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When Knowing is not enough: A Narrative Exploration of How K-12 Teachers Make Decisions about the Transfer of Critical Competencies from Professional Learning to Daily Practice

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WHEN KNOWING IS NOT ENOUGH: A NARRATIVE EXPLORATION OF HOW K–12 TEACHERS MAKE DECISIONS ABOUT THE TRANSFER OF CRITICAL COMPETENCIES FROM PROFESSIONAL LEARNING TO DAILY PRACTICE

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This dissertation, by Nell E. Ballard-Jones, has
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ABSTRACT

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School districts spend millions of dollars each year to provide training and learning to staff working in direct and indirect service to students (National Council on Teacher Quality, 2021). This financial commitment says nothing about what is even more important: the need for school employees and the systems in which we work to serve students more effectively. Despite vast allocations of time and money and presumably best intentions for better social and academic outcomes for students, very little data exist that reflect regular transfer and application of training/learning into professional practice (Nittler et al., 2015). By and large, schools and school systems look the same today as they did 50+ years ago despite the fact that the world looks very different and so much more is known about the cognitive process and contextual contributors involved in erudition development. Teacher application of critical competencies such as cultural responsiveness, trauma informed practices, social emotional learning and basic neuroscience in the ways they conceptualize and implement instructional practices may not be easily apparent during casual observation, yet they are inextricably linked to positive academic and social outcomes for students, thus imperative to effective professional practice. This study investigates the ways in which professional educators make decisions about the transfer and application of professional learning centered on critical competencies (soft skills) in their daily work. Narrative Inquiry (NI) provided the methodological frame for this exploratory study that

through thematic analysis surfaced five key factors influencing learning transfer: Instructor/Presenter/Facilitator; Connection to Lived Experience; Relevance to Job Assignment; Alignment with Self-Identity; and COVID–19. This dissertation is available in open access at AURA (https://aura.antioch.edu) and OhioLINK ETD Center (https://etd.ohiolink.edu).

Keywords: narrative inquiry, critical competencies, soft skills, adult learning, transfer of learning/training, teachers, decision making, professional development, thematic analysis, leadership

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Table of Contents

List of Tables

CHAPTER I: STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM AND POSITIONALITY

> …looking at the past must only be a means of understanding more clearly what and who they are so they can more wisely build the future. (Freire, 1972, p.72)

Professional learning is big business: billions of dollars are spent each year on it (Merriam & Baumgartner, 2020). In large and small organizations, both public and private, across all employment sectors, the fiscal, temporal, and human resources dedicated to continuous learning and growth in the United States are almost unfathomable (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). Whether via consultants, internal learning/training divisions within organizations, external conferences, workshops, or collegiate coursework, it is likely that regular learning (sometimes referred to as training) is ubiquitous in all segments of the American workforce. The field of K–12 education is no different. School districts spend millions of dollars each year to provide training and learning, both optional and mandatory, to classified and certificated staff working in direct and indirect service to students (National Council on Teacher Quality, 2021). This financial commitment says nothing about what is even more important: the need for school employees and the systems in which we work to serve students more effectively. Despite vast allocations of time and money and, presumably, best intentions for better social and academic outcomes for students, very little data exist that reflect regular transfer and application of training/learning into professional practice, even when the training is evaluated by participants as being engaging, meaningful and relevant to professional practice (Nittler et al., 2015). Herein lies a pervasive dilemma and what has commonly become known as the "transfer problem" (Baldwin et al., 2009 p. 41). Less doubt exists about the existence of the transfer than a lack of clarity about how, when, and why it happens (or does not), thus surfacing a significant problem of practice. It further highlights the need for lucidity on the seemly endless unanswered questions

about the conditions that facilitate and/or inhibit transfer, and the extent to which newly acquired knowledge and skills are, or are not, applied to professional practice.

Deeply enmeshed with studies of human learning, yet seated peripherally in most of the literature, the concept of learning transfer is most simply defined as the point at which new knowledge and/or skills are applied to novel and varied situations (Broad, 1997). The transfer process, however, is deceivingly complex; so too is parsing out the multifaceted factors that encourage and inhibit it. Over the last two decades, significant weight has been given to Haskell's (2001) taxonomies that describe both levels of learning and types of transfer. Haskell identified multiple types of knowledge and 14 kinds of transfer, all of which are interrelated and mutually reliant on one another. Coupled with rapid advances and revelations in the interdisciplinary field of neuroscience, more is known about how learning happens and what it looks like in the brain (Churches et al., 2017). However, this has led to more questions, and the realization (or reinforcement) that measuring transfer and the factors that encourage or inhibit it are incredibly difficult to parse. Perhaps this is why some practitioners and researchers seem stymied and continue to focus on aspects of content delivery and assessment, the personal attributes of learners and the role of workplace culture and structures in transfer—all of which emphasize a kind of passive role among learners. For these reasons, it is supposed that most inquiry in and investigation of the complicated nature of transfer including the biological, psychological, social, and environmental factors and relationships that predicate it have remained situated in the same research domains for the last half–century: training design, participant characteristics, and work-environment factors (Leberman et al., 2006).

Adding to the difficulty of gaining a better understanding of and identifying effective responses to this predicament is that learning transfer is not obviously grounded in any single

academic field, instead it exists at the intersection and periphery of several: psychology, adult education, neuroscience, and organizational development/management. Most obviously, transfer is rooted in classical learning theories that emerged from psychology's focus on making sense of the human mind and behavior: behaviorism, cognitivism, constructivism, and humanism. The focus on the myriad of adult specific learning theories prevalent in the field of adult education are clearly seated in the psychological canon and offer some insight into the unique characteristics of and best practices for working with post-adolescent learners, yet there is no coalescence around a single theory of learning (Merriam & Baumgartner, 2020). Because transfer of learning is the most fundamental goal of formal learning and training, transfer is also at the core of research in the fields of post-secondary education and organizational development/management. Ensuring that adult learners are able to generalize and apply new knowledge and skills to the workplace and maintain them over time is at the crux of this enduring quandary.

The fact that the existing literature on transfer of learning, which showcases contradictory findings, and often, inconsistent measures, pose further limitations. A gap of particular interest, and foundational inspiration for this study, are the limited attempts to investigate the transfer of so-called "soft-skills" (critical competencies) in organizational settings where shifts in mindset, perspective, and approaches to work are essential to personal and institutional growth and change. In the field of K–12 education, teacher application of critical competencies such as cultural responsiveness, trauma informed practices, and basic neuroscience in the ways they conceptualize and implement instructional practices may not be easily apparent during casual observation, yet they are inextricably linked to positive academic and social outcomes for students, thus imperative to effective professional practice. In response to the passive role

learners are assigned in much of the extant work on the topic, I am doubly invested in adding to the knowledgebase by seating the adult learner at the center of my inquiry—exploring the ways in which they make decisions about what they apply from learning and what they do not. To date, the data most commonly measured in transfer research are those pre-post tests, participant self-reports of knowledge/skill acquisition and inventories that measure the factors that contribute to transfer of learning (training; Baldwin et al., 2009; Merriam & Leahy, 2005; Subedi, 2004). It is not enough to compare what someone knew and could do before a learning experience to what they know and can do after a learning experience. The burning question is what they do, or not, with what they know. And why?

Even when we have much of the knowledge and many of the skills necessary to fundamentally change outcomes for students, and even though we invest tremendous resources of both time and money on professional learning to further build capacity for improved practice, meaningful change remains elusive. This is my "why," why I felt obligated to enter into scholarship that has the potential to shed light on how educators make decisions about if, when and how they transfer and apply new professional learning into practice. So, while I did not engage in specific dissertation research about equity, cultural competence, closing achievement and opportunity gaps or developments in educational neuroscience, all of which I am passionate about, I believe my inquiry into the transfer and application of learning by educators sheds some light on how teachers process and make decisions about the transfer and application of soft-skills and critical competencies to their practice. This information is imperative to the facilitation of fundamental shifts in how teachers think about, plan for and engage with their work. My desire, of course, is that the exploratory nature of this dissertation provides better understanding of processes and emergent themes that can (and will) inform future study designed to support better

professional learning and ultimately improved results in schools and school systems. Without significant change, the American education system will continue to reinforce inequitable outcomes for students, thus fortifying larger societal ills that leave significant segments of the U.S. population marginalized.

As a long-time school administrator, one of my most important responsibilities is to provide high quality and effective professional development opportunities to staff so that school teams can more effectively meet the needs of all students. The constant challenge I have faced is ensuring that professional learning not only meets key characteristics of core adult learning principles (Knowles et al., 2015; Merriam & Bierema, 2014), but also results in transfer and application of learning in practice so that educators are both prepared to better serve students and active in that endeavor. The goal is to move beyond being an organization committed solely to training and learning to also being an organization focused on and dedicated to planning for and doing the work necessary to effect improved practice and ultimately positive outcomes for students. It matters less what a practitioner knows and can do, than what they actually do. Adding to the sense of urgency is the fact that generally schools and school systems look the same today as they did 50+ years ago despite the fact that the world looks very different and so much more is known about the cognitive processes and contextual contributors (and obstacles) involved in erudition development. And the reality that significant numbers of students have been and continue to be inadequately served (or worse, harmed) in our schools and school systems (The Nation's Report Card, 2021; U.S. Department of Education, 2021; Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction [WOSPI], 2021).

Positionality

For over 20 years I have been a professional educator, I have worked as both a high school social studies teacher and as a school administrator. My professional experience includes both urban and suburban districts in large comprehensive schools as well as in smaller alternative settings. Unlike many of the colleagues with whom I've worked over the years, I came to this profession not because I liked or was particularly successful in school, rather I wanted to effect change because I believed that the American education system was falling far short of its promise to inform and shape a collective future that is more just, equitable, engaged, and representative.

For most of my K–12 academic life, I was a capable but disengaged and reluctant student. My high school friends generally outperformed me, I did just enough to get by. Yet today I am one of only three of my closest friends from adolescence to have earned bachelor's degrees and the only one to have completed a master's degree. I have wondered over the years what was different for me; I certainly was not any smarter or more talented than my friends, but I continued on a path of formal education and most of them did not. There are the obvious, if not cliché answers: my parents valued education and I had regular access to high quality instruction. My mother was a high school English teacher, my father the poster-boy for lifelong learning—a voracious reader and frequent enrollee in a diverse selection of community college classes during my childhood. But there are less obvious (to some) answers as well: I benefited from the privilege of being White and the child of parents who understood how to access and navigate the education system because by and large it worked for them. Even in my most mediocre (at best) academic moments, I had a significantly higher likelihood of completing post-secondary education and earning higher wages than many of my childhood peers simply by being born

White. It is within this frame that my career as a professional educator was forged and where I continue to situate the purpose of my work.

As is evidenced in my own life, K–12 student achievement data across the United States are overwhelmingly predictive: we can predict with relative accuracy how students will perform based on race, socioeconomic status, English language proficiency, gender, and special education/504 status (Alexander, 2012). Herein lies what I view as the greatest dilemma for professional educators: when school systems serve to reinforce and exacerbate, rather than minimize (or eliminate) societal ills of discrimination, alienation, and inequity—systems need to change. Unfortunately, too often the American education system has perpetuated and reinforced systemic inequities instead of eroding them (Alexander, 2012; Z. Hammond, 2015). The school district where I have worked for the last 15 years, for example, looks and feels very different than it did a decade ago; our student body is more racially, ethnically, linguistically, and socioeconomically diverse. And while the demographic shifts have happened over many years, the recognition of and efforts to eliminate opportunity and achievement gaps that are more and more visible have just recently moved from isolated school-specific initiatives to a district-wide priority. The data are clear: as a district we are not adequately serving and supporting all of our students. The educational programs and school cultures that have worked in the past are outdated and it is up to the adults in the system to effect needed change (WOSPI, 2021). The trends visible in my school district are not unique, they are reflected widely across the United States with little variation (The Nation's Report Card, 2021; US Department of Education, 2021; WOSPI, 2021). This calls to the fore an obligatory review of and spotlight on educator professional learning and how it is and can be used to address said systemic and cultural obstacles to student success.

Given identified gaps in the research and my own areas of interest, I engaged in exploratory narrative inquiry focused on understanding the ways in which professional educators experience, engage with, reflect on, process, and make decisions about the transfer and application of professional learning in daily practice. Specifically guided by the research questions identified below, I gathered data from 18 interviews conducted with K–12 public school teachers in five states from seven school districts. Teacher participants self-selected a learning event/experience that emphasized, in-part or completely, the development and/or importance of soft-skills and critical competencies as related to their professional practice.

Research Questions

- How do professional educators process, understand and assign significance to their own transfer and application of training/learning specific skills and knowledge?
- How do educators make decisions about what they apply from a formal training/learning experience into daily practice?

Choosing Narrative Inquiry

The omissions and limitations evident in extant transfer literature led me to narrative inquiry (NI) as the best methodological fit for my proposed research, not only because it exemplifies some of the most important precepts of adult education, the importance of emergent experiential and reflective practice framed by real-life knowledge, but also because it provided an avenue by which the telling of unbridled stories could surface new knowledge and meaning–making for me as a scholar–practitioner as well as for study participants. In fact, the principle that teacher and instruction-focused research should provide direct benefit to participants as a matter of course has been widely held among narrative researchers since the mid-1980s (Carter, 1993; Elbaz, 1991; Elbaz-Luwisch, 2006). Further, NI is well established as

appropriately suited to the complex and multifaceted reality of human-centered research in both education and psychology, which are where my academic inquiries are situated (Clandinin & Connelly, 1986, 1990).

In order to better understand how teachers make decisions about what they transfer and apply from formal learning experiences, I used the questions below to guide each of the narrative interviews conducted with study participants:

- What stands out to you from the professional learning experience/event?
- What have your transferred and applied from that learning event into your regular practice?

Given the focus of my investigation, thematic analysis presented the most appropriate tool to interpret and analyze the narratives I collected. Jovchelovitch and Bauer (2000) described a process in which the researcher constructs a coding frame by paraphrasing text into summary sentences and then into categories (key words) reflecting themes. Bold (2012) further described thematic analysis as encompassing two main ideas: "that the researcher is often seeking and identifying themes (or not) within the narratives; and that experiences usually involved relationships between people and contexts" (p. 129). Following the practices articulated by Riessman (2008) in her reworking of Mishler's (1995) model, I focused primarily on *what* was included in informant reports, rather than aspects of the "telling," in the identification of emergent themes.

Overview of Remaining Chapters

In Chapter II, I critically review the literature surrounding adult learning as well as transfer literature and identify the gaps that informed my research trajectory. I also identify the potential implications for leadership and change in the field.

In Chapter III, I explore the history and philosophical underpinnings of narrative inquiry (NI) as a methodology and why, coupled with my positionality, it provided an elegant fit for my study. I further review the research model as implemented and steps undertaken for data collection and analysis.

Chapter IV reports data derived from study participants relying on the identification and exploration of emergent themes. In Chapter V, I review key findings, limitations, and implications for future research along with general reflections on both the research process and outcomes.

CHAPTER II: CRITICAL REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

> There's no such thing as a neutral educational process. Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring conformity to it, or it becomes the practice of freedom. Richard Shaull in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. (Freire, 1972, p. 15)

This study explored the ways in which educators assess and make decisions about what they transfer and apply from a formal learning event into daily practice. With a specific focus on critical competencies (soft skills and ways of being), this research was designed to both fill gaps in the existing literature related to adult learning and transfer as well as to provide an integrated study of the two. In order to set the context for the focus of this research, Chapter II is divided into two main sections: the first focused on adult learning and the second dedicated to transfer. Both sections provide historical context, an overview of how these domains of study have evolved, emergent and iterative ideas and approaches, as well as reinforcement that my research path was worthwhile and contributes to the knowledgebase and practice in adult professional learning and related fields.

Adult Learning

Classical Learning Theories

The brain, described by Popova (2011) as a modern muse, is sexy. People have been fascinated by the mysteries of the brain for much of human history: we want to better understand it, to be able to explain it, and in many cases to be able to master it. Learning about the brain and understanding the processes and influences that drive knowledge and skill development are well recorded across time and space. The earliest documentation of brain research started thousands of years before the modern era in Sumer, Mesopotamia, around BCE 4000 (Chudler, n.d.). The work of Greek philosophers Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, though thousands of years old, remain critical foundations of modern thinking about learning and the brain. Decartes and Locke took

up the perennial nature-nurture debate nearly two thousand years after Plato and Aristotle engaged in similar discourse, and Rousseau explored ideas of power, marginalization, goodness, and corruption in societal and educational contexts in 18th century Western Europe (Bates, 2016). Dewey emerged at the turn of the 20th century as a critically influential thinker who emphasized the importance of learner experience in education, not just the delivery of pre-ordained knowledge. Like Freire who emphasized student activism and reflection as a means to reach critical consciousness among learners as a prerequisite to combating societal ills and inequities, Dewey, too, emphasized the importance of active education and providing learners with experiences that encouraged intellectual and moral development (Bates, 2016). Brain mystique persists as a perennial topic of interest to academics and laypeople alike. The legacy of these ideas explored and promoted are clear in nearly all studies of learning and education over the last century.

In addition to the foundational theoreticians briefly mentioned above, any review of learning theory in contemporary times must be also situated in classical psychology, specifically in behaviorism, cognitivism, constructivism, and humanism. While predominantly focused on learning in childhood and adolescence, the ideas posited in these theories provide the foundational canon for modern conceptualizations of learning in adulthood as well and are thus worthy of review.

Behaviorism

Widely criticized for ethical issues rampant in early research and autocratic principles, yet ubiquitous in learning environments to this day, behaviorism is fundamentally grounded in a belief of stimulus and response as the means to achieving desired learning outcomes (behaviors). From an educational perspective, behaviorists believe that teachers should be in control and

determiners of what and how students learn. The stimulus can be positive, such as a desired reward, or negative and fear based (punishment), but the outcome is always seated in preferred behaviors (as determined by the teacher or school system; Bates, 2016). Though not the first to investigate the influence of stimuli on study participants, Watson (Bates, 2016; Watson, 1919, 1928) is credited with developing the concept of *conditioning*. He believed that regardless of nature, humans could be conditioned (trained) to be and do (almost) anything. Pavlov and Skinner are probably the most well-known behaviorists of the 20th century, both extending Watson's work on conditioning via Pavlov's dog experiments (Malone, 1990) and Skinner's focus on positive versus negative reinforcement (Bates, 2016; Skinner, 1958).

Cognitivism

Heavily influenced by Dewey's focus on the importance of an individual's growth and development in the 1910s, cognitivism emerged as direct reaction to the compliance and conformist approach to learning favored by behaviorists. In essence, cognitivism is grounded in a belief that learning organizations and practitioners should be driven by development of human potential rather than predetermined outcomes dictated in a hierarchal social structure in order to reinforce existing power dynamics. Gestalt psychology that appeared in Germany in the 1920s was dominant in the development of cognitivism and particularly influential as it introduced the idea that there are inextricable links between perception, thinking, learning, and understanding. It is where these concepts intercept that cognitivists believed learners would experience a "ping moment" when inspiration would guide them to successfully solve a problem—the moment at which their own insight would lead them to a solution (as opposed to regurgitating a singular pre-determined process; Barber, 2002; Bates, 2016). Vygotsky (1978) further introduced the principle of educational scaffolding, building on previous social and educational experiences, as

facilitating learners' ability to reach the *zone of proximal development* where they can achieve higher levels of learning. The role of teachers, cognitivists would argue, is to ensure learning activities allow students to build on prior knowledge/experience and to provide opportunities for students to safely fail, then reflect and try again, as part of the learning process and personal development.

Constructivism

While some consider Piaget a cognitivist because his central belief that people build knowledge based on experience is at the core of most cognitive theories, others consider him the father of constructivism. Piaget (Piaget & Inhelder, 1969, 2000) elucidated a theory of learning based on the idea that knowledge and skill development is constructed by individual experience combined with the emotional, biological, and mental stages of development. While Piaget focused his work primarily on learning in childhood and adolescence, his theories are tremendously influential in conceptualizations of adult education as well—especially his assertion that reflection is an essential component of meaningful learning. Bruner (1966, 1971) added to constructivist theory by focusing on the communication between teacher and student—namely that instructors ensure students have all requisite knowledge and skills to solve educational problems without dictating rigid solution formulas. Instead, students are encouraged to make meaning from sometimes disparate prior knowledge, skills, and experiences in order to construct a new knowledgebase. Constructivists would view the role of teachers as facilitating this kind of experiential learning deeply reliant on connecting personally constructed knowledge with critical reflection that challenges learner assumptions and facilitates growth. Teachers act as mentors and coaches creating opportunities for real-world problem-solving and practice

among students that simultaneously supports and challenges learners to reach new and deeper levels of knowledge and skill development (Merriam & Baumgartner, 2020).

Humanism

In reaction to the perception of some psychologists that cognitivists and constructivists exaggerated the importance of meaning-making and behaviorists' de-emphasis of human capacity for learning and self-determination, humanism emerged in the mid–1900s against the backdrop of post-war society and burgeoning social and political activist movements. Humanists focus on self-empowerment and the will of the individual to not only dictate what is learned, but how and when it is learned. Rogers (1994, 2004) emphasized a client (student) centered approach to psychology and education and saw the role of therapists and teachers as facilitators who encourage practicing congruence, empathy and respect in order to enable learners to reach their own solutions. Essentially, the focus is not on what is taught, but how it is taught; process over product (Rogers, 1994, 2004). Maslow's (1987) hierarchy of needs suggested that an individual's receptivity to learning is dictated by fundamental human needs and the extent to which they are being met at any particular time and emphasized the crucial role intrinsic motivation plays in the advancement of learning. Mezirow (1997) believed the fundamental purpose of education should be grounded in learning that is individually transformative for the student, thus society. By focusing on the intersection of life experiences, reflection and rational discourse, Mezirow elucidated that humans would begin to experience the world and their interactions in it with an inclusive, compassionate and interdependent lens.

The idea of learning as a personal endeavor influenced by previous experience and reflection is ubiquitous in the fields of professional development and adult education—so while

classical learning theories in their inception were primarily focused on learning in childhood and adolescence, they have been applied in adult learning contexts as well.

Adult Learning in the Modern (American) World

For the purpose of this review, I will focus on learning in adulthood in the United States beginning with an appraisal of the sociocultural context within which adult learning is happening in this country, followed by a synopsis of kinds of educational experiences available and an exploration of the ways in which adults are engaging in learning activities and why they are participating.

The current context of adult learning can be framed around changing demographics, globalization, and technological advancements which combine, and often overlap, in their influence on contemporary adult learning. To begin, the population of adults outnumbers children and adolescents for the first time in American history (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). Along with this aging of America, the country is also increasingly culturally and ethnically diverse, and more educated than ever before (Merriam & Baumgartner, 2020). These factors have influenced a shift from a youth focused society to one primarily oriented around the adult populous, though this shift is not one dimensional or categorical. Ninety percent of those aged 25 or older have completed high school or some post-secondary education, approximately 44 million people, equivalent to 13% of total population, are foreign born—combined with overall birthrates, population growth projections suggest that non-Hispanic Whites will make up less than 50% of the population by 2045 (Frey, 2018). As a result of these realities, it is no surprise that education for adults most often falls into one of the following categories: job specific knowledge and skills; adult basic education (ABE) focused on language competency and/or

specific life skills/knowledge; personal enrichment/interest; and higher and continuing education programs (Merriam & Bierema, 2014).

The demographic shifts described above in combination with globalization, specifically the interaction between and interdependence among world economies, have further contributed to what learning in adulthood looks like in contemporary America. Brysk (2003) describes the rise in connection, cosmopolitanism, communication, and commodification as the key indicators of globalization. The expansion of world markets, privatization of previously government held industries and services, development of more sophisticated and efficient communications technology, and the emergence of non-governmental seats of economic power and influence, exemplify our global reality. The increase in goods, services, ideas, and capital, both financial and human, that now move, effortlessly (or seemingly so), across and between international borders exemplifies the complex reality of our globalized world. This marriage of global marketplace and information technology has changed not only how and where people work, it has also changed the purposes for and ways in which adults learn. Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), distance learning coursework, and Web-based learning platforms have made both formal and informal learning opportunities more widely available to those with technological resources. Unfortunately, they have also widened existing opportunity gaps for folks who have limited technology access. Further, some argue that the commodification of adult learning opportunities is inevitable based on the dominant influence capitalism plays in the globalized system and point to evidence that the resulting neoliberalist model reinforces, explicitly or implicitly, adult educational opportunities designed to maintain inequitable and discriminatory power dynamics (Merriam & Baumgartner, 2020; Walters, 2014).

In addition to foundational access issues and technological innovations, the move from an industrial society to one based on information systems has deeply changed how and why adults learn. "In an industrial society, machine technology extended physical ability; in an information society, computer technology extends mental ability" (Merriam & Bierema, 2014, p. 17). Most technology needed for one to adequately perform their job functions, even in "non-tech" fields, becomes obsolete or antiquated within only a few years. It follows then that organizations have become significant markets for adult education, often spending millions of dollars a year on professional learning, also referred to as Human Resource Development (HRD). The vast resources, both fiscal and human, dedicated to adult learning in this context further reinforce a rationale for and evaluation of adult learning seated in capitalist ideology that emphasizes materialism, measures success by how much wealth is acquired, and connects social justice with the opportunities members of the economic underclass have to build financial wealth. "In a postmodern world characterized by large-scale changes in global activity resulting in economic, social, and political uncertainty, adult education tends to be an entrepreneurial instrument of the so-called new world order" (Merriam & Baumgartner, 2020, p. 23) resulting in the maintenance (or exacerbation) of historic dynamics of power and influence. For many, adult learning is viewed as tool for economic advancement. What is missing from this narrative, however, is the fact that open educational resources and widespread access to information in the digital age have also provided individual adults with unprecedented opportunities to pursue both formal and informal self-directed and individually initiated learning; retired adults not interested in economic advancement, for example, are accessing learning opportunities at greater rates than ever before (Merriam & Baumgartner, 2020). In order to "keep up" with even the most basic technological changes like smart phone applications and adjusting to signing forms digitally in

lieu of providing in-person signatures, we are required to navigate a reality that requires constant learning and change.

The demographic shifts, the rise of globalization, and the technological reliance now ubiquitous in American society provide the context within which adult learning is happening in the contemporary world. Whether adult basic education, personally pursued enrichment, advanced degrees, specific learning provided by employers to improve performance and incentivize employees, or simply traversing constantly evolving technological changes that emerge as part of daily life, learning is an omnipresent aspect of adulthood in the modern world.

Theories and Principles of Adult Learning

Andragogy

The concept of *andragogy*, originally introduced by Knowles in the 1960s (Knowles, et. al, 2015) is perhaps the best-known attempt to explain the ways in which adult learners differ from pre-adult learners. While initially seen as a theory, andragogy is now seen more as a collection of assumptions that differentiate adult learners from children and adolescent learners. Prior to Knowles' seminal work, most adult educators relied on general psychological understandings of learning and development to inform their practice as discussed earlier in this chapter. Most fundamentally, Knowles differentiated his andragogical model from the pedagogical one (having to do with the education of children) in that it is transactional in nature and requires active participation by the student, as opposed to the learner being the passive recipient of teacher determined and directed learning (Knowles et al, 2015; Merriam & Baumgartner, 2020). There are six key attributes of andragogy: (a) learner's need to know, (b) self–concept of the learner, (c) prior experience of the learner, (d) readiness to learn, (e) orientation to learning, and (f) motivation to learn, which Knowles believed should inform the

design, implementation, and assessment of adult-focused learning events and experiences (Knowles, et. al, 2015).

Andragogy served to both provide an identity of sorts for practitioners of and participants in adult focused learning at the same time as it served fodder for debate and criticism. Early discourse focused around whether or not andragogy was, in fact, a theory. Davenport and Davenport (1985) were fairly generous in their assertion that "the explanatory and predictive functions generally associated with a fully developed theory" applied to andragogy (p. 158). However, Hartree (1984) and Brookfield (1986) posited that Knowles had identified and described the unique attributes of adult learners and offered best practices for practitioners rather than offering an actual theory. Brookfield further critiqued the ways in which Knowles framed some of his assumptions, namely the principle of self-direction which Brookfield viewed as more of a desired outcome than given condition; and the emphasis Knowles placed on learning for one's social role and immediate application. Specifically, Brookfield argued that as presented, andragogy reduced the complex nature and levels of learning to something superficial and linked only to the development of task specific knowledge and skills related to an individual's social and economic standing. Merriam and Bierema (2014) further critiqued Knowles' presumption that all previous educational and life experience benefits learning in adulthood and noted that some lived experiences actually result in the inverse by creating obstacles that impede new learning.

Other criticisms of Knowles' early assertions that andragogy was adult specific were also challenged based on widespread belief and practice that both children and adults should experience and need both teacher-directed and student-directed learning in different contexts (Merriam & Baumgartner, 2020). Ross-Gordon et al. (2017) more recently dissected each of

andragogy's six assumptions and argued that each can be applicable in some situations and not in others. Even Knowles (1984) himself seemed to soften his early assertions by presenting pedagogy and andragogy as more of a continuum in his later publications.

The most current disparagements of Knowles' work can be grounded in critiques of humanistic psychology that influenced his work and perspectives, namely the focus on the individual learner as being autonomous and intrinsically motivated. Grace (1996) and Pratt (1993) both observed that Knowles seemingly ignored the social, economic, and political contexts that inform and influence the purposes for and ways in which adults live and learn. "Knowles never proceeded to an in-depth consideration of the organizational and social impediments to adult learning; he never painted the 'big picture.' He chose the mechanistic over the meaningful" (Grace, 1996, p. 386). Jarvis (1987) critiqued andragogy through a sociological lens, further articulating a view that learning removed from societal context is limited and incomplete. Lee (2003) and Alfred (2000) found the Eurocentric presumptions of andragogy less applicable to foreign-born and non-White learners, and Sandlin (2005) took a critical perspectives approach arguing that Knowles ignored the power dynamics and political nature inherent in formal educational experiences and further omitted an appreciation of adult learners as a heterogeneous group.

Perhaps because Knowles and andragogy are so prolific in the field of adult education, it is a bit surprising that there has been relatively limited research testing the validity of andrological principles or predicting the behavior of adult learners. Beder and Darkenwald (1982) surveyed teachers who worked with both adults and younger learners who self-reported perceived differences between the groups—teachers viewed adult learners as different from adolescent learners. Gorham (1985) found that while teachers perceived that they treated adult

students different from younger learners, classroom observations indicated that they did not. Most other studies conducted between the mid-1980s and 2000 were dissertations that in one way or another attempted to assess the efficacy of andragogically informed instruction (versus a pedagogical approach) and resulted in inconsistent and disparate findings (Rachal, 2002).

Merriam and Baumgartner (2020) suggested that despite the difficulty of assessing the validity of andragogy, the key attributes of adult learners identified by Knowles do, in fact, provide practitioners a useful frame from which they can better understand and be responsive to the adult learners with whom they work. Henschke (2011) envisioned the future of andragogical study as a field unto itself building on the foundations set by Knowles, but also expanding to a more inclusive discipline that builds on the diverse perspectives evident in the literature, essentially decoupling Knowles from the definition and future study of andragogy. There is no doubt that in order for andragogy to transition from a collection of assumptions about adult learners to an explanatory and predictive model that identifies and can be used to measure learning behaviors, there is more research to be done.

Constructive-Development Theory

Heavily influenced by Piaget's constructivist perspectives on learning, Kegan (1982, 1994) posited five defining epistemologies, or ways of knowing, that characterize the stages of learning in adulthood. Whereas Piaget focused his research and theorizing on how children used their lived experiences to construct meaning over time, Kegan focused his work on learning and development that happens beyond the adolescent years (Girgis et. al, 2018). The constructive development theory (CDT) presumes, supported by recent developments in the field of neuroscience, that cognition continues to develop and change throughout adulthood and is not fixed (Girgis et al., 2018). Kegan (1994) promoted the idea that ongoing learning happens when

adults interact with previous knowledge in a new way: simply stated, when adults view something that was once subject and make it object, they develop more sophisticated ways of constructing knowledge. For Kegan, the *subject* includes the beliefs, assumptions and emotions that typically inform how individuals make meaning from and within their lived experiences (unconscious mind). *Object* refers to that which is held in the conscious mind when meaning is derived from cognizant thought, reflection, and action (Kegan, 1994; Solms, 2014). Kegan and Lahey (2009) postulated that the vast majority of adults live in the "socialized mind," or the third stage in CDT, for all or most of adulthood. The defining characteristics of the fourth stage of development are marked by an individual's ability to self–author and create meaning by holding and processing contradictory information simultaneously (without threatening one's sense of self). Kegan's (1982, 1994) fifth order of cognition is defined by an individual's ability to both self-author and engage with dialectical reasoning and meaning making that reflects the inextricable links between subject and object and the mutual influence each has on the other. Essentially, a person operating at the fifth level of cognition embraces the knowledge that nothing exists in isolation and that the nature of being (and knowing) is a complex iterative process, a state of constant evolution. Thus, one is transformed by deeper levels of consciousness when previously held identity(ies) and epistemologies are challenged, as opposed to being limited by what is unfamiliar and unknown.

CDT has chiefly "lived" in the field of psychology, yet recent developments in educational neuroscience have offered an expansion of and opportunities for collaboration between the disciplines. Most research intending to merge advancements in neuroscience with constructivist psychology has focused on the study of participant self-awareness and mindfulness (Girgis et al., 2018). Advancements in neuroimaging tools and techniques have made it possible

for researchers to track and map where learning happens in the brain and to explore the areas of neurological activation during particular task engagement (Varma et al., 2008). In the established fields of psychology and education, CDT has been more often included as an influence on or frame for research concentrated on self-directed and transformational learning than as a standalone vehicle for adult-focused research. Regardless, Kegan's (1982, 1994) work is tremendously influential, and the stages of cognitive development articulated in CDT have seemingly constant presence in literature on adult learning.

Self-Directed Learning

Introduced by Tough (1971), self-directed learning (SDL) is one of the most widely represented categories of study related to adult education. Often connected with the self-directed components of andragogy, SDL can be conceptualized as both a description of critical characteristics held by adult learners as well as a set of thinking skills and strategies necessary for successful learning outcomes (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991; Caffarella, 2000). At its essence, SDL reflects a fundamental understanding, vetted through early research from the 1970s and 1980s, that adults make conscious decisions about when, how and why they engage in learning events and activities (Merriam & Baumgartner, 2020).

The goals of SDL are threefold: (a) facilitate self-direction among those learning in adulthood, (b) cultivate educational experiences that are transformational for adults, and (c) encourage emancipatory social action (Merriam & Baumgartner, 2020). Heavily influenced by human–centered psychology that emphasizes the importance of individual freedom and autonomy, SDL implies (nearly) unlimited human potential for learning and places the responsibility for reaching said potential primarily on individual learners and on educators responsible for constructing and facilitating opportunities for student-driven learning in formal

settings. SDL also overlaps quite a bit with the philosophy of transformational learning (discussed in more detail in the following section) in the belief that deep and meaningful learning can only happen when learners reflect on the "historical, cultural, and biographical reasons for their needs, wants, and interests" thus transforming what is known by and how meaning is made for the learner (Merriam & Baumgartner, 2020, p. 142). Brookfield and Holst (2014) further asserted a view that a critical component of SDL is a recognition that the self-directed individual be both integrated within and connected to the larger social and political contexts so that learning results not only individual change, but also promotes a challenge to existing power dynamics and some form of activism.

Within the broad conceptualizations of and goals for SDL, there are essentially three models extensively reflected in the literature: linear, interactive, and instructional (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). Linear models are reflected mostly in Tough's work (1971, 1979) and that which was heavily influenced by early interpretations of andragogy in the sense that learners move through a relatively prescriptive series of events to achieve desired learning targets (Merriam & Baumgartner, 2020). Tough (1971, 1979) identified 13 steps in self-planned learning events that represent when learners make decisions about how, when, where, and why they engage in specified learning. Knowles (1975) conceived of a six-step contract that scaffolded the planning, learning and evaluation of a specific learning event by setting context, identifying learning needs, setting goals, identifying resources and strategies, and assessing outcomes.

In contrast to linear models, interactive versions focus on a less prescriptive process, instead highlighting the manner in which two or more factors interact in non-sequential ways resulting in the emergence of specific SDL opportunities. Spear (1988), for example, focused his

investigation on how opportunity, past or new knowledge, and chance converge to create such an event. Brockett and Hiemstra (1991) proposed a two-dimensional model that focuses on the interception of learner personality traits and instructional methods presenting the learning and the context as equally important. Garrison (1997) offered a multifaceted iterative model integrating the learner's self-management (control), self-monitoring (responsibility), and motivation as requisite to achieving meaningful SDL. Roberson and Merriam (2005) explored the connection between learner motivation and some form of catalyst (could be internal or external) that intensified an individual's pursuit of self-directed learning.

Instructionally based SDL models are those that exist in the context of formal educational experiences where instructors provide scaffolding and opportunity for learner self-directedness. Grow (1991, 1994) developed the Staged Self-Directed Learning (SSDL) model which outlines four stages of learning and the ways in which instructors can facilitate increasingly self-directed activities for students. The model promoted by Hammond and Collins (1991, 2016) seems to be the only one that explicitly posits emancipatory learning and social action as unequivocal aspects of SDL, thus seating their work in critical pedagogy. Their model articulates seven behaviors that are exemplified by self-directed learners:

1. Building a cooperative learning climate.
2. Analyzing and critically reflecting on themselves and the social, economic, and political contexts in which they are situated.
3. Generating competency profiles for themselves.
4. Diagnosing their learning needs within the framework of both the personal and social context.
5. Formulating socially and personally relevant learning goals that result in learning agreements.
6. Implementing and managing their learning.
7. Reflecting on and evaluating their learning.

In contrast to the process models of Knowles' and others, Hammond and Collins (1991, 2016) were purposeful in their attention to the social, political, and economic contexts within which learning happens and emphasized both personal and social learning goals as part of SDL.

The literature focused on self-direction as a critical personality trait or developmental characteristic of the adult learner, not simply a model or process for learning, is also well established. Knowles' (1975) assumption that adult learners have a psychological need to feel autonomous is widely accepted in this segment of SDL research. Brockett and Hiemstra (1991) and Tennant and Pogson (1995/2002) reflected that this need for learner autonomy is seemingly universally held in the field of adult education. Primary research in this area falls into one of two domains: measuring self-direction among learners and conceptualization of self-direction as innate characteristic or situational in nature (Merriam & Baumgartner, 2020).

Self-determination theory (SDT) presents a complementary view of human motivation and behavior change by reframing more traditional psychological and educational approaches that focus on how individuals can be (or should be) enticed (controlled) into learning and applying desired behaviors (Deci & Ryan, 2011). Instead, SDT adopts an organismic view of personality development and human behavior more readily seen in biological sciences, namely by placing human motivation on a continuum from controlled to autonomous; differentiated and influenced by social-contextual factors that either promote or inhibit basic human needs of competence, relatedness, and autonomy that inspire intrinsic motivation for learning, growth, and change (Ryan & Deci, 2018). SDT consists of six mini-theories that together posit that these "proximal satisfactions reflect, in the deepest sense, the essence of human thriving, and they predict any number of indicators of wellness and vitality" adding that "people's curiosity,

creativity, productivity, and compassion are more robustly expressed" (Ryan & Deci, 2018, p. 5) when social contexts cultivate intrinsic motivation and integration.

Ryan and Deci (2018) connected motivation and self-determination in much the same way that proponents of SDL do, by focusing primarily on intrinsic motivation as imperative to meaningful learning and change. The phenomenological focus on *self* in SDT frames theoretically related research around understanding the ways in which experience influences autonomous action and how an individual's feelings of volition enhance "proactive capacities to selectively engage, interpret, and act on external environments" (Ryan & Deci, 2018, p. 8). Ryan and Deci (2018) indicated that studies of SDT generally seek to understand and measure both the sources (internal and external) of motivation as well as:

> the effects of being energized by . . . different motives. Put simply, different motives are not just different in magnitude; they vary in the phenomenal sources that initiate them, the affects and experiences that therefore accompany them, and their behavioral consequences, including the quality of persistence, performance, and health benefits (or costs) they yield. (p. 14)

Costa and Kallick (2004) presented an approach to assessing SDL that, similar to SDT, focused on the learner's sense of volition, specifically the ability to self-manage, self-monitor, and self-modify. The Oddi Continuing Learning Inventory (OCLI) and the Self-Directed Learning Readiness Scale (SDLRS) have been used to measure self-direction as a personality trait connected to a variety of other individual variables or as a collection of attitudes, values, and abilities that indicate readiness for SDL (Oddi, 1986; Oddi et al., 1990; Owen, 2002). Overall, the following four variables appear to have the largest impact on whether or not adult learners engage in autonomous self-direction: (a) technical skills related to the learning process, (b) familiarity with the subject being studied, (c) feelings of competence, and (d) their commitment to achieving the specific learning targets (Merriam & Baumgartner, 2020). What is largely

missing in this research domain are explorations of the ways in which learners are influenced by larger the social, cultural, economic, and political realities that are inextricably linked to how, when and why adults practice SDL.

Transformative (Transformational) Learning

Used interchangeably in the literature, transformative or transformational learning (TL) is rooted in Mezirow's (1991) framing the ultimate goal of learning as a transformation—a "dramatic, fundamental change in the way we see ourselves and world in which we live" (Merriam & Baumgartner, 2020, p.166). There are essentially two veins in which TL is theorized, the first having to do the locus of learning being the individual learner and the second focused on learning that is sociocultural in nature. Taken together, they provide an overview of the incredibly complex constructions of knowledge while also surfacing sometimes discrepant definitions and discussions on the topic. Mezirow's (2012) psychocritical approach identifies two dimensions of TL: habits of mind and point of view. The six habits of mind are: (a) epistemic (how humans gain and use knowledge), (b) sociolinguistic (influence of language and culture), (c) psychological (personality and identity), (d) moral/ethical (how determinations of good and bad are made), (e) philosophical (worldview), and (f) aesthetic (how beauty is assessed; Mezirow, 2012). "A habit of mind," according to Mezirow (2012), "becomes expressed as a point of view*"* (p. 83). Points of view are the result of beliefs, values, feelings, and attitudes that inform how humans interpret and make meaning of the world and our lived experiences. Transformation occurs when there is a change in the learner's point of view and/or habit of mind. The keys to such change are the inextricably linked processes by which a learner experiences, then critically reflects on the ways in which a particular event was interpreted. This reflection facilitates a restructuring of previously held assumptions until they are transformed

into new beliefs, thus creating fresh habits of mind and points of view that inform subsequent actions and interpretations (Merriam & Baumgartner, 2020). Daloz (2012) and Boyd (1989, 1991) expanded Mezirow's initial position by including in the transformative learning process a more holistic view including attention to the ego and unconscious mind as well as a variety of sociocultural factors that also inform what and how people know and learn—all while staying firmly focused on the individual.

Paulo Freire is perhaps the best-known theoretician taking a purely sociocultural approach to TL (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). Guided by theorist Karl Marx and other socialist and communist thinkers of the 19th and 20th centuries, Freire encouraged a reshaped educational system as a means to consciously restructure both the individual and society, eliminating the conflict between oppressor and oppressed. By redefining the relationship between teachers, students and society at large, Freire (2018) believed that education should be transformed from primarily offering acts of false benevolence to a path of liberation from oppression:

> True generosity consists precisely in fighting to destroy the causes which nourish false charity. False charity constrains the fearful and subdued, the "rejects of life," to extend their trembling hands. True generosity lies in striving so that these hands—whether of individuals or entire peoples—need to be extended less and less in supplication, so that more and more they become human hands which work and, working, transform the world. (p. 45)

In order for Freire's vision to be realized, teachers and students would have to behave and conceptualize their roles differently. Using a banking metaphor to describe the existing educational system as one in which a teacher deposits knowledge into empty accounts waiting to be filled (students as recipients of knowledge), Freire (2018) proposed a model that in contrast fosters collaborative learning, meaning making and action—all with the goal of eliminating the oppressor-oppressed dynamic and creating a freer society. When teachers and students engage in dialogical relationships to facilitate cognitive growth, as opposed to simple information transfer,

Freire purported that both teacher and student benefit, thus improving society at large—when all parties become jointly responsible for individual and group learning, there is a mutual benefit that facilitates liberation because all participants are able to become their best, most actualized selves, free from oppressive social structures that perpetuate inequality (Freire, 2018).

In addition to the socioculturally focused approach to TL taken by Freire and those inspired by his work, recent developments in the emergent field of neuroscience have gained momentum. Advancements in neuroimaging tools have allowed researchers to document what the construction of learning and transformation looks like in the brain (Janik, 2005; Taylor, 2008). Instead of diverging from established approaches to and perspectives of TL, this neurological perspective has actually reinforced how the complex and complicated nature of learning, knowing and change are influenced by both by external and internal variables and stimuli—experience, reflection, connection, and the like, are enmeshed in how humans construct and reconstruct meaning over a lifetime.

Despite widespread agreement about the core precepts of transformative learning, there are tensions and disparate perspectives that fuel ongoing discourse. Most of the debates seem to appear in one of three main forms—first, from elucidations that force dichotomies: transformative learning theory being about individual growth or societal change (not both) as an example; secondly, from alternate interpretations of how much and how complex the change needs to be in order for the learning experience to considered transformational; and finally the extent to which transformation is at its core about the individual (self) or others (Taylor & Cranton, 2012). Given its popularity in the literature, TL seems poised to maintain central focus in the field of adult education, with keen interest in exploring the extent to which TL actually

exists in practice and the ways in which it can (should) be implemented and evaluated, no doubt providing fertile ground for future inquiry.

Experiential Learning

An interrelationship between life experience and learning is reflected in much of the literature on adult learning and education. As discussed in previous sections, it is a crucial component of how Knowles differentiated adult learners from children and adolescents, and life experience is seen as a vital aspect of both self-directed and transformational learning. Regardless of its inclusion as an aspect of other adult learning theories, experiential learning (EL) deserves a dedicated review within the larger frame of adult learning and education as the links between experience and learning in adulthood are inextricable.

Dewey's (1938) propositions about the relationships between learning and experience remain ubiquitous in the field of education and provide the grounding for what has become known as experiential learning. Dewey's exploration of learning through experience posited the two principles of *continuity* and *interaction* as the factors that together facilitate learning—and, when absent or misaligned result in limitations and obstacles to development, what Dewey referred to as "mis-education." Continuity presupposes that all human learning comes from experiences that are connected to prior knowledge as well as new and future learning, creating a perpetually iterative developmental process. Interaction, Dewey (1938) elucidated, describes the transactional nature of human experience—relating the ways in which individuals interact with their environment during a particular event as either help or hinderance to learning. Dewey is also credited with highlighting the importance of project-based learning in formal education contexts that resembles problems and practices in the "real-world" (Merriam & Baumgartner, 2020). The belief being that the combination of realistic and practical learning experiences

combined with deep and deliberate reflection could, and certainly should, prepare individuals to become life-long learners. Simply stated, the experience of the learner is tantamount to determining educational outcomes.

Heavily influenced by Dewey's project-based learning and the cognitive-constructivist psychology of Piaget and his contemporaries, Kolb (1984) has become the most well-known theorist in EL by introducing the Experiential Learning Cycle and Basic Learning Styles (ELCBLS) where he situated his definition of learning as "the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (p. 38). The ELCBLS posits a staged learning process that includes concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation to facilitate the development of increasingly complex ways of learning and knowing (Kolb, 1984). Subsequent contributions to the literature have raised criticism of Kolb's seeming neglect of contextual influences on learning and surfaced three descendant models. Jarvis (1987) proposed a framework that recognized learning as "the transformation of experience into knowledge, skills and attitudes" (p. 32). Jarvis used Kolb's work as the foundation of his theorizing; however, the model that emerged is more complex in that it extends four steps to nine routes to learning inclusive of both "nonlearning" (having to do with an individual who presumes to already know something or decides not to consider or engage with a learning opportunity), "nonreflective learning" (that which involves preconscious thought, memorization, or basic skills practice) and "reflective learning" (requires conscious contemplation of the learning event). Tennant and Pogson (1995/2002) differed from both Kolb and Jarvis in that their conceptualization of EL is less a defined process than a lens through which learners can apply experience as tools to reach desired learning outcomes. They

suggested that by incorporating different kinds of experience (prior, current, new) in instruction, learning is richer and more meaningful.

Fenwick (2003) takes a more philosophical approach than the others by presenting EL as an ongoing exploration of the complex, and often discrepant, ideas about what constitutes learning, how humans gain and show knowledge formally and informally, and the role of educators in these processes. Fenwick argued that because experiential learning emphasizes "real-world" skills development and the application of those skills in practical, efficient, and natural ways, there are essentially multiple dimensions of experience that must be considered in the learning process: purpose, interpretation (production of experience), engagement, self (relationship to society). Additionally, she identified the following divergent perspectives about the nature of experience and how each provides a lens through which the knowledge construction and theoretical underpinnings of experiential learning could be explored: constructivist (meaning is constructed via reflection), situative (learning by practice), psychoanalytic (learning by engaging the unconscious mind), critical theories (learning as reflection on and critique of dominant sociocultural paradigms) and complexity theories (learning comes from interactions with and interruptions from diverse influences; Fenwick, 2003). Regardless of the divergent learning theories that inform, and perhaps inspire, ideas about EL, there is no shortage of unresolved discourse on the topic—from exploring the notion of individual identity and selfhood in EL, to the significance of reflection on meaningful learning, and whether or not it is appropriate to frame an experience as a concrete sequential event, the possibilities are vast. Fenwick (2003) does not offer a process that easily allows for the intersection, or overlap, of said theories; she does, however, provide recommendations for how educators can facilitate and assess EL within the learning theory(ies) to which they ascribe.

Summary of the Literature

There exists decades of research, theory and practice in the learning domains. Firmly rooted in the field of psychology, scientific approaches to adult learning theories began with behaviorism in the early 20th century—its legacy is evident in the commonly held assumptions that effective learning results in behavior change and many of its premises are inextricably linked to how formal educational programs have developed over the last century with a focus on externally defined values and needs and "training" learners to meet specific outcomes. Later in the 20th century, theorists like Maslow and Rogers developed models that unlike behaviorism, acknowledged the complex nature of being, and the belief in (mostly) unlimited human potential. Rogers, in particular, is credited for inspiring the trend toward student–centered versus teacher–centered educational practices that began in the 1980s (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). Gestaltian cognitivists further diverged from behaviorism with a focus on the mental processes involved in learning, particularly memory and stages of development. More recently, constructivism, based on the idea that learning is the result of experiential meaning making has gained momentum and influenced thinking about best instructional practices. Aspects of all of these perspectives are evident in the development of adult specific learning theory and practice. There is widespread consensus on best practices in adult education: the importance of differentiated curriculum that is built on and related to the "real world" experiences adults have/will have; clearly defined and assessed learning objectives; opportunities for learners to engage in reflective practice; self–direction; and deliberate inclusion of collaboration as part of the learning event. Yet, just as there is "no single theory that explains human learning, there is no single theory of adult learning—several frameworks, or models… contribute to our understanding" (Merriam & Baumgartner, 2020, p. 117).

The topics that remain a bit more opaque in the field of adult education revolve around issues of power and marginalization and perspectives on the need/desire for the learner to change as a result of a learning environment or experience. While there has certainly been a move to more explicitly acknowledge power dynamics in classrooms between teachers and students over the last couple decades and increasing mainstream support of Freire's (2018) ideas about power and the political nature of learning, the complex interplay has yet to be fully fleshed out or adequately addressed. It is commonplace to identify the unequal distribution of power in a traditional classroom setting with a teacher or professor holding most of it. What is more complex and less frequently addressed in the literature and research are the multi-faceted ways in which these power dynamics are/can be manifested both inside and outside of classrooms. Issues of coercion around the ways in which instructional outcomes are determined and how content is chosen and delivered is reflected in much of the literature as a dilemma in the field. Heretofore this problem of practice has been primarily discussed as a problem without solutions, just recommendations on how individual practitioners and organizations can try to mitigate bias; or contextualized by theories that explain why and how these structures exist (i.e., critical theories), but do not sufficiently address what to do to combat them in any seemingly feasible way. Neither do they explore the ways in which individuals experience and make meaning from the resulting dynamics of power and marginalization. Another challenge frequently acknowledged in more current literature is related to disparities in who has access to adult learning opportunities and the kinds of opportunities that exist. Opportunity gaps are evident based on demographic, geographic and technology related factors impacting when, how and whether or not adult learning experiences are accessible. The challenges presented by impediments to access and the existence of issues of power manifested in coercion have far

reaching implications—the potential to reinforce inequity in educational systems, fields of employment and in society at large. In my estimation, these are significant predicaments that are deserving of both meaningful study and subsequent action.

Transfer of Learning (Training)

Transfer of learning is a concept inextricably linked to how human beings live and work—how we take in information and how, and to what extent, we are able to transfer said learning to new, diverse and unfamiliar situations. Transfer can also influence the ways in which we participate in the typical and routine parts of our lives by providing new perspectives and skills that help improve, or at least inform, how we function, engage, and process within and across diverse settings. Embedded in the fields of education, psychology, and management the transfer of learning (sometimes referred to as transfer of training) is the ultimate goal of educational experiences—in fact, it is one the most significant problems of practice identified by practitioners who work with adults (Phillips, 1996; Williams et al., 2003). "Learning transfer is not just a higher order cognitive ability; it is a survival skill" for both individual learners and the organizations in which they work (Hung, 2013, p. 36).

One of the most critical responsibilities of an organizational or institutional leader is to provide high quality and effective professional development opportunities for staff so that both individuals and teams can more effectively meet the needs of the organization. The challenge, of course, is ensuring that professional learning not only meets the key characteristics of core adult learning principles (Knowles et al., 2015; Merriam & Bierema, 2014), but also results in transfer and application of learning in practice. There exists widespread interest in fixing the "transfer problem" in adult education and training—ensuring that students/trainees are able to generalize learning to new settings (often in the workplace) and maintain said knowledge and skills over

time. Literally billions of dollars are spent on organizational and human resource development annually, so if for no other reason than the vast resource expenditures, stakes in this area are high (Merriam & Baumgartner, 2020). Perhaps it is not surprising then, that there exist multiple theoretical approaches to and frames for understanding and addressing what is widely seen as a perennial dilemma.

Definitions and Conceptual Understandings

At its essence, Broad (1997) defined transfer as the "effective and continuing application by learners—to their performance of jobs or other individual, organizational, or community responsibilities—of knowledge and skills gained in the learning activities" (p. 2). By and large, most research related to transfer of learning among adults inhabit the fields of workplace training and human resource development and focus on the ubiquitous themes of participant characteristics, program content and design, and work environment (Merriam & Leahy, 2005). While seemingly simple once distilled to this core, both the conceptualizations of and the learning processes involved with transfer are deceivingly complex. To begin, there exist multiple descriptions and definitions of transfer, the most common of which are reviewed below.

Near and Far Transfer

Near transfer involves an individual's ability to successfully apply learning to a new, though nearly identical, circumstance or situation (Foley & Kaiser, 2013). Primarily ascribed to learning that is focused on a particular and perhaps finite set of skills, near transfer is relatively easy to observe and measure. Simply put, in order to achieve near transfer, a learner must merely have retained specific skills that they were taught and be able to use them in a similar context. Far transfer, by contrast, describes an instance in which previously acquired knowledge and/or skills are applied to a novel situation or during an inimitable event. Essentially, it requires that

learners take new knowledge and use it to build deeper and more sophisticated levels of understanding and application of learning in unfamiliar contexts (Hempenstall, 2019). Detterman (1993) seems to be the first to name near and far transfer, though he is not last. While the terminology related to near and far transfer has become pervasive in practical discussions, the difficulty of research specific to these identifiers is that it is particularly superficial, namely because it almost exclusively studies learner behavior in isolation, devoid of socio-contextual influencers. Perhaps an attempt to address the apparent complexities of identifying, understanding, and assessing transfer, Detterman (1993) also discussed the concepts of *specific* and *nonspecific* transfer and *deep* and *surface* transfer as further descriptions of the types and levels of transfer. While it may seem that these are simply different terms to describe similar processes it is important to note, and perhaps emphasize, that the "transfer problem" is an incredibly complex problem of practice and efforts to add description and extend terminology have yet to adequately capture the phenomenon that at its essence, is situated in deep learning and meaning making. Baldwin and Ford (1988) posited that without the development of a research framework that facilitates the ability to investigate the effects of trainee characteristics on transfer and the ability to identify and measure specific environmental factors purported to influence transfer, research on the topic would remain limited. Despite some extension in the field related to best-practices, pre- and post-training factors that influence transfer and in the broadening of measurement tools to include more than participant self-reports and longitudinal studies, by and large the gaps identified more than 30 years ago remain (Baldwin et al., 2009).

High-Road and Low-Road Transfer

Salomon and Perkins (1989) introduced high- and low-road transfer as part of their critique of the concepts of near and far transfer that dominate much of the literature. In another

example of semantic, rather than substantive differentiation, Leberman et al. (2006) referred to low-road transfer as “automatic” and high-road transfer as “mindful,” essentially adding to the descriptions, but not the definitions. They all posited that because far transfer is incredibly rare and difficult to identify and measure, it is imperative that learning facilitators (teachers, professors, trainers, etc.) be actively engaged in enabling more complex levels of transfer among learners (Leberman et al., 2006; Salomon & Perkins, 1989). Low-road transfer holds many of the same attributes as near transfer: highly structured and practiced learning is focused on a specific content or skill(s) that can be applied automatically and without much difficulty in scenarios similar to those in which the desired knowledge and abilities were initially introduced and extensively practiced (Salomon & Perkins, 1989). High-road transfer, however, calls for deliberate scaffolding so that learners engage with and reflect on their attainment of desired learning outcomes as well as ways in which established knowledge and skills can be purposefully leveraged and applied to new and varied contexts. “High-road transfer is not dependent on identifying superficial similarities, but rather understanding deeper analogies” (Foley & Kaiser, 2013, p. 7).

Positive and Negative Transfer

Positive transfer is defined by Leberman et al. (2006) as “when learning in one context improves learning or performance in another context” (p. 4). An individual experiencing positive transfer utilizes previous knowledge and skills to enhance performance in another context. Negative transfer then, describes circumstances in which previous learning and skills obstruct new learning. Existing transfer research primarily frames transfer in these binary terms, either positive or negative, and focuses on the variables most commonly associated with positive transfer: participant characteristics, program content and design, and the work environment

(Baldwin et al., 2009; Carpenter, 2012; Merriam & Leahy, 2005). Like high-road transfer, positive transfer accepts the notion that both external and internal variables inform and encourage (or inhibit) transfer among individual learners. Extant literature in this domain overlaps quite a bit with that focused on adult education and learning by focusing on teaching/training best-practices and individual learner attributes.

Haskell's Taxonomies

Haskell (2001) presented a comprehensive and widely applied approach to transfer in instructional settings that both acknowledged the inextricable links between learning and transfer and introduced a taxonomy, rather than binary classifications theretofore dominant in the literature, as necessary to fully conceptualize the phenomena. In order to acknowledge then disentangle multiple kinds of transfer, Haskell (2001) posited a six–level taxonomy that described increasing levels of sophistication: Level 1: nonspecific transfer implies that all learning is transfer because all learning is contingent on previous learning; Level 2: application transfer refers to the application of an explicit set of skills for specific purpose; Level 3: context transfer refers to application of learning in similar, but not identical, circumstances; Level 4: near transfer refers to the application of learning to new situations; Level 5: far transfer refers to the application of learning in a situation wholly different from the initial learning; and Level 6: displacement or creative transfer requires the creation (or realization) of a new concept based on the relationship between old and new knowledge. Haskell situated his taxonomy amongst two categories or types of transfer: the type of knowledge the transfer is predicated on; and the kind of transfer that is involved. There are five types of knowledge: declarative, procedural, strategic, conditional and theoretical—declarative being the most important as it provides the foundation

for all others. The second category includes 14 kinds of transfer (none are mutually exclusive; Calais, 2006; Haskell, 2001):

1. Content-to-content
2. Procedural-to-procedural
3. Declarative-to-procedural
4. Procedural-to-declarative
5. Strategic
6. Conditional
7. Theoretical
8. General or nonspecific
9. Literal
10. Vertical
11. Lateral
12. Reverse or backward
13. Proportional
14. Relational

Haskell's contributions to the transfer literature cannot be understated. While there have been few attempts to empirically validate his positions, his framework is the most comprehensive attempt to address the complexities and indivisible links between learning and transfer. While Haskell (2001) did not offer a theory of learning or transfer per se, he argued for an integrated approach that incorporates existing educational theory, research and practice in order to achieve gains in learning comprehension and the attainment of transfer.

Theoretical Approaches

Formal Disciplines Approach

Within the precepts of classical Greek and Roman beliefs about teaching and learning, successful transfer has been defined by the learner's ability to replicate general skills and ways of being based on what they were taught via rote training and practice (Leberman et al., 2006). Rippa (1971) and Dennison et al. (1995) promoted such a position when they emphasized the importance of general brain training as opposed to specific content or skill instruction as the most important factor in the transfer process. Essentially describing calisthenics for the mind,

they reasoned that by treating the brain in a similar way to other muscles of the body, individuals would/could increase their capacity for learning and transfer by the simple fact that they exercised their mind so that it could operate more effectively and efficiently. While the reliance on memorization, imitation, and repetition at the core of this formal discipline's approach has been largely discounted and named as an unnecessary precursor to deep learning and transfer, remnants of this perspective remain ubiquitous in American culture—both in the widespread use of colloquial phrases such as "practice makes perfect" (and the tacit beliefs they reinforce), and in formal educational settings where "drill and kill" is still a common instructional strategy. Perhaps it goes without saying that this approach to learning and transfer does little to address the inherent complexities involved in solving the dilemma of transfer when the desired outcomes require more than imitation and repetition of low-level knowledge and skills.

Behavioral Approach

In a series of studies published in 1901, Thorndike and Woodworth (1901a, 1901b; Woodsworth, 1901) set the foundation for a behavioral approach to the exploration of transfer that came in reaction to the formal disciplines approach. As described earlier in this chapter, behaviorists focus on transferring specific desired behaviors that are explicitly taught. Unlike those who subscribe to a formal disciplines approach, behaviorists are grounded in the concept of *connectionism* or *associationism* (used interchangeably in the literature) which dismisses the idea of general transfer in favor of centering learning events and outcomes around stimulus and response (Leberman et al., 2006). Primarily studied and thus theorized in laboratory settings, Cox (1997) noted that behavioral approaches to transfer had limited applicability in classroom settings because the scientific venues in which research was conducted did not approximate typical learning environments. Further critiques of the behavioral approach are seated in the fact

that most inquiries are fixated on the role that reinforcement plays in the transfer process, seemingly ignoring other variables involved in the process (Ormrod, 1998). So, while behaviorism can provide some insight about the transfer of context specific skills and knowhow, it is limited in its ability to extend the knowledgebase related to the transfer of more sophisticated and abstract learning.

Cognitive Approaches

At the core of cognitive approaches to transfer is the basic proposition that learning happens and meaning is made when an individual is able to connect existing multifaceted knowledge and experience to novel and diverse settings and situations, thus creating new learning. Bower and Hilgard (1981) described the importance of a learner's ability to generalize key understandings from one context to another as paramount and argued that "learning by understanding rather than by rote" (p. 323) results in deeper levels of meaning, thus more advanced levels of transfer. Perhaps it goes without saying that Gestaltian philosophical influences discussed earlier in the chapter are evident in all aspects of cognitive approaches to transfer, particularly in the situation of the learner at the center of the transfer process. Leberman et al. (2006) posit that conceptual, procedural, strategic, and tacit knowledge coalesce to facilitate a reflective and reflexive process of transfer that in turn activates reconstruction of what is known and how it applies (transfers) to the ways in which a person conceptualizes and approaches new learning. Other cognitive approaches focus on the ways in which individual learners process and access information (Singley & Anderson, 1989); how existing knowledge and experience provide the schema around which all new learning is organized (Cree & Macaulay, 2000); and on the ways in which transfer can be encouraged and supported via classroom instruction, modeling, coaching and the facilitation of deliberate reflection (Brown et

al., 1989; Collins et al., 1989; Salomon & Perkins, 1989). In summary, while there exist unique details in the various cognitive approaches, there is a common conception of transfer as an iterative process that can be encouraged and influenced by external variables such as instructional models and previous knowledge. Ultimately, though, successful transfer is concentrated on the individual learner and marked by some form of intellectual change. It should come as no surprise then that much of the transfer literature is focused on identifying and defining personality characteristics of study participants and that assessment measures are commonly based on participant self-reports. The themes evident in the research on participant characteristics emphasize motivation, self-efficacy, expectations, and personality traits such as conscientiousness, openness to experience, extraversion, emotional stability, and agreeableness. Certainly, a more sophisticated frame for conceptualizing transfer is needed; cognitive approaches remain limited in that they do not adequately address sociocultural influences on learning, meaning making and ultimately transfer.

Sociocultural Approach

By and large, socio-cultural approaches to transfer remain centered on the individual learner (or in a workplace, a trainee) yet there is explicit attention given to the role of external influences and influencers on the transfer process, particularly in an institutional or organizational context. The literature is filled with hypotheses, inquiries, conceptualizations, and theorizing about the role organizational culture and training (learning) design play in successful transfer. Lave and Wenger (1991) were the first to shift from a solely psychological approach to transfer by positioning learners as members of larger communities, informed and affected by both other people and the systems within which they live and work. Analoui (1993) focused on three aspects of training that he believed would facilitate transfer in the workplace: (a) the

articulation of concrete learning outcomes, (b) the need to shift the ways in which individuals and groups work, and (c) improved organizational efficiencies when the job performance of individuals within the organization improved. Billet (1992), Boreham and Morgan (2004), Buckley and Caple (1996), and Tracey et al. (1995) focused on the importance of an organizational culture that emphasizes continuous learning and ensuring the training environment is compatible with and reflects the actual work environment so that the application of new knowledge and skills can be seamlessly integrated into the workplace. Others focused on the role of general relational supports within the workplace and the extent to which direct supervisors could (should) facilitate transfer among those they evaluate (Broad & Newstrom, 1992; McSherry & Taylor, 1994; Noel & Dennehy, 1991).

With regard to program design and content, available evidence indicates that including and deliberately emphasizing transfer-supporting teaching strategies such as post-training relapse prevention, and real-time practice and feedback, aid transfer and retention of new knowledge and skills among participants. While it is unrealistic to be able to isolate all of the worksite specific variables that can influence transfer, Merriam and Leahy (2005) noted that existing research reinforces the importance of supervisory and peer support, a learning focused culture, and clear connections between trainee and institutional goals as critical aspects of how work environment influences transfer.

A Theory of Reasoned Action and a Theory of Planned Behavior

It is noteworthy that regardless of the framework within which transfer is conceptualized, there is little explicit connection to the role of learner motivation. Certainly, there is frequent mention of content and skill relevance and real-world connection in terms of best practices for learning experiences that result in transfer, but the literature provides only adjacent or parallel

relationships rather than explicit intersection. Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) presented a theory of reasoned action (TRA) as a vehicle to predict, explain, and influence human behavior in applied settings by specifically assessing a person's beliefs, attitudes, intentions, and behaviors. Essentially, the idea is that human behavior can be conceptualized and predicted based on intervening constructs that trace back to an individual's beliefs. TRA considers factors like race, socio-economic class, and personality traits as external variables that further influence and drive behavior without being central to it. Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) posited that people acting with volition "consider the implication of their actions before they decide to engage or not engage in a given behavior" (p. 5) and can typically explain, or at least rationalize, why a decision was made, or behavior employed based on a desired outcome and the implications of their choices.

In 1985, Ajzen introduced the theory of planned behavior (TPB) as an addendum of sorts to TRA specifically to explain behaviors that are not solely volitional by adding the concept of *perceived behavioral control* which provides consideration for the ease with which a behavior could or would be performed habitually, at its essence, self-efficacy. Further, TPB provides that "a person's intention is a function of two basic determinants, one personal in nature and the other reflecting social influence" (Ajzen, 1985, p. 6). Ajzen articulated the significance of recognizing the relative importance an individual assigns to both the perceptions of peers as well as cultural norms as key influencers in achieving desired outcomes and preferred behaviors.

There are three main areas within which criticisms of TRA and TPB exist: the relationships between attitudes and normative beliefs; whether the components of TRA are sufficient predictors of intentions and behaviors; and the restricted range of meaning encompassed by the theories (Hale et al., 2002). Miniard and Cohen (1981) explored the extent to which behavioral beliefs and normative beliefs are the same constructs different only in name

as they studied actionable and observable behaviors as compared to behaviors resulting from more abstract processes of thinking, planning, and doing. Greve (2001), Liska (1984), Ogden (2003), and Smedslund (2000) argued that TRA cannot be tested as a true theory thus rendering it unfalsifiable. Trafimow (2009), on the other hand, postulated that TRA is falsifiable when combined with testable auxiliary assumptions and encouraged research psychologists to rethink the often rigid and antiquated criteria by which they assess falsifiability within their field.

For the last 40 years, TRA and TPB have remained ubiquitous tools used to help make sense of human behavior and motivation. Ajzen and Fishbein (1980; Ajzen, 1985) positioned volition as the central predictor of behavior outcomes, followed by social and cultural norms; they did not, however, explicitly explore formal learning events/experiences and/or the extent to which participants intended to transfer and apply new knowledge or skills outside of said experience. Nonetheless, the foundational precepts found within TRA and TPB surface, even exemplify, the complexity and intersection of disciplines and domains when engaged in inquires of human learning and doing. While not explicitly included as part of my study, this intersection provides fertile ground for future research and is certainly related to the emergent themes and considerations for future study reviewed in Chapters IV and V.

Summary of the Literature

"It is a paradox that, although transfer is acknowledged as fundamental to learning, it is rarely achieved when we want it and yet achieved without our efforts at other times" (Leberman et al., 2006, p. 30). Perhaps it is surprising then that most research and writing on the topic falls within the same spheres of inquiry as existed in the 1980s. By and large most inquiries have focused on training design, participant characteristics and work-environment factors. While the

depth and breadth in which these areas are more recently being explored has certainly expanded, specifically in order to look at measurement tools (Bates et al., 2012; Chin et al., 2019), best-practices (Billing, 2007; Illeris, 2009), and pre-and post- training factors that influence transfer (Blume et al., 2010; Carpenter, 2012; Nafukho et al., 2017; Roumell, 2019), essentially they still exist in the same realms of inquiry. Adding to the limitations of empirical research in the area of transfer, findings have been vastly discrepant and measures inconsistent. A gap of particular interest are the scant attempts to apply what is known about transfer to an organizational setting of so-called "soft-skills" that are less observable, but critical when attempting large-scale or significant cultural or organizational change.

Perhaps adding to the challenge of expanded transfer research is the fact that it is becoming recognized as an incredibly complex process. Haskell's (2001) taxonomies that describe both levels of learning and types of transfer are critically important and serve as what amounts to a summons for researchers and practitioners alike to treat learning and transfer as interrelated and mutually reliant on one another. Combined with advances in the field of neuroscience, more is known about the cognitive processes involved in learning—this is quite exciting. However, it has led to more questions, and the realization (or reinforcement) that measuring transfer and the factors that encourage or inhibit it are incredibly difficult to parse out. It is conceivable that this is why research in this area seems to be in a perpetual state of (near) stagnation and continues to focus on aspects of content delivery and assessment, personal attributes of learners and the role of workplace culture and structures in transfer—all of which emphasize a kind of passive role among learners, even when they are the subjects of such inquiries. It follows that this is another area where gaps exist within the literature: how adults make decisions about what they apply from learning and what they don't. The data most

commonly assessed in transfer research are pre-post tests, participant self-reports of knowledge/skill acquisition and inventories that measure the factors that contribute to transfer of learning (training). It is imperative, I think, to center the learner and their active role in both learning and transfer as the foundation of further academic exploration.

Conclusion

While it was more than 30 years ago that Vaill (1989) introduced the concept of "permanent white water" (p.2) to describe the tumultuous nature of contemporary organizational life and work, it seems more relevant now than ever. Vaill (1996) posited that the only way to successfully navigate, indeed thrive, among the constant ebbs and flows, invisible currents, and overwhelming rapids that make up the modern workplace is to adopt learning as way of being. Becoming an efficient and effective learner, a deep learner requires:

> Active, mindful agency of the sort that not only reacts to, but also seeks out new ways of being—ways that encourage us to step out of our comfort zones just far enough to allow our innate curiosity to take over. (Wergin, 2020, p. 38)

While neither explicitly addressed the process of transfer, both Wergin (2020) and Vaill (1996) emphasized the importance of expanding the ways in which both individuals and organizations approach and encourage deep and meaningful learning—namely by adopting learning as a perpetual aspect of existence. Perhaps it is ironic that the need for this kind of reframing includes K–12 educators and the institutions in which they (we) train and work because schools are intended to be learning organizations. Yet it should come as no surprise that there exist extensive critiques of traditional educational models that dominate Western societies, most notably those presented by Freire (2018).

Freire (2018) posited that traditional education systems serve to reinforce and perpetuate societal inequities and that in order to rectify the wrongheadedness of the system, teachers and

students must behave and conceptualize their roles differently. Using a banking metaphor to describe the existing educational system as one in which a teacher deposits knowledge into empty accounts waiting to be filled (students as recipients of knowledge), Freire articulated a need for dialogical relationships between and among teachers and students in order to facilitate unbridled cognitive growth. Vaill's (1996) description of "institutional learning" is quite similar to Freire's, noting cultural assumptions (both organizationally and societally) that those in positions of authority are best suited to not only make decisions about what needs to be learned but the ways in which it is taught, centering the process and purpose of learning around conformity and achievement of finite outcomes rather than overall growth. Without a fundamental shift in how learning and doing are conceptualized within institutions of formal education, we will continue to see lackluster results—learning and learners that are uninspired and uninspiring, inactive, and ineffective in serving the students for and with whom we work. It is self-evident, I think, that there is an urgent need for change.

Arguably more relevant now than ever before, it is imperative that educators and the systems within which they (we) work must think differently about what and how we know, what and how we learn, and most importantly, what we believe and how we behave in response. The literature is clear that even high quality, deeply engaging, relevant, timely, and exceedingly well-executed learning events and experiences do not guarantee transfer. The fields of adult education and human resource development offer best practices for successfully engaging with adult learners and facilitating positive outcomes; however, significant gaps remain. It is at this intersection where I situated my dissertation research, where I forged a path designed to more completely illuminate the ways in which teacher-learners conceptualize, determine and make decisions about their own transfer of soft skills (critical competencies) from professional learning

into daily practice. Without better understanding, those of us working in K–12 education will remain stifled in our attempts to not only survive the permanent white water, but we will continue to be ill equipped to successfully ride the waves—necessary to achieving the ultimate goals of more equitable opportunities and outcomes for the students we serve.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

> He is not afraid to confront, to listen, to see the world unveiled. He is not afraid to meet the people or to enter into a dialogue with them. (Freire, 1972, p. 24)

As evidenced in Chapter II, despite decades of study related to transfer of learning and adult education the scholarship in both domains remains limited. This dissertation study is an attempt to both fill gaps in the existing knowledgebase and provide an integrated study of the two as related to formal professional learning experiences for K–12 teachers.

This chapter provides a brief overview of common qualitative research methodologies and the rationale for choosing narrative inquiry (NI) as that which was applied to this dissertation. Definitions and a review of the history and philosophical underpinnings of the model are presented, followed by a more detailed discussion of narrative inquiry as an appropriate methodological fit. Subsequently, there is an explicit review of the research design, which includes a summary of participant selection criteria as well as the data collection and analysis procedures. Ethical considerations and quality control measures are also addressed.

Qualitative research methodologies exist primarily as means to investigate and conceptualize how individuals and groups impute a variety of social and cultural experiences. Framed by the interconnection of worldview, design, and methods, qualitative approaches to research emerge from the acknowledgment that human–centered investigations are significantly complex, both multi-dimensional and intersectional, thus necessitate methodologies that allow for an inductive approach to data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2014). The constructivist, transformative, and pragmatic worldviews prioritize meaning-making, change-making, and problem–solving differently; however, they are consistent in the perception that human–focused research should provide opportunities for holistic views of the subject and/or object under investigation. Phenomenology, case study, and grounded theory were each considered as

possible methodologies for my research path, and while all offer promising opportunities for future research as discussed in Chapter V, NI provided the best approach given the exploratory nature of my investigation and the challenge presented when conducting research during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Phenomenology offers an inquiry-based approach to research focused on the ways in which individuals make meaning from their experiences with/from a particular phenomenon. Given the topic of my dissertation, phenomenology would have been more appropriate if the intention was to investigate participant experiences with a singular learning event or as a longitudinal review of how teachers transferred knowledge and skills from a training event to daily practice. This kind of a study would have been predicated on an assumption that participants did, in fact, engage in the transfer process which itself would have been a difficult assumption to support given current gaps in the literature and significant inconsistencies in existing measurement criteria (Creswell, 2014; Giorgi, 2009). Similarly, case study would have offered utility if the investigation had been focused on how educators experienced a single shared learning event/program or if the intention was to follow an individual or small group of teachers, members of a school department, school, or district in their approach to and application and measurement of professional learning experiences. Both of these methodologies were dismissed as impractical given the challenging landscape of professional learning and K–12 educational practice during a pandemic and further seemed better suited for subsequent inquiries after identifying emergent themes via this exploratory study. Finally, grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008) offers a means by which researchers can build hypotheses and theories about a particular process, action, or interaction based on the collection and analysis of data gathered from study participants (Creswell, 2014). Much like phenomenology and case

study, the scheme development and theorizing at the core of grounded theory seemed premature for my investigation given the limited extant literature in this domain of inquiry. Furthermore, none of these three models seem particularly suited for a focus on the development or application of critical competencies, instead being more fitted to transfer research concentrated on concrete and finite skills and knowledge.

Narrative Inquiry

Definitions

Stories told and heard are the essence of narrative inquiry (NI). On its face, NI may seem like a simple and straightforward research method: a researcher asks questions, structured or not, and study participants tell their stories; those stories are interpreted, analyzed, and patterns of significance and meaning assigned. However, just as all of human history can be viewed as collection of stories lived, told, and retold—layered, diverse, and divergent—NI is deceivingly complex. “The power of narrative is not so much that it is about life but that it interacts in life” (Daiute, 2014, p. xviii).

Extant literature on research methods identifies *narrative* as both an informal synonym for “story,” but also as an abbreviated description of narrative inquiry as a research methodology (Clandinin, 2013; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2006). Narrative research is a model birthed from the social sciences—anthropology, linguistics, education, sociology, humanities, and the like—where the recitals of one or more individuals provide data from which an experience or experiences can be studied through the retelling of said story(ies; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Clandinin (2013) noted, “The focus of narrative inquiry is not only valorizing individuals’ experience but is also an exploration of the social, cultural, familial, linguistic, and institutional

narratives within which individual experiences were, and are, constituted, shaped, expressed and enacted" (p. 18). NI explores meaning through stories—in how they are told and what is shared.

While narrative researchers are keen both to deeply know and to learn from stories, the specific methodologies employed can vary widely and be differentiated both by the ways in which data are analyzed as well as the kinds of narratives that are accessed and reviewed (Kim, 2016). Stories can be told orally, expressed through documents, and/or constructed in dialogue (Riesssman, 2008). Narratives are deeply personal as they essentially make public what may not have been previously known to others, yet are situated temporally, thematically, and structurally within the larger context of society and human experience. All stories are influenced by the external as well as the internal human conditions that inform their recitation (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). As such, narrative researchers must consistently consider what stories are told, how are they are told, why are they told, and for whom they are told (Daiute, 2014; Denzin, 1989).

Riessman (2008) provided guidance on the functionality and purpose of a narrative study when seeking to understand individual and/or group identity and setting the context for the mobilization of social, economic, or political activism. Polkinghorne (1995) described a literary approach to data analysis that involves a researcher extracting themes across stories or taxonomies of story types based on a plotline. Riessman (2008) identified three strategies for analysis: thematic analysis of themes told; structural analysis in which the meaning is determined by how a story is told (comic, tragedy, satire, etc.); and dialogic or performance analysis that explores how the story is produced (interactive between researcher and participant) and performed (message or point). Daiute (2014) emphasized the importance of NI as a means to discover and explore complex social processes by investigating actions and consciousness in

order to uncover a "meaning (that) resides in expressive form—in its style, linguistic flourishes, organizational format, and visual features—as well as literally in the words referring to persons, places, things, and actions" (p. 2).

Though narrative researchers frequently consider the nature of the experiences to be explored, the story-generating process, and the intended audience when designing their studies, it seems a more loosely defined construct is preferable to a single definition or an exhaustive list of defining characteristics (Connelly & Clandidin, 1990; Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000).

> By its very nature, the use of stories in research means that the researcher has a desire to probe the human–centred nature of learning and the associated issues of complexity in a way that is holistic and transcends traditional discipline divides. (Mertova & Webster, 2020, p. ix)

At its essence, NI is about words and the stories in which they exist because the words inform perception, expression, and interpretation.

Perhaps it is due to the lack of rigid research parameters, the scant attention paid to scientific method, or the fact that there are varied and complex iterations of what narrative research can (and does) look like, or a combination of these factors, that there exists a commonly held criticism that NI lacks the rigor necessary to become a legitimate methodology. In reality, NI does, in fact, require rigorous data collection and analysis (Crang & Cook, 2007). NI embraces the inextricable links between the implied and stated meanings embedded in the stories told. And, while it is true that the data derived from narratives are subject to researcher interpretation and influenced by researcher bias and positionality (Bold, 2012), it is equally true that all research can be influenced by researcher subjectivity. Narrative researchers recognize that stories are reflections of a subject's reality and that individual stories can be considered "true" even with discrepancies in how particular facts are presented: narratives are told from the story-teller's perspective, which in itself provides meaningful data (Jovchelovitch & Bauer,

2000). Proponents of narrative inquiry have argued that its value can be seen in the identification of similar stories and experiences, thus allowing researchers to build context specific significance while also examining consequential insights from or within similar contexts (Bold, 2012).

History and Philosophical Underpinnings

"Stories are the 'substance' of generations, history and culture. They reflect our journey through life" (Mertova & Webster, 2020, p. 23). Across time and space, narratives have been used by human-beings to make sense of the world and define how we experience it. As such, it seems a bit surprising that the use of narratives in research is a relatively contemporary trend.

Certainly, the foundations of narrative are as old as human history, yet its use in formal social science research is a relatively new phenomenon. There exists, however, some disagreement about whether the increased visibility of narrative research reflects a resurgence from the early 20th century as argued by Holstein and Gubrium (2012) or as a model newly accessed and applied by social scientists over the last three decades (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). What is undisputed is that the growing popularity of NI since the 1990s is undoubtedly influenced by an increased resistance to more traditional empirical research methods that insufficiently address the complex nature of human-centered research. NI instead provides a platform that can facilitate the more holistic approaches necessary in many qualitative research paradigms.

Literary and linguistic theorists from the early 20th century relied on classical "narratology" to explore meaning in how stories are told, the relationships between the storyteller and the story, and in how rhetoric is used as a narrative tool (Mertova & Webster, 2020). By the 1960s, narratology was predominantly seen in structural linguistics where the

focus was not simply on how language and symbols were being used, but also on determining what meaning could be gleaned from the narrative in its entirety. The "narrative turn" in other disciplines began in the 1980s in the fields of history and literary criticism and later became more practiced in therapeutic domains, sociology, psychology, and eventually in teacher focused educational research (Kim, 2016; Lieblich et al., 1998). Connelly and Clandinin (1990) identified the following defining transitions in the evolution of narrative inquiry:

- Recognition of the relationship between study participant(s) and researcher(s).
- Increased emphasis on words, as opposed to numbers, as sources of data.
- Valuing specific knowledge, rather than general.
- Openness to multiple way of knowing (epistemologies). (p. 3)

From the 1960s to the 1980s, many in the social and human sciences began to shirk off the dominant influence of behaviorism that reinforced antiquated ideas about the relationship between study participants and the academics conducting the research as being inconsequential. Instead, was an opening to the idea that the participant-researcher relationship is one that is reciprocally influenced both by the context in which the research happens and the histories and worldviews of those involved in the process (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2006).

The next shift toward narrative inquiry came as a result of increasing recognition that when data are only reflected in numeric form, the complexities of the human experience are inadequately captured. For many years, social scientists designed and implemented their research to replicate, as much as possible, the "hard sciences," seeking universal truths on which laws could be based. Yet the advent of the civil rights and women's movements, along with the popularization of critical theory and descendant thought movements such as critical race and feminist theories brought to the fore new perspectives. Specifically, there was acknowledgement that the lived experiences of marginalized and disenfranchised individuals and groups could only be adequately investigated by recognizing the myriad of ways that social, political, historical,

and economic factors influence and inform the ways in which people experience the world (Kim, 2016). As a result, narratives that appeared during the liberation movements of the 1960s and 1970s made public stories and experiences that were previously hidden and, in a way, celebrated, or at least recognized, the expertise and power held by individuals and groups theretofore largely ignored (Holstein & Gubrium, 2012; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2006).

Additional momentum toward narrative methodologies resulted from an increasingly common perception that the pervasive practice of creating laws based on "facts" derived from research rested, at best, on dubious foundations because laws influence facts and vice versa—stated simply, pure scientific objectivity is an impossibility. Pinnegar and Daynes (2006) described a growing acceptance of the complex and relational processes embedded within all human-focused research—there is no way for a researcher to position themselves as a completely neutral observer who is able to make universal claims of truth. Kim (2016) posits this turn as influenced by the methods of phenomenological ways of knowing: giving personal meaning to a phenomenon (subjectivity); withholding universal claims of meaning (phenomenological reduction); and recognizing the essence of a phenomenon cannot be known by immutable features alone (intentionality). Dall'Alba (2009) argued that these fundamental precepts are well suited to the ambiguity, complexity, and rapidly evolving reality experienced by those of us living (and researching) in the contemporary world.

The final turn to narrative emerged in reaction to structuralism and modernism (Kim, 2016; Mertova & Webster, 2020) both of which are firmly grounded in a positivist epistemology where it is believed that there exist universal truths (or structures) based on reason. The departure from the prescriptive and limited nature of these positions allowed for the recognition (and valuing) of more varied and diverse worldviews in people-focused research. Worldviews

are situated in the assumptions, concepts, and values of culture and subculture thus are essential components of narrative analysis (Mertova & Webster, 2020). Postmodernism and poststructuralism are purported to have roots in aspects Nietzschean philosophy interested in the meaning of truth and investigating the relationships between power and knowledge (Peters, 1998). This influence is particularly visible in the Foucauldian approach to NI where the narrative is "embedded in discourse, power, and history" (Kim, 2016, p. 66).

The rise in the application of Rhizomatic principles to narrative research that began during the 1980s can also be conceptualized as a reaction to binary assumptions of research framed by positivism: subject versus object; right versus wrong; truth versus fallacy. Narrative in research is likened to a rhizome in nature where the critical connections between roots and stems, the points at which they mix, multiply and divide, and the paths they make (and take) offer no single way to access, interpret, or draw universal conclusions or meaning (Kim, 2016).

The four "turns" to narrative identified by Connelly and Clandinin (1990) are grounded in Dewey's (1976) theory of experience. Dewey elucidated a belief that experiences are a complex combination of personal responses to and interactions with contextual and situational stimuli. In essence, he posited that there is no single truth or reality to be discovered but rather an inordinate number of possibilities based on how the "owners" of said experiences process, interact with, and make meaning from them (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2006). By focusing on the enmeshed principles of continuity and interaction, Dewey (1976) explained that it is necessary to situate every experience as part of a continuum of learning, existing both in relation to antecedent experiences that informed it as well as subsequent experiences that have yet to come (but will certainly be influenced by the past and present). Polkinghorne (1988) summarized that

experiences are constructed from the interaction between how humans organize cognitive schemes and how people interact with their environments.

At the core, NI provides research practitioners with a variety of tools, considerations, and perspectives that allows for both flexibility and responsiveness when engaging with study participants and their stories. Narrative methodologies highlight inextricable links between how, when, and why stories are told and how, when, and why they are heard. The decidedly complex and reciprocally relational nature of human experiences are acknowledged and embraced by the subject as well as the process of narration: "We do not find stories; we make stories…" (Mishler, 1995, p. 117).

Methodological Fit

Narrative Inquiry has a contested and complicated evolution, yet there is clarity in the fact that it provides a powerful a tool for research in both education and psychology which are where my academic inquiries are situated. "The development of a narrative understanding of teaching follows directly from the realization that teachers are central to the development of curriculum and pedagogy" (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2006, p. 359). It follows, then, that the conscious and unconscious decision-making processes that teachers employ when deciding if, when, and how, to transfer learning from professional development may appropriately be explored in the narrative form.

Much of educationally focused research that appeared in the 1960s and 1970s was decidedly not narrative, and overwhelmingly, not especially meaningful because of its scant impact on practice or policy. Instead of a recognition of the complex and complicated nature of teachers and teaching, most extant literature from the time reflects a fixation on quantifying the personality traits exhibited by the "good" and "successful" teacher so that those characteristics

could be identified and reinforced in preparation programs and school districts (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2006, p. 364). By the late 1970s, however, a clear shift toward narrative is exemplified by Schwab's (1978) proposition of a dialogic curriculum development process based heavily on the works of Aristotle and Dewey that emphasized the importance of contextual knowledge about life, learning, and the people in classrooms when designing and delivering content (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2006). Schwab (1958, 1978) described "the corruption of education by psychology" based on the manner in which educational research had theretofore seemingly ignored the importance of lived experience of practitioners and learners. Schwab further identified the critical differentiation between traditional texts that presented definitive answers and those that promoted discovery, thus laying the foundation for the future of narrative exploration in education (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2006).

More recent research in education is reflective of an explicit narrative turn in the late 1970s and 1980s as discussed previously. Underlying this shift in the field of education research is the grounding philosophy that in order to understand what happens in classrooms, research must reflect not only the story of what is seen, but also what may be invisible to an observer: preexisting knowledge, processes, and assumptions that influence how teachers live and work (Carter; 1993; Elbaz, 1991).

> (T)he understanding of the individual cannot be fully realized without a simultaneous consideration of context: Not only the place of the individual biography within a wider historical story but also the embeddedness of the teacher in a school and school system and its mandated curricula, ideologies, pedagogical trends, and reform processes need to be taken into account. (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2006, p. 359)

While the work from this era did not reflect an exclusively narrative approach, the paths of inquiry and methods employed certainly included subject stories as sources of data. Further, the use of open-ended interview questions, close listening, interpretation of the narrative in its

entirety, and attention given to the use of language and symbols in how stories were told, all reflect a significant turn to narrative as a way to address the complexity inherent in the study of teaching and learning (Bold, 2012).

In large part influenced by the research of Clandinin and Connelly in the mid-1980s (Clandinin, 1985; Clandinin & Connelly, 1986, 1990), educationally focused narrative research became more finely tuned by the early 1990s with two key advances: the recognition that teacher thought and action could not be conceptualized as separate phenomena, and the acknowledgement that teacher and instruction-focused research should provide direct benefit to study participants as a matter of course (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2006). Despite these consistencies, narrative research in education continued (and continues) to be diverse and divergent, both reflective of and responsive to the varied and multifaceted dimensions of human-centered investigations. Elbaz-Luwisch (2006) identified five of the most common themes seen in educationally focused narrative research: (a) curriculum stories, (b) teacher's lives and identity, (c) studies of the interaction of knowledge and context, (d) stories of change, and (e) stories of diversity in teaching. Mertova and Webster (2020) summarized the growing convergence toward narrative inquiry as a result of the:

> Constraints of conventional research methods and their incompatibility with the complexities of human learning . . . , a product of a philosophical changes of thought to a more postmodern view, with its interest in the individual and acknowledgement of the influence of experience and culture on the construction of knowledge . . . (and) narrative's association with human activity and its sensitivity to those issues not revealed by traditional approaches. (p. 17)

Around the same time as narrative became more visible in education research, it also became seen as a practicable option for postmodern research in psychology. Polkinghorne (1988), Riessman (1993), Lieblich et al. (1998), Josselson (1996), and Bruner (1986, 1987, 1990) all contributed to this evolution by providing introductory methodology for NI, modeling how

stories could be deconstructed and used to explore ubiquitous ethical issues in therapeutic fields (with implications for education), providing a basis for understanding action, and reframing perspectives about the ways in which research validity and reliability should be viewed.

Narrative in psychology rests someplace on the narrative spectrum between the rigid methodologies used in social linguistics and the more fluid models seen in social history and anthropology (Riessman & Speedy, 2006). Narratives in psychology and therapeutic fields are often structured temporally and spatially with meaning being derived from how and why events are recited, not simply for the story told. Riessman and Speedy (2006) distinguish narrative from other forms of dialogue based on "sequence and consequence: Events are selected, organized, connected, and evaluated as meaningful for a particular audience" (p. 430). Most often, emplotment, character, scene, place, time and point of view are identified as critical attributes of narratives (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), yet they can also be organized by theme and installment (Gee, 1991; Riessman, 1997).

Polkinghorne (1988) posited that prior to the 1950s psychologists were primarily interested in understanding the cognitive processes and structures related to perception and memory through narrative means. Over the last 70 years, however, the inextricable links between stories and the social contexts in which they are lived and told is commonly understood and embedded in narrative analysis (Bold, 2012). Specifically, as noted by Daiute (2014), narrative psychologists started using narration as a means by which to study participants' identity development and health via lived "chapters," turning points, coherence, and/or continuity. Constructive in nature, these perspectives offer story as means to promote healthy socialization, reframe traumatic experiences, and to make sense of and bring order to chaos and the unfamiliar (Daiute, 2014). Kim (2016) situates narrative psychology as a key influence in how behaviorists,

cognitivists, and psychoanalytic theorists began to listen to and hear stories, the ways in which practitioners influence how stories are told, how they obverse the storytelling process, and how they conduct research.

Dunne (2005) grounds NI in education as informed by the narrative models found in psychology. By identifying the profound influence of Aristotle's position that powerful stories can (and do) move human-beings, Dunne further elucidates that because narratives reveal universal themes and illuminate that which is otherwise opaque, they are uniquely suited as a means to understand educational practice. It follows then, that NI would also be a methodological fit to explore my areas of interest: the decision-making processes educators engage with when determining if, what, and how they transfer and apply concepts and skills from professional learning to their instructional practice.

Whatever the intended phenomena a narrative is designed to investigate, the methods of data analysis are essential. I engaged with NI through an inductive approach that allowed for the development of conceptual frameworks during the analysis of data. Polkinghorne (1995) described a process that draws on interview data and the nascent categories that emerge from it. Charmaz (2006) articulated the value that comes from processing and interpreting data from a variety of different perspectives. Rather than enter the interview with preconceived notions about how study participants will respond, an inductive approach allows the interviewer to actively listen to and hear the story as it unfolds without the constraints of an existing conceptual framework. In his discussion of the notion of bricolage, Kim (2016) further supports my supposition that a narrative approach was fitting both due to the general complexity of human–centered research as well as the specific inquiries in education and psychology to which I am drawn. A bricoleur in qualitative research is one who can capitalize on the strengths of

multiple methods, diverse epistemological, and philosophical frameworks in order to "produce a bricolage, a pieced-together set of representations that are fitted to the specifics of a complex situation" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 4).

Given that NI positions both the researcher and study participants as narrators, it is critical that the ultimate story(ies) told are provided the room to be completely told and holistically processed.

> We, too, [researchers] are storytellers and through our concepts and methods—our research strategies, data samples, transcription procedures, specifications of narrative units and structures, and interpretive perspectives—we construct the story and its meaning. In this sense the story is always coauthored, either directly in the process of an interview eliciting an account or indirectly through our representing and thus transforming others' texts and discourses. (Mishler, 1995, pp. 117–118)

Narrative interviewing is different from other qualitative interview processes in that it is purposefully less structured, usually only focused on one or two "exmanent" questions, those that are generated by the researcher before the interview so that informant stories are not constricted (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000). The overarching goal of narrative interviewing is to allow emergent themes and topics to be revealed authentically and without restriction. Even unintentional intervention from and influence by the researcher evident in the kinds of questions posed and the manner in which they are asked can alter what and how stories are told, thus there is constant danger of stifling the great richness and complexity that can unfold when storytellers are intentionally emboldened to share their unfettered truths (Bold, 2012). Narrative interviewing consists of an interviewer posing one or two open ended questions the responses to which reveal emergent "immanent" questions that are used to elicit new and additional material beyond the main story-telling phase of the interview.

Jovchelovitch and Bauer (2000) explained that despite the purposefully unstructured nature of narrative interviews, there is, in fact, a chronology of interview phases that allows each

informant and interviewer to cocreate what becomes the interview structure. The self-generating process is described as a paradox unique to NI: “It is the constraints of the tacit rules that liberate the story-telling” (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000, p. 3). The process of NI is characterized by three main attributes: detailed texture; relevance fixation; and closing of the gestalt (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000). Detailed texture refers to the necessity of the storyteller to provide thorough contextual information as part of their narration. Without a framework that includes “time, place, motives, points of orientation, plans, strategies and abilities,” there is no story (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000, p. 3). Relevance fixation refers to the meaning that can be drawn from not just what the narrator includes, but the ways in which the details are shared. The closing of the gestalt situates the core phenomena temporally with a beginning, middle, and end in order to reflect an event as completely as possible, connected to what came before and what came/will come next.

Study Design

The omissions and limitations in the extant the literature on adult education and transfer of learning reviewed in Chapter II, coupled with my personal and professional interests and frustrations have led me to acknowledge a fundamental reality: It doesn’t matter what a person knows and can do; it matters what they actually do—how they employ their knowledge and skills. It follows then, that to satiate my curiosity and contribute to the erasure, or at least a reduction, of existing gaps, I conducted a study designed to better understand how educators make decisions about what they transfer and apply from formal learning experiences focused on developing and reinforcing critical competencies. The narrative study I implemented investigated the following questions:

- How do professional educators process, understand and assign significance to their own transfer and application of training/learning specific skills and knowledge?
- How do educators make decisions about what they apply from a formal training/learning experience into daily practice?

Practice Study

In the summer of 2020, I conducted a multipurpose practice study in order to both gain comfort and familiarity with narrative interview practices, decidedly different from the more structured interviews I'd engaged with before; and to ensure my research questions were appropriate to the topic of my inquiry and that the interview questions inspired responses that surfaced applicable themes related to understanding how educators make decisions about what they transfer and apply from formal learning experiences.

I interviewed two educators who had recently completed the same full-day training focused on identifying and utilizing Trauma Informed Practices (TIP) in work with students. The questions that guided the inquiry were:

1. How do professional educators assess their own transfer and application of training/learning specific skills and knowledge?
2. How do educators make decisions about what they apply from a formal training/learning experience?

One of the interviews was conducted in-person (outdoors following identified COVID-19 safety protocols) and the other via Zoom. The two informants recruited for the practice study were selected by convenience sampling because they provided easily accessible sources of data (Lavrakas, 2008). While neither were employed as classroom teachers, they were both professional educators working within the context of K–12 education. One of the participants is a

district-level administrator whom I had worked with before, but with whom I did not (do not) have any supervisory or evaluative relationship. The other informant engaged in the learning event as part of a social work practicum at a local university where she earned a master's degree in the field last spring. She did not engage in any practicum activities on my campus or under my purview and she did not seek employment in my school district.

Interviews

During the interviews I asked two questions, one about what "stood out" from the specific learning event attended and the second about what the informant transferred and applied from the learning event. During the first interview I named the presenter/trainer as part of the question and in the second interview I named the TIP content, but not the individual delivering the content of the learning experience. With the exception of changing the training identifier in the second interview, I asked the same questions in both interactions as they were sufficiently broad to encourage rich storytelling and capitalize on personal interest and significance as related to the training content.

Before the recording started in both interview sessions, participants completed an informed consent form. I explained how the process of narrative interviewing differs from more structured interviews they may have engaged with in the past, and I reviewed the overall scope of my research. During my first interview (in-person), this initial chat was nearly 20 minutes long and seemed to build on previously established rapport, but also may have influenced the interview responses. It was clear that this participant looked to me for reassurance throughout the process and wanted to do a "good job" helping me with my project—she sat forward in her seat, leaning in, allowed nearly unbroken eye-contact, and had a habit of asking me to restate the questions to be sure she had exhausted her thoughts before moving on. She also visibly flushed

and seemed embarrassed when her voice broke and tears welled early in the interview while emphasizing the importance of understanding trauma as an educator. While this interaction was helpful in practicing narrative interviewing and identifying some initial themes, it also provided clear evidence that it would be critical for me to conduct my dissertation research completely outside of the organization where I work to avoid the possibility of social desirability bias. My interview with the second participant provided a more accurate reflection of the kinds of interactions that I experienced during my actual dissertation research: virtual, given the current restrictions due to COVID-19; and with less chit-chat on the front end because we did not have a preexisting professional relationship. This interaction also reinforced the need to recruit participants outside of my school district. Despite the fact that I changed the training identifier from the first to the second interview, I do not believe the content of the narratives would have been significantly influenced/changed had I phrased either or both questions differently. Both participants shared stories that focused on content of the training and the trainer regardless of which version of the question I asked, thus indicating that the interview questions were adequately open-ended.

Outcomes

Five themes emerged from the practice study: (a) motivations and personal significance, (b) instructor behaviors/characteristics, (c) instructional strategies, (d) audience characteristics, and (e) contextual/environmental/personal obstacles. These themes were present in both interviews despite significant differences in how the training was experienced and viewed by interviewees. Interestingly, though not surprising, neither participant provided much evidence of in-practice application of the skills and content knowledge included in the training. Given the length of time between when the learning event was delivered and schools closed due to the

COVID-19 pandemic (less than two months), the fact that neither participant had daily teaching responsibilities at the time, and that existing transfer and application research documents huge gaps and limitations in how these phenomena are identified and measured, these outcomes were not completely unexpected.

The results did, however, inform how I moved forward with my dissertation study in terms of participant characteristics and identifying qualifying professional learning experiences. With regard to participant characteristics, I determined that my research should focus specifically on classroom teachers with daily instructional responsibilities as opposed to opening the participant pool to other K–12 educators such as counselors, social workers, and teachers on special assignment (TOSA) who have only periodic, if not irregular, teaching duties as part of their job responsibilities. Further, I determined that it was critical that I set parameters around when qualifying learning events occurred so that teachers had adequate opportunity to transfer and apply the critical competencies into daily practice while still recent enough that details of the experience were tangible and easily retrievable from memory. Additionally, I determined that the advent of COVID-19 actually provided a unique chance for me to engage with teachers outside of my immediate geographic area which increased both the diversity of study participants as well as the professional learning events on which they focused. This unforeseen window of opportunity allowed me to draw broader conclusions from the data than would have been possible had I focused on a single learning event and/or teachers from a single organization. Ultimately, the practice study served its purpose by allowing me to familiarize myself with the research process dictated by NI methodology and by providing an opportunity to finetune my approach to the study. Most importantly, it reinforced the fact that my research path was worthwhile and engaging.

Participant Selection Criteria and Procedures

Generally, the number of participants in a qualitative research range from one, as when investigating individual case studies and/or phenomenological work, to upwards of 30 when engaged with grounded theory (GT) methodology (Creswell, 2014). Due to the exploratory nature of this study I intended to recruit 15 to 20 participants so that I would have enough stories to be able to surface imbued patterns of emergent themes but not so many as to reach the excessive level of saturation needed when the aim is to introduce new theory via GT. Ultimately, I interviewed 18 public school teachers from seven school districts in five states between January and March 2021. All were full-time educators with daily teaching responsibilities within the context of K–12 schools. Further, each participant engaged in a qualifying professional learning event or experience within the last three years but at least four months prior to our interview. I made an exception for one participant who spoke specifically about a unique graduate program she attended five years prior to our interview because it was central to her decision to become a teacher and met the criteria of emphasizing the importance of critical competencies.

I relied on administrative colleagues employed outside of the district where I work to both help identify qualifying professional learning events within their organizations and to aid in the initial outreach to potential participants. To start, I contacted ten district and building administrators via email requesting a brief conversation to provide the purpose of my study and to gauge both their interest in and capacity for assisting in my identification and recruitment of participants (see Appendix A for sample contact email). I heard back from each of these initial contacts that they were interested in the content of my research, but not all were willing or able to help in my recruitment efforts: one immediately shared that he believed it would be untenable to ask staff to participate in the study given the level of stress and tension in that particular

school; and two other administrators offered to help but subsequently reported being unable to find teachers willing to participate. The remaining seven administrators each responded with the names of between one and eight teachers who were interested in learning more about the study and their potential role in it. This strategy resulted in the referral of 22 teachers all of whom I contacted and subsequently invited to participate in the study (see Appendix B for sample contact email). I did not receive responses from three teachers after two contact attempts and a fourth teacher responded that while interested in participating, she needed to opt out due to her existing workload and scheduling constraints.

Interviews for the 18 individuals who accepted the invitation to participate happened via Zoom between late-January and mid-March 2021. Prior to their interviews, each participant provided informed consent using the form provided in Appendix C and identified a professional learning event or experience focused partially or completely on the development and/or importance of critical competencies in how teachers think about, plan for, and engage with their instructional work. Teachers selected a variety of learning experiences on which to focus their narration including trauma informed practices, social-emotional learning, equitable assessment practices, culturally responsive and inclusive classrooms, restorative teaching practices, and Glasser's choice theory. Some of these events were required and others were self-selected and/or encouraged by supervisors. In my initial outreach to teachers and subsequent communication leading up to the interviews, I verified that participants had a specific training in mind and that it fit within the timeline and content parameters set forth in my participant selection criteria. Most teachers had at least two identified trainings they were prepared to discuss but settled on one after I encouraged them to select the learning event about which they had the most to say, regardless of whether their experience was favorable, unfavorable, or

neutral. Interestingly, even when interviewing multiple teachers from a single school, they often chose to talk about different experiences.

As mentioned earlier, an unintended benefit of researching during a pandemic was it allowed for a greater geographic reach when interviewing via a digital platform. As such, I was able to achieve more demographic diversity than originally believed possible both in the teachers I interviewed and the students they serve, resulting in proportionally higher numbers of Latinx/Hispanic and Black/African-American educators and fewer White teachers than the national average. In 2020, 79.3% of non-charter public school teachers identified as White, 9.3% identified as Hispanic, and 7% African-American/Black (Will, 2020). Among my study participants, 56% identified as White, 11% as Black, 16% as Hispanic/Latinx/Chicano, 11% as multiracial, and 6% (one participant) identified as Middle Eastern. I did not predetermine racial or ethnic qualifiers but asked all participants how they "identified racially and/or ethnically." Note that I used the language identifiers shared by interviewees in Table 3.1 thus there is some variation in the terms. Most notably, participants used "Chicano," "Latinx," and "Hispanic" in reference to their ethnic and racial identity so that is the terminology used in Table 3.1, although I have combined them in the dissertation text in order to align with federally recognized categories. Eight of the teachers interviewed had elementary level teaching assignments (Kindergarten–5th grade) and 10 were secondary teachers (6th–12th grade). Twelve of the teachers were elementary generalists (teach typically developing students) or secondary content area specialists. The remaining six were special education teachers who work with students who qualify for specially designed instruction (SDI) due to an identified disability and teachers who work with students learning the English language. It is important to note that SDI services for students with disabilities exist on a continuum and vary greatly: ranging from brief check-ins and

instruction designed to help basic executive functioning skills like organization to fully contained classrooms where qualifying students spend all/most of the school day. Two of the elementary special education teachers were working in fully/mostly self-contained programs while the others taught in a resource room context where students accessed SDI services for a limited part of their day but also were included in the general education setting (elementary generalist classrooms and secondary content classrooms).

Table 3.1

Participants' Pseudonyms, Basic Demographics, School, and Training Details

Name	Age & Gender	Racial and/or Ethnic Identification	Years of Experience	Grades/Subjects Taught	School Information	Training Selected
Becky	40, Female	White	15	Elementary Generalist	- Mid-sized city - Mostly White - Low poverty	Working with families living in poverty
Tony	35, Male	White	9	Secondary Social Studies/History	- Wealthy suburb - 50% students of color, mostly Asian (East and South)	Restorative Practices
Janie	39, Female	White	15	Secondary Science	- Wealthy suburb - 50% students of color, mostly Asian (East and South)	Diversity in science curriculum
Kyla	26, Female	Black	4	Elementary Special Education	- High poverty school in middle income suburb - 60% White students - 33% Black/African American or multi-racial	Social-emotional-learning
Sergio	61, Male	Chicano	22	Secondary Social Studies/History	- High poverty suburban school. - 90% of students identify as Hispanic/Latinx	Equitable grading practices

Name	Age & Gender	Racial and/or Ethnic Identification	Years of Experience	Grades/Subjects Taught	School Information	Training Selected
Loni	49, Female	White	26	Elementary Generalist	- Mid-size district in mid-size city - 80% White students - 90% of students living above poverty line.	Working with students experiencing trauma.
Veronica	42, Female	Multi-racial: White (Italian) & Hispanic	16	Secondary English/Language Arts	- High school only suburban district - 85% of students living in poverty. - Approximately 90% of students identify as Hispanic/Latinx - Higher poverty rates and more homogeneous than district average.	Building inclusive school cultures, combating bias, valuing diversity and intergroup relationships
Caitlyn	31, Female	White	9	Elementary Generalist	- Midwestern suburban school - Approximately 75% of students living in poverty - 60% of students are White - 40% students of color (mostly Black/African American, multi-racial and Hispanic/Latinx.	Social-emotional-learning
Nicole	34, Female	Middle Eastern	10	Secondary Special Education	- High poverty suburban high school. - 90% of students identify as Hispanic/Latino	Social-emotional-learning and mindful practices
Eddy	52, Male	White	6	Secondary Career and Technology (CTE)	- High poverty urban school - 32% White students - 21% Black/African American students - 19% Hispanic/Latinx students	Constructivist pedagogy

Name	Age & Gender	Racial and/or Ethnic Identification	Years of Experience	Grades/Subjects Taught	School Information	Training Selected
Nanette	27, Female	Black	2	Elementary Special Education	- High poverty suburban elementary school - Student population is mostly White - Large minority of Black/African American and multi-racial students.	Social-emotional-learning
Ana	34, Female	Hispanic	8	Secondary English/Language Arts	- Large suburban high school - Approximately 90% of students identify as Hispanic/Latinx - More than 85% of students living in poverty.	Restorative practices
Dana	55, Female	White	5	Elementary Generalist	- Mostly White options school in mid-sized city. - Higher proportion of students living in poverty and receiving special education services than district average.	Responsive classroom practices
Elise	49, Female	White	23	Secondary English Language (ELL/ESL)	- Mostly Hispanic/Latinx suburban school. - High rate of students living in poverty. - More homogeneous than other district schools. -	Social-emotional-learning

Name	Age & Gender	Racial and/or Ethnic Identification	Years of Experience	Grades/Subjects Taught	School Information	Training Selected
Johanna	58, Female	White	27	Elementary Special Education	- Alternative school in mid-sized college town. - Twice as many students living in poverty and receiving disability services than the district average.	Glasser's choice theory
Mikah	51, Male	White	20	Elementary Generalist	- Mid-sized district in small West Coast city. - 70% of students are White. - Largest proportion of students of color identify as multi-racial or Hispanic/Latinx - Approximately 30% of students living in poverty.	Social-emotional-learning
Delia	55, Female	Latinx	7	Secondary World Language	- Large suburban high school. - Vast majority of students living in poverty. - Over 80% of students identify as Hispanic/Latinx	Culturally responsive practices in world language
Elizabeth	51, Female	Multi-racial (non-specified)	19	Secondary Special Education & English Language	- Rural/remote K–12 school. - 90% of students living in poverty. - 99% of students identify as American Indian/Alaska Native.	Social-emotional-learning, Response to Intervention (RTI), and multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS)

Data Collection

While there are varied approaches to narrative inquiry methodology, I followed Jovchelovitch and Bauer's (2000) five phases of the narrative interview:

1. Preparation: exploring the field and formulating research questions.

2. Initiation: formulating the initial topic for narration.

3. Main narration: Listening to the informant without interruption (non-verbal encouragement allowed).

4. Questioning phase: Asking 'what happened then?' without inserting or implying attitude or opinion questions including asking 'why.'

5. Concluding talk: after interview recording stops; why-questions are allowed; interviewer records memory protocol immediately afterward. (p. 5)

As mentioned earlier, each of the interviews were audio recorded and conducted via Zoom and later transcribed via Rev.com. Interviews averaged approximately 40 minutes, with a couple lasting an hour, and one just short of 20 minutes. Participants selected interview times that were personally convenient, some opting for weekends, others for afternoons/evenings after the workday, and a couple in the middle of the day during their allocated planning time.

As is common in narrative interviewing, I asked only two formal questions:

- What stands out to you from the professional learning experience/event?
- What have you transferred and applied from that learning event into your regular practice?

In addition to these primary inquiries, I often asked follow-up questions seeking more detail and/or clarification about what participants shared in their initial responses. All subsequent queries and prompts were purposefully open-ended so to not lead interviewees or convey valuation or judgment. For a list of sample follow-up questions, see Appendix D.

Data Analysis

Jovchelovitch and Bauer (2000) identified transcription as the first step in the analysis process. Each audio file was transcribed within 24 hours of the interview's conclusion and checked for accuracy specifically to ensure education–centric vocabulary and acronyms were

captured correctly. Following an initial proofing review, I reread the transcript for content: highlighting recurring themes, topics, and ideas evident in the narration from which I created a list of emergent patterns. I added these lists to the notes I'd taken during the main narration, questioning and concluding talk portion of each interview. After conducting this process with the first five transcripts, I reread all previous accounts seeking to identify similarities, differences, connections, and incongruities. I repeated this process after the tenth, fifteenth, and final transcripts as well in order to identify the significant emergent themes and subthemes which are presented in Chapter IV.

Quality Control Measures

The three quality control measures I utilized to ensure a rigorous study and credible findings were researcher reflexivity, member checking, and peer debriefers. Throughout the data collection and analysis phases of this dissertation, I took reflective notes that captured my immediate reactions and observations, subsequent thoughts and impressions, as well as the middle of the night bugaboos and epiphanies. These notes served as key components of both the interpretation of data as well as my reflexivity as a researcher. It was important for me to be perpetually aware of my thinking because such metacognitive processing was essential to ensuring I kept my positionality from unduly influencing the rigor and integrity of the study.

Additionally, I used both member-checking and peer debriefers to increase the validity and reliability of my findings. The process of traditional member-checking (the process of interviewees reviewing transcripts for accuracy) would not have been a particularly valuable aspect of validating my study results because all interviews were audio recorded and transcribed by a neutral third party. Thus, asking informants to confirm transcript correctness would have been an inefficient use of their time and not especially enlightening for me, particularly because I

could return to the original recording if questions emerged or if clarification was necessary (Wells, 2011). I did, however, ask interviewees to check my notes related to the identification of emergent themes. The employment of this iteration of member-checking allowed me to take an initial pass at data interpretation before sharing my thoughts with study participants who then were able to provide feedback about whether or not the emergent themes I identified from the interviews matched their conceptualizations of the stories they told. Seventeen of the 18 participants confirmed that the identified themes encompassed their personal narratives. I did not hear back from one participant despite multiple contact attempts. Despite the fact that participants confirmed my early assessments without exception, this process would have allowed a reflexive dialogue about emergent themes had there been any disagreement or dissatisfaction with my findings. To further address issues of trustworthiness, authenticity, and credibility, I employed the support of two academic colleagues who served as peer-debriefers, one a K–12 educator and the other a self-employed consultant primarily working in government and tribal affairs and fundraising for non-profit organizations. These individuals were tasked with critically vetting my research findings in order to identify any potential gaps, oversights, misinterpretations, and/or omissions in my assessments which they did by reviewing all transcripts in search of possible discrepant or alternate explanations of the data. The combination of both an educational "insider" and someone without professional K–12 school experience as debriefers was especially important to ensuring assumptions seated in my positionality were kept in check. Together, these proactive steps to apply validation strategies exemplify some of the strengths of qualitative research analysis and were well suited to my particular study (Creswell, 2014). The peer debriefers confirmed my emergent themes and our discussions were instrumental in finetuning the subthemes.

Ethical Considerations

There were no major ethical issues with this study as it did not involve minors or vulnerable populations. Additionally, all interviewees were (are) employed outside of my organization and thus I did not (do not) have any supervisory or evaluative relationship with them. All study participants provided informed consent and understood they could withdraw from the study at any time. Participant confidentially was maintained by ensuring all audio-files and transcripts were saved on separate external storage devices that remained in a locked office. Saved transcripts identified participants by pseudonyms and the peer-debriefers who reviewed my initial research findings were provided only access to hard-copies of transcripts with pseudonyms and all other personally identifying information redacted.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

> The teacher is of course an artist, but being an artist does not mean that he or she can make the profile, can shape the students. What the educator does in teaching is to make it possible for the students to become themselves. (Paulo Freire in Horton & Freire, 1990, p. 181)

As described in Chapter III, narrative inquiry (NI) provided the methodological frame for this investigation into the ways in which K–12 public school teachers make meaning from and decisions about the extent to which they transfer and apply critical competencies from professional learning into their daily practice. This exploratory study is situated at the intersection of multiple research domains: primarily psychology, adult education, and organizational (human resource) development, and was intended to fill gaps in the extant literature. The hope being that with better understanding of how teachers make decisions about what, when, and why they transfer learning (or don't), that those of us working in K–12 education will be better equipped to be responsive to and supportive of developing professional learning experiences more likely to facilitate outcomes that are beneficial to the students with whom and for whom we work.

Study Participants

This study's 18 participants, four men and 14 women, are current K–12 public school teachers from four time zones, five states, and seven school districts. They work in a variety of rural, urban, and suburban districts and serve students across the full spectrum of demographic indicators, from racially/ethnically homogenous schools to those in heterogeneous settings, and from middle income areas to those living in both some of the poorest and the wealthiest zip codes in the United States. Participants had an average of 12 years of teaching experience, yet some were in their first few years of practice while other others were approaching retirement; some pursued educational careers immediately after college graduation and others came to the

profession as second or third careers. Put simply, participants reflect the full continuum of public-school teachers in the United States. Below are brief introductions to the professional educators who generously volunteered their time, in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic, no less, when teaching and learning looked different from ever before.

Becky is a 40-year-old White woman who is middle of her professional life teaching in a mostly White mid-sized city and school district. Becky has taught 3rd–5th grade students over the course of her career. While she currently works in a school where very few of her students live in poverty, she previously taught in a school that qualified for Title I supports. Under Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the Department of Education provides financial supports and incentives to schools in which 40% (or more) students come from low-income households. Becky's narration was based on a professional learning experience that focused on working with students and families living in poverty.

Tony is a 35-year-old White man who has taught history/social studies for nine years in a wealthy suburban high school known for rigorous academics and a nationally ranked athletics program. Approximately half of the students in Tony's school are White, 33% identify as Asian (inclusive of students descended from both East and South Asia), 6% identify as non-White Hispanic/Latino, 10% identify as multiracial, and approximately 2% identify as Black/African American. Tony has been recognized by national education groups for his focus on and commitment to social justice and the advisory role he plays for his school's Black Student Union. He discussed his experiences with training focused on restorative practices—an approach to creating classroom (and school) cultures that emphasize the importance of relationships where individuals are members of and accountable to the larger community in resolving conflict and navigating difficulties within the community.

Janie is a 39-year-old White woman teaching in the same school as Tony. Janie teaches a variety of year-long and semester-long science elective classes. She previously taught in another state but has been in her current position for several years. Janie spoke about a training she attended focused on incorporating topics of diversity into her science curriculum.

Kyla is a 26-year-old Black woman in her fourth year as an elementary special education teacher in a small suburban district where much of the population has been significantly impacted by the decline in blue collar manufacturing jobs over the last several decades. In Kyla's school, nearly 60% of students identify as White, 20% as Black/African American, 13% as multiracial, 4% as Hispanic/Latino, less than 2% each identify as Asian or American Indian/Alaska Native. Nearly 70% of students qualify for free or reduced lunch which is more than three times the district average. Kyla's teaching assignment is in a self-contained classroom where she works with students who have significant social, emotional, and/or behavioral disabilities. Kyla's narrative focused on training dedicated to social emotional learning (SEL) and implementing trauma informed practices.

Sergio is a long-time high school social studies/history teacher and at 61 is nearing retirement after 22 years in the profession. Before teaching, Sergio spent time working in another occupation, but has spent the last two decades at the same large high school. Nearly 90% of Sergio's students are Latinx, 4.5% identify as White, 2.4% identify as Black/African American, and less than 4% combined identify as multi-racial, Asian, or American Indian/Alaska Native. Sergio identifies as Chicano/Latino and lives in the immediate school community. Most students in Sergio's school are living in poverty and standardized achievement data indicate lower scores than the district average, generally by 10–15 percentage points. Sergio focused his discussion on training dedicated to establishing equitable grading practices.

Loni is a 49-year-old White woman with 26 years of teaching experience. She is an elementary generalist with 26 years of experience and has taught in multiple schools over the course of her career. Her current position is at a large elementary school where nearly 80% of her students are White, 9% are Asian, 6.3% are Hispanic/Latino, 4.7% are multiracial, and less than 1% are Black/African-American or Indigenous. Six percent of her students qualify for English Language services and 9% qualify for free or reduced lunch. Loni focused her narrative on a training focused on working with students with Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) which are specific identifiers of childhood trauma.

Veronica is a 42-year-old multiracial woman who has been teaching for 16 years. Prior to her current assignment, she taught in a variety of alternative settings, but has been in her current position as a high school English/Language Arts teacher since 2008. Veronica teaches at a large comprehensive high school in a populous, but suburban, high school only district. Over 85% of her students are living in poverty (20% more than the district average), and nearly 90% identify as Hispanic/Latino, the second largest racial group are White students who make up 4.5% of the school's population. The district serves more than 23,000 students in eight comprehensive and three alternative schools where 89% of students graduate on time, higher than the state average. Veronica focused her narration on a conference designed to build an understanding of and value for diversity, prepare participants to confront bigotry, and recognize the damaging impact bias can have on individuals and society, and to improve intergroup relationships.

Caitlyn is a 31-year-old elementary generalist currently teaching 2nd grade in a suburban district in the American Midwest. Caitlyn is a White woman who has spent her entire nine-year career at the same school where 60% of her students are White, 20% are

Black/African-American, 13% are multi-racial, and the remaining 7% are Hispanic/Latino, Asian, or Indigenous. Nearly three quarters of her students are living in poverty. Caitlyn chose to focus her narration on training related to social emotional learning (SEL).

Nicole is a 34-year-old high-school special education resource teacher who identifies as Middle Eastern. Nicole has been in her current position for five years but has been in the teaching profession for a decade. Nicole serves predominately Hispanic/Latino students living in poverty at a large comprehensive high school. Nicole focused her discussion on a series of trainings focused on social emotional learning (SEL) and mindful practices.

Eddy is a 52-year-old White man who is in his sixth year teaching culinary arts as part of a larger Career and Technology Education (CTE) program in an urban high school that has experienced declining enrollment over the last 10 years. Over 70% of Eddy's students are living in poverty, 32% of his students are White, 21% are Black/African American, 19% are Hispanic/Latino, 12% are multiracial, 11% are Asian, 5% are Pacific Islander and/or Indigenous. Eddy came to teaching after working in the food service industry for 30 years. Eddy focused his narration on training in constructivist pedagogy.

Nanette is a 27-year-old Black woman who has been teaching in a Kindergarten–3rd grade self-contained special education classroom for two years. Nanette's students spend the bulk of their day in her classroom for both academic and behavior instruction as they all have identified social, emotional, and/or behavioral disabilities. Nanette focused her narrative on specific units of her recently completed master's degree program focused on social emotional learning (SEL) and universal design for learning (UDL). Nanette teaches in a high poverty suburban school with lots of racial and ethnic diversity.

Ana is a 34-year-old Hispanic woman who teaches high school English/Language Arts at a large suburban high school in the American Southwest. Ana has eight years of teaching experience and has worked in a total of four school districts across two states in that time. Most of her students identify as Hispanic/Latino and more than 85% of them qualify for free/reduced meals. Ana's interview focused on a training focused on restorative practices.

Dana is a 55-year-old elementary generalist who has taught Kindergarten and 1st grade for the last five years. Dana is a White woman who came to teaching as a second career after spending much of her professional life working for the state government supervising anti-poverty programs. Dana's children previously attended the school where she now teaches. The school is an option program for district families interested in a focus on social-emotional growth, high levels of parent involvement, and multi-grade classrooms. Seventy percent of students are White, 16.4% Hispanic/Latino, 10% multiracial, 3.2% Black/African-American, and less than 2% combined identify as Asian or Indigenous. The school is part of a mid-sized district and city in the Pacific Northwest and serves twice as many students with disabilities and students living in poverty as the district average. Dana focused her discussion on training she received to become certified as a responsive classroom educator (specific approach to teaching and discipline seated in student wellbeing).

Elise is a 49-year-old White woman in her 23rd year as a professional educator and 11th year in her current assignment as an English Language Development (ELD) teacher at a large comprehensive high school where most students are living in poverty. Elise serves students identified as newcomers to the United States who have limited proficiency in the English language, many of whom have only partial literacy skills in their first and/or second languages as well. Over 90% of her students come from Mexico and Central America speaking primarily

Spanish, however, several also speak a variety of Mayan languages. Elise focused her narration on a training focused on social emotional learning (SEL).

Johanna is a 58-year-old White woman who has worked as both a special education resource teacher and generalist for the last 27 years at a small alternative elementary school in a mid-sized college town. Approximately 30% of Johanna's students live in poverty, twice the district average, and nearly 26% have identified disabilities that qualify them for specially designed instruction (SDI) as part of their special education services (the national average is 12%). Johanna focused her discussion on frequent training she does related to the applicability of Glasser's choice theory in teaching.

Mikah is a White man with 20 years of experience as an elementary generalist. He teaches a 4th and 5th grade split class in a mid-sized district in a small city on the West Coast. Approximately 70% of Mikah's students are White and the largest populations of non-White students identify as Hispanic/Latino or multiracial; and 30% of his students are living in poverty. On average, students at Mikah's school score lower on standardized assessments than both the district and state average, in some areas by up to 30 percentage points. Mikah focused his narrative on training focused on social emotional learning (SEL).

Delia is a 55-year-old Latinx woman who teaches high school Spanish and French in a large suburban school that serves more than 3,000 students, most of whom are living in poverty. She has worked in her current position for seven years and previously taught in both a dual-language immersion program at the elementary level and in a comprehensive middle school. Delia focused her discussion on a training that emphasized culturally responsive practices in world language classes.

Elizabeth is a secondary special education, English/Language Arts, and Indigenous language teacher in a rural pre-Kindergarten–12th grade school. Approximately 90% of her students are living in poverty and 99% are American Indian/Alaska Native. Elizabeth is a 51-year-old multiracial woman who has lived and taught in the community for 19 years. Her prior professional experience includes work in residential treatment facilities in other states. Elizabeth focused her narrative on a training focused on social emotional learning (SEL), response to intervention (RTI), and multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS).

It is worth noting that while several participants focused their narrations on training specifically tied to SEL, only two participants spoke of the same training event/experience. Perhaps it goes without saying that SEL has been a national education focus for the last few years, and not surprisingly the number of organizations and consultants offering professional learning and curriculum materials targeted to educators has exploded in response. A recent Google search for "SEL training for teachers" resulted in more than four million results, several pages of which were sponsored advertisements for training and curriculum packages geared toward schools and school districts.

Research Findings

As reviewed in Chapter III, thematic analysis was the method by which study data were examined. All interviews were audio recorded, transcribed, and reviewed both for accuracy of terminology (mostly education specific acronyms) and content. After I reviewed individual transcript and notes, the data from multiple interviews were explored to establish patterns and connections between and among narratives. After identifying initial themes, study participants were invited to review the identified themes and two peer-debriefers were engaged to examine the alignment of interview transcripts to themes to ensure the trustworthiness, authenticity, and

credibility of my findings. Engaging in this iterative process further facilitated necessary reflexivity in my approach to and interpretations of the data. Five major themes emerged from this process, listed in Table 4.1 below**.**

Table 4.1

Factors Influencing Learning Transfer

Theme and Sub-Themes	**Prevalence**
Instructor/Presenter/Facilitator • Perceived legitimacy of expertise • Model of delivery	Present in 17 of 18 interviews
Connection to Lived Experience • Personal • Professional	Present in 18 of 18 interviews
Relevance to Job Assignment • Students served • Content/grade level taught	Present in 18 of 18 interviews
Alignment with Self-Identity • Core values • Perceived reinforcement of existing practices	Present in 17 of 18 interviews
COVID-19 • Impact on teaching model • Impact on student needs • Influence on future planning	Present in 15 of 18 interviews

The remainder of this chapter will be dedicated to a review of each theme accompanied by supporting excerpts from participant narratives.

Instructor/Presenter/Facilitator

Not entirely surprising, the first theme to emerge from the data was related specifically to how study participants perceived the individual(s) tasked with presenting and delivering the learning event/experience and the manner in which it was delivered. The narratives of 17 interviewees made specific reference to the explicit role facilitators and facilitation played in how they made meaning from the professional learning event on which they focused their narration. In total, interviewees discussed a variety of both favorable and unfavorable learning experiences that included optional, required, self-initiated and passively accepted building and district specific trainings, conferences, as well as college/university coursework. The learning was sometimes led by other teachers, principals, or district-level staff and other times by consultants, contractual service providers, or college/university faculty. What is consistent throughout the narratives, however, is extent to which teachers needed to feel resonance with both content delivery methods and the person(s) delivering it. The work of teachers is difficult and when there exists a perception that the facilitator understands and appreciates the complexities of teaching and learning, interviewees were more likely to choose to fully engage in the training—a potentially critical precursor to the transfer of knowledge and skills to practice.

Perceived Legitimacy of Expertise

Perceptions of instructor competence was one of two emergent sub-themes in this category. Interviewees shared both laudatory and highly critical stories about the individuals and groups who led the professional learning events and the manner in which they facilitated. When interviewees assessed the presenter(s) as competent and connected to the realities, complexities, and intricacies of teaching, they were much more likely to describe the learning experience as both positive and productive (likely to result in the transfer). On the other hand, when trainers

were seen as unsuccessful in attempts to bridge the disconnect between theoretical and practical approaches to teaching or there was a perception of inauthenticity or a lack of acknowledgment of the complex and multifaceted issues and experiences impacting students, trainers were viewed as maladroit with very little to offer. And when trainers were perceived as inept or ignorant, overwhelmingly, participants saw only minimal value in transferring skills or new knowledge. In short, with little exception if training facilitators were deemed ineffective, many interviewees seemed unable or unwilling to explore why they should and how they could improve their practice as a result of the specific learning event.

In discussing district-wide required training on restorative practices that was delivered by mostly White building administrators and district professional development staff, Tony was critical of the approach:

> They took something that's centered in Indigenous ways of being with restorative circling in particular and kind of bastardized it. And they removed it from its context and so we are getting trained to do circles for the sake of circling… [this] stands out to me as being problematic and how it was taught and how it got applied.

Tony saw this training, one that he was initially "really excited [about] because I believe in restorative practices," as being emblematic of problematic approaches to professional development focused on "shifting the way that we have thought about our pedagogical approaches" specifically because:

> The classroom has been centered in Whiteness. And then we take these new strategies and not enough space is given, time is given for either the facilitators of such PD [professional development] or those receiving such PD to adequately de-center Whiteness and White Eurocentric …principles and ways of being and epistemologies and all types of things. And so then we basically, recolonize supposed decolonized methods.

Acknowledging that while there may be real limits to accessing true experts in the field, Tony was steadfast in his perspective that:

> Even if we are not having Indigenous people or people of color facilitating every single session there needs to be more groundwork that goes into people facilitating because seeing, going in attending a workshop, hearing it for those who are going to be doing the training and then parroting it to a new audience is just never going to be adequate. Like the people presenting it have to really have done the self-work, to have kind of done the practice. And so I think honestly, if we're going to do that, you need to have a little bit more of long-term not a soup of the day kind of approach.

Similarly, Ana's experience with a national conference focused on restorative practices was derailed almost immediately when:

> The presenter was saying that we shouldn't think about race. And there was some challenge to that, I mean if we don't pay attention to race, we're not seeing the whole picture…I think the presenter felt like in a corner . . . It seemed like some of the participants were uncomfortable, too, but I think it's good, they need to hear it.

For Ana, the facilitator's refusal to acknowledge the realities of how race impacts the ways in which students experience the world, thus school, was a non-starter. She completed the three-day training but acknowledged that she was not fully engaged because she:

> Already knows this stuff, it's what we already do. It feels kind of fluffy, know what I mean? It sounds good, but . . . during lunches or when we're on break, we just talk about how none of it is new, it is what we're already doing.

Without the initial buy-in to the legitimacy of the presenter's experience and perspective, Ana seemed unable or unwilling to fully engage in the experience, much less come away with new skills or competencies.

The narratives shared by Elizabeth, Nicole, and Delia exemplified how important it was that the presenters were believed to have high levels of expertise and applicable personal and professional experiences in order for the content to be deemed worthwhile. Elizabeth shared the following about the presenter of the SEL training she attended:

> He did a lot of personal stories. And so the personal stories that he was telling about his experience from his own life were things that I could relate to both here and when I worked at the treatment center. And be able to say, okay, not only does he know what he's talking about because he's had this experience, but the things that he's seen and the things that he's done have had an impact. And okay, he knows where I'm coming from

> and he's had successes, then that's a valid source for me to pay attention to. And so a lot of the things that then he would talk about applying things that... A lot of it I have already done…but to have somebody validate those experiences and say yes. And then to drill down into why what is working works, and what it is that the kids need and how to give them what they need and really see that success in a bigger picture. . . our students in particular have such trauma in their background just consistently throughout all of the communities, just historical trauma, there's generational trauma. In addition to poverty and hunger and racial inequity and all of those things, there is specific violence and all of that, that is just endemic out here. And so having somebody who recognizes how that affects students in a way that I've seen, and I can say, "Yes, he knows what I'm doing. He knows what I'm working with, he knows how to reach these kids and be able to gravitate to that."

Nicole explained the "reason why this [SEL training] spoke to me is because it's coming from an award-winning teacher who implements this in the classroom, who works with students who was so just… so entrenched in the work." Delia shared that the facilitator of the learning event she attended was "a very inspiring person . . . the passion that he has for teaching world language strategies, specifically comprehensible input, he's very engaging, very engaging, very passionate and authentic . . . he did some work in Guatemala, and he worked with Indigenous people."

Veronica and Becky in particular were moved by the personal stories shared by training facilitators and the relevance to the content and skills of focus during the learning. Veronica described one of her presenters as an:

> African-American [who] . . . shared her experience just being a student of color in a classroom, in a school that was not very diverse. I think when you have presenters, I don't feel like everyone should have to tell their stories if they're uncomfortable, but in these kinds of things, I really appreciated her telling her story.

While Becky herself came from a family with limited financial means, it was "hearing her [facilitator's] story and where she came from and the experiences that she had" that inspired a sense of connection and urgency for a shift in how she approached her work. Becky shared:

> I cannot believe that many people live like that. And that was some of my students living in their cars, or they're not getting the support and love at home… And so you see just the differences of everybody here in this class, but it's like, those people that had grandparents that went to college, parents that went to college, middle income, middle

> class, they have so many more privileges than others. So just finding ways to get out of it (poverty), it's tough. And sometimes impossible it seems like.

Model of Delivery

In addition to focusing on the personal and professional expertise of the individuals who delivered the professional learning events, several teachers spoke about the importance of modeling and practice as an instructional strategy. Modeling, working through specific real-world scenarios and having opportunities for reflective dialogue were all called out by interviewees as instructional approaches that helped them conceptualize how the application of particular skills could (or should) look in their daily practice. Nicole shared:

> That he actually modeled a lesson with our kids and he modeled what it's like to be the teacher of students he didn't even know. And it was really great. The fact that this is a person who models the strategy constantly. And that's the part to me that makes it, it's very easy to take away from the training.

Elise described:

> Watching other people I'm thinking … and saying, "Oh, that's something I could do," or "do I do that?" Or "how smooth is it going?"… So that too, watching him [facilitator] and just how he presented things and his flow was something I took away as well in terms of how it could help me improve my practice and how I'm instructing.

In describing her professor, Nanette said:

> She was great, because she modeled. And I think that's what I need. I need things modeled for me so I know exactly like, "Oh, I can do that." Or even if I see something being modeled, I can kind of switch it up, and mix it up, and make it my own. So she was probably one of my favorites.

Janie described a particularly valuable aspect of her training this way:

> It was, "Here are some different ways and different things to consider when you're teaching this." And one part of it we did from the kid's perspective too. So it was, "Here's the lesson, here's the logistics and here's the backgrounds." And then, "Okay. Let's pretend we're the kids and let's do this lesson like you would teach it." So that was the other part that was nice, is that you get to feel what it would be for the kids and how you interact. Because I don't know if you've ever been in a training before where they're trying to do icebreakers or they're trying to do something and you're like, "I don't want to do this." And I don't think a kid would want to do this. And so that was a huge part for it

> to be too. So I could think to myself, “How do I feel answering these questions and how would that make a kid feel, especially in the virtual environment answering these questions?”

When comparing her responsive classroom training to other professional learning experiences, Dana shared a time when modeling and practice during a training went wrong because it wasn’t seated practically in the reality of how many teachers work:

> I recently did two trainings on outdoor education or something and both of them had me sit and look at a tree for 20 minutes. And it's like come on, I have so much work to do, so I'm not going to go look at a tree, I'm going to do my work and then pretend I looked at a tree when it's time to come back. I think how I use them in the classroom is I'm just always testing things out to see what works and what doesn't work, but what I crave is seeing what works in a classroom. When I see snippets of a teacher in action, I'm like okay, there, I got something from that.

In addition to modeling and practice, Sergio, Veronica, Eddy, and Kyla appreciated the explicit embedded opportunities to reflect on their own practice and the implications of that practice on the students they serve. Sergio shared that the conversations included in his training:

> Really got me thinking about equity, social justice . . . caught my attention … And it was an aha moment for me because it really made me think about grading scales, who created grading scales? So I just started really digging deep and asking myself these questions and then how those scales negatively impact our schools in particular our kids and our communities, people of color and low socioeconomic status.

Similarly, Veronica shared that she:

> Liked the activities focusing on getting us to examine our explicit and implicit biases. I remember there were some activities where we just had to practice listening, which I thought was really great for teachers, especially talky English teachers, where we like to go blah, blah, blah, all day. So, just practice listening . . . That was really, I think, effective in just remembering to even teach my students how to do that and to do that for myself so that I pause and listen.

Eddy appreciated deep discussions he was able to have with colleagues, stating:

> That's what we are talking about a lot in this group. How do we develop trust in our students? When we are very visible White male, middle-aged male, how do we develop the trust in our Black young students that see us as the enemy? . . . How do we build that trust? Some of it is very blunt conversations, but you can't have a blunt conversation with your students unless you've built that layer of trust.

For Kyla, this kind of interaction allowed participants the ability:

> To bounce ideas off of each other, and talk about our own personal experiences because too many times in training, you're just sitting and listening, and flipping through a PowerPoint… I felt like I walked away with something, with a lot of stuff actually, versus just like, "Just sat through all of this time and all I'm getting for it is hours [continuing education hours] towards whatever," like voucher credit or whatever at the end. It was actually something that I enjoyed . . .making sure it's embedded within everything else that we do has been so super important.

Loni used an analogy to describe the importance of early engagement and buy-in with the facilitator: "It's like white noise and either you are going to get so used to it like the background noise from a fan or you're going to really take it on and listen…" Nicole's sentiment further synthesizes the important aspects that facilitator and facilitation play in professional learning that results in the transfer of critical competencies to daily practice:

> To attend to training, where not only you learn about the value of it, but you learn about specific strategies that are implemented right away. And you could tell because in a really good training… they're actually teaching you the skill. They're teaching you the skill, they're reinforcing the skill and they're modeling it. And you're constantly seeing ideas of what to do . . . somebody who requires your engagement, right? It's a part of the training. They engaged you as a learner.

Connection to Lived Experience

Each of the interviewees conceptualized their stories about the learning event within the frame of their personal and/or professional lived experiences. While this connection is referenced in many of the narratives included the previous section, the stories drawn upon in this section focus on more explicit examples from the data. These connections provided explanations for both impediments to and reinforcement of the decisions participants made to transfer and apply event specific skills and competencies into practice.

Professional

Interviewees shared three kinds of professional experiences that led them to find meaning and value (or not) in the learning: experiences with individual students and/or colleagues; a change in teaching assignment/students served; and connections to previous non–teaching work. Caitlyn spoke about how she applied the SEL training focused on zones of regulation in her work with one of her students:

> I had a little boy. He was homeschooled in first grade and mom wanted to switch him back to public school. And every day, he would come crying. He would cry every single day because he missed his mom. So every day, he would be blue, he would be sad, and we discussed, what can we do when we're missing mom? We had decided that he was going to bring in a picture of his mom, and every time that he would miss her, or miss mom or dad, that he would just get it out and look at it. And then that would help him move from the blue, to another color. So it just really helps.

Kyla described a time when she deescalated a conflict between one of her former students and a veteran general education colleague. Not only did Kyla describe the specifics of the situation, but she also shared some frustration at her colleague's failure to use specific and successful SEL approaches to the situation which escalated it unnecessarily and put the burden on Kyla (and the student) to solve the problem:

> You could tell she was on a short fuse. That's why I stopped because I knew it was going to end badly because she wasn't yelling at him, but she was talking to him in a way that I know he does not respond well to, sometimes kids in general don't respond well to. I kind of asked. I'm like, "Is it okay if I ...?", and she's like, "Yeah, go ahead." I don't overstep. She kind of just watched and smiled, and then walked away. She stood and watched the whole thing, and just looked at me and gave me a thumbs up, and then walked away. I'm like, it's not some magical thing that I have. It's tools that anyone can use… I can't be there every time that student in particular starts to get upset, and that's the thing, because there are students that I see in the gen ed setting that are past our students with some of the behaviors that they show. So it's like, "You guys could use this stuff too. It's not just some special education thing. That's not what it is. I can't be there every single time that they're in that moment and if you know that they're not going to respond well to that, don't continue to do it." They could've thought in that moment, "Well, she's got it handled," or it could've been an "aha" moment for them. I'm not sure, but like I said, I'm like, "Hey, just so if you're aware, if you need help, if you need assistance, you can ask

> questions. If he needs to take a break, remember to have him use his resources for what that would mean for him or whatever just so we can prevent that from happening and escalating any further.

Kyla's story exemplifies her clear belief that without transferring the critical competencies she gained from the SEL training she attended, she would not be able to adequately support her students or model effective strategies with her colleagues. For Kyla and Caitlyn, the decision to transfer knowledge and skills from training to practice was solidified when they were able to connect positive outcomes for specific students, in specific situations, to the confidence and competency they gained from the initial learning event.

Dana, on the other hand, found her training on responsive classrooms left her "ill equipped" to adequately and appropriate serve all of her students:

> I had a little girl in my class whose mom was a single mom working at McDonald's, and this little girl was wild, and also probably my favorite human for the year. It was like having a firework or sparkler in my class everyday, I mean she brought the light and she also was just, I was tired at the end of the day. But I knew I wasn't serving her as well as I could have been, and looking at responsive classroom wasn't going to help me at all…. I was told to update that mom on this child's behavior regularly, which was miserable for me because it made the mom feel like I didn't like the child, or the mom, and I loved the child. But if you're constantly getting updates on how your child is not sitting in her seat, is regularly blurting, this kid could not sit still, and also she had a lot of choral response which is just cultural, and even in (school name), which I feel like is a really lovely and alternative setting, you're still supposed to sit quietly and raise your hand and not blurt. And all the things that she couldn't do. And I had to continually tell that mom that, and by the end, the mom I think just despised me. I could tell her that I loved this child and the child would tell me she loved me everyday, all day, I love you Dana! I had a wonderful relationship with her, but the expectation of me constantly telling the mom how she wasn't meeting expectations of this system was miserable. And I don't think responsive classroom or any training I had ever been to acknowledged that that's what we do. That we tell parents of children who, whether they're Black or White, these were truly characteristics of this little girl, like a lot of church kind of things, celebration, call it out.
>
> I would read and she would go yeah, tell me more! So that kind of stuff. I felt ill equipped, but I have to say at my school there's not a lot of diversity…so I don't feel like any of my trainings have really been especially helpful with that.

Dana's perception of a disconnect between the responsive classroom training and what she needs to improve her practice is emblematic of her overall experience with professional learning—she feels that "there's been so few learning trainings that have been of use to me at all . . . In most training you get bits and pieces, but not really a great investment of time . . ." And, because that's been Dana's experience, she rarely makes the decision to transfer or apply new learning to practice.

Both Loni and Johanna discussed a shift in their professional responsibilities and the students they serve. Loni described "seeing more and more kids coming to the classroom with behaviors that no one could quite pinpoint as to why . . . Just the shutting down, the refusals" which had not been typical in her upper-income school. She sees herself as:

> More . . . proactive than reactive and didn't want to wait until it became a larger issue. And so when you start seeing kids discussing things or in their writing . . . there're things at home, you know that something has occurred but you can't figure out what. Nor is it necessarily my place to figure out what, it is just how I can help them deal with whatever it is.

This gradual shift in student behaviors led Loni to training specifically about working with students experiencing trauma. And what she learned shifted some of her practices to prioritize building student resiliency, namely through building strong, stable, and positive relationships with her students more deliberately than ever before and also framing her approach to serving students and families as less of a one-woman-show to one reliant on collaboration with colleagues and families to support the needs of students more holistically.

Johanna similarly shared the importance of understanding "the holistic experience was super helpful" because as she transitioned from working as an elementary generalist to a special education teacher, she needed to be able to support her students both in the resource room and also in the general education setting. Put simply, she needed to be able to adequately program

for her students so they could be successful in a wide variety of academic and social settings, and in order to do so, she needed to be deliberate about addressing the individual experiences of each student rather than promoting a one-size-fits-all approach.

It is not surprising that the teachers who spent the most time working in non-teaching fields before becoming educators grounded much of the meaning they internalized and many of the decisions they made in experiences that came from their pre-service years. The narratives of Elizabeth, Eddy, and Dana personified this pattern. Elizabeth shared that the SEL training she attended was:

> Really fantastic because my background, before I attended that conference, years ago I worked at a treatment center. And so everything that the presenter talked about, I had background from and could connect to . . . And so I think my experience at the residential treatment center gave me a lot of skills that I would not have otherwise had, working closely with the treatment team and the skills that they had working with the emotional needs of the kids. And that's something that I was able to bring forward and it became part of my intuitive makeup.

Elizabeth's prior work experience provided her an intuition of sorts that helped her conceptualize how and why specific approaches to SEL would work in her daily practice. Similarly, Eddy also mentioned "intuition" as he connected his experience in the corporate culinary world to his more recent vocation, "(t)raining staff is teaching. So coming into this, what I brought with me was this intuition of how to run a classroom, the memories of my culinary class, setting it up . . . a lot of that was that intuition." Eddy's perspective on what worked in the kitchen was directly tied to his presumptions about what would work in a classroom, thus deeply influencing the decisions he made about what and why he would transfer specific skills to his regular practice. For him, past experience and present practice were inextricably linked:

> Right now it would be hard for me to say exactly what I do in the classroom is industry-based and what I do in the classroom is training based. What I will say is that the training that I've received has made me more mindful of what I'm doing. Thinking through why something works. I do this and it works, of course it works. It's always

> worked. Why does it work? . . . As I've gotten more training, I'm understanding what I set out and why I did it that way. And it has changed over the years based on all of the teaching stuff that I'm learning. It's very purposeful now what I'm doing . . .learning more about brain development has allowed me to tweak it and shift it so that it fits a wide range of cognitive development.

Dana's work with poverty programs in state government, in contrast, made her much more critical of teacher professional development, finding much of it faux-positive, inauthentic, and disconnected from the needs of many students:

> I've been in a much more gritty world . . . and for me it felt more honest and real and true, but it's interesting, because I know that the teacher community kind of prides themselves on being kind, and a good listener, which I actually don't think there is a whole lot of good listening, honestly. It's just a very different culture, and I feel like it's what that keynote said, which is that it's people who really like school, went to school, so I think that's where some of the gaps are, the children who are struggling are the children who don't like school. And don't feel comfortable in school. And would love to not do school. And they're being taught by people who of course, there's always exceptions, but in general they're being taught by people who love the system enough to want to spend their life in it, and go to school to spend their life in it.

Dana views her all of her professional learning experiences through this lens, not so much as a complaint, but more from a place of frustration, believing the schools and teachers need to be more responsive to the needs of all students. And when she doesn't believe that what's been presented during a training is likely to change outcomes and experiences for all students, she is unwilling to put much effort into transferring or applying the soft-skills or critical competencies that were the focus of the learning event.

Tony shared a similar perspective, specifically that his district's focus on equity has been:

> A lot of talk, a lot of investment in outside firms. And then a lot of reliance on individual educators or buildings that are doing great work and are putting in the energy, the effort, the time themselves, and the district highlighting that as if it is district-wide.

He described his district's approach to equity focused trainings, like the restorative practices professional development on which he focused his narrative, as "soup du jour," a sampling of one-time or short-term offerings rather than a full implementation and as opportunities for the

district-at-large to prove its commitment to progressive agendas when convenient and popular. This piecemeal and bandwagon approach was particularly irksome to Tony who talked about getting "in trouble" for his early support of Black Lives Matter before it became more widely accepted after the murder of George Floyd in May 2020. Tony shared that:

> It's been an interesting journey for me personally. I was just . . . getting called into meetings with HR six years ago for Black Lives Matter stuff and getting written up. And . . . now they uphold like that's the work that we're all doing (in the district), the same people that they once were having the HR director meet with are now being celebrated and without any actual systemic change.

For Tony, these experiences seem to have engrained a deep-seated skepticism and perpetual internal dilemma when it comes to deciding whether or not to fully engage in district-provided learning focused on topics that he's passionate about. Tony clearly does not believe his district leadership is committed to the systemic changes necessary to achieve more equitable experiences and outcomes for students, but he is. And when the district provides training focused on equity, Tony has often decided to take what the district has to offer, expand it on his own, and use the district's rationale when challenged about how and why his instructional practices look and feel different from most of his colleagues.

Personal

The personal lived experiences of the interviewees have also shaped the ways in which, and extent to which, they made decisions about what they decided to transfer from learning to practice. Both Nicole and Mikah talked about the personal growth they experienced when engaging with mindful practices outside of work. Nicole "got really into mindfulness and yoga" in her personal life, and what she described as a personal epiphany related to her own emotional regulation (or lack there of) encouraged a sense of openness and excitement about what she

viewed as an opportunity to combine her personal passions with skills and competencies she learned in the SEL training to benefit her students:

> Can you imagine the heartache you could have avoided? Can you imagine the ease you could have felt if you just knew a little bit more about your own emotions about yourself, and if your teacher prioritized that, talking about it? It's just everything and some people, I'll tell you this, and this is the issue. Teachers don't have good SEL skills themselves. They struggle with their social awareness, with their relationship skills, with their self awareness…Some teachers never really get into that. And they have a hard time connecting with kids.

Similarly, Mikah has been deeply influenced by his wife's work in somatic mindfulness and because it has benefited him personally, he was eager to introduce those concepts and ways of being into his classroom by practicing ways to help his students become more emotionally and physically regulated:

> Especially these wiggly 9, 10, 11-year-olds to really try to understand their body through yoga, or just even gestures. Like make a gesture, make a symbol, make a body symbol for how you're feeling. Really trying to understand that feelings come from a body sensation.

The SEL training he participated in provided Mikah the rationale and the specific skills needed for use in a classroom context which facilitated a clear and deliberate decision to transfer and apply his new learning.

Other teachers were deeply influenced by their perspectives on and responses to recent world events; several mentioned the murder of George Floyd, subsequent protest movements, and the January 6, 2021 attacks on the U.S. Congress. Some, like Delia, found them so personally impactful that it inspired a shift how they viewed the work of schools generally, and the implications for their classrooms in particular. Delia shared that:

> Post George Floyd and everything, for me, I think that my number one job is to create a very safe environment and a very loving environment, because learning a second language requires a lot of risk, you have to be a risk taker. And so the kids need to feel so safe and know that you're never going to ridicule them and so on . . . And most of my students are children of color and so it's important for me to use the culture part of teaching a language for them to be able to begin to question their identity, to begin to

> answer who am I, where am I at this place in history? Why am I here? And to begin to ask them questions about their own biases, if you will. So I think connecting the sense that there's got to be that emotional safety, if you will, but also that it almost seems to be like relevant, right? And engaging.

Veronica applied a more philosophical approach when discussing the connection between her training and how she processed contemporary political and social happenings and movements as well as the responsibility she assumed to help her students conceptualize, process, and engage with such meaty and thorny topics:

> I don't really know too many people that think they're bad people, and they've been raised in all these different circumstances and have all these different values . . . we have to step back and examine our own thinking and our own choices and why we're acting that way. And if this is something that we're doing that we can see in the open, or if our actions are more on the level of microaggressions or they're on the level of just the unconscious and we don't realize how we're affecting other people or even affecting ourselves with our choices and ideas about the world.

When Veronica returned to her classroom after training and applied this perspective in her work with students, she:

> Found the classroom became so much better and we were able to actually get more work done because I think we were talking more about emotional needs. I think when you're always framing everything from a curriculum standpoint and you never put anything personal, that's when people tune out.

This kind of personal processing and varied approaches to perspective taking also helped Becky engage with her work in new ways after training. At the start of her teaching career, she needed "a better understanding of my students and where they come from each morning, instead of . . . I think I looked at them more as, you're late, your homework's not done." Becky grew up living in poverty and shared that "not having everything and not looking like all my other friends and not having that nice big home, a nice car, all those things that people judge and you always feel self-conscious about." Becky's insecurities about her childhood played out in her classroom in the ways she judged the low-income parents of her students, admitting:

> I was like, “Just go get a job or go have someone help you with your kids.” But it's not that easy when you see all of the things they're up against, I felt like it was really . . . I'm like, “Whoa.” You can't just call and get more money. The money they have per child, it's so devastating that they can't survive. They need that help.

This realization coupled with the opportunity that the training provided for Becky to connect to as well as process feelings about her own childhood resulted in her restructuring the approach she takes to student assessment. Becky no longer requires homework, doesn’t allow for extra credit, and is deliberate in her attempts to ensure student progress is measured and reported based on specific learning standards visible in daily classwork rather than on homework, participation, or other attendance related factors that disproportionally disadvantage students living in poverty. For Becky, the training allowed her to look at childhood poverty from a new perspective that was not centered around her own experience. As a result, she was comfortable, in fact eager, to make decisions that altered her practice so that it was more responsive to the needs of all of her students.

Admittedly less dramatic than Becky’s experience, Janie shared a similar occurrence in perspective taking that prompted her to think about ways to better serve students. The professional learning event that she participated in approached the topic of diversity in science curriculum from multiple perspectives. For someone with Janie’s experience in the “hard sciences,” this was a novelty not present in most of the science focused learning she’d engaged with in the past. For Janie, simply:

> Remembering that learners are different. And so I am the type of learner that I came from that strict background like you do it because you're supposed to, and that you do it and too bad if it's not interesting, you got to learn it if somebody tells you to learn it . . . And so when a student walks into your classroom, they might have a number of prior experiences, feelings about the topic, things that I can't even see on their face . . . So it gave me a chance to remember that that is an important part of student engagement and also highlighting students' strengths.

Janie described how she adjusted one of her units about cancer to a more holistic approach as a result of the training this way:

> We're . . . talking about cancer and the mechanisms of it, and also interviewing someone that either has experienced cancer themselves or have taken care of a family member when they had cancer. And that's really the only time that I've done that. But that has been helpful, so it's reminded me, "Hey, that is helpful too." It allows students to explore the emotional side of these topics and not just be factual scientific based. I wasn't expecting that, I've never done a lesson like that and it . . . demonstrated that that is an important part of the curriculum and it can be part of it, because it really gets at the psychological side of science and medicine . . . It was surprising, but it was good to start processing that and realize that I need to add a little more of that in.

The success of the unit further increased Janie's willingness to approach her content in ways more relevant and engaging to a broad spectrum of students while keeping the necessary rigor and focus on content specific standards and skills.

Relevance

All study participants made explicit connections between their decisions to transfer soft skills from training to practice, or not, based on their perceptions of relevance to either the students being served and/or the content areas taught.

Students Served

Loni "had a few students who have had some extreme family lives . . ." and believed the training contributed to her "ability to at least help them deal with what they're doing when they're here. . . giving them a little safe haven, giving them the opportunity to talk if they need to, going down to the counselor, those types of opportunities." Especially impactful on Loni's decision making was that she "saw the value in community rather than just being almost like an island and helping kids. Because that's really what it's going to take, is multiple people. Not one teacher is going to make the whole difference." Simply put, the recognition that she couldn't and wouldn't be able to provide all necessary supports to all students, and that that was okay, made

Loni more willing to apply the critical competencies in her regular practice because she knew she wasn't alone in her endeavors.

Similarly, Becky shared that she's "had a student living in a car. I have a homeless kid in the homeless shelter. I have ones that are at home with a mom, with multiple boyfriends coming in and out" so it has become important to her that she get:

> To know the families because, then I can help their child more. So I think it's not just like a community with my students and me, it's a community with their family and getting to know them as well, and then putting those pieces together.

Becky shifted her thinking about how she works with students living in poverty after the training; describing the experience as "pretty mind blowing." Instead of thinking, "Oh, work harder, work harder. I think many of these families are working to the best that they can." This change in perspective contributed to the change in grading and assessment practices described in the previous section.

Becky and Loni spoke about community in the context of how school staff can (should) support individual students and families. Elizabeth, in contrast, lives and works in a tiny remote village so her conceptualization of community is more holistic and blurs the lines between her professional responsibilities and private citizenship. What is clear is that the SEL training she discussed was centered on creating a safe spaces for her students, who also happen to be her neighbors:

> They're going to have a bad day, they're going to come back, is this going to be a safe place? It wasn't a safe place yesterday, what's going to happen today? And so reaching out to the kids and giving them that safe place and letting them know that they are wanted and they are welcome. It's process for them to be able to recognize that and accept it and make use of that safe space. And that's one of the things that I have always wanted to provide, because I know that that's not something they necessarily have in the rest of their lives. This is a safe place, and it will always be a safe place. . . And a lot of my students, if they don't have behavior problems, they are in the throes of learned helplessness. "I can't, I won't, you can't make me, I don't know how". . . Right? And it's the same, unlearning the learned helplessness is the same process for unlearning the behavior

> problems and being physically and emotionally safe in their lives. . . it's all part of the same process.

Elizabeth saw a direct connection and inextricable links between facilitating social and emotional wellbeing in her classroom and the welfare of village inhabitants at large. As a result, her decision to transfer and apply critical competencies from the SEL training was both a "no brainer" and at the same time wrought with emotion and a sense of obligation.

For Delia and Johanna, the relevance to the students they served came from aspects of helping them better understand themselves as both learners and human beings. Delia shared:

> Many people . . . I encounter are like, 'Oh yeah, I took French. I don't remember anything, I didn't learn anything.' And so it's definitely time to change that, it's just not a good way to learn the language, just all the grammar and you basically end up learning just that . . . you don't pronounce it, you don't use it, you don't hear any colloquialisms or any expressions or anything like that . . . you see this whole immigrant experience and you see the whole impact of racism, the suffering and then missing the home. So there's so much available for me to create those connections, validate the kids . . . of getting the students to open up and to participate while acquiring a language and they're making those emotional connections with the new language and their own experiences.

Johanna said:

> The kids that I work with, they're a wide variety of kids with disabilities. Many, many kids have behavior issues. I mean, some kids have behavior issues, some kids have social perspective taking difficulties. The reason that I find it really meaningful and helpful is that what I have found over 27 years is that teaching people how our brains work, how we work as humans is the most powerful. So teaching that you can only control your own behavior and the behavior is what we really do. We work with kids, whether it's a small issue or a more prevalent and intense issue that they're dealing with, having the choice theory and the kind of the reality therapy and the problem-solving approach really helps a lot to make specific plans and help them to behave towards the goal that they want to get to . . . I have two or three kids that right now that have lived in the woods. . . or their car or whatever. Teaching explicitly what's happening to the trauma brain, and also helping them without judgment to just have some de-escalation or regulation tools, I guess. I think that's . . . everything that we do.

These two saw a clear role for themselves to play not only in validating the experiences and challenges faced by their students, but also in how they need to curate explicit opportunities for

students so they would be better prepared to approach and respond productively and proactively to the difficulties they face.

For Ana and Nanette, relevance related to the students they serve was seated in how they felt about the need to build classroom cultures that support large groups of students who have struggled or been alienated elsewhere during their school experiences. Ana shared the following:

> For students who have been in trouble and just creative ways to restore justice . . .to keep their value intact, their sense of worth intact . . . I think a lot of what we've done in education has been so punitive and damaging. How could we expect these kids to like school? And so for me, I've always relied so much on those relationships that even if a kid was acting like a" knucklehead" one day, the next day it's been clean slate because I can't...You can only be so punitive. It doesn't pay off for anyone, especially the student and if our goal is to educate which it should be, those punitive issues really do a lot of damage and harm to students that already don't really want to be there.

While this portion of Ana's narrative (shared at the beginning of the interview) clearly communicated a sense of value in developing restorative relationships and experiences for students, it was not enough for her to decide to transfer any learning, it was more of an explanation for why she chose to attend the training in the first place. Per the discussion in the Instructor/Presenter/Facilitator section earlier in the chapter, Ana's willingness to transfer any training specific skills and competencies were largely derailed by the negative perceptions she had about the facilitator, especially frustrating for Ana as she clearly articulates the need for better approaches to working with struggling students.

Nanette, on the other hand, described her coursework about social-emotional learning as:

> Opening my eyes to see, "What do I want to teach my kids?" . . . I have a little bit more freedom in the classroom, because I have . . . my ED (emotionally disturbed) students . . . and our curriculum is set up different. I can be more individual . . . And I love that, because each kid is different. . . but I want all of them to have an environment that is as loving as possible . . . And when you think about that, when you think about all this love, and you're feeling very personal, like, "Wow, my teacher knows my siblings, my teacher knows my mom, my teacher knows my middle name." When you think of all those things, that kind of... That let's the kid buy into you, and they trust you. So then when the kid starts to trust you, that's when you can start teaching them… Kids cannot, will not,

> won't be able to, learn if they are not safe, if their basic needs are not met. If they are not feeling safe . . .

For Nanette, the simple fact that her students are in a self-contained special education program for children with emotional and/or behavioral disabilities was sufficient indication of previous school struggle for her to deeply commit to applying newly acquired skills from her coursework into practice. Thus, it has become a foundational part of her daily work to create a classroom culture of connection, trust and love by using the competencies she learned during her academic program.

Content Area

Eddy saw his culinary arts classes as unique opportunities to connect with disengaged students and to better prepare them for future employment, especially because as an elective teacher at a school that houses the highly academic and rigorous International Baccalaureate program he has:

> A higher ratio of students receiving SPED services in my class than in other classes. We're an IB school. But I don't have a lot of the IBDP [International Baccalaureate Diploma Program] students. But I do have a lot of the students that are going to need some skill. . . And I've got a lot of students that just don't believe that there is a future beyond class or that they are capable of anything. And this is my way of counteracting that.

As such, Eddy embraced the concepts embedded in the constructive instructional practices training so that not only would students build content knowledge, but more important to Eddy, was that they also build critical employment skills and a sense of self-worth and achievement. He shared:

> I get them into the kitchen as quickly as possible because then I get them engaged. And if they see the reward out there, they see, oh, we get to cook, we get to cook. We get to eat what we cook and we get to brag to our friends. So that is a motivator . . . So we get them right in the kitchen. But then the experience is what leads us to the learning. And I knew that I was doing right because . . . I'm learning about constructivist theory and ideology and putting the materials in the hands of the students and allowing them to make their

> own meaning or it is going to give them a deeper understanding. . . understanding where the students are in their brain development, knowing how things are being stored long-term, understanding where they are socially and how that plays into it.

Similarly, Janie's training shifted the way she framed concepts and content for students so that they would be more able to understand the complexities involved in understanding disease and disease patterns in human populations:

> So when you say, "This disease is more prominent in this population." That makes people think that it's because of their genetics and then people have linked genetics to race, but people don't realize that, I don't explain it enough . . . to say it's because of the racial construct that we have that it's affecting their access to healthcare and their access to preventative services . . . or . . . their multi-generational living and all of these different things . . . how people are different from each other.

After her training on diversity in the science curriculum, Janie believed it was imperative to understand not just the content of science, but also the social, political and economic impacts on human beings that are often inextricably linked to disease causes and outcomes, treatment methods and research approaches and opportunities.

As a high school English teacher, Veronica began to review her district's adopted curriculum with a more critical eye following the conference she attended, saying:

> We're reading stories of people who are trying to navigate in their complex world. I think the question is always when you're teaching English . . . that really stuck out at me in the training is when people ask the question, "Where are the students in the curriculum? Where do they see themselves?" That's something that I highlighted and put a star by in my notebook here, because I just feel like that's a question we always need to ask, "Where are they in the curriculum?"

Veronica believed her subject area is incredibly well suited to ensuring students can relate to the content, build empathy for those who are different and expand their worldviews by exploring the diversity of humanity and human experience through literature. The conference she attended provided her the tools to frame her planning and teaching more responsively to those with whom she works, the content she delivers, and the methods she employs.

Critical as he was about the delivery of the training he received on restorative practices through his district, which he described as “bleached at four different levels before it gets to the students,” Tony still saw a place for restorative practices in the ethnic studies class he teaches: “If you're having that level of community and conversations and that really . . . covers some really tough topics . . . so much of restorative is you can't restore relationships that don't exist . . . And so how do you build a relationship that when conflict happens, there's any desire to restore and to continue to be a part of the community?” Tony was sparked enough by the content of the training he received that he personally extended his learning on the topic, going as far as reaching out to teachers across the country who have experienced successful implementation and application of restorative practices in schools.

For Nicole, Kyla, and Elise, all teachers of students who qualify for special education or English language development (ELD) programing, there was no distinction between the students they serve and the specific content area of their teaching assignments. This is not particularly surprising given the foundational goals of providing students SDI and ELD support is so that they build enough skills, academic and social, so that they can access general education programing. Nicole shared:

> If my kids are depressed, if they're sad, if they're feeling down whatever it is, you see . . . Learning actually cannot even happen unless we're regulated . . . These are the kids that end up in the office, these are the kids that end up in fights, these are the kids that are explosive, right? Their emotions completely hijack them. And these are the kids that we're like, "Well, they don't have it together, so they need to be punished."
>
> I knew it was a problem, particularly for special students in special ed because their disabilities typically make them have a few deficits and behind actually, in the development of these areas. And I thought if we could focus on teaching these skills and reinforcing the skills, they're not going to have as many problems in school, they're going to have hopefully more ability to not necessarily control their emotions and feelings, but to keep those emotions and feelings and the negative things from controlling them, from feeling powerless over it . . . my main objective is to connect with kids emotionally and

> to improve their social skills, their communication, their self-management, all these things because we work on those skills . . . And kids with disabilities really need the help, and more explicitly taught the skill . . . so I decided to really go gung-ho on it.

Nicole's training was the impetus she needed to shift the focus of her support classes for students qualifying for SDI services from one where she "just had kids come in and do their homework" to a venue in which she could explicitly teach SEL strategies to improve student competence in emotional regulation, relationships and responses to academic or social stress at school (and in life) so that they would have more positive experiences and outcomes.

Likewise, Kyla discussed how her SEL training has been:

> Super helpful for me, and I actually this year and last year, I teach emotionally disturbed students, so having those skills has been so amazing . . . making sure it's embedded within everything that we do has been so super important.

She continued her discussion by highlighting her hope that the general education teachers with whom she works will engage in the SEL work because it is important to:

> Figure out what's going on with that student besides they're angry all morning. It's not just because they're angry. There's a reason for it, and I think that we get so swamped as teachers, and there's just so much going on that we're just trying to push through. If they had that tool that they could utilize in the general education setting and use it across the board, you know, you use it in Kindergarten. Well, then you're familiar with it when you go to first grade. You already know what it is in second grade, and so on. So, if other teachers had the tools that they could utilize in the general education setting and use it across the board . . .its bigger than just having it in your back pocket when we all use it to benefit everyone.

While Kyla's students are in a self-contained special education classroom, she sees the benefit in also ensuring her students understand social-emotional learning is not just for when they're with her. "(T)hey go to recess and lunch with the whole population. They go to specialists and everything, and so they need to know that it's not just for in here." For Kyla, what she teaches cannot be isolated from who and why she teaches.

When discussing the interdisciplinary ELD program that she's taught in for the last eight

years and the importance of keeping her students at the center of the work, Elise shared:

> We realized early on when we started doing this and there was only three of us, if we can't get those kids comfortable, if we can't build community, then we're never going to get them, they're never going to learn any English from us. . .And because they're such a vulnerable group on campus, new to the country, don't understand the culture, don't understand an American high school, they're thrown on buses and bussed because they come from all over the district, and here's some books, and here's this, and here's 3,200 kids, go figure it out. And of course, our classrooms are physically the farthest apart they could be from each other.

As a result of this context, Elise's SEL training provided reinforcement to how she conceptualized her existing practice and provided her with ideas about additional ways she and her team could further integrate the development of critical academic skills and content with ongoing social-emotional learning designed to facilitate trust and build relationships between and among staff and students in the department.

Self-Identity

Seventeen study participants made connections between their individual identities and the professional learning experience they identified. Specifically, teachers made explicit links to their core values as well as their perceptions about preexisting professional practices when making decisions about the extent to which they transferred and applied new learning to daily routines for planning and instruction.

Core Values

Delia, Kyla, Eddy, and Elise all shared versions of the same sentiment: they saw themselves as reflective people deeply committed to growth and improvement, both personally and professionally. In her discussion related to decisions to take a more holistic approach to her language instruction, Delia shared "I don't like being comfortable, so I have to stretch myself." Similarly, Kyla described her eagerness to engage in ongoing professional learning that will help increase her skills and facilitate better outcomes: "sign me up for that, please. If I'm able to go, I

will do it . . . and I'm kind of like that honestly in general. If there's any type of extra training . . . that that I feel like will help my students, I am definitely there . . . jumped on . . . I want to be the best teacher that I can be and I want to make sure that I am being the best for my students."

Eddy shared:

> I'm a total geek. So when I learned how to bake bread, I learned about the molecular structure of wheat. When I started brewing beer, I studied water chemistry and yeast. So when I start teaching, of course, I'm going to delve into the intricacies of teaching . . . I knew that there was so much more about teaching that I needed to know . . . I'm a geek, I'm a total geek. And when I get interested in something, I get really interested in it. So understanding a lot of the theory and philosophy that goes into that. That's where philosophy and psychology really helps to identify a lot of different things about doing a good job teaching.

Elise discussed a minor epiphany she had as part of the SEL training. As an experienced teacher, it was the first time in her recent memory that she'd actually returned to the importance of being reflective about not simply the success of a single lesson, but also about the larger picture of what and how she was delivering content to students. She said:

> My goal is always for our kids to graduate, speak enough English that you can go get a job, meet a cute girl, whatever, all those things. But did I always do things that would push them forward towards that? Maybe not, maybe not. So maybe I needed this so that I would really think about what was truly important.

Dana, Tony, and Nicole all saw themselves as being more attuned to the kinds of soft skills and critical competencies that are the focus of much of teacher trainings that are en vogue these days: equity, cultural responsiveness, social-emotional learning, and the like. Dana shared:

> You are getting the perspective of someone whose done something other than teaching most of their adult life. . . I have a real outsider's perspective and I really carry it. Like in staff meetings and stuff, it's always there. I think "oh my goodness," these people need to go get jobs somewhere else and then come back to teaching.

Tony described always doing "whatever I can to disrupt" the centering of Whiteness and resulting impacts for students. Even when uncomfortable implementing restorative practices in his classroom because he didn't consider himself an expert, Tony said:

> What I share with folks is like, the harm is active and ongoing, no effort to be better is going to cause more harm than a neutral neglect or no kind of position. And so you got to live what you preach. And so I was like, okay, I'm not able to do this perfectly. I don't have the circle keeper training, but I can keep my students centered and I can meet their needs as we go. And as I learned more, I can implement more and I can share with my students about how I've learned more about this and why we're making a shift or a change in my process.

When discussing her experience with mindful practice, a key aspect of the SEL training she attended, Nicole shared that she:

> was pioneer in that area . . . They didn't even want me to use the word meditation. . . I had painted a meditation corner for my kids. . . And that's always what the kids come back to me with . . . The reason I know that it's important is because they come back and they tell me, "Oh, I was breathing in the car the other day, and my mom was saying, What are you doing? I said, I'm just practicing breathing that [teacher name] taught me."

For Tony and Nicole, the decisions to transfer knowledge and skills from training were directly connected to how they intellectualized their core values and believed the learning experience aligned with those conceptualizations. Dana's perceptions of herself as an eternal outsider encouraged a critical view of the ways her colleagues approach their work, especially with students that struggle academically, socially and/or behaviorally. As such, after the training Dana was left with the same sense of inadequacy that she started with, wanting more and feeling like what she learned wasn't enough to help her make meaningful improvements to her practice.

Sergio and Johanna see their professional work as a vocation connected to their perceived purpose and the ways they are intended to live. For Sergio, the son of Chicano activists, "This was ingrained in me, right? The idea of fairness for everybody and we need to fight . . . for a better education system and a better community." The training Sergio engaged with resonated with this deep part of his identity, thus transferring new perspectives about how, why, and when to assess students was described as a relatively simple decision. For Johanna, the decision to transfer what she'd learned in her graduate work focused on Glasser's choice theory, was equally

simple because she'd "never, ever found that criticism works with humans, that kind of intense, that intense demoralizing criticism" so the aspect of the training that spoke to her was an emphasis on "non-judgment . . . because you're sitting down to . . . teach about . . . what they want in a quality world and helping them to achieve that." In Johanna's worldview, she holds a deep belief that individuals can create ideal worlds for themselves based on the choices they make. Choice theory spoke to that part of Johanna's core and the classroom experiences she wanted to provide.

Reinforcement of Existing Practices

Many interviewees explicitly or implicitly assigned value to the trainings they discussed based on whether or not their existing professional practice was reinforced as a result of the learning event. Loni had positive feelings about the training experience which she shared while describing herself as "more proactive than reactive" in her practice. As a result, when the ACEs training emphasized the importance of building trusting and consistent relationships with students and creating systems of support that are community-wide, Loni shared that those things were already:

> Paramount in my classroom from day one. I really try to build a rapport and make it a very nice safe haven for everybody. . . I really try hard at that in hopes that will allow them to open up if they need to . . . And if I hear anything or see anything to get others involved.

Like Loni, Veronica, Mikah, and Elizabeth, had similarly positive evaluations of their trainings. Veronica was pleased that the training seemed to reinforce her position that:

> I don't want to be the teacher on the soap box, shoving my views down everyone's throat. I want them to critically think . . . it allows me to still bring in what I'm passionate about but let them come to their own thinking and reasoning and conclusions . . . it's a lot of reflection that I put into my curriculum.

Additionally, Veronica spoke explicitly about the training providing her "more tools" that she could use in her daily practice. Mikah especially valued the aspects of the SEL training that emphasized emotional vulnerability, explaining:

> It's really important to show vulnerability. I try to do that as a model and it's important to explore all kinds of different feelings. And being sad is an okay feeling. And it's an understandable feeling. Or being angry, or being frustrated. And those are all real feelings that we have and experience. And we will for our whole lives. And so being able to talk about them is really important for me as a teacher.

Elizabeth vocalized being unable to "pull out the specifics of what changed" in her practice after the training but was reassured with the awareness that came from it, saying she believed she was "doing this for a reason, not just because my instinct tells me to, but because research says this is the best practice." As an example, she shared:

> I run the summer food program for the kids. And so I get to know all of the students long before they reach my classroom in a way that has absolutely nothing to do with behavioral expectations, nothing to do with academic expectations. It's just positive relationship building. I am giving them food, I am talking to them, we are a part of a community. And so being able to then build on that in the classroom . . . but the reason why it's important is because the kids need those solid foundational relationships.

In these sections of their narratives, Mikah, Veronica, and Elizabeth did not name specific aspects of the training that they transferred, however, all three did articulate clear rationale for existing practice based on content from the learning events.

As referenced earlier, Ana was not pleased with the training she engaged with given the approach taken by the facilitator in response to questions about how race impacts students. She did, however, make clear reference to the ways in which she focuses on the wellbeing of and relationships with students in her regular practice and that the training reinforced her instructional strategies, stating:

> I've always relied so much on those relationships that even if a kid was acting like a "knucklehead" one day, the next day it's been clean slate because . . . you can only be so punitive. It doesn't pay off for anyone, especially the student and if our goal is to educate

> which it should be, those punitive issues really do a lot of damage and harm to students that already don't really want to be there. . . the training . . . justified what I already do . . . the things I already know.

COVID-19

Not entirely surprising given that interviews were conducted 10–12 months into the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic between January and March 2021, the majority of the individuals interviewed focused at least part of their narrative on the impact of the public health crisis on their daily work. There was little explicit connection between participant decisions to transfer critical competencies and teachers' pandemic experiences; however, the extraordinary disruption to typical practice clearly surfaced new perspectives about and connections to previously completed professional learning. Three subthemes within the larger theme of COVID-19 emerged: the impact of the teaching model, impact on student needs, and influence on future planning.

Teaching Model

Tony and Veronica and Becky all spoke about the importance of creating or sustaining classroom cultures that were student centered when the instructional model looked different than ever before. At the time of the interviews, both Tony and Veronica had been exclusively teaching in a remote model where their students received synchronous instruction two or three days per week and asynchronous instruction the remaining days. Becky taught remotely at the beginning of the school year, but within a month moved into a hybrid model where she saw half her students in-person on alternating days; at the time of our interview, she had been teaching in a traditional in-person model for a less than a month. When discussing the challenge of creating a healthy and positive classroom community during unparalleled times in such a unique

instructional model, Tony described the burden he felt placed upon him by colleagues and supervisors:

> It looks impossible to be honest and it hurts, I think particularly for me and for others of my colleagues in the building who are constantly looked to as like the teachers who get relationships and are good at building community. And I feel like people are still this year leaning on those of us that historically have been able to do it. And I got to be honest . . . I'm not sure either it's possible or I have the skills necessary to really build that same level of authentic community. My focus has been on, like, I always give opportunities. I have breakout sessions and channels. We set them up tried to build relationships between those groups and spend the time. But there's many times where groups go to their discussion channels and then I pop in and nobody said anything for three minutes. And they were only going to be in there for six. And like you kind of have to like almost restart every time because this black screen is such a barrier, especially with students not having cameras on. It doesn't feel like a community at all. And so what that moves to me is trying to maintain, or what is the overarching message that my students are receiving while they're in my class, even if they're not sharing, even if they're not fully engaged, how does this syllabus, the approach, the expectations, the workload, what does all of that holistically tell them is important right now during this pandemic. And it's been my focus that they know that their wellbeing, their health, their mental health, their intellectual health is the priority.

For Tony, the training on restorative practices and his intentions to continue and expand that work in his classroom was stalled during the pandemic. Without seeing students in-person on a daily basis, his goal of facilitating a high functioning community in which students were members of and accountable to said community as they explored timely and weighty social, economic and political issues was usurped by what he viewed as the more pressing need for students to know that they were seen and valued by him and that everything he did over the course of the year was designed with that end in mind.

Veronica shared her efforts to create community and safe spaces for students within the context of remote learning using digital diaries and shared virtual workspaces so her students had similar opportunities to explore ideas and issues they would have engaged with in-person pre-pandemic and how her training helped frame that work:

> So my regular classroom, I've tried to build into like a community. We always have our greetings at the doors that we do. And then we always have our exits that we do. We're always in groups, and we always have whiteboard and it's always collaborative. It's very community oriented. And now there's COVID and we can't shake hands at the door anymore or we can't do this or we can't do that. And now it's all remote. I was going a little crazy thinking, "Well, how do we keep community going?" which is basically the point to me of the . . . training is how do you build a better community for everyone. And so taking cues from some of my . . . colleagues, we just started creating opportunities for students to contribute to the mindset conversations. . . And I know students want to talk about these things, even if they're at home, but it's tricky because I'm also in their home with their family members that have very specific viewpoints on things. I think that . . . training was very helpful in making sure that I didn't become someone who was now invading their space, but rather inviting them into mine. And in creating an online community that we're inviting you into there and if your parents have questions they can ask and nothing to make the kids feel like now they have to either defend their teacher . . . School is a place where a lot of students will . . . If they come from very conservative families, when they're LGBTQ that they may not share that with their family. They share it with the teacher. I realized that filter has been taken away now because they can't physically go to campus and have this other thing they're exploring in their life without the judgment of their parents or whatever. I think that training really helped me find ways to kind of be neutral . . . and allow them to have spaces where they could talk . . . So there's a lot of reflections they can write and I've been pretty impressed with the way they've opened up and what they're dealing with . . . And a lot of students ended up . . . responding to what was going on with George Floyd. And what it's going on with all these other things that are happening. And since we're in (region redacted), we have many students affected by adverse immigration policies and things like that. There was a lot of good discussions on that. I mean, I have students whose parents are being deported and so it's been a hard, hard year, especially when everything's online and you can't give them that support.

Becky's pre-pandemic focus on classroom practices responsive to students living in poverty, most notably not requiring homework, and structuring the academic day so that students had prioritized access to and engagement with high quality instruction throughout the day, had to be replaced. The fact that all schoolwork at the start of the year needed to happen at home forced Becky into a general triage model for building a social community before focusing on academics so that she could get to know students so that when they returned to in-person school, they were

connected and could “hit the ground running” when it came to regular content and skill development.

Dana, Janie, and Sergio described both the benefits and challenges of teaching remotely when it came to how they approached the practical aspects of their instruction and how they connected to their learning from the trainings that were the focus of their narratives. Dana shared the difficulty she’d had keeping her Kindergarten and first grade students, most of whom had less than a year of in-person school experience prior to school closures in the spring of 2020, engaged and on-task during her twice weekly synchronous classes:

> I noticed on Zoom it's harder, I have a little boy . . . and I've noticed that I've been saying his name, which normally I would try not to do in the classroom, but I have to get his attention sometimes, so I've been conscious of that, I'm like oh my goodness, am I shaming now? So I just use humor a lot when that situation happens, I'll say to him you are so wiggly today, do you have the wiggles? So it's not about him misbehaving, and then I'll say to the group who else has the wiggles, so that's another responsive classroom thing, always saying can you connect to that experience, has that happened for you, and saying things like I notice lots of watching eyes and listening ears instead of you're not watching and listening. So really calling on the positive behaviors that you see in the room, things like that.

In the example Dana shared, she was able to make a direct connection between her responsive classrooms training and how she could pivot her approach to classroom management in a way that stayed true to her core pedagogical beliefs while reacting appropriately to the unique challenges of teaching in a remote environment.

Janie saw virtual learning as a unique opportunity to practice applying some of the skills, strategies and approaches to content that came from her training on embedding diversity in her science curriculum. As shared earlier, Janie’s historic approach to instruction came from her experience as a student in the “hard sciences,” which primarily focused on exploring quantitative data that identifies what is versus an interdisciplinary or cross-disciplines approach that could provide a broader context. As a result, Janie used remote learning as an opportunity to try

instructional practices and approaches to content that she likely would have shied away from in-person, sharing:

> And it's great that it's virtual honestly, like, if it flops? It's almost like they can't see the sweat pouring, right? Like there is a little bit of safety in that, like, yes, they can see my face, but I'm small, when we're projecting a PowerPoint or something like that. And so it's given me the chance to try things out and when it flops, I say it out loud because they know, but you can take a chance and it's a semester class, so I only have them for a few more months. So yeah, I'm going to try out one of those parts of it and see how it goes.

Similarly, the pandemic was the impetus to Sergio's decision to explore and implement changes to the ways he approached student assessment for the first time in more than 20 years, describing a "silver lining behind this negative situation" of COVID-19 because it "did cause me to change my grading scale and after further research and conversations, I think that's the right call."

Student Needs

Kyla, Nanette, and Mikah each shared how the pandemic influenced how they worked to support students at home, specifically expanding their SEL instruction and supports to parents so that there was more consistency for students and, in Kyla's and Nanette's experience, how those connections eased the transition back to in-person learning which happened in the late fall of 2020. Kyla shared:

> Parents will say like, "I can't believe they're responding that well to you at school because at home, there's this, this, and this," and so we're saying that . . . "you can use this at home all the time . . . Whatever it is that helps you calm down, you can still do that at home". . . but the transition was a lot better than we thought because we put that into place and we did have those conversations with them about how to use that stuff at home and still try to keep up with it while we were virtual, so it did help with the transition a lot.

Nanette described for the first time ever, giving out:

> My personal number. And at first I was a little hesitant, and I do have a parent that likes to call on the weekends. But other than that, I think that has helped … because I've been able to bridge that gap even more.

Mikah, who was preparing for the return of his students in a twice a week hybrid model at the time of the interview, hoped that by "really trying to understand family circumstances. And really trying to accommodate not only . . . in the classroom, where we accommodate for children, and we differentiate for the children" but also "trying to understand more family circumstances. And trying to set up supports" would facilitate a positive transition for students back to in-person learning. Mikah continued that while "families are fairly involved" in the school in pre-COVID-19 times, that he had to be responsive to student and family needs for connection in new ways because most of the typically embedded opportunities for connection at school were nonexistent during virtual learning. Mikah described being deliberate in his attempts to "have conversations about real issues in their lives. And to have time for sharing" for both students and their parents. This meant that Mikah had to expand what communication and support looked like for and from him, explaining that:

> This is all new for them as well. And so many families are unprepared to be their child's teacher. . . a big part of it was about really increasing communication. I'll find myself writing emails at eight o'clock at night. Whereas before the pandemic it was like, "I'm done for the day."

Mikah grounded his altered approach to the changed needs of his students and their parents, hoping that when students returned to in-person school that the daily SEL practices he prioritized from pre-pandemic training could happen without much effort.

Johanna, Nicole, and Caitlyn discussed the challenges they faced balancing the increased needs their students had during remote and hybrid instruction and the pressure they felt to use the limited time they did have with students to deliver regular academic content. Though Johanna's SDI instruction for students is connected to academic support in core subject area classes, she made the deliberate decision to prioritize the fundamental principles of choice theory in both her

synchronous and asynchronous instruction for students, believing that without that foundation, her students wouldn't be able to adequately access general education curriculum, sharing that "having some explicit lessons about how we're going to get our freedom needs met, our fun needs met, our connection, our love and belonging" is important during normal periods of stress and anxiety, but especially so during the pandemic. For Johanna, "talking really explicitly about the needs we have as humans . . . the basic needs" took precedent in how she approached her work with students and her training in choice theory provided both the rationale and tools.

Like Johanna, Nicole is a special education teacher, and also chose to prioritize student social-emotional needs over core academic content, sharing some of the struggles she had engaging her high school students and how aspects of the SEL training she attended provided a helpful frame for responding:

> If not because of Coronavirus, I never thought would be a really big implementation of SEL at my school . . . but oh, god, it's hard to take the emotional temperature in the room on Zoom. You got to believe me . . . I don't know what the hell these kids are doing because they have their cameras off. . . but I did a whole unit about how . . . you deal with grief, because what you're experiencing is grief. The loss of school, you're angry about it, you're sad, you're depressed about it, or maybe you've accepted it, and you like it. And that was really helpful . . . to realize, God, we're in stages of grief right now. Again, dealing with how to deal with overcoming emotion. To be aware of these emotional states, and that this is something we all go through. And maybe we've gone through when we lost a pet or whatever it was. All right. Now, what I really love about the SEL training is the focus on this the mindfulness, oh my god, I love it. Focusing on gratitude as a way to make yourself happy, right? And move away from the grief.

Caitlyn, on the other hand, described an internal conflict that has emerged for her when deciding when, how and the extent to which she utilizes the SEL skills from her pre-pandemic training. She recognizes the social-emotional needs of her students and wanting to be the "best teacher" for them at the same time as she feels pressure to get them "caught up" academically. At

the time of the interview, most of Caitlyn's students were attending in-person school, but some were still accessing her class completely remotely. She shared:

> COVID has hit so hard, and has hit our kids hard, and their families. So, this whole situation has just made me be more understanding of my kids, what they're bringing to the class for me, what I'm working with, and also more understanding of what the parents are going through because a lot of them are working several jobs just to make ends meet. Some of them lost their jobs, so it has just made me more aware of my students' emotional needs.
>
> I think pre-COVID, I didn't realize what really goes on when they go home, because now I get to see inside their house. I get to see all the chaos. Maybe they share a room with a sibling, their older sisters or brothers taking care of them. I've always known that that stuff goes on, but I kind of push it back because it makes me very sad, some of these lives my kids have. So I think pre-COVID, it was there in the back of my mind, but I didn't let myself go there. And now, it's hard to push back because I'm in their house every single day almost . . .
>
> I think it's now, especially, it's so much more important (SEL) because these kids have just been through so much the past year. A lot for little brains to process, to explain how they're feeling, because I noticed some of my kids, they're really needy. They want that interaction with their teacher. I'll have kids that literally want to sit right beside me just to complete their work, because they haven't had that consistency. They just want the teacher near them, even though they don't need any help. . . I've tried the SEL zones in my classroom this year. I haven't been as good with it because the kids are so inconsistent when they're here or online . . . and I'm bad about that sometimes, especially right now, just we're so far behind. We need to get this done, but I still need to take time because I cannot teach my kids if they're not ready to learn. If they are sad or angry, they really need to learn how to regulate . . .

Future Planning

The narratives of Elise and Tony represent the high-level responses that interviewees shared as they began to think about the impact of COVID-19 on the 2021–2022 school year. Elise shared, "I really feel like I'm going to be a different teacher when we're back in person. I think that I've learned and think a lot about how to refine and to really focus in on what's really important." As a teacher, Elise struggled with online instruction, both the technical aspects of

learning new digital tools and platforms as well as thinking critically about what she was teaching and whether or not it was important. She shared:

> Before it was like, you turn the page and you're like, "Okay, that's the next thing. All right, I'm going to teach that." And now since I only see them three hours a week, every other day, it's like, "Is that really necessary? What's really the goal here?" So I've been asking myself that a lot. "What's the goal?" And trying to be more clear with the kids too.

Elise continued that once she was comfortable with all of the "newness" of teaching remotely, she was able to return to the content of the SEL training more completely:

> Because I was ready for it. I was like, "Okay, because I got these logistics down, I can take this in now." I probably couldn't have taken that in back in August, it would've just flew right over me. So I was ready and I'm still hungry for more like, "What else can I do when student return in the fall?"

Tony's thoughts about future planning were permeated by frustration that the coming school year would look like pre-COVID-19, which he perceived as a negative outcome particularly for students in marginalized groups. He said:

> It's extremely frustrating for me because I do feel like under good leadership . . . at a building or district level, could have been a time to completely rethink how we do stuff, but the focus was so much on, get us back, get us back, get us back. . . get back to normal. And it just, it's so bizarre to hear folks using equity, to justify their position without realizing they're using equity. . . We have to get back to the classroom because it's our Black and Brown students who are having the hardest time engaging in online . . . there's just been this complete lack of vision of like, this was a cosmic reset that we could have had on education, but all we seem to be seeing from both those who are just too overwhelmed to get into it. And from those in leadership that should be having that visioning is well, the whole goal is to go back to what was.

Tony planned to return to restorative practices in his classroom during the 2021–2022 academic year but continued to see obstacles to systemic changes that he believed would provide more holistic benefit to students in his school. Without a largescale commitment of time and resources by school and district administration, Tony shared:

> I'm really fearful that that response is going to be now that we have them in-person, cram content. We've been taking it easy, we've been going slow, so cram content. And

> honestly, I think . . . it should be completely emphasized that it is community, social emotional wellbeing, socialization [that are most important].

Summary

The data derived from the more than 200 pages of interview transcripts collected during the research processes elucidated five overarching themes and several subthemes:

- Instructor/Presenter/Facilitator
  - Perceived legitimacy of expertise
  - Model of delivery
- Connection to Lived Experience
  - Personal
  - Professional
- Relevance to Job Assignment
  - Students served
  - Content/grade level taught
- Alignment with Self-Identity
  - Core values
  - Perceived reinforcement of existing practices
- COVID-19
  - Impact on teaching model
  - Impact on student needs
  - Influence on future planning

It is worth noting that while I have treated each theme as distinct in this chapter to aid in the presentation of clear results, the reality is that strict delineations between and among emergent patterns do not exist. Additionally, it is likely that some stories were only tangentially related to the training event that teachers intended to discuss. Because of the markedly unstructured nature of narrative interviewing and the fact that participant stories are influenced by incredibly complex and largely indecipherable external and internal factors, I am unable to unilaterally determine the extent to which individual stories were true and complete accounts of teacher experience and decision making. However, as discussed in Chapter III, this fact does not diminish the significance of this study's findings because even with possible variations, omissions, and incongruencies in the information shared by research subjects, all stories reflect

their individual reality (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000) and provide consequential insights from and within similar contexts (Bold, 2012). In this case of this study, the ways in which teachers discussed their experiences with and made decisions about learning and transfer were varied yet surfaced overwhelmingly consistent patterns. The stories told and meaning made by participants show clear connections and interactions between and among themes. These inextricable links are evident not simply in what and how stories were told and professional learning experienced, but in the ways teacher participants intellectualized their decisions about transfer.

Each of the five emergent themes were evident in all or most narratives without variations that could be attributed to the type and topic of the learning event and/or whether or not experiences were portrayed positively, negatively, or neutrally. All but two participants focused their stories on different learning events and even those who engaged with trainings on the same or similar content, such as social-emotional-learning and restorative practices, shared different perspectives about their experiences, yet each interviewee's story surfaced similar narrative tessellations. The themes that emerged from the data are themselves neutral but participant experiences and subsequent decisions were not as is evident in the diverse narrations. Regardless of training focus, valuations of training success, and/or levels of personal interest in training content, participant stories overwhelmingly fell within the same categories. It is noteworthy that regardless of overall value assigned to the learning experience by interviewees, respondents did not describe any individual theme as providing the ultimate hinderance to or promotion of transfer related decisions. In fact, some of the individuals most critical of their professional learning experience as applied in one of the themes, ultimately made decisions to transfer because the positive value held within their conceptualizations of other themes carried more personal significance. Put simply, determinations related to the transfer and application of

new learning could not be traced to themes in isolation; all decisions were based on the multiple ways in which teachers experienced and made meaning from the training event holistically.

As previously discussed in Chapters II and III, there is significant complexity and challenge inherent in human-centered research generally and in learning and transfer research specifically. The findings of this study do not simplify this reality; however, they do illuminate aspects of learning transfer heretofore absent from the literature, particularly by placing the learner/trainee at the center of the study and focusing on their active role in determining when, how, and why transfer results from a training/learning event. The implications of these findings will be explored in Chapter V.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

> . . . to alienate human beings from their own decision making is to change them into objects. (Freire, 1972, p. 73)

As shared earlier, it doesn't matter what a person knows and can do; it matters what they actually do—how they employ their knowledge and skills in practice. As a longtime professional educator and K–12 school leader frustrated by the overwhelmingly predictive nature of student outcomes based on demographic factors such as race, socioeconomic status, English language proficiency, gender, and special education/504 status (Alexander, 2012), I began this dissertation journey seeking to better understand the ways in which teachers make meaning from and decisions about professional learning because I consider the beliefs and actions of educators the most critical precursors to improved outcomes for students. In addition to my personal and professional frustrations and experiences, this research path was further justified by gaps in extant literature related to transfer of learning which has primarily existed in the same domains since the 1980s with a focus on training design, participant characteristics, and work-environment factors (Baldwin et al., 2009). Each of these elements places an emphasis on a kind of passive role among learners which is antithetical to the reality that individual teachers actually have the agency to make decisions essential to the ways in which they approach their work with students. Thus, the intent of my dissertation work was to begin to address such omissions in the literature so that better understanding could inform approaches to teacher training that result in the creation of experiences more apt to culminate in the transfer and application of critical competencies foundational to improved practice and student outcomes.

Though narrative inquiry (NI) has a complex history and remains a source of discussion and debate as reviewed in Chapter III, it proved to be an excellent frame for this inaugural investigation into the ways in which teachers make meaning from and decisions about

professional learning. NI was selected as the methodology for this intersectional study given that it is ideally suited to research that encompasses the complexities inherent in human-centered research, particularly in the fields of psychology and education where my inquiry was situated (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2006). Specifically focused on the transfer and application of critical competencies (soft skills) such as trauma informed practices, social-emotional-learning, restorative practices, and equity, all of which are imperative to improved instructional practices and student outcomes, this exploratory research engaged with the narratives shared by 18 American teachers in which they articulated the ways they conceptualized and experienced formal training focused on the development of such skills in relation to their daily practice. This chapter explores the key findings, implications for leadership and practice, and possible approaches to future study.

Key Findings

As identified earlier in this dissertation, the following questions guided my research:

- How do professional educators process, understand, and assign significance to their own transfer and application of training/learning specific skills and knowledge?
- How do educators make decisions about what they apply from a formal training/learning experience into daily practice?

Through more than 200 pages of interview transcripts that resulted from this inquiry of public-school educators teaching in the United States, five themes and several subthemes emerged from participant narratives: (a) the perceived legitimacy of instructor/presenter/facilitator and how they delivered content; (b) connection to lived experiences, both personal and professional; (c) relevance to job assignment, either students served or content/grade level taught; (d) self-identity including core values and reinforcement of

existing practices; and (e) the impact of COVID-19 on instructional model, student needs, and future planning. It is certainly worth noting that had my research been conducted pre-pandemic, COVID-19 would not have been an emergent theme and different patterns may well have emerged. The pandemic fundamentally altered the ways that teaching and learning happened during the 2020–2021 school year, which says nothing about the myriad ways that teachers and students experienced the impacts of COVID-19 in their personal lives. The importance of this context cannot be understated when engaged in a discussion related to research findings.

Instructor/Presenter/Facilitator

Regardless of whether teachers viewed their professional learning experience as favorable or not, the vast majority made explicit reference to the ways in which the instructor/presenter/facilitator contributed to their experience. Included in several narrations was an emphasis on perceptions of presenter legitimacy. Teaching is hard work, good teaching is even harder, and when the teachers I interviewed believed that the presenter(s) knew or understood the challenges inherent in planning, delivering, and assessing classroom instruction, they were more likely to describe the event, and outcomes, positively. Further, multiple interviewees also discussed methods of content delivery, in particular instructional strategies employed by facilitators that emphasized modeling and engaging with practicing with real-world scenarios.

Connection to Lived Experience

Whether personally or professionally, the lived experiences of study participants provided a frame within which they assigned value, or not, to the training/learning experience on which their narrative focused. Several interviewees described specific vignettes from their work that helped them conceptualize the training and their decisions about whether or not to transfer

and apply the new learning into practice. These aspects of informant stories were typically related to experiences with individual students or colleagues. Additionally, interviewees also connected their experiences with and decisions about training to previous non-teaching jobs or a shift in their teaching responsibilities such as a change in student demographics, a move to a new school, or a different teaching assignment.

Two teachers spoke specifically about how the training connected with their personal journeys toward various kinds of mindful practices and self-care that they'd explored in their private lives. With a specific focus on being aware of and building tools to address emotional dysregulation, these teachers made a direct link between their personal experiences and beliefs to whether or not the training they engaged with was worthwhile and could provide meaningful contributions to their daily work.

Relevance

While it is not particularly surprising that relevance to students served and/or content taught emerged as a universally held theme, the interviewees did approach meaning making in slightly different ways, with some discussing explicit connections to their individual work with specific groups of students both inside and outside the classroom setting while others spoke more generally about being members of a larger school community. For teachers in the latter group, there seemed to be an almost relief in the notion that as individuals they did not hold all responsibility for student outcomes including how students experience and receive support at school. Simply put, there was only so much they could do, perhaps would do, as a single entity. Thus, no matter their levels of proficiency related to critical competencies or how such skills were applied in the planning for and engagement with their work with students, they would only be partially culpable for potentially negative outcomes. It is not clear the extent to which this

perspective influenced their transfer related decisions, but it does surface an interesting pattern that is worthy of further investigation.

In contrast, other teachers discussed the onus they felt not only to deliver academic content to students, but also to provide responsive classroom environments where students could develop skills and attributes designed to help them get to know themselves better, expand their worldviews, and become more prepared to respond positively and productively when confronted with future challenges both inside and outside the classroom. In these cases, the decisions folks made related to transfer were clearly conceptualized by a sense of responsibility that extended beyond classroom and course specific curriculum delivery.

Self-Identity

Nearly all interviewees connected their daily practice and responses to and decisions about professional learning to their core values and perceptions about their existing teaching routines and strategies. With regard to core values, several participants discussed the value they placed on their own personal and professional growth, truly seeing themselves as learners always in search of self–improvement. Others saw themselves as mavericks in the school system, believing their approaches to work were different from most of their colleagues, more critical of the status quo and more responsive to student needs. And still others viewed teaching as a calling of sorts, the avenue by which they would/could live their perceived purpose and model what they viewed as idealized ways of being and interacting. In all cases, these self–perceptions informed the extent to which the skills and competencies emphasized during training were determined to be transfer worthy.

Of the more experienced teachers whom I interviewed, several paired their perceptions about existing practice with the value and meaning they assigned to the learning event generally

and to the critical competencies at the core of said experiences more specifically. In each of these cases, informants drew the most meaning when they presumed their regular approaches to work were aligned to the explicit and implicit messaging that came from the training. It is noteworthy that while they made meaning, it is unclear whether this assigned meaning created a kind of obstacle to the transfer of new or different ways of utilizing critical competencies. In essence, if a teacher believed they were engaged in best practices pre-training and felt affirmed by the content delivered during the learning event, it is unclear whether or not such a positive self-assessment presented an impediment to the transfer and application of new or improved skills—whether those perceptions were accurate or not.

COVID-19

As mentioned in Chapter IV, living, working, and "doing school" looked very different for large segments of the American public beginning in March 2020. It follows then that the narratives I solicited from teachers nearly a year into the pandemic would include references to and explorations of how COVID-19 impacted they ways they intellectualized and engaged with their work. While there was little direct evidence to support a linkage between COVID-19 and how teachers made decisions about the transfer and application of critical competencies in practice, the pandemic did present a new lens through which they processed and approached their work with students differently than ever before. Interviewees often made connections between a newfound clarity related to student needs and the importance of including critical competencies as an integral component of their daily practice. Perhaps this new vision and perspective will lead to longer term shifts in the ways teachers think about and advance their professional practice as they return to pre-pandemic instructional models.

Comparing Findings to the Literature

As explored in Chapter II, the literature relevant to this study is seated in two primary domains: theories of adult learning and the transfer of learning (training).

Adult Learning

Grounded in the field of psychology, scientific approaches to learning began with behaviorism in the early 20th century and subsequently incorporated other classical learning theories: cognitivism, constructivism, and humanism (Bates, 2016). Those seeking to explore learning in adulthood built upon this psychological canon to include frames for conceptualizing the distinct characteristics of adult learners and the most appropriate ways to plan for and implement learning experiences responsive to their unique needs (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). Components of each of the foundational theoretical approaches to knowledge and skill acquisition are evident in both the development of adult specific learning theories as well as within discussions of practice. While there is no single theory of learning upon which adult learning theories exist, the literature in this domain documents widespread consensus on best practices for post-adolescent education and training: the importance of a differentiated curriculum that is built on and related to the "real world" experiences adults have/will have; clearly defined and assessed learning objectives; opportunities for learners to engage in reflective practice; self-direction; and deliberate inclusion of collaboration as part of the learning event (cf. Merriam & Bierema, 2014; Merriam & Baumgartner, 2020).

The emergent themes from this dissertation study align with the existing knowledge base particularly in the tremendous impact that lived experience, relevance to the work, and perceptions of identity each played a significant role in the ways participants assigned meaning and made decisions. Several informants related inextricable links between their transfer related

decision making and the extent to which the professional learning/training experience resonated with the ways they have experienced the world both personally and professionally, how the critical competencies of focus during training related to the realities and complexities of their daily work, and how they viewed their individual and work-based selves.

Transfer

As a concept, transfer of learning (training) is inseparable from the ways that humans work and live, embedded in every aspect of how we build knowledge and skills and our abilities and/or decisions to transfer said learning to new, diverse, and unfamiliar situations. Existing primarily in the field of human resources development (HRD) and typically focused on program design, participant characteristics and workplace environment, transfer research has overwhelmingly existed in the same domains for the last three decades (Baldwin et al. 2009; Merriam & Leahy, 2005). The dilemma at the crux of the literature has been framed as the "transfer problem," essentially an acknowledgement of the difficulty inherent in ensuring that professional learning/training events and experiences result in not only the development of new knowledge and skills, but also their sustained transfer and application into regular practice (cf. Baldwin & Ford, 1988; Baldwin et al., 2009; Merriam & Baumgartner, 2020). Adding to the limitations and gaps in existing transfer research are that the findings have been hugely discrepant and measures inconsistent (cf. Bates et al., 2012).

Interestingly, participants in this dissertation study aligned many of their stories within the same frames as existing research and both supported existing research findings and highlighted additional gaps within them (cf., Baldwin et al., 2009). Especially apparent in aspects of the stories that focused on training design, included as a sub-theme to Presenter/Facilitator/Instructor, my findings support existing research in that the delivery of

professional learning matters both in terms of content and skill development as well as in subsequent decisions teachers made about whether or not to transfer and apply said learning to their regular work (cf. Lauer et al., 2014; Leberman et al., 2006). Among the teachers I engaged as study participants, there was a predominant emphasis placed on the perceived legitimacy of the training facilitator(s) and whether or not training included modeling the use/application of critical competencies while also providing opportunities to reflect on practice and collaborate with peers on topics viewed by teachers to be relevant and realistic work.

The additional theme of participant self-identity also aligns with constructs set by existing research, especially that which has focused on individual learner characteristics (cf. Leberman et al., 2006). Though the connection between learner traits and learner identity is clear, this study was not designed to measure or correlate externally determined and identified participant characteristics or personality traits with an individual's assessments of their personal and/or professional identities. As a result, I cannot report meaningful findings along this line of inquiry. However, the proximity of self-identity as an emergent theme from this study to paths paved in previous transfer research could certainly provide new access points for novel inquiries within existing frames. This connection also highlights the fundamental closeness of research tied to the ways in which people live and learn and how, when, and why they make decisions about both.

Very few interviewees shared explicit commentary on ways their professional learning experiences and subsequent decisions were related to their larger school districts or specific schools, yet it is worth noting that both opportunities for and expectations related to ongoing professional learning within schools and districts were foundational to the experiences of study participants. In nearly all cases, the professional learning events and experiences discussed by

interviewees were supported both fiscally and temporally by the larger organization, either the school or district. Despite the commitment of time and money that allowed teacher participation in largely self-selected and optional learning experiences, there was surprisingly little sense of accountability teachers seemed to have to the larger organization(s). Primarily, teachers expressed their main responsibility as being to the students with whom and for whom they work and to themselves as practitioners. Obviously, teachers and students are members of and participants in the work of the larger organization, yet study participants seemed to conceptualize themselves separately. This raises interesting opportunities for profession specific research intended to further explore the importance of workplace culture and environment on transfer including further investigation of the pre- and post- training factors that encourage and discourage a person's transfer related decisions.

Findings Outside of Existing Frames

In addition to findings consistent with prevailing literature and extend opportunities for innovative investigations in existing research domains, this study also surfaced alignment with key adult learning principles that have heretofore been largely absent from transfer research. Specifically, this exploration surfaced the deep connection between teachers' lived experiences, both inside and outside the classroom, and not only what and how teachers learn, but also the decisions they make about what to do with what they know. Generally, decision making as a focus of transfer research is incredibly rare, thus this research has added to the knowledge base further illuminating the complexities of learning and transfer while also raising topics prime for further investigations into aspects of transfer that place the learner as an active participant in the process.

Summary

The findings of this study are consistent with existing literature and offer several opportunities for future research as well as practicable approaches to teacher professional learning that is more likely to result in the transfer of critical competencies from training into daily practice. Among the stories shared by research participants, professional learning/training that emphasized the importance of framing daily practice, both preparation and engagement, within the context of critical competencies is widely viewed by teachers as relevant to the ways they approach their work. By and large, study participants understood and emphasized the importance of student social and emotional wellbeing and the imperative to facilitate it within their classrooms as a critical precursor to student acquisition of substantive academic skills and content knowledge. Despite this fact, determinations interviewees made about when, why, and how to transfer these competencies into their regular work was inconsistent and influenced by several variables related to the training on which they focused their narration.

Limitations of the Study

The limitations common to qualitative research exist for this study as well (Creswell, 2014): results of this research must be generalized with caution due to the small sample size, only 18 participants; data were filtered through the lens of participant stories; interviewees had different levels of proficiency in communication skills; narrators had varying degrees of comfort at being interviewed and recorded; the act of being interviewed by a school principal may have influenced responses; and the interviews were not conducted in a "real world" setting.

My efforts to mitigate these limitations are evidenced in the participant pool I recruited which included a more racially diverse group of teachers than the national average and included professionals at all points in their careers who serve students at both elementary and secondary

institutions in geographically and demographically disparate schools and districts across the United States. Further, during my initial recruitment outreach conversations with building and district administrators, I was sure to emphasize that I was interested in speaking to a diverse group of teachers, not just those perceived to be the "best and brightest." I also took particular care in my pre-interview conversations with participants to ensure they knew I would protect their confidentiality with the use of pseudonyms and the removal of other personally identifying information from the transcripts, including specific training identifiers, and a promise not to share informant specific responses with building or district supervisors. Additionally, no study participants were/are employed by my organization, and I did not have any previous relationships with them.

Overall, the benefits of this study outweigh the limitations. Given the gaps in existing transfer literature, this research provided a solid base upon which subsequent study can build, indeed expand. Further, I am pleased to note the number of interviewees who shared, both during and after our interviews, their explicit and implicit appreciation for the opportunity to engage in dialogical reflection, some taking notes on ideas and/or themes they intended to revisit as a result of the narrative interviewing process and others sending me follow up thoughts after their interviews, but before the member-checking process. As reviewed in Chapter III, it is important that teacher and instruction-focused research provide direct benefit to study participants (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2006). I believe I was successful in this endeavor.

Implications for Leadership and Change

Learning in learning organizations such as schools makes sense, both for students and the adults who work with and for them. Learning for the sake of learning, however, is not sufficient when seeking to address longstanding achievement and opportunity gaps within American public

schools (The Nation's Report Card, 2021; U.S. Department of Education, 2021; WOSPI, 2021). The beliefs and actions of educators are critical to improved academic and social outcomes for students. Simply put, it does not matter what teachers know and can do, it matters what they actually do. Based on the emergent themes drawn from research data, this study offers some initial guidance related to the ways in which teacher professional learning focused on the development or enhancement of critical competencies can be designed and implemented to result in more regular transfer and application of such skills in practice.

To begin, it is imperative that the individuals and groups tasked with planning, designing, implementing, and assessing teacher training focused on the development and application of critical competencies are prepared to be cognizant of and responsive to the incredibly complex and interwoven factors involved in teaching and learning both within the formal confines of the school setting as well as in the ways that they must be contextualized within larger social, economic, cultural, and political happenings. While impossible to comprehensively address all aspects of teaching and learning in a single teacher professional development experience, to ignore the complexities inherent in the work of teaching, intentionally or unintentionally, is to imbue obstacles to transfer. Teachers must believe that their practice will improve or be enhanced if and when they transfer and apply new ways of thinking about and engaging with their work. And, in order for that to happen, they must be able to conceptualize themselves and their work with students in relation to all aspects of the training: content, delivery, and outcomes.

Next, it is imperative that school leaders responsible for providing high quality and effective professional learning opportunities to staff are thoughtful and deliberate about not only what and when training happens and who has access, but also clearly articulate why it is happening, how it connects to the explicit work of the organization, and the ways in which

participants will be supported in and accountable for improved practice. Without this last piece, I am convinced that teacher professional development will primarily remain focused on training for training's sake or as a means to meet external accountability requirements. This, in turn, will reinforce problematic habits, both ideas and behaviors, that emphasize the notion that knowing is more important than doing. Without fundamental shifts in ways those of us who work within school systems function, we will continue to perpetuate inequitable experiences and outcomes for our students, and ultimately society at large. The number and types of trainings offered and/or funded and the extent to which participants enjoyed them are not the only things that matter when it comes to valuations of professional learning focused on critical competencies. Transfer is the ultimate goal, so must be supported and reinforced purposefully.

Finally, it is crucial that the time and money allocated to professional learning within schools and school districts, specifically those experiences which are designed to facilitate foundational shifts to the ways in which educators conceptualize and approach their work, are deliberately allocated based on the long-term priorities of the institution. While this may seem obvious, the reality is that very little professional learning for teachers is designed to be long–term and appropriately multifaceted. This pattern has left teacher focused professional learning particularly vulnerable to what interviewee Tony described as a "soup du jour" approach, which often looks like significant resources, both time and money, being spent on training required to meet well intentioned legal requirements or to satiate public and institutional opinions about how school staff can better meet complex student needs. The unfortunate actuality is that too often, the resulting learning events and experiences serve as more performative "check-offs" than fulfillment of the intended purpose of teachers transferring and applying new cognitive constructs for the ways they engage with their work. Assuming

fundamental agreement with the sentiment that schools must serve students more effectively and equitably, short-term approaches to teacher training when desired outcomes necessitate vital alterations to practice are ineffective and will continue to be. Instead, learning events and experiences must be enmeshed in long-term strategic implementation of professional development designed with those ends in mind. Simply put, the "one and done" approach is untenable if meaningful change is the authentic goal.

Future Research

Socrates said, "There are no final answers, only better questions." The opportunities for future study in this or peripheral research domains are seemingly endless, both in terms of methodology as well as specific lines of inquiry. In Chapter III, I reviewed options for other qualitative methodologies: case study, phenomenology, and grounded theory, each of which offer research frames for study that could further reduce gaps in the existing knowledge base. Case study could be used to explore a single shared learning experience, compare multiple training events, or follow individuals or groups in their approach to and application and measurement of professional learning related skills in practice. These areas of focus could serve to illuminate more completely the ways in which workplace culture and environment influence transfer, particularly as related to pre- and post- training factors. Phenomenology would be an excellent frame for an exploration into how a teacher experienced a learning event or as a longitudinal review of experiences with professional learning focused on critical competencies. Grounded theory provides an opportunity for the development of a theory or framework, a bit premature as an immediate next step, but certainly a viable, and exciting, approach in future endeavors when there is more data available. It should be noted that space should also be held for mixed methods study, especially if investigating topics such as the extent to which teacher

perceptions about transfer align with student experience and/or supervisor evaluation, or something similar. Perhaps my positionality is an obstacle to seeing much benefit in a purely quantitative study, especially when exploring the incredibly complexities of human-centered research; on its own I do not believe it would bear much fruit.

Outside of the ubiquitous aspects of transfer research related to participant characteristics, workplace environment, and training design that will undoubtedly continue to inspire investigation, the findings from this dissertation reveal multiple avenues of research that should be pursued. In my estimation, those of most relevance to practitioners have to do with some kind of external evaluation of, or comparison to, the extent to which teacher self-assessments of their transfer and application of critical competencies align with the classroom experiences of students. Additionally, the sheer number of trainings focused on the development of soft–skills/critical competencies begs a deeper look at the commercialization and marketing of curriculum tools and specific menus, recipes, and/or checklists intended to address student social and emotional wellbeing and broader representation of students within standardized content materials. Specific study about whether or not student outcomes are measurably improved by these tools or if these approaches are simply technical approaches to overwhelmingly complex adaptive challenges faced by students and their teachers. Finally, a deeper inquiry into and more specific focus on the role personal identity plays in whether or not individual teachers make decisions about what, when, and how they transfer and apply critical competencies in practice could also better illuminate influences to transfer—essentially, is “teacher” more of a profession they have, or a fundamental aspect of who they are (or who they perceive themselves to be)? And does this distinction play a role in how they conceptualize, engage with, and make decisions about their work?

Further, as noted in Chapter II, both the theory of reasoned action (TRA) and the theory of planned behavior (TPB; Ajzen, 1985; Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980) offer additional avenues by which to explore the transfer and application of soft skills from professional learning into practice, particularly related to queries into how motivation influences decision making. TRA and TPB provide tools to predict, explain, and influence human behavior in applied settings as related to an individual's beliefs, attitudes, intentions, and behaviors. The concepts of volition and perceived behavioral control set forth in TRA and TPB present exciting possibilities for research that, like this study, center on the active role adult learners play in transfer outcomes.

Reflections

I have struggled with commitment and a "squirrel-like" attention span when it came to settling on a dissertation focus over the last three years, but it ultimately became clear as I grew into the position of scholar–practitioner that all of what I have ruminated about, been frustrated by, along with all that has provided me inspiration, is grounded, one way or another, in learning—my own, that of the teachers with whom I work, and the students for whom I work. It follows that there exists the necessity of an explicit connection between knowing and doing in my scholarship. This is where I hoped to find clarity, this is what I wanted to make limpid. This is where the opaque processes and subtleties involved in decision making and action exist. Thus, this is where my dissertation journey began.

While this dissertation was completed as a component of a larger academic program, the impetus for its undertaking was firmly situated within the scope and purpose for my professional work. I started my educational career as a classroom teacher seeking to provide more connected and meaningful experiences for students than my cohorts and I experienced during childhood and adolescence. I became a school principal so that I could extend my sphere of influence

beyond the individual classroom in which I taught in hopes of supporting learning environments that resulted in consistent social and academic success for all students. And while I have often been engaged with, and sometimes responsible for, the facilitation of student outcomes that serve to counteract the largely predictive nature of K–12 student achievement data in the United States (Alexander, 2012), my sense of disquiet with the ways that schools and school systems too often perpetuate, in fact sometimes exacerbate, achievement and opportunity gaps has remained firmly intact over my 20+ year professional career. The process of engaging with this research provided the opportunity to pair my frustrations about these realities with the inspiration I regularly experience as an education practitioner so that I could step into a realm of research that had the potential to shift the status quo.

The concept of "permanent white water" that Vaill (1989, p. 2) introduced three decades ago to describe the turbulent, sometimes chaotic and unpredictable, yet always consequential nature of organizational life and work is perhaps more relevant now than ever. Vaill's postulation that in order for both individuals and institutions to thrive, they need to embrace learning as a way of being. Within the context of K–12 public education, this assertion may seem misplaced or obvious, even redundant given that schools and school districts are designed as learning organizations, nonetheless K–12 education has looked nearly identical for more than 50 years despite the fact that the world is incredibly different and so much more is known about the conditions necessary to facilitate deep and meaningful learning among students. If traction is ever to be gained in efforts to address the fundamental inequities, inefficiencies, and both purposeful and passive malevolencies within traditional education systems, adults working within them must think and behave differently. While I have presumed such was the case for most of my professional career, engaging in this dissertation process affirmed my long-held

assumptions and have inspired a renaissance of sorts in the ways I have committed to approaching professional learning, my own and that of those with whom I work. Training for training's sake will no longer suffice if we are truly committed to improved outcomes for students, and ultimately society at large.

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Appendix

APPENDIX A: SAMPLE CONTACT EMAIL TO ADMINISTRATORS

Greetings –

I'm reaching out to solicit help identifying qualifying teachers for my dissertation research. I am seeking K–12 public school teachers to participate in a one-time interview about professional learning they have engaged with at some point over the last 24 months.

Research Focus – I am investigating how teachers make decisions about what and how they transfer from formal training/learning into professional practice. Specifically, I'll be exploring the transfer of so-called soft skills (critical competencies), (i.e. trauma informed practices, cultural responsiveness, educational neuroscience, etc.) that might be less visible during observation, but imperative to improved practice and student outcomes.

I would appreciate scheduling a few minutes to talk with you to determine whether or not teachers in your building/district have participated in professional learning focused on building critical competencies such as those I've identified above. And, if so, the best ways to identify and contact potential study participants.

In total, I will be interviewing 15-20 teachers from multiple buildings/districts who have participated in qualifying formal learning over the last two years. Interviews will be 1-on-1 and will likely take 30-60minutes each.

I believe that the participation of teachers from your organization will contribute to better understanding of learning and transfer processes, thus has the potential to influence the development and implementation of future professional learning. Further, I hope that the process of engaging with the interview process will provide teachers the benefit of time for focused reflection about the ways in which they approach daily practice.

Thanks in advance for your assistance.
-Nell

Nell Ballard-Jones
PhD Candidate
Graduate School of Leadership and Change, Antioch University

APPENDIX B: SAMPLE CONTACT EMAIL TO POTENTIAL PARTICIPANTS

Greetings, _____.

My name is Nell Ballard-Jones and I am a doctoral candidate beginning my dissertation research. I was provided your contact information by _____ who suggested you might be willing/able to help with my research by participating in a one-time interview.

Research Focus: I am investigating how teachers make decisions about what and how they transfer from formal training/learning into professional practice. Specifically, I'll be exploring the transfer of so-called soft skills (critical competencies) from formal learning into daily practice. Some examples of qualifying professional learning are events/experiences that focused on trauma informed practices, cultural responsiveness, equity, and/or educational neuroscience (this is not an exhaustive list).

I am seeking 15-20 teachers from multiple buildings/districts who have participated in qualifying formal learning over the last two years. Interviews will be 1-on-1 via video conference and will likely take 30-60minutes each.

It is my belief that your participation will contribute to better understanding of learning and transfer processes, thus influencing the development and implementation of future professional learning. Further, I hope that the process of engaging with the interview process will provide you the benefit of time for focused reflection about the ways in which you approach your daily practice.

Please let me know if you are interested in participating and/or learning more about the process and commitment necessary.

Thanks for your consideration, I look forward to hearing from you.
-Nell

Nell Ballard-Jones
PhD Candidate
Graduate School of Leadership and Change, Antioch University

APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICPATE IN A DISSERTATION RESEARCH STUDY

This informed consent form is for _____ who I am inviting to participate in a project titled: Decision making in transfer of learning.

Name of Principle Investigator: Nell Ballard-Jones
Name of Organization: Antioch University, PhD in Leadership and Change Program
Name of Project: How K–12 Teachers Make Decisions about Transferring Critical Competencies from Professional development to Daily Practice

You will be given a copy of the Consent Form

Introduction

I am **Nell Ballard-Jones,** a PhD candidate enrolled in the Leadership and Change program at Antioch University. In partial fulfillment of this degree, I am completing a dissertation designed to research the role of decision making in transfer and application of professional learning. You may talk to anyone you feel comfortable talking with about the project, and are encouraged to take time to reflect on whether you want to participate or not. You may ask questions at any time.

Purpose of the Dissertation

The purpose of this project is to use narrative inquiry (NI) methodology to investigate and analyze how K–12 teachers make decisions about what and how they transfer and apply critical competencies (soft-skills) from professional learning to daily practice.

Project Activities

This project will involve your participation in a one-on-one interview, either in-person or via a web-based platform that allows for synchronous conversation (i.e. Zoom). Interviews will be audiotaped solely for research purposes.

Participant Selection

You are being invited to take part in this project because of your recent participation in a formal professional learning event that focused completely or in part on the development of critical competencies. In total there will be 15-20 participants in this study.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this project is completely voluntary. You may choose not to participate. You may withdraw from this project at any time. You will not be penalized for your decision not to participate or for any of your contributions during the project. If an interview has already taken place, you may request that the information you provided not be used in this research.

Risks

I do not anticipate that you will be harmed or distressed as a result of participating in this project. You may terminate your participation in the project at any time if you become uncomfortable.

Benefits

There may not be any direct benefit to you, however, your participation will contribute to better understanding of how teachers make decisions about what and how they transfer and apply learning.

Reimbursements

You will not be provided any monetary incentive to take part in this project.

Confidentiality

All information will be de-identified, so that it cannot be connected back to you. Your real name will be replaced with a pseudonym in the write-up of this project. I will be the only person with access to the list connecting your name to the pseudonym. This list, along with any notes and recordings will be kept in a secure, locked location and destroyed at the end of the project.

Generally speaking, I can assure you that I will keep everything you tell me or do for the project private. Yet there are times where I cannot keep things private (confidential). I cannot keep things private (confidential) if I find out that:

- a child or vulnerable adult has been abused
- a person plans to hurt themself, such as commit suicide
- a person plans to hurt someone else

There are laws that require many professionals to take action if they think a person is at risk for self-harm or are self-harming, harming another or if a child or adult is being abused. In most states, there is a government agency that must be told if someone is being abused or plans to self-harm or harm another person. Please ask any questions you may have about this issue before agreeing to be in the study. It is important that you do not feel betrayed if it turns out that I cannot keep some things private.

Right to Refuse or Withdraw

You do not have to take part in this project if you do not wish to do so, and you may withdraw from the study at any time without your job being affected.

Who to Contact

If you have any questions, you may ask them now or later. If you have questions later, you may contact me at nballardjones@antioch.edu.

If you have any ethical concerns about this study, contact Lisa Kreeger, PhD, Chair, Institutional Review Board, Antioch University PhD in Leadership and Change, Email: _____ or Jon Wergin, PhD, Committee Chair at _____.

THE REMAINDER OF THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

DO YOU WISH TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS PROJECT?

I have read the foregoing information, or it has been read to me. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about it and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent voluntarily to participate in this project.

Print Name of Participant_____

Signature of Participant _____

Date _____
Day/month/year

DO YOU WISH TO BE AUDIOTAPED AS PART OF THIS PROJECT?
I voluntarily agree to be audiotaped for this project. I agree to allow the use of my recordings as described in this form.

Print Name of Participant_____

Signature of Participant _____

Date _____
Day/month/year

To be filled out by the person taking consent:

I confirm that the participant was given an opportunity to ask questions about the project and all the questions asked by the participant have been answered correctly and to the best of my ability. I confirm that the individual has not been coerced into giving consent, and the consent has been given freely and voluntarily.

A copy of this Informed Consent Form has been provided to the participant.

Print Name of person taking the consent_____

Signature of person taking the consent_____

Date _____

Day/month/year

APPENDIX D: SAMPLE FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS AND PROMPTS

- Tell me more about _____.
- You mentioned _____, can you provide a bit more context/explanation/detail?
- How did you/do you think about/conceptualize _____?
- You talked about _____, please describe what that looked like and felt like.
- How did you/do you process _____?
- What did you see, feel, hear as a result of _____?
- What happened as a result of _____?
- You shared _____, how does/did that fit into the experience as a whole?

APPENDIX E: SAMPLE MEMBER CHECKING EMAIL

Hi _____ -

I hope you're doing well. Since we spoke a few weeks ago, I have been plugging along with my interviews, talking to teachers from across the country.

As promised, though later than anticipated, below is a list of the main themes I pulled from your interview transcript - essentially, I believe that most components of the narrative you shared fall within one of these themes. Please peruse and let me know if they align with how you conceptualize what you shared during the interview. And, if not, what gaps and/or issues you see.

- Instructor/Presenter/Facilitator
- Connection to personal/professional experience
- Relevance to job assignment & students served
- Alignment with existing professional practice & core values
- Impact of COVID-19

Thanks again for your willingness to participate in the study.

Have a great rest of your week. I look forward to hearing back.

-Nell

APPENDIX F: SAMPLE EMAIL TO PEER DEBRIEFERS

Hey _____ -

Attached are the transcripts for interviews I've done - I've combined into a single Word document, but have identified individual section by participant pseudonyms (and tried to remove identifying information from the text). These are folks from across the country who teach both elementary and secondary in a variety of areas - they all self-selected a learning event/training event to discuss. The only parameters were that the training had to completely or in-part focus on soft-skills/critical competencies (ways of thinking about and planning for professional practice).

I played with when to start recording, so on some of the transcripts you'll see more chit-chat than in others.

In my initial transcript reviews, I've identified the following big themes:

- Instructor/Presenter/Facilitator
- Connection to personal/professional experience
- Relevance to job assignment & students served
- Alignment with existing professional practice & core values
- Impact of COVID–19 on teaching model

Let me know if you think I'm missing anything and/or if you think it makes sense to break some of the themes into smaller chunks (i.e. separate identifiers for core values & existing professional practice as opposed to connecting them as I have).

Thanks, ma'am. If you could get back to me in the next 3 weeks, that'd be great. I know they're long (but hopefully entertaining) and since I don't need super detailed feedback, I hope it isn't too overwhelming.

-Nell