . . .

  Yeah, if they can't make choices in the outside world, then, forget about it. And, I think, empowering them or helping them do a pro-con chart on the fly sort of thing. Like what would happen if you'd did this? What would happen if you did that? Which one do you think is better? OK, let’s do that. That sort of thing. (Ernie, recorded interview, March 24, 2006)

Ernie explained that students were immersed in cultural ideas in their day-to-day lives and needed the opportunity to process what they were hearing and seeing. Ernie said he was sensitive to this and responded to their probing questions regularly.

  It was useful to consider that Ernie was also an advisor to senior students who were participating in off campus walkabout experiences. As I read and analyzed Ernie’s comments about his teaching it was striking how much he seemed to have integrated his concepts of teaching to include both his professional teaching roles--senior advisor and science instructor. Ernie had clearly found ways to integrate his personal motif of caring for others into both roles.

  Personal motifs were an important aspect of teachers’ lives. Their integration into professional teacher identity seemed to occur deep in their black boxes, and then became constantly present in their professional lives. The integrated motifs significantly impacted how teachers conceptualized the task of teaching both in the short term, but especially in the long-term.
To understand how individual teachers think about their work, the biographical influences, including informal experiences of leadership and relating, K-12 student experiences, and personal motifs, need to be recognized and appreciated for their significant influences.

Teacher Preparation Program Influences on the Black Box

While the findings indicated that teachers utilized personal experiences from throughout their lives to process how they conceptualized teaching, and that many teachers frequently emphasized non-formal experiences as foundational to their understanding of teaching, most teachers indicated that their teacher preparation programs also were important to their current thinking about teaching. This section will discuss those findings. I will first discuss what teachers indicated that they now value and use from their teacher preparation programs in general, and then discuss separately what they learned from their student teaching and clinical experiences.

I separate the discussions of course-based instruction and clinical work, or student teaching, for two major reasons: (a) because Walkabout High School teachers indicated that those two types of programs were qualitatively different experiences, and (b) because course-work and student teaching are programmatically different. Student teaching was done in the context of a classroom of actual students and with a cooperating teacher, not with peers and guided by an education professor. Walkabout High School teachers were always more animated and engaged when talking about their student teaching experiences than their course work, whether or not they were talking of them positively or negatively.
The 10 teachers studied in this research experienced teacher preparation during a variety of life stages, from college days to a mid-life career change. Programs included: a traditional college preparation approach with student teaching in the final year; an internship program that had the pre-service teacher teaching in a high school during the day and taking graduate courses at night; and a teacher who chose not to have any formal teacher preparation, despite an interest in teaching, but instead completed a self-designed Global Studies graduate degree. Several teachers also continued studying teaching after they had become teachers by entering graduate programs. The kinds of degrees included Bachelor of Arts in Education, Master of Arts in Teaching, Master of Education, Master of Science and Technology, and a doctorate in education. This wide variety of preparation histories provides a broad perspective on the impact preparation programs can have on pre-service, and to a much smaller degree on in-service teachers.

The particulars of teachers’ lives are what schools are actually filled with – perhaps now encompassing more complexity than when teachers generally went straight from college into the classroom. Thus the following details provide further information regarding the breadth of the differences between the teachers’ preparation experiences and their perspectives on those programs. Three of the 10 teachers had bachelor degrees in education and went directly into teaching after college. Two became interested in teaching after many indecisive years of undergraduate studies and needed to take more course work after completing a bachelor degree to get
licensure. One of those got an M.A. in special education; the other took additional courses at another college, but did not get another degree.

Three of the 10 teachers researched were over 40 years of age. One returned to the university after a long career in business to take undergraduate courses required for state licensure. Two teachers completed non-education bachelor degrees prior to a decision to go into education. One went directly from a BS degree into a Master of Science and Technology program designed to provide teacher licensure. Another, who had a bad experience in undergraduate education courses, worked as an academic tutor for urban students for several years before returning for a masters level education degree.

Teacher Preparation Coursework

Teacher talk about the influence of teacher preparation courses was surprisingly minimal. But, when directed to think about their programs and how the programs had influenced their thinking about teaching, including how the program had prepared them for what they were currently doing as teachers, most excitedly remembered a professor that they wanted to talk about. When talking about those professors, and sharing what they remembered about those professors that was now valued in their lives as teachers, several themes arose among the 10 teachers.

One overarching theme was their exposure to the two perspectives central to the world of teaching, student and teacher. Walkabout High School teachers talked of things they learned about teaching in their preparation programs when during those programs they were asked to take the perspective of a student, just as their high
school students are the student. This usually occurred when professors modeled an educational concept in the classroom by having the pre-service teachers take the role of students, and sometimes the role of teachers. This closely matched, as I will show, the finding that a teacher’s black box organized the teacher’s conceptualizing about teaching through a framework of relating.

The second theme was that of understanding self within the paradigm of teaching: Who am I as a teacher? Who do I want to be as a teacher? And, what vision do I have for myself in the larger world? This theme was also connected to relating, but less in experiencing how it feels and works, and more in developing a teaching identity.

*Exploring and Developing as a Teacher from the Perspective of Being a Student*

Some teachers recalled strong and valued memories of interacting with a professor in their teacher preparation program that seemed beyond the relationship of a teacher and student relating in a school context. Normally, teacher and student relationships are thought of as communicating in a classroom discourse reserved for instructional interaction only. But Walkabout High School teachers remembered experiences of relating with their professors that pushed this boundary of traditional teacher-student interactions. Those non-traditional experiences of teacher-student relating were a part of the teachers’ memories, and influenced how they related with students. The following accounts reveal the importance of those remembered interactions.
Ann recalled a memory from her graduate studies that she indicated helped her develop the way she thinks about and relates to students: “And it was the first interaction I'd had with my professor and my other group-mates. And, they were all talking to me as if I mattered” (Ann, recorded interview, May 11, 2006). Ann’s thoughts about the remembered moment paralleled her own thoughts on how she wanted her students to experience her classroom discussions.

Ann valued this memory of being a student in a deeply personal way, it reminded her that she was a college-prepared, working, and experienced teacher, even if for only one year, and that her ideas mattered, and that was a cherished feeling for her. She valued this memory, and wanted to have her students experience similar support.

Ethan recalled how professors related to his pre-service teachers’ class in broad, unspecific ways, but yet ways quite memorable for him. Those memories now guided him in understanding teacher-student relationships. Ethan explained that while he has a learning style that appreciates lectures, it was obvious to him that his peers were much more moved and engaged as students in the new teachers’ classes. These professors treated the students differently.

And what was kind of interesting was that the old school professors were… I mean they were teaching like they were talking about teaching. I mean they were very teacher directed just, you know, just spewing out information (which I like), but that suits my (I guess) learning style a little bit. But the classroom of the other teachers, which were talking about all these new methods and different ways of approaching things were just much more energetic. And the classes were much more engaged. It was just obvious to me, on that level, with my own peers to see how the interaction was better. And, how people seemed to not only soak it in a little bit more as a whole, but also they became more invested in actually wanting to try out those things. . . .
It felt much more like there was active participation and listening going on. And also from the teacher as well. I mean, I think it was very clear that he or she was wanting to learn also from their perspectives and what their ideas were. You know, depending on what the lesson was, or what they were trying to accomplish. . . . but the teacher's methods and the teacher's movement from one point to the next would depend on the reaction and the feedback gotten from the class. And, so if the class reacted in one way it seemed like, OK, something clicked and then he or she would roll right into something else. And it seemed much more like a fluid lesson plan. It didn't seem like, OK, I've got to cover these four things today. And, they have to be presented in these ways, and I've got five minutes to cover this and five minutes to cover that. But, it was more like I have these four things to cover. Let's start with this and we will kind of go with it. And as they connect, or as we can make connection, or as they make connections then we roll into the next thing And I felt more comfortable with that too, when I started to try to do those things. I felt that that was more natural. It also felt like it was more engaging for everybody else. I lecture quite a bit. . . . A lot of it is more--its lecture--but some of it is interactive in that we go in a lot of different directions depending on, you know, where the students want to go. (Ethan, recorded interview, April 11, 2006)

Ethan’s views of teaching, and what he wanted to accomplish as a teacher in his day-to-day classes, were greatly supported by this remembered experience, though this occurred some five years earlier. When observing Ethan’s classes it was apparent that he was self-aware regarding his interactions with students. He brought lots of dramatic energy to what were frequently lecture-like presentations, but he was always excited and willing to go in a direction guided by student questions or interests. Somehow, however, he would find his way back to the key points for his day’s lesson. Ethan seemed to recall the feeling from his graduate courses and tried to recreate that for his students.

More commonly, Walkabout High School teachers described learning about social roles through pedagogical interactions more directly associated with teaching the curriculum. In those preparation program memories, teachers recalled how the
professors had them learn about teaching through intentionally placing them in the role of a student, or less commonly, the role of teacher. The teachers did not necessarily recall what they were expected to learn during those formal lessons, but their recall of the experience as an event that influenced how they currently think about teaching was clear.

Adam recalled learning as a student in a science education course. The memory was important in several ways, but it especially informed Adam of what relating to students might look like from the students’ perspective and why it was important pedagogically.

There was a class where we had a professor and it was up my alley because it was more about science, science inquiry, and stuff like that. So one of the first things he did was bring in this cardboard box and it has some tubes sticking out of it. And he...and I got to remember exactly how it worked...he put a gallon of water in and got two gallons back out, or whatever--something like that. He said, "This is my invention. It is the water-creating machine. It is going to solve all of our water problems." So obviously we know that there is something rigged up inside of there. But of course we got the idea--and you really do get the point--even though it is so obvious that he is showing us a method of getting kids interested, we ourselves were very interested. “How did he do it? What did he have inside of that box that allowed him to get that extra gallon out of it?” . . . So, and that is exactly what I try to do in my classes. You got to make the kids really want to know. So we all wanted to know "What did he put in there and how did he do it?" If there was anything that we talked about for an extended period of time it was what was in that box. (Adam, recorded interview, May 8, 2006)

Adam spoke of this powerful memory several times. It provided him with a clear understanding of how a student might feel and think in a class, while also revealing what he might do pedagogically as a teacher to get that response.

Other teachers conveyed in their discussions that it was what they actively did as students in their preparation program courses that now informed their thinking
about teaching, and not so much the content of those instructional activities. Many of these remembered lessons were recalled as *how* they were taught, or, if given the opportunity to practice being teachers, how they organized a lesson to teach as a teacher. This frequently meant that the pre-teachers were asked to work in distinctly different kinds and sizes of groupings to accomplish a variety of tasks. Here Mary explained that

we were learning about different types of education. Alternative types...that...people want you to teach a certain way like, now. Oh, we have cooperative, study groups, structured little groups and you have all these things that you should be doing, but then most of my peers were not experiencing any of that when they went in the classroom. So here is Lisa showing us how these things can work out. In her own teaching we are learning about whatever it was. And, you know, she would have us practicing that. While we were still learning how to teach and do all these things so it was really interesting... She would give us a concept and instead of just talking about a concept we would work it out in groups or we would do some kind of lesson plan to illustrate that. Then we would talk about it some more. It was great. (Mary, recorded interview, April 28, 2006)

Mary indicated that her current ideas about teaching were linked to this kind of active learning that occurred frequently in one professor’s class. It should be noted that Mary indicated that not all pre-teacher students were appreciative of the professor at that time. Mary also spoke of the educational value of taking those same strong, instructional pre-service class activities and having the opportunity to try them out as a teacher in an actual high school classroom. Her peers told her that this was not common for them; they were not permitted to try out these approaches to teaching and learning.

And, you know, she would have us practicing that...while we were still learning how to teach and do all these things so it was really interesting. So then I was taking that stuff and come to [Walkabout High School] and being able to use that here. Whereas not many others were as able to do that and
came to school where they are just jealous because they are like "man we can't...you know...they're telling us what we have to teach at this school. And they're like you have to do this, and this way." (Mary, recorded interview, April 28, 2006)

This opportunity to learn experientially in the role of student in the pre-service classroom and then getting to try doing a similar activity from the role, and perspective, of teacher in an actual classroom seemed especially strong.

This was one reoccurring theme in teachers’ valued memories about teacher preparation, and it was squarely connected to the findings that teachers think about teaching as a relational activity--the relational aspect of their course work was what they were remembering in the above stories.

The other theme teachers revealed about what they still remembered, valued, and had close to them in their black boxes, was the theme of exploring and developing one’s personal identity as a teacher--an integration of personal and professional identities. This also had to do with relating and connecting, but indirectly. Identity has to do with how teachers understand themselves and their place in the world, or in this case, how the pre-service teachers saw themselves in the world of teaching.

*Exploring and Developing the Self*

The development of personal identity and an understanding of one’s self as a teacher was found in three kinds of memories that teachers shared. One was the opportunity for self-directed learning in which pre-service teachers made choices about themes or concepts of personal interest to them. A second was professors’ support of pre-service teachers’ personal values brought to the study of teaching. And
the third was professors providing opportunity for pre-service teachers to develop a powerful personal vision for who they wanted to become as they matured as a teacher.

Self-directed learning refers to learning projects that are significantly determined by the pre-service teacher. These projects were usually based on personal interests established prior to the preparation program, but not necessarily. Five of the teachers, including some teachers who had one year of teaching experience and another with 25 years teaching experience, mentioned some self-directed learning experience from their formal preparation program that impacted how they thought about teaching. Frank still valued the author study project he created over 25 years ago, and described how that author still influenced how he thought about teaching. Frank noted the project was probably for an educational foundations course, and was based in a common pedagogical format of webbing that he said was commonly taught at that time. Cindy, a teacher with 15 years experience, also connected a self-directed learning activity from her formal, teacher preparation program with how she currently viewed teaching. In the one class that she remembered as embodying what the whole preparation program claimed to value, her professor assigned pre-teachers to design a social studies unit. Cindy used that opportunity to combine her interest in art with social studies and recalled it as important for her and how she currently viewed teaching.

Similar to self-directed learning projects were memories of formal teacher preparation programs permitting, allowing, encouraging, or enabling pre-teacher’s
personal values to fit into the program in some way. Many of the teachers indicated this as they shared why they thought the way they did. Ann indicated that she felt like her graduate studies allowed her to return to values she held about teaching prior to her undergraduate degree in education.

The reason I wanted to be a teacher originally, when I was younger, was like I understood there was like a soul to it. You can motivate kids. You can do…I think that was long lost, though, because I really started to get wrapped up in the pressure--a good teacher will have their students performing well on tests. I definitely got wrapped in that at some point. I think that the original reasons I chose teaching kind of got lost for a while, while I was studying. I know while I was at [another school district] I think I adopted "good teachers will prepare the kid for the next level," they will…”Good teachers will have a bell curve" [laugh]. (Ann, recorded interview, May 11, 2006)

Her development during graduate school of her Caring Model of education, in which students are cared for and empowered, was still greatly valued and central to her current conceptualization of teaching.

Dave had a self-designed education degree from his college that did not lead to licensure, but it did enable and support his personal values, and he referenced the importance of several people in that undergraduate degree program that influenced how he currently thought about teaching. His undergraduate focus of study was to better understand health and wellness.

Yeah, I finished my undergraduate at [college]. . . . And I did a self-design major integrating . . . looking at exercise physiology and physical education, with analyzing it through cultural studies’ lenses. . . . So I look at it from an anthropological, a sociological, historical, kind of perspective. What health and wellness is. And then I did a study abroad in Denmark which also...And there was a mentor there that I had who was a big influence on me as well as at [university]. There were probably two or three grad students in particular that really...one of whom is teaching at Miami University now--she is a professor there, in their phys ed department. (Dave, recorded interview, March 22, 2007)
Though disappointed that he could not get a job with this degree and had to eventually return to school to complete a program designed to get a teaching license—an Intervention Specialist degree—Dave valued the opportunity to explore broad questions about what defines health, and referenced that time of study numerous times in explaining how he currently understood teaching.

In education—somatics education program which had a big influence—there [were] a couple of people in the somatics department in the [university]...Which is supposed to be wholistic, mind-body, integrated education. Cause I was interested in the physical science of...or studying exercise physiology and the body and physical education. And then...but I was also drawn to the humanities—philosophy and anthropology and sociology and stuff. (Dave, recorded interview, March 22, 2007)

Ernie found support at his college for his values, but by someone outside the education department. Ernie regularly referred to an advisory person connected with the chaplain’s office who would dialogue for long periods with him about key science education questions such as creationism and evolutionary theory. Ernie clearly valued such an opportunity and mentioned how the advisor never told Ernie what to believe, or even what the advisor ultimately believed about the topic or questions discussed. Ernie said he thought this was because the advisor believed each person must make up his or her own mind. Ernie talked about this, too, when discussing his own view of teaching. He indicated that he tried to do this for his students by giving them lots of information and then challenging them to think clearly about the information. He told students that it is their decision, not his.

And then I had a mentor in college who is with the chaplain's office up in [college]. You know he never tipped his hand to me. He never told me what he thought. We talked about evolution, intelligent design, and we had this debate back and forth because he is a real science guy. And he's got this theology component. And, well like, “What do you think? Give me your
thoughts here, cause you're just asking questions all the time.” He's like, “Well if I tell you my thoughts then that will influence your thinking and I want you to come to your own conclusions.” I was like, “Yeah, yeah, yeah, ok tell me your thoughts. You know, whatever about that. So…actually to this day I still don't know what he actually thinks about it. I have some ideas about what he thinks about it, but...No, giving them a chance to work it out, but also allowing them to be like...you got to be patient with yourself in this procedure, that, it is a process of really asking questions, drawing conclusions, debating. (Ernie, recorded interview, March 24, 2006)

All but one of the formally prepared teachers indicated that their current view of teaching was influenced by the opportunity during teacher preparation to think as a visionary about who they wanted to become as a teacher. For some, that visionary quality of their preparation programs seemed to have been more of an unplanned component, while for other teachers, thinking about one’s personal vision for teaching was clearly an intentional learning component of their preparation programs.

Mary, for instance, had a project during one of her preparation courses that required her to write her philosophy of education. Mary explained that this occurred after, or during, a time that the professor supportively presented a variety of possible characteristics or qualities for a philosophy of education. Mary remembered that project, and told me she read it before one of our meetings because she wanted to see how she was achieving her ideals. She was pleased to realize that she was accomplishing much of what she intended to do as a teacher, or at least that she still valued and upheld the vision she had several years prior when a pre-service teacher.

[students] come with knowledge. I might bring my experiences and they bring their experiences and then we discuss...we learn from each other. . . . But I think that is what I really liked about this school. [Mary did her observations and student teaching at Walkabout High School.] And that's what I wrote [in] my philosophy of education. It is so funny to read my philosophy of education which is not greatly written, but [laugh], at the same time . . . . It is interesting because...it matches up with this school so well, and in so many ways. And
maybe not everyone sees the school the way I do, but to me it is like "Wow! Yeah that's what...". And I'm doing it, you know. I'm following what I said I was going to follow. You know we're talking about global issues. We're talking about, you know...we try to do a community oriented...we try to create a democracy in a sense. Like community oriented and just where everyone can share ideas and, you know, it doesn't work for everyone. That's what I see. I see community in my teaching--and with the students. And now my American Short Stories doesn't feel quite as community [small laugh] based as I...It is not my typical teaching style (I would say). It is very structured and it is very going over basic skills. That's what that class was set up for. Dave and I had done that for a reason. (Mary, recorded interview, March 27, 2006)

Mary had the rare opportunity to teach at a school where she studied and did clinical work during her formal preparation. It was also a school with a vision and mission she admired, and a school with teachers she thought highly enough about to write of them in her philosophy of education paper. Of significance here was that she continued to conceptualize her current teaching though an activity required in her formal preparation program – i.e. design a philosophy of education. Mary still believed in the sharing of ideas by all participants in the class, and based much of her classroom around that simple but significant view of teaching.

Frank’s vision during his undergraduate studies over 25 years ago was still influential in his current conceptualization of teaching. Frank’s vision of teaching developed from his experiences of college teacher preparation coursework and, especially, from clinical experiences at a particular school that he repeatedly referenced. Frank was deeply impressed by the forward-thinking school’s philosophy of education and spent most of his practicum requirement time at the school, and even some un-required hours, so he could learn as much as possible. He explained that at about that same time as his clinical experience he was doing lots of reading for a foundations course, and that the readings and the experience at the school greatly
inspired him and were the major influences on how he currently thought about teaching.

And I volunteered (essentially) a couple days a week during winter because, you know, this was the style of education I was interested in. Again, it was more individualized...I mean, yes, did they all learn math at a certain period of time, yes, did they all, were they all on the same page and the same time? Rarely. And it seemed to me to fit the model of education that I understood from my own development which was that I wasn't like many people. My interests, my whatever, led me in directions that weren't always where the teacher would have had me be. And I think that is a more realistic kind of understanding of child development. So, I think that was probably one of the primary influences. (Frank, recorded interview, March 1, 2006)

Ann had little positive to say about her undergraduate pre-service preparation program, which she recalled as a time when she needed to become “a good teacher [that] will have their students performing well on tests” (Ann, recorded interview, May 11, 2006).

I definitely got wrapped in that at some point. I think that the original reasons I chose teaching kind of got lost for a while--while I was studying [in the undergraduate education program]. I know while I was at [her first classroom teaching job] I think I adopted "good teachers will prepare the kid for the next level" … "good teachers will have a bell curve" [laugh]. (Ann, recorded interview, May 11, 2006)

However, her master’s program was completely different for her, and a centerpiece for that program apparently was the opportunity to re-vision what education meant for her.

The reason I wanted to be a teacher originally, when I was younger, was like I understood there was like a soul to it. You can motivate kids. ... I think that was long lost, though, because I really started to get wrapped up in the pressure to...a good teacher will have their students performing well on tests. (Ann, recorded interview, May 11, 2006)

So when I came out of undergrad I kind of considered things more in the banking model. I was supposed to be the holder of the information. ... But something nagged at me. This isn't good enough. I felt awkward in here; I
don't like it. As the years went on, after I was a first-year teacher I could kind of do my own thing, if you want to be different you have to shut the door and not tell anyone about it. That is when I went to my master’s program and tried to say, *there has got to be more about the teacher facilitating development in the student like wholeness*. Looking at it from a more wholistic perspective. How are they cared for? How are they...what are there needs intellectually? But, how does that fit into them as a whole human being. So that is were my masters program took me and where I changed my model of teaching. . . . I came up with more of a caring model. (Ann, recorded interview, March 21, 2006)

In all these cases it was important for teachers to explore their personal interests, values, and visions, enabling them to develop their personal identities as teachers. And, significantly, this was what teachers still valued and used from their preparation programs.

*Student Teaching*

The experience of student teaching was significant for a few teachers, but in general, teachers were oddly quiet about this time in their preparation. It is important to understand that I did not directly ask teachers to recall what they learned in student teaching, but asked where or how they developed or learned what they indicated were critical aspects of *their views* of teaching. So, teachers may have been greatly impacted by student teaching when it was occurring, but as classroom teachers explaining or discussing how they came to their current conceptualization of teaching, only two of the teachers emphasized student teaching as significant.

Of the teachers who did talk about student teaching, a few of them indicated that student teaching provided them an understanding of how they now think about relating to students. I had incorrectly anticipated that Walkabout High School
teachers would select, without prodding, to talk about their student teaching experiences as critical times for their learning to relate with students.

Adam, who had completed his student teaching within the past year, talked about significant growth in both his Fall practicum placement in an urban 6th grade classroom, and his Spring student teaching placement in an urban high school classroom. The urban school was important, but was mostly a negative learning experience for him. He described that through that placement he learned he did not relate, or “fit” well, in urban middle schools (Adam, recorded interview, May 8, 2006).

Adam’s second placement, student teaching in a suburban high school, was very positive and he said he got along much better with the students. He thought it had something to do with the high school students being older, the opportunity to teach his favorite subject, and the suburban culture that was more familiar to him than urban culture because of his small-town roots. The cultural challenges of connecting and fitting in with the students were significant enough that Adam did not apply for work in the large urban district.

For Adam, the student teaching experience was a lot about learning the importance of connecting to students, and developing skills for how to do that.

First I went to a middle school. Which...all right, it was an urban middle school, and in all honesty--I tried there but I did not like it. . . . I really don't think I fit in well in an urban setting. You know, just my habits, my personality and everything. I just don't...I think I'd have to work...I think I could do it, but I think that I would have to work so hard there to fit in. (Adam, recorded interview, May 8, 2006)
Adam said that while both his cooperating teachers supported this valuing of connecting with students, management of students was much more on the mind of the urban teacher, and connecting and having fun while learning was more on the mind of the suburban teacher. Adam recalled the high school cooperating teacher as really encouraging him in this area of connecting with students.

In this example, the social basis of teaching came through loud and clear as Adam expressed how he responded to “the urban setting” and the social interactions connected with that. Sadly, Adam’s struggles are not his alone. Preparing teachers for urban teaching is a nationally identified struggle for teacher preparation programs and public schools (Collaborative, 2000; Hollins & Guzman, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2001).

Adam recalled in the following quote how the social world of real classrooms conflicted with educational concepts stressed in his preparation program. Here was also found the complaint *what the professors teach will not fly in the real classroom because of classroom management issues*. The social aspects are more visible and a part of the discussion in the secondary school classroom as opposed to the collegiate classroom. Adam was mostly talking about what good teaching is for professors and high school teachers, but student relationships were central to his answer, in addition to testing and standards.

And so I got along real well with the teacher I was working with there [urban middle school], but I didn't fit in with the rest of the situation. So that one made that situation kind of interesting. His views of what I think made good teaching were, I think, a lot different than...like, I would tell him like they would tell me in my class, and he would be like, "ah man don't listen to that, that is never going to fly in a classroom." And a lot of it did have to do with
classroom management. You know, as far as the good...what makes a good teacher, he is like "no, no, don't do that."

I thought what they were telling me in my classes made pretty good sense and I think that it was a big difference between going into an urban and a suburban kind of setting. You know, what you can do and what you can't do. And so I struggled a little bit at that place--really getting to know the students and get into it...he really was following along with this, and this, and this and this is what you do for the test. For what ever test that is. So there it was even more...or at least as focused on following along the tests guidelines thing. But, then, when I got to my high school suburban setting, which was up in[suburban district], I had an awesome teacher...he was the Earth Science teacher--which was the thing I was so happy about--that I got to be in an actual Earth Science class doing my teaching...it was funny because he kind of said the same thing, you know, “don't listen to some of the things that they [professors] said.” But, he wasn't following along with teaching the test thing quite as much as I had expected...I think that he was one of the ones who really pushed me towards the get to know your kids. Joke around with them. Really...find out what they are interested in. He was so excited...I remember I did this thing were I had the kids write down “just tell me something about themselves.” You know, what do they like, what is their favorite thing. And he was real excited to see me do that because he knew that that was one of the things that was going to really help me get to know my students, and get them to know me, and really like me. (Adam, recorded interview, May 8, 2006)

Adam’s classroom had a highly personal interactive quality to it, with Adam being able to talk to each student about personal topics, and regularly interacting using fun, friendly banter, often as a way to redirect wayward student comments and actions. While such banter might cause some teachers to lose track of their academic agenda, Adam was able to stay on task.

In contrast to Adam’s sharp recall of student teaching and his connecting that experience with his current understanding of teaching, Gary, the other first-year teacher who did student teaching, said he had no “epiphanies” (Gary, recorded interview, March 30, 2006) in any of his preparation program, including student
teaching. Gary thought that this was the case because he was not young like the other new teachers; he was a mature, experienced person starting a second career. Unlike the other teachers, who when asked talked willingly about their preparation programs, I had to strongly encourage him to talk about his experiences in his teacher preparation program.

D: Describe a strong memory of growth during your training program.

G: [pause] ahhh.

D: It could be a positive kind of growth or negative or something that...

G: I can't think of one...I can't think of one positive experience. I would just say that with the student teaching experience overall looking at it as one unit if you will...started off...you know, again...a little trepidation going into an urban school. (Gary, recorded interview, May 25, 2006)

It ended up being just a very good experience that every, literally every day got better. You know, I enjoyed working with him. I enjoyed working with the students. I actually sat (because he was a coach, a baseball coach, besides being a math teacher, and his father was the co-athletic director, I ended up sitting in the bullpen)...in the athletic or AD's office which had a big table and some of the other coaches would hang out there instead of the teacher lounge. So that's where I spent my time working on lessons; going over stuff with...the cooperating teacher. And it was just a growing experience. Students, you know, sort of meandered in and out. Got to know the students in a slightly different context. It was right by the cafeteria so there was always a lot of activity. (Gary, recorded interview, May 25, 2006)

Gary seemed to be honest with me when saying he did not have any grand insights during his program or, in this specific case, student teaching experience.

Gary said that he could not really compare how he related to students with how his cooperating teacher related to students because his teacher was not really a math teacher, but was really more identified as the coach’s son, or baseball coach. Gary also said the cooperating teacher had a large personality, that he, Gary, did not have.
But, on the other hand he had certain things that he did very well that I probably have not achieved and that, I think a lot came by (1) his tenure at the school, (2) being/having that outside context of being a coach, being a guy who is 6'3", you know, handsome guy, domineering, very avid Red Sox fans. He was a personality. He was defined more as himself as a rounded individual than as a math guy. I don't think people really thought of him as...I mean he was a math teacher, but people didn't associate him exclusively with being the math teacher. He was the son of the athletic director. He was the baseball coach.... Yeah, and very dynamic young guy, so I mean I really probably a role that certainly a first year teacher (unless you come in in that role) you don't just sort of fall into it. Certainly I don't. Cause that's not...I'm not a coach. I'm not an athlete. I'm not 6' 4". I mean I'm not any of those things. (Gary, recorded interview, May 25, 2006)

Gary’s conceptualization of the social interactions of teacher and students seemed to have had little connection to this student teaching experience because of his perception that he could not, or would not, relate to students as his cooperating teacher related. Gary spoke of no other experiences with a class or a cooperating teacher other than in this teacher’s math class. Gary explained that he had also observed in this same cooperating teacher’s classroom the previous quarter for another course.

Frank explained how he learned from a whole community of people at an elementary school during his pre-service preparation program to be open and attentive to the individual student and to support and guide the interests of the student. From work with one student, Frank recalled learning to trust that students will learn, and can learn amazing things when trusted.

so I guess what I learned from [elementary school], the teachers there, and this girl is...that you should really trust students more. You should give them opportunities and think that is what I do best in the lab here and what I do best with my students overall. And helping this girl--she was struggling a little bit with writing and giving her some opportunities to sort of take charge of the writing, and helping her with the web and stuff like that. It gave me the real strong sense that kids can be trusted to invest themselves in their own
learning. I'm not sure that I believed that much prior to being at [elementary school] and is probably why I spent my entire senior year in and around [elementary school] for a variety of practice teaching experiences that year. (Frank, recorded interview, April 28, 2006)

For one teacher, Ann, the student teaching experience was specifically described as negative.

I'd say a negative impression I got was student teaching. I was in a traditional setting in a suburban high school with a mentor teacher who was very used to using the book and covering what was in the book with her kids. And I was hoping to be more innovative, or to see more innovative things but it was all sentences, commas, out of the book, next story, write this, read that, the end. I'm not going to say it was all their fault, perhaps I wasn't ready at that point. But I have a very negative overall picture of my student teaching—that moment of teaching sentences, clauses, and commas, probably being the worst because I didn't feel like I was being myself at all. I felt like I was teaching somebody else's material and it was going very badly. (Frank, recorded interview, April 28, 2006)

Here Ann indicated that she needed to have more of her self connected to the activity of teaching. The social interaction of a classroom, for Ann, needed to be more related to her personality, even during her preparation program. This strong interest in honoring self and personal voice in the classroom was found in other aspects of Ann’s view of teaching, including her eventual project for her graduate studies.

As found in other valued memories, observing and experiencing relationships between student and teacher was highly important to in-service teachers. Memories from student teaching were centered on understanding, relating, and connecting to students in positive effective ways.

Walkabout High School’s Influence on a Teacher’s Black Box

Teachers do not work in isolation but are a part of a practicing community (Wenger, 1998). This study explored the lives of 10 classroom teachers in one school.
The study was designed to limit variation in context to further understand how various individuals might respond to a similar cultural environment. In this section I will discuss influences of the Walkabout High School community on individual teachers’ conceptualization of the task of teaching.

What was the biggest surprise was that teachers attributed their conceptualizations of teaching to themselves and to previous experiences. They seldom made specific references to Walkabout High School and its vision and mission statement as an influence on how they thought about being a teacher. They did, however, generally express great pleasure at being at this school and in this school community of practice. These teachers, influenced by a school community they admired and supported, nonetheless conceptualized what the school community envisioned through their own biographical perspectives. And these biographical experiences greatly influenced how the teacher ultimately integrated his or her assigned duty as a member of the practicing community.

Adam revealed Walkabout High School’s influence on his developing understanding of teaching when he spoke of his teaching goals.

So yeah, teach them how to learn... Prepare them for the future... Help them figure out what they are interested in... Let's see, those are probably the main ones I would go for. More specifically, obviously, would be...gain a decent understanding of certain scientific fields--mainly earth science (in my case). Obviously since I've taken that kind of class I want them to hopefully come away with actual material about Earth Science, and a good understanding of science, slash, Earth Science. Yeah, I guess those would be my main ones. Those four for sure. What else. Let's see. Have fun. I want them to have fun, too. (Adam, recorded interview, March 17, 2006)

Adam’s top three teaching goals were noticeably closely connected to educational ideals valued and regularly, though indirectly, discussed by Walkabout
High School teachers. However, Adam only minimally discussed how he conceptualized teaching based on his experience at Walkabout High School. Instead, he spoke of the many biographical experiences he had prior to being hired at Walkabout High School and how those experiences were the reasons that he currently thought the way he did and had the knowledge and skills to teach the way he taught.

Tension between individual teachers’ own conceptualizations of teaching and the community’s vision of teaching, however, was found in many teachers. Though teachers were generally very positive about the school, when integrating how they understood teaching through their own black box of experiences, they sometimes struggled.

The two math teachers, Gary and Cindy, both new to the school, struggled to integrate the subject matter they were responsible to teach with the demands of the school’s vision. Their personal histories and experiences did not give them the knowledge to adapt. Both completed the school year, but did not return the following year.

Ernie, the Life Science teacher had personal experiences and understanding that helped him conceptualize and love the mentoring expectations of the job, but he was not yet comfortable with how he was integrating his understanding of science pedagogy with the school’s vision for teaching.

Ann, new to Walkabout High School but with prior teaching experience, described how she valued the Walkabout High School vision of education. However, she also realized that much of what she was doing was teaching as she had taught at
her previous school, but now with a larger number of students. She explained that this was a struggle, but was working on understanding how to be a good teacher in this new context. She relied on her personal experiences to conceptualize her teaching even as she valued the Walkabout High School teaching vision.

There are numerous ways individual teachers may have been influenced by the school, including the structure of the school, the organization of the school day and school week, job expectation, and teacher interaction. The six-day orientation for all Walkabout High School teachers prior to the beginning of the school year was one such interaction that may have been particularly influential because it brought together key administrators and all the teachers, both experienced and novice, to share and discuss the school’s vision of education and how that vision might be put into practice during the coming year. It was a time that experienced teachers shared their struggles and successes with the new teachers, as well as a time for new teachers to ask for clarification on what is expected of them. Importantly, the two critical administrators for the teachers, the Dean of Students and the Dean of Academics, both made it clear that this small charter school relied on teachers taking on leadership roles at multiple levels. A passive role for a teacher was difficult to imagine. This community of practice was an active, engaged one for the teachers, just as the vision for the school was for teachers to actively engage their students.

In conclusion, while this school provided a strong vision, clearly communicated and regularly reinforced, teachers did not reference it as influential to their conceptualization of teaching when spontaneously discussing their personal
thoughts, concepts, values, and beliefs about teaching. Perhaps the influence of the school was too immediate and present, and the teachers felt they needed to answer my questions by looking backward into their past histories. Perhaps both the past and the present are strong influences; this study clearly found teachers connected to their pasts.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Summary of the Findings

The goal of this investigation was to understand how professional teachers think about the task of teaching and how they develop the knowledge and skills to teach in a way consistent with their visions. Previous studies had gathered information about teacher knowledge in practice, but those studies were limited. Those case studies of single professional teachers or the growth of pre-service teachers during education classes revealed the need for further study of teachers’ knowledge in practice. Previous research included studies of pre-service teachers in the researcher’s education program or course. One study of two celebrated high school teachers (Kagan, 1993, p. 21) revealed significant differences between how practicing teachers think about teaching and what professors of education think teachers should be thinking. In contrast, my investigation gave voice to 10 professional teachers to further expand and enrich this still nascent field of educational research on teachers’ knowledge in practice.

Central to the findings was the importance of personal knowledge, experiences, and identity for teachers’ conceptualization of the task of teaching.
These personal qualities and experiences were hidden, as if unknown or unappreciated by the teacher, and thus described as being in a *black box*. The black box metaphor also conveys how this process is always working, yet generally unnoticed.

The theoretical construct of the black box was identified as having two strong organizing processes that support the conceptualizing of teaching: a main framing process that conceptualizes teaching tasks through the *relational*, and a secondary process that conceptualizes teaching as organized around *passion*.

Primary in teachers’ thinking about the numerous topics that they considered a part of the task of teaching was the construct of the teacher-student relationship. Novice teachers struggled to integrate their professional tasks with their personal experiences. This included even the most basic task--how to form a teacher-student relationship with a young adult in the classroom. For teachers with several years experience, relationships continued to ground their conceptualizations of teaching, but now most had developed more sophisticated organizing mechanisms of teacher-student relationships as expressed in their more elaborated models and descriptions for classroom interactions. Experienced teachers described their concepts of teaching with more stylized principles about relating with students, as if not much needed to be explained, but their experiences of relating to students were very concrete and personal, as these teachers had been involved in teacher-student interactions for many years.
Passion was connected to teacher-student relating in a significant, but indirect, way. Teachers spoke of motivation as one of the components of the tasks of teaching and expressed their conceptualization of motivation as rooted in developing a relationship with students. This relationship with students frequently included the teacher expressing or modeling passion for their work.

My findings on how teachers learned to teach also focused on what the teachers indicated influenced the make-up of their black boxes. Understanding what influenced the black box provided insight into teacher development. Influences on teachers’ black boxes were generally grounded in experiences that were notably relational, and generally could be described as a memory of being either in the role of student or the role of teacher. Influential experiences included informal experiences, experiences in the K-16 classrooms, experiences in teacher preparation programs, and for some teachers, other work experiences.

Teachers’ personal motifs were also found to significantly influence their black box. Personal interests and values identified as long-standing motifs for individual teachers were tightly intertwined with their conceptualizations of teaching.

Teachers’ pre-service preparation programs were found to be influential when the activities were highly active and the pre-service teacher was engaged in the activity in the role of student or the role of teacher. Those experiences are the ones that teachers indicated are still held in the black box and used to give insight into teaching.
Pre-service preparation was also influential when teachers could explore and develop the personal side of becoming a teacher. The personal side of pre-service teachers included opportunities to select topics of study that interested them as well as opportunities to develop their long-term vision of what education and teaching mean to them on a personal level.

Knowledge of practicing teachers needs to be more fully understood as an integration of the personal and the professional, with the personal aspects generally hidden, but deeply rooted in a life-time of living. Teachers process what they are asked to do through these hidden black boxes, and it is through this personalization that the teachers can conceptualize the tasks and activities of teaching.

One of the most unexpected findings of this investigation was the teachers’ infrequent references to their immediate context, to the Walkabout High School community’s influence on their conceptualization of teaching. In the context of a focused, mission-driven school that constantly reinforced the school’s vision, the teachers still looked to their past to conceptualize their daily tasks, not to present influences. This is not to say that the Walkabout High School context was not influential, only that the teachers did not articulate such things as the school mission statement or school-wide conversations as a source for their views. Instead, teachers processed their conceptualizations of their tasks through personal, biographical experiences metaphorically located in their black boxes.
How the Findings Relate to Other Research

Validating Previous Studies: The Impact of Personal Knowledge on Teacher Knowledge

Of the six major studies that addressed teacher knowledge through teachers’ perspectives (Alsup, 2006; Britzman, 2003; Bullough & Baughman, 1997; Craig, 1999; Kagan, 1993; Schoonmaker, 2002), all had university connections between the researcher and the subjects. Of the 13 subjects, 8 were pre-service teachers, 3 had initially been taught by the researcher and had gone on to teach in their own classrooms, and 2 were experienced teachers working as clinical instructors at a university. My findings provide a needed comparison by someone not connected with the subjects, as well as provide a sizable increase in the number of teachers studied and analyzed. My findings indicate that the general findings of those studies are not biased because of the personal connections. The major findings articulated and refined by all of those studies is that a teacher’s personal identity plays a major and undeniable role in how he or she thinks about teaching, which is consistent with the findings of this study. Those six small but detailed case studies provide considerable insight into the unique details of individual teachers.

The details gleaned from the lengthy studies that followed one person through pre-service preparation into several years of teaching provide a wonderful window into the complex world of the individual that increases our desire to understand teachers in general.
Kagan gave voice to an ongoing charge leveled by many classroom teachers against teacher preparation programs: teaching is a craft learned in the classroom and not a science as taught by professors of education in the universities (Kagan, 1993). This was one of the major points of disagreement found in the studies cited. Kagan’s study (1993) found that the knowledge of teaching has primarily to do with connecting and relating to students and that this has not, and cannot, be taught in teacher preparation programs. Alsup (2006), Britzman (2003), and Schoonmaker (2002) argued in different ways that teacher preparation programs can be helpful in preparing teachers, but the teacher preparation programs must be more sensitive to pre-service teachers’ development of personal and professional knowledge. Kagan’s conclusion was that teacher education was largely irrelevant, and that the practice of teaching and its practical knowledge was really unlike the theoretical knowledge of teaching taught in education schools.

My research revealed that Kagan’s (1993) focus on relating as a central quality of knowledge of teaching is well grounded. The central characteristic of teacher conceptualization of teaching that I identified, and which extends Kagan’s finding, is that teachers’ concepts, values, and beliefs, in general, are framed around experiences of relating as teacher and student, but are not limited to formal classroom experiences and instruction. Secondly, while Kagan stated that being a teacher was the way to learn how to relate to students, my findings indicate that teachers benefit from their memories and experiences of having been a student as well.
My finding that teachers utilized their experiences as students indicates a much more complex understanding of relating. It supports Britzman’s understanding that teaching is not simply a skill selected and put on like a shirt or coat, but that teaching is a complex social negotiation between teacher and student (Britzman, 2003). My findings support this more complex view of teacher identity and how identity and relating function in real social situations.

*Teaching as Learning about Self*

The six studies agree that learning about self is a central part of learning to teach, and that the integration of one’s personal identity and professional knowledge is crucial to the way in which teachers develop and mature as teachers. A teacher’s practical knowledge of teaching, then, is an integration of both personal knowledge and professional knowledge.

Of the six studies looking at the impact of personal identity on teachers’ knowledge, all were primarily about growth and change, except Kagan’s study, which compared the views of teacher knowledge of classroom teachers with those of professors of education. My study also found that classroom teachers emphasized the importance of learning about self. I was interested in how teachers conceptualize teaching and what has influenced that basic understanding. I found that each teacher processes his or her thoughts through a highly personal space I metaphorically call a *black box*. This space, though mostly unnoticed by the teacher, holds an organizing framework through which teaching is conceptualized and the tasks of teaching are
understood. This framework includes powerful memories of relating, usually as a student or teacher, either formally or informally.

When investigating the impact of student teaching, many researchers interested in the personal in teacher knowledge and teacher development identified and described how pre-service teachers experienced great tension (Alsup, 2006; Bullough & Baughman, 1997), a tension which concluded in personal change (Britzman, 2003). Such change troubles pre-service teachers because our culture’s general view of teachers is that they are powerful and somehow unchanging (Britzman, 2003).

Alsup stressed the need for pre-service teachers to explore these uncharted personal territories so that the personal and professional can be integrated, as well as to prepare teachers for these times of tension. She referred to this unknown zone as “borderlands,” (Alsup, 2006) which emphasizes how exploration into this area stretches an individual’s thinking. These activities of integration are generally lonely and personal as each teacher is a site of “ongoing tension between self-preservation and self-transformation” (Bullough & Baughman, 1997, p. 96). Though tension perhaps decreases as pre-service teachers become in-service teachers, time plays an increasing factor in teachers’ lives, and the responsibility of their own classrooms raises the stakes and pressure, as well. Integrating personal into the professional continues as a real struggle (Bullough & Baughman, 1997; Schoonmaker, 2002).

Only Kagan’s two expert teachers seemed to live without great tensions, supposedly because they had learned on the job over many years, but Kagan’s study did not make this aspect of their lives especially transparent to the reader. One of the
high school teachers stated that once he had taught the lesson it was the students’ responsibility to learn it (Kagan, 1993, p. 93). This vision of a teacher washing his or her hands of responsibility was unlike the teachers and pre-teachers described in the other studies, and may have neutralized some of the tension that others experienced from feeling partly responsible for student failure.

My findings found tensions, but focused on the place of the tension and what the teacher was trying to develop out of that tension. Teachers revealed that they were looking to their past to make sense of their present. Even as they struggled to change and improve as teachers they still reflected back on experiences generally dealing with relating. While the Walkabout High School teachers seemed influenced by their school’s mission which asked much of the teachers, this influence was hard to identify because teachers talked of teaching from a biographical view and did not articulate school influences.

Teachers need to have rich and complex experiences of teacher-student relationships, or other similar type roles, to process how to think about their teaching. Teacher growth was evident when looking at teachers with more experience and was greatly dependent on a teacher’s increasing understanding of relating to students. But all teachers, even the most experienced, seemed to understand teaching through personal memories of complex experiences. The one advantage for more experienced teachers was that their memories were increasingly of relationships they had built with other students in other classrooms. While this may point towards what cognitive psychologists have researched in their study of schemas and scripts that emphasize
memory as patterns (Woolfolk, 1998), teachers memories of their relationships with specific students still seemed central to their conceptualization of their work.

Though my work was mainly focused on how teachers conceptualize teaching and not a study of each teachers’ development and growth, my findings infer that unpacking and exploring the black box would be helpful for teachers as they develop and grow as teachers. But perhaps more importantly, this theory of an internalized black box filled with valuable memories that aid in conceptualizing tasks of teaching, suggests that teachers need to have the black box filled with powerful and useful memories of relating that can be called upon as needed.

To understand teachers and the knowledge of teachers requires recognizing the important and necessary role that personal identity and personal experiences plays in developing teacher knowledge of teaching. Experiences of relating, especially as teacher and student, should be especially valued and explored for their potential in aiding teachers in thinking about their work.

**Teaching as Contextual and Experienced Knowledge**

Another important theme for understanding teaching from the perspective of classroom teachers is the embodiment of knowledge in person, place, or group. Teachers have “well-remembered events” of past experiences (K. Carter, 1995) that guide their thoughts and actions in the classroom. Understanding teachers and how they conceptualize their work requires an understanding that strong memories of specific contextual events deeply penetrate all teachers, novice or experienced.
With the increasing understanding of the importance of context to knowing and to knowledge production, some educational researchers are studying parallel stories to understand teachers’ lives and teachers’ knowing (Connelly et al., 1997; Craig, 1999). In that theoretical construct, personal knowing is valued and explored through narrative stories combined with stories of place and context—an approach to knowledge grounded in situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991). With the two stories together, the reader can better understand how individuals are situated in a context while also having their own personal history.

Though Craig (1999) was alone in using the methodology of parallel stories, the other studies used a more limited view of the context of the teachers’ personal struggles. Those studies viewed knowledge as more embodied in the individual as the individual struggled to understand his or her role as teacher. Craig’s study assumed both this knowledge embodied in the person and knowledge embodied in the community context. My study did not utilize the methodology of two parallel stories, but agrees that such an approach can provide increased understanding to what is occurring in a given situation such as Walkabout High School. My focus was on how 10 teachers in one school context embodied the knowledge of teaching. What I found was that while most of the teachers were committed to the mission of the school, when articulating how they each conceptualized the task of teaching they referenced their past social experiences, not the school’s mission.

My study found teacher knowledge that was not theoretically bundled, but bound to complex memories of relating. Schoonmaker wrote, “Most beliefs are made
up of the many disorganized, ambiguous, and subjective elements that characterize life and learning and that defy reduction to a clean-cut set of stages” (Schoonmaker, 2002, p. 21). Though my findings are not described as beliefs, this description of teacher knowledge as constructed of multiple experiential elements is quite similar. In both cases the presence of ambiguity and the possibility of change are always present in the individual. In Bullough’s study (Bullough & Baughman, 1997), a teacher changed her conceptual metaphor of teaching after she had taught for several years and had switched to a different school with many different characteristics. Change is a real part of teachers’ conceptual lives and has to do with both personal and contextual factors.

None of the previous studies directly addressed the importance of passion in teachers’ conceptualization of teaching, but it was clearly foundational to Walkabout High School teachers. It is possible that these teachers emphasized passion because it was a part of the school founder’s vision and therefore recognized and valued as an effective quality for student learning (see Long & Hoy, 2006).

The Impact of the Findings on Teacher Development

I intentionally did not title this section Impact of Findings for Teacher Preparation because teachers’ development is life-long and should not be thought of as only happening during preparation. A teacher’s identity, history, and future goals should be honored and considered as integral to his or her development because these features will still be present and influential wherever that teacher goes to teach.
Pre-service teacher programs, however, may want to consider how these findings might influence their work. With eyes open to the importance of the black box and the role of personal knowledge and identity in teachers’ lives, professors of education can guide pre-service teachers in the exploration of their key memories and personal motifs and passions that will be constantly present when teaching in their own classrooms (D. Carter, 1996; K. Carter, 1995).

Reflective engagement of experiences and memories must be done purposefully and with a sense of context. The black box is not a thing to simply open, unload, study, and repack. It must be reflectively engaged and explored for how it processes concepts, values, beliefs, and experiences pertaining to teaching.

Preparation programs can assist in the development of teachers by providing valuable and significant experiences for pre-service teachers that may be useful for integrating personal and professional identities and conceptualizing work as an in-service teacher. The importance of reflective processing of such experiences within the class or with the professor cannot be overstated. Not only can positive growth emerge from reflecting on experiences, but prejudices and errant thinking can also sometimes be reinforced by experiences, and professors must be alert to this possibility and be prepared to counter it.

Preparation programs should focus on classroom relationships as a domain of knowledge for teachers to develop. While theory may help support some learning about relating for pre-service teachers, an opportunity to develop and practice actual relationships that may be similar to relationships encountered in real classrooms will
help. My findings indicate that those kinds of informal relationships can be quite valuable to teachers, and colleges of education should explore ways to support such growth.

Because this study revealed that informal and personally driven learning outside formal preparation was so influential on teachers, education programs should become more responsive to the individual needs and biographical histories of pre-service teachers. Assisting a teacher to grow from his or her own perspective on the world would require increased contact with a mentor-like figure and possibly a personal learning plan agreed on by the pre-service teacher and the education professor. Inter-connecting courses as well as professors working in teams could support this kind of personal responsiveness to pre-service teachers growth.

My findings indicate lessons learned and remembered during teacher education programs had certain qualities. Teachers remembered lessons taught by their education professors when concepts taught were presented through an active lesson in which the pre-service teacher was involved either as a student or teacher. In-service teachers also remember and use memories from teacher education activities that required or supported personal choice and personal vision building.

Teaching pre-service teachers is more than simply teaching how to teach, but requires educating individuals, soon to be teachers, and who, when that time arrives, will need to relate, think, and feel like a teacher in healthy, passionate, and positive ways.
Education programs preparing teacher educators must also consider the personalization of teacher knowledge and the importance of the relational in teacher conceptualizing. A clear and up-front valuing of the personal and relational nature of teaching processes may be even more important to identify, uncover, and develop at the doctoral level, as all students—even highly educated teachers—tend to do as they have been taught, or more precisely, do as they have been shown.

At the graduate level, as with other levels of teacher preparation, pre-teacher educators need to observe and experience the roles of both the teacher and the student. In this case the students are generally certificated teachers, already comfortable talking about classroom instruction, who are becoming teacher educators. What the pre-teacher educators are learning are the skills and knowledge used by instructors of teachers. Listening to and engaging pre-teacher educators on personal levels and in ways responsive to the findings in this investigation could be done through inviting the doctoral students to listen to professors of education dialogue about their roles and tasks as professors during informal gatherings and then inviting the graduate students into the circle to begin finding their own voices in that developing circle of peers. Engaging doctoral students so that they can further personalize teaching knowledge could also be done through small seminars or conferences in which professors of education, classroom teachers, and graduate students listen and participate in conversations generally not heard prior to beginning a teaching position in teacher education programs. Encouraging doctoral students to develop agendas and questions for such gatherings could also help them internalize
critical and valued ideas in the larger education community, both in the K-12 classrooms and those of the academy. Developing teacher educators need both to understand the importance of classroom teachers personalizing teacher knowledge and also have the opportunity to personalize their new knowledge as teacher educators.

Further Research: Remaining Questions and New Questions

The teachers studied were at a single non-traditional, urban school. The teachers were of varied experience levels, but most with five or fewer years of teaching. It would be helpful to have comparative research with subjects from traditional schools, as well as from suburban and rural schools. I would not expect a change in the importance of teachers’ personal identities influence on their professional identities, but would find the increased understanding of the role of relating and passion helpful.

I expect that what teachers are expected or permitted to do within a school community greatly impacts what they think about, but what an individual utilizes in their black box to process and comprehend is probably not so dependent on context. Teachers seem to have a need to think about teacher knowledge in relational terms and therefore are relying on memories of relating.

With the importance of past experiences identified in this study, the question arises as to whether recent experiences can have an impact in such a way as to become a useful and valuable asset to a teacher’s black box. The key would be that the experience is both relational and filled with passion.
Further study into the past experiences that are useful experiential references to in-service teachers may also help understand how to support teachers. I would like to see a study on the effect of contemporary experiences on teachers for their possible impact on conceptual change. Might there be certain experiences, such as visiting another school for one month or working with youth in an after-school program, that with thoughtful guidance and reflection could significantly add to a teacher’s black box and thus support his or her thinking about teaching in the up-to-speed world of the classroom.

In sum, this study begins to open new possibilities for research into how teachers conceptualize what it means to be a teacher. Understanding how teachers view teaching in context may help understand how better to prepare our teachers of the future.
APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Interview Questions

The following sets of questions were the basis for those interviews.

First Set

Describe the places, experiences, and training that prepared you for teaching.

Draw a picture of how you view teaching. Explain it as best you can.

What are your goals as a teacher? How do those goals manifest themselves in your work?

Describe your relationship(s) with your students – in and out of class, and with various students.

What knowledge or experience helps you in those relationships?

Are you changing? Has Walkabout High School changed you?

Second Set

Describe what you considered a good teacher when you were studying education in school? Describe a good teacher at Walkabout High School?
Describe guides, mentors, images, or visions that help you be the teacher you are and/or who you want to be. Consider how you prepare for your classes, how you teach in your classes, and how you relate to students.

Students have various personalities, cultural backgrounds, social identities, needs, and interests. What has prepared you for interacting with them?

Describe some of the strong memories of growth you have from your formal teacher preparation program.

Have you changed or grown as a teacher while at Walkabout High School? If so, share some examples.
APPENDIX B

Walkabout High School Teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Licensure Level</th>
<th>Teaching Experience</th>
<th>Degree(s)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ann</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>1 year tradition H.S., 3 years alternative H.S., 1st year at Walkabout H.S.</td>
<td>B.S., M.A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adam</td>
<td>Science</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>B.S., M.S.A.T.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cindy</td>
<td>Math</td>
<td>1-9</td>
<td>13 years elementary and middle school, 1st year at Walkabout H.S.</td>
<td>B.A., M.A., Doctoral Candidate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dave</td>
<td>Intervention</td>
<td>K-12</td>
<td>½ year at another H.S., ½ year at Walkabout H.S.</td>
<td>B.A., M.Ed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Specialist</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ernie</td>
<td>Science</td>
<td>Middle School</td>
<td>2 years, all at Walkabout</td>
<td>B.A.</td>
</tr>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Licensure Level</th>
<th>Teaching Experience</th>
<th>Degree(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ethan</td>
<td>Social Studies</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>1 year in traditional, 3 at Walkabout H.S.</td>
<td>B.A., M.A.T.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frank</td>
<td>Computer Science</td>
<td>1-9</td>
<td>1 year elementary, 20+ years doing professional development and teaching a few college courses, 4 years at Walkabout H.S.</td>
<td>B.S., M.A., Ph.D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gary</td>
<td>Math</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>B.A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>1 year experience, previously did a year of clinical study at Walkabout H.S.</td>
<td>B.A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Randy</td>
<td>Social Studies</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>1 year as outdoor counselor instructor, ½ substitute teacher</td>
<td>B.A., M.A.</td>
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BIBLIOGRAPHY


