Kim Pyne "Good Teachers" Require "Better Students" 2006 PhD Dissert. UNC-CH

CHAPTER 1
Introduction: Identity and Transformation

When you talk to people about their schooling experiences, most have vivid memories of at least a few teachers. Some teachers are creatures of nightmare, lurking behind their massive desks, hanging threateningly over the shoulder, wielding rulers like whips. Even years later, they cause blood pressure to rise, continuing to inspire fear and distress even as ghosts. Other teachers are figures of legend, offering a helping hand, setting surmountable challenges, shaping our vision of ourselves that still lingers late in life. For most of us, teachers have been both angels and demons, heroes and villains, good teachers and bad, characters out of memory whose touch remains palpable in our lives no matter how far away we roam from the old school house.

As I write this, my evenings are filled by thirty-one of these legendary (nightmarish?) figures. As an instructor for the university's Masters of Education for Experienced Teachers, my job is to draw a group of busy teachers into the world of graduate school and provide the space and ideas for them to begin rethinking themselves and their choices in the classroom. The course, aptly called "Reinventing Teaching," opens with a generally lighthearted examination of Ayers'(2001) "myths of teaching"—a list of concepts that historically and currently seem to define the practice of excellent teachers, but which crumble, or at least fade, in the face of real-life practice. The list includes the notions that "good classroom management is the essential first step in becoming a good teacher," "good teachers treat all students alike," and "good teachers know what is going on in the classroom."

On their first day of class, small groups of my teachers (students?) invariably point out the shallow generality of such definitions. This summer's cohort is no exception. "Define 'classroom management'," Zoe (a pseudonym[1]) exclaims sharply, her bright red lips narrowed with suppressed emotion. As a visual arts and performance teacher, she makes a passionate argument against the infamous silent classroom so admired by administrators and evaluators. From the other side of the room, Martha responds with vehement nods of her head, short grey hair wafting. "My classroom isn't neatly 'managed' either and I teach reading," she announces. "That doesn't mean kids *aren't* learning. It means they *are*!"

The group is nearly unanimous about the fallacy of treating all students alike. "Children *aren't* alike," argues Cameron, and the small group of her colleagues sitting near her murmur their support. "They don't all need the same things. How is it fair to treat them all alike?" Mirroring what Kohl (1995) writes about the difference between "equality" and "equity," but without utilizing the discourse of the Academy in any way, this cadre of working practitioners articulate a powerful vision of children that acknowledges complexity, multiplicity of identity, and a willingness to challenge external assumptions about children, teachers, and schooling. Although many may not yet recognize just how dramatic and critical a teacher's awareness of sociocultural difference can be, their daily interactions with children have instinctively laid the foundation for seeing with a depth and richness that non-teachers may often miss. In an age where curriculum is increasingly scripted, where teachers are regularly "deskilled" and federally-mandated assessments create inflexible benchmarks that ignore variation and individual needs among children, teachers still have the potential to know (Apple, 1990).

In part because of this awareness, my class is more indecisive and split over a statement such as "good teachers know what is going on in their classroom." Teachers are expected to

[1] All names in this manuscript are pseudonyms to protect the privacy of each individual.

have eyes in the back of their heads, to see the impending spitball when their back is turned to write on the chalkboard, to know when notes are passed beneath the table, or when answers are scribbled surreptitiously on the underside of a baseball cap. Their success depends on a mythic, preternatural knowing moment by moment. "But I can't catch everything," Janet admits. "Kids get away with stuff all the time." It is a hard admission, and the slow nods and dour expressions of her classmates show that the sensation is shared. Ayers points out an even deeper issue than missing a handful of hidden behaviors, however. Because teaching is act of social relation, a space where individuals with their own deep and complicated stories interact, there are always layers which teachers do not and cannot know. Every interaction between students, every passing glance between teacher and class, is fraught with memories, emotions, pasts and futures, a lifetime in an instant. Teachers negotiate spaces they neither know nor may be able to comprehend, coming from lives not only older but qualitatively different from their charges. "I know what a kid needs academically," one of the teachers suggests. "But they bring so much more into the classroom than academic needs." As a former teacher (now college instructor), I participate at the edge of these conversations, sharing stories and prodding them to consider alternatives. As we talk through this topic, I confess that I don't always even know the intricacies of a student's academic needs, hoping to describe the chasm between what we believe we know based on limited evidence and the complexity of individual experiences, hoping—as I suspect many of them do at some point in our class discussions—that such words do not frame me as a bad teacher in their eyes. Even though I will have nearly two months to prove myself and my skill, the fear remains, fleeting and indistinct, but recognizable. Such interplay of hopes and fears, as instinctive as fight or flight, seems to be a natural moment in the work of teaching, a piece of what creates us.

In a sense, good teaching is a chimera, elusive and almost indefinable, part myth and part suggested reality, and yet a beast in the room of our minds, crucial to the way we think about ourselves as teachers. (I used to tease my high school students that everyone believes they are a good driver, no matter what their driving record or evidence to the contrary. Perhaps good teaching is similar.) The Good Teacher, however dimly and instinctively understood, twines itself into our identities and becomes an integral facet in our confidence and security as teachers. As we begin to poke and question it, challenging our ways of knowing and being in classrooms, we may find that it holds our surprisingly fragile teaching self in its teeth.

Teaching Identity: The Good Teacher

Notions of identity as holistic and uniform have been increasingly challenged by postmodern conceptualizations of identity as fluid, ever in-process, created and re-created in the moment, both reactive and stable simultaneously. Rather than possessing a united and stable self, we embody and perform multiple selves that are complex social and cultural creations and responses. Identity is discursive, a construction of multiple interwoven and sometimes conflicting discourses, which Gee (1996) defines as

> ways of behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, believing, speaking, and often reading and writing that are accepted as instantiations of particular roles (of 'types of people') by specific *groups of people*. . . . They are 'ways of being in the world;' they are 'forms of life.' They are, thus, always and everywhere *social* and products of social histories. (p. viii)

Discourses are "situated literacies" (Gee, 1999, p. 38) that encapsulate more than the traditional literacies of reading, writing, or speech. They are instantiations of self, "ways of being in the world." Just as we might opt to foreground one discourse over another in response to social situations, identity is likewise socially and individually crafted, a product of both interior, ideological, and personal affects as well as external, collective, and circumstantial events. Identity is imbued by discourses both chosen and inflicted.

For Danielewicz (2001), learning to teach equates to the development of an acceptable teaching identity, a recognition of and deliberate positioning within social relations with students, other teachers, and the world of education.

> Becoming a teacher means that an individual must adopt an identity as such. I take this strong position—insisting on identity—because the process of teaching, at once so complicated and deep, involves the self . . . . Teaching is a complex and delicate act. It demands that teachers analyze the situation, consider the variables of students, texts, knowledge, abilities, and goals to formulate an approach to teaching, and then to carry it out—every day, minute to minute, within the ever-shifting context of the classroom . . . . These abilities suggest that teaching demands nothing less than identity to accomplish these tasks; this is more than just playing a role. (p. 9-10)

As young teachers engage in the discursive practices of teaching, they are shaped by them and shape them in turn. In her most recent work about "beginning teacher identity discourses," Alsup (2006) writes that "a teacher's identity is a weaving together of various subjectivities or understandings of self as expressed through genres of discourse and influenced by multiple life experiences" (p. 41-42). She emphasizes what she calls "borderland discourse" in beginning teachers, the discourse that lies at the junction of professional and personal selves and foregrounds a critical awareness of cognitive and emotional dissonance in the work of learning to teach. It merges both traditional discourses of education and other discourses that thoughtfully resist the hegemonic orientation of traditional teaching, inviting students to infuse their choices with a profound but sustainable awareness of the complexity of classrooms. By scaffolding beginning teachers as they investigate and articulate a borderland discourse, she argues, teacher educators better support the establishing and nurturing of complex, reflective teaching identities. Both Danielewicz and Alsup describe the role of teacher educators as conductors, orchestrating experiences that allow new teachers to combine their pre-existing identities, student identities, and newfound professional identities. More than just naming oneself professionally, the act of becoming a teacher, then, is an act of investment in additive identity discourses and a constant re-negotiation of self. "Whereas roles can be assigned, the

taking up of an identity is a constant social negotiation that can never be permanently settled or fixed, occurring as it necessarily does within the irreconcilable contradictions of situational and historical constraints" (Britzman, 1986, p. 42).

Sociologist Richard Jenkins (1997) points out that identity is created in the "dialectical interplay of processes of internal and external definition" (p. 25). Like student identity, teacher identity is inflected by time and place, memory and affect, by "who we are, and were, and wish" (Hanley, Green, Joyner, Powers-Costello, & Pyne, 2005). It is created in dialogic interactions with both internal visions of self and external reflections from others. How teachers perceive these daily interactions and perspectives necessarily affects how they perceive themselves, how readily they can name themselves and their work as successful—as indicative of being or becoming teachers of merit.

However, identity also lays on top of larger cultural prescriptions about teaching. Weber and Mitchell (1995) remind us that "we live embedded in biographies that are simultaneously personal, cultural, institutional, and historical. Our identities as teachers stem from both individual and collective life history" (p. 9)

> From schoolyard rhymes to "let's play school," there is a wealth of varied and sometimes contradictory images of teachers that continues to be passed on from one generation to the next. These images have remained largely unexamined and their significance unnoticed. By exposing and probing the dialectical relationship between schooling and the popular culture of everyday life, we explore the socially constructed knowledge of teachers and teaching that is not confined to school buildings, but spills out into television studios, movie theatres, homes, and playgrounds, infiltrating all arenas of human activity. (p.5)

Drawing on cultural studies, critical theory, and literary criticism, Weber and Mitchell explore the enculturation imposed by images of teachers in the popular mind and its possible impact on the professional identity of teachers. By looking at the "cumulative cultural text of the teacher," they interrogate how teachers have been positioned historically, how the "contradictory images, clichés, and stereotypes" of teaching seep into both curriculum and identity (p. 8). They list a

number of popular images, drawing from a wide variety of theorists and artistic sources including: teacher as midwife (Socrates), teacher as artist/scientist (Dewey), teacher as technician (Skinner), teacher as researcher (Stenhouse), teacher as artist (Eisner), and even teacher as policewoman, chameleon, witch, and bitch (Bullough). Britzman (2003) articulates three further conceptualizations of teachers that she finds problematic in her work with pre-service teachers: teacher as expert, teacher as in-control, and teacher as self-made.

Like Ayers' "myths" of teaching, such cultural images and metaphors inevitably simplify and even mysticize the complex work of teaching, blurring the moral quandaries and daily conflicts even as they showcase expected tensions (such as between rebel students and their disconnected teachers). "Whereas metaphors can both enhance and clarify our understanding by creating new meanings and perspectives, they can also limit, reduce, and oversimplify our sense of 'reality' in any given situation" (Weber & Mitchell, 1995, p. 24). The very nature of such images may posit the work of teaching as static, and the identities of teachers as falsely uniform. Weber and Mitchell argue that teachers face a constant "struggle for identity" in a world socialized to understand them in particular and limited ways (p. 20).

The creation of a teaching identity, then, is a constant act of balancing and negotiating discourses, hidden and obvious, internal and external, local and historical/cultural. According to Bakhtin (1981) each discourse, "having taken meaning and shape at a particular historical moment in a socially specific environment, cannot fail to brush up against thousands of living dialogic threads, woven by socio-ideological consciousness" (p. 276). In his work on understanding discourse in novels, Bakhtin eloquently captures the ideologic multiplicity of all discourse:

> Indeed, any concrete discourse (utterance) finds the object at which it was directed already as it were overlain with qualifications, open to dispute, charged with value, already enveloped in an obscuring mist—or, on the contrary, by the "light" of alien words that have already been spoke about it. It is entangled, shot through with shared

> thoughts, points of view, alien value judgments and accents. The word, directed toward its object, enters a dialogically agitated and tension-filled environment of alien words, value judgments and accents, weaves in and out of complex interrelationships, merges with some, recoils from others, intersects with yet a third group: and all this may crucially shape discourse, may leave a trace in all its semantic layers, may complicate its expression and influence its entire stylistic profile." (p. 276)

Identity development, likewise, is heteroglossic, existing within a multiplicity of social voices and points of interrelation. Because discourses are ideologically-laden, they do not always interact peaceably, but may clash, compete, and conflict even within a single individual. As will be seen in this manuscript, and as Britzman (2003) has argued, contradictory voices are an inherent and potentially necessary aspect of teaching identity. Bakhtin describes two forms of competing discourse in particular: centripetal, or authoritative, discourse and centrifugal, or internally persuasive, discourse.

> There is the centripetal, or the tendency toward the norm which is embodied in authoritative discourse, and the centrifugal force, or the push against authority, the refusals, the breaks—the imaginative space—that constitute internally persuasive discourse . . . Authoritative discourse demands our allegiance and is embodied in 'the word of the father, parent, teacher' . . . Internally persuasive discourse is tentative, suggesting something about one's own subjectivity and something about the subjectivities and conditions one confronts. (Britzman, 1992, p. 32)

The tension between conflicting discourses evokes a vision of identity that is also complicated and contradictory, where aspects of self collide, are questioned, discarded and even eventually reasserted. Such a "capacity for contradiction . . . can serve as the departure for a dialogic understanding that theorizes about how one understands the given realities of teaching as well as the realities that teaching makes possible" (p. 37).

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This dissertation is one such attempt to theorize the reality and possibility of teaching. It looks at how one teacher created meaning while navigating the social and cultural myths of

teaching, the impact of her perspectives on her life and the lives of her students, and the resultant teacher identity that existed at the junction of self and context. In particular, the idea of "the Good Teacher"—itself indicative of many cultural myths of teaching—became both a descriptor of herself and others, wielded as praise and also lifted as a standard for blame. It became shifting terrain, changing as her vision of her particular mission changed, both strengthened and made fragile by her relationships with students, and increasingly shot through with conflicting ideas and emotions as her personal transformation of "good teaching" crashed against socially and institutionally acceptable definitions. A simple phrase with simple words, it nevertheless framed a significant struggle for one English[2] teacher and, as it turns out, for me as both researcher and teacher.

A Rationale for the Study

In the preface to her landmark work *The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children*, Ladson-Billings (1994) points out that "no challenge has been more daunting than that of improving the academic achievement of African American students. Burdened with a history that includes the denial of education, separate and unequal education, and relegation to unsafe, substandard inner-city schools, the quest for quality education remains an elusive dream" (p. ix). Numerous statistics condemn the American educational process as one that

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[2] Equity in English classrooms is of particular interest, not only because of my background as an English teacher but also because of the position English holds in the high school curriculum today. Gee (1996) believes English Language Arts teachers play a critical role as gatekeepers of literacy practices in our society, and as such, may serve either the bastions of tradition or as guides toward more inclusive practice. In most public schools, students are required to take and pass four years of English instruction, including elements of composition, canonical literature, standard grammar, and speech. Because of its cornerstone position in the American curriculum as the place where literacy is most directly addressed, and because literacy acts are a primary means by which we function in society, English is an important site for understanding how students are provided or denied access to the means of interacting meaningfully with the larger social world.

> The most striking continuity in the history of literacy is the way literacy has been used, in age after age, to solidify the social hierarchy, enrich elites, and ensure that people lower on the hierarchy accept the values, norms, and beliefs of the elites, even when it is not in their self-interest or group interest to do so. (p. 36)

systematically neglects children of color. Ladson-Billings cites only a significant handful, including the low percentage of teachers of color and the difficulty retaining them, the high numbers of black males in the criminal justice system (exceeding those in colleges), the lack of economic resources plaguing schools populated largely by minority students, and the prevalence of segregated schools within supposedly desegregated cities. According to the U.S. Department of Education, drop out rates for Latino/a students in 2001 was 27%, over three times that of whites. For students who remain in schools, the continued disparity between the scholastic success of white students and students of color has provoked decades of researchers to investigate possible causes and solutions for this gap. Partial explanations include socioeconomic factors such as parental education, current income, and historical wealth; cultural differences in values and group norms; access to opportunities and the reaction to potential future discrimination; parental involvement and other home resources such as books, computers, acceptable study space, etc.; the influence of peers; social and cultural capital, etc. (Grissmer, Flannagan, & Williamson, 1998; Jencks & Phillips, 1998; Steele, 1997).

Pratt (1996) points out that "difference…does not necessarily imply inequality—where it does, it does so as the result of a historical process" (p. 4). According to functionalist and critical theorists, education is one of many institutions that help maintain the stratification of power in society, often with partial consent of the disempowered. Schools not only sort students into varying societal positions, but also are involved in changing social consciousness to accept such sorting as natural and/or inevitable. Because education is seen as a common good and because the knowledge transmitted within schools is perceived to be neutral and objective, schools have a unique and significant role in cultivating (deliberately or unconsciously) the status quo. As part of this, the task of assimilating cultural differences has often fallen to schools in the name of creating national unity and providing an equal education to everyone. Schools purport

to advance the common good of the country and, in doing so, force students to "mean against" their own personal discourses and values (Gee, 1996, p. 135). In this way, schools give the impression of transmitting a shared culture, but are in fact legitimating a single dominant culture while ignoring the multiplicity of identities non-dominants could offer. Students perceived as lacking in acceptable cultural capital can be funneled to particular tracks, provided with differentiated curriculums appropriate to their supposed abilities, and counseled into particular societal positions. Numerous research and theoretical texts have highlighted practices that enforce schooling as a gatekeeper to important resources and a bottleneck for student aspirations and long-term success. (Anyon, 1981; Apple, 1990; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Giroux, 2000; Hallinan, 1996; Ladson-Billings, 2001; Oakes, 1985, 1986; Valenzuela, 1999).

At the same time, schools are also sites of contestation, rupture, and transformative change. Aronowitz and Giroux (1985) describe schools as "agencies of social and cultural reproduction, exercising power through underlying interests embodied in the overt and hidden curricula, while at the same time offering limited possibilities for critical teaching and student empowerment" (p. 143). In order to shift schools in a more equitable direction, teachers can become "transformative intellectuals," playing a key role by altering the way they function within existing structures. Rather than repeating the past, such teachers refuse traditional banking models of education in favor of new modes of thinking and acting in classrooms, possess new attitudes about the potential of students of color, and challenge sedimented practices in general. Although large-scale reform is most often conceptualized as a top-down process, teacher buy-in remains one of the most critical pieces for dramatic change. Given this, teacher self-transformation is a significant (if hard to measure) tool in the battle for more equitable schools.

Cochran-Smith (2004) indicates, however, that teachers who "work against the grain" are a striking minority in schools (p. 28). She describes their work as complex, difficult, and often

discouraging as they "understand and work both within and around the culture of teaching and the politics of schooling," confronting administrators, disagreeing with supposed best practice, and balancing their dissent about standard measures of success with the need for their students to succeed on these very measures.

> They have to be astute observers of individual learners with the ability to pose and explore questions that transcend cultural attribution, institutional habit, and the alleged certainty of outside experts. They have to see beyond and through the conventional labels and practices that sustain the status quo by raising unanswerable questions. Perhaps most importantly, teachers who work against the grain must wrestle with their own doubts, fend off the fatigue of reform, and depend on the strength of their individual and collaborative convictions that their work ultimately makes a difference in the fabric of social responsibility. (p. 28)

Given the size of this task, it is no surprise to note that very few teachers would meet these criteria. Research on both pre-service teachers and professional staff development repeatedly provides portraits of teachers who are colorblind, lack cultural competence, are unaware of sociological descriptions of power in schools, and who believe profoundly in deficit theories of student failure (Delpit, 1995; Garmon, 2004; Sleeter & Grant, 1987). Even teachers who consider themselves "multicultural" often are able to marginalize the power issues of race by focusing on other –isms and issues of general discrimination. By framing prejudice as an individual reaction rather than as a socially-embedded pattern with a long history and continued ramifications, teachers and students avoid exploring the impact of race—including the privilege that accompanies whiteness and its consequences for the achievement gap.

Despite the popularity of the critical project in university discourse, such conversations and critiques are far from the norm in the American high school (Apple, 1990; Appleman, 2000; Carey-Webb; 2001; Giroux, 2001). For example, although whiteness studies have been in vogue in cultural studies and other realms of the Academy since the 1990s, offering philosophical explorations and revealing self-studies, this system of thought has found no ready home in the practical day-to-day of schools. Yet, the changing demographics of schools and the teaching

force highlight the need for dramatic change. According to National Education Association (2004) reports, in 2001-2002 60% of students were White, 17% Black, 17% Hispanic, and 5% other. The teaching force, however, was 90% white (up 2% in the last decade), 6% Black, and fewer than 5% other races. Over 40% of schools employed no teachers of color at all, especially in locations that have traditionally served lower numbers of students of color. Statistical projections show student diversity continuing to rise; students of color will comprise more than half the total American student population within the next 35 years. These predictions make no similar claim for teachers, foreseeing instead a continued increase in the whiteness of the teaching force. Such statistics voice a dual call for extensive recruitment of teachers of color for classrooms and, in the meantime, for research on how the massively white teaching force can become more culturally competent and critically aware in order to better serve the children currently in schools (NEA, 2004).

I do not wish to downplay the crucial need for more teachers of color by focusing only on the latter of these needs, but teachers, scholars, and teacher educators cannot overlook the pressing need to deal with the enormous numbers of whites already teaching and in pre-service programs. In my own experience working with a prestigious teaching fellowship program, I have seen the numbers of students of color drop off significantly for our current freshman class, which is already typically 70% or more European American. These students enter their pre-service program entrenched in an "apprenticeship of observation" (Lortie, 1975), the images and beliefs prospective teachers possess which act as lenses on new experiences in classrooms. Their taken-for-granted filters frequently embrace narrow and uncritical views of student achievement along racial and class-based lines and may also include: a belief in the rightness of meritocracy (Ladson-Billings, 1999), the sense that racism/sexism is over (Howard, 1999), a view of tracking as a neutral practice and testing as truthful assessment (Oakes, 1986), a conceptualization that

the main purposes of school is assimilation into the work force (Apple, 1990), and the idea that student resistance is indicative of student inability (Kohl, 1995). Unchallenged, such ideas "may function as barriers to change by limiting the ideas that teacher education students are able and willing to entertain" (Feiman-Nemser, 2001, p. 1016). So, even while advocating for increased diversity among their students, teacher educators can especially benefit from case models whose experiences challenge such beliefs and dispositions. Not only do teacher educators need models, but in-service teachers who lack systems of support for their developing ideologies may also benefit from the stories of those engaged in similar struggle.

Despite an increasingly substantial body of literature that addresses the need for teacher transformation, particularly among white teachers, there is very little focus on the process and implications of concientization within specific settings. There are innumerable articles decrying the failure of pre-service courses in establishing lasting change in student assumptions and dispositions toward culturally different students, numbers of self-reflections and self-critiques from the vantage point of graduate students and professors in the field, and occasional snapshots of in-service teachers showcasing particular successful methodologies and action research projects (Fecho, 2004; Freedman, Simons, Kalnin, Casareno, & M-Class Teams, 1999; Rogers & Soter; 1997). The work of transformative education does not stop at initial awareness (Friere, 1970; Frankenburg, 1996), but ultimately depends on the quality of sustainable praxis that results. Rarely do we get extended, ethnographic portraits of teachers who are deeply involved in the work of re-inventing themselves and their work, and thus in-the-moment practice remains obscured.

As researchers, we need to understand what forces act against such teachers and how they find their strength, how they came to consciousness, how they move from simple awareness into active transformative practice, and what personal meaning they make of their

struggle. Consequently, this dissertation hopes to open a window on transformative practice, its inception, challenges, and impact on teacher identity.

Robin Sullivan: A Moment of Introduction

She comes in and glances around, eyes roving across the coffee counter, past the island of cups and condiments, searching for my face among the small gaggles of people at their classily mismatched tables. A slender figure in muted colors, she hesitates in the doorway and seems to blend into the clientele here—mothers meeting friends at the café, academics pausing amid the bustle of ideas and papers for a quick lunch, a wrap, some gourmet soup, a cappuccino latte. This vine-overgrown, deliberately second-hand place is a familiar meeting place for white faces at lunch, drawing from the major university and the doctors' offices nearby. In this, we both seem to fit into this murmuring background with ease.

I watch her closely, waving to catch her attention and draw her toward my rickety (atmospheric) table where a black laptop and an already empty coffee cup take up most of the space. She hurries over, smiling. As always, she smiles with her whole face, green eyes glowing with that genuine delight that characterizes her interactions with colleagues, friends, students, everyone. We hug and fall naturally into conversation, even though it has been six months since we last spoke. Time collapses in shared exclamations of busy lives and work and families while we order lunch and return to settle in at the tiny, tilting table.

Sullivan is a white female, 35-years old, her reddish hair cut short and stylish, discrete glimpses of gold jewelry glittering at her ears. She has taught English for nine years at this meeting, and her enthusiasm for the work remains undiminished. Six months earlier I had the opportunity to supervise a student teacher in her classroom, re-initiating a professional acquaintance that had fallen into disrepair. Today, she talks about her classroom a little, a quick

amusing story about a student that counts on me to remember what it felt like to move in the world of the secondary English classroom. I offer an anecdote from graduate school and she sighs dramatically, resting her chin in her hand. "You're living the dream," she tells me with a wry smile, reminding me of long talks in empty classrooms where two teachers imagined becoming teacher educators someday. I shrug, uncertain how to both acknowledge the privilege of graduate school and the treason of having left the classroom, each fragment of self blended in inextricable ways. Instead, I mention that I'm working on a research project for a class and searching for a few teachers who might want to be involved in a series of interviews about their practice. I am watching her closely again, feeling the gulf between us more deeply than ever as I speak from my position not only as grad student but as educational researcher-in-training.

"What's the study about?"

"Well." I hesitate, searching for the words to speak about the loaded topic of race with another white teacher without the easy language of graduate classes to pave the way. I feel the absence of Delpit, Ladson-Billings, Bowles and Gintis, and Foucault keenly. "I'm interested in how English teachers think about the achievement gap," I hear myself hedging. "About how race affects their classroom and their teaching—"

Her gasp startles me. She leans forward suddenly, eyes wide, one hand stretched across our shared table as if reaching over the gulf I feel has opened between us. "Are you?" she says, intense and animated. "I've been wanting someone to talk to about that. You see, we've been doing this equity training and—well, I've learned a lot. It's shaken up the way I think about schools and kids and what I do, you know? Have—have you read anything by this woman named Peggy McIntosh?"

I'm sure that I must be blinking at her stupidly, my surprise written in the lift of my eyebrows and my fervently nodding head. This is a former colleague, a woman whom I have

always held in deepest respect, whose creativity and compassion for her students is legendary, and whom I always knew to be a better teacher than me. But, knowing who I was when I left the classroom and remembering our occasional interactions since then, I am not expecting this reaction. I am not expecting to hear the issues I was interested in exploring named so explicitly—colorblindness, code-switching, white privilege, cultural relevancy. In between bites of lunch and my agonizing that I didn't bring my digital recorder, we talk about transformation, about seeing whiteness and seeing culture and concerns over how to reinvent practice to work against the entrenchment of a status quo that denies educational opportunities to so many students. Like all conversations, this one is partial, fragmented. Born out of a similar interest in engaging ideas about diversity and schools, it also stretches across the chasm of individual identities, social positions, and the distance of time. It only hints at the hopes, possibilities, fears and tears we will share over the next two and a half years as together we attempt to understand her journey of personal and professional transformation. And my place at the edges of that journey, both chronicler and fellow traveler.

My Story: Another Moment

In graduate school, one's former teaching life becomes prime grist for the critical mill, or such has been my experience. Over these last four years of study, I often found myself reflecting back on individuals and events that grew dimmer day by day. Reading Delpit, I felt the criticism of white liberal teachers and their blind dedication to process writing. As a university supervisor of student teachers, I found myself sharing comparative stories from my five limited years in a high school English classroom. In teaching classes from undergraduate Social Foundations to Master's level Reinventing Teaching, I drew from a half-latent memory of how to approach students, how to demand engagement, how to navigate classroom discussions. No matter how

far I drifted from my time in the proverbial trenches of public education, it remained central to how I claimed the identity of "teacher"—both then and now.

In Spring of 2004, my duties as a university supervisor sent me back into the highly polished hallways of my former high school. Although I had been absent for some years, the feel of the place lingered and, despite some new furniture in the main office and another teacher in my old classroom, it was deeply, poignantly familiar. I paused in doorways, greeted old colleagues, peered unobtrusively into places that used to be my and my students' domain, temporarily swamped with the contradictory sense being a foreigner in this place of memory. It was my brief visit to the guidance office, however, that rattled me the most. The head counselor was just beyond the swinging glass door, looking perhaps a little greyer than before but with the same welcoming smile. As we disengaged from a hug, she announced, "We'd wondered when you would come back to see us." And then, more quietly, almost conspiratorially. "We can't seem to replace you."

Seeing the school newspaper lying on the counter in front of me, I assumed she meant that other teachers continued to refuse to take the journalism program onto their already full plates. I understood the impulse and nodded, reaching for a copy of the paper curiously. "I heard it had been hard to find someone to take care of *The Voice,*" I acknowledged.

She put a hand on top of the stack of papers. "Oh, you don't really want that. Believe me. It would depress you. But that's not what I mean."

I withdrew reluctantly, thinking to snatch a paper on my way out anyway. I had already seen horoscopes on the front page and my journalistic standards were grinding their proverbial teeth.

The guidance counselor continued. "It's the black kids. Nobody's ever been able to teach them like you could!"

The words cut through the warm feelings of welcome, seizing something inside me with icy fingers, stifling speech and thought. I started shaking my head, on autopilot, the smile I offered her feeling wrong, sickly, forced. "Now I really don't believe that—," I finally began.

But she gave me one of those "you're too modest" looks, laughing a little, sure she knew what I was thinking. "I'm serious! Those at-risk classes just—well, teachers have such a hard time with those kids. You know what I mean."

I started to try to explain myself, how much differently I had learned to view my former practice since I left Northridge High (a pseudonym[3]). How the choices I made regarding my "at-risk" English classes have haunted me, provided me a secure handhold for self-critique, evidence not only of underlying racism but also of the painful recognition that—for all my exceptional rapport with marginalized kids, for all my efforts to deal with serious issues in their lives, including race and class—I failed those kids by rarely demanding they perform to the same expectations as my "honors" classes. It only took a few stumbling statements of protest, however, before I realized that this was not a conversation that could happen meaningfully here, standing in the middle of the guidance office on a busy afternoon. I was making no sense, unable to speak this new "truth" in any way that could be heard. And, it was not as if I was unaware that I had a reputation for being a "good teacher" for marginalized kids, always defending and mothering those who didn't fit in, couldn't achieve, or had too many problems at home.

I gave up, made my excuses, and headed for my student teacher's classroom. The old school building had lost a little of its warmth, the reality of my tenure there weighing on my shoulders as I walked up the spiral stairs to the second floor English classrooms. The truth was that I had been a schizophrenic teacher—a woman of many faces, depending on what group was

[3] Like all people, all places have been given pseudonyms throughout this manuscript.

rambling in my doors. The honors kids got a tough-as-nails, demanding teacher who balanced the challenge of the class with the interest sparked by creative, exploratory, and active projects. The "at-risk" kids got a firm but affectionate teacher, who was willing to spend a month reading a novel with (and sometimes to) them, who involved them in possibly meaningful discussions but rarely expected completed homework or intense depth of thought. Honors kids got philosophy. "At-risk" kids got games. Honors kids got complex novels and complicated formal research papers. "At-risk" kids got short stories and business letters or short personal narratives. Honors kids were later accepted into local and national universities. "At-risk" kids might have thought about community college, but I doubted it. These two monolithic and (in my memory) remarkably uniform groups lingered in my thoughts long after the finite details of daily teaching life had faded, a source of regret and self-castigation.

I talk about myself here because this project brought home to me the impact of researcher positionality and the power of the cultural norms surrounding teaching, even inside the Academy. After months of feeling stymied in my analysis, distressed by a portrait that seemed increasingly negative and yet somehow only partial, and after years of reading and supposedly understanding the how researcher selves shaped research, it took a critical conversation with my advisor to finally begin seeing myself inside the study. Despite my regular assertions in my personal field notes that watching Sullivan was "like watching myself," that she was "making some of the same decisions I made as a teacher," and it was "hard to see her for seeing me," I somehow imagined that the profound connection I felt with this teacher was not playing an enormous role in my data collection and my analysis. When my participant critiqued her own practice, I often found myself agreeing. I wanted to comfort, to reverse the critique by pointing out the excellence I had expected to find, but those elements of practice that so

significant, but which I felt needed to be somehow sublimated in order to better honor the words and events that took place in my participant's narrative history. Left out? My voice as teacher. In exploring our relationship, my teaching history and my personal critique of those years formed a distinct and important foundation for compassion, for sympathy, for shared stories and explorations, and—without my explicit knowledge—for a floundering critique of the classroom stories that were playing out in our work together.

Each interview for this study invariably touched on my past even as it foregrounded my participant's, reflecting sometimes dimly my own present quest to better understand the intersection of race, privilege, and classrooms. As I became increasingly aware of the identity struggle within my participant, I also experienced a parallel challenge in myself. In these relationships with my participant and her class, I was both former colleague and outside researcher, both alike and 'other.' I was English teacher and teacher-of-teachers and researcher-of-teachers and still the one who once walked away from the profession entirely. I was perpetrator and ally, outsider invited in, insider who may have always been out, privileged by my race and by my opportunity to hear her stories. Most importantly, however, I was the teacher who still wrestled with the moral decisions made as a teacher of marginalized children and my own disturbing in/ability to claim the title of "good teacher."

Coda: In the Beginning

I believe there is a great need for educators and researchers to listen to the stories of those attempting to understand their own privilege, to hear the silenced voices of people of color, and to translate their increased cultural and critical awareness into pedagogical practice. Although Sleeter (1996) argues that education reform will not happen based on individual teacher will (and pushes us to consider top-down approaches), I believe that individual teachers remain the gateway through which all reform eventually occurs. As such, they are important for galvanizing reform in education. We need a better understanding about how white teachers develop a critical mindset about race and how they translate their new ideologies into action—a vision of developing and sustaining transformative praxis. Shor (1992) argues that classrooms must be connected to the work of the wider transformation of society and, while teachers cannot bear the burden for solving all social ills, they can work toward their own critical awareness and contribute toward a potential paradigm shift. Whether within an individual or within society, such shifts are progressive rather than immediate and fluid rather than fixed (Kuhn, 1996). But the predominant motion is in the direction of agency, hope, and the possibility of achieving a more equitable world.

hooks (2003) writes:

> If we fail to acknowledge the value and significance of individual anti-racist white people we not only diminish the work they have done and do to transform their thinking and behavior, but we prevent other white people from learning by their example. All people of color who suffer racial exploitation and oppression know that white supremacy will not end until racist white people change. (p. 57)

To this, I might add that if we fail to turn a researcher's gaze on the experiences, beliefs, and practices of individual white teachers engaged in attempts to embody anti-racist, transformative teaching, we also endanger the work of anti-racism in schools. Without clear pictures of their motivation, struggle, success, and even failure, we have little to offer others who might be willing

to follow in their footsteps. If we are going to understand how to inspire transformative identities in teachers, we must examine how those identities develop and the challenges that continue to shape them.

In that spirit, the story that follows chronicles a collaborative effort between Sullivan and myself to understand something amorphous about teaching, about schools and students, and about ourselves[4]. It begins in the fall of 2003, a midpoint in her journey of personal and professional transformation, then picks up in the fall of 2005 and spring of 2006, traveling with her as she takes stock of the journey and continues the work. It examines the tensions that exist within a single English teacher's identity as a "good teacher," how it develops and is sustained, how it is challenged by unfolding visions of equity and empowerment, how it runs up against the equally fluid and yet powerfully entrenched identities of students and tries to find acceptable ground in new professional spaces. It looks at the shifting ground of "good teaching" and the personal cost to a teacher trapped in the uncertain space between conflicting identities. It challenges the long-standing security of a professional system that both supports and denies the individual heroics of real teachers and real kids. Unlike the archetypical teachers of memory, celebration and critique are simultaneously bound here in the rich voices that weave through the ever-evolving narrative of a teacher's life.

[4] Because this manuscript wants to privilege the narrative voices at play rather than the more instrumental requirements of a dissertation, the traditional methods chapter appears as an Appendix at the end. Likewise, the literature review may be found throughout in an abbreviated, footnoted form.