DISSERTATION

(WE)DUCATION: A NARRATIVE AND AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS OF

THE TEACHING AND LEARNING PROCESS POSTURED AS AN INTIMATE

RELATIONSHIP

Submitted by

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ABSTRACT

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This project argues that the roles of teacher and learner are no longer definable by traditional conceptualizations, and instead, the intimacy with which teachers and learners experience these roles is comparable to a deeply meaningful, multi-faceted relationship. Many of the dynamics present in the traditional conceptualization of an intimate relationship are the material and embodied dynamics also experienced by teachers and learners as they engage the educational journey. Therefore, this study seeks to identify learners' and teachers' relationship(s) with education as "intimate."

Structured as a series of critical scholarly reflections based on a review of the personal and professional life documents of a learner and teacher who has served as a public educator, college professor, and graduate student, this project is written in the style of autoethnographic, narrative vignettes. The journey as a teacher and learner is chronicled, punctuating and analyzing the similarities between the process of teaching and learning and theoretical features of an intimate relationship. Each vignette recounts a conceptual intersection that is both literally and metaphorically linked to themes located in the discourse of interpersonal relations. Analysis of the vignettes reveals a three-part conclusion about the general, theoretical, and embodied relationship

between teaching, learning, and intimacy. Thus, the narrative and the accompanying reflections and analyses raise and (re)frame current theoretical, pedagogical, and philosophical questions about education, pedagogy, individual and cultural/institutional change, and identity.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1 – Introduction

It is a relationship of infatuation; one that entices, lures, attracts, and beguiles me, embracing every inch of my intellectual, spiritual, and emotional being. It is, as some suggest, a play of forces, resistances, transferences: psychic and intellectual (Tan, 2006). It is the process of "wooing and being wooed," involving an instinct toward and longing for a connection where the pleasures of the exchange are predicated upon the intimate partnership of knowing and loving (Keroes, 1999, pp. ix, 3, 15). It is the gratification of the mind, marked with the heightened frustration of the soul as it navigates the complexity of ideas, thought, and knowledge. It is the monogamous commitment to truth juxtaposed with the enticement of the creative tryst, an affair of the mind as it is seduced by thoughts, discovery, and experiences.

It is this process of teaching and learning with which I have been in love for years – a process to which I am deeply attracted and vigilantly committed. It is as Liston (2004) notes, "…a resemblance between the way Eros acts in the mind of a lover and the way knowing acts in the mind of a thinker" (p. 461). I have married my life to the process of education, centering my vocation, personal relationships, and professional endeavors around the commitment I have made to learning and teaching. Indeed, this "marriage" is one which has experienced the full range of joys and trials only located in the most intimate of relationships.

As a result, the devotion I have toward the teaching and learning process has propelled my experiences as both teacher and learner into new dimensions. No longer are my roles as teacher or learner definable by traditional conceptualizations. Instead, the intimacy with which I have experienced these roles becomes clearly comparable to a deeply meaningful, multi-faceted relationship and as a result, I endure and encounter many of the same dynamics present in the traditional conceptualization of an intimate relationship: complexity, passion, consummation, and embodiment - all very material components. This intimate relationship is an inescapable part of who I am, why I am, and what I am.

The intensity of this realization postures my relationship with the teaching and learning process as highly consequential. Yet because this relationship with the teaching and learning process is unable to be viewed, experienced, and evaluated through traditional paradigms, it becomes even more critical that I engage purposeful and thoughtful levels of reflexivity and interrogation of the relational dynamics, just as one would inside the throes of a "traditional" relationship. No longer is it enough to merely reflect on or tell the story of my relationship with teaching and learning; now I must study my story. Therefore, this study will seek to identify my relationship with teaching and learning as one that is "intimate," and in doing so, will investigate the conception of the relationship, the development of the relationship, and suggest future directions regarding how this paradigm might help nurture, grow, and evolve the relationship I have with teaching and learning.

In order to execute a study of this nature, I propose the utilization of a blended methods approach to qualitative study – a narrative inquiry written in the vein of a scholarly personal narrative, complemented by analytical autoethnographic perspectives and methods which encourage rigorous examination of the process of teaching and learning, confirmed by the study of life documents, personal memory, artifacts, and other data which assist in the thorough and scholarly exploration of this conceptualization of teaching and learning. In order to further situate this intimate endeavor, I begin by stepping back in time, tracing the evolution of my relationship with teaching and learning through a brief narrative posturing me as a young, eager student who then evolves into a teacher.

Young love: The early years

My relationship with teaching and learning first began as learner when I entered the public schooling system in 1983. Already teased and enticed by the field of education, I was the daughter of a middle school English teacher and a Ph.D. graduate working in ministry. My family placed great importance and value on the role of student and the priorities of obtaining a formal education. Unlike my peers, my childhood pleasures consisted of helping my mother grade papers and watching my father write and rehearse sermons, as I quickly longed to engage with Education the way they did. I have heard stories of my apparent attempts to "preach" to the flower gardens as a young woman who stood atop the large boulders in the yard of our rural Midwestern home. I remember gingerly
running my fingertips across the Shakespeare projects of my mother's 8th grade

English students, marveling at the construction of imitation Globe Theaters made of cardboard and other hodge-podge household materials. On the days where I was lucky enough to secure a trip to the Public Library, I recall checking out as many books as my library card account would allow and riding home furiously on my red and white banana-seat bicycle, only to devour them all in one evening, begging to return the next day.

This zest and growing affection for learning only multiplied as I aged. I breezed elegantly through elementary and middle school, embracing every teacher and task with an affinity that mirrored utopian textbook descriptions of the ideal student. There was no challenge I did not want, no class I did not like, no teacher I would not strive to please, and no task too demanding. Carefully balancing my academic development with the social dimensions of the schooling process, I determined early in my schooling career that I would follow in my mother's career path, and take my relationship with education to the next level.

And so, the preparation began. High school culture seduced me with the charm and mystery every young woman dreams of. Promises of advanced courses, older boys with whom to flirt, college preparation, extracurricular activities, school dances, freedom and independence - the promises of the pleasures in that package were almost too much to bear. However, as I grew and started to mature, the seasons of my seductive relationship with education began to endure hardship. I continued to compete for the affection of my teachers, the attention of colleges, and the lavishing of scholarship dollars. Though school started to become boring and unchallenging, I still yielded to every aspect of my relationship with learning, even to those aspects with which I vehemently

disagreed. Suddenly, the relationship was tainted - pressures intruded, distractions

abounded, and I watched my peers carelessly throw their relationship with learning

around, oblivious to the delicate, precious nature of this tenuous bond.

Even so, my courtship continued throughout my college career. I flirted with and then

embraced the reality of a professional life dedicated to teaching, though finding myself

un-satiated from countless encounters with passionless instructors, bored and

unmotivated classmates, and meaningless assignments. My passion re- invigorated with

an ardent zeal as I entered into the vocation of teaching in 2001, baptized by fire into my

first public teaching job in the urban ghettos of downtown Reno, Nevada. Consumed by

this job, every ounce of my existence lived and breathed teaching and was concerned

with the lives of my young, impoverished students.

As this affair unfolded, my vocational responsibilities landed me in a myriad of

contexts where I was quickly hurtled in and out of situations that would test my fidelity

and relational endurance. From teaching elementary school Language Arts to junior high

English to undergraduate level Communication courses, from summer school to full-time

positions to part-time contracts, from urban contexts to rural settings to universities to

community colleges, I tested and explored the commitment and bond I had with the

teaching and learning process. Moments existed where I felt adored and admired, yet also

hated and despised… curious and questioning, yet beloved and protected. I have

advanced from young love to mature love as I entered and completed my Master's degree

program and now, my doctoral studies. With this, I find myself at a crossroads –

face to face with the greatest love of my life: my intellectual flesh splitting from my spirit, as I recall and evaluate the relational journey that has unfolded over the past two decades, unable to determine how to sustain the life breath of the relationship much longer.

Making and breaking vows

It is a halting feeling to recognize that a process which I love is one that has both created and betrayed me. Though the goal of the educational journey is to illuminate, equip and inspire, the deeper into the throes I tread, the more I realize how much this journey is unmistakably complex and dynamic. Liston (2000) underscores this heavy and intricate inter/intrapersonal demand, arguing that teaching (and learning) occur on affective and cognitive terrains as they are both "emotional and intellectual work" (p. 81). Clearly, it is evident that teaching and learning are as much relational activities as they are public activities.

Certainly, through the past decade, years into the "marriage" I have with education, I have swayed with the emotional pendulum that is any relationship. The chapters of my intimate connection measure moments of indescribable bliss and intensity as well as periods of frustration, angst, and anguish. Familiar educational milestones dot the landscape of this family portrait: the proud moment of high school graduation, the receipt of the college acceptance letter, the awarding of a prestigious scholarship, the advancement into graduate study. Amidst those markers lie the more subtle, yet fulfilling moments of growth that wrote the initial pages of my love story: the long awaited grasping of a tough concept in an advanced placement course, the winning approval of a teacher as signified through a grade on an essay, the first moments where I was allowed

total and full control of a classroom during my student teaching tenure, a meaningful conversation with a student that can be held close to the heart for years.

Yet, this relational development has not been safeguarded against seduction and temptation – a taunting presence of hollow promises and failures, assaults to my soul. Goldstein (2004) warns against the technocratic dimensions of accountability, standards, and measurable outcomes that have often replaced the humanistic and nuanced concerns of real educational promises, thus demonstrating how one's relationship with teaching and learning can quickly feel like a relationship of betrayal. Derrick Jensen (2004) articulates that college departments of Education could be called "Departments of Seduction" for that is what they do – lead us away from ourselves (p. 15). Is it possible that Jensen is accurate for many of us? Is it conceivable that an underlying derivative of the educational relationship is infidelity of sorts? Are student-lovers and teacher- lovers entangled in nothing more than a situation where "the promises of education to transform, ennoble, and enable, to create the conditions for new understandings of our worlds and ourselves, have become tired and devalued promissory notes" (Liston, 2000, p. 81)? With these questions in mind, it becomes imperative to interrogate this love triangle of which I am part – teaching, learning, and myself.

Love induced research: Research/Relationship questions/RQ's

Certainly, it can be acknowledged on a superficial level that the teaching and learning process is easily likened to a relationship. Admittedly, I recognize that my musings do not represent isolated thoughts or purely original experiences, as this narrative is more than my own. However, the traditional paradigm through which this relationship is defined (student-teacher "relationship") and researched does not provide

7

enough room to suitably explore the dynamism of the paradigm I suggest. This relationship stretches far beyond connotations of the "teacher-student" relationship in its literal sense. It is larger, more complex, more metaphorical, and more educing. It is a relationship based, in the deepest sense, in profound intimacy. It is a relationship steeped in love.

Love is not a new concept as it relates to both formal research and discourse surrounding issues of education, psychology, and communication. Martin (2004) explores the various forms love can take, tracing the scholarly study of love back to the ancient Greeks who acknowledged several forms of love, among them: sexual passion, parental, filial, and conjugal affection, fraternal feelings, friendship, love of country, and love of wisdom (originally cited in Boas, 1967). An "anthology" of philosophies of love aids in further understanding modern perspectives on love, distinguishing among six varieties in Western thought: romantic love, eros, agape, Tristanism and chivalric love, friendship, and fellow feeling (Martin, 2004, p. 21; originally cited in Norton & Kille, 1983). Despite these varying definitional attempts and broad acknowledgements that love takes many forms, the relevance of love as it pertains to the educational journey is subsumed under other categories or treated as a taboo topic in formal educational discourse. Were love simply a "historical curiosity," it might not be as urgent an issue, however the love acts that interweave through the relational process of teaching and learning are compelling and impelling forces and agents that shape the outcomes of many scholarly endeavors, personal encounters, teaching and learning experiences, and professions.

It is this passionate relational potency that propels my curiosity as it pertains to

understanding the intimate relationship of which I am part…the intimate relationship with learning toward which I invite my students…the intimate relationship with teaching which has shaped and molded every aspect of my personhood for decades. It is this passionate relational presence that has instigated the writing of volumes of personal diaries and journals which offer a place of solace whereby I can organize thoughts, mediate frustrations, and identify common themes that have arisen and (re)occurred throughout the past years of my schooling and teaching careers. It is this passionate relational curiosity that has encouraged the saving of countless letters and student evaluations over the years which serve as a sanctuary of feedback and affirmation regarding the reasons for which I entered this vocation and reasons for which I choose to stay. It is this passionate relational urgency that has found its way multiple times into the formal writings and publications of my scholarly work; my academic voice choosing published and unpublished forums to classify, arrange, manage, and interrogate my role as student/scholar-lover. It is this passionate relational narrative that requires the telling of my story.

As such, the study that unfolds will seek to evaluate the nature of my role as teacher-lover and student-lover, utilizing both scholarly personal narrative and autoethnographic methods to situate myself as a member of this specific culture and investigate my story within this culture, invoking answers to the following questions:

RQ1: In what ways is the teaching and learning process broadly able to be likened to an intimate relationship?

RQ2: What relational themes emerge from viewing the teaching and learning process as an intimate relationship?

RQ3: How does an individual evaluation and recounting of a personal journey in teaching and learning transcend individual experience and become useful for a broader population?

RQ4: How do autoethnographic and narrative methods allow for a visceral examination of the teaching and learning process?

Setting relational boundaries: Delimitations, assumptions, and limitations

And so, I am agreeing to enter into relational examination – to bring my partner forth and have our relationship probed and imploded. We sit together through this study, teaching and learning, and I, on the metaphorical couch of our academic "therapist's office," waiting to unveil the sides of our story so that we can interpret and evaluate how this intimate partnership began, how it evolved, and where it may lead in the future. As any relational counselor would suggest, before this process can commence, we must delineate boundaries – we must set the parameters by which we both agree to abide, to preserve and reflect the commitment and love we have for one another. With these, we bind ourselves by a set of agreements which will steer the course of this study with purpose, focus, and mutuality.

The first of these agreements [delimitations] surrounds the communicative choices I will make throughout the study. It is important to me that I do not evolve this study into a giant critique, whereby I rip and tear at the form of my partner so as to reveal only flaws and faults within. This type of discourse easily emerges into conversations that revolve around the teaching and learning process, as the intimacy which begets the process makes visceral responses and reactions difficult to temper. However, I want to stretch beyond that, not merely deconstructing. I refuse to use this study as a giant

platform for complaint. I am not interested in revisiting difficult relational moments of

my educational journey crafting narratives which highlight merely the negative. Rather, I

want to use truth to speak to the reality of my journey as student-lover and teacher-lover,

and invite that truth to reveal its own themes, free of the typical and tired complaining

voice that exhausts so much of the greater educational conversation. Instead, I hope that

revealed truth becomes a helpful launching pad for relational evaluation. This will not

occur at the expense of trashing every dimension of the relationship for that is

unproductive, not cleansing; it is, at best, momentarily gratifying, but eventually and

inevitably toxic.

Next, I do not enter into this study with the intent to exercise any level of

evaluation of the programming or curricula that have influenced my relationship's

journey. Undoubtedly, a particular curriculum, for example, may be one instrument used

to build and develop the relationship I have with teaching and learning, but I am not

concerned with the effects of specific learning and teaching tools in this journey as I view

those tools as temporal, mandated, generic influences over which I had/have little

personal choice. Tools and instruments are part of my journey, but I am drawn more to

aspects of communication and emotion that create relational dynamics. Programs and

curricula, as well as other types of external forces, certainly have influence, but are not,

in my opinion, at the heart of this relationship.

Similarly, I will not be comparing and contrasting pedagogical approaches with

the hopes of likening my metaphorical relationship to a new pedagogy. Though review of

literature regarding varying pedagogical practices will contribute in essential ways to the

theoretical framework in which I situate my study, I intend to suggest a paradigm, a

philosophy rather than building or advocating for a particular pedagogical orientation. The evaluation of the teaching and learning process as an intimate relationship with definable themes allows students and educators to search out and understand those moments where the themes are present in their journey and relationships and make pedagogical choices as a result. The intent is not to suggest this paradigm is pedagogy.

With these boundaries and goals in mind, this is, most simply, my story – a first-person perspective revealing embodied processes that have been and are very real to me, processes with material consequence. My voice may represent the story of many other students and educators at various stages in their careers/relationships, yet moments of this relationship development are also uniquely mine. Autoethnographic and narrative study of this relationship may connect my/self with other individuals, my/self with the larger communities of which I am part, and my/self with the contexts that have influenced my journey (Reed-Danahay, 1997; Wolcott, 2004). Though some may view this study as limiting, claiming it to be too narrative, too personal, and not globally transferrable, it is an endeavor to move beyond my/self and evaluate my/self in relation to the Other as well. In doing so, a variety of "others," others of similarity (those with similar values and experiences as my/self), others of difference (those with different values and experiences from my/self), and others of opposition (those with values and experiences seeming irreconcilable to my/self) are critical players in this narrative, thus changing what may be viewed as limiting, to an act of agency (Ngunjiri, F.W., Hernandez, K. C., & Chang, H., 2010; as cited in Chang, 2008). In this sense, treating the personal as a "fundamental part of the experience being researched" rather than a limitation on reliability, validity, or generalizability allows the discovery of commonality across situations – the very

12

commonalities that in our non-research lives we necessarily "presume and rely on in order to get on with our lives" (VanderVoort & Duck, 2000, p. 4).

Certainly, some may argue that the scope and breadth of this study is too heavily influenced by my positionality and or subjectivity – that I am too close, too intimate with my subject/partner. Yet, because the intersection of my socio- identity and the opportunities and challenges I have faced in my educational journey are my positionality, I have no choice but to embrace these "limits" as unique contributors to the relationship of which I am part (Ngunjiri, F.W., Hernandez, K. C., & Chang, H., 2010). Yes, this positionality is limited by aspects of my race, ethnicity, age, upbringing, values, mores, and cultural perspective. However, I passionately believe that access to the sensitivities of my unique journey is a powerful tool for understanding, both on an individual and global level (Ellis, 2004). The reflexivity available to me as both creator and participant increases the awareness of my background, context, and predilections, and this vulnerability is "essential" to my argument, not just mere "decorative flourish or exposure for its own sake" (Behar, 1997, p. 14; see also Broadfoot & Munshi, 2007; Harding, 2004).

Additionally, I acknowledge that the transferability of my narrative exists largely within the scope of these limitations, however interminable possibility lies within the complex process of evaluating one's story. This journey of knowing/getting to know is rewarding, in that it centers both "agency and context" (Mitra, 2010, p. 18; see also Geertz, 1994). This type of project is not seeking an outcome of systematic rules or clever simulations of reality. Rather, it seeks to interpret and create knowledge rooted in the native context of lived experience, so that meaning and transferability are intrinsically

linked to localism, subjectivity, and positionality versus a "universal truth" likened to scientific theory (Mitra, 2010). In this sense, being is heavily implicated with doing, and vice versa. This is a study of the heart.

Delight

What follows in these pages, then, is the account of my love affair with teaching and learning – my attempt to discover how this journey can be likened to and linked with aspects of an intimate relationship. This romantic metaphor is, in many ways, one of the reasons I fell in love with education in the first place. As Carson so eloquently argues in her essay "Eros the Bittersweet":

> The delight we take in metaphor…is the reason we fall in love.
> Beauty spins and the mind moves. To catch beauty would be to
> understand how that impertinent stability in vertigo is possible. But no, delight
> need not reach so far. To be running breathlessly, but not yet arrived, is itself
> delightful, a suspended moment of living hope (1986, p. xi).

I am this woman -- running "breathlessly" after a metaphor, living in hope, attesting to being a lover of the educational process, yet self-actualized enough to recognize the seductive grips education has placed around my heartstrings. At stake is how I/we understand what "can be accomplished through education—or what education should attempt to accomplish—and in what ways…in this respect, an underscoring of the importance of teacher self-analysis constitutes more than a theoretical point; it becomes an ethical challenge to grapple with one's investments in, passions for, and refusals of teaching and learning" (Kelly, 2004, p. 154).

So, I will not allow myself to be more deeply seduced without questioning, and I will turn to autoethnographic, narrative inquiry in order to (re)position my/self as an object of inquiry, depicting a site of interest in terms of my personal awareness and

experience. These methods will allow me to interrogate this relationship, searching for

dominant themes which could illuminate new philosophical and paradigmatic

perspectives.

I, then, like many of the other lovers of education, am left with only one option.

If I wish to maintain this relationship with education, with all its manic, intoxicating

highs and lows, I must, as Freire suggests, assume a posture of hope and action.

However, hope for restored love does not mean love already; it necessitates a fight

(Freire, 1998). It is my earnest hope that through this study, my deep yearning and love

for education can be re(defined) such that I remain in that place of wooing and being

wooed – in that transference of forces that course my veins, and like many others in this

same relationship, leads me to deeper understanding of what it means to be intimately

intertwined with the great love of my life.

And so, the journey begins, first in Chapter 2 with the establishment of a

theoretical framework that allows for the positioning of this study within the broader

literature of the fields of Communication Studies and Education. Chapter

3 provides explanation and validation of the chosen research methods of autoethnography

and scholarly personal narrative, helping to clarify the utility of these methods and

specific nuances therein. Chapter 4 unveils my role as both a learner and teacher engaged

in an affair of the heart with the teaching and learning process, through the establishment

of twenty-five narrative vignettes written through voice of autoethnographic and narrative

methods, revealing themes that posture me accordingly. Chapter 5 provides a three-tiered

analytical framework that assists in analyzing the vignettes through individual, holistic,

and cross- vignette frameworks. Finally, a concluding chapter will both summarize the

study and offer implications for future research, future teachers and learners –

future relationships of the heart.

Chapter 2 – Theoretical Framework

To begin a study of the connection between intimacy and teaching and learning, it seems only appropriate to situate the study within the context of an inarguable anchor of interpersonal connection: love. Love and intimacy are not facets of human life that stand alone, nor are they independent of other human dimensions (Hendrick, 1992). These constructs are central to the human experience (Kelley, 2008). Most people, regardless of cultural background or age, education level obtained or personal interests, gender, orientation, or professional pursuits have participated in the journey of a loving relationship to some degree at some stage of their lives. Intimacy and love are each given and received through "communication acts" and are central to common conceptions of family and a multitude of other relationships (Kelley, 2008, p. 6).

The study of love as a phenomena or construct is not novel. Scholars from the disciplines of Psychology, Sociology, Anthropology, and Communication have pursued the study of love since ancient times. However the variation between and among disciplines, one constant has remained: traditionally, these "love journeys" are marked by the "common conceptions of love" within the Western tradition: eros, ludus, stroge, pragma, mania, and agape (Hendrick, 1992, p. 34). Hendrick and Hendrick (1986) provide a useful definition of each of these independent dimensions of love:

> Eros represents physical desire and passion. Ludus is a love steeped in the game playing of partners – a flirtation of sorts. Storge, the friendship dimension of love, describes the foundational premise for many long-term relationships. Pragmatic

love is a logical love based on the sharing of resources. Mania represents a possessive, dependent love that experiences a range of diverse feeling states. And finally, agape illustrates an altruistic care-giving love located in the most deeply devoted and committed relationships.

Though the scope of this study will not undertake a detailed delineation or analysis of these conceptions of love, it is valuable to note that most research on personal relationships can trace back to these theoretically historical roots. Most critical to this endeavor, is not the varying conceptions of love, but rather, the ways love influences and is enacted in our everyday relationships – such as those present in educational contexts. Buss (1988) argued that love is comprised of a natural category of *acts* that are a product of biological tendencies, evolutionary heritages, and sociological underpinnings. Most social science authors also view love as a combination of emotions, cognitions, and motivations, but Buss argues that love must appear in behavior in some way; that is, there must be acts manifesting that which we call "love."

Appropriately then, an interrogation of the ways in which my teaching and learning journey has mirrored an intimate relationship could be deemed a "love act" of sorts – a purposeful behavior which indicates the manifestation of my love for the teaching and learning process. Decidedly, this interrogation must be situated inside a framework that allows the biological, evolutionary, and sociological underpinnings of my love relationship with teaching and learning to be unearthed. However, since the relationship of which I speak is nontangible and metaphorical in most senses, the underpinnings I may unearth will, instead, come from the theoretical and ideological communication acts of research and a compilation of the literature regarding scholarly study of relationships throughout decades.

To enact this "love act," I will first evaluate the nature of research on personal

relationships in the field of Communication Studies, focusing on the definition of personal relationships, foundational theoretical components of personal relationships, and more specific analyses of what intimacy is and how it has been defined and regarded in the field of Communication Studies. Next, I will juxtapose these findings with similar findings in the field of Education, unveiling paradigms of teaching and learning that allude to similar constructs. Such constructs include the teacher-student relationship, teacher-student communication, theories of immediacy, and issues of passion and emotion in teaching. Finally, I will evaluate how specific pedagogical theories and philosophies have emerged that both bear likeness to the paradigm I will suggest, while offering alternate paradigmatic perspectives. Discussion of relational pedagogy and its similar counterparts will help locate the teaching and learning process as necessarily relational and will illumine the intricate relationship between teaching, learning, pedagogy, and self. In their totality, these various frameworks will both theoretically and ideologically couch the investigation of the teaching and learning process as an intimate relationship and demonstrate how this new paradigm can further contribute to our understanding of both interpersonal relationships and the educational process.

Talking about relationships: Defining 'personal relationship'

To engage in personal relationships is an unavoidable aspect of human existence. For some, personal relationships are the lifeblood which give their existence meaning, as they strive to fill their world with an abundance of familial, fraternal, and professional connections. For others, personal relationships are carefully navigated and managed, and in many cases, avoided and tempered so as to lead a more solitary lifestyle. Regardless of one's orientation toward personal relationships, as the world grows proverbially

smaller, the expectation and need for human communication, interaction, and connection grows more critical.

Throughout the past several decades, social scientific research has substantiated the presence and growing importance of personal relationships, significantly contributing to the understanding of personal relationships through extensive qualitative and quantitative research studies surrounding issues of love, commitment, relationship style, communication practices, and evaluations of the typologies of relationships (Perlman & Fehr, 1987). Despite developments in this research, questions surrounding the definition of "personal relationship" have been offered multiple times over the past two decades as a generalized central issue facing personal relationship research (VanderVoort & Duck, 2000). In other words, social scientists, specifically Communication Studies scholars, argue that to be able to study this phenomena, it must become more evident what the object of study is and how communication defines and frames this subject of inquiry. Some responses to this question have illumined the role of communication as the means of expressing or defining a relationship (Planalp & Garvin-Doxas, 1994). Others argue that communicative practices are vitally "constitutive" of the relationship itself (Shotter, 1992; as cited in VanderVoort & Duck, 2000, p. 1). Still others argue that communication is both an instrumental medium for and the essential substance of the relationship (Duck & Pond, 1989). Given the complexity of this definition and of daily life experiences in relationships, these questions alert us to the possibility that there is a rhetorical framework implicit in the definition of a relationship as definitions suit needs and occasions (VanderVoort & Duck, 2000). Moreover, the vicissitudes of experience in relationships represent a variety of behaviors, emotions, and interpretations, so the

question "What is a relationship" is one that ultimately requires consideration of the:

> Ways in which relaters communicate with one another, how they explain their relationship to each other and to other parties, and
> how researchers explain relationships to relaters, to each other, and to a wider audience (VanderVoort & Duck, 2000, p. 2).

So then, while the traditional goals of social scientific research have been prediction and control, an alternative goal now is to understand the meaning of human behaviors and experiences, such that the question can direct away from "What is a personal relationship" to "What is the meaning for whom, on what occasion, and for which audience?" (VanderVoort & Duck, 2000, p. 5) As a result, research on personal relationships can involve multiple systems of meaning – cultural meaning, familial meaning, institutional meaning, symbolic meaning, and the meanings that researchers themselves bring into their observational initiatives. These systems will be further explored and defined in the following pages in order to provide a foundation for the study of the teaching and learning process as relational. More importantly, clearly unveiling the meaning of a personal relationship "for whom, on what occasion, and for which audience" is centrally relevant to and informative of the teaching and learning experience.

Theoretical components of personal relationships

If teaching and learning is to be likened to a personal relationship, then all components of relational experiences must be interrogated so as to be compared to similar dynamics within the teaching and learning process.

The range of positive and negative relational experiences is vast, including the positive dimensions of relationships (see studies by Anderson, 1993; Berger, 1988, 1993; Berscheid, 1994; Fehr, 1993; Fincham & Bradbury, 1987; Fletcher &

Fitness, 1993; Honeycutt, 1993; Kelley et al., 1983) and the negative and difficult

dimensions of relationships (see Miller,1996; Retzinger, 1995; Bolger & Kelleher,

1993; Cupach & Spitzberg, 1994; Duck 1994). Once we acknowledge the importance of

studying relationships in all their "variability and circumstantial alternatives" we

necessarily must also recognize this variability in relational dimensions (VanderVoort &

Duck, 2000, p. 5).

Part of the variability of relational dimensions can be explained by Baxter and

Montgomery's (1996) Theory of Relational Dialectics. This theory is predicated upon

the assumption that relating is a complex and indeterminate process of meaning making.

The theory provides a dialogic component to more monologic theoretical approaches

(Braithewaite & Baxter, 2006). Claiming that communication patterns between

relationship partners are the result of endemic dialectical tensions, the theory is an

extension of Bahktain's theory that humans experience collisions between opposing

desires and needs. While this theory paves the way for the exploration of certain

dimensions of relational processes, more attention is warranted to further assess how

similar dimensions may exists in the teaching and learning process. Thus, whether

explaining the positive or negative aspects of a relationship, or describing the tensions

that may exists inside most intimate relationships, a foundational genesis for most

personal relationship studies regards the construct of love.

Robert Sternberg's research on love is likely the most referenced model of love by

social scientists (Sternberg, 1986; as noted by Kelley, 2008). Sternberg's

conceptualization of love focused on the nature of love and conceptions of the

real versus ideal "other" in romantic relationships (Sternberg & Barnes, 1985; Sternberg

& Grajek, 1984). Most relevant, however, is Sternberg's (1986) development of a

Triangular Theory of Love, the theory most frequently cited in modern personal

relationship research. This theory proposes that love can best be constructed in terms of

three different components, each of which might form the vertex of a triangle (Hendrick,

1992). The three components include intimacy, passion, and commitment whereby:

> Intimacy (feelings of connectedness and closeness) can be best thought of as an emotional investment, passion (psychological and physical arousal) as a motivational component, and commitment (representing a decision to be together) as a cognitive component (Hendrick, 1992, p. 58).

> The Triangular Theory of Love posits that intimacy, passion, and commitment are

necessary elements toward attaining consummate, or complete love (Madey & Rodgers,

2009).

Sternberg related his theory to other existing love theories and has made a

compelling case for the Triangular Theory of Love as broad-ranging enough to account

for many other theories. Madey and Rodger's (2009) study offers credence to this theory,

linking intimacy, passion, and commitment to "intuitive" components of a healthy

romantic relationship, citing that these three variables of love are believed to be "implicit

in people's theories of love" (2009, p. 76; see also Aron & Westbay, 1996; Sternberg,

1997). This "implicitness" and the potentially subjective nature of any given person's

personal "theory" of love warrants attention – especially as it relates to universal contexts

such public education. Because confusion still remains in terms of the conceptualizations

of each of these constructs and the interrelatedness and dependency of these variables on

one another, further investigation of these constructs – particularly intimacy, the subject

of study at hand, is warranted.

What is intimacy?

'Intimacy' and 'intimate' from the Latin words *intimus* (innermost) and intimare (to make the innermost known) are critical, yet elusive terms that may refer to feelings, verbal and nonverbal communication processes, behaviors, people's arrangements in space, personality traits, sexual activities, and types of long-term relationships (Partridge, 1966; found in Reis & Shaver, 1988). The feelings of intimacy, otherwise thought of as the strength of our interpersonal "attachments," profoundly influence development of love, reciprocal dependence, and affect (Millar & Rogers, 1976, p. 93). As social relationships are partially built on perceptions and meta-perceptions of self and other, intimacy is one of many components (others include trust, control, commitment, love, passion etc.) that, though readily acknowledged as highly subjective and interpretive in nature, is concerned with attachments and is clearly manifested in exchange of communication and behavior (McCall & Simons, 1966; Millar & Rogers, 1976).

Intimate relationships appear to have become more important throughout time as Veroff, Douvan, & Kulka's (1981) study underscores that interpersonal intimacy is a vehicle for "personal fulfillment" (found in Perlman & Fehr, 1987, p. 20). Considered a primary psychological need (Horney, 1950; Maslow, 1968), intimacy is an important contributor to individual well-being (see Prager, 1995; Manne et al, 2004). Additionally, Perlman & Fehr's (1987) study notes that "personal relationship literature is replete with evidence testifying to the importance of intimate relationships in our lives" (p. 19; see also Verderber, Verderber, & Berryman-Fink, 2007, pp. 318-345). As our lives are filled with multiple contexts and relationships, it can be surmised that intimacy will present itself in variable ways.

Recognizing the important yet varied connotations of this concept, the study of intimacy and personal relationships, in general, has been conceptualized as an interpersonal, transactional process (Reis & Shaver, 1988), though much of earlier intimacy research was mired in the belief that phenomena such as intimacy and attraction are timeless states and rootless events rather than viewing intimacy as a dynamic process affected by the participant's goals and relationship history (Duck & Sants, 1983). By reframing the paradigm of study throughout the past decades, it becomes evident that every day as well as social scientific meanings of the term 'intimacy' are logically couched in relation to a process of emotional communication, a process which is not a static condition, but rather, a marker of interactions that are intimate (Reis & Shaver, 1983).

Since intimacy is a part of everyday vocabulary, it could be expected to conjure various connotations and definitions. Perhaps because of the widely held interest in the topic, intimacy has been defined in a variety of ways. In order to understand the development and definition of this construct, it is important to recognize that modern theories of intimacy can be traced back to four distinguishable approaches: psychodynamic theories, communication and exchange theories, psychometric conceptions, and lay conceptions (Manne et al., 2004; Reis & Shaver, 1988). For example, older conceptualizations define intimacy as the willingness to disclose information to another person or an interaction that is physically proximate or nonverbally engaging (Manne et al., 2004; see Altman & Taylor, 1973 or Hall, 1966). Earlier psychodynamic models defined intimacy as involving two people who self-disclose and express and validate each other's worldviews (Manne et al., 2004; see

Sullivan, 1953). Since these early conceptualizations, the operational definition of intimacy has been refined to encompass a wider set of processes, and uni-dimensional perspectives have broadened (Kelley, 2000). Critical consciousness has awakened to the reality that as our world changes, our relationships change. Complex constructs such as intimacy can no longer be defined in a linear or uni-dimensional form, and these types of constructs solicit further study as they permeate new territories of our personal landscapes, requiring a new conceptualization, definition, and application.

Contemporary research in the field of Communication Studies offers valuable perspectives that help uncover the intricacies of intimacy and its morphing definition, while revealing important information regarding the way intimacy theories are formally taught within the Communication Studies discipline (Knapp & Vangelisti, 2005). Mark Knapp, a respected interpersonal communication scholar, proposes that relationships can be defined by stages, and the more advanced stages of coming together include such aspects as intensifying, integrating, and bonding wherein intimate communication and intimate acts are most often identified (Knapp, 1978). These theories on the stages of relationships have been fundamental to the development of personal relationship study. Interestingly, Knapp & Vangelisti (2005) cite that there are many "unanswered questions about the nature of intimacy and how it is manifested," but that several "foundations of intimacy" can provide helpful framework for further study (p. 226). These foundations include (1) personality and early experiences of relational partners; (2) situational and developmental factors in relationships; (3) cultural guidelines; (4) emotional arousal and labeling; (5) self-fulfillment; (6) self-surrender; and (7) commitment to a joint identity (Knapp & Vangelisti, 2005). These broad categories provide parameters for explaining relationships and labels (Knapp, 1978). Additionally,

Verderber, Verderber, & Berryman-Fink (2007) conclude that intimate relationships are "marked by high degrees of warmth and affection, trust, self-disclosure, and commitment and are formalized through symbols and rituals" (p. 319). Though varying to some degree, it is clear that most definitions of intimacy and the theoretical premises for the study of intimacy have common foundations, yet the application of such definition and theory lends itself to further evaluation when applied to specific, unique contexts and/or relationships.

> The terms 'intimate' and 'intimacy" refer to a vast array of phenomena:
>
> feelings, styles of verbal and nonverbal communication, behaviors, arrangements, personality traits, types of relationships, and even sexual activities (Reis & Shaver, 1988). Intimacy is an interpersonal process within which two partners:
> experience and express feelings, communicate verbally and nonverbally, satisfy social motives, augment or reduce fears, talk and learn about themselves and their feelings and unique characteristics, and become psychologically and physically close (pp. 387-388).

Clearly, intimacy is organized according to a multiplicity of features, definitions, processes, and purposes. Undeniably, it has been shown to be important to people's health and well-being. Finally, its repeated appearances in literature and research on family, marriages, relationships, communication, personality development, and psychology warrant it an essential focus of theory in interpersonal relations. Perhaps it is clearer how this construct may then find a suitable home in research regarding the dynamic process that is teaching and learning – a process which, like the construct itself, draws from tenets in a variety of disciplines.

Teaching and learning as relational activity

One of the first premises foundational to an evaluation of the teaching and learning process as metaphorically representative of an intimate relationship is the

27

establishment of the teacher-student relationship in general. Research in the fields of

Communication and Education over the past two decades makes this establishment

possible, as it has repeatedly studied classroom interactions, teaching environments, and

other factors as critically linked to student motivation, student achievement, learning

processes, and even teacher job satisfaction (Graham, West, & Schaller, 1992). Among

these findings, a repeated sentiment is echoed: the broad recognition that communication

is a "transactional process that is complex, symbolic, and has both content and relational

components," (Cooper & Simonds, 2003, p. 8). As a result, fields of study such as

Instructional Communication have now emerged as relevant, credible responses to the

need for detailed examination of the variables involved in the teaching and learning

process and the posturing of the teacher-student relationship. Though definitions of

"Instructional Communication" have varied as scholarship has evolved, Instructional

Communication involves both the use of verbal and nonverbal messages employed in

instructional contexts (also referred to as "communication in instruction") as well as a

division of communication scholarship that centers on the role of communication

processes in teaching and training contexts (Mottet & Beebe; McCroskey & McCroskey,

2006). Instructional Communication necessarily centers on the "study of the

communicative factors in the teaching- learning process that occur across grade levels,

instructional settings, and subject matter" (Myers, 2010, p. 149). As an interdisciplinary

field, Instructional Communication integrates theory and research from three disciplines:

educational psychology, pedagogy, and communication (Mottet & Beebe, 2006; see also

McCroskey & McCroskey, 2006). As a result of this interdisciplinary influence,

Instructional Communication paradigms have been shaped by both relational and

rhetorical perspectives, positioning the discipline to speak to the convergent nature of intimacy, teaching, and learning.

Instructional Communication: Rhetorical perspectives.

Rhetorical perspectives of Instructional Communication would contend that teachers are use verbal or nonverbal messages with the intention of influencing or persuading students in a way that will change or reinforce student attitudes, beliefs, values, or behaviors. It is a teacher-centered approach that emulates "linear forms of communication in which teachers are the source of instructional messages and students are expected to be compliant receivers of instructional messages" (Mottet & Beebe, 2006, p. 23). Such paradigms place emphasis on viewing students as similar to audience and carefully assessing their communicative traits (McCroskey & Richmond, 2006). Additionally, teachers are thought of as the communicative source and teacher communication traits, particularly teacher credibility, help to posture the efficacy of the teacher's communicative strategies and identity (Meyers & Martin, 2006; Frymier & Thompson, 1992; Frymier & Houser, 2000). Finally, a rhetorical model of Instructional Communication underscores the identification, measurement, and assessment of specific instructional variables like content relevance, instructor clarity, and instructor use of humor, fear, and power strategies in order to overcome barriers in learning contexts (Cheseboro & Wanzer, 2006; Roach, Richmond, & Mottet, 2006). This model relays a very intentional, teacher-centered and teacher-controlled schema for understanding communication in instructional environments, thus offering a clear perspective on the way intimacy is embodied and enacted in educational contexts.

Instructional Communication: Relational perspectives.

In contrast, and of specific interest to this study, relational perspectives of Instructional Communication acknowledge that teachers and students mutually create and use messages to influence each other. These perspectives draw upon contemporary models of communication often compared to Buber's (1958) "I-It" and "I-Thou" theory.

Buber's theory suggests a philosophical orientation toward personal dialogue whereby humans adopt attitudes toward communicative exchanges that connote either a subject-object perspective or a subject-subject perspective. The "I-thou" paradigm is traditionally thought to represent a relationship of reciprocity and mutuality where the "I-it" paradigm distinguishes a relationship of separateness and detachment. Accordingly, the "I-Thou" paradigm is suggested as a model of mutuality essential to the relational communication process, so an Instructional Communication framework guided by this philosophy would regard instructional climates as spaces for co-creation of meaning. One additional hallmark of this approach includes "an emphasis on both teacher and student feelings and emotions – how teachers and students perceive and affectively respond to each other" (Mottet & Beebe, 2006, p. 25; Ellis, 2000, 2004). The most prominent Instructional Communication dynamics studied in this perspective are not surprisingly immediacy and affinity-seeking strategies. Interestingly, though all instructors certainly do not claim to utilize this framework predominantly, the prominent dynamics of the relational paradigm (immediacy and affinity-seeking strategies) are perhaps the two most cited and researched dynamics in Instructional Communication literature. It is clear, consequently, how decades of research in the field of Instructional Communication have identified several variables that are critical aspects of

teaching/learning environments and how teacher-student relationships are viewed as one of the most significant "variables in the educational framework" (Frymier & Houser, 2000; Dobransky & Frymier, 2004, p. 211).

The teacher-student relationship

Clearly, teacher-student relationships are, inevitably present in educational contexts and inevitably interpersonal in nature. Graham, West, & Schaller (1992) base their Relational Teaching Approach (RTA) on the belief that "teaching involves a process of relational development…," citing that, "teacher-student relationships are consistent with other types of interpersonal relationships" (pp. 11, 12) This relational orientation toward teaching is, as previously discussed, reflected in much of the Instructional Communication research (Graham, West, & Schaller, 1992). For example, power studies have explored power-based strategies teachers may use to gain student compliance (McCroskey & Richmond, 1983; Plax & Kearney, 1992). Models of immediacy have suggested that a teacher's behavior will impact student learning (Anderson, 1979; Christophel, 1990; Frymier, 1994). Norton's (1977) work on communicator style evaluates how teacher communication styles profoundly impact classroom dynamics. Techniques of self-disclosure (Sorenson, 1989), increasing sense of solidarity (Nussbaum & Scott, 1980), use of humor (Wanzer & Frymier, 1999), and demonstration of caring (Teven & McCroskey, 1997) all allude to the interpersonal nature of the teacher-student relationship as well. Finally, Frymier's (1994) investigation of affinity-seeking strategies employed by both teachers and students has also contributed to an understanding of the roles played in the student-teacher relationship (Frymier & House, 2000). A salient theme within this line of research suggests an ongoing relationship between teacher and

student and the parallel constructs that tie this relationship to interpersonal communication. Research additionally underscores the importance of framing the teacher-student relationship in this manner, citing not only countless studies that report positive student outcomes as a result of this framing, but also that a "satisfying teaching experience can be enhanced by an ongoing interpersonal relationship between teacher and student" (Graham, West, & Schaller, 1992; see also Holdaway, 1978).

DeVito (1986) has also offered conceptual support for a relational approach to teaching. He suggests that, "it is useful not only to view teaching as an interpersonal process, but also to explore how teaching follows the life cycle of a personal relationship" (p. 53). In order to do so, Miller & Steinberg's framework (1975) for interpersonal communication becomes paramount (Dobransky & Frymier, 2004). This framework indicates that:

> interpersonal communication occurs when predictions are based on a psychological level of analysis, rather than a cultural or sociological level of analysis. In other words, for interpersonal communication to occur, two people must communicate with each other as individuals rather than with regard to the roles they are in (sociological level) or the cultural groups to which they belong (cultural level) (p. 212).

Thus, when teachers and students interact with each other as individuals, their communication is unfolding at the psychological level and would be deemed "interpersonal" in nature according to Miller & Steinberg's (1975) approach.

In order to relate on this level, Dobransky & Frymier (2004) suggest that Millar & Rogers' (1976) generalized approach to describing interpersonal relationships provides a clarifying description of the ways teachers and students may rely on some principles of interpersonal communication and thereby interact as "individuals." The elements of control, trust, and intimacy serve as the cornerstones of this approach, whereby the

"control dimension is concerned with who has the right to direct, delimit, and define the actions of the interpersonal system in the presently experienced spatial-temporal situation" (p. 91), the trust dimension is said to exist if both participants have manifested specific behaviors that indicate reliance and/or dependence on one another, and the intimate dimension is defined as, "…the degree to which each person uses the other as a source of self-confirmation and the affective evaluation of the self-confirmation" (p. 93). In this sense, definitions of intimacy overlap significantly with definitions of immediacy (perceived physical or psychological closeness – see Anderson, 1979; Richmond, Gorham, & McCroskey, 1987). Clearly, this is not to infer that teacher-student relationships should be classified as romantic in nature, rather, feelings of closeness and connection are indicators and creators of the self- confirmation and affective evaluation consistent with Millar & Rogers' (1976) definition (Wood, 2002).

Through this overview, we begin to see the classification of the teacher- student relationship in its literal sense and can easily tie many constructs of interpersonal relationships to teacher-student relationships. It is also evident that intimacy, to a degree, has been an emerging construct in the dialogue surrounding immediacy and teacher-student relationships. However, many of these constructs are highly subjective in nature, thereby making it difficult to speak directly and/or globally to the relevance and prevalence of these concepts in the teaching and learning process. Part of this ambiguity lies in the notion that these constructs are heavily influenced by affective states, or feeling sensations and emotions. As a result, an emerging body of literature in the field of Education begins to open conversation regarding the ways feeling states and emotions are a part of the teaching and learning process – certainly a viable and meaningful connection for framing the course of this study.

The significance of emotion and feeling in teaching and learning

The process of education is, by no means, merely a system of transmission. Because it is a potential site of critical inquiry and encourages transformation of the self and culture, the teaching and learning process offers the opportunity to interpret and reflect (Boler, 1999). The teaching and learning process also encourages an understanding of values, priorities, belief systems, and ethics. It requires, in many cases, a level of vulnerability and transparency unlike other social systems. Emotions function, then, partially as moral and ethical evaluations providing information regarding what we care about and why (Boler, 1999). In fact, Freud argued decades ago that emotion and cognition are inseparable, and the force of their interaction makes learning both "possible and difficult" (Freud, 1914, as cited in Pitt & Rose, 2007, p. 329). Thus, the "emotional experience" serves as a valid site of inquiry when evaluating the personal transformations experienced in both teaching and learning, as the emotional realities of the teaching and learning process also create new intimate relations between cognition and affect (Ptt & Rose, 2007).

In spite of this seemingly obvious emotional nature of the classroom, inquiry on emotions in educational contexts has been limited (Schutz & Pekrun, 2007). Outside of well-known studies on attribution theory (Weiner, 1985) and test anxiety (Zeidner, 1998), what is known about teacher's emotions and student's emotions is less certain (Schutz & Pekrun, 2007). This may be because historically emotion has often been theorized as "private" and "natural," – an experience that is "essentially" located in the individual (Boler, 1999 p. 5; see also Sternberg & Ruzgis, 1994). Despite an increasing

paradigmatic shift over the last two decades whereby emotions are now regarded more as "socially constructed," the view of emotion as individualized is still deeply embedded in our linguistic systems, conceptual frameworks, and research agendas. As a result, in attempting to understand emotions in relation to powerful dimensions of culture such as the teaching and learning process, a confrontation emerges between the unresolved tension embedded in our language and scholarly discourses. This is a tension between studies of "structures" or forces of power, and accounts of individualized, intrapsychic experiences (Boler, 1999, p. 6; see also Sternberg & Ruzgis, 1994). Acknowledging this tension becomes critical as emotions and feelings are evaluated in the framework of this study, because the shift in thinking about emotion as collaboratively constructed and historically situated, as well as an individualized phenomenon, allows glimpses into interpersonal relationship dynamics of control, ideology and hegemony (Boler, 1999; see also Gramsci, 1971; Hebdige, 1979; Fiske, 1987; Althusser, 1971). A multi-dimensional acknowledgment and investigation of emotion as it relates to teaching and learning postures teachers and learners to be more cognizant of the intimate nature of their educational journey and the complications therein. Boler (1999) provides a compelling list of examples whereby this "complicated emotional terrain of educational work" (p. 2) is demonstrated:

The inevitable fears of judgment that occur in a competitive climate of grades and evaluation;

The joy and Eros that are part of inquiry and interaction with others;

Self-doubt and shame, common especially to women's experience within higher education; women with Ph.D.'s who experience the "imposter" syndrome and continue to

be plagued with doubts regarding their intellectual authority;

Anger, alienation, and hopelessness experience by those educators and students who don't "conform" and who, thus, emerge as "losers" in the education game;

The "emotional baggage" we all carry into the classroom: stemming from our different cultural, religious, gendered, racialized, and social class backgrounds (Boler, 1999, p. 3).

In essence, these examples, and the countless others easily conjured, encourage teachers and learners to be wary of discounting emotion from the educational experience, too quickly dismissing the link between emotion and the teaching and learning process as "inappropriate" for systematic structures like formalized educational practices. Because of the many hours spent in educational contexts, the intensive pursuit of educational goals that is a part of everyone's lives to some degree, the social relationships forged as a result of the teaching and learning process, and the attainment of life goals dependent on the individualistic and collective agency in educational institutions, the teaching and learning process is "infused with intense emotional experiences that direct interactions, affect learning and performance, and influence personal growth in both students and teachers" (Pekrun, Goetz, Titz & Perry, 2002; Pekrun, Frenzel, Goetz, & Perry, 2007).

As overviewed, the complicated emotional terrain of educational work heightens our awareness that teaching and learning are, indeed, intimate encounters. As Liston (2000) argues, "Teaching occurs on affective and cognitive terrain; it is emotional and intellectual work" (p. 81). He exemplifies the connection through an illustration:

> In teaching four to forty-four year olds, we work on and through our emotions and ideas to engage students in a process called learning. When it appears successful, we have engaged students in the material at hand through connecting aspects of our lives and theirs with the grace of great things (see also Palmer, 1998).

It is a connection that can be filled with or partially dipped in life's significance and meaning. At its best, it is an affirmation of what is universally and uniquely human in each of us. At its most mundane, it is a recurring nod that significance exists (pp. 81-82).

Clearly, this is not unexpected terrain. The myriad of emotional experiences processed by educators and students is vast. These experiences touch our lives in different ways throughout our journey with the teaching and learning process, at times surrendering us to a sense of defeat or despair, while in other moments, exonerating us to sensations of victory and immeasurable joy. This range identifies teaching and learning as both interpersonal and personal, as relational and thereby, as intimate to some degree.

Braving edu-emotional storms: Experience of negative emotions in teaching and learning.

Surveying the dynamics of emotion in the teaching and learning process reveals that emotions occur on a wide spectrum, and so it is not surprising to discover that the research and literature regarding emotion and teaching/learning also exemplify the vastness of this range.

A variety of studies broadly assess the role of emotions in the educational process. Pekrun's (2000) social-cognitive perspective on emotions assumes that control and value-related appraisals are key antecedents of students' emotional experiences (Boekaerts, 2007). His study describes six main emotions present in the student experience. Of these six, however, only two connote "positive" feelings -- hope and joy, whereas the emaining four predominant emotions of the learner's experience include anxiety, hopelessness, anger, and boredom (Boekaerts, 2007). Linnenbrink's (2007) study surveys items of similar interest, seeking to develop a model that explains the emotional state of college-aged learners. The integration of affect, motivation, and engagement emerge as critical

pieces in relation to the potential "success" college students will have and the amount of "pleasure" they will experience in the educational process. Yet another study by Turner & Waugh (2007) elucidates the impact of evaluation and the potential shame and damage to self-efficacy that occur in the evaluation process has significant effect on physiological, cognitive, affective and behavior systems. A majority of these studies, then, seem to weigh the consequentiality of negative emotions and the resulting effect on the student experience.

However, the learner's experience represents only half the relationship. A barrage of difficult emotions must also be accounted for in regard to the experience of the teacher. In its totality, a teacher's emotional experience is quite varying, all the while, demanding.

Hargreaves' (1998) theoretical framework for the "emotional politics of teaching," based on seven critical assumptions that embed individual experiences of emotions with the sociocultural contexts of schooling, provides a helpful framework for the assessment of the overwhelming role emotions play in the teaching experience (p. 319; as cited in Liljestrom, Roulston, & deMarrais, 2007):

1. Teaching is an emotional practice;

2. Teaching and learning involve emotional understanding;

3. Teaching is a form of emotional labor;

4. Teachers' emotions are inseparable from their moral purposes and their ability to achieve those purposes;

5. Teachers' emotions are rooted in and affect their selves, identities, and relationships with others;

6. Teachers' emotions are shaped by experiences of power and powerlessness; and

7. Teachers' emotions vary with culture and context.

The preceding term "emotional labor" describes a teacher's effort to express, repress, or manufacture emotion based on a perceived need during particular transactions (Williams, et. al., 2006). Similar to the concept of emotional regulation, emotional labor demonstrates that a teacher's felt emotions and pedagogically desired emotions may not always be congruent, so teachers must often exert great effort to display the necessary or desired emotions in a given situation (Morris & Feldman, 1996). This tension describes only one of a myriad of difficult and challenging emotional tasks faced by teachers. Other sources of emotional experiences can be located as well: in the world of professional development, "teacher burnout" is one name given to the sense of pain and/or depletion common within the teaching ranks (Gold & Roth, 1993). Critical race literature points to the "fatalistic" social and political landscape that "disfigures children of color and engenders despair in all who care (Liston, 2000, p. 2; see Bell, 1992; West, 1993; and hooks, 1994). Even fictional accounts of teachers' lives as portrayed in cinema or other texts illuminate "cracks and crevices" of despair (Liston, 2000, p. 2). However, the relationship between emotion and the teaching and learning process is not one entirely steeped in negativity. It is dually important to illuminate and recognize the interplay between teaching and learning and the more positive emotions that create the intimacy of this relationship.

No hard feelings: Experiencing positive emotions in teaching and learning

One of the most promising examples of the positive emotional labor of the teaching and learning process is found in a fertile place of inception – the moment where

a young man or woman makes the decision to enter into profession of teaching, full of

hope and an authentic commitment to the vocation. In evaluating the success of teacher

education training programs which are designed to nurture and grow students such as

these, Goldstein (2004) adopts Sternberg's previously- mentioned triangular model of

love as a conceptualization that holds promise for the creation of love-based teacher

education programs. In this conceptualization, she argues that Sternberg's cornerstones

of commitment, passion, and intimacy can be defined more relevantly to the teacher

education context whereby:

> commitment is grounded in the fundamental responsibility of teacher educators
> and pre-service teachers to enter into loving relationships with their students;
> intimacy is writ large and transformed into intimacy-in-the-community, leading to
> the creation of a community of learners sharing close personal connection; and
> passion is linked to efforts to ensure that our pre- service teacher education
> students see the connections between
> love and the intellectual and curricular aspects of teaching children
> (p. 38).

Goldstein's (2004) conceptualization demonstrates that resourceful, dedicated

teacher educators may choose to sample from teaching strategies based in positive

emotion, offering pre-service teachers a strong and powerful foundation by

relying on the emotional components of love.

O'Quinn & Garrison (2004) extend these themes of positive emotion as a

pivotal cornerstone of a creating a loving classroom environment, citing:

> We all worry about the dangerous tendency to reduce all difference and diversity
> to the same concepts, categories, and standards that yield authoritarian
> conformity…in pursuing loving relations [in the classroom] instead of conditional
> ones, others may draw us out of our already formed self, our concepts, and our
> intuitions which is the reverse of reducing the Other (p. 59).

In the pursuit of these "loving relations," O'Quinn & Garrison cite the importance

of valuing creativity, arguing:

> Others are different from us because they possess different meanings, values and habits of actions. Understanding them, however, does not involve a mystical union. Instead, it involves sharing something. However, honest sharing cannot take place unless existing conditions are hospitable (p. 60).

In this sense, the co-creation of meaning is possible when learners decenter themselves, open themselves to emergent and creative processes, and focus on moral acceptability – environments that are created through "empathy, compassion, commitment, patience, spontaneity, and an ability to listen" (p. 63).

Thankfully, themes of compassion and commitment do dominate some of the literature regarding teacher education. One prominent example is found in Martray's (2006) anthology *A Joyful Passion for Teaching* which dedicates over 175 pages to the collected narratives of teachers from across the country who celebrate the smallest of moments in which lives were changed and hearts were touched. Self-described "transforming practitioners," these educators see themselves as:

> A living link in the educational process…changing internally through understanding, practicing, and reflecting such that individually and collaboratively, they implement for all learners appropriate and significant life-changing experiences that effectively provide for the needs of the individual, actively engaging students in the learning process… (Martray, 2006, p. 2)

It is this type of passion for teaching and learning and these types of joyful encounters that evoke positive emotional engagement for both the teacher and the learner. It is, as revered educational scholar Parker Palmer relates, an invitation into the "life of the mind" (1998, p. 22). It is, as Anne Carson reminds us, the indescribable union between "falling in love and coming to know" that has the power to make one feel genuinely alive (1986, p. 70). Through these experiences with the positive emotions present in the teaching and learning process, we see how education is, in part, the "willingness to continually revise one's own location in order to place oneself in the path of beauty" (Liston, 2004, p. 482;

41

Boler, 1999; Kelly, 1997). Through these experiences, we see the richness that is the intimacy of the teaching and learning process.

However, the real 'work' of teaching and learning is more than summation of the socio-personal, and/or affective aspects of the educational context, experience, and/or relationships present. It is also very much the derivative of the teaching and learning itself – the pedagogical choices made by the educator and the response learners may have to these choices. As a result, an exploration of the potentially "intimate" nature of teaching and learning would be replete without finally nodding to the pragmatics (the pragma "love") of pedagogy itself and investigating varying pedagogical philosophies that slant toward and/or ground themselves in relational foundations.

The 'work' of teaching: Pedagogical perspectives and intimacy

In its purest form, pedagogy serves as the metaphorical "vow" which unites teacher and/or learner with education itself. Pedagogical practices are comprised of both the literal words and the conceptual frameworks that "yoke" any given content to its prospective "spouse" – be it the spouse who is enacting the pedagogical choice (the teacher/pedagogue), or the spouse who absorbs and receives it (the learner). Polyamorous as this may seem, for pedagogy applies to many thereby insinuating pedagogy yokes itself to a multiplicity of partners, pedagogical practices need not reflect a monogamous attitude to be validated as an important component of the intimate nature of teaching and learning. Just as every person is different, every pedagogue brings his/her persona to the relationship, thereby making each yoking "new" for both learner and teacher. With this in mind, it is as important to attend to the 'how' (processes) of learning as it is to the 'what' (content) in order to assess the relational nature of the

teaching and learning process (Brownlee, 2004; Klatter et al., 2001).

Pedagogical theory is overrun with a multitude of perspectives that iterate, blend, blur, and suggest appropriate paradigmatic and pragmatic approaches to teaching and learning. This is further complicated by the lack of clear definition from which to operate in discussions surrounding pedagogy. For some, "pedagogy" connotes a set of learning activities and/or practices, as is evidenced by countless websites devoted to the listing of hundreds of "pedagogies" that are really nothing more than suggested modalities of teaching and/or methods of delivery (i.e. – collaborative learning, utilizing graphic organizers, lecture etc.). For others, "pedagogy" connotes a philosophical positioning – a paradigm through which one's teaching and/or learning could be viewed and from which one's motivation as teacher or learner is stirred. For the purposes of this study, a comfortable balance of both perspectives is helpful, though ultimately, a philosophical grounding is most appropriate in terms of relating the intimate nature of teaching and learning to pedagogical practices. As such, a review of pedagogical perspectives grounded in relational tenets will help demonstrate this connection.

Pedagogy of care

In her germinal work, *In a Different Voice*, Carol Gilligan (1982) elucidated the concept of an "ethic of care" to describe a kind of moral reasoning that eventually resulted in what is now known as a "pedagogy of care" (Zhang, 2007). This approach to teaching and learning supposes that behaviors of teachers may and should often be associated with a maternal role, whereby educational contexts are instead thought of as "schoolhomes" (Martin, 1992) and educators adopt certain maternal behaviors to recreate aspects of the home and of motherhood in the school and classroom (Zhang, 2007).

Highlighting themes of morality, domesticity, and "traditional" value systems, Martin argues that the three "C's" of "care, concern, and connection" must take their place in curricular models (1992, p. 40). Though it may seem extreme, it is not unusual to equate the process of teaching to mothering, especially for those who teach younger students. Many authors such as Apple (1985), Noddings (1988), and Ruddick (1997) find benefit in the duality of fostering educational contexts that model home and family relationships. Similarly, many theorists who write about the pedagogy of care have attributed several relational characteristics to teachers that are not necessarily associated only with mothers, thereby opening the range of this pedagogical perspective to equate things other than familial relationship. These attributes include: friendliness, respect, responsiveness, tolerance, willingness to listen, and so on (Bosworth, 1995; Bulach, 1998; and Catforth, 1999; as noted in Zhang, 2007).

Ultimately, though the pedagogy of care does illumine ways in which the teaching and learning process is relational, its focus on more female-oriented, familial relationships limits the utility of the theory, enabling it to describe a very limited form of intimacy. In response to this pedagogical framework, it becomes evident how many pedagogues strive, then, to align themselves with pedagogical practices that are more passionate in nature.

Pedagogy and passion

"Passion" is a popular buzz word as it relates to discourse surrounding teaching and learning and may certainly be one critical component that hoists notions of pedagogy and intimacy from the foundations of familial intimacy into the realms of more intense forms of intimacy. Many educators and learners experience revelatory moments whereby

the tentacles of passion grasp their unsuspecting heartstrings, never to be loosed again.

One such moment is described by author/teacher Jo McShane (2007), as she recounts her experience as an audience member at an international conference on pedagogy and educational practice, sponsored by the *Journal of Pedagogy*, *Culture, and Society*. After being exposed to session after session regarding theories of pedagogy, McShane recalls how the final speaker of the conference avoided intellectually rigorous postmodern elaborations on pedagogy and simply urged the audience to reclaim passion in educative practices by considering the relationship between love in its many forms and pedagogy.   Noting that "pedagogy is about service, an educative journey, interrelationships and to a certain extent rhetoric and persuasion," McShane realizes "it is also about love," (2007, p. 1). In this revelation, McShane recognizes that teachers and learners do not have to tread the 'holy ground' between the teacher and taught, but rather can acknowledge that "Love, after all, is at the summit of our moral vocabulary…and using pedagogic means that are appreciative and beneficent" is central and critical to "effective" pedagogy (p. 1).

In a similar vein, describing the intricate relationship between her work as a teacher and her "side life" as a concert violinist, teacher/author Rosalie Romano discusses the tension she negotiated for years trying to determine how her true "passions" might inform her teaching practices more effectively. Recognizing the irrefutable relationship between her knowledge of and love for music and her career as a teacher, she draws a powerful analogy between her pedagogical choices and her relationship with music. This analogy serves as a beautiful reminder of the capacity for passion to inform the pedagogical choices of a teacher. Romano artistically asserts:

> Guided by the mind of the teacher, feeling and emotion of the students are considered as indicators of engagement or capacity or interest from which the teacher takes her cues.

> The rhythm of the lesson has its own specific cadence, depending upon the students' responses. Such a pedagogical stance assumes the student is no mere observer, passive and receiving the teaching we give…from the attitudes of their playing, that is exactly what performers impose on us in the audience: the role of passive observer. How can there be satisfaction in that?

> Instead, passivity undermines the forging of connections between all participants. Passivity closes down our responses, and with them, any hope of imaginative engagements. Once you have experience the joy of engaging heart and mind in learning, it's difficult to endure being treated like a blank slate (Romano, 2002, pp. 371-372).

This analogy asserts, once again, that the teaching and learning process is an intricate and artistic relationship of emotions, inspirations, motivations, and actions. These narratives serve as poignant reminders that to be effective, any pedagogical practice must be infused with passion and stem from a source of meaning deep within so that both teachers and learners can be "romantically" intertwined with educational process and product. Though "passion" may be enacted in a variety of ways, it is arguable that passion is one of the essential building blocks of any intimate relationship, and thus becomes a cornerstone for the pedagogical choices teachers make and the visceral responses students have.

Relational pedagogy

The aforementioned examples of the pedagogy of care and the relationship between passion and pedagogy all speak to the broad notion that pedagogy can be tied to a relational perspective, thus connecting teaching and learning to relational dynamics such as intimacy. Relational models of knowing predicate themselves on being open, flexible, connected, responsive, and influenced by a set of beliefs that "values the relationships…over any particular outcome and…is marked by attachment and

connection rather than separation and abstraction" (Noddings, 1991, p. 158).

This philosophical posture is known generally as "relational pedagogy," an approach that treats "relationships as the foundation of good pedagogy, building on the strong emphasis on relationships already embedded in pedagogy itself (Boyd, MacNeill, & Sullivan, 2006, p. 2; MacNeill & Silcox, 2006). Equipping learners to be partners in their own education and viewing this reciprocal process as lifelong, relational pedagogy implies that teaching and learning should be relational activities: that is, connection between self and theory should be connected to interpersonal relationships (Brownlee, 2004).

Though relational pedagogy encourages the use of relational ways of knowing in a connected, relativistic view of epistemology (Magolda, 1993), it acknowledges that building relationships without improving student learning across all dimensions of education is not good teaching or learning. Similarly, though two people engaged in an intimate, loving relationship would acknowledge that love is an important foundation for a relationship, they would also argue it is not enough to justify and/or maintain a relationship. As a response to this potential critique, relational pedagogy grounds itself by focusing on fostering reflective behaviors among learners and educators. Similar to the types of relational communication present in an intimate relationship, relational pedagogy encourages practices such as: holding dialogic meetings in learning environments where teachers and learners can comment on the process and outcomes of each individualized situation, focusing on student-centered learning practices, and encouraging reflective behaviors on a regular basis for all parties involved in the educational experience (Boyd, MacNeill, & Sullivan, 2006).

Many of the concepts and tenets of relational pedagogy have a particular resonance when manifested through the lens of relational theory at large (Aitken, Fraser, & Price, 2007), thus making it easy to see how this form of pedagogy illumines the hypothesis that the teaching and learning process can be likened to an intimate relationship. For example, Bergum (2003) emphasizes the embodied nature of the relationship among people (teachers and learners) and the shared human space wherein knowledge is constructed. hooks (2003) argues that the most crucial connections in teaching are the relationship between teacher and student, and teacher and subject, both of which she argues should be charged with emotion. She suggests that a "teacher's passion for his/her subjects helps him/her to excite, enthuse, and inspire students, and that care for his/her students helps him/her to empathize, encourage, challenge" (Aitken, Fraser, & Price, 2007, p. 2). Concerns with embodiment, use of space, passion, emotion, empathy, and modeling of behaviors that are core to relational pedagogy have long been central to relational theory at large (Aitken, Fraser, & Price, 2007). Broadly, this pedagogical orientation focuses not only on teacher expectations, but it dissects the moral fiber of the expectation and connotes the teacher's expectations of a change in the learners' mindset, both academically and behaviorally (Freeman, & Adams-Johnson, 2007).

Through this exploration, it is clear that the "vows" pedagogy and pedagogues make to learners have the potential to unite teachers and learners intimately with the educational process. Understanding the familial tenets of the pedagogy of care, reflecting on the innate desire for passion in pedagogical practice, and re-visiting the premises upon which relational pedagogy is formed help to further strengthen the bonds of the intimate relationship in which teachers and learners engage.

Conclusions of a love act

  The preceding has been a love act endeavoring to illumine how existing research can frame the theory suggested by this study – that is, the attempt to draw parallel relationship between teaching and learning and an intimate relationship. First, the nature of research on personal relationships in the field of Communication Studies was discussed, focusing on the definition of personal relationships, foundational theoretical components of personal relationships, and more specific analyses of what intimacy is and how it has been defined and regarded in the field of Communication Studies. Following this, similar findings in the field of Education unveiled paradigms of teaching and learning that allude to similar constructs. Such constructs include the teacher-student relationship, teacher-student communication, theories of immediacy, and issues of passion and emotion in teaching. Finally, specific pedagogical theories and philosophies such as the pedagogy of care, passion and pedagogy and relational pedagogy and its counterparts assisted in labeling the teaching and learning process as necessarily relational, illuminating the intricate relationship that already exists between teaching, learning, and pedagogy.

  Through these evaluations, it is easy to see that issues of teaching, learning, and intimacy have long been generally and loosely connected through theoretical frameworks from allied fields of research. However, the painstaking love act of this study involves processing a more specific evaluation of this love "triangle," pushing concrete and tangible connections to the foreground of our scholarly consciousness. This will be attempted through both narrative and analytic autoethnographic examinations of my teaching and learning journey and will require: fostering my own definitions of personal relationship and intimacy as they relate specifically to my role as a learner and teacher,

differentiating between the established constructs of teacher-student relationships and their counterparts and the metaphorical construct of teaching and learning as relationship, acknowledging and analyzing my own and my students' own affective and emotional experiences as a teacher and learner, naming and evaluating my professional and pedagogical choices that create unions between students and academic content, and finally, offering purposeful reflections which will seek to expose thematic patterns that emerge from both a teacher and learner's perspective.

In doing so, attention is now turned toward assessing the methodologies that will allow for the most provocative, yet systematic and rigorous exposure of these themes.

Chapter 3 - Methodology

Reflective and interpretive approaches in qualitative inquiry – an overview

Research subjects and contexts are often complex sites, rich with data (Schon, 1991). As a result, choosing appropriate, meaningful methods through which to conduct research becomes a consequential endeavor. Researchers must ask themselves questions such as "What subjects/contexts are appropriate to reflect on?," "What is an appropriate way of conducting that observation and reflection?," "What constitutes rigor in research?," and "How do varying methodologies position researchers differently?" (Schon, 1991).

Qualitative research methods have emerged as a body of techniques that are uniquely designed to allow researchers to address these types of questions. Having grown in utility in the past several decades, qualitative research refers to both a field of study and a body of research design methods that traverse disciplines and subject matters (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Though definitions vary, a qualitative research practice can be defined as a "situated activity that locates the observer in the world, consisting of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible" (Denzin & Lincoln, p. 3). These research practices "transform the world," turning it into a series of representations that are studied through a variety of empirical materials, often employing multiple interpretive practices in a singular study (Denzin & Lincoln, p. 3). Since these approaches are highly reflective in nature, the utilization of a qualitative method

shapes the design and procedures of a study significantly. A study is also shaped by five

philosophical positions that guide the choice of qualitative method. These positions

include: researcher's stance toward the nature of reality (ontology), how the researcher

knows what she or he knows (epistemology), the roles of values in research (axiology),

the language of research (rhetoric), and the methods used in the process (methodology)

(Creswell, 2007; Creswell, 2003).

Narrative inquiry and autoethnography emerge, then, as two interpretive methods

that seek to reflectively position the researcher to evaluate cultures and stories from a

personal standpoint. Utilizing data about self and context, greater understanding of the

connectivity between self and others emerges through these methods (Ngunjiri,

Hernandez, & Chang, 2010).   This type of connectivity provides a beneficial lens

through which to study many research contexts, subjects, and questions. In regard to the

present study, the selection of this blended methodological approach encourages an

authentic, critical cultural posture toward evaluating the intimate nature of the

teaching/learning process. The interpretive and reflective character of these

methodologies is well-suited for a personal endeavor of this nature.

In order to more clearly ascertain both the purpose and value of these

methodological practices as they relate to the present study, a general description of each

method will be provided to add credence to the rationale for the use of each method.

Next, strengths and limitations correlated to each method will be discussed in order to

illumine issues of validity and trustworthiness insofar as qualitative methods are

concerned and often interrogated. Then, a detailed description of the systematic, applied

research approach for this study will be provided so that the interaction between each

52

chosen method and this particular study can be more clearly understood. Finally, a discussion will conclude this chapter whereby these methods are evaluated as tools of inquiry, and their potential applied value in various fields, particularly that of Education, is assessed and justified.

Narrative inquiry

It is not surprising to acknowledge that social life is premised on stories. As Stalker argues, "there is no escaping in Western culture that the story is the way we make ourselves known to one another" (2009, p. 219). Through narratives we gain a sense of continuity and identity (Alasuutari, 1997; McAdams, 1993), build connection with others (Gergen & Gergen, 1988), learn about cultures (Kenyon & Randall, 1997), and adjust behaviors (Spector-Mersel, 2010). Our stories become "symbols for God, ethics, morality, justice, wisdom, truth, love, hope, trust, suffering, and what constitutes personal and professional meaning" (Nash, 2004, p. 2). Beyond the texts of our popular culture and personal worlds, stories also enrich understanding of how we are embedded in cultures and societies thereby allowing researchers to situate themselves in these social worlds (Stalker, 2009). Necessarily, then, the first qualitative method which informs my research design paradigm is that of narrative inquiry, specifically the scholarly personal narrative (Nash, 2004).

Before investigating the utility of the scholarly personal narrative, it is first imperative to illustrate the formative role narrative inquiry plays in research design. Therefore, it is first helpful to investigate the various functions of narrative. "Narrative" has multiple meanings: first, it is the label assigned to a text or discourse and describes a particular form, style, or technique of writing. More commonly, it is also a mode of

inquiry with a specific focus on the stories told by individuals (Chase, 2005, as cited in Creswell, 2007, p. 54; Polkinghorne, 1959). To engage in narrative analysis refers to a "family of methods for interpreting texts that have in common a storied form," whereby the focus is on "particular actors, in particular social places, at particular social times" (Riessman, 2008, p. 11). Therefore, in the field of qualitative research and in the more specific narrative literature, narrative research can be commonly referred to as a method of collecting and analyzing empirical materials (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005), a methodology (Clandinin, 2007), and/or a qualitative approach (Creswell, 2007). Broadly then, one can write in narrative form, inquire through narrative strategies, and/or seek to share the narrative of a particular text, subject, or context as a mode of inquiry. It is a perspective that considers form and context, but the "core of narrative inquiry combines both a philosophical stance toward the nature of social reality and our relationship with it, and the mode in which it should be studied" (Spector-Mersel, 2010, p. 206).

As a general field, narrative inquiry is "grounded in the study of the particular," transferrable to the general, and uses language and imagery to communicate this meaning (Radley & Chamberlain, 2001, p. 331). Riessman (2008) also argues that narrative analysts "interrogate intention and language" and must ask:

> how and why incidents are storied, not simply the content to which language refers. For whom was this story constructed and for what purpose? Why is the succession of events configured that way? What cultural resources does the story draw on or take for granted?
> What does the story accomplish? Are there gaps and inconsistencies that might suggest preferred, alternative, or counter-narratives? (p. 11).

Fundamentally, narrative study relies on extended accounts that can be treated analytically as units, rather than be fragmented into thematic categories. This fragmentation, often utilized in other qualitative methods, may eliminate the structural

and sequential features that are hallmarks of narrative (Riessman). In narrative study, the
attention shifts to rich descriptions of details – how and why a particular event is storied
and what a narrator hopes to accomplish by developing the story; a good narrative
prompts readers to think beyond the surface of a text and generalize to theoretical
propositions which may be transferrable to other similar contexts (Bryman, 1988).
Rooted in social and humanistic disciplines, narrative inquiry has been utilized in the
study of literature, history, anthropology, sociology, sociolinguistics, and education
(Chase, 2005). As Clandinin & Connelly (2000) argue:

> We study [experience] narratively because narrative thinking is a key form of
> experience and a key way of writing and thinking about it. In effect, narrative
> thinking is part of the phenomenon of narrative. It might be said that narrative
> methods are an aspect of narrative phenomena. Thus, narrative is both the
> phenomenon and the method of the social sciences (p. 18).

For many, narrative is one of the most powerful research methodologies for representing
and understanding experience.

To further understand narrative inquiry, when characterizing narrative, six
dimensions emerge as essential: ontology, epistemology, methodology, inquiry aim,
inquirer posture, and participant/narrator posture. The first, ontology, acknowledges that
the narrative paradigm draws on the constructivist paradigm with its phenomenological
and hermeneutic foundations, and the poststructuralist paradigms which conceive of
social reality as constructed, fluid, and multi-faceted (Spector-Mersel, 2010). However,
the narrative paradigm more specifically focuses on the storied nature of human conduct
(Sarbin, 1986). Narrative epistemology acknowledges that narratives are rooted in
situational, current, inter- subjective, collective social fields in which they evolved and
are influenced by the cultural meta-narratives that give meaning to stories (Rosenthal,
2004; Zilber, Tuval-Mashiach, & Lieblich, 2008). As a result of this range of influences,

55

our stories are not our exclusive creations, but rather, we are their co-authors (Ruth & Kenyon, 1996). Insofar as methodology is concerned, the techniques through which narrative investigators collect narrative data align with many of the familiar strategies of qualitative research (observation, interviews, focus groups, etc.), yet in employing them, investigators focus on stories which are holistic in nature and have high regard for form and content (Spector-Mersel).

The latter three dimensions of narrative inquiry: inquiry aim, inquirer posture, and participant/narrator posture, highlight essential aspects that demonstrate the unique philosophical infrastructure that gives rise to narrative inquiry. First, the aims of narrative inquiry are diverse and may sample from a range of the following types of questions: psychological, sociological, anthropological, historical, linguistic, and interpersonal. Additionally, the ways in which groups or individuals share their stories may be represented by a variety of inquiry aims as well such as: self-narratives (see Nash, 2004, for example), life stories, narratives of those who experience special circumstances, or evaluations of identity on a macro level. Some researchers even employ narratives to give voice to marginalized subjects, thus prompting the question of whether narrative inquiry is "descriptive or interventionist; that it…sets out to change the world" (Clandinin, 2007, p. xv). With these various aims in mind, inquirer posture then refers to the distinction between reality "as it is" and the researcher "discovering" it; the narrative paradigm, like other interpretive paradigms, maintains that researchers and the phenomena they study are inseparable (Spector-Mersel, 2010, p. 216). Finally, narrative inquiry suggests that subjects of inquiry (narrators) stand at the center of study, not merely as informants, but as active agents, inseparable from the phenomenon under inquiry. Acknowledgment of the six dimensions of the narrative paradigm, then, helps

further delineate principle underpinnings of narrative research and illumines the delicate "gap" that may exist between viewing this method as both a form of content and a form in and of itself.

For the purposes of this research project, the scholarly personal narrative emerges as the form of narrative inquiry that will best address the proposed research questions. An "unabashed, up front admission" that one's own life is both significant and signifying, scholarly personal narrative is a research methodology that blends the rigor of traditional scholarship with a writer's personal experience (Nash, 2004, p. 24; Gornick, 2001). Useful as a mode of reflecting on professional practice, scholarly personal narrative, also often called personal ethnography or autobiographical scholarship, centers the writer and radiates outward. Acting as more than a memoir, scholarly personal narrative may include interpretation, application of appropriate and relevant theory and universal themes, and is useful for contributing knowledge to the researcher's professional field, much as it has done in the fields of women's studies and multicultural studies – fields where individual voices may contribute to greater understanding of the collective unit (McManus, 2011). Meant to benefit readers and touch their lives by informing experience through the telling of another's transformative experience(s), scholarly personal narratives account for postmodern, narrative truth criteria such as trustworthiness, honesty, plausibility, situatedness, introspectiveness, universality, coherence, livability, and adequacy (Nash, 2004; Bruner, 2002). Additionally, they are constructed in the spirit of "artful communication" (Nash, 2004, p. 44) designed and intended to bring writers and readers together, to exchange openly in Tolstoy's words, regarding "daily lacerations and uplifts of the spirit."

As indicated by the many forms of narrative inquiry that co-exist within the larger field, Guba and Lincoln note, as the "various paradigms are beginning to 'interbreed'…to argue that it is paradigms that are in contention is probably less useful than to process where and how paradigms exhibit confluence and where and how they exhibit differences, controversies, and contradictions" (2005, p. 192). In other words, many qualitative methods are closely related to other methods, and determining those overlaps helps further delineate how and why many interpretive methods often co-exist in a study and rely upon one another in order to thoroughly investigate research questions. Mapping the field of narrative inquiry, Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) use both the terms *borders* and *borderland spaces* aiming at elucidating what narrative inquiry and its philosophical neighbors have in common and how they differ. One of the methods that certainly resides on the 'borderland space' with narrative inquiry and scholarly personal narrative is that of autoethnography, which will be further clarified next.

Navigating narrative borderlands: A review of autoethnography

As a subset of narrative inquiry, self-narratives have grown in both humanities and social sciences as communication specialists have recognized that the nature of ethnography has changed and objectivist traditions are giving way to self-reflexive questioning (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Crawford, 1996). A particular strand of self-narrative, autoethnography, is a genre of writing that involves the utilization of personalized accounts whereby authors draw on their own lived experiences to connect the personal to culture and in doing so, place the self and others within a social context (Reed-Danahay, 1997). Autoethnography "epitomizes the reflexive turn of fieldwork by (re)positioning the researcher as an object of inquiry who depicts a site of

interest in terms of personal awareness and experience" (Crawford, 1996, p. 167). It is a methodology that utilizes the self-consciousness or "pervasive nervousness" referred to by Geertz (1988) to "reveal subjectively and imaginatively a particular social setting in the expressions of local and grounded impression" (Crawford, p. 167). This use of first person voice is intently subjective and connects to evaluating the role of reflexivity in understanding the self and personhood of the researcher, acknowledging that the researcher is a social being and actor who reads the world with a critical, perceptive eye and heightened human consciousness (Maguire, 2006; Friere & Macedo, 1987). As Maguire argues, "this conscious positioning of authors within their texts opens up possibilities for evocative, innovative ways in which researchers may represent realities, themselves, and their research participants in their texts" (p. 2).

In autoethnography, "the researcher self is not separate from the lived self" (Richardson, 2003, p. 197). It entails, requires, and combines an "ethnographic gaze inward on the self (auto), while maintaining the outward gaze of ethnography, looking at the larger context where self-experiences occur" (Denzin, 1997, p. 277). As a result, autoethnography provides a "rich space for exploring the individual's experiences in conjunction with sociocultural issues" (Young, 2009, p. 144). As such, it can be considered a form of "autobiographical ethnography" in which researchers interject personal experiences into ethnographic writings (Reed-Danahay, 1997, p. 2). Consequently, Ellis & Bochner (2000) argue that autoethnography is a mode of inquiry that provides insight into larger social, political, historical, and cultural structures and represents an epistemological and methodological shift toward exploring lived experiences. Autoethnography, then, emphasizes "how subjects are constituted in and by their relations to each other (Pratt, 1992, p. 7; as cited in Young, 2009).

Autoethnography, as a methodological approach, is rooted in anthropological ethnographic fieldwork. As a result of its use throughout various disciplines, it is common to note that scholars do not necessarily agree on the appropriate terms used to describe autoethnographic practices, nor do all of these terms represent the same methodological practice or intent. Ellis and Bochner (2000) provide a comprehensive list of labels that indicate an autoethnographic orientation. Among these include, but is not limited to, such labels as:

> autobiographical ethnography, ethnographic autobiography, evocative narrative, indigenous ethnography, lived experiences, narrative ethnography, personal experience narrative, postmodern ethnography, self-ethnography, socioautobiography, and writing- stories (as cited in Chang, 2008, p. 48)

Clearly, having "grown out of various disciplines," the variance of labels reflects the "diverging evolution of this genre" (Chang, p. 48).

Denzin (2006) explores the tensions present in the autoethnographic tradition, revealing that autoethnography can be understood in regard to four potential research paradigms. First, Jones' (2005) directive asserts that autoethnography must serve as a research method that can produce cultural and social change. Ellis and Bochner argue that autoethnography must be personal, highly embodied and a creative endeavor that allows for "sense-making" and encourages the "reader to empathize and feel" rather than offering profuse amounts of theorizing and analysis (2006, p. 433). Spry's (2001) perspective reveals that autoethnography is about self-narrative, situatedness, and identity. Finally, Anderson (2006) argues for an "analytic" form of autoethnography, premised in five clear features that refine its purpose away from mere evocative writing to more of a creative analytic process. Regardless of which paradigm is favored, the

complexity of autoethnographic variety can be explained by Ellis' and Bochner's triadic

model. They observe that:

> [a]utoethnographers vary in their emphasis on the research process (graphy), on culture (ethno), and on self (auto) and [d]ifferent exemplars of autoethnography fall at different places along the continuum of each of these three axes (p. 740).

These three aspects illumine similarity and difference between autoethnography and other

ethnographic endeavors. Like ethnographers, autoethnographers systematically collect

field texts and analyze and interpret them and importantly, attempt to achieve cultural

understanding through analysis and interpretation (Chang, 2008). Fundamentally, this

highlights the fact that autoethnography is not about focusing on self alone, but about

"searching for understanding of others (culture/society) through self" (Chang, p. 49).

However, autoethnography departs from traditional ethnography because

autoethnographers use their personal experiences as primary data. As Muncey (2005)

claims, "Autoethnography celebrates rather than demonizes the individual story" (p. 2).

Ellis & Bochner (2000) clarify this method, then, as "autobiographies that self-

consciously explore the interplay of the introspective, personally engaged self with

cultural descriptions mediated through language, history, and ethnographic explanation

(p. 46). Often accomplished through a collection of personal stories and narratives,

autoethnography delineates itself from "mere narration of self to engage in cultural

analysis and interpretation" (Chang, p. 43). Scholarship is performed through what

Chang highlights as "self-narratives" that may take on three distinct forms:

"descriptive/self-affirmative, analytical/interpretive, and confessional/self-critical/self-

evaluative" (p. 36, 39). These forms offer research methods that are friendly to

researchers and readers, that enhance cultural understandings of self and others, and that

have the potential to transform self and others.

Evaluation of validity: Delineating strengths and limitations of narrative inquiry and autoethnography

Since research projects are situated by the epistemologies that ground the empirical work, ways of thinking about validity and cautions surrounding a research practice are the "products of the paradigms that spawn them" (Riesmann, 2008; Morgan, 1983, as cited by Lather 1986, p. 270). Consequently, ways of evaluating validity of a research methodology should be assessed from within the situated perspective and traditions that frame it, which ideally and most importantly, an investigator should make unquestionably clear in a study.

In regard to the situated strengths of narrative inquiry, its fundamental existence within scholarship recognizes it as a method with "deep roots extending to the late 19th century" (Spector-Mersel, 2010, p. 206). The prominence and utility of narrative can be touted due to its commitment to the personal. As Nash (2004) so eloquently argues, the scholarly personal narrative has the power to touch lives and may often be healing and transformative in nature, since this genre opens space for deep and rich explorations of identities and cultures. The very process of writing a narrative evokes self-reflection and self-analysis for the author, requiring the researcher to do more than merely tell a story, but rather, consciously study his/her story while affording readers the opportunity to compare and contrast their lived experiences with those of the author (Chang, 2008). Additionally, a growing belief exists that narrative represents a "universal medium of human consciousness" (Lucaites & Condit, 1985, p. 90). Smith and Sparkes (2009) summarize this position claiming:

We live in, through, and out of narratives. They serve as an essential source of psycho-socio-cultural learning and shape who we are and might become. Thus, narratives are a portal through which a person enters the world and they play a formative role in the development of the person; help guide action; and are a psycho-socio-cultural shared resource that constitutes and constructs human realities (p. 3).

Beyond these merits, narrative can also provide explanation for the development, action, or issues of a collective community and highlight the construction of various collective dimensions (such as discourse) as a vehicle to understanding social structures. Additionally, the temporality of narrative allows investigation of life both "here and now" and as it is "experienced on a continuum" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 19). Narrative structures create a sense of continuity.

Despite these strengths, to proceed with narrative inquiry does require caution. The tentative nature of "narrative knowledge" has long left researchers questioning whether or not narrative work is "scholarly" (Spector-Mersel, 2010, p. 217; Nash, 2004). Adding to this scrutiny, a lack of clear narrative paradigm has often blurred and blended this method such that the term 'narrative' has "come to mean anything and everything," thereby compromising the philosophy of the method into an overly pluralistic and generic approach (Riessman & Speedy, 2007, p. 428). Most significant, however, are concerns related to validity and pragmatism. Narrative research contains "truths" that are heavily situated, often co-constructed as the investigator is translating another's story. As a result, the coherence of the participants' narratives may be questionable, and the influence of the investigator is of prime concern. Additionally, discussion of trustworthiness emerges as notions of the generalizability of narrative "findings" incite debate in regard to their

transferrable utility. Simply, the "truth" of one story may not resonate for other contexts and/or people.

Autoethnographic methods negotiate many of the same strengths and limitations as do narrative methods. Issues of positionality, reflexivity, objectivity, and representation emerge as general critiques of this method (Noblit, Flores, & Morillo, 2004; Denzin, 2010; Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Much like narrative methods, however, an acknowledgment of the critiques and cautions regarding this method allows for illumination of the potential value of this method as well. In short, autoethnographic research is often celebrated for that which it is criticized. Because autoethnography lends itself to personal topics, as authors have intimate knowledge of the subject, claims of the non-scholarly, narcissistic, and/or self-indulgent nature of autoethnography may have merit, but need not be leveling.

To extend the discussion of merits, methodologically speaking, autoethnography grants researchers unlimited access to the primary data source and engages a personal writing style that tends to appeal to readers. As Nash (2004) argues, these types of writing, "liberate researchers from abstract, impersonal writing" and "touch readers' lives by informing their experiences" (p. 28). This focus on reader response:

> encourages connection, empathy and solidarity as well as emancipatory moments in which powerful insights into the lived experiences of others are generated. This kind of writing can inform, awaken, and disturb readers by illustrating their involvement in social processes about which they might not have been consciously aware (Sparkes, 2002, p. 221).

Additionally, though transformation may not be an autoethnographer's conscious goal, because the researcher is the subject of study, a deeper, more intimate understanding of everyday cultural processes becomes possible as access to data is not limited, doors can be opened to the lived experiences of marginalized voices, and readers can be clued in to

aspects of contexts that may be otherwise manipulated or negated through outside

observations. It is for these reasons that autoethnographers:

> choose to foreground [their] own voices. This is not narcissism…the social analysis accomplished by this form is based on two assumptions: first, that it is possible to learn about the general from the particular; second, that the self is a social phenomenon. I assume that my subjectivity is filled with the voices of other people (Sparkes, 2002, p. 216).

Finally, autoethnography is a useful tool for researchers and practitioners who

deal with human relations, particularly those in multicultural settings, as it enhances

cultural understanding of self and others and has a potential to motivate cross-cultural

coalition building (Chang, 2009). As a result, in the spirit of scholarship, the critiques

associated with both autoethnography and narrative inquiry may be challenges to the

process, but not detrimental blows to the perspectives. Without such distinction, it

becomes too easy to clog the arterial lines of creativity, impeding the flow of energy and

lines of progress that allow qualitative scholarship to open the doors of inquiry (see

Gunn, 2006).

Applied methodology: Seeking intimacy in teaching and learning

As Coffey and Atkinson (1996) underscore, "the diffusion and popularity of

qualitative research methods are gratifying and serve as testimony to their value in the

exploration and documentation of diverse social worlds and social practices" (p. 11).

However, this same "spawning" of qualitative methodological fever has also given rise to

a spirit of "careless rapture" by which no "principled discipline" sometimes exists for

researchers (Coffey & Atkinson, p. 11). The intent of this study, though "wild at heart,"

is not to loosely and nonchalantly indulge in musings of the past, giving credence to

whimsical personal memory and other seemingly convenient forms of alleged narrative

and/or autoethnographic data.   On the other hand, the intent is not to methodologically

choke the spirit of the endeavor, either. As Foucalt asserts, the hard slog of detailed

analysis after months and years of collection is necessary, but the process breeds a form

of pleasure in its own; and fittingly so, since this is a study of intimacy.

Simply, the ethnographic and narrative life is not:

> separable from the Self. Who we are and what we can be – what we can study,
> how we can write about that which we study – are tied to how a knowledge
> system disciplines itself and its members and to it methods for claiming authority
> over both the subject (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 965).

As a result, this blended approach inherits and must abide by some methodological

"rules." Such guidelines include concepts like working within theoretical schemata,

writing on topics that matter personally and collectively, experiencing *jouissance*,

experimenting with varied writing formats, locating oneself in multiple discourses and

communities, engaging in self-reflexivity, and honoring the embodiedness of one's labors

(Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). Therefore, in order to seek the true essence of the

intimacy that exists in the dynamic spaces of teaching and learning, this blended method

balances the "embodied aesthetic wholeness," of narrative inquiry and autoethnography

that produces authentic and visceral research, while systematically nodding to the

expected methodological rigors of each mode of inquiry (Jacobs, 2008, p. 53). In

employing these strategies, it is my earnest desire to attend to teaching and learning

holistically and increase receptivity and openness, model wholeness-in- process, layer

strategies of inquiry and research experiences, while acknowledging the ecological and

intuitive resonance of teachers and learners (Jacobs, 2008, p. 53).

To do these things, it is understood that scholarly personal narrative and

autoethnography are not identical, interchangeable research methods; however,

the spirit and processes involved in both methods are quite similar in nature. Both methods involve integration of personal narrative and may be storied in form and structure. Additionally both methods rely upon rich description and detail that foreground researcher voice and experiences as important signifiers. However, though autoethnographic methods rely upon the integration of personal narrative as both a form of data and method of analysis, narrative methods are not necessarily autoethnographic in nature. Though storied in form to a degree and reliant upon data about the self, scholarly personal narratives do not necessarily focus on the cultural perspectives and positionality of the researcher in the same way autoethnographic work must.

As a result, from this point forward, methodology will be discussed through the lens of this blended paradigm, acknowledging the style and intent of scholarly personal narrative, while honoring the unique cultural, autoethnographic perspective available to me as a researcher who is also a member of the culture I study, thus opening doors for creative analytical processes and writing form also located in autoethnographic traditions (Anderson, 2006).

Fittingly, a discussion of pertinent and appropriate data is necessary, and as will become evident, the remaining aspects of the research process involving analysis and procedure are less able to be explained in a linear fashion.

Data.
Scholarly personal narratives and autoethnography are both qualitative research methods that rely upon data about the self and its context to furthering understanding of the connectivity between self and others within the same context (Ngunjiri, Hernandez, & Chang, 2010). Therefore, data is qualitative, self-focused, and context-conscious.

According to Ngunjiri, Hernandez, & Chang (2010), these methods are both systematic and organic in their approach to "data collection, analysis, and interpretation about self and social phenomena involving self" (p. E1). As a result, narrative and autoethnographic data provide the researcher a "window through which the external world is understood" (p. E1). Although the blurred distinction between the researcher-participant relationship has become the source of criticism challenging the scientific credibility of these methodologies (Anderson, 2006; Holt, 2003; Salzman, 2002; Sparkes, 2002), the authenticity of utilizing inner- most thoughts and reflections makes this research method a powerful and unique tool for individual and social understanding (Ellis, 2009). As such, the "data" of a narrative inquiry and/or autoethnographic study may consist of a myriad of artifacts that serve multiple roles in the creation, execution, dissemination, and interpretation of the project.

The first and potentially most significant of these potential "data" would include the purposeful (re)collection and conscious study of personal memory data. Though this may seem highly subjective or potentially "un-scholarly," the practice of recall in scholarly personal narrative and/or autoethnography is no different in principle than its practice in ethnography (Chang, 2008). However, different types of memory serve as the primary source of data and the prominence of such data are acknowledged up front as being, first, different from other modes of inquiry and second, of primary importance to the study. It is this personal memory that creates a "schematic landscape outline" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 83) whereby a specific moment or experience may find its location in a larger "temporal context and field" (Krizek, 2003, p. 143; Carr, 1986).

Autoethnographic and/or personal narrative data is also located within a researcher's present experiences as well. Equivalent to ethnographic participant

observation, the autoethnographic or autobiographical researcher collects data from "naturally occurring environments while participating in activities," however the primary difference is that the data collection field for scholarly personal narrative and/or autoethnography is the researcher's life itself (Chang, 2008, p. 89). Introspective data representing personal perspectives may, then, include data collected through self-observation and/or self-reflection. Rodriguez and Ryave (2002) argue in favor of this type of data, claiming:

> [self-observation] gives access to covert, elusive, and/or personal experiences like cognitive processes, emotions, motives, concealed actions, omitted actions, and socially restricted activities…bringing to the surface what is taken for granted, habitutated, and/or unconscious matters that…[is] unavailable for recall (pp. 3-4).

Such data may be collected through formalized self-reflection processes like writing in a field journal or personal diary, participating in interactive self- observation discussion groups, self-induced reflection exercises such production of concept maps or other diagramming exercises, or the writing of a brief personal narrative or other creative piece (such as a poem) about a specific event or moment. It may also be "collected" simply through organic processes that emerge through the research experience and/or writing of the narrative itself. In order to further clarify the subjectivity present in personal ethnographic data, drawing upon additional external sources – other individuals, visual artifacts, documents, and literature(s), can provide supplementary perspectives and contextual information that assists a researcher in investigating and examining her subjectivity (Chang, 2008). Muncey (2005) argues that such artifact collecting is a valuable data collection technique in the autoethnographic study because "additional evidence is supplied by meaningful artifacts acquired through [one's] life…to fill some of the gaps left by the snapshots" (p. 2).

With this background in mind, the role of data in this study also follows the typically conspicuous nature provided by the preceding framework, as it was both purposefully assembled in preparation for the study, while also in the spirit of narrative and autoethnographic methods, encouraged to organically emerge.

Additionally, as much of the study is based on personal memory data that was not originally cultivated or experienced under the conscious practice of more traditional auto/ethnographic data collection techniques, the approach of this project relies upon the nuances of translating "personal lived experience into public academic output" (Edwards & Ribbens 1998, p. 6), using the style of the scholarly personal narrative (Nash, 2011) and distinction between two auto/ethnographic forms -- analytical autoethnography and evocative autoethnography that create space for interpretive data collection and analysis procedures.

To clarify, Ellis and Bochner (2006) argue that evocative autoethnography is a "mode of inquiry designed to be unruly, dangerous, vulnerable, rebellious, and creative…showing struggle, passion, embodied life,…the researcher being vulnerable and intimate" (p. 433). Desiring a form of scholarship that "opens up conversations about how people live, rather than closing it down with definitive description and analytic statements," (p. 435) this form of autoethnography is heralded as a "journey – not a destination…a dwell[ing] in the flux of lived experience, rather than abstracting something that can be called knowledge or theory" (p. 431). Relying on the provision of richly descriptive personal experiences laden with emotion-based illustrations of universal concepts and themes, this form of autoethnography does not encourage traditional data collection processes, writing styles or modes of analysis. Characterized by the examination, interrogation, and celebration of…"subjective, involved, emotional,

70

detailed, and daily forms of knowledge" (Ribbens & Edwards, 1998, p. 11; see also Apthekar, 1989; Noddings, 1984; Rose, 1994) the creativity of the autoethnography itself serves the function of analysis as well, allowing each individual reader to take from it what s/he may deem appropriate and useful.

In contrast, Anderson (2006) challenges the framework of evocative autoethnography, asking the researcher to do more than "document personal experience…or to evoke emotional resonance with the reader" (pp. 386-387). Not content with merely capturing the "goings on" of a particular phenomenon, analytic autoethnography "truthfully renders the social world under investigation and transcends that world through broader generalization" (p. 388). Though quite similar in nature and often yielding products that are parallel in form, analytic autoethnography strives to utilize empirical data more systematically to gain insight into a broader set of social phenomena, heralding a strong commitment to a more linear, analytic agenda. A hallmark of this form of autoethnographic research, analytic autoethnographic accounts are accompanied by purposeful, procedural analytical components.

As this study purports to carve out unique, blended methodological spaces, purposefulness, mindfulness, validity and universality of the personal narrative is achieved by assembling data comprised of personal memory, present representations, and external sources to influence and provide grounding for the narrative. These data will be utilized and analyzed through narrative and both evocative and analytic autoethnographic means. To clarify further, the data set includes artifacts that can be further divided into two categories: those that reflect my position as a teacher, and those that reflect my position as a learner.

In order to evaluate the position of "teacher-lover," the following data have been gathered to inform this study: discursive comments on over 400 course evaluations from past undergraduate classes I taught from 2006-2011, a box of "teaching memories" I have collected from 2002-2010 containing over 40 various letters, notes, and memorabilia from students, parents, and teachers in both secondary and collegiate settings, a binder containing five chapters worth of teacher induction materials I was required to collect and submit to earn my tenure in the public school district in 2004, written comments from fifteen evaluations conducted by colleagues and administrators throughout the past ten years of my teaching career, over fifty emails I have written and received from various students, colleagues, and parents throughout my teaching career, 30+ pages worth of entries from my private teaching journal I recorded throughout the years as I process and reflect upon various challenges and joys of my career, nine years of annual goal setting professional development records I was required to keep in the school district and of course, the abundant number of intangible memories of moments, conversations, and personal growth/choices that have occurred in the past eleven years during which I have been a teacher.

Data that reflect the position of student include three 25+page length scholarly essays I have researched and written over the past decade throughout my graduate career that relate to issues of educational processes and themes, copies of letters I have sent to my teachers and professors at the end of the semester over the past five years of my graduate school career, my statements of intention for admittance to my Master's and Doctoral graduate programs, twenty- two additional journal entries written throughout my graduate career that initially emerged organically, however grew into a purposeful

exercise in reflection as I began to prepare for my dissertation process, and of course, intangible memories and reflections upon experiences, conversations, contexts, relationships, as well as challenges and growth in my journey as a student. Together, these data span twenty-six consecutive years of an identity as a student and eleven consecutive years in a career as a professional educator.

Both of these data sets undoubtedly contribute to further understanding the intimate nature of the teaching and learning process, but because this study seeks to write from the position of scholarly personal narrative and is infused with evocative and analytic autoethnographic perspectives due to the situated nature of my membership in the culture studied, the data serve two different, but consequential roles for this study – as both inventive and confirmatory sources. These roles will be further discussed in the proceeding analysis portion of this chapter.

Procedure and analysis.

Geertz (1994) argues that the autoethnographic project is not an outcome "of systematic rules, an ethnographic algorithm, which if followed, would make it possible…to produce clever simulations of reality" (Geertz, 1994, p. 218; as cited in Mitra, 2010). Rather, it results in the interpretation and creation of knowledge, rooted in context, so that meaning is intrinsically tied to localism, rather than a supposedly universal truth (Mitra, 2010). Stone (1981) also describes the autobiographical/narrative process as one that is "simultaneously record and literary artifact, psychological case history and spiritual confession, didactic essay and ideological testament" (p. 80, as cited in Tenni, Smyth, & Boucher, 2003, p. 12).

Due, then, to the complex, emergent, and interpretive nature of these narrative methods, Chang (2008) is unabashed in the notion that, the research process is "not linear in the sense that one activity leads to the next one…instead research steps overlap and one activity informs and modifies another" (p. 121). As a result, a critical component of the procedural and analytical steps in this blended methods approach is the constant shifting of the researcher's attention back and forth between the space of self and others, the personal and the social contexts. Quintessential to the process, then, data analysis transforms the narrative of the personal into a culturally useful and sensible text (Chang, 2008).

Where, then, to begin this transformation? Maxwell (2005) suggests both segmental and holistic "readings" of contextual data as an initial step in the process (p. 96). However, unique to narrative/autoethnographic methods, most auto/ethnographic writers encourage that the actual writing begin (as writing serves as the primary form of analysis) early in the process so that data fragments can be connected and contextualized, then re-visited throughout the process (McCurdy, Spradley, & Shandy, 2005; Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). As this process of data reading and initial writing progresses, topics will begin to repeat and emerge, and a more focused effort of interpretation may ensue.

I choose to begin, then, with Maxwell's (2005) suggestion of holistic and segmental readings of the data in order to saturate myself in the essence of the data – both past and present, so as to form some semblance of context for these data. Such holistic and segmental readings allow the discretionary siphoning of data that are either highly repetitive and/or not directly applicable to the nature of the study, but moreso, such reading provides fertile soil for the cultivation of the actual personal narrative. In utilizing

data in this inventive way, analytic questions form that allow the narrative to emerge, capitalizing on Nash's (2004) recommendations for the writing of a scholarly personal narrative; that is, to establish constructs, move from the particular to the general and back again, draw implications from personal stories and draw from formal background knowledge. Such analytic questions include:

a). Through these forms of personal communication, artifacts, and memories of personal intent as both a learner and teacher, where does it become evident that the nature of the experience became personal and relational?

b). What relational language, symbols, references, assumptions, or allusions are present in the data?

c). How is intimacy intimated through the data and recollection of personal memory and story?

d). By situation the data as smaller pieces of a larger narrative, what is the story being told?

e). How do the events and actions and characters of the story suggest themes that may also be located in relational discourse?

f). What specific events, ideas, and concepts support the interpretation of these themes?

g). Where can relational themes and patterns be located across time and context? As is evidenced by the preceding, utilizing the perspective of self-narrative (Ellis & Bochner, 2000) complemented by autoethnographic perspectives requires the analytical technique of thematic analysis (Maydell, 2010). Thematic analysis aims to locate the most salient themes within the data, which are able to represent the whole dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Maydell, 2010). By using the data to recall experiences,

stories, and moments from my journey as a teacher and learner, I can begin to develop a scholarly narrative that depicts this journey as one that is intimate.

In order to more clearly structure this narrative and aid in the purposeful analysis of the narrative, the themes that emerge through holistic readings and thematic analysis then serve as the backdrop for the scholarly narrative, and it is in this sense that the data is inventive in nature. Serving as a "springboard" for recall of particular moments and experiences, the narrative exploration of my identity as a learner and teacher can unfold. Specifically, thematic concepts are selected to serve as titles to twenty five short vignettes which depict my identity as a learner and teacher segmented into brief stories spanning twenty-six years. These vignettes allow my narrative to be organized according to themes that not only represent the heart of my story, but may also be present in relational discourse, thus drawing a parallel relationship between my personal story and a larger body of theory (Nash, 2011). Electing to structure these vignettes as a series of brief stories illumining multiple themes versus a smaller collection of longer narratives illumining fewer themes helps to depict the spectrum of emotionality and evolution present within the journey of teaching and learning, while honoring the emergent nature of the data. As the writing of these short vignettes continues, the data also serves a confirmatory role, affording me the opportunity to (re)visit various artifacts, documents, and/or memories to more richly explore the nuances of each experience and its contribution toward my intimate narrative, thus also relying upon the autoethnographic perspective, as I investigate my position within a larger culture of teachers and learners. Data will be both directly and indirectly cited throughout the vignettes as it serves to both invent and confirm the narrative.

After completing the process of data reading and engaging thematic analysis, the

writing and re-writing of the full autoethnographic scholarly narrative account ensues.

Tenni, Smyth, and Boucher (2003) argue:

> What we choose to write and how we choose to write it is constructed based on the ways we understand the world, our practice and ourselves. One of the challenges…of
> autobiographical [writing] is to attempt to identify and step outside the theoretical constructs upon which the data was predicated (p.
> 4).

Though narrative prose combines descriptive, confessional, and analytical writing, I seek

to free myself from the conventions of traditional academic writing and honor a voice

that is "complete with colloquialisms, reverberations from multiple relationships, and

emotional expressiveness" that provides readers with a sense of my full humanity and

identity as both an educator and a learner, so that they may engage their full humanity

and identity as well (Gergen & Gergen, 2002, p. 14).

I complete the narrative account by offering a three-part series of analyses rooted

in both the traditions of the scholarly personal narrative as well as evocative and analytic

autoethnographic methods. The first analytical framework employs a collection of "love

notes" or end notes which briefly seek to both summarize each vignette and concretely

connect each narrative vignette and its correlating theme to specific aspects of intimate

relationships. The second analytical framework evaluates the narrative holistically,

locating cross-vignette themes that further connect the narrative to the proposed theory as

well as existing literature on personal relationships and create a sense of universal

applicability. The final framework analyzes issues of embodiment and identity that

emerged through the process of executing the study and identified three discursive

markers that also embody the essence of the study.

As Nash (2004) urges, a scholarly personal narrative should be replete with "good stories,… passion,… open-endedness, and a love and respect for eloquent language" (pp. 62-67). It is through these practices that I hope to offer new scholarship and theoretical perspectives to the fields of both Education and Communication that serve to enlighten other educators and learners about the processes in which they engage personally, academically, and professionally.

Methods in practice: Narrative inquiry& autoethnography as applied to teaching and learning

Dewey's educational philosophy argues that "we are all knowers who reflect on experience, confront the unknown, make sense of it, and take action" (Johnson & Golombek, 2002, p. 2). Inquiry into an experience that is educative propels us to make connections among similar experiences while also perceiving how new experiences may be understood. Both narrative inquiry and autoethnography are constructed as modes of thinking, inquiry, and writing that represent the richness of educative human experiences (Bruner, 1996). As such, these methods become critical tools which offer unparalleled levels of reflexivity that can both interrogate and represent various contexts and voices. Certainly, educational contexts are one of several that may benefit from rigorous narrative and/or autoethnographic study. These benefits are not only relevant to the contexts in which educators find themselves, but also offer an opportunity for broader consciousness-raising in educational communities in general.

It is imperative, however, to evaluate the way narrative and autoethnography might function in institutional settings. Generally, narratives are "anchored in local institutional cultures and their interpretive practices" (Andrews, Sclater, Squire, &

78

Treacher, 2004, p. xi). Therefore, exploring an institutional narrative creates better understanding of the culture and practices of that institution. Certainly, education, as an institution, is comprised of many meta-narratives that have shaped the philosophies and practices of educational contexts for decades. Evaluation and analysis of these meta-narratives offers a critical understanding of what it might mean to be a teacher, learner, or part of an educational process or context.

On a more specific level, narrative and/or autoethnographic accounts of educational experiences function as a means for reflection (Clandinin, 1992). Studying, writing, and reading the narratives and/or autoethnographic accounts of educators may assist pre-service teachers in learning from experience and example, challenging assumptions, and providing case studies that can help them proactively prepare for the types of cultures and contexts they may encounter in their careers (Goodson, 1992; Munro, 1998). Narrative and autoethnographic accounts also serve as pedagogy -- fodder for teachers to utilize in their classrooms to convey meaning in ways that traditional curricula may not (Doyle & Carter, 2003). Narrative and autoethnographic accounts also provide a vehicle through which teachers are socialized into the profession and/or a particular educational climate or setting (Young, 2008) because they may be a way to (re)create social categories (McDermott, 1993). Generally, the stories and case studies of teaching moments and experiences with specific types of situations, problems, and people provide palpable fodder from which teachers can better understand the larger institution of which they are a part – both specifically, locally, globally, and culturally.

Beyond these inherent values in educational contexts, it is important to recognize the role narrative inquiry and/or autoethnography might play in the individual lives of

teachers. Since "teachers' theorizing is not linear, but rather, reflects a dynamic interplay between description, reflection, dialogue with self and others, and the implementation of various practices," narrative and autoethnographic inquiry enable teachers to describe the complexities of their practice while stepping back from the hermeneutical processes they normally engage (Johnson & Golombek, 2002, p. 6). By approaching these forms of inquiry not as a set of prescriptive skills, but rather as a mindset which is a purposeful part of their teaching persona and ongoing personal and professional development, teachers can "inquire into their experience and…uncover who they are, where they have come from, what they know and believe, and why they teach as they do" (Johnson & Golombek, 2002, p. 5). Because self-reflection and self- examination are critical to self-understanding, narrative and/or autoethnographic inquiry may allow educators to reflect on the forces that have shaped their sense of self as pre-service, current, and post-service teachers. Through these practices, two landscapes can be constructed: one of consciousness and one of action (Lyons & LaBoskey, 2002). These landscapes provide fertile soil for engaging in the most helpful form of professional development a teacher can embody and enact: self-reflexivity.

Just as these research practices must be engaged with caution as they are utilized in research studies, the utility of these methods as "informants" in teachers' personal and professional lives must be exercised with a proverbial "grain of salt." It would be foolish to rely on the personalized accounts or lived experiences of others as the sole source of knowledge from which an educator gleaned his/her praxis or made all of his/her pedagogical choices. In the same sense, an educator must not be so limited as to believe his/her narratives and lived experiences are the only truth either. The same cautions of positionality,

reflexivity, objectivity, and representation that may be exercised when selecting these methods for research design also apply in regard to a teacher's utilization of these methods for personal and professional development.

What is critical to understand and exciting to celebrate is that qualitative methods such as these should not and do not attempt to validate themselves in the same manner as the valorized forms of traditional triangulation touted in other methodological approaches. Rather, they are to be acknowledged and celebrated as methods which allow for "crystallization" or the:

> infinite variety of shapes substances, transmutations, multi- dimensionalities, and angles of approaches that may be….honored in each teacher and learners' voice as separate and distinct, exploring the boundaries of observation and imagination, witnessing and retelling, memory and memorializing (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 963).

Through this paradigm, these methods acknowledge all the personalized accounts and stories of teachers and learners as contributory and "valid," but none as the singular truth. Simply, just as there are a variety of methods that a qualitative scholar may choose to employ as deemed appropriate for a study, a teacher may also select one of these methods from many as a potential preparatory, pedagogical, or reflexive tool.

Conclusions

As has been demonstrated, choosing appropriate, meaningful methods through which to conduct research becomes a consequential endeavor. Narrative and autoethnography emerge as two qualitative research methods that provide a useful, provocative means for inquiring into many research questions and contexts. Undoubtedly, these approaches expose useful spaces of reflexivity in many fields, and scholars will continue to anticipate the contributions of these methods for a long time to come.

What follows, then, is first the narrative account of my journey in learning and teaching, separated into twenty-five brief vignettes that are thematically linked to the discourses and theories of intimacy and personal relationships. This narrative is then followed by a series of analyses which dissects the vignettes, further locating the narrative(s) as theoretically relevant.

Chapter Four: A Relationship (Re)Visited: The Intimate Nature of My

Journey as a Teacher and Learner

In consideration of the scholarly personal narrative, Nash (2004) declares:

> To write a personal narrative is to look deeply within ourselves for the meaning that just might, when done well, resonate with other lives; maybe even inspire them in some significant ways. Writing is the ultimate trip for an educator. It leaves an indelible mark on the universe, even if its only palpable achievement is to bring about one small, un-dramatic change in a school, home, neighborhood, social service agency, or in a single classroom. To write a creative personal narrative…so that it enlarges the conventional cannons of scholarship...is to transform the academy and the world (p. 22).

What follows, then, is a scholarly endeavor to tell and through that telling, study the

narrative of my educational journey. To do so affords the opportunity to testify and bear

witness to the significant nature of this journey, evaluating its transformative power from

the perspective of both teacher and learner (Gornick,

2001).

In doing so, the "results" of this study exist in the establishment of twenty five

vignettes that illustrate specific relational dynamics presented through my journey as a

learner and teacher. Tracing this journey from my earliest years in formal education

through my post-doctoral identity, I am able to evaluate the evolutionary nature of these

relational dynamics as they present/ed themselves in the teaching and learning process.

Paying homage to the narrative in both structure and content, these vignettes are situated

within an autoethnographic perspective that implodes my identity as a learner and

teacher, conveying a descriptive writing style that encourages a reader to locate

him/herself within the framework of each story. It is my hope that as a result, the

educational processes of teaching and learning will emerge as easily viewable through a

relational paradigm.

In order to chronicle this journey and tie it to the discourse of relational

communication, each vignette is simply titled with a descriptive phrase or term that seeks

to encompass a particular relational theme, thus further locating my story as one of an

intimate relationship. When viewed individually, each vignette speaks to the relational

nature of that generalizable stage in the educational process, yet when viewed

holistically, the narrative presents a larger "lifelong" relationship thread as well.

To penetrate the "familiar" is, by no means, easy or obvious work, even when the

"familiar" has been a part of the human experience for centuries (Gornick, 2001, p. 9).

To give my personal journey a sense of universality and familiarity for broader public

consumption is then both helpful, and in itself, quite an ironically intimate endeavor.

Purity: The "Virgin"

Sadly, I do not remember it as if it were yesterday, as memories of that day in

September twenty seven years ago are not something easily come by decades later. But

the pictures tell the story. And boy did my mother love to take pictures…

It was a typically humid Minnesota morning – the type of morning where the sun

is not sure if it wants to shine, yet the temperatures found some means to begin their slow

ascent into unbearably uncomfortable conditions. I was perched at the living room

window of our split-level home in our small rural town, ready over an hour early, waiting

to see the first signs of the yellow bus grinding its way past the red barn on the gravel

road in the distance. Bus #5 was driven by Mr. Bud, the bus that had for years taunted

me by taking away my brother and sister each morning, leaving me behind to anticipate

nothing more than another day at daycare. But today was different – today was my first chance to board bus #5; today was my first day of school.

I had picked out the clothes I was to wear weeks in advance on our family's annual shopping trip to the JCPenney store twenty miles away in Wilmar, Minnesota. Mom and Dad had given me a bold allowance of one hundred dollars so that I would have new clothes for my first year of school, allowing me the adult-like privilege of selecting them myself. What an adventure it had been! I bought what any girl my age would have normally bought – something pink and flowery. It was a terribly cute little ensemble. Somehow, the makers of this piece had found a way to attach the shirt to the shorts, thus making it one outfit altogether – the perfect attire for a no-fuss tomboy who wanted a hint of a dress without succumbing to the mortification of wearing an actual dress.

At that time in my life, I was a strange amalgamation of Ramona Quimby meets Mr. Rogers meets Shira, Princess of Power - a rambunctious, active, fearless, physical young lady who had a creative mind that would never stop, yet an unexpectedly soft side that was aware of humanity and human relations. Prior to that first day of school, these personal nuances were evidenced every morning as I hovered fascinatingly over my teacher-mother grading her English papers and when it was time for her to depart for school, I would depart for my babysitter's home, ready to engage my daily schedule. This included a verbal, interactive watching of *The Price is Right*, then hand-making furniture for my Barbie house out of old cupboards and various household packaging waste, tending to my indoor caterpillar collection, building pottery from the mud I had harvested from the banks of the Hawk Creek, and then finally either writing someone

(like the President, for example) a letter, or prepping one of the weekly "sermons" I used to deliver every Saturday from our front yard flower garden. Looking back, I am certain that my parents anticipated I would be a scholastic tall order, as I could never be kept busy enough, never challenged enough, and there was no task I was not eager to do and do well.

Before bus #5 picked me up, I had already determined I was going to be the smartest student in my class. With my very "intelligent" super short boy haircut, I was proud of the fact that my mother had already taught me to read and write before I even entered Kindergarten. I was reading chapter books when the rest of my classmates may not even know the alphabet. I had been taking piano lessons for over a year now, shuttled to my teacher who lived in a town thirty miles away, because my parents thought my siblings and I good enough students to be worth the time and money to develop our talents from an early age. Everything about me embraced and welcomed the opportunity to be in school. I was not afraid; I was ecstatic.

So, there I sat, in my pink flower onesie, with a hideously short haircut, a gray jacket, and a bright red backpack. When it was nearly time to depart, Mom appeared with the camera, trying to herd her children together for the annual first- day-of-school photo and while my older brother and sister were less than thrilled to solidify this moment in time, I smiled straight into that camera and beamed. And as the bus pulled up to our house, I was already out the door before I could yell, "Goodbye Mom, goodbye Dad! I'm going to school!"

Those early years in school were nothing short of a dream come true. To say that I loved school was an understatement. I lived school, breathed school, played school

when I was not actually attending school, and lived with a school teacher. My memories are filled with debuts in the Christmas musical, coloring contests, birthday parties at PJ's drive-in, admiration of my older sister's high school band instrument, the excitement of field trips, and singing holiday songs in my elementary classes. Certainly, there were a few rough moments – seeing my brother get bullied by an older boy, getting made fun of for having stitches after one year's annual shopping trip to JCPenney turned into a tango between me and the door, the chicken pox, and occasionally getting into trouble at home, but regardless, life was good, and I was happy all of the time.

This was such a simple time in my life – a time where the smallest of wonders were enough to satiate me for weeks. I was not burdened by the stress and pressure of adult life; everything on every day was new to me. I was, in its most virtuous in essence: pure, untouched, unscathed, unpolluted. I did not arrive at school with pre-conceived notions about the horrors of certain teachers, the drudgery of assignments, or homework. I adored my teachers and wanted to be like each one of them. I accepted every task assigned and glided through them with ease and pride. And even though some of my classmates may have struggled more with basic academic skills than I did, it seemed to me we were all still happy, oblivious to greater "implications" of our academic performance, and simply satisfied to earn the reward of time on the "Word Munchers" computer game or an extra five minutes of recess.

It is interesting to note that as I recollect these early years as a learner, very few of my actual memories of school have to do with academia. I can recall much of my classmates, my teachers, and the events of our school community, but little of the projects we completed or the things I "learned." Perhaps this was because for me, learning came

so inherently and so easily that it did not feel laborious; it felt natural. Perhaps the stories of my classmates would be different? Perhaps my teachers may have other perspectives?

Nonetheless, I was oblivious to other factors; I simply loved to learn and loved all things that regarded the schooling process. I was uninitiated into the rhetoric, routine, expectations, pressures, and potential failures that may accompany the process of learning. I was unchanged by any past experiences with school, unadulterated in my pure attitude toward my role as a student.   It is this orientation toward learning that provided the foundation for my relationship with learning. It was these early years underscored by a vestal attitude propelling me forward with energy, excitement and commitment. This was a time of deep happiness.

Love (at first sight)

I will never forget that warm smile. It was the smile of a mother, a smile that would forever be imprinted on my heart. I needed that smile, as I had found myself in quite a precarious role; I was the "new girl."

After my father's acceptance of a new job, my family was uprooted from our small, Midwestern town to a significantly larger city in central Minnesota. Awestruck by the mesmerizing differences in this community, I felt like a child dropped off at the summer county fairgrounds, staring at the entrance, not knowing which way to go first. This town, at population 13,000, was a virtual metropolis compared to my former city of 1,400 inhabitants. It had restaurants, large grocery stores, a shopping mall, and what's more – it had multiple schools. Never before had I seen a community large enough that students of the same age and grade level were to be separated based on their geographic location within the city and then accordingly, attend different schools. I had been accustomed to a community that had two schools – one for grades K-6, and one for

grades 7-12. One was either a younger student, or an older student, and there was nothing more needed to delineate the appropriate school context. According to my residential address, 806 South Mill Street, I was to become a lucky attendee of Adams Elementary School, a stalwart brick building that was approximately three blocks from my home.

Several weeks before the school year was slated to begin, my family received an invitation to attend a back-to-school night, whereupon we would be given the opportunity to visit the school and meet our upcoming teachers. I was entirely ready for this event as I had grown lonely living in this new, unfamiliar city. Spending the summer months helping my mother unpack the house and being relegated to hanging out with my older brother was losing its appeal. Our new "city" home was smaller and situated on a typical city block with neighbors on every side and a parking lot across the street. I longed for and missed our multi-acreage home from the countryside where my days could be filled running through field, jumping in the river, and building tree forts in the neighboring groves. And mostly, but for a few neighborhood children I had met who were younger than me, I longed to establish new friendships and engage with others socially. So, back-to-school night was appropriately high on my radar for potential friend-spotting.

Interestingly, it seems that her recollection of our first meeting is stronger than mine, as she has retold this story to me literally twenty times in the years that have since passed. However, I cannot be blamed for the fact that I was stunned upon our initial meeting. How could I not be? I was in a compromised state of mind. This school was so ….different than what I had experienced. It seemed so fancy and full of contraptions I had never before seen. There were simply so many people there; I could not fathom from where they all came? Until that time, my classrooms had been small and barren,

encompassing the halls of a rickety old building with squeaky wooden floors. We had,

perhaps, fifteen or so students in our entire grade level, and most of the school materials

with which we worked were old and recycled. This new school, this "Adams

Elementary," seemed like a foreign country.

And as we made our way down to the basement room which was to house my

third grade experience, I was beyond words when I first met her. She was to be my first

best friend in this new town. Her smile – it was the kindest smile I had ever seen. Her

deep brown curly hair framed her face, and her skin was so beautiful and so perfect…I

fell in love with her instantly. And how she knew my name already, I was never able to

figure that out. But she greeted me with a hug and said, "Welcome, to 3rd grade, Sonja. I

am your teacher, Mrs. Vicki."

With that single phrase, I became transformed as a student. Every day that I

entered Mrs. Vicki's third grade class was the most exciting day of my life. She was a

teacher unlike any I had seen. The things she planned for us and taught to us were

fascinating, challenging, and thrilling. Her classroom was a stimulating environment of

colors, activities, posters, and endless opportunities to have fun. Just when she presented

one activity that I thought was the coolest thing ever, she would surprise us with another

the next day: morning sponge activities, daily board notes, cursive writing lessons,

transition math contests, class guinea pig pets – the fact that I recall these things over

twenty four years later pay testimony to the impact they had on my mind.

I was voracious in my attempts to please her. Though admittedly a bit of a talker,

despite my rampant mouth, I completed every assignment to a level of perfection I had

never known I was capable of. I lived for the moment each day when we got to open our

daily board notes and see the sentence she had written in response to us. Her handwriting was so lovely, and her words in my board notes packet made me long to write more and more and more each day, hoping it would incite a longer response from her. When I got picked on by some students because of my "ugly boy hair," she was the one who held me in her arms while I cried and told me that I was beautiful and loved just the way I was. When the classroom no longer became the suitable place for Goldie and Brownie, the class guinea pig pets, she chose me to be the recipient of the animals, and I adopted two new pets for my home. Oh, how I loved Mrs. Vicki. I loved every single thing about her and wanted her to be my teacher forever.

And then one day, everything changed…

Apparently, Mrs. Vicki had a job far beyond what my young mind could have comprehended. It seemed she was called to do more than entertain and mesmerize me, being the object of my every affection. Through our time together, she had been observing me, watching me, and studying me. While I was busy pleasing and adoring, she was busy…being a teacher.

One day, my parents were called to come into the school, and after sitting uncomfortably in the hallway while she and my mom and dad spoke in muffled voices, I was invited back into the classroom. She said something like:

> "Sonja, I have had the pleasure of being your teacher for several months now, and it seems to me that you are a very smart young lady. You always get your work done so quickly, and you learn everything I have to teach you so fast. Unfortunately, with all of these kids in the class, I do not feel that I am able to offer you the kinds of challenges your mind needs. So, I talked to your mom and dad, and we think it would be great for you to be in some other classes."

I immediately started to cry. Mrs. Vicki, the most wonderful teacher in the world who I loved more than anyone, did not want me in her class. I had failed our relationship; she did not love me back.

Of course, through my tears and dramatics, I did not realize that this was not the case whatsoever. In fact, Mrs. Vicki loved me so much that she had gone out of her way to arrange for me to receive a private tutor who would come to our school and teach me accelerated math. Additionally, she had arranged for me to take the necessary tests to admit me to our school district's gifted and talented pull-out program, a specialized program for elementary and middle school students which would meet for three hours a week to offer advance learning activities. I was not leaving her class; I was being given the opportunity to excel and finally have an educational challenge worthy of my budding intelligence. This was an act of selfless love; this demonstrated the heart of a true teacher.

Thus began a relationship that would grow to last a lifetime. Mrs. Vicki, the teacher who was the first to welcome me to my new school with her warm smile, would become one of the single most influential educators in my entire life. Her true love for me and her true concern for my educational opportunities provided me the first chance to receive a quality education that actually helped me grow as a learner. The deep love I had for her and our relationship, which, looking back, really resembled that of mother and daughter, built the foundation for a relationship that still exists to this day. Mrs. Vicki supported me throughout my entire schooling career, attending all of my events, and often inviting me to her home for dinner when I was a high school student. She was the one who inspired me to be a teacher, and fittingly, gifted me with a huge box of teaching supplies on the day of my college graduation. Her enthusiastic professional

recommendations helped me land my first teaching assignment, and she travelled

thousands of miles to stand on the beaches of Mexico as a guest at my wedding. When

my father had an accident, paralyzing him, Mrs. Vicki was one of the first to contact my

family, and now, as my sister's family has moved back to our

hometown, she will play the influential role of educator to my nieces and nephew. In my

young eight-year-old mind, my first visions of Mrs. Vicki could only be likened to love at

first sight. There was nothing I wanted more than to be around her, learn from her, and

absorb her every word. Certainly most of us have recollections of that one special

teacher from our childhood who became the object of our adoration, that teacher about

who we could recall every detail. My great object of adoration was Mrs. Vicki, and it

was her compassionate love act as an educator that contributed to who I am today in

profound ways.

I credit large pieces of my identity to her love for me as a learner.

Obsession

It did not take long for the effects of my new learning program to become

evidenced. Mrs. Vicki's inclinations toward my need for advanced placement learning

were so accurate, that after just a few short weeks of engaging in private tutoring and the

gifted/talented program, I was once again transformed as a learner and brought to

heightened levels of awareness regarding my own scholastic interests and aptitudes.

In particular, a momentum toward literacy propelled me each and every day, as

my reading skills finally emerged to a point where reading was a natural part of who I

was as a person. Most students experience this moment – a moment where reading

becomes as second nature as breathing, and for me, this happened early and voraciously

as I began to ravenously devour any and every book upon which I could place my hands. Story time in our class meetings was delightful, but nothing compared to the process of being swept away into the throes of a chapter novel that I could read on my own. What's more, the pride that swelled inside of me each time I had saved enough of my weekly allowance money to purchase my own book was even more exciting, as it was an investment in my relationship with my own learning and the opportunity to build my personal collection of novels, a tangible signifier of this relationship.

My obsession with reading grew by the day, as my skill as a reader grew in a parallel nature. Books were my constant companion, and if my mother were ever looking for me inside our house, I was easily located curled up on the couch, the back step, the front step, or under my yellow canopy bed with yet another book in hand. I read in the car; I read while I walked the dog. I read in school during every available minute that was not occupied by another task. I even got in trouble repeatedly for reading under my comforter each night instead of sleeping. My desires to read and learn were not limited by the type of text available to me; I read magazines, newspapers, series books, comic books, textbooks, children's publications…it did not matter. I would read something and then read the entire thing again immediately, hoping to soak up something new each time, as the tattered pages of the books I owned were sullied with the markings of my fingerprints in the corners where I turned the pages hundreds of times.

This deep desire quickly turned to obsession, where my drive to grow as a reader and read as much as possible seemed to overtake my being. I desperately wanted to win our class book reading contests and would often read over one hundred books a month. I pushed myself to log as many reading minutes as possible for the Book-It program

sponsored by Pizza Hut so that I could be awarded prize upon prize, more tangible

signifiers of this relationship. I joined our school's Great Books program so that I would

receive extra mentoring and opportunity to read classic novels in small discussion groups.

I wanted to learn new words every day, and often asked my mother to teach me

challenging vocabulary words far beyond my utility so that I could read more advanced

books. (For example, "facetious" – heavily exaggerated. Mom thought this an apropos

word to launch my discursive career!) I started completing the vocabulary

quizzes in my father's *Reader's Digest* magazine so that I could prove myself worthy of

more challenging literature and adult conversations. Defining myself by my literacy

skills, reading was everything to me, and I looked for any opportunity possible to

showcase, discuss, and engage my reading endeavors.

Yet, spending time learning from books and magazines does not fully encompass

the extent of my obsession with reading. Modeling my life after characters in texts, I

would try to dress similarly, speak similarly, and act similarly to those characters who

became fixtures in my everyday life. Yes, it was necessary for me to start my own local

neighborhood *Babysitter's Club* so that I, too, could collaborate with my ever-so-cool-

and-pretty adolescent friends as small business owners. Naturally, my parents would not

mind if I converted every room in our house into one of the *Six Special Places* so that I

had an appropriate fort or hideout in each nook of our home. Didn't everyone have a *Big*

Friendly Giant that they secretly spoke to? I certainly did.

Sadly, somewhere in my journey as a learner, the vitality with which I approached

reading must have dissipated a bit, as I learned to obsess over new things. However, my

intimate encounters with literacy at a young age caused me to focus every ounce of my

being and attention on developing myself as a reader, which in turn, developed me as a

student, which then developed me as a learner. The intensity I possessed toward focusing on this element of my educational journey encompassed and consumed me; I was, in whatever form capable to me as a child, obsessed with learning.

Dating

As I continued in my formal educational journey, one of the best aspects of growing older as a student was the veritable menu of curricular choices that began presenting themselves to me. The days of spending an entire school day with one teacher were slipping away, as I emerged into the wonderment of middle school where I was allowed the opportunity to take classes from many different teachers in many different subject areas.

Early on, it was no surprise that I was going to elect to make formalized training in music a part of my public school journey. Already an accomplished vocalist and pianist largely by choice of my parents who felt it pertinent I begin the study of both at the tender age of five, I was excited to begin learning about other instruments so that I could find my one true musical passion – the instrument I chose to love and study of my own accord for a lifetime. Though my mom and dad were certain they had already laid the musical path I would and should trod, they were not opposed to my desires to sow my musical oats. Thus, my dating relationship with music education began.

Casting aside the rational and logical advice I had been given by my parents, older siblings, and other teachers regarding which instruments were suitable for my personality, or which instruments would have more longevity in terms of their viability to be a part of my future, or which instruments would be most unique and/or challenging enough for me, I wanted to do what I wanted to do. And what I wanted to do was play

the flute. Typical. Trite. Predictable. Boring. But, unstoppable.

All the other girls were playing the flute. The flute was popular. The flute was feminine. The flute was lightweight and cute, and importantly, flutists got to sit in the front row of the band, thus garnering much immediate attention. For these highly consequential reasons, I needed to play the flute. And so, the flute and I began our courtship.

Initially, I loved that flute. It was gorgeous and beautiful, and I looked for every reason to carry that flute around with me. I felt accepted, because so many people had a flute. I wanted to get to know everything about how to play it, and I wanted to be the best flutist in the band – to show that my flute and I were successful together, destined to last. But, after a few weeks passed, as some had predicted it would, my interest in the flute began to wane.   Every now and then we'd meet up for some occasional time together…a few days a week, here and there. I tried to be committal, but I couldn't help myself. Other instruments had started to entice me, as the gaps in my relationship with the flute became more and more widening. I wanted and needed to learn more.

So, next, I found myself oddly attracted to the oboe. Where the flute was sleek, light, and simple, the oboe was unexpected, rare, and unique. Where the embrochure needed to create sound on the flute was straightforward, learnable, and required little skill, the oboe, a double-reed instrument, was complex and needed finesse. Where the light and airy sounds of the flute were initially giddy and joyful, they soon seemed hollow and shrill, yet the oboe was distinctive and sonorous, taunting and beckoning to its listeners to be deciphered among all the instruments of the band. Yes, the oboe would certainly satiate me.

For months I wrestled with that oboe, forcing it to become a part of me. Desperate to see this relationship through, I poured all of my energy into learning the oboe. I cracked and squealed and wailed on the oboe, forcing my air into its body, and though I was able to quickly obtain the fingerings needed to produce the right notes, I could never capture the essence of the pure sound of which I knew the oboe capable. I constantly felt juvenile and inexperienced when I played it. I lacked confidence, and though my musicianship skills were more than prepared in terms of understanding notation and musical theory, the oboe and I were not meant to be.

And so, I returned to the flute. The old stand-by. Old faithful.

But…desperation burned within me. Boredom took over. There was no passion in the flute. There was no challenge in the flute. My easy glide into the Honor's Band and the second chair seat were not accomplishments; they were child's play. Where was the merit of this relationship? It had no vitality. And while I stewed in self-pity during Honor's Band one morning, a quick turn of my head was all it took for me to see the truth – to see what really was my heart's desire.

The tenor sax.

Yes, the tenor saxophone. It was time. I had arrived. I was ready.

Initially, the tenor sax had intimidated me. Large in presence and cumbersome to manage, I was not sure it would be an attractive companion. Daunted by the ugly, low rumblings I had heard others produce in this instrument, I did not want to be the cause for such a horrifying sound in the band. But on this particular morning, the young woman playing the tenor sax was making beautiful, enticing sounds that were smooth, sexy, and mysterious. She glided along those keypads, and when her vibrato emerged, the buttery richness of deep tenor tones gestured to me, signifying its interest.

To commit to the tenor saxophone was a great undertaking. This larger instrument carried a much heftier rental fee, and literally, a much heftier load. Once again, I had to train myself to understand and execute playing a reed instrument. The cool factor associated with the saxophone did not come without its demands. I had to work to own it. I had to be worthy to represent such a unique instrument effectively. If I wanted to call myself a "jazz musician," I had to be a jazz musician – disciplined, yet soulful. Artistic, yet classy. Accurate, yet emancipated.

These demands began to wear on me. To identify in this cool and collected manner was stretching me so far from who I was really was capable of being. I was playing an instrument so that I could play a part – a part for which I was not ready. Sheepishly, I returned my tenor saxophone to my director's office after just three short months.

And yes, back to the flute I went.

This story goes on and on with the same pattern for the remainder of my middle and high school music education. Committed to wanting to be a part of musical education courses, I knew I wanted a relationship, but much like someone in the dating phases of an intimate relationship journey, though I could identify some key traits I desired in a partner, I was constantly exploring different kinds of partners and using that explorative process to further learn about who I was.

Some learners do this with specific academic courses or majors of study in college, exploring various options and testing waters; I did this with band and orchestra instruments. Flute, oboe, tenor saxophone, violin, organ, harpsichord, string bass – often returning back to the faithful and familiar woodwind family, only to throw myself back

into the throes of other instrument families soon thereafter. I was a musical instrument dater, tenuously navigating the highs and lows of each new relationship, no matter how short or long term, a learner searching for some aspect of musical education with which I could form a more lasting, permanent relationship.

Communication

Obsessing over musical instruments was not the only thing I was devoted to as a middle school student. In addition, it appears I have always been, and will always be, a woman of many words, a narrator who finds it cathartic to commit every moment of her life to paper.

Since the onset of my first attempts at written literacy, I have written in order to find my voice, to make sense of the mire and muck of daily living, to commemorate the moments I deemed worthy of celebration and wanted to revisit again and again in the future. Developing my skill as a writer has been a piece of my educational identity since I was a young woman.

So, it was not without extreme joy that I welcomed the announcement in my sixth grade English class that we were going to begin writing in journals as a daily class activity. This is a prominent moment that exemplifies where my journey as a learner became quintessentially bound to my fervor as a written communicator - located in three old, torn up, peach and green notebooks that are meticulously labeled in black marker "PRIVATE: KEEP OUT. THIS MEANS YOU. SONJA'S JOURNAL." Volumes 1, 2, and 3 were born in 1990.

To this day, I am not sure if Mrs. Johnson, our 6th grade Language Arts teacher, really read what we wrote or not. I have to hope she didn't, for it must have

seemed childish and ridiculously immature. Her goal was that we were to use these journals to write on a daily basis, exploring ideas and thoughts while strengthening our command of the English language. However, my journals were full of pages upon pages devoted to a narration of who was and was not my best friend that day, who I was "going out" with and "breaking up" with, commentary on people's hairstyles and clothing…completely hollow, shallow, and meaningless drivel. At times my friends and I would trade journals and read one another's innermost thoughts – a true sign of status among friends. Then we would write lengthy responses, equally as shallow, filled with empty promises of being in love with a new boy and committing to remaining best friends for eternity. But to me, my journal was the world, so in that sense, I was fulfilling a portion of the curricular intention.

I delved into every opportunity to talk through, think through, and write about every aspect of life. I wanted to communicate, to share, to be heard, and to go back and re-read my words and listen to my own voice to better understand my own story. I wanted to shape each phrase exactly right, and would often write notes in the margins about how horrible a sentence sounded or how wrong a word was spelled, already an emerging editor of sorts.

However, the silliness of this endeavor is not to be dismissed lightly. For even though it was, in some senses, merely the act of a dutiful student fulfilling the wishes of her teacher, there must have been something to that process – there must have been something to the substance of those volumes I wrote as an emerging teenager. For if there were not, why would I have saved them? Why would I cart those journals around the country as I moved from home to home for decades to follow, if they did not mean

something to me – if they did not signify something about me?

Perhaps I carry them with me, because I have always been, and will always be...a writer, and to be a writer means that one cannot let go of his/her words – no matter when they were written. They are a part of one's story; they are a part of one's relationship.

My years as a learner are forever marked by this desire to be in relationship with writing – to be a communicator at all times. My mother's profound commitment to saving the remnants of our childhood years afford me the opportunity to sift through huge scrapbooks filled with my writings. Short stories, poems, letters – scads of documents that all speak to my affinity for the written word. Beyond my sixth grade journals lay reams of binders filled with all the pieces I wrote throughout my high school career, and beyond this, the story continues in a similar fashion into college and graduate school. Anthologies of written words record my life: "Sonja's high school poems" reside in a floppy red binder in my cupboard, "Song lyrics and song ideas" scatter through a manila file folder near my piano, "Graduate school essays" fill a box in my storage room, and "Personal journal of growth" lies dormant in a file on my laptop. I write for assignments; I write for pleasure; I write for purpose; I write for others; I write for myself. To write is to be alive in the mind and awakened in the soul, and each stage of my life as a learner is marked by the development of my communicative skills as a writer.

It seems that the process of education and learning asks us to be that – to be constant communicators, always interpreting, commenting, evaluating, and sharing. We are assessed on our ability to communicate effectively – much like our relational partners assess our skills as a partner based on our ability to communicate "effectively." For

some learners, the task of communicating is fulfilled out of obligation, even resentment. For others learners, the task of developing as a communicator becomes a defining piece of their identity. Just as we grow our communication skills in our personal relationships, we are asked to grow as communicators in our educational relationship, too.

My intense desire to communicate through written word is a piece of my identity as a learner, a piece which has shaped and molded every aspect of who I am as a student and teacher. Inevitably, it also shapes who I am as a person, as my desire to be in communication is predominant feature of who I am. Volume 1 started decades ago…how many volumes might I fill in a lifetime?

First Impressions

I nervously paced the hard wood floors of the kitchen, stopping to turn and look in the mirror nearly every five seconds, wanting to ensure that a hair had not somehow lost its place or a new pimple had not magically sprouted within the past five seconds. My bag was packed near the door, and I watched the minutes tick by on the clock, wondering how much longer my brother was going to make me wait.

Finally, he came down the stairs, calm and collected, looking very stylish in a Seinfeld t-shirt, pair of black jeans, and a freshly buzzed hair cut that would ensure his head would fit snugly inside of his football helmet. He was just so cool, and everyone loved him. I hope they loved me too.

As per the usual routine of the first day of school, Mother snapped our photo in the driveway, but this time, we did not wait for a bus. This time I had the privilege of being chauffeured by my brother, much to his disdain, as my parents instructed him to "take care of me" that first day. So, I gingerly entered the front seat of his car, feeling

like an outsider, as this was foreign territory. Normally, I was not allowed in my brother's car; he was too busy transporting his friends, and I was merely his little sister. But today, I would proudly be dropped off in the parking lot of the high school by the captain of the football team, the star of the high school choir, and one of the Homecoming king representatives. Today was the first day of ninth grade.

Beginning high school is a mythical experience for many people. It does not seem to matter where one lives or who one is, for most, that first entrance into high school signifies a rite of passage into a new stage of life, a point of arrival. Most of us spend our childhood days looking up to older siblings and wondering about their lives as high school students. In many cases, we travel to the local high school for sporting events or musical concerts, so we have a sense of familiarity with the mystery and wonder that is high school life. We may know a few of the teachers from other aspects of our community, and of course, the urban legends of high school life trickle down through the younger grades, preparing all of us for the reality that is to become what feels like the most defining four years of our lives.

Many aspects of high school culture become moments young students dream of – be it the acceptance onto a sports team, prom night, Homecoming, pep rallies, participation in a club or musical group, and all of the various wonders of dating and friendships that will consume our social radars. Certainly, many of the academic aspects of high school are equally as prominent: achieving a desired grade in a challenging class, working with a legendary teacher, having the opportunity to take elective courses of personal or vocational interest, preparing for the infamous ACT and SAT exams, and looking ahead to college application or a career path of choice. At the tender age of fourteen, musings about these aspects of high school feel like the single most important

things that have ever happened, and it is because…they are.

So, it is not surprising in the least to assume that on the first day of high school, I was anxiously postured as a young learner ready to embark on a new stage in my educational journey, desperately hoping more than anything, that I would be deemed impressive enough to be a part of this wonderfully exciting place. I desired acceptance and approval from all of the people, concepts, and tasks involved in the high school journey. As we drove in silence toward the school, my brother broke the air with one simple question: "You nervous?" All I could do to respond was simply to breathe deeply and blink my wide eyes multiple times. Was I nervous? Yes! Was I thrilled? Yes! Had I waited for this day for years? Yes! Was I frantically preparing every inch of my physical, emotional, social, and intellectual being for this day? Yes!

As the car pulled into the parking lot I was greeted by the sight of hundreds of students filing quickly into the building, loud music streaming from car speakers, people hugging, laughing, talking; it was like a small world here in the middle of our city. Facing the brown brick structure ahead of me, my brother was long gone, leaving me to fend for myself as he easily slinked into his rhythm and routine. I stood, a tall, skinny, overdone, awkward young woman amidst a sea of older students who confidently navigated this moment.

My heart raced; this was a building I had driven by for years and entered on many occasions; it was not necessarily new to me. But today, my role in entering this building was different – I was no longer an outsider, a guest. I was hoping to become a member. This would be my daily home for the next four years, and it would forever become imprinted on my heart and mind as a significant contributor to who I would be as a

person. I needed to make the best first impression possible. I needed to leave my mark

in the initial moments of this day so that my journey as a learner in this place would find

foundation in the strong first impression I would create just moments from now.

I had heard it said, "You never get a second chance to make a first impression…"

How true this was.

Who did I want to be? What message was I going to send about myself as a

learner? How would this first impression I was to make on my high school career forever

shape this consequential period in my life as a student?

Well, it seemed there was only one way to find out…

I picked up my bag, inhaled a deep breath of humid Minnesota air, and set off to

meet, for the first time, my new partner.

Affinity Seeking

High school proved, as to be expected, one of the most over-stimulating periods

in my life. The feelings, emotions, and experiences of the high school existence are

enough to convince a young person that his or her entire life identity is the direct product

of each moment that occurs. In this sense, everything is so intensely relative that

everything feels incredibly relevant.

I, too, was a product of this over-stimulating, highly relative and temporal

existence. Mesmerized by the social aspects of high school, I was typically fearful of

some people, while entranced by others. In certain circles I was noticed, in others

ignored. I grew from awkward, clumsy and ugly to more confident and experimental

with my physical image, and negotiated many of the typical frustrations and joys of high

school as it pertained to friends, romance, issues with parents and the myriad of activities

available to high school students.

Yet amidst this disarray of social navigations, I also took seriously my role as a student. Upon my first week in ninth grade, it was apparent that I would need to take things "up a notch," so to speak. High school teachers were not easily lured by my previous academic charms and generally being a "nice person" or "good student" no longer sufficed. These teachers meant business and were serious about this business. They were working with adult-aged students in many cases and preparing them for college and career training paths. I was a few mere years from college now, too, and it became quickly evident that the mediocrity which was celebrated in middle school would now be scoffed at in high school.

This halting feeling arrived first upon entering Mr. Holicky's 9th grade Advanced Physical Science class. His classroom was bare, fundamental, and had no room for cutesy decorations or frills. He was a no-fuss scientist. We were readily made aware that he had given up a job offer with NASA in order to stay living in Minnesota and had decided to serve a few years as a science teacher.

His furious scribbles of scientific notations across the chalkboard seemed a foreign language, as my classmates and I crouched, intimidated by every question posed. One homework assignment not completed, one snicker in class, and you were done. His famous hallmark retort, "There's the door" was not merely a statement; it was an instruction to beat it, and sadly, several of our classmates exited that door, never to return again. To get past Mr. Holicky's science class was imperative, as it was the gateway course to all of the upper division courses

needed in order to complete our graduation requirements; it was a right of passage in our high school. Survive Holicky, you could survive anything. Oddly, it was rumored that he was, in fact, a sentimental guy who tended to go lightly on his upperclassmen Physics students once they had proven themselves worthy, but to we minion-esque ninth graders, it was feeding time. Like timid sheep being herded, we obediently and politely followed the shepherd himself, working only to impress him with our ability to complete, let alone pass, his exams. Our solitary role was survival, followed closely with the need and desire to impress.

Then there was Ms. Thelen. Her English courses were nothing short of a hard reality slap in the face coupled with a dose of cynicism to boot. A former dabbler in professional theater, who I am certain was scorned by more than her fair share of men, she was above and beyond the cool factor of the coolest teacher

– so far beyond that there was not a chance in hell any of us were good enough to be in her class, nonetheless her theater productions. Edgy, refined, sarcastic, and confident, to impress Ms. Thelen was nothing short of a small miracle, and when a student caused her to smile, compliment, or even laugh, it felt like the achievement of a lifetime – the induction into a private fraternity. I wrestled with my desire to impress her throughout my high school career, scraping by in her English classes, laboring over speeches in her Public Speaking course, and nervously hoping I would not let her down as the lead in the school musical. I studied her discourse, her dress, and her demeanor, trying to fashion myself in a way that would be, in the least, not completely abhorrent in her sight. To me, she was better suited to be smoking a long cigarette on the streets of Paris discussing a piece of Renaissance art. How she ended up in our school, in our small, no-

name little rural town, I will never know for certain. But she, along with others, was among the faculty upon which we needed and desired to leave our mark.

This struggle to seek affinity stretched far beyond interactions with specific teachers. It seemed that all aspects of high school were one large contest of impression-making. Of course, the obviousness of this in terms of social interactions is clear, but in terms of academic identity, it may not have been as lucid at that time. Since I had the pleasure and challenge of commiserating most of my days with the "honor's" students, I was constantly among the "best of the best" as academically high-performing students. I took classes with students who would cry when they would receive an A- on an assignment or whose parents would scold them for a grade below an "A" on a report card. We were constantly trying to demonstrate our competency and our deservedness, our worthiness of being deemed honor's students. It was a competitive environment, geared toward and centered upon impressing so that we could go on to bigger and better places (college) and impress even more. We grappled for the role of valedictorian, jockeyed for positions as honored academics, vied against one another for every award, and labored to build our resumes as "whole students" involved in music, sports, and civic organizations within our school and community.

The process of learning changed dramatically in the high school landscape of the honor's student, as it became evident that a personal relationship with learning itself was no longer optional; it was demanded. Suddenly, this conceptual framework became embodied in the daily rituals of "doing school" as each student developed his/her relationship with learning, signifying this development in varying ways, but ignited with a fuel intent on sparking the interest and attention of all those who could help promote

this relationship to higher levels. It was, indeed, a time of great impressionability, a time to be impressed, and a time upon which to impress.

Pleasure

The rhythm of high school began to consume me – literally….

Slowly, as each week passed, and as I progressed from the dregs of my underclassmen role to the heights of upperclassman status, it became clear that I was building my academic persona not only around the usual pursuits found in the traditional core curriculum classes, but primarily around the ever-present interest I had in music education.

Like many high school students, this was a time where I was finally allowed the freedom to experience choice in regard to my education. I was not entirely bound by the structures of working with one classroom teacher the entire school day, nor was I forced to engage the same curricular path as my classmates merely because we were all the same age or at the same grade level. Instead, I had the choice to intermingle my core classes with classes that were of personal interest to me specifically, and this brought a deep sense of pleasure to each day of my high school career.

This pleasure drove me to voluntarily agree to arrive at school very early each morning, eager to participate in one of our many honor's music ensembles. As a sign of our commitment to the groups, we were expected to put in the time and effort to extend our school day on behalf of the need for practice, and though this created tiresome days and very early mornings, I gladly and contentedly arrived an hour early, eager to be amongst my other friends who found the same deep sense of pleasure from participation in these groups.

The effort that must be extended to be a member of the Chamber Singers, the marching band, the Wind Ensemble, and the Acapella Choir was not minimal. Our directors demanded excellence and challenged us with musical scores far beyond that of most high school students' capabilities. As a result, many of us glided easily into memberships in the All-State Choir and Band and outscored our peers at state music competitions annually. Our musical theater productions were of the highest caliber, often positioning those who landed lead roles as viable candidates for collegiate scholarships in Theater. The rigor, challenge, and competitive nature of these activities were unusually intense for a high school, but, as an eager learner, I delighted in it.

Undoubtedly, the very best memories I have of my high school career – the moments that make me smile broadly and the stories I tell most often years later, regard my experiences with the music programs at my school. The sense of happiness I derived as a learner in these classes, with these teachers, filled me with such unadulterated joy - it is a joy that I long to return to years later…a time where the smallest moment brought such a clear sense of pride, satisfaction, and enjoyment. My mind and heart are cased with these pleasurable memories: the weeks spent at All-State choir camp in the blistering heat of the summer, the coy smile our choir director would offer us on the final note of a challenging song, the hours logged practicing choreography for our musical montage performances at the spring concerts, our band trip to New York City, our choir trip to Florida, endless summer days marching the streets of our home town to perfect our summer parade routines, singing the national anthem at our sporting events, offering holiday music at local nursing homes and elementary schools, literally every moment I remember about my high school experience is accompanied by some aspect of my role as

a student in the music department.

The rhythm of this piece of my educational journey swept me away. I was filled with a renewed love for school because I was, in essence, simply having so much fun connecting pieces of myself as a person to pieces of my role as a learner. The relationship I had entered into with learning finally afforded me the opportunity to indulge to my senses and mind, a gratification for many aspects of my identity as a learner that were left un-satiated by other traditional classes. These are the moments learners yearn for; moments where some facet of the educational process reaches out and connects with a deeper sense of who we are, offering unadulterated, pure pleasure.

Where human existence questions what is ultimately good, pleasure responds as an enduring answer. Where happiness may describe a stable sense of well-being, pleasure is present in the moment, allowing us to fully acknowledge and *feel* the happiness. Where relationships demand work and effort, pleasure is the reminder of why the work is worthwhile. Where schooling had become mundane and routine, musical education afforded me the liking, wanting, needing, and learning that pleasure embodies – thus, growing my relationship with learning to a level of euphoric contentment.

Attachment

It was a fiercely windy day.   Our line stood anxiously, gripping our caps and gowns as we waited for the queue to begin the march toward the football field. The stands were full of expectant guests, and the wind whipped their programs violently as members of the band labored to steady their music stands, applying clothespins to each, hoping that the sheet music would not escape. Though the wind cooled the air, the sun blazed down, and we stood in anticipation, hot, excited, yet accomplished.

A few parents gathered nearby, desiring a picture of their son or daughter adorned in cap and gown, waiting to process into the ceremony. Glancing at those around me, it all felt so strange, so comical. Here we stood – like an identically-dressed herd, obediently waiting for the command to move forward, postured as one unit together. Yet for years prior, we never acted like a unit. We were labeled the "Class of 1997," but we were, in truth, a group of smaller units, collective bodies of disparate social circles. Today, however, we would forever be immortalized as a group once again - the "Class of 1997."

I felt precarious; I knew all of these people and had been attending school with them for years, but on this day, things seemed so different. The formalities of the ceremony and the reality that this was the very last time we would all be together again dissolved the boundaries we had created among ourselves. Suddenly, all of the divisions of the past four years of high school seemed to fleet away, and now, we were one again – not separated by popularity or status, interests or identities. We were one unit of equally afraid young people, about to be "liberated" from the very thing that had held us together for years: we were about to graduate.

I grew increasingly agitated. My palms leaked sweat as I shifted uncomfortably in my tropical colored sundress below my bulky gown. The band that I had, for years, prided membership in, started to play – but this time, without me.   The irony of the music, I realized, became a source of annoyance: *Pomp and Circumstance.* Really, yes – it was apropos. That was all this was – pomp and circumstance. A show – all of us on display for all of our parents and community members to approvingly nod, send us on our way, and feel satisfied that they had successfully pushed another group of young people

through the school system. And the only reason we had even come together in the first place was circumstance...pure luck…one mere zip code was all that deemed us "The class of 1997." A stupid zip code.

Shaking my head, I did not understand why I felt so distressed. In one vein, I was nervously proud of myself and my fellow classmates and it seemed that for the first time in years, we had come together once again as this chapter in our educational journey was about to close. On the other hand, I was irritated at the foolishness of the situation – the reality that perhaps we had never really been "friends," and this was all a show…, the question of whether or not any of us were really prepared for college or life in the "real world"…., had this time, this place, these teachers really taught us anything?

And then, with one hard gust of dusty wind in my face, it washed over me. In actuality, I was not proud nor was I irritated. No.   I was sad. Deeply, penetratingly sad.

The wind continued to blow fiercely as we processed slowly toward the entrance of the football field where our grand ceremony awaited us. But now, the wind served a new purpose – it dried the tears that seemed to rush from my eyes, pouring hot stinging drops upon a face that should have been smiling. I had walked this path so many times before – as a young girl attending the high school football games, as a middle school student running the track in P.E. class, as a high school student preparing for the Homecoming field show or an upcoming track meet. To say the least, this was not a new path. But it was to be the last time I would walk that path as a student of this school. For years, this place, these people, and this journey of being a high school student, composed of all the blissful highs and disheartening lows, had been my life's scope. Being a student – being a learner – it was all I knew. And each step I took toward my

seat in that field was one step closer to what felt like the end of the longest relationship (outside of family) of which I'd been part in my life. I was attached, whether knowingly or not, profoundly attached, to this relationship and all the symbols that represented it. My identity had been steeped in the varying dimensions of this relationship, and the substance of every day of my life had been influenced by the attachment I had to my identity as a student. I knew nothing of myself outside the realm of the relationship, and I was not ready to sever the ties.

The wind continued to blow me toward the field. I wanted to hang on, grasp any last small scrap that would keep me tied to this place forever. Scanning the crowd, I could see my teachers, my band and choir director, the principal, my parents, classmates, my best friends…in a dizzying blur, all it took was a few songs, short words uttered by a myriad of esteemed speakers, and one brief walk across a stage, and the attachment, as I had known, lived, and embodied forever, was broken.

Sensuality

Dear God, it was nothing short of amazing - nearly lascivious in nature. I was on sensory overdrive, overload, overwhelm, over-the-top. My first days in college were inexplicably grand.

Apart from the generalized sense of complete and total liberation I felt in finally having the opportunity to live away from my highly conservative and relatively strict parents, and managing the obvious excitement of new people and a new way of life, the first days of college breathed an almost…sexy new air into the lifeblood of my relationship with learning. I welcomed, embraced, and caressed each moment of that first week.

Struck by the reality that my journey as a learner was now inextricably linked to every last facet of my life, there was a constant reminder of the sensual nature of the initial experiences in college. I do not regard this sensuality as sexual, per se, but rather, in the most stringent definitional manner possible: it was constant, un-ceasing edu-sensory indulgence and gratification. I lived in the place I went to school. My daily schedule was bound by going to classes. I socialized and resided with my classmates. Each meal I ate was with those with whom I attended school. My teachers would often see me in my pajamas as I straggled across the campus to an early morning class. Learning…education…was everywhere; my senses had no choice but to acknowledge it all of the time, as it surrounded me.

Kicking off the college experience in style, I spent the first night of my official college tenure sneaking about the campus with a new boy I had quickly befriended in orientation. He was smoky and mysterious, a literary buff who seemed far more mature than any boy I had ever known. First, we recklessly sped about campus on our rollerblades at 11 o'clock in the evening, darting over benches, through greenery, and atop rails. After we exhausted ourselves, we sat perched on the banks of the pond near the President's home, whispering in muddled voices hoping not to disturb or be questioned by campus security, yet luxuriating in the reality that it was after midnight, and we faced the very building we'd take our first class in the next morning, yet oblivious to time. Following this, we manifested all the blankets and pillows we could locate from our dormitory rooms and built ourselves a suitable camp underneath the bell tower in the center of campus, reading poetry, talking about our "vastly challenging" respective pasts, listening to the carol of the bells each hour, as we faced the empty halls of the gravely dark campus library, relishing in each moment together.

That night was one of the single most memorable and meaningful nights of my life. Hovering around each corner of campus, skulking in the moonlight near libraries, monuments, and academic buildings, not worrying about time or place or consequence…we immersed ourselves in the sensual pleasure of being young college students who were not only free to think and do as we wanted, but who were encouraged to think and do as we wanted, literally living in an environment that reinforced those sensual experiences constantly.

This very sensuality palpated every second of my initial days in college. Each professor, introducing his or her course, would underscore the imperative nature of becoming a "liberal artist." Each moment of meeting a new person in the dorms or at a meal reminded me that these were to be my classmates, my eventual project group mates, my potential best friends, perhaps even a lover? Every event from the daily grind of class, to choir rehearsal, to campus chapel, to parties, surrounded me with the people and topics of my chosen place of learning. I was enamored, elated, cosseting each moment in my being.

Sadly, not every learner has the opportunity to leave high school and attend college. Additionally, the college experience is variable for each different student, depending on the structure of one's home life, financial status, and the norms of each particular collegiate community. But for many, to go to college involves a complete submission of the self to the culture of education. For those engaged in a more "traditional" college experience, living on campus for a duration of their college term, this submission to the culture of education invades every facet of one's life, awakening the attention of each sensory particle of one's existence.

It is a sensual practice, demanding that each learner open him/herself to the qualities of presence, experience, and awareness. It was a new dimension for my identity as a learner, and I embraced, revered, and sought to embody it with each part of my being.

Mutuality

Years after college, I was sitting in a marriage counseling session and was told by the therapist that the single most important quality necessary to an enduring relationship was a sense of mutuality: a shared level of vested interest, commitment, and reciprocal giving to the relationship – a sense of equality between partners where respect and effort were mutual. This made quite a bit of sense to me, as I had experienced many relationships where mutuality was lacking and imbalanced, thereby producing very dysfunctional dynamics. It seemed that I was always…one step ahead, one conversation further, one investment deeper than most of my partners. I hadn't found someone where I sensed and felt levels of mutuality that satisfied me, but moreso, satisfied the lifeblood of the relationship, equipping it to endure and thrive.

While in college, I had never heard of this concept, so I was not able to pinpoint the sensation that grew within me only but a few weeks into the college experience. Looking back, I now realize that 'mutuality' is the perfect conceptual label for this period in my journey as a learner.

It is probably fair to say that the sensation first occurred in my Renaissance Literature (ENG 322) course. I had been warned by the professor that the course might be a bit "aggressive" for a freshman, but since there were no requirements preventing English majors from choosing the order of their course of study, I wanted to jump in right

away. I will never forget that first day of class. The opening introductions left me in awe; each student seemed so accomplished, mature, and intelligent – nearly exotic in comparison to many of the typical and apathetic students I had been surrounded by in some of my high school classes. The professor was an older woman, small in stature, with striking, wiry gray hair and an old-fashioned sense of style. Her name was Dr. Olive; I immediately liked that name.

The initial assignment in that course was to return to class two days later having read Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus* in its entirety. Admittedly, up until that day, I really didn't know who Christopher Marlowe was, and I had never heard of *Dr. Faustus.* I did not consider myself ill-educated; after all, I had been accepted to a prestigious private college with the best scholarship the school could award. But those next two days proved to be grueling and required that I muster every ounce of academic strength and resourcefulness located within me. Frustrated, I found myself looking up a word nearly every five minutes, and struggling with every allusion buried inside the text. Not only did I not know how to read *Dr. Faustus*,

I did not know many of the textual references layered within; I did not know anything about the context of the tale; and I did not trust that the reading I was doing was worthy of a class discussion or written reflection. Frankly, I felt like a struggling failure, but something inside of me encouraged me to persist.

Throughout the course of the semester, I worked tirelessly, struggling to make my way through Donne, Turberville, Sir Walter Raleigh, Ben Jonson, Thomas Morley, and Nashe, and finally heaved a sigh of relief when we landed in the "familiar" territory of Shakespeare, only to be thrust to the literary wolves once again when we bypassed familiar Shakespearean plays in lieu of the more obscure of his writings. This was one

course where the homework was not to be idly glazed over, where class was not to be skipped, where papers could not to be written the night before they were due.

This experience was not limited to Renaissance Literature, however. The majority of my courses seemed to raise my personal academic expectations in the same manner. Religion 100, though fascinating, sent me into spiraling mires of confusion as the Bible suddenly became assigned reading, and I was expected to write theologically sound papers discussing Augustine's *Confessions*. My Discourse 101 course, akin to Public Speaking, was supposed to be my "fun" class, yet the demands of memorized delivery, researched presentations, and required competitive speaking contests held in the evenings every three weeks suddenly made me feel like hours of practice may not be suitable to assist my performance at the levels required. My psychology lecture course opened new ways of thinking and viewing the world around me, but the laborious amounts of textbook reading could not be avoided as I came face to face with 200-question- long exams multiple times throughout the semester. Clearly, there was no getting out of this easily.

For many, the complexity, tenacity, and rigor of the experience as a college student may have been too much, and to be honest, for some…it was. I watched several of my classmates crumble and fall apart during that first semester in college. Academic probations were issued, and formerly "good" students embraced the first "F's" of their academic career. It was challenging, to say the least. For me, this was a wonderfully exciting and invigorating experience. For the first time in years, I was truly being challenged, exposed to ideas that had never before entered my mind. I was engaged in conversations far beyond the scope of anything I had experienced previously. I was taught by true professionals who were literal experts in their field, and their feedback,

though harsh at times, warranted nothing less than improvement and growth.

It was at this time that my relationship with the learning process first became mutual, and it was the first time I consciously realized that mutuality had been lacking for so many years. The imbalance had been present and detectable, but never as obvious as it became once it was finally corrected. Though I had an enjoyable career as a high school student and encountered some challenging class moments and engaging teachers, those moments were not constant. The opportunities afforded to me were not a daily part of my identity as a student, and in return, I did not have to consistently engage at a higher level either. Once I entered college and had my first taste of collegiate ways of learning and knowing, my education was finally giving back to me and asking the same from me in return.

Though it was work - hard, unrelenting, work that had to be attended to daily, what worthwhile relationship isn't work? As levels of mutuality began to be established, the relational nature of my role as a learner became clearer and more tangible. Education was not something I merely received or did. Education was a relationship I was part of – a process that had a vitality and an essence that could be easily observed and felt, but also grown and enhanced in the same way it might be neglected or maltreated.

Through this increased level of mutuality, I began to confirm that my relationship with education would exist…forever.

Rejection

The euphoric high of the new-found mutuality in my relationship with learning was not left untested.

Though I appreciated and welcomed the opportunity to be challenged and

engaged in my scholastic journey, it was not necessarily easy nor was it consistently fun. Gone were the days of high school when a paper written the night before would suffice to receive an "A." I actually had to work…hard..., and not just some of the time with certain teachers…all of the time, with every professor. I could not ride on the coattails of my name or prior successes, and I had to recognize that some of the subject matter in my course of study was simply going to be difficult and may not result in the same level of achievement I had previously received in high school. In its simplest sense, I was allowing myself to be vulnerable and opening myself to the intimate nature of the relationship in which I was engaged. This is why it was incredibly heartbreaking when I first felt rejection…

We had been asked to retrieve our papers from a box outside our professor's office. The end of the semester was near, and like most college campuses, ours was abuzz with students anticipating winter break and professors wishfully regretting the homework that had been assigned which now demanded their grading attention.

The course load had been heavy and mentally trying. A 300-level Religion course, the readings were dense and the research expectations far surpassed any required of me in the past. Our professor was a stern, no-fuss woman who was clearly disinterested in developing personal connections with her students and unapologetically conducted a very business-like class that intimidated many students out of the Religion major. Though Religion was not my major, I had opted into the course partially on my father's prompting who thought it would be an interesting complement to my English major, and also because I was frankly disinterested in many of the other course alternatives needed to fulfill that particular strand of my course of study. Initially, I

considered dropping the class, as I struggled to find common ground with the professor and had a difficult time maintaining interest and therefore, work ethic, but as I am not one to bail quickly when a subject is difficult, I stuck it out, recognizing this was another opportunity to be challenged and to grow.

It was dusk when I made my way over to the building to pick up my paper that evening. Humming to myself, I recalled the pleasant moments of the past hours I had spent in choir rehearsal, as I quickly crossed campus. A light, misting rain fell, attempting to turn to snow; it felt cold and biting on my skin, and as I entered the warmth of the building created a deceitfully welcoming aura. The old wooden steps up to the third floor creaked with their familiar groan just as they did every time I walked that staircase, as I easily navigated my way to her office. Spotting the box, I filtered through the various manila envelopes, stapled closed with students names scrawled across the top, and when I found mine, thought little of the moment and proceeded back down the squeaky stairs.

Pausing on one of the landings, I decided to spend a moment quickly perusing the comments, but was not feeling any particular sense of urgency, as my confidence level in regard to grades on papers was always high. Natural for an English major, writing was a strength of mine, and I consistently received nothing less than "A's" on every essay I wrote. I had dedicated quite a bit of time to this project, so the work was not shoddy or slapdash, and the essay had undergone multiple revisions so that it was finely tuned and reflected thoughtful, careful analysis and attention to writing style.

With this in mind, it was nothing short of heart stopping when I pulled my paper from the packet only to see a large "D+" splashed across the front page. I gasped.

Certainly, this had to be a mistake – someone else's paper had been misplaced into my envelope. But, it was not. As my eyes scanned the document, I recognized the text as my own, but could not believe that the comments in the margins would be directed toward my writing: "Ridiculous argument…," "Poorly thought out…," "Disorganized…," "Cited incorrectly…," "Waste of time to read…." With each turn of the page, my eyes grew larger and filled with stinging, wet tears, as my heart raced. I slumped into the chair on the landing and began to weep, sobbing, my shoulders heaving. The paper crumpled bit by bit inside of my sweating palms, and my body rolled into a small ball, as I hugged my knees and rocked myself into a steady cry. Horrible, irrational thoughts raced through my mind, as I contemplated what this grade would do to my overall course grade, and then what my course grade would do to my GPA, which would then affect my eligibility for the scholarship I maintained – I spiraled. Never, in my entire life, had I received a grade like this. It was truly incomprehensible.

What seemed to hurt most is that in my mind, I associated grades such as this with students who did not put effort into their work – with students who did not care about their scholastic responsibilities. I had heard rumors of those who got "F's" on organic chemistry tests, complaining that they had laboriously studied and still failed, but I always assumed those rumors to be hyperbole. Certainly no one who was prepared, no student who legitimately tried on an assignment or test could actually fail? But now, I was one of these; this had become my truth.

I had worked – very hard. I had tried. I had put in effort and the work was authentically my own – the product of hours of reading, research, and meticulous

attention to every sentence that graces the page. And for any number of reasons, it was not good enough. In fact, not only was it not good enough, apparently, nothing about it was right. I had been slapped in the face by my own education, and left to sit in the dusky, rainy night of an old college building, crying in the solitude and grasping my pathetic attempt at academic excellence…utterly rejected.

To this day, I never have understood why my professor despised my paper, and perhaps I never will. After a scheduled meeting and the opportunity to revise, I was able to raise my essay grade to a mere "B-," but salvaged my course grade to a redeemable "A-." However, the horrifying feeling of looking at a piece of my academic work and seeing such a dismal result has not left me unscathed. To this day, I still grimace when I receive papers back from professors or emails regarding the status of a publication, as I am un-waiveringly nervous about the potential of being rejected again, particularly when that rejection comes on the hinges of honest effort.

To be cast off by something one loves and earnestly devotes oneself to produces a halting, empty feeling. But to be a part of an intimate relationship and open oneself to the vulnerabilities therein is to knowingly subject oneself to the potential of inevitable constant rejection. To be close is to risk feeling far away when the closeness is interrupted, no matter how mild or significant that interruption may be. It is only through the negotiation of these emotions that rejection can be surpassed and (re)constituted as a necessary element in the process of growth – indeed, the true essence of learning at its best.

Consummation

"To be a teacher is more than a job you will do; it is who you will be."

I remember first hearing these words from a respected Education professor during my

junior year in college after I had formally been accepted into and begun the teacher

licensure program. We were gathered in one of the introductory

Education courses, The Art and Science of Teaching, and as is typical among many

Education classes I'm certain, the professor had asked us all to share what motivated us

to select Education as our major. The room had been filled with bright-eyed, hopeful

responses regarding the desire to "make a difference," "work with kids," "follow in the

footsteps of my parents," "have a positive influence on others' lives," and "emulate a

teacher I once had who was significant to me." Though I found most of the answers to be

trite and expected, I couldn't scorn the cliché sentiments because in truth, a part of me

resonated with each one of those answers.

Oddly, I cannot specifically remember the moment I made the decision to

formally declare Education as my major. In fact, there is a good chance I assumed it

from the onset of my college career and never really interrogated the choice. It was, I

suppose, always a natural part of my plan and identity. Like others, I was the daughter of

teachers. I was also a very curious person who had long examined and evaluated what

the educational process really meant to me and my life. Additionally, I was "good" at

"doing school," so it seemed natural I would "do school" as a profession. Despite these

various general impetuses, there was no one significant epiphany that influenced this

decision. Yet, I do remember when I specifically began the coursework that would

solidify and consummate my relationship with education forever.

Like any other first day of a class, this one was no different. There was a funny little professor who struck me with the usual idiosyncrasies every professor seemed to embody (by this time I had learned that professors are a unique breed of people!). There were anxious students who nervously scanned the syllabus to discern whether or not the course would be manageable. There was a mutual "sizing up" of the situation and context among all students. But for the first time, a heightened sense of commitment was being asked of each of us.

As the first of many courses that would prepare us for a career as teachers, we were being asked to consider the implications of this career choice, and these implications stretched far beyond this specific class. As is the case when a student moves from general college requirements into courses specific to a major, the activities in which we engaged were no longer generalist attempts at building our well-roundedness as students.   Rather, these courses were building our identity in our chosen career path as teachers – an identity that would be a part of our personal composition for a lifetime.

What made this feel so significant perhaps, was the opening statement our professor greeted us with: "To be a teacher is more than a job you will do; it is who you will be." As we all considered the implications of this truth, I began to realize, he was correct. We were embarking upon far more than a job. The ramifications of our success as teachers would influence people far beyond the self or one small corporation or company for which we worked. We were preparing to learn how to permanently impact others by equipping them with academic and life skills. We would become the teachers who would have the same impact and influence about which we had spoken earlier in that

class meeting. We were preparing to learn about a lifestyle and identity choice – not just a professional choice.

This introductory course in Education served as an opportunity to formally and officially consummate the permanence of the lifelong relationship I had with learning by adding another dimension to the relationship – that of teacher. Education and I were now inseparable.

Chemistry

With huge pieces of flaking Styrofoam surrounding me, I sat crumpled on the floor wondering what I had gotten myself into. It was a Saturday afternoon, and while most of my college classmates were enjoying the last few weekends of our Senior year and the surprisingly temperate weather, I had self-selected onto the third floor of Ben Franklin Junior High School, sitting in the classroom where I had spent the past three months serving as a student teacher in a 9th grade English class.

It had been a turbulent affair thus far. I entered the assignment eager to please and excited for my first opportunity to truly serve as a actual teacher, after several semesters of practicum work in various schools. Full of vision and ideas, I felt my placement was ideal, until I learned that my (rather elderly) cooperating teacher had lobbied to refuse me as her protégé, feeling "offended" by my nose piercing and singular flower tattoo on my ankle. My college stood at my defense, declaring me one of their top candidates, naturally "gifted" at teaching and assured her I would be nothing less than a stellar student teacher. However, her conservative perspective was not to be won over easily, and nearly every day I served in my role as student teacher left me feeling doubtful and frustrated. For nearly three

months she relegated me to menial secretarial tasks, handing over stacks of papers to grade and encouraging me to do nothing more than "observe." I was not allowed to lead any of the actual class meetings or design curriculum, and I felt like an imposter. Every relationship I tried to develop with the students was frowned upon, and it seemed nothing I did was good enough, professional enough, or worthy enough. Yet, despite these conditions, I pressed on, sensing and knowing that my moment would come, and when it did – I would be ready.

The moment finally came when late into my assignment she declared that she was going to hand over "full control" of the classes to me, and it was my charge to teach the entire *Romeo and Juliet* unit. Though I was beyond thrilled, I realize she had probably tired of teaching this unit after 35 years, so this was likely a welcome reprieve for her. Regardless, I took it on with gusto, and readied myself, working endlessly to design the unit and the daily lesson plans.

Fittingly, I determined it was time for the classroom to undergo a bit of a physical change, so I devised plans to build a modified version of the Globe Theater right into our classroom, and thus found myself on a Saturday afternoon hanging huge 10x10 styrofoam partitions from the ceiling in order to resemble the shape of the Globe. Throughout the afternoon, that old, rickety classroom was transformed from a modest, bare, and generic room to a room capturing the life of Shakespeare. The "Globe Theater" encompassed the front spaces of the classroom, while vibrant Renaissance-style fabrics, photographs from the Elizabethan era, and posters of scenes from Shakespearean dramas were donned on every wall and chalkboard. However, I was not merely going to rely on a transformation of space to make this learning experience magical; I was also readying

myself, having read, studied and memorized the entire play so that I could lead these students through with a sense of confidence and expertise worthy of their trust and participation. Beyond excited, I could not wait for the students to arrive.

I was at school by 6:30am that Monday, and as the bells sounded for first period, I watched in anxious pleasure as the 9th graders began to drift into the room. Their typical leisurely gaits were interrupted when they came through the door; not a single student entered without some form of reaction – a gasp, a question, a laugh, a look of disbelief. Conversations arose, questions were asked, as students' chittering resounded throughout the room. The excitement grew in the air; the anticipation palpable – it was electric with energy. Students were agitated as I had to complete the mundane tasks of attendance and announcements – tasks they normally revered for it meant more time to socialize and less time to work. But today, they wanted to know – they wanted to learn and participate.

What followed were some of the best weeks of my teaching career. For seven periods a day I led groups of ninth graders through their first moments with Shakespeare. I was not bothered by the repetitive routine of this teaching schedule, as each class took on its own identity and new sets of questions, affording me the opportunity to refine my lessons, making them better and better with the sound of each new bell. Together, we giggled when students got tongue- tied trying to pronounce Old English words, mesmerized ourselves with old school video clips to follow up with daily readings, found ourselves humming and singing the familiar tune of the *Romeo and Juliet* video soundtrack, and engaged discussions about scenes and characters in the hallways after class. We - the students and I - were all immersed in the experience and for the first time since I had begun my student teaching assignment, I saw joy and interest on the faces of

these young people. Even those students who were normally disengaged, distant, or apathetic came to life, and when it was time for them to present their final projects, not one student failed to turn something in.

I was beyond elated. This thing I was doing…this teaching…this connecting with kids…this co-creation of knowledge and experience was more fulfilling than I could have hoped for. It felt so right, so good, and so natural; it was true vocational chemistry. An indefinable, instinctual reaction; I now knew that teaching was my calling, my vocation in its truest sense. I felt the palpable trigger within me, drawn more and more, attracted more and more to this job each day, signifying the genesis of the relationship I was developing with teaching.

Devotion

Soon thereafter, the confident and energized young woman who had recently graduated from a conservative Midwestern college found herself quite ill- prepared as she faced a classroom full of Spanish-speaking students, many of whom were gangsters in the heart of downtown Reno, Nevada.

Through a series of ironic events, this school that was my first teaching assignment was not what most contemporary educators would claim as "ideal." Unlike anything I had ever seen, attended, or being trained for, the high school was located in the heart of downtown Reno. A sea of pavement surrounded the worn old buildings, as the interstates crossed in and around the property. Where I expected to see football fields, parks, and green space, I saw concrete, fencing, security guards, and casinos. Housing an on-site homeless shelter for over 15% of their student population, this school battled gang violence on a daily basis, and witnessed a shockingly high rate of teacher turnover each

year...rather – each semester.

Not all of the Reno public schools were in such dire straits. Many of the suburban sites on the edges of the community were blessed with new, technologically-advanced facilities, Advanced Placement tracks, notable sports teams, posh classrooms, and eager students who were college-bound. This school, however, remained one of the lowest performing schools in the district, catering to city kids from low socio-economic, bi-lingual homes with parents who were often missing, imprisoned, on drugs, engaged in serious criminal activity, or working multiple blue collar jobs to pay rent. I had seen movies about schools like this, but never thought I would end up the young, female teacher facing my own classroom of "dangerous minds." Eager as I was, I experienced a baptism by fire into the arena of public education, in which making a difference became an obscure fantasy and safely making it through the day became my celebrated accomplishment.

The opening day of professional development was not exactly as I had pictured it to be. A very large and daunting staff of serious, overly tired-looking teachers were crammed inside of the hot, ill-equipped "media center," and briefed by the gruff and stern principal. Handouts came through the crowd, as we were instructed to begin to visually identify some of the most recent in gang signs, colors, and tagging symbols. No one greeted me; no one welcomed me. The warm conversations of my college teacher licensure courses seemed like a figment of my imagination, and I grew afraid and anxious.

After the meetings ended, I was quickly shuttled to my new classroom by the English department chair. Though I am certain she meant well, she had five new teachers to welcome to our department. I sensed this had become a sad routine each year –

welcoming a barrage of new, well-intended young teachers to their first teaching assignment, only to secretly assume that they would probably not survive beyond that first year.

A cursory glance around this classroom left me troubled. It was so stark, so ill-supplied, so sterile. The door opened to a gray hallway, which in turn opened to a parking lot, which in turn, opened to an abandoned lot and a freeway entrance. Sinking into a desk, I immediately felt a sweeping sense of nostalgia overtake me as I considered my high school – how lucky I had been to attend school in such a beautiful, clean, safe place. What kind of students would a place like this serve?

To describe the first few months of my teaching career would encompass a literal novel. Easily, a chapter could be penned about each of these students and his or her hardships. They presented in all colors and sizes – all backgrounds and stories. I taught pregnant girls who were being abused by their boyfriends. I taught students who could not speak or write a word of English. I taught kids who had never met their parents and had spent the entirety of life in foster care. I taught gang members, several of whom were involved in dangerous gang fights on our very school property – one just mere steps from my classroom door one afternoon. I taught a student who was later arrested for lacing another teacher's chair with Exacto knife blades. I taught a student who found my phone number and called me in the middle of the night to ask for a ride from a 7-11 downtown after he had been chased by gang members. I taught white students, Hispanic students, black students, Polynesian students, and Asian students. I even taught a student who was arrested for breaking into my car and stalking me in my apartment.

Yet, despite the turmoil, fear, and fatigue, I showed up every day. I would not

give up. I would not resign. My lessons were designed and re-designed to meet the changing needs of these students, and I was determined to see them through this course. I did not care that a Reno policeman had to stand outside my door every day for several weeks as my robbery/stalking case was investigated. I did not care that I had to translate students' papers from Spanish to English and then determine how to write discernable comments back in Spanish. I would not relent even though some days, I had to forego every single lesson plan in order to simply let the students debrief their personal stories in order to maintain their attention. I travelled on Saturdays to pick up some of the kids and drive them to the public library where they might experience a first visit to check out a book. I found translators to make phone calls home to parents. I visited families at their family-owned restaurants, dry-cleaning businesses, and shops – anywhere I could find them in order to connect and look for ways to support their students. I did every single thing in my power to make that situation work, then work better, and then work even better. I was undeniably devoted. This job of teaching was my partner, and it was not optional to leave my partner. It did not matter where, when, who, or how I taught. I was a teacher, and that was what I was devoted to doing: teaching.

 Sadly, after several months of enduring this violent and turbulent teaching environment, it did become impossible for me to continue my teaching career in this location. This was not for lack of desire, commitment, or devotion. Simply, the level of violence was just too high, and I had become the target of a gang member's "affection." The best and healthiest thing for me to do for myself, my family, and my students was to resign.

 Though many would assume that when the time came for my departure, I would fly from the school building with glee, I remember that last day.   Standing one final time

134

before my hodge-podge class of Spanish-speaking renegades with tears in my eyes, I desperately tried to understand my befuddled feelings. In that critical moment, one student came forward and presented me with the following piece of prose, written on a hand-made card:

> You are the newcomer who intruded into our lives. You came
> with love and laughter, hoping we would like you. We never even cared. You
> came wanting to make us laugh and change our lives. School was never
> interesting--until you came along. You showed us love and kindness, things no
> one had ever done before.
>
> I guess I'm just stalling. Even begging God for more time, wishing it was the first
> day the newcomer came along. For the newcomer changed our lives. I want it to
> be the first day you came along, and not the day we have to say goodbye, because
> the newcomer changed our lives.
>
> It's not the last impression that stays in your heart. It's the first
> that caught our souls and will remain there forever. You were
> once the newcomer who intruded in our lives, and now you're part of our hearts.
> So, come back to us again someday, newcomer. We are awaiting your return.

was at this moment that the "newcomer" - that I - realized what was transpiring.

Through the few shorts months I had taught at this school and devoted my soul and life to these kids, I witnessed first-hand the lives of these students, wrought with drug abuse, failing home situations, indescribably violent social interactions, disregard for the necessity or importance of education in the traditional sense of the word, and a pervasive hopelessness that permeated every corner of their lives. Our paradigms regarding the process of teaching and learning could not be more opposite. But, it did not matter. Education would see us through and draw us together.

Yet, just as I was beginning to break through these barriers, just as education was beginning to do its work, I had to leave for the sake of my safety.

With this reality forced upon me, I felt like a failure. The devotion I longed to show, I feared, may have appeared incomplete.

As I drove away from the flashing lights of Reno into the dark valleys of Nevada that evening, tears streamed down my face, and I feared for the future of these students, marveling at how my entire life was forever changed.

Contentment

Indeed my experiences as a high school English teacher in the urban context of Reno, Nevada provided me with an unusual, but important paradigm regarding the state of public education. However, in the months and years that followed, my true inauguration into teaching was a bit more – peaceable.

Having been forever moved by the passionate stories of my former cultural brood of young gangbangers, my transition into teaching junior high school at a predominantly white, middle to upper class, suburban school in a socio-economically stable region of Colorado was a startling, yet appreciated departure from my first teaching assignment. Where I had once faced stark conditions with embarrassingly limited resources, my new school was but a mere thirteen years old, sprawling, clean, updated, and spacious. Where the former staff members with which I taught were reserved, hardened, and jaded, many of my new colleagues were energized, full of good humor, and happy. Where I previously worried about classroom fights, whether or not my students had been fed the night before, and if I had remembered to lock the door each period, my new school was bright, full of well-adjusted, middle class kids who came from fairly traditional, nuclear families, and the worst "violence" they saw was the occasional hair pulling of a girl-on-girl spat in the locker bay. In short, without the distraction and situational neglect that

136

accompanied the urban teaching assignment, I was able to do a lot less worrying and coping with the realities of life, and a lot more truly academic teaching.

Working in conjunction with a mentor, it seemed that one school year quickly spilled into the next, as I labored to refine my curricular planning, classroom management techniques, and professional relations. The same fervor that had accompanied my student teaching and then my initial urban teaching assignment immediately surfaced once again, as I explored and lived the nuances of daily life as a public school teacher. I soon began to realize that this life of teaching, though slightly different from day-to-day, embodied a predictable cycle of events that would lead to an easily anticipated professional rhythm.

Just as partners in a long-term romantic relationship or members of a family begin to learn and anticipate one another's rhythms, I began to familiarize myself with this cycle and its hallmarks, as I became comfortable with each step. But this sense of comfort was more than the expected comfort one would find in growing familiarity with a job in general. This familiarity was accompanied by wildly personal endeavors that required emotional and psychological endurance, an endurance only mustered with the utmost of dedication to something very personal and very intimate. This was an endurance, that when embodied through the grind of each school year, produced a sense of fulfillment, satisfaction, and contentment, as each cycle was navigated again and again, year after year.

For instance, no matter how great a teacher one labored to be, there would always be that handful of students who were apathetic, disinterested, and who would not follow through with the requests made of them in terms of behavior and workload. It did not matter how good I got; they were in each class I taught.

It did not matter how entertaining my lessons were or how applicable the concepts were to their lives; they did not and would not care until something inside them shifted. It worked like clockwork. I spent the better part of most school years chasing down these kids, contacting their parents, going out of my way to arrange special accommodations, and most of the time, I knew that it would make little to no immediate, noticeable difference. But, it was part of the process, part of the cycle I began to learn and embrace. And then, within a few years, they would trickle back into our building for a visit, looking a bit taller, wiser, and sheepish. Admittedly, each one of them would shake their head and mutter something about how "You had been right all along, and they finally 'figured it out'." Then we would sit and reminisce until late in the afternoon as we enjoyed a good laugh over some of their strange antics as younger students, recalling the fond memories of their tenure in 9th grade English. Priceless – the cycle of the apathetic, under- achieving suburban student. I grew to know it, expect it, and became content with it, letting it run its course year after year.

In the same manner, however, I was also blessed to serve many exceptionally talented, and fully-achieving students throughout my first years of teaching. These students were part of the cycle as well: the nervous, always- striving-to-please students I had once been when I was their age. They were often in the Advanced Placement courses, and much like me when I was young, they were energetic, curious, demonstrative, and already thinking ahead to college. Their academic work was nothing short of impressive, leaving me to wonder what my teachers must have thought of me back in the day; it seemed, contrary to public opinion, that many of my advanced students were getting smarter and smarter all of the time. I was blown away by their writing

ability, their dramatic renditions of plays and poetry, and their meticulous work on projects. These ambitious students were a part of my teaching cycle, too, and I was very content.

Yes, for many years I grew into an adult as I grew as a teacher. I started to understand what this relationship was all about – I got to know it, so I could grow to expect and proactively anticipate the cycles of the relationship: both positive and negative…the angry parents, school gossip, forthcoming teaching evaluations, holiday seasons, testing seasons, annual field trips, budget cuts, staff reductions, new hires…little by little, my ability to read, anticipate and participate in the cycles of teaching allowed me to gain confidence in my role and its accompanying expectations. Years of enjoying the natural rise and falls of this cycle and all the students, colleagues, and moments that complemented it found me comfortable, content, satisfied, and gratified.

As my experience grew, my relationship with teaching helped me learn who to be as a person and who to be as an educator. Being a teacher was becoming more than a job I did; it was becoming a natural part of who I was, something in which I was deeply vested and invested.

Resentment/Desire

And then one day, I grew bored. Not just temporarily bored or mildly bored. No, I was mind-numbingly bored.

Like professionals in many fields who grow weary after serving in a particular position for some time, I started to feel antsy. The sameness and routine that had once pleased me now annoyed me. The satisfaction I had once held in achieving my position as a public school teacher now became a standard that was simply too "low" for my

personal and professional goals. The cycles I had learned to comfortably expect and accept became points of contention, not contentment.

Maybe it was the day that only three out of my twenty-one students in my third period English class decided to complete their homework that pushed me over the edge. Maybe this apathy I had long tried to combat was no longer something I wished to deal with, and the thought of having yet another conversation with an adolescent who could care less was just something I did not want to spend my days doing. Maybe I had been asked to administer one too many standardized tests and the resentment was building because I felt like real, visionary, inspiring teaching moments were becoming less valued and measurable scores were instead rewarded. Perhaps the ever-swinging pendulum of public education legislation was causing me to grow weary, and the rhetoric sounded tiresome and empty instead of promising and hopeful.

Conceivably, I was exhausted from constantly feeling like I had to prove myself worthy of my role as a teacher: the incessant number of observations teachers have to undergo were interrupting our classroom climate, and I felt like any time I engaged a moment of discipline or consequence, I had to defend myself as it seemed teachers forever bowed to the mercy of students and parents who knew how to work the system in their favor. Baffled, I watched students who blatantly cheated on exams sidestep punishments as Mommy and Daddy rescued them, demanding apologies from teachers for "hurting their feelings" through "accusation."

Frustrated, I saw my class sizes rise each year to the point where I was teaching a class of 37 students and did not even have a chair for each kid, but was expected to create a learning environment that was enriching and rigorous. Quite possibly, I was out of

good ideas, and each month I faced the notion of grading another essay when I had a pile of 180 more papers to go. It was unappealing – nearly sickening at times, and the sense of dread and disdain accumulated within me. How could I teach another student about diagramming a sentence, review the definition of a noun, read *The Odyssey* for the 47th time and continue to feign interest when it all felt so…pointless and un-stimulating? For whatever number of reasons, my passion was fading, and the good and fulfilling moments seemed fewer and far between.

This feeling of dissatisfaction is, unfortunately, a very common theme that permeates intimate relationships. Sometimes, after being drawn in and closely participating in a relationship for a prolonged period of time, the proverbial cracks in the mortar begin to show. Where we are initially blind to flaws and subsumed by the excitement and passion of our relational partners, time enters and exposes areas of weakness. The things we once loved become the things we despise and resent. Boredom, bitterness, and fatigue lend themselves to experimentation and desire. Small cracks turn into large, gaping voids, and we seek consolation elsewhere.

I found myself in this place in 2004: bored, unfulfilled, ungratified, frustrated, and let down. The depth of these emotions resonated on a level far beyond that of generalized job dissatisfaction; they permeated every area of my existence and left me questioning my entire identity. My resentment led me to a very dangerous place of desire where adulterous thoughts of "cheating" on my vocation began to infiltrate my psyche. I did nothing to fight these desires; I simply let them magnify through my continued focus on the negative aspects of the slow complacency my teaching career was approaching. I desired to do anything but show up at school, and even though I remained technically

faithful to my duties and my relationship with teaching, a rift was quickly widening my heart, threatening to pull me away from the very thing I had loved so intimately and passionately. Consumed by despair, I contemplated resignation.

Something had to give before this spiral got the best of me. One sunny, spring afternoon as I left school, ruminating over the day's trials, frustrations, and general mediocrity, something inside of me gave way and created space for a change of heart. In an unexpected, mundane, typical weekday, as I drove from school to home, the answer just…appeared. There was no miraculous moment of self-discovery or urgent event that prompted this shift. Rather, it was the subtle voice of my partner – Education - that spoke within me. It said:

> *Sonja…look no further than your classroom. Look no further than your students. Look no further than yourself and who you are to find what is missing, to fill what feels incomplete.*

This was the answer, and fortunately, because of the intimate, intertwined nature of the teaching and learning process, I did not have to look any further than my own classroom, my own students, and my own self to find what was missing.

Simply, in my quest to become a contented, successful teacher, I had forgotten to do one thing: I had forgotten to be a learner.

Suddenly, it made so much sense. Donning the title of "teacher" did not preclude me from being a learner; in fact, it demanded that I work harder to embody learning and growth and reflective intellectual practice. A teacher is to be the archetype of all learners, and I had selfishly and foolishly let go of the single most important piece of my identity that once propelled me into the very role of teacher.

Not only did I desire to jumpstart my identity as a learner once again, I craved it.

In a matter of minutes, the plan unfolded before me, with little effort, satiating all of the moments of boredom, resentment and bitterness with a renewed zest and energy. Taking on a life of its own, this plan clearly formulated itself with ease: I was going to continue in my commitment with teaching and would complement it by formally returning to the role of learner – but this time, it would be by my own choice, my own deep and earnest desire to re-enter the formal role of student once again.

I was going to apply for graduate school.

It was time for my relationship to be taken to the next level; it was time to integrate my identities as teacher and learner.

Investment

Dear Ms. Carlson:

It is with pleasure that I resubmit the requested revision of my essay Home

Sweet Home: Tattoo Parlors as Postmodern Spaces of Agency for consideration

in the Western Journal of Communication. The feedback provided by the reviewers has

been invaluable and contributed to significant improvement in this essay.

And so began a letter written in May of 2007, in a bold attempt to be one of the first members of our university's graduate cohort to publish in the *Western Journal of Communication*. A prestigious journal with a competitive rejection rate, I was aiming high, particularly high for a mere graduate student working on her Master's Degree in Speech Communication. But, my indefatigable drive sensed that anything was possible.

This confidence arrived after enduring nearly three years of arduous study working on my Master's Degree. Graduate school tested every fiber of not only my intellect, but my general ability to organize and maintain a sane life.

I began simply, with one class, and it only took a matter of minutes to realize that I was utterly satiated by the experience of being surrounded by other serious intellectuals. For some odd reason, I enjoyed the insecurity of feeling inadequate and mentally inferior, because it challenged me and kept me intellectually alert. It had been so long since I felt stimulated, and the process of grasping, searching, and striving to know was gratifying and electric. I lived for the reading quizzes our professor gave every week in Intercultural Communication. Allowing us to bring one page of notes for assistance during the quiz, I furiously read the chapters and scoured every page, cramming as many concepts and theories into 8-point font that was humanly possible. I enjoyed being stumped by questions steeped in the minutia of the text, and I reveled in the opportunity to write a literature review, for never before had I been asked to hold myself to such high levels of research accountability, and never before had I written a document that was 25 pages long.

Moreover, my identity as a teacher was renewed and expanded as I experienced heightened states of empathy in understanding, once again, what the role of "student" really meant. Critiquing the style of my professors, I interrogated every aspect of their pedagogical approach, carefully tucking away strategies and ideas for how to refine my own teaching practices as well as mentally rejecting those approaches which lacked authenticity and felt unproductive. Bit by bit, as I worked with expert professors who represented so many varying personas, I grew my pedagogical repertoire, forming a battery of instructional tools.

To re-enter graduate school later in life was quite uncommon for those engaged in my Master's program. A competitive program that was highly selective, most of my

Master's cohorts were young and fresh from their undergraduate careers. The odd (wo)man out who had been working for many years in a professional field and who maintained such "adult" things as a marriage and a mortgage, coming back to school was much more of purposeful investment than it appeared to be for those who seemed to tumble their way from undergraduate work into graduate work.

My presence in graduate school was no mere accident, nor was it something I was doing out of fickle lack of discernment. The ramifications were serious; the tuition came from my pocket, not from the government or the university. My grades were personal, as they reflected countless hours directed away from my family and my career into a private endeavor of self-improvement. My role as a graduate teaching assistant at the university level was revered, as it became a laboratory of experience for me teach at the highest level to date in my career, working with students who sought serious direction for their life's profession. I was deeply invested in every step of the process, committed to nothing short of excellence and growth, welcoming the work I knew was required for a rich experience; nothing good ever comes easily.

One of the most theoretically challenging courses of my graduate career presented in the form of a class called "The Rhetoric of Everyday Life." Taught by an assertive, articulate, and quirky teacher who intimidated in both stature and discourse, I found the course readings obscure, the course content fascinating, and the presentation of the course intriguingly paradoxical. When given the opportunity to write a conference-length paper about any topic of our choosing, I immediately gravitated toward a topic that was personal, one in which I could find deep investment: tattoo culture. Unlike most of my peers, I began to labor over this paper immediately at the onset of the course, devoting

several hours a week to research, reading, and drafting – committed to creating the strongest paper possible.

Some of this work ethic was inspired simply by the pure intimidation I felt regarding the professor and his decorated resume. Respectably published and hailing from an outstanding academic background, I feared rejection, but let that rejection guide my investment in the course further. Truly interested in producing quality scholarship and gleaning as much from every course and professor I could, I strived to emulate his distinct style, and reveled in the joy of each sentence written that seemed fitting of a final draft.

Sadly, though my peers celebrated my work, the professor did not. Laced with comments about the "purple" nature of my writing and the general inadequacy of much of the writing style, I gulped down an "A-" in that course, which seemed generously awarded, and this became the only course that stood in the way of my coveted 4.0 GPA. However, at this point in my life as a learner, my investment was so much deeper than a mere grade point average. I believed in my work, and I believed in its potential, and so, in the quiet of my office, night after night, I carefully and strategically prepared to show the world that it was time for my scholarly arrival.

After many hours of painstakingly tweaking the essay, I tentatively submitted the draft to one of the most respected journals in our field. Expecting nothing more than a potential rejection letter, I prepared for reality, yet hoped for fantasy. Months later, I was stunned to receive a letter indicating that I was being asked to revise. Not certain what that meant, I forwarded the email to my professor, asking if this was good news or worth pursuing. In an honest and candid response, he replied, encouraging me forward. So

again, I labored for hours and days working and re-working that paper. I read every word and sentence out loud hundreds of times, thoughtfully considering the placement, flow, and rhythm of each sentence. I drafted multiple introductory paragraphs, pacing around my office reading each one aloud to test its timbre. Colleagues reviewed portions of my paper, and my dreams danced at night with thoughts of new additions to each rendition. Recommitted to my relationship with learning, I was deeply invested in the process to produce quality, publishable scholarship. And once again, I waited.

Several months later, just before leaving for work one morning, I unexpectedly opened my email in typical daily routine fashion, only to clasp my hand over my mouth and squeal in pure, loud delight. I had received word from the journal's editor that my article had been selected as the lead article in The *Western Journal of Communication*. With near disbelief, a slow smile crept across my face. Though I had graduated several months prior, received several teaching award nominations, and even earned a coveted spot as a part-time adjunct instructor at the university, nothing felt as a rewarding as seeing the fruits of my scholarly efforts revealed in this manner; my identity was growing to teacher-learner-scholar.

I was a published author. Years and years of dreams, effort, long nights, early mornings, rejections, successes, revisions, and reflections had brought me to this moment. Countless memories of awkward days as a gangly young middle school student trying to win local essay writing contests juxtaposed with

memories of hours spent in the computer lab writing my way through college in sweatpants and pony tails. I had been investing in my development as a writer my entire life, spending literally thousands of moments deepening the commitment I had to refining

my voice. And it was in this moment where that voice spoke loudly and assertively.

Teaching and learning had co-mingled, proving that anything is possible when the investment is present.

Commitment

To commit to a relationship for eternity is a binding, yet terrifyingly fulfilling endeavor. Three years in graduate school proved and identified for me that teaching and learning were inseparable processes, and those who selected to be teachers by profession were selecting to be learners by profession as well. To commit to teaching was to commit to learning. To commit to teaching was to commit to excellence and personal development at all times. Anything short of this level of commitment was a failure to the potential of the relationship.

After receiving my Master's Degree and thriving in my new found role as an on-going public school teacher who also worked as an adjunct college instructor, I decided to make the ultimate commitment, marrying my life to the process of teaching and learning by pursuing the highest level of degree possible: the Ph.D. What's more, this degree was to be obtained in the field of Education – the most decisive professional move I could make to bind myself to the teaching and learning process forever.

In order to officially mark my entrance into this relationship, I was asked to provide a statement of purpose indicating why these goals were significant to me. In 2007, I provided the following explanation of my goals and hopes for my doctoral study:

> *Ideally, I envision myself as an educator of educators. I hope to work in a concurrent position as both a public school educator and as a professor who teaches future educators. The reason this structure is important to me is that I feel it imperative to stay connected to the daily experiences of a secondary educator if I am going to be an effective Professor of Education. Being able to empathize with the actual struggles, challenges, and joys of my undergraduate*

students as they embark on their teaching careers is a key to providing the best training for them as future teachers.

Specifically, I am interested in promoting interdisciplinary relationships between Education and Communication departments. I feel that undergraduate students need more training in the potential applications of communicative theory and its relationship with effective teaching. I envision creating a set of courses for undergraduates that explore ways in which communicative theory has the potential to impact and influence their teaching. Such topic areas could include: building interpersonal relationships in the classroom, managing issues of immediacy, gender and identity construction in the classroom, intercultural communication, conflict resolution between and among students, parents, and staff, ties between theory of family communication and parent/student/teacher relationships, and theories of small group communication and its relationship to pedagogy.

My educational goal is to continue working as a professional while concurrently being enrolled in the initial stages of the Interdisciplinary Ph.D. program. I hope to begin full-time coursework in the Department of Education working toward the Interdisciplinary Ph.D. in the fall of 2007, completing the coursework within two years and then spending one to two semesters writing my dissertation.

The CSU School of Education offers several beneficial aspects that will contribute to my long-term goals. First, because of the general nature of the Interdisciplinary Ph.D., I will be able to gear my studies in a track that is specifically useful to my areas of interest. Having the freedom to take courses that apply to my direct interests will not only keep me motivated, it will help tie the work I did in my M.A. degree to the work of my Ph.D.

Second, the nature of choice involved with the Interdisciplinary Ph.D. allows for some creative ways to obtain credits. I will be able to hold teaching positions in the department and gain credits toward my degree simply by engaging in and reflecting on my teaching experiences. Additionally, I will be able to utilize intern credits to work in interesting and prominent positions with the Communication department.

Finally, I am specifically interested in a number of courses that the SOE offers. In particular, the course "Communication and the Classroom" is of direct interest to my future professional goals.

I look forward to this unfolding journey.

This statement is laced with the language of hopefulness and resonates with a voice of dedication and commitment to a purposeful, meaningful learning experience. Though the path can never be fully clear until the journey is completed, the voice present in this statement suggests a willingness to embrace the struggles and challenges that lay ahead in conjunction with the joys and benefits that will be reaped by actively participating as an engaged and dedicated partner.

It is this type of purpose and commitment that has guided the most intimate life relationships into which one can enter. It is after the thoughtful reflection and contemplation evidenced in the preceding statements that one can enter, with certainty, into a binding relationship, eager to be part of a monogamous, dynamic relationship with a partner who will forever influence the self. By seeing how the self is incomplete without the eternal commitment to the partner, entering into this level of commitment becomes a logical, yet passionate and necessary endeavor – certainly all elements that must be present for the success of a lifelong relationship.

I was ready to commit myself to the process of teaching and learning forever, in the most significant manner available to me. The work would be intense, but again, I recognized that any good relationship requires work, and to make the promise to the process was the necessary first step.

Someday, when the formal journey of obtaining my doctoral degree in Education was complete, I would stand at the academic altar, waiting to hear the magical words that would forever bind me to my partner: "I now pronounce you Dr. Sonja Modesti."

Seduction

I am sick with anger. The process with which I am in love and to which I have committed every ounce of my personal and professional being is one that is betraying me.

150

Ironic as it is, I have devoted my life to a relationship that, at its alleged peak, is doing

nothing but disappointing. Though the goal of this doctoral journey is to equip and

inspire me, to challenge me, elevating me to the status of expert teacher, the deeper into

the throes I tread, the more I realize that this journey is masked by seduction – a taunting

relationship of hollow promises, proverbial hoop jumping, and opportunities for my

professors to engage "collaborative" research and writing processes that will do little

more than bolster their tenure and fail to recognize my contribution.   Though *seduction*

itself can be a process of allurement, I have begun to realize that the seduction of which I

am part is dangerously close to ending my relationship with my great love.

How ironic that I am reading Derrick Jensen's *Walking on Water* right now,

assigned to me in a doctoral course. He articulates my relational quandary, writing:

> The word *education* comes from the Latin root e-ducere, meaning to "lead forth"
> or "to draw out." I would contrast that with the root of the word *seduce*...to *educe*
> is to lead forth; to *seduce* is to lead astray.

> I wish I had suggested that our departments of education be called, if we were
> honest, departments of seduction, for that is what they do: lead us away from
> ourselves. (2004, p. 15)

Is it possible that Jensen is accurate? Is it conceivable that an underlying derivative of

my relationship with educational is an infidelity of sorts?

I have lost my sense of hope and promise. I do not interpret that Jensen is

indicating that the educational process is broadly one of exploration and creative

experimentation asking us to challenge our norms and stretch personal or intellectual

boundaries. Rather, I believe his analysis to be accurate in describing the enveloping

darkness that penetrates the souls of teacher-lovers and student- lovers like me who are

entangled in this relationship. Instead of luring students to reach beyond the boundaries

of themselves for the sake of educational challenge, my doctoral education has become, in many ways, a process of seduction, tempting and enticing me away from myself. One of the authors who has inspired me most in this journey, Daniel Liston, alarms me with his assessment:

> All too often, the promises of learning and teaching are not kept. We teach numbers to students rather than intriguing patterns to children and we ask students to memorize phylum and genus rather than to explore water-filled worlds. We identify character, plot
> and literary terms with the AP exam in mind. The world is no longer a magical place, but rather an achievement course filled with obstacles. (2004b, p. 116)

It is this form of seduction that is my primary concern. It is a seduction that commits an unforgivable sin: as Jensen states, "it leads people away from themselves, training them to be workers and convincing them it's in their best interest to be ever more loyal slaves [to education], rowing the galley that is industrial civilization ever more fervently" (2004, p. 190).

Who else shares my story of seduction? Who are the other people in "training" to become "slaves," slowly seeing the sabotage of their great love for education by being seduced and educed away from themselves? Did I make a mistake by entering into this commitment? Is this commitment causing me to do the same to my students?

Arriving to our university eager and visionary, my undergraduate students have hopes of surrounding themselves by peers who are equally as eager to develop themselves through the educational process. What many find, instead, is the disheartening reality of the educational journey: they are asked to compromise themselves for the educational process. Those who used to excel at balancing life – school, family, friends, and relationships may, because of school and its related commitments, cast aside many of those significant elements of the self. We ask students

to choose to pursue their desire to progress, to prioritize our classes in the educational relationship over other relationships, thus leading them away from themselves. Time spent deepening one relationship often means sacrificing another.

Many of our undergraduates also relate the process of schooling to a process of gaining popularity and social status. I watch them flippantly abandoning their values, for the sake of trying to fit in with others who are in the same process, as they carelessly abuse alcohol, do drugs, or have sex, merely to assimilate. They stop at nothing to position themselves socially, because they have inter-mingled their social life with the educational process. The literal juxtaposition of the educational institution itself with an undergraduate's personal life can cause the educational process to become intertwined in social processes; the sensory pleasures overwhelm. The result can be disastrous, as students flirt with the ways in which the social periphery can and will affect the academic pursuit. Undoubtedly, the potential for drawing one away from oneself is critically evident in the undergraduate condition. What have I done in the undergraduate courses I teach to expose and repel these harmful realities? Have I failed my students?

Yet, my teaching interactions at the university are not limited to undergraduate students alone. My doctoral status now deems me worthy to supervise graduate teaching assistants, and I recognize the seductive processes again. In the hopes of augmenting their lives, these graduate students enter much as I did; it is the searching and questioning that lure them into the educational process. Discovery and opportunity for challenge tantalizes them, causing rapture, falling quickly and madly in love with the role of graduate student. Yet in many cases, our programs do not meet their expectations in

terms of intellectual rigor. Rather, they are greeted with little more than a passive sense of bureaucracy and the politicization of the educational process.

As first year graduate students and teaching assistants, they envision graduate school as a place to grow and be challenged, but instead are being reduced to a series of hoops through which they must jump encouraged to compete against one another to win favor and jockey for positions and the lavishing of faculty affections. Hopes of obtaining a degree that symbolizes opportunity are demoralized into visions that are merely about a piece of paper, a title, and a tireless race to doctoral school admission. We celebrate, encourage, and lead an experience in which creative expression is stifled in the name of conformity, and intellectual stimulation is regularly replaced by the cheapness of technocratic standardization, tired canonical memorization, and the production of prototype, Ph.D.-ready graduate students.

Who have I become?

This seduction, or leading astray, is materializing in the process in which I engage my students, just as I have learned it from those who now teach me in the doctoral program. The time spent away from other relationships, the social pressures that accompany the educational process, the hoop-jumping monotony that de-emphasizes rigor in favor of standardization, the bittersweet negotiation of the self that is left vulnerable and transparent when exposed to new ideas and experiences without direction. Yet more frightening is to recognize that learners are not just idle victims. To be seduced involves complicity. One alone cannot seduce; it is an interaction of two – the duo and the duel.

Have I lost myself in the process; like a body caught in the throes of passion; have I inhibited myself from the power to act? Am I engaged in a mode of circularity that is itself secretive and ritualistic, a sort of immediate initiation that plays by its own rules" (Baudrillard, 1990, p. 83). I cannot go on this way. I cannot succumb to the seduction of doctoral school, nor can I let it reign over the teaching practices in which I engage. This is not me.

I must return, once again, to that conscious place of wooing and being wooed – to that transference of forces that courses my veins, to lead me to deeper understanding of what it means to be intertwined with the great love of my life.

Infidelity/Betrayal

Fighting against visible demonstrations of my frustration, I winced and clenched my eyes narrowly, desperately striving to keep them from noticeably rolling. I wasn't trying to appear superior or disrespect the professor. I had been there before; I knew what a first day of class was like and the challenges of uniting a group of total strangers to place them on a convergent academic and intellectual pursuit. Truly, in nine years of teaching, I am certain some of my initial classroom meetings with my students probably felt simplistic, frustrating, and base, too. I should be empathetic and rational. I should be okay with the tone and climate of this initial class meeting. I should be; but I wasn't.

Instead of politely accepting the first day of class activities, syllabus, and meager attempt at a class discussion and then just moving on my merry way, happy to be dismissed early from this wretchedly late night class, I found myself anxious, angry, and highly agitated. I could not stop moving in my seat, tapping my fingers on the desktop, heaving breathy sighs, or cocking my head backward to exhale and struggle to remain

155

composed. I could not focus or force myself to participate in the childish discussion. My mind raced and all it kept asking was the same question: "Really? Really? This is it?"

This was it? This was what I had waited over a decade for? This was the pinnacle of my doctoral experience? My last semester of my PhD coursework was to be comprised of a simplistic course wherein I felt every ounce of my intellect and all-too-precious time were being wasted by low-level, obvious lines of questioning that probed less deeply than that of a conversation I would expect in my junior high classroom? I was paying thousands of dollars in tuition for a course that would essentially be "taught" through the pedagogically lazy and repetitive nature of student presentations the entire semester? I was literally months from graduation, and I had been handed an actual tube of toothpaste and was being asked to use it to draw a picture to describe a term that was to substantiate our opening course lecture?

I paused to breathe. "Sonja, stop it," I coached myself. "You have not even given this course a chance. It is the first day; you know how hard that can be." Yes, I did. I had been there, countless times. I had faced that sea of uncomfortable middle school students sweltering in hot classrooms in the middle of the repressive and stifling August heat. I had entered sterile college classrooms where no one spoke one word for minutes on end until I finally broke the silence with a generic greeting. But, in spite of these conditions, I had also written up and planned out dramatic beginning of the year speeches designed to entice and invigorate my students. I entertained, cajoled, and sweated my way through opening syllabi lectures literally soaking my clothes to the core so that I would interest my students and help them believe that I had passion for and belief in the value of what we were going to do together as a community of learners.

So maybe that was it…maybe the obvious lack of passion was what bothered me.

156

Maybe the fact that this instructor wasn't sweating, wasn't singing, or dancing, or lyricizing or striving with every ounce of her being to convince us that her soul was committed to this process. Maybe I was looking for some sense of familiarity – a metaphorical mirror into which I could look and see pieces of myself, so that I could give her the benefit of my exceedingly hefty doubt, assuming we were sisters on the front lines of the war against apathetic, bored students. Maybe I just needed to know she cared a little bit more.

This commitment to and search for passion had developed inside of me as I progressed through my doctoral coursework. No longer wanting to passively fall prey to the seductive power of education, I took my relationship back. I raised consciousness, dug in my heels and would not avert my affections. My relationship with teaching and learning was to be my own pure, untainted love, and I would not let any influences effectuate a reality other than that.

So, I tapped my pencil, doodled in my notebook, ate my carefully planned selection of snacks, and waited. I desperately yearned to find that moment of calm reassurance helping me experience a sense of peace that would assuage my frustrations and demonstrate the worthiness of this final doctoral course. And I waited. And waited. And after three hours, that calm never came as the class was dismissed.

Stepping into the cool fall air after class, I began to rehearse the conversation that would unfold. My partner would pick me up and ask the question any good boyfriend would ask, "How was class?" What would I say? Would I provide some trite and simplistic answer? "Fine. The usual – you know." Would I elaborate in great detail about assignments and my perceived personalities of those in the class? Would I tell him

I spent three hours lamenting that my final doctoral class felt like a joke and though I was

slightly relieved that the academic rigor would be less daunting and demanding, I also

felt embarrassed that I was not in a course that challenged me more and was worthy of

the eventual title "Ph.D.?"

> And so, the question came, just as I anticipated. Just as quickly, my response:

> I am angry. I am so beyond angry and so frustrated. I have waited for four years to get to this moment, and I feel like it is all culminating in a joke.

> Would you believe what she asked us? Would you believe that the questions comprising a doctoral class would be so simple and childish? Who I am to believe I have any level of ability when it is obvious they will let just about anyone in these courses? Who am I to believe I have something special to offer when I am surrounded by people who blindly and eagerly participate at that low of a level?

> I know, I know. You probably think I'm horrible for saying this. I feel bad. I don't even know her. I shouldn't be so harsh. I am sure she's a wonderful person. It might get better…it has to get better; I have to have hope.

> But it really pisses me off when I sit in a class and feel like I could merely read the books and do a few assignments on the side and get more out of it. My time is so valuable right now, and I need every moment I can get, so why would I sit in a class that has nothing to offer me?

And then we drove off into the dark night in our little gray car, just as we would every

Monday night for the next sixteen weeks, with the same type of conversation playing out

each time.

No, the course did not improve. In fact, it got worse. The expectations lowered,

the quality of the interactions dwindled further. Students grew more distant and

apathetic, often resorting to text messaging one another in class, ridiculing the juvenile

nature of the activities and lack of structure and direction. It was the single most

disappointing, un-engaging class I had taken in my entire life, and sadly, it was the last

official formal class I was ever to take for my Ph.D. studies.

My great love had failed to stay true to its promise of monogamy. Where

it had pledged to challenge and inspire me, to prepare me and actuate my potential as an

educator, it had flippantly disregarded those promises, betraying me, cheating me, leaving

me to feel empty and alone – questioning if our relationship ever had real substance.

Why this ending? Why now? Why, after all these years of commitment and investment,

why would it stray?

Relationships are comprised of tenuous bonds predicated on intent. Yet, even in

the midst of strongest and purest intention, bonds are broken and partners fail one

another. Partners cheat, stray and hurt one another to incomprehensible depths. The

question then becomes…does the relationship have enough merit, enough substance, and

enough persistence to move past the betrayal and to return to the faith and love that first

created it?

Isolation

I returned. The investment was too great. I could not let the disappointments and

betrayals of one class or one professor forever prevent the actualization of commitment.

I knew the road ahead would be long, challenging, and riddled with trial: doctoral

exams, locating a dissertation topic, writing a proposal, building a committee. But, I was

prepared to face the hardships, because yes – any good relationship involves work.

I guess I just never expected that to do something in the name of love and commitment

would make me feel so….abandoned.

Dissertation writing: Two months in…

I am consumed by loneliness. I have never felt so alone in my entire life.

Me? Of all the people in the world to feel alone…me? Ironic, as I am typically the most social, conversant person imaginable. It's rather embarrassing to admit; I am not quick to fall prey to periods of self-loathing and victimhood; I despise victims, yet here I sit – alone, feeling sorry for myself.

Scolding myself, I am frustrated with my behavior. Typically, I am confident. I am an achiever. I am writing this dissertation, and as a result, I will have obtained my doctoral degree, and certainly that is something of which to be proud. That is an accomplishment that many dare dream of, nonetheless execute. The first of any of the children in my family to obtain a degree in higher education, I am making my parents proud as my colleagues admire and respect my dedication toward this professional and personal goal. Few people can say that they have dared to write a dissertation. Few people can say that they have completed their Ph.D. Yeah, keep telling yourself that. Keep convincing yourself of that reality, and then maybe…just maybe you'll start to believe it.

Dissertation writing: Six months in

But really…who cares?

I am sitting in my house, alone – "working." My family is together – enjoying one another thousands of miles away, while I remain here by myself, dedicated to finishing a degree program that is driving me further away from people I would rather be near. I cannot even afford a plane ticket to travel home for Easter because I have so much debt and so little income that I do not dare spend the money. I'm sure while they are enjoying ham and scalloped potatoes and nieces and nephews and laughter and wine, I will be sitting here. Alone.

But wait, I am developing myself as a professional…, right? I will be a better teacher because of this experience, a more seasoned scholar with stronger credentials through which I can impress other faculty, administrators, students, and their parents. The middle schoolers I teach can claim that their English teacher is a "Dr." and their parents will not question my credibility or expertise, as they will certainly see I am a well-decorated academic. Yet, I am not really teaching. I work so little at my school, because I do not have time, and when I am there, my mind is weighed down with the lists of things I should be working on, the deadlines that hover above me, and the writing that should be taking place but is not because I am too busy wrangling adolescents.

What is impressive about that? Nothing. My colleagues are at work, doing something with their lives, making money, interacting, and at least trying to influence the lives of others. I am at home, in my bathrobe, anxiously waiting for my Blackberry to go off in hopes that someone, just someone out there might want to talk to me or communicate with me. I am completely alone.

Dissertation writing – Seven months in…

Absorbed by the quiet, I am daunted by the task before me and find anything I can do to procrastinate opening my computer one more time, only to enter the space that I know will drive me further and further away from others. My laptop seems to be my best and only friend as of late…

With each word that I endeavor to write, it is one more word that places a wedge between me and the outside world. So few know what this process is like. So few understand the pain-staking dedication and time and thought that encumbers a person in this life stage. I don't even bother to explain it any more. My friends and partner and

161

family all ask the ritual questions, but do they really want the answer? Can they handle the answer? Will they have the words to satiate my need and desire to talk about every inch of this relational mess I am in? I used to be passionate about my schooling and my projects, but now, now this relationship I have built with the process of learning…I am learning nothing…nothing except how to be alone.

I laugh aloud at the great irony – here I am, the confident, progressive scholar who is trying to meaningfully contribute to the professional development of other teachers and students by speaking to the relational nature of the teaching and learning process, yet I do this in complete isolation. Few will ever read this document, and the fight to publish it is for what? A line on a vitae that will seemingly never be good enough for any institution to warrant me talented enough to teach their students?

My great love – my great "relationship" – has landed me in the most solitary, removed, isolated place a person can be.

I am so lonely.

Angst

"Ding!" The familiar sound of my Blackberry alerts me, and I race to locate it, quickly fumbling with the device in order to immediately identify who may be contacting me.

It seems I am forever checking my email. Technology makes it too simple now; wherever I am and wherever I go, my email can follow me on my Blackberry. I am constantly available, and therefore, I am constantly aware that I am constantly awaiting a message.

All of a sudden, after years and years of teaching and taking classes and writing a

dissertation….all of a sudden, I am done. Now it is time to move forward – now it is time to actuate my relationship with education by bringing it full circle, by fulfilling all of the goals I had set before me and obtaining that coveted position as a professor – as a teacher of teachers. Now I am re-entering the job market, ready to demonstrate that my relationship with teaching and learning is substantive enough to warrant it useful for the preparation of other learners and teachers. Now, I wait and wait and wait, depending on the mere shallow sound of an electronic device to signify that my whole future might change.

I want to live in the moment, to continue being satiated with my accomplishments and position, but it is nearly impossible to live in the moment when I am constantly looking to the future, wondering...waiting…hoping.

This process wears on me. It fills me with angst.

I feel as though I have no control.

I send documents into the oblivion to advertise myself, to exploit my relationship with teaching and learning in hopes that it is deemed worthy. I anxiously wait for weeks, months, hoping that one morning I will awaken to a message that someone, somewhere finds my story compelling and wants to hear more – wants to help me write the ending…

Maybe today will be the day?

Maybe tomorrow?

Maybe something new will appear – an opportunity, the perfect match? Perhaps some institution will be willing to take a risk on me and my story – on me and my partner.

I want to live in the moment, to continue being satiated with my accomplishments and position, but it is nearly impossible to live in the moment when I am constantly looking to the future, wondering...waiting…hoping.

I did not anticipate it would be this difficult. After the years of dedication and

work, I thought it would be a simple process. I thought my relationship with teaching

and learning had endured enough to situate it so comfortably, that it would be a matter of

me choosing where we would go from a spanning menu of options. I never envisioned

that I would nervously subject myself to compulsively watching my phone, waiting to see

it light up with a phone call or beep indicating that I had a message. I am not used to this

anxiety.

But for now, we wait.

We embrace the angst, as we have learned to let trials such as this grow us,

strengthen us, sharpen us, prepare us.

We are forever looking for teachable moments. We are in one now – a very long

moment, with no certainty of when it will pass.

But, the message will come, and when it does, we will go.

Nostalgia

She sat so nervously on the leather couch in our office on that bright, sunny

morning in May. Dressed perfectly, I assume she spent the better part of two hours

readying herself, and likely flexed her credit card to buy that new, sharp suit. She was

pretty, young, fresh, and eager. Her hands nervously traced the edges of the paper she

had be given. I remember that paper – a list of probable questions that may arise in the

interview. Our principal was kind enough to provide candidates with that list so that they

might be better prepared to answer the variety of questions that would substantiate the

interview. Our principal wanted them to shine.

I peered curiously at her from behind the coffee pot in the teacher work room.

Chuckling, I examine myself: jeans, boots, heavily tattooed, brightly colored hair – I did

not exactly represent the definition of traditional, conservative, inconspicuous professional. I certainly was not wearing a suit. But I used to…

I bet she is so thrilled. Getting an interview in this district is no small feat. She is probably straight out of college and the salary that she is anticipating seems like a small fortune! Hmph…, a small fortune – what a pleasantly naïve perspective – "small" being the key word.

Good for her. I never cared about the money back then either.

Her eyes stalk every person that meanders in and out of the office. She is probably wondering which of them will serve on her interview committee. They are already passively evaluating her as they walk by, just as she is already eagerly envisioning them as her future colleagues and mentors, thinking they look successful, intimidating, and smart. Wow – who knew that my colleagues and I could intimidate? We are mere middle school teachers – plain old, tired, regular people who look forward to summer vacation and a good beer on the weekend.

My principal emerges from the conference room, calling her name in a monotone, business-like manner. Her eyes widen, growing alert as she stands, tidying herself. They shake hands as she is directed back toward the room where my colleagues await her arrival. I catch her eye as she passes me and offer a smile.

She will proceed to sit in that room and unveil her dreams. She will talk of the lofty goals she has, the lesson plans she labored over in college, the wonderful moments of her student teaching experience, how much she loves working with kids, and her excitement for the potential of becoming a staff member at our school. She will never forget this day – the interview for her first teaching job.

I remember that day, too – the business suit, the list of questions, the nervous

anticipation, the first handshake with my principal, the faculty members staring at me, the plans and dreams and hopes.

It is good to have these memories. It is good to have this past – teaching, learning and I…we have been together for a long time now.

I hope she gets the job.

Evolution

It is often said that the only constant is change.

Yet I believe that as change is introduced into the landscapes of our personal and professional identities, there is some sense of circularity and familiarity to that change. We always seem to revisit pieces of who we have been and where have been, even in the midst of new directions.

This is most certainly true as it applies to the journey of teaching and learning. It is a relationship that begins for all of us when we are young, and though we do not all decide to formalize that relationship to the level of pursuing teaching as a profession, who we are as learners is an on-going, lifelong evolutionary process of change that is infused with a (re)turning back to the same types of moments again and again. We all have common memories of first days of school, teachers we loved, processes of discerning the course of our academic interests and study, growth toward and away from certain educational landmarks and places, new experiences with rigor and challenge, preparatory steps toward our career choices, initiation into our vocation, disappointments in relation to teachers and courses, and various obstacles that must be overcome as we learn how to use that which we have spent a lifetime learning.

As a result, to compare teaching and learning to an intimate relationship does not

prove dramatically difficult, because this relationship and its accompanying seasons of circulatory change unfolds under the theme of the single most constant theme of any intimate relationship: *evolution*.

The relationship we all have with teaching and learning is a relationship of growth, changes, returning, revisiting, and growing again. It is a relationship of joy, sorrow, frustration, pain, and pleasure. Who I will be as a learner and teacher ten years from now will undoubtedly resonate with who I have been as a learner for the past twenty-seven years and as a teacher for the past eleven years. My students are telling the same stories that I told when I was their age, and my former teachers look back on me in the ways I look at my students now. This narrative resonates with an expected evolution that is speckled with the varying nuances of each individual experience, just as most intimate relationships resonate with the same narrative draped in the same nuances, too. Plainly, relationships are predicated upon growth, work, and evolution. The rest is just....well, the relationship being a relationship.

I anticipate this evolution, the continuation of my story and the ways in which my story builds and connects to the stories of other learners and teachers.

I can think of no better partner with whom to traverse this evolutionary journey for duration of my life.

Chapter 5: Analysis of results

The preceding vignettes served as primary writing artifacts that identified the teaching and learning process as one that is intimate in nature by unveiling personalized accounts of various moments in my educational journey that may metaphorically resonate with themes present in intimate, interpersonal relationships. By honoring the form and intent of the scholarly personal narrative, a creative authorial voice crafted a passionate and open-ended story that moved from instances of the particular to the general and back again, weaving the tale of student-lover and teacher-lover who navigates her personal relationship with teaching and learning (Nash, 2004).

Despite the ways that a scholarly personal narrative illumines the metaphor and theory in and of itself, merely providing emotionally evocative descriptions of these events in a storied form may not warrant this theory solvent enough for readers who seek more than literary "kinship" with an author. Indeed, one of the central dilemmas for researchers that rely on interpretive or qualitative methods is that we are "seeking to explore privately based knowledges and personal understandings, but to reconstitute them within publicly based disciplinary knowledge" (Ribbens & Edwards, 1998, p. 13). With this understanding, in the spirit of scholarship and in the exemplification of the intimacy with which I regard my own relationship with teaching and learning, I endeavor to further and more critically analyze the narrative vignettes, by relying on the utility of the blended methodologies that frame this study, drawing from the previously cited techniques of evocative autoethnography and analytical autoethnography (Ellis and Bochner, 2006;

Anderson, 2006). In doing so, I further explore and analyze this narrative in order to siphon out additional concrete connections between my experiences and the theory I propose, while also offering a sense of globalized application that may demonstrate how my experiences could transfer to larger contexts and/or populations.

Before proceeding, a review of the proposed autoethnographic analytic tools will be provided to demonstrate their function and purpose. As cited, Ellis and Bochner (2006) argue that evocative autoethnography should be a "mode of inquiry designed to be…creative…showing struggle, passion, embodied life,…the researcher being vulnerable and intimate" (p. 433). Desiring a form of scholarship that "opens up conversations about how people live, rather than closing it down with definitive description and analytic statements," (p. 435) this form of autoethnography celebrates "the flux of lived experience" (p. 431). Relying on the provision of richly descriptive personal experiences laden with emotion-based illustrations of universal concepts, this form of autoethnography does not encourage traditional writing styles or traditional modes of analysis. Rather, the creativity of the autoethnography itself serves the partial function of analysis while also providing specific thematic momentum, urging each individual reader toward useful conclusions.

In contrast, Anderson (2006) challenges the framework of evocative autoethnography, asking the researcher to do more than "document personal experience…or to evoke emotional resonance with the reader" (pp. 386-387). Not content with merely capturing the "goings on" of a particular phenomenon, analytic autoethnography utilizes empirical data to gain insight into a broader set of social phenomena, and employs more traditional, procedural analytical components.

Both of these perspectives will be utilized throughout the following three-part analysis. Part one of the analysis organizes and evaluates each vignette on an individual level, unearthing the visceral nature of each story in the spirit of Ellis and Bochner's (2006) evocative autoethnographic paradigm, briefly summarizing each narrative vignette to further situate its inclusion and provide a concrete rationale for how each theme portrayed in the narrative may directly relate to a theme present in an interpersonal relationship. This portion of the analysis allows for evaluation of Research Questions 1 and 2, as well.

Part two of the analysis evaluates the vignettes in a holistic manner. Representative of Anderson's (2006) "commitment to an analytic agenda," the vignettes are analyzed on a cross-vignette scale so that broader cross-vignette themes can emerge as a result of studying the narrative/s as a whole. These cross- vignette themes of relational stages, relational qualities, and relational challenges represent an important overarching framework that further unites the theory proposed in this study to existing theories in the field of Communication Studies. Elaborating on Research Questions 1 and 2, the second analysis additionally creates scholarly space for the exploration of Research Question 3.

Finally, the third portion of the analysis helps to delineate the embodiment referred to throughout the study as well as the embodiment experienced in the process of completing the study. This analysis poses a third framework utilizing embodiment to identify three discursive markers that frame larger applications for the study, while also addressing Research Question 4.

Ultimately, this three-part analysis not only provides a richer evaluation of the scholarly personal narrative and a tangible demonstration of the blended methodology in situ, but also directly addresses the research questions posed as the onset of the study, unifying the intent and the results of this study in one "vow." We tend to read out of our own clarified needs, and it is my earnest hope that the following analysis can/will meet the needs of many learners and teachers alike (Gornick, 2001).

An "evocative" analysis: Love notes

As an initial portion of the analytical process, I offer a series of end notes/love "notes" to first, summarize each individual narrative vignette; second, rationalize the inclusion of each narrative and demonstrate its relationship to the suggested metaphor of intimacy; and third, to provide a more layered understanding of the complexities of each story and its connection to the concept of relational intimacy (Rushing, 2011). By providing these analytical notes, it will become even more apparent how the narrative and autoethnographic accounts situate the teaching and learning process as intimate by offering concrete, tangible connections between the content of the narratives and the discourse of intimate relationships.

Additionally, the "notes" serve to more directly address Research Questions 1 and 2. To review, the questions were framed as follows:

RQ1: In what ways is the teaching and learning process broadly able to be likened to an intimate relationship?

RQ2: What relational themes emerge from viewing the teaching and learning process as an intimate relationship?

Vignettes of Early Learners

Purity: The Virgin

A celebration of the pure and unadulterated joy that many young children feel in anticipation of their first day of school, "Virginity" seeks to compare the initial experiences in formal education to the initial intimate experiences of a romantic relationship. Portrayed as a time that is simple, pure, yet eager, the "virginal" student is one who appreciates the learning process and the activity of going to/being in school, just as a virginal relationship partner reveres the excitement of the initial romantic encounter(s).

Having clearly envisioned the way the experience would unfold, I, the virgin learner fervently waited to consummate my image of the schooling experience with the reality of the schooling experience, just as a virginal lover has created images and expectations of a first intimate encounter she wishes to experience. Additionally, the parallel relationship is evidenced in the simple reality that a virgin learner has not yet had the opportunity to participate in a formal learning experience and yearns for the chance to share in the experience she has witnessed countless others enjoy, just as a virginal lover has not yet fulfilled the physical pleasures of a relationship as others in similar relationships may have.

Love (at first sight)

It is not rare that throughout the educational journey a student will find a teacher who is nothing short of inspiring, motivating, captivating, and worthy of complete adoration. Not to be confused with an inappropriate attraction, "Love (at first sight)" describes the reaction I had toward a teacher who served a very maternal role in my life, exemplifying levels of care that created a context of comfort, stability, and warmth.

Just as relationships are often cited as beginning with love at first sight, an indescribable feeling of connection and chemistry, often based in highly emotional, reactive conceptualizations of love, this vignette illumines the ways teachers often fill gaps in the socio-emotional needs of young students, saturating students' lives with a sense of excitement, purpose, and inclusion. Students often transfer these positive feelings into strong feelings of affection and adoration, wanting to please their teacher just as new lovers cautiously navigate their relationship, hoping to be pleasing to their potential partners.

Often, relationships credited with a genesis in love at first sight are not usually lasting, just as a student cannot remain under the tutelage of a favored teacher forever. But, these passionate and meaningful relationships are often remembered with a sense of positive nostalgia and gratitude, regularly becoming sources of credit for the growth and direction of young students/lovers' futures.

Obsession

Simply depicted as a young student who finds herself voraciously attracted to reading, "Obsession" demonstrates how a relationship with learning mirrors an intimate relationship when partners become consumed with one another, seeking the fulfillment of incredibly intense and passionate desires.

Throughout the learning process, students will often find themselves focusing nearly every piece of their personal and academic identities around a particular aspect of the learning journey – be it a class, a project, a certain grade, or a certain goal. In those moments, nothing else seems to matter and all other aspects of life may easily be disregarded or neglected. In the same way, relational partners often obsess over one

another and these obsessions may have lasting effects on the quality and longevity of the relationship.

As depicted by the vignette, obsessions regularly shift, replacing themselves with new obsessions. Those things that were once points of extreme interest or focus may become less meaningful as relationships adapt and mature, leading partners to find new things over which to obsess as they grow and evolve in educational and personal relations.

Vignettes of the middle level learner

Dating

No intimate relationship is possible without a period of experimentation. This period is often known as the time when couples are "dating" – getting to know each other, testing the waters, and determining if the relationship is a good "fit."

Much like young lovers experiencing a multitude of relational partners, "Dating" describes my maturation into a period of educational sampling – a time where I explored the possibilities of my great love: music education. The rapid and somewhat comical journey of building "relationships" with varying musical instruments in the band is likened to the ways young daters often flippantly race through relational partners. As a young learner, I sought to identify my core relationship values as I explored and experimented with various musical instruments throughout my four-year tenure in middle school band. Similar to human dating patterns, I often returned back to the comforts of my first love: the flute, as I progressed in developing my identity as it pertained to my love of music education.

Communication

For any intimate relationship to succeed, communication is often cited as one of the primary components that must be healthfully intact, occurring regularly, monitored and observed with care, and challenged to grow and develop as partners work together to build a meaningful relationship. Incidentally, "Communication" highlights how the educational process is predicated upon communication, and how learners are also required from early ages to be actively engaged in frequent, monitored forms of communication in order to be successful in the learning process.

"Communication" shares my story as a middle level learner happily engaged in daily journaling assignments in English class. Though the journal writing is initially chronicled as juvenile and superficial, it serves a foundational curricular role, setting the stage for an academic journey as a writer. This passion for writing spawns into an academic career replete with attempts at refining my craft as a writer/communicator.

Just as relational partners grow in their communicative skills, often initiating as immature and unskilled communicators, relationships necessitate effort toward the daily improvement and practice of communication. In the same way, learners are also expected to be growing in communicative skills and demonstrating improvement and growth as well.

Vignettes of the high school learner

First *Impressions*

The moment of first impression often marks the impetus or genesis of an intimate relationship and will certainly become a point of reference for the duration of the relationship as partners reflect on the processes involved in getting to know one another

beyond superficial levels. A time to impress upon, the moment of first impression will often attract or repel potential partners.

As young learners move into the maturing role of high school students, the concept of the first impression becomes more critical as students realize they must now start to re-negotiate their role as learner and regard their teachers, fellow students, and learning environment with more esteem. The first day of high

school serves as a backdrop for "First Impressions" as I anxiously anticipates my first day and the many "firsts" to come, awaiting the fulfillment of all the myths of high school culture. Just as a first impression guides the tenor of a potential relational encounter, the first impressions a student makes in a new stage of her relationship with learning have the potential to significantly impact her school career.

Affinity *Seeking*

High school is certainly a time of preparation for the more serious aspects of adult life. The stakes rise as students engage more rigorous coursework, challenging tests, and interaction with a wide variety of teaching personas. Determined to win the affections of teachers and to find success within courses that will propel them forward onto college and/or careers, "Affinity seeking" describes how students jockey and vie for positions of affinity throughout their high school career, striving to impress their teachers and fellow classmates. Exploring the various personas of memorable teachers and challenging classes, this narrative depicts my journey as an Advanced Placement learner endeavoring to reach academic success and pave the way for a college-bound scholastic career. In the same way, people are propelled toward the pursuit of intimate relationships as they desire the opportunity to be cared for and recognized as valuable. Often feeling like we

compete with others for a prized partner or relational position, it is human nature to strive toward impressing others, being accepted and excelling in those relationships that have the potential to determine the fate of our personal happiness and success. We negotiate and employ affinity seeking strategies in every facet of our daily relational identities.

Pleasure

To locate a true passion in the educational journey is the ultimate goal for every learner. "Pleasure" narrates my story, depicting how I found this sense of passion and joy in the form of participation in my high school's music department programs. Recalling the highlights of my high school career, it becomes evident that most every memorable moment is somehow intertwined with participation in a musical ensemble or event, as those moments provided me with the deepest sense of pleasure throughout high school. This participation is remembered as an exciting, gratifying, and satisfying experience – pleasure in its truest form. No amount of work or dedication was too much to be asked for the potential pleasurable outcome that would accompany the work.

Intimate relationships are sites of pleasure as well. We are tantalized into these relationships and are willing to devote endless amounts of time and energy in order to reap the sense of gratification and satisfaction that might exist inside the feeling of pleasure. Pleasure incites us to participate in intimate encounters; it is one of the motivators for remaining in intimate relationship with others. As we regard these intimate relationships, moments of pleasure emerge as the positive memories of our experiences in intimate relationships, and we willingly continue the work necessary to draw us back to a site of pleasure with our partner again and again.

Attachment

"Attachment" recounts the day of my high school graduation and illustrates the deep levels of attachment that may be forged between learners and their learning contexts. Negotiating the difficult tasks of leaving behind memories, teachers, and classmates, this vignette showcases the myriad of emotions that are present as I approached the stage to receive my high school diploma. Surprised by my spectrum of emotions, I acknowledge that part of my learning identity is tied to a specific place and group of people, and though I am excited to expand this identity, I am understandably and undeniably lamenting this loss of the familiar.

Intimate relationships undergo the same type of negotiations, as it is sometimes necessary to move on. In these moments where relationships are ended and new relationships are forged, it can be difficult and confusing to navigate the muddy emotional waters of the comforts found in the familiar versus the excitement and challenge of the unknown. Undoubtedly, our personal composition is influenced by the past, and it is important to recognize the

contributions of our past attachments in relation to who we might become. In this same way, knowledge and learning are recursive, and we must address the attachments we have to the processes, people, and styles that have influenced our identity as learners.

Vignettes of an undergraduate student

Sensuality

Sensuality, in its literal form, regards the awakening, awareness, and indulgence of the senses. "Sensuality," in its narrative form, regards the sensory- filled experience of the first days of a college career. An exciting and unique time, the first week of college is

filled with the inundation of the senses –

completely new learning experiences surround every aspect of the college student and

every facet of life. Social, emotional, physical, psychological, and cultural dimensions

are all influenced by the constant presence of the learning environment which literally

surrounds and invites the student at all times. It is a titillating, overwhelming experience

that overloads the learner.

A sensual intimate relationship mirrors many of the same qualities. Constant,

indulgent, exciting, titillating – sensuality, as experienced in a relationship, becomes an

all-consuming presence as well, inundating the participants with a desire to be and exist

in the senses, basking in the pleasure of the experience. Sensuality in an intimate

relationship teases the lover into an engaging, playful, and connective experience, just as

the college student is invited into an overwhelming, sensory connection as well,

signifying qualities of a deepening relationship.

Mutuality

The transition to the rigors of collegiate academia can be both challenging and

exciting. In the narrative "Mutuality," I describe my adjustments to these rigors,

embracing the long-awaited equalization of my abilities and the efforts required of my in

regard to my academic pursuits. Finally reaching a point of academic mutuality, I

celebrate and welcome the dramatic increase in reciprocity in terms of my challenging

collegiate literature and religion courses. Acknowledging that a worthwhile relationship

is one where both partners engage at a mutual level, I do not shy away from the

opportunity to be challenged, but instead passionately embrace it.

Mutuality is also a significant factor in relation to the success of an intimate relationship. For an intimate relationship to thrive, both partners must be capable of giving at reciprocal levels. When mutuality is not present, relationships often slowly dissipate into periods of resentment and bitterness where partners stop delivering and starting resisting. This lack of mutuality is not only present in intimate relationships, it is often the culprit for bored and apathetic students who are not being challenged in their learning endeavors and/or frustrated and apathetic teachers who feel like they are working harder than their students.

Achieving and maintaining mutuality requires work, but the outcome is two undeniably satisfied partners and a very rewarding relationship.

Rejection

No relationship is immune from the disheartening and hurtful dimension of rejection. At times rejection is signified through the ending of a relationship. In other circumstances, rejection occurs as a situational reaction to a specific moment, event, or action in a relationship. Regardless of the level of permanence or impact, rejection is painful, frustrating, and can often incur self-doubt for the partner being rejected.

In "Rejection" I demonstrate the negotiation of being a typically successful and high-achieving student with a stringent work ethic who faces the painful and brutal reality of receiving a shockingly low grade on a major assignment in a challenging course. The reception of this grade was hurtful and difficult to bear as a normally confident, inspired learner. Through this experience, I had to negotiate how to accept and utilize rejection as a tool to make my relationship with the educational journey stronger, versus allowing this rejection to become a roadblock or impediment to success.

Consummation

After discerning that a career in education was my appropriate vocational calling, I recalled the first moments in my teacher education program in the vignette "Consummation." Inspired by the dictum my professor set before me, I eagerly desired to officially commit my life's work to teaching. Ready to accept the responsibilities and life-altering realities of a career as an educator that are much more personal in nature than many other potential professions, I longed to "marry" my personal and professional identities together.

Just as a teacher makes a lifelong commitment to the educational journey, relational partners also seek a moment of consummation where their commitment and bond is forever sealed and officially recognized. The choice to commit to a partner is consequential, as the yoking of two into one will forever impact the identity of each individual. In this way, every person who elects to consummate a relationship with education by becoming a teacher is forever impacting the culture of teaching and will forever sense the impact that teaching has, in return, on his/her life.

Chemistry

To feel a palpable attraction to a partner is an undeniably desirable experience. When chemistry is present in an intimate relationship, it is electric. Without explanation, without hesitation, and often without full comprehension, partners are drawn to one another, and the tangible result is an explosive, charismatic, energized interaction that leaves both partners giddy with pleasure and satisfaction.

"Chemistry" details how this sensation translates into the process of teaching and learning. As a student teacher, I was finally granted full control of a classroom and

through my experiences teaching the literature of Shakespeare to 9th grade students, my

attraction to teaching exploded in an electric exchange of ideas and confirmatory

moments. I became certain that teaching was my calling, as teaching was a natural,

uninhibited form of expression, resonating with students intuitively and effortlessly.

These moments as a student teacher exemplified the tangible chemistry I hoped would

exist between me and my chosen partner: teaching.

Vignettes of a novice teacher

Devotion

Baptized by fire into my first teaching assignment in the poor, inner city schools

of Reno, Nevada, "Devotion" explores my arbitration of an incredibly demanding first

year serving in public education. Battling violence, language barriers, absence of quality

teaching resources, and lack of preparation, I found myself passionately committed to

fulfilling my teaching assignment, devoted in every sense of my physical, mental, and

emotional being to my students and their progress. Refusing to succumb to the pressures

and challenges of this teaching environment, my commitment to my role as a teacher

evoked an infectious passion among my renegade students, igniting a love for learning

and sense of hope within them.

In a similar vein, many young relationships experience baptism by fire into the

initial stages of their commitment, as partners often find themselves feeling ill-equipped

to handle the challenges of such a demanding, complex relationship. Though terminating

the relationship may seem like the easiest solution, those who are deeply devoted to their

relationship strive, at all costs, to strengthen the relationship – sometimes at the risk of

burning out, drawing from the same arsenal of socio-emotional weapons a teacher must

rely upon in order to survive even the direst of educational conditions.

Contentment

As the growing pains ease in a committed intimate relationship, partners often reach a state of contentment where they have learned to anticipate and traverse the rhythms and cycles of the relationship. This stage marks a growth in relational maturity and skill, and often results in a pleasing, comfortable, secure state of contentment where partners feel successful and find a sense of worth and value in their relationship.

"Contentment" describes a similar stage in a teacher's development. Learning to anticipate the rhythms and cycles of the educative lifestyle allows a teacher to become confident, well-versed, and deeply satisfied with a vocational choice. In this narrative, I am able to describe my process of maturation through several years of teaching, learning from the commonly shared experiences of all teachers and navigating the struggles and joys of the profession with a sense of contentment that I was fulfilling my vocational call.

Resentment/*Desire*

The same ease and rhythm that accompanies an intimate relationship that has reached a place of stability can also turn, in time, to a sense of mediocrity and apathy. Comfort may easily translate to boredom, if intimate partners are not actively working to maintain the vitality of their relationship and actively pursuing ways to keep themselves individually stimulated and fulfilled. This place of dissatisfaction may result in a sense of resentment which can lead partners to a desire to pursue entities outside of their relationship.

The vignette "Resentment/Desire" chronicles this same sensation of relational deadlock, as I felt myself burning out after serving several years in public education.

Frustrated by the monotony and re-occurring sense of apathy that surrounded me, the contentment I once felt was been replaced by an annoying sense of disillusionment, as the vitality of my career seemed to slowly fade. Searching for a way to renew the passion in my relationship with teaching, I eventually recognized that failure to attend to my role as a learner had caused a rift, and I sought to remedy this rift by re-attending to the duality of the teaching and learning relationship as a whole.

Vignettes of a graduate student

Investment

Seeking a path of self-improvement is a common remedy for many who experience a vocational "standstill." Educators who desire to improve themselves are often attracted to returning to the role of student in order to enrich their training and broaden their intellectual horizons in the company of peers who seek the same stimulation. To return to graduate school as a full-time teacher is nothing short of an incredibly challenging task, as it requires a huge investment of time, money, and energy: three things that teachers are already often lacking. "Investment" details the story of my return to a competitive, rigorous Master's program and my eventual accomplishment of publishing an essay in a well- regarded scholastic journal. Through this graduate program and my multiple attempts at submitting and revising the essay, I recognized the deeply-rooted investment I had made in my education and growth as an educator, as well as the investment I was beginning to make in my identity as a scholar.

To maintain and deepen the quality of an intimate relationship requires a similar level of investment as partners must regularly make the conscious choice to navigate the range of experiences that will be present in a relationship that is intimate. Simply, a good

relationship that is worth an investment requires work, and work is never easy and not always enjoyable. Just as a writer must revise a draft in order to invest in its eventual publication, a relational partner will constantly "revise" her relational identity to ensure that the relationship succeeds at the highest level possible. This type of investment is both necessary to the sustenance of the relationship and equally rewarding.

Vignettes of a doctoral student

Commitment

To pursue a Ph.D. is perhaps one of the most intense educational journeys upon which a learner can endeavor, as it (re)positions a learner with a new identity as scholar. It is the ultimate commitment a learner can make to the process of education, as it requires substantial amounts of time, dedication, energy, and willingness to be devoted to a singular goal: reaching the pinnacle level of expertise in a chosen field. Throughout the vignette "Commitment," I reflect on my decision to enter a doctoral program by assessing the goals I set forth in my Ph.D. program application. I interrogate these goals, determining how and why this level of educational commitment may be the most critical and important step I can take toward permanently yoking myself to the process of teaching and learning, a process I have grown to love deeply.

Intimate relationships also afford the opportunity to reach a pinnacle level of personal and relational commitment. Whether that commitment is materialized through an engagement, marriage, pregnancy, or other form of bond-oriented signifier, to commit in a public, binding manner to a partner is a significant testimony to the pledges partners can make to one another. For most intimate relationships, long-term commitment is the

ultimate goal and the ultimate signifier of the deeply vested assurance each partner can have that their relationship is eternal.

Seduction

Caught in the throes of the doctoral process, "Seduction" iterates the tale of my looming sense of emotional disarray when I realized that the process of teaching and learning contained a "dark side" of hollow promises and waning relational integrity. Frustrated by my growing sense of disillusionment with the bureaucracy of graduate school, I felt that my relationship with learning had become tainted and jaded, as I was slowing being seduced away from the roots of my original intent, while also being acculturated in methods of seducing my collegiate students away from themselves as well.

Sadly, many intimate relationships negotiate moments of seduction that challenge the stability of a relationship – whether it be an external force literally seducing a partner away, or some other type of force simply seducing partners into mental and emotional places that threaten the integrity of a relationship. Seduction can be a powerful tool that heightens the internal intimacy of a relationship, but it may also be a destructive force that externally pervades a relationship, decomposing it. When an intimate relationship faces this type of intrusion, it must rely on the core values that initially brought it to a point of monogamous commitment. By understanding, evaluating, and resisting seductive forces, a relationship can maintain its compass, and preserve its integrity therein.

Infidelity/*Betrayal*

There is no more sickening and desperate feeling than to be betrayed in a intimate relationship. Betrayal is often cited as the primary cause for the cessation of a relationship, and to survive an incident of infidelity often leaves little but emotional carnage and remnants. Intimate relationships must stand guard against any form of infidelity, as a betrayal will haunt the identity of the relationship forever, perhaps permanently damaging it.

"Infidelity/Betrayal" serves as a narrative that speaks to the hurt, pain, and disappointment caused by a doctoral program that betrayed me: a devoted and committed student. Frustrated and angered by the let-down of a poorly administered class in the final stages of doctoral coursework, I felt cheated on by the process of teaching and learning. While I had given everything, risked everything, and invested everything, I was shocked and dismayed to learn that the course would give nothing, and I must merely accept that it would perform well below the expectations I had for my final class as a Ph.D. student. To negotiate this betrayal is hurtful process, as it is for many students who feel their investments in learning may not have actualized the way they intended or were promised.

Isolation

Having painfully slugged beyond the betrayal experienced in poorly constructed doctoral coursework, "Isolation" narrates the final stage of my doctoral journey: the dissertation writing process. Through this vignette, I struggled to cope with the demands of the isolating experience of writing my doctoral dissertation. Struck by the irony that this process is supposed to improve my teaching skills, I lamented that I had given up

much of my teaching profession in order to commit myself to this singular relationship. Feeling solitary and disconnected, I was uncertain whether the goal warranted the journey – a question that many learners face in varying stages of their educational pursuits.

Intimate relationships also have the capacity to make participants feel, ironically, very alone. Participation in such intimate relationships can often drive partners away from their other relationships and interests, isolating them into a strangely suffocating, morbid place of self-doubt and resentment. It is quite paradoxical yet alarmingly common to be invested and committed in an intimate relationship yet to feel very lonely and isolated. This difficult juxtaposition of feelings is one of the most complex collections of emotions that must be navigated in close relationships.

Vignettes of a post-doctoral teacher

Angst

"Angst" describes the anxious and apprehensive feelings of insecurity that permeated my postdoctoral struggle to discern what my professional future should entail. Proud of my educational achievements, I had been certain that a fruitful career as a college professor would quickly accompany the completion of my degree. However, an abundance of job offers did not automatically appear, and this disappointment began to feel unbearable and uncharacteristic, leaving me with a sense of instability and uncertainty that a relationship of this length and magnitude should not normally entail. Determined to continue the process of job applications, I sought to embrace this sense of angst, hoping to use the process as another series of teachable moments.

Undoubtedly, every intimate relationship will encounter periods of angst characterized by heightened anxiety and insecurity. It is a natural aspect of opening

oneself to the vulnerabilities of being close to another and striving, together, toward a goal. The real test is not the survival of the momentary or situational angst, however. It is, rather, whether or not that angst can be used as a positive source of fuel to further strengthen the relational bond.

Nostalgia

A warm sensation of nostalgia overcame me years into my teaching career after growing and developing as an educator. On a random day shortly after the completion of my doctoral degree, I observed the process of a young teacher applying for her first job. Locating pieces of myself in the applicant's demeanor and identity, I was filled with a sense of accomplishment, gratitude, and memory, reflecting on the ways that the process of teaching and learning had matured me. "Nostalgia" observes this moment of my interactions with the applicant, and tenderly illumines the hopeful mentality of both veteran and novice teachers.

As intimate relationships grow and mature, partners also have the opportunity to look back and remember all of the trials that were endured which brought them to a moment of hopeful, optimistic contentment. Memories serve as springboards of opportunity to reflect upon growth that was achieved through the challenges and accomplishments of the relational journey. A sense of nostalgia offers intimate relationship partners the opportunity to revel in the investment of the bond they have tended over time so that they can observe others who begin this journey and wish them the same seasons of love.

Evolution

Teaching and learning are evolutionary processes that involve adapting to change while simultaneously revering the familiar. They are recursive processes that demand a flexibility and adaptability while also engaging a cyclical nature of returning back to familiar moments, experiences, problems, and joys. The only certainty in teaching and learning is this passionate evolution.

In the same way, intimate relationships are predicated upon evolution. Change and adaptation are fundamental aspects of a relationship's ability to merely survive or colorfully thrive. Relational partners draw from who they were and where they have been to help mold where they must go. They passionately tread the turbulent waters of change together, as it is togetherness that will be the only constant.

An analytical analysis: Cross-vignette themes

The preceding initial analysis of "love notes" offers a specific connection between each individual vignette and the larger theory proposed while also addressing Research Questions 1 and 2 which interrogate the ways teaching and learning may mirror an intimate relationship. Wolcott (1994) urges ethnographic researchers to assume the identity of such storytellers, as personalized accounts illumine instinctual, authentic, transparent, and potent paradigms not often rendered through other research methods (Sparkes, 2002).

However, a process such as this must also enable a researcher to "develop and refine theoretical understandings of a social system so as to understand the practical applications" (Anderson, 2006, p. 387). Fittingly, then, further analysis must be conducted in order to address not only the individual components of the narrative/s, but

also the narrative/s as a whole. This analytic autoethnographic technique provides an opportunity to further and more richly address Research Questions 1 and 2. Additionally, it affords occasion for the evaluation of Research Question 3. This research question asked:

> How does an individual evaluation and recounting of a personal journey in teaching and learning transcend individual experience and become useful for a broader population?

A holistic analytic approach seeks to take the personalized account and apply it broadly to existing theoretical frameworks. I have labored as a narrator in hopes that the reader has been intimately drawn into the account and able to connect with the experiences portrayed through the stor(ies). What follows next, then, is an attempt to pull back out from the specific nuances of each individual story and evaluate the narrative vignettes holistically, searching for cross-vignette themes that may universally apply to broader populations.

Relationship stages, qualities, and challenges

A holistic examination of the narrative vignettes reveals that the thematic terms used to label and identify each vignette can be further cross-categorized according to one of three salient relational descriptors that not only describe generalizable relational features of the teaching and learning process, but also generalizable features of most intimate personal relationships. The three descriptors include themes that demonstrate the stages of a relationship, themes that reveal qualities of a relationship, and themes that unearth challenges of a relationship.

By identifying and analyzing these three descriptors in a cross-vignette fashion, an alignment is made between the metaphorical/theoretical proposition of this study and existing bodies of research in the field of Communication Studies. Such alignments include reference to Knapp's (1980) Stages of a Relationship Theory, Sternberg's (1986) Triangular Theory of Love, and Baxter & Montgomery's (1996) Theory of Relational Dialectics. Utilizing these seminal theories as conceptual frameworks creates room for the expansion of existing literature and further, richer application of these concepts in other fields. The illumination of these cross-vignette themes allows for the interdisciplinary connection between the concepts present in relational theory and the potential application of this theory to educational relationships and contexts.

Thematic analysis: Stages of a relationship.

A number of perspectives exist for describing and/or explaining interpersonal relationship development (Wheeless, Wheeless, & Baus, 1984). A majority of these perspectives regard affective relationship development, and are, therefore, pertinent to intimate relationships. The scholarship of Newman (1981a, 1981b) and previously cited work by Knapp (1980) has accented the study of intimate relationships, illumining how one of the central hallmarks of an intimate relationship is its progression through a series of predictable and discernable stages. Likewise, this study has illumined that one of the central hallmarks of the teaching and learning process as likened to an intimate relationship is its progression through and repetition of discernable stages.

Knapp's (1980) theory proposes that an intimate relationship can be described by two phases of stages: relationship escalation and relationship termination. The escalation phase includes a period of initiation, experimentation, intensification,

192

integration, and bonding while the termination phase refers to a period of differentiating, circumscribing, stagnating, avoiding, and terminating. While these stages may not be entirely representative of the lifeblood and chronology of every intimate relationship, and while delineations regarding how these stages are embodied in familial relationships versus friendships or romantic relationships, are not necessarily the foci of Knapp's theory, there is similarity between the conceptual framework of Knapp's theory and some of the thematic vignettes illustrated in this study.

This study identifies six relational stages that could also be cited as markers or "stages" of the teaching and learning journey, and many of these stages are mirrored in the framework provided by Knapp. These stages include: virgin/purity, dating, the period of first impressions, consummation, commitment, and evolution. Virgin/purity and the period of first impressions are conceptually synonymous with the periods of initiation and experimentation described by Knapp's theory in which participants are "new" to one another, actively observing one another, striving to make favorable impressions with one another, and gaining information about one another. The period referred to as "dating" in the narrative vignettes of this study can also be likened to Knapp's experimentation stage as well as the intensification stage. This period is marked by increased levels of self-disclosure, the gradual removal of formalities, and discussion about levels of commitment. Finally, themes of consummation, commitment, and evolution are marked as stages of the teaching and learning journey just as Knapp suggests that relationships escalate through stages of integration and bonding where the relationship is formalized and partners seek to weave their relational identities and personal identities together.

What can be gleaned from this cross vignette analysis of themes that represent stages of a relationship and correlating comparisons to Knapp's theory, is the understanding that if the teaching and learning process is regarded as an intimate relationship, participants should expect the process to be a journey by nature, just as a relationship is a journey or process. Different phases or stages of the journey will be marked by discernable characteristics that can help interactants better understand, negotiate, and anticipate the cues, roles, norms, challenges, and expectations of each stage. Adopting the paradigm suggested by this study encourages teachers and learners to tell, evaluate, analyze, and interrogate the nature of their teaching or learning narrative, comparing it to the stages proposed by Knapp's theory. By viewing their teaching or learning process as similar to an intimate relationship, interactants could potentially locate themselves inside of these discernable stages, and apply stage-specific strategies that improve the communication and negotiation of relationships at a particular stage.

The proposed theory of this study interacts further with Knapp in a useful manner. Augmenting Knapp's Stages of a Relationship Theory, this study offers additional insights regarding the stages of a relationship, demonstrating that educative relationships, in particular, must be viewed as evolutionary and recursive, circular versus linear. Knapp's theory is predicated in the study of romantic relationships, and presumes that most relationships are leading toward an eventual termination of sorts. The theory proposed by this study creates space for the understanding that an educative relationship may traverse with/in these stages freely and is not necessarily ever leading to termination – it is truly a "life relationship" in its literal and conceptual definition. By allowing, expecting, and nurturing evolution through and the (re)visiting of certain stages, the

educational journey is marked by significant psychological and emotional demands, as stages and individual relationships are negotiated and renegotiated again and again throughout the evolution of the larger teaching and learning relationship itself. Knapp's theory provides a helpful framework for classifying the teaching and learning relationship as stage-oriented, highly intimate, and relationally "recursive" in nature.

Thematic analysis: Qualities of a relationship.

Further analysis reveals a second cross-vignette descriptor that is important to explore. A broad, cross- examination of the vignette themes indicates that many of the themes illustrated are rooted in relational qualities. Notably, these themes include qualities that advance the relationship from casual, generic forms into forms that are rightly categorized as "intimate." Such themes include: pleasure, attachment, sensuality, chemistry, devotion, contentment, investment, and nostalgia. Certainly these themes illustrate qualities that most would argue should be present in a relationship deemed "intimate."

In a similar vein, as reviewed in Chapter Two, Sternberg's (1986) development of the Triangular Theory of Love proposes that love can be best constructed in terms of three different components, or qualities, each of which might form the vertex of a triangle; the three qualities include intimacy, passion, and commitment. The comparison between Sternberg's theory and the themes illumined throughout this study is not provided so that the significance or inclusion of any one quality versus another may be argued. In truth, Sternberg was defining love, whereas this study seeks to illumine intimacy in situ, so the purpose of each theory is slightly different and warrants the inclusion of varying qualities accordingly.

Rather, the significance of juxtaposing Sternberg's theory with the cross- vignette analysis of themes that illumine relational qualities suggests two important findings: first, and most simply, different intimate relationships necessitate different qualities. Sternberg argues that to reach consummate love in a romantic relationship, a relationship is marked by intimacy, passion, and commitment. I argue that to consummate the love of student-lover or teacher- lover, a relationship is marked by intimacy based on a barrage of qualities that may demonstrate its intimacy such as pleasure or attachment or sensuality or devotion. Simply, relationships are comprised of qualities that will constitute both its "definition" and destination.

The second, less intuitive conclusion suggests that both Sternberg's theory and a relational qualities thematic analysis demonstrate a level of consciousness that must be present in participants' interactions with one another and the relationship. To know love, Sternberg suggests one must consciously foster passion and intimacy, while decidedly committing to a close relationship with another. To know learning and teaching, I assert that one must act relationally, consciously recognizing, accepting, experiencing, and embodying indicators of intimacy that permeate the learner or teacher's existence. The need for the conscious recognition, acceptance, and embodiment of intimate indicators is demonstrated throughout the narrative vignettes presented in the study. As illustrated, it is nearly impossible to engage and fully reap the totality of the learner or teacher's role without being oriented toward indicators of relationships. The stories present incidences of friendship, collegiality, passion, intrigue, connectivity, comfort, vulnerability, trust, humor – the list of descriptors is nearly endless and is exemplified throughout the emotionality present in the narrative vignettes. An awareness of the

relational nature of the process is demonstrated through the heartbreak, triumph, joy, bitterness, and myriad of other feelings that attribute the process of teaching and learning to a highly relational, intimate state. To be a lover of teaching or learning, to be in love with teaching and learning, to be a teacher who loves and a student who loves, is to consciously cultivate a relationship and with that, intimacy between and among learners, educators, and knowledge itself. Just as Sternberg urges that love is not consummated without conscious attention to the cultivation of distinct qualities (intimacy, passion, and commitment), this study urges that teaching and learning also will not be consummated without conscious attention to the cultivation of distinct intimate qualities.

In short, it is clear that many of the themes represented through the narrative vignettes illustrate qualities that may be present in an intimate relationship. Identifying the qualities that nuance each learner or teacher's personal relationship with teaching and learning is critical to understanding the overarching quality of the relationship at large. Models such as Sternberg's Triangular Theory of Love demonstrate that varying relationships incite the presence of varying qualities, and all love-based relationships require a conscious evaluation of the qualities that are both present and lacking in the relationship, either bolstering its growth or rendering it to a state of suffering and potential demise.

Thematic analysis: Challenges of a relationship.

Suffering is undoubtedly present in every relationship as challenges are an unavoidable part of the vulnerability involved in participation in an intimate relationship. It goes without saying – every relationship will face struggles and challenges. As mentioned in Chapter Two, the Theory of Relational Dialectics (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996)

offers an excellent framework for making sense of such challenges. According to this approach, various contradictions or, ''dynamic interplay between unified oppositions'' (p. 8) are constantly at play in relational life. Of particular interest to this theory are the constructs of autonomy versus connection, openness versus protection, novelty versus predictability, and judgment versus acceptance.

Dialectical process thinking contributes to conceptual frameworks about relational life and intimacy. First, it allows evaluation about issues around which relational partners construct meaning. Second, it allows the static frame to be removed, as emphasis is placed on the interplay between change and stability (West & Turner, 2004); the presence of both patterns and unpredictability are regarded as natural occurrences within relationships. Likewise, dialectical thinking directs people to observe the interactions within a relationship, among its individual members, as well as outside a relationship, as its members interact with the larger social and cultural systems in which they are embedded (West & Turner, 2004). This approach is helpful when regarding the challenges embedded within educative relationships and their correlating cultural and institutional structures.

Evaluating the narrative vignettes presented in this study allows for the identification of many such relational dialectics that are also comprised in tension. Though not presented as a series of opposites, the vignettes engaged themes that resonate with the familiar sounds of relational challenges, many of which are certainly easily situated in polarity from another relational dynamic.

For example, "Obsession" portrays a learner who is passionate about education, demonstrating a thriving hunger for the development of the relationship, unable

to be satiated. However, as her relationship with learning matures, she finds herself stagnant, stale, and "Resentful" toward the same educational process. "Affinity Seeking" demonstrates the learner's attempt to be accepted in an educational environment and rewarded for success, whereas "Mutuality" portrays a distinctly different orientation toward education: the same learner rejecting notions of extrinsic reward, and instead seeking intrinsic motivation for the development of skill and challenge. "Chemistry" denotes the elation and sense of satisfaction a young teacher feels when finding her niche as an educator, yet within a matter of a few years, "Contentment" is shoved aside by a growing sense of "Desire" that attempts to thwart her professional path, casting aside her true love for teaching. "Commitment" is tested as a teacher returns to the role of student, earnestly yearning to develop her educational relationship further, yet finding herself "Seduced" at every turn, leaving her vulnerable to the autocratic and political winds of higher education.

Through these brief references, it is clear how many of these themes could be easily categorized as contributors to the relational dialectics and tensions that serve to challenge most intimate relationships. Consequently, by viewing the teaching and learning process as intimate, we begin to utilize theories such as the Theory of Relational Dialectics to make sense of the pendulum that is the relational experience. Contradiction, hypocrisy, opposition, and tension comprise the vitality of a relationship just as much as other more positive, easily navigable and pleasurable features of a relationship. This understanding and expectation undergirds the success and health of an intimate relationship, and if we accept the teaching and learning relationship as such, these tensions will become part of the relational balance we strive to maintain.

A key difference, however, is that the relational dialectics of the teaching and learning journey are not unfolding between two human partners per se, but rather between a human partner and, often, a conceptual partner – a nontangible partner over whom the human partner has little to no power in the traditional connotation. What happens when a relationship exists and is tangibly experienced and embodied as intimate, facing all of the traditional markers of relational challenge, but when one partner is limited in its ability to co-negotiate the dialectal tensions? What happens when, in truth, "dialectical" isn't possible – when dyadic becomes non-dyadic? In short, what happens when the greatest relational dialect being negotiated is the tension that emerges when "dialectical" does not exist?

Perhaps this is the most significant challenge of the teaching and learning process as viewed through an intimate, relational lens: how to tend to the relationship when the relationship is conceptually and metaphorically based in most aspects. In order to allay the concerns presented by this essential question, we turn to the theory proposed. If we can evidence an intimate relationship in the teaching and learning process, then we must guide that relationship by the same frameworks that would guide an interpersonal relationship in its traditional conceptualization. We must ask the same types of questions of the conceptual relationship that would be asked of a literal relationship so that tensions can be explored and negotiated as "dialectically" as possible. Such questions may include:

a) How does a student-lover or teacher-lover improve communication with her partner?

b) How might a student-lover combat the isolation felt by pursuing an educational goal when her partner is not able to respond in traditional ways?

c) Through what methods can a student-lover or teacher-lover increase relational mutuality?

d) What strategies can prevent educational endeavors from leaving the student-lover feeling seduced or the teacher-lover engaging in seduction?

e) How does the teacher-lover combat feelings of resentment toward her chosen vocation?

f) How might a teacher-lover negotiate the angst that accompanies the process of trying to achieve professional goal?

g) Where can affinity be sought in the educational relationship when affinity is not necessarily able to be tangibly felt?

h) How is commitment defined and consummated in each stage of the educational journey?

In traditional relational analysis, the answer would be found through dialectical theory: these tensions are co-negotiated through dialogue, time, and experience between partners. They may not be resolved, but at least they can be confronted.

In the scope of this study, the same must be expected. Though one partner may not always be tangible in the traditional sense, if a relationship is acknowledged even through metaphorical means, then the relationship must be treated as such: a relationship. Just as every "traditional" relationship finds a means to forge even the most difficult of situations, a metaphorical or conceptual relationship must do the same. To be equitable, even "traditional" relationships comprised of human partners reach states of deadlock where one partner may not be willing or able to be dialectical either. In those instances,

we pursue our partner in the name of the relationship, just as we would, should, and do in regard to the relationship that exists with the teaching and learning journey.

These are difficult questions to answer because the relationship we all have with the teaching and learning process is constituted based on representations: we feel a sense of affinity based on the accolades afforded to us by people and things who *represent* teaching and learning (teachers, grades, scholarships, etc). We struggle with isolation based on tasks that *represent* teaching and learning (homework, projects, theses, dissertations, etc). We are seduced away from ourselves and cheated on because of products and processes that *represent* teaching and learning (courses, programs of study etc.). The relationship in which we take part, the relationship which produces challenges and struggles able to be likened to any "traditional" relationship, is a relationship constituted through representations, thus rendering its participants to potentially feel these challenges and struggles in deeply personal, and deeply troubling ways, as the challenges and struggles are not merely a part of the relationship, but rather, they *are* the relationship.

It is this finding that entreats one final form of analysis. Clearly, the cross vignette themes of relational stages and relational qualities have situated the teaching and learning process as intimate. Yet, the illumination of the cross vignette theme of relational challenges unearths one final, important framework of analysis that speaks to the unique nature of the intimate teaching and learning relationships: embodiment.

An embodied analysis: Writing as intimate teaching and learning

As scholarly personal narratives and autoethnography are both process and product, as well as methods and texts themselves, it has been appropriate to engage the

narrative vignettes in accordance with corresponding individual end\"love" notes as well

as cross-vignette evaluation of themes that demonstrate relational stages, relational

qualities, and relational challenges (Chang, 2008; Dyson, 2007; Mundell, 2011). This

process of constructing, revisiting, revising, and organizing the narratives has provided

two solid frameworks for scholarly analysis.

As demonstrated through the two preceding analyses, the process of writing is a

process of discovery in itself. Richardson and St. Pierre (2005) contend that:

> A great part of inquiry is accomplished in the writing…writing *is* thinking,
> writing *is* analysis, writing *is* indeed a seductive and tangled method of discovery
> (p. 967).

This sentiment could not more accurately describe my position as a researcher throughout

the course of this study, and could not more fittingly bolster the credibility of the

metaphorical theory this study proposes. It also allows Research Question 4 to be

addressed. To review, this question asked:

> How do autoethnographic and narrative methods allow for a visceral examination
> of the teaching and learning process?

Simply, data continually emerged through this writing process, as it was a process of

recursive introspection and reflection: truly, a process that involved more than telling my

story, but also studying my story in a very raw, visceral, and highly emotional

experience. Such a process is known as reflexivity (Anderson, 2006), and this blended

methods approach required and allowed each draft, the subsequent "love notes," and the

cross-vignette thematic analysis to further clarify meaning, thus refining my own

understandings. The finished product is a series of brief stories that also form a larger

narrative describing the events and situations which have occurred in a journey, as well as

the underlying cultural beliefs, values, and understandings that guided my actions through the journey.

As findings are told, retold, and analyzed, autoethnography shifts from a data collection and processing tool to a writing convention (Mundell, 2011). The narrative section clarifies the personal, professional, and cultural frameworks of the teaching and learning journey from a first person account, containing contextual details, emotion, and stories affected by histories, social structures, and cultures. Without the intimate nature of my writing experience – the struggle, effort, and dedication required to traverse the emotional spaces of my entire life and identity, and without the process of writing, (re)writing, revising, and (re)visiting the narrative(s) again and again, I would not have had the opportunity to locate the essence – the true "heart" of this project. Ironically, it was the very intimate act of writing itself that proved my theories of teaching and learning as an intimate relationship to be so very accurate. My role as a writer – as a learner – throughout this study, enabled me to feel and experience the very intimacy about which I wrote. I did not have to labor to manufacture some form of interpretation because not only had I lived the interpretation, I was living it again through the writing.

Interpretation, as Foucault (1967/98) asserts:

> Does not clarify a matter to be interpreted which offers itself passively; it can only seize an already-present interpretation, which it must overthrow, upset, shatter… (p. 275).

This type of power is present within the structures of narrative and autoethnographic inquiry, and as a result afforded me the opportunity to see the metaphor I proposed active, alive, and present, as my personal relationship with teaching and learning was embodied. As a result, the final analysis of this scholarly personal narrative advocates for

an examination of embodiment and identity that are both the product of the selected research methods and the "doing" of the study itself, as well an iteration of the proposed theory at work. By evaluating this embodiment, three discursive markers emerge as a final analytical framework.

Writing as embodiment: A love act continued

In general, this study has endeavored to serve as both a love act of learning and a love act of teaching. The very "doing" of the study embodies teaching and learning, and in the doing, has demonstrated that "intimate" is, indeed, an appropriate term to describe the process of teaching and learning. As I have wrestled with the creation and execution of this study, I have lived the stories about which I wrote, re-lived them through the writing, and embodied intimacy as I strive to analyze them, experiencing the very themes suggested through the course of the study: moments of pleasure, investment, and devotion as well as moments of angst, resentment, and isolation. Simply, this study asserts that to teach or learn is to be engaged in an intimate relationship, and to do either effectively requires a level of relating: to relate with oneself, with others, with contexts, with moments, with skills, and with concepts.

Moreover, through the embodiment experienced in this study, I began to recognize that this process of describing the intimate nature of teaching and learning kept circling back to three words that I had to prohibit myself from repeatedly engaging through the study. This is natural, I assume, as writing and learning are both recursive processes. However, the abundant number of times I felt the urge to utilize these three words deems them sources of further inquiry and discussion. It is in these three words that I locate the true essence of the intimacy I have labored to describe, and it is in these

three words I once again feel and demonstrate the embodiment exhibited through this project.

Three simple words:

Emotion.
Without question, terms that surrounded the concept of emotion and feeling were the most frequently referenced terms throughout this study. Words that are literally synonymous with "feeling" or "emotion" were presented throughout and repeated frequently. These terms include: *spectrum, sentiment, sense, attitude, view, perspective, intuition, impression, resonance, and experience*.

Frequent allusions to a feeling state not only titled and thematically guided the narrative vignettes but also dotted the individual vignette analyses. Such terms include*: sadness, joy, excitement, carnage, remnants, pain, hurt, disappointment, elation, survival, despair, gratification, satisfaction, complexity, disillusionment, annoyance, thrill, confidence, charisma, instability, uncertainty, rigor, optimism, and hope.*

The justification for study and even the selection and defense of methods to be used in the study were couched by emotionally-charged words such as: *evoke, love, engage, sense, rationalize, connect, inspire, captivate, dare, struggle, consume, care, value, overwhelm, overload, endeavor, titillate, and long*.

Additionally, an examination of the tone of the study as a whole yields the following generally applied terms which illustrate the emotionally-situated language present in the study: *personal, earnest, intimate, private, vulnerable,*

transparent, visceral, passionate, evocative, relational, favored, intense, vested, and desperate.

It is not surprising that emotion-based terminology would infiltrate a study regarding personal relationships, as we expect and anticipate intimate relationships to be emotional at their core. To exist without emotion in an intimate relationship seems contradictory to the very essence of what intimacy is. Feelings are a natural derivative of intimate relationships.

But, is it surprising that emotion-based terminology also surrounds the discourse of teaching and learning? The literature review presented earlier in this project cited Boler's (1998) work, which identified emotion as present in the educational process. However, very little research exists beyond this seminal work.

The current study, however, implodes the paradigm through which emotion is viewed in relation to education. Yes, it can be seen that feeling is present in the individualized emotions related to specific experiences of specific educational encounters. Yes, reactions to the events of specific moments in teaching and learning are emotional. However, this study offers additional perspectives, as little has been said about how the process and journey of teaching and learning itself mirrors the constant emotionality of a relationship. While there are singular moments of emotional reaction in teaching and learning, there is also a broader, *constant* tenor of emotionality present in the teaching and learning process. In fact, it could be claimed that learners and teachers operate not merely on a spectrum of intellect, but also on a spectrum of emotionality at all times, just as lovers operate on a similar emotional spectrum in their intimate relationships.

Negotiation.

Unexpectedly, a second term that was embodied throughout this study was that of "negotiation." This term and its related synonyms such as: navigation, meditation, mitigation, exploration, and resolution were the most frequently cited terms used as a way to connect the themes of my narrative vignettes to examples of intimate relational discourse.

It seems that learners, teachers, and lovers are constantly in a state of negotiation. The actual fodder of the negotiation varies, of course. Students negotiate work load, teaching personas, expectations, personal identities as related to the cultural institution of schools, and varying stages of the educational journey. Teachers negotiate work load, student personas, expectations, personal identities as related to the cultural institution of schools, and the varying stages of their own educational journeys. In the same way, lovers negotiate the work load of the relationship, the many personas of their partner and they themselves, personal identities as related to the cultural institution of relationships (i.e. marriage, etc.), and the varying stages of their relational journey. To write about and analyze these tensions is to embody the negotiation of negotiation. In doing so, I realize that to be a learner…to be a teacher...to be a lover, is to be adept at this jockeying and navigation.

Evolution.

The final term postured for use many times throughout this study was simply: evolution. Its conceptual counterparts: recursive, circular, cyclical, dialectical, developmental, progression, and maturation, were also heavily utilized throughout the study. Incidentally, no one concept seems to more adequately describe what a relationship of any nature can be labeled as: evolutionary.

Those relationships that evolve healthfully with partners evolving mutually are gratifying, pleasurable, and experience a deep sense of purpose and longevity. Those relationships that fail to evolve often…fail. This concept of evolution is so suitably tied to both intimate personal relationships and to describing the nature of the teaching and learning process. It appears to be one of the most significant and solvent bonding agents that can yoke teaching and learning to intimacy.

To evolve is to relate. To relate is to evolve.

Similarly, to learn is to evolve, and to evolve is to learn.

This is perhaps the most "teachable" moment of the theory proposed. In short, the literal process of writing, interpreting, and analyzing the personal narrative of myself as a learner and teacher allowed me to embody the narratives and further, to embody, feel and experience the theory at work. The level of intimacy obtained through this exercise revealed three specific semiotic/semantic components that serve as an additional complement to the metaphor already illustrated. From this, I/we learn:

a). that teaching and learning is an intimate process because it exists on a spectrum of emotionality that must be anticipated, expected, and navigated in the same way as the emotionality of an intimate personal relationship;

b). that teaching and learning involve a level of negotiation that is also present in intimate relationships, thus rendering teachers, learners, and lovers as one in the same in regard to many relational dynamics; and

c). that teaching and learning is an evolutionary entity, just as intimate personal relationships are evolving entities. To neglect or prevent this evolution is to risk damaging the relationship; to embrace and learn from this evolution is to encourage the fullest blossoming of the relationship.

209

Though the "meaning" gleaned through this study has been nothing short of clarifying and gratifying, the beauty of writing as a method of inquiry (Richardson, 2005) is that writing does more than simply "mean." Deleuze and Guattari (1980/87) suggest: "Writing has nothing to do with signifying. It has to do with surveying, mapping,…even realms that are yet to come" (pp. 4-5). It is for this reason that I can conclude this study through one final chapter that will offer some implications for the utility of this theory and its further application in the fields of both Communication Studies and Education.

Chapter 6 – Conclusions

Overview of study

We are, indeed, a species motivated by intimacy. To desire warmth, closeness, and communicative interaction with others is a natural form of communion in which humans participate to varying degrees throughout their lifetime.

We are also a species motivated by the quest for knowledge and the process of inquiry. To satiate curiosity, interrogate philosophy, and reap the intellectual stimulation of esteemed mentors is equally as fundamental to our personal, social, psychological, and cultural development.

We all spend some portion of our lives engaged in intimate relationships with others. These relationships may materialize as familial bonds, deeply meaningful friendships, or romantic intimacy. Similarly, we all engage some duration of our lives in the role of learner, both formally and informally, as we are the students of the many teachers who give of themselves in order to assist in the development of our personal and vocational skills.

It is not unforeseeable that intimacy and learning might locate themselves in similar discourses. It is not surprising that the themes present within one realm are easily detected in the other. It is not without anticipation that the descriptors of one form might be suitable descriptors for the other. It is not without question that the teaching and learning process can be seen as rooted and grown in the same soil that harvests the seeds of love relationships.

This study has ventured to create a metaphorical and theoretical connection between the teaching and learning process and intimate personal relationships. By utilizing scholarly personal narratives written from an autoethnographic perspective, the journey of one learner who chose to become a teacher reveals accounts of an intimate relationship spanning a lifetime that undoubtedly intersects with, mirrors, and resonates with the stories of many other learners and teachers.

It is through intimate relationships, we may find our most "profound experiences of security and anxiety, power and impotence, unity and separateness" (McAdams, 1988, p. 7). A cursory review of the themes that emerged through the narratives of this study corroborates this sentiment. The narratives speak of passion, seduction, commitment, love, betrayal, isolation, affection, pleasure, sensuality, attachment, mutuality, and rejection – all themes that permeate not only the discourse of a learner or teacher's personal journey, but also the discourse of a lover's story. These themes are not the inauthentic manufacturing of theory trying to bolster its potential. Rather, they are the visceral, real, primal experiences of both learners and lovers – two groups who though never formally or theoretically married, evidently share much of the same organic fabric.

Hendrick and Hendrick (1986) remind us of the conceptually independent dimensions of love: eros, ludus, stroge, pragma, mania, and agape. Through an examination of these forms of love, this relationship between teaching and learning and intimacy is clearly situated. Eros, representing physical desire and longing certainly relates to the passion that accompanies the process of learning and educating, as students and teachers, just like lovers, literally feel the visceral nature of their experience in the physical sense. Ludus, a love steeped in the game playing of partners, is easily

corroborated to the bureaucracy and politicization of the educational process. Storge, the friendship dimension of love, may resonate with the feelings of joy, pleasure, and contentment experienced by both learners and teachers. Pragmatic love, a logical love based on the sharing of resources, is attestable to the many ways in which teachers and students give and take from one another, assess one another, and move together through levels of teaching and learning that will manifest greater resources for us all. Mania, the possessive, dependent love, encourages an evaluation of the way obsession and seduction creep into the educational journey just as it may into an intimate relationship. And finally, agape, an altruistic care-giving love located in the most deeply devoted and committed relationships, is effortlessly illustrated in the countless examples of teachers who devote their lives to caring for students.

Even more specific models of intimacy are able to substantiate this metaphorical connection. Though used previously to extricate a specific framework of analysis, a general application of Sternberg's (1984) triangular model of love purports the necessity of passion, commitment, and intimacy as three integral components of full or whole love. Do the narratives presented in this study not demonstrate that these components are prevalent in the process of teaching and learning, too? Do teachers not feel passionate about their vocation just as students feel passionate and proud about their scholastic ambitions and achievements? Is the process of obtaining an education, be it formal or informal, not a vibrant example of commitment at its finest? Do we not celebrate and laud the commitment to formal education through cultural practices such as graduation ceremonies that commemorate educational landmarks, pay raises that motivate educational achievements, scholarships that award educational efforts, and national testing procedures that publically rank educational accomplishments? And simply, is not

the work involved in learning and teaching something that merits the title of "intimate?" What could be more intimate than the transparent opening of one's mind and the process of being evaluated and guided through an intellectual pursuit? It seems, to me, that passion, commitment, and intimacy are plainly dimensions present in the teaching and learning process, just as they are components necessary to the obtainment of theoretical holistic "love." In truth, aren't these the types of dimensions that lead eager students to say things like, "I love school," or "I love that class?" Do these dimensions not grace the lips of the teacher who says, "I love my job?"

Through this overview of the study, it is clear that intimate love affairs gratify basic needs, fulfill fundamental values, meet developmental tasks, further instrumental pursuits, and appease environmental demands (McAdams, 1988). In a similar fashion, the process of teaching and learning does the same. However, it was only through the very personal endeavor of writing an autoethnographic narrative account that I was able to more clearly discern what I believe to be the most critical findings, the true "heart," of the study – which will be overviewed next.

Review of findings: Love induced research

Three simple words – "I love you" - often mark the progression of a relationship from its fertile inception to the more coveted stages of true intimacy. Three words add depth, meaning, value, commitment, and significance to personal relationships. Hence, it seems more than mere coincidence to recognize that the analysis portion of this study was aptly divided into three categories, which often further subdivided into three subcategories, thereby making a "I love you" a suitable metaphor to represent the analysis conducted throughout the study.

The first of these three analyses, or the "I" portion, endeavored to engage the emotional nuances of each narrative vignette, creating a specific and concrete connection between each individual story and a potential similar theme located in the discourse of intimate relationships. Capitalizing on the individual nature of each story and a relevant interpersonal connection found in intimate discourse, it can be easily seen that the moments of an individual's journey as a teacher or learner could certainly be categorized in the same metaphorical vein as an intimate relationship.

However, the second analysis, or the "love" portion serves to illustrate that love and intimacy are much more complex ideas that deserve more detailed analysis. Because love and intimacy are not merely individual endeavors, the second analysis sought to interrogate the narrative/s holistically, evaluating how each story and each thematic illustration contribute to a larger love story.

Through this cross-vignette analysis, three distinct findings emerge: first, it can be seen that the process of teaching and learning can be likened to an intimate relationship because both relationships involve the prediction of and progression through various relational stages. Citing augmentations to Knapp's Stages of a Relationship Theory, the teaching and learning process is seen as a recursive, evolutionary relationship with no definitive beginning or ending – a relationship that encompasses many other smaller relationships within. Second, it can be seen that the process of teaching and learning can be likened to an intimate relationship because, as Sternberg reminds us, both relationships are distinguished by certain relational components or qualities that must be consciously enacted in order to reach a level of consummate love. Finally, it can be seen that the process of teaching and learning can be likened to an intimate relationship

because both relationships involve the expected negotiation of relational challenges and struggles, as evidenced through Baxter and Montgomery's (1996) Theory of Relational Dialectics. However, as indicated through this analysis, a key feature of the teacher-lover or student-lover's relationship is the absence of a tangible partner with whom to co-negotiate these relational tensions, which offers particular insights regarding how the participants in such a relationship might seek to mitigate relational concerns.

The final analysis, or the "you" portion of the analysis hinges on the realization that a definitive "you," or a clear, tangible partner is somewhat absent from the partnership when teaching and learning are viewed as a relational process. Instead, the "you's" of this partnership are often materialized as people and things who represent education at large, and the "you" that becomes most solvent is the teacher or learner herself, the one who is literally embodying the relationship every day. By evaluating the embodiment present in this metaphorical theory, it becomes clear that teaching and learning: a) operate on a scale of emotionality much like an intimate relationship; b) involve constant negotiation of identity as is necessitated by an intimate relationship; and, c) operate through recursive and evolutionary processes just as intimate relationships do, too.

This three-part analysis, or statement of analytical "I love you" serves as a testimony of the breadth and depth the proposed theory and demonstrates its utility both in the fields of Communication Studies and Education and in the personal and professional endeavors of all those who daily embody and enact the theory in their lives.

Toward a long-term commitment

Narrative and/or autoethnographic accounts of the educational journey as likened to an intimate relationship provide the opportunity for reflection among educators, administrators, policy makers, students, parents and community members, and pre-service teachers (Clandinin, 1992). Studying, writing, and reading the narratives and/or autoethnographic accounts of an educator who frames the educational process in the way proposed by this study may assist pre- service teachers in learning from experience and example, challenging assumptions, and providing case studies that can help them proactively prepare for the types of cultures and contexts they may encounter in their careers (Goodson, 1992; Munro, 1998).

A narrative and autoethnographic account of this nature may also serve as pedagogy - fodder for teachers to utilize in their classrooms to convey meaning in ways that traditional curricula may not (Doyle & Carter, 2003). Additionally, a narrative and autoethnographic account of this nature might also provide a vehicle through which teachers could be socialized into the profession and/or a particular educational climate or setting (Young, 2008). Generally, the stories and case studies of teaching moments and experiences with specific types of situations, problems, and people provide palpable fodder from which teachers can better understand the larger institution of which they are a part – both specifically, locally, globally, and culturally.

Beyond these possibilities, it is important to recognize the role that this study might play in individual lives. By approaching these forms of inquiry not as a set of prescriptive skills, but rather as a mindset which is a purposeful part of one's teaching persona and ongoing personal and professional development, those affiliated with this study (myself, my committee members, my colleagues and family members who may

217

read or encounter my work) are encouraged to "inquire into their experience and…uncover who they are, where they have come from, what they know and believe, and why they teach as they do" (Johnson & Golombek, 2002, p. 5).   Because self-reflection and self-examination are critical to self-understanding, this study may allow educators to reflect on the forces that have shaped their sense of self as pre-service, current, and post-service teachers and learners. Through these practices, two landscapes can be constructed: one of consciousness and one of action (Lyons & LaBoskey, 2002). These landscapes provide fertile soil for engaging in the most helpful form of professional development a teacher can embody and enact: self-reflexivity.

Transforming metaphor into theory

The landscape of action provides multiple opportunities whereby this study or portions therein could be deemed useful in the public and academic domain.

Certainly, the concepts proposed are well-postured to be presented as theory in the field of Education. The theory of teaching and learning as an intimate relationship would be useful, as mentioned, for those engaged in teacher preparation courses, pedagogy courses, courses in educational philosophy, and/or broadly applied in practitioner settings through both formal and informal modes of professional development.

Applications of this theory could prove far-reaching in helping educators better understand how to analyze their own teaching practices and experiences, recognizing that they are engaged in personal relationships with students, parents, and other educators which are being framed through the lens of a much greater, dominant life-long relationship with teaching and learning. Implications of this theoretical framework may help to further explain patternistic phenomena that permeate many educational contexts.

Such phenomena may include: the decline in testing performance traditionally witnessed in "transitional" grade levels where students have switched from one school building to another (i.e. elementary to middle school), the dysfunctional personal relations of some higher education contexts, the root causes that undergird habitual low performance on state testing, the seemingly "inexplicable" successes or failures of specific teacher-student relations, more salient ways to increase learner motivation, and/or the urgent need to re-evaluate the nature and delivery of collegiate curriculum. These are but a few examples of educational phenomena that may be better understood through the application of the humanistic, nuanced concerns of the theory presented throughout this study. Similarly, an investigation and application of the methods used in this study may also serve as evidence that a narrative and/or autoethnographic mode of self-evaluation could become an additional tool that should be incorporated into a teacher's portfolio or yearly assessment protocol.

The findings of this study might also contribute to the field of Instructional Communication. Working to expand the current literature on teacher-student relationships, the theories and metaphors explored in this study offer a more comprehensive, interdisciplinary approach to understanding communication dynamics in educational contexts. Tangibly, this study could be transformed into a workshop/presentation that might be suitable for a professional development series that is marketable to school districts, and on the grandest of scales, could be transformed into a stand-alone text that may resonate with academic, professional, and popular culture audiences.

In addition, there is merit in further exploration of the theory proposed by this

study on a microscopic level. A comparative study might assess the intimate nature of educational processes in other cultures as compared to U.S. American educational processes, or a longitudinal study might assess how the intimate nature of the teaching and learning process "unfolds" at different "stages" in the educational journey. A detailed analysis of the implications of this theory at every level from early childhood education to graduate study could prove both provocative and informative for teachers and learners of all levels.

Undoubtedly, the possibilities are seemingly endless, interesting, interdisciplinary, and contemporary in their appeal and application.

A final love note

According to Jung (1961), Rogers (1961), and Kelly (1995), intimate relationships function in the service of one primary tendency: to promote the individual's quest for self-actualization.

Though I cannot claim to be entirely self-actualized, the intimate relationship I have engaged with teaching and learning for the past twenty six years does mark the journey of a teacher-lover and student-lover who has grown and literally become the person she is because of her deep love for and with education.

The metaphor I have offered may possess more utility for some than others, but for me, it is nothing short of the truth of my story and the stories I have witnessed throughout my life. I can think of no better tribute to my relationship with

teaching and learning than to study it as such, posturing it clearly as it is: my great love.

And I can think of no better conclusion to offer my partner than simply to say: thank

you.

Love always, Sonja

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