

IT MAY TAKE *FAITH*: AN INVESTIGATION OF TEACHER PERSISTENT
AGENCY IN THE CRUSHING CONTEXTS

by

Amy Lynn McDonald

Copyright © Amy Lynn McDonald 2019

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of the

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
TEACHING & TEACHER EDUCATION

In the Graduate College

THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

2019

THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA
GRADUATE COLLEGE

As members of the Dissertation Committee, we certify that we have read the dissertation prepared by Amy Lynn McDonald, titled *It May Take Faith: An Investigation of Teacher Persistent Agency in the Crushing Contexts* and recommend that it be accepted as fulfilling the dissertation requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Marcy B Wood
Dr. Marcy B. Wood

Date: May 10, 2019

Kathy Carter
Dr. Katherine J. Carter

Date: May 10, 2019

Renée T Clift
Dr. Renée T. Clift

Date: May 10, 2019

Erin E Turner
Dr. Erin E. Turner

Date: May 10, 2019

Final approval and acceptance of this dissertation is contingent upon the candidate's submission of the final copies of the dissertation to the Graduate College.

We hereby certify that we have read this dissertation prepared under our direction and recommend that it be accepted as fulfilling the dissertation requirement.

Kathy Carter
Dr. Katherine J. Carter
Dissertation Committee Co-Chair
Teaching, Learning, and Sociocultural Studies

Date: July 23, 2019

Marcy B Wood
Dr. Marcy B. Wood
Dissertation Committee Co-Chair
Teaching, Learning, and Sociocultural Studies

Date: July 23, 2019

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would first and foremost like to thank my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Lord Jesus, you have carried me through literally everything I have done in my life thus far that has been worth doing in the first place. You have blessed me with far more than I could ever have thought to ask or even dream of. Without you, I would never have made it through this program, let alone the writing of this dissertation! Thank you.

Second, I would like to thank my amazing teacher participants. Thank you for sharing the intricacies of your most difficult experiences with me, and for reflecting so honestly and intentionally on the significance of those experiences related to your identity and practice. It has been an honor.

I would also like to thank my committee: Dr. Marcy B. Wood, Dr. Katherine J. Carter, Dr. Renée T. Clift, Dr. Erin E. Turner, and Dr. Lynette A. Brunderman, for their unfailing support and guidance throughout the process that led to this publication. Thank you especially to my co-advisors, Kathy and Marcy! The two of you sacrificed countless hours and expended great intellectual effort pushing me to be the best that I could be, even when you knew I wished you would allow me to settle for less. You saw me through triumph and tragedy, laughed and even cried with me, and inspired me to continue to persist with agency in every circumstance. I owe you a debt I could never repay.

Thank you also to the late Dr. Jeffrey Bennett. Dr. Bennett invested a great deal of time scaffolding my academic writing only a few years ago. He was an incredible professor. I can honestly say that this paper would not be what it is today had I never taken his course.

Thank you also to my remarkable family. Without you, I would not have finished: Klem, you are my most precious gift. Thank you for your eternal patience and for

literally excusing me from all household duties for nearly six years, of your own accord and almost without complaint. Without you, I am not me. I love you with all that I am.

Mom, there are no words. You are and always have been among my greatest inspirations. I realized my life work in reflecting on your example. You literally taught me to write, and you saw me through the writing of this dissertation. In fact, I distinctly remember you helping me rephrase the entire introduction to my proposal!

Morgan Jeanne and Madysen May, where would I be without my two biggest supporters? In so many ways, the two of you have earned this accomplishment every bit as much as I have. You have been by my side from the beginning, first as encouragers, and eventually even as editors. Who else would have tolerated (and dare I say even *enjoyed?*) the *YEARS* of “Harry Potter nights” that brought us to this moment? love you to the moon and back!

Wyatt Glenn, you made your first trip to the U of A just four days after you were born. Your daddy watched over you in the next room so that I could go to class and not jeopardize my 4.0 for “inadequate attendance”. I have been in school for as long as you have been alive, and over the course of that time, you have been a source of great joy, strength, and motivation like no other. Thank you!

Mindy Lynn, one day I will be able to thank you for getting me through this last and most difficult leg of my dissertation work. I have so appreciated your commitment to be a “mover and a shaker” as your daddy calls you. Your precious kicks and punches and constant motions kept me awake for the last two months as I tried to finish writing and editing this dissertation with very little caffeine! Thank you!

Sarah, it has been more than seven years since you paved the way for me in the writing and defending of your own dissertation. I learned so much from you during that time, and I can only hope my editing was as helpful to you as yours has been to me. You

are a wordsmith and a ruthless cutter of content! Just imagine how long this paper would have been without you! Thank you for your unending support... and for showing up to my defense in a Harry Potter robe! I love you more than life!

Dad, you have been wind beneath my wings from the beginning of this journey. For every day you picked us up from school and watched over my kiddos on campus so I could be on time for class... For every night you made the BEST popcorn, filled it with amazing cheese, and waited on me hand and foot as I worked... For every prayer and every encouraging word that led me to today... Thank you!

Finally, and however unconventionally, I want to publicly thank J.K. Rowling, though I know she will never read this. I do not know why her work has been the comfort to me that it has, but it has. I read the Harry Potter series in Spanish as I wrote this dissertation. I played the movies in the background, to the great dismay of my husband, almost every night that I worked into the early hours of the morning...

I guess it takes a village to get through a PhD program. Thank you all!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES	9
LIST OF FIGURES	10
ABSTRACT.....	11
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	13
Context and Problem Statement.....	14
Crushing Contexts.....	16
Purpose Statement.....	21
Participant Focus and Central Research Question	21
Acknowledging Researcher Bias	22
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW	24
Conceptualizing Teacher Persistent Agency	25
Clarifying Definitions	25
Related Constructs	27
Current Understandings	37
Untold or Largely Unexamined Stories	49
Toward More Sophisticated Understandings.....	49
Narrative Inquiry.....	50
Participant Selection and Hard to Staff Schools	51
<i>Teacher Faith</i> , A Construct Parallel to Religious Faith	52
Components of [Christian] Religious Faith	53
Final Note on Sensitivity and Limitations	72
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY	75
Research Question Expanded	75
Methods.....	76
Participant Teacher Selection	76
Data Collection and Analysis.....	79
CHAPTER 4: THE CASE OF LUIS COTA AND HIS UNIQUE FAITH IN THE POWER OF RELATIONSHIPS AND HARD WORK	108
Introduction.....	108

Background Information.....	110
A Case of <i>Devout Faith</i>	111
Core Beliefs and Convictions	112
Hope and Trust.....	129
Regular Intentional (Agentive) Action	133
Faith-Strengthening Routines and Practices	138
Commitment to Collaboration or Congregation or Consultation	139
Teacher Faith and Persistent Agency Lived Out in the Crushing Contexts	141
CHAPTER 5: THE CASE OF WILLIAM NELSON AND HIS UNIQUE FAITH IN A CALLING TO TEACH “PURE” MATHEMATICS TO STUDENTS	144
Introduction.....	144
Background Information.....	146
A Case of <i>Devout Faith</i>	147
Core Beliefs and Convictions	148
Hope and Trust.....	180
Regular Intentional (Agentive) Action	185
Faith-Strengthening Routines and Practices	188
Commitment to Collaboration or Congregation or Consultation	193
Teacher Faith and Persistent Agency Lived Out in the Crushing Contexts	198
CHAPTER 6: THE CASE OF MICHAEL ABRAMS AND HIS UNIQUE FAITH IN THE POWER OF THE LEARNING PROCESS AND A STRONG COMMUNITY .	201
Introduction.....	201
Background Information.....	202
A Case of <i>Devout Faith</i>	203
Core Beliefs and Convictions	204
Hope and Trust.....	243
Regular Intentional (Agentive) Action	245
Faith-Strengthening Routines and Practices	251
Commitment to Collaboration or Congregation or Consultation	253
Teacher Faith and Persistent Agency Lived Out in the Crushing Contexts	255
CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS.....	258

Introduction.....	259
Purpose and Focus of this Study.....	259
Key Concepts and Definitions.....	259
Study Position Within Existing Literature.....	260
Discussion.....	262
Anticipated Study Contributions: Filling Gaps.....	262
Unanticipated Study Contributions: Teacher Faith and WRE Arcs.....	288
Wonderings.....	293
Summary of Implications.....	294
APPENDIX A: PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORMS.....	296
APPENDIX B: LIFE CHRONOLOGY (TIMELINE) PROMPT.....	299
APPENDIX C: LIFE STORY NARRATIVE (LSN) INTERVIEWS PROTOCOL.....	300
APPENDIX D: WRE AND CCC PARTICIPANT INSTRUCTIONS.....	301
APPENDIX E: WRE SENSE-MAKING INTERVIEWS PROTOCOL.....	302
APPENDIX F: CCCs FINAL INTERVIEWS PROTOCOL.....	303
REFERENCES.....	304

LIST OF TABLES

Table 3.1 Chronology of Data Collection and Analysis by Week.....	80
Table 3.2 Data Collection and Analysis Design Summary by Research Question (RQ)	104
Table 4.1 Chronological Summary of Researcher-Participant Interactions: Cota.....	108
Table 4.2 Quotations Related to a Focus on Relationships: Cota.....	113
Table 4.3 Cota’s Life Chronology (Timeline) Construction	115
Table 4.4 Cota’s Well-Remembered Events (WREs).....	118
Table 4.5 Cota’s Crushing Contexts Collection (CCC).....	120
Table 4.6 Frequencies of Nouns Appearing in Cloud in Original Transcript: Cota.....	124
Table 5.1 Chronological Summary of Researcher-Participant Interactions: Nelson.....	144
Table 5.2 Nelson’s Life Chronology (Timeline) Construction: Focus on Math.....	149
Table 5.3 Minor Changes to List of Nouns Pasted in Word Cloud Generator: Nelson...	153
Table 5.4 Frequencies of Nouns Appearing in Cloud in Original Transcript: Nelson	154
Table 5.5 Quotations Related to Enjoyment and Confidence Doing Math: Nelson.....	156
Table 5.6 Quotations Related to Desiring to Teach More Engaging Math: Nelson.....	160
Table 5.7 Nelson’s Life Chronology (Timeline) Construction: Focus on His Calling....	170
Table 5.8 Quotations Related to Teaching and Helping Others: Nelson.....	172
Table 5.9 Frequencies of Nouns Appearing in Cloud in Original Transcript: Nelson	174
Table 5.10 Quotations Related to the Importance of a Student Focus: Nelson	177
Table 5.11 Nelson’s Crushing Contexts Collection (CCC).....	190
Table 6.1 Chronological Summary of Researcher-Participant Interactions: Abrams.....	201
Table 6.2 Abrams’s Life Chronology (Timeline) Construction	205
Table 6.3 Frequencies of Verbs Appearing in Cloud in Original Transcript: Abrams....	211
Table 6.4 Quotations Related to a Focus on the Learning Process: Abrams	212
Table 6.5 Quotations Related to an Attention to Inspiring Student Curiosity: Abrams ..	220
Table 6.6 Abrams’s Crushing Contexts Collection (CCC).....	227
Table 6.7 Minor Changes to List of Nouns Pasted in Word Cloud Generator: Abrams .	235
Table 6.8 Frequencies of Nouns Appearing in Cloud in Original Transcript: Abrams...	236
Table 7.1 Key Coping Strategy: Commitment to Continued Action.....	268
Table 7.2 Examples of “Righteous Anger” by Participant	276
Table 7.3 Core Beliefs by Participant	283

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 4.1 Crushing Contexts Collection (Image): Cota	120
Figure 4.2 Word Cloud from Sensical Nouns in Cota LSN Interview	124
Figure 4.3 WRE #1 Participant Experience Arc (Annotated): Cota.....	128
Figure 4.4 WRE #2 Participant Experience Arc (Annotated): Cota.....	131
Figure 4.5 WRE #3 Participant Experience Arc (Annotated): Cota.....	136
Figure 5.1 Word Cloud from Sensical Nouns in Nelson LSN Interview	153
Figure 5.2 WRE #2 Participant Experience Arc (Annotated): Nelson	166
Figure 5.3 Word Cloud from Infinitive Forms of Verbs in Nelson LSN Interview	175
Figure 5.4 WRE #3 Participant Experience Arc (Annotated): Nelson	182
Figure 5.5 WRE #1 Participant Experience Arc (Annotated): Nelson	186
Figure 5.6 Crushing Contexts Collection (Image): Nelson	190
Figure 6.1 Word Cloud from Infinitive Forms of Verbs in Abrams LSN Interview	211
Figure 6.2 Crushing Contexts Collection (Image): Abrams	227
Figure 6.3 WRE #1 Participant Experience Arc (Annotated): Abrams.....	231
Figure 6.4 Word Cloud from Sensical Nouns in Abrams LSN Interview	236
Figure 6.5 WRE #2 Participant Experience Arc (Annotated): Abrams.....	240
Figure 6.6 WRE #3 Participant Experience Arc (Annotated): Abrams.....	247

ABSTRACT**IT MAY TAKE *FAITH*: AN INVESTIGATION OF TEACHER PERSISTENT AGENCY IN THE CRUSHING CONTEXTS**

by

Amy Lynn McDonald

This study was an investigation of a collection of veteran secondary mathematics teachers' storied experiences attempting to persist with agency through the most difficult contexts (*crushing contexts*) of their profession. Participants were recommended for the study by an administrator on account of their reputations as educators who consistently act in agentic ways focused on students. Ultimately, the objective of the project was to contribute new phenomenological understandings of *teacher persistent agency* to the field. Teacher persistent agency was broadly defined as *human agency* (as conceptualized by social cognitive theory) that is unrelenting and enduring (sustained over time and in a variety of contexts) and that explicitly attends to students. In other words, teachers with persistent agency were identified as having a regular practice of acting through any combination of personal, proxy, or collective efforts with a focus on students in *any* ways that involve intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness, and self-reflectiveness.

This study was situated within the two intersecting and intimately related bodies of literature addressing *teacher agency* and *teacher resilience* (and by extension the literature on *teacher retention*). Prior to this study, considerable scholarship existed related to the nature and worth of teacher persistent agency within these bodies of literature, even in the midst of adversity. This study was designed to build on that scholarship and to partially attend to two gaps within it. More specifically, it was an extension of the work of Sonia Nieto (2003, 2009, 2012, 2014, 2015), an answer to the

calls of Jamie Huff Sisson (2016) and Albert Bandura (2016), and an attempt to utilize well-established narrative methods to specifically investigate largely unexplored contexts, identified as crushing contexts, particularly those that were event-based. Ultimately the argument was made that a new construct, *teacher faith*, a non-religious faith that parallels a *Christian* religious faith specifically comprised of five distinct components, may be useful in helping researchers make sense of teacher persistent agency, particularly in crushing contexts. In addition, a call was made for additional investigations using similar methods.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

When I was a little girl, my aunt read me a story that I have never forgotten. The story told of a young man walking along a beach in the morning just after sunrise, when the tide was going out. The beach was covered with starfish, and the young man knew that with the sun up and the tide out, if the starfish did not make it back to sea in a relatively short time, they would die out on the sand. As the man walked the beach, he bent over and picked up the starfish one by one, gently throwing them to safety. After watching this for a short while, an elderly man approached him and criticized, “Young man, do you not realize that there are miles of beach, each covered with starfish? You can’t possibly make a difference!” The young man listened politely to his critic. Then after a moment, he bent down again, unabated, picked up another starfish, and threw it out to sea. Glancing back at the older gentleman, he countered meekly, “Made a difference *to that one.*”

I did not know at the time how much this story would come to mean to me. But as each year passes, I cling to its message. As juvenile as it may sound, at times over the course of my modest career in education, my “starfish” have been among my main sources of motivation. Viewing the story as a metaphor for my profession, I am the young man. My starfish are my students and the other educators that I support. Those that I have thrown back into the sea are those that I know in the depth of my core have been positively impacted in relation to their academics, practice, or general well-being at least in part as a result of my imperfect intentional and persistent efforts in and out of the classroom. At any given moment, my aim is, and always has been, to “make a difference” in their lives. But at times, I have paused, as the young man in the story, to contemplate

the larger, dimmer picture in relation to my capacity to make a favorable difference in meaningful, systemic ways. Each time that I have felt the slightest hint of discouragement, however, I have almost immediately thereafter discovered a renewed sense of strength and resolve when I very simply directed my attention back to my starfish, reminding myself in particular of those that I knew had made it back to sea.

Context and Problem Statement

Educators and scholars continue to disagree as to what constitutes an act or set of actions that “makes a difference” to students, but it is generally believed that an effective teacher at least acts with the intention of fostering higher academic achievement for all as measured by the standardized tests currently employed to compare and rank students (Blanchard, Zigarmi, & Nelson, 1993; Darling-Hammond, 2013; García & Weiss, 2015; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2004). History has proven this to be a lofty task, particularly for teachers of students from traditionally underserved populations, and certainly also for teachers instructing students in specific content areas (such as mathematics, for example), especially at the secondary and post-secondary levels. There is an achievement gap in America that persists between students of high and low socioeconomic status, students of majority and minority cultures and ethnicities, and students with and without disabilities that few sites have been able to bridge (Darling-Hammond, 2013; Duncan-Andrade, 2011; García & Weiss, 2015; Traub, 2000; Wells, 2009). Nearly two decades ago, Traub (2000) lamented that while America has poured billions of dollars into inner-city schools, and “fiddled with practically everything you could think to fiddle with,” on a large scale, it has “done almost nothing to raise the trajectory” of traditionally marginalized children (p. 52).

In other words, even if the goal of public education were simply higher test scores for all students, the case can be fairly made that we are failing. Teachers are simply not making a big enough difference. Indeed, there are entire groups of students that we have been largely unable to support in a manner sufficient to enable them to attain even the most basic academic achievement of a high school diploma (Darling-Hammond, 2013; Duncan-Andrade, 2011). What is more, despite enhanced awareness in recent decades of historical inequities in education, these same groups of traditionally marginalized students are also the ones most often afforded inferior resources to support their learning (Arnett, 2015; Darling-Hammond, 2013; García & Weiss, 2015; Sadker, Sadker, & Zittleman, 2009). Duncan-Andrade (2009) perhaps summarized it best when he argued that the state of educational affairs for certain underserved student populations has become so bleak that their teachers may as well be trying to grow roses from concrete.

Teaching has always been hard. But in recent years, with larger class sizes, increasingly diverse student populations, prevailing poverty (especially in the hardest to staff schools), inequitable and inadequate funding, new and sometimes poorly implemented or misunderstood discipline policies, and technology competing for students' attention, it has become harder still (Darling-Hammond, 2013; Nieto, 2015; Traub, 2000; Freeman, Wilkinson, & Vanlone, 2017). The basic demands on the American public educator today are so prodigious, the resources so few, and the history so bleak, that some educators and educational researchers have begun to ask whether meaningful change is even possible in the current system (García & Weiss, 2015; Hoy & Miskel, 2013; Traub, 2000; Wells, 2009). In essence, they are asking the same question at the heart of the old man's lament in the story my aunt told me so many years ago: Under

these conditions, how can one possibly make a difference?

It is no wonder given this dominant failing narrative of public education in America that substantial numbers of teachers have begun to complain incessantly, settle for mediocrity, discount the capacity of specific students, refuse to teach certain students in favor of others more likely to succeed or “easier” to work with, avoid teaching certain subject areas, and/or even abandon the profession altogether (Friedman, 2000; Ingersoll, 2001, 2004; Mansfield, Beltman, Price, & McConney, 2012; Nieto, 2009, 2015; Simos, 2013). Even over the course of my relatively short career as an educator, I have watched more than a handful of talented teachers become disenchanted and discouraged. I have even watched some leave the profession entirely. In reality, these teachers were just a few of many others like them according to the literature: burnt out, underpaid, over-criticized, or convinced that they had insufficient power or opportunity to effect consequential and lasting change (Bobek, 2002; Borman & Dowling, 2008; Chang, 2009; Cochran-Smith et al., 2012; Cochran-Smith, 2004; Darling-Hammond, 2003; Day, 2008; Ewing & Smith, 2003; Friedman, 2000; Guarino, Santibañez, & Daley, 2006; Hong, 2012; Ingersoll, 1999, 2001, 2004; Olsen & Anderson, 2007; Simos, 2013).

Crushing Contexts

To put it quite simply, education has become a field wrought with what I have come to call *crushing contexts*. In general, a *crushing context* is an event, moment, decision, experience, environment, or set of circumstances of the most disheartening variety, such that even naturally tenacious individuals when confronted with often find themselves completely overwhelmed, or “crushed”. Crushing contexts are those that in many cases, for many individuals, challenge or even squelch the strongest optimistic

beliefs in and about the work that one is engaged in, or even about life itself. Such contexts very typically motivate avoidance, retreat and resignation, complacent thought, destructive decision-making, or similar unproductive responses.

In education, there are crushing contexts at both the macro- and micro- levels. The macro- crushing contexts are those where it is most difficult to find willing and persistent teachers (e.g., hard to staff schools), those contexts within which many reasonable people could understandably argue that making a substantial desirable difference is extremely unlikely at best if not entirely impossible at worst. Most typically within these crushing macro-contexts there are a host of unfavorable conditions or variables that make it difficult for educators and their students to function at an optimal level. Two very commonly investigated crushing macro-contexts prevalent in the literature, for example, are “high poverty” and “urban” schools. These schools are sometimes also described as “hard to staff schools,” because they have traditionally been more difficult to staff with qualified teachers than schools in affluent and suburban areas (AFT Teachers, 2007; Berry, 2004; Berry & Hirsh, 2005). In addition to dilapidated buildings and dwindling resources, often these schools boast a variety of policies imposed by legislators or administrators that limit teacher freedom, policies such as mandated and scripted curricula, teacher exclusion from decision-making processes and positions, narrowly defined teacher evaluation procedures directly affecting teachers’ monetary compensation, and the like. The micro- crushing contexts of education, by contrast, are those moments, individual events, or daily decisions that are in and of themselves “crushing”, those instances that leave many educators feeling overwhelmed, frustrated and distracted, or entirely ineffectual.

We know from the existing literature that not all teachers respond to these crushing contexts in undesirable ways. That is to say, on the one hand, we do know that many teachers are responding to these crushing contexts by leaving the profession within their first five years of teaching or remaining in the profession but giving up on groups of students or hopes of doing anything but sustaining an unfavorable status quo (Friedman, 2000; Ingersoll, 2001, 2004; Mansfield et al., 2012). But on the other hand, we also know that there are others who not only remain in the profession, but also who at least report a commitment to press on in the difficult moments and to continue to focus on, believe in, and work toward perfecting their craft and increasing the positive impact they are having on their students every day, however that positive impact is defined (Nieto, 2009, 2014). What can we learn from studying the lived experiences of *these* teachers? What can we learn from a focus on their persistent effort in their most crushing contexts?

Educational researchers have long asked the general questions of why teachers keep teaching and what makes some of them more successful in facing adversity than others (AFT Teachers, 2007; Berry, 2004; Berry & Hirsh, 2005; Duckworth, Peterson, Mathews, & Kelly, 2007; Duckworth, Quinn, & Seligman, 2009; Hong, 2012; Kurtz, 2015; Laffoon, 2012; Meijer, de Graaf, & Meirink, 2011; Nieto, 2009, 2015; Olsen & Anderson, 2007; Perrachione, Rosser, & Petersen, 2008; Robertson-Kraft & Duckworth, 2014; Simos, 2013). Scholars have even asked why some teachers continue to teach in certain crushing macro-contexts, though they have not been specifically labeled as such (Guarino et al., 2006; Kurtz, 2015; Laffoon, 2012; Mansfield et al., 2012; Nieto, 2014, 2015; Olsen & Anderson, 2007; Robertson-Kraft & Duckworth, 2014). While there is much to be gleaned, however, about the nature of teacher persistent effort in general over

time within these collections of studies, the nature and character of teachers' experiences in the most crushing contexts of their work (particularly at the micro-level) remains largely unexplored. Even at the macro-level, where numerous teachers have been called upon to complete a variety of statistically-tested and even validated general surveys designed to measure the presence of predictive factors of things like self-efficacy, resilience, and agency, little or no effort has been placed into following respondents to investigate whether they were able to act within the event-based crushing contexts of their profession in a manner consistent with their responses on those surveys (Bowles & Arnup, 2016; Day & Gu, 2007, 2010; Ewing & Manuel, 2005; Howard & Johnson, 2004; Le Cornu, 2009; Mansfield, Beltman, Broadley, & Weatherby-Fell, 2016).

Of course, if the goal is to better understand the continual intentional effort of teachers in spite of or in response to a variety of crushing contexts, there are numerous concepts and inquiries already prevalent in the literature that may be potentially helpful. By my view, the two most relevant collections of literature to that end are those that investigate the constructs and phenomena of teacher agency and teacher resilience. I address each of these in detail in the next chapter, as it is this literature that most informed both the analytical framework and the methods selected for this project.

This study, however, was designed to solicit a more complete understanding of teacher persistence and agentic action in crushing contexts than that which can already be found, one that was not confined to predictive quantitative measures but attempted to make sense of the more concrete, lived experiences of teachers. Through a series of carefully selected narrative procedures, this study adds to the literature a cluster of unique cases of the collective lived experiences of three veteran educators in the acting out of

intentional agentic decisions in the crushing moments and within the general crushing environments of their profession. In more explicit terms, this study was an attempt to fill at least two significant gaps in the educational literature. The first is the gap that has been created by an over-reliance on insufficient methods to investigate the multifaceted complex construct that I call *persistent agency* (fully defined in the next chapter), pursuits that have relied almost exclusively on quantitative generalized measures connected to cursory, predictive and self-rating surveys to describe the nature of teachers' persistent effort. While undoubtedly useful in their own right, such studies are insufficient to adequately conceptualize any sort of trustworthy understanding of teachers' persistence in action.

The second gap in the literature that this study addresses is the lack of scholarly pursuit focused on extracting whatever knowledge or information about teacher persistent action is tied to teachers' unique lived experiences in each new crushing teaching event or moment relative to the impact of that experience on their overall persistent agency. There has been very little exploration to date of teachers' experiences within the most crushing event-based contexts they face and how those experiences relate to their persistent agency. In fact, beyond the event-based narratives that teachers volunteered in response to those very generally-focused inquiries into their various motivations to persist in general in their field (Nieto, 2009, 2014, 2015), there is a severe lack of focus on the most crushing events and moments of teachers' work. This being the case, there has also been almost no opportunity to investigate a potential intersection of significant findings within teachers' storied understandings of their persistent agency across the general macro-contexts and very specific micro-contexts of their work, which was

another focus of this study.

Purpose Statement

In short, the purpose of this narrative inquiry was to better understand the nature of the lived experiences of a collection of veteran teachers in crushing contexts and to discover how those experiences relate to or impact their persistent agency. Through a combination of methods adapted from those employed by Carter (1994, 2008, 2009); Clandinin and Connelly (1990, 2000); Stoehr, Carter, and Sugimoto (2017); and Stoehr (2014, 2017); I collected and analyzed a selection of narrated accounts from three veteran secondary mathematics teachers. This project contributes to the literature by addressing the questions of not only why teachers remain in the profession despite adverse macro-contexts (the crushing contexts) but also what can be learned from their event-based experiences as they strive to persist with agency during the most difficult events and moments (crushing micro-contexts) of their work.

Participant Focus and Central Research Question

Participant teachers were recommended for this study by an administrator for their reputations as educators displaying a certain commitment to consistent and persistent effort focused on students in their teaching of secondary mathematics. More about the specifics and philosophy behind their selection is discussed in the next two chapters. It is my intention that this particular cluster of teachers serve as a collection of special and instructive cases of educators continuing to persist with agency in similar arguably crushing macro-contexts and narrating their experiences in a variety of crushing micro-contexts of their profession. My central question for this study was thus: How do participant teachers' narratives, action and reaction patterns, and talk about their

experiences in the crushing contexts of their profession relate to their overall teacher persistent agency?

Acknowledging Researcher Bias

At the outset of this work, I wish to acknowledge that as a researcher, I bring my own biases to this project, biases which may surface in the pages that follow. I have done my best to reduce these biases by making my perspectives known to my doctoral committee and committing to a process of regular collaborative challenge, reflection, review, and revision. Nonetheless, I openly acknowledge from the start that I am a middle-class White woman educator with experience teaching preschool through high school in both the public and private sectors. I was raised by a single-parent public educator in a house of all girls. Lastly, and potentially most relevant given the nature of this project, I am a person of profound (Christian) *religious* faith, who has admittedly been very deeply and regularly impacted by a fairly developed religious faith construct for most of my life. That is to say, I openly admit that everything I do or say or think I know is filtered through a set of Christian beliefs or convictions about the worth of all human life, the goodness of God, and the promise that anything good I set out to do will have a positive impact (you reap what you sow) whether I get to see that positive impact myself or whether it will manifest itself at another point. In the end, I believe all of these things because I believe that love, which motivates any agentive action in pursuit of good in the first place, *never* fails. To say that who I am did not impact the way I poured through the literature or interpreted the data I collected as part of this project would be irresponsible at best and immoral at worst. What I *can* affirm is that I have been ever cognizant of my biases in every stage of this project and have sincerely attempted to keep

them from compromising the integrity of my research. I have also made every attempt to provide ample evidence for any conclusions I have drawn or claims that I have made in the pages that follow.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this study, I sought to understand the relationship between a group of veteran secondary mathematics teachers' experiences in the crushing contexts of their profession and their overall teacher persistent agency. In other words, I sought to understand a collection of teachers' storied knowledge that was in any way tied to their teaching experiences in the most difficult moments and within the most challenging circumstances. My aim was to investigate the collective impact of their storied experiences on their teacher persistent agency. My objective in this chapter is to position this study within the current literature, and to advance the argument that this inquiry, while modest in scope, contributes new phenomenological understandings of teacher persistent agency to that literature.

Prior to this study, considerable scholarship existed related to the nature and worth of teacher persistent agency, even in the midst of adversity. But there were also some fundamental gaps in the literature that this study was designed to address. In the pages that follow in this chapter, I offer a clarifying definition of the central construct at the heart of this investigation, summarize the noteworthy contributions and limitations of the existing scholarship to our conceptions of that construct, and identify and defend the frameworks and methodologies that were utilized in this study in pursuit of more sophisticated understandings. Following this discussion, I borrow from my religious (Christian) faith to establish a parallel construct of *teacher faith* that I contend is useful in making sense of the data that was collected as part of this project. I return to this parallel construct throughout this document. Finally, at the close of this chapter, I acknowledge the sensitivity of the information I requested from educators as a part of this scholarly

endeavor and the well-documented potential limitations and challenges that come with asking such information, particularly as a White researcher.

Conceptualizing Teacher Persistent Agency

Clarifying Definitions

Human agency. The central phenomenon at the core of this pursuit is largely built upon the psychological construct of human agency. More specifically, it is largely built upon the construct of human agency as defined, explored, and defended by social cognitive theorist Albert Bandura (1986, 1997, 2001, 2002, 2006, 2012). According to Bandura (2001), *agency* can be most basically defined as “acts done intentionally” (p. 6).

As simplistic as this definition may seem, it encapsulates four core features that can be exercised simultaneously in one, two, or three distinct modes. The four core features are: intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness, and self-reflectiveness (Bandura, 2001, 2002). In other words, Bandura (2001, 2002) argues that any complete conceptualization of human agentive action or performance necessitates a consideration of the performer’s action plans and strategies for realizing those plans (intentionality), anticipation of likely future outcomes that guide and motivate their efforts (forethought), ability to construct appropriate courses of action and reaction to regulate execution (self-reactiveness), and self-awareness to consider the effectiveness, accuracy, and possibly even significance of their thoughts and actions (self-reflectiveness).

Bandura further contends that agentive acts can be a result of any combination of three modes of action: personal, proxy, or collective. In other words, agency, or intentional acts, may be a result of an individual’s efforts (personal), a result of others acting at an individual’s behest (proxy), a result of group effort (collective), or a result of

any combination of personal, proxy, or collective efforts. *Human agency*, then, according to social cognitive theory, can be most explicitly defined as intentional action through any combination of personal, proxy, or collective efforts that involves intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness, and self-reflectiveness. It is this more explicit definition that can be directly applied to the definition of the construct at the heart of this study.

Teacher persistent agency. This study was not an investigation of general human agency, of course, but of *teacher persistent agency*. The first immediate distinction is that my focus was on human agency directly related to teaching. I was not interested in every intentional action of teachers, however. I was interested in the intentional actions of teachers that were related in some way to their work with students. The second distinction, requiring slightly more clarification, is the presence of the “persistent” descriptor. I was interested in teacher agency that persisted or was sustained over time and in a variety of contexts. That is not to say that I was interested in a specific intentional act or set of acts that was consistently performed or sustained. Rather, I was interested in teachers who have a persistent practice of acting intentionally, or have patterns of agentic action related to their work with students that are sustained over time and in a variety of contexts.

Teacher persistent agency, then, for the purposes of this project, can be defined as human agency in the social cognitive sense that is unrelenting and enduring and specifically related to teaching students. There is nothing particularly novel about this construct. It has been so named and defined for clarification purposes. Below, I describe two very similar concepts that are currently the focus of a growing body of educational research literature that are therefore relevant to this study.

Related Constructs

Currently, there are numerous academic pursuits that may contribute to a general understanding of what researchers have established, investigated, and theorized about in relation to the construct of teacher persistent agency as just defined. The bulk of the most intimately related information, however, can be found in the two growing and often intersecting bodies of literature that attend to *teacher agency* and *teacher resilience*. In fact, in the earliest stages of this project, I labeled my explicit interest as one in *resilient teacher agency*. While these constructs are undeniably related, however, upon deeper investigation, it became apparent that sometimes agency and very often resilience, as intellectualized by researchers, seem to require more than I was prepared to explore. While I felt it appropriate to retain the term agency and offer a clarifying core definition, it seemed more responsible to utilize “persistent” as a descriptor in place of “resilient.”

Teacher agency. There is undeniable diversity to be found in the various definitions advanced by individual researchers for teacher agency, but the bulk of these definitions are at least directly related to, if not firmly rooted in, Bandura’s work. It is largely for this reason that I adopted a social cognitive theory analytical framework for this project. I emphatically acknowledge that much of the recent agency literature contains no explicit mention of Bandura or social cognitive theory (e.g., Batra, 2005; Biesta & Tedder, 2006; Campbell, 2012; Long & Lampen, 2014, 2015; Malmberg & Hagger, 2009; Priestley, Biesta, & Robinson, 2013, 2015). But all of the teacher agency research I have read is based on some conception of agency that requires purposeful actions or patterns of action that are much like those described by Bandura.

These purposeful or agentic actions are consistently described in the literature as

comprising at least one of the core characteristics advanced by Bandura (intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness, self-reflectiveness). Admittedly, many researchers use different terms to describe these core characteristics, but their descriptions are largely consistent if not entirely synonymous with Bandura's. For example, Long and Lampen (2014, 2015) and Higgins (2011) consistently use the term *purposiveness* in a manner consistent with Bandura's *intentionality*. The same researchers describe purposeful actions as those that involve "selective" and "strategic" decisions that require advanced thought about potential consequences and reflection on previous actions and the outcomes of those actions. This is largely consistent with Bandura's conceptions of the *forethought* and *self-reflectiveness* characteristics. Other researchers, particularly those who adopt an ecological framework, for example, (Biesta & Tedder, 2006; Priestley et al., 2013, 2015; Sayed et al., 2015) maintain a similar focus on the individual teacher's critical and meaningful responsiveness to problematic situations that is largely consistent with these same core characteristics. These are just a few of many examples.

While researchers using a variety of teacher agency frameworks have consistently focused on intentional action that is at least similar in nature to that described by social cognitive theorists, however, there are at least two significant categories of deviation from Bandura's work prevalent in the teacher agency research that are important to mention and incongruous to this project. Firstly, there is inconsistency in the literature in relation to the modes of action of teacher agency. Secondly, several researchers make specific demands in relation to the context, focus, or goal of agentive action that neither Bandura nor I make. Such deviations are noteworthy because they are unnecessarily restrictive.

In terms of modes of agency, as aforementioned, Bandura and other social cognitive theorists contend that an individual's agentic action may be the result of any combination of three modes of effort: personal, proxy, or collective. They similarly maintain that while it is important to acknowledge the existence of these modes and their interconnectedness, it is difficult and largely unnecessary to regularly distinguish between them in an investigation of agency or agentic action (Bandura, 2001). That is the stance I took in this project, but it is distinct from much of the agency literature. For example, even while acknowledging social influence and structures, some researchers have focused entirely on individual agentic effort and capacity (Fullan, 1993b; Wyatt, 2016). Others have considered personal and collective agency as two entirely distinct constructs, the latter of which may be more significant, and ignored the proxy mode altogether (Long, Graven, Sayed, & Lampen, 2017; Priestley et al., 2015; Tschannen-Moran & Barr, 2004; Tschannen-Moran, Salloum, & Goddard, 2015; Tschannen-Moran, & Hoy, 2001; Tschannen-Moran, Hoy, & Hoy, 1998; Wheatley, K. F., 2005). To impose the condition that teachers be able to perform intentional acts without the assistance, support, or approval of others, or entirely independently (autonomy) was simply not an aim of this inquiry, however. Similarly, I had no intention of carefully distinguishing between individual and collective efforts or capacities unless teachers' narratives specifically directed me to do so. I was interested in any and all intentional teacher actions focused on the support of students, regardless of the number of individuals influencing, involved in, or directing those actions. I wanted to know more about these efforts, of course, but I made no qualifications and imposed no restrictions.

More important than the distinction of modes of effort, however, is the fact that

many scholars advance a more sophisticated and demanding definition of agency than Bandura that takes on additional distinct characteristics that were beyond the scope of this project. In other words, the second noteworthy distinction from Bandura's work in the teacher agency literature is the fact that several researchers have consistently made specific demands as to the context, focus or goal, and/or actual outcomes of agentic action. I made no such demands; I considered them unnecessarily restrictive as well.

In terms of context, for instance, the ecological view is that agency is by definition a critical response to trouble or problematic situations (Biesta & Tedder, 2006; Priestley et al., 2013, 2015) that arise in any number of diverse contexts (Sayed et al., 2016). In other words, scholars adopting an ecological view of teacher agency impose the condition that meaningful and intentional teacher action be situated within problematic or undesirable educational and social milieu (Biesta & Tedder, 2006; Priestley et al., 2013, 2015). While I focused in this project on crushing contexts that may indeed be described as problematic, I did so in an attempt to uncover new phenomenological understandings of teacher persistent agency, not because I wanted to advance the argument that a crushing context was a prerequisite of agentic action.

A very similar restriction to the context restriction imposed by many teacher agency researchers is the requirement that teacher agentic action advance a specific goal or focus. There are countless examples of this type of restriction in the literature. By far, the most common example has to do with teacher agency that is focused on creating significant social change, often in a political sense. Many researchers interested in this type of agency cite as their foundation Fullan's (1993a, 1993b, 2011) conception of agency that requires moral purpose and deviant acts that seek to cause not only situational

but also systemic change, so as not to reinforce the status quo. In other words, such researchers describe teacher agency as intentional action to generate politically or societally motivated change. For example, Batra (2015) specifically describes agency as overtly political and requiring a greater vision. Similarly, Long et al. (2017) define teacher agency as intentional action to bring about “meaningful and sustained social transformation” (p. 12).

Within this larger body of teacher agency scholarship focused on general political and social change, there are numerous unique pursuits that are even more narrowly focused. Many of these endeavors focus on one or more specific curricular and educational reforms. For example, Nguyen and Bui (2016), citing Fullan's (1993a) theory on change agency, examined how a group of English teachers in a remote mountainous area in Vietnam were able to intentionally interpret, interrogate, and appropriate the English language reform politics thrust on them in more favorable ways to the benefit of students. Similarly, Newcomer and Collier (2015) reported on a group of teachers finding ways to meaningfully resist an undesirable four-hour block of structured English immersion for language learners. Within a qualitative study of nine primary school teachers in California, Buchanan (2015) advocated a similar form of teacher professional agency, agency that leads to intentional resistance and negotiation in educational reform contexts when creative teacher action is seen to be more beneficial to students than strict compliance. Each of these distinct political agency studies alongside many others advocate in their own ways agentive teacher reactions to imposed reform and curriculum that are more effective than mere compliance (Priestley, Edwards, Priestley, & Miller, 2012). In other words, they are focused on those action and reaction patterns that Long et

al. (2017) describe as those that “only take on board that which enriches and inspires” students (p. 12).

Much like the literature on agency that requires resistance to educational reform is the growing body of research related to intentional teacher actions aimed at changing the status quo for specific bodies of students, or bringing about specific desirable outcomes for students. Often such scholarship is focused on groups of students who have been traditionally underserved or labeled as underachieving or specific desirable outcomes for students that are considered atypical. For instance, Pantic (2015) reported on the agency of 12 educational experts in Scotland who were committed to political action promoting inclusion and improved outcomes for all students in contexts of cultural and social diversity. Similarly, Tan (2016) addressed students in China’s “non-elite” schools and the impact of teacher agentive acts on disturbing the pattern of underachievement in those schools. Schweisfurth (2006) reported on a group of teachers in Canada that had taken it upon themselves to intentionally and regularly include themes of global citizenry in their teaching as a way of addressing the social and political injustices in Canada that they believed required attention. There are several examples of this type of teacher agency, agency that goes beyond a capacity to resist (Sloan, 2006) to a practice of regular intentional action to create specific positive change for specific bodies of students, often requiring political involvement and action (Cofield, 2013). There are even scholars who take the position that true teacher agency must simultaneously inspire greater student agency, enabling more independent and autonomous student thinkers (Biesta, 2009; Katz & Shaha, 2015).

It is not the case that the agency at the heart of this investigation excluded any of

these or similar examples of teacher agency detailed in the literature. It is simply the case that it did not *require* any of the restrictions they entail. I was not interested in separating a teacher's actions or patterns of actions from the social or environmental contexts or influences around and within which they were performed. I also did not focus on a specific desired outcome or the success of the intentional act or actions performed with that outcome in mind. In fact, the only restriction I was willing to impose on Bandura's conception of general human agency as intentional action was that which has already been addressed within my definition of the construct at the heart of this inquiry, that which is represented by the descriptor of "teacher". In other words, I was quite simply interested in any and all intentional teacher actions or patterns of action that were taken with students in mind, or that were relative to students. The actual outcomes of these actions and whether they could be described as successful or political in nature were largely irrelevant; what mattered was that the teacher agency was motivated by a desire to support students. Many of the aforementioned studies have at their core this same general focus.

Teacher resilience. Just as several distinct definitions of teacher agency have surfaced in recent years, so there is no single definition of resilience that is consistently utilized in all related scholarship efforts and pursuits. Nonetheless, at its core and across most of the studies I have read, resilience has to do with teacher persistence over time and especially in challenging circumstances (Gibbs & Miller, 2014). Thus, as a construct it is intimately related to this project. It is important to note, however, that just as many of the definitions of teacher agency defended by scholars are slightly more demanding than the central construct of this inquiry required, even a cursory exploration of the resilience

literature reveals at least a few distinct but related definitions of resilience that require more than just persistent effort over time to commit intentional acts and make intentional decisions even in adverse circumstances where certain things are outside of one's control (Bowles & Arnup, 2016; Day & Gu, 2007, 2010; Howard & Johnson, 2004; Mansfield et al., 2016).

Gu and Day (2007) describe resilient teachers as committed, engaged, and motivated teachers who, regardless of career stage, continue to develop professionally and “maximize” their capacity to provide “high quality” teaching. While I was undoubtedly interested in the teacher who continues to make intentional decisions focused on supporting students with the goal of continuing to develop professionally and maximizing their capacity to provide high quality teaching to those students, I did not engage in discussions of evaluating or quantifying teacher effectiveness so as to pronounce a teacher as resilient or not based on their professional growth or the quality of their teaching. In other words, teacher persistent agency requires the commitment, engagement, and motivation that Gu and Day (2007) describe, and it is reasonable to assume that these attributes lead to growth and development and the betterment of one's practice, but the persistent effort itself is entirely separate by my view from the outcome. That is to say, a teacher may display persistent or resilient effort without any evaluation of the consequences of that effort.

Gu and Day (2007) are not alone in conceptualizing resilience in this way, as requiring a successful outcome. Several other scholars advance the same argument. For instance, Masten, Best, and Garmezy (1990) define resilience as “the process of, capacity for, or outcome of successful adaptation despite challenging or threatening

circumstances” (p. 425). Similarly, Mansfield and others (2016) conceptualize resilience as simultaneously a *capacity*, a *process*, and an *outcome*. More specifically, these scholars contend that teacher resilience involves the *capacity* of a teacher to harness any personal and contextual resources necessary to navigate successfully through challenges, the *process* by which a teacher acts or strategizes over time in line with their character and within specific contexts, and the *outcome* of a teacher who can be described as experiencing significant levels of growth, commitment, enthusiasm, satisfaction, and well-being that come from possessing and acting on this resilience consistently. There are even scholars who utilize the term to select specific desired outcomes. Patterson, Collins, and Abbott (2004), for instance, define resilience as “using energy productively to achieve school goals in the face of adverse conditions” (p. 3). In other words, in addition to focusing on the outcome, they focus on persistent effort that is directed toward achieving a set of community-motivated and community-determined educational goals.

I disagree with those who contend that resilience requires a specific or “successful” outcome, however that is defined. I am not alone in this view. I stand instead with scholars like Grotberg (1997) and Bernard and Pires (2006) who conceptualize resilience to be an attribute that is entirely independent of outcomes. Just as these scholars, I contend that resilience is a quality to be displayed in the moment, in reaction to stressful situations (Bernard & Pires, 2006; Grotberg, 1997). Grotberg (1997) advances a definition of resilience as the “human capacity to face, overcome, and even be strengthened by experiences of diversity” (p. 13). In other words, he, alongside Bernard and Pires (2006), contends that resilience is reacting in productive ways to psychological distress. As a result, these scholars have spent ample time investigating various risk

factors that contribute to such distress and protective factors that moderate the potential and common negative effects of that distress. This conceptualization of resilience is more compatible with the “persistent” descriptor of teacher persistent agency that was at the heart of this work.

There are other scholars, however, particularly those interested in teacher resilience as it relates to teacher retention, who have consistently labeled and measured teachers’ resilience simply in terms of the number of years they have remained in the profession (Castro et al., 2010; Patterson et al., 2004). They reason that teachers who keep teaching in spite of the common difficulties of the profession must be able to respond productively to the stressors that drive so many from the profession. This definition is insufficient, if not slightly irresponsible, by my view. From the start, I have been interested not in teachers who have simply remained in the profession. I have been interested in learning from teachers who have remained in the profession but also who continue to focus on supporting students and have a practice of persistent effort and agentive action to that end. It was veteran teachers that also displayed these latter characteristics that I sought out for involvement in this study.

The teacher resilience embodied in this inquiry, then, can be summarized as the ability to react and respond in productive ways and remain focused on students even in stressful situations or circumstances. Initially, I considered framing this investigation as an investigation of the impact of teachers’ storied experiences on their resilient agency and providing this summarized definition. Nonetheless, for the sake of clarity in light of the fact that numerous scholars either associate the achievement of a desired outcome with teacher resilience or consider remaining in the profession sufficient evidence of

teacher resilience, I settled on the “persistent” descriptor in identifying the construct at the center of this study.

Current Understandings

While there is some discrepancy in the research as to what constitutes *teacher agency* and *teacher resilience*, the constructs are intimately related. In addition, though some researchers have attached descriptors or qualifiers to each of these constructs involving specific goals or outcomes that I do not attach to the term *teacher persistent agency*, the fact that this study does not preclude these outcomes or qualifiers means that the agency and resilience literature is nonetheless relevant. I therefore contend that what is known about the worth and nature of teacher agency and teacher resilience can be attributed to the intimately related construct at the center of this study. In this section of this chapter, I address what the research has demonstrated to date related to the worth and nature of teacher agency *and* teacher resilience, as well as what remains to be demonstrated. In other words, I present the following findings from studies of teacher agency and teacher resilience as findings that summarize what is already known and what remains to be discovered about teacher persistent agency.

In the literature, teacher agency and teacher resilience are so often discussed together that they are difficult to conceptualize apart. Some scholars have even presented the terms as essentially synonymous (Castro, Kelly, & Shih, 2010; Patterson et al., 2004), though I do not find that assertion particularly helpful. Not surprisingly, then, across the literature, there are similar findings related to both constructs. For example, it is generally understood by quantitative researchers that the most significant personal resources predicting, enhancing, or sustaining teacher resilience are those same factors that are

associated with predicting, enhancing, or sustaining agency (Day, 2014; Gu & Day, 2007; Sumsion, 2004; Tait, 2008). In summarizing the contributions of the current literature to an understanding of teacher persistent agency, then, I have intentionally chosen to present discussion of similar scholarship and findings from the teacher agency and teacher resilience literature side by side.

A desirable trait or practice. For a variety of reasons, many of which have already been discussed in this chapter in an attempt to clarify definitions, the psychology literature and nearly all of the qualitative and quantitative inquiries related to agency and resilience present the constructs as generally desirable traits or practices. For example, several studies have specifically associated both teacher resilience and teacher agency with teacher retention (Castro et al., 2010; Patterson et al., 2004). Research projects focusing specifically on teacher resilience have been conducted in Australia (Mansfield, Beltman, Price, & McConney, 2012; Johnson et al., 2014), Europe (Wosnitza et al., 2013), Ireland (Morgan, 2011), South Africa (Ebersöhn, 2014; Long et al., 2017), and the United Kingdom (Sammons, Day, Kington, Gu, Stobart, & Smees, 2007). Across these studies, the international consensus is that the particular personal resources (e.g., motivation, social and emotional competence) and use of coping strategies (e.g., problem solving, goal setting, maintaining work-life balance) associated with resilience are significantly correlated with the length of time teachers remain in positions and in the profession, even amidst reported conflict or struggle. In other words, teachers who were identified through a variety of surveys and interviews as resilient also stayed longer in positions and in the profession. It is so generally agreed that resilience enhances retention that some scholars, in investigations of novice teachers, even described teachers

remaining in the profession or in their initial positions as possessing a “resilience factor” (Ewing & Manuel, 2005; Le Cornu, 2009) that arguably enabled them to keep teaching even when times were tough. Similar scholarship related to the association of agency and resilience with teacher retention is abundant (Beltman, Mansfield, & Price, 2011; Clark, 2011; McCormack, Gore, & Thomas, 2006).

In an age of teacher shortages along with the highly-publicized exodus of teachers within their first few years of teaching (Ingersoll, 2005), this finding alone would be sufficient to label the constructs as desirable. But other scholars have made more far-reaching claims as to their worth. For instance, Beltman, Mansfield, and Price (2011) argue in a review of research on teacher resilience that veteran teachers with resilience become more effective teachers over time, have heightened career satisfaction, and are better prepared to adjust to education’s ever-changing conditions. They further hold that resilient teachers demonstrate a variety of useful practices on a consistent basis that lead to these positive outcomes in the classroom. Other scholars have presented similar findings. In terms of useful strategies demonstrated by resilient teachers regularly, problem solving (individual and collaborative) was cited most frequently as a trait of resilient teachers (Castro et al., 2010; Dolati, Emamipour, & Kushki, 2014; Johnson et al., 2014). Professional learning and reflection were others (Leroux & Théorêt, 2014; Nieto, 2003; O’Sullivan, 2006; Patterson et al., 2004).

Similar arguments are made within the agency literature. Keogh, Garvis, Pendergast and Diamond (2012) contend that agency, efficacy, and resilience work together in positive ways because resilience assists teachers in responding in productive ways to the stressors that accompany challenges such that they are more likely to manage

challenges, which in turn enhances their self-efficacy and then consolidates their ability to continue to make intentional decisions (agency). Bowles and Arnup (2016) describe resilient teachers as those who “are resourceful, demonstrate agency, and develop positive management strategies” and “overcome adversity” (p. 147). Across the literature, teachers identified as agentic or resilient tend to possess or report accompanying or correlated factors (as determined by a variety of quantitative analysis of surveys) such as passion, enthusiasm, and enjoyment that reflect positive emotional states which are also reported as critical not just to teacher retention but teacher effectiveness as well (Bowles & Arnup, 2016; Le Cornu, 2013; Tait, 2008). These arguments are so consistently made that some scholars have described resilience as a prerequisite to effectiveness (Gu & Day, 2007; Jephcote, 2009).

A multifaceted construct. While the general consensus is that *agency* and *resilience* and by extension *teacher persistent agency* are desirable traits or constructs, the descriptions of their worth reveal perhaps the most troublesome aspect of their nature: they are multifaceted constructs that are difficult, if not impossible, to quantify. This has been fairly well defended in both the theoretical and measurable literature. Even the core definition I advance as part of this study, focused simply on purposeful action related to teaching, necessarily involves a complex process of planning, predicting, believing, and ultimately moving or deciding to act that must be navigated and mitigated in relation to the environment and contextual realities within which that process occurs (Bandura, 2001, 2006, 2012). Several studies have reported on teachers who are agentic and more resilient in some contexts and environments than others (Arnott, 2011; Bieler, Holmes, & Wolfe, 2017; Clark, 2015; Kitade, 2015; Sawchuk, 2015; Ticknor, 2015). In terms of

contextual resources, the most dominant theme in the literature is the importance of various relationships and social networks both within and outside the working context that favorably impact teacher work and by extension agency and resilience (Bobek, 2002; Brunetti, 2006; Cameron & Lovett, 2014; Day, 2014; Ebersöhn, 2014; Hong, 2012; Howard & Johnson, 2004; Mansfield et al., 2016; O'Sullivan, 2006; Sharplin et al., 2011; Steward, 2014; Sullivan & Johnson, 2012; Nieto, 2003). In other words, these capacities are not fixed and they may actually be quite variable; it is at least possible that the same teachers may act regularly with agency in one environment and very little in another.

Complex constructs like these are understandably difficult to quantify.

Nonetheless, researchers have attempted to do so for years. The bulk of the studies described above as evidence that teacher persistent agency is a desirable trait, for instance, have relied upon some attempt to quantify or label a teacher as agentive or resilient based on their responses to surveys about related factors. Nearly all of these surveys can be traced back to the work of general psychologists as well as social cognitive theorists. Both the field of psychology in general and social cognitive theory in particular hold that people's beliefs directly influence the courses of action they pursue. People's beliefs influence the amount of effort they put into any given endeavor as well as how long they will persevere in the face of obstacles and failures (Bandura, 2006, 2012). These beliefs impact people's resilience to adversity as well as whether their thought patterns are self-hindering or self-aiding. Finally, their beliefs are directly related to how much stress and depression they experience in coping with taxing environmental demands and the level of accomplishments they realize in their work (Bandura, 2001). In other words, social cognitive theory and psychological tradition contend that people's

beliefs are directly related to their capacity to act with agency and resilience. It is no surprise, then, that researchers have consistently taken to quantifying certain productive and predictive teacher's beliefs as a means of quantifying their agency and particularly their resilience. There are, of course, those qualitative studies already described that address and investigate more specific agentic action. But by and large the studies that target general teacher agency and resilience in varied attempts to demonstrate their worth have relied upon the predictive nature of a variety of factors found to be associated with teacher agency and resilience, the most significant of which is *self-efficacy* beliefs (Biesta et al., 2015; Day, 2014; Gu & Day, 2007; MacKenzie, 2012; Meister & Ahrens, 2011; Sumsion, 2004; Tschannen-Moran & Barr, 2004; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001; Tschannen-Moran, Hoy, & Hoy, 1998; Tschannen-Moran, Salloum, & Goddard, 2015).

While these self-efficacy studies are well vetted in the literature, however, predictive surveys are insufficient to encapsulate multifaceted and ever-changing constructs. Bandura (2012) himself has lamented the fact that predictive survey studies have dominated agentic inquiry for this reason. More specifically, he cautions that self-efficacy beliefs may diverge from actual realized action (agency) for a variety of reasons, including genuine faulty self-appraisal. It is not until extraneous factors reveal the distortion between self-belief of capability and actual action that one can appreciate the significance of this caution. In other words, self-efficacy is only one predictive factor that must operate in concert with many others within the agentic framework of social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1977, 1986, 2006) for agency to actually be demonstrated. If a comprehensive understanding of the construct of agency is to be realized, those other factors, such as goal systems, perceived environmental facilitators and enablers, and

environmental impediments, should also be considered by researchers, not just the truncated self-efficacy factor. In the words of Bandura himself (2012),

It remains for future research to determine how inclusion of omitted socio-cognitive factors alter the size of the direct effects of other variables in a causal structure. Full evaluation of the social utility of psychological theories should also extend beyond comparative predictiveness to the principle they provide for developing human capabilities for effecting individual and social change. This is the weak part in our scientific enterprise (p. 40).

In other words, because other socio-cognitive factors have been largely ignored by researchers in studies of agency, Bandura cautions that both our understanding of and our capacity to adequately promote and develop the construct is incomplete. Researchers need to utilize more sophisticated methods than predictive surveys if they are to truly understand the nature of agentic action. They need to explore those socio-cognitive factors that are not reflected in responses to surveys. They need to explore agentic action in social contexts. This study was an attempt to do just that.

Bandura is not the only researcher to worry about the validity of the traditionally quantitative methods that have been employed to study agency. Several scholars have begun to pair the quantitative information available to more qualitative investigations. What some have found is what scholars like Bandura warned they might find. Some case studies that have emerged have demonstrated inconsistency between teachers' self-reported beliefs and their actual patterns of action and reaction (Vaughn, 2013; Verberg, Tigelaar, van Veen, & Verloop, 2016). In other words, just because a teacher answers a general question about their resilience or agency or related beliefs does not mean they

will act in accordance with that response in any or all circumstances.

In terms of this study, then, while the quantitative findings detailed above are relevant and significant in that they are generally convincing that agency and resilience (and by extension teacher persistent agency) are worthwhile constructs, they are insufficient if the goal is an authentic phenomenological understanding of these constructs and how they actually operate in practice. Despite researchers' best attempts to validate measures of teacher agency and resilience through a variety of statistically-evaluated predictive surveys, only qualitative methods can reveal how teachers think about and utilize strategies of resilience and personal agency in actual contexts and circumstances. Similarly, only more detailed investigations can reveal whether teachers actually consistently act on their beliefs as reported in surveys over time and in practice (Clark, 2011). Only more detailed investigations can reveal whether such teachers are able to act on their reported beliefs in all settings, or whether perhaps it is more difficult to do so under circumstances that can be described as crushing. Only more detailed investigations can reveal whether there are other beliefs, apart from self-efficacy beliefs, that consistently impact teachers' resilience or agency in meaningful ways.

In summary, the first major gap in the literature in terms of revealing a more complete understanding of teacher persistent agency is the gap that exists because researchers have focused more heavily on the predictive power of self-efficacy beliefs to measure a teacher's agency, and especially their resilience, than on investigation and observation of agentive and resilient acts and practices. Questionnaires that rely on participant self-measurement may or may not accurately reflect what actually happens in difficult circumstances, however. Indeed, there are extant perplexing findings in related

qualitative literature to suggest the opposite, such as the fact that teachers leaving the profession as a result of adversity cite some of the same motivations and report some of the same or even higher rated self-efficacy beliefs as those who are staying (Gu & Day, 2007; Nieto, 2014).

This study was designed on the premise that there may be something unique or significant to be discovered about teacher agency and resilience that can only be revealed in authentic storied contexts. Bandura (2001) argued that given the same environmental conditions, people who have the ability to exercise many options and are adept at regulating their own motivation and behavior will have greater freedom to make things happen than will those who have limited means of personal agency. But those sorts of options and conditions are difficult to measure in the confines of traditional quantitative science. If agent causation involves the ability to behave differently from what environmental forces dictate rather than inevitably yield to them, the only way to understand and investigate the personal agency that is expressed in enticing, difficult, or coercive situations would be to explore the nature of the actions performed in those contexts. In other words, this study was conducted on the premise that there may be new understandings to be found in deep investigations into the actual experiences and stories of staying and persisting teachers that simply cannot be found in surveys.

It is not the case, of course, that no qualitative work had been done prior to this project to contribute to a general understanding of teacher persistent agency. It was my contention instead that there was more to be discovered. In the early part of this chapter, for example, the bulk of the scholarship cited to define teacher agency were comprised of qualitative investigations. Most of those investigations, however, focused on agentic

action that was directed toward a particular outcome, such as political or social change. As a result, the qualitative analysis was intended to uncover the general strategies and supports utilized to enable teachers to accomplish those specific outcomes, even amidst counter pressures. Some of those same strategies and supports manifested themselves in the stories of the teachers involved in this study. But from the start, my work was both more general and more specific. It was more general in that I did not specify an intended outcome of persistent agency. I was interested in the macro-contextual counter pressures (which I call crushing circumstances), but I was also interested in whatever teachers believed were important pursuits relative to their students and whether there were any patterns or generalities in those agentic pursuits. Finally, it was more specific in that I added an explicit focus on the event-based crushing contexts of teachers, and I used well-established narrative methods to look more deeply at those individual crushing events or moments and teachers' storied experiences within them.

My focus on storied experiences is well founded in the literature. There is significant literature available documenting the importance of personal histories to understanding professional identities and agentic action (Coldron & Smith, 1999; Connelly & Clandinin, 1999; Cooper & Olson, 1996; Goodson, 1994). There is also significant scholarship focused on individual stories within those larger histories. Nieto's (2009, 2014, 2015) qualitative work related to teacher agency and resilience, for example, is full of stories.

Nieto focuses on presenting the voices and lived experiences of teachers persisting in the profession. Contained within the stories she has collected over the years from persistent teachers are insights into the role critical incidents have had in shaping

their identity, persistence, and agency. In other words, when she has simply asked teachers why they continue to teach in a profession wrought with adversity, they have consistently responded by telling her stories of their experiences. Many of these stories have been stories of the joy of working with students (Nieto, 2012, 2014). Others have been stories of difficult moments that turned out positive in the end or at the very least reminded teachers that they were needed and making a difference in the lives of children. Some of these stories boast the same sorts of themes as my starfish story (Nieto, 2009, 2014, 2015). What is most significant about Nieto's work is that these stories she tells are not her stories, but teachers' stories, as only they can tell them, and they are tied to actual lived experience, not just questionnaires. In addition, counter to the dominant failing narrative of education, the bulk of the stories Nieto has shared on behalf of teachers have been stories of hope and possibility, not just in spite of that dominant failing narrative, but even because of it. For example, one teacher chose to tell a story of agency as evidenced by his own willingness to resist unfavorable policy and curriculum changes and teach in a way he believed was best for his students, even if it meant lower test scores on narrow measures of student achievement that could affect his teacher evaluations (Nieto, 2015).

This study built on the work that Nieto had already done. The distinction was that I asked teachers to focus exclusively on *difficult* stories (crushing context stories), stories they would perhaps not choose to tell of their own accord, and that I was utilizing different qualitative methods to look more closely at those stories than Nieto had at the stories she had collected. In that way, in addition to being an extension of Nieto's work, my study was also an extension of work similar to that of scholars like Sisson (2016),

though my methods were very different.

Following a larger narrative inquiry focused on investigating the professional identities and agency of five public preschool teachers in a major metropolitan school district in the United States, Sisson (2016) was inspired to look more critically at the stories of identity and agency told by one of her participants, Cece. In this study, Sisson drew upon cultural models theory to return to Cece's narrative in the hopes of uncovering a deeper understanding of the complexities of her identity and agency. Sisson's conclusion was that certain lived experiences could be described as "critical incidents" and teachers would only be able to act with agency within those incidents if they could find ways to insert their voice into them. In other words, Sisson (2016) argued, critical incidents tend to challenge identity and agency. In addition, how teachers respond has the potential to further shape their identities and agency in powerful ways. In terms of Cece, for instance, her most agentic participant, Sisson contended that it was because Cece found ways to insert her voice in critical times that she was able to enhance her agency and find ways to do what she believed was best in terms of adding and supplementing her curriculum in spite of mandated changes and materials she did not completely agree with.

In other words, Sisson (2016) argued that critical incidences and experiences can serve as catalysts that also shape how teachers navigate the difficult circumstances of their profession that conflict with their strongest beliefs. Sisson (2016) called for further narrative research into how teachers respond to such critical incidences and what policies and practices serve to support their voice in those incidences. Because I focused on crushing experiences and teachers' thoughts and actions within them related to their agency specifically, my work, while extremely modest in scope, was in some ways an

answer to Sisson's call.

Untold or Largely Unexamined Stories

If persistent agency is indeed best understood in stories, the final question becomes which stories would be most important to consider. This leads me to the second gap in the current literature, the gap that exists because certain stories have been largely untold. As has already been articulated, one thing that is lacking from the dominant literature is an intentional focus on the event-based crushing micro-contexts of the teaching profession and the teachers who persist with agency within them. In preparation for this study, I could find no scholarship that examined the nature of teachers' thoughts, actions and reactions, and the storied nature of their experiences trying to make intentional decisions in the most crushing teaching events or moments of their general work. In other words, while scholars have asked teachers the general question of how they deal with conflict and difficult contexts and circumstances and they have responded either with their beliefs about their capacities to do so on surveys or by telling stories in interviews, they have not specifically asked teachers to narrate the hardest moments of their teaching, narratives that may not have happy or inspiring endings. If they have not asked for these narratives, then, it was at least fathomable that there may be something more to be discovered about teachers' ability to persist with agency in those untold moments. If the goal is a more complete phenomenological understanding of how teachers act in agentic ways or demonstrate persistent effort in difficult contexts, these event-based micro-contexts must also be investigated. For this reason, I opted to view the crushing context narratives as paramount within this study.

Toward More Sophisticated Understandings

Narrative Inquiry

In designing this study, I very intentionally adopted a narrative inquiry framework. Narrative inquiry has been an established tradition among educational researchers for more than two decades (see, for example Carter, 1993, 1994, 2003; Carter, Doyle, & Romano, 2007; Carter & Stoehr, 2012; Clandinin & Connelly, 1990; Connelly & Clandinin, 1988, 1990; Doyle & Carter, 2003; Drake, Spillane, & Hufferd-Ackles, 2001; Stoehr, 2014, 2017). It is particularly suited for studies like these, that require explanations that cannot be found in percentages or statistical comparisons (Carter, 1993, 1995; Clandinin & Connelly, 1990, 2000). It was the reflection of participants on the experiences and events within their storied lives and how they had shaped their identities as teachers that this study was designed to elicit (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Drake et al., 2001). It is these reflections that I believed would be the most informative to the field of education at large, and it is these reflections that could not be found, by my view, outside of story.

Significantly, for more than two decades, narrative researchers have utilized a variety of narrative tools in an attempt to collect the personal-experience narratives that better capture the sophisticated nature of a variety of multidimensional constructs and concepts (Carter, 1994, 2009; Carter & Stoehr, 2012; Carter, Stoehr, Carter, & Sugimoto, 2013a, 2013b; Stoehr, 2017). Carter (1994) in particular has focused on investigating the event-based knowledge that is tied up in teachers' experiences within those episodic events in classroom settings that they personally identify as especially salient and memorable. Across two decades, Carter has used a particularistic genre of classroom-based narratives, entitled "well-remembered events" (see for example, Carter, 1994,

2009). Carter maintains that these well-remembered events hold significant explanatory power relative to teachers' overall experiences and "action and reaction patterns" specifically within especially memorable events. In addition to these well-remembered event narratives, there are other narrative tools that have been well established in the literature that I utilized in this project in an attempt to uncover untold or largely unexamined stories that had the potential to reveal additional information about the nature of teacher persistent agency. In the next chapter, I describe in more detail the origins, nature, and potential of the specific narrative inquiry tools that I utilized in my pursuit of greater understanding of the most salient crushing moments and events described by my three participant educators. Ultimately, I hoped to examine their unique crushing teaching narratives to investigate the impact, if any, of their crushing experiences on their practice or agency.

Participant Selection and Hard to Staff Schools

I intentionally sought out participants for this study from within macro-contexts that substantial research had already shown to be potentially crushing. More specifically, I made the intentional decision to focus on secondary mathematics teachers working in hard to staff districts. Each of these two characteristics of the macro-context is especially noteworthy: both the fact that the teachers were working in hard to staff districts, and the fact that they were teaching secondary mathematics. The former descriptor is quite obviously at least potentially crushing; if it were not, the districts would not be hard to staff. But the latter is also quite arguably crushing, for at least three reasons. First, there is an undeniable dominant failing narrative associated with the teaching of secondary mathematics (Lee, 2010). Second, there is ample existing scholarship about historical

detrimental mindsets and high anxiety connected to mathematics among the majority of teachers at a variety of levels of teaching and experience (Brady & Bowd, 2005; Hembree, 1990; McGlynn-Stewart, 2010; Sloan, 2010; Stoehr, 2014, 2017). Finally, this secondary mathematics context becomes perhaps more crushing when it is combined with a teaching of traditionally marginalized students, many of whom are typically educated in hard to staff (often understaffed) schools and districts (Darling-Hammond, 2013; Duncan-Andrade, 2011; García & Weiss, 2015; Sadker et al., 2009).

In the next chapter, I provide additional information about the selection of these secondary mathematics teacher participants. I also expand upon my central research question, presenting a list of more detailed questions that were the foundation of my work. Finally, I detail and defend each of the narrative methods I selected to seek answers to those questions.

Teacher Faith, A Construct Parallel to Religious Faith

I identified the following five key components of devout Christian faith: core beliefs and convictions, hope and trust that acting on those beliefs and convictions is ultimately good or beneficial, regular intentional (agentive) action in accordance with those beliefs and convictions, routines and practices that build and strengthen one's faith, and commitment to collaboration or congregation or consultation of some sort with others with like beliefs and convictions. In terms of my specific religious faith, each of these components is very inextricably tied to a divine being (a Trinity actually). But the components in and of themselves need not be religious in nature and they need not be tied to a divine being. In the remainder of this work, I contend that these components, encapsulated by the term *teacher faith* and applied specifically to the educator context,

can perhaps be useful in making sense of the multifaceted experiences of teachers in crushing contexts and of the key construct (teacher persistent agency) at the heart of this project. More specifically, I argue in later chapters that each of the three participant teachers in this study possesses a unique, non-religious teacher faith that is comprised of the five distinct components borrowed from my religious faith construct. I further contend that they repeatedly drew on their unique teacher faith in order to persist with agency through the crushing contexts they narrated as part of this study. In order to make this case, I return repeatedly to the construct of teacher faith as one comprised of the aforementioned five components.

While teacher faith is admittedly my own construction, it is one built upon a religious faith construct that is very well established in [Christian] literature. As a result, in the remainder of this chapter specifically dedicated to a presentation of existing scholarship relevant to this project, I turn now to an exposition of evidence of the aforementioned components of my faith framework in historical Christian literature. I include within this discussion connections to Scripture (Canonical Holy Bible) and also to some foundational Christian writings by two giants in the historical Christian faith literature, Saint Augustine of Hippo and Saint Thomas Aquinas. Then in Chapter 3, I describe in more detail the process of using and developing the non-religious teacher faith lens in analyzing the data collected in this study. I have already addressed the initial process of developing this lens (contemplating my faith and identifying the components), but I expand upon this explanation, specifically addressing how I came to apply the lens, and addressing its role (or lack thereof) in coding the data collected in this inquiry.

Components of [Christian] Religious Faith

While there are distinct branches of Christianity that differ in some of their beliefs and practices, in general, the theology of the Christian church holds that Jesus Christ, Son of God, was sent to Earth to provide a way of salvation for a people who had sinned and separated themselves from a perfect God who created the world and everything in it. In line with God's plan, Jesus suffered, died, was buried, descended into the grave, and rose from the dead to grant eternal life to those who would believe in Him and accept the forgiveness of their sins that His death paid for. The ministry, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus are collectively known as the "good news" of the Christian faith and are the focus of four of the books of the New Testament in the Holy Bible (the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John; "gospel" means "good news"). When Jesus ascended into heaven, He sent the Holy Spirit to Earth as a "helper" and a "comforter" for any people that believed in Him or would come to believe in Him. In other words, Christianity is a religion based on a divine Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Being an ancient faith, there are numerous Christian historians and theologians who have contributed to the vast (and still growing) body of literature detailing and defending its intricacies. Two of the many well-known and well-respected theologians that I have personally read rather extensively are Saint Augustine of Hippo and Saint Thomas Aquinas. Saint Augustine of Hippo lived hundreds of years ago. Even though he died in 430, however, his writings and sermons are still considered theologically relevant and spiritually insightful. Augustine had a dramatic conversion to Christianity at the age of 33 and eventually became a Bishop in the church. Before his death, he became a prolific Biblical scholar, writing hundreds of sermons and some of Christianity's most influential books.

Saint Thomas Aquinas lived much later than Augustine, though he too died hundreds of years ago (in 1274). Aquinas was a Catholic priest and a Doctor of the church. He was a great influencer of Western thought and modern philosophy. He embraced many of the ideas of Aristotle and is honored by the Catholic church as a saint. Aquinas's works are generally part of any core curriculum or program studied by those seeking any sort of Christian ordination or general history of the church.

In terms of the discussion at hand related to the literary foundations of faith, both Augustine and Aquinas have contributed a great deal. For example, in expounding upon the general nature of the Christian faith, Aquinas first and foremost repeatedly expresses the view that it is impossible to have faith without help from God and ultimately to convey that it is nonetheless possible to come to a mature faith if one continues to seek help from God because humans are unique beings who were created in God's image to be in relationship with Him. Within a collection of his most famous writings, the following statements are a good summation of the first part of this view:

No more then can the human intellect know truth unless it is illumined by the light of the invisible sun which is God [...] Moreover, acts are said to be in us if we have within us the sufficient principles for their exercise. But knowledge of the truth is not in us, since there are many who labour to know the truth yet are unable to do so. Therefore we do not have within us the principles sufficient for knowing the truth. In order to know it, then, we must be helped from without (pp. 110-111).

In other words, Aquinas constantly argues that humans are incapable of understanding truth without God but that with Him, they can come to a place of full faith where they are

able to become more like Him. He therefore encourages the pursuit of God and a mature faith. This pursuit is something that Aquinas also contends is natural and God-inspired. In his own words, “Every creature is so moved as to be made more and more like God insofar as it can be. That is why the human mind should always be seeking to know God more and more according to its manner” (Aquinas, 1998, p. 129).

Saint Augustine emphasized similar beliefs in Book XIX, *City of God* (Augustine, 1959). In his own words,

And we recognize in ourselves the image of God, that is, of the supreme Trinity, an image which, though it be not equal to God, or rather, though it be very far removed from Him- being neither co-eternal, nor, to say all in a word, consubstantial with Him- is yet nearer to Him in nature than any other of His works, and is destined to be yet restored, that it may bear a still closer resemblance. For we both are, and know that we are, and delight in our being, and our knowledge of it (Augustine, 1959, p. 370).

In other words, just as Aquinas argued that humans are incapable of understanding truth without God but that with Him they can come to a place of full faith where they are able to become more like Him, so Augustine (many years earlier) emphasized the same. He focused in particular on the unique place that humans have in creation, namely the fact that they are the single creation most like God who are positioned to become more like Him by pursuing Him (and by Him, he clearly references the triune God, or the Trinity).

Some of the ancient Christian writings can be rather complicated (in part because of the progression of our language and issues with translation) and dissecting them is certainly beyond the scope of the work at hand. That said, at least one more quote seems

particularly relevant to an introductory discussion of devout Christian faith. Hundreds of years ago in discussing our faith, Aquinas also wrote,

It should be said that the first, though not always the proximate, principle of any science is understanding: sometimes faith is the proximate principle of a science. This is clear in subalternated sciences whose conclusions proceed as from their *proximate* principle from the belief in what is presupposed from the higher science, but as from the understanding in the higher science, where certain knowledge of these believed things is had, as from their *first* principle. Similarly, the proximate principle of this science is faith, but its first principle is the divine understanding, in which we believe, but the end of faith is that we might come to understand what we believed, much as one knowing the inferior science might learn from the higher and then things he had hitherto only believed would become understood and known (Aquinas, 1998, p. 133).

Admittedly, there is a lot packed into that passage. In essence, Aquinas draws an analogy to science in defending the nature of the Christian faith. Many of his writings are apologetics writings. He makes the point that sometimes, in both science and religion, beliefs and by extension actions in response to those beliefs precede evidence or true understanding. He further contends that this is actually quite appropriate. These actions in the end lead to a mature faith (“the end of faith”) or a mature science where the individual who has been acting on beliefs in faith can come to truly understand the truth of what they believed in such a way as to truly know them. In other words, Aquinas contends that just as scientists initially accept certain things in faith and act on them and learn higher levels of science that confirm these things, so Christians do the same. In the

case of my faith, I can definitely attest to this process of first believing like a child in my God, without much evidence or experience or understanding. As I matured in and acted on my faith, however, my God has become more real to me, to the point that now I cannot even consider the possibility of His nonexistence. He is known to me just as scientists know certain things that were once unknown or inconceivable.

Appropriately, the first of the five components of my devout faith that I previously identified is a set of core beliefs. The second is the hope that acting on them is beneficial. The third is the actual commitment to act on them. In some ways, each of these components is evident in the afore-presented words of Aquinas and Augustine. Of course, far more explicit literary foundation for each of these five components will come directly from Holy Scripture in the pages that follow. Nonetheless, it is significant to mention that these components are also prevalent in the general writings of Christian theologians from hundreds of years ago.

Core beliefs and convictions. The first component of devout religious faith is core beliefs and convictions. In terms of my Christian faith, there are several core beliefs that are essentially prerequisites to faith, but the most significant are those that have already been presented, namely a belief in the triune God: God the Father, God the Son (Jesus Christ), and God the Holy Spirit, and a belief in God's general plan to offer salvation through His son, Jesus Christ. In other words, in order to be a person of Christian faith, there are certain core beliefs and convictions you must ascribe to, and these core beliefs are repeated throughout Scripture, often explicitly tied to faith. For example, in the book of Hebrews 11:6, the Word of God says, "And without *faith* it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him must *believe* that He exists

and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him” (Holy Bible, New International Version- *henceforth just NIV*, capitalization and italics mine). In this passage, “faith” is essentially described as believing key things, very specifically that God exists and that He rewards those who seek Him.

Similarly, in Acts 16:31b, the proclamation that comes as the Apostle Paul is preaching from a jail cell to the jailer who eventually comes to adopt the Christian faith for himself is similar: “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved- you and your household” (NIV). Here again, the message is that Christian salvation comes to those who *believe* that Jesus is Lord. In other words, that core belief is a first step in becoming a Christian or having faith. In Romans 10:9-10, the Apostle Paul describes this first step in slightly more detail when he says, “If you declare with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and *believe* in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you *believe* and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess and are saved” (NIV, capitalization and italics mine). The message of this passage is the same as the previous to the potential believer or faith adopter: If you believe this core truth that God allowed His son Jesus to die on the cross to pay for your mistakes and then raised Him from the dead, and you choose to accept the salvation that is therefore freely available to you, you are welcomed into the faith.

There are numerous places throughout the Old and New Testaments of the Holy Bible where a complex core belief in the one triune God and His plan of salvation is essentially identified as foundational to the faith but I will present only two more. In Ephesians 4:4-6, in a letter written to the church in Ephesus, the Apostle Paul reminds early Christians of this same foundational core belief. He writes, “There is one body and

one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one *faith*, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all” (NIV, italics mine). Here the same pronouncement of truth and the Trinity is again presented. Finally, and rather famously, after Jesus is crucified and raised from the dead to provide a way for people to come to believe and accept salvation in the first place, when He appears to his 11 disciples and instructs them to bring others into the faith, He says, “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (NIV, Matthew 28:19). In short, Christianity and the Christian faith are built upon a foundation of core beliefs and convictions that are explicitly identified and reiterated throughout Scripture, very notably the core beliefs in the Trinity (Father, Son, Holy Spirit) and the plan of salvation through Jesus’s death.

Hope and trust. Tied very closely to these core beliefs and convictions are the hope and trust required of the Christian who claims to have faith in a triune God and His plan of salvation. This second component of a devout faith is also well documented in historical Christian literature as well as the Bible itself. It is this component, in fact, that is described as enabling the devout Christian to persist through the hardship and struggle that is prevalent on Earth. St. Augustine writes extensively, for example, about a Christian hope that enables the Christian to be happy and to endure the hard times on Earth. In Book XIX of the *City of God*, for example, he writes,

As, therefore, we are saved, so we are made happy by *hope*. And as we do not as yet possess a present, but look for a future salvation, so it is with our happiness, and this “with patience;” for we are encompassed with evils, which we ought patiently to endure, until we come to the ineffable enjoyment of unmixed good;

for there shall be no longer anything to endure. Salvation, such as it shall be in the world to come, shall itself be our final happiness (Augustine, 1959, p. 680, italics mine).

In other words, according to St. Augustine, having a devout faith means clinging to the hope that even when circumstances are unfavorable, there is no cause to lose your joy or patience or ability to endure because the devout Christian clings to the hope of the promised future salvation that is perfect and full of joy rather than focusing on present trials. The Christian with a mature faith is able to continually trust in the triune God because the devout Christian believes (knows) that in the final and true end, all will be well and salvation will be complete.

This requirement to have hope and trust is presented as a component of the Christian faith very clearly throughout Scripture. For example, Hebrews 11:1 very literally states, “Now faith is the confidence in what we *hope* and *assurance* about what we do not see.” (NIV, italics mine). In other words, faith itself is essentially defined in Scripture as confidence in what we hope and trust, namely God and His many promises. It is this same component that is referenced throughout Scripture as enabling the Christian to persist through struggle and not to quit, regardless of circumstances or difficulties. Just as St. Augustine and many other foundational Christian scholars have preached for hundreds of years, hope and trust in God enable the devout Christian to persevere through anything they may experience on Earth. In Isaiah 40:31, the Word says, “But those who *hope* in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint” (NIV, italics mine). In other words, the promise to the Christian is that if they have hope

and trust God, they will be able to persevere even when others may (however understandably) grow tired and weary. This same promise is found repeatedly throughout Scripture. It is a promise that is meant to bring encouragement. Consider the following three examples:

Surely the righteous will never be shaken; they will be remembered forever. They will have no fear of bad news; their hearts are steadfast, *trusting* in the LORD (Psalm 112:6-7, NIV, italics mine).

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28, NIV, capitalization mine).

Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance (James 1:2-3, NIV).

The message is clear. Trust and endure. God will work everything for your good. Your faith will endure.

What is particularly significant to note is that this commitment to hope and trust is something that God freely gives to the believer who seeks it from Him. It is explicitly tied to their core beliefs. In other words, it is not something that a human being is expected to naturally possess or be able to simply conjure or work for without help. It is not a matter of just “sucking it up” or “trying harder” to trust. In a letter to the Romans explaining the Christian faith and the salvation available to all who believe, the Apostle Paul states, “May the God of *hope* fill you with all joy and peace as you *trust* in Him, that you may overflow with *hope* by the power of the Holy Spirit” (Romans 15:13, NIV,

capitalization and italics mine). In other words, the onus is not solely on the believer but also on a triune God to enable this hope and trust. According to this passage, if the believer comes to God believing and seeking and steps out in faith, God through the Holy Spirit supplies the believer with that hope and trust and also strengthens it. This concept is prevalent throughout Scripture. For example, in Ephesians 1:18-19, Paul writes,

I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you know the *hope* to which He has called you, the riches of His glorious inheritance in His holy people, and His incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength (NIV, italics and capitalization mine).

Again, the message is that the strength and power to have this hope and trust comes from above. There are many other examples in the Bible of this truth. Among other things, God in His Word makes it very clear that there is no condemnation in Christ. The believer is never expected to be perfect or to have “arrived” (let alone be able to arrive) at a mature faith without God’s help. In fact, this is explicitly stated. Consider, for example, Romans 8:1-4:

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so He condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit (NIV, capitalization mine).

In other words, the Christian need not feel pressure to be perfect or feel any guilt for not acting entirely in accordance with their core beliefs or the admonitions of the Bible. It is expected that they will never be perfect. That is why Jesus came to die in the first place, to pay that debt for them. Recall that both Augustine and Aquinas wrote of the notable difference between the believer and their much more perfect God. The Christian simply has the responsibility to step out and believe, attempt to act on those beliefs, and look to God for help and strength to continue to do so.

Jesus communicated this same message while on Earth interacting with people and teaching them about the Christian faith and the power that would be available to them because of His upcoming death and resurrection. While He was at times saddened by people's lack of faith, He was also encouraged when they sought God to mature in their faith and Himself offered help to those who struggled to believe. Take, for example, His interactions with the father who came to Him for help with his son who had experienced severe convulsions on account of being possessed by a wicked spirit from birth. The man came to Jesus and asked for help with his son "if Jesus was able" (Mark 9:22). Jesus's response in the gospel of Mark, Chapter 9, Verse 23 to the man's request and expressed doubt is clear: "If you can?" said Jesus. "Everything is possible for one who believes." What is particularly striking about this interaction is the man's honest response to Jesus's words that he need only believe. Verse 24 records this response: "Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, 'I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!'" In other words, the man admits to Jesus that he wants to believe but he is still struggling with doubt. He is struggling to believe, but he is partly there. Jesus does not send the man away or condemn him for this doubt. He also does not refuse to deliver his

son. Instead, in the presence of many witnesses, Jesus immediately casts the evil spirit out to deliver him.

Regular intentional (agentive) action. While Christians are not expected to be perfect or not have any doubts, it is still the case that believing in God or core convictions is insufficient for devout faith. Another core component is action. In other words, Christians need to act regularly in accordance with their core beliefs. In 1 Timothy 4:10, Paul writes (in a letter to Timothy), “That is why we *labor and strive*, because we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all people, and especially of those who believe” (1 Timothy 4:10, NIV, italics mine). Essentially, the Apostle Paul, in encouraging Timothy (a follower) and attempting to strengthen his faith, reminds him that Christians work, or put effort in, as a result of their core beliefs and the hope they have in Christ. The same message is communicated by another apostle in James 1:22: “Do not merely listen to the Word, and so deceive yourselves. *Do* what it says” (NIV, italics and capitalization mine). In other words, faith requires action. Later in this same book, the apostle continues this dialogue. In James 2:26-28, he writes,

But someone will say, ‘You have faith; I have deeds.’ Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds. You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that- and shudder. You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the alter? You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. And the Scripture was fulfilled that says, ‘Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,’ and he was

called God's friend. You see that a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone. In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction? As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead." (NIV)

In other words, acting on one's core beliefs is a component of the Christian faith. It goes alongside beliefs and hope. The components work together. Any careful reading of the Bible supports a complex construct of faith, containing this action component, the aforementioned components of core beliefs and hope and trust, as well as the two remaining components I address next.

Faith-strengthening routines and practices. In terms of the component of faith-strengthening routines and practices, in truth it is the case that there are several examples in the Bible of practices that strengthen one's faith that are recommended to the intentional believer. That said, there are two commands in particular that greatly dominate such passages, so I will comment on those, as they are indeed integral to a devout faith and sufficient to demonstrate the component. The first is a commitment to reading and studying the Bible. The second is a commitment to regular prayer and communion or conversation with the living God.

There are numerous explicit passages in Scripture containing the command to read the Bible in connection with our faith. For example, in Romans 10:17, the Apostle Paul writes, "Consequently, *faith* comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the *Word* about Christ." (NIV, capitalization and italics mine). In other words, if a Christian is to mature in their faith, they need to hear and read the words of

God; they need to study the Bible. This is not just a New Testament message. Even before Jesus came to Earth to live out God's plan, Joshua writes to the people of Israel who are learning to be in relationship with a perfect God: "Keep the Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful" (Joshua 1:8, NIV). In other words, from the beginning, the message from God is clear. The Bible has been given (in pieces eventually compiled together by historians and theologians) as a means of communicating who our triune God is; to have faith and be part of the faith is to commit to reading it.

Perhaps the most important message in connection with this command to read the Bible is the fact that the words contained therein are the words of God and they contain power to help the believer strengthen and live out their faith. Hebrews 4:12 says,

For the Word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart (NIV, capitalization mine).

In other words, reading the Bible is not like reading any other book. The Christian acknowledges that reading the Bible is reading the actual words of God and is therefore greatly beneficial to strengthening one's faith. Paul emphasizes this very truth when writing a second letter to Timothy. In 2 Timothy 3:16-17, he writes,

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work (NIV).

In other words, Paul advises, if you want to live out the faith, to truly be prepared to do so, you have to read the Bible. Throughout his life, Paul preached this message, emphasizing that reading and studying God's Word was a way of renewing and transforming your mind to become more like the mind of Christ. Consider, for example, Romans 12:2. In that passage, Paul writes to the Christian church,

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is- His good, pleasing and perfect will (NIV, capitalization mine).

In other words, the more you "renew your mind" by reading about God's mind and ways, the more prepared you will be to live a life of faith.

Alongside this clear command to read and study the Bible is a similar command to pray and talk to the living God on a regular basis. Unlike many other religions, Christianity is not about honoring or worshipping a dead god or idol. It is about coming into a relationship with a living triune God who is available for relationship. Such a relationship requires communication. After the crucifixion and resurrection, all Christians were granted direct access to God because Jesus paid the price of separation in His perfect sin offering (his death) for any who freely accept the forgiveness He offers. As a result, a key message of the New Testament in particular (recorded following Jesus's death) is to seek regular conversation with God.

In Luke 18:1, "Jesus told His disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up" (NIV, capitalization mine). In Romans 8:26, the Apostle Paul emphasizes that the Christian need not worry about praying in a perfect or specific

way. As is true of all things in the faith, the Christian is meant to step out in faith and expect help from a living God. He writes,

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us through wordless groans (NIV, capitalization mine).

As a result, the Christian is expected to come regularly before God with their requests and concerns and to fully expect that God is listening and will respond. That is prayer. Philippians 4:6 says, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God” (NIV). Colossians 4:2 says, “Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful” (NIV). 1 Thessalonians 5:17 says simply, “pray continually” (NIV). The general message is clear. A person of Christian faith is someone who prays, and who strives to do so more as a means of becoming more and more like Christ, and by extension strengthening their faith.

Commitment to collaboration or congregation or consultation. The final component I identified of a devout [Christian] faith is a commitment to collaboration or congregation or consultation of some sort with people of like faith and convictions. The Bible is very clear on this requirement and repeatedly also communicates the reason for it (the betterment of all). In 1 Timothy 4:13, for example, while encouraging a newly planted church through a letter to Timothy in his absence, the Apostle Paul writes,

Until I come, devote yourself to the *public* reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching. Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through prophecy when the *body of elders* laid their hands on you. Be diligent in these matters; give

yourself wholly to them, *so that everyone* may see your progress (NIV, italics mine).

In other words, Paul encourages early believers to come together regularly, to read God's Word, and to consult with the "elders", or more experienced believers who have progressed further in the faith. The goal of these meetings is so that "everyone" sees and makes progress.

This is the same message that appears again and again throughout Scripture. As is explained in Ephesians 4:11-13,

So Christ Himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip His people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the *faith* and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fulness of Christ (NIV, italics and capitalization mine).

In other words, Jesus literally prepares people to serve in the church so that all believers can mature and reach a unity of faith. To neglect to meet with these people, to neglect to congregate or consult with them, would be to ignore this. In Hebrews 10:24-25, essentially the same message is communicated:

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another- and all the more as you see the Day approaching (NIV).

In other words, all believers are commanded to come together and encourage one another in their faith, to focus on their like convictions and beliefs, and to motivate one another to act on them ("spur one another on toward love and good deeds"). Proverbs 27:17 phrases

this another way: “As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another” (NIV).

Always, the intention of the congregating is that people become stronger in their faith.

Not only is this a command found throughout the Bible, it is a description of what the early church did to grow in their faith. As Acts 2:42 records of the early Christian church, “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer” (NIV).

Finally, and just as significantly about this component as each of the others, it is important to mention that again the expectation is not that the believer is able to grow in this component or mature in their faith without divine help. Jesus’s promise is clear in Matthew 18:20: “For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them” (NIV). In other words, the Christian steps out in faith and obedience and a triune living God (Father, Son, Holy Spirit) acts and communes to help strengthen their faith and bring them into a closer relationship with Him. The fact that Christianity is not about an individual working hard to arrive on their own at a mature faith is perhaps never more clearly conveyed than in the Apostle Paul’s statement to the church at Philippi in Philippians 1:6 when he assures them of “being confident in this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus” (NIV, capitalization mine). Another key belief of the Christian faith is that one day Jesus will come back to Earth and we will get to live for eternity with God. The emphasis in this passage is first on the fact that God is the one who is responsible for helping us to believe in the first place. He started the good work in us. Similarly, it is God who will continue to help us grow and mature if we look to Him. Of course, it is slightly more complicated in that we have to actually surrender to Him, seek Him, and desire to change. But if we do,

it is not about trying harder or doing it on our own. An alive, triune God, is ever-present and available and working around the clock to help any who are willing come to know Him more. That is why there is no condemnation. It is not ours to do alone. That is why there is hope and trust. Where we are imperfect, God is perfect. Where we are incapable, God is fully capable. And one day, Jesus will come back and we will be reunited with Him to live without hardship. That is, essentially, the Christian faith.

Final Note on Sensitivity and Limitations

In the first chapter of this work, I openly acknowledged my potential biases as a middle-aged, White, Christian educator. Still, before proceeding to the next chapter, it would be negligent of me to fail to address the well-documented potential challenges and limitations that come specifically alongside being a White researcher, particularly a White researcher requesting sensitive information from teachers of diverse backgrounds (Helm, 1990; Sue, 1993; Chubbuck, 2004; Petersen, 2008). Integral to this study, I was asking educators to share the most intimate details of their unique storied experiences in the most difficult moments and circumstances of their profession. I understood that in so doing, I was asking them to trust me with those experiences. As much effort as I put into building a rapport and relationship with these educators, emphasizing the safe space they were in, and going to great lengths to preserve their voice in the process, it was still the case that I was asking these educators to be vulnerable in front of a middle-aged, White educator.

Countless researchers before me have more than adequately demonstrated the importance of understanding storied experiences, particularly on American soil, from the theoretical framework of critical race theory, or the critical examination of society and

culture in terms of the intersections of race, law, and power (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1999). While two of the participants in my study were actually White educators, one of them was not. I was well aware that it could at least be conceived that this one educator in particular may have been responding to my prompting from a place similar to the “pedagogy of fear” described by Brown (2011) in her examination of the ethical challenges of researchers of color when conducting research with White participants. Drawing from multiple literature on emotions, qualitative research, and race, Brown (2011) examined how a racialized field context framed her subsequent emotional responses as an African-American researcher conducting research with White teacher participants. She urged other researchers to be aware of the intersections of race and racial identity in cross-cultural qualitative research settings. While this study is indeed distinct in nature, boasting a White researcher, it is a qualitative study that involves cross-cultural exchanges over sensitive topics. As a result, I feel obligated to make note of this fact as an unavoidable potential limitation of the study.

While there is not much that can be done to entirely prevent the complexity of interracial actions, reactions, and biases in cross-cultural qualitative research, there is much literature to support certain proactive and beneficial measures that White researchers can take in attempts to guard against further inequity and bias. Perhaps the most significant of these is to first acquire a robust understanding of Whiteness and White privilege as constructs that continue to pervade our society (Chubbuck, 2004). Chubbuck contends alongside others that equity in any educational context requires the realization that there is and always has been such a thing as White privilege in America and that all American educators (and White educators in particular who make up the bulk

of the teaching force) need to unify in their efforts to both understand it and fight against it (Chubbuck, 2007). Helm (1990) makes a similar claim in emphasizing that “racial identity” is based on involvement in a collective group, whether that identity is perceived or not by the person associated with it. In other words, as Sue (1993) acknowledged, many Whites do not recognize that they have a racial identity and that can be detrimental, particularly for White researchers conducting cross-cultural research. But they have that identity by association. It is perceived by others whether they want to accept it or not.

In addition to educating oneself, Petersen (2008) addressed the importance of admitting as White researchers that we are not immune from inheriting racial and cultural biases and therefore taking as many intentional strides as possible to prevent such biases from impacting our research. While there is not much that can be done about my identity or the color of my skin, I emphatically recognize my privilege as a White educator. In addition, I have indeed taken great strides as Petersen urged (many that will be addressed in the next chapter) to prevent my influence, my voice, or my experience from finding their way into the stories of the three educators I was honored to work with in this project. It is my sincere hope that both the design of this study and the stories that were ultimately collected as a result stand as testament to this fact.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This chapter is comprised of the particulars of the design of my study. I first present an expanded list of research questions, summarize my participant selection procedures, and provide the general timeline of my collective efforts (Table 3.1). I then describe the data collection instruments and protocols employed as well as the details of my data analysis, including within this description the manner in which these data and analyses are presented in later chapters. I organize the description of these methods around the research questions they were specifically designed to address. Finally, I conclude this chapter with a table that summarizes the comprehensive methodologies of this project (Table 3.2).

Research Question Expanded

In Chapter 1, the central inquiry at the heart of this study was introduced as: How do participant teachers' narratives, action and reaction patterns, and talk about their experiences in the crushing contexts of their profession relate to their overall persistent agency? This central research question was explored extensively on two levels, the macro- (environment-based and circumstantial crushing contexts) and the micro- (event-based crushing contexts). This exploration was inspired by the following expanded list of research questions:

1. What decisions and direct actions characterize these teachers' overall persistent agency?
2. How do these teachers narrate their environment-based and circumstance-based (macro-) crushing context experiences and what characterizes their range of action and reaction patterns within those narratives?

3. How do these teachers narrate their event-based (micro-) crushing context experiences and what characterizes their range of action and reaction patterns within those narratives?
4. In what ways, if any, do teachers' narratives, action and reaction patterns, and talk about their experiences in the micro- and macro- crushing contexts of their profession illuminate the nature of their persistent agency?

Methods

Participant Teacher Selection

For this study, I initially selected and worked with four participants in an effort to better understand teacher persistent agency. Three of the four completed the study in its entirety. Together they serve as a collection of cases of secondary mathematics educators narrating their experiences in the crushing contexts of their profession. These educators were recommended for this study for their reputations as teachers who have continually exerted persistent effort relative to strengthening their students' academic competence and general well-being. All three of the participants who completed the study were veteran teachers, meaning that they had taught for at least seven years prior to the start of the study. In addition, all three had been teaching secondary mathematics in the same hard to staff school district. In fact, all three of them had spent the bulk or all of that time teaching in the same Title 1 school. Two of them were still actually teaching at this school (referred to as Towne- pseudonym- throughout the findings chapters of this publication) during data collection. More detailed information about the philosophy behind the selection of these educators and the contexts within which they work has already been presented, but it is potentially significant to note that the fact that each of

the participants spent so much time teaching in the same school or community became increasingly relevant as data was analyzed. As a result, I revisit this fact in Chapter 7.

In terms of participant recruitment procedures, at the outset of this project, I contacted three different hard to staff public school districts to seek permission to perform a research study with some of their secondary mathematics educators. Each of these districts met the general criteria I set for the label “hard to staff,” meaning simply that over the course of at least the last five years, each district had multiple unfilled teaching positions at the start of the academic year. Two of the three districts granted me permission to conduct my study, and in the end I selected the district whose administrator responded first to a request for an in-person interview. While I contacted all high school principals in each district via email, the administrator who responded first was actually one who had been initially recommended by my committee during my proposal defense for his reputation as an innovative principal focused on the best interest of students. Incidentally, this administrator, henceforth identified as Dr. Albert Ramirez (pseudonym), was the only administrator who responded to my email. I met with Dr. Ramirez, explained the purpose of my project, and asked for recommendations of veteran secondary mathematics educators (with at least seven years of teaching experience) who consistently displayed persistent effort relative to their students’ academic and general well-being.

Just as with Dr. Ramirez, in accordance with IRB regulations and as a matter of ensuring privacy, every name contained in this and all future chapters of this work are pseudonyms. At times throughout this publication, I remind the reader of this fact, but with or without the reminders, it is always the case that the identity of all participants

involved in this study as well as the identities of any people or places they mentioned within their narratives are intentionally protected. Names of people, institutions, or specific locations are either not given or are pseudonyms.

Dr. Ramirez gave me ten recommendations of veteran teachers of mathematics who he believed consistently demonstrated persistence in their efforts to improve students' general and academic well-being. Seven of these were men and three were women. I contacted each of these teachers via email, briefly introducing myself, the project, and the time commitment and effort I anticipated would be required of them if they chose to participate. In the emails, I asked whether they would be willing to meet with me in person so that I could review the project in more detail and so that they could decide whether they wanted to be a part of my study. Of the ten teachers recommended, four agreed to meet with me, three men and one woman. Following these meetings, all four consented to participate. In the end, however, only three of the four completed the project. The participant who chose to withdraw from the study in the middle of data collection did so because she simply could not spare enough time to continue to participate on account of unexpected life events. Because she withdrew from the study without completing it, I did not include any of the data I collected from her within my analysis. As an unfortunate consequence of her withdrawal, an undeniable limitation of this study was that the participants whose cases are ultimately presented were all men. In Chapter 7, I will return to this limitation as a potentially salient one, particularly given the nature and specifics of this project. At that time, I will consider briefly how research suggests this study may have been different had this not have been a limitation. Also, as aforementioned, a similar limitation that will be revisited in Chapter 7 is the fact that each

of these three participants spent at least the bulk (if not all) of their time teaching at the same high school, as members of the same community. In that way, while this work is indeed a presentation of three arguably powerful cases of teacher persistent agency, it is also a case of three men who taught in a very specific context and community and those nuances are indeed quite relevant. As a final note in terms of procedures, all participants who consented to participate in this study were asked to sign a written consent expounding on the nature and specifics of the project. A copy of the written consent form used can be found in Appendix A.

Data Collection and Analysis

Overview and chronology of efforts. This study was comprised of the careful collection and analysis of a selection of narrative-based tools designed to elicit storied knowledge from my participants. More specifically, I chose to utilize a combination of the methods employed by Carter (1994, 2008, 2009), Clandinin and Connelly (1990, 2000), Stoehr (2014, 2017), and Stoehr et al. (2017). I made minor additions and adaptations to these methods to better suit the particulars of my project. In the pages that follow, I present and defend the intricacies of my data collection and analysis as they map onto each of my research questions. To aid the reader in making sense of this study as a whole, I first present the following table summarizing the sequence of my data collection and analysis efforts. This summary table presents the order of my work organized into weeks as I initially proposed and described it to each of my participants. It is important to note, however, that while the *order* of my data collection efforts was the same for all participants, not all of the participants followed this schedule in terms of the actual weeks of the project. In other words, not every participant completed each portion of the data

collection during the same week of the study, nor did each participant require as much time between data collection tools as others. Knowing and fully appreciating the nature of teaching, from the beginning of this study, I expressed my willingness to adhere to each of my participant's unique schedules in the hopes of providing a flexible structure within which each participant would be able to most fully engage in each of the data collection activities. If a participant had more time in a given week and wished to complete additional activities, I accommodated that request. Similarly, if any given week was entirely too busy, I collected no artifacts that week. In this way, I hoped to collect the most complete stories and accounts from each participant and to avoid the categorization of my project as an additional burden. There were distinctions, then, in terms of the total amount of weeks that I interacted with each individual participant, as well as the amount of time between each interaction. Each of these distinctions is detailed in the individual findings chapters that follow. Nonetheless, this table provides an accurate overall chronology of data collection and analysis that was consistent for all participants. Following this summary table, I turn to more detailed descriptions of my collective efforts.

Table 3.1

Chronology of Data Collection and Analysis by Week

Week(s)	Data collection instrument(s)	Specifics (Number, frequency, length)
1	Life chronology (timeline) constructions (stage 1 of 2 to co-construct <i>life story narratives</i> - LSNs)	1 per teacher; 3 total; no length requirements or restrictions
2	LSN interviews (stage 2 of 2 to co-	1 per teacher; 3 total; no time limit imposed

Week(s)	Data collection instrument(s) construct LSNs)	Specifics (Number, frequency, length)
	<i>Crushing context collections (CCCs) introductions</i>	No quantity requirements or restrictions
3-4	Largely N/A- Time for clarification, processing, and data analysis	Teachers only contacted if clarification is needed; researcher available to participants
	CCCs	No quantity requirements or restrictions
5	<i>Well-remembered event (WRE) #1</i>	1 per teacher; 3 total; no length requirements or restrictions
	CCCs	No quantity requirements or restrictions
6-7	WRE #1 interviews	1 per teacher, 3 total; no time limit imposed
	CCCs	No quantity requirements or restrictions
8-9	Largely N/A- Time for clarification, processing, and data analysis	Teachers only contacted if clarification is needed; researcher available to participants
	CCCs	No quantity requirements or restrictions
10	WRE #2	1 per teacher; 3 total; no length requirements or restrictions
	CCCs	No quantity requirements or restrictions
11-12	WRE #2 interviews	1 per teacher, 3 total; no time limit imposed
	CCCs	No quantity requirements or restrictions
13-14	Largely N/A- Time for clarification, processing, and data analysis	Teachers only contacted if clarification is needed; researcher available to participants
	CCCs	No quantity requirements or restrictions

Week(s)	Data collection instrument(s)	Specifics (Number, frequency, length)
15	WRE #3	1 per teacher; 3 total; no length requirements or restrictions
	CCCs	No quantity requirements or restrictions
16-17	WRE #3 interviews	1 per teacher, 3 total; no time limit imposed
	CCCs	No quantity requirements or restrictions
18	Largely N/A- Time for clarification, processing, and data analysis	Teachers only contacted if clarification is needed; researcher available to participants
	CCCs	No quantity requirements or restrictions
19	CCC interviews (final interactions)	1 per teacher, 3 total; no time limit imposed
20-21	Largely N/A- Time for clarification, processing, and data analysis	Teachers only contacted if clarification is needed; researcher available to participants

Regarding the macro-context. In terms of the specifics of my data collection and analysis, I first address my first two research questions (RQs), those related to teachers' experiences in the macro-context. Those questions, again, are:

RQ1. What decisions and direct actions characterize these teachers' overall persistent agency?

RQ2. How do these teachers narrate their environment-based and circumstance-based (macro-) crushing context experiences and what characterizes their range of action and reaction patterns within those narratives?

Data collection efforts. To address these first two questions, I collected data using

the following three narrative tools: life chronology (timeline) constructions (stage 1 of *life story narrative*- LSN- constructions), *life story narrative* (LSN) interviews (stage 2 of LSN constructions), and *crushing context collections* (CCCs- activity and interviews). The history behind these tools and my specific intentions for their use are described next.

Life chronology (timeline) constructions. At the outset of this project, teachers were asked to prepare a basic life chronology (timeline). They were not asked to include all major events, circumstances, or influences in their life in a timeline format, but rather any that they believed had a lasting impact on their identity and practice as secondary mathematics teachers. In other words, they were asked to construct a timeline of the events and influences they deemed relevant to their development as teachers. Participant teachers were not required to write detailed reflections on their selections; instead, they were instructed to give each of their selections a name or a summary title as they placed them on their timeline. During the in-person interviews that immediately followed (within a week of timeline submissions), the teachers were asked to use their timelines to narrate their life journeys.

While designed specifically for this study, this data collection instrument is consistent with other narrative research (Stoehr, 2016). I chose to ask for these timeline constructions as the first stage in a two-stage process of collecting *life story narratives* (LSNs). LSNs are well-established narrative tools that reveal how teachers' identities are constructed and reconstructed over the course of their lives (Carter, 1993, 2008; Connelly & Clandinin, 1988, 1990). Historically, these types of narratives have been collected through autobiographical and personal journal writings, personal interviews, and small group interviews. Utilizing these narratives in research has been a means of seeking

greater understanding by acknowledging the wealth of influences that exist and shape one's identity and character. In this study, general LSNs were collected, constructed, and reconstructed primarily through this chronology task in conjunction with the interviews that followed them. The timeline task was intended to be a meaningful way for participant teachers to reflect on their identity formation before they actually narrated that formation in an interview with me. I had two main goals in providing a structure in which teachers would take the necessary time to intentionally think about their identity formation in advance of an interview. First, I wanted to ensure they would tell me the most complete stories. Building a preparation task into the LSN constructions was a way of decreasing the likelihood that some major influence or event would be left out of these teachers' stories. Second, by asking teachers to recall these events and influences in advance of the interviews, I was attempting to safeguard against leading my participants to narrate their journeys in any particular way. They completed this task apart from me, without any input from me, in whatever timeframe they deemed relevant. This tool or task, then, was meant not only to serve as a reflective aid as they prepared to tell their life stories, it was also an attempt to build in an extra step that would preserve their voice in their narratives and minimize my influence on those narratives.

More specifically in terms of procedures, participants were given the option of constructing their timelines however they chose. I asked simply for a chronological list of significant events and influences. They could record that list on paper of their choice, electronically, or via any other means they deemed appropriate. There was no length recommendation or requirement for these constructions. Teacher participants were given a simple instruction sheet outlining this task and introducing them to the interviews that

would follow (see Appendix B for the prompt distributed).

LSN interviews. As aforementioned, the LSN interviews took place immediately following (within a week) the collection of the life chronology timeline constructions. I obtained consent to audio record these interviews, and the recordings were later transcribed. The intent behind these interviews was to provide a space for participant teachers to narrate their life stories in terms of whatever events and influences they had identified as having been instrumental in their development as educators. In other words, the focus of these LSN interviews was unveiling teachers' storied understandings of how they became the secondary mathematics teachers they were at the time of my study. As teachers told these stories with the help of the timelines they had constructed, I listened and took notes. Wherever possible, I avoided interrupting their narratives other than with brief clarification questions. When clarification questions arose that did not require interrupting teachers' narratives, I simply made note of them. Near the close of the interviews, I asked any remaining clarifying questions as well as ensured that teachers had provided a name or title for each of the events and influences they identified in their timeline constructions. These names served as the basis of my coding. Finally, because I was interested in teachers' action and reaction patterns, I also occasionally asked questions about their actions and reactions to any of the events contained in their LSNs if they had not fully articulated them already in the natural telling of their stories.

While there is a certain unavoidable co-construction involved in narrative analysis between researcher and participant (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), I went to great intentional lengths during these interviews to ensure that the teachers themselves were naming and titling the various aspects of their stories that I treated as codes during the

analysis stage of this project. My intention throughout data collection was to ensure that it was *my participants' stories* that were being told, rather than my own. This is distinct from the routine practice of Clandinin and Connelly (2000) in seeking LSNs, but it is consistent with the admonitions that Carter (1994, 1995) and others have advanced for decades relative to the importance of preserving participant voice in narrative research (Carter, Stoehr, & Carter, 2012; Doyle & Carter, 2003; Stoehr et al., 2017). For a complete overview of the LSN interview protocols utilized in this project, see Appendix C.

Crushing context collections (CCCs). At the close of the LSN interviews, teacher participants were presented with an instruction sheet summarizing the remainder of the data collection activities incorporated into my project: the well-remembered event (WRE) accounts and the crushing context collections (CCCs- Appendix D). In terms of the CCCs, each teacher participant received a collection of people-shaped papers and a small plastic bin. They were asked over the course of the remaining weeks in the study to collect crushing contexts (past and present) relative to their teaching of mathematics on these small papers and to store them in these small bins. More specifically, they were asked to reflect on those contexts (macro- or micro-) relative to their experiences as mathematics educators that they considered “crushing” in nature, and to record those contexts by giving each of them a name or a title and writing that name or title on its own people-shaped paper. Once the titles were written, teacher participants were asked to physically crumple those papers (symbolic of the crushing nature of the contexts) and to store them in the small bins provided until their final interviews.

Finally, at the close of the study, during the last interview with each individual

participant (separate interviews), I asked these teachers to open their crumpled papers, comment on their crushing contexts, and to connect those contexts with the discussions we had had to date pertaining to their various experiences within the crushing contexts of their profession. In other words, I asked them to reflect on all of the crushing context experiences they had shared with me, and to report anything they had not already shared regarding their storied experiences within those contexts. The protocol for these interviews can be found in Appendix F.

Data analysis. To analyze the data specifically collected to address my first two research questions related to teachers' experiences in the macro-contexts, I focused on two sub-questions for analysis. Each of these analysis questions (AQs) is intricately connected to the three aforementioned narrative tools that were utilized to collect my data (timeline constructions, LSN interviews, and CCCs):

AQ1-2a. Are there any themes or similarities in the events and influences these teachers identify within their reconstructed life stories as having contributed to their identity as teachers? Are any of these themes shared across participants?

AQ1-2b. Are there any themes or similarities in teachers' responses to questions about their actions and reactions to the various events and influences they identify in their stories (questions designed to elicit their characterizations of persistent agency)? Are any of these themes shared across participants?

AQ1-2c. Are there any themes or similarities in the crushing macro-contexts (CCCs) these teachers report?

To prepare to answer these specific questions, I recorded audio and personal field notes from each LSN interview. Given that this was a two-stage life story construction

and reconstruction process, I also looked over the timeline constructions that were submitted. Finally, I focused my attention on any and all crushing contexts (CCCs) that were recorded relative to crushing *macro*-contexts.

More specifically, once the interviews were completed, I looked for themes and patterns within individual teacher participant cases and then across participants. I looked first at the names or titles the teacher participants had given to various aspects of their LSNs (events and influences named or titled in their timeline constructions as well as any naming done during the interviews themselves). Seeking themes within and across the participant-given titles on the participants' timeline constructions was relatively simple. I treated each title on participants' timelines as a code and looked for commonalities among those codes, both within and across participants.

Within the LSN interviews, however, in addition to seeking commonalities by continually reviewing the transcripts, both as a way of making sense of the data and also eventually presenting the data to my readers, I utilized an online word cloud generator to attempt to uncover major themes or influences within the LSNs of my participants. More specifically, I pasted two distinct and significant portions of each LSN interview transcript into an online word cloud generator to generate two distinct word clouds for each participant. All of the words that I pasted into the generator technically appear in each cloud but the size of each word is a direct reflection of the frequency of its use. For this reason, I believed this practice would aid me in visualizing any major themes or influences (based on the size and frequency of significant words contained in each transcript) that could be found in the LSNs of my participants.

To be clear, I did not paste the entire LSN transcripts into the word cloud

generator for fear the result would be illegible and dominated by meaningless articles such as “the” or “and”. Instead, I chose to generate two word clouds for each participant directly from the LSN interview transcripts, one from a compilation of nouns and the second from a compilation of verbs. I reasoned that the nouns and verbs in each participant’s LSN interview should provide a summative view of the most significant influences and actions each participant revealed in their LSN interview relative to their life and teaching.

To generate the first word cloud, focused on the nouns contained in each participant’s interview, initially I simply pasted all of the nouns that appeared in each transcript into the word cloud generator. Names were first replaced with pseudonyms in accordance with IRB requirements. In consideration of the results, however, I noticed two things that I felt jeopardized the accuracy of the clouds as summative visual representations. First, I noticed that there were some significant nouns that were either singular or plural versions of the same root or synonyms referring to the exact same noun that were appearing separately in each cloud. In order to ensure these words were combined in an improved word cloud, I made singular nouns plural and in some cases chose to recode synonyms so that they would appear together in the final visual representation that was generated. While this was a consistent practice across participants, individual changes are reported in detail within each of the findings chapters. In other words, each change I made is fully accounted for in the extended discussion contained in each of the findings chapters. In each case, I reveal not only the words that appear in the word clouds (the words that were pasted into the generator), but also the words that originally appeared in the transcript and how they were recoded. I also

record the frequencies in which each word appeared in the original transcripts.

The second area of concern related to the original word cloud output was the appearance of various nouns that in and of themselves (apart from the greater context) were truly nonsensical. In some cases, in looking back at the original transcripts, there were certain nouns that referred to so many distinct nouns in the original transcript that I felt it would be unfair in a visual display to have them appear as larger, and therefore more significant influences. In others, the nouns contained no real meaning on their own, apart from other words contained in the transcript. In the end, I opted to simply remove these words entirely from the list I pasted into the generator. As in the case of the recoding of nouns, these individual noun deletions are accounted for fully in each of the findings chapters. Following these two minor changes, I generated an improved word cloud representing a summative visual representation of all of the sensical nouns contained in each participant's LSN interview transcript. Accompanying each word cloud in each findings chapter is a table containing the exact frequencies of the words as they appear within the original transcripts.

To generate the second word cloud, focused on the verbs in each participant's interview, I followed essentially the same process. First, I made one change to all verbs before pasting them into the online generator. I changed all verbs to their infinitive form so as to avoid having the same verb appear separately in the visual display simply because it appeared in the transcript in a different form. Secondly, as with the nouns, I removed any verbs that were in and of themselves nonsensical from the lists I pasted into the online generator. Again, in each case, every change that I made was fully reported in the individual findings chapters alongside the discussion of the word clouds.

In addition to the LSNs, I also looked to the naming and titles contained on any of the paper-shaped people (CCCs) submitted that were specifically referencing macro-contexts to answer these particular research analysis questions (AQs). Throughout this study, the names and titles teacher participants came up with served as the basis of the coding relied upon in my analysis. Once the various summary codes (names and titles) were collected, I looked for any themes and patterns within individual cases and then across participants. Just as I did during interviews, if a people-shaped paper was submitted with a name or title that was not easily understood, I asked the teacher participant to explain the significance of their selected titles so that I could group related titles during the coding and analysis stage of my work. This commitment to requiring participants to title, name, and expound upon their own artifacts was yet another attempt to preserve my teacher participants' voices in the co-construction of their life story narratives, an endeavor that was an integral part of my narrative analysis.

Regarding the micro-context. I turn now to a discussion of my data collection and analysis relative to my third research question, regarding the micro-context. That question, again, is:

RQ3. How do these teachers narrate their event-based (micro-) crushing context experiences and what characterizes their range of action and reaction patterns within those narratives?

Data collection efforts. To address this third research question, I collected data using the following three narrative tools: *well-remembered event* (WRE) narratives, *well-remembered event* (WRE) sense-making interviews, and *crushing context collections* (CCCs- activity and interviews). The history behind these tools and my specific

intentions for their use are described next.

Well-remembered event (WRE) narratives. For more than two decades, narrative researchers have utilized the *well-remembered event* (Carter, 1994, 2009) as a tool to collect personal-experience narratives relative to a variety of foci (Carter, 1994, 2009; Carter & Stoehr, 2012; Carter et al., 2013a, 2013b; Stoehr, 2017). Carter (1994) defined a WRE as “an incident or episode” that the individual considers for their own reasons as “especially salient or memorable” (p. 236). WREs can be collected in an attempt to answer questions suitable to narrative inquiry related to episodic or event-based experiences. According to Stoehr (2017), research utilizing this particular narrative inquiry tool showcases individual life experiences that are vividly recalled by participants because of the impact they have had on those participants. In this study too, they were collected for their explanatory potential. The intent was that they help me better understand the storied experiences of teachers in the crushing moments and events of their profession and the nature of the impact of these experiences, if any, on their practice relative to their action and reaction patterns or to their persistent agency.

Over the course of this study, participant teachers were asked to contribute three WREs from their time teaching secondary mathematics, episodes that they identified as *crushing* as well as especially salient or memorable. WREs are often embedded within life story narratives, and for this reason, the two tools are particularly appropriate to be utilized in tandem. Understandably then, some of the WREs these teachers narrated in detail were events they had already disclosed during their LSN interviews. Even though some of the WRE contexts were repeated, the detailed protocol for WRE collection ensured that new information was gleaned about teachers’ storied experiences in these

contexts.

More specifically in terms of protocols, teacher participants were asked to contribute their WREs either in writing or as an audio recorded narrative prior to the sense-making interviews. These WREs consisted of three parts: a description of the event, a reconstruction of participants' inner dialogue as they recalled it during the event, and the sense they made of the event moving forward. In other words, participants were asked to recall the facts and important contextual information related to each WRE, to reconstruct their inner dialogue and emotional experiences during these event, and finally to relay what thoughts they had in terms of the impact of these events, if any, on their teaching practice or identity. Finally, the teachers were asked to give their events a name or summary title that for them encapsulated the basic significance or plot of the events. To remind participant teachers of these three distinct parts of the WREs, I directed them to the first portion of the instruction sheet detailing the WREs and CCCs (Appendix D).

WRE sense-making interviews. Within a week of each individual WRE submission (written or recorded), I conducted sense-making interviews with each of the participant teachers. In each interview, I expressed my desire to clarify, confirm, or extend my interpretation of their narrative. In other words, I sought a mutual reconstruction of the WRE in a manner similar to the mutual reconstruction of life stories popularized by Connelly and Clandinin (1988, 1990). I made the same intentional decision in this process *not* to tell their stories to them (distinct from Connelly and Clandinin) as I had during the LSNs, but rather to ask whatever clarification questions were necessary to ensure my understanding of their stories as they had chosen to tell them. My primary goal in these interviews was to ensure that my understanding of the

facts of the events, the teachers' inner dialogue during the events, and whatever they had reported in terms of the impact of these events was consistent with their actual storied experiences. If there was any information that was missing or unclear from the teachers' original submissions, I sought to obtain that information during these interviews. This included, of course, asking them to either name or title their WREs if they had not already done so, or to explain the significance of those titles if it was not immediately apparent.

In addition to seeking a complete and well-understood WRE account from each of these teacher participants, I concluded these interviews with a drawing activity to help me make sense of the participants' overall emotional experiences within these crushing events. While this was an original activity, it was consistent with similar practices in existing qualitative research (e.g., Dinham, Chalk, Beltman, Glass, & Nguyen, 2017). Because I was interested in potential plot patterns to be found within teacher participants' thoughts, emotions, and actions and reactions as reported within these WREs, I decided to ask these teachers to draw an arc to represent their emotional experiences during these events. In other words, at the close of each interview, I presented each teacher participant with a blank sheet of paper and asked them to provide me a visual of their experience within this event in terms of a rise and fall in action and/or emotion. I provided the same short story example to introduce this task to each participant. Because of this visual component, while these interviews were audio recorded in their entirety, this final portion of these interviews was also video recorded. I also recorded (written) personal summative and thematic field notes during these interviews. The complete protocol for these interviews, including more detailed information about the visual arc task, can be found in

Appendix E.

It is perhaps important here to note related to this drawing activity, that while I gleaned much from this activity in terms of understanding the overall experiences of teacher participants during these crushing context events, were I to utilize this activity in other research, I would need to more narrowly focus it and make the instructions clearer. Rather than rise and fall of action in combination with an emotional experience as I had initially intended, some teachers focused exclusively on their state of emotions during these events. What is more, there was no consistency in terms of what ascending and descending lines represented, even with the same participants. In other words, while the collective data obtained through this process (visuals, video clips, and transcription of teacher participant dialogue) revealed much about the teacher participants' experiences in the salient event-based crushing context events they described, the visuals themselves could not stand alone as comparable artifacts. An ascending line on one visual may have a completely distinct significance than a similar line on another visual. Later in this chapter, in a discussion of the analysis of the data collected using this tool, I address how I responded to these discrepancies.

CCCs. As aforementioned, at the close of the LSN interviews, teacher participants were presented with an instruction sheet detailing the *crushing context collections* (CCC) activity. At this time, teacher participants received a collection of people-shaped papers and a small bin. They were asked over the course of the remaining weeks in the study to collect crushing contexts (past and present) relative to their teaching of mathematics on these small papers and to store them in these small bins. More specifically, they were asked to reflect on those contexts (macro- or micro-) that they considered “crushing” in

nature, and to record those contexts by giving each of them a representative name or title and writing that name or title on its own person-shaped paper. Once the titles were written, teacher participants were asked to physically crumple those papers (symbolic of the crushing nature of the contexts) and to store them in the small bins until their final interviews. Finally, at the close of the study, during the last interview with each individual participant (separate interviews), I asked each participant teacher to open their crumpled papers, comment on their crushing contexts, and to connect those contexts with the discussions we had had to date relative to their experiences within the crushing contexts of their profession. In other words, I asked them to reflect on all of the crushing context experiences they had shared with me, and to report anything they had not already shared relative to their storied experiences within those contexts. The protocol for these interviews can be found in Appendix F.

Data analysis. In terms of the analysis of the data related to these teachers' experiences in the micro-contexts that were collected utilizing the aforementioned tools, I introduce the following three sub-questions for analysis, each of which is intricately connected to those tools:

AQ3a. Are there any themes or plot patterns in the well-remembered event narratives and/or the event-based crushing contexts (CCCs) these teachers report?

AQ3b. Are there any themes or similarities in the reconstructed self-talk or inner dialogue they report during these events related to the impact of such dialogue on their ability to persist in difficult moments?

AQ3c. Are there any themes or similarities in the reasons they give for labeling these events as well-remembered or crushing?

AQ3d. Are there any themes or similarities in the sense they make of the impact (if any) of these crushing contexts?

In order to adequately answer the first two of these sub-questions in particular, I first turned my attention to participants' WRE accounts. I poured over each WRE in an attempt to understand both the basic narrative and the participant's experience within that narrative. In other words, I reflected on the basic plots and components of each WRE using procedures common to the narrative analysis that has been performed by scholars reflecting on similar stories for decades (Carter, 1993, 1994, 2003, 2013b; Carter, Doyle, & Romano, 2007; Carter & Stoehr, 2012; Clandinin & Connelly, 1990; Connelly & Clandinin, 1988, 1990; Doyle & Carter, 2003; Drake, Spillane, & Hufferd-Ackles, 2001; Stoehr, 2014, 2017). The first step in this process was simply to make sense of the basic plots of each WRE. I reviewed both the original submission of each WRE (written or recorded) as well as the transcripts of the sense-making interviews. I then summarized the plot of each WRE using the participants' words and vocabulary as much as possible.

After making sense of the basic plots of each WRE, I directed my attention to the arcs drawn by my participants during the latter portion of each WRE interview. As already described earlier in this chapter, during data collection, participants drew their experience arcs in front of me while narrating each of their WRE accounts. Because this portion of the interview was video-recorded, in an attempt to reproduce my experience for the reader, I returned to the videos and transcriptions of these WRE interviews and annotated the experience arcs participants had drawn in an attempt to represent the experience of each participant as presented during each WRE interview. In other words, I wanted the reader to have the benefit of what I actually experienced as each participant

presented their visuals to me before attempting to analyze or interpret these experiences. As aforementioned, these arcs were constructed in unique ways such that simply looking at the titles and shapes of each arc as drawn by participants would not adequately convey participants' emotional experiences within each narrative as they expressed them during those interviews. As such, to aid me and my readers in making sense of the experience arcs as actually presented by participants during the interviews, I added some quotations to these arcs that I extracted directly from those WRE interviews. I placed these quotations around each arc as close to their exact location as participants spoke and drew in real time during the interviews as possible.

Once the arcs had been annotated with quotations from each participant, I looked anew at the WRE accounts to uncover potential themes or patterns. I first searched across both the original written or recorded WREs submitted by teachers and then turned to the sense-making interviews. I consulted the recorded audio, my personal field notes, and also the transcriptions of each interview in an attempt to effectively survey the reconstructed accounts generated during those interviews. I had already asked teacher participants to name or title these WREs in a manner that would encapsulate their events, and through the interviews I had ensured that all participant teachers had submitted those names or titles (WREs). Using the participants' own words and titles as codes, I sought to identify any themes and patterns within teachers' narratives and across teachers' narratives, tracking the frequency at which each of these themes appeared.

After looking over the WRE accounts, I turned my attention to any and all event-based (micro-) crushing contexts recorded by teacher participants over the course of the data collection period on the people-shaped papers (CCCs). In much the same way, using

either the participant-given titles themselves or participants' words as contained within interview transcripts, I sought themes and patterns within teachers' narrative and across teachers' narratives. Again, I was careful to track the frequency at which each of these themes appeared.

In order to answer the third analysis question, I turned my attention to the reasons teachers provided for labeling their stories as "well-remembered" as well as the impact or significance of those events as they had described them relative to moving forward in their profession (part three of their WRE submissions). In other words, I revisited the third part of their WRE submissions where they addressed what impact these events have had and will continue to have going forward, if any, on their practice. Again, I used teacher participants' own words, names, or labels as the basis of any and all coding. I then sought to identify any themes and patterns within teachers' narratives and across teachers' narratives, tracking the frequency at which each of these themes appeared.

Regarding potential intersections across contexts. Finally, I turn to a discussion of my data collection and analysis relative to my final research question, regarding the potential intersections across contexts. That question, again, is:

RQ4. How does the characterization of these teachers' overall persistent agency relate to their narratives, action and reaction patterns, and talk about their experiences in the micro- and macro- crushing contexts of their profession?

Data collection efforts. The bulk of the data utilized to address this final research question was collected to address my first three research questions. I did, however, ask one specific question at the close of the final interviews with each teacher participant (CCC interviews) in an attempt to seek any storied understandings specifically connected

to *both* micro- and macro- crushing contexts. Basically, after the participants finished opening their individual papers and expounding upon their unique crushing contexts, I asked them whether they had noticed anything about their own crushing contexts in general, how they get through them, and what sense they make of them. This closing interview was my last attempt to solicit additional storied understandings from my teacher participants that had not been revealed through the afore-described data collection efforts. There was no time minimum or limit imposed on these interviews and I only asked clarifying questions as necessary. Again, I was intentional in my desire to listen to their stories and to refuse to tell their stories for them. As with other interviews, these interviews were audio recorded. I also took field notes during them.

Data analysis. In terms of the analysis of the data related to these teachers' experiences in the micro- and macro- contexts that was collected to investigate the potential intersection of the knowledge gleaned from these distinct contexts, I introduce the following two sub-questions for analysis, each of which is intricately connected to all of the aforementioned data collection tools that were utilized throughout this study:

AQ4a. Are there any themes or similarities in the nature of the contexts that teachers are reporting as crushing across both the micro- *and* macro- contexts of their profession?

AQ4b. Are there any themes or similarities in the teachers' narratives, action and reaction patterns within those narratives, and/or talk about those narratives across both micro- *and* macro- contexts?

To address the potential intersecting storied knowledge question, I first simply looked again to the data collection and analysis that had already been completed, that

which was designed to address my first three research questions. In looking over my collective efforts, I attempted to compare and contrast my findings from the general lens of a researcher looking to explore potential intersections across the knowledge and experience housed within the circumstance-based and event-based crushing contexts as narrated by my teacher participants. More simply, I grouped any themes or similarities of codes already explored. Once ample time and effort had been dedicated to this enterprise, I looked at teacher participants' responses to the final question posed in the CCC interviews themselves (the final interviews with each participant).

Consistent with the analysis described to this point, I utilized simple coding derived directly from teacher participants' own words and phrases. In other words, I looked to the responses of individual participants to the various data collection activities, and using their own words as codes, I sought themes by grouping synonymous and related codes within and across teachers' responses. Again, I carefully tracked the frequency at which each of these themes appeared. All of this analysis together prepared me to answer my final research question. In addition, having completed data collection, I looked over all the data collected, particularly the action and reaction patterns of individual teachers, to obtain a more informed answer to my first research question (embedded in this final question) related to the characterization of these teachers' overall persistent agency. In other words, while the tools described to address that first question were envisioned to be sufficient to give a general picture of participants' overall persistent agency as they described it within their life stories and in response to interview questions about those life stories, there were certain patterns that became apparent as all

of the data were collected over the course of the entire study. These patterns also informed that basic inquiry.

Regarding a *teacher faith* construct and lens. As described in Chapter 2 of this publication, it was at this point in my data analysis that I began to think about applying a *teacher faith* lens to my analysis efforts. In other words, after I had collected all data, completed the transcription of all interviews, and spent ample time attempting to group themes and commonalities, particularly within individual cases through simple coding as planned and afore-described, I began looking across my data. I was in search of patterns, similarities, and differences. I looked not only across the raw data, but also across the tools I had employed to help me analyze the data (the annotated arcs and the word clouds, for example).

In looking carefully at this data, what stood out to me in place of major commonalities in terms of the crushing contexts themselves (though there were some) or the very specific words or actions utilized repeatedly in these teachers' unique action and reaction responses to those contexts or their inner dialogue in reflecting on them were the more wholistic commonalities in their patterned actions, routines, and responses to their unique crushing contexts. To be quite honest, their general lived patterns and practices reminded me in many ways of my Christian faith. As I have confessed numerous times, being a person of devout faith, everything that I see I know I see through a lens of faith. Also, in this particular case, I had already spent quite a bit of time considering resilient teachers as potentially teachers who act in faith, albeit nonreligious faith. But at this point in my work, I truly believed I was seeing something significant.

It was at this point, then, that I took time to step away from my data and analysis

and reflect again on my Christian faith and its components (something I had already thought a great deal about prior to the study). It was at this point that I made the conscious decision to revisit the idea that perhaps a parallel construct containing these same components stripped of their religious nature would be potentially useful as a lens from which to reconsider my research. In the end following this reflection, I made the intentional decision to reorganize my data within each individual and unique case around the five components of devout (nonreligious) teacher faith I had identified. In other words, I looked at the data I had already spent time analyzing and specifically sought examples within that data of each of the components of devout faith within each unique teacher participant case. Without exception, they were easy to find.

I emphatically admit that this was a decision bearing consequences. Not only did I not consider looking for counterexamples or counterevidence, I did not consider applying a different lens after this decision was made. It is not that I intentionally ignored counterexamples or counterevidence. I did not see any. But I also had no procedure for seeking them out. As a result, I candidly acknowledge that such a procedure may have yielded a different perspective. It is the case that I made every attempt to be responsible in my analysis. I presented all data collected without exception (nothing is concealed, as is evidenced by the length of each of the findings chapters). I also truly contend that each of my participants is a powerful and unique case of devout faith, a fact that I believe is adequately demonstrated by the data itself. Nonetheless, it is important to concede at this point that applying a different lens or organization or perspective may have revealed other findings that are therefore not presented in this work. I revisit this conversation of potential limitations again in the last chapter of this paper and invite my readers to pour

with a critical eye through the data with their own lenses and biases.

Summary of efforts. In terms of methodology then, the following table summarizes my collective data and analysis methods.

Table 3.2

Data Collection and Analysis Design Summary by Research Question (RQ)

RQ1. What characterizes these teachers' overall persistent agency?	RQ2. How are these teachers narrating their environment-based and circumstance-based (macro-) crushing context experiences and what characterizes their range of action and reaction patterns within those narratives?	
Data collection instrument(s), quantity/frequency	Analysis sub-questions (AQ)	Analysis plans description
<p><i>Life story narrative (LSNs) constructions (2 stages):</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Life chronology (timeline) constructions</i> (1 per participant, 3 total; no length requirement or restrictions, varied by participant; stage 1 of 2) 2. <i>LSN interviews</i> (1 per participant, 3 total; no time requirement or restrictions, varied by participant; stage 2 of 2) 	<p>AQ1-2a. Are there any themes or similarities in the events and influences these teachers identify within their reconstructed life stories as having contributed to their identity as teachers? Are any of these themes shared across participants?</p> <p>AQ1-2b. Are there any themes or similarities in teachers' responses to questions about their actions and reactions to the various events and influences they identify in their stories (questions designed to elicit their characterizations of persistent agency)? Are any of these themes shared across participants?</p>	<p>LSNs: 1. Seek clarity and consensus in co-construction of LSNs by asking questions; 2. Utilize coding derived from teacher-provided event and influence titles; 3. Code action and reaction patterns reported in interviews; 4. Seek themes and patterns among codes within and across participants' contributions; 5. Generate word clouds from LSN interview transcripts from representative lists of sensical nouns and verbs</p>
<p><i>Crushing context collections (CCCs)</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>CCC collection activity</i> (1 collection 	<p>AQ1-2c. Are there any themes or similarities in the crushing macro-</p>	<p>CCCs: 1. Utilize coding derived from teacher-provided CCC titles (those focused on macro-</p>

<p>per participant, 3 total collections; no quantity requirement or restrictions, varied by participant)</p> <p>2. <i>CCC interviews</i> (1 per participant, 3 total; no time requirement or restrictions, varied by participant)</p>	<p>contexts (CCCs) these teachers report?</p>	<p>contexts); 2. Seek themes and patterns among codes within and across participants' contributions</p>
<p>RQ3. How are these teachers narrating their event-based (micro-) crushing context experiences and what characterizes their range of action and reaction patterns within those narratives?</p>		
<p>Data collection instrument(s), quantity/frequency</p>	<p>Analysis sub-questions (AQ)</p>	<p>Analysis plans description</p>
<p><i>Well-remembered events</i> (WREs)</p> <p>1. <i>WRE narratives</i> (3 per participant, 9 total; no length requirement or restrictions, varied by participant)</p> <p>2. <i>WRE sense-making interviews</i> (3 per participant, 9 total; no time requirement or restrictions, varied by participant)</p>	<p>AQ3a. Are there any themes or plot patterns in the well-remembered event narratives and/or the event-based crushing contexts (CCCs) these teachers report?</p> <p>AQ3b. Are there any themes or similarities in the reconstructed self-talk or inner dialogue they report during these events related to the impact of such dialogue on their ability to persist in difficult moments?</p> <p>AQ3c. Are there any themes or similarities in the reasons they give for labeling these events as well-remembered or crushing?</p>	<p>WREs: 1. Seek clarity and consensus in co-construction of WREs by asking questions; 2. Utilize coding derived from teacher-provided WRE titles; 3. Code action and reaction patterns, repeated or synonymous phrases or thought patterns, and impact responses as reported in WREs and/or interviews; 4. Seek themes and patterns among codes within and across participants' contributions; 5. Utilize participant-generated arc to construct arc incorporating participants' words representing emotional experience</p>
<p>REVIEW OF <i>Crushing context collections</i> (CCCs) (Already referenced above)</p>	<p>AQ3d. Are there any themes or similarities in the sense they make of the</p>	<p>CCCs: 1. Utilize coding derived from teacher-provided CCC titles (those focused on micro-</p>

	impact (if any) of these crushing contexts?	contexts); 2. Seek themes and patterns among codes within and across participants' contributions
RQ4. How does the characterization of these teachers' overall persistent agency relate to their narratives, action and reaction patterns, and talk about their experiences in the micro- and macro- crushing contexts of their profession?		
Data collection instrument(s), quantity/frequency	Analysis sub-questions (AQ)	Analysis plans description
REVIEW OF ALL DATA (Already referenced above) FROM: <i>Life story narrative</i> (LSNs) constructions (2 stages) <i>Well-remembered events</i> (WREs) <i>Crushing context collections</i> (CCCs) [in particular, focus on final question of CCC interviews]	AQ4a. Are there any themes or similarities in the nature of the contexts that teachers are reporting as crushing across both the micro- <i>and</i> macro-contexts of their profession? AQ4b. Are there any themes or similarities in the teachers' narratives, action and reaction patterns within those narratives, and/or talk about those narratives across both micro- <i>and</i> macro-contexts?	Review of all data: Compare and contrast all coding done during study across tools and contexts Final CCC interview questions: 1. Use participants' words as codes; 2. Seek themes and patterns among codes within and across participants' contributions
*POST-DATA COLLECTION PHASE QUESTION: 5. Is there evidence of each of the five components of the unique construct of <i>teacher faith</i> within the data collected from teacher participants?		
Data collection instrument(s), quantity/frequency	Analysis sub-questions (AQ)	Analysis plans description
REVIEW OF ALL DATA (Already referenced above) FROM: <i>Life story narrative</i> (LSNs) constructions (2 stages) <i>Well-remembered events</i> (WREs) <i>Crushing context collections</i> (CCCs)	AQ5a. Is there evidence in the teachers' narratives, action and reaction patterns within those narratives, and/or talk about those narratives across both micro- <i>and</i> macro-contexts of each of the five components of <i>teacher faith</i> : core beliefs; hope and trust; regular agentive action; faith-strengthening	Review of all data: Compare and contrast all coding done during study across tools and contexts

practices; and commitment to collaborate, congregate, or consult with others of like beliefs?

AQ5b. Are there similarities or differences within or across teachers' narratives, action and reaction patterns within those narratives, and/or talk about those narratives across both micro- *and* macro- contexts in terms of these aforementioned five *teacher faith* components?

CHAPTER 4: THE CASE OF LUIS COTA AND HIS UNIQUE FAITH
IN THE POWER OF RELATIONSHIPS AND HARD WORK

Introduction

In this chapter, I present the unique case of Luis Cota (pseudonym). Ultimately, I advance the argument that Cota is an educator who regularly exhibits a unique devout faith and who relies on his faith to persevere through crushing contexts. More specifically, in this case, I contend that Cota boasts a mature faith motivated by two core beliefs and an overarching conviction in the power of relationships and hard work. Through detailed analyses of Cota's narratives, action and reaction patterns, and talk about his experiences in the crushing contexts of his profession, I delineate evidence of each of the previously articulated components of devout faith. I present my argument, and therefore organize the bulk of this chapter, by systematically addressing each of these five components. Before advancing this argument, I provide some general information about Cota to the reader. Over the course of this study, I met with Cota in person seven times, spoke with him on the phone twice, and exchanged several emails and text messages. Table 4.1 below summarizes our significant interactions over the course of more than six months. As a general reminder, in accordance with IRB regulations and as a matter of ensuring privacy to all involved, every name (of person or place) contained in this and all chapters of this work are pseudonyms.

Table 4.1.

Chronological Summary of Researcher-Participant Interactions: Cota

Date	Purpose/ Data collection instrument(s)	Specifics (Details)
1-28-18	Initial meeting	Explanation of study, questions answered; ~ 00:32:00
2-14-18	Impromptu phone	Impromptu phone conversation; more

Date	Purpose/ Data collection instrument(s)	Specifics (Details)
	conversation	questions answered; Cota talked about his career as an educator and expressed need for extended data-collection period due to busy schedule; 00:43:14
2-28-18	Pick-up of consent form	Consent obtained; brief impromptu conversation; ~ 00:12:00
3-24-18	Life chronology (timeline) construction (stage 1 of 2 to co-construct <i>life story narrative</i> - LSN)	Submitted via email; 18 events recorded/ titled
3-25-18	LSN interview (stage 2 of 2 to co-construct LSNs)	In-person meeting; 00:27:32 formal recorded LSN interview; ~ 00:26:00 impromptu conversation
4-6-18	<i>Crushing context collection</i> (CCC) introduction	In-person meeting; CCC explanation and impromptu conversation; ~ 00:25:45
4-13-18	<i>Well-remembered event</i> (WRE) #1	Submitted via email (359 words)
4-13-18	WRE #1 interview	In-person meeting; 00:25:13 formal recorded WRE interview; ~ 00:36:00 impromptu conversation
6-15-18	WRE #2 & WRE #3	Submitted via email as separate recordings; 00:06:31 and 00:06:18
6-18-18	Impromptu phone conversation	Impromptu phone conversation; Cota spoke briefly about his 2 nd and 3 rd WREs as well as a need to wait for the follow-up interview based on a change in his plans for next year in terms of his career; 00:33:44
7-19-18	WRE #2 & WRE #3 interviews	In-person meeting; 00:35:25 formal recorded WRE interviews (combined, recorded separately); ~ 00:15:00 impromptu conversation
8-4-18	CCC interview (final	In-person meeting; 00:35:12 formal recorded

Date	Purpose/ Data collection instrument(s)	Specifics (Details)
	interactions)	CCC interview; ~ 00:18:00 impromptu conversation

Background Information

Luis Cota is a Hispanic man holding three educator certifications in the state of Arizona: secondary education (mathematics), bilingual education, and principal. He boasts two Master’s degrees (one in Teacher Education and one in Educational Leadership), obtained from the same research-one institution. At the start of data collection, Cota was 53 years of age and well into his 29th year as an educator. For 28 years prior, he had been a full-time high school mathematics teacher at Towne High School, a Title 1 school in a lower socioeconomic district in Southern Arizona. At Towne, Cota taught various combinations of Algebra 1, Pre-Algebra, Geometry, Algebra 2, and College Algebra, depending on the year. In addition to his full-time teaching schedule during this 28-year span, Cota also coached wrestling, taught mathematics as an adjunct professor at the local community college, attended graduate school to obtain both of his advanced degrees, was a full-time husband and father to three children, and tutored students after school in his “free time” (LSN interview, March 25, 2018). During data collection, Cota was in his first year out of the classroom, working as an assistant principal at a nearby middle school in the same district. Each of these events were reported by Cota within his life chronology timeline (See Table 4.2).

Cota was formally recommended for this study by his most recent high school principal, Dr. Albert Ramirez. Initially, I had asked Ramirez exclusively for recommendations of veteran educators who were still in the classroom, but he insisted, “If your goal is finding the most stubbornly resilient and dedicated teachers that never

give up on students, then you really need to talk to [Luis]” (December 8, 2017). He even pointed me to an article written in celebration of Cota, who upon announcing his intention to leave Towne for an administrative position at another school in the district was awarded an “honorary PhD” by Towne for his amazing service. Ramirez was not the only person to recommend Cota for this study. William Nelson, the man who would become my first consented participant, made a similar emphatic recommendation during an informal meeting about my study, identifying Cota as both a mentor and an inspirational lifelong learner who would be “perfect for your study” (Nelson, Introductory meeting, November 29, 2017). Following the Ramirez recommendation (the second recommendation for Cota), I contacted Cota via email. Following an in-person meeting and a phone conversation, he consented to participate.

A Case of Devout Faith

As a reminder from Chapter 2, drawing from a comparison to my [Christian] religious faith, I contend that there are five key components to devout faith: core beliefs and convictions, hope and trust that acting on those beliefs and convictions is ultimately good or beneficial, regular intentional (agentive) action in accordance with those beliefs and convictions, routines and practices that build and strengthen one’s faith, and commitment to collaboration or congregation or consultation of some sort with others with like beliefs and convictions. In the pages that follow, I articulate evidence of each of these key components of faith in the words and lived experiences of Luis Cota contained within each of the three main sources of data collected as part of this project (the *life story narrative- LSN*- timeline and interview, the three *well-remembered events- WREs*- accounts and interviews, and the *crushing context collection- CCC*- collection and

interview). I further claim that it was Cota's devout faith that enabled him to continue to make agentic decisions focused on students even in the crushing moments and circumstances of his teaching.

Core Beliefs and Convictions

When Dr. Albert Ramirez recommended Cota for this project, one of the statements he made was: "He cares about students; he believes in them no matter what" (December 8, 2017). With every interaction and collected narrative, that care for students and belief in their capacity to learn and grow was expressed. To be precise, the following were two strong beliefs or convictions that surfaced multiple times throughout our interactions and within his various narratives, and they applied to students as well as staff:

1. A belief in the worth of people and the importance of relationships; and
2. A belief in the capacity of all people to learn and grow *if* they are willing to put in the work required to do so.

A belief in the worth of people and importance of relationships. Many educators will tell you that they do what they do, at least in part, for the love of their students. Luis Cota is no exception. "They love me, and I love them too" (LSN interview, March 25, 2018), he told me during our very first formal interview. But throughout our time together, Cota demonstrated a core belief in the worth of *all* people and relationships, students *and* staff included. Indeed, evidence of this core belief was prevalent across all data sources collected as part of this inquiry.

For example, the most prevalent theme in every reflective conversation I had with Cota was the importance of building relationships with people. Twice during our first

formal interview he specifically identified relationship-building is central to his identity: “I think the biggest thing about me is that I build relationships with people,” he told me early on in that first interview. “I build relationships. It’s the most important thing I believe,” he added later (LSN interview, March 25, 2018). In all, Cota addressed the importance of relationships 18 times during reflective portions of his interviews. Table 4.2 below summarizes each of these instances. As a reminder from Chapter 3, after transcribing all interviews, I used conservative coding to uncover themes. In other words, I grouped identical or very nearly related words and concepts. More specifically related to the claim at hand, I grouped three very specific terms in identifying a focus on relationships as a theme in Cota’s various narratives: relationship, trust, and love (when specifically expressed about people or working with people). Collectively these codes appeared 18 times within Cota’s interview transcripts as follows.

Table 4.2.

Quotations Related to a Focus on Relationships: Cota (Codes: relationship, trust, love)

Instance	Evidence (Summary or Quotation)	Meeting (Date/Setting)
1	“I think the biggest thing about me is that I build relationships with people. It’s who I am...”	LSN interview, March 25, 2018
2	“...working hard to be creative and build relationships ” (speaking of colleague)	LSN interview, March 25, 2018
3	“I think I build relationships . It’s the most important thing I believe.”	LSN interview, March 25, 2018
4	“I think if you build a trusting relationship with someone- a student...”	WRE #3 interview, July 19, 2018
5	“...teaching them something they don’t care, but a relationship [...] get them to start to buy in [...] they will see it...”	WRE #3 interview, July 19, 2018

Instance	Evidence (Summary or Quotation)	Meeting (Date/Setting)
6	“but the big buy in is relationship ... if they know you care...”	WRE #3 interview, July 19, 2018
7	“if you get them to trust you and like you [...] then you can teach them...”	LSN interview, March 25, 2018
8	“I would tell them... hey, they don’t know you from Adam. But if you get them to trust you... that you have their best interest at heart...”	LSN interview, March 25, 2018
9	“It’s the same thing in the classroom... If they trust you and believe you... and they can tell...”	LSN interview, March 25, 2018
10	“Still loved teaching them math... I would get excited when they get excited...”	LSN interview, March 25, 2018
11	“The biggest thing in my life. I loved them...” (referring to students)	LSN interview, March 25, 2018
12	“Some of the kids are like barnacles. They don’t leave me alone. They love me and I love them too.”	LSN interview, March 25, 2018
13	“They would say [...] that class loves you... yah, cause I give it back.” (referring to commentary from a colleague regarding a class with “difficult” students with various labels)	LSN interview, March 25, 2018
14	“I love teaching.”	LSN interview, March 25, 2018
15	(Speaking of sharing his decision to leave for administration) “Even the trouble-maker boys said if I promise to work hard, will you stay? [...] It was really hard. I’ve always loved working with kids...”	LSN interview, March 25, 2018
16	“Even as long as I did it, I never lost that fire. I never felt like I didn’t want to come to work. When you feel like that, love like that, the kids know [...] when you’re excited, they feed off that.”	LSN interview, March 25, 2018
17	“If you love coming to work, the kids really benefit.”	LSN interview, March 25, 2018

Instance	Evidence (Summary or Quotation)	Meeting (Date/Setting)
18	“If you’re going to be effective, you have to love the kids, learning, educating...”	CCC interview, August 4, 2018

In addition to emphatically stating the significance of building relationships during interviews, in constructing his life chronology timeline and later describing his life story and lived experiences as an educator using that timeline (LSN interview, March 25, 2018), Cota also highlighted several significant relationships, apart from family relationships, that he formed over the course of his career in education. He spoke repeatedly of these relationships and their continual impact on his life story narrative. The first and perhaps most impactful example of this was his relationship with David Guerrero, the first principal he worked for at Towne, whom he originally worked for at an ice cream parlor. Literally the first significant event Cota recorded on his timeline pointed to his meeting of Guerrero (see Table 4.3 below).

Table 4.3.

Cota’s Life Chronology (Timeline) Construction

Year(s)	Significant Event
1984	Worked in ice cream store for Towne principal
1984-1988	Boss convinced me to become a teacher
1989	August- Got hired as teacher for math at Towne HS
1989	September- What the hell did I get myself into?
1989	September- Braiden born
1990	February- Decided I wanted to teach for my career and felt it
1991	August- Sarah born
1991	October- Became an assistant wrestling coach

Year(s)	Significant Event
1991	December- Got Master's in Teaching and Teacher Education at U
1993	January- Became adjunct math professor at local community college
1993	October- Became head wrestling coach
2001	Knew I had to become a different teacher to reach kids; Tried things to change my style of teaching to become more hands-on
2004	Quit teaching at community college
2008	Won state title in wrestling as a team
2012	Started using white boards in class to get immediate feedback
2012	Told I was an average teacher by principal
2013	Got Master's in Leadership at U
2017	Became assistant principal at Archer Middle School

Cota mentioned Guerrero numerous times during our interactions together. In fact, while Cota ultimately credited his God for who he was as an educator and the success he had experienced as a teacher (“God had everything to do with that”, he said; CCC interview, August 4, 2018), he also credited Guerrero as someone who had greatly impacted his life story narrative. During the final interview, Cota described Guerrero as a loving father figure. “He’s always been like a father to me. All through my career he would always check up on me. He still does” (CCC interview, August 4, 2018). In the end, he even credited Guerrero for being instrumental in his decision to go into the profession in the first place.

As Cota narrated his timeline construction, he explained to me that he had not always wanted to be a teacher, but for as long as he could remember, he had been driven. He became a father in high school, and was determined to succeed in life no matter what

his profession, in part for his family. In 1984, Cota began working after school at an ice cream parlor under manager Guerrero, who was also the principal at Towne High School. According to Cota, for nearly four years, Guerrero worked hard to convince Cota that he should be a teacher. He encouraged him constantly and after Cota graduated from the local university, he was offered a position at Towne High School teaching mathematics in August of 1989. Guerrero was still principal at the time. By the end of our times together, Cota had described Guerrero as a mentor, inspiration, and friend who he still goes to for advice (LSN interview, March 25, 2018; Impromptu conversation, April 13, 2018; Impromptu conversation, July 19, 2018; CCC interview, August 4, 2018).

Guerrero was not the only noteworthy relationship that Cota mentioned repeatedly throughout our times together. In fact, another Towne principal, the last one Cota worked for and the man who recommended him for this study, Dr. Albert Ramirez, also came up numerous times in Cota's narrative. "From day one, I thought, man I want to work for this guy" (WRE #1 interview, April 13, 2018), Cota announced during a conversation about his first well-remembered event. He went on to describe Ramirez during that same interview as a man who cared about the kids and the teachers at Towne. "All the kids knew who he was" (WRE #1 interview, April 13, 2018), he emphasized. Cota mentioned this principal during three of our formal interviews, and four times during our impromptu conversations.

In addition to these two relationships, Cota mentioned several other strong relationships during our times together. The bulk of them were relationships with other math teachers in the math department at Towne, but he also mentioned some clerical staff members. Perhaps the greatest evidence of Cota's conviction that people are valuable and

worth his time and effort, however, is an evaluation of the contexts he identified as crushing over the course of this project. Without exception, the plots of all three of Cota's well-remembered events centered on individuals other than himself (Table 4.4 below contains plot summaries of each of these WREs). Whether it was watching an administrator discourage an entire staff or listening to a student profess that all she wanted in life was to “get out of school, get a job, and live with a black guy” (WRE #3 interview, July 19, 2018), it was what was happening to people or what people were doing that was not in their best interest that was “crushing” for Cota to watch. Each of these events and their intricacies (including the sensitive and loaded language in the aforementioned quote about living with a black guy) will be analyzed in greater detail in later sections of this chapter. At this time, it is simply significant to mention that Cota had a habit of focusing on other people and internalizing their struggles or pains as crushing. This is evidence of his belief in the worth of people. If they did not matter to him as much as they do, their crushing experiences would not become his crushing experiences.

Table 4.4.

Cota's Well-Remembered Events (WREs)

#	Participant-Given Title	Plot Summary (Any quotations are Cota's words)
1	Bad Leader	A new and generally unsupportive administrator came to the school [Towne]. Cota describes this administrator as not providing any support to teachers, being highly judgmental, and ultimately refusing to renew the contract of a new teacher Cota was actually working with who was working on an advanced degree in mathematics and by Cota's evaluation trying very hard to build relationships with her students and improve her teaching. Cota offered to mentor this teacher in the hopes that this administrator would allow her to stay, but the administrator refused.

#	Participant-Given Title	Plot Summary (Any quotations are Cota's words)
2	The Let Down to the Rise	This event took place during the 2006-2007 year. Cota was the wrestling coach in addition to being a full-time math teacher. On this occasion, he was at a state competition with his wrestlers, some of which were also his students. The crushing moment happened when one of his students who was actually beating another student in a match 9-4 (who he had also actually beaten earlier in the tournament) was accused of biting the other student and [unfairly] awarded a technical violation. This student was not only disqualified, because the violation was labeled flagrant, but all of the points he had earned for the team were stripped from them. Initially Cota was angry, but he realized his student was sick and had simply been wrestling with his mouth open because he was struggling to breathe. The event did not end in a positive way that year. The team was knocked out of 2 nd place (a medaling position), down to 5 th (no medal). Cota did mention, on a positive ending note, that the next year they won the state title (hence the "Rise" in the title he assigned to the WRE).
3	Live With a Black Guy	Cota took the title for his final WRE account from a quote of one of his students, a quote that he found particularly crushing. Cota had approached a student that he had really been trying everything to engage in the classroom (to no avail) for a one-on-one conversation. For whatever reason, he could barely seem to get this particular student to write her name on a paper; he was trying to build a relationship with her that he could leverage in order to ultimately get her to work and learn. When he inquired as to the reason she was so unwilling to do anything during this conversation, her response was: "This is stupid. I don't know why we have to learn any of this. All I want to do is get out of school, get a job, and live with a black guy [...] That's all I want out of my life." For a number of reasons, this pronouncement was crushing to Cota.

This pattern of focusing on and caring about the experiences of others was not simply contained within Cota's crushing WREs; the same pattern was revealed through

the crushing contexts he collected and presented as part of the final (CCC) interview. In fact, five of the seven crushing contexts that Cota reported he literally titled with the names of other people. In accordance with IRB regulations, I had to blot these names out in the image that appears below (Figure 4.1), but I present the image nonetheless. In addition to the image of the collection, I present the following table (Table 4.5) summarizing Cota's commentary in relation to these contexts and why he identified them as crushing.

Figure 4.1. Crushing Contexts Collection (Image): Cota



Table 4.5

Cota's Crushing Contexts Collection (CCC)

#	Participant-Given Title	Summary
1	Braden	This student [Braden] decided not to wrestle his senior year after being on Cota's team previously. Cota was crushed by the

#	Participant-Given Title	Summary
		<p>decision because he believed Braden would regret it. What is more, Braden did not talk to Cota until the end of the year, and it turned out he did regret his decision. It was crushing to Cota that he was unable to convince Braden to wrestle (the student told Cota he greatly regretted his decision later in the year and Cota wondered whether he could have found some way to convince him to stay on the team) and that the rest of the team was so affected by his absence.</p>
2	Plain Vanilla	<p>The title that Cota assigned to this crushing context, “Plain Vanilla,” came directly from an evaluating administrator’s description of one of his lessons. After observing Cota’s lesson, the administrator compared it to “plain vanilla.” As far as Cota could recall, there was no specific criticism or suggestion offered for improvement, even when he asked for critical feedback to improve his practice. That was particularly crushing to him.</p>
3	David	<p>The title of this crushing context- [David]- refers to David Guerrero, Cota’s original principal and old boss. Cota recorded his name mid-year during this study when he was regretting his decision to go into administration and greatly missing the classroom. He had called his old boss (Guerrero) and his mentor expressed a great hurt that Cota would even ask him about returning to the classroom (Guerrero had been the one to convince Cota to go into administration in the first place and had been instrumental in him being offered a position). Guerrero deterred him from returning to teaching, even though Cota had been offered his old position if he wanted it. It was crushing to him for two reasons. First, because he really felt a strong desire to go back into the classroom but also because he thought his mentor had felt somewhat betrayed and unappreciated (Cota</p>

#	Participant-Given Title	Summary
		had actually already interviewed to return to his old teaching position at that point, which shocked Guerrero).
4	Katherine	This student, [Katherine], was trying to request Cota as a teacher for the next year during his last year in the classroom. Cota had not yet told the students he was going into administration and having spent 28 years teaching in the same school, none of the students anticipated this was a possibility. When this particular student found out Cota wouldn't be there her senior year, she literally cried (real tears); "Sir, this is the first time I've ever understood math and you don't care," she said.
5	Oscar	This was another student, [Oscar], who was crushed when he found out Cota was leaving the school the next year to become an administrator. This student also begged him to stay. "Sir, I put it on my mother... I swear, if you just stay... I'll do anything," he urged.
6	Priscilla	[Priscilla] was an angry veteran teacher who disagreed with losing an advanced math class and being asked to teach Algebra 2 one year, a decision that Cota made as head of the department in collaboration with his principal. That year each of the veteran teachers was trying to teach some of the lower-level classes required for graduation because student scores were lower in these courses and the admin team believed this would be a worthwhile intervention. She disagreed and went to express her feelings to Cota. She literally said she hated him and threatened never to speak to him again. Eventually, she apologized, but it was a hard time for Cota who greatly valued the relationships he had developed with every teacher in his department.
7	The Grind	Cota titled his final crushing context "the

#	Participant-Given Title	Summary
		<p>grind”, referring to his daily schedule and workload during his 28 years of teaching. For the bulk of those years, particularly when his wife was home with the kids, he was working full-time, tutoring after school, coaching wrestling, and going to school at night. It was a grueling schedule and they were living paycheck to paycheck. He even recalled counting coins every week the few days before payday to ensure they would be able to buy formula for his son. His days were long- early morning practice (wrestling), all day teaching, Pima teaching at night, and going to sleep late- just so that he could do it all again.</p>

In other words, the majority of the events that Cota described as crushing were crushing to him because other *people*, whom he valued greatly, were suffering in some way or making bad choices that were not in their or others’ best interest. Cota himself noticed this pattern and even commented on it during our final time together. After opening each crumpled paper and relaying to me the story behind each title, when I asked him about crushing contexts in general and what he had learned about himself over the course of this study, he responded, “What’s hard? People... People are hard...” (CCC interview, August 4, 2018).

In reality, this same theme tied so closely to his first core belief was visible even from the initial life story narrative (LSN) interview. Consider the following word cloud, generated from an insertion of every noun Cota spoke during his LSN interview into the word cloud generator as described in Chapter 3 (Figure 4.2). The two nouns that appeared more than any other in the transcript of that interview were “kids” (17 times) and “people” (nine times). It is particularly interesting to note that the noun “kid” appeared four additional times in the original manuscript as well (total of 21 times). Because these

Frequency	Noun(s)
5	Place; Coach; Job
4	[School-name]; [Place-name]; Teaching; Math; Year; Kid
13	Relationships; Heart; Work

A belief in the capacity of people to learn *if* they are willing to work. The second core belief that was immediately evident in the life story narrative of Cota was his conviction that all people can learn and grow *if* they will only put in the time and effort required to do so. He articulated this general conviction in a variety of ways and contexts over the course of this study. One of the most consistent ways that Cota emphasized the importance of hard work and its connection to learning and growing in general was in drawing a comparison to wrestling.

The theme of wrestling surfaced during my very first meeting with Cota. During that conversation, he credited what he learned from wrestling for “literally all my successes in life” (Initial meeting, January 28, 2018). “Wrestling taught me that I could do anything if I just work at it,” he said, “even teach math” (LSN interview, March 25, 2018). According to Cota, he was not always good at math. It took him six years to get a degree in mathematics, but he knew he could do it because of what he learned from wrestling. Teaching also did not come easy to Cota. It was harder than he had anticipated and by September of 1989, just one month after he began teaching at Towne, he was wondering if he was ever going to be any good at it. “My son was born that month, and I remember thinking, what did I get myself into?” (LSN interview, March 25, 2018). By Cota’s own admission, he held onto the resilience that came with being a wrestler and a love for his students. It turned out that was motivation enough, and by February that first year, Cota made the conscious decision to make teaching his lifelong career.

Also by his own profession, Cota took this belief that hard work will get you wherever you want to go into everything he did working with both students and staff. Describing his experience working with a committed math department at Towne he said, “I knew a child that wanted to learn would go there and learn because we were trying to reinvent so much and would not give up” (LSN interview, March 25, 2018). Two times later during that same interview, Cota reiterated how he would communicate this belief regularly to his students. “Any chance I get, I do my best to tell them to work hard... you can do whatever you want, just set your mind to it”, he said. “Wrestling taught me that... you can do whatever you want if you put in the effort”.

It was very clear that Cota did not just have this core belief in himself or his students, he extended it to all people willing to put forth the effort required for progress. In fact, one of the three well-remembered crushing events that Cota shared with me centered on a colleague that he really felt could continue to make progress who simply was not given that chance to do so by an unsupportive administrator. The plot of this WRE was already presented in Table 4.4 earlier in this chapter. Cota mentioned Towne’s loss of this teacher both during his first during his LSN interview and during his WRE interview. The first time he described this particular teacher, he described her as a new teacher who was already “working hard to be creative and build relationships, bending over backwards to collaborate” (LSN interview, March 25, 2018). He admitted she struggled with certain things, classroom management among them, but he emphasized her strengths and lamented that even though he had begged his administrator to allow the teacher to stay, promising to work with her and help support her, that administrator chose not to renew her contract. In Cota’s extended description of that crushing moment, his

belief that this teacher could continue to learn and grow is unmistakable.

What was crushing to me is that this teacher was a second-year teacher working on a Masters in math and would come and share ideas of things she was trying and creating all the time. She was putting effort in. I sat in on her classes. She had a good rapport with kids. She was really trying hard and so when our principal at the time came in and observed her for her final eval and determined right away she wouldn't hire her, that was very disappointing to me. She was excited, liked our kids... that was kind of crushing and even after I spoke to her and said I'd work with her and try to help with classroom management... she said no [...] so that was crushing to me. (WRE #1 interview, April 13, 2018).

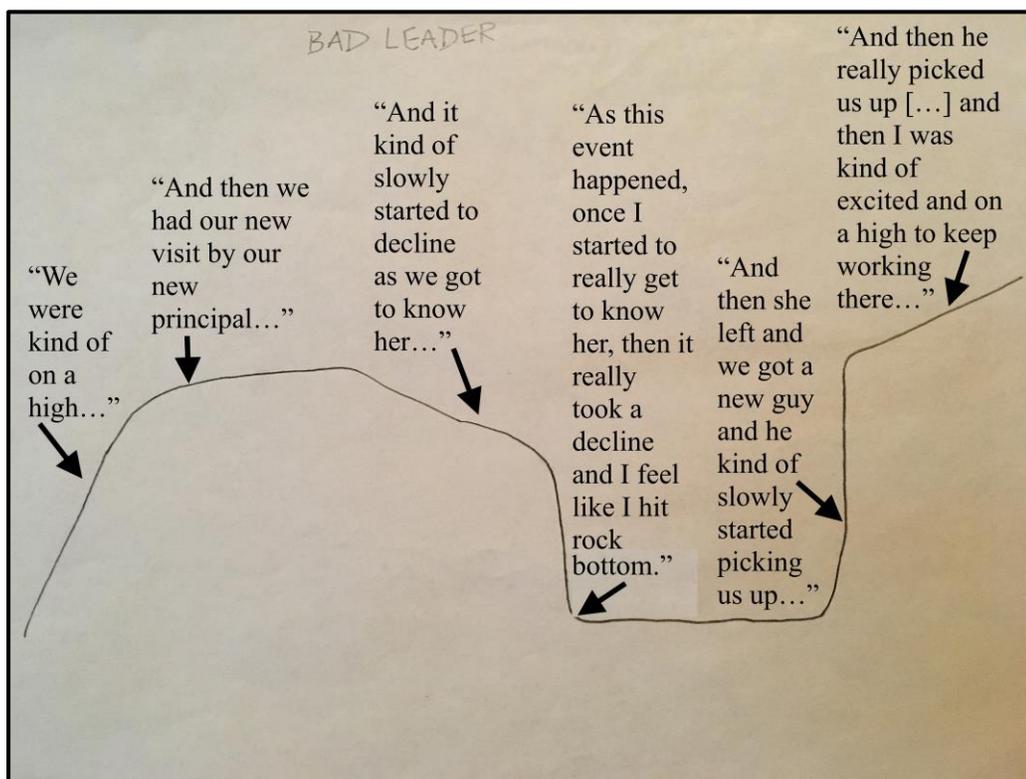
In other words, Cota was convinced that this teacher was willing to put in the work that he knew would enable her to improve her practice. He knew she was going to be an amazing teacher. The fact that his new administrator was unable to see that eventually made him angry. In his own words,

Even after I spoke to her and said I'd work with the other teacher to try to help her with classroom management, she said, 'No, I can't do this. I can't because I'm thinking of the kids.' That comment really upset me... thinking of the kids... she never left her office. She didn't even know the kids, so that was crushing to me. Several people left, and that was hard. I chose instead to try to inspire others and lead by example. (WRE #1 interview, April 13, 2018)

It is perhaps interesting to note that initially, Cota did his best to work alongside the new administrator when she arrived at Towne. Consider the following arc that he constructed during that WRE interview where he eventually pronounced her a "bad

leader” (literally the title he assigned to the event). He started his arc with an upward line to indicate his initial excitement and willingness to embrace her into their community. This is particularly significant given the fact that she was replacing the principal he loved, his mentor, Guerrero. The more he attempted to build a relationship with her, however, the more he became discouraged (hence the drop in the line along the arc).

Figure 4.3. WRE #1 Participant Experience Arc (Annotated)



Eventually, Cota could not bring himself to be around her. It is not that he believed she could not learn or change, it is that he observed that she refused. In a way he felt guilty about the feelings he developed for her, but he shared them candidly. “I was very angry at her... furiously angry... I literally, and this is probably bad, but I changed where I had been parking for years just so that I could avoid seeing her” (WRE #1 interview, April 13, 2018). What he did not do, however, was give up on the learning of

the other teacher that this administrator did not seem to believe could learn and grow. As will be discussed again during the section of this chapter that addresses Cota's commitment to continued agentic action, while he avoided this new administrator, Cota went out of his way to continue to invest in the learning of that second-year teacher.

Hope and Trust

In addition to regularly expressing at least two core beliefs about the worth and capacity of people, Cota constantly communicated a hope and trust that acting on those beliefs and convictions was ultimately good or beneficial, regardless of the circumstances of the moment. In other words, Cota conveyed a resilient belief that what he was doing mattered, whether he could see the impact in the immediate or not. Following his description of each of his three well-remembered events, for example, it was this belief that Cota referred to in order to explain his ability to get through the most crushing moments of his work.

The basic plots of each of these crushing events was already presented (see again Table 4.4 above) and one of them ("The Bad Leader") has just been discussed at length. The other two will be revisited in greater detail in the pages that follow in this chapter. First, let us consider Cota's experience during his second WRE, which he titled "The Let Down to the Rise". Recall from Table 4.4 that the basic plot of this WRE was that Cota's team of wrestlers (students) was dealt a devastating blow when it was knocked out of a medaling position at the championship tournament after a member of the team was falsely accused of intentionally biting his opponent (flagrant foul). Cota's hope and trust that acting in agentic ways in connection with his core beliefs is always beneficial was particularly visible in this experience, both in the arc that he drew to represent his

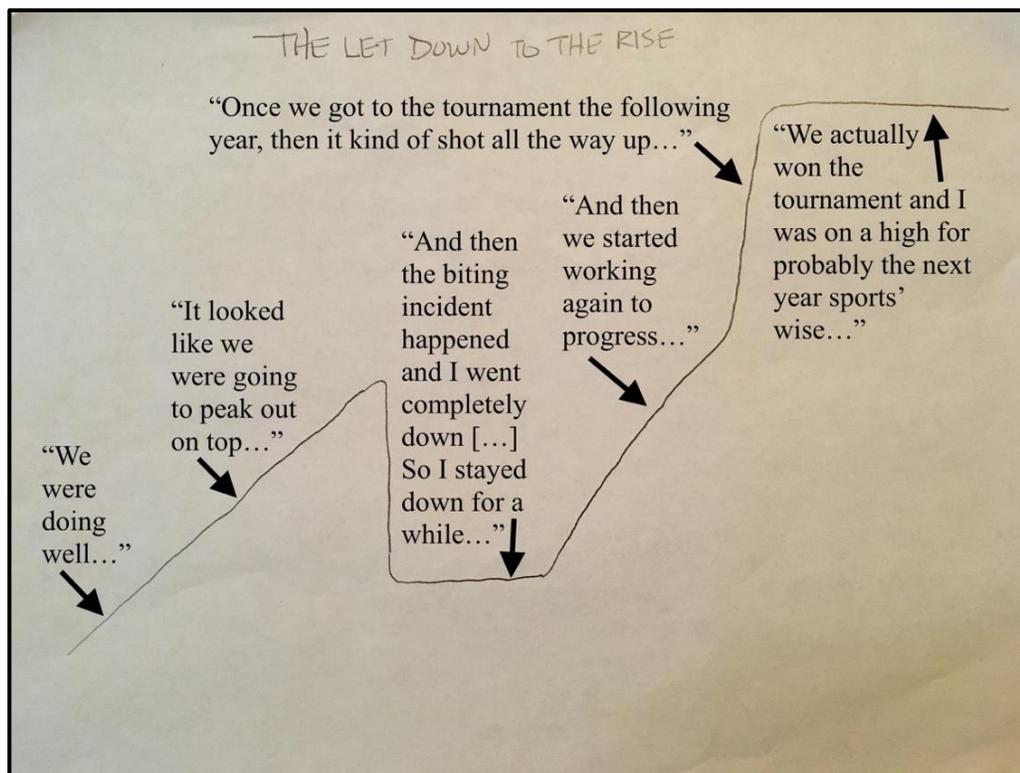
emotional experience within the crushing event, as well as in the words he used to reflect on the event during the WRE interview. It is not, of course, that Cota did not experience pain and anger during this event. He was very honest, in fact, about his anger during the interview. Initially, he was angry at his student, believing at first that the accusation must have been sound (“Never question an official,” he told me; WRE #2 interview, July 19, 2018). In his own words,

My first instinct... I was so upset... First of all, [student’s name], how could you? Why would you? [...] I took off for a walk and needed to gather myself and I ignored [student’s name] when I knew I saw him out of the corner of my eye running up to me [...] I just needed a moment to calm down. I was disappointed. Maybe I was selfish... But I came back and I thought it over...

This low point of anger is very visible in the arc that Cota drew in connection with this event. (See Figure 4.4 below). Equally visible, however, is the upward trend as Cota begins to rebuild after the devastating moment, to focus on the positive and hard work and take his team through that process. This optimistic outlook, even without the existence of any immediate visible good or benefit of the devastating experience, was only possible because he truly believed that as long as he continued to move forward in positive ways in keeping with his beliefs and convictions, things would go well in the end. It is significant to also note the extreme high (upward line and plateau) that Cota shows in connecting the teams’ experience the following year to this crushing WRE event. In other words, just as Cota had consistently expressed that good always comes from persisting in hard work and effort for the benefit of others, in this case, he was able to give a specific example of how difficult times can give way to fabulous times. While

he and his team had to endure the devastation of the end of a season where they really felt they deserved to medal, the fact that the next year they were able to return and actually win the championship was evidence that positive experiences can follow crushing experiences. This entire experience is visibly demonstrated in the arc (Figure 4.4 below) that Cota drew during the reflective interview.

Figure 4.4 WRE #2 Participant Experience Arc (Annotated)



Technically, of course, the crushing event did not have a happy ending. The team was knocked, rather unfairly, out of placement at a state tournament. The students that year truly were “crushed”. But Cota still chose to end his arc on a high, looking forward to the next year and the title that was won. When I asked him what was going through his mind during the difficult moments of that event and also what sense he made of those moments and why they were so memorable to him and how they impact his practice,

Cota responded by expressing his hope and trust that continuing to be positive and do the things you believe in doing will always result in good things, even if you have to go through hard times. In his own words,

I think what it does is it makes you realize that no matter how bad a situation is, you know, you're going to get yourself as far as you get yourself up. You dust yourself off, and you gotta move forward. You gotta keep on truckin on. You're either gonna pack it in, or you're gonna say, 'Well, try it again...' And that's what I did [...] I think as long as you're persistent and continue with a goal in mind and especially for your kids [...] you're doing it for them and you're working hard to get them to realize that things don't always go the way you plan but as long as you keep on doing them for the right reasons, you'll be okay, you'll end up on top, wherever that may be. [...] I think you just have to keep believing that what you're doing is for their betterment... And you do it with a smile, and you do it with a care, and you try to make it relevant... (WRE #2 interview, July 19, 2018).

As aforementioned, the hope and trust that Cota held onto was not just revealed in his experiences in crushing moments. It was a sentiment he expressed repeatedly that was tied very closely to his life story narrative. Both his experience at home with his family and his experience as a wrestler nurtured that hope and trust. For more than a decade while Cota was teaching full time, going to school, and coaching, his wife stayed home with the kids. "We were in debt and surviving," he described during our first formal interview. "If I look back and I think we had three kids, she was at home, and we were surviving on a salary starting at \$21,000 a year, that's nuts... but we always got through" (LSN interview, March 25, 2018). He went on to describe his family's belief that if they

worked hard and did their part, God would do His and no matter what the circumstances were, ultimately they would be okay. “When it gets hard, we think, we’ve made it before” (LSN interview, March 25, 2018), he explained.

In terms of wrestling, during his CCC interview, when asked to consider everything he had shared and what he had noticed or learned, Cota responded by talking about a Joe Rogan (not a pseudonym) podcast. Joe Rogan is a UFC aficionado who once did a podcast where he was remarking about the incredible nature of wrestlers. That podcast is one that Cota will never forget. Rogan made the comment during that podcast that the unique thing about wrestlers is that they will keep going and going despite the torture, that they enjoy putting themselves through the pain just to show everyone they can do it. He also quoted a famous wrestler and wrestling coach that Cota already admired, Dan Gable (again, not a pseudonym). Gable once said to wrestlers about wrestling, “If you can do this, everything else is easy. Everything else in life is easy” (Cota, CCC interview, August 4, 2018). Cota summed up his sentiments with this: “Yes, we’ve had hard times. You dust yourself off and keep on trucking. I’m gonna win the war even if I lose a battle. It’s an attitude I’ve developed in my life” (CCC interview, August 4, 2018). In other words, Cota faces each crushing context with a steadfast hope that if he is acting in accordance with his beliefs and working hard in the best interest of others, his efforts will matter, regardless of any set of circumstances he finds himself in.

Regular Intentional (Agentive) Action

It may well be that hope and trust that enables Cota to continue to perform regular agentive acts while focusing on the best interest of his students, regardless of the circumstances. In every single story about a crushing event or experience, his

commitment to regular agentive action was a consistent reaction pattern to the crushing moment. In other words, without exception, Cota responded to each crushing moment or event by taking action almost immediately, actually *doing* something in response that was consistent with his core beliefs. In most cases, it was a series of actions, and Cota was never thwarted when an individual act did not seem to make the impact he hoped.

Consider, for example, the third well-remembered event that Cota reported involving the girl Latina student who was simply refusing to do any work in his class. As a reminder, the basic plot of this WRE was already revealed in Table 4.4 earlier in this chapter. Basically, each day, she would take out her mirror and her makeup, talk to her peers, or completely ignore whatever was asked of her. Each day, Cota would coax her and attempt various methods to get her engaged, just as he had done for years with each of his students. Unlike his experience with the bulk of his students, however, this particular student was generally nonresponsive to the vast majority of his attempts to engage her in the work at hand. At times, she even refused to write her name on a paper.

One day early in the year, Cota approached this student near the end of class and asked her whether she would be willing to stay after a few minutes so that he could speak to her. It was a new agentive action, an attempt to build a rapport and figure out the source of her lack of motivation without an audience of peers. It was not an unusual thing for Cota to do. As has already been addressed, he believed in the power of relationships perhaps more than he believed in anything else. When she agreed to stay after, Cota was encouraged. When her peers, and therefore her audience, were gone, Cota asked her why she never wanted to do anything in his class, and tried to talk to her about the importance of what they were learning in the real world. To Cota's surprise, the girl responded rather

quickly and abruptly, “This is stupid. All I want to do is get out of school, get a job, and live with a black guy.”

In that instant, Cota admitted, he was slightly discouraged and also somewhat taken aback. In his own words,

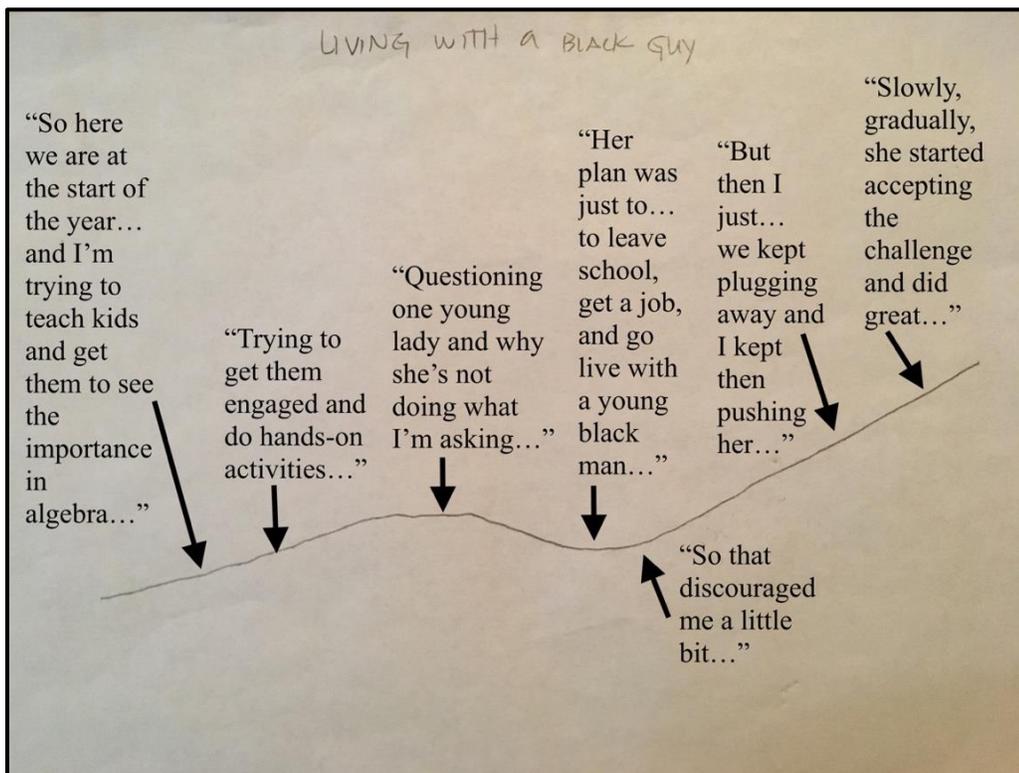
I thought to myself, why would you say that? Where is your father? Why a black guy? Why not, but why? I was just so confused. Really, I just didn’t understand why she would want to settle for ‘just’ living with any guy. Didn’t she have dreams? But I didn’t say any of these things out loud. Instead, I asked her whether she was just going to drop out and she said her mom was making her go to school. I tried to build on that. ‘Well, if you have to be here anyway,’ I would plead, ‘may as well work, you might learn something’. (WRE #3 interview, July 19, 2018).

In other words, in the end, Cota decided to do what he always did, continue to try anything and everything he could think of to get her engaged and help her learn. “I just... we kept plugging away and I kept pushing her...” he said. “I just treated her like all the others. Every day was a new day and I kept trying anything and everything I could to get her to work” (WRE #3 interview, July 19, 2018). Eventually, Cota’s persistence was rewarded. As he celebrated at the close of this same interview, “Slowly, gradually, she started accepting the challenge and did great!” (WRE #3 interview, July 19, 2018).

What is particularly noticeable about Cota’s commitment to action is the impact it appears to have on his emotional experience. It is as if the continued action enables him to be in better spirits. Much like the previous WRE discussed in this chapter, this particular event made Cota angry for at least a short time. Nonetheless, the experience arc Cota drew in connection with this crushing event does not reveal a significant or long-

lasting low and even ends on a relative high (see Figure 4.5 below). Indeed, this event, crushing though it was, is yet another example of Cota's ability to persist in acting in productive ways that prevent him from remaining overly angry or discouraged for long.

Figure 4.5. WRE #3 Participant Experience Arc (Annotated)



This refusal to give up and commitment to continued action was a pattern present in all three well-remembered events as well as each crushing context story Cota shared. Even within his life story narrative interview, Cota gave numerous examples of his creative attempts to act in ways that he believed were in the best interest of students. From focusing on relationship building and investing the time into that practice to committing to focusing on standards and incorporating truly relevant curriculum (incorporating social justice issues) into the classroom, Cota was determined to spend every day making intentional decisions focused on his students. He was also committed to trying new instructional techniques. In fact, he even recorded an event on his timeline

in 2008 where he attempted to use white boards in his classroom for the first time. He mentioned that he was studying for his Master's degree and finding that his current students were not engaged by the same things as his previous students and he was going to keep trying new things until something was really effective. "That was really effective," he said, "so to me it was a significant event" (LSN interview, March 25, 2018). There were other examples still. One year he bought some new calculators and dedicated some time to teaching his students how to really use them and what sorts of things they could do for them that mattered in the real world. "They thought they'd won the lottery," he exclaimed. "It was a great tool" (LSN interview, March 25, 2018).

Regardless of the challenge, Cota was determined not to get discouraged and never to quit trying. As alluded to previously, in the case of his first well-remembered event about the unsupportive administrator, while Cota admitted that it was hard to be around her and that he even changed where he parked so as to avoid seeing her at times, he never stopped being supportive to all of his colleagues and he never stopped acting in the best interest of his students. "Several people left, and that was hard," he commented. "But at the time, I was working towards getting a leadership degree. I wanted to become an administrator, and I was thinking I would never do things this way [...] I chose instead to try to inspire others and lead by example" (WRE #1 interview, April 13, 2018). He even continued to mentor the teacher he knew would be leaving at the end of the year after he learned that administrator refused to renew her contract. He told me he knew that everything he invested would be worthwhile because she was going to be an amazing teacher.

In short, when Cota decided something was worth the effort, he continued to work

toward it. If he knew exactly what to do, he would do it. If he did not, he would keep trying different things until something worked. By his own profession, this was a pattern those closest to him knew all too well. In his own words, “To this day, my wife will say, the one thing about you is that you are so disciplined. You can say okay, set your mind, and you do that... no matter what it takes. Maybe I’m stubborn,” he added (CCC interview, August 4, 2018).

Faith-Strengthening Routines and Practices

But not all of Cota’s time was spent giving and acting for the betterment of others. He was also very committed to building himself up. He was always reading and studying; seeking advice and ideas from colleagues; and trying out new lessons, structures, and even curriculum. He invested significant time into improving his practice, in part because he believed it would help him be the most effective teacher and also because he believed the more effective he was, the easier it would be for him to continue to work hard regardless of the circumstances. At one point, Cota even mentioned that he felt it was partly his determination to keep improving himself that kept him encouraged even in the more difficult seasons and life experiences (LSN interview, March 25, 2018).

Cota was also intentional in making use of his free time in ways that would strengthen his practice. For example, he always made time for family. Content to focus on hard work, students, and wrestling during the week, he never gave up his day of rest at home. All week he lived a life of discipline, working long days, leaving early and getting home late. But Sundays he reserved for rest at home. That was his day to recharge. The busy week “taught me mental toughness, to set goals, to stay on the grind. It made me stronger,” he said (LSN interview, March 25, 2018). “Sundays would be a day where I’d

get home and just veg” (CCC interview, August 4, 2018). “I was used to burning the candle at both ends” (LSN interview, March 25, 2018).

In addition to building time into his routine for learning and for rest, Cota also made time to reflect on the comments and experiences of students and colleagues that had over the years thanked him for the impact he made on their lives. In other words, he would intentionally revisit those encouraging comments that students, teachers, principals, and parents had made over the years to let him know that what he was doing mattered. “Looking back to comments made by kids or people... that can keep you going, it can strengthen your faith that wow, they did appreciate and see my efforts” (CCC interview, August 4, 2018). During that same interview, Cota went on to recount several of these comments and instances, some from parents, some from students, many involving tears and some even begging him not to leave Towne to be an administrator at another school. Looking back has always been a way to help Cota look forward and strengthen his resolve to keep working.

Commitment to Collaboration or Congregation or Consultation

The final component of a devout faith is a commitment to collaboration or congregation or consultation of some sort with people of like convictions. There was not a single meeting or conversation where Cota did not bring up an example or the general significance of meeting with his colleagues. He was particularly passionate about working with the colleagues in his department at Towne where he taught for so many years. For many years, Cota served as the math department chair at Towne. It was his job to ensure that empowering collaboration was occurring, and he took that job very seriously. In fact, according to Cota, the work he did alongside his colleagues in the math

department was one of the things that made him the most proud and brought him the most job satisfaction. “Our math department is a pretty dynamic set of people,” he told me during our very first formal interview. I noted immediately that while he was speaking from a position in a different school, he still used words like “our” and the present, “is”. “We care, support one another, share ideas, step in to help... That was such a special place. It was so easy to stay for so many years” (LSN interview, March 25, 2018), he continued.

Cota emphasized that the department at Towne was a team, and that while there were times that he would have to remind some people on the team to make some sacrifices in the best interest of the team, most of the time the collaboration was so powerful that people wanted to do things for one another and even for other teachers’ students. “I’ll tell you again, our department is amazing. Our kids, our community... are super lucky. They love math, care about kids... Of course, there are a couple we need to keep encouraging, but it’s a fortunate place where we care for students and each other [...] It’s a big family” (LSN interview, March 25, 2018).

Perhaps most important to Cota about this collaboration was that he really and truly believed it made everyone stronger. He compared it to wrestling alongside the same people for hours a day. He emphasized the bonds that are formed, the understanding that can be given, and the fact that a group of people have access to more ideas, more experiences, and more memories that can provide insight into how to work well with students than a collection of teachers working in isolation. Since everyone in his department was supposed to be focused on the best interest of students, they all had a common interest. They could agree to disagree at times, but they would not disagree on

their desire to help students learn math and become successful. “We relied on each other,” Cota said, “for our different strengths” (CCC interview, August 4, 2018). Cota concluded that interview by mentioning that he would never have been recommended for this study if he had not learned from and relied on so many different individuals over the course of his career. He again brought up his very first principal that once convinced him to finish a degree in math and teach. He brought up a colleague in his department (Nelson- pseudonym- who is also a participant in this study) who had become a fixture at Towne who literally developed his own standards-based curriculum that was more relevant to students because it incorporated real world examples and social justice issues. He mentioned a teacher that had taught alongside him for twenty-five years and the many “lifesaving” conversations they had had over the years as they went through some difficult times and unsupportive administration. In short, Cota would tell you that he is who he is because of others, and in particular he would point to the others with like beliefs that he has collaborated or consulted or congregated with over the course of his lifetime.

Teacher Faith and Persistent Agency Lived Out in the Crushing Contexts

In the end, just as I have so often drawn from my religious faith to persist through the difficult times in my life, in and out of educational settings, so Luis Cota consistently referenced the aspects and components of his teacher faith in reflecting on his experiences during the crushing contexts of his profession. We never discussed a faith construct of course. I never mentioned any specific attributes. But Cota actively attended to all five of them. First, he repeatedly returned to his two core beliefs that were fundamental to who he was and how he interacted with his students and his colleagues as

he reflected on his teaching and his persistence through difficult moments and circumstances. In other words, he never lost sight of how much he cared for people in general and how invested he was in building and maintaining relationships with them. He also never gave up either on his own learning and growth or that of any of the people around him. He continued to seek collaboration and input from colleagues and higher education to enable himself to incorporate new and innovative strategies in his classroom that could push his students even further in their understandings. He continued to focus on and invest in the well-being of everyone around him however he could.

Secondly, throughout our time together, Cota frequently referred to a hope and trust that acting on his beliefs and convictions was ultimately good or beneficial regardless of what the circumstances were in the moment. Third, he demonstrated regular intentional (agentive) action in accordance with his beliefs and convictions even during the most difficult moments. In other words, he continued to focus on making decisions in the classroom in particular that were in the best interest of his students and while he allowed himself to feel his anger and frustration in crushing moments, he did not allow himself to falter in his dedication or commitment to act in intentional ways. Fourth, throughout Cota's narratives, there was evidence of routines and practices that built and strengthened his faith and resolve as an educator with persistent agency that undoubtedly enabled him to continue to act in these intentional ways even during crushing moments. Finally (fifth), Cota's commitment to collaboration or congregation or consultation of some sort with colleagues and experts with like beliefs and convictions was a regular theme. In the case of Cota then, perhaps it really is his teacher faith that enables him to continue to persist with agency in a field wrought with crushing contexts. In the end,

Cota said it best in a quotation worth repeating, though it was referenced earlier in this same chapter. When asked to reflect on his persistent agency in connection with his second well-remembered event as well as in general, Cota said,

I think what it does is it makes you realize that no matter how bad a situation is, you know, you're going to get yourself as far as you get yourself up. You dust yourself off, and you gotta move forward. You gotta keep on truckin on. You're either gonna pack it in, or you're gonna say, 'Well, try it again...' And that's what I did [...] I think as long as you're persistent and continue with a goal in mind and especially for your kids [...] you're doing it for them and you're working hard to get them to realize that things don't always go the way you plan but as long as you keep on doing them for the right reasons, you'll be okay, you'll end up on top, wherever that may be. [...] I think you just have to keep believing that what you're doing is for their betterment... And you do it with a smile, and you do it with a care, and you try to make it relevant. (WRE #2 interview, July 19, 2018).

If that is not a statement of teacher faith, I am not sure what is.

CHAPTER 5: THE CASE OF WILLIAM NELSON AND HIS UNIQUE FAITH
IN A CALLING TO TEACH “PURE” MATHEMATICS TO STUDENTS

Introduction

In this chapter, I present the unique case of William Nelson (pseudonym). Ultimately, I advance the argument that Nelson too is an educator who regularly exhibits a unique devout faith and who relies on his faith to persevere through crushing contexts. More specifically, in this case, I contend that Nelson boasts a mature faith motivated by three core beliefs and an overarching conviction that he is called to teach “pure” mathematics to students in ways that are the most meaningful and beneficial to them. Through detailed analyses of Nelson’s narratives, action and reaction patterns, and talk about his experiences in the crushing contexts of his profession, I delineate evidence of each of the previously articulated components of devout faith. I present my argument, and therefore organize the bulk of this chapter, by systematically addressing each of these five components. Before advancing this argument, I provide some general information about Nelson to the reader. Over the course of this study, I met with Nelson in person five times, spoke with him on the phone twice, and exchanged several emails and text messages. Table 5.1 below summarizes our significant interactions over the course of nearly 6 months. As a general reminder, in accordance with IRB regulations and as a matter of ensuring privacy to all involved, every name (of person or place) contained in this and all chapters of this work are pseudonyms.

Table 5.1.

Chronological Summary of Researcher-Participant Interactions: Nelson

Date	Purpose/ Data collection instrument(s)	Specifics (Details)
11-29-17	Initial meeting	Brief explanation of upcoming study, questions

Date	Purpose/ Data collection instrument(s)	Specifics (Details)
1-09-18	Phone conversation	answered about Towne and principal willingness to allow graduate students on campus; ~ 00:32:00 Phone conversation; more questions answered; Nelson informed me his principal had mentioned the study to him already; Nelson expressed willingness to participate and to communicate basics of projects to others in department if they asked; 00:32:18
1-11-18	Pick-up of consent form, brief meeting	Consent obtained; brief impromptu conversation- review of first activity (timeline) and willingness to be flexible with timeline; ~ 00:18:00; left other consent forms in case others in department asked for them
3-25-18	Life chronology (timeline) construction (stage 1 of 2 to co-construct <i>life story narrative</i> -LSN)	Submitted via email; 9 distinct “seasons” of individual events recorded/ titled, 1 additional annotation (non-event)
3-26-18	LSN interview (stage 2 of 2 to co-construct LSNs)	In-person meeting; 00:41:18 formal recorded LSN interview; ~ 00:28:00 follow-up conversation, WRE and CCC explanations given (printed)
3-29-18	Phone conversation	Questions answered about WREs and CCC; plan to drop CCC materials off at Towne following week; 00:08:18
4-2-18	Very brief interaction (not categorized as a meeting)	CCC materials dropped off (there less than 5 minutes)
5-11-18	WRE #1, WRE #2, & WRE #3	Submitted via 3 separate emails with attached recordings; 00:01:30, 00:02:58, and 00:03:01
5-11-18	WRE #1, WRE #2, & WRE #3 interviews	In-person meeting; ~00:20:00 formal recorded WRE interviews (combined, recorded separately- WRE #1- 5:07 audio, 2:15 video; WRE #2- 4:57 audio, 1:03 video; WRE #3- 3:17 audio, 1:21 video); ~ 00:15:00 impromptu conversation
5-24-18	CCC interview (final interactions)	In-person meeting; 00:09:21 formal recorded CCC interview; ~ 00:18:00 impromptu conversation

Background Information

William Nelson is a White man holding a secondary education (mathematics) teaching certification in the state of Arizona. He possesses a BS in Mathematics and is currently working toward a Master's degree in Teacher Education with an emphasis in Math Education. At the start of data collection, Nelson was 37 years of age and halfway through his 11th year teaching high school mathematics. This particular year and for 4 years prior, Nelson had been a full-time high school mathematics teacher at Towne High School, a Title 1 school in a lower socioeconomic district in Southern Arizona. Over this time at Towne, Nelson taught various courses in mathematics, working mainly with freshmen and primarily teaching Algebra 1. In addition to teaching, during this study, Nelson served as head of the mathematics department at Towne, volunteered his time to help coach wrestling, continued to develop his personal business (writing and selling mathematics curriculum), attended graduate school, and spent time with his wife and young child (LSN interview, March 26, 2018).

Nelson was formally recommended for this study by his principal at the time, Dr. Albert Ramirez. Before this recommendation, however, I met with Nelson informally, asking whether his principal would allow me to seek recommendations from his department in the first place and detailing the basics of my approved project. It was Nelson who alerted Ramirez to check his email for my meeting request (Initial meeting, November 11, 2017). If I had any apprehension that Ramirez may feel obligated to recommend Nelson for my study for that reason, it became clear during our in-person meeting that he would have recommended Nelson of his own accord. Indeed, Nelson was the first teacher Ramirez mentioned during our meeting, and his eyes lit up when he did.

“I know you have already met William,” he said. “He is the head of our department, never gives up on kids, and really cares about their best interest and well-being; you definitely want to ask him” (December 8, 2017). “And he’s really good at what he does, especially working with freshmen,” Ramirez continued (December 8, 2017). “I suppose it’s saying something if you move your own child to your school just so he can be in a teacher’s class,” (December 8, 2017) he remarked later during that same meeting. In other words, Ramirez was so confident that Nelson was a resilient teacher that when his own child was struggling in mathematics at another school, he brought him to his school just so that he could be in Nelson’s class. Following Ramirez’s recommendation, I formally emailed Nelson to request that he participate in my study. After a phone call and another in-person meeting, Nelson consented.

A Case of Devout Faith

As a reminder from previous chapters, drawing from a comparison to religious faith, I contend that there are five key components to devout faith: core beliefs and convictions, hope and trust that acting on those beliefs and convictions is ultimately good or beneficial, regular intentional (agentive) action in accordance with those beliefs and convictions, routines and practices that build and strengthen one’s faith, and commitment to collaboration or congregation or consultation of some sort with others with like beliefs and convictions. In the pages that follow, I articulate evidence of each of these key components of faith in the words and lived experiences of William Nelson contained within each of the three main sources of data collected as part of this project (the *life story narrative- LSN*- timeline and interview, the three *well-remembered events- WREs*- accounts and interviews, and the *crushing context collection- CCC*- collection and

interview). I further claim that it was Nelson's devout faith that enabled him to continue to make agentic decisions focused on students even in the crushing moments and circumstances of his teaching.

Core Beliefs and Convictions

While I never specifically asked Nelson about his core beliefs and convictions, the following three resilient beliefs surfaced multiple times throughout my interactions with him:

1. A belief in the beauty and value of "pure" mathematics, done and studied for its own sake, and the importance of teaching it in ways that highlight that beauty and value;
2. A belief that his personal calling is to help others and to teach math; and
3. A belief in the importance of focusing on students and their overall being and well-being.

A belief in the beauty of "pure" mathematics, to be taught in new ways.

Nelson's life story narrative (LSN) reveals a belief in the beauty and value of "pure" mathematics, done and studied for its own sake, and the importance of teaching it in ways that highlight that beauty and value. This belief is particularly strong and undoubtedly distinct from the beliefs of any of the other participants in this study. One preliminary piece of evidence to support this claim is the simple fact that Nelson frequently focused his discourse on mathematics. For example, consider the first artifact Nelson submitted for this project, the life chronology (timeline) construction. This timeline appears in Table 5.2 below, unaltered apart from the bold print and bracketed commentary I inserted to draw attention to entries focused on mathematics specifically.

Table 5.2.

Nelson's Life Chronology (Timeline) Construction: Focus on Math

Season #	Season Title (ID) and Significant Experiences
1	Elementary Experiences <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • good at math • “flat out wrong” even though I was right [math example] • “Around the world” and nobody could beat me [math example]
2	Middle School Experiences <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • English teacher for a math teacher • first time for struggle- algebra • able to teach myself at home [math]
3	High School Experiences <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • advanced math • I hated proofs! [math] • 100% on tests and quizzes [math] • Constant wonder- When do we talk about calculus? • didn't get an A but tutored the valedictorian (Pre-Calc) • helped a lot of people [math] • no senior math- who wants Calculus first period?
4	Community College Experiences <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • tested into College Algebra • dropped Calculus first time- psyched myself out • Pre-Calc Trig too easy- dropped it and waited • finally calculus- new conceptualization piece- fascinating • decision to be a mathematician- teach math and coach wrestling
5	University Experiences <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • transfer from CC • didn't really fit in • professors not necessarily best teachers [math professors] • office hours obligatory- I am an inconvenience [math professors] • a lot of things I shouldn't do [math professors]
6	Internship Certification Experiences <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • teaching immediately [teaching math] • learning to teach in isolation- pretty much “winging it” [teaching math] • intro to intermediate algebra class- eye opener • I am boring the crap out of them [teaching math] • crash course on survival as a teacher [teaching math] • complete lack of support [teaching math]
7	Affluent District Experiences <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-Calculus and AP Calculus, no state testing

Season #	Season Title (ID) and Significant Experiences
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • trying to do things differently [teaching math] • opposition- “[<i>District name</i>] way or the high way” [teaching math] • I got in trouble [because of how he was teaching math] • no freedom [to teach math the way he wanted] • no PD or trainings [related to teaching math] • contacted University professors for help [math professors] • retention wasn’t there- nobody to blame [related to students learning math] • new focus- multiple representations/ conceptual development vs. procedures [math-specific examples/ pedagogy] • big ego check [teaching math] • developing conceptual activities [math-specific examples/ pedagogy]
8	<p>Less Affluent District Experiences</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • back to first district [teaching math] • great department head at HS, knew from wrestling (wanted to work with him) [teaching math] • from teaching upper level classes to teaching freshmen [teaching math] • different student population • developing my own curriculum [math curriculum] • new principal- Maslow, responsive practices, from math at center to students at center, discipline is about learning
9	<p>Grad School Experiences</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • critical pedagogy and responsive practices [teaching math] • Groupwork course- Complex Instruction [teaching math] • started my own business (selling math curriculum, blogging) • started professional development facilitation [teaching math]
Notation	Always wanted to help people

While the timeline on its own does not reveal any depth in terms of Nelson’s intricate feelings about mathematics related to its nature or how it should be taught, it is significant to note that it is very obviously primarily centered on the content of mathematics. For instance, Nelson recorded 18 events on his timeline to represent the first four seasons of his life (when he was attending elementary school, middle school, high school, and community college). Without exception, those 18 events referred to experiences learning or doing mathematics. Related to elementary school, for example,

Nelson recorded as timeline entries an aptitude for doing mathematics, an event where he was accused by his teacher of being incorrect in math when he knew he was correct, and a competitive mathematics activity related to knowing math facts better than his peers. Related to middle school, he recorded the fact that he had an English teacher for a math teacher, he struggled for the first time with mathematics content (with algebra specifically), and ultimately that he was able to teach himself mathematics content at home without the help of a teacher. Nelson recorded 50 events altogether on his timeline, alongside one general comment (see again Table 5.2 above). Of those 50 events, 30 were specific to his experiences learning or doing mathematics (60%) and an additional 17 (34%) were specific to his experiences *teaching* mathematics. In other words, in terms of content and focus, 94% of the events recorded on Nelson's timeline were either centered on his experiences learning and doing mathematics or his experiences teaching it. In fact, Nelson recorded only three events that were not inextricably tied to mathematics: his transfer to the University, his struggle to find like-minded individuals at the University (although it became clear during the interview that he was referring to individuals with an appreciation for mathematics specifically, so in reality even this example is somewhat tied to an appreciation of mathematics), and the different body of students he found when returning to the first district he ever taught in.

What is so striking about this is the fact that I did not ask Nelson to describe his experiences with mathematics over the course of his life. Instead, I explicitly asked him (and each of my participants) for a timeline that contained any major events, circumstances, or influences in his life that he believed had a lasting impact on his identity and practice as a secondary mathematics teacher. In other words, I asked him to

construct a timeline that would help him tell me his story in terms of how he became the teacher he is today, including within that story (and therefore on his timeline) *any* events or influences he deemed relevant, not just those specific to mathematics. Of all of my participants, Nelson alone focused his timeline almost exclusively on his experiences with math content or teaching mathematics. He did not even mention his family or other influences (such as wrestling) until we spoke at length about other aspects of his life during the various interviews that followed. If the content of mathematics were not so important to his identity, it would not likely have dominated his discourse.

The fact that Nelson frequently focused on mathematics when narrating his life story is perhaps most easily visible in the first of two word clouds that I constructed in analyzing his life story narrative (LSN) interview, the cloud focused on the nouns he spoke during that interview. This word cloud appears below (Figure 5.1). Alongside the visual display in a separate table (Table 5.4) are the exact frequencies of nouns as they appeared in the actual transcript. Given the length of the interview (more than 40 minutes) and the speed at which Nelson spoke (very quickly), not every noun in the transcript is represented in this table. Instead, each noun that appeared at least four times in the original transcript is contained within the frequency table. That said, every single noun appearing in the transcript is represented (visible) on the actual word cloud. As a reminder, in accordance with the process explained in Chapter 3, I made two changes before constructing this word cloud. First, I removed nonsensical nouns. Second, I chose to recode a selection of nouns that were synonymous with other nouns contained in the transcript before pasting the comprehensive list into the word cloud generator. Table 5.3 below is a comprehensive list of each of the five recoding changes I made in this case,

showing to the left the word that appeared in the word cloud (the one pasted into the generator) and to the right the words that originally appeared, as well as the frequencies at which each word appeared.

Figure 5.1 Word Cloud from Sensical Nouns in Nelson LSN Interview

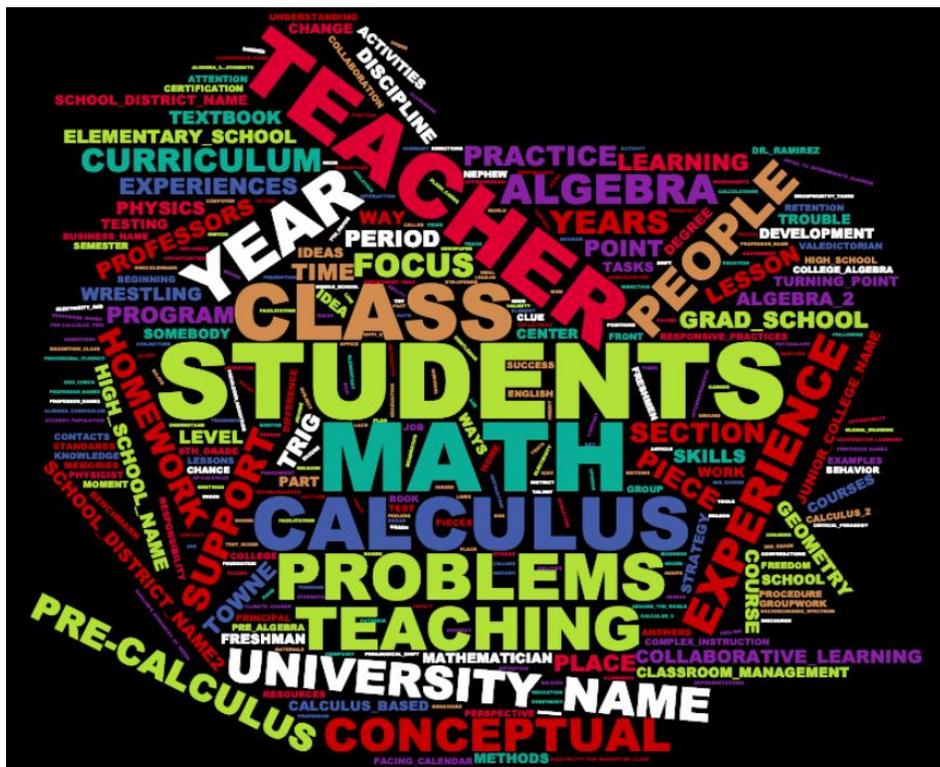


Figure 5.1. The word cloud above was generated by pasting all of the sensical nouns from the transcript of Nelson’s LSN interview into a word cloud generator as described in Chapter 3 (via <https://www.wordclouds.com/>).

Table 5.3.

Minor Changes to List of Nouns Pasted in Word Cloud Generator: Nelson

Noun Appearing in Cloud (Frequency in Transcript)	Nouns in Original Transcript Recoded in this Way (Individual Frequencies in Transcript)
Students (62)	Students (42), kids (20) (Note: In the transcript, it was clear that “kids” was referring in <i>every</i> case to students, no exceptions)
Math (46)	Math (31), Mathematics (15)

Noun Appearing in Cloud (Frequency in Transcript)	Nouns in Original Transcript Recoded in this Way (Individual Frequencies in Transcript)
Classes (37)	Class (22), Classes (15)
Problems (14)	Problems (10), Problem (4) (Note: In the transcript, it was clear that each time it was referring to a <i>math</i> problem or problems)
Pieces (6)	Piece (4), Pieces (2)

Table 5.4.

Frequencies of Nouns Appearing in Cloud in Original Transcript: Nelson

Frequency	Noun(s)
62	Students
46	Math
40	Teacher
37	Class
24	Calculus
14	Problems; Year
13	Teaching
12	People
10	University name; Experience; Conceptual
9	Algebra
8	Pre-Calculus; Support
7	Direct instruction; Curriculum; Homework; Focus; Years
6	Practice; Section; Piece
5	Grad school; Experiences; Professors; Learning; Program; Period; Lesson; Point; Place; Towne; Trig; Time
4	Professional development; Collaborative learning; School district name #2; Elementary school; High school name; Discipline; Algebra 2; Wrestling; Geometry; Textbook; Physics; Skills; Course; Level; Way

The most significant noun contained within Nelson's LSN interview transcript that appears in the cloud is *students*, but it is not difficult to see the many mathematics-related nouns that also appear. The second most common noun appearing in the cloud, in fact, is *math*, contained within the transcript (in the form of *math* or *mathematics*) 46 times. Also notable are nouns like *calculus* (24 times), *problems* (specifically related to

math problems, not problems in general with no exceptions- 14 times), *algebra* (nine times), and *Pre-Calculus* (eight times). In other words, Nelson repeatedly referred to the content he was teaching in telling his life story.

In addition to the fact that Nelson focused his LSN discourse on mathematics, evidence for his first core belief in the beauty and value of what he eventually refers to as “pure” and “real” mathematics is easily found in the specific ways he spoke about the subject over the course of the entire data collection period of this project. In the pages that follow, I will present and interpret a plethora of this evidence. I primarily organize the presentation of related data by individual data source or common theme and understanding.

During the formal interview that immediately followed my collection of Nelson’s timeline, for example, Nelson addressed how his understanding of mathematics content changed and progressed over time. As he told his story, he expressed the enjoyment and confidence he had always experienced doing mathematics, the wonder and appreciation he presently had for the subject as he currently understood it, and a lament for the way we are so often “boring the crap out of [students]” when we teach it (LSN interview, March 26, 2018; see also LSN timeline, Table 5.2 above for quotation).

There are several examples of this in the transcript of that LSN interview. In terms of the evidence related to the enjoyment and confidence he had always experienced doing mathematics, consider the following ten quotations (Table 5.5), extracted from the portion of the LSN interview related to Nelson’s experience with mathematics over the course of the first three seasons of his LSN as recorded in his timeline (when he was attending elementary school, middle school, and high school; see again Figure 5.1). The

quotations are unaltered except that I have chosen to bold portions that explicitly express either enjoyment or confidence.

Table 5.5.

Quotations Related to Enjoyment and Confidence Doing Math: Nelson (LSN Interview)

Instance	Quotation
1	“I have really early memories of being good at mathematics and liking it . When I think about it now, what I take that to mean is that I could calculate really quickly; I never struggled.”
2	“It was either 2 nd or 3 rd grade, I remember I was multiplying by nines and I didn’t use the standard strategy of memorization. My strategy was to look at nine as ten minus one, multiply, distribute, whatever, and calculate it. But my teacher told me I was wrong. She dismissed my strategy. She didn’t recognize that there was any validity to it. She just told me I was flat out wrong, even though I knew I was right .”
3	“One of the other big things I remember from elementary school was <i>Around the World</i> , playing that with flash cards. And I remember nobody could beat me . I could go around the whole classroom and beat everybody at it. So again, I was always really good at math and it showed in terms of my classes.”
4	“Other than that, elementary school, again, math was easy. I liked to do math .”
5	“8 th grade was the first time I struggled with math. I had to actually work at it [...] I can remember looking through my textbook and working through the examples in that section that I knew we were going to be covering the next day. It was my first experience of being able to teach myself mathematics and not having to rely on a teacher or a lesson. In the end, it felt good because I was able to figure it out .”
6	“In high school, I was always in advanced math. Again, I got back to this point where math was really no struggle . Things were easy. I didn’t have to work too hard to get them. So I ended up helping a lot of other students in class.”
7	“Same thing was true when I went to PreCalc my junior year. I literally got 100% on every single test and quiz that my teacher gave all year long .”
8	“ I already knew what we were doing or I could figure it out quicker on my own than paying attention to what the teacher was saying . Again, I did a lot of tutoring... helped a lot of kids out .”
9	“ I understood the mathematics and I was able to help people...”
10	“I ended up taking a PreCalc Trig class which wasn’t appropriate. I

Instance	Quotation
	already knew everything so I ended up dropping that and waiting to take Calculus.”

In each of these ten quotations, Nelson’s longstanding confidence in doing mathematics is evident. At this early stage in his life, his enjoyment of mathematics was tied to this confidence. The fact that he was generally always able to understand mathematics, often very quickly and better than his peers, made it enjoyable. He also specifically mentioned that it felt good to figure things out on that rare occasion where he struggled with the content initially.

As Nelson encountered more advanced mathematics, his enjoyment and confidence in doing mathematics also progressed. More specifically, when he began to study calculus, he developed an appreciation for mathematics that he had never experienced before. In his own words,

The one thing that I struggled with was the conceptualization piece. It had never been there in any of my math classes prior to Calculus, so I had no idea about how to think about things conceptually. I knew the procedural fluency no problem, like the back of my hand. So I remember struggling with that quite a bit in that particular textbook, having to deal with the conceptual pieces and not being able to just rely on the algebraic manipulation. But that semester, that was a big hook for me. The calculus got me interested in math in ways that I hadn’t been prior. I was always good at it and it had always been easy, but for some reason, there was something about calculus that I really liked (LSN interview, March 26, 2018).

In other words, while Nelson had always enjoyed doing well in mathematics in terms of following procedures and calculating things quickly, a whole new world of appreciation

and enjoyment became available to him when he was asked to truly think about the mathematics, in a conceptual sense. Once he was asked to think more deeply about the mathematics, he found it truly interesting. Even though it was initially a struggle for him to think about mathematics in this way, that deeper thinking was the “hook” that he found so engaging (Nelson’s word, taken directly from the quotation on the previous page). As Nelson said later in that same interview, “I realized that it was the calculus that I found so fascinating. And so it was at about that point, around Calc 2 or Calc 3, that I really changed my focus to wanting to do mathematics.” It was also at that point that Nelson changed his major from physics to mathematics. He switched because, in his own words, “When I decided that it was the calculus that I loved, [...] I realized I wanted to be a mathematician and not a physicist.”

After expounding upon his decision to pursue a BS in mathematics in the first place, Nelson added, “I knew that I liked math and that I was capable of doing it and at that point, that was enough for me” (LSN interview, March 26, 2018). He went on to describe his love for mathematics in general as being distinct from that of any of the other individuals he met who were pursuing the same comprehensive math major, students that either wanted to be applied mathematicians or physicists. “Unlike these other mathematicians,” Nelson explained, “I wanted to study *pure* math [...] not to simply learn mathematics as a means of learning to do something with it that would garner a good wage” (LSN interview, March 26, 2018). In other words, Nelson expressed the belief that mathematics was worthy of attention and admiration in and of itself. He enjoyed doing and learning about mathematics just for the sake of doing and learning about mathematics. He appreciated the beauty and order he found when he was forced to

try to actually understand concepts and make connections. While Nelson's sentiments about mathematics were not expressly shared (whether or not they were actually shared) within the narratives of the other participants in this study, he stands alongside many others in the field of math education in advancing views related to the inherent beauty and value of mathematics and how it ought to be taught as a result (Crespo & Sinclair, 2008; Herbal-Eisenmann et al., 2016; Sinclair, 2004).

It was actually in reflecting years later on his appreciation for how interesting mathematics was when he was forced to struggle through problems involving deep thinking that Nelson developed the second part of this first core belief: his conviction that traditional ways of teaching mathematics (the way he himself had begun teaching mathematics) were “boring the crap out of [students]” (LSN interview, March 26, 2018). In this quotation, Nelson was actually speaking of *himself* and the fact that he was “boring the crap” out of his students. This was a conclusion he drew in his third year of teaching when he began to truly contemplate the general disengagement of his students and reflect on the experiences he was affording them. Not long after this, as will be discussed shortly in this chapter within a consideration of Nelson's second well-remembered event (WRE), Nelson even went to the University to seek assistance from professors of mathematics to analyze his teaching because his students were simply not engaged and not learning. It was during these rich conversations that Nelson began to make connections back to his experiences in college. In other words, through some of these discussions, Nelson was inspired to focus on the types of activities that he had found so engaging when he was studying calculus, so that he could then try to expose his students to similar activities. Several times throughout the remainder of the LSN

interview, Nelson expressed his desire to teach differently, to expose his students to more engaging experiences than he experienced most of his life. In his own words,

My entire experience in math classes was essentially the traditional banking methods of teaching where the teacher stands up at the front [...] tells you what everything is, shows you how to do a few problems, and then maybe has you do a problem on your own [...] It was just sit back and I'm going to talk to you while you maybe learn something. But I didn't feel like I got a lot out of the interaction (LSN interview, March 26, 2018).

In other words, while Nelson had always enjoyed doing calculations and being good at mathematics, he realized that the bulk of his learning experiences in mathematics had simply not been engaging. He came to this realization as he reflected upon the disengagement of his own students and as he sought help in rethinking his own teaching from experts in mathematics education. Nelson then made a commitment to himself that he would no longer allow disengaging traditional teaching methods to dominate his instruction to students. As such, Nelson began to focus on incorporating activities designed to develop his students' conceptual understanding and constructive, higher-order thinking. Those were the experiences, after all, that had been engaging to him, and that was what the professors were recommending. Consider as evidence of this change the following five quotations (Table 5.6 below), pulled directly from the LSN interview. These quotations are unaltered except that I have chosen to bold portions that express Nelson's desire to incorporate engaging activities and deeper thinking connected to conceptual understanding in his classroom.

Table 5.6.

Quotations Related to Desiring to Teach More Engaging Math: Nelson (LSN Interview)

Instance	Quotation
1	“I wasn’t focusing on multiple representations . There was no conceptual development in my lessons. It was all procedural and even at that it was a mismatch of all sorts of things.”
2	“I started doing a lot of different things. Instead of having my students write some sort of boring summary on the section that they probably didn’t read anyways, I created activities that they could do once they had done the reading.”
3	“So I started developing these conceptual activities that would help students understand, that would give us a lead in into the lesson.”
4	“So that was the beginning of the conceptual development piece of my practice... So from there, I started thinking about how I could create problems and learning opportunities for my students to develop that conceptual understanding and then follow through with the procedural methods.”
5	“And the tasks really helped me to get at conceptual learning that a lot of the students were missing [...] It’s been such a transformative experience for me to have that in my classroom and to see the difference in how my students are engaged with the mathematics and their understanding with the mathematics than when I was delivering instruction through the banking method, doing direct instruction [...] how it’s changed with the collaborative learning...”

In each of these instances (quotations), Nelson expressed his commitment to shift his teaching methods from the traditional methods that were not interesting even to him as a child who generally enjoyed doing calculations to methods that afforded his students opportunities to develop conceptual understanding. Particularly alongside his earlier expression related to the transformative experience studying calculus was for him in terms of developing his great love for mathematics, this is additional evidence of his core belief in the beauty and value of mathematics.

Nelson’s love for mathematics and belief in its worth was also evidenced in the fact that often what he perceived and described as “crushing” was tied to his conceptions of the worth and nature of mathematics and how one ought to teach it. A clear example of

this is Nelson's second WRE. Nelson titled this WRE "The Other Side of the Fence" based on the common adage about the grass being greener on the other side of the fence. Nelson had made the decision to move from a low socioeconomic district and school with low test scores, poor labels, and high needs to an affluent district and school with many more resources, low student-teacher ratios, and other clear perks. While this new set of circumstances would have been a welcome change to many professionals, Nelson did not find "greener grass" on the other side of the fence. Instead, he found a context so crushing that he would ultimately contemplate leaving the profession and question his practice.

At the time of the move to the more affluent district, Nelson had already come to a place where he was wanting to experiment with newer teaching methods and look at student achievement to make data-informed decisions to improve his practice. He was looking in particular for new ways to truly engage his students in the study of mathematics and he was excited initially about the new opportunities he may have in the more affluent district to do so (LSN interview, March 26, 2018). What he found in this more affluent district, however, was an administration that was basically wanting and expecting him to "be up front and doing direct instruction and kids to be quiet and following along" (LSN interview, March 26, 2018), methods he had already found to be largely ineffective, particularly with students who had not yet had positive experiences with mathematics. In other words, after leaving an unsupportive administration and thinking that maybe things were going to be better because he was "going to an affluent community where the kids did their homework and everything", Nelson discovered that "they just ended up having their own issues" (WRE #2 interview, May 11, 2018), issues

that turned out to be far more crushing to him as an educator with a love for “pure” mathematics.

At first, Nelson tried to work alongside administration to come to a common understanding of what good mathematics teaching was. He asked if he could attend professional development or seek input from local university professors of mathematics and mathematics teaching and apply that learning to his teaching. In other words, Nelson went straight to administration to question existing structures and the status quo in light of what he already knew and wanted to continue to learn about best practices in teaching mathematics. But his administration was unsupportive. Nelson knew what was wanted of him. He knew *how* to conform to the traditional methods of teaching mathematics, focused on computation and memorization of standard algorithms. Indeed, he had begun his teaching career utilizing those methods. But he could not bring himself to conform in that way now; he already knew that way to have been largely ineffective and ineffectual with his students. As a result, he sought out partnerships on his own with university professors. In other words, unwilling to maintain the status quo and reinforce existing structures that he did not believe in or to trust that his new administration knew the best way to teach the important subject of mathematics, Nelson sought out university mathematics professors (experts) as an individual struggling with religion seeks guidance from deacons (experts) in a church.

In the end, Nelson concluded that he wanted to afford his students experiences where they could grapple with real mathematics involving critical thinking and discuss their thinking with their peers, even though these were not the experiences his administration wanted him to provide students. Nelson was so convinced that focusing on

conceptual understanding and rich problems would be beneficial to his students that he was even willing to be put on probation for his lack of conformity. What is more, he continued to reflect on his own practice and to make agentic decisions in his classroom at the recommendation of these professors of mathematics in ways that ensured he would remain on probation the entire time he was teaching in that district. The district ultimately decided not to renew his contract. While the disconnect between what management wanted and what Nelson believed was best for students landed him on an improvement plan and made him consider quitting, in the end, Nelson's resolve ended up stronger still. In his own words,

I was on an improvement plan all three years that I was there. In a lot of ways, it made me feel like I was a horrible teacher. I remember thinking man, maybe I'm a bad teacher and maybe this isn't good for me. But deep down I knew that I was a good teacher. I knew that I was good for kids. And I think I came to realize that that school wasn't a good fit for me. I was good for the kids. The kids were learning a lot from me. But honestly, I had to sacrifice so much of my ideology and what I believed in to drink their Kool-Aid that I just wasn't willing to do that. [...] I remember when I left there, I was thinking about doing other things. It was my sixth year teaching, so like a lot of teachers, that was kind of that little hump and hell, I even considered looking into engineering, which I'm not even interested in. It was a tough time. Again, I contemplated what other things I could do to get away from all the bullshit of teaching. But, hey, here I am six years later and... not an issue. (WRE #2 interview, May 11, 2018)

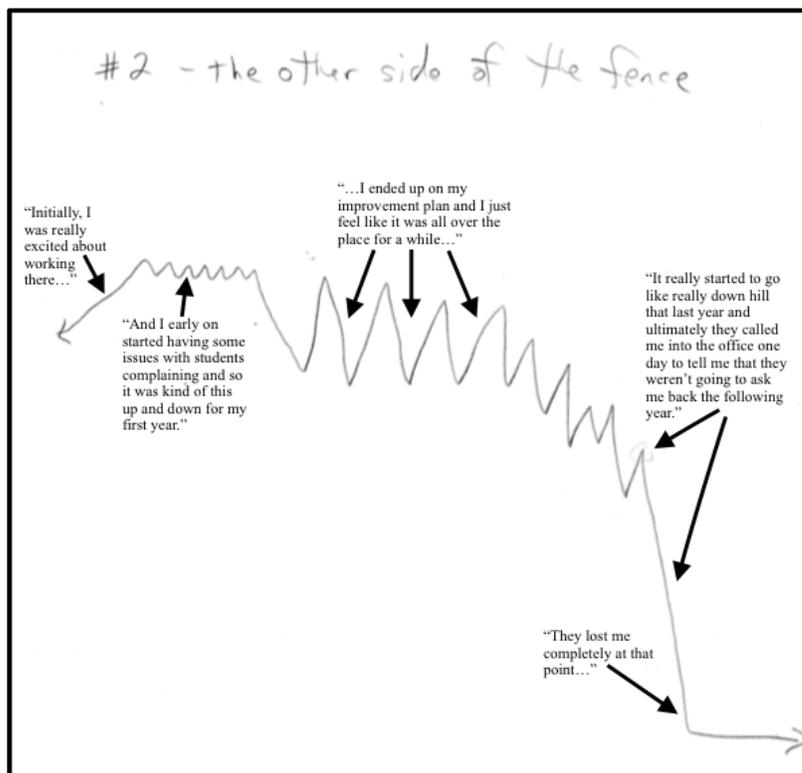
In short, whereas many teachers would have been able to enjoy the smaller class

sizes, ample resources, hard-working students who did their homework regularly, and higher-level teaching assignments (Nelson was teaching Pre-Calculus and AP Calculus exclusively in this more affluent district), Nelson could not look past all that he would have to give up to enjoy those things. No longer could he teach mathematics as a set of procedures disconnected from the real world. He knew too much. He knew now that doing so would rob the students he loved of rich mathematical tasks that required critical thinking. He simply could not deny them the opportunity to focus on conceptual understanding and multiple representations. After all, it was his own experiences focusing on conceptual understanding that had brought him to see the true value of mathematics in the first place. “Real mathematics is not about memorizing procedures and moving to the next section in a textbook,” Nelson remarked (WRE #2 interview, May 11, 2018). In other words, Nelson would rather teach mathematics in a way that required thinking, engaging tasks, and conceptual understanding to a larger group of students in a lower socioeconomic district who would not do their homework and had many additional challenges than teach in traditional ways to students who were somewhat self-motivated (LSN interview, March 26, 2018). Part of being a teacher of devout faith necessitated him bucking authority as necessary to challenge existing structures that were not in the best interest of students. All of this is quite evident in the emotional experience conveyed by the arc below (Figure 5.2), constructed as described in Chapter 3, at the close of the WRE interview.

In forming each of his arcs at the close of the WRE interviews, Nelson consistently used the rises and falls of the lines to express his emotional highs (ups) and lows (downs). As Nelson drew, he spoke again about his inner thoughts during these

well-remembered events. Later, I placed some of his words (direct quotations from those video-recorded portions of the interviews) above or below the lines as close to where he actually spoke them in real time as the lines were drawn as possible. In this particular case (see Figure 5.2 below), Nelson began forming his arc with a line with a positive slope to convey the building excitement that he had going to a more affluent district with additional resources to teach higher-level math to students with a reputation for caring about their work. But even early on, some of his students began complaining because they wanted to return to the traditional methods of teaching that they were comfortable with. They actually whined to Nelson about the collaborative problem-solving activities and requested book work and chapter tests as they had in previous years. Nelson was very frustrated. It was as if they did not want to think or put in effort. Nelson drew a series of short upward and downward lines to describe his reaction to this part of his WRE.

Figure 5.2. WRE #2 Participant Experience Arc (Annotated): Nelson



The next portion of the arc contains a series of longer ups and downs. This was meant to represent his time on an improvement plan. Management approached him asking for a return to traditional methods and certain other things they wanted to see in his classroom and Nelson spent his days trying to hold true to his core beliefs and change or add only those things that management wanted that were not in contradiction to those beliefs. It was an exhausting time, and he really became discouraged (hence the steady decent of the lines). Still, he continued to experience some highs as his students began responding to some of the conceptual activities he continued to utilize and to learn things he knew they would not learn from memorizing procedures. A few of Nelson's students even began to express their appreciation for the order and sense they were seeing in the mathematics and those moments of realization were very rewarding and encouraging to Nelson and the cause of the upward lines (WRE #2 interview, May 11, 2018). Of course, these encouraging moments were not enough to prevent Nelson from the feelings of anger and frustration that are reflected in the figure above as downward lines. While Nelson was able to persist through his frustration, he felt it nonetheless. In his own words,

Even though they knew that I could do the mathematics and teach, I wasn't following their procedures for doing everything and jumping through all of the hoops the way that they wanted me to and so they put me on an improvement plan to try to get me in line. So frustrating! And ultimately that pushed me out..."

(WRE #2)

Indeed, near the end of his third year teaching in this district, Nelson was told that they would not be asking him to return the following year. At this point, he hit his lowest

emotional state in terms of that event. Even though he believed in the work he had been doing that kept him on that improvement plan, the news was crushing. In fact, it was at this point that Nelson even began to question his worth and capacity as a teacher, however temporarily. His ultimate reflection looking back on the event is not represented in the above arc, but as has already been discussed, Nelson did not allow himself to remain in this low state. In fact, he returned to another of his core beliefs (discussed next) to convince himself not to give up.

A belief that his personal calling is to help others and to teach math. In addition to having a love for mathematics, it became clear working with Nelson that he felt very strongly about helping others and teaching mathematics in general. In fact, he essentially described teaching math as his “calling”, albeit in a roundabout way, during his LSN interview. After describing his love for mathematics, and his fascination with calculus in particular, Nelson transitioned into a discussion of his experience at the University. In particular, he lamented how he was unable to find a group of like-minded people in the upper level mathematics courses. More specifically, he articulated how it seemed everyone else in the pure math track at the university was interested in applied mathematics and seeking careers to that end, while he “just wasn’t so into it” (LSN interview, March 26, 2018). In terms of his justification, his response was thus: “It wasn’t really me. I don’t think it was my *calling*” (LSN interview, March 26, 2018, italics mine). By the end of that interview, Nelson revealed what his “calling” was, to teach and to help others. In his own words,

I think I’ve always wanted to help people. Like early on, even with my nephew, I always had patience and was always able to work with my younger kids and help

them learn things so I think teaching always felt kind of like this natural path, and I think especially it's after having some of my experiences, it's this idea that ALL kids need good teachers. And so I think for me the big thing is my desire to help. I want to make the world a better place and I feel like teaching is... that's my chance to do that. I might not create the next big invention, and I might not fix global warming or climate change, but I feel like I can have a big impact through teaching. (LSN interview, March 26, 2018).

In other words, Nelson strongly emphasized his desire to help and to teach and even presented teaching as something he always felt he was supposed to do. This sentiment was not just something he expressed once or twice in words. This conviction surfaced and resurfaced throughout our time together over the course of nearly 6 months. Even a look at Nelson's LSN timeline construction reveals his passion for helping others and for teaching. This timeline was already presented (Table 5.2 above), but it appears again below in a slightly different form (Table 5.7). In other words, I have bolded different parts of Nelson's text to emphasize that even within this relatively short construction where Nelson was asked to simply "title" events and influences, five times he specifically mentioned helping others or teaching them in those titles. Significantly, four of those five times appear very early on in the timeline, evidence that it is a conviction Nelson has had for years. What is more, the final occurrence that appears at the close of the construction is prefaced by the term "always", additional evidence of the fact that helping and teaching has been a lifelong passion and remains a driving force in his life. This last appearance is also quite pointedly the *only* title on the timeline that represents an overall conviction or influence that is not tied to a specific finite event. If Nelson saw fit to only

include one summative belief on such a short construction, it must have been a significant one.

Table 5.7.

Nelson's Life Chronology (Timeline) Construction: Focus on His Calling

Season #	Season Title (ID) and Significant Experiences
1	Elementary Experiences <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • good at math • “flat out wrong” even though I was right • “Around the world” and nobody could beat me
2	Middle School Experiences <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • English teacher for a math teacher • first time for struggle- algebra • able to teach myself at home
3	High School Experiences <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • advanced math • I hated proofs! • 100% on tests and quizzes • Constant wonder- When do we talk about calculus? • didn't get an A but tutored the valedictorian (Pre-Calc) • helped a lot of people • no senior math- who wants Calculus first period?
4	Community College Experiences <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • tested into College Algebra • dropped Calculus first time- psyched myself out • Pre-Calc Trig too easy- dropped it and waited • finally calculus- new conceptualization piece- fascinating • decision to be a mathematician- teach math and coach wrestling
5	University Experiences <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • transfer from CC • didn't really fit in • professors not necessarily best teachers • office hours obligatory- I am an inconvenience • a lot of things I shouldn't do
6	Internship Certification Experiences <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • teaching immediately • learning to teach in isolation- pretty much “winging it” • intro to intermediate algebra class- eye opener • I am boring the crap out of them • crash course on survival as a teacher

Season #	Season Title (ID) and Significant Experiences
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • complete lack of support
7	<p>Affluent District Experiences</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-Calculus and AP Calculus, no state testing • trying to do things differently • opposition- “[<i>District name</i>] way or the high way” • I got in trouble • no freedom • no PD or trainings • contacted University professors for help • retention wasn’t there- nobody to blame • new focus- multiple representations/ conceptual development vs. procedures • big ego check • developing conceptual activities
8	<p>Less Affluent District Experiences</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • back to first district • great department head at HS, knew from wrestling (wanted to work with him) • from teaching upper level classes to teaching freshmen • different student population • developing my own curriculum • new principal- Maslow, responsive practices, from math at center to students at center, discipline is about learning
9	<p>Grad School Experiences</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • critical pedagogy and responsive practices • Groupwork course- Complex Instruction • started my own business (selling math curriculum, blogging) • started professional development facilitation
Notation	Always wanted to help people

Careful consideration of the transcripts of our various interactions revealed additional evidence of this same conviction. At least eight quotes are worth presenting as evidence of Nelson’s core belief that teaching mathematics and helping others was his calling. Table 5.8 below contains these quotes. The first six are other quotations extracted from the LSN interview. The final two are statements Nelson made reflecting on his experience within two of his well-remembered crushing events.

Table 5.8.

Quotations Related to Teaching and Helping Others: Nelson (Codes: teach, teaching, teacher, help, helping, helped)

Instance	Evidence (Summary or Quotation)	Meeting (Date/Setting)
1	“So I ended up helping a lot of other students in class...” [Speaking of Algebra 2 class experience]	LSN interview, March 26, 2018
2	“Again, I did a lot of tutoring... helped a lot of kids out. We had our valedictorian in that class and I remember working with him quite a bit.” [Speaking of Pre-Calculus class experience]	LSN interview, March 26, 2018
3	“But again, it was one of those things where I was able to help a lot of people... I understood the mathematics and I was able to help people...” [speaking of High School experience in general]	LSN interview, March 26, 2018
4	“At the beginning of college, I had always thought about being a teacher because I wanted to coach wrestling... So for a while it was just figuring out what is it that I was going to teach ...”	LSN interview, March 26, 2018
5	“I always had this idea that I might teach college...”	LSN interview, March 26, 2018
6	“The plan was always to get my Bachelor’s degree and then to transition and get certified [to teach] through some place...”	LSN interview, March 26, 2018
7	“I didn’t have trouble getting back into my routines or teaching the students [...] I kind of got a spike in anger, but then I went right back to teaching ...”	WRE #1 interview, May 11, 2018
8	“In a lot of ways it made me feel like I was a horrible teacher ... I remember thinking man, maybe I’m a bad teacher and maybe this isn’t good for me. But deep down I knew that I was a good teacher . I knew that I was good for kids...”	WRE #2 interview, May 11, 2018

The first six quotes are examples of the way in which while telling his life story narrative, Nelson emphasized both his experiences helping others and his desire to teach.

As has already been discussed, from the beginning of his life story narrative, Nelson

chose to focus on his experiences in math classrooms and with mathematics. But it is significant to note that in addition to describing his personal experiences and convictions about mathematics, Nelson repeatedly draws attention to the fact that he was helping others make sense of the same content.

In addition to emphasizing this regular practice and conviction throughout his LSN, Nelson demonstrated over the course of the study that he often relied on this basic conviction that helping and teaching mathematics was what he was meant to do as a means of coping with or reflecting on his crushing context experiences. In other words, he was able to focus on teaching mathematics in ways that exposed students to critical thinking and helping students in general even during crushing times because it was important to him. The last two quotations in the table above were extracted from WRE sense-making interviews. The first is taken from Nelson's first WRE, which will be discussed at length later in this chapter, in the section focused on intentional agentic action. In this crushing context, Nelson was frustrated with an administration that refused to do anything to support him with a student that repeatedly cursed at him in his room and walked out of his class. While Nelson candidly admits to the feelings of anger and frustration he experienced as a result, he also emphasizes the fact that even in that state, he was able to refocus fairly quickly on his regular practice of teaching. After all, helping and teaching mathematics are things he has always felt called to do. In other words, Nelson articulated his ability to refocus on teaching as a natural way of coping with difficult situations like that one.

The final quote comes from Nelson's second WRE, the one already covered in detail in the previous section of this chapter. Following a very frustrating three years

during which Nelson put countless hours of effort into seeking information about best practice in the teaching of mathematics and endured a humiliating probationary status that at least temporarily made him question whether he was a good teacher, Nelson returned to his second core belief that he was meant to teach mathematics and to help. It was this deep conviction that enabled him to shake the opinions of the administration that had not renewed his contract and to strengthen his resolve to continue doing what he loved. "...Deep down I knew that I was a good teacher", Nelson said, "I knew that I was good for kids" (WRE #2 interview, May 11, 2018).

If this were not evidence enough, consider the second word cloud I generated from Nelson's LSN interview transcript. This word cloud (Figure 5.3 below) contains each of the infinitive forms of the sensical verbs in the LSN transcript. In addition to the visual display, accompanying the word cloud in a separate table (Table 5.9) are the exact frequencies of words. Each verb that appears at least three times in the original transcript is represented in this table.

Table 5.9.

Frequencies of Nouns Appearing in Cloud in Original Transcript: Nelson

Frequency	Noun(s)
40	Teach
30	Take; Get
29	Think; Know
25	Want; Work
22	Help
20	Learn
19	Start
18	Don't
16	Remember
15	Can
13	Realize; Develop; Feel
10	Look; Come
9	Need; Find; End; Try

Frequency	Noun(s)
7	Struggle; Change; Focus; Tell; Make
6	Implement; Shift; Give; Say; Use
5	Improve; Create; Engage; Follow; Worry; Show; Put
4	Collaborate; Understand; Support; Figure; Switch; Talk; See
3	Facilitate; Practice; Decide; Can't; Leave; Deal; Like; Move; Will; Sit

Figure 5.3 Word Cloud from Infinitive Forms of Verbs in Nelson LSN Interview

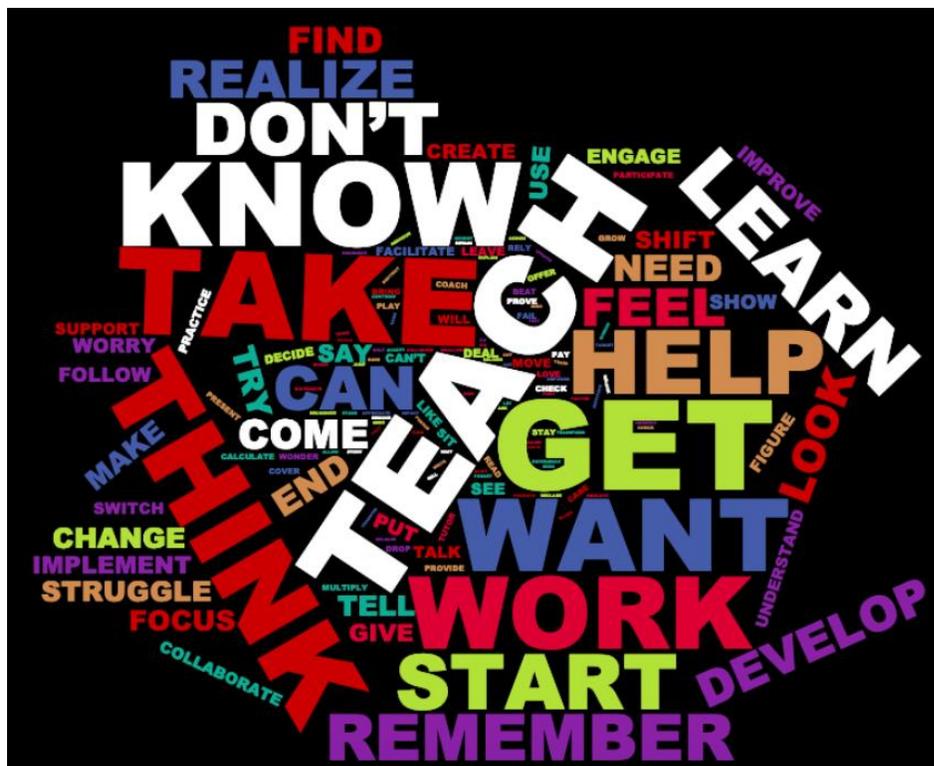


Figure 5.3. The word cloud above was generated by pasting all of the infinitive forms of the verbs from the transcript of Nelson's LSN interview into a word cloud generator as described in Chapter 3 (via <https://www.wordclouds.com/>).

The frequency table is quite telling. The most dominant verb in Nelson's LSN is "to teach", appearing 40 times over the course of a 40-minute interview. The fifth verb on that same list is "to help", appearing 22 times. In addition, the intentional reader will see other teaching-related verbs in that table, verbs such as "to learn" and "to facilitate", and also others related to a teacher's attention to "struggle" and "change" in the classroom.

A belief in the importance of focusing on students' overall well-being. The third significant belief revealed in the data collected from Nelson related to his belief in the importance of focusing on students and their overall well-being while teaching and helping. Evidence of this belief surfaced repeatedly throughout Nelson's LSN as well as within each of his WRE accounts. Returning again to the word cloud presented earlier in this chapter (Figure 5.1), Nelson used a noun referring to *students* specifically (either *students* or *kids*, referring in *every* case to students with no exceptions) 62 times throughout the 40-minute interview. It is significant to note that this was a life story narrative interview. In other words, the focus of the interview was meant to be Nelson himself. It was meant to be about his life and how he came to be the person and teacher he was. Nonetheless, Nelson was unable to tell that story without focusing on students.

It is not simply the number of times that Nelson refers to students during his LSN interview that demonstrates his belief in their importance and his persistent focus on their well-being. There is ample evidence for this belief in the reputation he has built for himself as well as the specific things that Nelson said and did to demonstrate this focus on students over the course of this study. Recall, for instance, Dr. Ramirez's first words to me about Nelson: "I know you have already met William," he said. "He is the head of our department, never gives up on kids, and really cares about their best interest and well-being; you definitely want to ask him." Of all of the things Dr. Ramirez could have said about Nelson in recommending him for this study, the first thing he mentioned was his focus on students. Nelson's own words also express his belief that students ought to be at the center of a teacher's work. Table 5.10 below contains eight quotations extracted from the various data I collected as part of this project. It is not that these are the only times

Nelson mentioned his focus on students, of course. After all, he referred to them 62 times in his LSN interview alone! Instead, these eight quotations are intentionally selected examples of Nelson stating or demonstrating his belief in the importance of a focus on students, their experience, or their overall well-being.

Table 5.10.

Quotations Related to the Importance of a Student Focus: Nelson

Instance	Evidence (Summary/ Quotation)	Setting
1	[Speaking about how his experience in school prepared him for teaching] “I did get some ideas of things that work and things that I liked but for the most part, I realized the standard, traditional way of teaching just didn’t cut it... For a student like myself who’s good at math and has natural talent and abilities, it was no problem... But how many students are really like me?”	LSN interview, March 26, 2018
2	[Speaking of his overall experience in the more affluent district] “I think at the time it was a good eye opener for me about the reality of the education [...] It showed me a lot of what’s wrong with our education system... That we value test scores and socioeconomic status and race so much more than we value the actual learning process... So being out there really showed me that in order to be successful in the eyes of the education system as it is now, it really meant foregoing everything that I’ve come to believe about education: students first, treating students like human beings. They were test scores and they were a commodity out there and so the expectation is that you were going to do your best to make that commodity the best that it could be and I couldn’t do that; I couldn’t treat my students like they were a number or part of an assembly line.”	WRE #2 interview, May 11, 2018
3	[Speaking about meeting with university professors] “I went from thinking about the mathematics as being the important part and the center of what I was doing and changing that focus to the students as being the center and being what was important.”	LSN interview, March 26, 2018
4	“I knew a gentleman who had been a wrestling coach at [Towne] when I was in school and I knew him through wrestling over time and I could appreciate his viewpoint on not just teaching but on working with kids. He was one of those people that just gets it. He understands that	LSN interview, March 26, 2018

Instance	Evidence (Summary/ Quotation)	Setting
	kids are so much more than a test score, they're so much more than the person that they are when they're sitting in your class... And so he really tuned me into this idea of looking at the kids as whole people and being able to support them, not just in math, but in other ways.”	
5	“My second year here is when we got a new principal. The previous principal had been a terror, had done and said really horrible things to teachers and students and so when Dr. [Ramirez] came in, it was a big change. We changed our focus and started focusing on Maslow’s hierarchy of needs and responsive practices. So we shifted from a focus on testing and behavior to putting the students first. So that was a big pedagogical shift for me, in shifting from me being the center of everything and putting more attention on the students.”	LSN interview, March 26, 2018
6	“I also started thinking a lot about discipline... the difference between discipline and punishment... Up to that point, I was doing a lot of punitive things: restricting kids from things, taking things away from students, removing them from class, things like that. So I tried to shift my thinking about how can I help the students learn? So discipline is about learning, so how do I help students learn the appropriate behaviors while not forgetting about the mathematics?”	LSN interview, March 26, 2018
7	About the same time as Dr. [Ramirez] came here, I started grad school. So I had a little bit of experience with the critical pedagogy and responsive practices and then when I started grad school I took it up another level. I had a course with Dr. [Professor name] on groupwork and that was a big shift in the way I did things. I went from doing a lot of direct instruction to doing more cooperative learning. In terms of the student learning and discipline, I realized that I had to empower my students. I had to give more responsibility to them in terms of having a part in class...”	LSN interview, March 26, 2018
8	[Speaking about his implementation of Complex Instruction and changes that come with a focus on students and what they need] “I had to go back and relook at what it was that I was doing in each lesson. What were the important pieces? And the tasks really helped me to get at conceptual learning that a lot of the students were missing. The other piece is that I was able to bring a lot of the collaboration into our normal direct	LSN interview, March 26, 2018

Instance	Evidence (Summary/ Quotation)	Setting
	instruction. So when I do direct instruction, the students are still engaged, they're still participating, they're working together, checking each other's answers, they're supporting each other in the ways that I have wanted them to and trained them to, so that's been very powerful..."	

Taken together, these eight quotations reveal Nelson's commitment to focus on all students' general well-being. In terms of the first quotation, in expressing why traditional ways of teaching are ineffective, Nelson identified all students' experiences as relevant and important to his teaching, rather than just students like himself that find mathematics easy. In the second quotation, he specifically articulated that students are the focus of his instruction and emphasized that he refuses to see them as commodities or test scores. Rather, they are human beings with strengths and talents and passions who deserve to learn mathematics in ways that honor who they are and what they are interested in. In spite of Nelson's love for mathematics content, the third quotation reveals that he was willing to change his focus from math to students. In other words, he was convinced that students were what mattered most and while he wanted to honor them by engaging them in powerful and meaningful experiences with the content he loved, he also wanted to acknowledge who they were as individuals and how he could help them in general.

In the fourth and fifth quotations, Nelson acknowledges two people who were very influential in teaching him to put students first. First, he mentioned Cota, the man who was department chair when he first came to Towne, as someone who constantly reminded him that students were whole people and everything about them and who they are mattered and could be helpful in crafting effective instruction. Secondly, he acknowledged Dr. Ramirez for bringing new insight into what it means to focus on

students, their hierarchy of needs, and responding to their needs and wants in the midst of content instruction. In other words, in addition to regularly stating students' importance, Dr. Ramirez exposed Nelson to new literature that became more and more influential to him, revealing new perspectives about race and critical pedagogy that Nelson continues to embed in his instruction as well as his constructed curriculum.

In the sixth quote, Nelson revealed that in addition to simply thinking of students first in the context of designing content instruction, he now thinks about students' behavior. He was careful to note his first love of mathematics and his unwillingness to forget about the math, but he was also clear that he would focus also on how to teach students about their behavior. In the final two quotations, Nelson describes one of the most significant influences on his current practice: the connection he made with a professor who introduced him to a more promising way of facilitating student collaboration than any he had ever seen- *Complex Instruction*. This way of structuring groupwork was a way that, by Nelson's view, honored not only pure mathematics, but also the strengths and needs and insecurities of his students. In other words, it was a practice that attended both to the importance of providing rich content to students and to the need to address issues of race and status and a lack of consideration of others' ideas. This new information became pivotal to Nelson as he attempted to put students first in his practice.

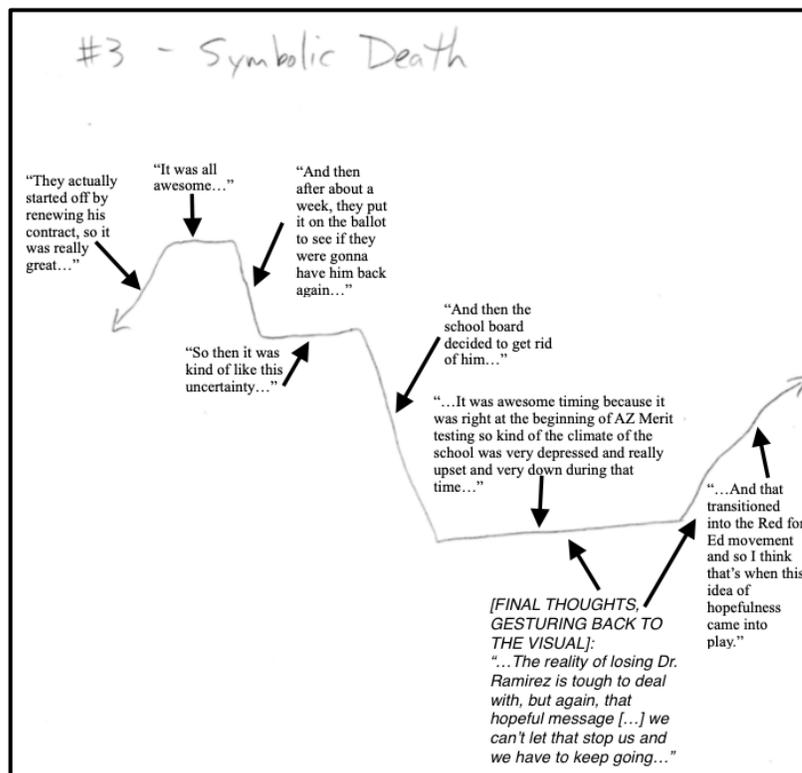
Hope and Trust

In addition to regularly expressing at least these three core beliefs, Nelson constantly communicated a hope and trust that acting on those beliefs and convictions was ultimately good or beneficial, regardless of the circumstances of the moment. In

other words, Nelson conveyed a resilient belief that what he was doing mattered, whether he could see the impact in the immediate or not and whether he liked all of the results or consequences of those actions or not. This is evident from a consideration of Nelson's three well-remembered events (WREs). In all three cases, Nelson was able to continue acting on his beliefs even though the circumstances around him were crushing and even when resolution of each crushing event was not what he wanted it to be (which interestingly was the case in all three of Nelson's WREs). Consider, in particular, an analysis of Nelson's third WRE.

In terms of the basic plot of this narrative, the district ultimately voted not to renew the contract of Nelson's principal, Dr. Albert Ramirez. That was not their initial decision so the story begins with a very pleased William Nelson. Dr. Ramirez, after all, has been a mentor to Nelson, teaching him about significant things like critical pedagogy and responsive practices and fully supporting his new and innovative ideas as well as those of his colleagues. But the district later announces there will be a vote to determine Ramirez's fate and in the end, a heartbreaking decision is made. It is almost enough to make Nelson want to leave the school or the profession, but in the end, he returns to the hope he has and his commitment to carry out Ramirez's legacy as motivation to continue. The following arc represents Nelson's emotional experience during this time. The rise and fall of the arc is again reflective of the rise (highs) and fall (lows) of his emotions over the course of the event. The quotations are Nelson's words as he drew the arc, as close to the exact moments in which he the lines near them as I could possibly place them. In other words, each quotation reveals the crushing nature of the experience to Nelson.

Figure 5.4. WRE #3 Participant Experience Arc (Annotated)



At the close of the WRE #3 sense-making interview, I asked Nelson to further articulate for me the significance of this event for him going forward, an event he had titled very dramatically “Symbolic Death”. More specifically, I asked Nelson to return to and perhaps even expound upon the metaphor he used at the close of the recording of this WRE account. At the end of that recording, Nelson had said, “Not to be overdramatic with a Star Wars analogy, but I was Luke with a New Hope after Obi Wan sacrificed himself for me” (WRE #3 Recorded Account, May 11, 2018). Being the fan of Star Wars that I am, I was fairly certain I knew what Nelson was referring to. Star Wars Episode IV is literally entitled *A New Hope*, and at the close of the movie, Luke’s mentor, Obi Wan Kenobi, sacrifices himself to allow Luke and others time to escape before he dies at the hand of Darth Vader, knowing the they are the future of the Resistance. I was, in fact,

correct in my presumptions. When Nelson described the “new hope” he had at the close of this crushing event, he drew upon this analogy. He said,

On the one hand, it’s very discouraging, very heartbreaking to lose that. But on the other hand, I’m hopeful that we can continue to carry on the legacy that Dr. [Ramirez] has brought here and so even though the school board has found a way to get rid of him, his ideals will live on. [...] We’ll remember the freedom that he’s given us and the autonomy that he’s given us and will continue to fight for doing what’s right for our kids regardless of who they might put in a position of leadership for us. Again, on one hand, it was very discouraging. In part, it was just like man, do I even want to work for somebody else? Again, on one hand, it was very infuriating, really, but I think ultimately, he would want us to. It’s kind of like when the hero’s mentor dies. When Obi Wan dies at the hands of Darth Vader to essentially give Luke the motivation and the power that he needed to be able to ultimately defeat Darth Vader in the long run. I feel like, again, it’s hard to think about what we’re gonna do without him, but I’m gonna use it as motivation to work harder and to continue that fight... It is a new hope for me. (WRE #3 interview, May 11, 2018)

Nelson again referred to his great hope when we met for the last time to reflect on crushing contexts in general and his overall experience persisting with agency through them. At one point during that conversation, I referred back to the three components of WREs: the description, his internal dialogue in the midst of the event, and his reflection on each event’s significance. I asked of crushing contexts in general what he noticed helped him to persist. Was there some internal dialogue that was consistent? Something

he continually told himself? Was there an action? Nelson's response was profound and specific and entirely about hope. It is somewhat lengthy, but I could not bring myself to shorten it. In Nelson's words,

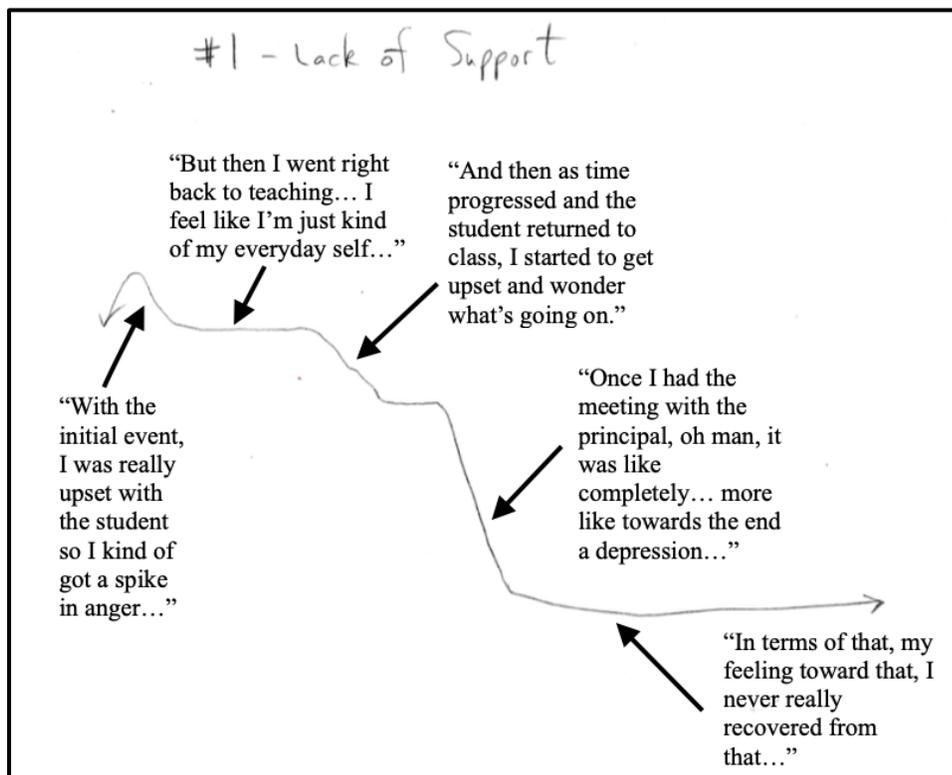
I think for me it's maybe less of an internal dialogue but maybe more the feelings. I feel kind of schizophrenic and bipolar in a way, where I have these feelings and thoughts of complete hopelessness of the situations that we're in and that there's no end in sight or there's no light at the end of the tunnel and then the contrast with the idea that there *is* still hope. To throw another Star Wars analogy in there, this idea that the Resistance or the Rebels are so far outgunned and outnumbered that on the surface it appears like there's really no hope and why would they continue to fight against those powers? But then there's this idea that somebody's gotta fight. If nobody fights against that, then the evil wins. It's that fight between the hopelessness and the hope at the same time. And in the end, the hope wins. I think that's what drives me. It feels hopeless sometimes and I think everybody's in that situation at one point in time that they feel like things are hopeless and that there's no point, but that's when you have to be the strongest and realize, well I can't give up and I have to persevere and ironically, that's one of the things that we're trying to teach our students in math, this idea of perseverance in spite of difficulties or failure. So as a teacher I feel like I have a responsibility to model that, and not just for modeling's sake, not just to show the kids that you gotta fight and you can't give up. But that's what I believe. As big of an obstacle that we have to fight against, the fight is worth it. Because in the end, hope wins! (CCC interview, May 24, 2018)

In other words, for Nelson, a key component of his faith is his hope that acting continually in a manner consistent with his core beliefs will make a difference. In the end, Nelson “wins” regardless of the individual battles or struggles because he is engaging in a life worth living. He is bringing a valuable content to a deserving population and he will continue to focus on their well-being and believe in their capacity to make forward progress.

Regular Intentional (Agentive) Action

It may well be that hope and trust that enables Nelson to continue to perform regular agentive acts while focusing on the best interest of his students, regardless of the circumstances. In every single story about a crushing event or experience, his commitment to regular agentive action was a consistent reaction to a crushing moment. In other words, without exception, Nelson responded to crushing contexts by continuing to act, actually *doing* something that was consistent with his core beliefs. In most cases, it was a series of actions, focused on the best interest of his students, and that specifically included them being exposed to teaching methods that would provide them an opportunity to engage conceptually with a subject he loved. When an individual act did not make the impact he wanted, Nelson did not cease to teach in agentive ways. Take for example, WRE #1. In this crushing context, already referred to earlier in this chapter, Nelson was frustrated with an administration that refused to do anything to support him with a student who repeatedly cursed at him in his room and walked out of his class. Consider the following arc (Figure 5.5) constructed to represent his experience during this event. Again in this case, the rise and fall of this arc represent the rise (ups) and fall (downs) of Nelson’s emotions over the course of the event.

Figure 5.5. WRE #1 Participant Experience Arc (Annotated): Nelson



The quotations along this arc (Figure 5.5) convey Nelson’s experience as he narrated it. Despite his extreme frustration with the lack of support he was receiving from administration (hence the title he gives the event, “Lack of Support”), even knowing he wanted to confront administration, Nelson never stopped acting in agentic ways in the best interest of students. In other words, while he absolutely felt the full emotions of the moment, he continued almost immediately to teach. In his own words, “I don’t think I had any trouble with the teaching aspect of it [...] I don’t feel like I lost my stride” (WRE #1 interview, May 11, 2008).

In this instance, Nelson did feel the need to confront administration and question whether a complete lack of consequences was in the best interest of any students. He was concerned about the example being set and the fact that their sending the student straight

back after multiple outbursts was a dangerous and destructive message, in addition to making him feel completely unsupported. But obviously, he could not immediately address administration. He had a job to do, and he had students counting on him. And even though in the end, the event caused him to leave the school, for the remainder of the year, Nelson continued to do for his students what he had already been doing. He also continued to make intentional decisions to try to improve his practice. As he himself summarized, “I don’t feel like it caused an interruption that I couldn’t get back to. It just really made me feel insecure about my place and my position at [School’s Name]. It made me question if it was the right space for me to be teaching in. I didn’t have trouble going back to the classroom. I didn’t have trouble getting back into my routines or teaching the students” (WRE #1 interview, May 11, 2008). As in each of his WREs, the denouement of this event was not what Nelson wanted. As he himself explained,

...Ultimately I was like, “You know, I feel like you guys don’t have my back in that you’re supporting this kid and his behavior and not me.” And they were basically like, “Yah”... And I was so angry at that point. So I asked them, “If I could get a job teaching math anywhere in the city, why would I want to stay here?” And that was my big thing, why would I want to stay here if I’m not supported? And they were like, “Well if that’s how you feel...” And that was that. So right after that, I immediately started looking for another job. That really did it for me. I was no longer gonna work there no matter what. So I left that. Case closed. (WRE #1 interview, May 11, 2018)

In other words, following crushing context events, Nelson was continually able to persist through endings he did not enjoy and ultimately to do what he always did, which

was continue to try anything and everything he could think of to focus on the needs of his students and colleagues and to help everyone (himself included) learn or teach a content that meant so much to him. This refusal to give up and commitment to continued action was a pattern present in all three WREs as well as each crushing context Nelson shared during our final meeting. From focusing on collaboration and engaging tasks and investing the time into the practice of incorporating truly relevant curriculum (incorporating social justice issues) into the classroom, Nelson was determined to spend every day making intentional decisions focused on his students and trying new instructional techniques. When Nelson decided something was worth the effort, he continued to work toward it. If he knew exactly what to do, he would do it. If he did not, he would keep trying different things until something worked. And he was basically never satisfied. At one point, Nelson recalled the comment of an assigned mentor (New Teacher Induction mentor) who was expressing the fact that his kids were “some of the best behaved around” (LSN interview, March 26, 2018). While the mentor was pleased with what she was seeing, Nelson was not satisfied. “It still didn’t seem like enough. It seemed like the kids were still not engaged. And so I wanted to take it to another level [...] So I started developing an algebra curriculum from the ground up based on standards” (LSN interview, March 26, 2018). This is Nelson’s way. He focuses on forward progress for all and continues to make agentic decisions toward that end regardless of the crushing contexts and circumstances around him.

Faith-Strengthening Routines and Practices

Perhaps part of the reason Nelson is able to continue to make agentic decisions regardless of the crushing contexts and circumstances around him is that he refuses to

remain stagnant in his faith. Instead, he spends significant portions of time, often outside of the confines of his classroom and school day, engaging in routines or practices that strengthen his faith and bolster his teaching knowledge. More specifically, during the impromptu conversation that immediately followed the recorded CCC sense-making interview at the close of this project, Nelson identified the following three intentional practices or routines to which he dedicated significant time on a regular basis: time for detox, time to read or study or get new ideas, and time to experiment and learn from that experimentation. Each of these practices will be expounded upon following a brief consideration of the context of this conversation.

The final data source utilized in analyzing the case of Nelson was his Crushing Contexts Collection (CCC). Over the course of the study, Nelson recorded six different crushing contexts, giving each of them a representative title that he initially wrote on a small slip of paper and then crumpled and stored for the aforementioned CCC interview. Nelson identified some contexts that were events and some that were circumstances. A picture of these crushing contexts (the original slips of paper as titled by Nelson) appears below (Figure 5.6). In accordance with IRB confidentiality requirements, one piece of one of these titles has been blotted out. It was the name of a school. In addition to this visual display, I also acquiesce at this time a table summarizing the basic story behind each of the crushing contexts Nelson revealed during this final interview. As was the case with the WRE plot summaries, in constructing these summaries, I was careful to use Nelson's words as much as possible and to confine myself to a retelling of basic facts. Any quotations that appear in this table are quotations that were extracted directly from the transcript of the interview. In considering these crushing contexts, it is important to

note that Nelson was very clear during our final interaction together that the list below was not comprehensive but rather representative. “Being a teacher is difficult and the overall context of education is discouraging,” Nelson remarked during the candid impromptu conversation immediately following the recorded CCC interview (Impromptu meeting, May 24, 2018).

Figure 5.6. Crushing Contexts Collection (Image): Nelson

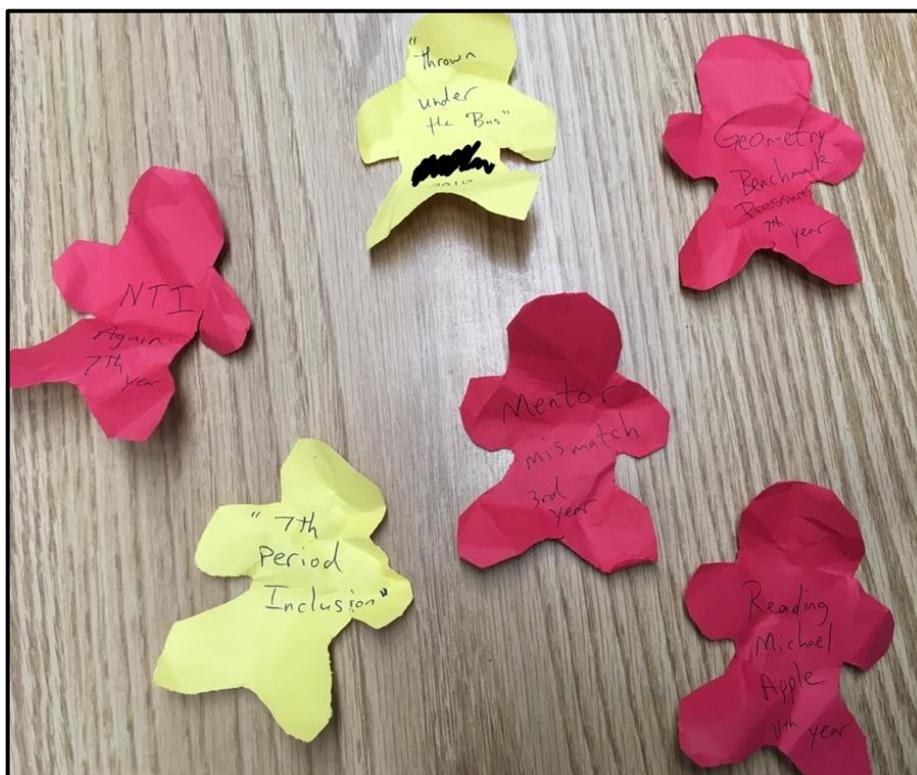


Table 5.11

Nelson's Crushing Contexts Collection (CCC)

#	Participant-Given Title	Plot Summary
1	NTI Again 7 th Year	“New Teacher Induction” again... Coming back to the district even as a 7 th -year teacher, Nelson had to go through NTI with the district. He felt disrespected and got nothing out of the experience.
2	Reading Michael Apple	Nelson had been reading Michael Apple and described it as “crushing” to read his work and “realize how many groups are

#	Participant-Given Title	Plot Summary
	11 th Year	working against education, especially public education.” Nelson emphasized his desire to be a part of providing quality learning opportunities for all kids and how it can feel to “realize you’re the little guy fighting against a big monster and you wonder if you can even win the battle”...
3	Mentor Mismatch	Happened more than once, but his third year teaching in particular, his mentor was an English teacher who just had nothing to really offer him... Nelson says he sees it all the time, new math teachers don’t have math teacher mentors... they have teachers lacking the specialized content knowledge who are simply unable to give detailed and specific help. “What are teachers getting from it?”
4	Geometry Benchmark Pressures 7 th Year	Nelson’s first year at Towne the math department got a lot of slack for low benchmark tests. “They didn’t take into account that a teacher had quit and we had 50 kids in our class!”
5	“Thrown Under the Bus” Name of school (blotted out) 2010	Lack of support by admin at Nelson’s first school. It was always the teachers’ fault and there were never any consequences for students. “What was the point of wanting to work in a place like that?”
6	“7 th Period Inclusion”	For the last several years, his inclusion class has been 7 th period... “Somebody’s not really thinking about the idea that... maybe 7 th period isn’t the best time to put all of them in one room together” to do math when they come having failed math and hating it and are generally burnt out by the end of the day anyway.

A thoughtful read of the plot summaries above is sufficient to provide the context of the impromptu conversation where Nelson ultimately revealed the three aforementioned faith-building practices that he dedicates regular time to (time for detox, time to read or study or get new ideas, and time to experiment and learn from that experimentation). Education is a larger crushing context wrought with smaller crushing contexts. There are policies that do not make sense and rob teachers of precious time (such as CCC #1 above where Nelson was forced to meet regularly even though he was

an experienced teacher simply because he was re-entering the district or CCC #3 where he was forced to meet with a new teacher mentor who was not even a math teacher and had little to offer him). There are oppressive structures and insufficient quality measures in place that often have a direct impact on what teachers are able to accomplish in their own classrooms or how they programs are evaluated (CCC #2, CCC #4). To return to Nelson's words, "Being a teacher is difficult and the overall context of education is discouraging. But it's worth it in the end and sometimes you just need to detox." (Impromptu meeting, May 24, 2018).

In the 15 minutes or so that followed this comment, I took notes as Nelson talked about the three aforementioned intentional practices. First, he spoke about the need to "detox". More specifically, he began to talk about the consistent time he spent with his wife and son and some of the fun things that they would do that took his mind completely off of his work as a secondary math teacher. He also talked about time he spent intentionally resting, relaxing, not thinking about students, and just "taking a break" (Impromptu meeting, May 24, 2018). Nelson's final statement to me, in fact, was, "Always make time for family, always make time for listening to great music, and never forget to rest." In addition to time for "detox", Nelson spoke again (as he had many times over the course of the project) about the importance of reading and studying and getting new ideas from colleagues and experts in the field. He mentioned the impact of reading Michael Apple's work recently and the fact that he could not be resilient each day through the hard times if he did not spend time studying (whether as part of his coursework in grad school or independently) and venting to or seeking advice and ideas from trusted colleagues.

Finally, Nelson talked about the importance of continuing to experiment and try new things. “Sometimes you just have to try something new and hope it works and regroup if it doesn’t” (Impromptu meeting, May 24, 2018). Nelson discussed again the importance of trying out new lessons, new collaborative structures and routines, and even new curriculum. This was a rejuvenating part of his practice because he was essentially continuing to practice stepping out in faith and holding onto the hope that he, his students, and eventually others in the field would learn from these experiments and be better for the time he invested in them. Each of these three routines or dedications were time investments that continue to strengthen Nelson’s faith.

Commitment to Collaboration or Congregation or Consultation

One of the most consistent themes in Nelson’s narratives was his commitment to and desire for collaboration with, congregation with, or consultation from people who share some of his core beliefs. His desire was particularly strong for consultative interaction with supportive administration, though he lamented the fact that the lack thereof was a common theme in both his and his colleagues’ crushing contexts. In reflecting on the nature of crushing contexts in general in the field of education, Nelson said,

I think for me I see like a common theme of all of these teachers being on their own in a lot of ways, or being left to their own devices to fend for themselves. I think the one title “Lack of Support” maybe encapsulates the whole theme in general that in a lot of these situations, it was really either lack of direct, overt support by administrators and mentors and people that should be there to help you and support you... And then other things where it’s either lack of direct, overt

support by people that should be there or just the way that the system is structured that doesn't provide that support [...] I think in general it's just this idea of not having the support and the resources needed which leads to frustrations. (CCC interview, May 24, 2018)

In other words, Nelson believed that perhaps the most important way to adequately prepare oneself as an educator to be successful and effective in a broken education system was to collaborate and seek input from colleagues and mentors in the field. "We're smarter together," he said at one point (LSN interview, March 26, 2018). Besides expressing this belief, Nelson demonstrated it over and over as he continued to seek out opportunities for collaboration. Many such examples have already been shared in this chapter. Nelson was particularly frustrated by the lack of support or help from administration during his first three years of teaching in a low socioeconomic district. Ultimately, he looked to his colleagues for support, but there were many days when he allowed himself to feel his frustration outside of the classroom and away from his students. In reflecting on his first well-remembered event (that has already been discussed in this chapter), for example, Nelson said,

I felt so mad and almost betrayed. If I had been doing something wrong to the student to warrant that kind of behavior, I would have been less concerned about it, but since the student was completely attacking me because he didn't want to follow the rules in class... There were no repercussions for him! I remember thinking why am I gonna want to discipline kids or why am I gonna wanna go through the channels if admin's not going back it up? I think I felt really betrayed mostly [...] They didn't really listen to my side of the story at all" (WRE #1

interview, May 11, 2018).

Part of the evidence for Nelson's appreciation, then, for support, congregation, collaboration, or consultation of some sort is evident in his extreme frustration (even anger) when it does not come from the people he feels should be most interested in providing it (administrators). In the instance above involving the student that was acting out in his class, Nelson simply could not understand how administration would not want to partner with him in the best interest of the student and the other students in his class. He was essentially infuriated by their apparent lack of care for what was going on in his classroom and their seeming disinterest in partnering with him in any way.

Shortly after this stage in Nelson's career, he went to the more affluent district and again found a lack of support and professional development from administration, he sought collaboration from professors at the local university. At one point, he describes sitting down with two professors and benefitting from their expertise. "I met with both of them and they were great at helping me figure out well, number 1, what was wrong with what I was doing... which come to find out was everything, pretty much..." (LSN interview, March 26, 2018). He emerged from meetings like this with strengthened resolve and new ideas to employ in the classroom. Among his greatest treasures from his collaboration with these professors were his new commitments to focusing on high-leverage practices like providing multiple representations for students (not just algebraic methods, as he had relied on early in his teaching), a focus on conceptual understanding (as opposed to algorithms and procedures), and the importance of collaboration on open-ended tasks (LSN interview, March 26, 2018).

Part of the reason Nelson was so excited to come to Towne, particularly after such

powerful collaborations with university professors, was for the opportunity to collaborate with Cota and other like-minded professionals. From their interactions in common wrestling circles (both Cota and Nelson spent much of their own time coaching students in wrestling), Nelson knew Cota to be a man who cared for students and was incredibly resilient. It was the collaboration Cota described of the math department at Towne that so appealed to Nelson when he was not asked to stay in that affluent district after three years on an improvement plan. It was his appreciation of Cota as an individual that caused Nelson to agree to accept a position at Towne even though that meant agreeing to teach lower level courses he had never taught and primarily freshmen, an age group he had never worked with that did not necessarily have the best reputation among secondary educators.

Perhaps most important to Nelson about this collaboration is that he really believes it makes everyone stronger. This is evidenced in the way Nelson narrated the collaborative relationships he repeatedly referenced throughout our interactions together. In particular, Nelson mentioned Cota, Ramirez, four different university professors, and teachers he had met in professional development settings as being instrumental in his own maturation as a teacher (LSN interview, March 26, 2018; WREs #1-3 interview, May 11, 2018; CCC interview, May 24, 2018). He even talks about an author's collaborative influence (Michael Apple). In reading his work, Nelson acquired strength as a like-minded individual focused on the well-being of students amidst the same crushing backdrop of public education (CCC interview, May 24, 2018).

Indeed, from the time Nelson began attending the University, he was always "looking for some place where I could fit in" (LSN interview, March 26, 2018). He

valued collaboration and discourse and sought to provide opportunities for such things into his lessons for his students' benefit. In Nelson's view, collaboration and support are imperative for adequate teacher preparation. He expresses this view every time he complains of the lack thereof. For example, when he reflects on his experience in the internship program, he says, "I don't feel like it was the best preparation to become a teacher [...] I didn't have other students or sit down meetings or real collaboration since it was online. I didn't have the chance to have discourse with other students, to have conversations with other educators about things." (LSN interview, March 26, 2018). Instead, he was "learning to teach in isolation" (LSN interview, March 26, 2018).

It is no doubt this belief in the power and significance of collaboration with and consultation from people of like beliefs that now motivates Nelson to seek to provide this collaboration for others, both his students and other educators. In the classroom, he is committed to providing collaborative opportunities. In professional development circles, he is committed to educating in-service and pre-service teachers as the importance of critical pedagogy, groupwork, and reflective conversations among educators. In addition to providing professional development, Nelson continues to seek it out for himself. If collaboration were not an important part of strengthening his faith and practice, he would not likely be so committed to these practices. In his own words,

The other thing I realized is that a lot of the work that I'd done in thinking about my practice and improving my practice and moving towards new things I had to do on my own... so between grad school and thinking about my company, it brought up these ideas that not only do we need curriculum developed out there and available but we need people to do it. We also need teachers who can

implement curriculum and teach in different ways... So on top of the curriculum piece was also this idea that we need professional development... So my big focus at this point is working with in-service and pre-service teachers to improve their practice so we can improve learning opportunities for students and even develop curriculum... (LSN interview, March 26, 2018)

In other words, Nelson feels so strongly about the power of congregating with people of like convictions that he is unable to focus exclusively on his own classroom and his own students. He wants to make a bigger difference in the world of teaching, and of teaching mathematics specifically. After all, he has a love for real mathematics, and he is convinced that all over the world students in math classrooms are not experiencing real mathematics. They are not actively engaged in meaningful tasks and they may still conceptualize mathematics as a list of boring procedures. It is not enough to have a focus on students and be intentional in his own classroom. So Nelson works each day to develop curriculum and support for implementing that curriculum for other teachers of mathematics. He would not invest so much time and effort to this end if he did not believe that these teachers, much like his students, benefitted greatly from collaboration and input.

Teacher Faith and Persistent Agency Lived Out in the Crushing Contexts

In the end, just as I have so often drawn from my religious faith to persist through the difficult times in my life, in and out of educational settings, so William Nelson consistently referenced the aspects and components of his teacher faith in reflecting on his experiences during the crushing contexts of his profession. He repeatedly returned to a collection of core beliefs and convictions that were fundamental to who he was and

how he interacted with his students and his colleagues. In other words, he never lost sight of the mathematics content he loved and his commitment to teach it in ways he himself had not been taught, innovative ways that would afford his students rich experiences in problem-solving and discovering beautiful and orderly conceptual understanding. He continually focused on his students as individuals, thinking not only of his desire for them to learn to think critically about mathematics, but also of his desire to value them for the individuals they were, and to prepare them well for the next stages in their lives. Throughout our time together, Nelson frequently referred to a hope and trust that acting on these beliefs and convictions was ultimately good or beneficial regardless of what the circumstances were in the moment. He demonstrated regular intentional (agentive) action in accordance with these beliefs and convictions even during the most difficult moments. In other words, he continued to focus on making decisions in the classroom in particular that were in the best interest of his students and while he allowed himself to feel his anger and frustration in crushing moments, he did not allow himself to falter in his dedication or commitment to act in intentional ways. Throughout Nelson's narratives, there was evidence of routines and practices that built and strengthened his faith and resolve as an educator with persistent agency that undoubtedly enabled him to continue to act in these intentional ways even during crushing moments. Finally, Nelson's commitment to collaboration or congregation or consultation of some sort with colleagues and experts with like beliefs and convictions was a regular theme. In short, in the case of Nelson, perhaps it really is his teacher faith that enables him to continue to persist with agency in a field wrought with crushing contexts. In the end, Nelson said it best in a quotation worth repeating, though it was referenced earlier in this same chapter,

I can't give up and I have to persevere and ironically, that's one of the things that we're trying to teach our students in math, this idea of perseverance in spite of difficulties or failure. So as a teacher I feel like I have a responsibility to model that, and not just for modeling's sake, not just to show the kids that you gotta fight and you can't give up. But that's what I believe. As big of an obstacle that we have to fight against, the fight is worth it. Because in the end, hope wins! (CCC interview, May 24, 2018)

CHAPTER 6: THE CASE OF MICHAEL ABRAMS AND HIS UNIQUE FAITH
IN THE POWER OF THE LEARNING PROCESS AND A STRONG COMMUNITY

Introduction

In this chapter, I present the unique case of Michael Abrams (pseudonym). Ultimately, I advance the argument that Abrams too is an educator who regularly exhibits a unique devout faith and who relies on his faith to persevere through crushing contexts. More specifically, in this case, I contend that Abrams boasts a mature faith motivated by two core beliefs and an overarching conviction in the exceptional power of the learning and discovery process and a strong community. Through detailed analyses of Abrams's narratives, action and reaction patterns, and talk about his experiences in the crushing contexts of his profession, I delineate evidence of each of the previously articulated components of devout faith. I present my argument, and therefore organize the bulk of this chapter, by systematically addressing each of these five components. Before advancing this argument, I provide some general information about Abrams to the reader. Over the course of this study, I met with Abrams in person at length three times and exchanged several emails. Table 6.1 below summarizes our significant interactions over the course of nearly 4 months. As a general reminder, in accordance with IRB regulations and as a matter of ensuring privacy to all involved, every name (of person or place) contained in this and all chapters of this work are pseudonyms.

Table 6.1.

Chronological Summary of Researcher-Participant Interactions: Abrams

Date	Purpose/ Data collection instrument(s)	Specifics (Details)
2-9-18	Initial conversations via email	Series of emails, brief explanation of study, questions answered
2-27-18	Pick-up of consent form,	Detailed explanation of study, questions

Date	Purpose/ Data collection instrument(s)	Specifics (Details)
	questionnaire provided, short meeting	answered, consent obtained, questionnaire given, review of first activity (timeline) and willingness to be flexible with timeline; ~ 00:27:00
3-20-18	Questionnaire and Life chronology (timeline) construction (stage 1 of 2 to co-construct <i>life story narrative</i> - LSN)	Each submitted via email; 3 distinct “seasons” of life recorded/ titled on timeline (Childhood, Early Adulthood, Adulthood), total of 15 titled events, 1 additional annotation identifying overarching life theme (non-event)
3-20-18	LSN interview (stage 2 of 2 to co-construct LSNs)	In-person meeting; 00:41:18 formal recorded LSN interview; ~ 00:28:00 follow-up conversation, WRE and CCC explanations given (printed), materials for CCC promised
4-2-18	Very brief interaction (not categorized as a meeting)	CCC materials dropped off following series of email interactions answering additional questions about WREs and CCC (at Towne less than 5 minutes)
5-23-18	WRE #1, WRE #2, & WRE #3	Submitted via email as Word document with three separate WREs
5-23-18	WRE #1, WRE #2, & WRE #3 interviews	In-person meeting; ~00:29:00 formal recorded WRE interviews (combined, recorded separately- WRE #1- 8:24 audio, 2:14 video; WRE #2- 8:52 audio, 1:18 video; WRE #3- 5:44 audio, 2:06 video)
5-23-18	CCC interview (final interaction)	In-person meeting; 00:12:36 formal recorded CCC interview; ~ 00:12:00 impromptu conversation

Background Information

Michael Abrams is a White man holding a secondary education (mathematics) teaching certification in the state of Arizona. At the start of data collection, Abrams was 38 years of age and halfway through his 11th year teaching high school mathematics. For

his entire teaching career, including the time he spent student teaching, Abrams has been a high school mathematics teacher at Towne High School, a Title 1 school in a lower socioeconomic district in Southern Arizona. Over the course of this time at Towne, Abrams has taught the following courses: 9th grade Algebra, 9th grade Algebra Support, 10th grade Geometry, 10th-12th grade Remedial Algebra, 11th grade Algebra 2, and 12th grade Financial Math. Throughout our time together, Abrams was teaching 12th grade Financial Math exclusively (LSN interview, March 20, 2018).

Abrams was formally recommended for this study by his principal at the time, Dr. Albert Ramirez. “He’s another young teacher like [William],” Ramirez said during our interview, “and he’s also a veteran teacher, and someone who’s really committed to kids and doing what’s best for them. He works with our seniors right now, and he does a really great job” (December 8, 2017). Following Ramirez’s recommendation, I emailed Abrams to request that he participate in my study. After a few emails and an in-person meeting to answer questions, he consented.

A Case of Devout Faith

As a reminder from previous chapters, drawing from a comparison to religious faith, I contend that there are five key components to devout faith: core beliefs and convictions, hope and trust that acting on those beliefs and convictions is ultimately good or beneficial, regular intentional (agentive) action in accordance with those beliefs and convictions, routines and practices that build and strengthen one’s faith, and commitment to collaboration or congregation or consultation of some sort with others with like beliefs and convictions. In the pages that follow, I articulate evidence of each of these key components of faith in the words and lived experiences of Michael Abrams contained

within each of the three main sources of data collected as part of this project (the *life story narrative- LSN*- timeline and interview, the three *well-remembered events- WREs*- accounts and interviews, and the *crushing context collection- CCC*- collection and interview). I further claim that it was Abrams's devout faith that enabled him to continue to make agentic decisions focused on students even in the crushing moments and circumstances of his teaching.

Core Beliefs and Convictions

While I never specifically asked Abrams about his core beliefs and convictions, the following two resilient beliefs surfaced multiple times throughout my interactions with him:

1. A belief, based on his personal lived experience with learning, in the value of learning and discovery and his and his students' capacities to learn and grow; and
2. A belief in the power and importance of community.

A belief in the value of learning and his and his students' capacity to learn.

The various data collected over the course of this project from Abrams revealed a belief in the value and worth of learning and discovery that was distinct from any belief held by the other participants in this study. This belief was demonstrated repeatedly in at least three ways. More specifically, Abrams's passion for learning and discovery was evident in the attention and worth Abrams regularly attributed to the general learning process, Abrams's persistent focus on inciting student curiosity and engagement in learning, and the nature of the contexts Abrams identified as crushing.

In terms of the attention and worth Abrams attributed to the learning and

discovery process in general, evidence was revealed through three main sources: Abrams's life chronology timeline, the word cloud generated from the sensical verbs in Abrams's LSN interview, and fifteen representative quotes taken from Abrams's interview transcripts. First, Abrams's life chronology timeline displayed an attention to life events expressly related to learning and the learning process. Abrams placed fifteen life-event items on his timeline construction, events which he separated into three seasons of his life: childhood, early adulthood, and adulthood. During the interview following his submission of that timeline, Abrams highlighted his own learning and discovery and the learning process in general in connection with eleven of those fifteen events. Table 6.2 is a reproduction of Abrams's timeline. It is unaltered except that those eleven events appear in bold.

Table 6.2.

Abrams's Life Chronology (Timeline) Construction

Season #	Season Title (ID) and Significant Experiences
1	Childhood <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summers doing archaeology w/ parents • Trip to Argentina • Model airplanes • Computers
2	Early Adulthood <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Music • Rebellion • University dropout • Community college • University • Math ed program
3	Adulthood <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • [Towne] • HAM Radio/electronics workshop • Home ownership • Android apps

Season #	Season Title (ID) and Significant Experiences
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • [Sarah's] suicide
Notation at close-outside of timeline events	Creating and learning have been overarching themes throughout my life

From his childhood, Abrams recalls spending his summers doing archaeology with his parents. His father was overseeing a variety of Masters and Doctoral projects related to archaeology and so Abrams was surrounded by, and in even involved in, the processes of learning and discovery. In his own words, “I spent every summer doing excavation in my dad’s project in Northern Arizona and they [referring to his parents] were, you know, both academics and kept me very involved” (LSN interview, March 20, 2018). As Abrams explained, he had “all this access to their inquiries and their projects and it just kind of put me in that mindset” (LSN interview, March 20, 2018). Abrams later referred to this setting as one that was instrumental in inspiring him to see himself as a scientist and an academic (see Table 6.4 below).

Later in his childhood, Abrams was even able to go on an archeology-related trip to Argentina with his parents. While he was there enjoying the learning typically associated with his parents’ archaeological endeavors, he also had to fully engage in teaching himself new content, because he was out of school for two months and had to make up the work (LSN interview, March 20, 2018). This too was a learning time for him, particularly informative in terms of coming to an understanding of how he learned and the fact that he could figure things out (mathematics, for example) on his own, without a teacher, given the necessary resources and information to do so (LSN

interview, March 20, 2018). It is interesting to note, that later on in our discussions, as will be addressed in a more appropriate section in this chapter, Abrams alluded back to this experience when he discussed part of the reason he is always trying to incorporate activities and scaffolds within his classroom to enable his students to become independent learners in similar ways. In his own words,

I try to set it up so they can pretty much learn stuff on their own and I'm there to clarify, ummm, help them through things. Also, that way when they show up after having been absent for a day or two in a row, I can just be all, well, here's all the stuff you need, here's what we're working on right now... And it's good for them to see that they can learn that way. It's powerful." (CCC interview, May 23, 2018).

I will revisit this particular quote (see Tables 6.4 and 6.5 below) later in this chapter. For now, suffice to say, Abrams learned early on in his life that being able to learn on his own with the necessary resources and a supportive adult available to consult if necessary was an invaluable and memorable experience that he eventually wanted for each of his students as well.

It was not just his formal learning experiences in school or even the trips with his parents that helped Abrams develop so great an appreciation for learning and discovery. Over the course of his life, Abrams gleaned a great deal about discovery and learning in general from his interest in and experiments with building model airplanes, programming computers, HAM radio and electronics, and Android apps, for example. In each case, he spent time figuring things out, trying and failing, discovering and creating. In many ways it was these less formal learning experiences that made Abrams appreciate learning and,

in particular, the fact that he was good at it.

That being said, Abrams also reflected a great deal on his more formal secondary education experiences during our time together in that first LSN interview. He expounded upon everything from his disengagement initially at the University to his stint in Community College to the revelations that came when he was finally enrolled in the Math Ed program at the University. In terms of his initial disengagement, Abrams was careful to point out that it was his fault alone that he did not initially engage in higher education, and it really had nothing to do with an inability to learn or a lack of love for learning. In his own words,

I dropped out of the University just cause I wasn't interested in going yet. Cause I went right after high school and I just was not into it... And so, you know, I just kind of did this or that [...] learned to play music, and goofed around and did whatever I wanted for a while and then at some point figured it did sink in that I should probably figure out something to do with my life. But even in that time, I was still enjoying learning. (LSN interview, March 20, 2018)

Similarly, when Abrams expounded upon his return to secondary education, again he reinforced his general enjoyment of learning. "Then I went through Community College for a while which was kind of silly and then I went back to the University," he said. "I had a great time... I actually got really into mathematics once I got into the higher-level stuff" (LSN interview, March 20, 2018).

Abrams also commented a great deal during this interview on his on-the-job learning and maturation as experienced during his student teaching at Towne High School (LSN interview, March 20, 2018). In the discussion that follows, many of his

detailed reflections on learning during this time will be presented (see Tables 6.4 and 6.5). What I wish to articulate at this moment is the fact in contrast to other participants, Abram's timeline was literally centered on the events in his life that involved him in the processes of learning and discovery, many of which sparked his natural curiosity and enjoyment. As if all of these learning-related events listed on this timeline were not evidence enough of the attention and worth Abrams attributes to the learning process in general, at the base of his timeline (see Table 6.2 above), Abrams was careful to note that "creating and learning have been overarching themes throughout [his] life" (Life chronology timeline, March 20, 2018). In other words, while I specifically asked Abrams (and each of my participants) for a timeline that contained any major events, circumstances, or influences in his life that he believed had a lasting impact on his identity and practice as a secondary mathematics teacher, he chose to report events, and one statement of "themes" (his wording, Life chronology timeline, March 20, 2018) relative to his learning and discovery.

In short, I asked Abrams to construct a timeline that would help him tell me his story in terms of how he became the teacher he is today, including within that story (and therefore on his timeline) any events or influences he deemed relevant. And rather than focus on relationships and steps to becoming a teacher as Cota did or his experiences with and convictions related to the teaching of mathematics as Nelson did, Abrams focused his timeline almost exclusively on his own curiosity and the *process* of learning in general as he has experienced it over the course of his life. During the formal interview that immediately followed my collection of this timeline, Abrams also chose to tell me his life story by describing in detail those learning experiences. He even included in his

discourse how his understanding of the learning process changed and progressed over the course of his life and the impact that had on his teaching. He obviously considered these experiences and conceptions as pivotal to his development as a teacher. Presuming he followed the instructions of the timeline construction, he was essentially stating that his very identity was tied to them (see again Appendix B for the life chronology timeline prompt he was given in preparation for this task).

Just as the timeline Abrams submitted attests to the attention and worth he attributes to the learning process in general, so does a simple consideration of the verbs contained in the transcript of the LSN interview that followed. Just as with other participants, I took each of the verbs contained in the transcript of the LSN interview, changed them to their infinitive forms, and pasted them together as a comprehensive list into a word cloud generator to aid me in the analysis of my data. The result of this endeavor appears below (Figure 6.1). Immediately following is a table that shows the frequency that each of the verbs appears (in some form) in the original transcript (Table 6.3).

As is evident in both the cloud and the table, certainly the bulk of the verbs that Abrams chose to use to tell his life story narrative are directly related to the learning process itself, including, significantly, the three verbs utilized the most. “Teach” appears (in some form) 16 times in the LSN interview transcript, “learn” 11 times, and “figure” (as in “to figure out”) seven times. In addition, a good deal of the remaining verbs directly relate to the learning process in general as well. Take, for example, words like “remember” and “think” (appearing four times each, respectively), “discover” and “try” (two times each), as well as “consider”, “connect”, “clarify”, “explain”, “realize”, and

“explore” (one time each- LSN interview, March 20, 2018; Figure 6.1 and Table 6.3 below). Frankly, it is impossible to ignore the attention and worth Abrams attributes to the learning process in general from a consideration of the verbs he chose to employ to narrate his life story.

Figure 6.1 Word Cloud from Infinitive Forms of All Verbs in Abrams LSN Interview Transcript

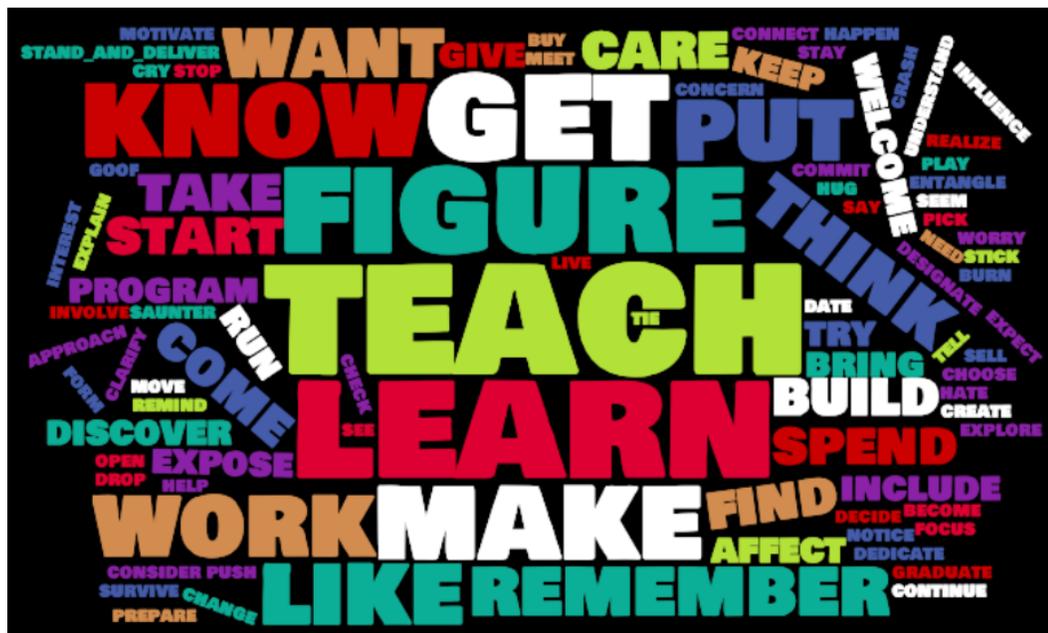


Figure 6.1. The word cloud above was generated by pasting all of the infinitive forms of the verbs from the transcript of Abrams’s LSN interview into a word cloud generator as described in Chapter 3 (via <https://www.wordclouds.com/>).

Table 6.3.

Frequencies of Verbs Appearing in Cloud in Original Transcript: Abrams

Frequency	Verb(s)
16	Teach
10	Learn
7	Figure; Get
6	Make; Know
5	Work; Like; Put
4	Remember; Think; Want
3	Build; Spend; Start; Come; Care; Find; Take

Frequency	Verb(s)
2	Discover; Welcome; Program; Include; Expose; Affect; Bring; Give; Keep; Run; Try
1	Stand and Deliver; Understand; Designate; Influence; Dedicate; Entangle; Consider; Approach; Motivate; Graduate; Interest; Continue; Concern; Saunter; Connect; Clarify; Explain; Involve; Realize; Explore; Prepare; Survive; Commit; Remind; Decide; Notice; Change; Happen; Choose; Become; Create; Expect; Check; Focus; Crash; Worry; Stick; Live; Meet; Date; Move; Push; Help; Need; Stay; Tell; Stop; Seem; Pick; Open; Hate; Drop; Goof; Play; Burn; Form; Sell; Tie; Buy; Hug; Say; See; Cry

It was not just the presence of learning-focused verbs that stood out to me or that served as evidence of Abrams's passion for the learning process, however. It was also the fact that the learning process, as well as curiosity and inquiry, proved to be a constant focus for Abrams, one that was at the heart of nearly every discussion we ever had. In other words, Abrams expressed so often his love for learning and belief in its worth that it was a passion that was impossible to ignore. It is largely for this reason that I consider this first core belief as the strongest of the two I address in this chapter and central to his teacher faith. There are several notable examples of Abrams's focus on the learning process, both in his own life, and in his classroom with his students. In table 6.4 below, I present fifteen representative quotations pulled directly from transcripts of our various interactions as evidence of this focus. I have intentionally bolded portions of these quotations for their connection to Abrams's passion for and focus on the learning process, whether his or that of his students. Alongside each quotation, in the fourth column of the table, I comment on each of these quotations, providing context or further interpretation as necessary to inform the reader.

Table 6.4.

Quotations Related to a Focus on the Learning Process: Abrams

Instance	Evidence (Quotation)	Source	Comments
1	“I guess it just kind of put me in that mindset that, you know, I saw myself as more like a scientist or academic growing up...”	LSN interview, March 20, 2018	This quotation appeared earlier in this chapter. Abrams was referring to his experiences traveling with his archeologist parents and what those archeology-related experiences meant to him. They helped him to identify as a scientist or an academic from very early on in his life.
2	“They took me on a trip to Argentina [...] I was out of school for two or three months during that and so I had to teach myself [...] I was learning on my own... ”	LSN interview, March 20, 2018	As was already discussed earlier in this chapter, Abrams was particularly impacted by the trip in his adolescence to Argentina, not just because of the archaeology that he had always found interesting. More specifically, he had to make sense of the book and assignments his algebra teacher provided him during the extended period of time when he was out of the country with his parents. While he remembers the experience as being somewhat difficult, he also remembers pleased at his capacity to figure things out on his own. Later, as has again already been stated, he refers back to this time as partial justification for his desire to afford his own students the opportunity to try to learn things on their own.
3	“I liked [...] building model airplanes and, you know, remote control airplanes, umm, and... and then I also got exposed to computers [...] and just that sort of stuff put me in the mindset of, umm, you know, like, that I just liked to learn things and figure things out... ”	LSN interview, March 20, 2018	Even in considering his experiences outside of school, Abrams described several endeavors that further cemented his love for the learning process in general. More specifically, he discussed his various experiences with a variety of technologies: remote control airplanes, computers (computer programming), and things of that nature. He also expressed how much he enjoyed each time he learned something new or figured something out. In other words, he described his love for learning.
4	“I remember as a kid I was learning to,	LSN interview,	Again in this case, Abrams describes his enjoyment of learning, figuring things

Instance	Evidence (Quotation)	Source	Comments
	like, program something on the computer and I would, you know, be thinking about how I would teach that to somebody [...] explaining it to myself... And so I guess that kind of, I mean, that put me in the mindset of yes, liking to learn, liking to figure things out, and liking to create things... "	March 20, 2018	out, and creating. He also detailed his regular habit of actually thinking about how he would teach what he is learning to somebody else and his somewhat related practice of being conscious of how he is explaining things to himself as a means.
5	"I hated high school... Specifically, I was pretty indifferent to school overall. It was uninspiring, and I learned stuff despite, you know, my education just cause I wanted to and so I thought maybe that would be some reasons to become a teacher... "	LSN interview, March 20, 2018	In this case, it is in reflecting on an unengaging learning environment and set of personal experiences coupled with his success in learning in spite of those experiences that Abrams became inspired initially to become a teacher. The thought of being a part of creating a more engaging learning environment for students as a teacher was appealing to him perhaps in part because of his own love for learning.
6	"I did the Math Ed program at the [University] and, I mean it, well it's, I guess I hadn't really considered, you know, for people other than myself, that didn't think like me, how you would teach... teach them	LSN interview, March 20, 2018	At this juncture in his life and learning, Abrams was particularly engaged in the experiences designed to help him focus on the different ways people learn. Having already had some experience thinking about how he would teach something in a way he understood, he engaged himself within the Math Ed program in reflecting not only on his own learning of mathematics in general but also what that might afford him in

Instance	Evidence (Quotation)	Source	Comments
	anything [...] This program kind of opened up that idea [...] really gave me a different way and it made me understand how I learn things on my own also [...] how I approach teaching...		terms of thinking about how to approach his teaching of mathematics, perhaps to people that do not think like him.
7	“And just that it’s not really so much, like, about what I teach, it’s, you know, it’s like the people that I’m doing it with and, and, you know, the students and, you know, whatever it is that I’ve been designated to teach them, it doesn’t really matter what the standards are as long as I’m moving them along and, and, you know, pushing them, you know, helping them go through their life...”	LSN interview, March 20, 2018	In reflecting on what it means to Abrams to be a teacher, instead of emphasizing a particular content standard or even mathematics in general, Abrams specifically talks about trying to move students along in their learning in general, to inspire learning or forward progress in some way.
8	“So, you know, that was... that’s something that I would include, it’s just that idea of curiosity and wanting to figure things out...”	LSN interview, March 20, 2018	When I asked Abrams at the close of our LSN interview if there was anything else he felt he wanted to say in terms of explaining to me how he became the teacher he is today before I stopped the recording, this is what he said. In short, Abrams expressed his general curiosity and how much he enjoys the learning and discovery process when he is asked to “figure things out”.

Instance	Evidence (Quotation)	Source	Comments
9	<p>“I guess there isn’t a ton of internal dialogue except trying to figure out what it is that I need to say to this kid to keep them going... you know, is it, do they need some sort of... like, do they need a sarcastic comment? Do they need, like, some, just like support? Do I just... do I just need to ask them what they’re thinking? Do I need to explain something? Do I just need to walk away?”</p>	WRE #1 interview, May 23, 2018	<p>Even in the midst of crushing circumstances where Abrams is admittedly frustrated or disappointed by the lack of progress or curiosity of his students, he never ceases to focus on moving his students forward in their learning. When reflecting on a lesson that did not go as he planned and when asked what internal dialogue specifically he had in the moments where he was recognizing that his students were not as engaged as he had anticipated or would have liked, Abrams answered with this quote. In short, he expressed the sentiment that even when his students are disengaged, he does not consider the option that they cannot move forward in their learning. Instead, he focuses on what he thinks might inspire them to keep trying or move forward in the learning process.</p>
10	<p>“I work to improve my instruction and relationships with students constantly and am much more interested in how teachers and students perceive me...”</p>	WRE #2, May 23, 2018	<p>In this case, Abrams was actually reflecting on a crushing comment that was written on a formal evaluation. In making sense of the entire experience, however, he could not help but focus on what he does to try to improve the instruction he provides his students on a regular basis and even what they think about him as a teacher and their learning.</p>
11	<p>“I have had other people that come in and observe from... you know, other teachers or [...], through [...] the University [...] and then there’d be like a real conversation about what it was and [...] I mean, you know, umm, my</p>	WRE #2 interview, May 23, 2018	<p>Because Abrams is so focused on learning himself, he greatly values other professionals with knowledge and experience that can improve his practice. In other words, he greatly appreciates the collaborative conversations and interactions with other professionals who truly have something to offer him that will inform his practice. The goal, again, is to provide instruction that helps students learn.</p>

Instance	Evidence (Quotation)	Source	Comments
	<p>administrator this year, like, he's... you know, he doesn't have much to say about math... (laughs)... cause he's not a math teacher... but there's still like.. there's other good stuff that comes from... you know, from him..."</p>		
12	<p>"I got them to... convinced them to focus just on having kids who really needed extra help and anybody who was a behavior problem... for the support class... for the second period... so that... that helped... it was better on the day to day... classes were smaller for the support and so I could actually kind of support some kids..."</p>	WRE #3 interview, May 23, 2018	<p>This particular quote is interesting to me because it seems to suggest that Abrams believes all students can learn. It had been evident up until his description of this third crushing event (which will be detailed later in this chapter) that he had a love for learning in general and that he wanted to provide good learning experiences for his students, but here Abrams is talking about a group of students that were the least successful in learning during a year when he had been given way too many students (because another teacher had quit). Interestingly, rather than focus on the students who were learning, Abrams specifically campaigned to keep the kids who were struggling the most in the extra support class so that he could have additional time with them. Whether more because he was convinced of his capacity as a teacher to teach or not is unclear, but it is at least evident that he believed the "hardest" students could learn. If he did not, surely he would not have gone out of his way to get more time with the kids struggling academically and behaviorally (which obviously impacts academics). There are many teachers who would have done the opposite, wishing to focus instead on students who seemed motivated or more capable of learning.</p>

Instance	Evidence (Quotation)	Source	Comments
13	<p>“I don’t do a lot of direct instruction with students because it’s inefficient... Right, I try to set it up so they can pretty much learn stuff on their own and I’m there to clarify, umm, help them through things. Also, that way when they show up after having been absent for a day or two in a row, I can just be all, well, here’s all the stuff you need, here’s what we’re working on right now [...] And the only thing I’m trying to do is... educate them a bit and then be able to legitimately say that they have learned it, and they’ve learned how to learn without me trying to tell them or force feed them...”</p>	CCC interview, May 23, 2018	<p>This quote is one that was referenced earlier in this chapter. After alluding to his experience as an adolescent in Argentina trying to figure out his math on his own with the resources his teacher had provided, Abrams addresses the importance of helping his students learn to learn without him “directly instructing” them, as has been a traditional way of teaching mathematics. In other words, he addressed his commitment to try to provide his students opportunities to take up the resources that he gives them and make sense of them, to experience the learning process as he has come to know and appreciate it. He also mentioned that this can be particularly helpful in a district where the attendance is as bad as it is. If students miss direct instruction, they miss direct instruction. If they miss an activity that was designed in a way to help them learn to learn, he can still hand over all of the components of the activity.</p>
14	<p>“And so I, you know, talk to them about how they are still developing neurologically and... and that’s like one of the last parts that, that kind of forms and... it’s not that you don’t... Like you understand, the logic is sound- like</p>	CCC interview, May 23, 2018	<p>Even when students do not make good choices, choices conducive to learning, Abrams does not stop trying to engage them in the learning process. Instead, he exercises consideration for their challenges as well as the fact that their brains are still developing. He chooses to have real and motivating conversations with his students about continuing to strive to practice making good choices in spite of these challenges and even failures. This quotation was taken from a</p>

Instance	Evidence (Quotation)	Source	Comments
	you understand the cause and effect but the part of your brain that allows you to make that choice to actually take control of it is still developing- and so like, you know, as you go through life, this gets better... it's important that you keep working on it cause that will make it get better...		discussion of the many crushing contexts Abrams identified over the course of the study. He was specifically referring to the crushing context (that will be addressed later) he titled "failing seniors". It was interesting to me that in describing that context, he chose to focus on the learning opportunities still available for failing seniors, even later in life.
15	"It really is, you know, about the individual students and becoming somebody that cares about them and figuring it out... Especially as a senior teacher, I'm like the very last thing that they go through... figuring out what it is they need to get them off, going in the best way..."	CCC interview, May 23, 2018	This is yet another example of Abrams focusing on the learning of his students. Rather than focus on a particular standard or content, he tries to focus on his individual students, what it would be best for them to learn next, and how he can contribute to that learning.

In addition to paying ample attention to the learning process in general, further evidence of the second portion of Abrams's core belief in particular, related to his confidence in his as well as his students' capacities to learn and grow, is found in the amount of effort and attention he affords to attempting to incite the curiosity of his students. In other words, being fully convinced of the importance of curiosity and creativity in his own life and learning (recall that Abrams specifically identified these as

themes in his life at the base of his timeline construction- see Table 6.2 above), Abrams regularly strives to incite the curiosity and general engagement in learning of each of his students. More specifically, at least ten times during our three extended meetings together, Abrams explicitly addressed his attempts to engage and stimulate the curiosity of his learners. Each of these examples is contained in Table 6.5 below in the form of quotations pulled directly from transcripts. Again, these quotations are unaltered, other than that I have intentionally bolded portions of each statement to direct the readers' attention to my intention in including them. Alongside each piece of evidence, also contained within the table, I provide additional comments related to each of these quotations, providing additional context or further interpretation as necessary to inform the reader and defend my claim that the quotations reveal Abrams's efforts towards inciting the curiosity and interest of his students.

Table 6.5.

Quotations Related to an Attention to Inspiring Student Curiosity: Abrams

Instance	Evidence (Quotation)	Source	Comments
1	“I hated high school... Specifically, I was pretty indifferent to school overall. It was uninspiring, and I learned stuff despite, you know, my education just cause I wanted to and so I thought maybe that would be some reasons to become a teacher... ”	LSN interview, March 20, 2018	This quotation also appeared in Table 6.4 above because it is directly related to Abrams's appreciation for learning in general. In reflecting on an unengaging learning environment and set of personal experiences coupled with his success in learning in spite of those experiences, Abrams expressed his inspiration to become a teacher who would create a different environment, presumably one that is engaging and sparks the interest of his students.

Instance	Evidence (Quotation)	Source	Comments
2	<p>“I did the Math Ed program at the [University] and, I mean it, well it’s, I guess I hadn’t really considered, you know, for people other than myself, that didn’t think like me, how you would teach... teach them anything [...] This program kind of opened up that idea [...] really gave me a different way and it made me understand how I learn things on my own also [...] how I approach teaching...”</p>	LSN interview, March 20, 2018	<p>This quotation also appeared in Table 6.4 above because it is directly related to Abrams’s appreciation for learning in general. In reflecting on the different ways people learn and are engaged and how to handle that in a classroom, Abrams was inspired to become a teacher who would create an environment that is engaging and sparks the interest of a diverse body of students with different needs and learning styles than his own.</p>
3	<p>“...And was a lot more focused on, you know, really problem-solving, cooperative learning... which was all really, you know, made it a lot more interesting and so that was, you know, motivational...”</p>	LSN interview, March 20, 2018	<p>Abrams is continually focused on what he refers to as “newer” ways of teaching as opposed to the “stand and deliver” traditional way of teaching secondary math. This quotation came directly from the LSN interview when he was discussing some of his experiences in the Math Ed program. In particular, he was discussing some of the experiences they were given actually learning some of the same mathematics they would eventually teach students, but learning in more engaging ways. In reflecting on that program at the University, Abram specifically mentioned things like cooperative learning and problem-solving as more motivational and interesting learning experiences for him. In terms of speaking of those as</p>

Instance	Evidence (Quotation)	Source	Comments
4	<p>“There was another, you know, young teacher there and we formed a little clique where we were really into like figuring out, umm, how to teach freshmen algebra, umm, and, you know, we were all kind of sold on... on, you know, I suppose newer ideas, different ideas than how math was taught there [...] So that was, you know, that was another step...”</p>	<p>LSN interview, March 20, 2018</p>	<p>“motivational”, while he did not technically specify in what way, it is reasonable to assume given his focus on trying to appreciate how different people learn in preparation for teaching that he means motivational to him in terms of making him want to incorporate similar activities into his teaching.</p> <p>At this particular part of the LSN interview, Abrams was discussing his experience his first few years of teaching in particular. During this time at Towne, he partnered with another teacher (William Nelson) to focus on Algebra 1 specifically and teaching freshmen. Together, they spent quite a bit of time planning more engaging and meaningful instructional materials for student use. Eventually, Abrams worked with this other teacher (years later when Nelson returned to Towne) to develop new curriculum that was still standards-based but incorporated group-worthy, open-ended mathematical tasks and embedded cooperative learning opportunities that were more engaging for his students.</p>
5	<p>“I like to learn about things and... and do things, and so just the idea of... of, like, curiosity and creativity is just something that’s always been a part of me and something that, you know, was initially, you know, part of why I</p>	<p>LSN interview, March 20, 2018</p>	<p>No doubt because of his love and appreciation for learning and curiosity in his own learning, Abrams is committed to attempting to incite the curiosity of his students. In fact, the desire to do so was part of what made him want to be a teacher. But it is something he works hard at. He often notices that so many things he finds inherently interesting are</p>

Instance	Evidence (Quotation)	Source	Comments
	<p>wanted to be a teacher and then in reality made it hard too. I didn't know how to fit that in really [...] Something that I just noticed in my students, you know... Why do you not just inherently find everything interesting? I really try hard to find engaging tasks for this reason."</p>		<p>simply not interesting to his students and he tries hard to find engaging tasks to spark their curiosity.</p>
6	<p>"I've been teaching this... this financial math for a couple years which is like... I like teaching it, you know... It's interesting because, you know, kids find it directly relevant, you know, there's no question... But I don't like it because it's such a non-intellectual exercise... It's all well, you know, here's how taxes work, umm, now you can do your taxes, as opposed to, you know, discovering truths about mathematics that's just so much more interesting..."</p>	<p>LSN interview, March 20, 2018</p>	<p>Because Abrams so greatly values curiosity and wants his students to experience it, he works hard to make the math he teaches engaging. For this reason, he values both mathematics that is relevant because it is more interesting than non-relevant mathematics, as well as tasks and activities that incite student interest. Of course, his personal preference is interesting mathematics that is truly interesting in and of itself (much like the mathematics that Nelson appreciates), but he understands and appreciates that his students' interests will vary and sometimes relevant or practical mathematics is all that will interest certain students, so he does even find meaning in teaching the lower, less interesting levels of mathematics, particularly in the courses that actually teach students skills they can immediately use in the real world.</p>
7	<p>"I created a lesson that I</p>	<p>WRE #1,</p>	<p>This quote comes directly from</p>

Instance	Evidence (Quotation)	Source	Comments
	thought would be interesting, engaging, and provide a deep understanding of a concept and was really excited to teach it...	May 23, 2018	Abrams's reflection on his first crushing WRE account. While the lesson did not go as he had hoped (as will be detailed extensively in a later section of this chapter), it is indeed representative of the effort Abrams routinely puts into trying to plan engaging lessons for his students.
8	"I'm perpetually disappointed by how little curiosity and perseverance my students show, however, I now understand that is where my work really is [...] I would spend my time, you know, writing things out coming up with ideas, organizing these... these activities and from which I like I didn't have much to pull from [...] So now, you know, I have a lot of that stuff developed and, you know, lots of different versions of things and... and now, you know [...] the thing that I'm working on, I guess, is... is the inspirational part, right... How to... how to get kids... how to bring out their curiosity or get them to be curious and how to build their... their perseverance and determination and...	WRE #1, May 23, 2018	While it is undoubtedly Abrams's goal to have his students experience the magic of curiosity and discovery, he is well aware that the bulk of his students do not seem to come to him with the natural curiosity he had. Rather than give up on his students and lament this fact, however, he chooses to focus on how he can engage them. He spent years initially collecting and creating engaging tasks. Now he has many of those at his disposal. He still works at and looks for new ways, however, even using those tasks that have proven their worth over the years, to bring out his students' curiosity relative to those engaging tasks. In this quote, he even labels <i>this</i> work as "his" current endeavor or focus.

Instance	Evidence (Quotation)	Source	Comments
9	<p>and all that... that's, you know, that's really what I work at, as opposed to you know, the math part, the lesson part..."</p>	<p>CCC interview, May 23, 2018</p>	<p>This quotation also appeared in Table 6.4 above because it is directly related to Abrams's appreciation for learning in general and ensuring students learn, but I included a portion of the quotation (at the end) here that does not appear there and also did not include the end of the quotation. As has already been mentioned twice, when Abrams said these things to me, he specifically alluded to his own experience as an adolescent when he realized he could make sense of things on his own. That was important to him. It is no doubt this same engaging experience he is hoping his students will have when he says, "...it's good for them to see that they can learn that way. It's powerful."</p>
10	<p>"I feel like I could just... If I knew enough about it, I would just teach any subject... It doesn't... It's not a passion for the subject that makes me want to teach... It's... it's more, you know, stimulating the thinking, trying to get them to, you know, spark the curiosity in them and just motivate them to go be</p>	<p>CCC interview, May 23, 2018</p>	<p>In reflecting on this project as a whole, crushing contexts, and why he teaches, Abrams made it very clear in our final interview that for him it is not about the content he teaches. Unlike in the case of Nelson in particular, for Abrams it truly is about learning in general. For every student, what he desires most is just that they experience the curiosity and motivation that will inspire them to learn something new, to think in new ways.</p>

Instance	Evidence (Quotation)	Source	Comments
	productive, happy, well-adjusted people in the world...”		

In addition to the constant focus on and appreciation for the learning process in general as well as his collective efforts toward inspiring the curiosity and engagement of his students, a consideration of the various contexts that Abrams identified as “crushing” over the course of our time together also unveils evidence of his first core belief. For instance, consider the five “current” (specific to the 2017-2018 school year and his work with seniors) crushing contexts that Abrams recorded on his CCC person-shaped papers. Four of those five contexts he identified were events and circumstances that directly impede the learning of his students (CCC interview, May 23, 2018). In other words, literally what made the contexts crushing to Abrams was the experience of his students, or their lack of learning. The fifth context may also be arguably related in that Abrams did insinuate that he worried about its impact on students when he was reflecting on it during our final interview. He may very well have been concerned about their learning, though he did not expound. All five of these contexts appear below in Figure 6.2 (image). As was true for all of my participants, when Abrams recorded these crushing contexts over the course of data collection, he gave each of them a representative title before he stored them for our final interview. While Abrams’s crushing context titles are all fairly self-explanatory, beneath the image below, I have also provided a table (Table 6.6) containing some of Abrams’s commentary in connection with these contexts. More specifically, within the table next to each Abrams-given CCC title are quotations pulled directly from the transcript of our CCC interview. These quotations are unaltered except that I have bolded parts of them to emphasize the various connections to this core belief.

Figure 6.2. Crushing Contexts Collection (Image): Abrams



Table 6.6

Abrams's Crushing Contexts Collection (CCC)

#	Participant-Given Title	Abrams's Commentary
1	1/3 of Students Absent on Any Given Day	"This is like, this is seniors stuff mostly [...] especially because the class I was teaching this year was [...] pitched to seniors and they sign up for it as the lower or the easier math class [...] These are the ones that are just trying to get out. And so, they don't have a lot of interest in it... and so it really is, literally, on any given day, a third of them are just gone. It's not even the same third [...] So everything I do, I have to do at least a couple, three times I guess [...] I'm just... like I'm disappointed in how little it seems like we actually learned because everything takes a million times longer than it should... But there have been great learning moments..."
2	Failing Seniors	"They... like they want to graduate... obviously... But some of their decisions to not do the work or not come to class..."
3	Student Came to Class for 1 st Time in Over a	"I don't remember who it was, or what the deal was, and then just, yah, putting those two things together [referring to both failing seniors above and this CC]... so, you know, alright,

#	Participant-Given Title	Abrams's Commentary
	Month	you missed a month, now... how are we going to fix that in time for graduation? "
5	2 Out of 30 Students Completed an Assignment	"And, you know, 2 out of 30 do the assignment..."
6	Principal Forced to Leave	"...principal being forced to leave is kind of more devastating [...] it's out of the norm [...] They haven't even started the process for hiring our principal for next year... no idea who it'll be, what they'll be like... if they will, umm, be, you know, supportive for us... if they're going to be working, umm, you know, have the right kind of perspective that I think we need and I think we've had about what [Towne's] like and what the students need and what the faculty and teachers need..."

In other words, Abrams's passion and appreciation for curiosity and learning was also evidenced in the fact that, at least in most cases, what Abrams perceived and described as a "crushing context" was inextricably tied to the failed, impeded, or inferior learning experiences of his students. In the case of the third of students absent on any given day, for example, Abrams does not continue to trudge through a pacing calendar without considering his very real circumstances and in so doing deny his students the opportunity to truly learn any content. Instead, he tries to structure his classes in a way that in spite of the crushing circumstances, all students come away with some learning. What is crushing to him, nonetheless, is the fact that his students do not get to *learn as much* as they could if they were always present. It is significant to note that at the end of the quotation above, Abrams does at least celebrate the moments when good learning still happens.

Similarly, in the case of failing seniors, what is crushing to Abrams is the fact that they are failing to learn. Even this being the case, it is significant to note that he does not

give up on failing seniors or their ability to learn if at some point they decide they are interested in doing so. In fact, in reflecting further on this crushing context and the poor choices many of his failing seniors are making (not waking up on time, not coming to school, not turning in work), rather than berate them, Abrams talked about his conversations with his students and how he works to encourage them to “keep working on it” (CCC interview, May 23, 2018). He tells his students, for instance, that their brain is still developing and that the part of their brain that is actually helping them make choices (good and bad) is still developing. In other words, he encourages them not to be defined by past failures but to continue to strive to make better choices, one choice at a time. He tells them that “it’s important that [they] keep working on it cause that will make it get better” (CCC interview, May 23, 2018). Rather than begrudge their inadequacy or lack of effort, he laments the fact that even though they generally want to graduate, they are still making destructive choices that keep them from attending, completing work, and ultimately enjoying as many learning experiences as are technically available to them.

Indeed, even in reflecting on the final crushing context recorded on the little slip of paper, regarding his principal being forced to leave, part of what was crushing to Abrams was the potential impact of that event on all of Towne’s students. I did not ask for clarification and Abrams was not explicit, so it cannot be proven that part of what may have been crushing was a concern for their learning, though that could have been the case. He did express a concern as to whether the new administration would have “the right kind of perspective [...] about what [Towne’s] like and what the students need” (CCC interview, May 23, 2018). In other words, part of what was so crushing was the

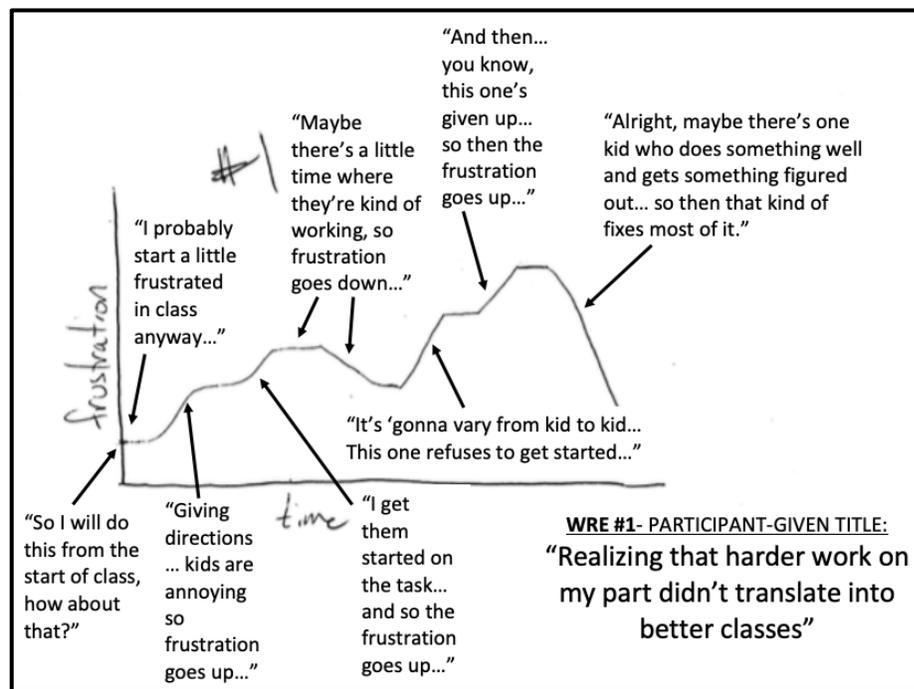
fact that Abrams had no way of knowing whether the new administration would be as supportive of his students as the previous principal was.

Perhaps the most vivid example of how crushing it is to Abrams when his students are not learning in spite of all of his efforts, however, was revealed in a consideration of his first well-remembered event. Abrams titled this crushing WRE: “Realizing that harder work on my part didn’t translate into better classes” (WRE #1, May 23, 2018). Abrams narrated this event from his first year of teaching when he had worked hard to create a lesson that he truly thought would be “interesting, engaging, and provide a deep understanding of a concept” that he was “really excited to teach” (WRE #1, May 23, 2018). In reality, when he taught the lesson, however, the bulk of his students were “off-task, didn’t complete it, didn’t think about anything deeply, and seemed like they could care less” (WRE #1, May 23, 2018). In reflecting on the significance of this event, Abrams remarked, “I’m perpetually disappointed by how little curiosity and perseverance my students show, however, I now understand that is where my work really is” (WRE#1 interview, May 23, 2018). In other words, Abrams was crushed in this event because he felt all of his effort had been ineffectual. After all, his students were still not experiencing meaningful learning.

To make sense of this first crushing well-remembered event, I added some of Abrams’s words to the arc he constructed to represent his emotional experience at the conclusion of the interview focused on that event. In other words, in a manner consistent with the arcs that have appeared in previous chapters, I added some of Abrams’s commentary to the arc that he drew during our time together in the hopes of presenting a more complete picture for the reader of what I experienced during that interview as

Abrams used the arc to re-narrate the event in terms of his emotional experience in particular. This arc appears below (Figure 6.3). There are a couple of notable distinctions related to this arc in comparison with those that have appeared in other chapters. First, distinct from most of the other arcs, this arc drawn by Abrams does not cover his reflection on the event, only what he experienced in the moment or in the midst of the event itself. Also distinct related to this arc, and notably a distinction which is true of *each* of the arcs Abrams constructed, Abrams actually drew a graph with two labeled axes to show a very specific emotional experience within his crushing event. More specifically in this particular case, Abrams drew a graph with an axis labeled “frustration” and one labeled “time” to show his various levels of frustration at different points of time throughout the event.

Figure 6.3. WRE #1 Participant Experience Arc (Annotated)



In narrating his experience in the moment during this event, Abrams was very

candid about the extreme frustration and even anger he felt as a result of the general lack of effort and engagement in the learning on the part of his students. Some of these candid statements appear on the arc, but at least two others are worth repeating. Early on in his description of the event, for instance, Abrams said, speaking of his students,

I was angry at them because I had worked so hard to do something for them and some were so apathetic they wouldn't even try it, others gave up immediately, and some just grudgingly participated. I thought, why should I work hard for you when you don't even fucking care? (WRE #1 submission)

Not only were his students not seemingly getting much out of the lesson, he had put so much time and effort into creating the lesson (whether finding or constructing engaging mathematics tasks, he cannot recall) that he was downright angry. He wondered whether all of his time and effort had literally gone to waste. Interestingly, while Abrams was indeed angry, he did emphasize that he spent the entire lesson continuing to try to engage the students and salvage the activity as much as possible. When I inquired as to Abrams's internal dialogue as he wrestled with this frustration and still forced himself to do this, his response again contained some very colorful language to expound upon his frustration. He said,

Nothing nice, I mean [laughing] it was probably a lot of fuck, and like what is the matter with you? Why won't you read this? Why won't you sit? Why won't you talk to this person? How can you be stuck there? How do you have so little motivation that you won't even bring your eyes to look at the paper?" (WRE #1 interview, May 23, 2018)

In other words, during this event, Abrams did not feel resilient or inspired or productive

at all. He did continue to try to engage and support his students until the bell ring, but in the end, he described his efforts as “utterly ineffective” and the lesson as a whole as “disastrous” (WRE #1 interview, May 23, 2018).

In reflecting on and making sense of this WRE centered on a lesson with such great potential that essentially fell apart, Abrams very clearly drew on his core belief that his students were capable of learning and he was capable of learning how to teach them. Rather than remain frustrated with his students or quit the profession, Abrams emphasized the fact that when similar things happen now (this was his first year of teaching), he is more capable of taking his students’ lack of engagement or curiosity in stride. He similarly no longer allows himself to get so worked up about the things he cannot control, such as when students get stuck in a different part of a lesson than he anticipated (for example, if they are unable to measure something and that halts a lesson that was meant to go well beyond a measurement). Instead, he says things to himself like, “Well okay, not at all where I thought we would be getting stuck with this” (WRE #1 interview, May 23, 2018) and continues to focus on what he can do to continue to move the students along anyway. In his own words, when things fall apart in this way now, Abrams is “more bemused by it than angry [...] Oh yah, kids can’t measure” he joked.

Most significant perhaps about this particular event, is that while the event was crushing because students were not experiencing great learning, even so early in his teaching, Abrams did not allow himself to remain crushed. He continued to try to actually do things to improve the situation. This is a pattern he has continued and now his internal dialogue contains far fewer expressions of anger and far more productive problem-solving related to the actions Abrams wants to take in response to the crushing moments.

As Abrams emphasized in his response to the sense he makes of this event going forward and why it was so memorable, “My inner dialogue now is different,” he said. “I’m trying to figure out what it is that I need to say to this kid to keep them going...” (WRE #1 interview, May 23, 2018).

In other words, as crushing as it is to Abrams even now when his students do not appear to be learning, when lessons fall apart, or their current levels of mathematical understanding or lack of foundational skills rob them of the magic that would have been waiting, Abrams remains fully committed to the learning process. He embraces wherever his students are and tries to continue to nudge them forward. If he did not have this core belief that in the general capacities of his students to learn, he would presumably not be able to do this.

A belief in the power and importance of community. In addition to having a very strong belief about the capacity of all people to learn and grown, Abrams also has a resilient belief in the power and importance of community. Of all of the participants in this study, for Abrams in particular, the community in which he taught was a huge part of his identity as a veteran teacher of mathematics. He drew strength from this community and its power and significance both when he was dependent upon them and when he was operating independently. This is perhaps most easily seen from a consideration of the word cloud generated from a list of the sensical nouns Abrams utilized to tell his life story narrative.

Just as in previous chapters, it is important to note that before generating this word cloud, I removed non-sensical nouns from the list and combined singular and plural nouns together, listing them as plural. In addition, I made a few other minor changes to

ensure that like-nouns would be grouped together on the word cloud (for example, changing the nouns “teacher” and “teaching” to a representative “teach” so that they would appear together). These latter changes that I made to a noun or set of nouns are all contained in Table 6.7 below. The intent behind these minor changes, as the intent behind similar changes reported in other chapters, was simply to ensure the word cloud would be representative of what the transcript actually revealed. In other words, since the size of the words change with the frequency of their use, suggesting their relative importance to the participant, I contend that these changes, while miniscule, make a potentially big difference in the interpretation of the word cloud on the part of the researcher or reader. As a result, I opt continually to make the necessary changes to the list I then enter into the word cloud generator to ensure that even technically different nouns can appear together provided they are nouns referring to the same base noun (whether synonyms or singular or plural variations of that base noun, for example).

Table 6.7.

Minor Changes to List of Nouns Pasted in Word Cloud Generator: Abrams

Noun Appearing in Cloud (Frequency in Transcript)	Nouns in Original Transcript Recoded in this Way (Individual Frequencies in Transcript)
Teach (18)	Teacher (10), Teaching (8)
Students (9)	Students (4), Student (2), Kid (1), Kids (2) (Note: In each of <i>these</i> cases, these nouns as they appeared in the transcript were referring to one or more of Abrams’s students, not himself. The reader will note that the term “kid” does appear in the cloud, each of those times it was used by Abrams in reference to himself as a child, not to his students.)
Math (9)	Math (7), Mathematics (2)

The word cloud that was generated from the slightly altered master list of nouns contained within Abrams’s LSN interview transcript appears below (Figure 6.4). Just

Frequency	Noun(s)
1	National Club Organization; AP Computer Science Course; Remote Control Airplanes; Electronic components; Cooperative Learning; Computer Programming; Electronic Gizmos; Community College; Northern Arizona; Model Airplanes; Problem-Solving; Archaeologists; Android Apps; Organization; Programming; Electronics; Creativity; Cell Phone; Excavation; Radio Club; Experience; HAM Radio; Standards; Community; Ownership; Argentina; Scientist; Doctoral; Childhood; Education; Question; Projects; Workshop; Exercise; Research; Master's; Mountain; Freshmen; Tomorrow; Antennas; Suicide; Meeting; Purpose; Feeling; Classes; Subject; Journal; Parents; Math Ed; Truths; Course; Design; Months; Thesis; Summer; Nobody; Clique; Fellow; Method; Basic; Place; Woman; Child; Music; Home; Food; Week; Step

Literally each of the seven most significant nouns appearing in Abrams's transcript in some way relate to Abrams's community and his life work at Towne. The most significant of these [*teach* (appearing 18 times in the transcript), *students* (9 times), and *math* (9 times)] are directly related to Abrams's work within his community. The next four [*life* (7), *years* (6), *days* (5), and *Towne* (4)] paint a picture of where Abrams spends his time. Also notable and further down the list are community-related nouns like *classroom* (2), *school* (2), *people* (2), *high school* (2), *faculty* (2), *cooperative learning* (1), *organization* (1), *community* (1), *meeting* (1), *classes* (1), *months* (1), and *clique* (1).

It is not just this word cloud, of course, that serves as evidence that community is so important to Abrams. More than any other participant in this study, Abrams repeatedly referred to the community in which he was teaching in narrating his life story as well as his experiences during the crushing contexts of his profession, expressing both a great appreciation for the support of the teachers and staff at Towne as well as a desire to stay at Towne for years to come. Most important for Abrams about this community was the fact that they were ever-present in the hardest times, offering genuine support when he needed it most and truly caring about him and his work and growth.

Abrams has looked to the Towne community as a source of genuine support and care during his most difficult times, both in and out of the classroom. Perhaps the most heartbreaking example can be found in Abrams's reflection on the final event he recorded on his timeline construction (see Table 6.2 above): "[Sarah's] suicide". Abrams met Sarah when she was a student teacher at Towne and they dated for "four or five years" before Sarah took her life suddenly on Abrams's first day back to work on August 1, 2016. They were living together at the time and in Abrams's own words, she was "the other person I was gonna spend my life with" (LSN interview, March 20, 2018). Having taught herself at Towne for three years, Sarah was also known to many of the other teachers and members of staff at Towne. The community came together in a big way for Abrams after that morning and it made a huge impact on his teaching. In his own words,

I went there [Towne] and I told them, you know, what had happened and just you know the whole faculty was there... more than I'd ever seen at any sort of faculty meeting. An outside organization that she had worked for had come and then they were just, you know, so caring, and they all, you know, came up and, like, hugged me individually, and it was genuine. From there on out, you know, they came to my house and brought me, you know, or you know, just checked on me all the time, brought me food, made sure I was doing okay, and so, that kind of [...] changed my kind of feeling about, like [...] clarified anyway, like, what's important about, you know, about what I do and, and just that it's not really so much like about what I teach... It's, you know, it's like the people that I'm doing it with and, and, you know, the students and, you know, whatever it is that I've been designated to teach them, it doesn't really matter what the standards are as

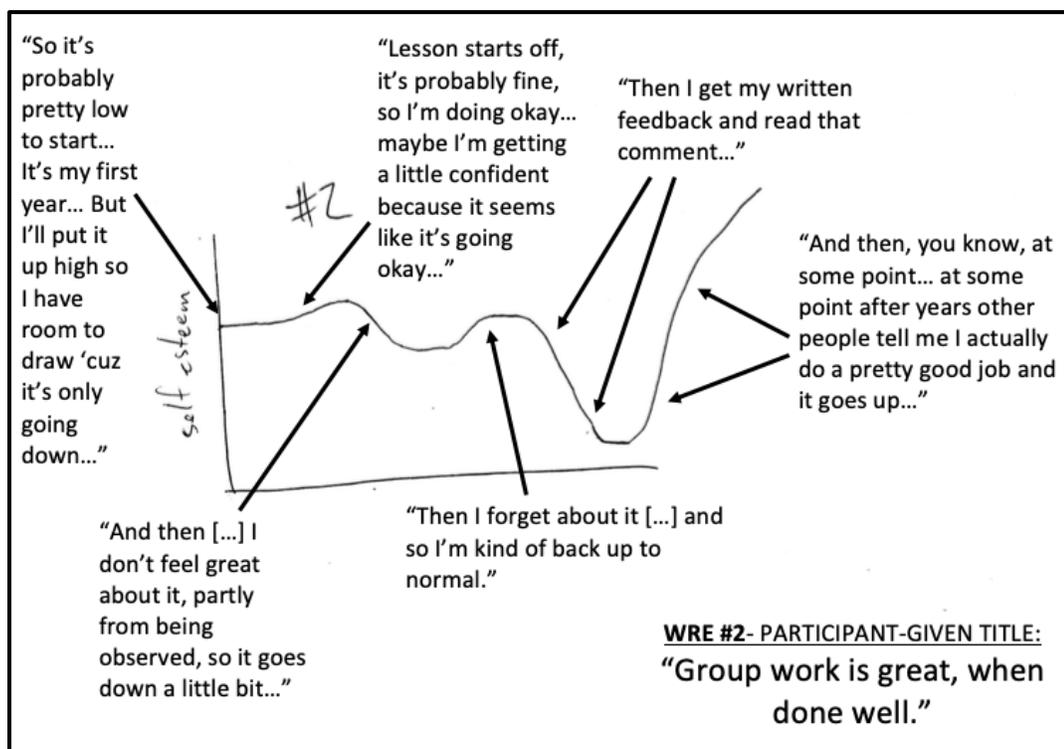
long as I'm moving them along and, and, you know, pushing them [...] helping them go through their life.

Even before this tragic event, Abrams had always greatly appreciated the community at Towne. In fact, it was the welcoming and inclusive community that made him choose to stay at Towne after he finished his student teaching. At the time, he did not rely on the community as he says he does now, but he was well aware of its strength. In many ways, early on, Abrams felt as though he could operate entirely independently and would be left to himself to do so at Towne if he wanted. He even admitted to feeling he could do so now if he wanted. It was simply the fact that he knew the community was there and it was strong if he ever needed it and that he was happy it was there for students. In his own words, even though he never really relied on the power of the community before Sarah's suicide, "I was happy that it was that way. I was comfortable. Everybody was dedicated and welcoming and friendly" (LSN interview, March 20, 2018).

There were other times, of course, before this great tragedy that Abrams drew strength from the community at Towne. Consider, for example, Abrams's second well-remembered event. Abrams was in his first year of teaching when the feedback he received from the administrator following his formal observation really crushed his spirits. To this day, he does not recall the lesson, but he had planned some sort of collaborative task for his students to engage in and whether because of imperfect directions or inferior classroom management, it did not go as well as he would have hoped. While he does not recall the content of the lesson, he emphasized the fact that he will never forget the comment that was written on the formal evaluation he eventually

received. He described the comment as a “huge blow” to his self-esteem and he ultimately made the decision to use the comment as the title of his WRE: “Group work is great, when done well.” Consider the following arc (Figure 6.5 below) related to Abrams’s experience during this crushing event, constructed in a manner consistent with the previous arc. As aforementioned, for this arc, too, Abrams chose to draw a graph, this time plotting his self-esteem over the course of the event (Figure 6.5).

Figure 6.5. WRE #2 Participant Experience Arc (Annotated)



Unlike for the previous WRE, Abrams does extend this arc to include his reflection on the event, or how he was able to persevere through and after its resolution. Admittedly, it took some time for his self-esteem to recover, which is perhaps why he chose to draw the arc in a way that focused on his self-esteem in the first place. The last quotation on the arc is testament to the fact that only “after years” was Abrams able to become confident in the job he does as a teacher. Perhaps even more telling is a quotation

taken directly from the reflection portion of Abrams's WRE submission. Contained within his submitted (written) WRE (third component), for Abrams lamented,

At the time it was both heartbreaking and angering because I already knew I was struggling and it was such an insulting way to phrase it. I needed support, not criticism. I barely wanted to keep coming to work because it was such a daily struggle and then to have my administrator come in and say yup, you really do suck made me kind of mad. (WRE #2 submission)

Significantly, it was the Towne community that helped Abrams recover following this event. For Abrams, it was indeed crushing to have tried so hard to prepare a lesson using newer strategies and an interesting task and have someone dismiss that effort and work because there were parts of the group work that did not go as smoothly as he would have liked. Still, rather than revert to traditional methods and give up on collaborative work for students, Abrams continued to work with Nelson, another teacher at Towne, to plan collaborative tasks for students that would be both engaging and meaningful. The two of them had gone through the Math Ed program together and even though Abrams felt he was struggling in this first year to manage and engage his students, he was invested enough in what he knew and appreciated about the learning process and what was engaging to continue to want to work at the lessons he was bringing into his classroom. As such, during his first three years at Towne, he partnered with Nelson (who came in at the same time as he did) to focus on Algebra 1 specifically and teaching freshmen and trying to figure out how to do a good job. The two of them met almost daily during their prep and spent quite a bit of time planning more engaging and meaningful instructional materials for student use. Eventually, Abrams worked with this

teacher (years later when Nelson returned to Towne) to actually develop new curriculum that incorporated group-worthy, open-ended mathematical tasks and embedded cooperative learning opportunities that were more engaging for his students. At this point, most of what they did was seek out existing material from other sources that was more engaging and mirrored what they had enjoyed themselves about the Math Ed program.

It was not just Nelson that brought Abrams out of the discouraging event that wounded his self-esteem. In addition, as other teachers and community members (some from the University) came to see him teach, rather than hold on to the feedback from that administrator who offered no helpful suggestions to him, he chose to believe their evaluations that he actually does, in his own words, “a pretty good job” (WRE #2 interview, May 23, 2018). In fact, in reflecting on the meaning he makes of this event going forward, Abrams again used some colorful language to describe how he persists through anything similar now:

When you know, my evaluator comes through to observe me, or the district comes through to observe me, or the Department of Education comes through to observe me... like, I don't give a fuck... they are not trying to help me be a better teacher [...] they're trying to get some numbers [...] they have some rubric that they're evaluating me on and then they'll rank me in some way... and it is totally meaningless for me... it's for them... And so I don't care. (WRE #2 interview)

In other words, Abrams continues to focus on his students and their learning and to do his best to engage them. He tries to collaborate to improve that learning, believing that he can learn to be a better teacher and his students are capable of learning. But he does not allow himself to be discouraged by those days when his students do not respond

as he planned or when outside evaluators give him negative feedback.

Hope and Trust

In addition to regularly expressing at least these two core beliefs, Abrams constantly communicated a hope and trust that acting on those beliefs and convictions was ultimately good or beneficial, regardless of the circumstances of the moment. In other words, Abrams conveyed a resilient belief that what he was doing mattered, whether he could see the impact in the immediate or not and whether he liked all of the results or consequences of those actions or not. This is perhaps most evident from a consideration of Abrams's reflection on all of the crushing contexts he had reflected on over the course of this project.

During each of Abrams's three well-remembered events, while he was well aware that there were many things that were not going as well as he would have liked (or not going well at all), he continued to remain invested in his students' learning process. After all, his strongest core belief is in the value and significance of that learning process and he would not give up on that belief even when a particular lesson fell apart. Instead, he held on to his hope that any learning was a step in the right direction and that all of it mattered. Abrams was able to continue acting on this belief even when the circumstances around him were crushing and hard to persist through. What is more, following his description of each of these events (without exception), it was essentially this hope that Abrams referred to in order to explain his ability to get through those most crushing moments, particularly when the denouement of those events was not what he hoped it would be.

Consider, for instance, the first two WREs already discussed in this chapter (see

Figures 6.3 and 6.5), and specifically the manner in which Abrams described his perseverance and actions through the height of conflict of each event. In the first event, entitled “Realizing that harder work on my part didn’t translate into better classes,” Abrams remarked at one point while drawing his experience arc (see Figure 6.3), “Alright, maybe there’s one kid who does something well and gets something figured out... so then that kind of fixes most of it” (WRE #1 interview, May 23, 2018). In other words, for even one student to make progress in terms of learning, Abrams could endure an extreme lack of progress for others. That would be enough to give him hope that his actions were nonetheless worthwhile.

In reflecting on this first event years later, Abrams commented that while in one sense the same thing still happens over and over again, it no longer crushes him. “I’m more bemused by it than angry,” he remarked at one point. “Oh yah, kids can’t measure” he joked a little later during that same conversation. “I predict it way better [...] If there’s going to be issues with something, where it’s going to happen and in general I can set it up so there’s far less of these sorts of issues” (WRE #1 interview, May 23, 2018). While Abrams emphasized that on the one hand, he is better at predicting when students will struggle and preventing some of the moments where learning is truly impeded, he is also careful to emphasize that when it happens, he holds on to the hope that all he needs to focus on is what to say or do to nudge students along in their learning. In his own words, “I accept [...] what’s happening and I [keep...] trying to figure out what it is that I need to say to this kid to keep them going” (WRE #1 interview, May 23, 2018).

Following his second WRE (Figure 6.5 above), also from his first year of teaching, it was again a hope that he could continue to act on his core beliefs and still

make a positive difference in the lives of kids that kept him going. In particular, he drew hope from his second core belief related to the power and importance of community. Instead of internalizing the words of the administrator that did not seem to be interested in helping him, only criticizing him, Abrams found hope in looking to the people that did care for him, appreciated his efforts, and were willing to give him encouragement alongside constructive feedback. In other words, through these events and throughout his teaching, the hope that Abrams holds is tied to both of his core beliefs, that all people can learn and grow and that having a strong community around you is a powerful way to ensure that continues to happen.

Regular Intentional (Agentive) Action

It may well be this hope and trust that enables Abrams to continue to perform regular agentive acts while focusing on the best interest of his students, regardless of the circumstances. In every single story about a crushing event or experience, his commitment to regular agentive action was a consistent reaction to a crushing moment. In other words, without exception, Abrams responded to each crushing context by continuing to act, actually *doing* something that was consistent with his core beliefs. In most cases, it was a series of actions, and Abrams was always able to continue to focus on the best interest of his students. He was never thwarted when an individual act did not seem to make the impact he may have hoped and he did not cease to teach when things crumbled around him.

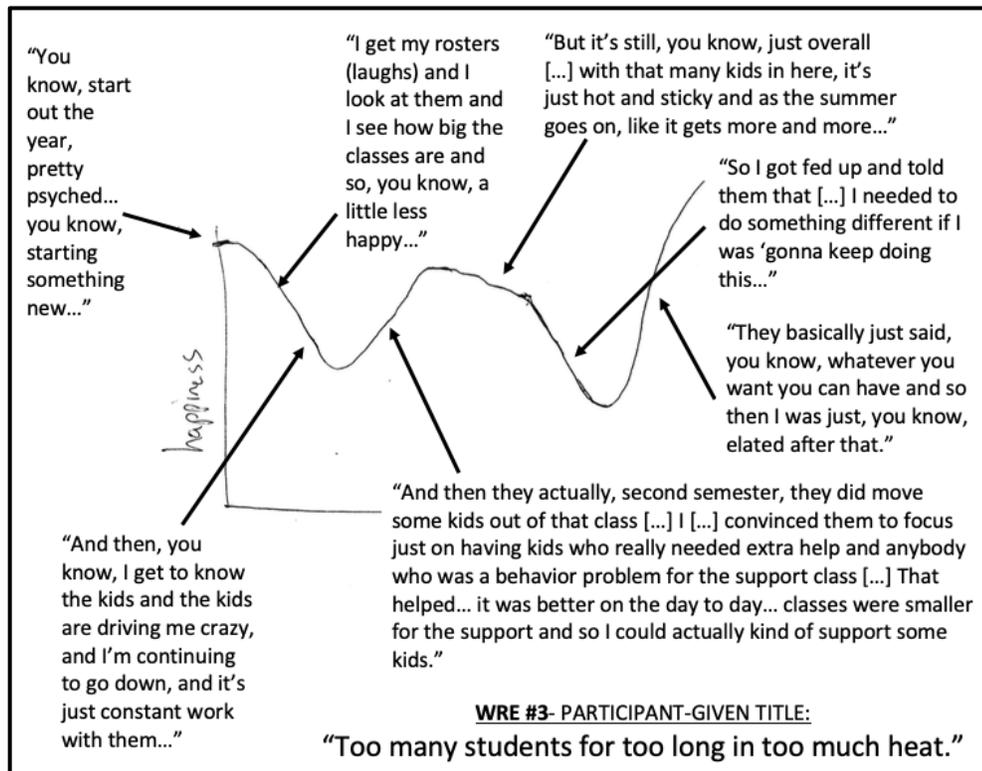
Take as evidence an analysis of Abrams's WRE #3 entitled "Too many students for too long in too much heat." If any set of circumstances were going to make Abrams want to quit teaching, it would probably be this set. After some six or seven years of

teaching primarily Algebra 1, Abrams was asked to take a double period of Algebra 1 and Support with the same group of more than 36 students. The idea was that the students in this class had not yet experienced success in mathematics and if their teacher had an extra period to address any foundational gaps or conceptual misunderstandings, they may be better able to get them through Algebra 1. In addition to this double period, of course, Abrams would also be teaching traditional Algebra 1 classes. Then at the start of the year, Abrams found out he would be picking up an Algebra 2 class because another teacher had quit. That class would have 40 students. If this work load and multiple preps was not discouraging enough, the air conditioner in Abrams's room was not working.

Too top everything off, because he was a veteran teacher, counselors had placed several boys with extensive behavioral records ("obnoxious boys" as Abrams described them) in his double period. Not surprisingly, after a few weeks of this very hot classroom full of too many kids every period and trying to adequately prepare for multiple preps with that many kids for the first time in his teaching career, Abrams lamented that it took everything he had to get through these classes every day. "At the end of the day, I would be dehydrated and have a terrible headache and just want to go home," he admitted. "I just kept thinking that I hoped some kids would be absent or dropped from the class and that if I had the same teaching assignment next year I would quit" (WRE #3, May 23, 2018).

Consider the following arc (Figure 6.6), constructed in a manner consistent with those already presented in this chapter. For this arc, Abrams chose to display his "happiness" as measured over time, again on a graphical display. The horizontal axis accounted for the passage of time, and the vertical for his level of happiness.

Figure 6.6. WRE #3 Participant Experience Arc (Annotated)



Many teachers in this same set of circumstances would probably have given up or at least put less effort into their classes. But not Abrams. He continued to focus on forward progress for all of his students and to make as many agentive decisions as he could, in spite of the crushing circumstances in their best interest. There was not much he could do about the heat. But he brought fans and tried to get through it. And as for the effort he put into his classes, he kept coming back every day with engaging activities and fresh hope. In his own words,

I had no choice. I was, you know, employed as a teacher. I don’t know, like it’s... I don’t think I would really have known how to quit. [...] There would have been terrible guilt if I had just abandoned them [...] You know, for the students, for the school, because you know, I was already teaching a class for somebody else who had quit. And they ‘gotta put those kids somewhere [...] So as kind of horrifying

as it was for me, like, to, you know, that's the way I describe it [...] I did a decent job, umm, and I knew the kids were, you know, they were getting an education with me. And I couldn't just, as much as like some of them, I kind of just wanted to strangle, like I wasn't just going to abandon them. [...] So yah, you know, I kept coming back.

And he did not just keep coming back. He kept coming back and trying to think about how to best support his students. He went to administration and convinced them to remove some of the students from the support class at the end of the semester that he felt had made enough progress that they could get along without it. He asked them to focus on the students who really needed the extra help as well as those students who were a behavior problem. His second period, then, his support class, got smaller and would be full of those who needed him most. The fact that his request was not to remove the "difficult" students from the class but to keep them should be evidence enough that the agentive decisions Abrams continued to make in the midst of an exhausting year were decisions in the best interest of students. It is true that Abrams felt he could have done a better job without the miserable circumstances and particularly with fewer preps, of course, and he made that known to administration when he essentially demanded he not have the same assignment the following year. "I told them I would quit," he said. "And I meant it." Even this was truly an agentive decision in the best interest of students. Abrams wanted to ensure he not get burnt out and that he have sufficient time to prepare the best lessons for his students. He knew he could weather a storm like that for a year, but beyond that would be asking too much. He agreed to take whatever class administration wanted the next year, just not multiple preps with such large class sizes.

He also wanted to keep his planning.

While this third WRE is perhaps the most vivid example, the truth is that Abrams continued to make agentic decisions in every crushing context he described over the course of our time together. When students were not as engaged as he anticipated with any given lesson, he continued to focus on what he could say or do to continue to advance their learning anyway (WRE #1 interview, May 23, 2018). When the administrator dismissed his lesson as group work not done well, he continued to plan collaborative activities and worked with a colleague to improve upon them (WRE #2 interview, May 23, 2018). When attendance was so bad that 1/3 of his students were missing on any given day and many of them were failing (all seniors), he continued to adapt the way he designed his classes to offer his students the best chance at success. He continued to allow them to turn in work late, make work up, and take tests again, even when it meant more work for him, as long as he could ensure that they were legitimately learning what he needed to teach them (CCC interview, May 23, 2018). When reflecting on this persistent agency amidst crushing contexts during our last time together, Abrams said, “I know what to expect. I also know what’s in my control and what’s outside of my control. And I just, I can’t worry about it, and I just try to make it the best that it can be with what I have to work with” (CCC interview, May 23, 2018).

In other words, despite his extreme frustrations with a variety of crushing contexts, Abrams is committed to never stop acting in agentic ways in the best interest of his students. In his mind, he has a job to do, and he has students counting on him. And whether those students are frustrating him or not in any given moment, they are his students, and he truly believes they can learn. In addition to making intentional decisions

in the classroom, Abrams also continues to make intentional decisions to try to improve his practice outside of the classroom. From focusing on collaboration and engaging tasks and investing the time into the practice of incorporating truly relevant curriculum (incorporating social justice issues) into the classroom, Abrams is determined to spend every day making intentional decisions focused on his students and helping them along in their learning and in their lives.

Abrams final words to me were in relation to what it means for him to be a teacher. In the last couple of minutes he attempted to express to me why he is able to continue to persist regardless of what is going on around him, and why he will continue to try to find better ways to help all of students learn and progress. Abrams emphasized that for him it really is “about the individual students” and what is best for them (CCC interview, May 23, 2018). He takes his job particularly seriously especially since he has become a senior teacher. In his own words,

I’m like the very last thing that they go through [...] figuring out what it is they need to get them off, going in the best way [...] As much kind of positive influence as I have... to make them... you know, like I’m at the end, like their... their opinion of school is formed... So I cannot really change too much... you know, here and there, but I can’t radically change their opinion of what education’s about. But I can influence it [...] I can make... try to make it enjoyable... try to make it, you know, seem like time well spent... valuable... and like they have, because it’s important here, that they have somebody that cares about them and is looking out for them, at least. [...] It’s not a passion for the subject that makes me want to teach... It’s... it’s more, you know, stimulating the

thinking, trying to get them to, you know, spark the curiosity in them and just motivate them to go be productive, happy, well-adjusted people in the world.

For Abrams, then, it really is about coming to work every day and trying to move students further along in their thinking and learning. This commitment is no doubt tied to his core beliefs that all people can learn and that a strong community is powerful and important. In short, his classroom is a small close-knit community within a larger close-knit community and his hope is that as he continues to make agentic decisions, he will be instrumental in inspiring growth and maturation for each of the students that come through his classes.

Faith-Strengthening Routines and Practices

The most common faith-strengthening routine that was impossible to ignore in my time with Abrams was his habit of reflecting. Many times he emphasized that while in the moment, Abrams would be attempting to act in response to his students, at the end of each lesson and at the end of each week, Abrams would reflect. In his own words, in the classroom, “I’m just more in the process” (WRE#1 interview, May 23, 2018). “It’s really not... It’s not until later when I’m reflecting that I’m just like, oh my God, I can’t believe they couldn’t do that kind of thing... What can I do next time to avoid that happening again?” (WRE #1 interview, May 23, 2018). And Abrams does not always reflect alone. He invites those he respects- his colleagues, professors at the University, some administrators, to analyze student achievement and engagement data with him and to brainstorm new activities and ideas.

In addition to reflecting on lessons at their conclusion and his practice in general, Abrams is also very committed to continuing to incorporate new materials, new strong

tasks and activities, and new ideas into his teaching. In other words, he does not wish to be stagnant. Early on in his teaching, he spent considerable time writing things out, coming up with new ideas, organizing activities and compiling them so that he would have more and more to pull from. It was important to him not only that he believed in students and responded to where they were and what they needed, but also that he come prepared with engaging material. At first, this commitment was rather difficult. “I didn’t have much to pull from, you know, I didn’t have much at least that I liked [...] that was, like, immediately useful” (WRE #1 interview, May 23, 2018). On a daily basis, he was spending hours researching and developing. As the years passed, Abrams had a lot more available to him. As a result, he was able to turn his focus to finding new ways to engage and motivate his students, though he still spends some time finding and developing new and engaging mathematical tasks and activities.

The fact that Abrams no longer has to spend so many hours every day preparing every aspect of his instruction (from bell work to group work) has also helped him be more willing to try new techniques and reflect on the motivation (or lack thereof) of his students. In his own words,

I have so many different versions of things and now, you know, like, if lessons go well or go terribly, like, it doesn’t really matter cause it’s... it wasn’t a lot of work to put them together. The thing that I’m working on, I guess, is... is the inspirational part, right... How to, how to get kids how to bring out their curiosity or get them to be curious and how to build their perseverance and determination [...] That’s really what I work at... as opposed to, you know, the math part, the lesson part. That’s where I’m at, I think.

Finally, Abrams is not afraid to stand up for himself when he needs to. Following that third WRE, Abrams went to administration to demand a planning period and at least a year without multiple preps to regroup. His understanding of what he can take and how to prevent fatigue is likely what enabled him to come back the following year willing to try whatever administration had in mind. In other words, Abrams is committed to his own self-care. He is careful to do all of his grading and planning at school (either during his planning or before or after school) and to reserve his time at home for enjoyment and rejuvenation. He focuses on the good from each day and lets go of the things that did not go as well as he would have liked. Practices like these keep him focused on his core beliefs and engaged in the work he is doing. In other words, they strengthen his faith and practice.

Commitment to Collaboration or Congregation or Consultation

Another prevalent theme in Abrams's narratives was his commitment to and desire for collaboration or congregation or consultation of some sort with people who share some of his core beliefs and are truly invested in his progress and that of his students. Unlike the various administrators or representatives of the state (Department of Education) that have sometimes come through with evaluative rubrics and no real investment in Abrams or his students, Abrams cared a great deal about the collaboration and insight from those individuals he afforded great respect. Abrams demonstrated this belief through his various accounts of valuable collaboration. Some of these accounts or examples have already been shared. For example, when Abrams was overtly criticized by an administrator who had no constructive advice to improve his practice, ultimately he looked to his colleagues for support (WRE #2 interview, May 23, 2018). Also, in addition

to drawing encouragement from his colleagues in the math department and supportive administration in later years, at times Abrams, alongside the entire math department at Towne, sought collaboration from professors at the local University to inform his practice (LSN interview, March 20, 2018). He also spent a considerable amount of time collaborating with Nelson (another teacher) for the first six or seven years of his teaching, determined that this collaboration would result in better Algebra 1 instruction and greater learning for each of his students (LSN interview, March 20, 2018). He emerged from collaborative meetings like this with strengthened resolve and new ideas to employ in the classroom.

Perhaps the reason Abrams is so committed to collaboration is that he really and truly believes it makes people stronger. This conviction, of course, is directly tied to his first core belief that all people can learn and grow. In addition to those collaborative relationships and efforts already discussed, Abrams cited other collaborative relationships in his own life and teaching as evidence for this belief throughout our interactions together. In particular, Abrams mentioned another teacher, Michael Esperanza, and a professional development workshop he did at Towne for Abrams and his colleagues. Within this workshop, Abrams and others were exposed to various robots, computer programming, and HAM radio. The experience was so inspiring for Abrams that it made its way onto his timeline construction (See Table 6.2 near the start of this chapter). Abrams also mentioned the impact of collaboration from Dr. Ramirez, his principal at the time, whenever he would come and observe or just check in with the math department. While Dr. Ramirez admittedly “doesn’t have much to say about math,” Abrams remarked laughing, “cause he’s not a math teacher [...] there’s other good stuff that comes from,

you know, from him” (WRE #2 interview, May 23, 2018). Finally, Abrams acknowledges the impact and collaboration of some of the University professors who came to Towne over the years. In each of these cases, Abrams believed that those he collaborated with or met in professional development settings were instrumental in his own growth and maturation as a teacher (LSN interview, March 20, 2018; WREs #1-3 interviews, May 23, 2018; CCC interview, May 23, 2018).

It is no doubt this belief in the power and significance of collaboration that not only motivates Abrams to remain at Towne where community and collaboration are so strong, but also encourages him to continue to seek collaborative opportunities for himself and other educators. Additionally, in the classroom, Abrams is committed to providing collaborative opportunities for his students. If collaboration were not an important part of strengthening his faith and practice, he would not likely be so committed to these practices for his students.

Teacher Faith and Persistent Agency Lived Out in the Crushing Contexts

In the end, just as I have so often drawn from my religious faith to persist through the difficult times in my life, in and out of educational settings, so Michael Abrams consistently referenced the aspects and components of his teacher faith in reflecting on his experiences during the crushing contexts of his profession. He repeatedly returned to a collection of core beliefs and convictions that were fundamental to who he was and how he interacted with his students and his colleagues. In other words, he never lost sight of his love and appreciation for learning and discovery in general or his commitment to teach it in ways that afforded his students the opportunity to be curious about things and to grapple with information and work out their own learning, innovative ways that would

afford his students rich experiences in problem-solving and critical thinking. Throughout our time together, Abrams demonstrated a hope and trust that acting on his beliefs and convictions was ultimately good or beneficial regardless of what the circumstances were in the moment. He demonstrated regular intentional (agentive) action in accordance with these beliefs and convictions even during the most difficult moments. In other words, he continued to focus on making decisions in the classroom in particular that were in the best interest of his students and while he allowed himself to feel his anger and frustration in crushing moments, he did not allow himself to falter in his dedication or commitment to act in intentional ways. Throughout Abrams's narratives, there was evidence of routines and practices that built and strengthened his faith and resolve as an educator with persistent agency that undoubtedly enabled him to continue to act in these intentional ways even during crushing moments. Finally, Abrams's commitment to collaboration or congregation or consultation of some sort with colleagues and experts with like beliefs and convictions was a regular theme.

Perhaps the best way to end this chapter is the same way my final interaction with Abrams ended. In reflecting on each of the crushing contexts he had collected (CCC) and the fact that teaching secondary mathematics is difficult in and of itself, Abrams recounted with a smile just how difficult it was at the end of his very first day as a full-time teacher. He chuckled,

Actually, I remember my first day of teaching [...] full time after doing my student teaching [...] I was in a, like, portable. It was a terrible classroom and I had freshmen. And it was just such a harrowing experience. Like, you know, three days getting prepped for this, and I didn't really know what to expect having all

the classes completely for me to take care of. And I was just traumatized, like, I don't know if I cried or not but I do remember thinking, oh my God, what have I gotten myself into? [...] I'm like, that was day one and I have to do this again tomorrow and then the rest of the days of the week, and then for the rest of the year, and it just seemed like a mountain that I would never be able to climb! I guess I survived.

As so many others, Abrams has survived well beyond that first most difficult year.

Today, he is a veteran teacher committed to continuing to teach, try new methods, study his students, and hoping to get better and better at engaging his students. And just as the others I had the honor of studying as part of this project, Abrams continues to rely on his teacher faith to persist with agency in the best interest of his students regardless of the crushing contexts around him. For this reason I know that he will continue to survive.

CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This chapter is comprised of the particulars of the contributions of this study to the fields of teaching and teacher education. For the convenience of the reader, I first provide a general introduction containing pertinent information repeated from Chapters 1 and 2 related to the purpose and focus of this project, the characteristics and definitions of the key construct it explored and the contexts in which that construct was explored, and the position of this project relative to the larger bodies of existing scholarly literature it was designed to inform. I then focus the bulk of the chapter on a meticulous discussion of both the anticipated and unanticipated contributions of my research to that literature.

Ultimately, within this discussion, I advance the argument that *teacher persistent agency* is indeed a desirable and multifaceted construct as the literature currently conveys, but also that it is one that appears to be motivated by a plethora of distinct core beliefs, not necessarily related to *self-efficacy* beliefs. This is particularly salient as self-efficacy beliefs currently dominate related academic discourse in the specific bodies of literature that so greatly inspired and informed my research, potentially overshadowing the consideration of other teacher beliefs that may also hold promise in terms of contributing to a greater phenomenological understanding of the construct at the heart of this study. Woven into this larger discussion in support of these arguments is a cross-case analysis of some of the data and findings already presented in previous chapters focused on the unique cases of my three teacher participants.

I conclude this chapter with a summary of the implications of my research, incorporating within this summary both a discussion of wonderings related to the limitations and particulars of my research project as well as a call for similar future

investigations. More specifically, in the end, in the hope of further advancing the fields' understanding of teacher persistent agency, especially as displayed in the most crushing of contexts, I suggest that other researchers take up the construct of *teacher faith* as I have introduced it, one that has not yet been vetted in the literature, comprised of five distinctive components, and utilize that construct in the future to make sense of similar qualitative inquiries of new cases of resilient teachers. I simultaneously advocate that at least two of the narrative methods so integral to this study be utilized again in these future endeavors.

Introduction

Purpose and Focus of this Study

In this study, I sought to understand a collection of teachers' storied knowledge about their experiences attempting to persist with agency through the most difficult moments and challenging circumstances of their teaching. My objective was ultimately to contribute new phenomenological understandings of teacher persistent agency to the fields of teaching and teacher education through a detailed investigation of teacher narratives that were largely focused on *crushing contexts*. In other words, my aim was two-fold: first, to advance the understanding of the field of teacher persistent agency in general and second, to investigate the collective impact of three unique teachers' crushing context experiences on their persistent agency.

Key Concepts and Definitions

Teacher persistent agency. The key construct at the heart of this inquiry was teacher persistent agency. As a reminder, teacher persistent agency is defined as *human agency* as conceptualized by social cognitive theory that is unrelenting and enduring

(sustained over time and in a variety of contexts) and that specifically attends to students. In other words, teachers with persistent agency are those with a persistent practice of acting in ways that involve intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness, and self-reflectiveness focused on students and are achieved through any combination of personal, proxy, or collective efforts.

Crushing contexts. While teacher participants were asked to report on their persistent agentive acts across contexts, the key contexts in which teacher persistent agency was explored in this study were the various crushing contexts of teaching as the participants identified them. Crushing contexts are defined as events, moments, decisions, experiences, environments, or sets of circumstances of the most disheartening variety, such that even naturally tenacious individuals when confronted with often find themselves completely overwhelmed, or “crushed”. They are those that in many cases, for many individuals, challenge or even squelch the strongest optimistic beliefs in and about the work that one is engaged in, or even about life itself. Such contexts very typically motivate avoidance, retreat and resignation, complacent thought, destructive decision-making, or similar unproductive responses.

Study Position Within Existing Literature

This study was situated within the two intersecting and intimately related bodies of literature addressing *teacher agency* and *teacher resilience* (and by extension, also the literature on *teacher retention*). Prior to this study, considerable scholarship existed within these bodies of literature related to the nature and worth of teacher persistent agency, even in the midst of adversity. This study, however, was specifically designed to address two gaps in that literature, as well as to build on and extend certain existing

scholarly pursuits that contribute much to a general understanding of teacher persistent agency as just defined. More specifically, in seeking a greater phenomenological understanding of teacher persistent agency through carefully selected narrative methods, this study sought to at least partially fill the following two gaps in the larger literature:

1. First, this study attended to the gap that exists in our understanding because the bulk of the related scholarship to date has relied heavily upon insufficient methods focused primarily on the predictive power of decontextualized self-efficacy beliefs to measure the two multifaceted constructs of agency and resilience (and by extension teacher persistent agency) rather than on investigation and observation of agentic and resilient acts and practices themselves within and across contexts.
2. Second, it attended to the gap that exists because the qualitative investigations that have been performed to date using more promising narrative methods to investigate agency and resilience (and by extension teacher persistent agency) have not focused on crushing context stories like those specifically explored in this project.

Apart from addressing these two gaps in the literature, this study held additional promise to uncover new phenomenological understandings because the definition adopted for teacher persistent agency was not unnecessarily restrictive as have been at least some of the definitions adopted by scholars seeking to better understand agency and/or resilience. In other words, while several scholars have opted to focus their qualitative investigations on agency or resilience that requires a specific motivation or a specific or successful outcome or even some general level of adversity at the outset of

action, I placed no such restrictions on this investigation. I focused instead on any and all agentive acts performed by teacher participants focused on students in the hopes of learning as much as possible about teacher persistent agency. I also did not rely on teacher surveys designed to measure self-efficacy beliefs to identify teachers with persistent agency. I relied instead on the recommendations of an administrator who had witnessed these veteran teachers' resilience and consistent focus on students over time.

Discussion

Anticipated Study Contributions: Filling Gaps

This study, while modest in scope, was a detailed investigation of three veteran secondary mathematics teachers' abilities to persist with agency even through the self-identified crushing contexts of their teaching. There were similarities and differences among these unique cases in terms of teachers' narratives, action and reaction patterns, and individual reflections on their crushing context experiences, but as has been demonstrated over the course of the last three chapters, each of these teachers can be described and defended as teachers with a unique devout faith motivated by distinct core beliefs that enabled them to regularly demonstrate persistent agency in their teaching. As anticipated, due in large part to the intentional design of this study, the various data collected across these three cases related to these teachers' persistent agency attended in part to existing gaps in the literature. Careful consideration of the data collected in this project in comparison and contrast to existing literature therefore contributes new understandings of teacher persistent agency to that literature.

Expanding current understandings using more sophisticated measures. My previous discussion surrounding what was known of teacher agency and resilience (and

by extension teacher persistent agency) in advance of this study was separated into two broad categories. The first addressed the fact that the construct is desirable and the second that it is multifaceted and difficult to measure. For this reason, I present the following discussion of more sophisticated understandings that may be available as a direct result of this project and similar future endeavors by attending to those same two broad categories. I further delineate my findings through the use of a small set of subcategories. It is my sincere hope that in so doing I bring a clarity and focus to my individual claims.

A desirable trait or practice. As has already been presented and defended at length, the psychology literature and nearly all of the qualitative and quantitative inquiries related to agency and resilience consulted in preparation for this investigation present the constructs as generally desirable traits or practices for a variety of reasons. The reason best supported (essentially uncontested) by the literature for this characterization is the association of both teacher resilience and teacher agency with teacher retention (Beltman et al., 2011; Castro et al., 2010; Clark, 2011; Day, 2014; Ebersöhn, 2014; Ewing & Manuel, 2005; Gu & Day, 2007; Johnson et al., 2014; Le Cornu, 2009; Long et al., 2017; Mansfield et al., 2012; McCormack et al., 2006; Morgan, 2011; Patterson et al., 2004; Sammons et al., 2007; Sumsion, 2004; Tait, 2008; Wosnitza, et al., 2013). While there are distinctions among these studies, it is generally agreed that the various personal resources (e.g., motivation, social and emotional competence) and use of coping strategies (e.g., problem-solving, goal setting, maintaining work-life balance) typically associated with agency and resilience are significantly correlated with the length of time teachers remain in their positions and in the profession, even amidst

reported conflict or struggle. In the aforementioned studies, these personal resources and coping strategies were identified namely through a variety of surveys and interviews. Most typically, though not without exception, teachers with higher levels of favorable personal resources and coping strategies as measured by such surveys stayed longer in their positions and in the profession than teachers with lower levels of these predicting factors who had not been identified as agentic or resilient.

The teacher participants in this study were all veteran teachers, having taught at least seven years prior to the start of data collection (28 years, 11 years, and 11 years respectively) and showing no intention of leaving the profession. In accordance with existing scholarship, these teachers would be considered resilient and agentic.

Presumably, if they were asked to answer questions on the various surveys employed in the aforementioned studies, they would report high levels of the favorable personal resources and coping strategies represented on those surveys, though that is impossible to confirm as I did not ask them to complete any surveys. That said, it is perhaps significant to note that while a variety of unique personal resources and coping strategies were revealed in the data collected for this study, the list advanced by the scholars in that aforementioned literature (personal factors of motivation and social and emotional competence and coping strategies of problem-solving, goal setting, and maintaining work-life balance) is so general that it is insufficient to adequately represent what narratives in this study revealed. As my findings in the previous three chapters demonstrate, the general resources and strategies referenced in the pre-existing scholarship were actually not the most salient factors that teachers in this study identified

as contributing to their respective abilities to persist with agency through the most crushing contexts of their profession.

In other words, while my work definitely supports the conclusion that teachers with persistent agency are more likely to stay in the profession, it also reveals that there are potentially extensive lists of personal resources and coping strategies that may be unique to each teacher able to persist with agency, many of which may be more significant than the generalized list that pervades the current literature. If an in-depth study of just three teachers teaching in arguably similar (at times nearly identical) crushing contexts revealed distinctions in personal resources and coping strategies, it may be irresponsible to base our understanding of teacher persistent agency (or agency or resilience for that matter) largely on findings from studies reliant on surveys that necessarily overgeneralize resources and coping strategies. This makes particular sense given that there are existing perplexing findings in related qualitative literature to confirm that there are teachers leaving the profession as a result of adversity who cite some of the same motivations or coping strategies and report some of the same or even higher rated self-efficacy beliefs as those who are staying (Gu & Day, 2007; Nieto, 2014).

In terms of the teachers involved in this study, their various narratives revealed more nuanced personal factors and coping strategies. I will address the latter of these next, as the teachers' individual coping strategies were most directly related to the literature just discussed. Nonetheless, these representative teachers' motivation (personal factor) will be attended to later in this chapter, in a section specifically related to their core beliefs.

Coping strategies. Given the intentional focus of this project on crushing contexts, there was much to be seen across the cases in terms of coping strategies. Some of these strategies were indeed consistent with the aforementioned literature, but others were not. For example, there was some evidence of problem-solving and maintaining work-life balance in some of the teacher narratives, though not consistently across all cases and not necessarily of the same type addressed in these surveys. In terms of problem-solving, for instance, perhaps because my focus was math teachers, there was great emphasis on the importance of the strategy in general, but technically very little in connection with problem-solving as a coping strategy in the midst of conflict. It is the case, for example, that two of the participants in particular (Nelson and Abrams) spent significant time focused on the problem of insufficient curriculum to afford their students rich learning experiences with the mathematics content. As has already been discussed, these teachers spent hours (and literally years) working toward “solving” this problem, collaborating to both develop new curriculum as well as to seek and share resources from others. Significantly, however, neither teacher identified insufficient curriculum as a crushing context. What is more, evidence of trying to solve the problems of the individual crushing contexts in the moment within event-based narratives is sparse across cases, if it exists at all.

In terms of maintaining work-life balance, when reflecting on persisting through crushing contexts in general, two of my three participants did indeed afford some time to this topic. Nelson, for example, in reflecting on persisting with agency through crushing contexts in general, reported that he spent time on a regular basis engaging in activities that he referred to as “detox” outside of work (Impromptu meeting, May 24, 2018). More

specifically, he spoke about the consistent time he spent with his wife and son and some of the fun things they would do that took his mind completely off his work as a secondary math teacher. He also reported dedicating time regularly to “taking a break,” which he described as resting, relaxing, and not thinking about his students. His final statement to me in that meeting was, “Always make time for family, always make time for listening to great music, and never forget to rest” (Impromptu meeting, May 24, 2018). Cota had similar recommendations during our last formal interview together. While he emphasized the significance of his busy work week during our first meeting, he also emphasized the importance of the rest that came at the end of the week during our last. In Cota’s own words, while the busy work week “taught me mental toughness, to set goals, to stay on the grind” (LSN interview, March 25, 2018), “Sundays would be a day where I’d get home and just veg” (CCC interview, August 4, 2018). While work-life balance was not something that either Cota or Nelson identified as a coping strategy in any of the event-based crushing context narratives, it was something that strengthened their capacity to persist with agency in general (and their faith). I would expect that Abrams does similar things, but he never specifically mentioned anything of this nature during any of our times together, so I cannot responsibly report that he does.

In addition to those coping strategies addressed in the existing literature, the participants in this study discussed a host of other things they did regularly to help them cope with the overall crushing contexts of secondary mathematics teaching specifically. These have been addressed at length in the previous three chapters, many within the sections detailing faith-strengthening routines and practices and some within the narrative analyses of the well-remembered event accounts. I will not revisit each of these now, as

they are varied and many. The intentional reader is encouraged to revisit those sections in the preceding chapters if they so desire.

What is significant to consider in relation to coping strategies, however, is the fact that the most prevalent coping strategy that surfaced in my research, a strategy which was present in the narratives of each of the three teacher participants, was actually not one cited as a coping strategy in the aforementioned literatures. In other words, in terms of coping, the most consistent finding of this study was the fact that without exception, each of these resilient teachers when faced with the crushing events of their profession chose to emphasize their practice of refocusing their attention (specifically within those hardest moments and circumstances) on the work at hand and on their students specifically. In other words, across cases, there was a persistent practice of responding to crushing contexts by continuing to act in agentive ways (and in keeping with one's core beliefs, as has been discussed in earlier chapters and will be addressed later in this chapter) focused on students, regardless of the circumstances or perceived success of those actions. In many ways, this commitment to continue to act in the moment with persistent agency was both a distraction from whatever was being perceived as crushing and a resilient response to that adversity. In other words, it was a coping strategy that enabled each of the participants in this modest study to persist with agency. Consider the following six representative collections of quotations from these three participants (see Table 7.1 below), plucked from previous chapters and presented again side by side, organized by individual.

Table 7.1.

Key Coping Strategy: Commitment to Continued Action; Organized by Participant

#	Cota	Nelson	Abrams
Context			
1	<p>Reflecting on third WRE (WRE #3 interview, July 19, 2018):</p> <p>“But then I just... we kept plugging away and I kept pushing her...”</p> <p>“I just treated her like all the others. Every day was a new day and I kept trying anything and everything I could to get her to work...”</p> <p>“Slowly, gradually, she started accepting the challenge and did great...”</p>	<p>Reflecting on first WRE (WRE #1 interview, May 11, 2018):</p> <p>“I don’t think I had any trouble with the teaching aspect of it [...] I don’t feel like I lost my stride...”</p> <p>“I don’t feel like it caused an interruption that I couldn’t get back to [...] I didn’t have trouble going back to the classroom. I didn’t have trouble getting back into my routines or teaching the students.”</p>	<p>Reflecting on first WRE (WRE #1 interview, May 23, 2018):</p> <p>“I guess there isn’t a ton of internal dialogue except trying to figure out what it is that I need to say to this kid to keep them going...”</p> <p>“Alright, maybe there’s one kid who does something well and gets something figured out... so that kind of fixes most of it...”</p> <p>“...now I’m more bemused by it than angry [...] I accept [...] what’s happening and I [keep...] trying to figure out what it is that I need to say to this kid to keep them going [...] I’m just more in the process.”</p>
2	<p>Reflecting on third WRE (WRE #3 interview, July 19, 2018):</p> <p>“I think what it does is it makes you realize that no matter how bad a situation is, you know, you’re going to get yourself as far as you</p>	<p>Reflecting on crushing contexts in general (CCC interview, May 24, 2018):</p> <p>“I think for me it’s maybe less of an internal dialogue but maybe more the feelings. I feel kind of schizophrenic and</p>	<p>Reflecting on crushing contexts in general (CCC interview, July 19, 2018):</p> <p>“figuring out what it is they need to get them off, going in the best way”</p>

#	Cota	Nelson	Abrams
Context	<p>get yourself up. You dust yourself off, and you gotta move forward. You gotta keep on truckin on..."</p> <p>"I think as long as you're persistent and continue with a goal in mind and especially for your kids [...] you're doing it for them and you're working hard to get them to realize that things don't always go with way you plan but as long as you keep on doing them for the right reasons, you'll be okay..."</p> <p>"...you just have to keep believing that what you're doing is for their betterment... And you do it with a smile, and you do it with a care, and you try to make it relevant to them..."</p>	<p>bipolar in a way, where I have these feelings and thoughts of complete hopelessness of the situations that we're in and that there's no end in sight or there's no light at the end of the tunnel and then the contrast with the idea that there <i>is</i> still hope..."</p> <p>"...there's this idea that somebody's gotta fight. If nobody fights against that, then the evil wins. It's that fight between the hopelessness and the hope at the same time. And in the end, the hope wins. I think that's what drives me. It feels hopeless sometimes and I think everybody's in that situation at one point in time that they feel like things are hopeless and that there's no point, but that's when you have to be the strongest and realize, well I can't give up and I have to persevere..."</p> <p>"...as a teacher I feel like I have a responsibility to model that, and not just for modeling's sake, not just to show the kids that you gotta fight and you can't give up. But</p>	<p>"I also know what's in my control and what's outside of my control. And I just, I can't worry about it, and I just try to make it the best that it can be with what I have to work with"</p> <p>"It's not a passion for the subject that makes me want to teach... It's... it's more, you know, stimulating the thinking, trying to get them to, you know, spark the curiosity in them and just motivate them..."</p>

#	Cota	Nelson	Abrams
Context	that's what I believe..."		

Each of these quotations has already been presented and fully interpreted in these earlier chapters of course, but some additional commentary across cases seems relevant at this point in the discussion. In various interviews focused on their respective experiences within their well-remembered crushing context event-based narratives and a reflection on crushing contexts in general, all three teachers emphasized their persistent action focused on students in spite of whatever it was they had identified as “crushing” that they were experiencing simultaneously. When Cota reflected on the well-remembered event involving the student in his class who expressed a complete lack of interest in her education using some loaded and sensitive language (“All I want to do is get out of school, get a job, and live with a black guy”...), while he did not deny himself the need and right to focus on the crushing nature of these comments, he also did not allow himself to cease acting in ways he knew were beneficial for all students, this particular student included. As the quotations in the table above reveal, he continued to focus on teaching her in agentive ways, and refused to be discouraged by her negative professions, which he certainly hoped would never again be repeated. Cota was regularly committed to responding in this way to crushing moments, as he described in connection with crushing contexts in general, as revealed in the other collection of quotations in the table above. He would continue to act with care and hope in ways he believed were good for students, regardless of the circumstances around him.

Nelson expressed nearly identical sentiments in his many reflections on his experiences in the crushing contexts, as did Abrams. In the quotations above, Nelson is

first responding to the well-remembered event involving an unsupportive administration who refused to respond to an unruly student's inappropriate behaviors in his classroom and a particularly discouraging meeting with that administration about that student. As he emphasized, independent of that situation that was impacting his narrative both inside and outside of his classroom, within his classroom, he remained nonetheless able to continue to focus on good teaching as if nothing crushing was happening at all. In reflecting on how he was able to do this, Nelson expounded upon a Star Wars analogy (not fully re-presented in the above table, but part of the same discussion; see Chapter 5) and likened his commitment to act in productive ways to "fighting the good fight of teaching" (WRE #1 interview, May 11, 2018). Abrams's commentary above, while unique in its own right, is very similar to Cota's and Nelson's in that he too emphasizes his ability to remain present in the moment, or to just be "in the process" as he calls it in order to continue to act in productive ways focused on the best interest of his students. He is committed to intentionally focusing on the students he is teaching in the moment, their learning process specifically, and anything he can do or say to advance that learning.

Word of clarification and caution. It is perhaps worth emphasizing at this point that *teacher faith* and in particular the specific commitment to continued action that was so strong for each of my participant teachers is not to be misunderstood as a commitment to simply try harder or persist in structures that are crushing without attempting to change them. In other words, the danger exists for this construct of teacher faith to be misinterpreted as a call for teachers to simply "pull up their boot straps" and "keep trudging" regardless of what is happening around them. But that is not what these teachers' narratives reveal at all. Recall, for example, that Nelson was so willing to fight

against a status quo and structures in place that were not beneficial for his students that he allowed himself to be placed on probation, remain on probation for nearly three years, and be eventually dismissed from a teaching position. Yet all during that time, he made agentic decisions to do everything in his power to resist and change the structures around him, and though he was dismissed in the end, he was able to see some favorable change.

In terms of a commitment to continued agentic action, then, teachers with faith are those that are willing to continue to act with agency focused on students in line with their core beliefs. In many cases, that may mean making difficult decisions to fight against an unfavorable status quo or oppressive structures in ways that cost teachers a great deal. As was already discussed in Chapter 2 somewhat extensively, there is a growing and healthy body of existing teacher agency literature related to a focus on the pursuit of political and systemic change that details many such narratives.

Other factors. The existing literature does not focus solely on the productive coping strategies of teachers to defend the claim that resilience and agency (and by extension teacher persistent agency) are desirable traits, of course. In addition to the fact that teacher persistent agency is known from existing literature to be associated with teacher retention, other scholars have made more far-reaching claims as to its worth. For instance, Beltman and others (2011) argue in a review of research on teacher resilience that veteran teachers with resilience become more effective over time, have heightened career satisfaction, and are better prepared to adjust to education's ever-changing conditions. Other scholars contend that resilient teachers demonstrate a variety of useful practices on a consistent basis that lead to these same outcomes, practices such as

engaging regularly in individual and collaborative problem-solving (Castro et al., 2010; Dolati et al., 2014; Johnson et al., 2014) and participating often in professional learning and reflection (Leroux & Théorêt, 2014; Nieto, 2003; O’Sullivan, 2006; Patterson et al., 2004). Scholarship focused on teacher agency reveals the same. Keogh and others (2012), for instance, contend that agency, efficacy, and resilience work together in positive ways because resilience assists teachers in responding in productive ways to the stressors that accompany challenges such that they are more likely to manage challenges, which in turn enhances their self-efficacy and then consolidates their ability to continue to make intentional decisions (agency). Bowles and Arnup (2016) contend that such teachers “are resourceful, demonstrate agency, and develop positive management strategies” such that they regularly “overcome adversity” (p. 147). To draw these conclusions, the majority of these studies again reference statistically-validated surveys, identifying correlated factors such as passion, enthusiasm, and enjoyment that reflect positive emotional states that were then associated with effectiveness and teacher retention (Bowles & Arnup, 2016; Gu & Day, 2007; Jephcote, 2009; Le Cornu, 2013; Tait, 2008).

The bulk of my findings over the course of this project generally reinforce each of these claims, with perhaps one notable contribution. Evidence that all three participant teachers in this study participated in regular professional learning and reflection consistent with that described in the aforementioned literature, for example, (Leroux & Théorêt, 2014; Nieto, 2003; O’Sullivan, 2006; Patterson et al., 2004) is prevalent and has already been fully detailed in the individual findings chapters. Similarly, evidence that all three teachers engaged regularly in individual and collaborative problem-solving (Castro et al., 2010; Dolati et al., 2014; Johnson et al., 2014) has already been well attended to in

the same chapters. These lengthy discussions are contained within the individual sections focused specifically on “faith-strengthening routines and practices” and “commitment to collaboration or congregation or consultation” in those respective chapters. The problem-solving, of course, was problem-solving in general related to their practice, not problem-solving related to the individual crushing moments they had to endure. As a result, just as Bowles and Arnup (2016) contended that agentive teachers “are resourceful, demonstrate agency, and develop positive management strategies,” so the individual teachers involved in my study can be adequately described as being and doing the same (p. 147).

Productive emotional states. What is possibly distinct in my research from the pre-existing literature, however, is that while general discussions did in fact reveal the identified correlated factors such as passion, enthusiasm, and enjoyment that reflect positive emotional states that were then associated with effectiveness and teacher retention in earlier studies, (Bowles & Arnup, 2016; Gu & Day, 2007; Jephcote, 2009; Le Cornu, 2013; Tait, 2008) they also revealed a certain amount of negative emotional states that did not seem to deter from teachers’ collective persistent agency and that I did not see paralleled in the literature I reviewed in preparation for this project. In other words, across cases without exception and on more than one occasion, each of the teachers involved in my study expressed a considerable amount of frustration and even anger in narrating their respective experiences within the various crushing contexts they faced. At the risk of drawing another comparison to religious faith literature, I would contend that their anger was analogous to the “righteous anger” Christians describe and defend in reference to an instance where Jesus literally turned over tables of religious leaders in a very public and dramatic display of his disapproval for what leaders in the church at the

time were involved in (Holy Bible, Matthew 21:12-13, Mark 11:15-18). In other words, these participant teachers expressed strong negative feelings (sometimes with very colorful and emotional language) within their narratives and yet were able to commit productive acts in spite of those strong feelings and expressions. To a devout Christian like myself, so familiar with Biblical narratives and directives, these sentiments that do not seem to prevent the participants from productive action are in keeping with the admonitions of the apostle Paul when he urges Christians, “Be angry and yet do not sin” (Holy Bible, Ephesians 4:26, NASB version). The teacher participants are angry, and yet they do not “sin”; their anger would be categorized in religious circles as “righteous anger”. Consider again the following examples, reproduced here from earlier chapters (Table 7.2 below), unaltered apart from the addition of bold text to emphasize their colorful anger. As each quotation has already been interpreted, I will spare the reader any lengthy interpretations at this time. The intention of this consolidated reproduction of data is simply to remind the reader of the angry professions of these participant teachers in support of the discussion at hand.

Table 7.2.

Examples of “Righteous Anger” by Participant

#	Cota	Nelson	Abrams
Context			
1	“Even after I spoke to her and said I’d work with the other teacher to try to help her with classroom management, she said, ‘No, I can’t do this. I can’t because I’m thinking of the kids.’ That comment really upset me...	“So I think for me I started feeling, with the initial event, I was really upset with the student so I kind of got a spike in anger, but then I went right back to teaching” [...] But then there was the meeting and ultimately I was like, ‘You know,	“I was angry at them because I had worked so hard to do something for them and some were so apathetic they wouldn’t even try it, others gave up immediately, and some just grudgingly participated. I thought, why should I work hard for you when you

#	Cota	Nelson	Abrams
Context	<p>thinking of the kids... she never left her office. She didn't even know the kids, so that was crushing to me. Several people left, and that was hard. I chose instead to try to inspire others and lead by example.” (WRE #1 interview)</p>	<p>I feel like you guys don't have my back in that, you're supporting this kid and his behavior and not me.' And they were basically like, 'Yah'... And I was so angry at that point. So I asked them, 'If I could get a job teaching math anywhere in the city, why would I want to stay here?' And that was my big thing, why would I want to stay here if I'm not supported? And they were like 'Well if that's how you feel...' And that was that.” (WRE #1 interview)</p>	<p>don't even fucking care?' (WRE #1 submission)</p>
2	<p>“I was very angry at her... furiously angry... I literally, and this is probably bad, but I changed where I had been parking for years just so that I could avoid seeing her so much. It was very hard to be around her.” (WRE #1 interview)</p>	<p>“I felt so mad and almost betrayed. If I had been doing something wrong to the student to warrant that kind of behavior, I would have been less concerned about it, but since the student was completely attacking me because he didn't want to follow the rules in class... There were no repercussions for him! I remember thinking why am I gonna want to discipline kids or why am I gonna wanna go through the channels if admin's not going back</p>	<p>“Nothing nice, I mean... [laughing] it was probably a lot of fuck, and like what is the matter with you? Why won't you read this? Why won't you sit? Why won't you talk to this person? How can you be stuck there? How do you have so little motivation that you won't even bring your eyes to look at the paper?” (WRE #1 interview)</p>

# Context	Cota	Nelson	Abrams
		<p>it up? I think I felt really betrayed mostly [...] They didn't really listen to my side of the story at all." (WRE #1 interview)</p>	
3	<p>"I was so upset. First of all, [student's name], how could you? Why would you? [...] I took off for a walk and needed to gather myself and I ignored [student's name] when I knew I saw him out of the corner of my eye running up to me [...] I just needed a moment to calm down. I was disappointed. Maybe I was selfish..." (WRE #2)</p>	<p>"Even though they knew that I could do the mathematics and teach, I wasn't following their procedures for doing everything and jumping through all of the hoops the way that they wanted me to and so they put me on an improvement plan to try to get me in line. So frustrating! And ultimately that pushed me out..." (WRE #2)</p>	<p>At the time it was both heartbreaking and angering because I already knew I was struggling and it was such an insulting way to phrase it. I needed support, not criticism. I barely wanted to keep coming to work because it was such a daily struggle and then to have my administrator come in and say yup, you really do suck made me kind of mad. (WRE #2 submission)</p>
4		<p>"In part, it was just like man, do I even want to work for somebody else? Again, on one hand, it was very infuriating, really... (WRE #3 interview)</p>	<p>"When you know, my evaluator comes through to observe me, or the district comes through to observe me, or the Department of Education comes through to observe me... like, I don't give a fuck... they are not trying to help me be a better teacher [...] they're trying to get some numbers [...] they have some rubric that they're evaluating me on and then they'll rank me in some way... and it is</p>

#	Cota	Nelson	Abrams
Context			totally meaningless for me... it's for them... And so I don't care. (WRE #2 interview)

Without exception, then, each of the three teachers in this study expressed an anger that is perhaps not traditionally associated with the productive emotional states (such as “enthusiasm” or “enjoyment”) that the aforementioned scholars emphasized as predictors of teacher retention and resilience. And yet, these teachers were clearly able to continue to persist with agency in spite of such emotional states. Perhaps a certain amount of anger is understandable. Perhaps it can even be considered productive, or at the very least not unproductive.

A multifaceted construct. In addition to teacher persistent agency (by extension) having been adequately defended as a desirable construct in the literature in advance of this modest academic inquiry, it had also been described as a multifaceted construct that is difficult to quantify, despite the fact that certain scholars have attempted to use statistically-validated surveys to do so for decades. Indeed, in part because the construct involves a complex process of planning, predicting, believing, and ultimately moving or deciding to act that must be navigated and mitigated in relation to the environment and contextual realities within which that process occurs (Bandura 2001, 2006, 2007), it is perhaps more accurately conceptualized in conjunction with at least some qualitative investigation. In short, when it comes to teacher persistent agency, contexts matter, and contexts are generally better understood from qualitative data. Several more qualitative studies have reported, for instance, that teachers are more agentic and resilient in some contexts and environments than others (Arnott, 2011; Bieler et al., 2017; Clark, 2015;

Kitade, 2015; Sawchuk, 2015; Ticknor, 2015). This is particularly relevant to this study in that one very real limitation of any interpretation of the data I collected as part of this project is the fact that for the bulk or even all (Nelson and Abrams) of their time teaching, all three of my participants were members of the same very close-knit community at Towne High School. In other words, the data was collected from essentially the same context and environment. To claim that their persistent agency and crushing context narratives would be the same in every other context would be irresponsible and unfounded. Further investigations would have to be done to make any such claim. After all, only Nelson had experiences to recount from other contexts.

Indeed, there was ample existing scholarship to be found in advance of this project that sought specifically to reveal either additional predictive factors or the nature of productive environments that are conducive to thriving resilience and agency, many of which were present in the math community in particular at Towne. Perhaps the most dominant finding among this intentional scholarship revealed the importance of strong relationships and social networks (within and outside of the working context) for their potential to favorably impact teachers' work and by extension their agency and resilience (Bobek, 2002; Brunetti, 2006; Cameron & Lovett, 2014; Ebersöhn, 2014; Hong, 2012; Howard & Johnson, 2004; Mansfield et al., 2016; O'Sullivan, 2006; Sharplin et al., 2011; Steward, 2014; Sullivan & Johnson, 2012; Nieto, 2003). This finding will be addressed next in light of my work.

Strong relationships and social networks. The aforementioned scholarship was definitely reinforced by the narratives of the teacher participants involved in my study. There is no better example than the case of Cota. Indeed, Cota's strongest core belief was

related to the worth of people and the importance of relationships. “I think the biggest thing about me is that I build relationships with people,” he told me during our first formal interview (LSN interview, March 25, 2018). “I build relationships. It’s the most important thing I believe,” he added later during that same interview (LSN interview, March 25, 2018). As has already been presented earlier in this work, 18 times over the course of reflective interviews, Cota addressed the importance of relationships specifically (see Table 4.3, Chapter 4). He also repeatedly mentioned the strength to persist that was inspired by three particular individuals: David Guerrero (his first principal), Dr. Albert Ramirez (his last principal), and William Nelson (a colleague with whom he worked very closely for years attempting to bring social justice and relevant mathematics into Algebra 1, and also another participant in this study and teacher at Towne). This was aside from the fact that he mentioned the importance of always making time for family relationships and for collaborating with the “amazing” individuals in his department (LSN interview, March 25, 2018). “We relied on each other,” Cota said later of the same colleagues, “for our different strengths” (CCC interview, August 4, 2018).

While the evidence was not as strong in the cases of Nelson and Abrams, it was there. That evidence, of course, has already been attended to in the sections related to a commitment to collaboration or congregation or consultation in their respective findings chapters. What is significant here in terms of a cross-case analysis is that while there are distinctions, each of my participants did reference specific people and their relationships with those people in their various reflections on the support they drew upon to persist with agency in crushing contexts. In other words, Cota’s case was unique in that he held very strongly to a core belief specifically related to the importance of relationships

whereas Nelson and Abrams simply expressed appreciation for key relationships on several occasions and, in the case of Abrams, for a strong community where relationship-building was always available and care was evident. Again, it is important to note that this community was available to each of my participants at Towne. They were at some point all members of the same math department. Had this not been the case, findings may have been different.

Teacher beliefs and agency or resilience. Also discussed in great detail in the pre-existing literature relevant to this study was the fact that the strength and presence of the intimately related multifaceted constructs of agency and resilience (and by extension, teacher persistent agency), have been often predicted by various beliefs surveys. In other words, because the field of psychology in general and social cognitive theory in particular hold that people's beliefs directly influence the course of action they pursue, the amount of effort they put into a given action, and how long they will persevere in that action in the face of obstacles and failures, researchers have put much effort into identifying productive beliefs and thought patterns and then attempted to quantify these beliefs as a means of predicting agentive and resilient action. The most significantly cited productive beliefs that have been extensively vetted in the literature are self-efficacy beliefs (Biesta et al., 2015; Day, 2014; Gu & Day, 2007; MacKenzie, 2012; Meister & Ahrens, 2011; Sumision, 2004; Tschannen-Moran & Barr, 2004; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001; Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998; Tschannen-Moran et al., 2015). Significantly, however, Bandura himself (1977, 1986, 2006) cautioned that self-efficacy is only one predictive factor that must operate in concert with many others within the agentic framework of social cognitive theory for agency to be realized. Those factors, such as goal systems,

perceived environmental facilitators and enablers, and environmental impediments should also receive attention from researchers, not just the truncated self-efficacy factor. In addition, Bandura specifically cautioned that self-efficacy beliefs may diverge from actual realized action (agency) (2012), an admonition consistent with evidence revealed later by other researchers reporting on case studies that revealed considerable inconsistency between teachers' self-reported beliefs and their actual patterns of action and reaction (Vaughn, 2013; Verberg et al., 2016). Bandura called for additional research and also further warned that other beliefs may in fact be important to consider as potentially predictive of agency, aside from self-efficacy beliefs (2012).

The study at hand was in many ways a response to Bandura's cautions and suggestions for future research. It is not surprising, then, that one of the most significant findings was the fact that even the small collection of teachers involved in this research boasted a host of distinct and very strong core beliefs (only a few of which could be categorized as self-efficacy beliefs, though none of which was a general self-efficacy belief) that appeared to greatly inspire and support their ability to act in agentive ways. These beliefs were discussed at length in earlier chapters, but for the convenience of the reader, I have reproduced them in a summary table below (Table 7.3).

Table 7.3

Core Beliefs by Participant: A Core Belief...

# Belief	Cota	Nelson	Abrams
1	...in the worth of people and the importance of relationships	...in the beauty and value of "pure" mathematics, done and studied for its own sake, and the importance of teaching it in ways that highlight that beauty and	...based on his personal lived experience with learning, in the value of learning and discovery and his and his students' capacities to learn and grow

# Belief	Cota	Nelson	Abrams
		value	
2	...in the capacity of all people to learn and grow <i>if</i> they are willing to put in the work	... that his personal calling is to help others and to teach math	...in the power and importance of community
3		... in the importance of focusing on students and their overall being and well-being	

What is particularly significant about the collection of core beliefs revealed in teacher participants' narratives is not so much the individual beliefs as the fact that these teachers' abilities to act in agentic ways consistently seemed to be driven by a plethora of distinct core beliefs, not necessarily related to the self-efficacy beliefs that currently dominate the related academic discourse in the specific bodies of literature that so greatly inspired and informed my research. This is not a contradictory finding to the existing beliefs literature related to the constructs of agency and resilience, but a complementary one. It is indicative of the fact that, perhaps because self-efficacy has proven to be a powerful predictor of agency and resilience, the existing related scholarship has potentially overshadowed other teacher beliefs that may also hold additional promise in terms of contributing to a greater phenomenological understanding of the construct at the heart of this study.

The unique case of Nelson in particular comes to mind. Quite unlike the other two participants in this study who were motivated by beliefs rather common across teaching populations, for Nelson, it was very much his strong beliefs about mathematics and how it ought to be taught that propelled him forward in productive, agentic ways, even when

he had to fight the urge to give up. Nelson emphasized repeatedly his appreciation for the beauty of pure mathematics, for mathematics done and understood for mathematics' sake. This passion is not unrepresented in math education literature, but it has yet to pervade the bodies of literature I consulted in preparation for this project (Crespo & Sinclair, 2008; Herbal-Eisenmann et al., 2016; Sinclair, 2004). In every single one of his well-remembered event accounts, the ending to the events was a disappointing one. Similar endings have driven teachers from the profession. But Nelson was able to garner the strength he needed at least in part because of his powerful beliefs related to mathematics and what real mathematics could mean for his students. Perhaps this is knowledge that would be useful to educational researchers with a keen interest in teacher recruitment and retention. Perhaps if teachers have a great passion for a subject area, in conjunction with other supportive structures and components (perhaps the other components of teacher faith), that great passion would be sufficient to spark a faith that could enable them to persist with agency in the profession even through the initial "survival" stages of teacher development that are so well documented in the extant teacher education literature (Burder, 1982; Burke et al., 1984; Dubble, 1998; Fuller, 1969; Katz, 1972; McDonnell et al., 1989; Watts, 1980). Again, at this point none of this has been vetted in the literature, certainly not to the extent of self-efficacy literature. But each of these findings demonstrate the potential for additional study and literature to inform our field.

New findings from untold stories. In addition to answering the call for additional qualitative investigation, this project was specifically intended to build and expand upon the work of Nieto (2009, 2014, 2015) and Sisson (2016). Nieto boasts years of quality research presenting the powerful voices and narratives of countless resilient

teachers. Many of these stories are stories of hope and possibility, not unlike the stories collected as a part of this project. From the beginning, my work was to be an extension of Nieto's with the added focus on asking teachers to tell the stories of their crushing contexts in particular, stories that to my knowledge Nieto never specifically requested, though she certainly never discouraged. What is especially salient about even the modest collection of the event-based crushing context narratives that potentially adds new insight to the current literature is the fact that the dénouements or resolutions of these stories were not always positive. Indeed, the bulk of the stories teachers have chosen to tell Nieto have been stories that in some way had a happy ending, even if that ending was happy because of the significance teachers made of the event later. That was not always the case in this study.

For example, without exception, the three well-remembered crushing events that Nelson told ended badly. In the first, he left a school because of unsupportive administration who never responded in a favorable way to the conflict of the event. In the second, he was literally let go from a position and spent the entire length of the event on an improvement contract (over the course of three years). In the third, the administrator he loved and credited as an incredible mentor was dismissed by his school board. And yet these well-remembered crushing stories were stories that technically bolstered his strength and resolve to continue to do great work focused on the best interest of his students.

It was not the case, of course that this pattern of terrible endings was consistent across cases. Cota, for instance, ended each crushing narrative with a happy ending, even if that ending was something that technically occurred after the close of the crushing

event. He ended his reflection on his first WRE focused on a “bad leader” (his title) with a discussion of the next leader who came to his school who turned out to be amazing and inspiring. He concluded his recount of his second WRE with the devastating and unfair wrestling loss (of his students) with a note that they came back to win the title the next year. Finally, he emphasized at the conclusion of the story involving his student that initially had no desire to succeed in mathematics with information about how well she did the next year in mathematics.

The narratives of Abrams, by contrast, boasted a mix of happy and unhappy endings. He concluded his discussion of the first WRE related to the lesson gone bad with the fact that while the lesson did not end well, it did change his perspective in terms of where he should focus his energy and time in preparing for future lessons. In terms of his second WRE related to the poor teacher evaluation, while nothing good ever came of the interaction with the administrator (there was no positive resolution to that end), again he reflected on his ability to now distinguish between meaningful feedback and useless judgment and to bring himself to a place where he was not crushed by the latter. Finally, in terms of his final WRE, while it was generally a miserable year and many issues were never resolved, there was at least something to celebrate in the end in that in the midst of the event (“Too many students for too long in too much heat”), he was able to convince administration to make one change that benefitted some of the students that needed his attention the most and also at the end of the year, he was able to secure the promise that he would not be handed a similar load in the future.

What is significant to note, then, is not whether or not the stories had happy endings, but simply the fact that some did and some did not and teachers were

nonetheless able to persist in meaningful ways through them. In other words, in light of these findings, it may behoove educational researchers to continue to ask teachers to tell the hardest stories, perhaps even specifically noting that they may not have happy endings. Presumably the happy stories or at least the ones that turn out well in the end are the ones that teachers will tell if we simply ask about their narrative experiences. But in light of the nuanced findings of this study, perhaps it is worth asking them specifically to tell even those stories that did not boast happy endings. Maybe some of these crushing context stories will turn out to be stories of “critical incidents” like those detailed in the work of Sisson (2016). According to Sisson, critical incidents and experiences serve as catalysts and often shape how teachers are able to navigate through the difficult circumstances of their profession, particularly those circumstances that stand in conflict to teachers’ strongest beliefs. As was discussed at length in an earlier chapter, Sisson (2016) specifically called for further research into how teachers are able to persist through these circumstances. This study, then, was a direct response to her request.

Unanticipated Study Contributions: Teacher Faith and WRE Arcs

While I fully anticipated more detailed understandings of teacher persistent agency to surface as a result of my narrative research, it was two unanticipated findings that in the end I found most compelling in my work. The first and potentially most significant was the new construct inspired by the similarities across the narrated experiences of the participants in my study (that admittedly resonated with my own life experience as an individual and an educator) that caught my attention during data analysis. The second, and also very promising, was the tool or method adapted from a strong tradition of narrative analysis that eventually brought great insight in terms of my

participant's unique emotional experiences within their narratives that I did not expect. More specifically, the construct of teacher faith that inspired the title of this document is one that I sincerely hope others in the field will consider attending to in further analysis of similar research. It is one that I admit has not been vetted at all in the literature and yet one that I believe in light of this study is worth further investigation. Similarly, while all of the methods employed in this study were invaluable to my research, I found the participant-drawn arcs connected to the event-based crushing context narratives (WRE accounts) to be unexpectedly helpful to me in making sense of the differences in the emotional experiences of my participants. It is therefore an exercise I highly encourage in future research as a result.

Teacher faith. In previous chapters, I articulated the following five key components to a devout religious faith: core beliefs and convictions, hope and trust that acting on those beliefs and convictions is ultimately good or beneficial, regular intentional (agentive) action in accordance with those beliefs and convictions, routines and practices that build and strengthen one's faith, and commitment to collaboration or congregation or consultation of some sort with others with like beliefs and convictions. I then suggested that we ascribe each of these components to a new and similar, though distinctively non-religious construct, one that I have called teacher faith based on the obvious parallel. In making sense of the data collected in this project, it was this new construct, or these five components, that were impossible to ignore in the narratives of each of my teacher participants. While there were so many nuanced findings related to the individual narratives, action and reaction patterns, and reflections I collected from my participant teachers, the greatest consistency was found in the presence of a faith

motivated by core beliefs and seemingly strengthened by each of the other four components.

In the end, this finding was not surprising to me, but perhaps that is because I am a person of great religious faith. Just as I have so often drawn upon my religious faith to persist through the difficult times in my life, so each of the participants in my study consistently referenced the aspects and components of their teacher faith in reflecting on their experiences during the crushing contexts of their profession. They were each repeatedly motivated by a collection of core beliefs and convictions (unique to each participant) that were fundamental to who they were and how they interacted with students and colleagues. They frequently drew upon a hope and trust that acting on those beliefs and convictions was ultimately good or beneficial regardless of what the circumstances were in the moment. They expressed that hope in a variety of ways throughout our times together. They also consistently showed their commitment to regular intentional (agentive) action in accordance with their beliefs and convictions even during the most difficult moments. In addition, throughout their narratives, there was evidence of productive routines and practices that built and strengthened their faith and resolve as educators with persistent agency. Finally, their commitment to collaboration or congregation or consultation of some sort with colleagues or experts with like beliefs and convictions was evident throughout their life story narratives in particular. In short, throughout my interactions with these three participant teachers focused specifically on their individual narratives, action and reaction patterns, and reflections on their experiences within their self-identified crushing contexts, the most consistent thing across cases was evidence of each of the key components of devout faith. It is not the case, of

course, that their faith was identical. In fact, quite the opposite is true. The core beliefs in particular that motivated their faith were quite distinct. Nonetheless, if teacher persistent agency is as nuanced and individualistic as it appears to be, perhaps drawing upon a unifying construct such as teacher faith to predict and explain teachers ability to regularly persist in agentic ways can help advance scholars phenomenological understanding of the construct. In a field wrought with crushing contexts, where teacher retention is a critical issue and the prevailing narrative is often bleak, it is my humble intimation that this construct may hold untapped potential to contribute in meaningful ways to current and future academic pursuits.

WRE participant arcs. In addition to seeking a complete and well-understood WRE account from each of my teacher participants specifically focused on well-remembered crushing events, I concluded my WRE sense-making interviews with a drawing activity to help me make sense of my participants' overall emotional experiences within these crushing events. While I knew this was an original activity, I also knew it was consistent with similar practices in existing qualitative research (e.g., Dinham, Chalk, Beltman, Glass, & Nguyen, 2017). Because I was interested in potential patterns within teacher participants' thoughts, emotions, and actions and reactions as reported within these WREs, I asked participant teachers to draw an arc that would serve as a visual representation of their experience within their WRE in terms of a rise and fall in action and/or emotion. I provided the same short story example to introduce this task to each participant. While these interviews were audio recorded in their entirety, this final portion of the sense-making interviews were also video recorded. The complete protocol for these interviews, including more detailed information about the visual arc task, again,

can be found in Appendix E. As has already been addressed, related to this drawing activity, while I gleaned much from this activity in terms of understanding the overall experiences of teacher participants during these crushing context events, were I to utilize this activity in other research, I would need to more narrowly focus it and make the instructions clearer. Rather than rise and fall of action in combination with an emotional experience as I had initially intended, some teachers focused exclusively on their state of emotions during these events. What is more, there was no consistency in terms of what ascending and descending lines represented, even with the same participants. In other words, while the collective data obtained through this process (visuals, video clips, and transcription of teacher participant dialogue) revealed much about the teacher participants' experiences in the salient event-based crushing context events they described, the visuals themselves could not stand alone as comparable artifacts. An ascending line on one visual may have a completely distinct significance than a similar line on another visual. In the end, I chose to accommodate for this by mapping some of my participants words as they drew these arcs onto the arcs themselves. These compound productions were what was presented in the findings chapters of this study.

While the protocol for this activity may be yet imperfect, the messages conveyed in the final products were extremely beneficial. For this reason, I plan to perfect and reuse the activity again in future related research and would encourage others to do the same with my blessing. I truly believe the concept of creating a visual arc that is distinct and yet comparable among a greater number of participants within the crushing contexts of teaching could offer new insights that would potentially have implications on teacher preparation and teacher retention programs and literatures.

Wonderings

Just before the close of this lengthy endeavor summarizing my research, allow me to reiterate one more time the limitations of this study that nonetheless presents three powerful cases of teacher persistent agency in a very specific crushing macro-context as they narrate their unique experiences within a collection of unique crushing micro-contexts. As has been adequately documented, all three participants who completed this study were men and I am a woman. In light of the fact that several studies have found that men and women differ in how they recount events and experiences, how they may differ in their actual experiences of similar events, and how they narrate experiences to other genders, this is a limitation worth repeating (Herrschaft, Veysey, Tubman-Carbone, & Christian, 2009). For example, in a sample of 37 individuals with various stigmatized identities who were asked to narrate life changes, the narratives revealed that women and men experience role transformation differently. More specifically, the women in the study referred more to relationship-related factors (RRF) and men referred more to status-related factors (SRF). There really is no way of predicting how this study would have been different if I were a man or if I had been able to interview women with teacher persistent agency. Each of the men in this study discussed relational factors quite a bit, but that could be a result of the distinct nature of my study. Nonetheless, it is a natural limitation of this study I do not wish to ignore or underemphasize. In pursuit of similar scholarship, I can only hope that other researchers will take up the call to explore contexts other than the one I explored, perhaps content areas other than mathematics (though I stand behind my specific reason for choosing to seek out secondary mathematics teachers), and certainly of larger scale in terms of number of participants.

What is significant to me is that scholars continue to pursue a greater phenomenological understanding of teacher persistent agency than currently exists, looking in particular to crushing contexts, and perhaps also attempting to apply a lens of nonreligious *teacher faith* to the analysis of that research.

Summary of Implications

It is my humble submission at the close of this lengthy project that my research, while modest in scope and focused rather exclusively on only three unique cases, offers new insight to the fields of teaching and teacher education. The examples unearthed in the narrative experiences of these teachers are rich and inspiring. Were additional parallel studies to be done with a greater number of administrator-recommended veteran teachers with persistent agency, particularly centered on their event-based crushing context narratives as collected utilizing only slightly adapted well-remembered event protocols from Carter's decades (1993, 1994, 2003, 2013b) of amazing work, perhaps additional rich data would service to contribute additional understandings. Also, with greater numbers of participants and WRE accounts specifically focused on event-based crushing contexts narratives, new methods of analysis would be available to make sense of what would promise to be additional rich data.

For instance, Carter regularly performs plot-pattern analyses on larger collections of well-remembered event narratives, typically with some specific focus or context. I was only able to collect nine crushing event narratives, an insufficient number to seek generalizable patterns. Additional, larger-scale studies with the same focus, however, could open up the possibility of more generalizable (or not) findings than my work because they would presumably collect more narrated accounts and more arcs to compare

and contrast. In addition, if the construct of teacher faith were also visible in the narratives of greater numbers of resilient veteran teachers, where prior scholarship has focused on predictive factors, perhaps it would become useful to look at the construct of teacher faith as its own predictor of teacher persistent agency. Were that the case, teacher preparation programs could perhaps embrace a host of valuable core beliefs of future teachers and simultaneously attend to the other four components of devout faith that support those beliefs in ways that presumably enable teachers to act in productive and agentive ways even when times are especially tough. In short, it is my firm belief that this research, while performed with a number of limitations on a very small scale, opens a window of opportunity for future academic pursuits focused on constructs and contexts worth further investigation on a much larger scale (teacher persistent agency, teacher faith, crushing event-based contexts).



APPENDIX A: PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORMS
 (Protocol 1712139953- Approved by Univ. of Arizona IRB,
 Expires 21-Dec-2022)

The University of Arizona Consent to Participate in Research
Study Title: An Investigation of Teacher Persistent Agency in the Crushing Contexts

Principal Investigator: Amy McDonald

This is a consent form for research participation. It contains important information about this study and what to expect if you decide to participate. Please consider the information carefully. Feel free to discuss the study with your friends and family and to ask questions before making your decision whether or not to participate.

Why is this study being done?

I want to learn from veteran secondary mathematics teachers about their storied experiences in the most difficult moments and difficult circumstances of their teaching. I want to better understand the impact of their life narratives and storied knowledge on their capacity to make intentional decisions focused on students even when confronting the most difficult moments and contexts in their teaching of mathematics. Teachers' event-based knowledge is being explored in the literature with great promise, but no research to date has targeted the event-based knowledge tied to crushing contexts.

What will happen if I take part in this study?

Initially, I will ask you for demographic data. More specifically, you will be given a form that asks you to reveal your gender, age, race/ethnicity, teaching certification information, number of years teaching, and grade levels taught. You may elect not to reveal any of this information if you so choose.

For your first research activity, you will create a life story timeline with the events and influences that you believe have impacted your identity and practice as a teacher. You will use that timeline to tell me your life story narrative in an interview to follow the next week or the week after.

Over the course of the study, you will be asked to think of and name or title several different difficult moments (crushing contexts) in your teaching. Ultimately, you will be asked to share 3 different well-remembered (significant) crushing context events that you will share with me in writing or via recording and then explain further during interviews. Each interview will take no longer than 90 minutes. During these interviews, you will be asked questions about your thoughts and actions during these well-remembered events.

At the close of the study, you will participate in another interview, reflecting on your different well-remembered crushing context experiences. The interview will be a semi-structured format.

How long will I be in the study?

The major portion of the project will begin in January 2018 and conclude before the end of December 2018. I may contact you over the next two years, however, to give you information about my findings or ask clarification questions. Because this is a narrative project where you will be telling the stories, it is not entirely possible to predict the amount of time you will put into this study if you choose to participate. My projection is

that it will be anywhere from 5 to 20 hours over the course of 30 weeks, and never more than 4 hours within any given week. There will always be breaks in between data collection so as to provide reflection time, clarification time, and analysis time for me.

How many people will take part in this study?

I plan to recruit 4 teachers into the study.

Can I stop being in the study?

Your participation is voluntary. You may refuse to participate in this study. If you decide to take part in the study, you may leave the study at any time. No matter what decision you make, there will be no penalty to you and you will not lose any of your usual benefits. Your decision will not affect your future relationship with The University of Arizona or Tucson Unified School District. If you are a student or employee at the University of Arizona, your decision will not affect your grades or employment status. Your decision will not affect your employment status either. If you choose to withdraw from this study after it is in progress and before it is concluded, you will have the option of deciding whether I can still use the information you have already provided or whether you would like me to permanently delete all files related to your participation.

What risks or benefits can I expect from being in the study?

There are no risks to this study beyond those typically encountered as you participate in any professional development activity or go about your regular educator business. In terms of potential benefits, you will be asked to reflect on your lived experience. Hopefully this reflection will benefit your person and your practice. By processing a variety of relevant and difficult life experiences leading up to your teaching and during your teaching, and potentially sharing some of your conclusions and coping strategies, you may be better prepared to cope with similar experiences in the future. In addition, some of the information you share about your ability to persevere in the best interest of students may be a benefit for other current or future educators or educational researchers seeking to better understand the storied experience of secondary mathematics teachers, particularly during difficult moments and in difficult circumstances, and to prepare future secondary mathematics teachers for their work in the field.

Will my study-related information be kept confidential?

Efforts will be made to keep all study-related identifying information confidential. All study-related data will be stored on the principal investigator's personal password-protected laptop. In the dissertation report, report to participants and administrators, and any future publications, no identifying information will be shared. Because you are free to talk about this study and because I seek 4 teachers in your district and potentially at the same school, certain individuals within the study may know certain identifying information about other participants. But the principal investigator will not provide or share that information. Video and audio recorded data will be kept, even after it has been transcribed, for future reference in case I wish to use the data in future publications. By signing this form, you are giving your consent for this storage and use. None of this data will ever be accessible to anyone but myself and my advisors. However, your records may be reviewed by the following groups:

- The University of Arizona Institutional Review Board
- Office for Human Research Protections or other federal, state, or international regulatory agencies

What are the costs of taking part in this study?

There are no costs for taking part in the research project other than your time.

Will I be paid for taking part in this study?

You will not be financially compensated for your time as you participate in the research study.

Who can answer my questions about the study?

For questions, concerns, or complaints about the study you may contact *Amy McDonald* at 520-468-9596 or *amylynnm@email.arizona.edu*.

For questions about your rights as a participant in this study or to discuss other study-related concerns or complaints with someone who is not part of the research team, you may contact the Human Subjects Protection Program at 520-626-6721 or online at <http://rgw.arizona.edu/compliance/human-subjects-protection-program>.

An Institutional Review Board responsible for human subjects research at The University of Arizona reviewed this research project and found it to be acceptable, according to applicable state and federal regulations and University policies designed to protect the rights and welfare of participants in research.

Signing the consent form

I have read (or someone has read to me) this form, and I am aware that I am being asked to participate in a research study. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered to my satisfaction. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

I am not giving up any legal rights by signing this form. I will be given a copy of this form.

Printed name of subject

Signature of subject

Date

Investigator/Research Staff

I have explained the research to the participant or the participant's representative before requesting the signature(s) above. There are no blanks in this document. A copy of this form has been given to the participant or to the participant's representative.

**Printed name of person
obtaining consent**

**Signature of person obtaining
consent**

Date

APPENDIX B: LIFE CHRONOLOGY (TIMELINE) PROMPT
(For use during life story narrative interviews- see Appendix B)

Thinking back over the course of your life, what has your journey to becoming a secondary mathematics teacher been like? More specifically, what individual **events, influences, and experiences** do you see as having contributed to your identity as a teacher?

Please **generate a chronological list** of the events, influences, experiences, decisions, and/or circumstances that you believe had a lasting impact on your teacher identity. In other words, list those things that have made you the secondary mathematics teacher you are today. You do not need to detail the specifics of each entry. I will ask you any questions I have during an interview next week. Instead, **please give each entry a summary title** to help both you and I make sense of these entries, and will immediately trigger your memory as to the significance of the event, influence, or experience to you. For example, if there was some sort of event or experience that you could tell as a story, imagine you are writing that story down and please give the story an appropriate title. Place the titles of these events and experiences in chronological order as best as you can. Any circumstances or character traits that you would like to add that **transcend time** but you feel have greatly impacted your journey into teaching can be **recorded along the outside of your timeline**, either in the margins or wherever you choose to place them that does not appear to be a fixed moment in your life. **Please give these appropriate titles as well.**

You can generate this timeline in the journal I have provided you, on a separate paper of your choice, or utilizing ANY other recording method you deem appropriate. Once you've finished your timeline, please let me know so that I can schedule an interview with you. Remember, in this interview, I will simply be asking you questions about the titles you have recorded on your timeline. My goal is to better understand the events, influences, and experiences that you've identified as having been important in your teaching journey.

APPENDIX C: LIFE STORY NARRATIVE (LSN) INTERVIEWS PROTOCOL
(Audio Recorded)

Following Life Chronology (Timeline) Construction

Introductory remarks (PI): I reviewed your life chronology timeline. Now I would like to ask you some questions about the events, influences, and experiences you recorded. I'm just interested in understanding why you selected them as significant and important. I will take notes as you talk, and I may also interrupt you with clarification questions. This interview is being recorded. Is that still okay?

[I WILL WAIT FOR TEACHERS' APPROVAL AND THEN PROCEED WITH ANY QUESTION(S) I HAVE.]

APPENDIX D: WRE AND CCC PARTICIPANT INSTRUCTIONS

Well-Remembered Event (WRE) Instructions

I am interested in your storied experience during the “crushing context” events of your teaching of secondary mathematics. Crushing contexts are those moments and events that often motivate avoidance, retreat and resignation, complacent thought, destructive decision-making or similar responses. They are those contexts that for some people challenge and even squelch their strongest optimistic beliefs in and about the work they are engaged in or even about life itself. They are basically those moments and events that you find “crushing”.

My hope is that you can tell me about a well-remembered crushing moment or event from your teaching of secondary mathematics, what you remember about your experience in that event, and what sense you made of it when it was over. You can record your experience as a journal entry (handwritten or typed) or an audio recording. I have no expectations or limits in terms of length. I would just like you to be sure to include three things in your account:

1. **A description** of the single event (basic factual description with whatever contextual information and details you believe are relevant),
2. **Your internal dialogue** during the event (what you were thinking, why it felt crushing to you in the moment)
3. **Moving forward?** What sense do you make of this event moving forward now that you have revisited it?

Finally, I would ask that you **give your event a representative title**. When you have finished retelling your event, please send it to me (in whatever format you have chosen), and we will schedule the follow-up interview. In the interview that follows, I will just be asking any clarifying questions or other questions I have related to this event. If it is not immediately evident, I may also ask you to explain the title you have chosen to encapsulate the event.

Additional Crushing Contexts Collections (CCC)

As you now know, I will be asking you to retell 3 well-remembered crushing context stories from your teaching in detail (event-based with a beginning, middle, and end) before this study is over. But I am also interested in learning more about some of the other contexts you find or have found crushing related to your teaching over the years. For this reason, in addition to retelling these 3 stories in detail, I would like you to please think of any other crushing context stories that you remember or that occur during this study and to write those down for us to consider during the last interview. More specifically, for these stories, instead of retelling them in detail, I would simply like you to think about them and give them encapsulating titles that summarize their crushing nature, titles that if you saw them again a month later, would let you know immediately which story you were referring to. I would like you to write these titles on their own little papers (those papers I have provided). After you write the encapsulating title of one such crushing context, crumple up that paper, and store it in the container I have provided. At the end of this study, during our last interview, I will ask you to open up these papers and look over all of the titles (stories) you have written down. These papers will be the motivation for our last interview.

APPENDIX E: WRE SENSE-MAKING INTERVIEWS PROTOCOL
(Audio Recorded and Video Recorded- drawing activity)

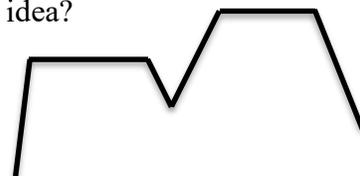
Introductory remarks (PI): This interview is in response to your Well-Remembered Event (WRE) account. I read [OR listened to] your account and this interview is just about making sure I have a clear understanding of this crushing moment or event in terms of what your experience was in that event and why you still remember it. I will take notes as you talk and I may also interrupt you with clarification questions. This interview is being recorded. Is that still okay?

[WAIT FOR ACKNOWLEDGEMENT THAT IS OKAY BEFORE PROCEEDING.]

1. Okay, so before I ask any questions to clarify or extend my understanding, is there anything you would like to add, clarify, or remove from your account?
2. [WAIT FOR TEACHER TO RESPOND... ASK ANY QUESTION(S) REMAINING ABOUT DESCRIPTION, INTERNAL DIALOGUE, AND POTENTIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE EVENT AS NARRATED.]

[ONCE THE DISCUSSION OF THE EVENT HAS CONCLUDED...]

Introductory remarks (PI): Before we part ways, I would like to ask you to create and then use a very simple visual aid to summarize your overall experience within this event. More specifically, I want you to think of your story as you have just told it and draw an arc to represent your overall experience, thinking of your thoughts, emotions, and actions and reactions during this event. I am going to give you a blank piece of paper and I simply want you to draw a line that represents the rise and fall of action or emotions you experienced during your well-remembered event. Your line can be curved, straight, or a combination of both. It is meant to represent how you felt and what you experienced. Then I would like you to talk me through that visual referring back to your well-remembered event. For example, on the paper in front of you, you see a curved line that represents my emotional experience when my four-year-old son had a seizure in the middle of the night. At first, I had an immediate spike of emotion, a combination of nervousness, heightened awareness, and perhaps even fear. That is why the line shoots up sharply. Over the course of the next few hours as we waited for him to wake up, I remained in a state of hyper-awareness, but it was a fairly constant state of waiting. That's why the line flat-lines next. Then there were a series of follow-up events. We were initially told everything was fine. That's why the line goes down. Then we got a call that he may need brain surgery. Line back up... Do you get the idea?



[WAIT FOR ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF UNDERSTANDING; PROVIDE PAPER.]

Additional remarks (PI): Now I would like you to draw your own narrative arc. When you are ready, I would like your permission to record video as you talk me through the visual you have created.

[WAIT FOR ACKNOWLEDGEMENT THAT IS OKAY BEFORE PROCEEDING.]

APPENDIX F: CCCs FINAL INTERVIEWS PROTOCOL
(Audio Recorded)

Crushing Context Collections (CCC) Interview Protocol:

Introductory remarks (PI): So this will be our last time together. Before we start, can I have your permission to record one last time?

[WAIT FOR TEACHERS' APPROVAL AND THEN PROCEED WITH THE INTERVIEW.]

Introductory remarks continued (PI): So, over the course of this study, I've asked you to tell me a little bit of who you are and how you became the teacher you are. I've also asked you to tell me some difficult stories in detail... some crushing context stories... three to be exact. And the last thing I asked you to do is to, over the course of the entire study, collect some other crushing context events or circumstances and to record those on some small person-shaped colored papers. And by "record," I mean to title them- to give them some sort of a name that really encapsulates what makes those contexts crushing to you. This interview is about those little pieces of paper and how they connect to the other stories you've told me and to who you are as a teacher. Basically, I just have one main question: Can you open those papers and tell me about those crushing contexts?

[RECORD NOTES AS THE TEACHERS TALK ABOUT EACH OF THEIR CRUSHING CONTEXTS.]

Concluding remarks (PI): At this point, I have one final question. I've spent a lot of time listening to your storied experiences over the past few months and really trying to understand what crushing context experiences are like for you in terms of the nature of those experiences, your internal dialogue and emotions during those experiences, and also the sense you make of those experiences and how they impact your identity and practice. Now that our time together is coming to a close, have you noticed anything about crushing contexts in general for you, how you get through them, and what sense you make of them? Is there anything else you want to share?

References

- AFT Teachers. (2007). *Meeting the challenge: Recruiting and retaining teachers in hard-to-staff schools*. Washington, DC: AFT.
- Augustine, St., & Dods., M. (Translator) (1959). *The City of God*. New York: The Modern Library.
- Aquinas, T. (1998). *Thomas Aquinas: Selected Writings*. London: Penguin (Classics) Books.
- Arnett, A. (2015). Separate and unequal: Historically unequal funding at HBCUs continues to be a persistent civil rights issue. *Diverse Issues in Higher Education*, 32(8), 12-14.
- Arnott, S. (2011). Exploring the dynamic relationship between the Accelerative Integrated Method (AIM) and the core French teachers who use it: Why agency and experience matter. *Canadian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 14(2), 156-176.
- Bandura, A. (1977). Self-efficacy: Toward a unifying theory of behavioral change. *Psychological Review*, 84(2), 191-215.
- Bandura, A. (1986). *Social foundations of thought and action: A social cognitive theory*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*. New York: W.H. Freeman and Company.
- Bandura, A. (2001). Social cognitive theory: An agentic perspective. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 52, 1-26.
- Bandura, A. (2002). Social cognitive theory in cultural context. *Journal of Applied Psychology: An International Review*, 51, 269-290.

- Bandura, A. (2006). Toward a psychology of human agency. *Perspectives on Psychological Science, 1*, 165-180.
- Bandura, A. (2012). On the functional properties of perceived self-efficacy revisited. *Journal of Management, 38*(1), 9-44. doi:10.1177/0149206311410606
- Batra, P. (2005). Voice and agency of teachers: The missing link in the National Curriculum Framework 2005. *Economic and Political Weekly, 40*(40), 4347-4356.
- Batra, P. (2015). Curriculum in India: Narratives, debates and a deliberative agenda. In W. Pinar (Ed.), *Curriculum studies in India: Intellectual histories and present circumstances* (pp. 35-63). Canada: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Beltman, S., Mansfield, C., & Price, A. (2011). Thriving not just surviving: A review of research on teacher resilience. *Educational Research Review, 6*(3), 185-207. doi:10.1016/j.edurev.2011.09.001
- Bernard, M. E., Pires, D. (2006) Emotional resilience in children and adolescents: Implications for rational-emotive behavior therapy. In A. Ellis & M. E. Bernard (Eds.), *Rational emotive behavioral approaches to childhood disorders*. Boston, MA: Springer.
- Berry, B. (2004). Recruiting and retaining 'highly qualified teachers' for hard-to-staff schools. *NASSP Bulletin, 88*(638), 5-27.
- Berry, B., & Hirsch, E. (2005). Recruiting and retaining teachers for hard-to-staff schools: Issue brief. Washington, DC: NGA Center for Best Practices.
- Bieler, D., Holmes, S., & Wolfe, E. W. (2017). Patterns in the initial teaching assignments of secondary English teachers: Implications for teacher agency and

- retention. *The New Educator*, 13(1), 22-40. doi:10.1080/1547688X.2016.1144119
- Biesta, G. (2009). *Good education: What it is and why we need it (Inaugural lecture)*. Stirling: The Stirling Institute of Education.
- Biesta, G., Priestley, M., & Robinson, S. (2015). The role of beliefs in teacher agency. *Teachers and Teaching*, 21(6), 624-640. doi:10.1080/13540602.2015.1044325
- Biesta, G. J. J., & Tedder, M. (2006). *How is agency possible? Towards an ecological understanding of agency-as-achievement*. Working Paper No. 5. Exeter: The Learning Lives Project.
- Blanchard, K. H., Zigarmi, D., & Nelson, R. B. (1993). Situational leadership after 25 years: A retrospective. *The Journal of Leadership Studies*, 1(1), 21-36.
- Bobek, B. L. (2002). Teacher resiliency: A key to career longevity. *Clearing House*, 75, 202-205.
- Borman, G. D., & Dowling, N. M. (2008). Teacher attrition and retention: A meta-analytic and narrative review of the research. *Review of Educational Research*, 78, 367-409.
- Bowles, T., & Arnup, J. L. (2016). Early career teachers' resilience and positive adaptive change capabilities. *The Australian Educational Researcher*, 43(2), 147-164.
- Brady, P., & Bowd, A. (2005). Mathematics anxiety, prior experience and confidence to teach mathematics among preservice education students. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, 11(1), 37-46.
- Brown, K. D. (2013). The love that takes a toll: Exploring race and the pedagogy of fear in researching teachers and teaching. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 26(2), 139-157. doi:10.1080/09518398.2012.666284

- Brunetti, G. J. (2006). Resilience under fire: Perspectives on the work of experienced, inner city high school teachers in the United States. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 22*(7), 812-825. doi:10.1016/j.tate.2006.04.027
- Buchanan, R. (2015). Teacher identity and agency in an era of accountability. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice, 21*(6), 700-719.
doi:10.1080/13540602.2015.1044329
- Burden, P.R. (1982). Implications of teacher career development: New roles for teachers, administrators and professors. *Paper presented at the National Summer Workshop of the Association of Teacher Educators*. Slippery Rock, PA.
- Burke, P.J. (1985). Teacher's career stages and patterns of attitudes toward teaching behaviors. *Education, 105*(3), 240-248.
- Cameron, M., & Lovett, S. (2014). Sustaining the commitment and realising the potential of highly promising teachers. *Teacher and Teaching, 21*(2), 150-163.
doi:10.1080/13540602.2014.928132
- Campbell, E. (2012). Teacher agency in curriculum contexts. *Curriculum Inquiry, 42*(2), 183-190. doi:10.1111/j.1467-873X.2012.00593.x
- Carter, K. (1993). The place of story in the study of teaching and teacher education. *Educational Researcher, 22*(1), 5-12.
- Carter, K. (1994). Preservice teachers' well-remembered events and the acquisition of event structured knowledge. *Journal of Curriculum Studies, 26*(3), 235-252.
- Carter, K. (1995). Teaching stories and local understandings. *The Journal of Educational Research, 88*(6), 326-330.
- Carter, K. (2003). Narratives and learning to teach: Implications for teacher-education

- curriculum. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 35, 129–137.
- Carter, K. (2008). Spontaneous story spaces: Understanding narrative knowledge in teaching and teacher education. *Proceedings of the 6th annual Hawaii International Conference on Education, HICE Education*, Honolulu, HI.
- Carter, K. (2009). Field-based well-remembered events: How preservice teachers know teaching through narrative. *Proceedings of the 7th annual Hawaii International Conference on Education, HICE Education*, Honolulu, HI.
- Carter, K., Doyle, W., & Romano, M. (2007). Themes in preservice teachers' narratives of personal well-remembered events. *Proceedings of the Hawaii International Conference on Education*, Honolulu, HI.
- Carter, K., & Stoehr, K. (2012). Developing stories from the field: The impact of audience and advice on preservice teachers' narrative understandings of teaching. *Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association*. Vancouver, Canada.
- Carter, K., Stoehr, K., & Carter, G. (2012). Narrating school experience and knowing teaching. *Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association*. San Francisco, CA.
- Carter, K., Stoehr, K., Carter, G., & Sugimoto, A. (2013a). Gay but *not gay*: Preservice teachers' narratives of sorrow about LGBTQ students' experiences in K-12 school settings. *Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association*. San Francisco, CA.
- Carter, K., Stoehr, K., Carter, G., & Sugimoto, A. (2013b). Learning to teach out and proud? Preservice teachers' well-remembered narratives of social justice in school

- and field-based settings. *Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association*. San Francisco, CA.
- Castro, A. J., Kelly, J., & Shih, M. (2010). Resilience strategies for new teachers in high-needs areas. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *26*(3), 622-629.
doi:10.1016/j.tate.2009.09.010
- Chang, M. (2009). An appraisal perspective of teacher burnout: Examining the emotional work of teachers. *Educational Psychology Review*, *21*, 193-218.
- Chester, M., & Beaudin, B. (1996). Efficacy beliefs of newly hired teachers in urban schools. *American Educational Research Journal*, *33*, 233–257.
- Chubbuck, S. M. (2004). Whiteness enacted, Whiteness disrupted: The complexity of personal congruence. *American Educational Research Journal*, *41*, 301-333.
doi:10.3102/00028312037004849
- Clandinin, D. J., & Connelly, F. M. (1990). Narrative, experience, and the study of curriculum. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, *20*(3), 241–253.
- Clandinin, D. J. & Connelly, F. M. (2000). *Narrative inquiry*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Clark, J. S. (2011). Conceptualizing agency: Preservice social studies teachers' thinking about professional decisions (Doctoral dissertation, Indiana University). Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database (UMI No. 3488046).
- Clark, J. S. (2015). 'My assessment didn't seem real': The influence of field experiences on preservice teachers' agency and assessment literacy. *Journal of Social Studies Education Research*, *6*(2), 91-111.
- Cochran-Smith, M. (2004). Stayers, leavers, lovers, and dreamers: Insights about teacher

retention. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 55, 387–392.

doi:10.1177/0022487104270188

Cochran-Smith, M., McQuillan, P., Mitchell, K., Terrell, D. G., Barnatt, J., D'Souza, L., ... Gleeson, A. M. (2012). A longitudinal study of teaching practice and early career decisions: A cautionary tale. *American Educational Research Journal*, 49, 844-880. doi:10.3102/000283121143100

Cofield, C. (2013). *Agentic typologies: Teacher agency and urban renewal as tools of school reform* (Doctoral dissertation, State University of New York at Buffalo). Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database (UMI No. 3598623).

Coldron, J., & Smith, R. (1999). Active location in teachers' construction of their professional identities. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 31(6), 711-726.

Connelly, F. M., & Clandinin, D. J. (1988). *Teachers as curriculum planners*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Connelly, F. M., & Clandinin, D. J. (1990). Stories of experience and narrative inquiry. *Educational Researcher*, 19(5), 2–14.

Cooper, K., & Olson, M. (1996). The multiple 'I's' of teacher identity. In M. Kompf, T. Boak, W. R. Bond, & D. Dworet (Eds.), *Changing research and practice: Teachers' professionalism identities and knowledge*, 78-89. London: Falmer Press.

Crespo, S., & Sinclair, N. (2008). What makes a problem mathematically interesting? Inviting prospective teachers to pose better problems. *Journal of Math Education*, 11, 395-415. doi:10.1007/s10857-008-9081-0.

Darling-Hammond, L. (2003). Keeping good teachers: Why it matters, what leaders can

- do. *Educational Leadership*, 60(8), 6-13.
- Darling-Hammond, L. (2013). Inequality and school resources: What it will take to close the opportunity gap. In Carter, P. L. & Welner, K. G. (Eds.), *Closing the opportunity gap: What America must do to give every child an even chance*, 77-97. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Day, C. (2008). Committed for life? Variations in teachers' work, lives, and effectiveness. *Journal of Educational Change*, 9, 243-260. doi:10.1007/s10833-007-9054-6.
- Day, C., & Gu, Q. (2007). Variations in the conditions for teachers' professional learning and development: Sustaining commitment and effectiveness over a career. *Oxford Review of Education*, 33, 423-443.
- Day, C., & Gu, Q. (2010). *The new lives of teachers*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Dinham, J., Chalk, B., Beltman, S., Glass, C., & Nguyen, B. (2017). Pathways to resilience: How drawings reveal pre-service teachers' core narratives underpinning their future teacher-selves. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 45(2), 126-144. doi: 10.1080/1359866X.2016.1204424
- Dolati, S., Emamipour, S., & Kushki, S. (2014). The relationship between problem solving and resilience with job satisfaction in female teachers. *Applied Psychology*, 2(9), 36-46.
- Doyle, W., & Carter, K. (2003). Narrative and learning to teach: Implications for teacher-education curriculum. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 35(2), 129-137.
- Drake, C., Spillane, J., & Hufferd-Ackles, K. (2001). Storied identities: teacher learning and subject-matter context. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 33(1), 1-23.

- Dubble, S.L. (1998). Evolving people/evolving schools. *Paper presented at the North American Montessori Teachers' Association Conference*. Phoenix, AZ.
- Duckworth, A. L., Peterson, C., Mathews, M. D., & Kelly, D. R. (2007). Grit: Perseverance and passion for long-term goals. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 92*(6), 1087-1101.
- Duckworth, A. L., Quinn, P. D., & Seligman, M. E. P. (2009). Positive predictors of teacher effectiveness. *Journal of Positive Psychology, 19*, 540-547.
- Duncan-Andrade, J. M. R. (2009). Note to educators: Hope required when growing roses in concrete. *Harvard Educational Review 79*(2), 1-13.
- Duncan-Andrade, J. M. R. (2011). The principal facts: New directions for teacher education. In Ball, A. F. & Tyson, C. A. (Eds.), *Studying diversity in education*, 309-326.
- Ebersöhn, L. (2014). Teacher resilience: Theorizing resilience and poverty. *Teachers and Teaching, 20*(5), 568-594. doi: 10.1080/13540602.2014.937960
- Ewing, R., & Manuel, J. (2005). Retaining quality early career teachers in the profession: New teacher narratives. *Change Transformations in Education, 8*(1), 1-16.
- Ewing, R. A., & Smith, D. L. (2003). Retaining quality beginning teachers in the profession. *English Teaching: Practice and Critique, 2*(1), 15-32.
- Freedman, S. W., Simons, E. R., Kalnin, J. S., Casareno, A., & the M-CLASS Teams (Eds.). (1999). *Inside city schools: Investigating literacy in multicultural classrooms*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Friedman, I. A. (2000). Burnout in teachers: Shattered dreams of impeccable professional performance. *Journal of Clinical Psychology, 56*, 595-606.

- Freeman, J., Wilkinson, S., & Vanlone, J. (2017). Status of high school PBIS implementation in *the U.S. OSEP Technical Assistance Center on Behavioral Interventions and Supports Brief*.
- Fullan, M. (1993a). *Change forces: Probing the depths of educational reform*. London: Falmer Press.
- Fullan, M. (1993b). Why teachers must become change agents. *Educational Leadership*, 50(6), 1-13.
- Fullan, M. (2011). *The moral imperative realized*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Fuller, F.F. (1969). Concerns of teachers: A developmental study of teacher concerns across time. *Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association*. Boston, MA.
- García, E., & Weiss, E. (2015). Early education gaps by social class and race start U.S. children out on unequal footing: A summary of the major findings in “Inequalities at the Starting Gate”. *Washington, DC: Economic Policy Institute*.
- Goddard, R. D., Hoy, W. K., & Hoy, A. W. (2004). Collective efficacy beliefs: Theoretical developments, empirical evidence, and future directions. *Educational Researcher*, 33(3), 3-13.
- Goodson, I. (1994). Studying the teachers’ life and work. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 10(1), 29-37.
- Grotberg, E. H. (1997). The International Resilience Project. *Paper presented at the International Council of Psychologists Conference*. Graz, Austria.
- Gu, Q. (2014). The role of relational resilience in teachers’ career-long commitment and effectiveness. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, 20, 1-13.

doi:10.1080/13540602.2013.844408

- Gu, Q., & Day, C. (2007). Teachers resilience: A necessary condition for effectiveness. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 23, 1302-1316. doi.10.1016/j.tate/2006.06.006
- Guarino, C. M., Santibañez, L., & Daley, G. A. (2006). Teacher recruitment and retention: A review of the empirical literature. *Review of Educational Research* 76 (2), 173-208.
- Helms, J. E. (Ed.). (1990). *Black and White racial identity: Theory, research, and practice*. Westport, CT: Greenwood.
- Helms, J. E. (1993). I also said, "White racial identity influences White researchers." *The Counseling Psychologist*, 21(2), 240-243.
- Hembree, R. (1990). Nature, effects, and relief of mathematics anxiety. *Journal for Research in Mathematics Education*, 21(1), 33-46.
- Herbal-Eisenmann, B., Sinclair, N., Chval, K. B., Clements, D. H., Civil, M., Pape, S. J., ... Wilkerson, T. L. (2016). Positioning mathematics education researchers to influence storylines. *Journal for Research in Mathematics Education*, 47(2), 102-117.
- Herrschaft, B. A., Veysey, B. M., Tubman-Carbone, H. R., Christian, J. (2009). Transformation narrative: Implications for revised reentry strategies for female offenders. *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation*, 48(6), 463-482.
- doi:10.1080/10509670903081250
- Higgins, C. (2011). *The good life of teaching*. London: Wiley.
- Hong, J. Y. (2012). Why do some beginning teachers leave the school, and others stay? Understanding teacher resilience through psychological lenses. *Teachers and*

Teaching, 18(4), 417-440. doi:10.1080/13540602.2012.696044

Howard, S., & Johnson, B. (2004). Resilient teachers: Resisting stress and burnout.

Social Psychology of Education, 7(4), 399-420.

Hoy, W. K., & Miskel, C. G. (2013). *Educational administration: Theory, research, and practice, 9th edition*. New York, NY: McGraw Hill.

Huisman, S., Singer, N. R., & Catapano, S. (2010). Resiliency to success: Supporting novice urban teachers. *Teacher Development*, 14(4), 483-499.

doi:10.1080/13664530.2010.533490

Ingersoll, R. M. (1999). The problem of underqualified teachers in American secondary schools. *Educational Researcher*, 28(2), 26-37.

Ingersoll, R. M. (2001). Teacher turnover and teacher shortages: An organizational analysis. *American Educational Research Journal*, 38(3), 499-534.

doi:10.3102/0002812038003499

Ingersoll, R. M. (2004). Why do high-poverty schools have difficulty staffing their classrooms with qualified teachers? *Washington DC: Center for American Progress and Institute for America's Future*.

Ingersoll, R. M. (2005). The problem of underqualified teachers in American secondary schools: A sociological perspective. *Sociology of Education*, 78(2), 175-178.

doi:10.1177/003804070507800206

Intrator, S. (2003). *Tuned in and fired up: How teaching can inspire real learning in the classroom*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Jephcote, M. (2009). Teachers' learning: Committed and resilient teachers are more effective practitioners. *The International Journal of Learning*, 16(11), 63-72.

- Johnson, B., Down, B., Le Cornu, R., Peters, J., Sullivan, A., Pearce, J., & Hunter, J. (2014). Promoting early career teacher resilience: A framework for understanding and acting. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, 20(5), 530-546.
doi:10.1080/13540602.2014.937957
- Katz, I., & Shahar, B. (2015). What makes a motivating teacher? Teachers' motivation and beliefs as predictors of their autonomy-supportive style. *School Psychology International*, 36(6), 575-588.
- Katz, L. G. (1972). The developmental stages of preschool teachers. *Elementary School Journal*, 73(1), 50-54.
- Keogh, J., Garvis, S., Pendergast, D., & Diamond, P. (2012). Self-determination: Using agency, efficacy and resilience (AER) to counter novice teachers' experiences of intensification. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 37(8), 46-65.
doi:10.14221/ajte.2012v37n8.3
- Keough, J. (2007). Teacher resilience and retention in the profession. *Paper presented at the Australian Teacher Education Conference*. Wollongong, Australia.
- Kitade, K. (2015). Second language teacher development through CALL practice: The emergence of teachers' agency. *CALICO Journal*, 32(3), 396-425.
- Kitching, K., Morgan, M., & O'Leary, M. (2009). It's the little things: Exploring the importance of commonplace events for early-career teachers' motivation. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, 15(1), 43-58.
doi:10.1080/13540600802661311
- Kurtz, M. (2015). *Teacher retention: Why do they stay?* (Doctoral dissertation, Edgewood College). Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database

(UMI No. 10029809).

- Ladson-Billings, G. J. (1999). Preparing teachers for diverse student populations: A critical race theory perspective. *Review of Research in Education, 24*, 211-247.
- Ladson-Billings, G. J. (2001). *Crossing over to Canaan: The journey of new teachers in diverse classrooms*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Ladson-Billings, G. J. & Tate, W. F. (1994). Toward a theory of critical race theory in education. *Teachers College Record, 97*, 47-68.
- Laffoon, M. (2012). *Why do good teachers stay in high poverty schools?* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Kansas). Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database (UMI No. 3527879).
- Lee, J. (2010). Tripartite growth trajectories of reading and math achievement: Tracking national academic progress at primary, middle, and high school levels. *American Educational Research Journal, 47*(4), 800-832.
- Le Cornu, R. (2009). Building resilience in pre-service teachers. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 25*, 717-723. doi:10.1016/j.tate.2008.11.016
- Le Cornu, R. (2013). Building early career teacher resilience: The role of relationships. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education, 38*(4), 1-16.
doi:10.1422/ajte.2013v38n4.4
- Leroux, M., & Théorêt, M. (2014). Intriguing empirical relations between teachers' resilience and reflection on practice. *Reflective Practice: International and Multidisciplinary Perspectives, 15*(3), 289-303.
doi:10.1080/14623943.2014.900009
- Long, C., Graven, M., Sayed, Y., & Lampen, E. (2017). Enabling and constraining

conditions of professional teacher agency: The South African context.

Contemporary Education Dialogue, 14(1), 5-21.

Long, C., & Lampen, E. (2014). Teacher agency and professional practice: Developing and nurturing creativity in education. In M. Lebitso & A. Maclean (Eds.),

Proceedings of the 20th Annual National Congress of the Association of

Mathematics Education of South Africa, Vol. 1 (pp. 275-284). Kimberley, South Africa: SwiftPrint.

Long, C., & Lampen, E. (2015). Professional identity and teacher agency; necessary and

sufficient. In S. Maoto, B. Chingonga, & K. Masha (Eds.), *Proceedings of the 21st*

Annual National Congress of the Association of Mathematics Education of South

Africa, Vol. 1 (pp. 311-333). Polokwane, South Africa: University of South

Africa.

Mackenzie, S. (2012). 'I can't imagine doing anything else': Why do teachers of children with SEN remain in the profession? Resilience, rewards and realism over time.

Journal of Research in Special Education Need, 12(3), 151-161.

doi:10.1111/j.14713802.2011.01221.x

Malmberg, L. E., & Hagger, H. (2009). Changes in student teachers' agency beliefs

during a teacher education year, and relationships with observed classroom

quality, and day-to-day experiences. *The British Psychological Society*, 79, 677-

694.

Mansfield, C. F., Beltman, S., Broadley, T., & Weatherby-Fell, N. (2016). Building

resilience in teacher education: An evidenced informed framework. *Teaching and*

Teacher Education, 54, 77-87. doi.101016/j.tate.2015.11.016

- Mansfield, C. F., Beltman, S., Price, A., & McConney, A. (2012). Don't sweat the small stuff: Understanding teacher resilience at the chalkface. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 28*, 357-367.
- Marso, R., & Pigge, F. (1997). A longitudinal study of persisting and nonpersisting teachers' academic and personal characteristics. *The Journal of Experimental Education, 65*, 243–254. doi:10.1080/00220973.1997.9943457
- Martin, L. E., & Mulvihill, T. M. (2016). Voices in education: Teacher shortage: Myth or reality? *The Teacher Educator, 51*(3), 175-184.
doi:10.1080/0887830.2016.1177427.
- Martinez, K. (2004). Mentoring new teachers: Promise and problems in times of teacher shortage. *Australian Journal of Education, 48*(1), 5-108.
- Masten, A., Best, K., & Garmezy, N. (1990). Resilience and development: Contributions from the study of children who overcome adversity. *Development and Psychopathology, 2*, 425-444.
- McCormack, A., Gore, J., & Thomas, K. (2006). Early career teacher professional learning. *Asia-Pacific Journal, 34*(1), 95-113.
- McGlynn-Stewart, M. (2010). Listening to students, listening to myself: Addressing pre-service teachers' fears of mathematics and teaching mathematics. *Studying Teacher Education, 6*(2), 175-186.
- Meijer, P. C., de Graaf, G., & Meirink, J. (2011). Key experiences in student teachers' development. *Teachers and Teaching, 17*(1), 115-129.
doi.10.1080/13540602.2011.538502
- Meister, D. G., & Ahrens, P. (2011). Resisting plateauing: Four veteran teachers' stories.

- Teaching and Teacher Education*, 27(4), 770-778. doi:10.1016/j.tate.2011.01.002
- Morgan, M. (2011). Resilience and recurring adverse events: Testing an assets-based model of beginning teachers' experiences. *The Irish Journal of Psychology*, 32(3-4), 92-104. doi:10.1080/03033910.2011.613189
- Newcomer, S. N., & Collier, L. C. (2015). Agency in action: How teachers interpret and implement Arizona's 4-hour structured English immersion program. *International Multilingual Research Journal*, 9(3), 159-176.
- Nguyen, H. T. M., & Bui, T. (2016). Teachers' agency and the enactment of educational reform in Vietnam. *Current Issues in Language Planning*, 17(1), 88-105.
- Nieto, S. (2003). *What keeps teachers going*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Nieto, S. (2005). Schools for a new majority: The role of teacher education in hard times. *The New Educator*, 1(1), 27-43. doi:10.1080/15476880490447797
- Nieto, S. (2009). From surviving to thriving. *Educational Leadership*, 66(5), 8-13.
- Nieto, S. (2014). *Why we teach now*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Nieto, S. (2015). Special topic: Still teaching in spite of it all. *Educational Leadership*, 72(6), 54-59.
- Olsen, B., & Anderson, L. (2007). Courses of action: A qualitative investigation into urban teacher retention and career development. *Urban Education*, 42(1), 5-29.
- O'Sullivan, M. (2006). Professional lives of Irish physical education teachers: Stories of resilience, respect and resignation. *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy*, 11(3), 265-284. doi:10.1080/174080600986314
- Paley, V. G. (1979). *White teacher*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

- Palmer, P. J. (1998). *The courage to teach: Exploring the inner landscape of a teacher's life*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Pantic, N. (2015). A model for study of teacher agency for social justice. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, 21(6), 759-778.
- Patterson, K., Collins, L., & Abbott, G. (2004). A study of teacher resilience in urban schools. *Journal of Instructional Psychology*, 31(1), 3-11.
- Perrachione, B. A., Rosser, V. J., & Petersen, G. J. (2008). Why do they stay? Elementary teachers' perceptions of job satisfaction and retention. *Professional Educator*, 32(2), 1-17.
- Petersen, J. L. (2008). The intersection of oral history and the role of white researchers in cross-cultural contexts. *Educational Foundations*, 22(3-4), 33-52.
- Priestley, M., Biesta, G. J. J., & Robinson, S. (2013). Teachers as agents of change: Teacher agency and emerging models of curriculum. In M. Priestley & G. J. J. Biesta (Eds.), *Reinventing the curriculum: New trends in curriculum policy and practice* (pp. 39-52). London: Bloomsbury.
- Priestley, M., Biesta, G. J. J., & Robinson, S. (2015). *Teacher agency: An ecological approach*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Priestley, M., Edwards, R., Priestley, A., & Miller, K. (2012). Teacher agency in curriculum making: Agents of change and spaces for maneuver. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 42(2), 191-214. doi:10.1111/j.1467-873X.2012.00588.x
- Robertson-Kraft, C., & Duckworth, A. (2014). True grit: Trait-level perseverance and passion for long-term goals predicts effectiveness and retention among novice teachers. *Teachers College Record*, 116(3), 1-26.

- Rose, M. (1995). *Possible lives: The promise of public education in America*. New York: Penguin Books.
- Sadker, D., Sadker, M., & Zittleman, K. (2009). *Still failing at fairness*. New York, NY: Scribner.
- Sammons, P., Day, C., Kington, A., Gu, Q., Stobart, G., & Smees, R. (2007). Exploring variations in teachers' work, lives and their effects on pupils: Key findings and implications from a longitudinal mixed method study. *British Educational Research Journal*, 33(5), 681-701. doi:10.1080/01411920701582264
- Sawchuk, S. (2015). New studies find that, for teachers, experience really does matter: Studies cite gains by veterans. *Education Week*, 34(25), 1.
- Sayed, Y., Badroodien, A., McDonald, Z., Salmon, T., Balie, L., De Kock, T., ... Foulds, K. (2015). *Teachers and youth as agents of social cohesion in South Africa*. Cape Town, South Africa: Centre for International Teacher Education.
- Schweisfurth, M. (2006). Education for global citizenship: Teacher agency and curricular structure in Ontario schools. *Educational Review*, 58(1), 41-50.
- Sharplin, E., O'Neill, M., & Chapman, A. (2011). Coping strategies for adaptation to new teacher appointments: Intervention for retention. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 27(1), 136-146.
- Sinclair, N. (2004). The roles of the aesthetic in mathematical inquiry. *Mathematical Thinking and Learning*, 6(3), 261-284. doi:10.127/s15327833mtl0603_1
- Simos, E. (2013). Why do new teachers leave? How could they stay? *The English Journal*, 102(3), 100-105.

- Sisson, J. H. (2016). The significance of critical incidents and voice to identity and agency. *Teachers and Teaching*, 22(6), 670-682.
doi:10.1080/13540602.2016.1158956
- Siwatu, K. O. & Chesnut, S. R. (2015). The career development of preservice and inservice teachers: Why teachers' self-efficacy beliefs matter. In H. Fives & M.G.Gill (Eds.), *International handbook of research on teachers' beliefs*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Sloan, K. (2006). Teacher identity and agency in school worlds: Beyond the all-good/all-bad discourse on accountability-explicit curriculum policies. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 36(2), 119-152.
- Sloan, T. (2010). A quantitative and qualitative study of math anxiety among preservice teachers. *The Educational Forum*, 74(3), 242-256.
- Spillane, J. P., Halverson, R., & Diamond, J. B. (2004). Towards a theory of leadership practice: A distributed perspective. *Curriculum Studies*, 36(1), 3-34.
- Steward, J. (2014). Sustaining emotional resilience for school leadership. *School Leadership & Management*, 34(1), 52-68. doi:10.1080/13632434.2013.849686
- Stoehr, K. (2017). Mathematics anxiety: One size does not fit all. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 68(1), 69-84.
- Stoehr, K. (2014). From preface to practice: A narrative study of women learning to teach mathematics (Doctoral dissertation, University of Arizona). Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database (UMI No. 3614026).
- Stoehr, K. J., Carter, K., & Sugimoto, A. (2017). Stories and statistics: A mixed picture of gender equity in mathematics. In V. Ross, E. Chan, D. K. Keyes (Eds.),

- Crossroads of the classroom (Advances in research on teaching, volume 28).*
Emerald Publishing Limited, 39-58.
- Sue, D. W. (1993). Confronting ourselves: The White and racial/ethnic-minority researcher. *The Counseling Psychologist, 21*(2), 244-249.
- Sullivan, A., & Johnson, B. (2012). Questionable practices? Relying on individual teacher resilience in remote schools. *Australian and International Journal of Rural Education, 22*(3), 101-116.
- Sumsion, J. (2004). Early childhood teachers' constructions of their resilience and thriving: A continuing investigation. *International Journal of Early Years Education, 12*(3), 275-290. doi:10.1080/0966976042000268735
- Tait, M. (2008). Resilience as a contributor to novice teacher success, commitment, and retention. *Education Quarterly, 35*, 57-75.
- Tan, C. (2016). Teacher agency and school-based curriculum in China's non-elite schools. *Journal of Educational Change, 17*(3), 287-302.
- Ticknor, A. S. (2015). Critical considerations in becoming literacy educators: Pre-service teachers rehearsing agency and negotiating risk. *Teaching Education, 26*(4), 383-399.
- Traub, J. (2000, 1/16/2000). What no school can do. *The New York Times*.
- Tschannen-Moran, M., & Barr, M. (2004). Fostering student learning: The relationship of collective teacher efficacy and student achievement. *Leadership and Policy in Schools, 3*(3), 189-209. doi:10.1080/15700760490503706
- Tschannen-Moran, M., & Hoy, A. W. (2001). Teacher efficacy: Capturing an elusive construct. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 17*(7), 783-805.

- Tschannen-Moran, M., Hoy, A. W., & Hoy, W. K. (1998). Teacher efficacy: Its meaning and measure. *Review of Educational Research, 68*, 202-248.
- Tschannen-Moran, M., Salloum, S. J., & Goddard, R. D. (2015). Context matters: The influence of collective beliefs and shared norms. In H. Fives & M.G. Gill (Eds.), *International handbook of research on teachers' beliefs*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Vaughn, M. (2013). Examining teacher agency: Why did Les leave the building? *New Educator, 9*(2), 119-134. doi:10.1080/1547688X.2013.778763
- Verberg, C. P. M., Tigelaar, D. E. H., van Veen, K., & Verloop, N. (2016). Teacher agency within the context of formative teacher assessment: An in-depth analysis. *Educational Studies, 42*(5), 534-552.
- Wells, A. S. (2009). Our children's burden: A history of federal education policies that ask (now require) our public schools to solve societal inequality. In Rebell, M. A. & Wolff, J. A. (Eds.), *NCLB at the crossroads: Reexamining the federal effort to close the achievement gap*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Wheatley, K. F. (2005). The case for reconceptualizing teacher efficacy research. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 21*, 747-766.
- Wosnitza, M., Morgan, M., Nevrilova, K., Cefai, C., Henkel, M., Peixoto, F., Beltman, S., & Mansfield, C. (2013). *Keeping Cool Europe – Enhancing Teacher Resilience in Europe*. Application Lifelong Learning Programme. Submission number 539590-LLP-1-2013-1-DE-COMENIUS-CMP.
- Wyatt, M. (2016). Are they becoming more reflective and/or efficacious? A conceptual model mapping how teachers' self-efficacy beliefs might grow. *Educational*

Review, 68(1), 114-137. doi:10.1080/00131911.2015.1058754