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"JUST A TEACHER" WITH A PHD: THE DOCTORAL AND PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCES OF K-12 PRACTITIONERS

Dissertation
by

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ABSTRACT

"Just a Teacher" with a PhD: The Doctoral and Professional Experiences of K-12 Practitioners

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Much of the research on doctoral students' experiences is reported quantitatively from national studies across disciplines or in the form of abstractions about ways in which institutions might improve graduate education (e.g., Golde & Dore, 2001; Nerad, 2004). Qualitative, empirical research exploring the reasons for doctoral graduates' career choices is limited, especially for doctoral students in the field of education. Given that ~ 50% of doctoral graduates pursue careers outside of academia, it might be beneficial for institutions of higher education to prepare their doctoral students for the careers they ultimately choose.

After teaching high school English for seven years, I decided to pursue a PhD in Curriculum and Instruction because I thought I might want to become a teacher educator. My experience in the doctoral program challenged my expectations, and after completing coursework, I returned to the high school classroom. This dissertation sought to understand the experiences of doctoral students who earned PhDs in Curriculum and Instruction and chose to return to or remain in K-12 settings as opposed to pursuing careers in academia.

I applied narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) and autoethnography (Denzin, 2014) as methodologies to present an exploratory, multiple-case study (Yin,

2014) of six graduates (and one almost-graduate) from a Curriculum and Instruction doctoral program. Written narratives, individual interviews, documents, and artifacts provided the data for this study.

Findings reveal the factors that influence students' experiences in the doctoral program, as well as their ultimate career choices, which include: a commitment to and passion for public education, the financial implications of pursuing a career in academia compared to one in K-12 schools, the specific requirements of the program (e.g., coursework, assistantship, and dissertation), the misconceptions upon entering the program, and the ability to share new knowledge within K-12 schools. Participants overwhelmingly agreed that the knowledge and skills they developed during the program impacted their practice in positive and powerful ways.

For

Audrey
because I wouldn't have (and couldn't have) done any of this without you

and for

Ryan, Megan, and Lauren
who inspire me every day

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

"Who's there?" (Hamlet, 1.1.1)

Just a Teacher

It is November 26, 2018, the Monday after Thanksgiving break, and we are having a department meeting. The topic is Zaretta Hammond's (2015) book *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain.* We have been instructed to read the first two chapters in preparation for the meeting because each department is following the same discussion protocol. We, in the English department, begin each meeting with a five minute "Connections Protocol." Connections is a way for people to transfer their mental space from where they have been to where they are going. During our meetings, it is a time for individuals to reflect upon a thought, a story, an insight, a question, or a feeling that they are carrying with them, and essentially dump it out in front of the group so that they may focus on the task at hand.

During this particular Connections Protocol, one of my colleagues shared Shannon Reed's (2018) list, "If People Talked to Other Professionals the Way They Talk to Teachers" from the McSweeney's website.[1] Here are some of my favorites:

- "Ah, a zookeeper. So, you just babysit the animals all day?"
- "My colon never acts this way at home. Are you sure you're reading the colonoscopy results correctly? Did you ever think that maybe you just don't like my colon?"

[1] McSweeney's is a publishing company in San Francisco, California. It offers a daily humor website. The link to the referenced article is here: https://www.mcsweeneys.net/articles/if-people-talked-to-other-

- "So you run a ski lodge? Do you just, like, chill during the summer? Must be nice."
- "Do you even read your patients' charts, or do you just assign them a random dosage based on how nice they've been to you?"

We all laughed at the joke and our formal discussion proceeded as we explored the behaviors and attributes that we consider to be linked to different aspects of our identities. One of the strongest contributing factors to my own identity is the fact that I am a teacher. One's occupation was not an option within Hammond's framework; however, many of us discussed our careers as a defining factor of ourselves. Some of us shared the fact that we are not confident outside of a school or educational context and often brace ourselves when we meet new people and tell them that we are teachers. My department head relayed a story of a recent party he attended where he made sure to tell a lawyer that he is a "department head" as opposed to a teacher because it makes him feel like he has a little more professional power or authority. Many of us expressed the fact that we often receive dismissive responses from strangers when we tell them we are teachers (see Reed's list above).

I am a high school English teacher. In my 12th grade literature course, my students and I explore a variety of academic sources in order to acquire a better, more nuanced understanding of literary artifacts. We use our individual and collective understanding to facilitate meaningful, action-oriented self-reflection and growth. In order to study the experiences and perceptions of others, we draw on different literary theories and inquire into issues of gender, race, class, social mobility, morality, and philosophy. Over the course of the year, we reflect on the following questions:

- What are the different components of our identities that shape the way we perceive the world around us?
- How do our personal perspectives impact the way we read literary artifacts?
- How does studying the experiences and perspectives of others through literary artifacts enhance our understanding of ourselves and the world around us?
- How does our understanding empower us to contribute meaningfully in both local and global contexts?

During our study of Shakespeare's *Hamlet,* I ask students to consider the very first line: "Who's there?" A question so profound in its simplicity, it is the fundamental question of identity. Who's there...around us? within us? within the author? This is what all literature aspires to propose. Understanding those around us can lead to a better understanding of ourselves. As exciting as it is to be unique in a world full of followers, we want to be understood. We take comfort in the fact that there are others like us—that we are not alone.

As I explained in the opening story of this dissertation, the question of "Who's there?" is not one that some teachers like to answer. Our profession is not as highly respected as we would like. The perception of teachers in our culture can be troubling to those of us who consider this profession, well, a profession.

I love my job. Despite my two-day stint as a Communications major, and a brief flirtation with the idea of being a History major, once I started my undergraduate studies, I knew that I wanted to be a teacher. I remember a conversation I had with a less-than-acceptable boyfriend at the time. When I told him that I wanted to be an English teacher he said, "That's great. Then someday you can be a professor."

"Why would I want to be a professor?" I asked.

"Well, you don't want to just be a teacher for the rest of your life, do you?"

How was I supposed to know? And what was wrong with being a teacher for the rest of my life?

My decision to apply to a doctoral program in Curriculum and Instruction had nothing to do with that conversation, but I had reached a point in my teaching career where I felt there was more for me to know and to do. People often asked what I thought I wanted to do with a PhD and I was hesitant with my answer. "I want to keep teaching," I always said, but maybe I could "see myself as a teacher educator someday." As a teacher educator I could impact a wider range of students—I would help develop the beliefs and understandings of teacher candidates who would go off into the world of public education and inspire students of their own. Perhaps I would be more than "just a teacher."

Perhaps not.

While my doctoral program certainly prepared me to become a teacher educator to some degree, my experience differed vastly from other members in my cohort who have accepted or are searching for positions in academia. There was certainly a disconnect between what I thought I wanted from the program when I first applied and what I realized I needed by the conclusion of my coursework. Despite the messages we received about the prestige of becoming a professor at a top-tier research university, many of the students within and beyond my own cohort expressed a desire to work anywhere but academia.

The Problem of the Study

Over the course of this research study, I have discovered two problems. There is a broader, national problem regarding the changing nature of higher education. There also seems to be a "problem" specific to PhD programs in education. The context of this study focuses on the PhD program in Curriculum and Instruction at Boston College; however, I believe that the findings could contribute to reframing the organization, requirements, and goals of all doctoral programs in education.

General Concerns for Higher Education

Benjamin Ginsberg (2011) warns that the golden age of higher education is over—enrollment, budgets, and support have declined in recent decades. Altbach (2016) argues that higher education must adapt to this new era and paints a grim picture for those with aspirations of earning a tenure-track position:

> A deteriorating academic job market has raised the standards for the award of tenure and increased the emphasis on research and publication. At the same time, there are demands for faculty to devote more time and attention to teaching. Further, only half of new appointments to the professoriate are on the traditional "tenure track"—leading to a career-length appointment after careful evaluation. The rest are either part-time lecturers or full-time contract teachers. These changes have created a profound shift in the nature of academic appointments and career prospects in the United States. (pp. 85-6)

More than half of doctoral recipients report that their principal job would be outside of academia. In other words, a large number of people who earn doctorates do not pursue careers as academic scholars in higher education institutions, which "reflect[s] political,

economic, social, technological, and demographic trends and events" (NSF, 2017, p. ii). Less than half of my cohort in the Curriculum and Instruction PhD program pursued a career in academia. Why is it that an R1 University—a higher education institution whose purpose is to develop research professors—produced only a few members of a cohort who sought professorships?

PhD candidates need support for a variety of careers. The messages and values about career decisions for a PhD differ among students, professors, and society at large. Golde and Dore (2001) found "a three-way mismatch between student goals, training, and actual careers" (p. 5) in today's doctoral programs. Much of the most widely-cited published research is almost twenty years old, creating a significant research gap, and the same problems persist. PhD programs are more competitive than ever due to limited funding, which suggests a serious problem in that decreased funding will further increase the pressure on doctoral students, forcing them to make the decision to go into academia and denying them the opportunity to hone their passion, serve others, and lead lives of meaning and purpose.

Nerad (2004) argues "that initiatives for change in doctoral education are important first-step responses to the criticisms; however, they must be accompanied by ongoing research that can provide empirical data on doctoral student experiences, career paths, and on the impacts of the initiatives themselves" (p. 184). The empirical research regarding doctoral students' experiences is mainly conducted through survey methods. "Traditional research methodologies, such as surveys and graduation rate data, although important, may limit understanding of the dynamics of relationships among students, faculty, and institutions" (Antony & Taylor, 2004, p. 98). There is clearly a need for more

research that includes the voices and stories of graduate students' lived experiences, including not only what careers they choose but also why they choose them.

Specific Concerns for Doctoral Programs in Education

In PhD programs of education, there is some concern about the distinction, or lack thereof, between an EdD and a PhD. As Kerlinger (1965) noted, "The functions of the degrees of Doctor of Education and Doctor of Philosophy in education have perplexed universities for decades" (p. 434). EdDs are understood to be a practitioner's degree, while the PhD is reserved for scholars. In other words, those who earn PhDs are expected to pursue careers in academia as professors, while those who earn EdDs are district-level administrators (e.g., principals, superintendents). The "problem" is that there is very little difference between the requirements necessary to earn each degree. The most prestigious schools of education offer different degrees and the reputation of the PhD as holding more "clout" makes it (in the eyes of prospective students) the more prestigious and appealing degree.

When I applied to Boston College's doctoral program, a Research 1 (R1) university program, I was advised to make clear in my application that I hoped to work in higher education and fight for public education from a position beyond the classroom. I took this to mean that my application would not be taken seriously if I explained my real intentions in my personal statement: *I'd love to take classes for a year and then return to my teaching position. I'll finish the rest part-time.*

In an R1 university, I would be prepared for life in academia: research agendas, grant proposals, national conferences, publications, publications, and a few more publications. From the perspective of a high school teacher, this seemed like an

interesting career choice, but I was not convinced that it was the choice for me. This is not necessarily the choice for many doctoral candidates in R1 universities. According to the 2015 Survey of Earned Doctorates, 48.3% of individuals with earned doctorates in the field of education reported that their first job after graduation would be in academia (NSF, 2017). The survey does not indicate the career choices of the more than 50% of graduates that chose positions outside of academia. Students in my own cohort continually expressed interest in positions that fell outside the traditional tenure-track. The literature on doctoral education criticizes programs and suggests different approaches to changing the traditional research-intensive model (see Campbell, Fuller, & Patrick, 2005; Nerad, 2004). There is scant research on the experiences and career choices of graduates other than abstract ideas and statistics. In their 2001 report, "At Cross Purposes: What the Experiences of Today's Doctoral Students Reveal About Doctoral Education," Golde and Dore asked students about their levels of interest in various career options. Only 4.9% expressed a "current interest" in non-college teaching, which may or may not include working in a K-12 setting; however, since the start of their programs, 20.9% of students indicated an increased interest in this type of career. The researchers also found that the most important factor that positively influenced students' interests in pursuing a faculty career was the enjoyment of teaching (83.2%) (Golde & Dore, 2001). This research study provides such data in order to inform doctoral programs, especially faculty members within those programs, to remember what brought them to this service work and to consider whether or not they are preparing their graduate students for the careers they want.

One of the "problems" of doctoral programs in education is that educators typically pursue doctorates after years of teaching or administrative experience, which establishes them in certain personal, professional, and geographical places. By the time educators accrue enough experience to motivate a decision to earn an additional advanced degree (beyond the required Master's degree), they are likely to have families, which plays a significant role in one's career choices. Placing significant value on the teaching experience of its doctoral applicants, Boston College, and other doctoral programs in education, may raise a marketing issue because teachers with years of experience are less likely to be PhD graduates willing to do what it takes to earn a tenure-track faculty position at a Research 1 university, as they often have established roots, financial security, and less overall mobility.

Once I observed the reality of life as a professor at a Research 1 university, I reconsidered my ideas for the future. What I love so much about teacher education is the "teacher" part. The isolating nature of research, the disconnect between the worlds of academia and K-12 schools, as well as a desire for work-life balance has impacted my and others' decisions to revise our initial goals for our doctoral work.

Purpose of the Study

The impetus for this research study was born from the disconnect I felt as a doctoral student who did not want to pursue a career in academia. I have continually asked myself: Why am I working toward this degree if I plan to remain a classroom teacher? While others in the program may not have experienced the same existential crisis, I knew of other teachers who graduated from the same doctoral program and returned to a high school classroom. Our stories are worth being told.

Context of the Study

This research study explores the experiences of K-12 practitioners who have earned a PhD. The educational context that is common to study participants is Boston College's doctoral program in Curriculum and Instruction, a Research 1 university located outside of Boston, Massachusetts. The school's mission aligns with the Jesuit ideals of serving others and promoting social justice.

Through a cohort model, students take courses and complete research assistantships in order to achieve the goals set forth by the program:

- Students will demonstrate knowledge of effective practices regarding college-level teaching and/or professional development with in-service teachers
- Students will demonstrate the ability to conduct original, empirical and/or conceptual research related to topics in curriculum and instruction
- Students will participate in regional, national and/or international conferences in the broad areas of curriculum and instruction
- Students will learn how to create an academic paper at the "publishable" level of quality on a topic related to the student's area of specialization within the broad field of curriculum and instruction[2]

The program is designed to foster the intellect, ethics, and leadership potential of professionals to make a difference in the lives of children, teachers, and leaders. This R1 University has its own social and cultural narratives, which will become clearer through participants' stories. "In narrative inquiry, people are viewed as embodiments of lived stories. Even when narrative inquirers study institutional narratives, such as stories of

[2] The goals and mission of the program can be found on the school's website: https://www.bc.edu/bc-web/schools/lynch-school.html

school, people are seen as composing lives that shape and are shaped by social and cultural narratives" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 43). There are social and cultural narratives found within the programs requirements as well as the interactions students have with faculty and peers.

Requirements of the Program

Boston College's Lynch School of Education and Human Development offers full-funding packages for full-time PhD students during the first three years of their study. Research and teaching assistantships provide funding as well as tuition remission and individual health insurance coverage for students. The stipend for a 20 hour per week assistantship was approximately $17,000 per year when I was taking courses between 2012 and 2015. We received tuition remission for three classes per semester. A doctoral student's program of studies outlines the course requirements, which include 16 courses (54 credits) within three categories "Curriculum and Instruction," "Research," and "Major Areas of Study." Students must also complete the Doctoral Comprehensive Exam, which requires doctoral students to write a publishable article and submit it to a top-tier journal in the field of education. The comprehensive examination, or "comps" as it is called by students, changed shortly before I began the program. It was originally an examination, in which students were provided a list of questions or prompts they had to research and write multi-page papers. One question related to curriculum, the second to instruction/teaching, the third to research, and the fourth to the student's area of specialization (e.g., Curriculum, Policy, and School Reform; Language, Literacy, and Learning). Graduates who completed this type of comprehensive exam have relayed stories of spending an entire week, days and nights, in the library or completely secluded

in their home offices surrounded by books, in order to complete this extremely stressful task. The newer comps requirements shifts the message of the purpose of this examination in that it places significant value on the publishable paper—that the work of the doctoral student is to become a researcher who will submit their work to top-tier educational journals.

The doctoral program in Curriculum and Instruction has changed in other ways over the years. A graduate course catalog from 1990 explains:

> The Doctoral Program in Curriculum, Instruction, and Administration is designed for people seeking leadership roles within a variety of educational settings, such as schools, higher education, or other social organization. The program offers candidates flexibility in selection of courses while providing them with the opportunity to develop strong leadership skills….Special programs for practicing teachers and administrators who have full time job commitments are occasionally offered, as well as the program described herein. (Boston College, 1990, p. 32)

The graduate course catalog from 2014 offers a brief explanation of the general requirements for the PhD, which "is granted for distinction attained in a special field of concentration and demonstrated ability to modify or enlarge a significant subject in a dissertation based upon original research" (Boston College, 2014, p. 118). Over two decades there is a shift in the language presented to PhD students and the message is clear: the value is in the research.

The experiences of the participants in this study shape and are shaped by the social and cultural narratives within and beyond the institution being studied. Despite our differences, we experienced a similar type of life within the same institution. Many of us

shared courses and professors. Some of us never even crossed paths. Each of us, however, made the choice to, or *not* to, pursue tenure track positions in academia. I wanted to explore why.

Research Questions

Through the use of multiple data sources, including the stories of other K-12 practitioners with doctorates, I address the following research questions:

1. Why do practitioners who earn doctorates at a Research 1 university return to K-12 settings?
    a. How do K-12 practitioners describe their experiences in the doctoral program?
    b. How, if at all, did their experiences in the doctoral program impact their career choices?
2. In what ways, if any, do practitioners believe their experiences in the doctoral program better prepared them for careers in a K-12 setting?

The Researcher's Profile

According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), "Narrative inquiry characteristically begins with the researcher's autobiographically oriented narrative associated with the *research puzzle*" (p. 41, italics in original). My life felt like a puzzle, a one thousand piece puzzle that was mostly put together before it was knocked off of the table. My challenge was to figure out how to put myself back together, how to pick up the pieces of a mangled dissertation to get myself through the program. Luckily, I already had the job that I loved. This dissertation is my attempt at putting the pieces together.

When I left the classroom in 2012, my colleagues told me I was "lucky" and that I would not want to come back to teaching partly because of any number of reform initiatives, but also because of the perceived changes in students. They cared less, did less work, participated less. This "student-as-less-than" rhetoric is not uncommon. I often struggled with the daily challenges of dealing with high school students. Most notably, I felt that my values and principles did not align with theirs. Many did not like reading and regarded it as a pointless activity. Some aimed for Ds in my class because they just wanted to pass. One tried to rationalize stealing from his job at a local grocery store because he felt that he deserved to take what he wanted from a big store that "wouldn't even notice." It is easy for teachers to fall into the trap of blaming students. It was not until I left the classroom and began my doctoral program that I realized how much "blame" should have been put on me.

Over the course of my first three years in the PhD program, I worked on a number of projects related to large-scale educational change in the U.S. and abroad. Working with practitioners at all levels (from classroom teachers and administrators to university professors) afforded me glimpses into different educational contexts and settings around the world. Conducting research for and about other practitioners only strengthened my desire to return to the classroom. I thought constantly about what I would do differently in my own practice with this new knowledge and experience.

Thinking about what I would do as a classroom teacher again, kept me afloat during my research assistantship. The first three years of the doctoral program were challenging for me. I felt torn between the excitement of being a student again, of seeing and learning about the various aspects of our educational system that I had not

understood before, and the desire to do more focused work on my passion—teaching English language arts at the high school level. Unlike other first-year doctoral students, I was given the opportunity to travel. I supported the work of my professor in a number of cities across the U.S. and Canada, but spent most of my research assistantship time on a literature review on rural education in the U.S. I spent the majority of my summer between my first two years of the program writing alone in an office. A second project required me to develop a survey instrument for teachers and administrators along with a postdoctoral fellow in Canada. My professor encouraged me to take a Survey methods course in order to help with the survey development. I did what was asked of me.

A clear path was laid out for me: Conduct this literature review, run professional development with a group of educators in the Pacific Northwest, collect data, present findings at conferences, write a dissertation about the work, and use it all to launch my career as an academic. The only problem was that I was not passionate about any of the work I was doing. When I first became a teacher it felt right. Even when I left my teaching job to pursue the PhD, it wasn't because I had stopped liking my job. I believed that the degree would help me earn more credibility and power so that I could make the changes I wanted to make.

After completing my coursework, I left my research assistantship to become a teaching fellow and supervisor of student teachers at a local, urban high school. Being back in the classroom, as an instructor and not a student, ignited the fire in me and helped me to realize that I needed to forge my path away from the ivory tower. I prepared for interviews while grading final exams for a course I was teaching (Reading and Special Needs Instruction for Middle and Secondary Students), and writing evaluations for

student teachers. The shift away from my research assistantship and toward a teaching fellowship changed everything for me. I was happier. I had purpose. I felt like myself again. I faced an additional challenge, though: the dissertation.

I began writing this dissertation from a very bitter place. I was tired. I was angry. I was over it. This research study is, in fact, my second attempt at a dissertation. Nothing about the first one went as planned. My experience in the doctoral program fueled my passion for teaching and upon returning to the high school English classroom, I decided that I wanted to pursue a practitioner researcher dissertation in which I would study the effect of my teaching on my students' levels of reflective judgment (see King & Kitchener, 1994). It was a great idea. It would require a tremendous amount of work, especially for a full-time teacher. If that didn't dissuade me, the Institutional Review Board significantly delayed my reaching that goal. They pushed back on my methodology and expressed concern that my students would feel coerced into participating in my study, making it unethical. I was pregnant at the time of my Full Board Review, a requirement that shocked my dissertation committee as well as former doctoral students who completed dissertations like this before. Less than a month after I sat in a room being questioned about the ethicality of my research, I lost the baby. I was 18 weeks along. To say this was devastating is an understatement; however, I believed that if I fully committed to working on my dissertation, I could finish in a few months and move on with my life. It turned out that I pushed myself too far.

This was one of the darkest times in my life. I hadn't fully mourned the baby that was "supposed" to be born that June. I couldn't seem to wrap my head around the

practitioner research dissertation that I was "supposed" to finish that year. I was planning on so much and realized that what was "supposed" to happen simply wasn't going to.

I knew I needed a break, so I took one. I tried to put the dissertation out of my mind and sat with the idea of not finishing the program. That idea didn't sit still very long. I realized that I had to complete this final task because it was just that...a task. It was exercise in stamina, strength, and tenacity.

With my current research study, I have realized what good the program has done for me, despite the challenges that I will address in later chapters. While talking with another graduate of the program, I actually said out loud, "I wish I could do the program over again, knowing what I know now, and not giving a fuck[3]." This program has made me who I am. It has improved my intellectual capacity, strengthened my confidence, enhanced my self-awareness. For all of this and more, I am grateful.

Now that I am back in the classroom, I am better equipped to innovate and modify my practice to become a more critical educator—one who can access and utilize research and other resources, one who challenges the traditional literary canon, one who poses problems, one who engages in dialogic teaching in order to explore broader possibilities for students.

Conclusion

The experiences of the participants in this study vary in terms of course work, research assistantships, and relationships with faculty. The majority of participants entered the PhD program with misconceptions about what it meant to be a college professor; some participants expressed uncertainty about their career goals. At times there seemed to be more questions than answers. Within this very particular group of people in

[3] I apologize for the crude language.

a very particular context, we can discover some answers in the stories. Throughout the study, I incorporate quotes from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, which is a play about reading and misreading. It is about the different ways we can interpret people's actions, thoughts, and words. Throughout the process of writing this dissertation I have read and reread participants' stories, written and rewritten stories of my own, and have come to understand that there is no such thing as being "just" a teacher, especially if one has earned a PhD.

In the next chapter I review the literature on doctoral students' socialization and experiences. I also outline the theoretical frameworks that have informed the organization of the study, as well as my own understanding of participants' and my lived experiences.

CHAPTER TWO

DOCTORAL EDUCATION, SOCIALIZATION, AND EXPERIENCES: REVIEWING THE LITERATURE

"Read it at more leisure. / But wilt thou hear now how I did proceed?"

(Hamlet, 5.2.30-31).

Introduction

My goal in writing this dissertation was to answer the question: Why do practitioners like me subject themselves to a rigorous doctoral program and return to K-12 settings where such a degree is not required? The purpose of this literature review is to provide an overview of two conceptual frameworks that informed the organization and analysis of this research study. Both frameworks contribute to my conceptualization of not only the structure and process of this research study but also the approach to data analysis.

First, I outline Weidman, Twale, and Stein's (2001) framework for the socialization of graduate and professional students, and offer a brief discussion of theories of graduate student socialization that influenced their work. Second, I address Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) three-dimensional narrative inquiry space as a theoretical framework to understand and analyze the stories told throughout the study. I then review the scholarly discussions on doctoral education in the United States more generally, including concerns and critiques about doctoral education structures. I outline the two doctoral degrees awarded in the field of education—the PhD and the EdD—and address the purposes and similarities between them. Following this discussion of doctoral education in general, I turn to the research on doctoral student socialization and

experiences within and beyond doctoral matriculation. I conclude with the research that is available on doctoral graduates' career choices, though there is little qualitative empirical research published in this area. There is even less empirical research about the graduate students who earn doctorates in the field of education. More qualitative research is needed in this field of study because much of the current research is based on previous studies, reviews previous studies, or uses the same data sources, most of which are survey data. Current research is methodologically too similar and my intention is for this study to contribute to the qualitative case study literature in the field of doctoral education research.

Theoretical Frameworks

The Socialization of Graduate and Professional Students

Socialization theory is a commonly used theoretical framework for understanding graduate and professional student experiences. Bragg (1976) defines the socialization process as "the learning process through which the individual acquires the knowledge and skills, the values and attitudes, and the habits and modes of thought of the society to which he belongs" (p. 3). In the context of this study, socialization applies to graduate students within the Curriculum and Instruction doctoral program at Boston College—the society to which we sought to belong. Weidman, Twale, and Stein (2001) claim that in order for graduate students to succeed in this environment "they must learn not only to cope with the academic demands but also to recognize values, attitudes, and subtle nuances reflected by faculty and peers in their academic programs" (p. 2). They must experience a "metamorphosis" of sorts as they move through and beyond their programs (p. 5).

> Of course, identity with and commitment to a professional role are not accomplished completely during professional preparation but rather continue to evolve after novices begin professional practice. Hence, as applied to the present view of professional socialization, *stages* reflect somewhat different states of identity and commitment that are overlapping rather than mutually exclusive. (p. 11, italics in original)

In any educational endeavor, we are in conflict with the idea of failure. Our goal is success and, within the concept of socialization theory, success is conforming to a new society even if it means changing one's identity.

Theorists agree that there are stages through which graduate students may pass during the socialization process, which include the anticipatory, formal, informal, and personal (Tierney & Rhoads, 1994; Weidman, Twale, & Stein, 2001). The anticipatory stage occurs when a graduate student enters a program and "becomes aware of the behavioral, attitudinal, and cognitive expectations" within the program (Weidman, Twale, & Stein, 2001, p. 12). Graduate students acquire this awareness in both formal and informal ways, ultimately personalizing the messages they receive. They may (willingly or not) develop a new professional identity as a result of the socialization process.

Weidman, Twale, and Stein (2001) build on prior models of socialization (see Bragg, 1976; Stark, Lowther, Hagerty, & Orcyzk, 1986; Weidman, 1989; Stein & Weidman, 1989, 1990) in order to illustrate the "nonlinear, dynamic nature of professional socialization and the elements that promote identity with and commitment to professional roles" (Weidman, Twale, & Stein, 2001, p. 37). (See Figure 1)

Figure 1. Weidman, Twale, and Stein's Framework for Graduate Student Socialization

The core of the socialization experience happens within the university, where students interact with one another, the faculty, and the academic program. Within the context of the university the program faculty have the most control over the factors that influence students' socialization.

> Graduate students coming into the academic program experience its culture and are socialized into their chosen professional fields through learning, interaction with faculty and peers, and integration into its activities. During the course of their studies, graduate students acquire new knowledge, become involved in the life of their academic programs and career fields, experience the peer climate, and invest in developing the capacities necessary to become professional practitioners in their chosen areas. (p. 38)

The four other components of graduate student socialization include: prospective students' backgrounds and predispositions, personal relationships and communities, professional relationships and communities, and novice professional practitioners (their commitment and identity within their first post-doctoral position). The concentric ellipses represent the interactive relationship among these components and highlight the fluidity of the process. Each part of this process can occur at any place or point in time.

Many aspects of our personal and professional lives lead us to the PhD application process. As I will describe in Chapter Five, the participants expressed knowledge of the possibility and, in several cases, even the inevitability of our socialization into the world of academia. We certainly understood that doctoral education would be structured according to the completion of advanced course work and supervised research. We learned that our experiences in various courses and assistantships would impact our career choices. While we shared some understandings and experiences within the same program, each of us had a unique story to tell.

Three-Dimensional Narrative Inquiry Space

John Dewey's writing on the nature of experience influenced Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) understanding of narrative inquiry, giving them "a term that permits better understandings of educational life" (p. 2). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) developed their three-dimensional narrative inquiry space as a theoretical framework used to understand narratives as relational, constructed texts that represent every aspect of one's experience, which, as Dewey claims, "does not go on simply inside a person" (Dewey, 1938/1997, p. 39). He argues that the principles of "[c]ontinuity and interaction in their active union with each other provide the measure of the educative significance

and value of an experience" (pp. 44-5). Within the context of this study graduate students experienced a unique socialization process in the doctoral program and not only learned on an individual level but also with other students, with professors, in classrooms, in communities, and in academic institutions. Narrative research centers around people's stories and helps us understand the connection between our experiences and our professional knowledge (Anderson, Herr, & Nihlen, 1994).

Building off of Dewey's criteria for experience (continuity, interaction, and situation), Clandinin and Connelly (2000) conceptualize and operationalize their three-dimensional narrative inquiry space:

> [T]hinking about narrative inquiry, our terms are *personal* and *social* (interaction); *past*, *present*, and *future* (continuity); combined with the notion of *place* (situation). This set of terms creates a metaphorical *three-dimensional narrative inquiry space*, with temporality along one dimension, the personal and the social along a second dimension, and place along a third. Using this set of terms, any particular inquiry is defined by this three-dimensional space: studies have temporal dimensions and address temporal matters; they focus on the personal and the social in a balance appropriate for the inquiry; and they occur in specific places or sequences of places. (p. 50, italics in original)

I use narrative inquiry as both a research methodology and a theoretical orientation in which I look backward and forward, as well as inward and outward, at the experiences of participants within and beyond their doctoral programs. Participants and I "retell our stories, remake the past" in order to enhance both "personal and social growth" (p. 85).

Review of the Literature

Doctoral Education Overview

The word "doctorate" derives from the Latin docere, which means "to teach." The doctorate is the highest degree one can earn in formal education, and signifies one's ability to make original contributions to the knowledge base in a chosen field of study. At its 1861 commencement, Yale University conferred the first three doctoral degrees (PhDs) in the United States (Furniss, 1965). Our current doctoral education system developed from the German model of graduate education, as many of the early faculty members of U.S. doctoral programs earned their PhDs in Germany among other European countries. "The German model of graduate education emphasizes scientific inquiry and the expectation of faculty members' engagement in active research" (Mendoza & Gardner, 2010, p. 12). With only "the best minds" pursuing such academic endeavors, students engaged in seminars and one-on-one instruction by faculty members at prestigious universities. Other requirements included passing language and comprehensive examinations, which, once passed, led to the production of a thesis (what we now refer to as a dissertation). After the thesis "was subjected to the scrutiny of a faculty committee," a student could graduate and enter the world of academia (p. 12).

Major historical events have greatly impacted the structure and funding of graduate education in the United States. From the end of World War I through the launch of Sputnik I, the U.S. focused more heavily on the significance of research in science and engineering. All fields benefited from the increased attention being given to graduate education, and students acquired more support in the form of financial aid, fellowships,

and research and teaching assistantships (Gumport, 2016; Mendoza & Gardner, 2010). During the Cold War,

> the main features of doctoral education as we know them today were consolidated, such as the interdependence of research sponsorship, faculty research agendas, and doctoral education; reduced teaching loads to allow faculty to develop their research; and increased responsibilities to doctoral students as research and teaching assistants. (Mendoza & Gardner, 2010, p. 15)

This "golden age" of graduate education in the U.S. did not last[4]; once global markets emerged, funding for academic research decreased dramatically. Research universities lost a great deal of support, which resulted in departments specializing in order to compete for the limited available funding. The effect on doctoral students was particularly painful when stipends for assistantships declined as a result of the Tax Reform Act of 1986. It was around this time that research universities began partnerships with industries and began to engage in more applied research (Mendoza & Gardner, 2010).

As research universities have adapted to the social, political, and historical demands of the times, the ultimate purpose of the PhD has been discussed extensively. Golde (2005) claims that our culture has perpetuated the idea that those who earn PhDs must become academics who "produce top-flight research with an international impact and [institutions of higher education must] prepare the next generation of research university faculty members" (p. 688). Others believe that the purposes of doctoral education should be more explicit in its training students to teach at the college level (Adams & Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2002; Gaff, 2002), or that

[4] See Ginsberg (2011)

more attention must be paid to training students for careers outside of academia (Golde & Dore, 2001; Jones, 2003). In their chapter titled "The Ph.D. in the United States," Mendoza and Gardner (2010) endorse the definition provided by the Council of Graduate Schools (1990): The PhD "is designed to prepare a student to become a scholar, that is to discover, integrate, and apply knowledge, as well as communicate and disseminate it" (p. 10). Mendoza and Gardner highlight the complexity of doctoral education as a whole; however, it is this complexity that underscores the impact those with doctoral degrees may have on society:

> [T]he Ph.D. is paramount to higher education and society, as it influences not only the students who enroll within its programs, but also the faculty they work with, the students they teach, the larger disciplinary context to which they contribute, and the society in which they will practice their skills and disseminate their knowledge. How and when these elements occur, however, can vary greatly depending on the field and the institution…. (p. 19)

In the field of education, doctoral recipients practice their skills and disseminate their knowledge in a variety of professions, not all of which reside in the ivory tower.

Doctoral degrees in education. In the field of education, there are two doctoral degrees, the PhD and the EdD. The EdD was designed in the 1920s for practicing educators (Deering, 1998). Shulman et al. (2006) explain:

> In theory, these two degrees are expected to occupy overlapping yet distinct categories. The Ed.D., intended as preparation for managerial and administrative leadership in education, focuses on preparing practitioners—from principals to curriculum specialists, to teacher-educators, to evaluators—who can use existing

> knowledge to solve educational problems. A Ph.D. in education, on the other hand, is assumed to be a traditional academic degree that prepares researchers, university faculty, and scholars in education, often from the perspective of a particular discipline. (p. 26)

As Fred Kerlinger (1965) noted, "The functions of the degrees of Doctor of Education and Doctor of Philosophy in education have perplexed universities for decades" (p. 434). Scholars have argued for a number of years that, despite the intention upon its development, there is little to no difference between the EdD and the PhD (Dill & Morrison, 1985; Eels, 1963). In 1963, Eels compared the PhD and the EdD on a number of characteristics including: (a) the nature of the dissertation; (b) entrance requirements; (c) the nature of qualifying and final examinations; and (d) the means by which each degree is classified by various agencies. Eels concluded that theoretically and practically, the two degrees are indistinguishable. Still, educators hold fixed views about the meanings and purposes of each degree. The PhD is for scholars, while the EdD is for practitioners.

> The PhD is tied to research, the EdD to practical work. The university professor is, or should be, a PhD; the school man[5] is, or should be, an EdD. The PhD candidate must be skilled in inquiry, whereas the EdD candidate must be skilled in demonstration, persuasion, public relations, curriculum, and administration, among other things. (Kerlinger, 1965, p. 434)

Regardless of the actual or perceived differences between the degrees, the U.S. awards over 6,000 doctorates in education per year, although according to the NSF report (2017),

[5] I am cutting Kerlinger some slack in his use of "man" because this was 1965 and I believe he just didn't know any better.

"The number of doctorates awarded in education has declined over the past decade, leading to a large, steady drop in the relative share of doctorates in that field from 14% in 2005 to 9% in 2015" (p. 4). This may be due, in part, to the fact that doctoral students in the field of education are more likely to rely on their own resources in order to fund their academic endeavors. The Survey of Earned Doctorates indicated that education doctoral graduates had education-related debt burdens of over $30,000, while many of the doctoral graduates in science and engineering fields reported no debt at all (NSF, 2017). The financial structures and supports in place for doctoral students has been viewed positively and negatively by scholars and students alike (Nguyen, 2016). Researchers and students have found much more than money to complain about, however. Overall, there are numerous articles and reports that critique the current state of doctoral education, offer suggestions for improvements, or highlight already existing improvement initiatives (see Golde & Dore, 2001; Nerad & Cerny, 2002; Nerad, 2004; Nyquist & Woodford, 2000).

Concerns and critiques of doctoral education. Throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, a number of foundations, professional associations, government agencies, and institutional leaders assessed and/or called for reform in graduate education (Association of American Universities, 1990, 1998; Committee on Science, Engineering, and Public Policy, 1995; Golde & Dore, 2001; Hartle & Galloway, 1996; Kennedy, 1997; LaPidus, 1997a, 1997b; Lovitts, 2001). Concerns and critiques have continued well into the 21st century. Four main themes have emerged in the literature: the oversupply of PhDs, the lack of preparation for jobs beyond academia, the overvaluing of research, and the high levels of graduate student attrition.

The oversupply of PhDs. Gumport (2016) notes that faculty at research universities "lament the need to reduce the size of incoming doctoral cohorts due to funding constraints as well as to academic labor market projections for an oversupply of PhD recipients reminiscent of the early 1970s" (p. 110). The original golden age of doctoral education left in its wake more doctoral recipients than available academic positions. In their report on the processes and outcomes of doctoral education, Nyquist and Woodford (2000) asked people from different sectors (including research-intensive universities, teaching-intensive universities, K-12 education, and doctoral students) about concerns they had regarding the PhD. They claimed that "Ph.D.s who do not have academic positions have become a concern for many fields" (p. 5). They go so far as to call this oversupply of PhDs a "crisis" (p. 5). Jones (2003) echoes the concern about this crisis and explains:

> The oversupply problem is further aggravated by the incentive that universities have to continue training doctoral students even if the labor market is unable to absorb them upon graduation. Doctoral candidates often provide their department and university with benefits that include assistance with research and other tasks. In many research universities, graduate students do much of the teaching of undergraduate students. (p. 26)

For many students, however, the desire to earn a doctorate "outweighs concern about the job market that awaits after graduation. Most Ph.D. candidates are willing to dedicate themselves to intensive research and study because they enjoy the subject matter" (p. 22).

The lack of preparation for jobs beyond academia. A love for subject matter draws people into the idea of working in higher education. Not only are there fewer

academic job openings than there are prospective academics, many students change their minds about their career goals beyond graduation. In their review of national studies and current literature at the time, Campbell, Fuller, and Patrick (2005) argue for changes in the current model of doctoral education because graduate students are not sufficiently prepared "for the rapidly changing work environment into which they will emerge" (p. 153). The authors cite five major studies that support this claim (Nyquist et al., 1999; Nyquist & Woodford, 2000; Nerad & Cerny, 2002; Nyquist, 2002; Wulff et al., 2004).

Golde and Dore (2001) argue that much of the earlier research and reports were missing the experiences and perspectives of doctoral students; they attempted to fill those gaps with their *Survey of Doctoral Education and Career Preparation*. They found that the training doctoral students received was not what they wanted, nor did it prepare them for the jobs they took upon graduation. At the start of their programs, 4.9 % of the doctoral students surveyed expressed an interest in non-college teaching, and that statistic rose to 20.9% by the end of their programs.

Nerad (2009) revisited one of the same studies addressed by Campbell, Fuller, and Patrick (2005) (her own *Ph.D.s—Ten Years Later Study*) and also reviewed more recent studies (Nerad, Aanerud, & Cerny, 2004; Nerad, Rudd, Morrison, & Picciano, 2007; Sadrozinski, Nerad, & Cerny, 2003), in order to address the outdated assumptions of higher education faculty members and policymakers in relation to doctoral education. She lists these assumptions as follows:

1. All students who study for a PhD want to become professors.

2. Professorial positions are highly desirable, and the best doctoral recipients become professors.

3. The career paths of these people are linear and smooth traditional academic careers, moving from PhD completion to assistant professor, with perhaps two years of postdoctoral fellowship in between, then to associate professor, and on to full professor.

4. Everybody who successfully completes a PhD will most likely choose the very best academic job offer, unconstrained by relationship and family concerns.

5. Professors enjoy the highest job satisfaction compared to any other employment group. (Nerad, 2009, p. 80)

Her call for change echoes the concerns of those who believe our educational system must adapt to an evolving global economy:

> The next generation of faculty will need to implement doctoral programs in step with the changing times—programs that prepare graduates to work effectively in academic and nonacademic careers, to cross national and disciplinary boundaries, and to take on leadership roles in a globalizing world. (p. 89)

A variety of skills will be necessary for graduates—skills that go beyond the traditional preparation of scholars.

The overvaluing of research. Doctoral programs provide extensive training in research; however, they fail to include "professional preparation in teaching and advising, the publication process, writing and attaining research grants, or understanding professional expectations in the areas of service, outreach, or research ethics" (Helm, Campa, & Moretto, 2012, p. 6). In Austin's (2002) study of students who aspired to become professors, she found that participants "often mentioned mixed messages about teaching—the most obvious being public statements by institutional leaders about the

importance of teaching contradicted by institutional policies and faculty behaviors emphasizing research" (p. 108). Nyquist et al. (1999) reported similar findings. Many of their participants expressed confusion about the mixed messages they received during their graduate work: "The most apparent contradictory or ambiguous messages concern the relative value of the teaching and research dimensions of academic life, particularly at the Research I universities" (p. 23). They also reported observing "implicit messages…[that] reveal a devaluing of teaching and a valorization of research" (p. 23). Given such mixed messages, the researchers reported little surprise in students' desire for more support, especially in terms of "real intellectual and emotional engagement with others about teaching" (p. 24).

It is clear that doctoral students observe this type of thinking—that research is valued above all else; however, as Ehrenberg and Kuh (2009) note, "Efforts to improve doctoral education should focus on the characteristics of the curriculum, the advising provided to students, clearly articulating objectives and requirements, and integrating faculty and students into a community of scholars" (p. 259). Each of these suggested focal points contribute to the overall experience of the doctoral student and whether or not they will successfully complete the degree program.

The high levels of graduate student attrition. In 2015, the United States awarded over 55,000 doctorates, a number that has continually risen since the inception of the degree (NSF, 2017). Prior to the 1990s, there seemed to be a dearth in the research about doctoral student attrition because, as Bowen and Rudenstine (1992) stated, "The practice has been (for understandable reasons) to concentrate on those students who actually earn doctorates, allowing those who drop out to disappear from sight" (p. 107). Various

researchers indicate that the doctoral student attrition rate ranges from 40 to 50% (Berelson, 1960; Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992; Lovitts, 1996; Golde, 2000, 2005).

In his article, "Should I Stay or Should I Go? Student Descriptions of the Doctoral Attrition Process," Golde (2000) states in the first sentence: "Paradoxically, the most academically capable, most academically successful, most stringently evaluated, and most carefully selected students in the entire higher education system—doctoral students—are the least likely to complete their chosen academic goals" (p. 199). "Attrition is costly to society," Lovitts (2001) claimed. "Society needs highly educated people from all disciplines to fill a wide variety of positions both inside and outside of academe" (p. 4). In another study Lovitts (2004) found that some graduate students felt that what they learned in their graduate programs was irrelevant to the real world. This feeling, among others, led to high rates of attrition. She addresses the implications of this apparent disconnect and argues that "losing students who have an interest in real-world applications means that important, socially relevant questions are not getting asked, much less answered" (p. 133). Across the studies, it is critical for prospective faculty members "to see positive role models, professors who assure them that they can be both excellent scholars in their disciplines and people who lead 'normal' lives" (p. 133); otherwise, they abandon their aspirations of becoming professors. Many graduate students are not seeing the possibility of living a "normal" life in top-tier, R1 universities.

Graduate students leave their programs for a number of reasons; however, one factor that contributes to higher levels of attrition as a result of a failed socialization process by the institution.

Doctoral Student Socialization and Experiences

Socialization, in the context of graduate study, is largely viewed monolithically. Some attention has been given to the institutional or disciplinary contexts as well as the individual characteristics of the students. One of the goals of this study is to share the experiences of doctoral graduates and place their stories within the research literature. Even before beginning a doctoral program, students experience socialization into the world of academia. This, as I was reminded numerous times over the course of this study, is the primary purpose of doctoral programs at R1 universities. While many graduates choose to pursue careers in academia, many others do not. Students respond differently to the socialization efforts of their programs. Those who earn doctorates move on to a wide range of careers within and beyond institutions of higher education, as do those who leave their programs without obtaining the degree. In this section, I review the literature on the socialization of graduate students, and the effects it has on their professional and personal identities, as well as the ways in which it influences their career choices.

Socialization and professional identity. In this section, I review some of the research that explores the professional identities of doctoral students. Bragg (1976) defines professional identity as the "internalization of the norms of the profession into the individual's self-image…[and] the acquisition of the specific competence in knowledge and skills, autonomy of judgment, and responsibility and commitment of the profession" (p. 11). Golde (1998) has argued that graduate students experience four general socialization tasks to determine whether or not they want to take on the professional identity of an academic within a particular field and institution. During this process, they face the following four questions: "Can I do this? Do I want to be a graduate student? Do

I want to do this work? Do I belong here?" (p. 96). The stages of socialization influence graduate students' choices before they even enter their chosen programs. They must grapple with understanding their intellectual capabilities, their willingness to be a student, their desire to do the types of work necessary for success in academia, and their personal feelings of belonging within a particular department or school culture. Wulff, Austin, and Associates (2004), in their book *Paths to the Professoriate: Strategies for Enriching the Preparation of Future Faculty,* focused on the ways in which doctoral programs are "preparing the faculty of the future for roles in a variety of institutional types" (p. xii), meaning institutions of higher education. They acknowledge the concerns expressed through reports published in the late 1990s and early 2000s, including the ideas "that graduate education in its traditional form was not adequately fulfilling its responsibility to employers, not fully adapting to changing national needs, and not sufficiently preparing graduate students for the world in which they would work" (p. 7). The demands on the next generation of faculty, according to Austin and Wulff (2004) are great:

> The next generation of faculty members must have command of a range of research abilities, appreciation for a variety of ways of knowing, and awareness of the ethical responsibilities researchers will encounter. Faced with a diverse array of students, they must understand how teaching and learning processes occur, and they must be effective teachers. They must know how to use technology in their teaching and understand the meaning and practice of engagement and service appropriate for their institutional type. Faculty members must be effective in communicating to diverse audiences, including government and foundation leaders, members of the community, parents and students, institutional leaders

> and colleagues. Furthermore, they must know how to work effectively, comfortably, and collaboratively with various groups both inside and outside the academy. The next generation of faculty also must understand how to be responsible institutional citizens, comprehending the challenges facing higher education and the implications of these challenges for their roles in the academy and as academics in society. (p. 10)

Doctoral students are socialized into various roles and cultures throughout their time in their respective programs. By addressing the roles and responsibilities that will be expected of future faculty and scholars, Wulff et al. highlight the complexity of preparing doctoral students for the futures they want to pursue or those that might be available.

"[T]hroughout their graduate programs doctoral students are socialized into being disciplinary professionals. And their view of the discipline and disciplinary competence is shaped by the experiences they have and the people they learn from" (Golde, 2010, p. 81). Golde argues that "the prevalent educational experiences in each discipline are not randomly occurring or haphazardly selected; instead, they are reasonable and pedagogically sound mechanisms to meet the desired outcome of developing disciplinary expertise, in all of its complexity" (p. 85). Gardner (2010) emphasized the problem with socialization focusing mainly on the larger context of doctoral education, "rather than through specific disciplinary and institutional contexts" (p. 61). Her study of 60 doctoral students in six disciplines within the same institution found that there were distinct socialization processes—one in terms of a developmental progression through the overall program as well as a "larger socialization to the discipline in their particular departments" (p. 74). In his 2005 study, "The Role of the Department and Discipline in Doctoral

Student Attrition: Lessons From Four Departments," Golde reported a number of themes to account for the reasons students did not complete their doctoral programs. First, he found that research practices did not match with students' strengths, goals, and expectations. History students, for example, could not cope with the loneliness they experienced in their programs. Students also experienced a mismatch between their personal expectations and the department's expectations. Some did not realize that they were being trained for a professional career. Students in humanities departments experienced "narrow professional training oriented toward being an academic" (p. 684). The cultures within specific departments perpetuated the "goal to produce top-flight research with an international impact and to prepare the next generation of research university faculty members" (p. 688). As I will discuss later in this chapter, the perceptions of faculty life are often misconceived by entering graduate students, which plays a significant role in students' career choices.

The socialization framework covers every aspect of a student's experience in a graduate program. The research describes socialization in terms of success or failure. Successful socialization seems to occur when students earn the degree and become academics in their chosen field. Gardner (2008a) interviewed 40 graduate students in chemistry and history departments at two institutions. A number of students' experiences did not "fit the mold" of traditional graduate education (p. 125), including women, students of color, students with families, part-time students, and older students. Sweitzer's (2009) study that followed a cohort of first year, business doctoral students suggested that "perceptions of fit influenced students' development of the prototypical professional identity they were socialized to accept" (p. 25). She noted that it is inevitable

for programs and departments to be concerned with their reputations, which are influenced by the placement of graduates; however, she then cites Prewitt (2006), who argued that the leaders within departments must

> take a hard look at how doctoral training can be better designed to teach the skills and instill the habits of mind that, in fact, will increase the odds of career success, whether the career is in a research university, teaching college, or outside the academy. (p. 26)

The professional or academic experiences of doctoral students are not the only factors that contribute to the success or failure of a program's socialization efforts. Personal factors also play a significant role within and beyond the graduate program.

Socialization and personal identity. In this section, I review the individual characteristics of doctoral students that influence their socialization experiences. There are numerous factors that contribute to one's personal identity. For the purpose of this literature review, I found the most research conducted in relation to (1) race, ethnicity, and culture, and (2) gender. Doctoral students' personal well-being across identities was greatly affected by the support they received from their institutions, the faculty, their peers, their families, and their communities (Winkle-Wagner, Johnson, Morelan-Quainoo, & Santiague, 2010)

Race, ethnicity, and culture. There is growing research on various groups of underrepresented graduate students' experiences[6]. In this literature review, I found research conducted on specific racial and cultural groups within doctoral programs including studies of Puerto Rican doctoral graduates (Rapp, 2010), African American and

[6] See *Standing on the outside looking in: Underrepresented students' experiences in advanced degree programs*. (2009). Edited by Mary F. Howard-Hamilton, Carla L. Morelon-Quainoo, Susan D. Johnson, Rachelle Winkle-Wagner, and Lilia Santiague.

Black doctoral students (Allen, 2018; Antony & Taylor, 2001; Cockrell, 2007; Felder, Stevenson, & Gasman, 2014; Fountaine, 2008; Garrett, 2006; McGaskey, Freeman, Guyton, Richmond, & Walton Guyton, 2016; Taylor & Antony, 2001), and Chicano/Latino(a) doctoral students (Gonzalez, 2017; Ramirez, 2016; Westerband, 2016), a fair portion of which was found in unpublished doctoral dissertations. Each of the studies addresses how racial experiences influence doctoral socialization and the importance of culturally competent mentoring and support. Westerband (2016) argues:

> By design, the doctoral education process is one based on an apprenticeship model, where certain forms of information and skills are handed down from faculty mentors to student mentees. The transferal of information from mentors to students is highly dependent on the information offered by mentors, which varies depending on individual faculty mentorship styles and availability. (p. 219)

Poor relationships with faculty have been reported by a number of studies for underrepresented students (Austin, 2002; Gardner, 2007; Nyquist et al., 1999). Some of the research I found indicated that doctoral students were not able to find and/or make strong connections with faculty members who identified with their race or culture (e.g., McGaskey et al., 2016; Rapp, 2010). This would indicate a significant disadvantage for students who do not find faculty mentors or advisors who can provide them with the information they need to feel supported and, ultimately, successful.

Antony and Taylor (2004) highlight their research on the experiences, especially the socialization, of Black doctoral students during their graduate school years (Antony & Taylor, 2001; Taylor & Antony, 2001). They focus specifically on graduate students

pursuing PhDs or EdDs in the field of education. They interviewed twelve students, asking questions that are strikingly similar to the ones addressed in this dissertation:

> Each interview began with demographic questions, including age, marital status, number of dependents, full-time or part-time status, the year in program, department affiliation, and intent to pursue an academic career. Students then were asked to describe their educational history, how they had made the decision to apply to graduate school, and how they had chosen their particular institution. Their experiences in the doctoral program were explored, including their interactions with colleagues and faculty. In addition, students were asked to discuss the manner in which their professional and career aspirations were encouraged or hampered. Finally, they were asked to assess their ultimate career aspirations, whether or not they considered the professoriate as a goal and why, what they knew about faculty careers, and where they had gained this information. (p. 99)

This is one of the only studies I found that explicitly addresses the career choices of doctoral students in the field of education. Among the participants, there was a universal "perception of negative stereotyping toward Black doctoral students" (p. 99). They also felt more scrutiny because of their race; in other words, they had a "sense of being watched, of not quite fitting in, [and] of being admitted because of race and not because of credentials" (p. 101).

Felder et al.'s (2014) participants' perceptions of the ways in which race affected their socialization process suggested that "support from African American faculty carries with it an affective responsibility, one that acknowledges behavior associated with the

intellectual and moral obligations African American students may bring with them to the academic environment" (p. 36). Black students in Ellis's (1997) study of Black and White women and men "were less likely to have mentors or advisers in their departments with whom they developed close working relationships" (p. iv) and Black women were the most isolated group. Her study highlights the impact of not only race but also gender on one's graduate student experience.

Gender. In her study of women doctoral students and their experiences in education versus engineering programs, Masterman (2014) found that women in the education program (prototypically a female's field) had fewer positive experiences and more barriers to degree progress than the women in engineering (prototypically a male's field). They also experienced more isolation and stress compared to their engineering counterparts, due to the different natures of the programs. Educational work, especially in the dissertation phase, is conducted primarily in isolation. Engineering doctoral students worked more often in groups and research teams. Meyers (2017) also studied women's experiences in a music education program, where participants expressed similar feelings of isolation and stress; however, like Masterman (2014), she found that faculty mentors and advisors (especially women) provided necessary support for their professional and personal needs. Finding time to work on their dissertations was challenging for many of the participants, especially those with children. One of the participants in Masterman's (2014) study worked "between 80 and 100 hours per week across her six or seven part time jobs" and still had to find time to dedicate to working on her dissertation (p. 171). In her study, the experiences of nontraditional-aged women during the dissertation process, Lenz (1997) found that doctoral candidates in both science and education fields expressed

the need for "support and nurturing throughout the dissertation process. Having the necessary network of support enabled women to finish the process; those who did not have the support network did not complete the dissertation" (p. 73). Three of the twelve students in Antony and Taylor's (2004) study abandoned academic career aspirations because of what the researchers referred to as "disidentification." According to Steele (1997) disidentification is "a reconceptualization of the self and of one's values so as to remove the domain as a self-identity" (p. 614). Graduate students' identities are multifaceted. Beyond the personal identifiers of gender, race, culture, ethnicity, and class (to name a few), we are also students, teachers, and researchers. Throughout our programs our various identities are fostered and developed, and perhaps revised. It is a professional, personal, and emotional journey—one that requires a great deal of support.

Socialization and support. In her extensive research on preparing doctoral students for faculty positions, Austin (2003) reflected on her concern that doctoral students enter their programs without a complete understanding of what it means to be a professor. Undergraduate and graduate professors play a key role in students' decisions to apply to doctoral programs (Austin, 2003; Bieber & Worley, 2006). Students observe the ways in which "faculty members spend their time, what they say about engaging in research and working with students, how they comment casually on tasks they must do, how they organize their time" (Austin, 2003, p. 129). The problem, according to Austin, is that students "seldom engage with their faculty members in extensive conversations about what it means to be a faculty member, how higher education is changing, and what range of skills and abilities they should develop" (p. 129). These conversations set the groundwork for the relationships between students and their future mentors and advisors.

Within the literature on graduate students' experiences, the role of the mentor/advisor is one of the most influential supports and can truly "make or break" one's experience (Masterman, 2014, p. 180).

Mentors and advisors. Throughout the research, studies have shown that graduate students who indicated higher levels of program satisfaction experienced more frequent and positive faculty mentorship as well as engagement in intellectual communities, regardless of discipline, ethnicity, race, or gender (see Anderson, Cutright, & Anderson, 2013; Austin, 2003; Maton, Wimms, Grant, Wittig, Rogers, & Vasquez, 2011; Masterman, 2014; Nettles & Millett, 2006; Walker, Golde, Jones, Conklin Bueschel, & Hutchings, 2008). Interestingly, Noy and Ray (2012) explored existing research on graduate students' perceptions of their advisors and found "that some faculty members may view certain students more worthy of advisor support than others," specifically White men, who "have been the dominant group represented in academia" (p. 877). Much of the more recent research focuses on the doctoral experiences of students with various racial, ethnic, and cultural identities, and a significant number of studies focus on the experiences of women; this research highlights the benefits of having mentors and advisors who share common identity markers. Ultimately, the relationship between student and mentor can have a profound effect on students' overall program experiences as well as the specific tasks or phases throughout the program.

Anderson et al. (2013) highlight the necessity of a mutual relationship between and among students and mentors:

> First and foremost, students must be active agents in their own learning, recognizing the value of interacting with faculty and communities of scholars.

> Students must seek out or create learning opportunities, eliciting advice and feedback from faculty and peers. Students may serve as valuable apprentices to faculty, developing an effective and productive working relationship that serves both student and faculty. Mutually beneficial relationships between these stakeholders should be encouraged. Faculty, individually and/or collectively, can help students understand such opportunities and responsibilities by making goals, expectations, and assumptions clear to students from the very beginning of their doctoral programs. (p. 210)

Since the goal of any formal academic pursuit within a program is to graduate, it is important to note that Nettles and Millett (2006) found that students who had mentors completed their programs more quickly than those who did not have mentors. As I have discussed earlier, many students' experiences slowed progress during the dissertation phase, when they are working independently, and often, in isolation. Lenz (1994) claimed:

> The importance of a suitable advisor was very important for the 'completers' and appeared to be inhibiting for the ABDs[7]….The ABDs had lost their advisor-advisee relationships and had not been able to re-connect with anyone at the university to establish a new advisor-advisee relationship. (p. 351)

In her study of women doctoral students in education and engineering, Masterman (2014) highlighted the significance of having a good faculty advisor, even if they considered it a matter of luck. The women who reported the most positive experiences in their programs, regardless of discipline, had advisors who provided support for their professional and personal well-being.

[7] All But Dissertation

Outside support. In addition to faculty mentors and advisors, doctoral students require others within and beyond the program or institution to foster a positive graduate experience (Austin, 2002; Bragg, 1976; Gardner, 2007; McGaskey et al., 2016; Weidman et al., 2001), which hopefully concludes with degree completion. Many doctoral students who do not feel supported by those within their programs or institutions seek outside support systems to navigate the challenges of doctoral education. This type of support played a particularly significant role for doctoral students of color. Studies conducted by McGaskey et al. (2016) and Felder, Stevenson, & Gasman (2014) both suggested that same-race support is crucial in terms of such students' feelings of success. In McGaskey et al.'s (2016) study, those outside of the program offered "psychosocial support. Black peers supplied a type of affirmational and emotional support that allowed the participants to survive and thrive in an environment of which they were suspicious and felt was discriminatory" (p. 154). In her recently completed dissertation, Krystal Allen (2018) conducted semi-structured interviews with nine Black women in doctoral programs (BWDP) across the U.S. about their faculty mentoring experiences. Most of the participants had positive experiences with faculty mentors; however, some women experienced challenges due to a lack of Black women faculty. The cultural competency and understanding of Black women's experiences was of great importance to participants who had positive experiences. Unfortunately, because some participants experienced a "lack of guidance provided by [a] faculty mentor, a few of the BWDP in this study questioned whether they were adequately prepared for academic or administrative positions post-graduation" (p. 127). Participants did, however, seek out "peer support networks such as sister circles, social media support groups, and cultural and/or gender

specific organizations to fight against the feelings of isolation and invisibleness, and to navigate systems that were not designed with BWDP in mind" (p. 121).

The need for strong support systems is most necessary at the end of one's degree program, typically around the time students are in the dissertation phase. This is often the most difficult time for students because it is meant to be done in isolation (Council of Graduate Schools, 2004). In her multiple case study of three female ABDs and three female graduates of a PhD program in education, Lenz (1994) noted that graduates were positively impacted by caring faculty advisors as well as supportive family and peers. Cockrell's (2007) analysis of the contributing factors to African American doctoral students' perseverance and graduation found that participants relied on spirituality, family, and their own personal drive to complete their degree programs.

Doctoral Student Career Choices

Earlier in this chapter, I included Nerad's (2009) list of outdated assumptions about doctoral education. The first assumption, that all students who enter a doctoral program want to become professors, is supported in the research in the sense that much is written about how to better prepare doctoral students for faculty positions (Wulff, Austin, & Associates, 2004; Council of Graduate Schools, 2003). Entering the world of academia is the ultimate professional achievement. Most informative of graduate students' career decisions is Nerad, Aanerud, and Cerny's (2004) analysis of Nerad and Cerny's "PhDs—Ten Years Later" study, a national study of graduate students' career outcomes. The researchers surveyed doctorates in six disciplines from five major fields of study (none of which included education as a discipline). The questionnaire asked about postdoctoral positions, job search processes, factors influencing their decisions about former and

current positions, as well as a retrospective evaluation of their programs. The survey also included five open-ended questions. Ultimately, their study reinforces

> the notion that the doctoral degree itself is put to many different uses in a variety of employment sectors. Traditionally, faculty and students in fields such as English and political science have operated under the assumption that no employer outside the academy will hire Ph.D. recipients. Also in these fields, there exists a general assumption—particularly by the faculty—that the successful Ph.D. student should become a professor. Numerous comments in the open-ended section of our survey reported the risk of appearing to be a less serious doctoral student if one does not aspire to the professoriate. (p. 152)

Graduate students are clearly socialized into believing that professorship is the highest and most respected career choice upon completion of a PhD.

Doctoral students enter their programs with set ideas and understandings of what life will be like as a professor. In their four-year, longitudinal, qualitative study of graduate students who "aspired to the professoriate," Wulff et al. (2004, p. 101) found that many graduate students faced similar questions and challenges in their doctoral experiences: making sense of academic work and faculty careers; navigating the expectations placed upon them as graduate students; identifying the ways in which their institution conceptualized and defined success; and considering the ways in which their professional and personal lives will turn out if they pursue careers in academia. The authors claimed, "most respondents have not developed a full understanding of what faculty work actually involves, nor have they gained understanding of specific career options outside academe" (p. 107). In an earlier article written by Austin, the data

suggested that doctoral students understood faculty work to involve research and teaching, but not "the full array of responsibilities," which include "advising students, participating as an institutional citizen, evaluating or providing feedback to colleagues, handling paperwork, participating in or chairing governance committees, developing new technologically mediated approaches to teaching" (Austin, 2003, p. 133).

Nyquist et al. (1999) studied the experiences of doctoral students, whose goals were to become professors in higher education institutions. They addressed the following question: "How do aspiring professors experience their graduate educations, and how does their understanding about becoming a faculty member change throughout the graduate school experience?" (p. 19). With an original pool of 99 participants at three institutions, the authors reported that the majority expressed interest in careers in the professoriate. Over the course of the study, however, a number of participants became "increasingly ambivalent about their futures and [were] seriously considering options other than the academy" (p. 19). Their findings highlighted positive and negative experiences within three broad themes: adapting to values, mixed messages, and requests for support. For some students, their expectations and values aligned with that of their new academic environment, which were "internalized fairly easily." For others, however, there was a misalignment and students experienced "disillusionment," "resignation," and "disappointment" (Nyquist, et al., 1999, p. 20). Other studies have illustrated the effects of such negative experiences on doctoral students' aspirations to pursue careers in academia. Golde and Dore (2001) and Garrett (2006) found that approximately one-fourth of their respondents had a change in interest in becoming professors since the start of their programs.

In their study, "Why Graduate Students Reject the Fast Track," Mason, Goulden, and Frasch (2009) address the negative reputation of the academic fast track and call for reenvisioning academia in order to attract and retain the next generation of doctoral candidates. Their survey of over 8,000 doctoral students revealed concerns about the family-friendliness and work-life balance of tenure-track faculty positions at research-intensive universities. When considering future career plans, nearly all of the respondents were either somewhat or very concerned with the family-friendliness of their choices (74% of men and 84% of women). Many of the respondents had shifted their career goals away from a tenure-track faculty position since beginning doctoral studies. The reasons most commonly cited were related to work-life balance, including "other life interests," "issues related to children," "professional activity too time consuming," and "negative experience as a PhD student" (p. 15). An important aspect of this article is the recognition of "common prevailing assumptions" of academia, including the ideas that the values of work-life balance and family friendliness are not "promoted [to be] as important...by academic administrators and faculty" and that "talented doctoral students should want to become professors on the academic fast track" (p. 16). In Fagen and Suedkamp Wells' (2004) study, "Many respondents felt that graduate students who expressed an interest in pursuing nonresearch careers lost favor and became 'black sheep' in their programs" (p. 84).

Golde and Dore (2004) revisited the data from their 2001 study and focused on respondents in the fields of English and chemistry. "By focusing on two disciplines with differing cultures and approaches to knowledge, [the researchers] emphasize that the nature of the discipline must be considered in analyzing, understanding, and seeking to

improve doctoral education" (p. 20). As students progressed through their programs, their interests in and motivations for pursuing careers as professors declined. The researchers attributed this decline to students' enhanced understanding of faculty life. They noted:

> Students indicated that they were motivated in their career aspirations by a love of teaching, enjoyment of research, and interest in doing service—the three traditional components of faculty work. They found college campuses appealing places to work and appreciated the lifestyle of faculty; however, the conditions of faculty work gave them pause. They found the tenure process problematic, the workload expectations onerous, the research funding difficult to obtain, and the salaries low. (p. 23)

There seems to be an idealistic view of what life will be like in academia. On the surface, life as a professor is appealing because one would have the chance to teach and research topics about which they are passionate, and they would be doing service in the field of education. When the curtain is drawn back and graduate students get a glimpse of reality, it turns out it isn't all it's cracked up to be.

The pressure cultivated within top-tier research universities gets much attention in the research. Wulff, Austin, Nyquist, and Sprague (2004) conducted a four-year longitudinal study in which they surveyed and interviewed graduate students from various top-tier research institutions, including "Professional Schools," which contains Education and Educational Psychology within their disciplines. Ultimately, the researchers characterized four groups of students: 1) students who began their programs aspiring to enter traditional tenure-track positions and held onto that goal; 2) students who viewed the traditional tenure-track position as "'ideal' visions of intellectual

stimulation and academic entrepreneurship," but those visions were "tempered by less appealing perceptions of scholarly life, such as isolation, economic bottom lines, and overworked faculty" (p. 58); 3) students who previously attended small liberal arts colleges or private institutions and expressed a strong desire to teach in those environments; and 4) students who decided to pursue careers outside academia. Interestingly, many students became "increasingly disillusioned and disenchanted" and "flatly reported that they could not lead the kinds of harried lives they observed in professors around them and thus leaned toward applying their knowledge in what they thought would be less stressful environments" (p. 64). Graduate students see balancing the professional and the personal as a challenge at top-tier research universities.

Goldsmith (2000) and Harvey (2000) address their experiences with careers beyond the academy in a special issue of the *ADE Bulletin*. Goldsmith discusses her experience with career counseling of English PhDs and other graduate students. With others, she developed the Career Management Series, which was a series of workshops for English PhDs providing "[a] genuine opportunity to rethink the meaning of a doctoral degree in English and the meaningful uses to which it might be put" (p. 35). She highlights the fact that there is the possibility of meaningful employment beyond what students are enculturated to believe. Harvey (2000), an English PhD who participated in one of these workshops, wrote about "entering this discussion with a sense of self-preservation and of wanting, at the age of thirty-two, to get on with [her] life" (p. 40). Her experience in the workshop was positive because, she claimed, "By talking about other kinds of work, we turned down the brightness of the holy aura surrounding academic work" (p. 40).

Harvey makes two points that relate to other themes and messages throughout the literature on graduate students' experiences:

> Living through the several years now so often required between the PhD and a tenure-track job relies on a level of privilege or a freedom from financial obligation, or at least on a tolerance for extended penury, that not everyone can muster. (p. 41)

Also, a friend of hers describes "a distinct sense that pursuing a nonacademic career is a fall-back stratagem in defeat" (p. 41). The notion that pursuing a nonacademic career indicates "defeat" is a clear indication of the values within some institutions of higher education.

Teaching with a PhD. There is very little empirical research about doctoral students who graduate and choose to teach. Perhaps the notion that working in a K-12 setting indicates "defeat" has impacted the value seen in exploring this area of the research. In their qualitative phenomenological study of the experiences of those who completed doctoral degrees in education, Rockinson-Szapkiw, Spaulding, and Bade (2014) shared their analysis of contributors to doctoral students' persistence to earn their degrees. Most significant were the relationships students formed with faculty and peers. Personal and academic support systems enhanced students' chances of completion. Their participants included professors at higher education institutions, K-12 teachers, principals, instructional designers, and school counselors. "Career sustainment, career advancement, and a pay raise were prevailing motivations for many who persisted" (p. 301) and decided to remain in or return to work in K-12 settings.

Mandzuk (1997) described his experience as a doctoral graduate returning to an elementary school teaching position as a "sometimes difficult and unsettling transition" (p. 439). After teaching for 17 years, Mandzuk decided to pursue a doctorate to expand his knowledge base and allow for future career opportunities in higher education. The decision to pursue this degree, he acknowledged, "is a life-changing experience that can have a dramatic effect on one's perceptions and practices as a teacher" (p. 440). Kerfoot's (2008) dissertation, "The Stories of Public School Teachers Who Hold Doctorates: A Narrative Study," explores the reasons seven public elementary school teachers pursued doctorates as well as the ways in which their experiences influenced their beliefs about education. She found, "The participants presented the social benefits of earning a doctorate in terms of the knowledge they have acquired, the relationships they have developed, and the professional opportunities they possess" (p. 149). Teachers in this study went into positions of leadership within their own schools and the broader educational community. They also engaged in more scholarly work through teacher education as well as advocating for conducting classroom research. The benefits of the degree were clear:

> The doctoral experience has influenced their beliefs about teaching, public schooling, and education in a number of ways. It has given them a clarification of their beliefs, a strengthening of their knowledge base, an ability to reflect on practice on a more in-depth level, an openness to new ways of thinking, and the needed background to examine their practices from a research perspective and apply what goes on in schools to existing research. (p. 171)

Summary

This review of the literature outlined two conceptual frameworks—the socialization of graduate and professional students and three-dimensional narrative inquiry space—as a means of situating this study theoretically. I provided an overview of doctoral education in the United States before specifically addressing research on the socialization and experiences of graduate students. Despite the purpose of doctoral programs to socialize their students to become research scholars, not all doctoral students see this as a good fit, which influences their career decisions. The next chapter introduces narrative inquiry as the methodological lens through which I approached telling the stories of doctoral graduates who now work in K-12 schools.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODS AND DESIGN

"Though this be madness, yet there is method in 't" (Hamlet, 2.2.223-224).

Introduction

This dissertation sought to understand the experiences of doctoral students who earned PhDs in Curriculum and Instruction at Boston College and chose to return to or remain in K-12 settings as opposed to pursuing careers in academia. The purpose of this study was to share their stories and learn about the factors that influenced their career choices. The study also explored the impact of the program on participants' personal and professional lives. Given that much of the research on doctoral students' socialization and experience is reported through statistics from national studies across disciplines (mainly science and engineering) or abstract ideas about ways in which institutions of higher education might improve graduate education, this study utilized a more creative research methodology and design. I combined narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) and autoethnography (Denzin, 2013) as methodologies to present an exploratory, multiple-case study (Yin, 2014).

I begin this chapter with my positionality as the researcher and list the research questions as a reminder for the reader. I then provide an overview of and rationale for the methodological approaches I utilized in this research study. I conclude the chapter with an overview and description of the study's design, data collection procedures, and subsequent analytic approach.

Researcher Positionality

As I explained in the first chapter of this dissertation, the impetus for the study stemmed from my personal experiences within the doctoral program at Boston College. I was in a unique position among the other members of my cohort because I had earned my undergraduate and Master's degrees from Boston College—the only institution of higher education from which I have earned degrees. I was further embedded in the culture of the Lynch School of Education and Human Development when I co-taught English Methods with my advisor, Dr. Audrey Friedman. With three years of teaching experience, I got my first taste of life as a teacher educator and I loved it. Co-teaching this course was invigorating. I was talking with new and experienced teachers about issues of practice, and, more importantly, the fun we can have with an English language arts curriculum.

Over the next few years I continued to take graduate-level courses at BC through their voucher program (working as a cooperating teacher for undergraduate student teachers allowed me to earn free courses), and found myself in classes with doctoral students, learning about theories of educational leadership and a comprehensive history of our American educational system. I was fascinated by the content and relished the opportunity to take one course at a time so that I could fully focus on the material at hand. Shortly after completing my third doctoral-level class as a non-degree student, I applied to the PhD program in Curriculum and Instruction.

I have shared much of my story in the first chapter of this study, so I need not repeat it all. It was important for me to highlight the place in which I was situated within my cohort. I was a "new" student in the doctoral program; however, I had been a part of nearly every aspect of this university since 2001. When I finally settled on my current

dissertation topic, I felt strongly that I wanted to share my story, that this study would not only report on the findings I gleaned from others' experiences. My story was worth being told as well. I am what Adler and Adler (1987) referred to as a "complete-member researcher" —someone who is "fully committed to and immersed in the group" I am studying (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 740). I certainly internalized beliefs and feelings about the program because I would consider my overall satisfaction with the program to be a 50/50 split. Once I was able to get out of my research assistantship and begin working with student teachers in schools, as well as teaching courses for undergraduate and graduate students, I felt like I had finally come out of the darkness. I loved learning about certain topics, I hated my experiences "doing research" (read: writing literature reviews), I loved engaging in conversations with other educators about important educational issues, I hated the stress of trying to complete tasks for faculty members and not myself. Therefore, there are pros and cons to my positionality within the study.

In our conversations, participants and I had shared knowledge, which made it easier for me to understand the context of their statements; however, there may have been some assumptions or biases on my part over the course of my notetaking and analysis. Later in this chapter, I will explain the steps I took to eliminate any misunderstandings, biases, or misjudgments I may have made.

This research study relied on participants' perceptions of their own experiences without assuming a predetermined theoretical model into which their stories might fit. I align myself with social constructivists, or individuals who

> seek understanding of the world in which they live and work. They develop subjective meanings of their experiences—meanings directed toward certain

> objects or things. These meanings are varied and multiple, leading the researcher to look for the complexity of views rather than narrow the meanings into a few categories or ideas. (Creswell, 2013, p. 24)

The experiences and knowledge that others and I constructed through the doctoral program, have contributed greatly to understanding ourselves, our goals, and the world around us. I hope that this research study increases the awareness of prospective and current doctoral students, as well as graduate faculty and administrators, about the experiences of being an educator who pursues a PhD. Being open to the differences among opinions and experiences leads to a richer and more unique understanding of the motivations behind our decisions to work in K-12 settings and retreat from the glorified ivory towers of academia. My personal experiences, as well as the underlying goals of this research study, influenced the development of my research questions:

1. Why do practitioners who earn doctorates at a Research 1 university return to K-12 settings?
    a. How do K-12 practitioners describe their experiences in the doctoral program?
    b. How, if at all, did their experiences in the doctoral program impact their career choices?
2. In what ways, if any, do practitioners believe their experiences in the doctoral program better prepared them for careers in a K-12 setting?

Methodological Approaches

Narrative Inquiry Methodology

Connelly and Clandinin (1990) define "narrative" as "a way of characterizing the phenomena of human experience and its study" (p. 2). Since I was interested in understanding the personal experiences of practitioners who earned doctorates in education and chose to work in K-12 settings, narrative methods provided the opportunity to gather the personal experiences of participants through their own stories and, ultimately, "restory" them "into a framework that makes sense to the overall study" (Creswell, 2012, p. 74). "With narrative," claim Bamberg and McCabe (1998), "people strive to configure space and time, deploy cohesive devices, reveal identity of actors and relatedness of actions across scenes. They create themes, plots, and drama. In so doing, narrators make sense of themselves, social situations, and history" (p. iii). Throughout the doctoral program, participants and I followed the "plot" to graduation and certainly experienced some "drama" along the way.

Narrative inquiry recognizes experience as temporal and contextual. It acknowledges that one's telling of his or her experience is not the only possible story to be told—stories may be told and interpreted differently, in a different time or context (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). My experiences differ greatly from others who have completed the same program and currently work as high school teachers. My experiences are also similar to others who completed the same program and who work in vastly different positions. By undertaking this research through narrative, I worked to recognize and highlight the individual experiences of myself and others like myself.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) stress "the importance of acknowledging the centrality of the researcher's own experience—the researcher's own livings, tellings, retellings, and relivings. One of the starting points for narrative inquiry is the researcher's own narrative of experience, the researcher's autobiography" (p. 70). Therefore, I include a section outlining autoethnography as a methodology in order to highlight extensive self-reflexive process that inspired this study and has propelled it forward.

Autoethnography

Autoethnographies are essentially narrative expressions that are meant to connect the social to the cultural by exploring the self within a cultural context (Reed-Danahay, 1997). I wanted to write about and analyze the epiphanies I experienced within the culture of the doctoral program and confirm my own interpretations with those of others (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). The term "autoethnography" is used by social scientists in a variety of ways, therefore, "the meanings and applications of autoethnography have evolved in a manner that makes precise definition and application difficult" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 739). I make no claims of precision in this research study, which is why narrative inquiry combined with autoethnography seemed a fitting methodological approach.

Throughout the study, I believe I have avoided the self-indulgence that Chang (2007) warns researchers against. She argues that "autoethnography should be ethnographical in its methodological orientation, cultural in its interpretive orientation, and autobiographical in its content orientation" (p. 207). I have blended my own experiences with the experiences of others to explore the particular context of the Curriculum and Instruction doctoral program, while grounding the content of the study in

my own autobiography. My intention in utilizing autoethnography as a methodological approach is to understand the impact my experiences within and beyond the doctoral program had on my personal and professional life. Through the inclusion of others' stories I intended to highlight the inner workings of the social context of the doctoral program and confirm or contradict my own experiences in a meaningful way.

Study Design

This study follows an exploratory, multiple-case study approach (Yin, 2014). Case study research combined with narrative and autoethnographic methodologies is an appropriate partnership for this study because as Riessman (2002) explains:

> Narrative methods can be combined with other forms of qualitative analysis…. Some fancy epistemological footwork is required, because the interpretive perspective that typically underlies narrative work is very different from the realist assumptions of some forms of qualitative analysis and certainly of quantification. Combining methods forces investigators to confront troublesome philosophical issues and to educate readers about them. (p. 706)

Essentially the study of a lived experience, a narrative approach allows researchers to study the "active, self-shaping quality of human thought, [as well as] the power of stories to create and refashion personal identity" (Hinchman & Hinchman, 1997, p. xiv). Through the power of my own story, I was hired as a high school English teacher again, solidifying one of the most important aspect of my identity. I continue my story through this dissertation study and allow others to tell theirs as participants situated in their own experiences and contexts.

Case Study

Despite it being one of the most frequently used qualitative research methodologies, the case study has various definitions and structures that guide its implementation (Yin, 2014), which results in confusion about "what a case study is and how it can be differentiated from other types of qualitative research" (Merriam, 1998, p. xi). Merriam further explains that a "case study can be defined in terms of the process of actually carrying out the investigation, the unit of analysis (the bounded system, the case), or the end product" (p. 34). I do not believe these terms to be mutually exclusive, and Creswell (2012), supports Yin's (2014) and Merriam's (1998) views that case study research is a methodology in and of itself. Creswell (2012) defines case study research as "a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information…and reports a case description and case themes" (p. 97). Each of the elements mentioned above informed this study to some degree. I explore the cases of graduates of the Curriculum and Instruction doctoral program in order to share their stories as an end product. I give each participant an individual profile in the next chapter, a narrative representation of the individual case, before combining all of our experiences into the study's findings, a narrative representation of all cases.

Merriam (1998) outlines three additional characteristics of case study research design that extend beyond the issue of boundedness. First, the study must be *particularistic* in that it centers on a particular phenomenon, person, or situation. This study focused on the experiences of *particular* practitioners in their *particular* K-12

settings who have experienced a *particular* phenomenon in the doctoral program. Next, case studies must be *descriptive*, in that the researcher uses detailed, rich description of the phenomenon under investigation. In a way, this dissertation utilized case study as a medium for a narrative inquiry, and it took on a more narrative structure—storying the experiences of my participants and of myself (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Lastly, case study research must be *heuristic* and enhance the reader's understanding by either confirming what is already known, or revealing meanings or experiences that have yet to be explored. This holistic study allows for cross-case analyses and informs the lack of research on practitioners' decisions to earn doctorates and, in these cases, remain in or return to K-12 settings.

As Mishler (1999) argues, personal narrative research is case-centered. Each of the research participants has completed (or nearly completed in the case of this researcher) a doctoral program and serve as multiple holistic cases. As the researcher, I consider myself a case because I connect my own experiences that led me back to the classroom to the experiences of other participants who chose K-12 settings in which to work. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) confirm, "Narrative inquiries are always strongly autobiographical. Our research interests come out of our own narratives of experience and shape our narrative inquiry plotlines" (p. 121). The beginning of this dissertation articulated some of the plotlines of my story, and this multiple-case study design relates the experiences of us all. (See Figure 2)

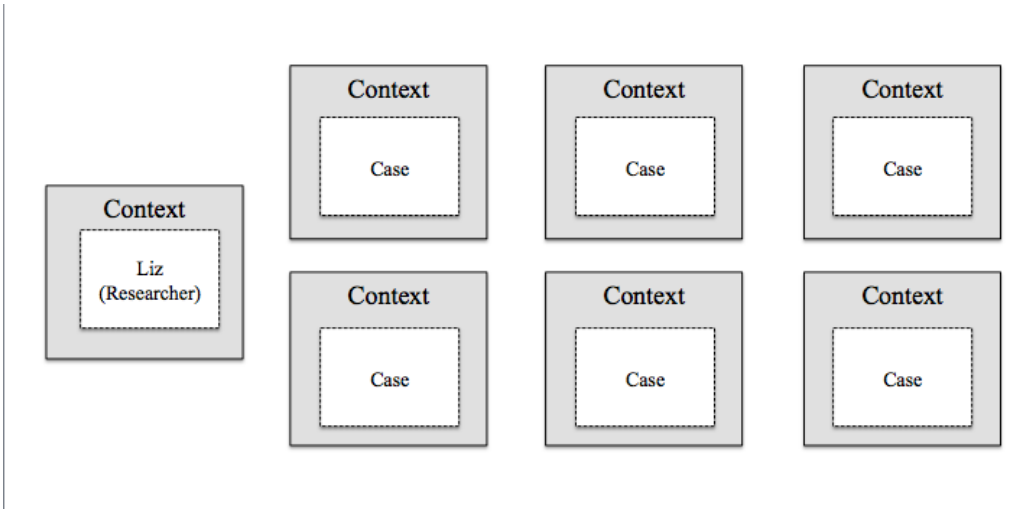

Figure 2. Multiple-Case Study Design Diagram

Selection and Recruitment of Research Participants

As I described earlier in the study, this is my second attempt at a dissertation. I remember sharing a number of frustrations with my first dissertation with my colleague, Henry[8]. I was tortured. The Institutional Review Board challenged the ethics of a teacher research study and my timeline was significantly delayed. I joked with Henry, "I should just write my dissertation about us. I should tell our stories about why we got PhDs and ended up back in teaching." Little did I know that less than a year after this conversation, I would be doing just that. I knew there were enough people like us who had taken the same route away from the ivory tower. I knew that the explicit and implicit messages about the university's expectation that we become research professors did not influence more students' decisions to pursue a career in academia, so I set out to find exactly how many and see if they would talk to me.

Yin (2014) argues that "multiple-case designs should follow a replication, not a sampling, logic, and a researcher must choose each case carefully" (p. 63). Through the office of the Teacher Education, Special Education, and Curriculum & Instruction

[8] Pseudonyms have been given for all participants.

(TESpECI) department, I was able to obtain a list of graduates and their "current" positions, as they were reported to the office upon graduation. Using that list, I conducted an internet search for the email addresses of the twenty graduates who reported working in K-12 settings. I was able to find contact information for 17 out of the 20. I already had the personal email addresses of six out of the twenty graduates I emailed, and, interestingly, they were the only six who responded to my initial recruitment email. In this email I invited practitioners to participate in my dissertation research study (see Appendix A for the recruitment email in full). Once graduates agreed to participate in the study I offered them a $10 gift card to a merchant of their choice (e.g., Starbucks or Amazon). Though my initial communication sought to recruit cases that would represent a diverse population of participants (including, but not limited to: gender, race, age, and position), the participants who agreed to the study represent fairly similar demographics[9]. All participants were assigned pseudonyms to ensure anonymity.

Data Sources and Collection

Data collection for this study included several sources: written narratives in response to questions, individual semi-structured interviews, as well as documents and artifacts from participants' doctoral program and/or teaching/administrative practice. Through the use of multiple data sources and methods I aimed for two types of triangulation of the data—data triangulation because it makes use of several sources of data, and methodological triangulation because it uses multiple ways to collect data (Freeman, 1998). Each of the data sources informed all research questions in some way, although specific data sources offered greater insight into some questions more than others.

[9] A table that lists the participants and their demographics will be presented in the next chapter.

After participants agreed to be part of this research study, I personally communicated with each of them, including a link to a copy of the Informed Consent as well as the guiding questions for the written narrative (see Appendix B for the Informed Consent document and Appendix C for the written narrative guiding questions.)

Written narratives in response to questions. "The main claim for the use of narrative in educational research is that humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Participants in the study were asked to write narratives in response to specific questions. Participants provided data that first addressed the research questions by writing stories about themselves, so that we could later discuss these stories during the individual interviews. The questions allowed participants to construct written narratives about their experiences within and beyond the PhD program, given sufficient time to tell their stories. This was an appropriate method to begin this research study, as Clandinin and Connelly (2000) state, "Formalists begin inquiry in theory, whereas narrative inquirers tend to begin with experience as expressed in lived and told stories" (p. 40). It was important for me to get the participants' stories in their own words first. I wanted to allow them enough time to reflect on their answers to my questions and offer the details that they felt were most important in terms of their experiences in the program and ultimate career choices.

In order to encourage participants to write in a way they felt most comfortable, I offered them the freedom to choose to answer some or all of the questions. The purpose of the written narrative was to acquire information about participants' experiences within and beyond the Curriculum and Instruction program. I asked participants about their reasons for applying to the program, their experiences in courses and assistantships, as

well as contributing factors for their decision to work in K-12 settings. Not all participants answered all questions in the written narratives, but through the interviews I was able to capture each participant's responses to all questions. The questions were sent to participants in August of 2017 and participant narratives were completed between October 2017 and March 2018. In March 2018, I wrote my own narrative responding to the same questions as participants.

Interviews. Yin (2014) argues that interviews are one of the most important data sources in case studies. The purpose of the interviews was to gain further insight into participants' doctoral and professional experiences and to probe into participants' responses to the written narrative guiding questions. The constructionist epistemology undergirding most qualitative research informs Warren's (2002) claim that researchers should conduct open-ended interviews. "The goal," she writes, "is to unveil the distinctive meaning-making actions of interview participants. As such, the design of qualitative interview research necessarily places limits on standardization and the working relevance of existing literature" (p. 86). After I coded and analyzed participants' written narratives, I highlighted certain statements made by participants for which I wanted clarification or expansion, before scheduling the interviews. Hatch (2002) advocates for carefully designed research questions, especially when multiple participants are interviewed only once.

> While it is still to be expected that interviews will be dynamic and follow the leads of informants, guiding questions for one-shot interviews with many individuals will be ordered in certain ways and include certain question areas that all informants should address. Such studies are designed to capture a number of

> perspectives on particular topics, so it is essential that each participant has the chance to discuss each topic. (p. 102)

While I had a set list of questions to guide the interviews, I allowed the conversation between us to flow as naturally as possible. I began each interview with a request for participants to expand upon a statement they made in the written narrative. For example, when I interviewed Stephen, I wanted him to clarify his statement that he was "looking for more" and was "trying to discover some sort of new passion" in his career (interview). I asked him, "What was it about the C&I program that you thought would give that to you?" Many of the interviews began in this fashion. I asked Henry about his initial interest in earning a PhD in comparative literature. I asked Charles about a question he posed in his narrative: "At this point in my career, did I really want to devote years of studying in order to earn a PhD? What was I trying to prove, anyway?" Maggie and I began our discussion about her decision to pursue a PhD as opposed to an EdD, which seemed to fit her career goals more appropriately. In Grace's narrative, she discussed the challenge she faced in schools with the unanswered questions she and her colleagues experienced. This propelled her pursuit of a PhD, which was similar to Sydney's impetus for applying to doctoral programs. My interview with Sydney began when I asked her how she became the interim principal at her school after spending one year as an assistant principal. Each of the interviews developed into conversations that took their own distinct turns. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) explain:

> Conversation entails listening. The listener's response may constitute a probe into experience that takes the representation of experience far beyond what is possible in an interview. Indeed, there is probing in conversation, in-depth probing, but it

> is done in a situation of mutual trust, listening, and caring for the experience described by the other. (p. 109)

My relationships with each of the participants range from acquaintance to friend. I have known each of the participants in some capacity since I entered the program in 2012. Through a more interactive interview process, I hoped that participants and I would "draw upon and use [our] commonsense knowledge to create some intelligible sense of the questions posed and the ensuing discussions about them" (Johnson, 2002, p. 108).

I found Johnson's (2002) definition of the semi-structured, in-depth interview to be relevant to this research study:

> In-depth interviews tend to be of relatively long duration. They commonly involve one-on-one, face-to-face interaction between an interviewer and an informant, and seek to build the kind of intimacy that is common for mutual self-disclosure. They tend to involve a greater expression of the interviewer's self than do some other types of interviews, as well as a personal commitment on the part of participants.... (p. 103)

I was intentional about using these in-depth interviews in conjunction with other forms of data including the "lived experience of the interviewer as a member or participant in what is being studied" (p. 104). Therefore, my faculty advisor, Dr. Audrey Friedman, conducted the same interview with me, the researcher. Johnson (2002) argues that in-depth interviewing is the best approach when "the research question involves highly conflicted emotions, [and when] different individuals or groups involved in the same line of activity have complicated, multiple perspectives on some phenomenon" (p. 105). This

was certainly the case for participants in this study who experienced certain aspects of the program in vastly different ways.

The interviews occurred once with each participant between June 2018 and August 2018, at a time and place that was mutually convenient for the researcher and the participant. Three of the interviews took place in person (Stephen, Charles, and Henry), while others were scheduled via phone (Grace, Maggie, and Sydney). The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. They ranged from 45 to 75 minutes. (See Appendix D for the full interview protocol.)

At the conclusion of each interview, I asked participants if they would be willing to have a follow-up conversation or email communication with me, if, after the coding and/or analysis, I had any questions. All participants agreed. (See Appendix E for the texts of all email communications I sent to participants.)

Documents and artifacts. Once I conducted and transcribed the interviews, I sent out an email to participants requesting documents and artifacts that they believed could aid in telling their stories. As Yin (2014) asserts, "documentary information is likely to be relevant to every case study topic" (p. 105). Hatch (2002) refers to this type of data as "unobtrusive" (p. 116) because it does not require any extra work on the part of the participants. I also requested that participants share the personal statements they submitted with their applications to the doctoral program, as well as other assignments (e.g., a paper or project for a course or assistantship), journal or diary entries, and photographs that may be related to either their experiences in the program or their decisions to return to a K-12 setting. The personal statements proved to be the most beneficial document shared by participants in terms of the data analysis.

In addition, I asked participants to share one artifact from their professional practice that truly captured the way they feel about their work as a teacher or administrator in a K-12 setting. This could have included (but was not limited to) a journal or diary entry, a photograph, a piece of student work, a representation of professional development, a note or card received from a colleague or parent, or any other artifact of their choice. Participants shared letters from students, outlines of workshops they presented to their districts, and emails to staff. A select few of these documents assisted in triangulating the data in the narratives and interviews.

Research journal. Throughout the study I have kept a research journal—a place where I recorded and analyzed all parts of the research process. Many authors (e.g., Hatch, 2002; Creswell & Miller, 2000) have recommended keeping some type of research log or journal as a medium through which one can reflect on the process and "keep track of the human side of the research experience" (Hatch, 2002, p. 114). Given that I employed narrative inquiry methodology, this is especially appropriate and has offered additional data for my own story. It has also provided me with an outlet to reflect further on my own personal experiences within and beyond the program.

Data Analysis

This section describes the process by which I analyzed the data. I engaged in the type of data analysis process that Campano (2007) called "systematic improvisation," because certain aspects of the research design, data collection, and analytic plan were not determined *a priori*. This dissertation study called for a recursive process of data collection and analysis—the data informed analysis and analysis informed the data.

According to Creswell (2012), there are six steps in analyzing and interpreting qualitative data:

> preparing and organizing the data for analysis; engaging in an initial exploration of the data through the process of coding it; using the codes to develop a more general picture of the data—descriptions and themes; representing the findings through narratives and visuals; making an interpretation of the meaning of the results by reflecting personally on the impact of the findings and on the literature that might inform the findings; and finally, conducting strategies to validate the accuracy of the findings. (p. 237)

I prepared and organized the data using MAXQDA, the qualitative data analysis software, because I collected large amounts of textual data for this study. MAXQDA offers a database that helps with the storage, organization, coding, and analysis of qualitative or mixed methods data. Participants' written narratives, personal statements, and other documents were uploaded into the database. Once the interviews were transcribed, I uploaded the transcripts as well and organized the data first according to data type (e.g., personal statements, interview transcripts). I also organized the data by participant, grouping all of the data provided by each participant in its own individual folder.

My initial exploration of the data occurred when I first read through all of the participants' written narratives in preparation for the in-depth interviews. This reading of the data was meant to acquaint me with the stories of participants and highlight points of discussion for the interview. I performed an initial round of coding with the concepts from Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) three-dimensional narrative inquiry space, which

builds off of Dewey's criteria for experience (continuity, interaction, and situation). I used the terms *personal* and *social* (interaction); *past*, *present*, and *future* (continuity); and *place* (situation) in order to classify some of the details of participants' experiences with the hope I might find significant similarities and differences.

I continued this coding process with the other data and decided to use the continuity codes (past, present, and future) to frame the participant profiles. In essence, I "restoryed" the data from participants' personal statements, written narratives, and interviews to create their profiles and tell the stories of their journey throughout the doctoral experience.

Hatch (2002) argues, "Even when computer programs are used to assist in the mechanics of sorting data, only the intelligences, creativity, and reflexivity of the human mind can bring meaning to those data" (p. 148). Therefore, I remained open to various codes that emerged throughout my reading and rereading of the data. After I wrote the first drafts of the participant profiles, I emailed each participant and asked them if they would want to read what I had written. My goal was to engage in the method of member checking (Creswell, 2012) to ensure that I had captured accurately the stories of participants. I presented each participant with the draft of their profile and asked them to comment on the accuracy with which I told their stories. All participants reviewed their profiles, and two of the six offered some details to help clarify various events in their lives.

Once participants had confirmed the accuracy of their stories and offered support for the initial representation of their experiences, I began to reread the data in order to code, organize, and determine the findings of the study. I continually revised and

recreated codes, and I also developed new codes and potential themes that emerged (see Appendix F for a list of codes and emerging themes). I took a thematic approach to the analysis of the data, which is a common method of narrative analysis (Riessman, 2008). Narrative analysis allows for a systematic study of personal experience and the meaning we make of those experiences. Through this approach, my goal was to make sense of our past experiences in the doctoral program in order to determine how they influenced our current personal and professional experiences. Therefore, I created a number of themes as they corresponded with the research questions, which can be read in Chapter Five of this study.

The data collection and analysis occurred for over a year. Table 1 below outlines the data collection and analysis timeline for the study.

Data Source	Data Collection	Data Analysis
Written participant narratives	October 2017 - February 2018	February 2018 - March 2018
Documents / artifacts	March 2018 - July 2018	June 2018 - August 2018
Interviews	April 2018 - July 2018	May 2018 - August 2018

Table 1. Data Collection/Analysis Timeline

Creswell (2012) acknowledges the relationship among data collection, analyses, and writing as recursive and multi-layered. This process involves decontextualizing the data to sort and code only to recontextualize the data in order to make meaning from it (Ayres, Kavanaugh, & Knafl, 2003). Table 2 below outlines the timeline of the write-up of the data.

Sections of Data	Timeline for Write-Up
Participant Profiles	November 2018 - December 2018
Findings and Analysis	December 2019 - February 2019

Table 2. Timeline for Write-Up of the Data

Summary

This research study utilized a creative qualitative research design that combined narrative inquiry and autoethnography to present an exploratory, multiple-case study. This methodological approach enabled me to share the stories of doctoral graduates and the themes that emerged from those stories. In the next chapter, I offer profiles for each of the participants. These serve as the individual case studies of the participants.

CHAPTER FOUR

PARTICIPANT PROFILES: "RESTORYING THE STORIES"

"Lord, we know what we are but know not what we may be" (Hamlet, 4.5.48-49).

In this chapter, I provide an overview of the six practitioners who agreed to participate in this study, followed by a narrative of each participant. These stories focus on three stages in participants' lives 1) before application and admission to the doctoral program; 2) during the doctoral program; and 3) after graduating from the doctoral program. I begin each participant's story with a brief description of either my relationship to them or other details that I believe enhances the reader's understanding of them.

Overview of Participants

With the exception of the researcher, all participants have graduated from the Curriculum and Instruction doctoral program at Boston College's Lynch School of Education and Human Development. Each of the participants is currently employed in a K-12 setting in a public or private school. After obtaining a list of graduates and their last known positions, I contacted each via email requesting their participation in the study. The sample of graduates recruited spanned ages, races, and years of graduation. The final sample consists of the six people who agreed to participate in this study after I sent out the initial recruitment email.

Seventy-one percent of participants fall within the ages of 35-45, with one older than 60. Each of the participants identifies as white, which creates a stark lack of diversity. I do not believe it adequately represents the percentage of graduates who are in the program, nor does it represent the racial breakdown of which graduates return to K-12 settings. This is a clear limitation of the study; therefore, I cannot draw any conclusions

about doctoral experiences based on race. The demographic characteristics of each participant are shown below in Table 3. I include the chart here as a guide and a reference; this demographic information enriches the profiles that follow in the chapter.

Name	Position	Level of Current K-12 Setting	Type of K-12 Community	Total Years in Program	Age *	Race	Gender	Marital / Family Status
Liz	English Teacher	HS	Public Suburban	7	34	White	Female	Married, 2 children
Charles	History Teacher	HS	Public Urban – Characteristic	5	64	White	Male	Single, no children
Henry	English Teacher	HS	Public Suburban	7	37	White	Male	Married, 2 children
Sydney	Assistant Principal	MS	Public Suburban	5	41	White	Female	Divorced, 2 children
Stephen	Technology Integration Specialist	K-8	Public Suburban	6	44	White	Male	Married, 2 children
Maggie	Curriculum & Instruction Director	K-12	Independent Suburban	6	39	White	Female	Married, 2 children
Grace	Specialized Instructional Coach**	K-12	Public Suburban	5	41	White	Female	Married, 2 children

*At the beginning of the study

**New position for 2018-2019 school year (Elementary School Assistant Principal)

Table 3. Participant Demographics

I have had varying degrees of personal interaction with the participants; some I have known for many years and others only recently. My prior personal interactions with participants created comfortable familiarity, which may have contributed to their willingness to participate in this study. Each of the participants graduated from Boston College's Curriculum and Instruction doctoral program and currently works in a K-12

setting as a classroom teacher, administrator, or specialist. Overall, the demographic characteristics of participants are strikingly similar. I will discuss this further in the limitations section of the final chapter. For the initial phase of data analysis, I composed a narrative profile of each of the six participants by using holistic coding. With this technique I grouped entire sections of participants' personal statements, written narratives, and interviews that represented each phase of participants' lives—instead of analyzing the data line by line (Saldaña, 2016).

Doctoral Graduate Profiles

Each of the six practitioners has a unique story to tell about his or her experiences leading up to, during, and following the completion of the doctoral program. I use participants' own words throughout their profiles in order to capture their most authentic opinions and feelings.

Grace

"I gravitate towards reading The Annals of Dyslexia *or* Educational Leadership*, rather than* People *or* Time*. For me, it is in the wiring. I am wired to teach. I am wired to take my knowledge of pedagogy, language development, neuroscience, and kids and combine them to create something really powerful."*

In one of the most unique cases in this research study, Grace forged a humble and cautious path toward a career as a tenure-track professor. She did everything that was expected of her in the program, and she reached the ultimate goal: a professorship. After a few years, Grace realized that her passion for teaching and learning, and working in schools was not being fulfilled in that role...so she came back.

Before the Program

Grace's knowledge and experience spans the country across a variety of domains. As an undergraduate, Grace studied to be a speech and language pathologist; however, when she graduated, she did not immediately seek employment. Instead, she volunteered with AmeriCorps on the West Coast, during which time she sorted cans at a soup kitchen, painted homes, and cut trails in forests. When she returned to the East Coast, Grace worked in an urban public school district, where she coached swimming and listened to students' stories of "drive-by shootings, hunger, and despair" (personal statement). Her next teaching job was in a private school for students with special needs. During her time there, she applied and was accepted to a graduate program in special education. Grace later returned to public school teaching and became an elementary special educator, who ran a substantially separate program for students with learning disabilities. In this position, Grace said that colleagues often came to her with questions about students, specifically English learners (ELs), and whether or not they should be referred to special education. The prevailing sentiment presented to Grace was: "We don't know what to do with this kid."

These questions, according to Grace, kept her up at night. She recalled, that "no one in [her] district had time, and, in some cases, interest in thinking through [her] questions." Grace had already gone to school to study speech and language, as well as special education; therefore, "it seemed like working on a Ph.D. in either of those areas would be redundant" (narrative). She told me that she had a pretty profound conversation with her husband, who said, "I don't want to wake up and be 65 and you are still sitting with unanswered questions. Go to school and find some other nerds to talk to about your

questions." Grace knew that he was right. She said, “I didn't exactly know what the outcomes of going back to school would be, but I knew I had to go.”

During the Program

Pragmatically speaking, Grace knew what she could get out of the program. In her narrative, she wrote, “When I started, I told myself I didn't actually have to finish. I could just work one semester at a time, and it could be low-risk. Plus, each semester, I told myself, added 15 more credits to my K-12 pay scale. It was safer that way.” One of the reasons Grace took such an approach to the doctoral program was that she found out she was pregnant with her first child when she began applying to programs. With such a monumental life change on the heels of another monumental life change, Grace needed to have this mindset in order to survive. She not only survived, she thrived.

Grace succeeded in her coursework and believed all of the classes to be “rigorous, and ... much of the work ... meaningful” (narrative). “The courses that included writing papers for publication seemed to be the most noteworthy - there were direct implications for writing and rewriting papers,” and such courses, she felt, prepared her for a future faculty position (narrative).

Grace also had positive experiences with her assistantships. During her first year, she had a split assistantship between working with a professor and working in the practicum office. She was able to balance some of the more traditional research assistantship experiences with a practical (and familiar) opportunity to observe graduate student teachers. In later assistantships, Grace worked with professors who engaged in intense research studies in schools across the area. During one semester working with a particular professor, Grace “felt like [she] could not breathe” (interview). As she

progressed through the program, Grace gained a better understanding of what a career in academia actually entailed. Upon entering the program, she was unsure about what she wanted to do. Other members of her cohort seemed to have clear research agendas and professional goals, Grace had thought they were all there "to figure it out" along the way (interview).

Grace certainly figured it out and realized that a career as a teacher educator was appealing to her. After completing her coursework, she found that structuring her time to complete her dissertation was difficult, and, she said, "...the end of the dissertation phase was challenging, because the timeline felt like it was out of [her] hands. And, at that point, patience was dwindling" (narrative). In her narrative, Grace wrote that her greatest experience in the program was the positive impact the program had on her life's path:

> [I was able] to simultaneously work as an academic and as a mother (and a few other things....). While I created that identity for myself, I would say that BC's program fostered who I wanted to be. My babies came to meetings, faculty members celebrated their milestones (and understood when they were sick and you couldn't meet a deadline), and my classmates and I were able to codeswitch - Freire to changing diapers. This experience was the greatest because it has changed the trajectory of my life as a person, not just a person that went through the BC program. (narrative)

After the Program

In her first year out of the program, Grace held adjunct positions at two universities. She was later appointed a faculty position at a university in the northeast.

For four years, she taught, conducted research, and participated in university service. In her narrative, Grace wrote:

> All signs pointed to tenure including a successful mid-tenure review, but I was miserable. My work didn't feel really relevant; I was writing articles, supporting preservice teachers throughout their practicum experiences, working collaboratively with colleagues around accreditation, and teaching - all the things I was supposed to be doing, but everything felt really removed in terms of impact. I knew I needed to start exploring other options.

Grace made the decision to return to a public school district, near where she lives with her husband and two children, to explore the option of working on a special education administrator license, while she continued her faculty position. This experience helped her realize that she did not want to pursue an administrative license in special education; however, she did enjoy working "directly with teachers in the district, particularly around co-teaching, providing professional development and non-evaluative coaching" (narrative). Grace described being in classrooms with teachers and their students as "energizing and nostalgic."

> In a fortunate turn of events for Grace, the public school district created a position for [her] that allowed [her] to continue supporting and coaching co-teachers across the district (K-12), lead professional development, and work directly with the district's EL coordinator to better support bilingual students with disabilities (i.e., the intersection of language and disability).

Her commitment to reading achievement for all students is inspiring, and Grace played an instrumental role in the success of students across her district. One of her most impactful

achievements in that role revolves around her continued work to support bilingual students. Grace wrote:

> I've facilitated a district working group to unpack and make recommendations about how we educate, evaluate and make decisions on behalf of bilingual students and their families. From a social justice perspective, this work is essential for our public district (and our nation). Given my experiences at BC, I feel like I can really contribute to our district's conversation, and make changes that will hopefully result in more positive outcomes for bilingual students.

In the most recent school year, Grace was hired as an assistant principal in one of the elementary schools, where she will undoubtedly foster positive outcomes for her staff and students.

Maggie

"Life is about how you treat people, how you give back, how you make the world better, in whatever way you can."

I first met Maggie when she spoke as part of a panel in one of my doctoral courses—Advanced Classroom Research. She had conducted a teacher research dissertation and I felt inspired. Honestly, I felt better than I ever had in the program to that point. Here was a strong, confident woman, who had completed the program while teaching high school English, and she wrote her dissertation about the work she was doing in her own classroom. As I explained in Chapter One, my first attempt at a dissertation was in the genre of practitioner research. As you may recall, it did not go well. When I reached out to Maggie about participating in the current study, she was excited for the opportunity to share her story.

Before the program

Maggie refers to herself as an "accidental teacher." She majored in psychology and English as an undergraduate, and then pursued a Master's degree in English. The program offered teaching fellowships "to make it affordable"; despite loving teaching at the college level, it became clear that the program's "definition of 'affordable' was not [Maggie's], and the stipend and tuition remission to teach the courses would not be enough to support [herself]" (narrative). After her first year in the Master's program, she applied for teaching positions in K-12 schools, began teaching English at a private K-12 institution, and left the program.

After a few years in the classroom, Maggie felt that she could enhance her teaching if she enrolled in education courses. Rather than pursue a Master's degree in Education (M.Ed.), Maggie enrolled in a Masters of Science for Teachers (M.S.T.) program in English. There, she learned more about the theoretical underpinnings of the skills she developed while teaching at the high school and college levels. She was also encouraged by her Master's thesis advisor to consider pursuing a PhD. Her principal, at the time, also supported the idea of Maggie pursuing a PhD, despite the fact that he was in the Education Administration program at Boston College earning an EdD. In their conversation about the different programs, Maggie's principal made a comment that has stuck with her. The PhD, he said, "carried more clout" (narrative).

Ultimately, Maggie decided to apply to Boston College's Curriculum and Instruction program because, as she wrote, "I was (and continue to be) most interested in the teaching and learning that goes on in classrooms" (narrative). After attending an information session at BC, Maggie felt that perhaps her decision to apply "would be a

terrible idea" (narrative). She told the dean at the time that she planned to work while in the program and he said that the program was not set up for working teachers. "I left feeling deflated," she wrote, "as the message I took away was the program was for people stepping 'up and away' from K-12 education, and while I had an eye toward moving to higher ed once I got my degree, that was just one possibility I was imagining" (narrative).

Maggie explored other Curriculum and Instruction programs; however, there were a few things about BC that put it above other institutions. First, earning the PhD as opposed to the EdD, which was offered through other programs, was not as appealing based on the previous comments from her principal. She also reviewed the courses and class schedules—BC's cohort model appealed to Maggie's desire to join a community of learners. Lastly, Maggie admitted to being influenced by the reputation of a university such as BC. "I realized," she said, "I come from a family of educational elitists, and a private, prestigious institution like BC was more attractive" than a state school (narrative). Putting the negative information session experience behind her, Maggie applied to the program and soon after received the phone call that she had been accepted.

During the program

Maggie's experience in the program was marked by a number of personal and professional challenges. Teaching while in the program was difficult, but with more years of teaching experience than her husband, Maggie was the "breadwinner" of the family. Luckily, her school created a workable part-time position for her, by allowing her to teach a class before the school day began; it was a Journalism elective that she had created. Maggie was also the advisor for the school newspaper. Her teaching responsibilities ended before her graduate classes began. It was a hectic existence,

though. She occasionally had to lie to get out of certain assistantship tasks because she needed to be at work. A tremendous benefit, however, was the way in which her situation proved both enriching and challenging to her. According to Maggie:

> It enriched me because my experiences at the all-boys high school I was teaching at focused my research...on single-sex education (which wasn't my initial intention), and my experiences at the school ultimately shaped my dissertation, a teacher research study on gender in the all-boys English classroom. It challenged me because sometimes the research I was reading and theories I was learning simply weren't supported in my experience as a teacher; there were nights where something we discussed in class at BC was completely contradicted the next day in class at my high school. (narrative)

Maggie's experiences in various courses were mostly positive, and felt strongly that "the amount of time and energy that [certain professors] … put into their courses...was top notch" (interview). Maggie had mixed experiences, however, with her assistantships. The first one "went well on the surface," but was not particularly beneficial on either a professional or personal level. Her later assistantship (split between two women in non-faculty positions) got her engaged in work with new teachers and afforded her the opportunity to teach more courses at the college level. When her father unexpectedly died during her second year in the program, Maggie's priorities and concerns understandably shifted. While navigating the responsibilities that follow the death of a family member, Maggie tried to get through her coursework.

A pivotal moment in Maggie's life occurred at her father's funeral. She recalled:

> I knew my dad was a good guy, but the experience of his funeral highlighted for me that life is not about the degrees you earn – or where you earn them from – the awards you win, the grades you get, or all these other achievements that had previously mattered quite a bit to me, and I thought to my father as well. Life is about how you treat people, how you give back, how you make the world better, in whatever way you can.

This realization diluted the passion and drive Maggie once had for the program. She had "Incompletes" that turned to failing grades because she hadn't completed some of the work by the university-set deadline. "By that point," Maggie said, "the idea of moving to higher ed and playing the political game needed to navigate getting grants and tenure didn't appeal to me at all. … I thought about quitting the program more than a few times, but I soldiered on" (narrative).

An apt metaphor, Maggie did soldier on, and after completing her comprehensive exam, she returned to full-time teaching both out of financial necessity and because she knew she wanted to remain in a K-12 setting. Because of this, as well as her commitment to working with a long-term research team, it took Maggie longer than usual to complete her dissertation. Despite the fact that her work on this team delayed her own graduation, she felt it to be a valuable professional experience.

While she was completing her dissertation, Maggie applied and was appointed to an Assistant Principal position at her school. She found herself in an ideal situation because administrators at her school each taught one course. This "was a win-win in [her] book" (narrative).

After the program

Maggie is currently the Director of Curriculum and Instruction as well as the Diversity and Inclusion Director at an independent Catholic school in the midwest. She is in her late thirties, and is married with two children. Her children attend the school at which she currently works, so she will remain in that position while they attend. Interestingly, after I sent out the recruitment email for participants in this study, Maggie received an offer for a tenure-track Educational Leadership position at a local university. Maggie explained her decision to apply for and, ultimately, turn down this position:

> Because I missed teaching, I thought I could be an adjunct and keep a foot in the door of higher ed. When l ... noticed the full-time position, ... I applied, not thinking I would get it, but thinking it would open the door for an adjunct position. As I went through the process, it was clear higher ed was not where I wanted to be, but I saw the process through and received an offer. I turned it down for many reasons, but one of the biggest was that I would have to take a 45% paycut to accept it. That did not make financial sense for my family, and I actually was a bit insulted that a job requiring a Ph.D., would earn less than what I was making my last year of full-time teaching without a Ph.D. (narrative)

Maggie's story is interesting because something compelled her to apply for this tenure-track position, and yet she did not take it. In the next chapter, I will explore the role that money played in participants' decisions to apply to BC's Curriculum and Instruction program, as well as their decisions to return to and/or remain in K-12 settings. Maggie sees herself as a Head of School someday. In this capacity, she can use her PhD in a way that influences the teaching and learning of an entire school. Maggie's current position

allows her to do much of what she loves, including teaching a summer class, where her main goal is to teach her students self-advocacy skills. Much like her desire to help her students grow, Maggie is also empowered to help the faculty grow as she plans in-service days that include meaningful, teacher-led, professional development.

Sydney

"I can't just go back and be a professor at a research university. I've been out of the field two years. I've published nothing. I've done no research. When I began the program, I didn't understand that's how it works."

I got to know Sydney during my first year in the doctoral program. She and I both worked for well-known professors and spent a lot of time on campus. Sydney had spent a decade as a classroom teacher, was passionate about issues of social justice, and was looking for ways to make changes in our system of education that would serve all children. Recently, Sydney was offered a finalist's spot for a tenure-track position at a local university that seemed to be perfect for her—it was everything she thought she wanted during her time in the program, but she turned it down. If I were in her shoes, I'm sure I would have done the same thing.

Before the Program

When Sydney applied to the Curriculum and Instruction doctoral program, she had already accomplished quite a bit in her ten years of teaching, including earning a Master's degree and becoming a National Board Certified teacher. She was (and still is) committed to her own and others' education. Like many of us who have taught in public schools for a long time, she began to feel frustration. In her personal statement for the admissions committee, she wrote:

> While I have felt challenged by and proud of the work I have accomplished over the past decade as a classroom teacher, I have also been frustrated by the lack of school-wide improvement in the places I have taught. It is discouraging to work with many teachers who are unprepared to tackle issues of equity, or who are unaware of how to teach the diverse array of children in their classrooms. Research demonstrates that the largest controllable impact on student achievement is teachers. Therefore, teachers have the power to close the achievement gap between students of color and white students, but only if they are effectively taught to work in diverse environments. Sadly, many teachers lack what Glenn Singleton calls "the will, skill, knowledge and capacity" to erase what I consider the biggest civil rights issue of our time: inequity in education.

Sydney understands and believes in the importance and impact of teachers on student achievement. Her commitment to social justice education began even before she knew she wanted to be a teacher. During her senior year of college, Sydney took a sociology course titled, "Education and Inequality." When she learned about social reproduction theory, she felt "incensed" and "horrified" at the treatment of poor students compared to their wealthier counterparts. These feelings precipitated a number of moves on her part. She wrote:

> I decided to become a teacher to interrupt that cycle. I actively sought out people and organizations working to bring equity to our schools. Immediately following graduation, I worked for an organization called Partners in School Innovation. Teams of recent college graduates helped teachers in high-poverty schools conduct action research to improve student achievement and close the

> achievement gap. It was so exciting: reading and discussing books and articles about race and ethnicity, using data to find solutions to problems, analyzing classrooms that didn't serve children well and learning from others that were highly effective.

Sydney essentially was doing what she set out to—and it sounds a lot like the work doctoral students do.

Sydney's most influential educational experience may have been in her teacher education program, a Master's in Education program, which she enrolled in three years after graduating from college. While there, she "realized how amazing [she] thought teacher educators were" and thought that she might enjoy teaching teachers one day. Over the next nine years, Sydney taught classes and took on teacher leadership roles at various schools—a large, urban high school that was split into small learning communities; a new Pilot school in an urban community; a school in a small city with a rapidly growing immigrant and refugee population—and "felt so grateful for [her] teacher preparation." She realized that what she had experienced in her own teacher education program was "rare" and that many of her colleagues did not have the same knowledge, skills, or empathy to teach in a socially just way (personal statement).

Sydney reported feeling "like [she] couldn't make a really big difference [outside of her] classroom," and she had strong beliefs about how we should educate our students. She referred back to her frustration with colleagues when she said, "I was frustrated by…[the] lack of engagement, the lack of curiosity, and the lack of wanting to improve a lot that surrounded me...at my school." Sydney was "tired of teaching" (interview). Considering her experience in her teacher education program, Sydney realized that

"teacher educators need PhDs…" and she believed herself to be at a point in her career and her personal life where it "made sense" for her to apply to doctoral programs (narrative).

Sydney saw her future planned out "in two ten year chunks or fifteen year chunks," believing that "at some point [she would] be a school leader, [and] at some point [she would] be a teacher educator" (interview). She applied to various schools in the Boston area and chose Boston College because of its location and its reputation as a top ten school of education.

During the Program

During her time in the program, Sydney established herself as one of the most respected doctoral candidates. She was the graduate assistant of one of the most well-known professors on campus. Between her coursework and her "intense" (my word, not hers) assistantship, Sydney took part in a variety of experiences that would prepare her for any job she desired upon graduation.

Sydney described her time in the program as being both enjoyable and "depressing." During our interview, she recalled a memory she had of one of the first conferences she attended. She said:

> I was thinking about the first time I went to AERA, and ... I just remember arriving and seeing 10,000 people all in the same place. They're talking about schools and teaching and learning and [I felt] so sick to my stomach because I was a ... I was an engaged teacher leader. I read a lot of things and I did a lot of things. I went to a lot of conferences and I went to tons of learning experiences, [I

> earned] ridiculous amounts of graduate credits ... and I didn't even know that AERA existed. (interview)

Sydney spoke much about the disconnect she felt in the program, a disconnect from K-12 schools, as well as a disconnect from other people. One of the most challenging aspects of the program, which I will explore in the next chapter, is, what Sydney described as, "the isolation of doing data analysis and writing alone" (narrative). She loved the social aspects of the program. The professor for whom she worked was "brilliant," and the people within her cohort shared her passion for education. Teaching undergraduate and graduate classes at Boston College and another local university "was another amazing part" of the program (narrative).

Sydney describes herself as "pretty optimistic in general" and said that she "learned something in virtually every class [she] took. Some more than others . . . some were frustrating, like stats, because it didn't seem to apply realistically at all to what [she] needed to know, and others were so inspiring and made [her] feel so grateful to be learning again" (narrative). The gratitude Sydney felt about learning again is an emotion that many of us felt in the program. It is perhaps one of the contributing factors that led us back to K-12 schools.

After the Program

By the time she graduated, it was abundantly clear that Sydney was not going to move away from her home; besides, "there were no jobs in the area" (interview). She reported feeling "glad" about this fact because she was not convinced that she wanted to pursue a career in academia. She expressed a feeling that, I believe, many doctoral graduates feel: "I felt like I should do it [go for a tenure-track position] because I had

worked so hard and because I had put my family through so much and because why do I have this PhD if I'm not gonna do something with it?" (interview).

Luckily (or not, depending on how you look at it), Sydney had no job prospects for professorships. She applied for an assistant principal position at a middle school. In our interview, she told me, "That first year, being out of BC and being an AP, I worked a lot. But I was happy going to work like 99 out of 100 days. It was sort of shocking to me how much one could like doing their job." Then, she found out about a teacher educator position at a local university, which has a well-respected teacher education program. Sydney's first response…"Oh, fuck." And I get it! Sydney truly believed that it was the job she was "supposed to do" (interview).

Sydney felt torn about whether or not she should apply to this position. She loved her current job, but also had a strong relationship with the faculty at the local university. The position felt tailored to her, and on the advice of a family member, Sydney wrote her cover letter.

After the initial round of interviews, Sydney was informed that she was a "backup finalist," and would be moved up to the list of actual finalists if another candidate dropped out. "I was so relieved," Sydney told me, "that I didn't have to tell them that I didn't want to do it or whatever [my reason] was going be" (interview). This sense of relief, however, did not last long. When one of the finalists dropped out, Sydney had to make the decision to inform the hiring committee that she did not want the job. She would not be moving forward in the process.

Sydney told me that she pretended it was about the money, that she could not afford to live off of the salary they would offer. More than anything, though, she said, "it

was that I really liked my job" (interview). Sydney is happy in her current position (as the interim principal), but she shared her dream of running a professional development school. She believes that her "later life will include...a partnership with a university." Sydney said she doesn't think she needs a PhD or to be a tenure track professor to make that happen; however, she feels glad that she has one so that she has the credentials to truly partner with a university. Sydney summed up her narrative with the joy she finds in her current position: "I'm super engaged and in the real day to day of it, and it's so satisfying. I get to DO the things I researched and read about for five years!"

Stephen

"For now, I am pretty happy doing what I am doing and just relieved not to have to worry about graduate school anymore."

Stephen and I shared an office space during our time together in the doctoral program. We even shared a hotel room at a conference. (Our spouses were fine with it!) Stephen did not spend much time in our office, as I learned later, because he had a number of responsibilities outside of the program. We would chat before and after evening classes, and share stories about the professor for whom we worked. We had vastly different experiences with this particular professor, and yet we both walked away having learned something about ourselves and our positionality in relation to institutions of higher education. When I asked Stephen about why he decided to pursue a PhD he said:

> I was just looking for some sort of meaning in my career. ... I think I was immature professionally, still probably am that way, and was just looking. What's something else I could do to really push myself that would be different? Maybe

> something will come out of it that will be amazing. I mean, [in terms of] applying, ... I like the fact that I had a technology background, like a professional technology background, before I became a teacher, and then I was a teacher, and then I used the technology in education. So I felt like that was kind of an interesting angle to come at, that there was a story to be told from my experience and that might be valuable to them.

Before the program

Stephen did not begin his professional life in education. He worked in politics, helped run an internet startup, worked for a consulting company, and then became a social studies teacher. His decision to become a teacher, he said, was influenced by his mother, who was a special educator. Stephen worked for more than ten years at the middle and high school levels as a social studies teacher and then as a technology integration specialist. He also served one year as chief academic officer at a private boarding school for international students.

The thought to pursue a doctorate lingered in Stephen's mind as something he "wanted to try" (interview). For five years, he considered this option, while the responsibilities of adult life—jobs, home, and children—prevented him from fully committing to the idea of going back to school. With his experience as a teacher, administrator, and technology integration specialist, Stephen wrote in his personal statement: "I realized that I wanted to continue on a path of examining school leadership, curriculum development, and technology integration. I also became increasingly aware of the level of inequality that exists in the American system of public education." This sense

of urgency, of seeing a problem and wanting to do something about it, is apparent across many of the personal statements I read for this study.

Stephen articulated his plans for the future in his statement and did not indicate a desire to pursue a faculty position at a research university. He wrote that he hoped "to use [his] doctoral experience to complete research on how student learning can best be supported by technology." He also expressed an interest in "further develop[ing] the idea that technology can serve as a great equalizer." Ultimately, he indicated his wish "to seek district-level leadership positions focused on curriculum, instruction, and technology, post graduation." When he considered where he might be ten years from his admission to the program, Stephen said:

> I would like to be leading a school system focused on using technology to improve and equalize K-12 public education. I do think that the Superintendent of the future will need to have expertise in the potential benefits for technology in K-12 education.

In his written narrative, Stephen did indicate having "dreams of professorships," despite taking "comfort with the idea of being back in the classroom." The doctorate seemed to be a way for Stephen to ask more of himself, "to discover some new source of passion" in his career. He applied to a number of programs in the area; however, Boston College was the only one that offered complete tuition coverage. Money played a significant role in Stephen's decision to attend Boston College. He indicated that any other program with any other financial structure would have rendered completion impossible. This seemed to be the perfect situation.

During the program

Stephen's first doctoral course was with his advisor on the topic of Universal Design for Learning. This experience was a powerful one, as he wrote, "It was everything I wanted from courses there. [The professor] was passionate and engaging and the topic was new to me – and seemed to make sense as an element of K-12 that was missing from my experience in the past" (narrative). This course was a highlight for Stephen because there was a clear emphasis on "real world experience" (interview). The readings and assignments were manageable and he felt as though his experience was valued and validated in the class because the professor was working in schools. While he was happy to engage in the intellectual challenges of other courses, he felt they were too theoretical. He recalled, "Many of the courses I took in the rest of the program followed this same pattern: intellectual challenge, frustration with the theoretical nature of the content, exhaustion with the workload" (narrative).

A unique aspect about Stephen's experience in the program is that he worked full-time while taking on the full-time course load and assistantship within the department. Looking back, Stephen thinks he would not have been accepted if people knew that he planned to work full-time while in the program. It is my understanding that doctoral students are no longer permitted to do this. It all seemed to work out for Stephen, though. He used the word "lucky" multiple times to describe his assistantship with a well-known professor at the university. Stephen's assistantship experience differed vastly from other doctoral students, mainly in that his was not ruled by the clock. They did not sit down for weekly meetings or have a schedule of daily tasks. In fact, his professor kept strange hours and it wouldn't be out of the ordinary to get an email at 2:00 in the morning

requesting information about something. This particular professor "also had a burgeoning interest in technology and in social media," so Stephen "was able to serve the role of tech tutor" (narrative).

When Stephen successfully defended his dissertation, more than anything he felt "relief." He met some challenges with his dissertation committee and had to make significant edits. There was nothing particularly "typical" about Stephen's experience in the doctoral program, which I believe contributed to this sense of relief—this sense of wanting to walk off campus and never set foot on it again. I did see him step foot on the campus again, though, at his robing ceremony. He looked very happy.

After the program

There are numerous factors that contribute to one's decision to pursue a particular career. Stephen learned much about himself and the reality of life as a research professor during his time in the program. He summed up this understanding during our interview:

> I think I've learned that I don't really mesh well with what being a research professor is all about. I don't like reading long, complicated studies about education. I like being in classrooms and schools and playing with cool technology. I don't think I'm very good at writing in the way that they need you to write, which is very sophisticated and ordered and step by step. I don't know if that's because I've been in education and I write for my audience, which are students, so it tends to be simplified and short. I write PowerPoint slides very well, like 15 words. Or maybe it was being stretched thin. But yeah, I don't see my skill set as matching with that. Then even if I did decide to try for it, just the practical part of being a professor where you have no job guarantee, where the

> salary would be lower than what I make now, then all the stress of that, with still raising children ... All those things together don't make sense. But I think the bigger thing is just that it just doesn't match me. It's just not the right fit.

Stephen seems to have found the right fit for the time being. He is married, has two children, and is a city councilor (and chair of the city council's education subcommittee). He continues to be happy in his current position as a technology integration specialist, and especially loves working with students to make digital projects, such as green screen videos, podcasts, and websites. His school is also in the planning stage of redesigning the library into "a Global Creator Space—an environment where students can turn their interests into digital creations independently" (e-mail communication).

I know, more than anything, Stephen is glad to be done with the program, but he appreciates what he learned about himself and the world around him. He accomplished something great and uses the skills he's acquired in all aspects of his life. Most importantly for any technology guru, earning this degree gave him "one more chance to toot [his] own horn on Facebook" (interview).

Henry

"I was told even after my dissertation, it is a true waste of talent...to not become a professor..."

If it were not for Henry, I would not be teaching where I am now. I am grateful that I met him, and even more grateful that I get to teach with him every day. We provide each other with ideas for lessons and assessments, and challenge each other to push our ideas further than we imagined they could go. If any one of my participants seemed

destined to become a professor at a Research I university, it was Henry. He is the quintessential intellectual with the demeanor of a literature professor. I can easily picture him wearing a blazer with suede elbow patches, standing at a podium, reciting a quote from *The Great Gatsby* or *Heart of Darkness*, then leading a discussion about a postcolonial interpretation of the texts. I feel compelled to tell you that Henry does not wear a blazer to work, but I often hear him leading class discussions from the podium in his classroom.

Before the Program

Henry attended a private Christian high school, and, later, a liberal arts college where he earned an undergraduate degree in English. During his time in an English master's program, he was encouraged to pursue a PhD in comparative literature, but reconsidered that route. Although it seemed like "a pleasant existence," mentors in Henry's life candidly told him of the competitive nature of academia, more specifically how "cutthroat" it was to try and earn a tenured position at an institution like the one from which Henry graduated. In his interview, Henry told me that one of his former professors said, "...if your interest is to go into a classroom and sit around a seminar table and have interesting discussions and read good books, you should just go to an elite prep school ... it'll be better than doing it here" (interview). The life of a literature professor was not exactly what Henry had expected or envisioned. He realized that he was "working towards the classic stereotype of an elitist profesor in an ivory tower" and "wasn't really sure how working towards a literature degree or becoming a literature professor was going to do much good in the world" (narrative).

During his master's program, Henry taught English at a private high school; there he realized that a degree in education would be "a natural fit, as [he] envisioned the education professor as having more of a grounded role in shaping real lives, policy, programs, and systems" (narrative). Driven by what he called "an academic curiosity," Henry ultimately decided to apply to doctoral programs in Curriculum and Instruction. The decision, he said, was influenced by "a combination of two factors: the practicality of finding something that fit within the complicated situation of [his] life at the time and the desire to accomplish this vague idea [he] had had for a long time about becoming a professional academic" (narrative).

Henry's experience teaching in independent school settings significantly impacted his educational philosophy. In his personal statement from his application to Boston College's doctoral program, he focused primarily on the subject of social justice and socially responsible teaching. His commitment to being a socially just educator and instilling a sense of social responsibility in his students is clear. In the opening paragraph, he wrote:

> The social-minded educator treats each student equitably while simultaneously recognizing their individuality. In order to serve the social and educational needs of students, the just educator continually revisits disciplinary policy, grading policy and curricular decisions to ensure fairness. The social justice-minded educator hopes to create an environment that reduces marginalization and hierarchies, so all students can equally participate in the act of learning. Furthermore, I believe educators (teachers, administrators, and policy makers) should directly address pressing issues of social justice.

When considering the work he saw himself doing someday, Henry wrote, "Ultimately, as a professor, I hope to partner with local school communities, helping novice teachers create socially responsible curriculum and design progressive school reforms" (personal statement). He specifically expressed interest in conducting research in predominantly white schools, "in communities where a natural egress toward social or civic engagement may not exist" (personal statement). Henry seemed destined for academia—he had the encouragement of mentors, the academic capabilities, and the desire.

During the Program

Henry described his experience in the doctoral program as being "shaped by...two pressures: balancing a need to be a real person, maintain health insurance, and make enough money to feed my family, with the desire to achieve a long term goal, do some useful work for others, and enjoy my own work" (narrative). Henry did enjoy his time in the doctoral program because he got to do what he loves—teach. In fact, he taught seven different courses during his time at BC, which is a shockingly high number when compared to the experiences of other doctoral students who typically teach no more than two different courses in their time. As a teaching fellow, Henry was extremely successful. He recalled, "I think I demonstrated competency, so I referred to myself by the end as like the substitute teacher in residence, like someone would take a sabbatical and I would take over their classes…" (interview). The problem with this, he found, was that "if you're a good teacher, and you have teaching experience, that means that you are then asked to teach more classes, which means you now have less time to do your research. You are not developing the skill that's marketable" (interview). The "skill" to which Henry is referring is that of research. He recognized that "large scale research project[s]"

were valued in the program; however, that type of work "requires...more scheduling, travel, and more publications"—work that becomes more difficult when one has a heavy teaching load and a complex family situation.

Henry had a slightly negative view of the courses he took as a student at BC, claiming that the "A's and smiley faces" he got on papers as the only comments did not serve him well. As he stated numerous times in his interview, teaching classes to undergraduate and graduate students has "zero return" for one's career in academia. As a result of his experience in the program, and his choice to commit himself to teaching courses and getting through the program, Henry did not feel the desire to pursue a career as a professor. In his written narrative, Henry said that he "envisioned the education professor as having more of a grounded role in shaping real lives, policy, programs, and systems." During our interview, I asked him if his experience at BC reinforced this notion or not. He replied:

> No, I think that's a reason why I'm not going to stay and pursue a professorship out of the program, 'cause it did not feel like that was actually the case, that if the goal was to have some type of real-world impact on the ground, teaching 120 students in an actual high school classroom each year would have much more impact than whatever we would be doing giving lectures and writing a crappy book.

Henry had no intention of pursuing a professorship out of the program, and yet, he received clear messages from certain professors that it would be a "waste" for him to go back to teaching high school English. One of the members of his dissertation committee wanted him to rework his dissertation into publishable papers. Henry wanted nothing to

do with that. He cares deeply about issues of social justice and felt that the focus of his dissertation was extremely narrow, that very few people would care about it, let alone understand it. (This is a common theme that I will explore in the next chapter.) Henry continually asked himself, “What could come of this?” In order to complete his dissertation, he slept away from home four to five nights a week. There were too many demands put on him at home and he recognized how focused he needed to be in order to complete the dissertation. And what did he realize? “By the end I was like, this is not gonna be my life” (interview).

Henry told me that he did not feel any tension or pressure from others regarding his decision to return to the classroom. He is self-assured and not worried about what people think—one of the things I admire most about him. During our interview he acknowledged the negative tone of many of his stories, and wanted to clarify something for me. Ultimately, Henry saw how many great things were happening in schools and felt a pull to go back to the classroom. “Right, so it's not just a negative being driven out of academia,” he said. “It's sort of a pull to come back to something which you really enjoy doing.”

After the Program

Henry currently teaches 11th and 12th grade English at a suburban, predominantly white high school. He is in his late thirties, and is married with two children and a dog at home.

Henry tells me he is glad to be back teaching high school English because “you can take a little bit more of a long view, change five percent next year, and five percent the year after that... maintain your sanity and get better over time instead of feeling like it

just has to happen instantaneously" (interview). The life of a professor bears a greater sense of urgency when it comes to adapting to institutional needs. Henry articulately reflected on the appeal of being an English professor and said:

> Why does that sound so appealing? Because you think you have all this autonomy, but then once you get into it, you have very little autonomy. It's only the well-known, powerful people that have that autonomy and everyone else is a slave to the institution and the grant writing cycle and everything else. If you're in a decent public high school, you have way more autonomy.

When we talked about plans for the future and the possibility of becoming a professor someday, I could not tell if Henry's tone was bitter, resentful, or completely unaffected. He explained that he might have to do it through some backdoor channels—get an administrative job, one that would afford him time to write—though he would have to conduct new and more innovative research. In the future, Henry can see himself creating his own position within his current school that is focused on research that could be conducted within his building. "There is just so much that could be done here," he said, "simply within our [English] department. If there were some better numbers, then I think people would respond to them. … [N]o one here is going to develop their own teacher research initiative and follow through. No one has the time." He's right. We don't.

Although it is likely inevitable, I hope that Henry does not leave the classroom anytime soon. He and I share lesson ideas and engage in honest and meaningful conversations about issues that are important to us. Most importantly, his cynicism is refreshing.

Charles

"I said, I know I can do the work, [but]…it's going to change my life for the next six years or so. So, that was kind of my epiphany, I knew I'd regret it if I didn't, and it's something I always wanted to do, so I said, 'I'll do it.'"

There are a number of details that contribute to Charles's status as the outlier of the study's participants. He is a high school history teacher with more than thirty years of classroom experience. He is beloved by students and staff, and has established himself as the foremost expert on the history of the city in which he lives and teaches. His favorite topic to cover in his local history class is industrialization of his city in the 19th century. Charles has devoted his life to education. At the age of fifty-one, he made a bold choice and decided to apply to a doctoral program in Curriculum and Instruction.

Before the Program

Charles completed his undergraduate degree at Boston College and began teaching upon graduation. He coached various sports over the years, and even became involved with city politics. Charles established himself as one of the pillars of his community, within and beyond the high school classroom. At the request of a friend, he began supervising student teachers from BC and became friendly with the faculty and staff within the Teacher Education department. Being on the college campus again may have inspired Charles to consider another step in his own education. As one of the most passionate and knowledgeable teachers in the study of history, Charles intended to apply to a PhD program in History at BC, but the department chair was straightforward about the fact that Charles would have to leave his teaching position in order to attend the

program full-time because he would be expected to teach undergraduate classes. That would not work for Charles.

He carefully considered his options and realized that he could apply to the Curriculum and Instruction doctoral program and gear his work toward the teaching of history. It seemed like a win-win. He submitted his application and recalls receiving an envelope from BC months later: "When I opened the envelope confirming my admission to the doctoral program in Curriculum and Instruction, I felt like a high school student again. There was only one problem - I was rejected by the admissions office" (narrative).

Charles was disappointed by the rejection and turned to his friends and mentors in the Teacher Education department to discuss his potential for reapplying for admission to the PhD program. It would be difficult to take advanced doctoral level classes, while simultaneously teaching history full-time. One professor offered him some advice: "[She] suggested that I consider enrolling in ED 709 (Research on Teaching) for the fall semester. She explained that it was an intensive course requiring a great deal of reading and completion of a major paper. [She] felt that taking this course would give me a good idea of the work involved in the doctoral program" (narrative).

The course, Charles said, "*was* intensive." He spent his weekends tackling the high volume of reading, he participated in Monday evening study groups, and he attended Tuesday evening's class, which were all "devoted to analysis, discussion, and debate." All the while, his teaching responsibilities continued unabated. There were lessons to prepare, papers to correct, and recommendations to write. When he began the course in September, Charles feared that the workload would detract from his teaching; however, as the weeks passed, he discovered that the reverse was true. He wrote:

> My class at Boston College actually enhanced my teaching, making me more reflective of my practice and increasing my interest in the art of effective teaching. Similarly, my classroom teaching at…[the high school] complimented my class work at Boston College. As a full time secondary school teacher, I was able to approach the material from a slightly different perspective than other members of the class. (personal statement)

Charles wrote about his experience in this course in his personal statement for his reapplication to the doctoral program. He wrote:

> My experiences in ED 709 taught me a great deal. For the first time, I was exposed to the fascinating world of educational research. Words that once drifted on the distant edge of my consciousness, such as paradigms, qualitative, quantitative, and ethnographic, were now part of my working vocabulary. Also, I looked forward to Tuesday evening's class. I found the discussions and debates to be challenging and intellectually stimulating. Class sessions were an opportunity to consider new ideas and interact with a fascinating group of people who shared an interest in the primacy of education.

He truly loved every minute of this new educational experience and decided to take more doctoral level courses before officially applying to the program again. He established strong relationships with these professors, two of whom would be members of his dissertation committee.

Charles was the only member of these classes who was labeled a "special student," one who was not pursuing an advanced degree. After another successful semester (earning As in both doctoral level courses he took), Charles faced a decision. "It

was now or never," he said. "I couldn't forever remain a 'special student.' I decided to re-apply" (narrative).

During the Program

Charles was accepted into the program and over the course of five years, he took one course in the fall, one course in the spring, and two courses during the summer session. He had the most positive overall experience in the program compared to every other participant in this study. He continued to take courses with the professors he had known from his year as a "non-degree student," especially those who considered themselves educational historians.

In his written narrative, as well as his interview, Charles named virtually every professor he encountered at BC and praised his experiences with them. He loved his coursework; however, there was one class that concerned him—statistics. In his narrative, Charles recounted his experience in stats, and discussed the sacrifices he made in order to succeed:

> Before taking a full year of Ph.D. stats, my previous math class had been [in high school] in 1971-1972. I gave up coaching basketball...so I could devote all of my energy to doing well in stats. I was fortunate to have two excellent professors. In addition to the actual classes, I would head over to BC once a week (sometimes more) to meet with the T.A.s. The T.A.s were not much older than the [high school] students I was teaching, but they were an enormous help. Taking statistics was my greatest challenge in the program. With other classes, I was always confident in my ability to do well. I love to read, and I love to write. However, stats is a whole different way of looking at things. For me, it was like learning a

foreign language. I did well in stats, but it required an unbelievable amount of time and effort. (narrative)

Charles continued to offer a real world perspective in his BC classes as a result of his teaching, and he managed to connect virtually every paper he wrote with education in his hometown. A few years into the program, Charles submitted a paper to the *History of Education Quarterly* as a co-author with a professor. Initially, it was rejected, but they took the reviews, completely restructured the paper, and submitted it to *The Massachusetts Historical Review*, a major publication in the field of history, where it was accepted. The research Charles conducted for that article formed the basis of his dissertation.

One other significant factor that distinguishes Charles from the other participants in this study is the following statement Charles provided in his narrative: "I enjoyed writing my dissertation." [Pause for laughter.] The way he described conducting research is nothing short of poetic:

> I spent one summer at the Baker Library (Harvard) closely examining the hand-written records of the Boston Manufacturing Company (going back to 1813). Oftentimes, I would spend the whole day researching my topic, and find nothing of value. On other occasions, I would strike it rich, unearthing evidence in support of my argument. I spent another summer at the Massachusetts Historical Society in Boston, examining the handwritten papers of Francis Cabot Lowell, Patrick Jackson, and Nathan Appleton. During the school year, I went to the public library and read through copies of the local newspapers from the 1850s and 1860s. (narrative)

During our interview, however, I got Charles to admit that the amount of time and quantity of reading it took to complete his dissertation did cause some negative (if I can get away with classifying them as such) feelings. He told me, "I remember dreaming about, you know, things, I just couldn't get it out of my head, I was just obsessed with having this done right, and getting it done, and you know, I was lucky, I had a really good committee" (interview).

After the Program

Charles always intended to remain in teaching. That did not stop people at BC as well as his high school from asking him if he would be leaving to teach in college. During and after his time in the doctoral program, Charles taught history methods courses at BC. While he has no intention of changing schools, Charles took some time to talk through his "dream job" with me. It would be a U.S. History course for Education majors. Every student would be planning to teach history. After learning about a particular topic or time period in U.S. history, students would attend a seminar that allowed them to plan how they would teach the content to high school students.

Earning a PhD was an intellectual exercise for Charles. He did not intend to move up and away from K-12 teaching or "advance" to an administrative role; he wanted to be a better teacher. Charles very eloquently expressed how I felt once I was back in the classroom. He said, "I was a stronger student because I was a teacher, and I was a stronger teacher because I was a student. I don't even know how… [but] it improved my outlook...on teaching" (interview). That's what draws us in—this desire, not necessarily to be the best, but to be better.

Summary

In this chapter, I "restoryed" the journeys of the six practitioners from their application to the doctoral program to the present day. I am grateful to the participants who shared their stories with me, and in the next chapter, I outline the major findings of the study based on the data they provided.

CHAPTER FIVE

FINDINGS: "NOBODY'S GONNA READ IT ANYWAY"

"If circumstances lead me, I will find / Where truth is hid, though it were hid, indeed, / Within the center..." (Hamlet, 2.2.170-171)

Introduction

In the last chapter, I created profiles of the six doctoral graduates from Boston College's Curriculum and Instruction program. They shared their stories through a variety of data: personal statements they submitted with their applications to the program; written narratives in response to questions I provided; and one-on-one, semi-structured interviews about their experiences leading up to, during, and beyond the program.

This chapter articulates the major findings of the study, using the research questions as a framework to present the findings, and provides a brief explanation of the genesis of each question. I then highlight a number of themes, intended to summarize some of the key findings within participants' experiences during different phases of their lives within and beyond the program. The findings address the primary purposes of this research study: to explore doctoral graduates' decisions to return to K-12 settings instead of pursuing careers in academia, as well as to identify similarities and differences among their experiences within the same doctoral program for further analysis.

RQ1: Why do practitioners who earn doctorates at a Research 1 university return to K-12 settings?

As I have explained earlier in this study, this first research question arose from my personal experiences in the doctoral program. I sought to discover the reasons why I (and others) chose to pursue a PhD and work in K-12 settings. While no two people have

quite the same experience, many of the participants in the study expressed similar reasons for returning to K-12 settings prior to or upon completion of the doctoral program. Two of the three teachers in the study returned to the classroom before completing the program (Henry and I), while three other participants remained working either part-time or full-time in schools throughout the program (Maggie, Stephen, and Charles). The remaining two participants sought employment upon completion of the program, ultimately ending up in administrative roles in public schools (Sydney and Grace). As with any major life decision, a variety of reasons contributed to this career choice. One of the major factors that played a role in all of our experiences was money. From the decision to begin the doctoral program, to the consideration of our career choices, the financial implications of pursuing a PhD were substantial.

Theme 1: Financial Implications

Theme 1a: The appeal of the program's funding structure. Participants chose this particular program because of its financial resources and support; however, they returned to or remained in K-12 settings because the K-12 context offered greater financial security. Each of the participants in the study spoke about money. It impacted their decisions to apply and accept admission to this program over others in the area because it offered 100% of the funding. In both his written narrative and his interview Stephen referred to his decision to attend this doctoral program as a "no brainer." The structure of the program allows doctoral students to work 20 hours per week, for which they earn a stipend. Students also receive tuition remission for three classes per semester. Stephen admitted that "the reason [he] ended up going with the C&I[10] program in BC was that the funding was 100% and other programs that probably were a better fit were

[10] Short for "Curriculum & Instruction"

going to require some out-of-pocket expenses." He continued, "I knew it was a great school and renowned. It seemed amazing that they would provide a system where I could do the whole program for free" (interview). Henry shared a similar appreciation for the funding structure because it allowed him to take courses for free, earn a little money, and have the freedom to work other side jobs to make ends meet.

Charles also completed the program for free, but through different means. He remained in the classroom during his time in the program and was able to acquire vouchers to take courses at BC because of the fact that he was a practicum supervisor and cooperating teacher of teacher education candidates. Each classroom teacher that hosts a student teacher earns a free course at the university. During our interview Charles asked me how much students spend to take a course at BC. When I told him that it cost nearly $5,000, he replied, "That's a huge amount of money to put out. And I was lucky, I just got vouchers for everything….I think I got every one of my Master's courses and PhD courses...I don't think I paid for a single one" (interview). As I noted in Chapter Four, Stephen, Charles, and Maggie all worked full-time while they pursued the degree. Teachers in the state of Massachusetts do get some tuition remission for graduate courses they might choose to take; however, in many (if not all) districts, this remission would not cover a one-credit course at Boston College.

Theme 1b: The effects of the program's funding structure. Grace and Maggie spoke about the appeal of the funding structure at BC; however, both women were married with children and recognized the impact that such a salary cut would have on their families. The stipend for working 20 hours per week was approximately $17,000 a year. We were paid once a month from September through December and February

through May. Maggie reflected on the time when she was considering applying to BC's program:

> Now, it's worth noting here that my husband was a career-changer teacher, which means that he was on the lower end of the salary scale, having just a couple years of experience. At this point, we had two kids (ages 4 and 2) and a mortgage. Seven years of experience with a Master's made me the "breadwinner" of our family, and I also had the better health insurance, so leaving my job to be a doc student simply didn't compute, even with the assistantship. (narrative)

Participants did not make the decision to attend this program lightly. Maggie chose to remain in her position as an English teacher because her family could not afford it otherwise. I remember having many conversations with my husband (fiance at the time) about the feasibility of our living off of primarily his salary. He worked two other jobs (aside from his guidance counselor position at a nearby high school), and I began tutoring to make extra money. We put most of our expenses on credit cards, and by the time I began teaching again, we had acquired significant debt.

Grace spent much of our conversation during the interview discussing money, even reminding me at times not to forget to return to the topic. She told me that when she graduated, she had $100,000 of debt because she and her husband had taken out a $20,000 loan each year she was in the program. She did not understand the "fiscal implications" of completing the program only to earn "an initial $60,000 salary[11] working for a university" upon graduation (interview). Currently, Grace is "functioning under a

[11] Based on my conversations with other graduates who have gone to work in higher education, this number falls on the high end of the scale for first year professors.

10-year forgiveness plan," with the hope that after making 120 payments toward her loans, the remainder will be "forgiven."

I will explore the misconceptions participants had about working at a university later in this chapter; however, the reality of our financial needs set in at different points for different people. Henry described his experience in the program as being "shaped by...two pressures: balancing a need to be a real person, maintain health insurance, and make enough money to feed [his] family...with the desire to achieve a long term goal, do some useful work for others, and enjoy [his] own work" (narrative). The financial reality for Henry was quite profound. He recalled:

> I think I knew by the end of my first year that I wasn't going to get a tenure track position after graduation. Starting my first semester, I had to work 30 hours of an assistantship every term as well as additional outside tutoring hours and other contract jobs just to make ends meet at home. (narrative)

What seems to be "baked into the system at this point," according to Henry," is "that basically you have to be wealthy to be able to have the support to take four or five years off to be 'all-in' in the world of academia" (interview). Without the financial security to attend the program and commit fully to its demands, it seemed impossible to achieve the expectations of the program.

Theme 1c: The reality of the salary differences between academia and K-12. While every participant spoke of the difference in salaries between working at a university and in public schools, three of the six participants worked in, or could have worked in, tenure-track positions. Grace's first job post-graduation was at a university in a tenure-track position, but she left to return to an administrative position in a public

school because of her own personal satisfaction with the job (which I will discuss in the next section). In her narrative, Maggie described an opportunity to accept a tenure-track position at a university located within five minutes of her current job:

> Interestingly, after you put out the call for these narratives, I received an offer for a tenure-track Educational Leadership position at [a local university]. Because I missed teaching, I thought I could be an adjunct and keep a foot in the door of higher ed. When looking at [the university's] site (which is 5 minutes from my school), I noticed the full-time position. I applied, not thinking I would get it, but thinking it would open the door for an adjunct position. As I went through the process, it was clear higher ed was not where I wanted to be, but I saw the process through and received an offer. I turned it down for many reasons, but one of the biggest was that I would have to take a 45% paycut to accept it. That did not make financial sense for my family, and I actually was a bit insulted that a job requiring a Ph.D. would make less than what I was making my last year of full-time teaching without a Ph.D. (narrative)

Sydney was offered an opportunity to be a finalist for a teacher education position at a university not far from her home. Instead of continuing with the interview process after the first round, Sydney declined the opportunity. She later spoke to the director of that particular university's program and said, "I'm so sorry, this is such an amazing opportunity. I'm so flattered. I ran the numbers and I can't live on that" (interview). Later Sydney told me it would have been a $30,000 pay cut. "I can't…" she said, "that doesn't make any sense. But if it were my dream job, would I have figured it out?" (interview). This willingness, or unwillingness, to earn less was a struggle we all faced.

Stephen, who had been working in a K-12 setting throughout his time in the program, decided to remain in his school. In his written narrative, he explained why he ultimately decided to remain in a K-12 setting:

> I just didn't feel like I had any other option. I don't have the publications to be a serious applicant for a tenure track professorship here in the Boston area and we are not moving. In addition, as a public school technology integration specialist with ~15 years in the system, my salary is very respectable and there would be no way to match it in anything other than a top flight professorship. Also, I have tenure in my current school district and a virtual guaranteed job here. With two kids, it is hard to give up that security. (narrative)

The same pressure to remain in K-12 affected Henry's decision. In his case, he is the single earner in his family and truly valued "the security of having a job with a steady paycheck and health insurance" (interview). The PhD, despite what many people may assume, does not automatically guarantee graduates a position in higher education. There are thousands of PhDs awarded each year and not nearly enough positions to accommodate all graduates. For example, Charles spoke of an acquaintance who was an adjunct professor teaching "four or five classes at different colleges, trying to piece them together, without healthcare," who "might make $30,000 killing [himself]" (interview). This is not the image that many people (including the participants in this study) understood to be a potential outcome after earning a PhD.

Many of us acknowledge that we, in fact, did not want to "kill" ourselves trying to make it in the world of academia. I was working harder in the program than I ever had as a high school teacher to earn significantly less money. In a recent conversation with a

friend who is a tenure-track professor, I revealed that I had no plans to leave teaching high school English partly because once I graduate with my PhD, I will soon earn over $100,000. It would take me years of working my way up in the ivory tower to earn that as a professor, and I do not believe I would be as happy as I am now.

Theme 2: Commitment to and Passion for Public Education

Theme 2a: The push to "leave." In their personal statements, many of the participants expressed a moral obligation to continue their own education in order to enhance the education of others. It is important to acknowledge this as one of the reasons many of us applied to BC's doctoral program in the first place. By sharing their personal statements with me, participants offered a glimpse into some of their most honest feelings from a time before they entered the doctoral program—a time during which they espoused deep passion for their work with students and a desire to extend the impact of this passion beyond their current contexts. It is not surprising to find a commitment to and passion for public education among a group of classroom teachers who applied to a doctoral program in Curriculum and Instruction.

Our personal statements reflected what we loved as well as what we hoped to achieve in the future. Grace listed her many activities, jobs, and accomplishments that have resulted in bettering others' lives. She wrote, "I made house calls, coached swimming and listened to kids talk about life outside of school—drive-by's, drugs, hunger and despair. Every teacher should teach at least one year in the city—it gives breadth to the world" (personal statement). She also expressed her strong desire to produce "one-of-a-kind research" focused on enhancing learning opportunities for special education students (personal statement).

Sydney described a hiking trip she chaperoned and reflected on "the beautiful homes and lush greenery" that her students had never seen. She continued:

> This gap, between rich and poor, students of color and white students, is morally repugnant. Ten years ago, I became a teacher to help close the achievement gap by providing an excellent education to students who might not otherwise get one. (personal statement)

She recognized the necessity of becoming a student again in order to gain the knowledge and skills to effect change, and wrote, "I truly hope that this next stage of my professional life will be spent at Boston College, learning with and from others who also stand for social justice" (personal statement). A commitment to working for social justice appeared throughout these data.

Maggie acknowledged that the mission statement of her school aligned with that of Boston College and expressed a desire "to improve and unify [her school's] curriculum to truly fulfill this ambitious goal" (personal statement). Examining curriculum development along with technology integration appealed to Stephen, who argued that "technology may offer us the next great opportunity to equalize educational opportunity in the United States" (personal statement). Inspired by school communities, such as Boston College, that are "committed to conducting their own good work," Henry expressed faith in "the resources and community at the Lynch School of Education [to] continue to inspire and refine [his] thinking about socially just schooling, so that [he could] make the most out of [his] commitment to socially conscious education" (personal statement). Ultimately, there was a desire within each of us to be better. Charles demonstrated this desire so purely. He was "interested in the intellectual challenge of

determining how to improve the teaching of history at the high school level" not only to make him a more effective teacher, but also to contribute to his work with the teacher candidates he mentored and supervised through the teacher education program at Boston College (personal statement). One of the most thoughtful pieces of data I collected was from a letter written to Charles by a former student. In one section, the student acknowledged the way in which Charles affected his thinking:

> *The whole idea of thinking conceptually is something I take with me because, I value knowledge of knowing what has happened and is happening in our country. With the passion you brought to class you inspired me to want more for myself.* (Charles, artifact)

Ironically, this student chose to pursue his undergraduate degree at Boston College.

Theme 2b: The pull to "return." Charles, Stephen, and Maggie remained in K-12 schools throughout their time in the program. For Charles this was never a question. For Stephen and Maggie, as indicated earlier in this chapter, they kept working out of financial necessity. It was not feasible to leave a full-time job. Henry, Sydney, Grace, and I left our full-time positions as classroom teachers to pursue this degree; however, Henry and I returned to teaching high school English before completing our dissertations. Once they had completed the program Sydney and Grace applied for jobs—Sydney as an administrator in a middle school and Grace as an adjunct professor at various universities before landing a research position. As I described in her profile, Grace was not passionate about or happy with her work at the college level and decided to return to a K-12 setting.

Grace, in a way, was driven out of academia by her experiences after graduation. Henry and I spent time during our interview discussing many of the negative aspects of

the doctoral program, or the ones that would have pushed us further away from desiring a tenure-track position at an R1 university. Sydney expressed her concern with the relevance of courses and assistantship tasks in relation to the day-to-day work of schools, describing her doctoral work as "so detailed and abstract" (interview). She felt something lacking in her coursework: "I did the readings and I wrote the papers and I had the conversations about it. I just didn't feel passionate about it" (interview). Once hired as a middle school administrator, Sydney worked a lot, but "was happy going to work 99 out of 100 days." She told me, "It was sort of shocking how much one could like doing their job" (interview). Toward the end of his interview, Henry reflected on what could be viewed as a positive interpretation of our experiences within the program: "[I]t's not just a negative being driven out of academia. It's sort of a pull to come back to something which you really enjoy doing" (Henry, interview). In the doctoral program, students are able to see meaningful work happening in schools all over the world. That certainly served as inspiration for my own desire to return to the classroom.

RQ1a: How do K-12 practitioners describe their experiences in the doctoral program?

The intent of the study's sub-questions (RQ1a & RQ1b) was to get a sense of how the different participants described their experiences within the same program. In my interview questions I asked participants about their course work and assistantships, and what they perceived as the strengths and weaknesses of the program. Ultimately, I decided to ask each participant whether or not completing the program was worth it, given the fact that we do not need PhDs in order to work in our current positions in K-12 schools.

Theme 3: Overall Program Experience

At the end of each interview, I asked participants, "Was it worth it?" After our discussions of the strengths and weaknesses of the program, of the emotional toll it took on so many of us, I wanted to know if they believed it a worthwhile endeavor. Teachers and administrators in K-12 settings do not require a degree beyond a Master's. This research study attempted to determine other motivating factors that may have contributed to doctoral students' decisions to pursue a PhD. The way in which participants spoke of their overall experiences within the program highlights the underlying assumptions we had about ourselves as well as the purposes and goals of the program. The overall program experiences were different across participants because each of us entered the program with different expectations and goals. There are, however, some common themes that spanned participants' experiences—a sense of accomplishment, a connection with others, and an emotional toll.

Theme 3a: A sense of accomplishment. Earning a PhD is a major academic and personal accomplishment. The mythical quality of the PhD is understood across our society. I have had my share of challenges in life and this has certainly been my most daunting task; it has also taken the longest to complete. Henry and Maggie acknowledged a feeling of accomplishment and a sense that they could "pretty much do anything" (Maggie, interview). Stephen expressed more emotion when reflecting on his completion of the program, which he completed only months before the interview:

> I mean, now that it's over, I feel like I can say yes [it was worth it] because I feel like it was a challenge. I mean, [it may have felt like] a bunch of bologna, but it was a challenge just getting everything done while balancing the time, and there

> were times where it forced me to think and question my own stuff. So at least I can think to myself, you did that. That was a huge challenge, and it's not designed for people like you and you still did it and they don't want people like you because it's impossible. So I mean, I'll hold that with me. (interview)

People like Stephen who worked full-time in a school and did not choose to take the traditional or expected route to become a tenure-track professor, knew that this type of life was not for them. Grace, on the other hand, seemed to be exactly what the program wanted out of its graduates. She not only completed the program, but accomplished another major goal when she was hired as a faculty member at a university. She was "psyched about it" because she "felt prepared" not only to teach but also to conduct research well (interview).

The rigor of the program impacted the overall experience of the participants. In her attempt to offer encouragement for my own experience with the dissertation process, Sydney shared this: "You will get it done. It's going to be over. You're going to be proud of yourself. It's hard work" (interview). Describing this process as "hard work" is an understatement (if you ask me), but her support indicates the ultimate sense of accomplishment and relief that one feels at the end.

Theme 3b: A connection with others. Students and faculty within the program served as support systems for many of us. Charles made lifelong bonds with classmates, even becoming the godfather to one of their children (interview). I remain close with many of the women who graduated from the program, especially those who are also mothers, and Sydney was extremely close with her "awesome" cohort, which consisted of "mostly moms" (interview). In the previous chapter, I included Grace's reflections on her

experiences having two children while a student in the program. She was able to bring her children to meetings and discuss the challenges of raising children with her classmates. Grace believed that her time in the doctoral program "changed the trajectory of [her] life as a person, not just a person that went through the BC program" (narrative). People reported personal and professional strains during the program, especially those of us who had children during our time there. Balancing families with the demands of the program proved challenging on all levels. Sharing that part of our identities impacted the relationships we formed with peers.

Theme 3c: An emotional toll. The majority of participants experienced some negative feelings during the program, including "imposter syndrome[12]," isolation, depression, and naivety. Grace remembered feeling as though she did not "deserve" to be in the program because she was offered admission after other candidates had turned down their own acceptance. The fact that she was "B-listed," indicated to her that she was "not smart enough" (interview). Once we began the program, interactions with other students in certain classes contributed to such feelings of "imposter syndrome":

> In these intro classes, which are about learning how to do research and write about research, there are huge amounts of reading, to the point where it's just very intimidating. I felt like somebody who was fresh out of a masters program—who had never worked, had never taught, didn't have children—was more qualified to speak about it than myself ... It didn't sit well with me that my background wasn't going to be helpful with that. (Stephen, interview)

[12] Imposter syndrome consists of feelings of self-doubt, insecurity, and fraudulence despite one's success or accomplishments.

Even Charles, who has decades of teaching experience, was worried that the students in his first class were going to "blow [him] away" during class discussions (interview). I can say with certainty that I believed everyone else in the program was smarter than me and that I had to legitimize my existence among them. I relied on my teaching experience in an attempt to overcompensate for what I believed to be was a lack of research knowledge.

Further entree into the world of university research contributed to participants' feelings of isolation. As I have expressed earlier in the study, my own experiences "doing research" in the program consisted mostly of writing literature reviews. It was extremely isolating work. Sydney's greatest challenge in the program was "the isolation of doing data analysis and writing alone" (narrative). Although she acknowledged that parts of the program were enjoyable, Sydney admitted that "parts of it were really depressing" (interview). I will explore these "parts" of the program later in the chapter when I discuss the disconnect between universities and K-12 schools.

Ultimately, some participants did not know what to expect from the program. We entered believing that it would be developmental and that we could learn more about ourselves and our career options as we progressed. Sydney articulated the generalized view a few of the participants had upon entering the program:

> When I applied, I still sort of conceptualized the rest of my career as having two hats. One administrative and one as a teacher educator. Frankly, I did not understand what I was getting into. I didn't know. I mean I thought I was gonna learn how to teach teachers. I was really naïve. I knew that there was research involved, but I didn't really know what that meant. (interview)

Maggie and I were unaware of the definition of a "Research 1" university (despite the fact that we both attended research universities in the past). Few of us, as Stephen pointed out, "had gotten deep into the professors or programs at the different schools" (narrative). In other words, we conducted very little research before applying to this Research I university.

My experience in the program can be summed up by this passage from my own personal narrative. I believe that it highlights some of the struggles participants faced in this highly rigorous, highly demanding program:

> I went into the program thinking that I wanted to make big changes in education or become a big changemaker. I quickly learned (or felt) that it seemed almost impossible to do. Real and effective change is hard to achieve, mainly because adults are difficult to work with. So my challenge was that I didn't know what to do. I felt isolated and lost because I missed the classroom so much. I was surrounded by people who were excited about the projects they were working on and who were getting a lot of research experience. I felt like an imposter. I had no idea what I wanted to research and kept flip-flopping. This pushed back my timeline and I wasn't as efficient within the program as I could have been if I knew then what I know now.

If I knew then what I know now almost all of my experiences in the program would have been different. Many of us were functioning in two or three worlds—home, graduate school, and work—and felt the emotional consequences. Maggie said she "probably would not do it (the program) again," yet she could "not imagine not having done it"

(interview). Like Maggie, "when I hear of people who are considering getting a PhD, I don't say it aloud, but in my head I question: *Why?!*" (Maggie, interview).

Theme 4: Course and Program Experiences

Earlier in this study, I outlined the requirements for Boston College's Curriculum and Instruction PhD program. Throughout the data collection process, participants described their experiences in their coursework as well as their assistantships—two components of the program that typically lay the foundation for one's dissertation. Participants in this study did not always take the "typical" or expected route of many doctoral students, and their experiences in various courses and in their assistantship work impacted their decisions within and beyond the program.

Theme 4a: Coursework: The good, the bad, and the ugly. The courses in the program got mixed reviews from participants. Experiences varied depending on the content, the "assessments," and the instructor. Some questioned the value of the coursework, while many lamented the heavy emphasis on theory over practice. Faculty members set the tone for students' experiences in various classes and the more negative experiences we had in certain classes resulted from a disconnect between the theory and the practice as well as the egos of some faculty members.

In required courses, professors frequently assigned their own publications, sometimes only loosely related to course content. In one course designed to establish certain historical and political contexts of our system of education, I was surprised to learn very little about these historical and political contexts until well into the semester. Many of the required courses were focused on research and methods that, as Stephen described, "seemed to be about completing strenuous academic challenges as if it was a

chance to let students know that they didn't have the academic chops, the time, or the energy to do the rest of the program" (narrative). Statistics certainly made me feel that way. Stats courses are required for all doctoral students and those did not get as much positive feedback from participants, mainly because many of us would not consider high-level mathematics our strength. Most of the participants (six out of seven) conducted strictly qualitative dissertations. We all did well in our courses, but as Henry argued, "getting high marks on papers doesn't move you forward in any career trajectory…. The fact that I got A's and smiley faces on a whole bunch of papers has no value in reality" (interview).

Despite some negative experiences in certain courses, there was considerable praise offered for the faculty; Maggie and Charles specifically acknowledged the teaching as a strength of the program. Both took away "classroom management" and "teaching tips from professors at BC just by virtue of how they ran their courses" (Maggie, interview). Charles felt he was "a better teacher" in his current position, and could transfer much of what he learned in his courses to his work as a supervisor of student teachers. Participants overwhelmingly discussed the value in the intellectual engagement within this program that introduced us "to entire regions of education research literature that [we were] unaware of" (Stephen, narrative). According to Henry, the program as a whole helped him to see "how education connects every other institution, which is humbling in a really useful way" (interview). Despite expressing frustration at the little impact policies seem to have in individual classrooms, Sydney enjoyed learning about "the nefarious policy webs and political webs and monetary webs that are out there" (interview). Ultimately, it was the successful confluence of historical

context, theory, and research presented by passionate and engaging professors that contributed to the positive experiences of participants in their coursework because, as Sydney put it, we were just "grateful to be learning again" (interview).

Theme 4b: Assistantships: The good, the bad, and the lucky. Outside of the classroom, much of the value participants found in the doctoral experience came from the assistantships in which we were placed, or ultimately moved to. In this regard, participants had the widest range of experiences. Most of the participants expressed respect and gratitude for the professors for whom they worked. Stephen was "absolutely lucky" to be placed in his assistantship because it was not a "typical" assistantship, which requires doctoral students to be available during academic business hours for regular research team meetings. His professor had "dedicated administrative help," which meant that this professor "did not need him on campus frequently" (narrative). Much of the work he completed for his professor was done virtually. Because Stephen worked full-time in a school district, he did not have the flexibility of the rest of the doctoral students.

Maggie also worked part-time during the program and maintained an assistantship, which proved to be particularly challenging for her. Her first assistantship "went well on the surface, but it was with a rather difficult professor who gossiped about others in the department," including both professors and doctoral students (narrative). She was later able to move into another assistantship position with professors who provided the professional and personal support that she needed during a challenging time in her life. She taught courses that fostered her love of curriculum design and provided her with experience teaching future elementary educators—an experience she had never

had before and one that has proven valuable in her current position as a curriculum director.

Sydney and Grace had more typical assistantships, conducting research with professors and their research teams. Sydney remained in her original assistantship throughout her time in the program, but Grace worked with multiple professors during her five years as a doctoral student. According to her, she "had different experiences engaging in research with faculty members," stating that certain faculty members were not "consistent about the way they involved students in their writing and their research" (interview). Her first assistantship was "easy"; however, the next semester involved work with a professor who was more demanding of Grace's time and Grace felt as though she "could not breathe" (interview).

Sydney's assistantship was also quite demanding and required extensive research work, mainly "high level...meta-analysis of what was going on in the field" of teacher education as well as more "managerial" tasks to help support the doctoral program (interview). This work, according to Sydney, was "much more removed from the daily work in schools that [she] had envisioned" as a core component of a teacher education program (interview).

Both women taught courses at Boston College; Sydney expressed a love for teaching at the college level, and Grace focused on the necessity of such an experience for graduates of the program. She wrote, "I learned a ton about teaching at the college level, and when I landed a faculty position, I soon found out that my colleagues didn't have the same privilege" (Grace, narrative). All participants expressed positive feelings as a result of teaching at the college level.

If we are to view teaching assistantships as a privilege, then Henry was the luckiest doctoral student to ever go through the program. Henry's financial situation necessitated his taking on as many jobs as he could. I was shocked when, during his interview, he told me that he had taught "seven different courses" while he was a doctoral student (interview). I had never heard of anyone teaching more than two or three different courses while a student. (Fun fact: Henry still teaches courses at BC once in awhile.) He was happy teaching, but seemed to lament the fact that he did not get paired with a professor who was already doing a long-term research project that he could get "slotted into" (interview). Doctoral students were expected to be involved in research projects, though that was easier for some than others. Henry explained:

> I would have had to, on top of everything else I was doing, basically create my own research agenda as a second or third year doc student, who actually hasn't been taught how to do that, with no contacts, with no grant, with no money. (interview)

Despite my own assistantship, which slotted me into a long-term research project, I was miserable. It was not the type of project in which I was interested. It involved a great deal of travel (my first trip occurred three days after I got married) and many hours of lonely research and writing. After two years, I left my graduate assistantship with a professor and began teaching undergraduate courses and supervising student teachers at a local urban high school. This work was meaningful to me and brought me much needed joy after a time of such darkness.

Theme 4c: Dissertations: The good, the better, and the finished. Some of the darkest times for doctoral students is during the dissertation phase of graduate study. In

the midst of navigating coursework, assistantships, and other obligations in our lives, doctoral students must create the ideas, the time, and the resources to complete a dissertation. In an "ideal situation" one's dissertation stems from the research one conducts during their assistantship. None of the participants in the study found themselves in this situation. We developed our own original research studies that reflected our individual experiences and interests. Perhaps the most surprising piece of data emerged during my conversation with Charles. He is the only graduate of the doctoral program who actually said he "enjoyed writing" his dissertation. He told the story of his research experience like a true historian, detailing accounts of trips to various libraries and uncovering fascinating artifacts.

The majority of participants found the dissertation process to be challenging because it is a major undertaking done in isolation. Sydney, Henry, and I have all expressed the difficulties of structuring our time (post-coursework) because, as Sydney stated, "It was so hard to motivate myself to do something that felt so pointless...because I wasn't getting a job [in academia]" (interview). Henry and I joked about the fact that "nobody's gonna read [our dissertations] anyway" (Henry, interview). Maggie discussed the amount of time it took her to complete the program and finish her dissertation, not only because she was working full-time again, but also because she had agreed to join a research team with her mentor. She admitted that "it was the most rewarding professional experience [she] had had up to that point"; however, it "delayed" her own work (narrative). Timing was everything for a number of participants while writing the dissertation. Whether we "moved out of [the] house for three months" (Henry, interview),

or completely changed dissertation topics because of delayed IRB approval (Liz), we are all victims who must become masters of time.

Writing the dissertation is an exercise in endurance. During this process I have received much advice from graduates after expressing my fear that I would never finish. Sydney recalled feeling that her work was never done until she completed the program. "That feeling," she said, "goes away and it's wonderful. It's so great. You're going to love it" (interview).

RQ1b: How, if at all, did their experiences in the doctoral program impact their career choices?

Theme 5: Work-Life Balance

Theme 5a: Professional priorities. Participants desired work-life balance, which did not seem attainable if they chose to pursue a career in academia. The only participant to have worked as a professor, Grace expressed that she likes now "having two kids and a schedule that's relatively similar. It's more consistent work, versus the ebbs and flows of academic life" (interview). In order to continue as an academic, Grace knew she would have to keep writing; this is one of the responsibilities of faculty members that is valorized over teaching. Many of the participants in the study, including me, received clear messages that research was prioritized over all other academic work. Grace purposefully did not seek Research 1 positions after graduation because she enjoyed teaching and wanted that to be her top priority; however, the year she spent at one university was not as enjoyable as she thought it would be. She said:

> Finally, I was like fuck it, I cannot do this anymore….The writing was really lonely, and really boring, and I hated it. I was like I have to do this in order to be

> faculty, I have to. And I have to keep rewriting and writing it because it's all getting rejected, and all that crap. (Grace, interview)

Sydney also confessed that she felt like she "left the [doctoral] program never wanting to feel like that again." Her conception of work-life balance is "so much better now," two years after graduating (interview).

Maggie, who worked in a high school during her time in the doctoral program, described the stress she encountered while trying to balance all of her responsibilities. She wrote:

> The most difficult part about teaching while in the program was feeling like I had three or four different jobs, with different responsibilities, different deadlines, and different bosses. I constantly felt like I was dropping a ball or was supposed to be somewhere I wasn't. (narrative)

When she was a year away from defending her dissertation, Maggie moved into an administrative position at her school. In this new role, she was able to teach one class, significantly reducing her take-home work. When she considered a position at a local university, she imagined experiencing "a lifestyle upgrade," in which she would teach "only a couple courses a semester," and have "more schedule freedom, where [one is] not at [a] school from 7:00-3:00 everyday" (interview). While this is not a guarantee for new faculty, this is certainly a belief that many people have of university professors. Maggie learned about her potential schedule at this university, and concluded that it did not fit within her desired work-life balance:

> All of the classes were at night.... I would be "off" during the day, when my kids are at school, and then teaching when they're home. At this point, where they are

15 and 13, almost, I can't miss all those sports events and school events. (interview)

As we get older, our priorities tend to shift. Since I began the program in 2012 a lot has happened in my life and I have come to understand what matters most to me.

Theme 5b: Personal priorities. Those of us with families acknowledged the importance and desire of being home whenever possible. The urge, and often the necessity, to be present for our families was a particularly significant stressor within the doctoral program. Many of us made choices that prolonged our time in the program due to both expected and unexpected familial obligations. Stephen talked about needing "to tuck [his] kids into bed and that was going to come first and the work would suffer" (interview). Maggie lost her father during her time in the program and shared its impact on her in her written narrative: "Dealing with this major life event proved my greatest challenge in the program," she wrote, "and it shaped the path I ultimately took post-graduation." This experience "shifted" her priorities and she became less focused on her grades or any other achievements that might go along with earning a doctorate. She wrote, "Life is about how you treat people, how you give back, how you make the world better, in whatever way you can" (narrative).

In his narrative, Henry wrote about making the decision to apply to a doctoral program in the first place. He needed to find a balance between "the practicality of finding something that fit within a complicated situation of [his] life ... and the desire to accomplish this vague idea [he] had had for a long time about becoming a professional academic" (narrative). For Henry, who had a newborn and "an ailing wife who needed a considerable amount of care, starting a PhD program was oddly convenient" (narrative).

In the first few years of his son's life, "the evening classes and flexible work hours" were appealing to Henry. Later, he came to understand the reality of life as a new professor. He said:

> It just seemed like a really bad position to be in where either you have to be pretty much a total absentee father for three years to guarantee long-term security, or you try to do both and you jeopardize your long-term security because you're not sort of all in. (interview).

Through the program, we learned of the expectations placed on new professors and the work (including publications, teaching, etc.) it takes to secure tenure...which is not a guarantee for all new faculty members.

The structure of the doctoral program was helpful to Henry during the first couple of years because he said:

> I could be home during the day and then I could go to my little cubby on Friday and I would often work until 2:00 in the morning getting a paper done, because you can write a paper whenever, but eventually you actually have to be [on campus] once it gets a little bit more real. I just wasn't willing to give up my entire life to it, especially when you come out and you're like, why am I even doing this? If the only purpose is so that I can have job security, then I should just get a different job. I don't really feel invested in the product. (interview)

In my own narrative I wrote about an experience at a national conference for educational research. I attended the President's Lunch with the professor for whom I was working at the time. During the lunch a number of researchers were receiving awards for their research and "almost every woman got to the podium and thanked other people for

raising their families. I sat there thinking, 'I don't want that to be me.' That's when I knew for sure" (Liz, narrative). I did not want to pursue a career that would require me to be away from my children in order to gain the kind of success that everyone seemed to want. I certainly was not invested in that product. The demands of the doctoral program, which seemed to mirror the demands of life in academia, contributed to our decision to avoid such a life in the future.[13]

Theme 6: Disconnect between Academia and K-12

Throughout the various phases of the doctoral program, participants felt a degree of separation between the worlds of academia and K-12 schools. The misconception of what life as a university professor was like, combined with the feeling of being "disconnected" from the real world created tensions within many of the participants and contributed greatly to their decisions to return to K-12 schools instead of pursuing careers as tenure-track professors.

With the exception of Charles, each of the participants in the study entered the Curriculum and Instruction program with an expectation that they would have a future as a teacher educator in some capacity. The data suggest that we entered the program with an idealized or incomplete picture of what it is like to have a career as a college professor. In a short period of time, we learned of the expectations we should have of ourselves and the expectations the university did have for us.

Theme 6a: Expectations going into the program. Aside from the funding offered by the university that I mentioned earlier in this chapter, the school's reputation

[13] This is not to say that there is anything wrong with those who pursue careers in academia and must spend time away from their families. As a mother of two young girls, I reflect back on that experience and realize that it was inspiring to see those women earning the awards and the respect that they deserved. I just knew that I did not see myself taking the same route.

unquestionably played a prominent role in participants' decisions to apply. Three of the participants did not apply to any other doctoral program. Each of us was pragmatic in our applications, all committed to staying in the Boston area because of our families and careers. We knew that our immediate futures would be here.

We also knew how to "play the game" to increase our chances of acceptance. When comparing the personal statements submitted during the application process to the written narratives and interviews, the changes most of us underwent during our time in the program became clear. We initially emphasized our commitment to social justice, demonstrated our familiarity with the work of the most well-known professors in the program, and convinced the committee (and perhaps even ourselves) that acceptance to the program would lead to "bigger and better" things for our careers in education.

The PhD seemed to be a magical degree that would open up endless doors of possibility. It certainly held the most "clout" among all graduate degrees (Maggie, narrative). A few of the participants also believed that with this degree would come the opportunity and the freedom to pursue any career we desired. Sydney and I shared similar aspirations as we entered the program. During our interview she explained:

> I guess for me, when I applied, I still sort of conceptualized my career—the rest of my career—as having two hats. One administrative and one as a teacher educator. Frankly, I did not understand what I was getting into. I didn't know. I mean, I thought I was going to learn how to teach teachers. I was really naive. I knew that there was research involved, but I didn't really know what that meant. (interview)

This notion that we could wear "two hats" was perhaps an idealized version of what it would be like once we graduated with a PhD. Henry clearly articulated the notion some of us had when we entered the program. Being a professor sounds so appealing to us because of the belief that we will "have all this autonomy," but the reality is quite the opposite. He added:

> It's only the well-known, powerful people that have that autonomy and everyone else is a slave to the institution and the grant writing cycle and everything else. If you're in a decent public high school, you have way more autonomy. (interview)

The glamorous, idyllic life of the college professor that existed in our minds did not include grant writing cycles, conference proposals, or revisions and resubmissions. There existed an incomplete picture of the professor's responsibilities beyond the lecture hall at an R1 university.

Theme 6b: Expectations in coursework and assistantships. In my earlier discussion about our experiences in different courses throughout the program, a few participants were underwhelmed by some of the teaching within this nationally recognized teacher educator program. Each participant shared experiences in one of the first courses we took as doctoral students. Stephen felt that the

> beginning classes of the program were much more focused on only research and literature and it didn't really matter necessarily if you had taught students or worked in a school or had children. It was all about just reading and understanding literature and being able to talk about it in sophisticated ways. (interview)

Grace addressed the "irony" of that particular course being "about teaching and learning," and yet we spent all of our time "theorizing about the applied practice" (interview). Personally, I felt tension between my inclination to simply listen to what I was told and my desire to speak reality to some of this theory.

In general, Maggie did not believe that "enough of the faculty in [the program] stay particularly grounded and focus on the classroom." She continued, "[I]f you are going to be in a department of education, you really have to have, or should have, a realistic view of what life in schools is like" (Maggie, interview). Grace and I questioned others'—professors' and students'—interests in the applied work of teaching during her interview. Grace said:

> If [professors] really don't care about the applied work, and just want to theorize, then it leaves somebody like you (Liz) holding the bag, because you're like, "Yeah, but you're talking about these theories, and I'm telling you either they work, or they don't, or this is how they look." (interview)

This disconnect moved beyond the theory and practice relationship into the geographical. Stephen commented on our required reading in which the research was conducted "in Hong Kong or some place far away because that's where [professors] happen to do their research." He expressed confusion about our context within a particular geographical area "that is supposed to [have] such experts about education, [with] all these resources and this beautiful campus and yet [seems to have] very little involvement with the schools around us" (interview). There is a certain concern Stephen expressed about the university's work focusing outside of the local context. He described professors as "just fiddling away at research while real world education in the United

States is burning and Massachusetts is the best case scenario" (interview). The participants cared deeply about connecting their work in the doctoral program to the problems they saw in the day-to-day work of educators in their own K-12 schools.

Sydney discussed her assistantship experience and the disconnect she felt between her advisor's research agenda and the need for change that she saw in schools:

> I didn't see the direct correlation between what we were spending time on and the sense of urgency that I feel around the fact that education is in the shitter and we're not really doing much; we're not having a conversation with the people doing the work. And that was where my values got tripped up. I was like, I can't spend my life working outside of ... the place where the work is happening. (Sydney, interview)

Sydney's first entree into the world of academic research did little to demonstrate a connection between the work of the university with the work of K-12 schools. She and another doctoral student were tasked with "tabling...hundreds, if not thousands of studies" on a topic within educational research. She listed the tasks required, highlighting the monotony and tedium:

> We had to sort [the studies] *and* read their abstracts *and* skim them *and* write down what their theoretical perspective was *and* write down what their conceptual framework was *and* write down what they studied *and* write down where they were *and* write down the positionality of the research. (interview)

She joked about drinking beer during this process because they "had to do something enjoyable at the same time or else…" (interview). "Or else" is a dangerous cliff to hang from, though we did not feel comfortable expressing our true feelings to most professors.

Sydney admitted, “I mean I certainly didn't say to my advisor, ‘This seems like a silly waste of time. Why are we doing this? It has nothing to do with actual kids in actual schools’” (Sydney, interview).

Within my own research assistantship work, I realized how little control I had over conducting the type of research that would interest me. Between my first and second year in the program, I spent the majority of my summer writing a literature review on rural education (not what I envisioned as a topic of study during my time in the program). I had never experienced such isolation before. The time required for such research and writing greatly exceeded my expectations. While I was able to submit the paper as my comprehensive exam, this work felt so disconnected from my interests and passions within the field of education. The tedium of the tasks some doctoral students experienced contributed to a clearer understanding of the potential reality of life as a professor at an R1 university. With that came the realization that it would take years (and an insane amount of work) to become a professor who would be able to delegate such tedious research to a doctoral student.

Another aspect of the program is the expectation that doctoral students will attend and present at local and national educational conferences. In one of our first courses, we were explicitly instructed to become members of the American Educational Research Association (AERA). Sydney’s first experience attending this conference made her “sick to [her] stomach” because she considered herself a well-informed and “engaged teacher leader,” but she had never even heard of this association before. There are emotional effects from experiencing this disconnect. At the conference, Sydney questioned: “Why are all these people doing research that teachers don't know about? What on earth is

going on here?" She also realized that she did not "want to be in this world doing work that teachers aren't going to read or experience or engage with" (Sydney, interview). It was deflating and depressing.

Theme 6c: Realities post-graduation. Participants in this study received certain messages about what was expected of us and what we should expect of ourselves in the doctoral program. These were mostly implicit messages embedded in the way people spoke about the world of academia. As I mentioned earlier in this section, many of us believed that the program would serve as a gate that remained open for us to pursue our professional goals when the time was right. We did not realize that once we graduate from the program, the gate quickly starts to close behind us.

When I asked Henry if he could see himself pursuing a career in higher education, he replied:

> I mean, maybe. I think if I were to get there, it would have to be sort of like the back door where you get into more of an administrative position possibly and your kids get older so you have a little bit more time and maybe write some [new research]...certainly not my old research. It's have to be something new and ten years down the line, really quite a bit of distance has passed. I can't imagine doing it next year or the year after. I just don't have the publications to do it. I don't have the skillset. (interview)

The necessity to immediately apply for tenure-track positions was unclear to many of us. Sydney admitted, "I can't just go back and be a professor ever at a research university. I've been out of the field two years. I've published nothing. I've done no research. I

didn't understand that's how it works" (interview). Once we are no longer "tied into that network," our hopes of professorships may be over (Maggie, interview).

As I have discussed in earlier sections of this study, Grace spent her first few years out of the program working as a professor. The reality of life as a professor proved isolating mainly due to the amount of writing expected of her. Unhappy in her position, Grace looked for other opportunities in academia, while completing an administrative internship within a local public school district. During the course of that year, Grace realized her passion was "doing research and working in schools." She told me, "The writing was really lonely, and really boring, and [she] hated it" (interview). She knew that she had to write in order to be in academia, but it consumed so much of her time. The cycle of writing, submitting, rewriting, and resubmitting journal articles was, in her words, "crap" (interview). After leaving academia, Grace talked with university faculty members whom she trusted. She asked them, "Can I ever come back?" Their answers were clear: there is always a way to come back, but Grace "would have to write and be engaged in research and be able to 'account for' those years stepping out" (interview).

Despite the encouragement that Henry received from faculty members to pursue a career in academia, he decided against this course of action.

> If the goal is to have some type of real-world impact on the ground, teaching 120 students in an actual high school classroom each year would have much more impact than whatever we would be doing giving lectures and writing a crappy book. (Henry, interview)

To be fair, not all of the books published by research professors are crappy, but book writing seemed to take up quite a bit of faculty members' time.

Ultimately, many of us interpreted or experienced a disconnect at every level of the educational system. Sydney articulated the "three bubbles" of work happening within and around our school systems. "There's the work in schools, there's the work in universities, and then there's the policy work happening at the state and federal level. None of them seem to ever talk to each other" (Sydney, interview). We like to talk to people. That's why we are in schools. We feel connected to the practitioners and the students in our buildings—the people with whom we interact every single day.

RQ2: In what ways, if any, do practitioners believe their experiences in the doctoral program better prepared them for careers in a K-12 setting?

My final research question was borne out of my own personal understanding of and appreciation for my time in the program. After teaching for seven years, I applied to the doctoral program and went back to school so I could focus my attention on the aspects of teaching that I have found most challenging and determine the ways in which I could improve on them. I wanted to know if participants could articulate specific benefits of earning a doctorate and returning to the classroom or the K-12 setting. If I have learned nothing from my time in the doctoral program, it is that teachers have the greatest impact on student success and achievement. How we define "success" and "achievement" is entirely another research question. It is clear that each of the participants has achieved great success as a result of their commitment to and passion for teaching and learning. Now we are able to take what we have learned and do the work we love.

Theme 7: Application of Greater Knowledge to the Public Setting

This research has highlighted some of the drawbacks as well as the benefits of pursuing a PhD. Despite its challenges, participants overwhelmingly believed that the

program made them better practitioners. It has empowered and enabled us to apply the knowledge and skills we acquired in our coursework and research assistantships. It has also refined our ideas about what it means to make a difference as an educator.

There is a reciprocal relationship between our lives as doctoral students and our lives as K-12 practitioners. Each role informs and enhances the knowledge and practice of the other. Charles and I took courses at BC before entering the doctoral program. Taking courses as a non-degree student, while simultaneously teaching full-time, allowed us to experience the life of a doctoral student without the pressure of actually *being* a doctoral student. With this experience we were able to apply fresh knowledge to our school contexts, enhancing our desire to pursue the doctorate. In Charles's personal statement, he commented on the effect that taking courses had on his teaching:

> My class at Boston College actually enhanced my teaching, making me more reflective of my practice and increasing my interest in the art of effective teaching. Similarly, my classroom teaching...complimented my class work at Boston College. As a full time secondary school teacher, I was able to approach the material from a slightly different perspective than other members of the class.

Charles, Henry, and I all believe that our experiences in the doctoral program have contributed to our idea of "rigor" in the high school classroom. It also "gives [us] more credibility" with students (Charles, interview). In the wealthy, suburban district where Henry and I work, possessing a doctorate is certainly a positive topic of conversation among parents' during back-to-school night. My students are also aware of the fact that I am currently writing my dissertation. After explaining to them what it was, they inevitably asked how many pages it had to be. When I told them that there was no page

requirement, but that I had already drafted over 150 pages, I thought some of them might pass out. I take pride in the fact that my students are witnessing this challenge for me. It is an experience that I can share with them for the rest of my career.

As a result of the work we have done throughout the doctoral program, we have a better understanding and conceptualization of everything from classroom management to academic research. Charles spoke about "subconsciously" taking in what he saw professors do in classrooms: "You take a lot of those things that you see, and you bring them into your own teaching practice" (interview). Henry believed that he "became a better teacher partially because [he] taught so much" (interview). My own teaching of undergraduate courses "completely changed the way I approached planning. I think big picture now, and I am able to do that more easily because I have more experience " (Liz, interview). Henry also elaborated on the impact the program had on his research skills:

> I think I have a better understanding of what real research is, which is good. I'm a much better consumer of research. I read a lot and I listen to a whole bunch of podcasts. So I think I'm much better at hearing something now and just being like, "That is crap. Give me 15 minutes on a good database, and I can find 15 alternate claims that disprove whatever this person just said with such authority." So that's kind of nice to have that feeling. (interview)

This type of confidence is necessary for all practitioners. As a specialist, Stephen has had multiple opportunities to discuss the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) both informally and formally within his district. He has meaningful conversations "about the way that [teachers] design curriculum" and build "choices" into the curriculum (interview).

Grace and Sydney have experienced a great deal of success in their leadership roles. Grace's colleagues recognize that she "know[s] about teaching and learning in deep ways that other people don't know" (interview). These conversations offer "validation" for Grace because they are impressed with the experience from higher education that she is able to apply to the K-12 setting (interview). Interestingly, Grace said:

> I feel like I'm actually getting shit done, that I didn't feel like I could do in higher ed. I feel like I can get stuff done, and I also feel valued. You know, it's like you self-deprecate about your nerdiness, but I guess what I'm saying is people in K-12 appreciate that. Or they tell me that they do. (interview)

The feedback we receive from our colleagues is important; however, it is important to recognize the individual reflection that has become a critical part of our practice. Participating in this research study proved helpful to Sydney, who said:

> I think that it's been nice for me to be in conversation with you because I'm reminded of the parts [of my experience] where I did learn how to be cost effective and I did learn about the power of writing in some ways. And thinking about conceptualizing things...you know, a lot of those skills do come out. I do think a lot about: How well am I sharing with my teachers? How am I building understanding relationships about what our work is here? [Our work in schools] has two components and they have some overlapping parts. One's teaching and learning. One's climate and culture. So I do think about that in a way that would help people. (Sydney, interview)

More than the application of knowledge to a public setting, our reflections on the knowledge we have acquired can have the most profound impact. In a conversation with my advisor, I considered the impact the program has had on me:

> As an undergraduate, I learned about backwards design in terms of curriculum planning, but it isn't until you have more experience that you are able to truly conceptualize the benefits of this approach to year-long planning. The first few years of teaching are survival. Now I can more clearly think holistically—what are the big questions I want to address? What should my students know and be able to do as a result of instruction? What assessments will I use to show that my students are learning? How does this all connect to the goals our class has established? When I am faced with a question for which I do not have an answer, I know how to find it. Reading research for the sake of reading research can be a waste of time. Now, I can be selective about what I read. I pose far better questions. I am committed to teacher research and my teaching has improved significantly because of this way of thinking about teaching. (Liz, interview)

After earning a PhD in curriculum and instruction, we are better consumers of research, we are better critical thinkers, we are more confident in our positions, we are so much better at what we do. Don't our students deserve more educators like us?

Summary

In this chapter I outlined the findings of this research study, organized by research question. First, participants' decision to work in K-12 settings as opposed to institutions of higher education (RQ1) were influenced by a commitment to and passion for public education, as well as the financial implications of pursuing a career in academia

compared to that of K-12 schools. The subquestions (RQ1a and RQ1b) detailed the experiences of doctoral students in the curriculum and instruction program that impacted their decisions to work in K-12 settings. The specific requirements of the program (e.g., coursework, assistantship, and dissertation) led to both positive and negative experiences in terms of overall program satisfaction. This academic endeavor is not for the weak of mind, stomach, or heart. Coming to terms with some of the misconceptions we had upon entering the program proved to be quite challenging for some participants; however, each of us expressed happiness with our career choices. The final research question (RQ2) explored the ways in which our experiences in the doctoral program have better prepared us for careers in K-12 schools. Participants overwhelmingly agreed that the knowledge and skills we developed during the program has impacted our practice in positive and powerful ways. The next and final chapter concludes the dissertation with an analysis of the findings, including implications for research and practice.

CHAPTER SIX

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS:

"IT DOESN'T HAVE TO BE PERFECT, IT JUST HAS TO BE DONE"

"Indeed, without an oath, I'll make an end on 't" (Hamlet, 4.5.62).

Introduction

It is hard for me to believe that I am writing the final chapter of my dissertation. Many times during the last few years, I honestly believed this was not possible. Much of the literature on doctoral student experiences explores the factors that impact students' completion versus attrition (Barnes & Randall, 2012; Golde, 2000, 2005; Lovitts, 2001, 2004). It was looking more and more like I was going to become another tally on the attrition side when I wrote the following journal entry:

> I can add three new letters to my name, but I'm not sure which ones. Here are my choices: PhD or ABD. I can write a dissertation in order to earn my doctorate. I can also walk away from the program and continue to do what I love—teach. I've been standing at this crossroads for months, trying to decide if completing the program is the best decision for me, especially since I have committed to being *just a teacher*. (July 2, 2017)

It was around this time when I asked my daughter if I should keep writing my dissertation or quit. She told me to keep writing, and even though she had only just turned three, I decided to take her sage advice.

Discussion of Findings

This research study emerged from my own experiences in a doctoral program in education—from the personal and professional experiences that impacted my decision to

pursue the PhD and return to a career as a high school English teacher. After a failed attempt at completing a practitioner research dissertation, I wanted to know whether or not it was "worth it" to pursue a PhD without the intention of "putting it to use" in an institution of higher education. To answer this question, I recruited participants who had graduated from the same doctoral program and selected careers in K-12 settings as opposed to academia.

I combined narrative inquiry and autoethnography as my methodological approach to report, in essence, a multiple case study that explored the factors contributing to participants' decisions to return to or remain in K-12 schools upon graduation from the doctoral program, as well as the impact they believed the experience had on their professional practice. I utilized a variety of data sources, including written narratives in response to questions, individual interviews, documents and artifacts from participants' doctoral program and/or teaching/administrative practice, as well as follow-up communication with participants, to better understand the experiences of others and myself.

Analyses of rich data, the detailed and collective accounts of participants' experiences within and beyond the doctoral program, offer the following conclusions:

- Pursuing a PhD is a valuable experience for educators, especially those who work in K-12 schools, because we are able to use the skills and knowledge we acquired in the program to effect change at the local level.
- The relationships we have with mentors, faculty members, and peers play a significant role in our satisfaction with and completion of the program.

- There is a clear disconnect between our expectations and reality of the experiences of doctoral study as well as the life of a university professor. Such misunderstandings contributed to our decisions to work in K-12 schools as opposed to academia.
- The financial implications of pursuing graduate study, a subsequent career in academia, and the consideration of various education-related careers influenced our experiences at all stages of the program.

Pursuing the PhD

Pursuing a PhD is a valuable experience for educators, especially those who work in K-12 schools, because we are able to use the skills and knowledge we acquired in the program to effect change at the local level. Whether pursuing a doctorate was something participants had considered for some time (e.g., Henry and Charles) or a path we had only recently considered (Liz), we spoke about the benefits to our professional lives. A love of teaching and learning and a desire to expand our knowledge base fueled our academic pursuits, which is consistent with the research on teachers who pursue advanced degrees (Kerfoot, 2008; Piantanida & Garman, 2009). As Charles wrote in his personal statement, he applied to the program to take on "the intellectual challenge of determining how to improve the teaching of history at the high school level." In my own personal statement, I wrote: "Through the doctoral program I hope to gain more knowledge of successful systems [of education]: systems that respect and trust teachers; that enhance students' ownership of learning and motivation; systems that I know can work." Inherent in this statement is a sense of hope for the future of education in the United States. I was ready to be part of the change.

Our roles as both students and educators inform one another. Many of the participants experienced the effects of taking courses while working as a classroom teacher, specialist or administrator. Charles and I shared an increased interest "in the art of effective teaching" in our respective subject areas as a result of taking doctoral courses (Charles, personal statement). Learning about various educational issues from multiple perspectives—student, teacher, and researcher—has enhanced our understanding and conceptualization of our professional responsibilities.

Fostering Relationships

The relationships we have with mentors, faculty members, and peers play a significant role in our satisfaction with and completion of the program. As Kerfoot (2008) found in her study of elementary school teachers with PhDs, many of the participants in this study were encouraged to apply to doctoral programs in education by colleagues and mentors—many of whom were university faculty. This finding is supported by other research (e.g., Austin, 2003; Bieber & Worley, 2006) and reflects the experiences of the participants in this study, including me. Dr. Audrey Friedman encouraged my application to the program. Despite the challenges I have faced over the last several years, I would not be the educator I am today if it weren't for her nor would I be this close to becoming a doctoral graduate. Maggie's and Grace's decisions to apply to doctoral programs were influenced by their own mentors, whom they named explicitly to me in their narratives and interviews.

Each participant discussed the various challenges we encountered during our time in the doctoral program; overall, though, participants had fairly positive experiences. Research on graduate student socialization is mostly studied in the larger context of

doctoral education (Gardner & Mendoza, 2010; Weidman et al., 2001); however, both disciplinary and institutional contexts play significant roles in the overall experiences of doctoral students (Gardner, 2010; Golde, 2005; Kuh & Whitt, 1998). As Gardner (2010) noted, graduate students must "become independent while simultaneously maintaining support of peers, faculty, and advisors" (p. 76). Some of the most significant factors that enhanced our experiences were the strong relationships with faculty and peers. This is consistent with the research, especially conducted on the factors that influence doctoral student completion versus attrition (Gardner, 2008b; Gardner & Gopaul, 2012; Golde, 1998, 2000, 2005; Millett & Nettles, 2009; Rockinson, et al., 2014). The program itself offered varying degrees of support for participants, which became most prevalent in our discussion about the faculty. While coursework received mixed reviews from participants, there was much praise offered for the faculty. From their pedagogical strengths to their knowledge of the historical contexts, theories, and research about the topics for which we were passionate, the professors' roles in our overall doctoral experiences were critical.

The relationships participants formed within the doctoral program, including those with faculty and peers, confirm the literature about the critical role that support plays for the doctoral student (Anderson et al., 2013; Austin, 2003; Grant et al., 2011; Masterman, 2014; Nettles & Millett, 2006; Walker et al., 2008). Support from our families and friends, also played a role in our successful completion of the program, which is also evident in the research literature (Austin, 2002; Bragg, 1976; Gardner, 2007). I am currently writing this chapter at 2:30 p.m. on a Sunday afternoon. My friends and family knew that I would be spending much of today in the library and during the last

24 hours I have received multiple text messages of encouragement, including a simple: "hello ☺ hang in there."

Experiencing Disconnect

Expectations vs. reality. There is a clear disconnect between our expectations and reality of the experiences of doctoral study and the life of a university professor. Such misunderstandings contributed to our decisions to work in K-12 schools as opposed to academia. Golde and Dore (2001) and Garrett (2006) reported that many doctoral students change their career plans over the course of their programs due to a variety of reasons. Most common in this research study were the misunderstandings we had about the life of a university professor. We experienced a disconnect between the worlds of academia and K-12, and we also realized that the idealistic vision of an autonomous university professor did not seem to be the reality.

With the exception of Charles, each of the participants entered the program with visions of a future in teacher education. As we peeked behind the curtain and saw a true representation of life as a faculty member, many of us found ourselves tripped up. We entered the program with many of the assumptions outlined by Nerad (2009), especially that "professors enjoy the highest job satisfaction compared to any other employment group" (p. 80). Austin's (2003) work also highlights the misunderstandings that doctoral students have about faculty work at the university level. During our conversations Grace and I talked at length about the amount of time we spent "theorizing about the applied practice." Participants cared deeply about connecting their work in the doctoral program to the problems they saw in the daily work of educators. Sydney spoke of a "sense of urgency" about issues of education, but did not believe the program enabled students to

have conversations with people doing the actual work of teaching. She admitted, "I can't spend my life working outside of … the place where the work is happening" (Sydney, interview). Mandzuk (1997) discussed some of these cultural differences referring to them as "three sets of conflicting norms" (p. 446) between schools and universities. First, he claimed that schools focus on doing, while universities focus on thinking; second, that schools are characterized by acceptance, while universities are characterized by debate; and third, that teachers are dependent on others to tell them what to do, while university faculty are autonomous and adventurous in their endeavors within their respective fields. In my own experience, I would argue that these conflicting norms are only partly true. The factors influencing the autonomy of teachers include the administrators within each building and the trust they have in their teachers. Henry and I talk extensively about the autonomy we feel we have in comparison to some of the faculty at Boston College. In the upcoming school year, we are both teaching new courses that we created ourselves. Teaching newly developed courses at the university level appears to be reserved for a selected few that have attained a more powerful status.

K-12 settings vs. academia. A disconnect between these two worlds, whether real or imagined, emerged from this research. The emphasis on research over teaching was clear throughout our experiences in the program. The expectation that graduates would pursue research professorships was not always explicitly stated, but many of us perceived that message. Grace and I talked at length about the messages we received about graduate's career choices. She explained:

> I think it was very rare for people to say that they were going to go back into the K-12 world. When people did say that, it came with all these conditional

> statements. Like they move somewhere and their partner couldn't get a job. Or it seemed like a default. Why would you go to BC? Why would you go to an R1, learn how to be a researcher first, a teacher second? I mean that's kind of how I saw it. Why would you go back into K-12? Unless you were going to do action research, that seemed to be okay. That was valued. If you were going to produce books or do research, that was the one place that K-12 seemed okay. But everything else K-12 seemed like for sure, default, why would you waste all that time and all that energy just to go back to K-12 were you started anyways? (interview)

Henry was the only participant who received an explicit message that returning to teach high school English was a "waste." He was told by two different professors that it was "a true waste of talent...to not become a professor" (interview). Hearing this story reinforced my belief that some of the professors in the program did not value what I did as a classroom teacher as much as what they did as research professors.

Despite Sydney's happiness in her current position, she expressed slight regret that she did not pursue a career in higher education because she thinks it would have made her faculty advisor happy. Sydney told me that her advisor did not explicitly say that to her. She explained, "She's been super supportive of everything I've done. But I feel like the previous people that she's brought onboard have gone into higher ed. And you know there's that whole lineage situation" (interview). There is a sense that the professors for whom we work are grooming us to be just like them. We engage in their work, which we may or may not pretend is of immense interest to us as well. If we continue their work, cite them extensively in our own research, and get tenure-track

positions at institutions of higher education, we make them look good. On the other hand, if we do not pursue careers in academia and, instead, "default" to positions in K-12 settings, we might be a disappointment to the professor and a failure of the program.

My experience in the program, especially in conversations with certain professors, led me to believe that teachers and students are like the pawns in the research agenda game. Classroom teachers are not as respected as they (the professors) claim they are. They are simply potential research participants. If they were respected, researchers would not regard them as deficits; the research works to change teachers, fill in their gaps, improve them. This all suggests that they are not doing a good job, that they need fixing. There is a pedagogy of poverty at play here. I suppose that teachers who feel they must be constantly fixed, changed, and transformed, may regard their students as deficits, rather than seeing the whole person who brings talents, skills, ideas, and dreams, as well as baggage, just like the rest of us.

Each of the participants in the study expressed a passion and love for their current positions and shared no regret about the decisions they made. We are happy with our choice to remain in or return to K-12 schools because we desired work-life balance, which did not seem attainable if we chose to pursue careers in academia. This is common among doctoral students' experiences as reported in the research literature (see Golde & Dore, 2004; Mason et al., 2009). Wulff et al. (2004) found that doctoral students did not want to lead the "harried lives" they witnessed among professors (p. 64). As I reported earlier in the study, Grace was the only participant to work in academia after graduation. She chose to return to a K-12 setting and expressed how happy she was to have a consistent schedule with her children and avoid "the ebbs and flows of academic life"

(Grace, interview). The stress and isolation that graduate students feel is well documented in the literature (Austin, 2003; Gardner, 2008a, 2008b; Golde, 2000, 2005), especially in recent doctoral dissertations about graduate student experiences (Allen, 2018; Gonzalez, 2017; Meyers, 2017; Westerband, 2016). Despite some of the challenges we faced in pursuit of the PhD, each of us achieved this critical accomplishment and are working where we are most happy. Our commitment to working with students and teachers has been strengthened by our experiences in the program and has enriched our knowledge and understanding of teaching and learning (Piantahida & Garman, 2009).

Considering Finances

The financial implications of pursuing graduate study as well as considering various careers in education influenced us at all stages of the program. In many cases, the funding structure was the deciding factor and perhaps led participants of the study to choose the PhD program at Boston College when an EdD elsewhere may have been more appropriate for their career goals. NSF's report in 2017 indicated:

> A steadily declining share of doctoral students rely primarily on their own resources—loans, personal savings, personal earnings, and the earnings or savings of their spouse, partner, or family—to finance their doctoral studies. In turn, a growing proportion of students over the past 10 years has relied on research assistantships and teaching assistantships for their financial support during graduate school. (p. 6)

They also found that nearly half of these students reported that their primary source of support was their funding from the doctoral program in which they were enrolled. Education doctoral graduates also had education-related debt burdens over $30,000,

while many of the doctoral graduates in science and engineering fields reported having no debt. Other researchers have found financial issues to be of significant concern to doctoral students in general, but doctoral students in education more specifically (Barnes & Randall, 2012; Demb, 2012).

Money was a tremendous motivating factor in the career decisions of the participants in this study. The debt that Grace, Henry, and I accumulated over the course of our time in the program ranged from $30,000 to $100,000. Aware of the fact that we would earn more money working in public schools as opposed to higher education institutions, played a significant role in our return to K-12 settings. This is supported in the research by Castle and Arends (2003) and Rockinson-Szapkiw et al. (2014) who noted higher salaries in K-12 settings as an incentive for doctoral graduates to pursue careers outside of academia.

Those of us who work in the Northeast are particularly fortunate when it comes to our salary structures as K-12 practitioners. This area offers some of the highest salaries for teachers and administrators in the nation. None of us, though, got into teaching for the money. It takes many years of experience and many years of graduate credits (which we have to pay for ourselves) to move up the salary scale. To leave well-paying jobs to move to a new position at a college or university where we would take a $30,000 to $50,000 pay cut does not seem fiscally responsible; however, Sydney and Maggie both indicated that they would have "made it work" if they believed it were the best career choice for them.

Ultimately, we all made it work. We expanded our knowledge about the educational issues for which we are passionate; we honed our teaching, research, and

presentation skills; and we achieved a goal that has been deemed possible by only the academic elite. It was all worth it, even if we were going back to being "just" teachers.

Limitations of the Study and Directions for Future Research

All research has limitations; I do not disappoint here. This study was conducted with the narrowest of foci: seven participants (including the researcher) from one department within one program at one university. The primary limitation is the specificity of the study. The small number of participants may not yield generalizable results to a larger population. Additional limitations existed in the design of the study. I utilized only one semi-structured interview by design, mainly because I wanted to ensure that I was not overloading the practitioners with extra work, especially since much of the data collection occurred during the school year.

The nature of this study—specifically, the fact that much of the data were self-reported and retrospective—might not capture a true account of certain events as reported by participants. Memories may have a more positive tone since participants have completed the program and are not currently experiencing some of the more challenging situations, especially the dissertation, that I face as I write this. My personal relationship to the phenomenon being studied could be viewed as an additional limitation; my own status in the doctoral program from which the participants graduated may create what Patton (2002) calls "selective perception" (p. 329). This may influence the way in which I "restoryed" the data from participants (Creswell, 2013).

Lastly, the conclusions I have made are based on the experiences of participants who each identify as White; therefore, my findings and conclusions are not meant to

represent the experiences of students of color or any other underrepresented student population.

Future studies might utilize a more in-depth qualitative model to discover new themes or consider the qualitative themes from this study as a means of developing future questions. Such questions may include:

- What differences exist between the experiences of educators who pursue PhDs and/or EdDs at universities not classified as Research 1 universities?
- What differences exist between the experiences of educators who pursue PhDs compared to those who pursue EdDs?
- What differences can be found in teachers' beliefs and attitudes about education with and without PhDs or EdDs?
- What differences in teaching practices can be found between or among teachers with PhDs or EdDs?
- How do any of these differences manifest across various demographics (e.g., race, culture, gender, marital status, age, sexual orientation)?

As I expressed earlier in the study, there is a dearth of research that includes the voices of doctoral students in the field of education. Teachers who earn PhDs and return to the classroom, may be looked down upon by those that are employed or that intend to be employed in academia (Mason et al., 2009; Nyquist et al., 1999), but our experiences deserve validation and our profession deserves more respect. It is my hope that this research study contributes to that understanding. Also, research conducted on the experiences of practitioners who undertake doctoral studies is needed to understand how

current higher education institutions can better prepare practitioners for work outside of academia.

PhDs in Education: Implications for Doctoral Programs and Their Students

The findings from this study have implications for doctoral programs in education and for prospective doctoral students and faculty members that advise, teach, and/or lead research in doctoral programs. More broadly, institutions of higher education may consider the ways in which they structure their doctoral programs to ensure the success of their students—a success that is not solely defined by a career as a tenure-track professor.

Implications for Doctoral Programs[14]

As I noted in Chapter Two, there is little qualitative research on the professional outcomes of PhD students. Much of the current research draws from national survey data, which does not always explicitly isolate the data based on discipline. Overall, more empirical research on doctoral student experiences in education is needed for institutions of higher education to adapt to the changing wants and needs of their students and the society into which they will live and work. During my proposal hearing, my committee members suggested the following question be added to my study: "What might a Research 1 institution do about the unintended consequences (positive and negative) linked to the professional outcomes of PhD students?" This is the guiding question for the implications of this study. In relation to the future work of doctoral programs in education, I offer the following suggestions, each of which comes with concomitant dilemmas.

Revisit program focus and advertise accordingly. If the ultimate focus of a teacher education program at an R1 university is to prepare students for careers in

[14] Especially BC's C&I program

academia, they should advertise it as such. In the marketing materials, as well as the open houses offered to prospective students, the messages should be clear. Boston College's marketing material for the PhD program in Curriculum and Instruction tells prospective students: *The Lynch School doctoral program in Curriculum and Instruction is designed to develop professionals who have the knowledge, intellectual disposition, professional skills, ethical sensibilities, and leadership potential to make a difference in the lives of all schoolchildren.* The program also claims to prepare students "to lead as skilled teacher educators, administrators, researchers, and policy makers." Participants in the study conceived much of the work of teacher educators to be conducted in the classroom as opposed to alone in an office or "cubby" as the doctoral student office spaces are called. We expected to "learn how to teach teachers" (Sydney, interview). Unfortunately, many of us felt that the realistic and specific expectations of doctoral students were not articulated clearly when we considered applying to this program.

If doctoral programs in education want to produce teacher educators for Research 1 universities, and make that explicit in their messaging, this may pose a number of problems. First, it diminishes the pool of applicants, assuming that many potential students may not have fully committed to the idea of becoming a tenure-track professor at an R1 university. This decrease in the number of applicants, would greatly impact the university's yield. This may also eliminate current educators who might eventually decide that academia is a good career choice for them. The data from the study overwhelmingly suggest that participants valued the knowledge and skills they acquired in the program. By eliminating the PhD as an option for classroom teachers deprives them of important coursework and a way of thinking that can improve their practice at

the local level where much of the hard work is done. The dilemmas are clear and ethical questions abound. Does the university want to prepare the best researcher or the best all-around educator? Does the university's admissions practices wittingly or unwittingly replicate elitism?

Focus on attracting and retaining teacher educators who have a variety of career goals. If the program wishes to recruit a broad spectrum of applicants with teaching or education-related experiences, then it must be sensitive to and fully accepting that its graduates may return to the K-12 arena. Since 2009, nearly 25% of doctoral graduates of Boston College's Lynch School of Education and Human Development are working in K-12 schools as opposed to academia[15]. The doctorate in education differs from other fields because educators pursue doctorates after years of experience, not directly out of their undergraduate or masters programs. At this particular institution, applicants must have at least two years of teaching experience. There may be other Research 1 institutions that directly admit students from their undergraduate and master's programs, foregoing the teaching experience requirement. Teaching experience is valued by doctoral admissions at BC. As Sydney told me during our interview, "the more the better. Not like 50 years and then coming back, but people that have been in classrooms between eight and fifteen years." This level of experience establishes people in a geographical location as well. By the time teachers accrue this much experience, they are likely to have families, which plays a significant role in one's career choices, as I noted in this study. The goal of any teacher education program is to produce teacher educators. It seems important to expect or require more teaching experience from such candidates. On

[15] Out of 103 graduates, 25 chose careers in K-12 settings. This data was shared by the TESpECI department office, which they admitted was incomplete data because not all graduates had reported their current positions. Some of the graduates may have changed positions or careers since this data was shared.

the other hand, universities have elected to offer direct admit programs because it increases the applicant pool and creates a more prestigious low acceptance rate, thus earning them higher rankings in *U.S. News and World Report*.

As a nationally recognized school of education, with a selective admissions process, it would seem beneficial to the program to retain *all* of its doctoral students if possible. Being more proactive about the program's focus and taking "greater initiative in helping prospective students to ask discerning questions and in providing them with appropriate information" (Golde, 2005, p. 696) might reduce attrition and develop a more informed doctoral cohort. Information could include job placement data; honest discussion about isolation, work-life balance, course expectations; and more timely description of ongoing or emerging research. It is important to note, as Denecke, Frasier, and Redd (2009) argued:

> Although much of their undergraduate (and possibly master's degree) experience has prepared them to succeed in coursework, students often have had little preparation for the later stages of doctoral study. In some fields, they typically find out only at the dissertation stage what a major portion of their lives as professional researchers will entail: significant time spent in isolation, long-term and sometimes uncertain rewards, and the painstaking revision of countless drafts. For some students these activities have their own rewards and contribute to the thrill of academic research; for others, however—whether in pursuit of an academic or a nonacademic career—these can be deal breakers. (p. 37)

Consider an additional EdD program or track for students who choose to return to K-12 settings. Many of the participants in the study acknowledged the prestige

of Boston College and cited that as one of the major reasons they chose this institution compared to others in the area. The research also suggests that students have little knowledge about the realities of doctoral study, but understand the authority that accompanies a PhD (e.g., Mason, Goulden, & Frasch, 2009). Boston College does offer an EdD in Educational Leadership, which is designed for full-time school administrators who wish not only to earn this advanced degree but also obtain their superintendent licensure through the state of Massachusetts. The Professional School Administrator Program (PSAP) is "grounded in the core values of the Lynch School with coursework focusing on leadership for social justice, school reform, community building, and leadership for learning" (LSOE, 2014). Like the PhD program in Curriculum and Instruction, the PSAP offers a cohort model for administrators to form meaningful relationships with other district-level leaders. Prospective students must have a master's degree and at least three years of administrative experience. Most interesting about this program is its "dissertation-in-practice conducted by a small team of students on the problems of practice in educational leadership" (LSOE, 2014). If this type of program existed for classroom teachers, I imagine that there would be great interest. An EdD in Curriculum and Instruction could aim to enhance the practice of classroom teachers, offer licensure in school-level administrative positions, and prepare students to become adjunct faculty or Professors of Practice. The distinctions between and among each of these programs could be more explicit and more clearly understood by prospective students, so they may make the most informed decision before embarking on such a challenging academic endeavor.

Enhance collaborative research. In the later stages of doctoral work, I (and many of the participants in this study) most strongly felt the isolation described in the research and in this study. The isolation I felt as a doctoral student impacted many aspects of my life, and I believe it is important to heed the advice of Nyquist et al. (1999) to "move away from statistics and abstract ideas about graduate education [and] confront the real-life experiences of these highly motivated, intelligent, caring, hardworking individuals" (p. 26). Sydney reflected on "the isolation of doing data analysis and writing alone" (narrative), which was echoed by other participants. My experience writing a 50+ page literature review during the entire month of June was one of the most miserable experiences of my life. The most isolating work is also the most tedious. Ensuring that students have opportunities to work with others, especially when completing work for assistantships could be beneficial. Although some faculty lead teams of doctoral student researchers, most work with one or two students at a time. This work is isolating by virtue of number and works against collaboration, which could result in more innovative and creative research. Collaborative research conducted in "centers" is becoming quite prevalent across many university research programs as are interdisciplinary research projects across departments.

Ensure doctoral students have equitable and valuable experiences in their assistantships. The findings of this study revealed inequity among doctoral students in terms of assistantships. Grace expressed some distress when she discussed her experiences in certain research assistantships, saying that she felt as though she "could not breathe" during one semester of work. One of the more honest assessments of the graduate assistantship structure clearly articulated the way I felt during the two years I

worked for a professor: “It's like a total caste system, you're just shit on” (Grace, interview).

Doctoral students in this study and in other research studies (e.g., Austin, 2002; Ellis, 1997) felt that they had to put their own research interests or agendas on hold in order to complete the required work of the assistantship. The main conflict for participants in Austin’s (2002) study “was feeling that they must adjust or sacrifice their own interests and goals (often the very interests and questions that led them to graduate school) to fit the expectations and interests of their advisors” (p. 110). While it is certainly necessary for doctoral students to gain professional experiences and “learn the ropes” with experts, there must be more time and space for these students (who are already professionals) to engage in work that is meaningful to them.

Clearer communication between faculty and doctoral students would help to clarify the equity among students’ experiences. Grace reflected on this in her interview when she said:

> I think I had different experiences engaging in research with faculty members. I mean it's the faculty member's prerogative, but I think it would be really helpful if people were consistent about the way they involve students in their writing and their research, and be super-explicit about that. I think people get burned and expectations aren't clear. [They say things like] “this is a data set, and you can't use it.” Well, I thought I could use it. I thought you were going to be first author.... All that kind of stuff. That could do for some clarity.

The mystical shroud that covers the university professor’s life is quickly dismantled once doctoral students enter their programs. Ultimately, we want clear

expectations, clear communication, and clear respect. The expectations placed on doctoral students are already great, considering ways to improve the quality of their experiences may increase their overall satisfaction in the program.

Value teaching in teacher education. Beyond the typical assistantship, which involves doctoral students conducting research with professors and their research teams, the most beneficial and enjoyable activity that became apparent in the study was teaching at the university level, which is a finding consistent with other dissertations on doctoral student socialization and experiences (e.g., Garrett, 2006; Meyers, 2017). Although teaching is a fundamental aspect of the role of university faculty, this part of the doctoral program received little attention compared to our preparation for research. As Rosser and Tabata (2010) noted, "In Doctoral/Research-Extensive universities and increasingly 4-year colleges, research and publishing is rewarded more than teaching and has supplanted teaching as the principal faculty role" (p. 451). By placing more explicit value on and support for teaching at the university-level, doctoral programs in education may retain more future teacher educators because not only is this what we love to do, it is also what we thought we would be prepared to do. Universities could also consider allowing for more team teaching between faculty and doctoral students, which would not only enhance the mentor/mentee relationship but also improve the practice of both. This is difficult as the university does not typically support team teaching, likely because the cost would be too great. Why pay two teachers when you only have to pay one? The data from this study, as well as from other research studies (see Austin, 2002), report that doctoral students feel unsupported when it comes to teaching courses at the university level, though they enjoy that work the most. Sydney, Maggie, Charles, Henry, and I all spoke

about how much we enjoyed teaching at the college level. The problem, however, was that we were provided little support or guidance. Henry articulated the experience of being asked to teach a new course during the program:

> I'd get called up to teach these various courses and the department chair would say, "Do you want to teach Education 482, sub-topic whatever it might be?" I'm like, "Sure, do you want to send me a synopsis of the class?" Yeah, and you get like a paragraph to work with. It was so disorganized, no one gave you anything. You're like, well I guess I'm gonna teach myself this subject in the next week and a half and then I'll teach it. I think I was actually pretty successful at that. Building this confidence, and realizing you can go do some research and figure some stuff out and pick a good book or two and then everything else just kind of falls into place. (interview)

Jones (2003) noted the growth of lower-paid adjunct faculty positions compared to full-time positions, and argued that this may become an issue not only for two-year institutions but also for four-year institutions. Doctoral graduates may be so desperate for a job that they take adjunct positions with the hope of "getting a foot in the door." Maggie, Sydney, and I all believed that becoming an adjunct was a potential stop on the teacher education career track. According to the American Association of University Professors, as of 2016, 73% of instructional positions across U.S. institutions were "off the tenure track" (AAUP, 2018). At Research 1 universities nearly 30% of the instructional faculty is comprised of graduate students (AAUP, 2018). Furthermore, as universities are now hiring more Professors of Practice, whose charge is to teach rather

than research, it may behoove programs in doctoral education to encourage K-12 faculty to consider earning a PhD and keeping their feet in both worlds.

Reconnect the worlds of academia and K-12 schools. The worlds of doctoral education and K-12 schools are too far apart. The consequences of this disconnect are documented in the research. As Lovitts (2004) indicated in her work, some graduate students felt that what they learned in their graduate programs was irrelevant to the real world, which led to attrition. "[L]osing students who have an interest in real-world applications means that important, socially relevant questions are not getting asked, much less answered" (p. 133). Nyquist and Woodford (2000) found that aspiring superintendents pursuing a PhD "lament that the curricula in doctoral programs are often irrelevant for the work they will be doing after obtaining the degree" (p. 12). They discussed the experience of one superintendent who was unable to get his dissertation topic approved by his committee and "quickly resigned himself to jumping through the hoops to get finished" (p. 12).

One of the most salient products of research is outreach scholarship, which works to link theory and practice in a more practical way. Yet, university researchers can be perceived as being off in their own worlds. As a few of the participants in this study noted, some professors spent more time travelling, conducting research abroad, and writing books, as opposed to engaging in more local research. Stephen spoke about working for his professor who was "rarely in the office" because this professor "traveled a lot" (interview). Henry discussed feeling a difference between the work being conducted at the university compared to the work he does in his high school classroom everyday. He said, "I can feel the difference happening in the interactions with real

students. I don't see that difference necessarily being writing another chapter for the *Handbook of Teacher Education*. It's got to happen more on the local level" (interview). This is not to say that there is not a number of professors doing meaningful work in the related contexts. I know many members of my cohort worked closely with local schools, teachers, and students, and conducted impactful research. This seemed to be more of an issue with particular professors who are (as they were described to me by one of my professors) the "macro thinkers." Integrating more practical and real-life schooling scenarios into their coursework and outreach scholarship into assistantships could aid in mediating the theory (research) and teaching (practice) connection. It may be also beneficial to delineate certain classes as exclusively theoretical and foundational to research, which clarifies expectations for all concerned. All coursework is beneficial, as those of us who return to K-12 settings see ourselves as boundary spanners bridging two worlds. What we have learned in the program is of extreme value; it can and should be put to use in schools every day.

Implications for Doctoral Students

Know what you want before you enter the program. All participants except Charles were unclear about what they wanted from the doctoral program and how this program would impact their career goals. Grace understood the world of K-12 and had family members who had worked in institutions of higher education in administrative positions, but she claimed that she did not know the "teacher education part," or that she "could have a career doing this" (interview). Despite the confidence she had in her preparation for a faculty position at a university, Grace's "soul crushing" experience as a tenure-track professor came as a complete surprise (interview). Sydney entered the

doctoral program believing that she could wear "two hats"—one as a school administrator and one as a teacher educator—and admitted that she "was really naive" in this assumption. She said, "I knew that there was research involved, but I didn't really know what that meant." She had a vision for her professional life that was strikingly similar to my own going into the program. She recalled:

> And so in my head I was like, oh, I could get this PhD now because I'm in my 30s and then I can be a school administrator in my 40s and then I can be a teacher educator in my 50s and 60s. That seems like a good idea… (interview).

Henry talked to a couple of professors before considering a PhD in comparative literature. He said:

> [T]hey both gave me similar advice, which was like at this point, this is so cutthroat….One of them basically said if your interest is to go into a classroom and sit around a seminar table and have interesting discussions and read good books, you should just go to an elite prep school. (interview)

The onus is on applicants to converse with faculty and ask the right questions: queries that attend to work-life balance, quality of assistantships, market-related issues, career goals and opportunities, financial concerns, and cohort diversity (race, gender, married/single, age, etc.). Potential students should ask these questions when they meet and talk with faculty, participate in open house and recruiting events, and faculty should respond honestly. They should use these questions when they read and analyze recruitment materials, program mission statements and brochures, faculty research, and when they talk to doctoral students already in the program.

Although applicants are required to indicate potential research questions and interests, and are encouraged to identify faculty with whom they would like to work, for many this is part of "playing the game" to be accepted. During their interviews, participants admitted not actually knowing anything about the professors whose work they cited in their personal statements. One participant told me that they "Googled" some of the more prominent professors and read the last page of an article written by one of them so that they could include it in their personal statement. Two other participants admitted that they had no idea who their advisor was until they had discussions about Boston College with colleagues who knew of this professor's work.[16]

The participants in this research study had vague ideas about research questions and goals, but thought that one goal of doctoral study was exploration to refine existing interests and questions or discover new ones, a type of discernment process, albeit short. During my interview with Grace, we discovered that we had similar experiences in one of the program's first classes. She recalled classmates being certain about their goals to become researchers, and she thought to herself, "Oh my god, all these people have a plan." I remember hearing the phrase "research agenda" for the first time during that class without a complete understanding of what a research agenda actually was. Grace remembered classmates having "clear research lines, or job destinations" when she "thought we were going to figure that out when we got here" (interview).

Given that participants mentioned sacrificing their own research agendas and questions to serve faculty agendas and questions, intimates a kind of futility to stating research goals and posing questions in the first place, as until dissertation time, questions do not really matter. I may or may not have infuriated the professor in my Dissertation

[16] I chose not to include pseudonyms here to increase and ensure anonymity.

Seminar course[17], during which time students were theoretically supposed to work through the conceptualization of their dissertations and hopefully draft the dissertation proposal. I have a folder on my desktop named "Question 47" because, over the course of that semester, I changed my dissertation question about that many times.[18]

Seek and make meaningful, reciprocal relationships with peers and faculty. Given the complicated lives of doctoral students and the rigorous demands of doctoral study, developing meaningful relationships with others is at best a challenge. Study groups are certainly one way to address this, but the focus is generally academic and collegial. Furthermore, this is not a comfortable venue for sharing any type of discomfort, anxiety, complaint, and vulnerability, or as many participants observed, feelings of being an impostor. Constructive venting is helpful especially with someone who shares similar situations. My friendships with women who have completed their doctoral programs have been invaluable. Each of us has children, which added to the stress, anxiety, and perhaps the motivation of doing this work. Through our conversations, as well as my own reflections on my time in the program, I have seen a dramatic difference in the experiences of doctoral students who have different life circumstances. The doctoral students who participated in this study shared many of the same demographics. Charles was the only unmarried participant, as well as the only one who did not have children. He, by far, had the most positive experience in the doctoral program, and as I mentioned in Chapter Five, was the only participant who enjoyed writing his dissertation. I cannot say that I am enjoying writing my dissertation while my husband is home with our two

[17] Sorry, Dr. Proctor!

[18] Two of my favorite questions included: How, if at all, does the interpretation of moral-cognitive dilemmas in literature lead to the development of students' self-awareness and social consciousness about participating in a democratic society? What happens when my students and I co-construct a multicultural literature curriculum unit designed to challenge and develop our beliefs about power and privilege?

daughters during school vacation week. We have had little time to spend with each other and the demands of this program have certainly impacted our relationship at various times. It has been tremendously helpful to communicate my feelings not only with my husband, but also with other women in the program who have had to spend time away from their families to complete their dissertations. It is crucial to talk to others who share some of your traits (i.e., marital status, parental status, gender, age, full-time or part-time status, race, culture, ethnicity, or sexual orientation). Forming a trusting relationship with someone who can help you contextualize and put issues into perspective can be the most powerful way to make it through your program.

Developing meaningful relationships with faculty is more difficult due to power dynamics. Grace accurately described the doctoral assistantship structure as "a caste system," which places doctoral students at the bottom of the social hierarchy. We do not have the financial, social, cultural or academic capital to go against the requests or demands of our professors or our department. As students we are at the mercy of the requirements for degree completion. Seeking out independent study with faculty who share your interests is immensely useful, but this requires initiative, effort, and time, which are already at a premium for you and faculty.

Participants in this study had (and some continue to have) particularly strong relationships with faculty. Sydney referred to her advisor as "one of the most brilliant human beings [she's] ever met in [her] life," and reflected positively on their "really good and close relationship." She appreciated the support she received from her advisor, especially in the form of the recommendation her advisor wrote for her, which Sydney said, "was the nicest thing anybody's ever written about [her]" (interview). My

relationship with my advisor has spanned almost fifteen years since I began my undergraduate degree at BC. Knowing that I can talk with her about anything—personal, academic or professional—has provided me with a level of support that cannot be matched.

It is important to be certain of your reasons for pursuing the PhD because it is inevitable that you will face circumstances that will challenge your personal and professional beliefs and understandings. It is essential that you have a sounding board for ideas, an expert that shares your interest and passion, and an advisor that can help you plan coursework, navigate and negotiate the local and larger contexts of doctoral study, and advocate for you. You must take the initiative, extend the effort, and make the time! Getting on research teams that share your interests is another effective strategy, but such opportunities are not always available. Given the challenging work-life balance that faculty experience, you must be considerate of their time, goals, energy, and responsibilities.

Share your stories. Finally, we must be willing to share our stories with anyone who may benefit from listening. In *Narrative Inquiry*, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) wrote:

> We retell our stories, remake the past. This is inevitable. Moreover, it is good. To do so is the essence of growth and, for Dewey, is an element in the criteria for judging the value of experience. … Enhancing personal and social growth is one of the purposes of narrative inquiry. (p. 85)

I would argue that enhancing personal and social growth is one of the purposes of education at every level. As a doctoral student I have certainly experienced such growth

and I work to enhance the personal and social growth of my own students through our study of literature.

I hope that I have made clear the importance of establishing relationships with others during doctoral study. It is also crucial to clearly and honestly communicate with faculty, peers, family members, friends, and complete strangers on social media.[19] Though you may not feel that your voice matters (as I so often have), I would encourage you to share your story with as many people as possible. Engaging in conversations with the participants in this research study proved to be the most enjoyable part for me. I looked forward to the interviews and often got lost in our stories, unaware that we had been talking for more than an hour. We spoke about courses and assistantships, professional and personal relationships, teaching and learning, misunderstandings and moments of clarity. We reflected on they ways in which we could potentially improve education at all levels, with multiple stakeholders. We revelled in our transformations.

Our passion for and commitment to K-12 education may have worked in ways that the program did not anticipate. Through our stories, we can help our programs and each other make sense of the chaos that can emerge from our experiences. These experiences within and beyond the doctoral program have shaped who we are and who we want to be. Through our stories we can better understand ourselves and others.

Conclusion

In my personal statement for the doctoral program admissions committee, I wrote: "There is something about BC—something that pulls me back to the institution that, beyond doubt, has created the educator I am today and shaped my personal identity." The

[19] There are some excellent Twitter accounts that provide much need humor about the lives of doctoral students and professors (e.g., @legogradstudent and @thephdstory).

university's commitment to social justice and the seriousness with which the school community instills this value within its teacher and doctoral candidates has affected the lives of teachers and students beyond its campus. As Stephen wrote in his personal statement, "There is no more important quality for a teacher to have than a love of learning" and I believe it is safe to say that every one of us who participated in this research study *loved* being able to learn again.

When I applied to the doctoral program, I believed that I could make a difference in the lives of future teacher educators and the lives of countless students, even those who never entered my classroom. Throughout my time in the program, I have written extensively about responsibility. It seems to be a guiding force in my personal and professional life. I feel responsible for so many things and for so many people, but, ultimately, I realized there is very little in the world of public education that I can do with those feelings. There is so much for which I feel responsible, but there is so much that is out of my control. All I can do is try to learn as much as I can, be open and honest with myself and others, and try. In *The Courage to Teach*, Parker Palmer wrote:

> When you love your work that much—and many teachers do—the only way to get out of trouble is to go deeper in. We must enter, not evade, the tangles of teaching so we can understand them better and negotiate them with more grace, not only to guard our own spirits but also to serve our students well. (p. 2)

Pursuing a PhD in Curriculum and Instruction was my way of going "deeper in." Now, with the knowledge and skills I developed during the program, I am teaching high school English again. I understand myself and the system in which I live and work much better,

and try mightily to negotiate the challenges of my life with more grace. I would like to think that I have done this well, even if I am *just a teacher*.

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Appendix A: Recruitment E-mail

Dear [fill in name]:

You are being invited to participate in a dissertation research study titled, "Just a Teacher" With a PhD: The Doctoral and Professional Experiences of K-12 Practitioners. You were selected to be in this study because you are a graduate of Boston College's Curriculum & Instruction doctoral program and a practicing K-12 teacher or administrator.

The research study I propose was born from the disconnect I felt as a doctoral student who did not want to pursue a career in academia. I am currently an English teacher at Needham High School in Needham, Massachusetts. I have occasionally asked myself: Why am I working toward this degree if I plan to remain a classroom teacher? While most may not have experienced the same existential crisis I did, I knew there were others like me. Our stories, I believe, are worth being told.

This study will explore the experiences of graduates from the C&I program in order to better understand the reasons they chose to return to K-12 settings as opposed to pursuing a career as a professor. Through this study I aim to give voice to subjects (doctoral students and graduates) who are typically represented by statistics in the research literature.

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to write a narrative about your experiences within and beyond the program, participate in a semi-structured interview, as well as submit documents and artifacts from your doctoral program and teaching or administrative practice. Each individual who expresses interest in participating in the study may or may not be chosen; however, I will allow anyone who was not randomly chosen to participate in the study if they wish.

As participants in this study, you will have the opportunity to reflect on your work, which may result in a benefit to your practice. In addition, your participation may contribute to educational research working to improve the experiences of future doctoral students.

Choosing to be in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to be in this study, it will not affect your current or future relations with Boston College. You are free to withdraw at any time, for any reason. There is no penalty or loss of benefits for not taking part or for withdrawing.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to respond to this email or call me at: xxx-xxx-xxxx. You may also contact my faculty advisor, Dr. Audrey Friedman, at friedmaa@bc.edu. If you would like to review the Informed Consent before making any decisions, I have attached it to this email. If you decide you would like to participate in the study, I encourage you to let me know as soon as possible.

Thank you!

Liz Cox

Appendix B: Informed Consent Document

Boston College Lynch School of Education
Informed Consent to be in the Study: "Just a Teacher" With a PhD: The Doctoral and Professional Experiences of K-12 Practitioners
Researcher: Elizabeth Cox
Adult Consent Form

Introduction

- You are being asked to be in a research study of the experiences of graduate students who earn PhDs and return to K-12 settings.
- You were selected to be in the study because you graduated from Boston College's Curriculum & Instruction program and currently work in a K-12 setting as a teacher or administrator.
- Please read this form. Ask any questions that you may have before you agree to be in the study.

Purpose of Study:

- The purpose of this study is to explore the reasons why graduate students earn PhDs from a Research I university and return to K-12 settings. This study also seeks to understand how participants' experiences in the doctoral program affected their career choices, as well as how these experiences have shaped their practice.
- The total number of people in this study is expected to be ten.

What Will Happen in this Study?:

- If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to write and submit a narrative about your experiences in the doctoral program. I will provide a list of guiding questions, though you are not required to answer all questions. I will also ask participants to participate in one interview, which will last no longer than one hour.
- I will also ask you to submit any documents or artifacts you believe could aid in telling your story. I will request that you share your personal statements that were submitted with your application to the doctoral program, as well as other assignments (e.g., a paper or project for a course or assistantship), journal or diary entries, and photographs that may be related to either their experiences in the program or their decisions to return to a K-12 setting.

Risks and Discomforts of Being in Study:

- There are no expected risks. This study may include some unknown risks.

Benefits of Being in Study:

- The purpose of this study is to share the stories of K-12 practitioners who have earned PhDs in order to better understand the experiences and career choices of doctoral students in education.

- The benefits of being in this study include the knowledge that you have helped to contribute to an area of research that does not include the voices of K-12 practitioners specifically, and doctoral students/graduates in the field of education broadly.

Payments/Costs:

- You will receive the following payment for participation in this study: $10 gift card to Amazon or Starbucks. Payment will be mailed to participants upon completion of the interview.
- There is no cost to you to participate in this research study.

Confidentiality:

- The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I may publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. Research records will be kept in password-protected files. Mainly just the researcher will have access to information; however, please note that a few other key people may also have access. These might include government agencies. Also, the Institutional Review Board at Boston College and internal Boston College auditors may review the research records.
- I will audio-record interviews and create transcripts. The audio will be deleted immediately after it is typed. This file will be stored electronically in a password-protected computer. All identifying features such as your name will be removed from the transcripts and replaced with a pseudonym of your choosing. Pseudonym codes will be stored in a separate password-protected file. All recorded data will be destroyed ten years after the study.

Choosing to be in the study and choosing to quit the study:

- Choosing to be in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to be in this study, it will not affect your current or future relations with the University.
- You are free to quit at any time, for whatever reason.
- There is no penalty or loss of benefits for not taking part or for quitting.
- During the research process, you will be notified of any new findings from the research that may make you decide that you want to stop being in the study.
- Note that you will receive the compensation even if you decide to end the study early.

Contacts and Questions:

- I am the researcher conducting this study. For questions or more information concerning this research you may contact me via email at elizabeth.cox.2@bc.edu or by phone at xxx-xxx-xxxx.
- You may also contact my faculty advisor, Dr. Audrey Friedman at friedmaa@bc.edu or 617-552-1901.
- If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact: Director, Office for Research Protections, Boston College at (617) 552-4778, or irb@bc.edu

Copy of Consent Form:

- You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records and future reference.

Statement of Consent: (please check the box below)

- ❑ I have read (or have had read to me) the contents of this consent form. I have been encouraged to ask questions. I have received answers to my questions. I give my consent to be in this study. I have received (or will receive) a copy of this form.

Signatures/Dates:
Study Participant (Print Name) : _____

Participant or Legal Representative Signature : _____

Date _____

Appendix C: Written Narrative Guiding Questions

"Just a Teacher" With a Ph.D.: The Doctoral and Professional Experiences of K-12 Practitioners
Participant Narrative Guiding Questions

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. Below is a set of guiding questions to help you with the construction of your narrative. Please do not feel obligated to answer all questions, nor should you feel restricted by the order presented below. My hope is that you will share your story with me in a way that makes sense to you.

- Why did you apply to a doctoral program in Curriculum and Instruction?
- Why did you choose an R1 university?
- What parts of the application process do you remember? How did you feel at any point during the process?
- What were your experiences like in different courses?
- What was your experience with your assistantship(s)?
- What was your greatest challenge in the program?
- What was your greatest experience in the program?
- When did you make the decision to return to a K-12 setting? What contributed to this decision?
- Are you happy with your decision?
- What has been your greatest challenge in your current position?
- What has been your greatest experience in your current position?

Appendix D: Interview Protocol

Intro: Review the purpose of the study

Semi-Structured Interview: Icebreakers

1. How was your school year? Any plans for the summer?
2. What's the first word you think of when you hear "dissertation"? "PhD"? "Doctoral program"?
3. Any advice for me as I get underway here?

Semi-Structured Interview: Part One

The following questions were included in the participant narrative during the first stage of data collection. Some participants answered some, but not all, of the questions; therefore, I will ask participants to respond to the questions they did not address in their narratives.

1. Why did you apply to a doctoral program in Curriculum and Instruction?
2. Why did you choose an R1 university?
3. What parts of the application process do you remember? How did you feel at any point during the process?
4. What were your experiences like in different courses?
5. What was your experience with your assistantship(s)?
6. What was your greatest challenge in the program?
7. What was your greatest experience in the program?
8. When did you make the decision to return to a K-12 setting? What contributed to this decision?
9. Are you happy with your decision?
10. What has been your greatest challenge in your current position?
11. What has been your greatest experience in your current position?

Semi-Structured Interview: Part Two

1. What are the strengths of the program?
2. What are the weaknesses of the program?
3. Do you believe the expectations and values of the doctoral program aligned with your own? Explain.
4. What messages about success (either in the program or in the professional world) did you receive from people (professors, advisors, other students)?
5. What messages did you receive about teaching or working in a K-12 setting?
6. Did you experience any tension between wanting to return to a K-12 setting and being pressured to go into academia?
7. In what ways, if at all, did the program prepare you for or enhance your practice as a teacher or administrator?
8. Did you (or have you) applied for a position at a college or university? If so, why?
9. Have you ever been offered a position at a college or university?
10. Did you accept the position? Why or why not?
11. Do you see yourself leaving the K-12 setting in the future? If so, what other career would you pursue? Why? If not, why not?

12. How, if at all, has your family life influenced your decision to work in a K-12 setting?
13. How, if at all, has your location (geography) influenced your decision to work in a K-12 setting?
14. Are there any other factors that we haven't discussed that have contributed to your decision to work in a K-12 setting?
15. Would you be willing to share an artifact or two that could enhance the story of your doctoral experience? For example, would you be willing to share the personal statement you submitted in your application, an assignment or project, a journal or diary entry, or a photograph?
16. Would you be willing to share an artifact or two that could enhance the story of your professional experience? For example, would you be willing to share a journal or diary entry, a photograph, a piece of student work, a representation of meaningful professional development, or a note or card received from a colleague, parent, or student?

Closing: Thank them for their time and ask if I can follow up with email or phone call with other questions.

Appendix E: E-mail Communication

Reminder:

Dear friends,

I hope you have all had a pleasant start to the school year. I am writing this friendly reminder to respond to the narrative guiding questions (attached below). Please feel free to answer these questions or tell your story as you see fit. In other words, answer as many or as few questions as you'd like in whatever format suits your writing style or time limits. Narratives can be emailed to me or shared via Google Drive.

Once I receive your narrative, I will review it, code it, and set up a time for us to complete a phone interview. These will be planned at a time that works best for you.

Please feel free to email me with any questions or concerns.

Thank you, again, for agreeing to participate in this study. I look forward to hearing from you!

Best,
Liz

Scheduling Interviews:

Good morning!

I am hoping to begin scheduling interviews for the month of June and want to give you the opportunity to let me know of dates and times that would work for you.

I can conduct the interviews in person, over the phone, or via Skype / Google Hangout at almost any time. If possible, could you send me some dates and times that might work best for you? If you would rather set up a time sooner, I am happy to accommodate.

Once we schedule the interview, I will send you my list of questions for you to review (if you'd like).

If anything has changed and you no longer want to participate in this study, please feel free to let me know. Otherwise, thank you for your help!

Have a great weekend!

Request for documents:
Thank you again for your willingness to talk with me. I am very much looking forward to writing up these case studies.

I am now writing to request some documents or artifacts that you might be willing to share as further data. I would love to have permission to read the personal statement you submitted with your application to BC. Also, if you have an additional paper from your doctoral work that reflects what you believe about teaching and learning, that would be great. Lastly, I am asking everything to share an artifact from their teaching practice that demonstrates what you love about your job. You may choose to (or not) accompany these documents with a brief explanation of why you are sharing them with me. Short and sweet works for me.

Thanks again and please feel free to email me with any further questions.

Best,
Liz

Appendix F: Codes and Potential Themes

FIRST ROUND

Interaction

- Personal
    - Internal conditions (feelings, dispositions, attitudes, desires, needs)
- Social
    - External conditions (people, objects, community; environment)

Continuity (categories: pre-program, during program, post-program)

- Past
- Present
- Future

Situation

- Place

SECOND ROUND

Interaction

- Personal: Internal conditions (feelings, dispositions, attitudes, desires, needs)
    - Imposter Syndrome
    - Naivety and Uncertainty
    - Values
    - Love for teaching and learning
    - Disconnect with K-12 schools
- Social: External conditions (people, objects, community; environment)
    - Positive Class Experiences
    - Negative Class Experiences
    - Positive Assistantship Experiences
    - Negative Assistantship Experiences
    - Positive Relationships with Professors/Mentors
    - Money's influence on people's decisions
    - Desire for work/life balance

Continuity

- Past (pre-program)
- Present (during program)
- Future (post-program)

Situation

- Place (at Boston College)
- Place (outside of Boston College)