A STUDY OF TEACHER AGENCY:
FORMS, PATHWAYS, AND IMPACTS FOR NOVICE, MID-CAREER, AND VETERAN TEACHERS

by

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DEDICATION

In remembrance of Marilyn Buckley, Ken Goodman, Alice Paul, and Richard Ruiz—inspirational educators who unfailingly used their agency to lift up the voices of their students.

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ABSTRACT

This investigation of teacher agency addresses the dual concerns of reduced teacher agency in an era of accountability tied to high stakes testing and a reduced conception of the professional role of teachers to that of an instrumentalist, restricting teachers' decisions regarding curriculum and instruction . This study has three goals**:** the primary goal is to understand the dynamics associated with the development of professional teacher agency; a secondary goal is to understand benefits and the detriments resulting from the exercise or denial of teacher agency; and a third goal is to describe teacher agency as it is practiced across a career span. This study answers questions about the forms of, conducive conditions for, challenges to, and impacts from the assertion or denial of teacher agency.

The participants are twenty teachers, ten veteran retired teachers and ten practicing teachers. The participants include a diverse ethnic and gender demographic of both elementary and secondary teachers. The veteran teacher cohort participants' use of agency was investigated through phenomenological methods (Husserl, 1931). The practicing teacher cohort was studied through grounded theory methods from a constructivist perspectivist (Charmaz, 2014), and included a participant action research (PAR) component. Data sources for both cohorts included interviews and a survey. The practicing teachers also participated in observations and related discussions. A critical theory lens was used as an aspect of the data analysis.

The findings and implications reveal teacher agency to be a developmental process. Teacher agency is linked to teacher identity formation and sense of professional ownership. Forms of agency are reflective of teachers' teleological sense of purpose, vis-à-vis individual student autonomy and democratic and social justice visions. Implications for pre-service teacher education, teacher learning, and future research possibilities are discussed.

Chapter One

An Investigation of Teacher Agency: Introduction and Overview

In this chapter I present an introduction and broad overview of this study of professional teacher agency. The chapter includes an explanation for my interest in this topic, the research questions, a working definition of teacher agency/autonomy, a history of teacher professionalism, the philosophical and theoretical traditions informing this study, my positionality, and an overview of the research methods I used to conduct the study. In concluding this chapter, I discuss its potential significance.

Professional Teacher Agency: Relevance and Salience

In the late spring of my fourth year as a teacher, a memorably opinionated and outspoken student, Obe, blurted out his latest complaint, interrupting me in mid-sentence, by pointing out "there you go, you're doing it again Mr. Spink!" To my response, "Doing what again, Obe?" He brazenly replied, "Doing what you always do . . . as soon as you get us all excited about our projects you go and ruin everything by telling us how we have to do it." Sometimes Obe interrupted to voice opinions not shared by his classmates, but often Obe spoke up on behalf of his classmates. This was one such occasion.

Taking a quick visual scan of the facial expressions and body language evinced by the other students, I recognized that I was outnumbered, out voted, and out of line. At that point I tabled my planned presentation of 'my requirements' for 'their projects' and my explanation of 'my rubric,' which I would use to evaluate the projects. Although I did not yet have the insight nor even the vocabulary to name, much less understand, the complexities involved with the assertion of teacher agency, I intuitively grasped the fact that I had overstepped my bounds. I now realize that I had used my agency to suppress the agency of my students.

Obe 'flipped' our teacher/student roles, and in so doing taught me something valuable about the use and potential misuse of teacher agency. I am still learning. This investigation into the forms, conducive conditions, challenges, and impacts associated with teacher agency is a continuation of the learning process which Obe's accusation catalyzed early in my teaching career.

I have taught elementary and middle school, accepted, and fulfilled both local and state leadership positions, and taught university teacher education classes over my thirty-five-year career as an educator. One reason for returning to graduate school for a doctoral degree was to better understand professional teacher agency, which I had observed and believe to be an important attribute of successful teachers.

Teacher agency, the capacity for teachers to use their professional judgement to enact their educational vision, has been increasingly contested over the course of my career. This perception was my greatest educational concern as I approached my graduate studies and planned this research project.

Human agency has long been theorized from the perspectives of various disciplines. Philosophical and political theory have focused on the value of agency and autonomy in terms of personal morality and the role they have played within a democracy. Psychology and educational theory have focused on the conditions associated with developing agency and the educational benefits of autonomous motivation and learning.

For this study, I draw on Emirbayer and Mische's (1998) description of agency as being the “capacity for actors to shape their response to problematic situations” (p. 971). From this understanding, I posit teacher agency as the capacity to enact an educational vision, and I theorize teacher autonomy as being the situationally embedded action(s) teachers take to assert

agency, including responding to challenges to their agency. The theoretical framework for this study also incorporates the shared socio-cognitive (Bandura, 2001) and socio-cultural (Ibrahim, 2006) conception of agency and autonomy as manifested both individually and collectively.

The keystone premise of this study is that teacher agency is a desirable attribute, within professionally circumscribed limits, and when linked to demonstrably sound and clearly articulated educational principles. In stating this general belief, I acknowledge that teacher agency has the potential to result in both beneficial and detrimental educational outcomes. As Hargreaves (2016) points out, "unlimited professional autonomy for teachers means that teachers are equally free to exercise poor judgement as well as good judgement" (p. 121).

My experience and interpretation of the relevant research leads me to believe that professional agency is potentially valuable to both teachers and learners. I contend this is so because by employing agency teachers are able to adjust and adapt their teaching practices to meet their students' specific, and sometimes unique, educational needs. Thus, this study views teacher agency, manifested as professional autonomy, as being a critically important capacity for teachers to successfully meet students' varied educational needs.

Moreover, this study is designed and conducted from a teleological view of the role and responsibilities that schools and teachers fulfill within a democratic and culturally pluralistic society. Political philosophers (Gutman, 1993; Habermas, 1989; & Rawls, 1991) and educational philosophers (Apple, 2001; Biesta, 2015; Dewey; 1916; & Freire, 1970) emphasize the important role that educators play to develop students' critical thinking and multi-cultural understandings. Thus, this study views teacher agency, manifested individually and collectively, as being essential to the realization of an education befitting a pluralistic, democratic society.

Hargreaves (2015), and others such as Buchannan (2015) and Meyer and Rowan (2006), claim that contemporary educational policy in the United States, and in many other countries, has diminished professional teacher agency. As described in greater detail below, the history of educational policy enactments reveals an on-going tension between those who believe teachers should be viewed as professionals with agency to make curricular and instructional decisions and those who believe teachers are charged merely to implement prescribed curricula and methods (Ingersoll, 2009). This discourse, which emerged in the 1990's and is increasingly more influential in shaping educational practices, has shrunk the professional role of teachers to fit an instrumentalist (Ball, 2013) conception of teaching. Concerns related to this trend motivated this investigation.

Research Questions

This study investigates teachers' professional agency, an important aspect of teachers' professional identity (Priestly, et al., 2015). Other closely related terms include concepts such as teacher autonomy (Benson, 2016), teacher as change agent (Fullan, 2003), and teachers' right to academic freedom (Sachs, 2003). The primary goal is to understand the dynamics associated with the development of professional teacher agency. A secondary goal is to better understand both the potential benefits and the detriments resulting from the exercise or denial of teacher agency for both teachers and students. A third goal is to describe teacher agency as it is practiced across a career span.

The research questions and sub-questions are as follows:

1. What forms of teacher agency are discernable at various junctures (early career, mid-career, and veteran phase) of a teaching career?

   a. Do the forms vary when comparing elementary and middle-school teacher cohorts?

2. What conditions appear to be conducive to the development of teacher agency?
   a. What pre-dispositions, personal experiences, or professional context influences appear to either support or inhibit the initial obtainment and then expansion of teacher agency over a full career?
3. What challenges to or constraints upon the exercise of agency do teachers experience during different phases of their careers?
   a. In what ways do teachers overcome, resist, adapt to, or acquiesce to challenges to their professional agency?
4. What are the discernable impacts of teacher agency on a teacher's professional learning and the educational experiences of their students?
   a. In what ways does the exercise or denial of teacher agency either positively or negatively impact a teacher's career trajectory?
   b. What is the relationship between teacher agency/autonomy and student agency/autonomy?

The remainder of this chapter traces the history of teacher professionalism, including my own experiences, elaborates on my definition of teacher agency, lays out a philosophical and political theoretical argument for both human autonomy and professional agency, and provides a summary of the methods. I conclude by reflecting on the potential impact of this study for teaching, teacher education, educational leadership, and research.

Naming and Historicizing the Problem: An Era of False Accountability

A movement toward de-professionalization marks the recent history of the teaching profession. This era begins with critiques of the effectiveness of public-school education that Berliner (2014) characterizes as a “manufactured crisis". As teaching and the effectiveness of individual teachers becomes increasingly linked to the standardized test performance of students (Meyer & Rowan, 2006), teachers have begun to lose control of how their role is defined.

One depiction of teaching just prior to this timeframe, provided by Darling-Hammond, et al. (2005), describes teachers as typically involved in shaping their own professional growth. This description fits my own experience as an early career teacher in the 1980s; and it also matches the picture of teacher professional development described by many educational researchers in the United States during the 1980s and early 1990s. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) describe this era as a time, “when calls for professionalization of teaching, enlarged roles for teachers, and enhanced teacher leadership, were surfacing across the nation” (p. 6).

In contrast, beginning in the mid-1990s, the teaching profession experienced a shift toward standardization and the rhetoric of accountability. This shift emphasized mandating the use of ‘scientifically’ designed curricula and research-based practices. The mandates were prescriptive and intended to be 'teacher proof.' These paradigmatic changes regarding the professional nature of teaching signaled a de-emphasis on the teacher as expert and decision maker (Fullan & Hargreaves, 2016). The signs were everywhere: 'Teacher agency not wanted.'

As mid-career teachers caught in the middle of these countervailing tides, many of my colleagues and I wishfully and naïvely assumed that this unfortunate turn of events would be short lived. A common strategy was to stay below the radar, quietly resisting and continuing to go about our business of teaching students using the judgment and abilities we had acquired

during the previous, more teacher agency friendly era. We gradually came to understand, however, that we faced tough choices. This was especially true when sweeping, professionally constraining policies, such as the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*, were passed. This act mandated standardized testing, test-driven curricula, and standards-based instruction. We who had grown accustomed to designing and/or adapting curricula and instruction in ways we perceived would best meet the needs and interests of our students were pressured to conform.

Some engaged in various forms of what Steinberg (2007) labeled "a pedagogy of insubordination." Others, many of whom were known to be equally effective and committed to teaching in the best way they knew, acquiesced. In my final years as an elementary classroom teacher, I encountered those who had acquiesced in the hallways of schools or at professional seminars. Predictably, conversations about the state of education would ensue. I listened and shared in expressing the litany of complaints regarding the insipid, unimaginative, and ineffectual programs and approaches we were more and more required to use. I was not able to provide a useful response. For some reason, I felt it was disrespectful to ask colleagues any of the following questions: "Why?" as in "Why give in?" "Why not fight back?" "Why did this change come about and is there anything that we could have done, or could be doing to reverse it?" Instead, I eventually gave up the battle and took my own easy way out by seeking a new teaching position. I was successful and was appointed to a middle-school science position, which was not constrained by these newly imposed policies.

Now, having retired from my role as a public classroom teacher, I remain troubled by these questions. Educational researchers, such as Ravitch (2010), Sachs and Mockler (2012), and many others, agree that the current threat to the professional status of teachers is real. Ben-Peretz (2012) frames this issue, related to the tension between agency and accountability, by

asserting the importance of "achieving a balance between professional autonomy and societal obligations in the form of accountability" (p. 64). In conceiving this study, my concerns about the apparent impotence of teachers in the face of de-professionalization is central. The next section provides an analysis of the role teacher agency plays in education.

Defining and Contextualizing Teacher Agency: What is it? Why is it important?

Teacher agency, in its most elemental form, refers to the capacity for a teacher, in consultation with students, their families, and school colleagues, to act willfully and intentionally to achieve pre-determined educational purposes. Ahearn's (2001) definition of general human agency as being "the socio-culturally mediated capacity to act" (p. 113) captures the contingent and embedded nature of teacher agency. That is, successful assertion of agency depends upon the relationship between the teacher and others who may exercise influence over the educational process. Teacher agency is asserted more readily and more fully when students and others support, rather than resist, the teacher's socio-culturally mediated teaching efforts.

Teacher agency is frequently conflated with the closely related term, teacher autonomy (e.g., Priestly et al., 2015). In this study, however, I am distinguishing agency as being the *capacity* for deliberate self-initiated action, or the intentional withholding of action, whereas autonomy is the *action* (or refusal to act) itself. This distinction is consequential in that it accounts for the ecological or contextual conditions that may either enable or curtail the assertion of agency within a given context or set of circumstances. This distinction explains how it is that the same teacher, or group of teachers, is either more or less able to assert their agency — as autonomy — depending on situational circumstances that may be wholly, or partially, outside of the teacher's(s') control.

Thus, teachers' use of professional judgement is a function of both the capacity (agency) for envisioning and carrying out individual and/or collective action (autonomy) and the specific circumstances (socio-cultural structure) of the moment. Autonomy, understood within the context of agency achievement, is the degree of freedom—as room to maneuver—required to enact an educational vision. Autonomy, as used in this investigation, does not apply to teacher decisions and actions representing license to act without regard for the educational needs of students—freedom for freedom's sake.

Moreover, teacher autonomy, as the assertion of agency, emerges through the interactions between teachers, students, and others, within specific contexts. This situated view of agency is consistent with the conception of teacher agency proposed by Biesta and Tedder (2007), construing agency, asserted as professional autonomy, as an emergent and ecological phenomenon.

As such, the ecological conception of agency as capacity consists of two interrelated ideas: the first is intentionality and the second is effectiveness. Agency as a capacity for successfully enacting teacher vision depends, in part, upon teacher theoretical knowledge and practical know-how. Given this basic conception of teacher professional agency, it is logical that a teacher's capacity for agency is likely to grow as a teacher gains knowledge and experience.

Darling-Hammond, et al. (2005) confirm that teacher autonomy develops over time. In *How Teachers Learn and Develop*, Darling-Hammond and colleagues synthesize a large body of research showing how beginning and early career teachers (the first five years, on average) move from being a novice with emerging capabilities to becoming consistently proficient. They explain that

> Over time, they progress from learning the basic elements of the task to be performed and accumulating knowledge about learning, teaching, and students to making conscious decisions about what they are going to do, reflecting on what is working based on their experiences, and — ultimately, at the expert level, sensing the appropriate responses to be made in any given situation. (p. 380)

This description of learning to teach corresponds to my own professional experiences and observations. However, the process may not be as linear as implied by the above quote. That is, although the beginning and ending points are likely true, any suggestion that the path is a smooth, steadily ascending climb, without significant bumps and sudden dips and moments of deep doubt, does a disservice to the inherent complexity of teaching (e.g., Shulman, 1986). There are daunting challenges involved in achieving consistent teaching competence.

This understanding is echoed by Nolan and Molla (2017), who concluded that “teachers' transition from novice to expert is not a linear process” (p. 17). My experiences and relevant teacher professional learning literature (Lave & Wenger, 1991), however, suggests that teachers who take charge of their professional learning translate their agency capacity into increased professional autonomy as their teacher knowledge and practitioner skills grow.

The Philosophical Roots of Agency and Autonomy

This section provides an overview of philosophical tenets, which informed my study. My synthesis of these related ideas, vis-à-vis agency, justifies the conduct of my study. In Chapter Two I describe the relevant social science theory and empirical literature framing this study.

This investigation of teacher agency is informed by the philosophical theory supporting human rational and moral autonomy associated with the Enlightenment period in the Western philosophical tradition. Additionally, this study draws on the socio-political 'critical theory'

tradition associated with the Frankfurt School. This tradition advocates for democratic and emancipatory political structures. It does so by integrating relevant insights and perspectives from various social sciences, including philosophy, psychology, sociology, and anthropology. What follows is an overview of this philosophical literature related to teacher agency.

Relevant philosophical literature includes those tenets supporting the responsibilities and rights of individuals and groups to achieve self-determination within a democratic and ethnographically pluralistic social and political order. The educational philosopher Bai (2006) claims that the issue of human agency is "the original philosophy project" (p. 10). In asserting this fundamental connection between human agency and formal philosophy, Bai draws on the historical developments that occurred within both Eastern and Western classical philosophical traditions that Jaspers (1953) labeled the Axial Age Theory.

Jaspers (1953) and others (Habermas, 1989; Panikkar, 1995) trace the origins of individual moral agency to the earliest written records showing the beginnings of widespread questioning of inherited orthodoxies. This recorded philosophical movement occurred in multiple places, extending approximately between the sixth and second centuries B.C. Major philosophical figures prominent in this shift away from a heteronomous world view towards that of an autonomous understanding of human nature, one that ascribed the trait of free will to the individual, include Confucius, Socrates, Siddhartha, and Zarathustra.

Habermas (1989) describes this philosophical tradition as being a change "from a mythological-cosmogenic world view to a rationalized worldview in the form of universal ethics" (pp. 151-152). Habermas points to evidence that the earliest signs of this philosophical transformation occurred in China, India, Palestine, and Greece within approximately the same historical time era. A key defining quality of this newly evolved tradition, for Habermas, is the

establishment of "systems of norms requiring justification of beliefs and actions from universalistic points of view" (p. 159). Griffin (2008) agrees with Habermas's claim, stating that the ability to construct normative ethical understandings is a major pre-requisite for achieving agency and that "our capacity for agency is at the core of our personhood" (p. 184).

Kant (1785) contrasts heteronomy with its opposite, autonomy, by classifying human actions resulting from a total acceptance of an externally imposed moral code as being nonmoral. Therefore autonomy—the recognition that one has the opportunity and responsibility to ethically evaluate and choose one's actions—is a pre-requisite for viewing actions as being either moral or immoral. In stating that "a free will and an act guided by a sense of duty to a moral principle are one and the same" (Kant, 1785, p.447), Kant analytically connects human autonomy and morality.

Building on this theory, the contemporary political philosopher Rawls (2005) offers a model of human autonomy that requires an intersection of our moral and rational potentials leading to the following: "the capacity for a sense of justice and the capacity for a conception of the good" (p. 81). In a similar vein, Kerr (1999) includes the aspect of 'universal norms' by arguing that autonomy demands "acting with one another in ways that are sustainable, and that are consistent with moral principles that are universally agreed upon" (p. 428).

Each of these moral and political philosophers articulates a vision of agency, manifested as free will or autonomy, and guided by rationally derived moral principles, which are, in turn, derived from Kant's (1785) "supreme principle of morality, the categorical imperative" (p. 303). Kant stipulates that this imperative requires that the individual rationally determines principles that they can, in good conscience, follow and that they would want others to follow in choosing actions that would impact said individual. Through one's chosen course of action, as an

expression of their moral free will, the individual acts from a sense of duty to these principles, rather than merely from adherence to rules or in service of narrow self-interest.

The common thread running through these conceptions is the belief that humans are both capable of rational reasoning to determine universally accepted principles and that they also can be held responsible for achieving congruity between actions and principles. Taylor (1985), in addressing the question of "what is human agency?", ties together three dimensions as requirements imposed by a moral understanding of human agency, explaining that "We think of the agent as not only responsible for what he does, but for the degree to which he acts in line with his evaluations, and also as responsible in some sense for these evaluations" (p.118). Taylor emphasizes human capacity for independent critical judgement. He maintains that actions are evaluated according to an alignment between one's moral understandings and one's actions.

Rational moral agency as the basis for a relational dimension to teacher agency. Edwards (2015) applies Taylor's dimensions to her conception of professional teacher agency as being inherently relational. She asserts that teacher agency is both an individual and a collective phenomenon. Teacher agency relies on the capacity of individual teachers to first make strong evaluations, to align their practices with the commitments that follow from their stated values, and to "be able to align motives and commitments with other . . . to work together to quite explicitly enact their values and commitments" (p. 784). The relational dimension of teacher agency, in Edwards' formulation, refers to both the mutually respectful (ideally) working relationship between teachers and students, and to the collaborative interactions that a teacher has with colleagues, parents, and community members.

Teacher agency for Edwards (2015), like human agency for Taylor (1985), entails a double sense of responsibility. The teacher is first responsible for recognizing the agency of

students in seeking to achieve a non-coercive teacher-student relationship. Second, teachers are wise to work together, according to Edwards, because "teachers are stronger when they work collaboratively, both internally and externally" (p.78) to enact their professional agency more fully, a view privileging collective over individual expressions of teacher agency.

Teacher Agency Purposed for Democracy and Social Justice: A Teleological View

The assertion of a teacher's right to freedom of thought and action and the concomitant responsibility to support basic student autonomy — freedom to think and act from choice — is a professional philosophical stance implying teacher agency. This is a conceptual framework of agency recognizing that teachers serve the interests of their students and of society guided by principles grounded in social justice and democratic political understandings.

Starting with the Kantian notion of the categorical imperative, which posits that human autonomy, or freedom, is manifested in rationally selected courses of action consistent with what one would *will* to become universal laws, there is a large body of ethical, moral, and theological philosophy that supports what Raz (1986) termed, *The Morality of Freedom*. Teaching, from this philosophical perspective, is at its core a moral enterprise governed by considerations of student and societal good. Moreover, educational political theorists (e.g., Apple & Bean, 2007) connect the capacity for individuals to engage in critically independent thinking and action to the viability of democratic political and social institutions.

Raz (1986) presents three necessary components for human autonomy or freedom to exist. First, the individual must have a reasonable degree of control over the important decisions that affect his or her future. He uses the metaphor of "authoring one's own life" (p.369) to describe this aspect of personal freedom. Second, an individual must perceive a range of options

to have genuine independence. Third, an individual must be free from unreasonable threats and coercion, which, when present, dictate a pre-determined course of action or of thought (p. 375).

Raz's (1986) argument, vis-à-vis a teacher's right to professional autonomy, is relevant to this study because of his emphasis on independence within limits circumscribed by the requirements of reasonableness and established ethical principles. My understanding of teacher agency as an educationally positive attribute does not argue for agency to be asserted as teacher autonomy in an unchecked or absolute sense. Instead, I take it to be self-evident that human agency, in any form, has as much potential for harm as it has for good. Both oppression and liberation run on agency. Teacher agency, in the form of professional autonomy, is legitimate to the extent that it conforms to ethical standards of professional practice and to the degree that it serves the educational needs of students and the wider society.

Teacher agency in service of democratic ideals. The professional agency I am attempting to better understand is yoked to principles of personal and social morality, and to agreements related to individual and group rights tied to democratically predicated conceptions of political equity and fairness. Teacher agency must be considered in relationship to larger societal goals and to the role that educators and education should play in achieving these purposes. I contend that Raz's (1986) stipulation, that human freedom is both a moral right and a moral responsibility, is a useful framework for understanding and critiquing the assertion of teacher agency in the form of professional teacher autonomy.

In a similar vein, Dewey's (1936) critique of freedom for freedom's sake as being both "more dangerous than a system of external control," and characteristic of those that, "have at most only the illusion of freedom" (pp. 64-65) provides a democratically rooted political foundation for supporting and critiquing agency. Dewey points out that freedom is a personal

and collective benefit only to the extent that it is linked to larger worthwhile purposes that serve the educational needs of the individual and that are also, “in accord with a democratic ideal,” (p. 33) and exercised in such a manner as to serve the needs of society. Teacher agency is legitimate to the extent that it meets Dewey’s criteria.

One of the central and frequently catalyzing issues for classroom teachers, struggling to exercise teacher agency, is the inherent contradiction of autocratically imposed policies and practices related to the 'what' and 'how' of teaching. This top-down control over teachers’ professional choices is viewed by agential teachers as being antithetical to an educational system that purports to prepare students to thoughtfully participate in democratic processes. As Lindley (1986) contends:

> an educational system which was geared to promote widespread autonomy amongst its pupils would provide an environment which stimulates critical self-awareness, a desire to question received wisdom, and self-directed learning: and most schools are unable to provide this. (p. 136)

Dewey further describes the role schools and teachers ideally play in preparing and immersing students in democratic processes. This approach (see also Rawls, 2005; Quong, 2011) provides educators with protocols and procedures for creating classroom-based opportunities for students to participate in democratic learning processes. I argue that an educational system aligned with the goals and needs of a democratic and pluralistic society engages in shared decision-making, including the balanced agentic participation of community members, administrators, students, and teachers.

A second, and closely aligned perspective, is that of education as an emancipatory process (Freire, 1970), requiring students to think critically and to actively participate politically.

Horkheimer (1972), a second-generation political philosopher closely associated with the contemporary Frankfurt School, claimed that "a theory is critical to the extent that it seeks emancipation" (p. 246). This critical theory perspective provides teachers with social equity and open participation classroom frameworks to guide students in creating equitable class community norms. In doing so, democratically oriented teachers seek, at the classroom governance level, to enact the Rawlsian (2005) political goal for citizens to articulate and freely endorse procedures and policies within a pluralistic democracy.

These frameworks are built on principles of public reason, overlapping consensus, and political toleration of differences (Rawls, 2005). Agentic teachers who understand and act on these fundamental principles of cooperation and respectful dialogue about differences, recognize and exploit the rich educational possibilities that the "classroom as a microcosm of society" (Dewey, 1936) has to offer. None of these lessons can be scripted or generically formulated. Exploiting these opportunities relies on the sort of teacher flexibility and creativity that can only arise within a classroom where both teacher and students are able to assert agency. Teachers choosing to claim agency as a professional right, however, must also accept the considerable burden of educational and social responsibility inhering in such claims.

Agentic teaching, connecting democratic tenets and classroom practices, ensues from a critical theory perspective applied to education. Once again drawing on the political philosophy of Horkheimer (1993), agency and critical theory are linked because both "have as their object, human beings as producers of their own historical forms" (p. 21). The next section examines the educational implications of social justice tenets applied to minoritized group rights, viewed from a critical theory perspective.

Teacher agency in service of social justice ideals. This section addresses the issue of social fairness and justice from the perspective of the institutional role that schools have the potential to play in achieving progress in this area. Just as Dewey and other educational theorists (e.g., Beane, 2005; Biesta, 2007) analyze and evaluate education from the teleological lens of schooling for democracy, other critical theorists (e.g., Ayers, et al., 1998; hooks, 1994; & Shor, 1992) view the role of teachers and schools in terms of social justice concerns. Both perspectives maintain that educational decision-making rights and processes are not epiphenomenal elements, disconnected from the larger socio-political context. Educational policies and practices, as Apple (2008) points out, are inherently political and have tangible social justice and equity consequences.

For example, one of the contradictions stemming from how conceptions of democracy apply to majority groups, contrasted with their impact on minoritized groups, arises from the potential for majority groups to dominate traditional democratic governance processes, resulting in a circumstance often referred to as 'the tyranny of the majority.' The political philosopher Valadez (2018) points out that although, “most contemporary democracies are culturally pluralistic, most of democratic political philosophy, in the Western tradition, assumed a culturally homogeneous body politic” (p. 14). The failure of democratic governance models to protect the collective rights of minoritized political groups creates substantial inequities and injustices. This is true today in the United States, particularly for African Americans, Native Americans, and Latinx students. Schools, through shared governance decision making processes, have the potential to either reinforce or critically evaluate and contest systemic inequities that disadvantage minoritized communities and their students.

To this point, the social justice educational theorist Bell (2005) explains that "the process of social justice education should be democratic and participatory, inclusive, and affirming of human agency and the human capacity to create positive social change" (p. 3). Teachers who subscribe to a critical theory perspective use their agency to raise awareness of the social inequities and injustices experienced by members of cultural minoritized groups. This approach requires an extension of the democratic ideal of individual self-determination to include rights to group self-determination, particularly for ethnic and racially marginalized groups whose cultural practices, languages, and territorial rights have been and continue to be threatened. The right to group self-determination and the legal protection of traditional cultural practices have been upheld by recent court ruling in the United States, and internationally through passage of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Minorities (1992) and Indigenous Peoples (2007). Such legal precedence and international declarations provide useful teaching opportunities for emancipatory multi-cultural teaching and learning.

Thus, it becomes clear that there exist many parallels to the democratic and the social justice orientations guiding the purpose and practice of emancipatory education. For example, a parallel tradition to Dewey's (1916) "classroom as a microcosm of democratic practice approach," is that of "schools as sites for the advancement of social justice" (Ayers, et al., 1998). This vision for education is associated with and arises from the pedagogical perspective of critical theory applied to democratic teaching and teaching within a multicultural society.

Moving from critical theory to classroom praxis. Through the insights and pedagogic principles provided by critical theorists in areas of gender, race, ethnic, linguistic, and sexual orientation/ transgender domains, (i.e., Apple, 2001; Freire, 1970; Grande, 2015; Meiners & Quinn, 2012), agential teachers, whose practices are rooted in social justice principles, actively

seek ways to raise critical awareness of these issues for themselves and for their students. Tom (1984) refers to such teaching as being a "moral craft." Similarly, Johnston and Buzzelli (2002) emphatically assert that "teaching is fundamentally a moral activity, that classrooms are sites of moral interaction, and that teachers are moral agents" (p. 118). Teachers endorsing this view recognize that curriculum and instruction addresses many different educational needs of their students and of society, but regardless of the particular topic of study, the teaching and learning dynamic is, ultimately and always, a morally implicated enterprise.

Moreover, highly agential teachers, drawing on the insights and recommendations supplied by critical theorists, find ways to translate critical theory to their teaching through situated practice, referred to by Freire (1970) as *praxis*. Praxis is "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it" (p. 36). Freire advances this notion in the context of his ontological argument that, for all human societies, equality and justice must be continually created and protected as a necessary condition of human freedom. For schools and teachers, praxis is the real-world application of understandings and principled beliefs aimed at increasing social justice through social transformation, which is a result of the day-to-day instructional activities, carried out with their students, guided by this aim.

This pedagogy requires agency with commitment and courage. Countering deeply entrenched narratives that marginalize others, deliberately challenging those aspects of the status quo that manifest and maintain oppression and other forms of injustice, and renouncing unearned social privilege, are acts undertaken by teachers with a well-developed sense of agency. Praxis is teacher agency enacted for social transformation.

Finally, self-awareness is required to adopt a self-critical perspective. Self-awareness is the starting place for understanding socio-historical injustices, which are embedded within our

cultural heritages (Martin, 2003). Embracing self-criticism, developing the courage to lead students, knowing, and accepting that there may be a personal and/or a professional price to pay, are hallmarks of teacher agency in its highest form. Agency that activates or elevates ones teaching practice to this autonomous level requires critical thinking, imagination, and resolute courage. The combination of these qualities, as a form of teacher agency that seeks to combat social injustice, exemplifies the notion of '"principled obstinance'" (Biesta, 2019; & Enzensberger, 1982). Through this study teacher agency is investigated in a multitude of contexts and forms, from the seemingly mundane to the demonstrably impactful. Although each assertion of teacher agency is potentially impactful for both the teacher and the learners, teacher agency that supports learner agency has the potential to serve the democratic and social justice goals of schooling for a pluralistic and democratic society.

Researcher Positionality

I am a teacher educator with 25 years' experience as a classroom teacher (grades 1-8) and several years as a teacher leader, serving in various consulting and professional development roles. The teacher education I received and the practices I employed are aligned with a theoretical view of teacher agency and teacher identity as dialogically interrelated socio-psychological constructs, which I mostly framed philosophically. That is, as a student and practitioner, I framed what I was taught and asked to do by asking the question, why? Upon reflection, I realize that both my successes and failures in creating engaging and purposeful learning opportunities for students stemmed from my professional identity and relied on my ability or, when failing to enact my vision, my inability to assert agency. This realization, coupled with the observations and advice shared with me by respected colleagues, convinced me of the importance of both expanding and maintaining my own agency capacity as an educator. I

also believe that the ultimate justification for asserting my professional agency is to nurture and support learner agency. Freire and Macedo (2005) capture this latter goal by stating

> how important it is for teachers to develop pedagogies that allow them to assert their own voices while still being able to encourage students to affirm, tell, and retell their personal narratives by exercising their own voices. (p. 23)

Accordingly, I believe that teacher agency primarily derives its legitimacy, its *raison d'être,* through nurturing the development of student learner agency and student moral autonomy. This belief is further borne out by my current professional experiences. Each school year, initially as a K-8 teacher and now each semester as a teacher educator, I ask my students to embark on a recall of and reflection upon their most 'transformative' learning experiences. This exercise produces self-reflections similar to the “well-remembered events,” described by Carter (1994). Having listened to or read hundreds of these personal learning memoirs, I cannot recall a single one that referred to any of the following: a list of questions at the end of a textbook chapter or a literature study guide; a 'brilliant' but didactic lecture; or the 'thrill' of taking a standardized test. Instead, although each story is unique, they invariably refer to moments when the learner felt ownership, recognized purpose, and experienced deep engagement. By implication, these memoirs reflect teacher agency deployed to support student agency.

These student memoirs reaffirm my core teaching belief in the importance of teacher agency. Reflecting on these stories has led me to hypothesize that teacher agency is an essential teacher attribute for the enactment of memorable and potentially transformational learning experiences. Hence, this study was designed to investigate the forms agency can take, the means or conducive conditions for its development, the strategies used by agential teachers to overcome challenges to agency, and the educational impacts associated with agency.

Additionally, I intended to develop practical understandings for how the insights derived from studying the veteran teachers, in phase one, could be put to beneficial use with the early and mid-career teachers in phase two. By drawing on the stories of the struggles and successes of the veteran teachers' individual and collective attempts to develop and maintain their own professional agency, I intended to provide ideas and inspiration for current teachers in a way that could potentially lead to greater empowerment for them and their students.

A Methodological Overview

To carry out this investigation of teacher agency across the career span, this study was designed into two phases. Both phases used qualitative social science research methodologies. The first phase focused on veteran, retired teachers; the second phase focused on early and mid-career practicing teachers.

Phase one used a phenomenological approach (Husserl, 1931) to investigate teacher agency. In the first phase I selected and interviewed ten veteran teachers who met my specified criteria for highly agential teachers. Predicated upon my personal history with these teachers, I saw them as having chosen fidelity to their pedagogical beliefs rather than fidelity to a program or to a standardized and routinized approach to teaching. Based on a thematic analysis of the interviews, I created a survey that each teacher answered.

Certain findings from the study of the veteran teachers (based on the thematic analysis of the interviews and the numerical analysis of the survey responses) provided insights about conditions conducive to the development and enhancement of teacher agency over a full career. From these insights I developed a tentative conceptual framework, or theory, of teacher agency formation and resilience. This framework contributed to the design phase two, the study of early and mid-career teachers' development of professional agency.

Phase two was conducted using a grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) from a constructivist perspective (Charmaz, 2017). In this phase I recruited, interviewed, and observed ten practicing teachers. Five of whom were elementary and five were middle school teachers. They also responded to the survey used with the veteran teachers. In keeping with a grounded theory approach to collecting evidence *in situ*, I conducted three observations, followed by discussions, in each participant's classroom.

These data collecting and analysis activities were conducted in a manner consistent with the tradition of participatory action research (PAR, McTaggart, 1991). I viewed the teacher participants as collaborators; thus, I discussed both the observations and their interpretations of how their agency was being expressed through their teaching practices. Additionally, I engaged with them in informal group discussions.

Two Studies That Inspired this Investigation

In considering how to design this study of teacher agency, I drew on aspects of Lawrence -Lightfoot's 1983 study, *The Good High School* . . . and Silver-Pacuilla's 2003 study, *Speaking Up and Speaking Out* . . .. Lawrence-Lightfoot (1983) designed her study of successful high schools to make a case against the top-down reform movement (e.g. *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform,* 1983*)*. Reflecting on the impact of her study, Lawrence-Lightfoot (2005) recognized that her focus on successful schools was also to push back against "the liability common to social scientists of tending only to focus on what is wrong rather than search for what is right, to describe pathology rather than health" (p.10).

Silver-Pacuilla's (2003) study used a participant action research (PAR) design incorporating Padilla's "Unfolding Matrix" (1996) method for collecting and analyzing data, and simultaneously sharing ideas and useful strategies to the participants. As with the Silver-

Pacuilla's study, my goal was to provide opportunities for the phase two participants to professionally empower themselves—should they choose to do so—by acknowledging their voices and by incorporating their insights during phase two of the study. I also sought to share the teacher agency strategy ideas suggested by the veteran teachers and those being developed by the practicing teachers.

Lawrence-Lightfoot chose to study successful schools as a basis for learning about promising educational practices. For many of the same reasons that Lawrence-Lightfoot deliberately looked for important insights and guidance regarding the creation of healthy schools, I chose exemplary and highly agential teachers as the participants for phase one of this study.

However, as was true with Lawrence-Lightfoot's study (1983), I realize that ‘good’ is not synonymous with ‘perfect.’ She elaborates upon this idea explaining that

> The goodness in the high school study is found to be a 'goodness' that is imperfect and changing. It is not the absence of weakness that has made a good school, but how one attends to the weakness . . . One of the key qualities of successful schools is their recognition and articulation of imperfection. (p.24)

Similarly, each of the 10 veteran teachers in this study revealed a surprising degree of imperfection—struggle, and at times, outright failure—in recounting their paths to ultimately achieving high professional agency. The stories of their struggles and successes illuminate this study.

Lawrence-Lightfoot's (2005) intention was first to have deep conversations with key actors who had successfully created the schools in her study, followed by a deliberate broadening of her participant group so that she could disseminate the revealed understandings and insights to individuals and groups of others working on similar issues. As with her study, my investigation

was a deliberate two-step design process that was intended to result in, what she termed, “not only acts of analysis and solidarity, but also, inevitably, what became acts of intervention” (p.12).

For phase two of this study, I used participant action research (PAR) (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1997) to investigate professional teacher agency with currently practicing early and mid-career teachers. In doing so, I followed Silver-Pacuilla's (2003) PAR research design by identifying teachers who expressed a desire to strengthen their teacher agency through active collaboration in both data collection and interpretation.

The circumstances of and pressures for top-down reform that began to take shape in the 1980's, which Lawrence- Lightfoot's study countered, have intensified in the decades since (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Hargreaves, 2000). Therefore, I maintain that it is important to understand and promote policies and opportunities for teachers and learners to have agency. This study is intended to both investigate and support the development of appropriate forms and the responsible assertion of teacher agency.

I followed Lawrence-Lightfoot's approach of selecting research sites that were oriented towards intentionally nurturing professional teacher agency. Both the elementary school and the middle school, the sites for phase two of this study, are STEM magnet schools with a mandate for teachers to play an active role in designing and integrating all curricular areas centered around core scientific and mathematical concepts. Moreover, both schools are led by administrators who explicitly support teacher agency embodied through innovative teaching and engaged learning.

This professional development goal of fostering teacher agency is viewed, by the teachers and administrators alike, as being vital to the creation of dynamic learning experiences for the students. This goal reflects the belief that through collegial collaboration and the encouragement

of both individual and collective autonomy, successful innovative teaching is achieved through participation in active professional learning communities (Vescio, 2008; Wenger, 1998). Given the optimum ecological conditions and the positive teacher pre-dispositions favoring the development of teacher agency, which characterize this study, I view this investigation as a study, "not of pathology, but of health" (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1983, p. 10).

As was the case for both the Lawrence-Lightfoot's (1983) study of good schools and the Silver-Pacuilla's (2003) study of women overcoming disabilities as literacy learners, my goal in this study was to enter into relationships with the participants characterized by empathetic regard, and with a "fully critical and discerning gaze" (Lawrence-Lightfoot, p.6). My intention was that the stories of the veteran teachers' struggles and successes with agency would prove useful to the practicing teachers in their quest for agency. Thus, I view this investigation of teacher agency as a study of possibilities.

Significance of the Study

The questions posed for this research project seek to bring conceptual clarity to what Pyhältö, et al. (2012) characterized as being the "vague" concept of teacher agency. Human agency has been studied and theorized by philosophers (e.g., Taylor, 1985), socio-cognitive theorists (e.g., Bandura, 1989), and socio-cultural theorists (e.g., Holland, et al., 2001). Ahern (2001) broadly theorized teacher agency as a variant of general human agency. There is, however, little research detailing how teacher agency is either nurtured or suppressed in specific educational contexts (Vongalis-Macrow, 2007). Through this study I address issues of importance to teachers, teacher educators, and teacher researchers by identifying various forms of agency and discovering common strategies teachers use to overcome challenges to their agency.

Furthermore, this study explores the theory that professional teacher agency is a teacher attribute that relates to learner autonomy (Deci & Ryan, 2008). That is, this study seeks to investigate the connection between teachers who develop agential professional identities and the potential impacts of their teaching on the agentic or autonomous learner identity development of their students.

Moreover, this study helps us to understand how teacher agency is formed. The literature (Priestley, et al., 2015) suggests that it is developmental, that a teacher increases in his/her capacity for agency over a career span. This study of two teacher cohorts, veteran and practicing, is designed to shed light on the process of teacher agency development over the full arc of a professional teaching career. Along this same line of inquiry, this study also investigates the potential differences in agency development between elementary multi-subject teachers and secondary single subject teachers.

Finally, this study examines the relationship between a teacher's sense of purpose and their educational vision, vis-à-vis democratic and social justice concerns. Some teachers may manifest educational visions to maintain the societal status quo. Other teachers may use their agency, as critical theory recommends, to enact a pedagogy of social justice praxis with their students. This study investigates the circumstances and dispositions that influence how teachers choose to assert their agency from a teleological perspective.

Summary

This chapter describes the personal, professional, and scholarly reasons for investigating teacher agency. I first presented a broad philosophical argument to justify the choice of agency as being an essential aspect of a teacher's identity, and thus worth studying. Next, I presented a more teleologically focused argument that links teacher agency to critical theory in devising

educational experiences that best serve the needs of a pluralistic and democratic society. I specifically addressed both the democratic and the multi-cultural implications of asserting teacher agency from an emancipatory critical theory perspective that recognizes the legitimacy of both individual and collective self-determination. I concluded this chapter by presenting a synopsis of the methods used in this study and a prediction of the potential significance of this study. The next chapter discusses the empirical and theoretical literature, from both a socio-cognitive and a socio-cultural perspective, relevant to this investigation of teacher agency.

Chapter Two

Professional Teacher Agency: Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

This chapter presents the theories framing the design of this study and a review of relevant literature about teacher agency. In the first section, I explicate the theoretical framework of teacher agency, which includes socio-cognitive and socio-cultural perspectives. Included in this discussion is an historical account of professional teacher agency in the U.S. and a summary of research and theory showing agency as having both beneficial and problematic potentials. The second section of this chapter is a review of forty empirical studies of teacher agency, with a detailed description of six studies, which are representative of recent investigations of teacher agency.

In Chapter One, I presented philosophical and critical theory literature asserting the political and moral right to agency for individuals and groups. The following theses were presented:

- Classical philosophical tenets support the right and obligation to agency/autonomy for both individuals and groups. That is, these foundational understandings link individual morality and collective social ethics to the human capacity for rationale deliberation in such a manner as to make individuals and groups responsible for aligning their actions with their stated beliefs.
- Critical social theory, associated with the Frankfurt School, highlights the role of individual and collective agency in accomplishing the emancipatory and democratizing intent of educational praxis aimed at justice and equality.

- Educational philosophy and theory, in the democratic tradition, links the agency of teachers to the agency of students in constructing learning experiences that serve the educational needs of a pluralistic and democratic society.

My understandings of this philosophical literature and its implications for education motivated me to investigate teacher agency. I then turned to academic literature, broadly associated with psychology and cultural anthropology, to frame my study.

Teacher Agency: Socio-Cognitive and Socio-Cultural Theories

This section describes two relevant theories related to teacher agency. I begin with socio-cognitive theory and follow with socio-cultural theory. Each subsection first provides a synopsis of the theory as it relates to human agency. Each synopsis is followed by a discussion of the relevance of the theory to teacher agency. Implications for investigating and promoting teacher agency are discussed following each theory.

Socio-Cognitive Theory of Teacher Agency: A Synopsis

The psychologist, Bandura (1989), who is most frequently associated with a socio-cognitive perspective on human agency, states that he and other cognitive psychologists (e.g., Bratman, 1999; Carlson, 2002; Korsgaard, 2009) "subscribe to an emergent and interactive model of human agency" (p. 1175). In so doing, these theorists stake out a middle ground between theories that posit human actions and thinking as reflecting either a view of individuals as being totally independent and autonomous free agents (Collins, 1995), or those theories that regard human behavior as being the highly determinant result of external social controls (Therborn, 1991). The interactive model of agency, accounting for both individual autonomous inclinations and social structural influences, disclaims both extreme views by postulating that individuals are both producers and products of their life circumstances.

This socio-cognitive model addresses the interrelationship between people and their social contexts. This model also adopts an agentic view of human influence upon and adaptation to circumstance in response to the "problem of dualism" raised by Giddens' (1984) "structuration theory" that "reconceptualized the dualism of the 'individual and society' as the duality of agency and structure" (p.162). Socio-cognitive theorists, such as Bandura (1989) and Burns and Dietz (1992), reject the clear separation between individuals and their social circumstances implied by structuration theory. From their perspective, human autonomy is a proactive or adaptive response to one's social situation, rather than a state of independence resulting from an absence of social structural influences or constraints. Humans assert their agency, according to this socio-cognitive model, by choosing their response to circumstance; and in so doing they both alter their circumstantial context, and they exhibit a degree of autonomy.

In addressing the tension inherent within the confrontation between humans attempting to assert their agency and their circumstantial constraints, Archer (2000) notes that "humans are far more than mere epiphenomenon of social forces," but she also warns that "we must neither under, nor over privilege human agency in our approach" (p. 21). Archer expresses a concern with what she sees as the tendency for post-modernists to minimize, or downwardly conflate, the potential for agency that individuals and groups possess. An example of such a view is typified in Foucault's (1970) prediction that, when seeking to resist prevailing societal norms, individual "man would be erased like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea" (p. 378).

Conversely, Archer (2000) also expresses skepticism of the enlightenment view of humans' inherently rational nature vis-á-vis human agency. She questions Kant's (1785) claim for the rationally based "categorical imperative," as being the major influence over human moral choices. For Archer, this enlightenment model represents an exaggeration, or upward inflation,

of human agency as being the dominant force in the dynamic inherent tensions between individuals seeking to assert agency and the social structures that frequently present a challenge to such efforts.

Current socio-cognitive theory balances the interplay between the social system and the individual through the construction of an ecological model (Hoy, et al., 2006) of agency. This model proposes that individual and collective agency is asserted within a nested set of influences (i.e., a socio-cultural ecosystem). Socio-cognitive theory seeks, in part, to explain individual differences in responding to similar circumstances.

Bandura's model of human agency. Bandura's (2006) research about human agency led him to claim that the essence of humanity resides in the capacity for humans to exercise control over the nature and purposeful direction of their lives, that is, to claim agency. He describes agency as characterized by four core features that operate through phenomenal and functional consciousness:

1. *forethought,* the conscious goals, or vision that an agent aspires to achieve,
2. *intentionality*, the plans, and strategies an agent intends to employ to accomplish their vision,
3. *self-regulation*, the control over one's motivation and perseverance in pursuing one's goals and in employing agentic strategies in the face of challenges, and
4. *self-reflectiveness,* the capacity to continuously evaluate one's agentic efforts, vis-á-vis goals, and vision.

In this model, forethought and intentionality are theorized as being an outwardly directed agentic processes. That is, they are directed towards formulating and accomplishing pre-determined goals. Self-regulation and self-reflectiveness are primarily inwardly focused aspects

of agency. Of these four core elements, Bandura elevates self-reflection above the others as being the essential catalyst for, and controlling guide over, efforts to assert agency. Bandura (2006) states that "the metacognitive capability to reflect upon oneself and the adequacy of one's thoughts and actions is the most distinctively human core property" (p. 165). In Bandura's model, agency that is to be of benefit, must be conceived through and guided by self-reflection.

Self-efficacy beliefs play a foundational role in the assertion of agency. From the onset of Bandura's (1989) research involving human agency, he has theorized that human self-efficacy beliefs perform a vital function in the successful assertion of agentic intentions. Bandura (1997) defines perceived self-efficacy as being "people's beliefs that they can produce desired effects by their activities" (p. 51). Strong self-efficacy beliefs not only give individuals and groups confidence to act, but that they also influence the choices they make, the level of aspiration represented by these choices, and the effort and resilience exhibited.

Bandura (1997) provides empirical evidence demonstrating how an individual's self-efficacy beliefs and capacity are critical to their agency. Further, Bandura (2000), links strong collective self-efficacy beliefs to successful assertion of agency by groups. Additionally, this body of research shows a correlation between weak self-efficacy and low agency in both individual and collective forms.

Other socio-psychological constructs, which are closely associated with perceived self-efficacy beliefs, are the concepts of locus of control (Rotter, 1966) and attribution theory (Heider, 1982). Each of these theories foregrounds individually held conscious beliefs and attitudes regarding one's ability to control (locus of control theory) or explain (attribution theory) cause and effect relationships for important life events. As is true of Bandura's agency and self-efficacy research, locus of control and attribution theory arose in response to the mechanized and

externally determinant explanations for human behavior exemplified by Skinner's (1938) operant conditioning theory.

Implications of human agency for teachers and students. Agency (Bandura, 2006), locus of control (Rotter, 1966), and attribution (Heider, 1982) theories address the degree to which an individual believes and demonstrates, that she or he can influence event outcomes through the exercise of internally controlled thoughts and actions. In both cases, perceptions of self-efficacy and locus of control beliefs regarding one's agentic capabilities operate along continua. Additionally, for each of these closely related theoretical models, research (Zimmerman, 1994) suggests that individuals who express confidence in their internal locus of control for event outcomes, or those who possess strong self-efficacy beliefs regarding their ability to assert agency, are more likely to achieve learning goals and/or to experience professional achievement (including successful teaching) than those with less confidence in their internal locus of control or those possessing weaker self-efficacy beliefs.

Another important source of socio-cognitive evidence, directly related to educational outcomes, links motivation and autonomy to achievement. This evidence comes from research investigating the impact of intrinsic motivation on learning and professional achievement. Studies in self-regulated learning (Martin,2004) and self-determination theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 2008) report that higher learner achievement and higher levels of professional attainment are associated with individual goal selection and intrinsic motivation.

Moreover, these studies provide evidence for the benefits of both teacher and student agency in selecting goals and in establishing control over one's source of motivation. Martin (2004) notes that “intrinsic or self-motivation is central to the finding of the self as agent, which is pervasively implicit in most studies of self-regulated learning” (p. 183). Likewise, Deci and

Ryan's (2008) research concludes that parents and teachers, who themselves rely on intrinsic motivation, are more likely to use autonomy supporting and intrinsically based parenting and teaching motivational strategies. Understanding the link between teachers' professional agency and autonomy, and their ability to support student autonomy, is a central focus of this study and it is reflected in the fourth question addressing the educational impacts associated with teacher agency.

Socio-Cognitive Theory: Implications for Investigating Teacher Agency

Following from Bandura's definition of general human agency as being, "the capacity for bringing visualized futures into the present through intentional action" (2006, p. 165), I have posited, as an operational definition of teacher agency for this study, that teacher agency is *the capacity for a teacher, or a group of teachers, to enact their educational vision for the intended benefit of their students.* I also agree with the social realist theories (Archer, 2000) of tying human agency capacity to societal structural elements that impact an individual's and a group's ability to assert their agency. Therefore, I subscribe to an ecological perspective of teacher agency as being a socially situated phenomenon (Biesta & Tedder, 2007;Hoy et al., 2006). Within this social system based ecological model, the socio-cognitive lens I utilized views teacher agency as arising from a teacher's metacognitive abilities to evaluate their teacher beliefs (Richardson, 1996), interrogate their ethical principles (Palmer, 1998), and self-regulate their motivational sources (Martin, 2004).

Ultimately, teacher agency is embedded in and represented by the quotidian decisions and actions, related to the myriad of professional responsibilities, which teachers embody through their daily practice. This manifestation of agency, as professional teacher autonomy, results from a combination of a teacher's, or teachers', use of their internally focused self-regulation and self-

reflection capabilities to guide their outwardly directed curricular and instructional enactments—their teaching practices. Strong self-efficacy beliefs expressed individually and/or collectively support the assertion of agency in the face of challenges.

Moreover, as Bandura's (2006) research shows, colleagues working together increase the strength of both individual and group efficacy beliefs (p. 478). For this reason, I theorize teacher agency/autonomy as a phenomenon that occurs in both individual and collective forms. Using these insights, I endeavored to investigate teacher agency by seeking to answer research questions pertaining to the forms, conducive conditions, challenges, and educational impacts associated with either the assertion or denial of professional teacher agency.

Socio-Cultural Theories of Agency: A Synopsis

The second theoretical frame is socio-cultural theory and research (Engestrom, 1999; Vygotsky, 1978, Wertsch, 1991). Both the socio-cognitive and the socio- cultural theories have large areas of overlap and agreement. Each theory, however, has its own specific theoretical orientation and research foci. Because of the differences the theories are sometimes misconstrued to be competing theoretical perspectives. This study, and many others, however, views these two perspectives as being complementary.

To this point, socio-cognitive theorists acknowledge that cognition is, in part, a matter of assimilating and accommodating new ideas and information through interactions with one's environment (Piaget, 1977). Similarly, socio-cultural theorists (see for example, Wertsch, 1991), point out that an appropriation of knowledge and concepts through social transactions with others entails cognition. Human agency, and the learning that supports agency, therefore, must be understood as the process of humans seeking to enact their agentic intentions in social settings by using both the cognitive and cultural tools available (Tharp & Gallimore, 1989).

From this perspective, learning is viewed as a psychological phenomenon that is frequently initiated and mediated by social interactions. Luria (1981) asserts that "One must seek the origins of conscious activity . . . in the external conditions of life. Above all, this means that one must seek these origins in the external processes of social life, in the social and historical forms of human existence" (p. 25). Given this emphasis on the importance of social and historical influences on learning and agency, by socio-cultural theorists, it is logical that their theory ascribes to an ecological model for understanding teacher agency development and assertion (Biesta & Tedder, 2007).

An ecological conception links agency development with professional identity formation for teachers. Socio-cultural theorists, such as Gee, (2000);, Holland, et al., (2001;), and Rodgers and Scott, (2008), regard a teacher's agentic efforts to be, in large measure, an extension of their professional identity. Using Lasky's (2005) basic and frequently referenced definition of teacher professional identity, “how teachers define themselves to themselves and others” (p. 901), I maintain that one's professional “self-definition” is reflected in the words uttered and actions taken when carrying out one's professional responsibilities. In tying professional identity to teacher agency, Buchanan (2015) points out that, “as teachers construct an understanding of who they are within a school and professional context, they take actions that they believe align with that construction” (p. 704). These actions, to the extent that they are intentional and freely chosen, represent a teacher's enactment of their educational vision — their professional agency — which is inseparable from their understanding of their proper professional role, that is, their professional identity.

This process of professional identity formation occurs in a teacher’s professional ecosystem composed of colleagues, students, and the traditions of their specific school, their

professional ecosystem. It is also shaped, however, as Holland, et al. (2001) attest, through the socially and historically constructed "figured worlds" that underlie the here and now of one's professional circumstances and experiences. These historical and cultural influences are implicit in the social/ecological structures (Giddens, 1984)—the niches and roles an individual fulfills.

This is true of society in general, and of schools specifically. However, through a dynamic and complex process, teachers with agency can transform these pro-offered roles and they are also able to impact larger social and political educational structures. "Teachers, therefore," as Ahearn (2001) observes, "are neither fully free agents, nor are they completely socially determined products" (p. 120).

Professional teacher identity arises, according to much of the recent relevant educational research literature (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Buchanan, 2015; Olsen, 2008) at the nexus of personal, professional, and situational influences. This literature suggests that a teacher's identity is influenced by their philosophical views (Taylor, 1992), their psychological/emotional make-up (Erickson, 1959; Zembylas, 2002), the social cultural world they inhabit (Holland, et al., 2001), and the professional discourse community in which they participate (Gee, 2001; Wenger, 1998).

Laclau (1996) refers to a contested conception of identity as being a "floating signifier," the meaning of which remains ambiguous until it is established and commonly accepted within a discourse community. Therefore, it is within the control of an individual teacher, possessed of agency, to seize an authorial role in one's own professional identity formation by acting independently and thereby "performing identity forming or transforming acts of identity articulation" (p. 103). Furthermore, it follows that professionals with collective agency can, as a professional discourse community, collectively construct and articulate their professional identity. Through this on-going dynamic process of professional identity reformation and re-

articulation, which continues unabated throughout the entire career span for teachers (individually and collectively), teacher agency and teacher identity are reciprocally related, mutually constitutive, and inseparable influences shaping both the professional identity and the agentic actions of classroom teachers.

A cultural historical perspective contributes to understanding the relationship between teacher identity and teacher agency. Kafka (2016) concludes her history of education chapter in the AERA fifth edition of the *Handbook of Research on Teaching* by pointing out that "More than anything else, however, the history of teaching is a history of contest and negotiation" (p. 71). At the root of much of that contestation is the very concept of professionalism, as it applies to classroom teaching. In offering a general and very basic definition of professionalism, Cruess and Cruess (2006) state that membership in a profession requires "expertise in relevant knowledge, mastery of the appropriate skills, and a commitment to a common set of values" (p. 205). For education, the conception of professionalism (Solbrekke & Englund, 2011; Hilferty, 2008) refers to their skill or efficacy to apply their knowledge to successfully teach academic content to students, and to their ability to form positive relationships with students in accord with established standards that guide their teaching practices across these domains of professional responsibility

In showing how this contemporary take on teacher professionalism contrasts greatly from the common view of teaching in past eras, Hargreaves (2000) outlines "four broad phases in the changing nature of teachers professional identity and professional learning" (p. 153). Hargreaves qualifies his history as being specific to English speaking nations but points out that parallels to the historical trend of teaching as increasingly technical in the US, UK, and Canada, which resulted in educators being granted a correspondingly higher degree of professional status, can be

seen in other post-industrial societies. He traces this evolution of the professional nature of teaching from the “pre-professional era," to the “age of the autonomous professional,” and to the most recent phase, the “age of the collegial professional” (p. 153). The fourth phase, which we are now entering, is that of the "postmodern phase." The expectation that teachers would develop professional capabilities to successfully function autonomously, and that they would choose to use their professional autonomy to collaborate with colleagues, was characteristic of the collegial professional era during which this study's veteran teacher participants and I entered the teaching profession.

The distinction between a pre-professional and a professional identity for teachers mirrors Hoyle's (1974) “limited” and “extended” conceptions of a teacher's professional identity. Stenhouse (1975) further elaborates on this distinction, asserting that

> In short, the outstanding characteristic of the extended professional is a capacity for autonomous self-development through systematic self-study, through the study of the work of other teachers, and through the testing of ideas through classroom research procedures. (p. 144)

Other theorists sharing this view include Gilroy (2014), who states that over time, teachers, through the experience and knowledge gained as practitioners, come to possess a unique body of practical knowledge. Lave and Wenger (1991), describe becoming a deeply knowledgeable practitioner as learning through “situated practice, that occurs through legitimate peripheral participation in communities of practice” (p. 42). Lave and Wenger's model for teachers' professional learning aligns with Stenhouse's in that both models emphasize the importance of teachers reflecting upon and learning from their own experiences (as situated practice), and they

also stress the importance of learning with and from professional colleagues by participating in a community of practice.

The research supporting teacher professional learning as a process of building emergent situated knowledge (Genat, 2009) through dialogical inquiry with colleagues (Wells, 2000) gave rise to a "situated learning theory (SLT)" approach (Butler, et al., 2004) to enhance teacher learning, thus strengthening teacher agency. This depiction of professional teacher identity formation co-evolving with teacher agency supports Hargreaves (2000) characterization of this most recent age as being the "age of the collegial professional."

The phase that we may now be entering (his fourth phase), according to Hargreaves (2000), is characterized by a struggle between neo-liberal forces seeking to de-professionalize teaching by reducing professional teacher autonomy, and those seeking to expand and push back against a professionally restricted conception of teaching. He refers this new era as the "post-professional or postmodern age" (p. 153), and insists that

> It is because of this quality of uncertainty brought about by the technological changes of the information age and the movement towards globalization, as a dominant influence on cultures everywhere, that the teaching profession needs to develop dispositions of taking risks and welcoming change, rather than staying with proven procedures and comfortable routines. (p. 224)

This element of uncertainty in a rapidly changing professional climate is precisely why I chose to investigate teacher agency across the entire professional teacher career span, represented by the veteran, early, and mid-career teacher participants.

Teacher agency is a professional capacity that includes both the potential for educational benefit and harm. Human agency, as Bandura (2018, p. 132) observed, is — in

and of itself — a capacity that results in neither a guaranteed benefit nor a certain harm. Both intentions and outcomes must be considered in making such an evaluation. This is likewise true with regards to teacher agency asserted as professional autonomy. The assertion of agency enables teachers to be equally 'free' to make either wise or unwise pedagogical choices (Hargreaves, 2015, p. 151).

Research (Priestley, et al., 2015) demonstrates that, in most cases, teachers guided by professional ethical standards and dedicated to meeting the educational and emotional needs of their students, tend to use their agency to learn from their missteps and to take corrective action. The present study of teacher agency investigates and describes problematic instances of teacher agency, despite the good intentions of the teachers. The literature review, which comprises the second section of this chapter, also presents both beneficial and harmful examples of teacher agency.

Socio-Cultural Theory: Implications for Investigating Teacher Agency

The socio-cultural perspective presented here does not contradict nor compete with a socio-cognitive view of agency, identity formation, behavior, or learning. Instead, as Bandura (2006) notes, “human behavior cannot be fully understood solely in terms of socio-structural or psychological factors. A full understanding requires an integrated perspective” (p. 62). Thus, this socio-cultural perspective complements and builds on the socio-cognitive perspective. These two theories frame this study of teacher agency. Their shared assumptions shed light on the processes that teachers undertake to develop and assert their professional capacity for agency.

Furthermore, both private interactions with the world (the socio-cognitive component), and interactions with others (the socio-cultural component), contribute to a teacher's professional identity formation. The process of continuous identity and agency reformation is influenced by

the external elements of professional relationships and contexts, and by internal aspects such as a teacher's emotional attachment to students and colleagues and by the narratives they construct regarding the meaningfulness of their teaching (Rogers & Scott, 2008). This process unfolds for an individual teacher, and collectively, as teachers work together culturally and historically.

Hence, the goal of this research project is to understand the relationship between cognitive processes, on the one hand, and the social/historical and cultural environmental conditions, on the other. The distinction between cognitive and cultural contributions to agency is more analytical than actual. In practice, both influences are always present. Wertsch (1991) makes the point that "mental functioning and the social cultural setting must be understood as dialectically interacting phenomena" (p. 60). Equivalently, Bandura (2008) explains that "cognitive capabilities provide people with the means to function as mindful agents" (p. 106).

Therefore, in this study agency is investigated through an ecological lens in consideration of professionals and their environment. The unit of analysis for this study of teacher agency is the beliefs, actions, and interactions of the participants, as they seek to assert agency within the multi-layered social, cultural, and historical contexts of schools.

Teacher Agency Research: Review of Literature

This review of literature provides two kinds of information. First, I provide an overview of 40 research studies describing patterns and trends within and across the literature (see Appendix 2.A at end of this chapter for complete references). Second, I present a detailed review of 6 of the 40 studies that are relevant to the design of the present study.

According to contemporary researchers of teacher agency (e.g., Priestley, et al., 2015), and leading theorists (e.g., Vongalis-Macrow, 2007), little research or theory sheds light on what Pyhältö et al. (2012) termed the "vague construct of teacher agency" (p. 96). I found no studies

of teacher agency before the year 2000. Instead, the concept of teacher efficacy was the subject of considerable research (e.g., Armor et al., 1976; Ross, 1992; Goddard et al., 2001) tying a teacher's beliefs about their teaching effectiveness to student achievement. Since 2000, however, research related to teacher agency has appeared in the literature with steadily increasing frequency. The key search terms used to locate these studies included teacher agency, teacher autonomy, teacher as change agent, and teacher leadership.

Table 2.1 displays the geographical locations of the 40 studies. These projects were conducted in K-12 schools over a wide geographic range.

Table 2.1

Location of Research Sites

Location	Number of studies
United States	16
Continental Europe	9
United Kingdom	4
Canada	3
Middle East	3
Asia	2
Australia	2
Africa	1

Trends and Patterns: An Overview

Across the forty studies, several categories of trends and patterns were identified related to: methods employed, theoretical perspectives applied, common themes discovered, and discrepant findings revealed. Broad theoretical perspectives from the fields of socio-cognitive psychology and socio-cultural anthropology framed these studies. Teacher agency was most often presented as a beneficial phenomenon, but a minority of the studies include discrepant findings showing problematic outcomes resulting from the assertion of teacher agency.

Methods. Table 2.2 displays the design categories of the 40 studies. Most (34) of the studies utilized a qualitative approach, with 33 of the studies using case study design drawing from multiple data sources, such as surveys, interviews and observations, and triangulation of those sources. I further categorized the studies according to method of data analysis: grounded theory (6) and phenomenology (6). For purposes of the discussion below, I singled out the qualitative studies using PAR (6) because phase two of my study used PAR.

Table 2.2

Summary of Study Designs

Methods	-- Analyses --		
	Qualitative	Quantitative	Mixed Methods
Case Study	33		
Survey		4	
Questionnaire			2

Theory. All the studies, either explicitly or implicitly, present teacher agency as being a temporally and situationally understood teacher capacity manifested as teacher professional autonomy. The contingent nature of teacher agency, as being influenced by a teacher's or a group of teachers' professional environment, reflects an ecological perspective of teacher agency. These studies rely theoretically on socio-cognitive (psychology) and socio-cultural (anthropology) insights into human development and learning. Specifically, teacher agency is portrayed as being linked to teachers' professional identity formation. In these studies, teacher agency is theorized to be both an individual and a collective phenomenon. In some studies teachers are positioned as agents of social change. All the studies explicitly posit teacher agency

as being a positive educational phenomenon; six studies, however, point out the potential for teacher agency to be beneficial as well as harmful.

Themes. I conducted a thematic analysis of the studies, which resulted in the identification of ten themes (see Table 2.3). These themes are listed in order of frequency, with references to example studies from the literature review for each theme.

Table 2.3

Literature Review Themes: Percent Frequency (F) (with Examples)

Percent Frequency (#)	Example
77.5% (31)	Teacher agency influenced by professional context (e.g., Campbell, et al., 2016; Fleming, 1999)
67.5% (27)	Teacher agency as a multifaceted phenomenon related to domains of classroom practice (e.g., Leander & Osborne, 2008; Priestley, et al., 2012).
62.5% (25)	Teacher agency interrelated with professional identity (e.g., Buchanan, 2015; Hokka, et al., 2017).
55% (22)	Teacher agency development reliant on collegial collaboration and dialogue (e.g., Wells, 2011; Zakaria, 2011).
52.5% (21)	Teacher agency manifested as a combination of individual and collective processes (e.g., Hunzicker, 2012; Taylor, et al., 2011).
45% (18)	Teacher agency directed towards supporting learner agency (e.g., Bolhuis & Voeten, 2001; Colbert, et al., 2008).

Percent Frequency (#)	Example
40% (16)	Teacher agency and identity influences and is influenced by professional learning, including teacher education experiences (Sawyer, 2017; Soini, 2015).
27.5% (11)	Teacher agency influenced by personal agency and life history (e.g., Ketelaar, et al., 2012; Palmer & Martinez, 2013).
25% (10)	Teacher agency influenced by socio-political and cultural discourses (e.g., Sannino, 2010; Wermke & Hostfalt, 2014).
25% (10)	Teacher agency reflected in teacher job satisfaction and the converse (e.g., Rudolph, 2006; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014).

Outlier findings. Six of the studies reported examples of teacher agency as problematic or detrimental to an individual teacher's practice and/or to the educational experiences of students. Examples of this type of negative impact from teacher agency include:

- individual teacher voice and agency suppressed through imposed, non-democratic decision-making processes used by agentic administrator(s) (Taylor et al., 2011),
- teachers using their agency to teach in an overly didactic manner that positions learning as passive (Camp & Oesterreich, 2010, Torres, 2014),
- teacher agency used to impose control of student behavior and student learning by imposing an extrinsic system of rewards and punishments thereby diminishing student social emotional independence and student learner autonomy (Torres, 2014; Vansteenkiste, et al., 2012), and

- teacher agency that avoids critical examination of one's practice and/or that subverts efforts to implement research supported forms of educational reform (Priestley, et al., 2012; Sawyer, 2017).

Descriptions of Six Representative and Relevant Studies

The following studies were selected to describe in detail for two reasons. First, they utilize methodologies representative of current teacher agency research. Second, the findings of these specific studies were helpful to the design of the present study. (See Appendix 2.A at the end of this chapter for these references, marked by an *.)

The first study (Priestley et al, 2015) investigated teachers' role in curriculum development and implementation. This is an especially relevant topic in an era when teachers' professional status is challenged, and standardized test scores are the basis for educational accountability. The study was a qualitative research project that utilized a case study design.

The participants included secondary content area teachers (n = 3) who each taught a single content area. Data sources included semi-structured teacher interviews, which were thematically analyzed and triangulated with classroom observations and student interviews. The teacher interviews tapped into the life learning histories of the teachers.

Results of this study showed that teacher agency was challenging for each of the teachers in the study, but agency was accomplished to a large degree by two of the teachers. In these two cases, the teachers drew on their previous learning and professional experiences to enact teaching they believed to be educational rather than instrumental.

This study contributed to the design of the present study. It investigated teacher agency in terms of curriculum design and implementation, two domains of a teacher's professional role connected to their potential use of agency. Further, the interviews triangulated with observations

of both teachers and students served as a model for the data collection and analysis of the second phase of my study, as described in Chapter Three. Additionally, the ecological perspective, with a dual analytical focus on the teachers and the context, informed the design of my study (described in Chapter Three).

The second study (Camp & Oesterreich, 2010), a case study using a PAR approach. This study investigated a teacher who drew the attention of the researchers due to her use of agency to challenge attempts to impose standardized/commercially produced curriculum, scripted lessons, and assessments. The researchers asked: 1) what are the key elements that created, supported, and sustained this teacher's agency? and 2) what are the implications from this study for teacher educators and teacher education programs that share this "uncommon vision"?

The participant taught fifth grade in a public school with a majority Latinx student population. This study utilized a thematic analysis of a semi-structured interview, direct classroom observation, and ongoing dialogical discussions with the participant. This study was similar to the present study in that the participants collaborated in the interpretation of the data as an aspect of the researcher's data analysis and identification of findings.

The teacher remained at this school for 4 years, designing curricula with an innovative and culturally sustaining approach, despite being the only teacher at her school who did not follow a commercially produced and test-driven curriculum. She resisted the commercial curricula because she believed it lacked cultural relevance for the students and their community (Camp & Oesterreich, 2010, p. 21). To resist the imposed curriculum and the perceived restriction of professional autonomy, she enacted "uncommon teaching." Her pedagogy emphasized creating educational experiences for her students characterized by critical thinking,

student choice, democratic classroom organizational structures, and culturally supportive materials and teaching/learning methods.

The researchers concluded that her teacher education program was influential in supporting and guiding this teacher (Camp & Oesterreich, 2010, p. 24). The teacher education program took place at a school and emphasized a professional inquiry approach to developing teacher autonomy and responsibility for constructing culturally sustaining curriculum design, innovative and engaging lesson design and implementation, and the use of embedded and authentic assessment practices to inform instructional decisions. Later, as an on-going graduate student, the teacher was able to draw on the support of like-minded colleagues in her graduate program cohort, who helped her gain the tools she needed to persist in teaching according to her principles. As such, she resisted and overcame the "common sense" policies promulgated by her school district's policy makers and her school's administration.

Moreover, the participant's commitment to pursuing an "inquiry approach" to her own professional development caused her to adopt an experimental approach to her practice, developing innovative teaching approaches oriented toward democratic and social justice. The teacher credits her experiences in her teacher preparation program and the approach used by her graduate program instructors for helping her to understand the importance of using professional agency to pursue professional learning goals. This study was important to the design of the present study for two reasons. First, it emphasized the value of teacher collaboration with both other teachers (the fellow graduate students in the participant's university cohort) and with a university-based researcher. Second, this study provided a model for using a PAR approach to conduct research with teachers.

Wells (2011) conducted and reported the third relevant study. His study focused on the dialogical construction of situated pedagogical knowledge through a participant action research approach guided by a socio-cultural theoretical perspective. The study was conducted with five elementary teachers, who were colleagues at a K-8 urban public school, and two university researchers. The study utilized a qualitative case study design that focused on action research projects that were collaboratively planned by the classroom teachers and the university researchers. The researchers collected classroom data as participant observers and used dialogical discussion methods with the teachers. Their discussion methods and the collection and analysis of the data were informative to the design of my study.

Wells (2011) investigated the following questions: 1) what is the impact on teaching practices resulting from teacher constructed pedagogical knowledge in collaboration with researchers through action research and dialogical interactions between and among teachers and researchers? 2) "how is writing and talking used as a tool for thinking and learning in the context of elementary science teaching" (p. 174)? and 3) "how is language used and in what forms, as students engage in scientific inquiry into a topic of their own choosing" (p. 173)? The dialogical discussion data were subjected to thematic discourse analysis.

Wells, his co-researcher, and the teacher collaborators found that:

- teachers, who were collaborators in the design and implementation of the project, dialogically generated pedagogical theories and strategies, which they were willing and able to integrate into their practices (p. 174).
- students who had choice of topic were highly engaged and more likely or more willing to engage in a discourse of inquiry rooted in exploratory question posing and hypothesis generating and testing (p. 175); and

- the process of dialogical construction of knowledge was perceived by both the teachers and the students as being critical for developing new understandings related to science teaching and learning (p. 176).

This study provided a model of action research with participants assuming the role of collaborators, and the use of situated learning theory generated through dialogical construction of understanding. Both of these attributes contributed to the design of my study. A unique feature of this study was the systematic use of student interview data. I also collected student data, albeit informally, during classroom observations. Finally, this study reflected a teleological view of teacher agency reflecting the belief that the major goal of teacher autonomy is to nurture and support student autonomy.

A fourth study (Robinson, 2012) theorized teacher agency as "the socio-culturally mediated capacity to act" (Ahearn, 2001, p. 112). This assertion of agency is manifested as a response to a regimen of teacher accountability based on student standardized test scores. This study was conducted using a qualitative case study design utilizing teacher interviews and classroom observations as data sources. The data were analyzed using deductive thematic analysis procedures based on pre-determined themes that were also used to formulate the interview questions. The study took place at a primary grade level (K-3) open optional charter school located in an affluent suburban community.

Robinson (2012) explains the focus of this study by arguing that teaching has become unduly regimented (p. 5) to the point of de-professionalization. She quotes Walsh (2006) to describe de-professionalization as an

> increased distrust of teachers that has led to the subordination of their professional knowledge and judgement in preference for measurement of performance through

> standardized testing; meaning that their critical voices have been increasingly silenced at the policy level. (p. 112)

Robinson examined teachers' collective resistance to these imposed policies. The teachers reported feeling threatened by the imposition of these policies. They responded by collaboratively renegotiating their identity vis-à-vis their earned right to professional autonomy. The teachers had long established holistic assessment practices and narrative evaluation reports which were sent to parents. The new policy required district wide standardized testing and the reporting of the test results in place of the teachers' accustomed practices.

Robinson (2012) reported three findings. First, she found that the teachers' strategy was efficacious when they collectively responded to policy makers by describing the threat the new policy proposal presented to their professional identities. Second, the teachers effectively utilized dialogic collaborative discussions to articulate the problem and to create solutions. Third, they expanded their collective agency by engaging other stake holders, including the principal and parents of their students, in productive dialogues leading to successful solutions.

Through the teacher-initiated dialogues they elucidated the contradiction of using a standardized testing basis for assessing their students, given their school's philosophy. This was true, in the researcher's view, because this school had a long-standing commitment to a child-centered educational approach. The teachers and the parents had selected this school because of the match between their educational visions and the philosophy of the school. The teachers' collective agency unified the school community to resist and refuse the pro-standardized assessment policy changes.

This study contributed to the design of my study because it investigated teacher agency as a collective and collaborative dialogical phenomenon in a particular ecological context. Finally,

this study focused specifically on the professional teaching domain of “assessment.” That is, teachers asserted their professional agency to conduct and report student assessments in ways that were congruent with their professional principles and reflected the school's philosophy. In so doing they drew on and solidified their professional identities as being teachers who had the capacity and the right to exercise their judgement.

Charteris and Smardon (2015) reported a study of teacher professional agency focused on what Gilborn & Youdell (2000) referred to as “educational triage” (p. 134). Educational triage refers to the 'quick fix' policy and practice responses to the accountability, performance-driven high stakes testing mindset of identifying low test scores as a sign of educational crisis and as an indication of the failure of teachers to perform competently. This study investigates teachers who are “agentially positioned as professional decision makers and collegial experts in the contexts of their own learning communities” (p. 115).

Charteris and Smardon (2015) asked the following questions (p. 116): (1) what are the effects from classroom teachers collaboratively interpreting classroom assessment data that is based on student work samples? and (2) how could teachers use dialogical reflection of their professional practices to identify and clarify the next steps to improve their pedagogical practices?

The study utilized a qualitative case study design. The participants included three elementary teachers from four different schools, for a total of 12 participants. The selected schools were rural, suburban, and urban settings. The teachers engaged in inquiry-based action research projects, which included collecting observation data from each of the participant's teaching practices. The observations were conducted by both the teachers and the university researchers. A dialogical approach was used as the basis for discussing and analyzing

observational data. As such, the research project was conducted using a participant action research (PAR) approach, which positioned the teachers and university investigators as research collaborators.

Three findings emerged from this study. First, teachers reported "looking more within myself," or "building greater self-efficacy through taking charge of my own professional learning" as evidence of "teacher agency" (p. 118). Second, teachers reported an increase in listening more intently and intentionally to the voices of their students, which helped to inform their teaching practices. Third, the researchers concluded that teachers' awareness of their role in nurturing learner agency/autonomy increased as they emphasized incorporating student voice into their critical reflections of their teaching practices. They reported seeing a positive relationship between the growth of their teacher agency and their students' development of agency.

This study is relevant to the present study because a dialogical construction of knowledge took place among the teachers in their communities of practice. An emphasis was placed on developing teacher agency for the purpose of nurturing learner agency. An ecological perspective on agency with situated learning theory was used as a major construct. A participant action research (PAR) approach was used, with teachers functioning as research collaborators and co-interpreters of the data. In the present study, I strove to provide a context for early and mid-career teachers to grow their agency through their collaboration with me and each other.

In the sixth study, Hunzicker (2012) investigated the relationship between teacher agency, as an influence on professional development and the exercise of teacher leadership. She noted other research studies showing that mandated imposed professional development appears to have little impact on either the teachers' classroom teaching practice or in the

leadership capacity of teachers (Dozier, 2007; Lord, et al., 2008). Hence, she sought to answer the following questions: (1) What is the relationship between teacher selected and/or teacher designed and led professional development and teacher leadership capacity? and (2) What is the impact of teacher designed and teacher led professional development efforts on teacher classroom practice? (p. 270).

The study was conducted using a qualitative multiple case study design. The participants were eight elementary teachers who were cohort members of a STEM professional development initiative. The data was collected using a questionnaire, the teachers' written self-reflections, and transcribed recordings of teacher focus group discussions. The data was analyzed through a process of initial inductive open-coding and constant comparison analysis techniques that are consistent with constructivist grounded theory methodologies. The multiple data sources were triangulated to arrive at the interpretations and findings.

Hunzicker (2012) concluded that teacher input for selecting professional learning topics and designing professional development programs contributed to the expansion of the teacher's leadership capacity. This collaborative approach to professional development planning created embedded opportunities for the exercise of "informal teacher leadership." As teachers continued to have experiences in an informal leadership role, their leadership efficacy beliefs strengthened. Moreover, teacher leadership (as both individual and collective agency) progressed in a continuum, beginning with emergent to developing to established. Finally, three conditions were conducive to the development of teacher leadership: "exposure to research-based practices, increased teacher efficacy, and serving in a leadership capacity beyond the classroom" (p. 272).

This study was helpful as I designed the second phase of the present study because it relied on situated learning theory by involving teachers in collaboration and reflective dialogue.

The investigative approach resembles the present study in that constructivist grounded theory methods were used. Further, Hunzicker's study (2012) shares with my study the assumption that the gradual development of teacher agency/leadership is facilitated by providing opportunities for teachers to collaborate in designing professional learning, leading to an increase in their professional efficacy. Hunzicker's approach of collaborating with the teachers to help select the direction and form of their professional learning is similar to the participatory action research approach that I used with the phase two participants.

A Synthesis of the Theoretical Framework and the Reviewed Studies

The theoretical framework and the literature reviewed in this chapter reflects a complementary understanding of socio-cognitive and socio-cultural theories applied to teacher agency. The thematic analysis of 40 research articles were categorized into ten themes, which informed the design of the present study.

The six studies selected for detailed annotations were qualitative case studies. Two used grounded theory methods, and one study used a phenomenological approach. Three of these studies were conducted in the participatory action research (PAR) tradition. The three major domains of a classroom teacher's professional responsibilities—curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment—were each addressed in one or more of the studies. Furthermore, all ten of the identified themes (see Table 2.3) related to teacher agency were referenced in the discussions of one or more of the six annotated studies.

Gaps in the extant research of teacher agency. Based on this review of literature, questions regarding the nature and source of teacher agency require further investigation. For example, the notion of teacher agency serving as a vehicle for professional development, is generally overlooked. Most studies view teacher agency as being the product of professional

knowledge and practitioner skill (linked to a teacher's efficacy beliefs) and under-estimate or ignore the role that agency may play in a teacher's professional growth. This agentic orientation may be crucial to the process of a teacher taking an active role in their professional learning. An agentic stance towards one's professional development may imply an authorial role in shaping one's professional identity. The present study explicitly investigates the role of agency for catalyzing professional learning (question 4, what are . . . impacts on professional learning?) and implicitly investigates the relationship between teachers' agency and identity formation.

Furthermore, most studies broadly theorize teacher agency, but few studies investigate specifics of how agency is obtained, sustained, or manifested in the day-to-day work of classroom teachers. This study investigates teacher agency closely and comparatively from an emic perspective. Teacher agency is described across the professional teacher career (early, mid, and veteran phases) and agency is compared between an elementary multiple-subject teaching context and a secondary single-subject teaching context.

Finally, teacher agency is theorized in this literature as a monolithic construct. That is, the preponderance of studies used a case study approach to describe individual teachers in a particular time and place. In contrast, this study views teacher agency as manifested in a teacher's practice related to instruction, curriculum, and assessment (domains of a teacher's practice), and as manifested both individually and collectively across the full teaching career spectrum. The theoretical frame and related literature suggest that agency is expressed in qualitatively different forms, which is related to the teacher's sense of purpose and their context. from adaptive, to innovative, to transformative, depending on the teacher's teleological perspective (sense of purpose) and their situationally influenced capacity to assert professional agency, either individually or collectively.

Summary

This chapter began with the theoretical framework of my study. The framework is based on socio-cognitive and socio-cultural theories as they relate to human agency, and by extension, teacher agency. I find the two theoretical perspectives to be compatible and each contributed to the design of my study.

The second section of this chapter reported on relevant literature. I found 40 studies related to teacher agency and conducted a thematic analysis of the studies. Ten themes were found across the literature. I provided frequency of the themes, cited sample studies, and described the methods and findings of the studies. Next, I described six studies, which were directly related to the design of my study.

This chapter concluded with a discussion of three gaps in the literature. My study was intentionally designed to investigate these gaps. The next chapter details the methods used to conduct my investigation of professional teacher agency.

Chapter Three

Research Design and Methods

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the research design and the methods employed to investigate professional teacher agency. This chapter is organized into two parts mirroring the two phases of the study. In the first phase, I collected and analyzed data to investigate professional teacher agency from the perspective of veteran teachers. In the second phase, I collected and analyzed data to investigate the professional agency of early and mid-career practicing teachers. Data analyses for both phases addressed, to varying degrees, each of the four research questions. Certain findings derived from phase one informed the design and conduct of phase two; these findings are reported at the conclusion of the phase one methods section. This chapter concludes with a description of the thematic constant comparison analysis I conducted to compare and contrast the findings from both cohorts regarding to teachers' sense of purpose.

The first phase utilized phenomenological investigative methods; the second phase utilized constructivist grounded theory investigative methods with a participatory action research approach. Finally, both cohorts were thematically constantly compared to explore the participants' teleological educational purposes across the career span.

In the introductory section of this chapter, I restate the research questions and provide a brief overview of the entire study. After the introduction, the chapter is organized into two major sections providing the details of the data collection, analyses, and participants, including my professional and personal relationship with each participant. The final section describes the thematic constant comparison across the two cohorts.

The Research Questions

Listed below are the four research questions and sub-questions:

1. What forms of teacher agency are discernable at various junctures (early career, mid-career, and veteran) of a teaching career?
    a. Do the forms vary when comparing elementary and secondary schoolteacher?
2. What conditions appear to be conducive to the development of teacher agency?
    a. What pre-dispositions, personal experiences, and professional context influences appear to either support or inhibit the initial obtainment and then expansion of teacher agency?
3. What challenges to or constraints upon the exercise of agency do teachers experience during different phases of their careers?
    a. In what ways do teachers overcome, resist, adapt to, or acquiesce to challenges to their professional agency?
4. What are the discernable impacts of teacher agency on a teacher's professional learning and the educational experiences of their students?
    a. In what ways does the exercise or denial of teacher agency impact a teacher's professional learning and career trajectory?
    b. What is the relationship between teacher agency/autonomy and the educational experiences of their students, including student agency/autonomy?

Following the overview, the methods to investigate these questions are described.

Study Overview: A Two-Phase Research Design

This study is a two-phase investigation. The first phase is phenomenological (Giorgi, 1985; Heidegger, 1962; Husserl, 1931; Smith, 1996). The second phase is grounded theory

(Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) with a participatory action research approach (McTaggart, 1991). This study is designed to investigate professional teacher agency, manifested over the course of the full teaching career span, from the perspectives of veteran (phase one) and practicing (phase two) teacher participants.

Phase one was designed to furnish insights into, examples of, and a tentative conceptual model for the phenomenon of professional teacher agency. The veteran teachers' perspectives contributed to answering all four of the research questions. Three phase one findings informed some aspects of the phase two design.

Phase one was conducted in the spring of 2016. Ten researcher-selected veteran teachers participated. Data were collected using semi-structured interviews (including informal post interview communication) and a researcher-constructed survey. The survey was based on the analysis of the interviews.

The interviews were thematically analyzed using phenomenological investigative methods consistent with those described by Giorgi (1985) and as extended by Smith (1996). Based on this analysis, I developed a conceptual model of professional teacher agency as an ecologically embedded phenomenon manifested as teacher autonomy. I reasoned that this tentative phenomenologically derived conceptualization of professional teacher agency could be used to investigate and construct understandings of professional teacher agency as it was experienced by the practicing (early and mid-career) teacher participants in phase two.

The second phase of the study was conducted during the 2016-2017 school year. This phase investigated professional teacher agency as experienced by practicing teachers. Data sources included semi-structured interviews, classroom observations with related discussions, and survey responses. An aspect of the design was to recruit teacher cohorts working together at

one of two school sites. Therefore, data collected included evidence of teachers' efforts to assert their agency both individually and collectively. The data were analyzed using constant comparison methods from a constructivist perspective (Charmaz, 2014).

Ten currently practicing teachers were selected to participate in phase two. This cohort consisted of two groups: five teachers were early career teachers (first through the third year of their careers), and five teachers were mid-career teachers (sixth through the eleventh year of their careers). The phase two teachers also represented an even number of elementary and secondary (middle school) teachers.

Phase two utilized grounded theory (Glasser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990), an investigative methodology based on a constructivist (Charmaz, 2014) theory. Additionally, phase two included a participatory action research (McTaggart, 1991) dimension. Denzin's (1978) advice for triangulation of interrelated data sets was followed.

Participant action research (PAR) was used to conduct 'action research' (Lewin, 1946; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2013). PAR provided opportunities for the participants to engage in reflection and to test out practices enhancing their agency. Based on the analyses of observations and discussions, an "unfolding matrix" (Padilla, 1996) was utilized to share relevant preliminary findings with the teachers, to provide an opportunity for teachers to reflect, and to plan for the next observation. Hence, I investigated teacher agency development collaboratively with the practicing teachers. Interrogation (Charmaz, 2014) of the findings from both phases suggested that teachers' educational purpose was related to teacher agency. Hence, I thematically compared the two cohorts to confirm that conjecture.

Phase One: Methods and Participants

This section provides the details of the phase one methods and participants. It begins by providing the rationales underlying the methods used. This is followed by a description of the participants and setting, including the selection procedures. Next, I describe the data collection and methods of analysis. I conclude this section by reporting three phase one findings, which informed the design of phase two.

Phenomenology: Rationale for Descriptive and Interpretive Traditions

Phenomenology, a sub-category of the epistemological branch of philosophy, is the investigative theoretical perspective underlying the phase one methods. Phenomenology locates 'reality' as existing within one's psychological experience of objects and events. As such, it was first proposed by Husserl (1931) as an approach to sociological investigations requiring the researcher(s) to "set aside all previous habits of thought and learn to see what is before our eyes" (p. 43). The practical implications of Husserl's proposed approach, according to Magrini (2012), resulted in

> a philosophical method of observing, recording, and interpreting 'lived experiences' through vivid and detailed descriptions. This practice seeks to uncover universal elements of human existence that are instantiated within particular empirical situations. (p. 2)

Essentially, according to Vaismoradi (2013, p. 398), phenomenological research attempts to understand a phenomenon from the perspective of the participants.

Phenomenological research includes both descriptive (Giorgi, 1985) and interpretive (Smith, 1996) traditions. In phase one I drew on both traditions. Initially, I focused on a factual and literal (i.e., non-interpretive) analysis of the interviews to learn how the phenomenon of

teacher agency was experienced and understood individually by the veteran teachers. Later, interpretive analytical methods were used to explore implied meanings and to deepen my understanding of teacher agency from the collective, or intersubjective, perspective of the veteran teachers.

Drawing on the descriptive phenomenological tradition. By beginning with a descriptive approach, I sought to accomplish what Giorgi (1985) describes as, "the explicit goal of phenomenology—discovery—and not that of verification" (p.14). To accomplish this goal, I conducted semi-structured interviews, using open-ended questions, with the veteran teachers. The use of a semi-structured interview format with open-ended questions is consistent with two key principles of descriptive phenomenological methods: 1) the essentialness of understanding the meaning of lived experiences through attentive listening to first person narrative representatives of the phenomenon; and 2) the need to deliberately suspend pre-conceptions as I described the experiences and beliefs of the participants. These two principals guided the design of phase one.

Constructing understandings through an interpretive approach. The phase one research also drew on the interpretive traditions of phenomenological investigative methodology, including hermeneutics (Speigelberg, 1976) and interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) (Smith, 1996). The interpretive tradition, which is characteristic of much current phenomenological research, uses a hermeneutic/questioning lens to reveal and gain understanding of latent or unseen aspects of the phenomenon under study. As such, "the aim of interpretive phenomenological analysis is to explore how participants make sense of their personal and social worlds . . . and to uncover implied or hidden understandings regarding the meanings that particular experiences hold for participants" (Smith & Osborn, 1997, p. 53).

The interpretive approach typically uses data sets from multiple participants, as was true with this study, to construct intersubjective understandings of the phenomenon being investigated. An intersubjective perspective is described by Russell (2006) as: "the full weight of reality that we experience with the world is only experienced once we have some awareness of others who also experience this world" (p. 163). By including ten highly agential veteran teachers in phase one of the study, and by using IPA methods to compare their interview data, I aimed to arrive at an intersubjective understanding of professional teacher agency.

Table 3.1 provides an overview of the research questions, data sources, and analytical methods for phase one, which are described in this section.

Table 3.1

Research Questions, Data Source(s), & Analytical Methods

Question	Data Source	Analysis
1. What forms of teacher agency are discernable during a teaching career (veteran, mid- & early)?	Interview Data File. Survey Responses	Inductive Thematic, Narrative, & Discourse
2. What conditions appear to be conductive to the development of teacher agency?	Interview Data File; Survey	Deductive Thematic & Comparison of Survey Responses
3. What challenges to or constraints upon the exercise of agency do teachers experience at different phases?	Interview Data File	Inductive & Comparative Thematic, Narrative Discourse
4. What are the discernable impacts of teacher agency on professional development & student outcomes?	Interview Data File; Survey Responses	Descriptive Thematic, Triangulation of Themes & Survey

As I concluded phase one, I considered what I had learned to incorporate into the design of phase two. I was led to consider the question posed by Smith and Osborn (1977): "Do I have a sense of something going on here that even the participants themselves are less aware of?" (p.53). From this approach, I derived numerous interpretive findings (reported in Chapters Four, Five, and Six) regarding teacher agency.

Participants: Selection Procedures and Setting

I purposely recruited ten veteran teachers from my network of professional contacts, all of whom readily agreed to participate. As described below, each had demonstrated an exceptional degree of professional teacher agency over the course of their careers. I selected three men and seven women, an equal number of elementary and secondary teachers, and three teachers representing ethnicities other than White. See Table 3.2.

Table 3.2 Veteran Teachers

Teacher	Number of Years Teaching	Grades Taught	Gender	Ethnicity
Janet	33	Middle & High School	F	White
Thomas.	29	High School	M	White
Jodi	35	Elementary	F	White
Martha	27	Middle School	F	Alaskan Native
Enrique	30	Middle & Elem. School	M	Latinx, Bilingual
Kass	28	Elementary	F	White
Sheryl	26	Elementary	F	Latinx, Bilingual
Diane	31	Elementary	F	White
Leigh	29	Elementary	F	White
Joseph	28	Middle School	M	White

At the beginning of this study (February 2016), eight of the ten participants were retired from classroom teaching. All ten teacher participants are now 'officially retired,' but most continue to be professionally active. Each of the selected veteran teachers possesses a reputation for effective and innovative classroom teaching practices. For example, Enrique and Martha led in proposing, designing, and successfully implementing charter schools for their school districts. The other participants designed, proposed, and successfully implemented new educational programs and/or approaches for schools at which they taught.

Collectively these veteran teachers taught for an average of just under thirty (29.6) years, and all of them received their teacher education in the 1980's. Eight of the teachers taught in Alaska for most or all of their careers, one taught in Wisconsin, and one in Arizona.

I was professionally acquainted with nine of the ten participants during the course of my career as I served in one or more of the following professional roles: a classroom teacher, a literacy leader, and a statewide mentor teacher. I held these positions during the time these teachers were serving as grade level (elementary) or subject specific (secondary) classroom teachers. I have personally observed the teaching of all eight of the Alaskan teachers. I was aware of the reputations of the other two non-Alaskan teachers prior to recruiting them for this study.

Colleagues, administrators, parents, and students have recognized all ten for their teaching successes. At various points in their careers, each was recruited into positions of leadership. All but two (Jodi & Joseph), stepped out of the role of classroom teacher to become instructional coaches (Diane, Kass, & Leigh), fulltime mentor teachers (Sheryl & Thomas), a curriculum specialist (Janet) or principals (Enrique & Martha). Each of these eight teachers returned to classroom teaching following their leadership hiatuses.

Three of the teachers in the study taught my own children (Janet, Joseph & Kass). I subsequently developed close personal friendships with these three teachers, along with one other teacher in the study (Martha). In the case of these four teachers, my wife and I have socialized with them, and joined them and their spouses on Alaskan adventures as we discovered common interests beyond our professional relationships. I have taught on the same faculty with two of the teachers in the study (Janet & Joseph).

For the nine teachers with whom I have had direct professional contact during their active teaching careers, colleagues and I have long admired their effectiveness as teachers, their commitment to advancing the welfare of students, and their willingness to continually reflect on their beliefs and practices. The tenth teacher, Enrique, was recommended by numerous professional contacts as an exemplary and courageous model of dynamic and innovative teaching. He is known for defending his professional right to teach in ways he deemed to best meet the needs of his students.

Data Sources: Descriptions and Collection Procedures

Two data sources were collected. The first was a semi-structured interview of each participant. Seven participants initiated follow up email and phone conversations. I recorded field notes of each interview, wrote field notes of follow up phone conversations, and copied email exchanges. I summarized the interview field notes, as described below, and gave a summary to each participant for member checking. The second data source was a researcher constructed survey. Procedures are described below.

The interview protocol and informal follow-up communication. The interview was designed to follow Seidman's (2013) guidelines for semi-structured interviews. I formulated four open-ended questions based on my professional experiences with professional agency and

my familiarity with the research literature pertaining to human agency broadly and teacher agency specifically. The interview questions were parallel to the research questions. That is, the questions focused on forms, conducive conditions, challenges, and educational impacts of professional teacher agency over the course of their extensive teaching careers.

The semi-structured interviews invited the participants to give an account of their experiences. As these questions were asked, participants were encouraged to not only recall, but to reconstruct (Seidman, p. 89) key moments related to teacher agency. The quality or underlying dynamic of these interviews fits with a category Holstein and Gubrium (2011) referred to as being "animated interview narratives" (p. 154). They fit Dilly's (2000) classification of "intensive interviews," because of my close professional relationship with nine of the participants and our shared interest in the topic of professional teacher agency.

Both linguistic and paralinguistic data were collected. The latter, according to Flood (2010), involves paralinguistic elements communicated by the participants and inferred by the researcher such as body language and tone of voice. These interviews were conducted as tape-recorded phone conversations, so the forms of paralinguistic data I noted were that of voice tone, volume, and inflection. Van Manen (1997) points out that to faithfully provide the most accurate and comprehensive account of the interview, "the researcher's description should convey the existential, emotive, enactive, embodied, and situational essences of the phenomenon as experienced by the participants" (p. 19).

The interview procedures. Each of the invited participants received and agreed to a consent form explaining the basic parameters of their participation (a 30-minute tape-recorded interview, a member check, and a follow-up 10 item survey). The consent form guaranteed that their identities were masked (pseudonyms were assigned) throughout all aspects of the research

process. The participants were also told that they were under no obligation to complete the study, and that they were free to withdraw at any point. Finally, each participant was promised that, during the member check, they would have an opportunity to review and offer corrections and/or clarifications to my summary, including direct quotes selected from the interviews.

The interview questions paralleled (in a paraphrased form) the four research questions of the study. Each participant received the following four interview framing questions prior to the scheduled interview:

1. In thinking about the topic of professional teacher agency, what are some specific ways or examples that show how you have asserted your teacher agency?
2. What conditions or factors may have contributed to your ability to initially obtain, expand, and maintain your professional teacher agency throughout your career?
3. What challenges, if any, did you face with regards to your development of agency or your ability to assert your professional agency through your teaching practices?
4. What do you see as being the educational benefits and/or the educational costs from either the exercise of or the constraint upon professional teacher agency?

As the interview was drawing to a close, I asked each participant to imagine themselves in front of my undergraduate teacher education class to provide two or three pieces of advice regarding the assertion of professional teacher agency. By using this strategy, I followed the advice of Seidman (2013) to "ask the participants to talk as though you were someone else"(p. 9).

The interviews were each conducted, via phone, at a time of the interviewee's choosing. The interviews were scheduled to last 30 minutes. I informed them that my primary role was to listen and to take notes during their comments, so as to not overly influence the direction or

contents of their statements. Occasionally I interjected a probing question for the purpose of asking for examples or for clarification. All the interviews were completed within thirty minutes.

During the interviews I actively took notes. In preparation for taking contemporaneous notes, I created a quadrant sectioned note-taking template across two facing pages in my notebook. I used each of the four questions as headers for each of the separate quadrant sections. As possible follow-up probe questions occurred to me during the interview, I listed them in the margin next to the relevant framing question. I also noted paralinguistic features, such as a change in volume or insertions of vocal exclamations such sighs, laughter, groans, etc. Finally, on a separate page, I recorded surprising or unexpected participant comments not directly linked to any of the four questions. I then created a teacher data set file for each participant and inserted these field notes.

Informal follow-up communication. My communication with seven of these participants did not end with the conclusion of their interviews. Instead, these participants-initiated email exchanges and/or follow-up phone conversations. The notes from the conversations and/or copies of email exchanges were included in each participant's data set file, to be analyzed as an extension of the interview data.

These follow-up conversations were not in my original design. I justified including them as data because those such as Hiller and DiLuzio (2004) recommend that researcher-participant dialogues create opportunities for participants to clarify their understandings of their experiences through a process of “reflexive progression” (p. 2). Important elements of a participant's experience discovered through "reflexive progression," according to Charmaz (2014), “refers to those views expressed by the participants that arise through the conversation" (p. 82). These post interview discussions, which were often characterized by a reflexive progressive quality, grew

out of, and built upon the examples of, and ideas about professional teacher agency raised during the interviews.

Member check: rationale and procedures. This section provides the rationale for the member check and is followed by a step-by-step description of the member check procedures. The member check provided the participants an opportunity to review, correct, and comment on my summary.

Rationale. I conducted the member check for two reasons. First, because the participants possessed deep insight into the questions I was investigating, the member check created an additional opportunity to tap into the participants' knowledge and perspectives of professional teacher agency. Second, I used the member check to fulfill my researcher responsibility to represent their views accurately.

Guba and Lincoln (1985) claim that member checking provides "the backbone of satisfying the truth-value criterion" (p. 110) of qualitative research. Moreover, Reason and Rowan (1981) maintain that checks are a standard feature of participatory action research design. In their words, "good research at the non-alienating end of the spectrum . . . [the researcher] goes back to the subject with the tentative results and refines them in the light of the subjects' reactions" (p.248). The member check was a key strategy to achieve objectivity and to accomplish the primary goal of phenomenological research—to discover, rather than to verify.

Member check procedures. Immediately following each of the tape-recorded interviews, I reviewed my notes and outlined a preliminary summary. Next, I listened to the tape recording of each interview, periodically stopping the tape to record details and to make additions to the initial outline. I then listened to each tape-recording a second time to excerpt specific verbatim quotes

representing key ideas expressed by the participants. Finally, I added details and examples to the outlines of those participants who engaged in follow-up communications.

I reorganized each outline based on a descriptive thematic analysis of each interview. I used the participants' terms or phrases as thematic headings for each section. Finally, I added quotes exemplifying each participant's experiences, perspectives, and beliefs about professional teacher agency, to the relevant sections of each outline. Using the completed outlines, I drafted the summaries in paragraph form. My goal was to accurately reflect each participant's ideas back to them in each summary.

Within a few days of conducting each interview, I sent each participant her/his thematically organized summary. Each participant was invited to clarify, elaborate upon, or correct any statements. Feedback suggested I successfully captured the participants' ideas in the summaries. The participants indicated that I accurately described their experiences and ideas, and that I appropriately selected and accurately rendered quotes representing and illustrating the interviews. Four interviewees made no corrections or clarifications; six participants suggested minor word changes and/or additional elaboration.

For example, Enrique, a former elementary teacher, elaborated on his frustration with the middle school approach separating the content subjects and requiring students to move from class to class. This frustration, which was shared by another teacher, led them to propose an 'integrated curriculum,' a school within a school, optional program. He had not made the extent of his frustration clear in the original interview; thus, he clarified this point through his follow-up email communication. The summaries were revised to reflect the participants' suggested changes.

The survey. The second data source is a researcher developed survey. This section provides the rationale for the survey and describes its construction and administration. One of the findings from the analysis of the survey data contributed to the design of phase two.

The rationale for conducting the survey. Although the use of surveys is generally associated with quantitative research, in the form of statistical surveys, there is an increased recognition (Jansen, 2010) of the value of using "the qualitative type of survey that does not aim at establishing frequencies . . . but at determining the *diversity* of some topic of interest within a given population" (p.2). Fink (2003) specifically recommends the use of qualitative surveys as a means of "exploring differences in meanings or degrees," (p.61), which participants experience regarding a specific aspect of a general phenomenon.

I designed and implemented the survey for two reasons: 1) to discover patterns within the construct of "conducive conditions" for teacher agency; and 2) to discover the variability in the degree to which specific "conducive conditions" were experienced or were perceived as being salient to the development of teacher agency for each participant. I used the survey to compare participant salience ratings of themes, which emerged from the veteran teacher's responses to the question of "conditions conducive to developing teacher agency?"

Construction of the survey. To construct the survey, I used a descriptive phenomenological approach (Giorgi, 1985) to thematically analyze the interview data (the analytical procedures are described below in the interview analysis section) to identify patterns or repeatedly occurring phenomena linked to the "conducive conditions" associated with the achievement of teacher agency (the second research question). Items for the survey were derived from the thematic analysis. I chose to include themes, linked to conducive conditions, which were present in fifty percent or more of the interview data sets. I followed these procedures:

1. I reviewed notes from the interviews and the summaries to locate statements about agency that I interpreted to be linked to the thematic category of "conducive conditions for developing teacher agency."
2. I created a list of phrases and terms from each participant's interview data related to the theme of conducive conditions.
3. I compared across the data sets, for the purpose of grouping similar or synonymous terms (e.g., parent, or other family member as a role model) into sub-theme categories (e.g., positive family influence on a participant's conception of teacher agency).
4. I listed all the sub-theme categories (n=14) and identified nine referenced by half or more of the participants in the study.
5. Finally, I composed thematic statements representing each sub-theme category for inclusion on the survey.

To create the survey instrument, I randomly listed the thematic statements to mitigate order effects. I also included an optional "open choice" item inviting participants to add conducive conditions, which they valued but were not on the survey (See Appendix 3.A for a copy of the survey). The following thematic statements were used in the survey:

1. Family or community based (other than school) role models of a highly agential teacher.
2. K-12 learning experiences that served either as an example of or as a "counter-example" for what "high agency" teaching might consist of.
3. University coursework and degree programs — including, but not exclusive to, the participant's teacher-education preparation program.
4. Early Career Mentors — either formal/assigned, or informal/self-selected.

5. Professional development opportunities (classes, workshops, in-services, etc.)
6. Professional organizational affiliations and/or professional conferences.
7. Collegial partnerships (teaming with "like-minded," teachers).
8. Challenges to "right to professional agency," as a catalyst to stronger convictions and the development of strategies to overcome structural limitations to achieving professional agency.
9. A growing sense of professional self-efficacy (discovering "what works," for you and your students) over time.

Administration of the survey. The survey was emailed to each participant (See Appendix 3.A). It was a 'live digital document' with expanding text boxes for optional comments under each item. Participants rated each item according to a 1 to 10 semantic differential scale (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974), with '1' indicating that a survey item played "no importance," and a '10' indicating that a particular item was "indispensable" to their attainment of professional teacher agency. All ten veteran teachers completed the survey. No veteran teacher participant added information to the theme statements, nor did they add suggestions in response to the open-ended tenth item.

Analysis of the Interview Data

Described below are the rationales and procedures for analyzing the phase one interview data sets. I applied two phenomenological analytical approaches to the interview data: 1) descriptive thematic analysis (Giorgi, 1993) for individual case analyses; and 2) interpretive strategies (Smith, 1996) including thematic, narrative, and discourse analyses, for cross-case comparative analyses. These analyses addressed one or more of the research questions. Each of

the following subsections begins with the rationale for and the question(s) addressed by a particular analysis and is followed by the procedures used to conduct each analysis.

Descriptive phenomenological thematic analysis: rationale and procedures. Until recently, as Norlyk and Harder (2010) point out, little specific guidance has been available for performing descriptive phenomenological data analysis. Sundler, et al. (2019) addressed this situation by proposing principles and procedures for descriptive thematic analysis in a manner consistent with the descriptive phenomenological research tradition. In doing so, they agree with Holloway and Todres's (2003) contention that thematic analysis is appropriate for both descriptive and interpretive phenomenological traditions, but descriptive thematic analysis is minimally interpretive, relying on the literal use of informant's words and ideas (Sundler, et al., 2019, p. 734).

The descriptive approach to phenomenological thematic analysis, according to Sundler, et al. (2019, p. 735) relies on three key principles:

1. openness to ideas, especially new ideas, presented by the informants,
2. questioning of the researcher's pre-existing understandings and beliefs, and
3. reflection on the participants' reported experiences with the studied phenomenon.

These guiding principles emanate from the underlying phenomenological belief that the participants are considered to be the experiential experts. Therefore, their expertise should direct the researcher's search for meaning.

Sundler, et al. (2019, p. 736) extend their advice by suggesting the following procedural steps:

1. familiarize oneself with the interview contents through repeated immersion into the interview data (listening to recordings or reading transcripts) to begin initial coding of key idea words and phrases.
2. note (in the margins) thematic patterns of meaning that are inductively emerging from multiple listenings to tapes and/or readings of transcripts; and
3. organize various statements in the data around key thematic headings reflecting the participant's system of beliefs about the phenomenon.

I followed these principles and procedures to conduct the descriptive thematic analysis of the veteran teachers' interview data. This analysis served the immediate purpose of producing interview summaries for the member check step and contributed to the larger purpose of addressing all four research questions.

Descriptive thematic analysis procedures. As reported above, a descriptive thematic analysis (Giorgi, 1985) was conducted to write the participant interview summaries. For this analysis, I identified themes explicitly stated in the data. Listed below are the procedures I employed for the inductive thematic analysis of the interviews.

1. I took contemporaneous notes during the conduct of the interviews, including notes of paralinguistic data. These notes were organized by the framing questions and included a section for ideas not directly connected to a specific question.
2. I repeatedly listened to the interview recordings, adding details and elaborations to my initial note-making, and writing down verbatim quotes from each participant's interview.
3. I used a highlighter to color code key terms and phrases, in my notes, which were linked to ideas about teacher agency.

4. Using these elaborated and color-coded notes, I constructed an outline by clustering the terms and phrases into themes that closely matched each participant's language.
5. I wrote each participant's interview summary, which was organized by thematic headings as sub-titles, and included relevant quotes.

The interview summaries were reviewed, and in some cases (n = 6), clarified by the participants. The participants' suggestions for correcting or adding to the reports were incorporated into the final drafts of each thematic summary. The summaries were then deductively analyzed, using cross case analysis procedures, to construct the survey, using interpretive phenomenological methods described in the next section. The completed summaries were added to each of the participants' data files.

Interpretive phenomenological analysis: rationale and procedures. In phenomenology, the interpretive tradition of data analysis shares several characteristics with the descriptive tradition. Both approaches are data driven, rather than theory driven (Griffiths, 2009); and both approaches derive emergent findings using flexible procedural guidelines (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). IPA (Smith, 1996), however, goes beyond description to discover meaning by interpreting participants' experiences as influenced by their contexts. An interpretive approach to phenomenological analysis considers the "context-dependent *lifeworlds* of participants, contingent upon social, historical, and cultural influences" (Eatough & Smith, 2009, p. 194). IPA is used to illuminate implied meanings, first within a single participant's data (Ho, et al., 2017), and then to discover patterns of convergence and divergence across multiple data sets (Smith, et al., 2009).

Noon (2018, pp. 76 - 80) provides the following guidelines for conducting an IPA:

1. Generate data samples from respondents who have a degree of shared experience with the phenomenon under investigation.
2. Utilize data collection procedures that invite the participants to share richly detailed first-person accounts of their experiences relevant to the phenomenon under investigation.
3. Begin data analysis with open-coding procedures to bring to light the participant's perspectives and understandings of the phenomenon under investigation.
4. Move gradually through increased levels of abstraction, identifying emergent themes within individual data sets and patterns of themes across data sets.
5. To write the final report, distinguish between the participants' explicitly stated beliefs and the researcher's interpretations.

To analyze the veteran teachers' experiences with agency, within the complex contexts of their personal and professional lifeworld influences, I utilized an IPA approach to conduct thematic, narrative, and discourse analyses of the interview data sets.

Inductive approach to interpretive data analysis of the interviews. I used an inductive approach to conduct a cross case comparative analysis of the veteran teachers' interviews and discovered themes not specifically linked to research questions; the analysis of the individual veteran teacher interviews revealed complex layers of meaning. After inductively identifying conceptual categories, which I restated as themes, I considered the relationship of the themes to each of the four research questions.

Inductive interpretation of paralinguistic data. I analyzed paralinguistic data by looking for patterns in each interview, such as a change in volume or rate that consistently coincided with

a particular topic or idea being discussed by the participant. I then triangulated this analysis with the thematic analysis of the same passages. By analyzing these patterns and linking paralinguistic changes to specific topics or themes, I inferred that certain incidents and topics elicited strong emotional connections for some of the participants. This analysis of the paralinguistic data, triangulated with the thematic analysis, addresses the third and fourth research questions, pertaining to challenges and impacts associated with teacher agency, respectively. Findings from the triangulation of these analyses are described in Chapter Five.

An example of the cross case inductive interpretive analysis. Described below is an example of the procedures followed for the interpretive thematic analysis. This analysis led to the identification of reoccurring themes and to patterns of themes as they related to each other, and eventually to the discover of intersubjective findings, tied to the research questions. These findings are reported in Chapters Four, Five, and Six.

1. As I compared each participant's interview data with other interviews, I began listing agency related conceptual terms and phrases, and their synonyms, which were appearing in multiple interviews.
2. I sorted these similar occurring themes into cross case clusters that became the basis for identifying cross-case categories.
3. (For example, one of the first clusters of synonymous or nearly synonymous terms included: "trade-offs," "ability to compromise," and "consensus seeking." I grouped these related terms within the category of "negotiate/negotiation.")
4. The category of "negotiation" was theoretically productive in that each of the participants described experiences with teacher agency that fit into this category.

5. In addition, various forms of "negotiations" were described by the participants in reference to their relationships with students, colleagues, administrators, and parent or community members.
6. Hence, I identified "the ability to successfully negotiate" as one of the cross-case, or intersubjective, themes teachers used to describe their achievement of professional teacher agency; this theme was primarily framed in relationship to navigating challenges to agency — the third research question.

As I proceeded with the comparative and inductive thematic analysis, I mapped the emerging categories and combined like categories into conceptual categories, later renamed as themes (n=6), reported as findings in Chapter Five. Next, I mapped these themes as they related to the research questions. In the example of "negotiation," this thematic category was grouped under the major theme of "collaboration." Collaboration, as a theme, was in turn linked to the first research question (forms) and the third research question (challenges). The importance of negotiation to achieve teacher agency was grouped with other forms of collaboration, such as "fostering trust," and "aligning with like-minded colleagues" as collective forms of agency. These collective forms of agency (question 1), in turn, were presented as strategies for overcoming challenges to agency (question 3).

Narrative analysis: rationale and procedure. IPA researchers such as Eatough and Smith (2017) maintain that narrative analysis is a natural complement to interpretive thematic analysis (p. 26). Using narrative analysis, I analyzed storylines (Mishler, 1999) to trace the development of teacher agency over an extended period of time. The "comparison of storylines," is referred to as "narrative configuration analysis," (Polkinghorne, 2006, p. 145). This analysis, as explained by Bertaux and Delcroix (2000), treats narratives occurring over

extended periods of time as sources of documentary evidence for discovering, "recurrent patterns concerning shared phenomena or common experiences from a particular milieu" (p. 2). The veteran teachers met these requirements as they were interested in professional teacher agency and shared the same time frame (1980s through 2010) as professionals.

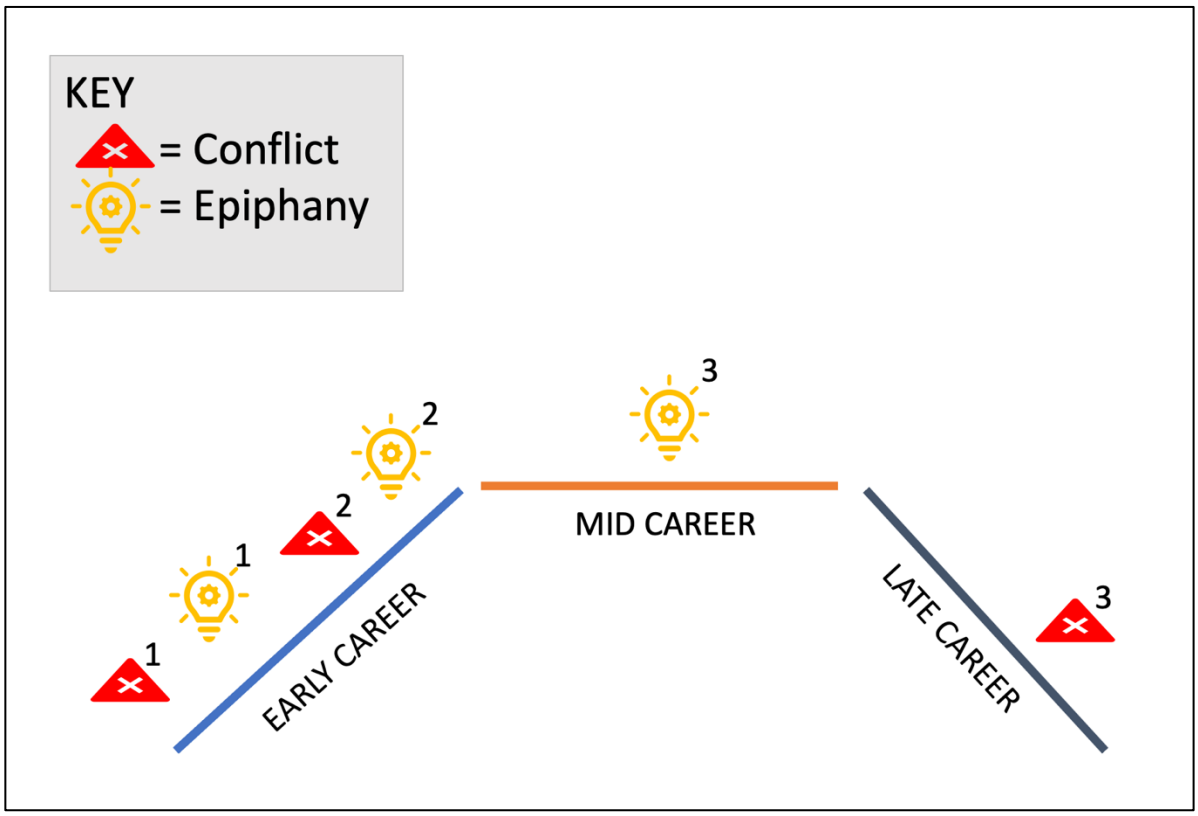
A key tenet underlying narrative analysis is that the extended stories represent actively interpreted storied accounts of the past and are not simply objective renderings of prior occurrences in chronological order. Narration, as an interpretive act, is consistent with IPA methodology. To this point, Ricoeur (1990) claims that extended narratives reflect a participant's interpretation of lived experiences as she or he “emplots important moments from our lives by drawing together events into a meaningful whole to create a story" (p. 65). As such, the veteran teachers' stories of agency reflect their organization of their professional histories and their understandings of their professional identities. My analysis of these narrative accounts represents my interpretation of the veteran teachers' career trajectories, vis-à-vis their teacher agency.

Narrative analysis procedures: The narrative analysis approach I used is classified by Bruner (1985) as being "paradigmatic," as it focuses on comparing and contrasting common story elements related to plot, setting, and characters. For this analysis, I focused on the elements of conflict and epiphany because the thematic analysis revealed a pattern connecting the types of conflicts and epiphanies that occurred with the time of occurrence within the teachers' career trajectories. Therefore, I used a paradigmatic form of narrative analysis to better understand the relationship between the occurrence of professional conflicts (as challenges to asserting agency) and epiphanies, and the career phases during which these phenomena occurred for the veteran teachers.

To conduct the narrative analysis, I created a story map of each participant's reported experiences with agency, showing the narrative arc contained in each data set. The story maps were organized according to story plot elements: setting, characters, events, conflict, and epiphanies (Savin-Baden & Niekerk, 2007). See Figure 3.1 for an example of a story map.

Figure 3.1

Veteran Teacher Joseph's Story Map



Conflict # 1: Joseph discovered that French, his subject as a teacher, was not intrinsically interesting or useful to his Mexican American students. So, he reentered his teacher education program and received a MAT as a science educator.

Conflict # 2: Joseph found that his teaching assignment was at a school relying heavily on a textbook dominated approach to science education, which he found to be ineffective.

Epiphany # 1: Joseph found success in modifying and adapting the textbook approach to include student choice projects, and student designed experiments as a complement to the textbook materials.

Epiphany # 2: Joseph found that by being less "in control" of his students and providing them with a structure allowing for increased student autonomy, his students responded with less disruptive behavior. High engagement became his strategy for successful learning management.

Epiphany # 3: Joseph found that clear communication with parents, and parent involvement in his more innovative projects, built a strong base of parent and community support for his agentic and innovative teaching methods.

Conflict # 3: (late career) a change in school leadership brought in an administrator who valued student and teacher conformity. Joseph's refusal to conform led to being officially reprimanded, and his lack of collegial collective agency left him vulnerable to the administrator's autocratic leadership methods. As a result, Joseph retired a few years prior to his planned retirement year, and shifted his educator professional role to that of a university adjunct instructor of future teachers.

Next, I compared and contrasted the story maps (Garaway, 1996), searching for patterns in the appearance and types of conflicts and epiphanies in each career phase. The individual story map plotlines were divided horizontally into the three career phases (early, mid-career, and veteran phase). These maps were then collectively aligned in a vertical formation so I could visually scan and compare the frequency of conflicts/challenges and epiphanies for each of the career phases (Figure 5.1).

I then analyzed the element of conflict, as different types, or categories (e.g., conflicts caused by a teacher claiming rather than earning agency) as it was described by the teachers. I discovered patterns in both the types of conflict experienced by the teachers, and patterns in the timing within the story arcs (the career phases). This analysis was used to answer the third

research question related to challenges associated with agency. These patterns, as professional context findings, are reported in Chapter Five.

I performed a parallel analysis of the epiphanies described by the veteran teachers by using Denzin's (1997) categories:

- cumulative epiphany — resulting from a gradually developing awareness over time.
- illuminative epiphany — reflecting a sudden awareness or turning point.
- major epiphany — resulting from a single event of major consequence.

This comparative analysis resulted in the discovery of patterns related to the types of epiphanies experienced by the veteran teachers and the career phases in which they occurred. This analysis was used to address three of the research questions related to the forms of agency, challenges to agency, and educational impacts associated with the assertion of agency. These patterns, as professional context findings, are described in Chapter Five.

Discourse analysis: rationale and procedures. Discourse analysis is a methodology that those such as Hammersley (2003) view as being complementary to interpretive phenomenology. A critical discourse approach (Parker, 2013, p. 233), considers the political dimensions to lived experiences by analyzing how individuals and groups effect and reflect social power structures through their use of discrete elements of discourse, such as words, phrases, and images. Other researchers, such as Martínez-Ávila and Smiraglia (2013), share this view and combine both methods, using an approach they refer to as "discourse analysis within a phenomenological framework" (p.1). I chose to use discourse analysis because I perceived discourse patterns in the veteran teachers' data, which I interpreted as being connected to aspects of their professional agency and professional identities within the context of relevant power structures in educational systems.

The words and phrases chosen by a speaker (Stubbs, 2001), express literal meaning, and at the same time, create a particular discourse which may reflect the speaker's attitudes about and understanding of the power dynamics implicated in their communication. In my repeated listening to the veteran teachers' interviews, I noticed differences in certain aspects of the teachers' discourse styles. This led me to formulate hypotheses about the use of particular words and phrases, and the possible implications of those discourse patterns in relationship to their beliefs about and uses of teacher agency. I investigated three aspects of the veteran teachers' language:

1. use of first person singular and first-person plural pronouns ('I' contrasted with 'we') to describe their experiences with teacher agency,
2. the frequency of active verb construction when describing use of agency, and
3. the extent to which veteran teachers referred to professional teacher agency as being domain specific (related to the domains of a teacher's responsibility, i.e., curriculum, instruction, and assessment), rather than as a global, or monolithic, construct.

All three aspects of the veteran teachers' language were analyzed to investigate how the specific language and language patterns used by participants reflected their attitudes and beliefs about teacher agency.

Discourse analysis procedures. The first step was to select the data to be analyzed. I chose portions of the recorded interviews that reported a teacher's accounts of experiences related to achieving or attempting to achieve professional agency (related to the first and third research questions). The number of related examples and accounts of achieving agency varied from a low of three (Thomas and Kass each provided extended accounts of only three examples),

to a high of seven (Diane provided multiple examples for each particular form of agency which she achieved).

After selecting the data samples, I created a matrix (Polit & Beck, 2004) to organize the samples according to three categories: first person singular and plural pronoun use; active and passive verb constructions; and multi-dimensional versus unidimensional references to domains of teacher agency (Table 3.3). Each teacher's coded data, that corresponded to or exemplified an identified category, was entered on the matrix. By using this procedure, I was testing my categories (Marshall & Rossman, 1995) to confirm that the relevant data fit into one of the pre-identified categories.

Table 3.3

Discourse Analysis Data Organization and Display Matrix (Polit & Beck, 2004)

Teacher Name	**First Person Singular (I) and First-Person Plural (we) Examples**	**Active and Passive Verb Constructions used to Describe Agency**	**Domain Specific or Generic References to Use of Agency**

I noted three patterns revealed by the analysis of the matrix. I graphed those patterns by frequency of use: (1) predominant usage (two thirds of the entries or more); (2) balanced usage

(between one third and two thirds in their frequency of usage); and (3) occasional usage (less than one third of their frequency of usage). For example, a teacher who used "we" rather than "I" more than two thirds of the time, when describing their experiences with assertion of teaching agency, was classified as "predominant collective," rather than "balanced" or "occasional," for the category of "collective view of agency." I used the same percentage cut lines to classify the other two language elements: verb constructions and domains of agency.

The categories and frequencies of participant verbal expression were compared with the forms (research question 1) of teacher agency which they reported during their careers. For example, I was interested in learning if teachers who primarily use the first-person plural ('we') pronoun form also provided examples of their assertion of agency as a collective, rather than individual, accomplishment.

I then triangulated (Denzin, 1978) the teachers' word choice frequency with their discourse patterns and the narrative analysis of their accounts of agency. This triangulation confirmed that teachers' use of individual single or collective plural pronouns matched their descriptions of agency achieved through individual or collective efforts.

The findings from the discourse analysis addressed research questions one (forms), three (challenges), and four (impacts). The results of this discourse analysis are reported in Chapter Five, along with other findings related to the influence of the professional context on the veteran teachers' agency. Certain findings derived from the discourse analysis influenced the design of phase two.

Analysis of Survey

I numerically analyzed the survey responses. I first tabulated each respondent's scores for each of the thematic statements. I found a substantial range of scores across the items. Six items received scores ranging from very low salience to very high salience. Next, I examined the survey item responses in terms of patterns of high and low response scores for each participant. The participants' responses were categorized. One category included high scores to the three items attributing attainment of teacher agency to current and past personal experiences (numbers 1, 2, & 9) and gave correspondingly low scores to formal learning experiences such as teacher education programs, and formal professional development (numbers 3 & 5). Nine of the ten teachers were placed into one of these categories. The tenth teacher was not so much an outlier as a person who partially fit into two of the three categories. This analysis suggested that veteran teachers adopted a particular "pathway" for developing their agency. This analysis contributed to answering question two, related to conducive conditions for agency, and is reported in Chapters Four and Five.

This analysis affirmed the value of the survey. It seems to be a reliable instrument. The veteran teacher's responses to the survey invites the question: Do early and mid-career teachers experience similar pathways? Hence, the survey is used with the phase two teachers.

A Conceptual Model of Teacher Agency had Implications for Design of Phase Two. As described above, a purpose for conducting phase one was to create a tentative conceptual theory of teacher agency to inform the design and conduct of phase two. This conceptual model is based on the literature described in Chapter Two and three findings from phase one. In the literature review, I reported Bandura's (2006) definition of human agency as "the capacity for

bringing visualized futures into the present through intentional action." (p.165). I posit that professional teacher agency is *the capacity for the teacher(s) to enact their vision of educational practices for the intended benefit of their students*. The veteran teacher interviews suggested that this capacity relies to varying degrees on contextual factors, and that teacher agency is both emergent and interactional. That is, the veteran teacher study confirmed the "ecological conception of agency-as-achievement" (Biesta & Tedder, 2007) presented in Chapter Two.

Second, the veteran teacher study led me to understand that those teachers' agency frequently relied on collective efforts tied to a collective vision, in addition to individual agency achievement. Hence, I expanded my conceptual model of teacher agency to include the idea that teacher agency might be expressed collectively as well as individually. I decided to select phase two teachers in two schools, to increase the possibilities for collaboration.

This conception (ecological, collective, and individual) suggested to me that phase two should include observations of and discussions with the teachers to consider: the teacher(s)' vision/instructional intention, their actions to enact their vision, and environmental conditions, which could potentially constrain or enable the teacher(s) to achieve their vision.

Two additional findings from phase one influenced the design of phase two:

1. The veteran teachers followed *distinct pathways* to achieve professional teacher agency (from the survey analysis and the narrative analysis); and
2. The veteran teachers perceived teacher agency as both a *domain specific (curriculum, instruction, and assessment)* and a *global* construct (from triangulating the thematic and the discourse analyses). *Curriculum* is knowledge and skills connected to particular subject matter areas; *instruction* is the method of teaching and learning; and

> *assessment is* the means to measure students' achievement of educational goals (Pellegrino, 2009, p. 2).

These findings influenced decisions regarding the data collection and analyses for phase two. The *distinctive pathways* finding from the survey analysis, led to the decision to use the same survey in phase two. The discovery of a *domain-specific* view of agency by veteran teachers influenced my decision to collect teacher observation data. More detailed links between these findings and the design and conduct of phase two are explained in the relevant phase two sub-sections.

Summary of Phase One Methods

This section presented a description of the methods and participants in phase one of this investigation. In doing so, I first provided the theoretical frames and rationales for the methods. This was followed by a description of the participant selection process, the participants, and the setting. Next, I presented the data collection instruments and procedures, and described the analyses. I concluded this section by reporting a tentative theory of teacher agency including three phase one findings which informed phase two.

Phase Two: Methods and Participants

This section describes the phase two methods. I begin by providing a brief overview of the data collection and analysis methods. I then explain the investigative principles of constructivist grounded theory and their relevance to phase two. Next, I describe the selection of participants, their professional characteristics, my relationship with them, and the settings for the study. Finally, data sources, collection procedures, and data analysis methods are described.

Overview of Methods

For the second phase I used a constructivist version of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014) and conducted the study in the participatory action research (PAR) tradition (McTaggart, 1991) applied to teacher research. In other words, in addition to investigating the practicing teachers' agency, the participants were provided opportunities to develop and/or expand their agency. A condition for being in the study was that the teachers shared this goal.

This phase investigated the same research questions (the forms, conducive conditions, challenges, and impacts associated with teacher agency) as phase one. I used the same data sources as phase one: interviews and surveys. In addition, I collected field notes of classroom observations and ongoing discussions with the participants. Data were analyzed according to procedures common to constructivist grounded theory research (Charmaz, 2014; Clarke, 2007; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007).

Constructivist Grounded Theory: Rationale and Explanation

A grounded theory approach, like the phenomenological approach used in phase one, is a qualitative method for conducting social science research**.** As paradigms for qualitative sociological investigation, grounded theory and phenomenology share key tenets. Both aim to develop inductive understandings of sociological and psychological phenomena as they are experienced in situational contexts. As such, both phenomenology and grounded theory are emergent and interpretive methods designed to discover and describe social/psychological dynamics and patterns rather than to test and verify pre-existing theories or hypotheses.

Just as Crotty (1996) describes the goal of phenomenology as "a critical re-interpretation, a new meaning, which is as much a construction as a description" (p. 275), Strauss and Corbin (1998) describe the purpose of grounded theory as the achievement of a greater understanding of

"a reality that cannot be known as it 'is', but which is always interpreted" (p. 22). As such, both methods fit Maines (2001) criterion for valid and useful social science research as: "a good science of the social starts with the nature of the phenomenon" (p.6).

Another tenet, and perhaps the most important shared premise of both phenomenology and grounded theory, relates to the notion of human agency broadly. Both methods ascribe the attribute of agency to the participants in the study. The phenomenologist van Manen (2016) asserts that his science is one "that studies persons that have consciousness and act purposefully in the world to create objects of meaning" (pp. 3-4). In a parallel claim, Charmaz (2014) describes a constructivist grounded theory investigative perspective as one that "views people as active beings engaged in practical activities in their worlds and emphasizes how they accomplish these activities" (p. 262 - 263). Both methods reject the deterministic assumptions central to the classical behaviorist paradigm.

Grounded theory differs from phenomenology, however, in other key aspects, making it an appropriate fit for phase two. Whereas phenomenological studies seek to describe and interpret, grounded theory investigations seek to explain. Grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) advocates for developing explanatory theories of social patterns of behavior from research grounded in data, rather than testing hypotheses tied to existing theories (Charmaz, 2014, p. 6). Moreover, grounded theory was developed and is frequently used to construct understandings with practical utility (Hookway, 2010).

Constructivist version of grounded theory. As grounded theory methods evolved, they shifted from a positivist orientation to a constructivist approach (Bryant, 2009; Clarke, 2005; Thornberg, 2014). Chenitz and Swanson (1986) locate the roots of constructivist grounded theory in two closely related schools of social psychology: pragmatics (Mead, 1932) and

symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969). Mead introduced the concept of emergence to explain individual and societal change. Through social and socio-historical interactions over time, the present 'emerges' with new characteristics from the past. Blumer, a student of Mead's, extended Mead's ideas into the theory of symbolic interactionism. One of Blumer's (1964) foundational principles for the theory of symbolic interactionism is captured in his statement that

> People do not act or react in an automatic way, but the individual is an acting organism who has to cope with and handle such factors, and who, in doing so, has to forge and direct his line of action. (p.55)

Annells (1996, p. 381) refers to Blumer's idea of symbolic interactionism as a "micro-theory" directed towards explaining how the individual is shaped by social interactions, and in turn shapes the wider society through individual and collective actions.

Adding to this understanding of the paradigmatic orientation of grounded theory, Charmaz (2014) explains

> Symbolic interactionism is a perspective not an explanatory theory . . . and this perspective views people as active beings engaged in practical activities in their worlds and emphasizes how they accomplish these activities. This perspective produces a dynamic understanding of actions and events. (pp. 261 & 262)

Grounded theorists in the constructivist tradition, according to Charmaz (2017), draw on the underlying premises of symbolic interactionism to assume an open-ended theoretical perspective. This perspective views individuals and groups as being agentic, and as being reciprocally influenced by each other and by their environment in the course of their interactions. The research strategies associated with constructivist grounded theory provide the means and methods to operationalize symbolic interactionism into useful empirical inquiry.

Charmaz (2014, p. 15) identifies five specific strategies central to constructivist grounded theory research:

1. simultaneous data collection and analysis through an iterative process,
2. emphasis on the analysis of actions,
3. use of constant comparisons as a primary means of generating theory,
4. use of the data to inductively develop new conceptual categories, and
5. use of theoretical sampling to refine data collection and analysis.

Each of these strategies was employed in phase two data collection and analysis.

One final key premise underlying phase two methods concerns the post positivist (Guba & Lincoln, 1994) and the interpretive (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994) nature of the constructivist grounded theory paradigm. This paradigm acknowledges that the researcher(s) is not neutral. As Strauss and Corbin (1994) point out, "the analyst is also a crucially significant interactionist in the research process" (p. 278). Moreover, because I adopted a participatory action research (McTaggart, 1991) approach, which engaged the participants in a dialogical co-construction of understandings, I assumed a critically reflexive awareness (Clarke, 2007) of the potential impacts of my beliefs and actions on the dynamics and results of the study.

From its inception in 1967 to its present application, grounded theory methods have evolved increasingly toward an approach seeking new understandings through an emic perspective. According to Bonner and Tolhurst (2002):

> In grounded theory methodology the researcher intentionally becomes immersed in the participants' world. The grounded theory researcher attempts to take on the role of the research subjects to discover what the world is like, how it is constructed and experienced. (p. 5)

As a former classroom teacher with a career long interest in and experience with my own efforts to develop professional teacher agency, I believe that my personal and professional positionality makes it possible for me to achieve an emic perspective as the researcher.

Conversely, it is important to balance the emic perspective by maintaining objectivity and to ask questions of the participants and of the data. Bowers (1989) states that "the researcher should strive, therefore, to maintain a position that is marginal, which allows the researcher to make comparisons between participants and situations, to discover how they are similar, and how they are different" (p. 34). By recruiting a diverse group of teachers for phase two, who were mostly unknown to me, I intentionally sought to achieve that balance.

Adopting a participatory action research approach (PAR). The second phase was designed to combine constructivist grounded theory methods (Charmaz, 2017) with a participatory action approach (McTaggart, 1991). The integration of these two complementary approaches (Teram, et al., 2005) fits with the twin goals of phase two: (1) to investigate teacher agency of early and mid-careers teacher participants; and (2) to describe ways for teachers to obtain and expand their professional teacher agency. PAR is described by Kemmis (2009) as a "practice changing practice," (p. 5). Hence, the purpose of using PAR was to both add to my understanding of teacher agency and to provide opportunities for the participants to expand their professional teacher agency.

Reason and Bradbury (2001) describe PAR as including "the whole family of approaches to inquiry which are participative, grounded in experience, and action-oriented" (p. xxiv). As with constructivist grounded theory methods, PAR has its theoretical roots in the pragmatic school of philosophy of (Mead, 1934), which led to the symbolic interaction theories of Blumer (1969) and the concept of social science research as being a dynamic process that Lewin (1999)

labeled as being "action research." Greenwood and Levin (2006, p. 63) refer to this family of action research approaches as being "pragmatic action research" and enumerated the common elements of these closely related approaches:

- takes place in a natural context,
- addresses real problems as perceived by the participants,
- collaborates researchers and participants,
- results in knowledge co-produced by both researchers and participants, and
- views diverse perspectives and experiences of the participants and researchers as enriching to the findings.

Combining constructivist grounded theory methods with PAR is supported by Teram, et al. (2005, p. 1131), who contend that this blended research design is suitable for deriving relevant theoretical knowledge for the academic community and producing useful practitioner strategies through active and mutually beneficial collaboration with the participants.

Table 3.4 provides an overview of the research questions, data sources, and analytical methods for phase two, which are described in this section.

Table 3.4

Research Questions, Data Sources, & Analytical Methods

Question	Data	Methods
1. What forms of teacher agency are discernable during a teaching career (veteran, mid- & early)?	Interview Sets Observations & Thematic Discussions	Inductive & Deductive Constant Comparison Analysis
2. What conditions appear to be conductive to the development of teacher agency?	Observations & Thematic Discussions	Inductive & Deductive Constant Comparison Analysis; Response to Survey

Question	Data	Methods
3. What challenges to or constraints upon the exercise of agency do teachers experience at different phases?	Interview Sets, Observations & Discussions	Inductive & Constant Thematic Analysis; Inductive Constant Comparison; Thematic Analysis
4. What are the impacts of teacher agency on teacher's professional learning and educational experiences of students?	Interview Sets; Survey; Comparison Observations & Discussions	Inductive Constant Comparison Thematic Analysis; Triangulation of Thematic Analysis with Numerical Analysis of Survey Responses

Phase Two Participants and Selection

To recruit the practicing teachers, I targeted two schools, one elementary and one middle. I made this decision for two reasons. First, the veteran teachers attributed "working with like-minded colleagues" (the second highest rated survey item for the veteran teachers) as an important conducive condition for developing professional teacher agency. The teachers at both schools had either been involved in each school's shift to STEM status or had chosen to seek a teaching position at a STEM magnet school featuring an emphasis on an integrated curriculum philosophy. Second, most of the veteran teachers experienced professional teacher agency as being both an individual and as a collective phenomenon. Grade level teacher teams closely collaborated in the development and implementation of their integrated curricular vision. I reasoned that conducting research with teachers consistently engaged in professional collaboration, would optimize my opportunity to investigate teacher agency expressed individually and collectively.

As a university student teacher supervisor, I was previously acquainted with one teacher at each school. After learning of the study, both volunteered to participate and offered to disseminate a recruitment flyer (See Appendix 3.B) among their peers at their respective schools. Through their efforts, I was put in contact with each of the other eight teachers.

All ten participants were self-selected volunteers. Each expressed an interest in exploring professional teacher agency as a potential benefit to their teaching practice and, by extension, to the enhanced learning of their students. The participation of these ten teachers was supported by both principals.

The practicing teacher cohort is comprised of five middle school teachers and five elementary teachers, and all are female. Five of the teachers are early career (3 elementary & 2 middle school) and five are mid-career (2 elementary & 3 middle school). See Table 3.4.

Table 3.5

Phase Two Teachers: Early Career (EC) or Mid-Career (MC); Years Teaching; Certification (Elem or Sec); Ethnicity

Teacher	Early Career (EC) or Mid-Career (MC)	# Years Teaching	Elem (E) or Secondary (S)	Ethnicity
Colleen	EC	3	S	Japanese American
Lynette	EC	3	E	White
Savannah	EC	1	E	White
Terri	EC	2	S	White
Brooke	EC	3	E	White
Denise	MC	11	E	Filipino-American
Iris	MC	5	S	White

Teacher	Early Career (EC) or Mid-Career (MC)	# Years Teaching	Elem (E) or Secondary (S)	Ethnicity
Samantha	MC	6	E	Latinx, Bilingual
Kristin	MC	11	S	White
Jana	MC	10	S	White

The settings. Prior to officially accepting any of the teachers into the study, I conferred with both principals regarding the nature of the study and to solicit their support. At approximately this same time (fall, 2016), I obtained university IRB approval to conduct this study, and was granted permission to proceed by the school district employing all ten of the teacher participants.

Both principals of the two schools identify as Latinx. The elementary school principal is female, and the middle school principal is male. Both schools are STEM magnet schools with majority-minoritized student populations, and both are Title I schools with the majority of students qualifying for the Title I federal free or reduced lunch subsidy program. The largest ethnic group for the middle-school is Latinx, with approximately fifty percent of the students being classified as either bilingual Spanish-English speakers, or Spanish dominant, English language learners. The elementary school serves a neighborhood where many refugee families are located. Consequently, this school population represents speakers of more than thirty languages and the corresponding ethnic diversity. Finally, both schools are located in an urban setting in the southwest region of the United States.

During my meetings with each principal, I was encouraged to hear them express strong support for professional teacher agency. Although both principals acknowledged paying close

attention to student test scores, they also indicated that learning benefits ensued from empowering teachers to engage student interest through the creation of innovative and relevant (both personally and culturally) learning engagements. Moreover, at magnet schools, student recruitment and retention are critical. Both principals expressed the belief that teachers with a high capacity for developing and asserting professional teacher agency were more likely to successfully recruit and retain students.

Data Sources and Collection Schedule

The data sources for phase two include: interviews, the survey, and classroom observations with discussions prior to and following each observation. The interview and survey data collection procedures closely parallel the procedures used in phase one. Field notes were taken of the classroom observations and discussions. After conducting an introductory meeting with each teacher, a schedule was set for the interviews.

I conducted a thirty-minute, face-to-face interview with each teacher, which was tape recorded and transcribed. I wrote summaries of each interview and engaged the teachers in member checking (described below). Next, each teacher and I scheduled three half-day classroom observations and discussions. The last two data collection steps, survey completion and a final discussion with each teacher occurred at the end of the school year on the teacher in-service day.

The formal interview procedures. At the onset of phase two, as with the veteran teachers, each teacher participant received a consent form explaining the basic parameters of their participation: a thirty-minute face-to-face tape-recorded interview, a member check, and the completion of the ten-item survey. In addition, teachers agreed to my conducting three classroom observations, which included pre and post observation discussions. Further, they were

guaranteed that all identities would be masked, all data would be confidential, and they were not obligated to complete the study and could withdraw any time. Finally, I informed them that they would be asked to review the summary of their interview and to correct, clarify, or withdraw any statements. Each participant signed the consent form and subsequently participated in all activities.

As in phase one, each participant received the four broad questions prior to the scheduled interview. These questions were the same as those asked of the veteran teachers, with minor wording changes to match the experience of the participants. The questions are as follows:

1. In thinking about the topic of professional teacher agency, what are some specific ways or examples that show how you have been able to assert your agency as a classroom teacher?
2. What conditions or factors may have contributed to your ability to initially obtain, and then expand and maintain your professional teacher agency to this point in your career?
3. What challenges, if any, have you faced, or are you currently facing, with regards to your ability to develop and/or to assert your professional agency through your teaching practices?
4. From your experience, what do you see as being the educational benefits and/or the educational costs, in terms of your professional development and/or your students' learning, resulting from either your use of agency, or your inability to use agency?

Additionally, based on the finding from phase one that the veteran teachers tended to view teacher agency across three domains of their teaching responsibilities (*instruction*,

curriculum, and *assessment*), I prepared and asked, as appropriate during the interview, probes (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) specific to these three domains.

As with phase one, the interviews lasted thirty minutes; but in phase two each interview was conducted and recorded face-to-face in the teacher's classroom. During the interviews, I took notes organized around the four framing questions.

The member check procedures. I conducted a member check for two reasons: to confirm that each summary accurately reflected the words and perspectives of each participant, and to continue establishing a collaborative and trust-based relationship with the teachers. To write each summary, I analyzed each interview using constant comparison analysis procedures (described below in analysis section) rather than the descriptive thematic analysis procedures used in phase one. I gave each participant a copy of the summary to read and comment upon. Their responses to the member check are described in the interview data analysis section below.

Observation data collection overview. The second data source was a series of three researcher observations for a half day in each teacher's classroom, including pre- and post-observation discussions with each teacher. The following sub-sections provide the theoretical rationale for conducting observations and a step-by-step description of the procedures.

The theoretical rationale for conducting observations. Participant observation is one of the main methods of data collection used in grounded theory research (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This form of ethnographic research places a premium on data collected by observing participants *in situ* (Adler & Adler, 1994). Lofland (1971) describes participant observation as looking, listening, and asking. Grounded theory observations, however, differ from the broad approach common to ethnographic research in that they are directed toward specific topics and questions (Charmaz, 2006).

In grounded theory, participant observations augment interviews and other forms of data. Participant observation allows a researcher to see what the participants do and say during natural interactions; those observations are then compared with the participants' descriptions of their experiences (Mulhall, 2003; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Additionally, my classroom observation field notes included information about the physical environment and interactions between and among the teacher and students. Moreover, by conducting observations and discussing the observations with each teacher, I added my researcher/teacher educator perspectives to complement or add to the teachers' perspectives. The symbolic interaction tenets (Blumer, 1969) imply that collecting and analyzing observations in the teacher's social environment is critical to deriving meaningful interpretations of the participants' experiences and to developing valid theories explaining the phenomenon under investigation.

Procedures for building trust. From previous experience, I knew I needed to establish trust between the participants and myself to conduct valid observations. Berthelsen, et al. (2017) make the point that the quality of the researcher's presence and the role that the participant observer assumes should minimally impact the actions and interactions of the participants (p. 417). Bogdan and Biklen (2003) refer to being accepted into a natural research setting and gaining the trust of the participants as "negotiating terms of entry" (pp. 120 - 125). To observe without altering the behavior of the participants (both the teachers and the students) I needed to quickly 'fit in' and gain trust, with a minimum of disruption to each classroom ecosystem. The steps I took to achieve fitting in and gaining trust are described in the following section.

I took three steps to gain the trust of the teachers, students, and support staff. The first step was to establish procedures protecting the privacy and identities of the participants, as guaranteed by the consent procedures.

Second, I established norms of confidentiality. Each teacher was assured that the content of the interviews and observations would not be shared with peers or administrators. Also, because I would be observing and speaking with students, I explicitly guaranteed that student identities would be masked (in keeping with FERPA requirements), and that conversations with students and in-classroom support staff would be confidential.

Third, because of my university affiliation and the role I had played previously as a faculty clinical supervisor and student teacher evaluator, I made it clear that I was assuming a non-evaluative role. My hope was that the teachers and students would view me as a neutral part-time participant observer and would carry on in the same manner as they did when I was not present. Thus, to pave the way for participant observation, the teachers and I agreed to introduce me to the students as a teacher colleague interested in learning more about the day-to-day teaching and learning that took place in their classroom.

Procedures for conducting the observations. Drawing from Gold's (1958) typology of possible participant-observer roles, I chose to actively engage in the learning activities to the extent that was practical for two reasons. First, by joining in with the learning activities in a role similar to that of a teacher assistant, I hoped to gain direct insight into the possible effects of the planned instruction. Second, by participating alongside the students, I had access to the students' verbal reactions and behavioral responses to the instructional efforts of the teacher.

The qualifying phrase, 'participate to the extent that was practical,' refers to the fact that I was actively taking field notes to describe the activities, to record verbal interactions, and to record a description of the salient features of the learning environment. Emerson, et al. (2001, p. 356) refer to this style of note taking as a "participating-to-write" approach. Topics for my field-notes were:

- examples of what is being said in the form of selective real time transcripts,
- the organizational/structural features of the classroom in the form of established procedures and protocol,
- detailed descriptions and diagrams of the physical arrangement of the classroom,
- lesson instructions, procedures, and materials,
- descriptions and/or photos of student work samples and other learning artifacts; and
- selective transcripts of class discussions, including exchanges between the teacher and students, and conversations among students.

My main goal for the observations was to collect data related to teachers' attempts to assert professional agency. I reasoned, however, that observations of students' responses to instruction would provide indirect information about the teacher's agency. I believed that student comments and my written observations of their behaviors and interactions with each other and their teacher would provide clues to the complex classroom learning and social dynamic. My half-day observations permitted me the opportunity to observe the teachers and students in a variety of learning structures, from direct instruction to independent student project time.

I discussed the teacher's plans before each observation and debriefed with the teacher immediately following the observation, documenting the teacher's reaction to and thoughts about the observation while the day's events were still vividly remembered by both of us. I took field notes of the pre and post observation discussions on facing pages in my field notebook, separate from the observation field notes. These notes included questions that occurred to me prior to the discussions, the teachers' response to these questions, and other ideas or questions that emerged through our pre and post observation dialogues. Immediately following each half day of

observation and discussion, I wrote an analytical memo capturing my questions and impressions followed by a summary, which I emailed to the teacher.

The survey as a comparative data source. The third and final data source was the survey. I used the same survey items with the practicing teachers as I used with the phase one participants. I administered this survey to the practicing teachers in a hard copy form, at our final face-to-face meeting. The administration of the survey and the final discussion with each participant marked the end of the data collection process.

Overview of the Data Analysis Methods

This section provides an overview of and rationale for phase two data analyses. Constant comparison (Charmaz, 2006; Glasser & Strauss, 1967) is a method well suited to the goals of phase two. Gregory (2010) explained that the intention of constant comparison data analysis is to compare and contrast "different 'slices of data' to reach higher levels of abstraction and advance with the conceptualization" (p. 7). Hence, I compared individual participant's experiences with agency over time, compared across practicing teachers, and ultimately compared the practicing teachers with the veteran teachers.

Both inductive and deductive analytical methods were used. The interviews and observations with discussions were mostly analyzed inductively. Additionally, two themes, which emerged from phase one, were used to deductively analyze the interviews: first a teacher's responsibility is linked to three domains (curriculum, instruction, & assessment) and second, agency is achieved both collectively and individually. I used numerical analysis to analyze the survey responses.

Analysis of the interviews. The first analysis of the interviews was undertaken to create a summary of each interview, which was used for the member check procedure. To create the

interview summaries, I immersed myself in the early and mid-career teacher interview transcripts and performed an inductive constant comparison analysis beginning with open coding (Charmaz, 2017). Next, I open coded my interview field notes, which included paralinguistic fieldnotes regarding the teachers' tone of voice, and other indications of the teachers' emotional associations with particular statements, such as facial expression changes or dramatic physical gestures. By constantly comparing the open codes from both documents, I grouped or clustered seemingly conceptually related words, phrases, and statements to create core categories. These core categories were the organizational basis for creating the interview summary outlines. Using the outlines, and adding relevant quotes, I wrote each interview summary in paragraph form.

Each participant was sent a copy of their summary for the member check. Four participants returned their summary with no corrections or elaborations, and six made suggestions for minor word choice changes and/or provided additional elaboration about specific incidents or ideas. For example, Jana elaborated on her concern about early career teachers' use of agency in the domain of assessment by emailing me a follow-up note with a detailed explanation for why she believed beginning teachers benefit from the advice of more experienced teachers when assessing their students. I rewrote each of these summaries to include the elaborations and details.

Constant comparison of interviews. The constant comparison analysis of participants' interview data sets, by both grade level taught (elementary or middle school) and by experience level (early career or mid-career), is illustrated in this section. What follows is an example of how I proceeded with the constant comparison analysis across the participants' interview data sets.

One code I identified through open coding (early career, middle school teacher, Colleen) was "frustration in communication." After open coding the entire interview, I identified a core category, "differences in perspectives and priorities," in reference to all the various actors with whom Colleen interacted: administrators, colleagues, students, and family/community members.

Next, through "axial coding" (Strauss, 1987), I constructed conceptual categories (by combining core categories identified in individual interview analyses) across participants. The cross-case constant comparison coding, using the initial core code of "frustrations in communication," turned up phrases such as: "hidden agendas" (Iris); "clash between short term focus on raising test scores and long-term goals of deeper understanding," (Brooke); and "one-sided expectations without an equal commitment to contribute" (Kristen). By comparing and contrasting across the participants, I merged these theoretically related core categories. This process resulted in the construction of the broader intersubjective "conceptual category" (Thornberg & Charmaz, 2014) of "agency achieved through identification of common understandings and shared goals."

As I compared all ten interviews, I realized that the conceptual category was 'saturated' (Green, et al., 2007). That is, all ten teachers described experiences of being challenged to successfully communicate their ideas and needs, and to find common ground for productive collaboration with various stakeholders. Hence, "agency achieved through reaching common understandings and identifying shared goals" became a conceptual/theoretical category for the phase two data.

This particular conceptual category, "agency through common understandings and shared goals" directly informs the third research question (challenges to achieving professional agency), but it also contributes to answering the other three questions, as reported in Chapter Five.

Altogether, this analysis revealed six conceptual categories, which were used to guide theoretical sampling during the collection and analysis of the observations and discussions.

Deductive analysis based on phase one findings. Following the inductive constant comparison analysis of the practicing teachers' interview data, I aligned the six conceptual categories and the thematic categories from the veteran teachers. The above referenced example, "agency through common understandings and shared goals," conceptually aligns with the phase one finding of "salience of teacher agency as an asset and/or a concern."

Another inductively derived conceptual category from the analysis of the practicing teachers' interview data is that of "agency manifested as teacher authenticity." This conceptual category emerged from the constant comparison analysis of three practicing teachers who temporarily left the teaching profession (Brooke, Iris, & Lynette), and then returned to the teaching profession when they were hired by schools that encouraged them to practice in authentic ways. This conceptual category of authenticity aligns with the phase one thematic category of "teacher agency experienced as both an individual and collective phenomenon."

Organizing and aligning the practicing teachers' conceptual categories with the veteran teachers' six thematic categories allowed for constantly comparing the veteran and practicing teachers. From the six practicing teachers' conceptual categories, I aligned two within each of the three thematic findings from the veteran teachers.

Theoretical sampling to bridge observation data collection and analysis. Each conceptual category (n=6, see findings Chapter Five for complete list) was constructed by comparing and contrasting the individual interview core codes across the data sets (axial coding, Corbin & Strauss, 1990), and was then used as the basis for theoretical sampling (Charmaz, 2014) during the observation and discussion data collection. The theoretical sampling provided

concrete examples for deepening my understanding of these key aspects of the practicing teachers' experiences with professional agency. Procedures for theoretical sampling, with an example, is provided in the next section.

Observation data analysis overview. The second data source was a series of three classroom observations of each participant with pre- and post-observation discussions of each, for a total of thirty observations and sixty discussions. These data sources were analyzed both inductively (described below) and deductively. I selectively used a deductive approach because the veteran teachers viewed their professional agency both globally and domain specifically (curriculum, instruction, and assessment). With this finding in mind, I analyzed observation/discussion data to discover the practicing teachers' use of (observations) and understandings about (discussions) teacher agency vis-à-vis a global and/or domain perspective.

Inductive analysis. I used constant comparison to analyze the observation and discussion field note data. Coding procedures were parallel to those used to analyze the interview data, beginning with open coding, and followed by identifying core codes, axial codes, and conceptual categories (renamed as themes). I compared the individual teachers across the observations and discussions, and then compared across the teachers' observation data sets. As is typical of grounded theory analysis, collection of the observation and discussion data and analysis of data occurred iteratively and simultaneously. The iterative process and ongoing analyses are described below.

Analysis of each observation and discussion occurred immediately after the event. I open coded each and wrote an analytical memo reflecting both my impressions of the teacher agency events and any analytical hunches I was contemplating. I wrote a summary of these perspectives, noting the key instructional and assessment teacher actions, interactions with

students, and student responses, along with the main points from the post-observation discussion. I included my interpretive comments and questions.

Consistent with the PAR approach, I emailed each participant the summary, inviting them to add their impressions and thoughts. In some cases, I received a detailed response to my summary. In other cases, I received a short response thanking me for my thoughts, followed by a confirmation of the date for our next scheduled observation session. Their responses did not add any new open codes but confirmed the open codes I had identified.

Next, I created core categories by combining synonymous or similar terms describing aspects of agency, into a single label (i.e., a core category). These core codes were transferred to matrices. The matrices were used to organize the data, to discover patterns across multiple observations of the same teacher and across multiple teachers' data sets (axial coding), and to share relevant preliminary findings with the participants (Padilla, 1996, unfolding matrix dissemination strategy) during our discussions.

The teachers and I used the post observation summaries and the matrix to consider questions and topics that might be productively explored during subsequent observations. In this sense, the second and third observations included targeted data collection, theoretical sampling.

Use of the "unfolding matrix" to facilitate dialogical data interpretation. The unfolding matrix (Padilla, 1996, p. 19) is an analytical tool/method, consistent with a PAR approach and grounded theory, to involve participant's interactions with data. Each teacher and I used the matrix to dialogically discuss their teaching and agency (Table 3.6). I shared relevant preliminary findings from the matrix, and we considered the usefulness of these intersubjective findings to their particular plans for exploring and expanding their teacher agency. We discussed aspects of their teaching practice, which they were interested in developing, and/or

pertinent questions they were pondering. These collaborative dialogues contributed to data collection decisions (theoretical sampling) for the next observation session.

Table 3.6

"Unfolding Matrix" (Padilla, 1996) – Template Used to Organize Phase Two Observation Data

Teacher Name / Date of Observation	Instructional – Adaptations or Innovations	Curricular– Adaptations or Innovations	Assessment Strategies - Agentic	Pedagogical Tact - Examples

An illustrative example. An example of this occurred when I was debriefing with Colleen, an early career middle school language arts teacher participant. She expressed surprise and disappointment because students did not engage in inferential reasoning during the class discussion, a strategy the students had previously done well. She intended for the students to use inferential reasoning to connect their life experiences with the experiences of the characters in a short story. Both her lesson plan and my observation verified that she demonstrated this form of making inferences, provided clear examples, and explained the procedures well. We were at a loss as to why the students had struggled.

During the discussion, I noted that one of the reoccurring core categories in the *instructional domain* matrix column was that of "lack of sufficient guided practice." Several of the other practicing teachers had encountered similar challenges within the instructional domain.

In discussions with these teachers, and through my comparative analysis (axial) across multiple teachers' data sets, I had derived that the category of "lack of guided practice" was common to several teachers.

Sensing that this category (from the matrix axial analysis) might explain the students' frustration, we carefully reviewed the details of the lesson, Colleen's recall of what occurred, and my observational notes. We "constructed tentative ideas about the data . . . and [then] examined this data to discover what was missing so that we could conduct further empirical inquiry" (Charmaz, 2014, p.199). Our tentative 'explanations as hunches' revolved around two possible explanations: the brevity of the short story form (the students had worked with novels prior to that lesson); and the pacing of the lesson, which did not allow for partner or small group talk before students were asked to make inferences. We mutually decided that for my next observation the teacher would present a similar lesson with the added step of peer exploratory talk, and I would tailor my observations to collect data specific to this category.

This example demonstrates how I used theoretical sampling and a matrix to both organize the data and to share preliminary findings with the teachers. This process was characterized by recursively working back and forth between the data and tentative explanations or puzzling questions. Using the matrix, each teacher and I were able to co-theorize puzzling teaching challenges to formulate new insights.

Survey analysis. The same survey administered to the veteran teachers was administered to the practicing teachers. I used the survey to test the relevance of the veteran teacher findings related to "distinctive pathways to learning." I used deductive interpretive data analysis to numerically analyze the survey responses. I tabulated each participant's responses to each of the thematic statements. The findings from the survey analysis are reported in Chapter

Five. This analysis contributed to answering question two, conducive conditions for agency of the practicing teachers.

Cross-Cohort Analysis

Interrogating the findings of Chapters Four & Five, I theorized that teachers' long-term purposes of education, their teleological perspective, may be related to their agency. Thus, I conducted a thematic constant comparison analysis across the two cohorts to discover the participants' sense of educational purpose—their teleological aim–in relationship to their use of teacher agency across the career span. To conduct this thematic analysis, I reviewed the participant data sets and the practicing teacher matrices. I conducted a comparative thematic analysis of the data sets. The themes from this analysis are reported in the last section of Chapter Six.

Summary

This chapter described the research methodologies used to investigate professional teacher agency as it was experienced by the twenty teachers who volunteered to participate in this study. The chapter was divided into two major sections, mirroring the two phases of the study: phase one, a phenomenological study of teacher agency from the perspective of veteran teachers; and phase two, a grounded theory investigation of teacher agency through the perspective of currently practicing early and mid-career teachers. The methods employed for analysis of phase one and phase two each provided a theoretical rationale for the collection and analysis of data, described selection of the participants, provided demographic characteristics of the participants, and the procedures for collecting and analyzing the data. Three findings from phase one influenced the design of phase two. The final cross cohort analysis of both phases was explained.

Overview of Findings Chapters

What follows are the three findings chapters. In these chapters I present my findings from this two-part study of professional teacher agency. Each of the chapters represents one of the three major themes emerging from this study. They are:

- Personal biography of the participants as an influence on their teacher agency,
- Professional context of the participants as an influence on their teacher agency, and
- Educational purpose of the participants as an influence on their teacher agency.

The structure of Chapters Four and Five follows the over-all design of this study. I first present findings from phase one of the study pertaining to veteran teachers, which is followed by findings from phase two of the study pertaining to early and mid-career teachers. Chapter Six is organized as a thematic constant comparison across both cohorts.

The findings are thematically organized and then systematically linked to one or more of the four research questions. I have chosen to organize the findings thematically, rather than aligning the findings with the research questions, because many of the findings intersect with two or more of the questions. Due to the over-lapping nature of the findings—across multiple questions—I have concluded that the findings can most coherently and comprehensively be presented as occurring within three themes that are inter-connected to the research questions. Thus, Chapters Four, Five, and Six set out findings derived from the analyses of the teachers' biographical information, professional context descriptions (and practicing teacher observations), and educational purposes, respectively, as influences on their teacher agency.

Chapter Four

Personal Biography as an Influence on Teacher Agency

In this chapter I present findings from each cohort related to three aspects of their personal biographies: their preprofessional experiences with agency, the apparent influences of their families and their communities of origin, and the apparent influence of their schooling experiences on their development of professional teacher agency. These findings were derived from the analyses of the participants' interview and survey data.

The findings in this chapter most directly address the second question of the study: what are the conducive conditions leading to the development of teacher agency? Additionally, these findings explicitly and implicitly address the other three questions of the study in that they shed light on 1) the forms of teacher agency achieved by the participants, 3) the participants' strategies for overcoming challenges to their professional agency, and 4) the educational impacts that resulted from their exercise of teacher agency.

Veteran Teachers and Biographical Influences on Agency

The findings obtained from the individual and then comparative analyses of the veteran teacher interview and survey data are organized into the following thematic categories:

- demonstrations of early agentic dispositions as an influence on teacher agency,
- views of education expressed by families and communities of origin as an influence on teacher agency,
- schooling experiences as an influence on beliefs about teaching and teacher agency; and
- distinctive pathways to learning as an influence on the obtainment and use of teacher agency.

These categories are described and supported with evidence in the next four sections of this chapter.

Veteran teachers' early demonstrations of personal agency presaged their development and use of professional teacher agency. Each of the veteran teachers told stories of their use of agency during their personal, pre-professional lives. Through the thematic and narrative analyses of the interview data, I discovered that all ten of the veteran teachers expressed an awareness of the connection between their use of agency in their personal lives and their use of agency in their teaching careers.

The veteran teacher Janet is an example of the continuity of agency first expressed in her personal life that carried over into her professional teaching practice. Janet, the oldest of six siblings, describes the challenge of sometimes being left in charge of her brothers and sisters as a time when she drew on her personal agency. She states that

> the one approach that was guaranteed to fail was to simply do nothing and hope for the best. I learned that, in those situations, doing anything, taking the initiative, having a plan, acting on it, and then changing it if necessary, was better than doing nothing.

She further describes how she applies this agentic approach to her present-day teaching. She maintains that her most important teacher role is to be a catalyst for her students' learning.

Janet began her career using her agency to carefully plan the learning engagements and goals for her students, but she gradually shifted to placing some planning and goal setting responsibility onto her students. She realized that she had always learned the most in classes and in family situations when she had taken the initiative, developed her own vision, and then, with support, had acted to realize her vision. Janet describes her eventual approach to teaching as one where she accepts that

> my role of teacher is that of being the pivotal expert in the teaching/learning process; but, for the learning to be memorable for the kids, I need to help them find ways to take their experience of learning in the classroom beyond our year together, and even beyond school, and to use what have learned in a meaningful way. My highest aim is to help our students develop the confidence to look within themselves and to know with certainty that they can use something inside themselves to achieve a goal, to accomplish something that is important to them.

Janet retired from teaching and within two years created and then directed an educational outreach program for a coastal marine research center in her community. The continuing thread of using agency can be seen in the leadership roles she has taken on in her personal, professional, and post-professional activities.

Sheryl also demonstrated personal agency prior to beginning her professional teaching career. She described herself as being "an indifferent and disinterested student who did just enough to get by." She, however, developed a passion for natural science while accompanying her grandfather on archeological explorations into remote locations in western New Mexico. From these experiences she determined that she would someday become an ecologist.

Later, as a single parent with a degree in environmental studies, Sheryl chose to become a teacher, in part, because "I so wanted to pass on my passion for learning through direct experiences with the natural world, that I gotten from my adventures with my grandfather, to my daughter and other children." Her story, demonstrates that she had a clear vision of who she was and what she valued as a learner, depicting a theme that carried over into her professional career. The clear sense of priorities and beliefs about her learning, acquired from her early experiences

with her grandfather, influenced the educational vision that Sheryl subsequently enacted as a teacher.

All ten of the veteran teachers' early use of personal agency influenced their later use of professional agency. This finding explicitly addresses the second research question: the teachers' pre-professional disposition of being personally agentic is interpreted to be a conducive condition associated with their later obtainment and use of professional teacher agency. Additionally, this finding implicitly addresses the other research questions: agency is expressed in the form of decisive action; agency is deployed to overcome challenges to enactment; and the teachers' accounts of agency imply specific impacts on their students' learning.

Family and community of origin influenced the veteran teachers' agency as learners and teachers. Families and communities of origin views of education was a second influence on the veteran teachers' professional agency and professional identity formation. Five of the veteran teachers (Diane, Enrique, Jodi, Leah, & Thomas) grew up with parents who were teachers. These five veteran teachers reported developing positive attitudes towards the teaching profession because of parental influence.

Eight of the veteran teachers (Diane, Enrique, Janet, Jodi, Leah, Martha, Sheryl, & Thomas) reported that their beliefs about education were influenced by early learning experiences during family travels, regular visits to the public library, and having parents or adults in their extended family who were attending college. These learning excursions with family members encouraged them to seek academic success and were described by the veteran teachers as positive influences towards each of these participant's decisions to become a teacher.

All ten of the veteran teachers described being raised within family and community contexts that valued education and manifested mostly positive attitudes toward schools and

teachers. Consequently, the veteran teachers viewed the teaching profession in a positive light. Teachers being highly regarded as professionals was a family and community influence on the participants and is interpreted as being conducive to their aspiring to obtain and assert professional agency. Moreover, the specific types of learning they experienced within their family contexts, contributed to the development of educational visions emphasizing active learning, student choice, and the use of place-based and culturally relevant content.

The view of teaching as an important profession is interpreted to be a conducive condition for developing teacher agency. Furthermore, particular beliefs about effective teaching are interpreted as an influence on the forms of teacher agency utilized by the veteran teachers. Together, the influences of a positive attitude towards teaching and a view of learning as an active process initiated by a teacher, implies an understanding of the teacher's professional role as being one that requires agency asserted as teacher autonomy. This finding explicitly addresses the first and second research questions pertaining to the forms of and conducive conditions for teacher agency.

The schooling experiences of the veteran teachers influenced their beliefs about teaching and teacher agency. The thematic analysis of the interviews revealed that all ten veteran teachers reported influences on their teaching beliefs stemming from schooling experiences. Most of these recalled experiences were positive (n = 8), a couple were negative (n = 2), but all of them informed the veteran teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning. These beliefs, in turn, seem to have influenced their use of teacher agency as professionals.

Five of the veteran teachers (Diane, Enrique, Jodi, Leah, & Thomas) as reported above, were influenced by their personal relationships with teachers in their immediate or extended families. Three other teachers (Janet, Martha, & Sheryl) reported being influenced as students by

having mostly positive school experiences with innovative and inspiring teachers. All eight of these teachers were influenced in their beliefs about teaching from these positive experiences.

In contrast to the experiences of these eight veteran teachers, two of the participants (Joseph & Kass) reported having mostly negative learning experiences in school. These experiences did not provide models for their eventual approaches to teaching; rather, they described their teaching style as being intentionally constructed in contrast to, and even compensation for, the ineffective teaching models and negative learning experiences that they encountered as students.

The veteran teachers schooling experiences, both positive and negative, influenced the forms of teacher agency that they later utilized in their professional careers. Their use of agency was directed towards teaching students in ways replicating their positive schooling experiences and avoiding their negative schooling experiences. This finding addresses the first and fourth research questions pertaining to the forms and impacts of teacher agency.

Distinctive pathways to learning bridge personal and professional realms of agency development. Agency is theorized as being the capacity to enact one's vision (Bandura, 2006), whether that vision be private or professional. Therefore, acquiring the requisite knowledge and expertise to overcome challenges to enacting one's vision, i.e., learning how, is central to becoming agentic. The veteran teachers provided evidence that their strategies for pre-professional learning continued as professionals.

The thematic analysis of the interviews revealed the professional learning each participant sought to develop their teacher agency. The narrative analysis led me to conclude that the veteran teachers evinced a consistent agentic approach to learning in both pre-professional and professional realms. By triangulating the findings of these two analyses with

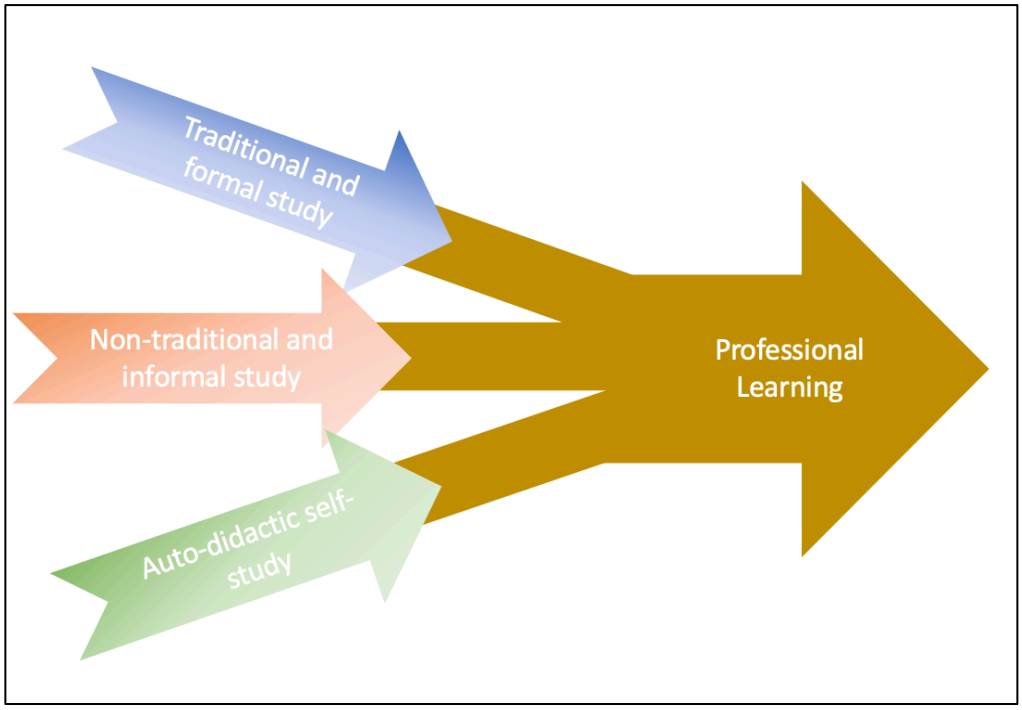
findings from the numerical analysis of the survey data (see Table 4.1), I discovered that nine of the veteran teachers consistently followed one of three distinct pathways to learning. The tenth teacher followed a combination of two of the pathways. As such, this finding of distinctive pathways to learning is evidence of the congruence between the personal and professional lives of these teachers.

The three pathways are (see Figure 4.1):

1. Learning through traditional, formal educational programs and teaching approaches,
2. Learning through non-traditional/informal educational structures, customized for, and sometimes designed by the learner, and
3. Learning through an auto-didactic approach that relies on a self-initiated and self-designed course of study.

Figure 4.1

Three Distinct Pathways to Learning



Analysis of each veteran teacher's data sets revealed a clear preference for accessing one of these pathways as their primary approach to both personal and professional learning, for nine of the veteran teachers. The tenth teacher (Sheryl) chose a combination of two of the pathways (formal and autodidactic). (See Table 4.1)

Table 4.1

Veteran Teacher Pathways as Indicated by Relevant Survey Responses

Pathway	**Survey Item[a]**					
Participant	**3**	**5**	**4**	**7**	**8**	**9**
Traditional/Formal						
Martha	10	10	8	9	6	9
Diane	10	10	3	8	4	9
Leah	10	9	6	8	4	9
Informal/Collaborative						
Thomas	4	8	10	9	6	8
Janet	6	6	9	10	8	9
Enrique	7	2	10	10	7	9
Self-Directed/Auto-Didactic						
Joseph	3	7	3	5	7	10
Jodi	1	4	2	4	9	10
Kass	6	8	7	8	10	10
Hybrid of 1st and 3rd Pathways						
Sheryl	10	5	8	5	8	10

[a] Survey items: **3:** Family/community- based learning experiences and/or family role models. **5:** Professional Development Opportunities. **4:** Early Career Mentors, either formal/assigned, or informal/self-selected. **7:** Collegial partnerships (teaming with "like-minded" teachers). **8:** Challenges to "right to professional agency" as a catalyst to stronger

convictions. **9:** Growing sense of professional self-efficacy (discovering what worked for you/your students) over time.

Below I provide an example for each pathway in the personal realm. In Chapter Five, which focuses on the professional context as an influence on teacher agency, I report on these same three teachers to provide evidence of a continuity between their personal and professional learning pathways.

Martha followed a traditional, formal academic pathway throughout her learning history. Martha, an Alaska Native elementary student growing up in a small interior Athabaskan village was recognized as an academically gifted student. Her mother agreed with the school district's recommendation for Martha to attend a comprehensive junior high and high school in a near-by larger hub community, comprised of approximately fifty percent Alaska Native students. Martha lived with two non-Alaska Native teachers (a married couple, one Native American and the other White) for the next six school years. She was then awarded a full college scholarship and graduated four years later with a degree in business. Martha stated that many of her teachers had low learning expectations for her and other Alaska Native students, but that the two teachers with whom she lived with were "not like some of the other teachers. They made learning engaging, relevant, and they communicated a belief that I and the other Alaska Native students could excel." Martha utilized traditional, formal educational opportunities as a K-12 student. She continued along this educational pathway during her first career in business, and later, for her professional teacher education.

Enrique learned best in non-traditional programs with multiple options. He showed early signs of independence or high personal agency when he convinced his parents to allow him to continue to attend his first neighborhood school (a Title I dual language immersion school

where the majority of the students spoke Spanish as their first language), after the family moved to a new neighborhood. Enrique explained that his preference for the neighborhood school was based on his desire to complete elementary school with his childhood friends. He went on to point out, though, that the consequence of this decision has been the maintenance of his Spanish speaking abilities. His younger sister, in contrast, lost her first language and regrets becoming a mono-lingual English speaker. Enrique later convinced his parents to allow him to apply to and enroll in an alternative high school program that focused on active, project-based learning. This preference for choosing non-traditional educational programs continued for him as he later pursued professional learning opportunities as an educator.

Kass is an auto-didactic learner who struggled to learn during her mostly traditional K-12 public school experiences. An exceptional experience influenced Kass's conception of what her role as a teacher could be occurred in high school when

> two high school English teachers led me to discover, for the first time, that learning could be joyful, purposeful, and fully engaging. My senior year I took a creative writing class that gave me total choice of what to write. This experience, and my regular English literature class that emphasized making personal connections with the readings, both left a big impression on me.

Kass tried four different colleges before discovering a non-traditional, non-graded college program that allowed her to design her own major. As a part of her program of study she proposed and completed several independent study courses. Kass received her teaching degree through an alternative route that included a year-long internship with an assigned mentor teacher and few formal classes. Kass has continued learning in this vein throughout her professional teaching career.

Despite their differences in learning pathways, the ten veteran teachers share the element of taking charge—demonstrating agency—in their personal learning journeys. Each teacher developed a clear sense of how they best learned and charted a learning course reflecting this understanding. They each demonstrated high agency in pursuing their personal learning along their preferred pathways. High personal learner agency, which continues as high professional learner agency, is interpreted to be a conducive condition—research question two—for obtaining teacher agency.

In conclusion, the findings pertaining to the biographical influences on veteran teacher agency shows a congruence between their personal and the professional agentic dispositions and pathways to obtaining and using agency. The veteran teachers' life story information and their descriptions of influences on their identities from their families and their communities, including their own educational experiences as learners, revealed a pattern of developing specific agentic dispositions and approaches that continued into their obtainment and use of professional teacher agency. Each of these teachers, who were recruited for phase one because of the high degree of professional agency they were reputed to have developed and sustained, exhibited signs of personal agency prior to becoming teachers. The highly agentic veteran teachers are interpreted to have been highly agentic individuals prior to entering the teaching profession.

Practicing (Early and Mid-Career) Teachers' Biographical Influences on Agency

This section describes findings connecting the biographical influences on teacher agency of the phase two cohort of early (n=5) and mid-career teachers (n=5), the practicing teachers. These findings derive from a constant comparison thematic analysis of the practicing teachers' interview and survey data. A between group comparison (of the early and mid-career teachers) of biographical influences on agency revealed no differences between the two groups, leading

me to conclude that the analysis revealed a 'distinction without a difference.' Therefore, the phase two teachers, for the purpose of this chapter, are referred to as “practicing teachers.” Differences were found, however, between the elementary multi-subject and secondary single subject teacher groups, in relation to the influences of the teachers' professional context on their agency. This finding is reported in Chapter Five.

The biographical influences on the practicing teachers’ agency correspond with the same overarching theme characterizing the biographical findings for the veteran teachers: continuity and congruence between their pre-professional and professional experiences with agency. The influences from the practicing teachers' personal agentic dispositions, families and communities of origin, schooling experiences, and preferred learning pathways emerged in their pre-professional realms and continued into their professional realms.

The findings from the analyses of the practicing teacher interviews and surveys are organized into the following categories (the same categories used for the veteran teachers):

- demonstrations of early agentic dispositions as an influence on teacher agency,
- views about education expressed by families and communities of origin as an influence on teacher agency,
- schooling experiences as an influence on beliefs about teaching and teacher agency, and
- distinctive pathways to learning as an influence on the obtainment and use of teacher agency.

These categories are described and supported with evidence in the next four sections of this chapter.

Early demonstrations of personal agency foreshadowed the practicing teachers' use of professional agency. Six of ten practicing teachers (Lynette, Jana, Denise, Kristen, Terri, & Brooke) related incidents from their pre-professional biographies demonstrating agentic dispositions. Jana explained that from an early age she embraced social activism and voluntarism, which was a family tradition. For example, she related the time that a classmate's mother lost her hair because of undergoing chemotherapy treatment for breast cancer. Jana stated

> I felt so bad for her and so I began to research into ways that maybe I could get involved and help. I read about a project based on volunteers cutting off their hair and donating it to an organization that uses real hair to make wigs. Even though I was still in elementary school, fifth or sixth grade, I wanted to donate my hair. My parents knew that they could hardly say "no" because it was just the kind of thing that they were always doing. I talked two of my friends into joining me and we cut off and donated our hair. We're all still friends today, including the girl whose mom had cancer.

Jana teaches at a Title I middle school and organizes fund raisers with her students each year, donating to schools experiencing natural disasters and are in immediate need of school supplies. Her early expressions of personal agency in the form of social activism are mirrored by her professional agency.

Brooke, an elementary teacher with a passion for environmental science and environmental causes, recalled helping her father collect petition signatures to begin a recycling program in their community. She recounted asking her father to be allowed to collect signatures at school, remembering

> I announced to the other kids in my class that we needed to get our parents to sign the petition so that our town would begin a recycling program as a part of the garbage collection. My teacher spoke with the principal, and I was given permission to ask parents to sign the petition before and after school. Before long several other kids asked to help get signatures. Dad brought more clipboards and we ended up helping to start a new recycling program. I appreciate the guts that it took for our teacher and our principal to take a chance and let students become involved doing something that could have been controversial; they took a stand so that we could take a stand.

Brooke and her teaching partner, Lynette, engage their students in environmental sustainability projects as an aspect of their community service-oriented teaching practice. Brooke's use of personal agency in service of her social principles is congruent with her use of teacher agency.

Four other teachers described examples of their use of agency prior to becoming teachers. Two of the teachers (Lynette & Kristen) persuaded their parents to allow them to attend optional K-12 school programs that were suited to their optimal way of learning. Both these teachers continue to use agency in directing their professional learning. One of the teachers (Terri) showed agency in the form of independence from her family's metaphysical belief tradition of agnosticism by attending and joining the church congregation that her best friend's family belonged to. She exhibited professional independence by creating the only middle school engineering curricular offering in her school district. The other teacher in this group (Denise) demonstrated personal agency through her decision to reject her first career choice, one centered on financial success, and choose teaching as a career, which she perceived as offering greater intrinsic satisfaction.

These six examples suggest that a pre-professional disposition toward agency is influential in the development of teacher agency. The analysis of the other four practicing teachers' interview data revealed insufficient evidence for either supporting or refuting this finding. This finding directly addresses the second research question pertaining to the conducive conditions associated with teacher agency. This finding suggests that teachers who have successfully achieved agency prior to becoming teachers are interpreted to be likely to continue to display an agentic disposition in their professional activities.

Additionally, this finding implicitly addresses the first and fourth research questions pertaining to the forms of and impacts from teacher agency. The practicing teachers drew on role models of independent thinking and social activism in their pre-professional realms in aspiring to achieve these forms of agency in their professional realms. Moreover, this form of professional agency, which was rooted in adherence to principled beliefs and a reliance on independent thinking and intrinsic sources of motivation, influenced the potential impacts of their teaching on their students along these same philosophical lines.

Family and community influences on agency of the practicing teachers. The constant comparison thematic analysis of the interviews revealed that all the practicing teachers were influenced by their families and communities to feel pride in their professional identities as public-school teachers. Each reported receiving encouragement from their families and communities in their decisions to become teachers.

For five of the participants (Denise, Iris, Lynette, Savannah & Samantha), becoming a teacher represented a socio-economic step upwards from their parents. Three of the participants had a teacher as a parent (Colleen, Jana, & Kristen) and two others (Terri & Brooke) were raised by parents whose professions were of high socio-economic status. Each of the ten participants,

including the two who reported experiencing mostly struggles in school, described coming from families and communities that held teachers in high professional regard.

Samantha is a mid-career elementary teacher who credits her mother's influence in choosing to become an English language learning teacher specialist. She grew up in a bilingual home environment with a Spanish dominant speaking mother who emphasized the importance of schools and teachers to her daughter. Samantha stated

> My mother insisted that we show respect to our teachers and that we go to school every day with the goal of learning something important. She was so proud when I became a teacher that is teaching kids like I was, kids needing someone who believes in their potential, kids needing someone willing to go the extra distance for them. I try to be that kind of teacher.

Denise was encouraged by her family and community to improve her socio-economic status and to serve others by becoming a teacher. Denise credits her hard-working single mom and her Filipino-American community for her character development. Denise worked hard in school to be successful, and this pattern culminated with her earning a college degree in business management. After a decade of working in the business world, and becoming a department manager, she chose to switch professions to become a teacher. She explained, emphasizing that

> My mom was adamant about my working hard at my studies. I was an only child, so I had her total attention. She was always reminding me that she moved to the U.S., got a job, and made sacrifices so that I could have something better. I was also influenced by other members of the Filipino community to study business and to make money. After doing well, getting my business management degree, and becoming a department

manager, I still wasn't satisfied. Teaching, teaching ELL kids like I was, means more to me.

Denise pointed out that her maturity (she became a teacher in her thirties) has helped her to maintain a focus on growing her professional expertise. After teaching for five years, she began the process of successfully earning her National Board Certification. She is currently the only teacher at her school who has achieved that distinction. The drive to succeed, instilled by her mom and her community, continues to influence her professional work ethic and her commitment to ongoing professional learning. Denise also displayed personal autonomy in choosing to disregard family and community emphasis on income and economic status, by choosing to teach, and to thus align her personal/social principles with her career choice.

The important influence of family and community on the practicing teachers' identities and their use of teacher agency addresses the second research question pertaining to conducive conditions for obtaining teacher agency. The high professional status inhering in the practicing teachers' family and community attitudes towards education influenced their beliefs about the value of teacher agency. This finding also implicitly addresses the third research question, pertaining to overcoming challenges to agency. The personal dispositions associated with determination and hard work, attributed to family and community influences by the practicing teachers, contributed to their overcoming challenges to their teacher agency.

Schooling experiences as an influence on beliefs about teaching and teacher agency. The thematic analysis of the interview data, triangulated with the findings from the analysis of the survey data, revealed influences from schooling experiences on teacher agency for seven of the ten practicing teachers. Of these seven participants, two reported mostly negative experiences and five reported mostly positive K-12 schooling experiences as being influential

toward their beliefs about teaching and their development of teacher agency (item #2 on the survey). The two teachers with mostly negative experiences responded to the second survey item with scores of 5.

These two teachers, Lynette & Iris, both related a series of unsuccessful years in school. They both struggled to complete the traditional K-12 graduation path. Lynette dropped out of school prior to graduation and later completed a G.E.D. (Graduation Equivalency Degree). Lynette and Iris chose to be teachers because they wanted to provide students with better educations than they experienced. They are both committed to teaching practices that account for individual student differences in backgrounds and pathways to learning, rather than the standardized, "one size fits all," approach to education that they experienced as students.

The other five teachers reported having mostly positive K-12 learning experiences. Two of these teachers had parents who were also their classroom teachers. Colleen's mother was her third-grade teacher and Kristen's mother was her high school English teacher. Two attended optional type programs: Jana attended a K-12 open optional school, and Denise attended a magnet school that stressed academic rigor with an intense direct instruction skills-based model. All five teachers referred to specific former teachers as being positive influences on their decisions to become teachers and on their vision for the type of teacher they aspired to become.

Further, these participants described a preponderance of positive schooling experiences reporting that their experiences influenced their professional identity formation and their use of teacher agency. Jana, a mid-career middle school language arts teacher, attributes her approach to teaching to her experiences as a student in an alternative public school. She related her K-12 open optional schooling experience by describing it as one

> where self-directed learning was the whole point . . . I've been steeped in this view of education for a long time. I went into teaching thinking that was what I want for my students. It's also the way that I approach my life, being a self-directed learner, so it is naturally going to be the way that I'm approaching my teaching.

Jana references her former teachers and her school experiences as contributing to her beliefs about teaching and her understanding of her teacher role, i.e., her teacher identity.

The seven practicing teachers who described vivid memories of their experiences as students, both positive and negative, were influenced in their teaching beliefs and in the development of their teacher agency by these experiences. This finding is confirmed by the triangulation of the survey results and the thematic analysis of the interviews. The average score for these seven teachers on the relevant survey item (#2, K-12 experiences served as either an example or a non-example of agency) is 7.7.

Conversely, the analysis of the interviews for three of the participants (Brooke, Savannah, & Terri) revealed that their experiences as students was not influential towards their decisions to become teachers nor did these experiences influence their visions for their roles as teachers. The interview data for these three participants is consistent with the low rating (scores of 1 or 2 on a 10-point rating scale) they gave the relevant item on the survey (#2, K-12 learning experiences which served as an example for high agency teaching . . .). All three of these teachers attended traditional neighborhood public schools. Recollections of their schooling experiences struck me as being remarkably unremarkable. Terri's summarization of her K-12 schooling experiences as "consisting mostly of worksheets, textbook assignments, and uninspiring power-point presentations," exemplified the unmemorable quality that these three teachers ascribed to their k-12 academic experiences.

The influence of schooling experiences on teacher agency addresses the first research question, pertaining to forms of agency, and the second research question, pertaining to conducive conditions for developing agency, and the fourth research question pertaining to educational impacts associated with their use of agency. These teachers expressed an awareness that their approaches to teaching were shaped to either emulate the positive teaching models they recalled, or in contrast to the negative teaching models they experienced. The seven teachers with vivid memories of their school experiences, whether positive or negative, demonstrated that these memories were conducive to their development of teacher agency. The specific nature of their educational vision, in turn, directly influences the forms that teacher agency takes and the educational impact on students.

Distinctive pathways to learning bridge the personal and the professional realms of agency development. The finding of "distinctive pathways to learning for the veteran teacher" was also found for practicing teachers. As was the case with the veteran teachers, a majority (seven) of the practicing teachers utilized the same distinctive pathways for professional knowledge as they had used as students. This finding was derived from the thematic analysis of the phase two teachers' interview data triangulated with the findings from the analysis of their survey data (see Table 4.2).

Table 4.2

Practicing Teacher's Survey Responses by Survey Item

	Survey Item[a]								
Teacher	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**
Lynette	8	5	6	9	5	4	10	9	10
Denise	9	9	9	8	9	8	6	4	9
Jana	9	9	4	8	5	4	8	9	10
Kristen	8	8	7	10	8	8	10	9	10
Colleen	8	8	10	8	9	3	10	5	9
Iris	3	5	2	6	1	0	10	6	9
Samantha	9	9	5	7	9	9	7	6	9
Savannah	8	8	7	2	6	6	6	4	8
Terri	8	6	10	7	9	5	9	3	9
Brooke	6	9	7	10	7	0	10	6	9

[a]**1**=Family/community based learning experiences and/or family role models; **2**=K-12 learning experiences that served as either an example or as a non-example for what "high agency" teaching might consist of; **3**=University learning experiences including, but not exclusive to teacher education preparation; **4**=Early career mentors; **5**=Professional development opportunities; **6**=Professional affiliations and/or professional conferences; **7**=Collegial partnerships; **8**=Challenges to "right to professional agency" as a catalyst to stronger convictions; **9**=Growing sense of professional self-efficacy over time.

Three pathways, plus one additional category of "undifferentiated approach to learning," were identified. The category of formal and traditional pathway to learning applies to the personal and professional preferred approach to learning for three of the practicing teachers (Colleen, Denise, & Terri). Teachers in this category tended to score item numbers 2, 3, and 5

high. Two practicing teachers (Kristen & Brooke) were categorized as informal and alternative pathway learners (with high scores for items number 4 & 7), and two (Jana & Lynette) with high scores for items number 8 & 9 were classified as auto-didactic learners. Three of the practicing teachers' surveys (Iris, Savannah, & Samantha) were categorized as showing an "undifferentiated" learning pathway. Their scores do not conform to any of the three pathways patterns. The following examples portray teachers' use of each of the three pathways to personal and professional learning.

Colleen followed a traditional, formal academic pathway throughout her learning history. She was raised in an upper middle-class home by two professionally employed parents and is the oldest of four siblings. She is of Japanese American ethnicity and reports that school was academically easy, but socially challenging. With respect to her upbringing and K-12 schooling experiences, Colleen stated

> I grew up learning and knowing from my parents and community that schooling was important; it was the key to a successful life. I had my mom as my teacher in third grade. My brother and sisters and I were required to make school, homework, and studying a priority. All of us got good grades and went to college right out of high school. I also grew up knowing how to be polite, how to talk with adults and teachers. My parents and the other adults around us worked in professions that required a lot of education and that earned them respect. I see with my students that this is something that is hard to learn if you didn't grow up in a certain environment. For me it's kind of automatic to take school seriously and to be professional.

Colleen made these remarks in response to a question about professional agency. She went on to explain that the "agency" component of that phrase was harder for her to achieve. In

the next chapter, focusing on the professional context of the participants, I elaborate on Colleen's challenges with achieving teacher agency. She sailed through her student years, including her college teacher preparation program, with "almost all A's." During this study she inquired about and applied to a master's level program in education at the local university. Her formal-academic approach to learning, which she characterized as "taking school seriously," is continuing as an aspect of her approach to her professional learning.

Kristen learned best within the context of non-traditional programs with multiple options. Kristen is in her eleventh year of teaching at a STEM magnet middle school. She was a leader on the school-community committee that designed and successfully proposed the STEM alternative school designation plan for her school. She attended a university laboratory school for grades K-8, followed by a more traditional high school. After struggling with high school, she attended a small private alternative style college. Kristen described the lessons she learned from her own experiences as a learner, and how she applies these lessons to her teaching, stating that

> I wasn't the highest achieving student. If I wasn't interested and had no choice in the topic, I tended to do the minimum. That was mostly a problem in high school. Before that I went to the open-optional school where my mom taught. My parents were worried that I needed a more disciplined style high school, with things like A.P. courses. But when that wasn't the best for me, they were okay with my going to a non-traditional college. I try to find out what kids are interested in and then have them propose a project that involves a certain amount of serious research and writing. Then I learn with them as I plan language arts instruction to fit with the group projects. It keeps me excited about learning; and because I teach language arts as a process I can still teach to our required

> standards. After we became a STEM magnet school, I have had to learn a lot about science to be able to integrate science and language arts.

Lynette is an auto-didactic learner who struggled to learn during her traditional K-12 public school experiences. Lynette was identified as having a learning/reading disability as a primary grade student. Her parents first home-schooled her for one year before enrolling her in a Waldorf K-8 charter school. She also struggled when enrolled in a traditional high school program; but later she was successful in completing her secondary educational requirements through the G.E.D. program. Lynette earned her teaching certification through an alternative year-long internship/apprenticeship program, supplemented by intensive summer course work. She explained that she and her grade level partner are

> spear-heading a project-based learning model with student choice being a key ingredient. Kids need to be exposed to all kinds of things to learn and not just fed a curriculum that was not designed with them and their experiences in mind.

Lynette and her grade level partner teammate (Brooke) sought out, discovered, and received a grant to attend a summer institute geared to help them continue to design their project based instructional model. Lynette is drawing on her auto-didactic learning strengths, taking the initiative to go outside district provided professional development options to pursue her professional learning goals.

The finding that a majority (n=7) of the practicing teachers evinced distinctive learning path preferences explicitly addresses the second research question pertaining to conducive conditions for agency and the fourth question related to the impacts associated with their use of agency. The practicing teachers expanded their teacher agency by asserting professional learner agency to pursue professional development through their preferred learning pathway. This

pattern of learning began as students and continued to their approaches to professional learning. The practicing teachers' experiences with professional learning are more fully described in chapter five. Distinctive pathways to learning characterizes and reflects their learner agency, which in turn, influences their teacher agency (conducive conditions) and their awareness of their students' use of pathways to learning (impacts).

In conclusion, continuity and congruence between the personal and professional identities and expressions of agency exists, to differing degrees, for the practicing teachers. The practicing teachers' professional career lengths range from two years to eleven years. Thus, their teacher identity development and obtainment of teacher agency (more fully described in Chapter Five through a comparison of early and mid-career teacher sub-cohorts) varies in accordance with this range of professional experience.

All ten practicing teacher participants provided evidence for links between their families, communities of origin and schooling experiences, and their choice to become teachers. Moreover, the distinctive pathways to learning, followed by a majority (n=7) of the practicing teacher cohort, reflects their agency as learners both personally and professionally. Their personal learner agency, manifested in their use of distinct learning pathways, was found to be influential on their intentions to obtain teacher agency, and their use of agency.

Chapter Four Summary:

Findings Connecting Teachers' Biographies with Agency

I used thematic, narrative, and constant comparison analyses to identify four thematic categories expressed by the veteran teachers pertaining to the influence of their biographies. These categories were confirmed by a constant comparison analysis of the practicing teacher's

biographies. The thematic categories and all twenty participant's responses to the survey were triangulated. The four thematic categories are the following:

- demonstrations of early agentic dispositions as an influence on teacher agency (addresses all four of the research questions),
- views about education expressed by families and communities of origin as an influence on teacher agency (addresses the first and second research question),
- schooling experiences as an influence on beliefs about teaching and teacher agency (addresses the first, second, and fourth research question), and
- distinctive pathways to learning as an influence on the obtainment and use of teacher agency (addresses the second and fourth research question).

The biographical details, as life stories, family and community beliefs and attitudes about education, and schooling experiences, were found to be influential for both veteran and the practicing teachers. The veteran teacher data shows a continuity and a congruence between the identities, the agentic dispositions, and the learning pathways connecting the teachers' personal and professional realms. My analysis of the practicing teacher data shows a similar, but more qualified, pattern. The practicing teachers vary in the degree to which they have, to this point, successfully obtained and asserted their teacher agency.

The influence of the professional context on the agency for both cohorts, and the variations in agency achievement for the practicing teachers, are described in Chapter Five. These findings are first presented by cohort, followed by a cross-cohort comparison.

Chapter Five

The Professional Context as an Influence on Teacher Agency

An ecological perspective of teacher agency frames this study, and is described by Priestley, et al. (2015) as "one that emphasizes the relational and temporal dimensions of the achievement of agency" (p.1). Boser and Hanna (2014) maintain that a tension exists between the autonomy of a professional and the structure of schools. Accordingly, Chapter Five findings derive from investigating the relationships teachers have with other actors, and the institutional circumstances and policies impacting the agentic intentions of teachers over the course (temporal dimension) of their careers.

The Chapter Five findings address the four research questions pertaining to forms of teacher agency, conducive conditions for teacher agency, challenges to teacher agency, and educational impacts associated with teacher agency. The data sources include participant interviews and surveys for both the veteran and the early and mid-career teacher cohorts (i.e., the practicing teachers). Additionally, practicing teachers' data sources include classroom observations and discussions.

Collection and analysis of data focused on discovering and comparing themes with methods typical of both phenomenological and grounded theory research. To analyze the veteran teachers' interview data, I used a phenomenological approach to thematic (Giorgi, 1985; Smith, 1996), critical discourse (Parker, 2013; Willig, 2003), and narrative (Bruner, 1991; Polkinghorne, 2006) analyses. The survey data for both groups were analyzed numerically. The practicing teachers' interview data were analyzed using a grounded theory approach to constant

comparative thematic analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1997). The practicing teachers' observations and discussions were analyzed using constructivist (Charmaz, 2017) grounded theory methods.

The agency of teachers is theorized to be revealed through the discursive forms and narrative content revealed through telling their stories (Ochs & Capps, 2001; Schleppegrell, 1997). By documenting and analyzing the veteran teachers' descriptions of agency and their discourse patterns, I discovered themes about teacher agency that were expressed through the content of their interviews and by certain discourse patterns they used to express themselves. By analyzing the practicing teachers' interviews and observational data, I obtained findings about teacher agency as it was actively evolving. The analysis of the survey data was triangulated with the interview findings for both the veteran and practicing teacher cohorts.

Hence, the Chapter Five findings were derived from investigating the multiple professional contexts in which the participants obtained and enacted their teacher agency. All of the teachers' stories, explanations, and word choice, plus the practicing teachers' observed demonstrations of agency, conveyed the agentic nature of their practices in relationship to their schools, the larger communities in which they taught, and their own professional learning.

Veteran Teacher Agency and the Professional Context

The findings from the analyses of the veteran teacher interviews and survey data are organized into the following thematic categories:

- salience of teacher agency demonstrated as both a professional asset and concern,
- forms of teacher agency expressed as both individual and collective phenomena,
- construct of teacher agency viewed as both global and domain specific.

These three thematic categories for veteran teachers' professional contexts are described and supported with evidence in the next three sections.

Salience of Teacher Agency as Both a Professional Asset and Concern

This finding emerged from the thematic analysis and the narrative analysis of the teachers' interview data. This finding was further supported by triangulating the thematic analysis findings with the analysis of the survey responses.

Teacher agency as an asset by the veteran teachers. All ten veteran teachers readily agreed to participate. Each participant completed the interview, the member check, and the follow-up survey without prompting. Furthermore, seven of the ten participants initiated additional conversations about their experiences with teacher agency, and their concerns for the agency of new teachers. This degree of voluntary participation suggests that the participants viewed teacher agency as an important professional topic. In addition to their full participation, all the veteran teachers provided evidence for and examples of the beneficial role that agency played in their teaching careers, which I organized into two categories: agency as an asset to professional learning; and agency as an asset to overcoming challenges to teacher autonomy.

Agency as an asset for professional learning. The veteran teachers' agency as students (Chapter Four) continued in their professional lives: the teachers evinced formal, informal/collaborative, or auto-didactic professional development choices. This relationship is illustrated by the following three examples from the same teachers presented in Chapter Four.

Martha followed her preferred pathway as a formal learner by charting her course of professional learning and development. After teaching in an urban Title 1 school, with a large population of urban Alaska Native students for the first two years of her career, she enrolled in a summer master's program specializing in pedagogical and curricular approaches designed to meet the needs of Native American students. In her mid-career phase, Martha used the knowledge she acquired through her professional development learning experiences to

successfully propose and co-design an urban Alaska Native culturally-based charter school. The process of proposing and designing this school reflected Martha's belief that all students deserved to see their cultural heritages reflected in the curriculum they experienced and sustained through pedagogic practices congruent to their community's ways of knowing and learning. Her learner agency and metacognitive awareness of a “preferred pathway” to learning, set her on a professional learning journey culminating in achievement of high professional agency.

Enrique, an informal/collaborative learner, continued his pre-professional learning pathway as he transitioned into his professional career. After beginning teacher education in a traditional university program with defined course requirements and structures, Enrique chose to transfer to a flexible online teacher education program. As such, he focused his learning on alternative educational models and obtained his master's degree in educational leadership. He used his degree to collaboratively propose and start an “alternative open-optional” school-within-a-school at a middle school. Enrique also described his professional agency as being both the source and the product of his professional learning.

Kass continued along her preferred pathway of autodidactic learning as she pursued professional knowledge to undergird her professional practice. She frequently shared professional research articles with colleagues and promoted professional choice book clubs as a vehicle for professional learning. Kass taught students by co-creating curricular goals, structures, and materials with her students to connect with their learning preferences and interests. By knowing who she was as a learner, Kass developed agency in ways supportive of both her autonomy and her students' autonomy as learners.

Each veteran teacher related examples for how their agentic disposition and self-knowledge influenced their professional learning, which led to obtaining and expanding of

teacher agency, expressed as teacher autonomy. Results from the survey confirmed this finding. Respondents selected scores of 10's and 9's for the survey item "discovering what works for you and your students through reflection on one's teaching practices." Teachers who take charge of their professional learning by reflecting on the impacts of their teaching practices manifest agency in the form of "extended professionalism" (Stenhouse, 1975). Using one's teaching practice as a source of pedagogical insight is an agentic learning practice common to each of the veteran teachers.

The veteran teachers' stories of professional learner agency are consistent with established socio-cognitive theory (Bandura, 2006). By acting from an agentic stance as self-directed and self-motivated professional learners (Bandura, p. 165), they increased both their professional knowledge and professional self-efficacy. Teachers' learner agency begets knowledge, which creates and strengthens their self-efficacy, the linchpin of developing teacher agency.

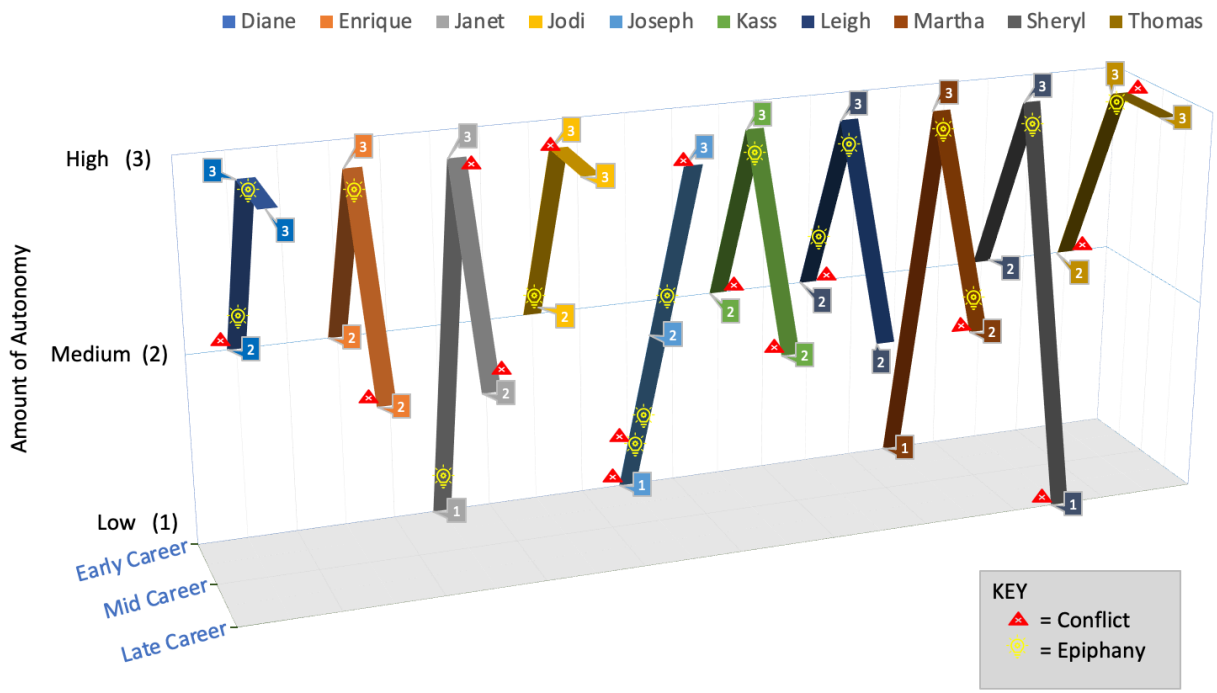
In conclusion, this finding reveals that the teachers' professional learner agency led to the obtainment and expansion of teacher agency. This link addresses the second research question about conducive conditions for teacher agency, and the fourth research question related to the impacts of teacher agency.

Agency as an asset for navigating challenges to professional autonomy. The veteran teachers' professional contexts presented both affordances for and challenges to the assertion of professional agency. Each teacher offered examples of how their professional agency proved useful in overcoming challenges to their agency, from both an individual and a collective perspective.

The narrative analysis of the veteran teachers' stories revealed patterns in the types of challenges encountered and the forms of agency exhibited across different career phases. The following story-maps shows patterns where agency-related conflicts and epiphanies most often occurred across the arc of the teachers' professional careers (see Figure 5.1).

Figure 5.1

Veteran Teacher Agency Over Time: Conflicts and Epiphanies



Most challenges occurred in the early and the late stages of the teachers' careers. The nature of the challenges and the agentic responses also varied at different points in the teachers' careers. The following three examples provide evidence for the claim of conflict that occurred during the early career phase.

Diane related her experience of arriving at her first teaching assignment, a rural Alaskan village school primarily serving Alaska Native students, only to find materials she described as being "utterly disconnected from the lives and interests of my students." She responded to this challenge by successfully seeking grant funds to supplement the commercial reading program with culturally relevant children's literature and place-based information books. Diane decided after her first week of teaching that she needed to resume her professional learning, recounting "I announced to my husband that we would be spending summers back in Madison so I could complete my masters in a bilingual and multicultural program." Diane taught students from culturally and socio-economically marginalized communities throughout her career, always with a focus of using culturally sustainable practices (Paris, 2012). She used her agency to seek and utilize affordances to assert her agency.

Leah also encountered challenges to asserting her professional agency in the early phase of her teaching career, reporting "I came face-to-face with the reality that I was forced to use the curriculum and materials that were already there." Her agentic response to this situation was, "I would use the materials, but in the way that I thought was best, not in the way that the teacher's guide prescribed." She explained that "teaching in ways that didn't fit my students was too painful." She also described implementing instructional adaptations to the curriculum: "my first ideas weren't very good . . . My idea of differentiation was to cut up all the workbooks and make packets so that I could have five different math groups . . . Over time I refined my approach so that I was able to deliver appropriate instruction how and when the kids needed it." Leah used her professional agency to adapt and innovate her teaching practices to enact her teacher vision.

Janet, a secondary science teacher, described her early career challenges to teacher agency as stemming from the fact that "I was not a very good teacher in those days." Over the

first ten years of her career "I was learning so much, but even then, I could have done so much more in a team structure at that stage of my career." Later, she benefited from teaching at a school with colleagues and a visionary administrator who were highly collaborative and innovative. She drew on her professional agency, throughout her career, to navigate challenges by deliberately choosing to collaborate with colleagues, a collective form of agency.

Two other veteran teachers, Enrique and Sheryl, experienced challenges to their agency in the later years of their teaching careers. Enrique was recruited to become a curriculum director and professional development coordinator by his district, having served as a classroom teacher for more than twenty years. During his third year in his new position, Enrique's professional beliefs and integrity became challenged by his district's decision to adopt prescriptive curricular programs, and his job responsibilities shifted to that of "training teachers" in the use of these programs, rather than continuing to provide optional professional learning seminars. Enrique resigned from this position and resumed his role as a classroom teacher.

Sheryl was placed on a "plan of improvement" by her new principal, late in her career, as a result of her refusal to use her district's mandated commercially developed science curriculum. Ironically, that same semester she was awarded an Einstein fellowship, which funded a one-year professional sabbatical for developing elementary science curricular frameworks, with other classroom teachers, at the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, D.C. Upon returning to her district, she was allowed to utilize some of the new curricular frameworks which she had helped develop while on sabbatical; and she was also asked to provide professional development seminars for other elementary teachers in her district.

These examples represent ways that the veteran teachers used agency to exploit opportunities and to overcome challenges in their professional contexts. These enactments of

professional agency occurred both individually and collectively. The veteran teachers utilized their agency to address challenges to function as autonomous professionals throughout their careers. This finding addresses the third research question pertaining to the veteran teachers' experiences with challenges asserting their agency in the form of professional autonomy.

Most examples of challenges during the teachers' early career phase were due to a lack of professional knowledge and the need to refine their craft. The challenges experienced in later career phases were due to a shift in the zeitgeist regarding the amount of professional autonomy accorded to teachers by current educational policies. This latter issue relates to what Hargreaves (2000) labeled as the "post-professional age of teacher professionalism and professional learning," and is addressed below.

Teacher agency as a professional concern. Each of the veteran teachers expressed concerns regarding professional agency. These were expressed in two ways: teacher agency is increasingly constrained, and teacher agency is, at times, misused. What follows are representative examples of both concerns.

Agency is constrained. Eight teachers expressed the belief that teacher agency is currently diminished for all teachers, but particularly for early career teachers. Each attributed this change to institutional shifts along the lines of what Ball (2003) identified as an "instrumentalist view" of teaching. This shift, in the opinion of the veteran teachers, has resulted in a reduced capacity to exercise one's professional judgement.

Examples of this concern were expressed by Martha and Diane. Martha said, "I remind new teachers that, despite what self-proclaimed experts representing the textbook companies say, and contrary to the orders sent down by district administrators, the textbook is not the curriculum." In a similar vein, Diane expressed fatigue at the continuous need to convince new

teachers and principals that “teaching scripted programs 'with fidelity' and teaching our mostly ELL Filipino students through culturally responsive practices require two very different and conflicting mindsets.” She opted to go the culturally responsive (Ladson-Billings, 1994) route for thirty-three years as a kindergarten teacher in a Title One school.

In contrast, two veteran teachers (Joseph & Jodi) expressed skepticism about their agency being constrained. Joseph stated that, “when I talk to student teachers or new teachers, I explain to them that they have the power to make the most boring lesson plans interesting, and they also have the potential to ruin the most interesting lesson ideas by making them lifeless and boring. It's up to them.” He did acknowledge that teachers are presented with many prefabricated lesson plans and pre-selected curricular materials but maintained that “teachers should not use this challenge to their autonomy as an excuse to take the easy way out.”

Similarly, Jodi noted that new teachers are “less willing to be creative in their teaching practices, and more willing to go along with district mandates without asking critical questions about the quality and suitability of the district adopted commercial teaching programs.” She believes that “It's natural for them to think that way, because many of them were taught that same way.” She has found that early career teachers and university interns have been receptive to using more agentive approaches to teaching when “they have been shown how, and they have seen how much better it is for kids.”

In summary, all but two veteran teachers expressed a belief that reduced teacher agency is tied to a socio-historical shift in the conception of teaching as a profession. Moreover, each of these eight veteran teachers told stories supporting the conclusion that the trend is real. All ten veteran teachers expressed concerns regarding the potential harmful ramifications of lessened agency on the autonomous thinking of both teachers and their students. Sheryl voiced this

concern by rhetorically asking, “In what world does anyone believe that we'll ever be able to teach students to think for themselves when teachers are not allowed to do the same — by thinking and acting independently through use of their professional judgement?” This sentiment was echoed by each of the veteran teachers.

Agency is sometimes misused by teachers. The thematic analysis of the veteran teachers' interview data shows a concern about the ways that agency may be misused. Thomas labeled one form of misuse as being “the problem of agency claimed rather than agency earned.” In a story (similar to Janet's comment that she was not an effective teacher early in her career) Thomas described the design and implementation of a very complex inquiry research project that he attempted with his high school students during his first year of teaching. He stated, “I was determined to pull off the project with all of my senior sections; I was set on proving that this type of authentic teaching and learning would work with all of the kids, not just my A.P. section . . . it turns out, I was way in over my head.” He described a full career of teaching, during which he was eventually able to “pull off” such ambitious visions for his teaching and the learning of all his students. He labeled his first-year attempt, however, as being “mostly a disaster for all involved.” This example is but one of several furnished by the veteran teachers that fit the theme of “agency claimed before it was earned.”

Veteran teachers Kass and Jodi described a second category of misuse of teacher agency as occurring when teachers use their agency to thwart either their own professional development or that of colleagues. Kass described her first years of teaching at a school serving mostly affluent mono-lingual English-speaking families. Her school community and teacher colleagues took pride in their school's routinely high-test scores and, therefore, “thought that we had nothing more to learn because we were seen as being at the top . . . that really bothered me because I

knew how much wasn't shown by test scores, and how many of our kids really weren't learning to their full potential." She spent the first decade of her career as a teacher who pursued her professional learning and approach to teaching against the grain of her school's professional culture. She became highly regarded as a successfully innovative teacher among more traditionally oriented colleagues. Eventually she transferred schools to work with like-minded colleagues at an open-optional public charter school.

Jodi's professional story path (from the narrative/story-map analysis) mirrored that of Kass's professional experiences for her early career phase. Jodi also taught in an affluent suburban community, at a school with an 'excellent reputation.' She followed her auto-didactic pathway to professional learning and became one of the first of two teachers in her state to earn the National Board Teacher Certification. Like Kass, Jodi described her first five years on her faculty as being a "professional outcast." Unlike Kass, Jodi remained at her first school for her entire career. She described her initial relationship with colleagues as being "filled with lots of tension whenever we discussed 'our school's mission;' I started out by being outspoken in favor of teaching the whole child, but eventually just went my own way." Over time, due to her strong professional reputation across her district, she mentored new teachers, some of whom she recruited as "professional soulmates" onto her school's faculty and thereby lessened her professional isolation.

Kass and Jodi, perhaps as a result of their highly agentic pre-dispositions, overcame professional peer pressure to conform to traditional teaching approaches that dominated their first professional contexts. Kass, by transferring, and Jodi, by recruiting professionally like-minded colleagues, altered their professional contexts in ways supportive of their development and use of agency. Their professional stories, however, of being discouraged from attempting to

develop and assert their professional agency, provide evidence that agency is, at times, misused by experienced teachers and administrators who create obstacles and/or exacerbate existing challenges.

The third category of misuse involves using teacher agency in ways that harm students. Three of the veteran teachers depicted incidents of using their agency to either intimidate or humiliate students. In all three cases the veteran teachers described the shame they feel when recalling how they misused agency to "put them in their place," rather than to "try to understand what was really going on and to help the kid." Joseph described using his popularity with the class to silence and humiliate "a problem kid who had gotten out of line and was making my teaching life a living hell." He recounted what he learned from critically reflecting on this memory, explaining that "it's wrong to blame kids . . . the point should be to understand kids . . . I eventually realized that the most challenging kids were the ones that I most needed to understand." This incident, and two other similar incidents reported, demonstrate that although professional teacher agency provides teachers with a capacity to benefit students, it also creates the potential for harm.

I compared the three categories of misuse and placed them on a continuum showing relative degrees of harm. The first type of misuse, attempting complex forms of teaching prior to obtaining adequate skills, was categorized as being the least harmful. Thomas described this form as being "an almost inevitable by-product of teachers taking risks as a step in their learning process." The second category, using teacher agency to block the development of professional agency for oneself and/or one's colleagues, is a mid-level degree of harm. Kass portrayed this misuse of agency as one resulting "in professional isolation that wears on you over time." The

third type, agency deployed to silence or ignore the voices of troubled students, was labeled by Joseph as “shameful,” a pernicious form of misuse of teacher agency.

In summary, the veteran teachers believe teacher agency to be a highly salient topic and mostly reflected a positive view of agency, but also a source of professional concern. This finding addresses the third and fourth research questions pertaining to challenges overcome through agency and impacts resulting from both the denial and the assertion of agency. The positive value of teacher agency, the concern about misuse, and the threatened future of agency were expressed as interrelated beliefs of commensurate magnitude by the veteran teachers.

Teacher Agency: Both An Individual And A Collective Phenomenon

I triangulated the thematic and discourse analyses (Polit & Beck, 2012) to compare the teachers' agentic efforts (thematic analysis) with their pronoun and verb (discourse analysis) use when describing their agency. The thematic analysis revealed that teachers ranged from primarily individualistic, to a blend of individual and collective, to primarily collective in the manifestations of their professional agency. The teacher's use of either first person singular or first-person plural pronouns was triangulated with the thematic analysis. The following sections provide examples for the claim that the veteran teachers viewed teacher agency as both an individual and a collective phenomenon.

Teacher agency and pronoun use. Two veteran teachers (Joseph & Jodi) primarily used first person singular pronouns (I/my); four teachers primarily used first person plural pronouns (we/our) (Diane, Enrique, Janet & Martha); and four teachers (Kass, Leah, Sheryl & Thomas) used a mix of first person singular and plural pronouns. Comparison of the distribution revealed no gender differences across the categories. The three male teachers (Enrique, Joseph, &Thomas) were evenly distributed, with one male teacher appearing in each category. Most

notably, veteran teachers who used singular pronouns provided examples of individual agency; teachers who primarily used plural pronouns described collective agency; and other teachers, who used both singular and plural pronoun forms, provided examples of both types of agency. The following examples illustrate this finding.

Joseph's interview revealed a pronoun pattern, heavily favoring the use of "I" and "my." For example, when describing how he developed his teaching approach, he explained that "I never had teachers that used active learning strategies. At my Catholic school they were very traditional." Joseph went on to describe figuring out how to teach by experimenting and gradually evolving towards an approach that emphasized "having *my* students learn science by doing science, instead of spending most of their time learning about science." His individualized, figure it out on his own strategy led to strengthened individual efficacy beliefs and a successful assertion of teacher agency.

Thomas used a mix of singular and plural pronouns when discussing his experiences with teacher agency. He described becoming an agentic teacher, "I latched onto people early in my career who modeled what looked to me as what educational excellence was." He added, referring to teaching history, "*our* learning, and the projects that *we* built, had to be about more than just the past, they had to connect with *our* realities and with the students' future visions." His assertion of agency, despite being influenced by models of teaching excellence, did not happen within a team-teaching (professionally collaborative) context, but instead involved collaboration with his students. His use of both singular and plural forms matches his description of connecting his individual teacher agency to the agency of his students. As such, his agency is a blended form.

Enrique describes his growing confidence as a teacher (efficacy belief) and agentic teaching efforts by using collective pronoun forms. He portrayed his participation in the design and implementation of an integrated, project based, middle school program as being "*our* most challenging and also *our* most rewarding work." He further relates how this project was "filled with moments of intense doubt for many of our students, the parents, and even ourselves." Enrique used collaborative imagery and collective/plural pronoun choices to relate the highly collaborative planning and teaching efforts that characterized his inter-relational approach to overcoming professional doubts (as collective efficacy beliefs) and the assertion of collective teacher agency. His descriptions of agency depict an approach that includes collaboration with colleagues, students, and families. Enrique's multiple forms of collaboration are reflected by his predominant use of the collective plural pronoun forms (we/our) in his accounts.

Each of the veteran teacher's pronoun forms matched their descriptions of obtaining strong efficacy beliefs and subsequent assertions of agency. Hence, the teachers' use of pronouns corresponded to the descriptions of teacher agency as shown by the thematic analysis.

Collective teacher agency achieved through alliances with parent community. Just as Enrique described his collective efforts to achieving teacher agency as including the relationship that he and his colleagues have with parents, four other veteran teachers (Joseph, Martha, Jodi, & Sheryl) also highlighted the importance of positive relationships with parents as a conducive condition for achieving agency and as a form of collective agency. Of these, two of the teachers (Jodi & Sheryl) are elementary and three (Enrique, Joseph, & Martha) are secondary teachers.

The thematic analysis of these five teachers' interview data reveals their cognizance of the value of informing (Jodi referred to "educating her parent community") and hearing from (Martha described her "coffee pot is always on" philosophy) the parents and guardians of their

students. Likewise, Sheryl reported relying on parents and other community members as volunteers to serve as resources and chaperones for frequent fieldtrips, a vital aspect of her curriculum and instruction to engage students with environmentally sustaining community service projects. These five teaches provided evidence supporting the importance of including parent and community members into their conception of collective agency.

Of the remaining veteran teachers, two (Kass & Leah) referred to working with students and parents over a two-year interval and the heightened familiarity and trust that developed between teachers and families. Diane stressed the importance of understanding and supporting the culture of her school's community. Neither Janet nor Thomas, both high school teachers, directly referred to families of students when describing their experiences with teacher agency.

Martha and Diane discussed their efforts to forge bonds with parents and community members as being strategic acts taken in the present, with an eye towards overcoming harm done by schools, as institutions, and individual teachers in the past. They both expressed an awareness of negative historical circumstances experienced by parents and other community members. By explicitly communicating this understanding to parents, and by seeking to listen and understand the parents' views they sought to redress past transgressions. By expressing a respect and appreciation for the cultural and linguistic heritages of their students, these two teachers reframed the educational process as one supportive of their students' heritage cultures and languages.

These findings address the first research question related to the forms of agency. That is, the majority of veteran teachers mentioned their agency in light of relationships with parents and the community. These findings also address the second research question because a conducive condition for agency is a positive relationship with parents and the community.

Teacher agency revealed through verb syntactical use. My discourse analysis of the veteran teachers' choice of verb forms revealed that each teacher described their use of agency with the frequent use of active verbs. The triangulation of the thematic analysis with the verb form usage, shows that the veteran teachers' descriptions of their teaching practices reflect a high degree of agency through both the content and the consistent use of active verbs.

All teachers used both passive and active verb constructions to describe their experiences with agency. When describing assertions of agency, however, each teacher used active verbs far more often than passive forms. Kass's interview provides an example: "It *was decided* by the math curriculum department that all of us would *have to* use the newly adopted program." She then immediately switched from the passive "it was decided by . . ." statement with the following series of active verb phrases: "We *recognized* the flaws in the program; we *devoted* a year to carefully documenting its limitations and flaws, and then we *set about* designing a better version of the commercial math program with our students in mind." The consistent use of active verbs, such as "recognized," "devoted," and "set about," reflects the high degree of agency that Kass and her teaching colleagues (including Leah) demonstrated in response to the district-imposed challenge to their professional agency.

The triangulation of the thematic analysis and the discourse analysis addressed three research questions. First, it provided information regarding question one, suggesting that teacher agency takes three forms: individual, collective, or a blend of both. Second, research question two was informed by finding that teachers choosing their preferred form of agency is conducive to obtaining and asserting agency. Finally, the third research question was informed by finding that active verbs were used to describe their efforts to overcome challenges to agency.

Teacher Agency Conceptualized as both a Global and a Domain-Specific Construct

The thematic analysis of the veteran teachers' interviews revealed that they viewed agency as both a general attribute and as a domain-specific construct. The teachers indicated that curriculum, instruction, and assessment were distinct but interrelated domains of the teaching profession. As is shown below, however, there were differences between the elementary and secondary teachers.

Elementary teachers' assertions of agency focused on instructional domain. The five multi-subject elementary veteran teachers (Diane, Jodi, Kass, Leah, & Martha) spoke of using agency in all three professional teaching domains, but a preponderance of their statements addressed using agency for instructional purposes. The following examples illustrate this pattern.

Martha's interview statements focused on her instructional approach, to "offer students culturally relevant and personally meaningful learning experiences." She showed little agency regarding the curriculum. Her following statement reveals an acceptance of content standards in this area: "The textbook is not the curriculum nor is it a teaching manual; it is a tool. We have always looked at the standards; they guide our curriculum." She emphasized instruction that she and her teaching partner spent years developing by explaining that "figuring out how we teach and bring the content to life and make it meaningful is up to us as teachers." She made this statement in the context of expressing concerns about what she describes as an "increasingly passive approach to lesson planning that new teachers are being trained to use." She recounted (in a raised voice which was rare for her) about giving advice to a first-year teacher at her school:

> I told her that if you ever find the perfect teaching manual on any subject, I'd like to see it; you are nothing more than a page turner if you teach that way; you are setting your

students and yourself up for some real disappointment. Instead, you must take the ideas and make them come alive.

Martha described using place-based and culturally relevant strategies to promote understanding over memorization. She explained that allowing student choice of scientific topics required her to "study things that I was not familiar with, so that as teachers we go on learning journeys with our students . . . teachers have to love learning themselves to inspire students." Although she made it clear that she followed her school district's content standards, she provided examples of using agency to implement creative instructional teaching methods. The other four elementary teachers shared this focus on instruction for their use of agency.

Secondary teachers' agency focused on curricular domain. Like the elementary teachers, the thematic analysis of the single subject secondary teacher interviews revealed that all five teachers (Enrique, Janet, Joseph, Sheryl, & Thomas) recognized the domains of curriculum, instruction, and assessment as being domains of teacher responsibility. As was true of the elementary teachers, the secondary teachers' accounts of their "situated practice" (Doyle, 2009) revealed that they also understood these domains to be highly interconnected. In contrast to the elementary teachers, however, the secondary teachers' primary focus was on curricula.

For example, Janet explained that "you can meet the requirements of your curriculum, but then you also need to ask, what do my students really need, and how can I adjust the curriculum to meet their needs?" She described the advantages of her team's efforts to make innovative design changes to their respective curricula in stating that, "through creative team planning and integrating across our subjects, we were able to add so many more layers to what the kids were learning."

In a similar vein, Joseph used a curricular perspective to describe his professional growth, "beginning [to teach] by listening to my department chair and following his basic guidelines for the content focus of my teaching; but I also began to look for other stuff that I could inject to make the lessons more relevant and interesting for my students." He made clear that his movement away from relying on curriculum guides, textbooks, and district content requirements, was a gradual process, filled with lots of trial and error. He identified his impetus for making these changes in explaining that

> Some of what motivated me to develop as an independent teacher was pure self-interest. I switched to teaching science [he began his career as a French teacher] because I saw its relevance to the lives of my students. I chose topics, and allowed my students to choose topics of investigation, based on this same principle. If I did not see the purpose or was not personally interested in what I was teaching, I was unable to make it interesting or purposeful for the students.

These examples typify the secondary teachers' use of agency to make learning purposeful. They each adapted and innovated the curricula according to the interests and needs of their students.

Synthesizing the veteran teachers' domain-specific foci, related to instruction and curriculum, for asserting agency. Joseph concluded his interview by suggesting that perhaps the "gloom and doom" regarding teachers' loss of professional autonomy is somewhat exaggerated. His experiences taught him that principals and parents supported teachers who conduct themselves professionally, "even if they use a non-traditional approach, such as adapting curriculum in ways that keep the process fresh and interesting for both the kids and the teacher." In this sense, Janet, Joseph, and the other secondary teachers echoed Martha and the elementary

teachers advocation for adaptations and innovations to best meet the needs of students and to enliven students' learning experiences. As illustrated above, however, the elementary teachers emphasized the implementation of original instructional methods and the secondary teachers emphasized assuming an authorial role for designing curricula in asserting their agency. This finding addresses the first research question of forms and the fourth research question of impacts.

Agency in the assessment domain. The triangulation of the narrative analysis and the thematic analysis revealed tentative findings about the veteran teachers' views of assessment and their use of agency related to assessment. This finding is tentative because evidence supporting this finding is present in 50% of the teachers' data sets. By comparing the teachers' narrative arcs, I located patterns in their experiences with assessment. Four veteran teachers' (Diane, Enrique, Leah, & Sheryl) experienced challenges, mainly in the early phase of their careers (Figure 5.1). In addition, the narrative data/story maps of three teachers (Jodi, Kass, & Thomas) showed assessment related challenges to their agency throughout their careers. I deduced the following assessment related findings:

- student self-evaluation is valuable.
- standardized high-stakes assessment, as currently used, is detrimental and should be critiqued and contested by teachers; and
- formative assessment is complex, teachers need considerable experience to successfully implement and translate such assessments into instructional decisions.

Student self-evaluation is valuable. The importance of student's self-evaluation was raised by three elementary teachers (Leah, Kass, & Sheryl), and two secondary teachers (Enrique & Janet). Leah made the point that one of her primary goals, as a multi-age primary teacher, is to assist students to understand their own learning strengths and needs: "children come to us

already knowing a great deal, and sometimes that includes how they learn best; for those that don't know this, figuring this out becomes the most important learning goal for the teacher and the student together." Kass, another primary multi-age teacher, further developed this theme, observing that

> My ability to accurately assess students is critical to my being able to help students advance; but I've also learned that when I communicate my evaluations to students, they tend to accept my assessment, but real change often doesn't happen until the students, themselves, participate in their own evaluations and recognize for themselves their progress and the direction that they need to advance in.

These examples show that three of the five elementary teachers asserted their teacher agency to use student self-evaluation for promoting greater student/learner agency. Two of the secondary teachers evinced a similar appreciation for the value of student self-evaluation.

Enrique, a middle school teacher, explained that "the process of students being able to learn autonomously and to think critically begins with their developing the power of critical self-reflection." Janet, another middle school teacher, attributed the growth of student self-efficacy learning beliefs to student self-evaluation in stating that "once kids see for themselves evidence of their improvement, by comparing a current work sample to something they produced earlier in the year, they really start to believe they can do it; and that belief makes such a difference." These two examples from secondary teachers further suggest how the veteran teachers value student self-evaluation to enhance student self-efficacy beliefs as a benefit to student learning. The evidence supporting the tentative finding of value for student self-evaluation, from three elementary and two secondary teachers, addresses the fourth research question related to impacts associated with teacher agency.

Standardized, high stakes, assessments. All ten veteran teachers expressed a critical view of standardized, norm referenced assessments. These are representative examples:

- "often invalid and misleading when applied to individual students" (Leah).
- "a harmful way to sort and compare kids and schools" (Diane); and
- "a nearly worthless source of information for guiding instruction "(Enrique).

The thematic analysis revealed a unanimous belief that teachers should use professional agency to critically understand and contest the use of standardized test practices, which became increasingly prevalent and impactful over the course of their careers. This finding addresses the first research question by showing that the veteran teachers used their agency to resist the use of standardized tests. This finding also addresses the fourth question by showing that the teachers believe that standardized tests have a negative impact for some students, and teachers who resist use their agency to benefit students by reducing harm.

Formative assessment is complex. The triangulation of the narrative and thematic analyses revealed that three teachers (Diane Jodi, & Kass) expressed reservations about their early career use of agency in the assessment domain. All three expressed the need for inexperienced teachers to be cautious when using formative data to make instructional decisions. Diane noted "When I look back, I'm a little bit stunned to think about how little I knew, compared to how much I thought I knew, about assessing my students." Jodi shared a similar perspective, "One area where I should have relied more on experienced teachers was in figuring out my students instructional needs. Only after teaching for several years and teaching lots and lots of kids, did I have a real basis, sound intuitions, for sizing up a student's strengths and needs." Kass offered the opinion that "using your team of teachers to assess students and to

develop instructional goals and a plan is something that I believe is extremely important for all of us, but especially for beginning teachers."

In conclusion, the veteran teachers view their use of agency both globally and domain-specifically (curriculum, instruction, and assessment). This finding addresses the first research question, pertaining to the forms of agency, the third research question, pertaining to overcoming challenges to agency, and the fourth research question, pertaining to the impact of agency.

Summary of Phase One Findings:

The Influence of the Professional Context on Veteran Teacher Agency

Through my use of thematic, narrative, and discourse analyses of the veteran teachers' interview data, and, as appropriate, the triangulation of these analyses with the numerical analysis of the survey data, I discerned three thematic categories pertaining to the influence of the veteran teachers' professional context on their agency:

- teacher agency was a salient professional topic, as both an asset and a concern (addresses all four research questions).
- teacher agency was manifested as a combination of individual and collective forms (addresses the first, second, and third research questions); and
- teacher agency was perceived as both global and domain-specific (addresses the first and fourth research questions).

The following sections describe the findings pertaining to the influence of the professional context on the teacher agency of the practicing—early and mid-career—teachers.

Phase Two, Practicing Teachers and the Professional Context

The findings for the influence of the professional context on the agency of phase two participants were derived from constructivist constant comparison analyses of their interviews,

surveys, and field notes of observations and discussions. The grounded theory research design is primarily inductive; however, I used the three thematic categories from phase one as starting points, or "sensitizing concepts" (Blumer, 1969). These themes were used deductively to seek similarities and differences between and among the veteran and practicing teacher cohorts. I adopted a critical stance to conduct this comparison, questioning the relevance of the phase one thematic findings to the agency of the phase two teachers. The results of the constant comparison analysis of the phase one and the phase two teacher interview and survey findings are presented in the next three sections.

Two additional thematic categories emerged from constantly comparing the practicing teacher observation and discussion data, triangulated with their interviews. The two themes are a) teacher-student relationships as an influence on agency and, b) the years of teacher experience as an influence on agency.

Salience of Teacher Agency as Both an Asset and as a Concern for the Practicing Teachers.

All but one of the practicing teachers (Savannah) provided evidence in their interviews and through their engaged participation in the research project that they regard teacher agency to be an important professional attribute. Nine of the participants prepared for the interviews by composing thoughts and examples of their understanding and use of agency. Conversely, Savannah did not familiarize herself with the interview questions. Therefore, she requested additional time to review the questions prior to rescheduling the recorded interview. She also indicated that teacher agency was a novel professional concept for her, one that she was interested in learning more about, but not one with which she had experience. Ultimately, all ten practicing teachers voluntarily participated in and completed each of the data collection processes.

Teacher agency viewed as an asset, but with some concerns. The thematic analysis of the practicing teacher's interviews revealed that six of the ten practicing teachers (Jana, Lynette, Colleen, Iris, Terri, & Brooke) expressed an unequivocal and uncritical belief that successful teaching depended on the assertion of professional agency to make decisions regarding what and how to teach—the curricular and instructional domains. The remaining practicing teachers (Denise, Kristen, Samantha, & Savannah) were mostly positive, but qualified, in their views of teacher agency.

Jana, a mid-career middle school language arts and social studies teacher, described the benefits from beginning her career by co-designing (with her grade level teaching partner) an integrated language arts and social studies program:

> At the time it seemed like an unfair burden; and, in a way, it was because we were both first year teachers. It was more of a 'sink or swim' situation, with less support than what teachers should ideally face. By going through that process, though, we were able to develop important insights as to what goes into a well- designed cross-curricular program. Understanding how to do this has allowed us to refine and create other curricula that are well matched to our students' needs.

Lynette, an early career second grade teacher quit teaching after one year in a school district with a highly scripted approach to instruction. Two years later, when she learned about the non-scripted approach to teaching that her current school encourages, she returned to teaching with the conviction that *(*expressed in an impassioned tone*)*

> . . . it's extremely important to be able to use your own method of teaching when you're trying to get something across because things that work for one teacher are not going to work for another teacher. At my first school, when I started to take a little bit different

> approach—sometimes involving movement or singing—the people that I was working with didn't think that was a very effective teaching method; but I could see how much the kids were retaining the information, which was drastically different than when they were just passively reading and answering someone else's questions.

Three of the mid-career practicing teachers (Denise, Kristen, & Samantha) viewed teacher agency as an important capacity for teachers to possess, but they also expressed some reservations. These teachers reported having seen teacher agency asserted in ways beneficial to students, but also in ways perceived as detrimental. Denise described working with two first year teachers possessing

> lots of exciting ideas and engaging projects, but they had pieces missing. When we looked at how the students were performing at the end of each quarter, it was clear that some of the foundational skills that their students needed to successfully take on their choice projects independently just weren't there. They kept putting it off by saying that the students would pick up on these skills naturally. Finally, at the end of the third quarter they asked me what I was doing with my students. I was open to trying some of their creative ideas, but the one thing that they were missing was consistent, targeted, direct instruction. They started to work more of that type of teaching and made comments like, “Oh man, that was really a good idea. I wish I had listened to you earlier.” Their students made a lot of progress in the fourth quarter.

Denise reported admiring her early career colleagues' agentic creativity but believes that beginning teachers require a balance between being autonomous and accepting advice from more experienced teachers.

Kristen, a mid-career, middle school language arts teacher, recalled her first year of teaching as a time when

> I was keeping one day ahead of the students. When I was hired at the last minute because they had more students than the school had planned for, I was given a curriculum framework consisting only of some learning objectives as standards. I really didn't have a curriculum, as far as materials, a scope and sequence and lesson plans. I look back now, as a teacher who has been teaching for a while, and I see that as a harmful type of teacher autonomy. I could have done a better job with those kids, as a new teacher, with even a little guidance.

Kristen echoes the views of Denise, recommending a balance between choice and guidance for early career teachers.

Savannah, a first-year teacher, was an outlier in the practicing teacher cohort with regards to using agency. She volunteered to participate in the research project but explained that "I know that with experience I'll want to branch off with my own ideas, so it's good to learn about teacher agency, but for this year I'm focused on following our programs."

The practicing teachers' interviews suggest a generally positive attitude toward agency; however, they described agency as largely monolithic, providing little elaboration on specific forms and impacts of teacher agency and only a paucity of examples connecting forms of teacher agency with specific educational outcomes. Furthermore, no practicing teacher referenced teacher agency as a vehicle for their personal professional learning, nor did they express an awareness that agency should be asserted within professional guidelines. This was in contrast to the elaborate examples articulated by the veteran teachers as a typology of concerns.

Most of the practicing teachers (n = 9) however, expressed concerns about the educational harm that may result from an absence or denial of teacher agency. For example, Brooke, an early career second grade teacher, described beginning her first year by using a highly scripted math program where she and her grade level teammate

> struggled with how scripted and artificial it was. None of the examples and story-problems fit with our kids' experiences or interests and the skills and concepts weren't tied to the real world from a kid's reference point. So before going too far with that program we switched to using the learning objectives as a framework only and created story problems that were relatable to our students. We taught the concepts and skills in a context that was real to our students' lives. I think that it's extremely important that you are teaching about things that you know and are genuinely interested or excited about. I also think that you need to be authentic in how you teach, and kids will pick up on that. If I were in a school where I couldn't teach authentically, I would find a different school or a different career.

Another such example was provided by Iris, a mid-career middle-school language arts special education teacher. Like Lynette, Iris resigned from her first teaching assignment after teaching for four years in a school district emphasizing "fidelity" to scripted programs. She decided to give teaching a second try when she learned about a STEM magnet middle school near the university where she was enrolled in a graduate studies program in child psychology. Iris contrasted her first teaching assignment with her current teaching experience stating that

> My first school became so structured, down to the minute, so that I couldn't even do read-alouds from a novel with my class. Everything was about using each minute to teach skills or content for the tests. It took all the joy out of learning for the kids and the joy

> out of teaching for me. As a teacher I want my students to love learning and to love being in the classroom. It got to the point that I didn't like it. I didn't like my job anymore.

These findings lead me to conclude that the theme of teacher agency salience is a highly relevant professional topic. The practicing teachers expressed the importance of agency in generic terms, in contrast to the veteran teachers' elaborated examples connecting forms of agency with specific outcomes. Moreover, this analysis suggests to me that both cohorts share a mostly positive view of teacher agency, which is counter-balanced by shared concerns about the negative educational impact of an absence or denial of agency. Teachers in both cohorts expressed concern that agency can be misused, although this concern was more frequently addressed and more explicitly illustrated by specific examples provided by the veteran teachers. Among the practicing teachers, concerns about the need to balance teacher autonomy with experience and guidance from senior faculty was expressed by three of the mid-career teachers (Denise, Jana, & Kristen) and two early career teachers (Colleen & Terri).

All four research questions were addressed through this constant comparison analysis of the veteran teacher and practicing teacher findings. Agency, for the practicing teachers, is described in the form of teacher autonomy to make decisions about what and how to best teach students (research question 1). The practicing teachers described the professional cultures and leadership at their current schools as being conducive to the development and assertion of their professional agency (research question 2). These teachers also described in general terms some of the challenges they were confronting when trying to successfully assert professional agency (contrasted with more specific examples furnished by the veteran teachers) that positively impact the learning of their students (research questions 3 & 4).

Teacher Agency Manifested as an Individual, a Collective, and a Blended Phenomenon by the Practicing Teachers

The practicing teachers' interview descriptions of their use of agency, and classroom demonstrations of agency provided evidence that they varied their use of agency as individual, collective, and blended forms—which parallels the findings from the veteran teachers. This finding was further confirmed when triangulated with their survey responses,

Teacher agency manifested as an individual phenomenon. Two participants described their use of agency as individuals. One teacher (Savannah) gave examples of her use of agency as an exclusively individual phenomenon; and one teacher (Samantha) referred to her use of agency as being predominately individual, with only one reference to professional collaboration. Savannah, a first-year primary grade teacher, expressed a concern about being "judged by more experienced teachers when we meet as grade level teams to review test results." She chooses to enact her teaching practice individually, rather than by consulting or collaborating with colleagues. She described her beliefs about her agency as

> mostly following the programs that we are supposed to use. I want to really get comfortable with our language arts and math programs before I start to try new ideas. The other first grade teachers recommend breaking our classes into smaller groups for direct instruction and then centers. My students struggle to stay focused if I am not working with them all together. We do our lessons whole group and then I give them artistic options with drawing, or working on other art projects, or independent reading, for the students that finish their assignments quickly.

This example highlights Savannah's outlier status among the practicing teachers. Her use of agency is to resist developing her own teaching strategies and to adhere to commercially

scripted lessons. This use of teacher agency matches her expressed weak self-efficacy beliefs, which she attributes to her status as a first-year teacher. Savannah's interview data, triangulated with her survey data (her lowest score of 2 was on the “collegial partnership” item, and her highest score of 9 was on the “professional development” item), suggests an individualistic approach with minimal assertion of teacher agency (some agency is reflected in her choice of providing artistic options for her students).

Samantha, a sixth-year intermediate elementary teacher, also provided interview and survey data revealing a tendency towards a mostly individual approach to obtaining self-efficacy beliefs and the subsequent use of teacher agency. She had moved to a new grade level (4th) the previous year, and likened that situation to her first year of teaching when

> I had no autonomy because I wasn't sure what my students needed, I was still getting to know the standards for that grade level (1st) and so I followed our programs to a 'T.' As I gained experience, my autonomy began to show up because I was able to see what my kids needed that maybe the program didn't give them. At that point I began to bring in my own literature and math ideas. This year (her second at her current grade level) I use the 4th grade program as a tool. Now I can change the lessons and the way that I teach them to fit my students' needs. I can do that because I know my students; I have a relationship with them.

In a fashion similar to Savannah, Samantha uses her teacher agency as an individual. Her individual agency is further reflected in her use of the first-person singular pronoun and in her response to the relevant questions on the survey (comparatively low score of 6 on the “collegial partnership” item), and a higher score of 9 on the “self-efficacy through discovering what works in my own classroom” item.

Teacher agency primarily manifested as a blended form. Four of the practicing teachers (Denise, Jana, Iris, & Terri) described their use of agency as a blend of both individual and collective forms. Denise, an experienced elementary teacher (10 years), advocates for a balanced approach to teacher agency whereby

> Individual teachers should have the freedom to use their judgement to make decisions about what is best for their students academically and from a social emotional standpoint. I inherited a behavioral plan that used a public form of pressure on the kids to follow the rules and I personally thought that it was more negative than positive. I changed it and designed an approach that was more between the student and me, with the goal of self-improvement and not being compared to the other students. On the other hand, teachers should work together towards common goals that are established for their school or that are district goals. Beginning teachers, especially, should use the knowledge of more experienced teachers as they look at how their students are performing and how to make their teaching more effective when needed.

Denise was instrumental in her school becoming a designated STEM magnet school. On several occasions she expressed disappointment that some recently hired colleagues lacked a commitment to following the STEM emphasis. She viewed individual teacher agency, in the form of resistance to a collective commitment to a STEM curricular and instructional model, as being problematic to the achievement of collective agency for her school.

Terri, a second-year middle school science and engineering teacher, also viewed unlimited individual autonomy (a situation parallel to Colleen's experience as a first-year elementary teacher) as being problematic at the beginning of her career. Terri was hired to create an engineering elective for her STEM magnet middle school, without the benefit of any existing

curricular model or instructional materials. She began by thinking that such a degree of freedom was “pretty stinking cool,” but shortly thereafter she experienced panic at the realization that

> I had no guidance for where to begin. There was no established curriculum and no materials that had been ordered. I only had a few days to prepare for the start of my first year and I realized that this much freedom could be disastrous. For the first four or five months it was extremely hard; and the truth is that I wasn't doing any real teaching. I survived by going from activity to activity as I thought them up. I was overwhelmed, but I pretended to have things under control at team meetings. Finally, when the magnet school coordinator stopped by my classroom after a really hard day, I broke down and confessed that I didn't know what I was doing. She had been a science teacher and so she took me under her wing. Our district didn't have an engineering curriculum or developed standards, but she found out what other districts were using, and we began from there. Now I love that I can mostly do my own thing; but I also collaborate with both eighth-grade teams so that the engineering elective projects tie together with the themes and content that they are teaching each quarter.

Terri, and the other practicing teachers who rely on the blended form of agency, report that choosing when to follow their own ideas and when to collaborate with colleagues provides them with opportunities to overcome challenges to their teacher agency. The descriptions of agency provided by these teachers includes a mix of both singular and plural first-person pronoun forms and is consistent with their descriptions and the examples of agency enacted both individually and collectively. These four practicing teachers gave scores of either 9 or 10 to the two survey items referring to “working with like-minded colleagues,” and “discovering what

works best through my classroom practices," which is consistent with both collective and individual agency.

Teacher agency manifested as a collective form. Four of the practicing teachers (Lynnette, Kristen, Colleen, & Brooke) described their use of agency as primarily being collective. Colleen is a second-year teacher who student taught in a middle school, then taught fourth grade her first year at an elementary school before returning to middle school as combined language arts and social studies teacher. Her year in elementary school taught her that

> It sucks teaching on an island. At first, I was excited to be able to make my own decisions, but without any experience in fourth grade I didn't know where to begin. Making things worse was the fact that faculty turn-over at that school was high and the leadership was weak. I asked for support, but the principal kept telling me that I was doing fine. She was too busy putting out fires in other classrooms, and the other teachers at my grade level were new and just as over-whelmed as I was.

Colleen also used the term "authentic" to characterize her type of teaching, which she accomplishes through close professional collaboration with her more experienced team of colleagues.

> This year I rely on my team to help me figure things out. I bounce ideas off them, and they often have helpful suggestions, but in the end, they trust me to use my judgement. We use a team approach to planning how to integrate our subjects and at the end of most days we get together to talk about how things went, where we're at, and where we need to go next.

Brooke is another example of an elementary practicing teacher who relies primarily on a collective approach to achieving teacher agency. She mentioned that her first year was a struggle

because she didn't professionally bond with other teachers at her grade level. This year, however, she was joined by a new teacher who shares her independent and creative approach to teaching. Brooke explained that

> Lynette and I work together on everything. All the planning goes together, and we treat our two groups of students as one large community of learners. I usually lead science and math lessons and she concentrate on language arts. Our students see us both as their teachers. We have very different personalities and different teaching styles. By sharing the teaching across both classes, our students are usually able to get what they need from at least one of us. We typically have project research time in the afternoons and the students can choose whether they need her (Lynette's) more energetic and direct teaching approach, or whether the calmer more individualized help that I offer is what they need. This team-teaching approach works because our principal supports us, and she has seen how engaged and successful most of the kids are.

Lynette, Kristen, Colleen and Brooke's descriptions of using agency are evidence that they rely on collaborating with grade level colleagues to achieve teacher agency. Their predominant use of a collaborative form of agency is further confirmed by their frequent use of plural forms of first-person pronouns (“we,” and “our”) and by their high survey scores (10, 10, 10, & 10, respectively) on the item referring to collaboration with peers.

An additional finding for the practicing teachers' uses of a collective form of agency, and the concomitant obtainment of strong efficacy beliefs, emerged from the analysis of the survey data. The survey included an 'open' item question that invited the respondents to add a tenth item about their development of teacher agency. Three of the practicing teachers (Jana, Colleen, & Terri) referenced their online community of practice, as an example of collegial collective

resource which supported their development of agency. This finding contrasts with the veteran teachers: no veteran teacher mentioned virtual collegial support networks.

Among the practicing teachers, there is an identical distribution of individual (n = 1), blended (n = 2), and collective (n = 2) oriented teachers for both the early (5) and mid-career teachers (5). Both individual oriented practicing teachers are elementary teachers. Therefore, these findings suggest that length of career and grade level taught are not related to the type of agency practiced.

In conclusion, the practicing teachers use of agency ranges along a continuum: individual (n = 2), blended (n = 4), and collective (n=4). This finding mirrors the veteran teachers (individual, n = 2; blended, n = 4; collective, n = 4). These forms of teacher agency explicitly address the first research question, and implicitly address the third research question related to challenges. The teachers' examples demonstrate that a professional context, which allows them to select their preferred form is important to successfully asserting and/or overcoming challenges to their professional agency.

Teacher Agency for The Practicing Teachers as Both Global and Domain-Specific

The third theme, that of agency being conceptualized as both a general or global teacher attribute and as a domain-specific understanding (the domains of instruction, curriculum, and assessment) appears to be less germane for the practicing teachers than for the veteran teachers. The constant comparison thematic analysis of the practicing teachers' interviews and their responses to the survey differ from the findings of the veteran teachers' interviews. The practicing teachers provided few domain-specific references to the use of teacher agency.

More than half of the practicing teachers (n = 7) referenced the importance of using professional agency to make professional decisions, rather than as a domain-differentiated

attribute aimed specifically at curriculum, instruction, or assessment. This finding contrasts with the veteran teachers who described their use of agency as being differentiated within one or more of these domains. The preponderance of examples provided by the practicing teachers referenced broad teaching aims, such as the general requirement to implement an integrated STEM educational model, without making clear distinctions between the curricular, instructional, and assessment implications.

Three of the practicing teachers (Lynette, Jana, & Terri) were exceptions to this trend. Lynette, a second-year elementary teacher, focused on instructional methods. She spoke about her need to use "my own unique methods that incorporated movement and singing to bring the lessons to life." Jana, a mid-career secondary teacher, and Terri, an early career secondary teacher, focused on curricular integration (Jana) and curriculum development (Terri). These exceptions correspond with the veteran teachers' domain specific pattern: elementary teachers focused on the instructional domain and secondary teachers focused on curriculum.

The practicing teachers' views of teacher agency vis-à-vis the assessment domain revealed another contrast between the practicing teachers and the veteran teachers. The practicing teachers' views of assessment were deferential, they were not critical about the types of and uses for required assessments. Among the practicing teachers, two elementary teachers (Denise & Samantha) and three middle school teachers (Kristen, Colleen, & Iris) specifically referenced the importance of collectively analyzing assessment data to make "vetted" instructional decisions, but none expressed a critically reflective stance towards the efficacy or validity of assessments. Among this group of practicing teachers explicitly recommending a collective approach to linking assessment to instructional decisions, four (Denise, Kristen, Samantha, & Iris) are mid-career teachers, and only Colleen is an early career teacher.

An exception to this uncritical view of assessment, was provided by Jana, a mid-career middle school language arts teacher. Jana made a domain specific distinction between instruction ("needs more teacher autonomy") and curriculum ("needs more team collaboration") and assessment ("needs to be better understood."). She also provided a domain specific critique linking teacher agency and assessment

> Assessment, I think, is an area of teaching that is still too frequently, and deeply misunderstood by teachers . . . The difference between formative assessments, that should blend right into instruction, and final assessments, that serve as benchmarks for how far the kids have come, is often contrived and misleading. All assessments have implications for both instruction and for making decisions about student progress and the effectiveness of our teaching. The idea of a summative assessment, meaning that the teaching and learning have come to an end and now we just need to assign a grade, is such an artificial—school rather than real life—view of learning. It also leaves all the power to assess in the hands of the school and teachers, rather than seeing it as something that should be shared with, and a means of empowering, students.

Jana's views on assessment are consistent with her pre-professional student experiences in an ungraded open optional K-12 school. They also echo a tentative theme from the veteran teacher findings, emphasizing student self-assessment as a worthwhile goal for teacher agency.

In conclusion, the practicing teachers viewed professional agency as global rather than domain specific. The three exceptions, all mid-career teachers, matched the veteran teachers' views. Also, the practicing teachers' views of assessment were less critical than those of the veteran teachers. This finding informs the first research question about forms of agency and the

fourth research question pertaining to the impacts associated with the assertion and/or denial of teacher agency.

Thematic Findings Derived from the Inductive Analysis of the Phase Two Data

Two additional thematic categories were derived through the inductive constant comparison analysis of the observation and discussion field notes, triangulated with the constant comparison analysis of the interviews. These thematic categories are:

- quality of student-teacher relationships as an influence on agency, and
- quality and quantity of professional experience as an influence on agency.

The following examples, organized into the two themes, address all four research questions.

The Quality of Teacher-Student Relationships as an Influence on Teacher Agency

All ten practicing teachers expressed variations of the belief that creating student-teacher relationships characterized by mutual respect and trust was necessary for successfully enacting their teaching intentions. As Brooke explained, "once students are comfortable in their classroom, and have developed trust with their teacher and classmates, learning can happen; but without that sense of trust there won't be a community of learners in any classroom." This belief statement comes from notes documenting my first post observation with her and is echoed through the discussion and interview statements of each practicing teacher. Triangulation of the interview findings with the observation findings confirmed that the practicing teachers viewed the building of trust with students as an important pre-condition to achieving agency, and that they each reported (interviews) and demonstrated (observations) success in fostering trust-based relationships with their students.

During my observations, I documented evidence related to the students' expressed attitudes and behaviors about their classroom social and academic experiences. Each of the observation fieldnotes included examples of a high degree of peer social acceptance among the students. Nine of the teachers used a combination of whole group, small group, and individual instruction. In contrast, Savannah used whole group instruction exclusively. In the nine classrooms where students worked in small peer groups, I did not witness a single instance of a student complaining about their group assignment. Nor did I witness a single instance of a group or individuals within a group saying or doing something that indicated a rejection of one of the group members.

In my experience as a teacher, a teacher mentor, and a student teacher supervisor, the absence of student resistance to working with peers is more the exception than the norm. Moreover, when questioned about their feelings regarding being a member of their class and about their relationships with their classmates, the students uniformly expressed positive views. In six instances students said they preferred certain subjects and activities over other subjects and activities, but in my casual conversations with students during unstructured times, no student indicated disliking their school, classmates, and/or teacher.

This finding addresses the second research question pertaining to conducive conditions for achieving agency and the fourth research question pertaining to the educational impacts associated with the assertion of teacher agency. The teachers, each in their own way, recognized the importance of creating a positive, trust-based, relationship with and among their students. Since my experience suggests that these students' satisfaction is unusual, I wondered how the teachers had established positive relationships with their students.

Teachers Differed in Their Use of Motivational Strategies

One pattern evident between and among the practicing teachers on the matrix portraying the observations and discussions triangulated with the thematic analysis of the interviews, was that the teachers clustered differently by their motivational approaches. The teachers' motivational approaches ranged, from primarily extrinsic (n = 2, Denise & Savannah), to primarily intrinsic (n = 3, Colleen, Jana, & Brooke), to a balance of both (n = 5, Iris, Kristen, Lynette, Samantha, & Savannah) forms. The following examples illustrate each of these approaches and the differing qualities of teacher-student relationships associated with the different motivational approaches.

Two of the practicing teachers relied on extrinsic student motivators. Denise is a mid-career elementary teacher who (along with Savannah, early career elementary) primarily utilizes extrinsic motivational approaches to obtain student cooperation and engagement. Denise structures her third-grade classroom so that students most often work in small (n = 4) cooperative teams. Teams continually earn or lose points based on their level of attention (visually looking at the teacher as she explains and demonstrates lesson information and procedures without interruption) and active participation (successfully following instructional directions without needing redirection or reminders of behavioral expectations). These points are announced by the teacher and recorded on a white board at the front of the classroom following each instructional segment. Teams with the higher scores are rewarded by lining up first as the class prepares to exit the classroom to attend special classes. If the class collectively achieves a pre-determined total, they are rewarded with extended free choice time at near the conclusion of the school day.

Denise also uses extrinsic motivators for individual students by posting student progress in language arts and math. Students chart their scores on weekly timed reading and timed math

assessments on a graph, which are publicly displayed on a bulletin board. Each week the student who shows the greatest improvement is recognized as the reading or math "star of the week" on this same bulletin board.

My analysis of the observation notes leads me to conclude that Denise's consistent use of extrinsic rewards to motivate her students results in a classroom learning climate of high student engagement and cooperation. During her interview, and later reiterated during discussions, she stated that students most effectively learn when they are "acknowledged and rewarded for their efforts," and when they "see tangible signs of their progress."

Students in her third-grade class validate her extrinsic approach by their consistent efforts to participate in learning activities with a high degree of cooperation with their classmates. My observation notes indicate that student intergroup conflict and student refusal to attempt to complete assignment tasks rarely occurred (four examples total). During my interactions and discussions with the students, they evaluated their experiences her class using the terms "fair" and "helpful." The analysis of the observation data, including student statements, confirmed interview statements by Denise regarding her use of rewards and recognition of student effort and progress as a means of achieving high student motivation. She successfully asserted her agency by using extrinsic motivational strategies. Further, this is a conducive condition for Denise's achievement of teacher agency and is also a positive student educational impact from the assertion of her agency (research questions two and four).

Three of the practicing teachers primarily use intrinsic motivational strategies. Colleen is an early career middle school language arts and social studies teacher who (along with Jana, mid-career secondary, & Brooke, early career elementary) primarily utilizes intrinsic motivational strategies to obtain a high degree of student cooperation and engagement. Colleen

has a close professional relationship with Kristen, a mid-career middle school language arts teacher, teaching the same grade and school as Colleen. Colleen student taught with Kristen and continues an apprenticeship/mentorship professional relationship with her. Colleen currently teaches eighth grade during her first year as a 'real' teacher.

Colleen stated in her interview that she uses her agency to nurture learner autonomy, a goal she formed during her student teaching under Kristen's mentorship. She consults with Kristen daily; but is also evolving her teaching practice in ways that differ from Kristen's. My analysis of the relevant discussion data shows that Kristen is aware of and encourages Colleen's evolving teaching practice.

As collegial partners they plan and debrief daily, sharing instructional ideas and a commitment to nurturing student independent thinking, initiative, and self-motivation. My analysis of discussion notes taken during pre- and post-observation discussions with Coleen, including joint discussions involving both of them reveals that the goal for students to assume ownership and take responsibility for learning is a consistent theme for both teachers.

> During the discussion with Colleen, following my second observation, she explained that Kristen's homework philosophy has been to only send home assignments and projects that students are motivated to accomplish. She and the kids jokingly refer to these assignments as “home-fun.” It works though. I've built on that idea and have kids find news stories that they're interested in, or do things like interview family members or friends, as homework assignments that are related to themes in literature or topics we're studying in social studies. I use class time to work on assignments that feel more like work to the students so that they don't have negative associations with projects that I ask them to work outside of class time, as homework.

In addition to using an intrinsic motivation approach for homework projects, Colleen nurtures student intrinsic motivation and independence in two ways. First, she uses explicit organizational structures and second, she invites students to connect curriculum with their personal experiences, interests, and concerns. My notes from my second observation session with Colleen's regular (as opposed to her gifted and her ELL sections) third hour eighth grade section included the following excerpt, describing a lesson representative of her pedagogical philosophy and approach:

> The bell work instructions direct the students to form triad teams with classmates that had chosen and brought to school various news site or newspaper articles about immigration and/or immigrants. Each group follows a discussion format, sharing and discussing key quotes. Students then compare the articles for common themes, charting the perspectives that are represented, and showing both similarities and differences about immigration from multiple perspectives. Twenty-three of the twenty-seven students brought in an article for this assignment. The four students who did not bring in articles were directed to each find an article online, and to work together to analyze their articles for themes and perspectives represented. Each group gives a brief summary about their discussion and show their chart by projecting it onto the smartboard screen. The lesson concludes as the students move into their pre-established literature discussion groups to compare the news articles with the novel they were reading—based on immigration themes.

This observation occurred in February. Colleen briefly addressed the entire class three times during that class period, announcing transitions from one phase of the agenda to the next. All twenty-seven students participated in the literature discussions and wrote an independent journal reflection following the discussions. Throughout the article and literature discussions,

Colleen moved from group to group listening and occasionally interjecting her thoughts. I observed and wrote in my field notes that the article discussions were animated and, at times, quite loud. At one point, a male student rang a chime and, when the class grew silent, asked his classmates to lower their voices. Apparently, Colleen expects and encourages students to function with autonomy and to utilize self-initiative and self-control.

Although Colleen is required to assign quarterly achievement letter grades, she does not grade student's daily and weekly assignments. She provides written and verbal feedback to each student, encouraging them to revise or to add to long term assignments and projects until both she and the student agree that the assignment requirements have been met. She also requires students to self-assess their final products and write a reflection explaining important new understandings gained by completing the project. Students choose each project, and are encouraged, but not required, to collaborate with other students. She does not use extrinsic rewards or punishments but did refer to a class contract (I recorded two references to it during my three observations), a statement collectively composed by the students to remind them of their agreed upon norms of behavior.

Student comments about their language arts class suggested a positive attitude about their social and academic experiences. As an example, one student described the learning experience as, "always busy, but it doesn't usually feel like work. We have themes to follow but we get to choose and research into current issues important to us, and then present what we learn to the whole class." Analysis of my observation notes, compiled over the three observation sessions, confirms that the students in Colleen's classes worked in small group teams for the majority of each observation period. Typically, these teams were engaged in either discussing theme-related texts, which they had chosen, or planning presentations of their ideas to classmates.

Colleen relies on an intrinsic approach to learner motivation to nurture student autonomy. She complements her curricular approach of designing intrinsically meaningful projects with a low-key approach to directing learning activities. This approach relies on students assuming responsibility for their conduct. Her mentorship relationship with Kristen, and her willingness to develop her own pedagogy, are interpreted to be important conducive conditions (question two) for developing strong self-efficacy beliefs and obtaining teacher agency. The observed high degree of student motivation and learner autonomy is evidence of the educational impact (question four) of her assertion of professional agency.

Five of the practicing teachers used a blend of extrinsic and intrinsic motivational strategies. Iris is a mid-career middle school special education/language arts teacher who, along with Lynette (early career elementary), Kristen (mid-career secondary), Samantha (mid-career elementary), & Terri (early career secondary), utilizes a blend of extrinsic and intrinsic motivational strategies. She teaches two sections of language arts, using a pullout/self-contained classroom model, for students with diagnosed learning disabilities. Additionally, she uses an inclusion instructional model and team teaches with general education teachers for three instructional periods each day. My analysis of discussion notes from pre- and post-observation briefings with Iris reveal that she seeks to develop self-confidence and risk-taking attributes in her students through intrinsic motivational strategies. She uses short term extrinsic rewards to entice students to attempt and engage with lessons and assignments, even when the students have little confidence in their capacity to successfully achieve. Iris describes her approach to motivation and nurturing positive learner self-efficacy beliefs as

> an attempt at an attitude reset for my students. Many of them are so used to school being this zero-sum competition with them always finishing at the bottom; I take away all

> comparisons and try to get them to buy into their own progress. We use team competitions, just to have fun and get the energy level up. I make sure that everyone feels that they are winners, and then I have students develop portfolios where they have a chance to see concrete proof of their academic improvement. The goal is to go from a "loser mindset," to a "growth mindset."

Like Colleen, Iris does not assign letter or percentage grades to student assignments. The analysis of discussion field notes reveals her belief that students with a history of academic struggles and low grades are harmed by grading. She encourages the general education teachers, who also work with her students, to focus on encouraging student effort and to emphasize evidence of student academic progress when assessing students. She stated that "students who are on academic losing streaks need something different. They need to find hope in recognizing their own progress rather than experience discouragement from being compared to peers." Iris assigns credit to her students whenever they attempt an assignment. Students then receive extra credit when they make corrections on their assignments and resubmit them.

The lessons I observed and analyzed reveal that Iris uses extrinsic motivators for direct instruction lessons. Students are given worksheets designed to provide follow-up guided practice for the specific skill that was taught during the direct instruction and demonstration phase of the lesson. Students work together, in teams of three or four, to complete these skill practice worksheet exercises. The teams then take turns presenting their answers and they receive team points for correct answers, or for noting and pointing out when other teams present incorrect answers. At the conclusion of each of these competitions, each student chooses a prize (small healthy snacks or a school pencil), and the winning team is rewarded with a second prize.

My field notes indicate that these competitions are spirited with the students participating enthusiastically.

Iris's interview statements expressed concern for her students' development of learner efficacy beliefs. She explained that “students first need to believe in themselves, as capable learners, if they are to develop the trait of perseverance. I always refer to them as developing learners and never as struggling learners.” Iris's students used the terms “encouraging,” and “challenging” to describe her teaching approach.

The affordance to design and implement instructional and assessment strategies that conform to Iris’s teacher beliefs, is interpreted to be a conducive condition (question two) for her development and assertion of professional agency. The matrix and interview analysis supports the effectiveness of her approach. This finding addresses the question of impact (question four) on student learner efficacy beliefs and student academic achievement that result from Iris's assertion of her professional agency.

Synthesis of Motivational Approaches: Manifesting and Influencing Teacher Agency

The three examples presented above exemplify variations in how the practicing teachers implemented motivational approaches as an aspect of their teacher agency. Although two teachers use primarily extrinsic motivational strategies, others use intrinsic motivational strategies (n=3), and five use a blend of these two approaches. All of these teachers implemented motivational approaches to promote student engagement with learning activities and student social cooperation with peers and the teacher.

There is little differentiation between grades being taught (elementary or secondary) or between the categories of early and mid-career. Both teachers using an extrinsic motivational approach were elementary teachers, one of whom was an early career teacher, and the other was

a mid-career teacher. One of the three teachers using intrinsic motivational approaches was a mid-career teacher; two were secondary teachers and one was an elementary teacher. Three of the teachers using a blended approach were secondary teachers; two were mid-career and one was early career.

The practicing teachers enacted their teaching vision for a high degree of student cooperation and student effort by implementing particular pedagogical approaches to motivation. As teachers in STEM schools, they were granted more teacher decision making autonomy than teachers constrained by school district mandates to "faithfully" follow curricular and instructional plans. Two of the elementary teachers (Denise & Samantha) and two of the middle school teachers (Iris & Kristen) participated in the creation and adoption of the STEM model, and the other teachers deliberately chose to teach at a STEM magnet school. These actions and decisions benefited their agency and addresses both the second and third research questions related to conducive conditions for achieving agency and strategies for overcoming challenges to asserting agency.

These different motivational approaches did, however, impact the quality of student intellectual engagements with the curriculum and opportunities for student learner autonomy. Based on the observational field notes, I observed that Denise's emphasis on extrinsic student motivation was linked to learning facts and details. In contrast, Colleen's use of intrinsic motivational strategies was linked to several kinds of learning engagements, asking the students to critically evaluate, analyze, describe, explain, and synthesize.

In contrast to the extrinsic motivation classes, the classes I observed utilizing an intrinsic or blended approach to student motivation, were characterized by student choice, student self-evaluation, open-ended discussions and reflective learning activities emphasizing higher order

thinking engagements. These approaches appeared to consistently engage students in independent, critical thinking processes and appeared to support students' obtainment of learner autonomy. For example, the students moved seamlessly from one phase of a project or activity to the next without teacher prompting. On the other hand, an emphasis on grades, competitions, and other forms of extrinsic rewards was linked to a high degree of teacher control with little student autonomy. This finding, connecting a teacher's approach to student motivation and their larger sense of pedagogical purpose for their agency, is developed further in Chapter Six.

The quality of teacher-parent/community relationships as an influence on teacher agency. The constant comparison of all ten practicing teachers' interviews and discussions provided evidence reflecting that achieving a positive and collaborative relationship with parents and community member enhances their professional agency.

Six of the practicing teachers (Lynette, Jana, Kristen, Colleen, Terri, & Brooke) interviews revealed specific strategies for building positive relationships with parents and community members. Lynette and Brooke reported that

> after hearing a few complaints from parents about the physical environment of our classroom, lack of soft rugs for the students to sit on, old and uncomfortable chairs, we distributed a flyer to parents requesting contributions towards improving these aspects of our classroom. We were also successful in applying for a grant to purchase round yoga style balls for students to use as chairs. Many of the parents contributed or found local businesses that offered to help furnish our classroom with discounted and donated items. By the second half of the year, parents began commenting on how much nicer our classrooms looked and how excited their children were about these changes.

Jana, a secondary mid-career teacher, relies on volunteer presenters from the community and also on parent volunteers to accompany her class on frequent fieldtrips. She made the point that

> I've learned that when the parents are enthusiastic supporters of my program, when they are 'on my side' as I advocate for having my students learning experiences becoming increasingly integrated with the outside of school community, it's almost impossible for my principal to say no.

Likewise, Terri with her engineering elective, and Kristen and Colleen with their non-traditional approach to homework (home-fun) described during both their interviews and discussions, how building positive relationships with parents contribute to their ability to achieve agency.

Despite this positive view of relationships with parents, four of the middle school teachers (Kristen, Colleen, Iris, & Terri) described in both their interviews and discussions occasions when, early in their careers, they felt “unfairly scapegoated” for student behavioral incidents. For example, during one of the post observation discussions with Kristen, three other teachers joined our discussion. They expressed concerns about meeting with unhappy parents individually. Hence, they enacted a policy of meeting collectively with parents to discuss student behavioral issues. Kristen had previously stated that this policy presents a unified stance and lessens the likelihood that an individual teacher might be blamed for a student’s struggles.

In conclusion, my constant comparison of the practicing teachers' interview and discussion data regarding their relationships with parents and the larger community, reveals that they view such relationships as being a beneficial influence on their agency. This view comes with certain caveats and cautions, particularly from four of the secondary teachers. Three of the middle school teachers (Iris, Jana, & Kristen) who expressed guardedness, when discussing

communication with parents, are mid-career teachers who referenced conflicting views with parents over student behavioral issues, which occurred during their early career phase. The early career middle school teachers and the elementary teachers expressed mostly positive view, with few concerns, of their relationship with the parents and community in their interview and discussions statements.

This finding addresses all four of the research questions. Working with parents is perceived as an important form of collective agency. Establishing and maintaining positive relationships with parents and community members is a conducive condition for agency. The veteran teachers were consistent in their reporting of favorable relationships with parents, while the practicing teachers reported mostly positive relationships, with some exceptions. Both the veteran and practicing teachers expressed the belief that parent, and community support of teachers is a valuable support for their agency which also benefits the learning of students.

Amount of Professional Experience Influences Practicing Teachers' Agency

The constant comparison analysis of the observation and discussion field notes, triangulated with my analysis of interview data, reveals that the mid-career teachers expressed teacher agency by using more complex and innovative teaching strategies than did the early career teachers. Additionally, this analysis led me to identify a related, but more tentative finding regarding the increased ability for some practicing teachers to effectively adjust their instructional approach commensurate with their amount of experience. As such, I have theorized a fourth domain, that of *pedagogical tact*.

Experience influenced the forms of expressed teacher agency. The agency demonstrated by phase two teachers was analyzed through constant comparison methods. Teacher agency, as demonstrated by the teachers' observed curricular, instructional, and

assessment practices, took the form of either adaptations of pre-designed lessons, or teacher created innovations. The early career teachers' agentic practices were adaptive, whereas most of the mid-career teachers (n = 4, the exception being Savannah) used both adaptations and innovations in their teaching practices.

For example, Lynette and Brooke, an early career elementary teacher team, were required to use a commercially produced math program. They adapted the program's instructional methods to engage the students more actively. They substituted math manipulatives for the program's worksheets, had students work with partners in active discussions and verbalizations of strategies for solving math story problems, and rewrote the content of many of the story problems to better link with the students' life and culture.

Similarly, Colleen, an early career middle school language arts teacher, provided students with alternative literature related to themes in her assigned literature anthology. She explained that providing choice supported student interests and reading preferences and helped her to better accommodate her students' academic needs.

Mid-career teachers also adapted curricular, instructional, and assessment materials. For example, Iris, a mid-career secondary special education teacher, adapted by providing high interest low readability texts for her "pull-out" language arts class. She deliberately searched for and utilized texts about the topics the students were learning about in their social studies and science classes. She explained that this approach allowed her to meet the language arts instructional objectives while also strengthening students' conceptual and vocabulary knowledge about topics related to their regular education classes.

In addition to adapting their teaching methods, four of the mid-career teachers (Denise, Jana, Kristen, & Iris—the first an elementary teacher, the other three secondary teachers) also

used original and, at times, more complex methods as an innovative form of teacher agency. For example, Jana, a mid-career language arts and social studies teacher, co-designed an integrated social studies and science curriculum based on community service-learning projects. Jana and her teaching partner (the math and science team teacher for her grade level) involved their students in selecting community-based projects that were linked with their grade level content requirements in science and/or social studies. The students engaged in inquiry studies to acquire background knowledge about their community project. This example of agency achieved in the form of innovation represents both originality and complexity.

A second example of innovative agency, one that is original, aimed to achieve literal student learning rather than fostering complex student thinking. Denise (a mid-career elementary teacher) incorporated math review into her daily physical fitness program. She segued from the daily math lesson to her students scheduled outdoor recess using the school running track to reinforce her students' understanding of math facts. Students were placed in groups, at intervals, around the track. The groups first solved a multiplication or division equation and then moved around the track in a manner to mirror the numbers in the number sentence (e.g., using three sets of four strides, while counting, to confirm that 3 x 4 equals 12) as a means of confirming their answers. The students consistently showed enthusiasm for this activity.

These examples of teacher agency, expressed as adaptations or innovations to curriculum and instruction, directly address the research questions related to forms of agency and to challenges to agency. The early career teachers adapted existing curricular materials to achieve their agentic intentions. The mid-career teachers created innovative, original, and sometimes complex curricular and/or instruction to achieve their agentic intentions. Examples of agency as

adaptation and agency as innovation occurred in both individual and collective forms (research question one) of teacher agency, and both strategies enabled these teachers to overcome systemic challenges (research question three) to their achievement of agency.

Pedagogical Tact: An Emergent Fourth Domain

As I organized classroom observational and discussion data onto a matrix, consisting of three columns representing the domains of instruction, curriculum, and assessment, I needed a fourth column to account for data not fitting neatly into any of the three domain categories. Several teachers were adjusting their teaching plan 'on the fly' as they responded to unanticipated student questions and comments.

These improvisations often involved both curricular and instructional domains (and, at times, assessment) simultaneously, capturing the interactive and dynamic nature of teaching. I initially labeled this activity as “pedagogy.” My review of the relevant professional literature, however, led me to realize that this category closely corresponds to what James (1899, p. 15) referred to as “artful practice,” or Schön (1983, p. 55) “reflection in practice,” or van Manen’s (1991) “pedagogical tact.” Pedagogical tact, according to van Manen (2008), “enables teachers to successfully act or respond to complex and novel classroom events immediately and improvisationally” (p.88).

As I observed these adjustments and engaged the teachers in reflection and discussion regarding them, I realized that many of these spur-of-the-moment maneuvers stemmed from tacit understandings rather than conscious deliberations. Teacher tacit knowledge, an element of pedagogical tact, is recognized by Winch et al. (2015) as a critical complement to technical know-how and conscious critical reflection. Dijksterhuis (2007) found that teachers typically consider, at most, two or three aspects of a complex learning environment in making consciously

reasoned instructional adjustments. Pedagogical tact, which relies on both conscious critical reflection while teaching (Schön, 1983), and tacit understandings (van Manen, 1991) enables teachers to simultaneously integrate multiple variables while making nearly instantaneous decisions and improvisations (Sipman, et al, 2019).

When asked about a deviation from her intended instructional plan (from the observation/discussion data), Terri, an early career secondary teacher, responded "I don't know, it just came to me that this would work better. There was something about the students' body language and expressions that caused me to change what I had planned; but even I was surprised by what I came up with" was typical of the practicing teacher's descriptions of spontaneous adjustments during teaching. Terri's understanding of her adjustment, made in the moment of teaching, is consistent with Schön's (1983) description of this phenomenon as being "an artistic, intuitive process that is difficult to explain, tacit . . . knowing through experience . . . intelligent action" (p. 50). Through my constant comparison of the practicing teachers' observation and discussion data, I discovered that pedagogical tact occurred more often with the mid-career teachers, and far less often with the early career teachers.

Four of the mid-career teachers demonstrated pedagogical tact. Two of the most experienced mid-career teachers, Jana and Kristen, routinely made 'on the fly' successful adjustments to their teaching plan. Jana, in particular, was articulate about her awareness of improvising in the midst of interactions with her students, explaining

> as I become more deeply knowledgeable about the content that we're working on, and as I get to know my students more personally, I feel that I'm able to flex and flow with shifting dynamics, my teacher brain becomes more synched up with their learner brains. I've gotten better at this over time.

Kristen also recognized that she relied on a flexible “give and take approach' when presenting information and ideas to students. She elaborated on this notion in stating that, “even though I teach three sections of eighth grade language arts, each class discussion goes differently. I use what I know about the students in each of the sections and their reactions during our discussions, to engage their interest and active participation. I try to discuss with them, rather than talk at them.” My analysis of the observation notes confirm that the class discussions led by Kristen were consistently highly interactive and characterized by her spontaneous connection of students' comments with the overarching concepts and themes of the lesson.

A third mid-career teacher, Denise had also taught for ten years, but I found little evidence of spontaneous improvisation; however, she demonstrated a high degree of pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman, 1987). She successfully integrated math and science content and concepts with other curricular areas such as language arts, and demonstrated excellent organizational and pacing expertise, engaging her students in active learning throughout the school day. Rather than deviate from her instructional plan, she redirected unexpected student responses toward her anticipated and desired response. As such, she appeared to be a teacher with high expertise, but low flexibility (Dane, 2010) possibly entrenched in her pedagogical approach (Korthagen, 2017). This inflexibility is an attribute antithetical to pedagogical tact.

The early career teachers were rarely observed practicing pedagogical tact, with the exception of Terri. Of the five early career teachers, Terri stood out as being able to successfully improvise and make changes from her intended lesson design when presenting information and interactively discussing the lesson topic with her students. Terri is a second-year middle school teacher who was tasked with designing a new science/engineering curriculum for her school. She stated that, “this year I have a clearer idea for what I'm hoping that my students will get out

of each unit of study. Last year I was just going from activity to activity. I realize that what I was doing was only pseudo-teaching, this year it feels much more like real teaching."

Terri demonstrated consistent use of pedagogical tack in adjusting her teaching plan during the teaching act, as a second-year teacher. The following two examples are typical of my observation and discussion data analysis for the early career teachers. Savannah, a first-year elementary teacher, relied on following the school's formal curriculum and instructional teacher guides. She consistently taught by first demonstrating the steps for each lesson, and then distributed lesson materials to her students. Students are expected to follow Savannah's procedures without deviation. Finally, she led students to complete worksheets which were intended to summarize key learning points from the lesson. The lessons were predictable, tightly organized, and allowed for few questions or responses from her students.

Other early career teachers, such as Lynette, fall somewhere along a continuum between Savannah's lack of spontaneous lesson adjustments and Terri's consistent improvisation. Lynette, and her teaching partner Brooke, have adapted much of their assigned curriculum materials and instructional guides to better reflect the socio-cultural backgrounds and particular experiences of their students. Lynette, however, revealed close adherence to each of the lesson plans she described prior to each of the observations. In the follow-up discussion, however, Lynette demonstrated an awareness of points during the lesson where student responses reflected either confusion or disinterest. She reflected on those instances and made decisions for adjusting the next day's follow-up lesson. This capacity for critical reflection upon a completed lesson, as evinced by Lynette, was a common pattern among most of the early career practicing teachers.

Pedagogical tact—as improvisational teaching in the moment— and critical reflection—as premeditated improvisation on a teacher's lesson design—are two important instantiations of

what James (1899) referred to as "artful practice." The flexibility afforded by improvisational teaching allows teachers to personalize their teaching to support the interests and needs of individual students. This approach also makes it possible for teachers to enact culturally responsive teaching practices which support their students' collective learning needs. Additionally, through improvisation, teachers are able to display their professional creativity, express their unique teacher voice and personality, and develop a heightened sense of authorial ownership of their teaching practices.

In conclusion, some evidence of pedagogical tact and/or reflection for future lesson adjustments, was observed for eight of the ten teachers. My constant comparison analysis of the practicing teachers' observation data reveals that for these eight these teachers, the capacity to successfully “reflect on and simultaneously adjust to uncertain events while acting” (Schön, 1983, p. 56) develops over time. Four of the mid-career teachers consistently made mid-lesson adjustments. One early career teacher also demonstrated this capacity, and three of the early career teachers demonstrated an awareness of the value of self-reflection leading to changes for future lessons. This finding addresses the first research question regarding the forms of teacher agency exhibited by the practicing teachers, and the third research question regarding strategies teachers employ to overcome challenges to their agency.

Summary of the constant comparison of veteran teachers and practicing teachers: the influence of professional context. The constant comparison analysis of the practicing teachers' interviews and the veteran teachers’ interviews revealed differences between these cohorts across three thematic categories.

- Teacher agency is a salient professional topic, which is both an asset and a concern for both groups. The practicing teachers’ understandings of agency were general and

less clearly articulated than the veteran teachers' conceptions (addresses all four research questions).

- Teacher agency is manifested as a combination of individual and collective forms for both groups (addresses the first, second, and third research questions); and
- Teacher agency is perceived as both global and domain-specific by the veteran teachers, but from a mostly global perspective by the practicing teachers (addresses the first and fourth research questions).

Additionally, two categorical themes emerged from my analysis of the practicing teachers' observations and discussions:

- teacher-student relationships influence agency; and
- the number of years of teacher experience influence agency.

Chapter Five Summary: Findings Connecting Professional Context with Teacher Agency

The purpose of this chapter was to present findings related to the ecology of a teacher's professional life, particularly their relationships with students, colleagues, and parents in terms of both the spaces they work(ed) in and the phases of their careers. This ecological perspective, drawn from the literature review, frames this study.

Participants were ten veteran teachers and ten practicing teachers (five early and five mid-career). All participants were volunteers and participated in an interview and responded to a survey, both of which were designed by the researcher. In addition, the early and mid-career teachers were observed teaching (three times) and participated in discussions with the researcher before and after the observations. Hence, data sources included interviews, surveys, and field notes of observations and discussions.

The veteran teacher interview data were analyzed using methods typical of phenomenology. The early and mid-career teachers' data sources were analyzed using methods consistent with grounded theory. All survey data were analyzed numerically. Constant comparison methods were used to compare findings within and across the early, mid-career, and veteran teachers.

Findings informed the four research questions guiding this study: the forms of teacher agency, the conducive conditions for teacher agency, the challenges teachers face in expressing their agency, and the various impacts of teachers expressing their agency. For example, findings suggest that teachers perceive teacher agency to be expressed individually, collectively, and/or in a blended form. Characteristics of each form were described. Further, a conducive condition for enacting teacher agency is that a teacher have the opportunity to continue professional learning

along their preferred learning pathway (building on Chapter Four): formal/traditional, informal/personalized, and autodidactic.

The challenges teachers face in expressing their agency differs during the different phases of their career. The veteran teachers were expansive in describing their challenges, particularly when describing early and later career challenges. The practicing teachers provided fewer details and examples of their challenges. Finally, all the veteran and four of the practicing teachers expressed a concern that teacher agency is increasingly restricted to the detriment of both teachers and students.

Observations and discussions with the practicing teachers revealed unexpected findings related to professional contexts that were not evident with the veteran teachers. The practicing teachers discussed the importance of their virtual, digital relationships with other professionals and for finding resources. Another important teacher agency capacity is that of adaptation and/or innovation within the domains of curriculum and instruction. The mid-career teachers made more complex and innovative changes in their curriculum and instruction. Further, the mid-career teachers were different from the early career teachers in terms of pedagogical tact. The mid-career teachers were more spontaneous, making real time adjustments (as pedagogical tact) from their lesson plans to respond to unanticipated events and responses from their students.

As cited in the introduction to this chapter, Boser and Hanna (2014) concluded that a tension exists between the structure of schools and the achievement of teacher agency. The analysis of data presented in this chapter confirms this tension; additionally, this analysis showed that autonomy afforded teachers in a STEM school faced a lesser degree of systemic challenge when compared with their experiences in schools that value fidelity to mandated curriculum and

instructional practices. Hence, this finding and the findings summarized above confirm the theory that the ecology of a school and community is related to teacher agency.

The next chapter, Chapter Six, builds on Chapters Four and Five in that the influence on teacher agency, linked to teachers' teleological beliefs regarding their long-term educational aims, are presented. These beliefs, in turn, are influenced by both their personal experiences (described in Chapter Four) and their professional contexts (described in Chapter Five). The findings in Chapter Six are derived from a constant comparison of the teachers' sense of educational purpose across both cohorts. Therefore, these findings are presented thematically rather than sequentially by cohort.

Chapter Six

Teacher's Sense of Educational Purpose and Teacher Agency

Educational philosophers Biesta and Stengel (2016) assert that "education is a practice constituted by its purpose" (p. 49). Further, they point out that educational outcomes do not have value in and of themselves; rather, outcomes should be evaluated in terms of educational aims and intentions. This philosophical understanding of education—as a teleological practice—is complex because multiple valid perspectives on educational purposes co-exist: the educator's, the student's, and the community's. In this chapter, findings related to teachers' sense of educational purpose and the exercise of their agency (the forms of agency, conducive conditions for agency, challenges to agency, and impacts of agency) are presented.

The design of this study was phenomenological and grounded theory. Chapters Four and Five reported findings derived from investigating the influence of teachers' biographical and professional contexts on their teacher agency. Interrogating these findings, I theorized that teachers' long-term purposes of education, their teleological perspective, may also be related to their agency. Thus, I conducted thematic (related to the participants' sense of purpose) constant comparison analyses, within each cohort and across the two cohorts, to discover the relationship between teachers' teleological aims and their teacher agency manifested across the career span.

The findings reported in this chapter are related to, and in some instances, an extension of the findings reported in Chapters Four (personal biographies) and Five (professional contexts). That is, both personal and professional influences are related to teachers' purposes for teaching, which contribute to their professional identity formation and to their development and assertion of professional agency.

The findings in this chapter differ, however, from the findings in Chapters Four and Five in that they are derived from a cross-cohort constant comparison thematic analysis to investigate the influences on and educational impacts of teacher agency and the participants' long-term overarching pedagogical aims, their teleological perspectives, rather than their short term instructional and/or curricular intentions. This philosophical lens led me to holistically analyze the data relevant to the participants' teleological goals and to constantly compare emergent themes and sub-themes. Therefore, the thematic findings are reported across both cohorts, rather than reporting the findings for each of the cohorts separately, as was done in Chapters Four and Five.

The themes derived from this analysis are consistent with socio-cultural (Wertsch, 1991) and socio-cognitive (Bandura, 2001) research and theory, linking the co-evolution of teacher agency and teacher identity to their sense of educational purpose (Buchanan, 2015). The three themes related to teacher educational sense of purpose and teacher agency are the following:

1. motivations for teaching,
2. ownership of professional practice, and
3. transformative teaching.

These findings addressed all four questions for this study.

Motivation to Teach Related to Teacher's Purpose for Teaching

The veteran and practicing teacher cohorts' sense of educational purpose is related to their motivations, as reasons, for choosing to teach. The teachers' motivation came from an altruistic disposition, which the motivational theorist Pink (2011) defined as "a yearning to serve a cause larger than ourselves" (p. 4). They were motivated to serve the educational interests of

students and the wider society. The teachers' sense of purpose refers to the specific ways their altruistic motives were manifested through their teaching practices.

All but one of the participants (the exception was Savannah, an early career elementary teacher) referred to their desire to "make a positive difference in the lives of kids like me," Denise, a mid-career elementary teacher, explained her motivation to work with bilingual and socio-economically disadvantaged students as an important source of motivation. Some, such as veteran secondary teacher Joseph, articulated his specific teaching purpose as "teaching content that is relevant and interesting to the students." Others, such as veteran elementary teacher Jodi, saw her purpose as "teaching in ways that are consistent with how kids learn naturally."

The second most common motivation for becoming a teacher (thirteen of the twenty participants, seven veteran teachers and six practicing teachers) was the teachers' wish to contribute to the larger community. Samantha, a mid-career elementary teacher, stated that she chose teaching, in part, because several of my teachers . . . went the extra mile to help me succeed as a non-English speaking elementary student. Therefore, I decided to dedicate myself to helping this generation of ELL students succeed in school while also hanging onto their gift of bilingualism," a worthy purpose of education. Samantha was motivated to make a positive contribution to society, and in so doing, follow the example of the teachers who had shown exceptional dedication towards her learning. Her sense of purpose also matched that of the teachers who had helped her develop her bilingual abilities.

Similarly, Leah, a veteran elementary teacher, referred to her time spent teaching as a Peace Corps volunteer, and "discovering how satisfying it was to bring the gift of education to kids that might otherwise not have such opportunities." Leah also credited her mom's influence, a special needs teacher, who was "dedicated to giving her all to kids who needed that extra dose

of attention and needed someone to believe in the possibility of their future success," as a role model for Leah's decision to channel her altruistic motivation into her educational purpose.

A third motivation, expressed by ten of the participants (four veteran teachers and six practicing teachers), was the anticipated opportunity to creatively design meaningful and engaging learning experiences for their students. Of the ten teachers who stated this reason, seven of them referenced the influence of creative teachers from whom they had learned as students. Jana, a mid-career middle school teacher, is committed to allowing her students creative freedom in selecting topics and designing projects. She believes that "teachers who are not allowed creative license and given permission to occasionally bomb in their teaching ideas, will not understand nor value that process as a vital aspect of their students' learning experiences."

Hence, teachers participating in this study were motivated to teach by an altruistic desire to serve the interests of students and society. Their teaching motivations were directed towards, or manifested as, three educational purposes: to positively impact young people, to make positive contributions to their communities, and to express creativity in their teaching to benefit students. These findings are consistent with the relevant research literature (Bastick, 2000; Bullough et al., 2012; Ingersoll & Collins, 2018). These researchers, and others such as Gu and Day (2013), report that teachers are motivated by their desire to make a positive difference in students' lives" (p.2). McAdams, et al. (1997) summarized their findings related to teacher motivation and educational purpose stating that most teachers "exhibit a service ethic that reflects hopefulness, a calling to teach, and a high commitment to teaching as a career" (p. 17). Thus, motivation, sense of purpose, and teacher agency, are conceptually linked. Motivation serves as the fuel for

agency and sense of purpose provides direction, or a vision, for the teachers' assertion of their agency.

Conducive conditions for realizing educational purposes. The teachers' altruistic student-centered motivations for becoming teachers also served to motivate them to seek conducive conditions for overcoming challenges to the development and assertion of their professional agency (questions 2 & 3). As reported in Chapters Four and Five, both veteran and practicing teachers valued meeting the needs of their students. They acquired and employed professional agency to meet student needs. All veteran and nine practicing teachers indicated and/or demonstrated a commitment to making a positive difference in the lives and learning of students. Further, these teachers valued using their professional judgement and professional creativity. All together, these motivations formed the impetus for seeking conducive conditions for and overcoming challenges to their assertion of teacher agency. They chose or transferred to schools that allowed them to be true to their altruistic purposes for teaching. Examples follow.

Two practicing teachers (Iris & Lynette), and one veteran teacher (Joseph) demonstrated agency by temporarily quitting teaching and not returning until they found positions where they could develop and assert agency to teach in ways consistent with their beliefs and values. Lynette, an early career elementary teacher, resigned from her first teaching placement because

> that district was so committed to what they called 'reducing teacher variance' so that I felt as though I was nothing more than a big robot assigned to teach little robots. Even if the students were gaining some academic knowledge and skills, they were also developing negative attitudes towards learning. I felt that this approach was harmful and so I quit at the end my first year.

After a year away from teaching, Lynette heard about and successfully applied for an opening at her current STEM magnet school where she is accorded professional autonomy to implement instruction that she believes is beneficial for her students.

Enrique, a veteran middle school teacher who contemplated resigning during his mid-career teaching phase, described feeling "disheartened, to the point where I nearly quit," when he was involuntarily transferred to a middle school using a fragmented curricular model. Instead, he asserted his professional agency by successfully proposing and designing an 'optional school within a school' to create an integrated curricular model. Enrique believed that an integrated curriculum best served the needs of students and asserted his agency to revise the curricular structure at his school.

During my observations and discussions with Colleen, an early career middle school teacher, I observed that her teaching approach and strategies had evolved substantially from what I had observed two years earlier when I was her student teaching supervisor. During one of our discussions, she explained

> I learned a great deal about effective teaching from Kristen (her mentor teacher), but I also learned important lessons about how not to teach, or at least about the type of teacher that I don't want to be, from my first year, as a fourth-grade teacher. Following a script, not ever feeling like I was really being myself, was a year of being in teacher hell. I wish that someday I could go back to my students and apologize. That was the hardest part, knowing that I was failing my students. I'd want them to know that the teacher that I was last year wasn't really me. In some ways, though, I learned the really important, and maybe the most important lesson about myself as a teacher, through that miserable

> experience. It left me with the certainty that I need to find out what feels authentic and to teach authentically.

Colleen transferred from her first-year teaching assignment and returned to the middle school where she had student taught. Her year as an elementary teacher left her with an increased awareness of the importance of surrounding herself with supportive colleagues, as she sought to assert her agency for the purpose effectively teaching her students.

These teachers (n = 19) drew on their agency in linking their educational purpose to their use of teaching strategies, including altering their professional contexts, to meet their students' needs. This finding addresses the second research question related to conducive conditions for agency. They modified and/or sought new professional contexts to remain true to the outcomes they valued. Hence, choosing or altering professional contexts to provide opportunities for teachers to be agentic is a conducive condition of agency. This analysis also suggests answers for the third research question by documenting strategies the teachers used to overcome challenges to their agency.

These findings are consistent with the relevant professional research literature. Roness and Smith (2010), for example, found that "newly hired teachers, particularly those who are altruistic and intrinsically motivated, are at high risk to leave the profession in the first five years due to disappointment and disillusionment when they find that they are unable to practice teaching according to their beliefs and values" (p.2). All but one teacher indicated and/or demonstrated that their primary motivation for becoming a teacher—to make a positive difference in the lives and learning of students—was also the primary motivation for acquiring (seeking conducive conditions) and to maintain (overcoming challenges to) their professional teacher agency. Their agency, in turn, allowed them to achieve their teaching sense of purpose.

Forms and impacts of teacher agency are related to sense of purpose. Nineteen of the twenty teachers expressed agency in the form of curricular and instructional innovations to accomplish their educational purpose. For example, veteran middle school teacher Enrique created an integrated curriculum model for his school. He and his partner designed an integrated curriculum model, with choices for students, to counter the "sterile and disconnected learning experiences of a traditional separate subject curriculum." Diane, a veteran elementary school teacher, pointed out that, "using the adopted reading program made teaching easier, but learning harder." This realization led her to develop a culturally sustaining approach to her language arts instruction.

Among the practicing teachers, Denise (a mid-career elementary teacher) rejected using a behavior management system she believed belittled and harmed her students. In its place, she implemented her own approach to student behavior and academic motivation emphasizing personal effort and improvement, "in a way where all of the kids could be successful because they were not compared to each other, but the emphasis was on personal growth." Similarly, Kristen, a mid-career secondary teacher, replaced suggested readings from the adopted language arts literature anthology with literature selections reflecting the ethnic diversity and urban experiences of her students. Like Enrique and Diane, both Denise and Kristen evinced agency in the form of pedagogical adaptations and innovations.

Only one teacher (Savannah, an early career elementary teacher) participant apparently used her agency to primarily ease her teaching load, rather than to benefit her students. Savannah expressed an interest in agentic teaching, but her actions suggested that sticking with scripted programs, which required minimal planning and preparation on her part, was her chosen approach to teaching. This approach was an agentic act by Savannah because it went against the

professional grain at her STEM school, where the majority of her colleagues planned original integrated units of study and sought to adapt and/or innovate their teaching practices in ways they hoped would enhance the learning experiences of their students. Savanah's educational purpose differed from the purposes of the other teachers, however, in that it did not serve the educational interests of her students.

Nineteen of the teachers provided evidence that their student-centered sense of educational purpose influenced the forms of agency they developed and the impacts of asserting their agency. This finding is consistent with research (Ware & Kitsantas, 2007) that altruistic and intrinsically motivated teachers possess a high level of commitment to their students' learn. The altruistic motives drive the teachers' quest for agency and their sense of educational purpose influences the direction of their agency, as forms and impacts. This finding addresses the first and fourth research questions pertaining to the forms and educational impacts associated with their assertion of teacher agency.

In sum, the majority of teachers in this study achieved a congruence between their altruistic motives for becoming teachers and their visions—their sense of educational purpose. This congruence links their sense of purpose and their development and assertion of agentic forms and impacts. This finding addresses all four research questions by describing how the teachers' sense of educational purpose is interconnected through the forms, conducive conditions, challenges, and impacts associated with their assertion of agency.

Ownership of Teaching Practice Related to Sense of Educational Purpose

Ownership of teaching practice—both individually and collectively— appears to be influenced by the teachers' sense of educational purpose. All but one of the teachers began their careers with an extended professional conception (Hoyle, 1975; Shulman, 1998; Stenhouse,

1975) of teaching, rather than a limited (Hoyle, 1975) or instrumentalist conception (Ball, 2003; Hardy, 2016; Mockler, 2011). The extended professional teacher identity, coupled with an agentic approach to professional learning (reported in Chapter Five), contributed to ownership of their practices. The teachers' sense of educational purpose, in turn, is served by teacher agency manifested as ownership of practice.

This finding was initially derived from the within cohort constant comparison analyses: the thematic and discourse analyses of the veteran teacher interview data and the constant comparison thematic analysis of the practicing teachers' interview, observation, and discussion data. The across cohort constant comparison confirmed that a teacher's sense of educational purpose is reflected in their professional identity, their obtainment of agency, and their development of a sense of ownership of their teaching practice. This finding explicitly addresses the fourth research question pertaining to the impacts associated with teacher agency.

Ownership of practice differed between the two cohorts. Nine of the ten veteran teachers used the phrases "my teaching practice," and/or "my practices," when describing their experiences with teacher agency. The exception among the veteran teachers was Joseph; during his interview, however, he used near equivalent possessive phrases, such as "my approach," and "my method." In contrast, only three of the practicing teachers (Denise, Jana & Kristen, all mid-career teachers) used the phrase "my teaching practice" in reference to their experiences with teacher agency. These teachers were each in their eleventh year of practice. Denise used a combination of adaptive and innovative forms of agency. Jana and Kirsten both described and demonstrated innovative teaching practices, particularly regarding the design and implementation of original multi-disciplinary integrated curricula. Both teachers were also emphatic about eschewing commercially produced curricula, explaining that the commercial

materials conflicted with their beliefs about the educational interests and needs of their students. These teachers' sense of educational purpose led them to develop ownership of their professional practice to be able to assert agency in ways that aligned with their pedagogical purposes.

The other two mid-career practicing teachers (Iris & Samantha) each described aspects of their teaching practice reflecting professional ownership. They asserted their agency by adapting curricula adopted by their schools or devising and implementing original instructional methods. Iris expressed her sense of professional ownership, as a teacher responsible for using her professional judgement stating

> We [her grade level team] discuss the learning needs of all of our kids in detail, but the team relies on my expertise as a special education teacher, and my insights into the specific learning needs of the kids in our program with I.E. P's, to suggest and design inclusive scaffolding structures into our unit plans. They also count on me to supplement their whole class instruction with targeted small group instructional interventions, so that our kids with special needs can fully participate in all of the regular education classroom group learning activities.

This description demonstrates her sense of owning her teaching practice and accepting responsibility to use her professional judgement.

Kass, an elementary veteran teacher, elaborated upon professional ownership of teaching as adaptive and innovative practices (reported in Chapter Five) in stating

> although we more or less designed our elementary math program from scratch, we did agree to the principal's request to adopt a published language arts framework to guide our reading and writing instruction. With our math program we were able to make changes and needed adjustments as we went along, because each of us had had a hand in its

> design. We understood the curriculum from the inside out and could tweak it for individual students or groups of students, on an 'as needed basis.' Likewise, our language arts framework, as an agreed upon set of instructional strategies, was broad enough that each teacher felt empowered to decide when, to whom, and with which mentor texts, each of the strategies would be taught.

These examples elucidate the connection between teachers' sense of educational purpose, their agency (forms of adaptations and innovations) and ownership of practices. Kass expanded on this connection, asserting that teacher agency, leading to a sense of professional ownership of one's or a group's teaching practices, serves their purposes:

> When teachers have control over these decisions, they also take on a heightened sense of responsibility for the results of their teaching. When my teaching partner [Leah, another veteran teacher participant] and I, and the other teachers at our school, choose the instructional materials and methods, the effectiveness of our lessons is 'on us.' This is real accountability. It also leads to a greater level of commitment in our teaching. When it's my plan, I'm going to totally throw myself into my teaching. I believe in it and I'm responsible for making it work. For those kids who aren't 'getting it,' and there are always some kids who don't get it from the initial lesson, those are the kids who keep me awake at night thinking of adjustments I could make, or a different approach I could try, until they too, eventually, 'get it.'

Kass's and Iris's description of asserting teacher agency in the form of owning their teaching practices matches the definition of teacher ownership expressed by Saunders et al. (2017): "ownership occurs when teachers are permitted to use their professional judgement to make decisions based on their professional knowledge to address the learning goals which they

have for their students, or the goals they have for their professional learning" (p. 8). The teachers educational purposes, in the forms of student and teacher professional learning goals, are served by developing a sense of ownership of their practices.

Additionally, the cross-cohort thematic constant comparison suggests that professional ownership of teaching practices occurs in three spheres of influence: the classroom, the school, and professionally. Thus, ownership of practices allows teachers to extend their sense of educational purposes to include spheres of influence beyond their classroom contexts. What follows are explanations for and descriptions of owning professional practices in each of these spheres to manifest their educational purpose.

Teacher ownership of practice in the classroom sphere. The preponderance of evidence across both cohorts suggests teacher ownership of practice focuses on classroom instructional and/or curricular decisions made by individuals and sometimes collectively. This finding varied according to the career phases: early career, mid-career, and veteran. The variation in ownership is represented by continuum (displayed in Figure 6.1) ranging from low, to low-moderate, to moderate, to high-moderate, to high.

Figure 6.1

Continuum of Professional Ownership for Early (EC), Mid-career (MC), and Veteran Teachers

Low		Moderate		High
Savannah (EC)	Samantha (MC)		Terri (EC)	Denise (MC) Jana (MC)
		Colleen (EC)	Kristen (MC)	
			Brooke (EC) & Lynette (EC)	All Veteran Teachers

Ownership of teaching practices by early career teachers was reflected by their use of agency to adapt and/or innovate curricular and instructional approaches, as reported in Chapter Five. At the low end of the continuum, Savannah (first year, elementary teacher who followed the commercial lesson guides) ascribed student successes and struggles to the efficacy of the program, not to her teaching efficacy. During one of the post observational discussions, she commented that

> the other first grade teachers have encouraged me to break my class into small instructional reading groups; but our reading program is at too high of a reading level for most of the kids, so it's too frustrating for most of them if I'm not using the whole group direct instructional approach, which the program calls for.

Savannah consciously chose to follow the pre-packaged scripted program, which demonstrated a low degree of ownership of her teaching practices.

Other early career teachers' descriptions and demonstrations of their teaching practices reflected greater agency and correspondingly more ownership. Colleen borrowed many of the broad structures for her language arts teaching from her colleague and middle school mentor teacher but found ways to personalize her approach to be more authentic to her personal manner and vision of high student autonomy. As such, she exhibited a moderate degree of ownership of her teaching practices, continuing to try new approaches but also relying on methods she learned during student teaching under the guidance of her mentor teacher. Brooke and Lynette, two second year partner teachers at their elementary school, chose a project-based approach to their teaching, which is different from their school's adopted curricular and instructional programs. Their professional practices suggest a moderate to high-moderate degree of ownership of their

professional practices. As a tightly knit team, Brooke and Lynette evinced a collective form of agency and a collective sense of ownership of their professional practices.

The mid-career teachers' expression of professional ownership reflects a moderate to a high moderate range on the continuum. Samantha, a mid-career elementary teacher, describes her early career phase as a time when she closely followed the instructional guides and curricular sequences of her school's adopted scripted programs. Gradually, however, she recognized the poor instructional and curricular fit between these programs and her mostly English language learning and ethnically diverse students. Hence, she substituted culturally relevant curricular materials and adopted culturally sustaining interactive instructional practices. She continues to follow the general curricular frameworks and instructional skill sequences provided by the adopted programs, but from a culturally adaptive perspective. As such, I've interpreted Samantha's degree of ownership over her teaching practices to be moderate.

Jana and Kristen, conversely, fully designed their elementary (Jana) and middle school (Kristen) curriculums to reflect their pedagogical beliefs in the efficacy of a multi-disciplinary integrated approach to curriculum and instruction. These two practicing teachers referred to their teaching as "my teaching practice," which I interpret as revealing a fuller sense of professional ownership compared to the other practicing teachers. They, along with Terri (early career middle school engineering teacher) demonstrate authorship of their day-to-day teaching practices. Terri, though, is continuing to develop, through trial and error, her curricular and instructional methods, evincing an uneven self-efficacy belief profile. In contrast, Denise, Jana and Kristen, experienced teachers with strong self-efficacy beliefs, combine their high teacher agency, in the form of curricular and instructional innovations, with years of successful teaching to the realize high ownership of their professional teaching practices.

As reported in Chapter Five, all the veteran teachers' reports of their day-to-day classroom practices reflected the assertion of a high agency. Each teacher exhibited innovative forms of teacher agency as their teaching practices evolved over their career spans. Likewise, each of the veteran teachers' descriptions of their curricular and instructional approaches reflected ownership of their practices. They referred to these approaches as "my teaching practice," (or, in the case of the two predominately collectivist veteran teachers, Enrique and Martha, "our teaching practice") and they furnished examples portraying their teaching developmental arcs as increasingly innovative as they gained experience. The placement of the early, mid-career, and veteran teachers on the ownership continuum reveals a pattern of increased ownership commensurate with years of teaching experience.

Moreover, the veteran teachers reported a consistent pattern of accepting responsibility for the outcomes of their teaching, as they developed an increased sense of ownership. Kass's description of lying awake, determined to adjust her teaching for those students who were struggling to learn, is representative of the veteran teachers' singular lack of ascribing teaching/learning struggles to conditions outside their professional spheres of control. Notably, nine of the practicing teachers sought to develop and assert agency to own their practices, sharing the veteran teachers' willingness to accept responsibility when their agentic teaching efforts fell short of their envisioned intentions. The moderate to high sense of professional ownership of teaching practices expressed by a total of 19 teachers across both cohorts is matched by their high degree of responsibility for the results of their teaching.

The teachers' sense of educational purpose guides their vision for the assertion of agency. Achieving their educational purpose of meeting student needs is reflected by their ownership of their practices. The teachers take responsibility for the effectiveness of their teaching.

The link between achievement of teachers' educational purposes, high agency, and a strong sense of ownership of one's professional practices is consistent with research (e.g., Ketelarr, et al., 2012; Saunders, 2017). Further, research confirms that teachers with a high sense of professional ownership demonstrate a strong commitment to their professional development and to the successful learning of their students (e.g., Ware & Kitsantas, 2007; Serow, et al., 1994). These inter-related findings address the fourth research question pertaining to the impacts, as achievement of purposes, associated with teacher agency.

Teacher ownership of practice in the school-wide and professional spheres. Thematic constant comparison analysis of the two cohorts revealed that for most teachers professional ownership expanded to a school-wide and a professional sphere. These teachers asserted their agency in accordance with their educational purposes by influencing their schools' instructional and curricular decisions. They also used their voices to shape professional learning in their schools. Further, some built connections with professional teacher organizations and participated in those organizations. This expanded sense of ownership was reflected in a parallel expansion of their professional identity.

An expanded form of professional ownership was most evident among the veteran teachers but was also present, to a lesser degree, for each of the mid-career teachers. The early career teacher examples of ownership were exclusively in the classroom and professional spheres but not the school-wide sphere. This finding addresses the first and fourth research questions pertaining to the forms of agency and impacts from the assertion of agency, respectively.

Each of the ten veteran teachers demonstrated their interest in and ability to expand their sense of ownership to include shaping their school-wide professional contexts. In doing so, their educational purposes were favorably served. Two of the veteran teachers, Enrique and Martha

(both middle school teachers), successfully designed and proposed optional school programs where they then served as teachers. In both cases they were motivated to provide alternatives to learning for students who were not experiencing academic success in traditional school settings. Six other veteran teachers (Diane, Janet, Jodi, Kass, Leah, &Thomas) worked collaboratively with colleagues to create school wide learning initiatives, such as science fairs, literacy forums, etc. influencing their school's teaching and learning cultures. Two of the veteran teachers (Joseph & Sheryl) established learning projects with community agencies to provide enrichment learning opportunities for students at their schools. In each of these cases, the teachers were guided in their assertions of agency across spheres of influence beyond their classrooms by their sense of educational purpose.

The veteran teachers also described efforts to shape the curricula and instructional practices at their schools in accordance with their sense of educational purpose. In addition to the two teachers who designed and implemented alternative school programs, Kass and Leah led their faculty in redesigning their elementary school's math curriculum and instructional program. Janet collaborated with her middle school colleagues to design an integrated approach to teaching their eighth-grade curriculum. Diane designed and led literacy professional development seminars at her school to shift their language arts practices toward being culturally sustaining.

Each of these examples occurred during the veteran teachers' mid-career or late career phases, suggesting that a teacher's expanded sense of professional ownership of their practice (into spheres beyond their classrooms) corresponds to an expanding sense of one's professional identity. As Noonan (2019) suggests, professional identity is "a teacher's sense of their 'professional self' and their role, which is formed and reformed over time" (p. 2). The veteran

teachers each described a professional identity status reflecting their sense of educational purpose at various career junctures. By extending their assertions of agency more widely, the teachers achieved their educational purposes in these additional spheres of influence.

For example, Leah described becoming increasingly aware that her teaching aims, and approaches were at odds with her colleagues, which led to her decision to transfer to a school with colleagues who were more professionally like-minded. Within this context of like-minded colleagues, Leah expressed agency in the form of extended, school-wide ownership of her professional practice, leading an initiative to create their own math curricular and instructional program. Leah explained

> For the first ten years of my career, I was so consumed with working out my approach to teaching first and second grade students and deepening my understanding for how to manage the multiple curriculums, differentiate my instructional strategies to meet the various learning levels and needs of my students, and figure out how to balance my teaching responsibilities with my family responsibilities. Eventually I became more involved in some of the issues created by the school district's attempts to impose rigid curriculums on our school. I realized that my professional autonomy was being threatened and so I banded together with other experienced teachers at our school to resist these initiatives.

Leah's example demonstrates both an extended sense of professional ownership of practice and an enlarged professional identity, which reflects a sense of her professional role to include her professional voice. She used her voice to advocate for school policies that aligned with her professional values and beliefs. In doing so, Leah both expanded her professional influence beyond her classroom, to the school-wide sphere, and she demonstrated an enlarged

professional identity reflected in her school-wide faculty leadership role during the math curriculum project. Thus, she was able to extend her teacher aim, her educational purpose, beyond her classroom in ways that benefited her colleagues and their students.

Among the practicing teachers, mid-career teachers Denise, Jana, and Kristen, exhibited a similar level of concern about school level decision-making, and a corresponding extended sense of ownership of their teaching practices. Denise led her school's faculty and administration effort to become a designated STEM magnet school. She explained that she believed strongly in a STEM approach because it benefited student learning and aligned with her professional vision of academic rigor and accountability. She described her involvement in this school-wide change,

> Before we made the switch, our school had a range of teachers, some who were more committed to educational excellence than others. Even the effective teachers, though, tended to do their own thing and there was no real sense of cohesion, or shared vision. STEM has given us that. Within two years of becoming a science and math focused school, we were able to recruit stronger teachers, replace some of the weaker teachers, and began to make a serious run at improving our test scores. But I worry that we're now losing some of that unity. Our current principal has added an emphasis on the arts, and some of the newer teachers, who weren't here before we became a STEM school, are more into doing their own thing.

Denise was in her eleventh year, when she made these remarks, and is one of three practicing teachers to regularly refer to her teaching as "my teaching practices." Denise, like Leah, is an agentic teacher with a strong sense of ownership and an extended professional identity that includes using her voice to influence school wide decisions.

Although four of the early career teachers described an appreciation for being included and listened to during grade level (elementary) and team level (middle school) planning sessions, none of the early career teachers provided evidence of using their agency to affect school wide change. The mid-career teachers sense of educational purpose was manifested in widening spheres; the early career teachers sought to achieve their educational purposes within the sphere of their own classrooms.

Nine of the veteran teachers (all but Jodi) and five of the practicing teachers (Brooke, Colleen, Kristen (m-c), Lynette, & Terri) exhibited an expanded sense of ownership of their teaching practices through their active participation in professional associations. These teachers asserted their professional agency by attending professional conferences, subscribing to professional journals, and using their professional connections to influence their schools' professional learning. These agentic acts demonstrated a professional identity, which included assuming responsibility for professional learning. This process was guided by these teachers' sense of educational purposes.

For example, Sheryl a veteran teacher, stated that

> When I joined the *National Science Teaching Association* I found 'my people' and my professional home. Before that, when I attended school or district in-services,
>
> I tended to feel out of place. In the beginning [of my career] I looked forward to going to the conferences, getting new ideas from other teachers, and learning from the experts. Before too long, however, I began to realize that I had ideas of my own to contribute and I began submitting presentation proposals. Later, I got other teachers at my school and across our district to join me in submitting group proposals and presenting together.

Sheryl's experience of beginning her participation in a professional organization as a novice, and gradually evolving into a more full-fledged role of collaborating with other professionals as a peer, is typical of descriptions of professional association membership experiences provided by other veteran teachers. Through participation in professional organizations, Sherly was better able to achieve her educational purposes. By inviting colleagues to participate in professional conference presentations, Sheryl was able to expand her achievement of her educational purpose into wider sphere of her school district.

Terri, an early career secondary science and engineering practicing teacher, described the importance of her participation in a national teacher learning program declaring

> I was desperate to reach out to other middle school engineering teachers because, when I was first hired, I was the only one in our school district. Fortunately, the district science curriculum coordinator found a master's degree program for K-12 secondary engineering teachers, through Notre Dame University. I was accepted; the district paid for my tuition and the costs for my attendance at the on-site summer workshops; and this program has turned out to be a professional lifesaver.

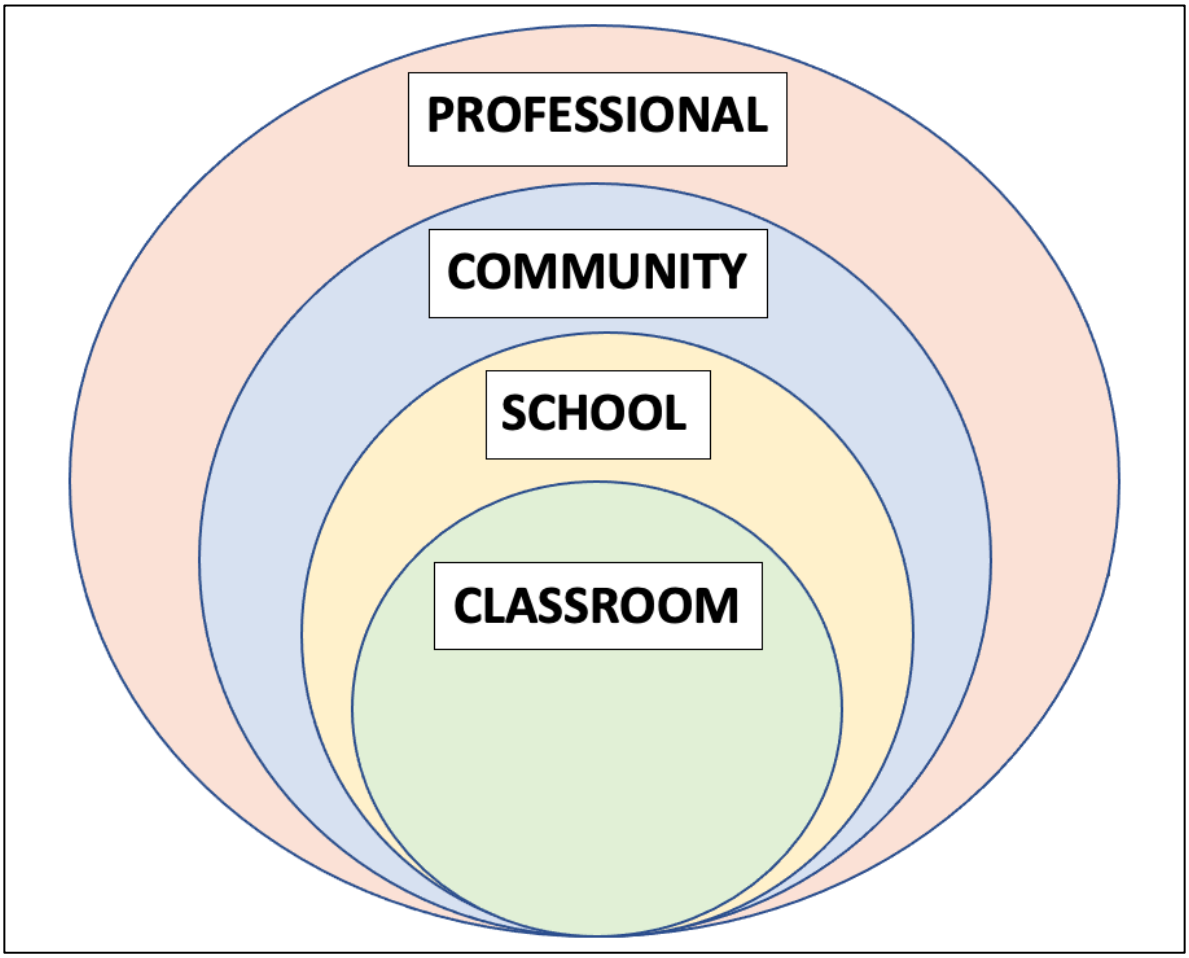
Terri's professional learning through her graduate school program led to an expanded sense of ownership of her professional practices and exemplifies an extended professional identity. This expanded sense of ownership, in turn, resulted in her extending her sphere of influence beyond the classroom and into the professional sphere.

In conclusion, I found that teachers' achievement of their educational purposes was best served by expressing of teacher agency coupled and developing ownership of their practices. Each veteran teacher exhibited agency and ownership of practice in both the classroom and school-wide spheres. Nine veteran teachers also exhibited ownership in the professional sphere.

Four of the mid-career practicing teachers exhibited a growing sense of ownership in the school-wide sphere, and six practicing teachers, (three early and three mid-career) demonstrated a sense of ownership in the professional sphere. In each of these cases, the teachers' sense of educational purpose guided their development of ownership of their teaching practices their agentic assertions into spheres of influence beyond their classrooms. (see Figure 6.2).

Figure 6.2

Spheres of Influence

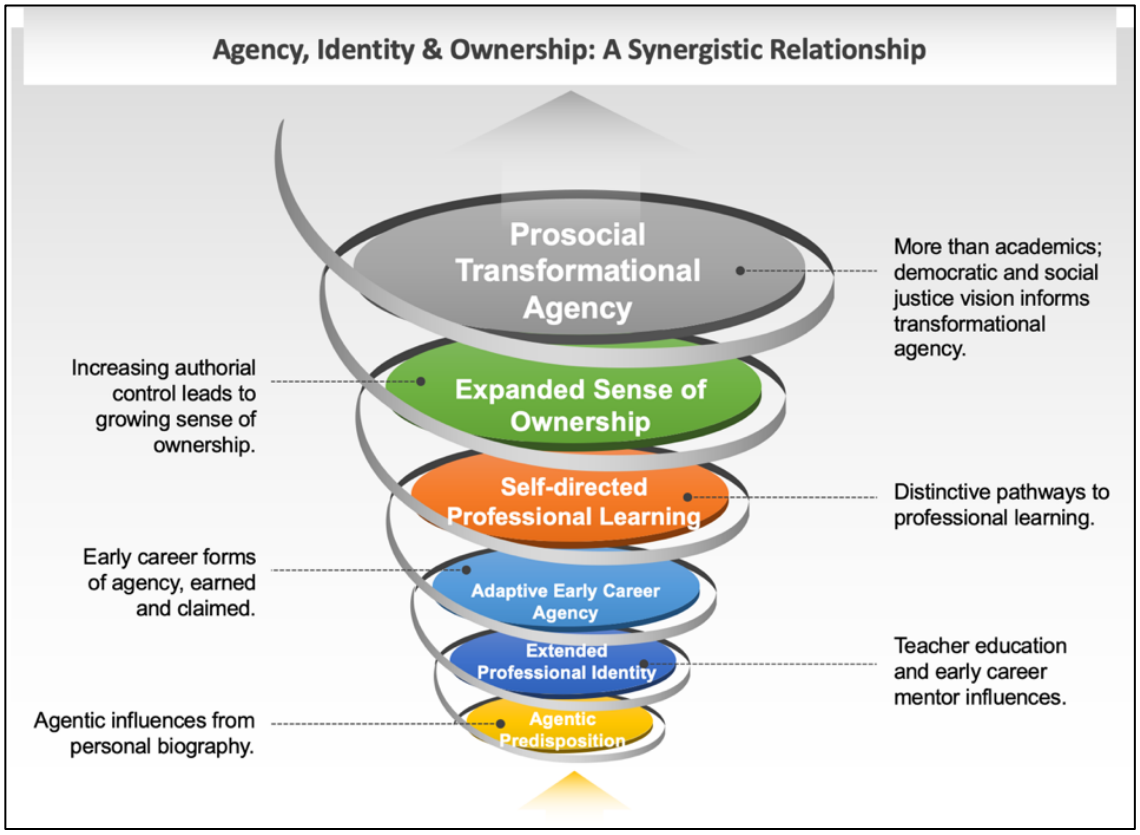


These findings are consistent with the relevant professional literature suggesting that teachers are best able to achieve their educational purposes when agency, identity, and sense of ownership co-evolve. For example, Ketelaar, et al. (2012) concluded that "a high degree of

agency corresponds to a high degree of ownership . . . ownership implies more 'buy-in,' and reflects a greater level of professional commitment" (p.8). Furthermore, an extended sense of professional ownership to include school-wide decision-making processes represents an enlargement of teachers' professional identity, which is also consistent with the research conclusions by Buchanan (2015) and Olson (2008). Additionally, the research of Stewart and Davis (2005) attributed participating in professional organizations as an "influence on developing a positive disposition toward viewing teaching as a lifelong professional learning process" (p. 44). Moreover, these findings support an understanding of agency, ownership, and teacher identity as being highly inter-related aspects of a teacher's sense of and ability to achieve their educational purpose (see Figure 6.3).

Figure 6.3

Agency, Identity & Ownership: A Synergistic Relationship



These findings address all four of the research questions. Ownership, for both cohorts, represents a durable and multi-faceted form (question 1) of teacher agency manifested within the spheres of the classroom, the school, and professional organizations. Ownership takes root and grows with experience in professional contexts where teachers are permitted to use their judgement and give voice to their educational visions (question 2, related to conducive conditions). Ownership is associated with a heightened sense of professional commitment, a professional disposition which teachers draw upon to overcome challenges to their agency (question 3). Finally, a strong sense of professional ownership implies an acknowledgement of responsibility for, and the need to strive towards, meeting the educational needs of one's students (question 4), related to the impacts associated with the assertion of agency. In sum, the development of a strong sense of professional ownership, in conjunction with robust agency and an extended professional identity, is interpreted to be beneficial to a teacher's or a group of teachers' ability to achieve their educational purpose.

Pro-social Educational Aims Associated with Transformational Agency

The final thematic finding links the teacher participants' sense of educational purpose to an aspirational vision for teaching to bring about positive social change. This teleological view of teaching, (a term Biesta, 2002, links to a transformative educational vision) connecting democracy, equality, and social justice (e.g., Howe's [1997] radical liberal theory of democracy, justice, and schooling) extends the pedagogical conception of teaching practice beyond a repertoire of craft skills and subject knowledge to include teachers as agents of social change (Freire, 1970; Fullan 1993). The thematic constant comparison across the two cohorts reveals that some teachers entered teaching with the intention of promoting social change (n = 9) or developed a socio-political educational agenda as their teacher identity evolved (n = 4).

The term "transformational agency" is identified in the relevant professional literature (e.g., Matikainen, et al., 2018) and describes a form of teacher agency. Two categorical themes emerged:

1. transformational agency to nurture learner autonomy rooted in critically reflective thinking, and
2. transformational agency to cultivate student social justice awareness and dispositions to action.

The teachers who demonstrated agency, in one or both categories, demonstrated alignment of their educational purpose, their sense of ownership, and their professional identity development. This finding addresses the first research question, related to forms of agency, and the fourth research question, related to educational impacts, vis-à-vis the teachers' pro-social teleological envisionments.

Transformational agency to nurture student autonomy as critical thinking. Teacher agency, asserted by using intrinsic motivational strategies to support learner autonomy, was described in Chapter Five in relationship to short-term educational goals. The constant comparison across the two cohorts suggested, however, that the use of intrinsic motivational strategies also served the teachers' teleological long-term pedagogical goal of supporting students' development of a self-directed, autonomous learner identity—purposes they related to the purpose of meeting students' needs. Thus, transformational agency is a form of teacher agency (question 1) to accomplish the pedagogical goal of nurturing students' capacity to think critically and independently (question 4)—pre-requisites for productive participation in democratic processes and political discourses (Beane & Apple, 1995; Dewey, 1926; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004).

In Chapter Five, I presented evidence supporting the finding that all ten veteran teachers and seven practicing teachers (Brooke, Colleen, Iris, Jana, Kristen, Lynette, & Terri) explicitly expressed the goal of supporting their students' development of learner autonomy. These teachers' goals were organized into four thematic categories: development of student intrinsic motivation for learning, development of student self-knowledge regarding effective learning strategies, development of student goal setting capacity for learning, and development of self-evaluation capacity for students.

The cross-cohort constant comparison thematic analysis suggested that, for each of these teachers, the goal of nurturing student autonomy served two purposes: short-term goals tied to students' academic learning, and the long-term teleological vision of students as lifelong learners. Examples of teachers striving to achieve both of these complementary goals follow.

Leah insisted on consulting her students about their preferred learning path. Her reasoning was that doing so was both a strategy for her to plan effective instruction, and to "arm" her students "with this knowledge (to) set a child on a path to being more in charge of their school and their life learning." The reference which Leah makes to "life learning," places her pedagogical aim in this teleological category. Similarly, Jana's (and her grade level teacher partner's) curricular plan to incorporate a community service-learning project, as an end of the school year learning experience for her sixth-grade students, served to "push our students to see their school learning as having the potential to become a vehicle for making meaningful contributions to the wider community." This community service project reflected both short term educational goals and long-term pedagogical purposes.

The thematic constant comparison analysis further revealed that half the teachers valued nurturing students to think independently and critically. Six of the veteran teachers (Enrique,

Janet, Jodi, Martha, Sheryl, & Thomas) and four of the practicing teachers (Brooke, Colleen, Jana, & Kristen) appeared to hold this belief. Of these ten participants, seven are secondary and three are elementary teachers. As exemplified below, these ten teachers used critical thinking instructional engagements to nurture their students' abilities to question, understand, and develop informed and independent views about issues of socio-political importance.

For example, through observations and discussions with Brooke, an early career elementary teacher, I learned of her design and implementation of an ecological unit of study, whereby her students compared energy cycles and the use and disposal of resources in natural non-human ecosystems with these same phenomena in the school and the homes of the students. Through this study, students were taught to critically evaluate their use of energy at school and at home and were required to generate proposals for increasing the efficiency of energy use and decreasing resource waste. As a result, her students designed and implemented a school composting project, and many students-initiated recycling efforts in their homes.

In a similar example, Janet, a veteran secondary teacher, designed a curricular unit of inquiry for her middle school students which focused on understanding and critiquing the students' 'carbon footprint' in relationship to the amount of energy each student utilized in their daily activities. This unit of study resulted in students proposing and committing to daily lifestyle changes, for a specified length of time, followed by a comparison measure of energy saved through these changes. Janet's stated goal was

> . . . to help students make connections between what we were learning at school and the ramifications of their experiences and choices in a broader, societal context. More than that, I wanted students to come to appreciate that, even though they are not yet adults and often resent the controls imposed on them by their parents, teachers, and rules of society,

they still have a great deal of choice in their daily lives and by critically examining the consequences of their choices they have the power to bring about positive social change. Our students frequently commented on how, by making changes in the way that they go about their day-to-day energy use choices, they were surprised and pleased to realize that they often influence friends and family members to also be more critically thoughtful about their use of energy.

Janet and Brooke enacted their teleological teacher visions in the context of the curricular content area of science for the purpose of developing their students critical thinking abilities related to environmental issues. This enactment of teacher agency for pro-social purposes also extended the teachers' sphere of influence into the community realm.

Thomas, a veteran social studies teacher, epitomized this pedagogical vision by stating that "For the first ten years of my career I mistakenly thought that my goal was the teaching of history; eventually I realized that my real mission was to use history as a means of teaching my students to think critically about the type of society they wanted to shape and live in." These examples are representative of using agency by ten of the participants to enact a pedagogical vision of nurturing their students' abilities to think critically and independently about the potential connection between their academic knowledge, their participation in community socio-political processes, and the societal impacts of their choices.

Transformational agency for social justice. Teachers' educational purpose to maintain or challenge the status quo regarding social justice issues influenced whether they asserted their professional agency for transformational purposes. Nine of the teacher participants (three veteran and six practicing teachers) explicitly employed their agency in the service of pro-social justice transformational goals.

The nine teacher participants focused on one or both of two overarching issues:

- understanding and countering socio-historical related institutional racial, ethnic/linguistic, and gender or sexual identity-based inequality experienced by marginalized groups, and
- understanding and accepting responsibility for each of our culturally inherited misconceptions about and potentially harmful interactions with individuals whose socio-cultural identities and life experiences differ greatly from our own.

Three veteran teachers (Enrique, Sheryl, & Thomas) and four practicing teachers (Colleen, Iris, Jana, & Kristen) each engaged their students in both issues. Two practicing teachers (Brooke & Lynette) directed their agentic efforts towards raising their students' awareness about inequality of resources and educational opportunities for marginalized groups.

Both veteran teachers Sheryl and Thomas asserted socially transformational teacher agency during their mid-career and veteran career phases. They described their first ten years of teaching as being focused on nurturing individual student self-directedness, with little regard to larger social issues. Thomas stated

> For my first ten years as a high school teacher my goal was to hook kids interest into understanding and caring about history; and then it hit me, what I really need to be doing is to use history to help my students attain a historically informed understanding of the structural-political causes leading to the massive economic, educational, and judicial inequalities which exist in the U.S. and in most other countries as well.

In describing this epiphany, Thomas revealed a shift in understanding his teacher role, his professional identity, to include a sense of educational purpose and responsibility to assert

transformational agency. He asserted transformational agency to cultivate his students' awareness of and advocacy towards addressing societal inequalities.

Sheryl expressed a similar epiphany. She explained that she too spent the first ten years of her teaching career focused on engaging her students in learning through a classroom-based inquiry and active learning approach, when it occurred to her that the "world outside our classroom offered the 'real thing.' " She made a transition to using community based social and environmental challenges as the basis for developing a community service project based curricular approach. Thomas's and Sheryl's story arcs revealed that their epiphanies and shifts in pedagogical orientation mirrored their growing sense of ownership of their teaching practices and expanding their teacher identity to include a sense of their teacher role vis-à-vis their educational responsibility to the larger society.

In contrast, Enrique began his teaching career already focused on issues related to social inequality and environmental harm. Enrique's parents had included him and his sister in their social justice advocacy and environmental activism during his student years. Enrique chose to become a teacher, in part, because of his teleological view of the potential for education and educators to alter the societal status quo from both a group equity and an environmental sustainability perspective. Enrique explained that

> From day one, as a teacher, I was convinced that the most important measure of my teaching was not tied to my students' scores on end of the year standardized tests. Instead, I have always known that what really matters is what my students choose to do with their knowledge and skills. If they don't use their literacy skills, their subject knowledge, and most importantly, their critical reasoning abilities, to participate actively and thoughtfully in democratic processes, if they don't use their education to improve

their community, fight for equality, and to protect the environment, then my teaching and their learning won't count for much.

In keeping with his pro-social beliefs, Enrique's purpose for being a teacher was to cultivate his students' awareness of and commitment to redress social injustice and environmental threats. He used his teacher agency to enact this educational purpose. He chose to develop and assert a transformational form of teacher agency to nurture his students' capacity to act as advocates for and agents of social change.

Two practicing teachers (Brooke & Lynette), like Enrique, began their careers with a commitment to social transformation, especially toward increasing students' awareness of educational inequality from a global perspective. They did so by helping their students to forge personal relationships with students whose life experiences contrasted greatly from their own, as a means of countering stereotypical thinking often conveyed through popular media portrayals of "others". Their students, mostly of low economic status by U.S. standards, formed a pen pal relationship with students attending a Palestinian elementary school. As the American students came to realize how better resourced their classroom was, Brooke's and Lynette's students solicited classroom supply donations to send to their pen pals. Participating in this project, the students learned about the culture, religion, and popular interests of their Palestinian counterparts, thus addressing both themes related to the teachers' assertion of transformational agency.

The other four practicing teachers (Colleen, Iris, Jana, & Kristen) asserted transformational agency toward both issues (inequality and stereotypes of groups as portrayed by popular media) utilizing integrated curriculum and team-teaching to guide their students' inquiry-based projects. Their students were encouraged to link current event topics and literacy and

content topics of study. Students proposed and carried out projects and presented their findings to their classmates.

Colleen, the early career teacher from this group, integrated each of her current events student inquiry teams across ethnic/racial and gender categories. She encouraged each team to find articles about community social justice issues that intersected with the various perspectives represented by these various categories. Students were expected to understand a news story about an issue from multiple perspectives, and to critically examine the perspective of the reporter and the reporting entity to uncover possible bias.

Kristen, Colleen's mid-career teaching partner, took a similar tack with her students' analysis of literary texts. She explained,

> Our goal is for our students to understand the relevance of our curricular content standards and required topics of study, and the assigned literature readings, to the world and their experiences outside of school. We encourage them to not just 'study about,' current event issues, but to get involved and participate in community service projects with cultural groups whom they've had limited direct experiences with, as one of the most authentic and effective ways of learning. We want their education to include books and discussions, but as the starting point, not the ending point, for their learning.

Kristen and Colleen shared the pedagogical view that their teaching should lead their students to an understanding of the relevance of the school curriculum to larger social justice concerns.

I interpret the veteran and practicing teachers' use of transformational agency as reflective of their teacher identity. They recognize and accept responsibility for asserting their teacher agency to cultivate students' critical thinking abilities and dispositions for achieving positive social change. In choosing to enact this form of agency, in a time when a fully professional

conception of the teacher's role is strongly contested (late within the career trajectory of the veteran teachers, and throughout the career trajectory of the practicing teachers), these teachers exhibited a potent sense of professional ownership and a fully realized extended professional form of teaching identity to accomplish their teleological purposes for teaching.

Chapter Six Summary

The findings presented in Chapter Six derive from a cross-cohort thematic constant comparison analysis. The goal of the analysis was to discover the influence from teachers' teleological perspectives—their sense of educational purposes—on their use of teacher agency to achieve those purposes. The intersection of teachers' agency, ownership of their professional practices, and their professional identity was explicated. Furthermore, I substantiated the finding that the teachers' altruistic motives for choosing to teach, and their sense of educational purposes, led to their use of transformative agency to foster student self-directedness, and to cultivate student pro-social advocacy capacity. The next chapter is a summary of the findings, followed by a discussion of implications for teacher education, professional development, and further research. Final conclusions are then presented.

Chapter Seven

Summary and Discussion

In this chapter I summarize key findings, synthesize the findings, and discuss implications regarding this study of teacher agency. The summary of key findings is organized according to each research question. Next, I theorize the findings by connecting to the ecological conception of human agency (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). An assumption within the ecological conception, that of complexity theory (Byrne, 1998), contributes to my explanation of the findings. Considering these explanations, I discuss implications, including possible contributions to the field ensuing from this study and possibilities for further research.

The investigation of teacher agency was conducted in two phases, one phenomenological (Husserl, 1931) with ten veteran teachers, and the second using grounded theory methods (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) with ten practicing teachers (5 early and 5 mid-career). Each cohort was comprised of five elementary and five secondary teachers. The veteran teacher cohort consisted of seven female and three male teachers; the practicing teacher cohort was all female. Participants were volunteers, ethnically diverse, and ranged in experience across the three career phases.

Data sources were interviews of all participating teachers and observations and discussions with the practicing teachers. The veteran teachers' interviews were analyzed using thematic and narrative analyses methods. The practicing teacher interviews, observations, and discussions were analyzed using constant comparison methods.

The study was motivated by concerns reported in the literature, my perception, and the perception of colleagues that teacher's agency has diminished in the last thirty years. The

investigation sought to discover the forms, conducive conditions, challenges, and educational impacts associated with the participants' assertion and/or denial of professional teacher agency.

Summary of Key Findings

Forms of Teacher Agency

As the teacher agency theoretical and empirical research literature suggested (e.g., Darling-Hammond, et al., 2005), the forms of teacher agency manifested across the career span are developmental. That is, early career forms of teacher agency were temporary and narrowly focused on strategies for responding to problematic aspects of the teachers' professional responsibilities. Veteran teacher descriptions and practicing teacher descriptions and demonstrations of their initial uses of agency revealed reactive strategic approaches that were temporary stop-gap instructional adjustments and curricular modifications. Over time, the teachers' assertions of agency evolved into more complex and durable variations and extensions of the nascent strategies.

Three forms of teacher agency emerged: adaptive to innovative and/or transformative; individual to blended to collective, and teacher directed to learner directed. These forms occurred along continua and are not discrete; rather each teacher manifested complex combinations of these forms, which varied according to career phase and professional context. The over-all pattern, however, was the development of increasingly complex forms of agency across the career span as teachers advanced in their theoretical and practical professional learning and experience. The evolution of original and complex forms represents patterns and tendencies in the development of participants' assertion of agency. An exception to this pattern occurred regarding one of the two variants of transformational agency—pro-social directed transformative agency. I elaborate on this exception below.

Adaptive, innovative, and transformative forms of agency. Teachers used adaptive, innovative, and transformative forms of teacher agency. Use of adaptive and innovative forms appears to be developmental and related to teachers' career phases. As evidence of this, all but one of the early career teachers used an adaptive form of agency. The mid-career teachers all used curricular and/or instructional innovations. Likewise, the veteran teachers each described using instructional and curricular adaptations during their early careers. As teachers gained experience, curricular and instructional innovations became commonplace. Transformational agency was used by some of the teachers and its occurrence was not found to be related to career phase.

Among the practicing teachers and the veteran teachers, I compared multi-subject elementary teachers and single subject secondary teachers. The early career multi-subject elementary teachers primarily focused their agentic efforts to adapting scripted instructional guides with the whole class because the scripted materials conflicted with their beliefs. The veteran elementary teachers also reported that early in their careers, they were mostly concerned with instructional issues. In contrast, the early career single-subject secondary teachers primarily asserted their agency by adapting assigned curricular content that did not match the socio-cultural and individual needs and interests of their students. Likewise, the secondary veteran teachers reported examples of curricular adaptations during their early career phase.

The analysis of the interviews, observations, and discussions with the early and mid-career teachers confirmed the pattern of moving from adaptive to innovative forms of agency with increased craft skill and theoretical knowledge gained over time. During the mid-career phase teachers expanded their use of agency to include other professional domains. Ultimately, the elementary and the secondary veteran and practicing teachers asserted an adaptive, and later,

an increasingly innovative form of agency across all three domains of their professional teaching responsibilities: assessment, curriculum, and instruction.

Pedagogical tact as adaptive agency integrating the domains. A form of adaptive agency representing the intersection of curriculum, instruction, and assessment is that of pedagogical tact (van Manen, 1991). The classroom observations of the practicing teachers revealed that five of the teachers frequently deviated from their plans, adjusting 'on the fly.' These adjustments, when reflected upon and analyzed during the post instructional debriefing, usually involved both instructional and curricular aspects of the lesson and were based on insights obtained by tuning into their students' responses and sensing some confusion.

The five teachers who manifested this form of adaptive agency described their modifications to the original teaching plan as being instinctive, rather than basing their adjustment on conscious analysis and deliberative decision making. Teachers typically reported experiencing an ineffable 'sense' that their plan was beginning to flounder and the course change as being a 'snap decision.' The research of Sipman, et al., (2019) described this adaptive form of agency as being the "ability to simultaneously integrate multiple observational details to make instantaneous adjustments and improvisations" (p. 88). The agentic capacity of pedagogical tact is characterized by van Manen as being an important complement to critical reflection. This form of adaptive agency was manifested by four of the mid-career teachers and only one of the early career teachers; therefore, it is most likely developmental.

A discrepant finding for transformational agency. Transformational agency deviated from the developmental pattern of the other forms of agency. For the majority of teachers in both cohorts, transformational agency, served the dual purposes of nurturing individual student self-directedness, or learner agency, and promoting pro-social aims related to social justice and

environmental sustainability. Transformational agency directed towards nurturing student self-directedness was found to occur developmentally. Transformational agency to support an educational purposed social justice and/or an environmental sustainability agenda was more prevalent among the practicing teachers (n = 7) than for the veteran teachers (n = 5). Moreover, the use of transformational agency for pro-social purposes was not connected to a career phase, as it was evident for both early and mid-career practicing teachers.

Innovative teacher agency was occasionally found to be problematic. Teacher agency claimed prior to agency being earned was one common problematic expression of teacher agency. Both veteran teachers and practicing teachers related examples of struggles with successfully asserting agency when they attempted complex innovative enactments of agency beyond their professional know-how.

Individual, blended, and collective forms of agency. There was a complex inter-play between these three forms of agency. That is, some teachers primarily used an individual form of agency in their professional/collegial context (3 veteran & 2 practicing teachers) but partnered with community or other professional contacts to practice collective agency, complementing their highly individualized form of agency.

Another aspect of the complex nature of the individual and collective forms of agency was revealed. Only one veteran teacher and one practicing teacher favored one form to the exclusion or near exclusion of the other; the majority of participants in both cohorts blended these two forms of agency. Those teachers who utilized both individual and collective forms of agency frequently described the two forms as being mutually enhancing, rather than as being in tension. The six veteran teachers who consistently blended both forms described professional collaboration as beneficial to enacting their individual educational vision. Eight practicing

teachers primarily used blended agency. As a function of the integrated curricular model utilized at the STEM magnate schools, they routinely engaged in professional collaboration. Even with this collaboration, however, they asserted considerable individual professional autonomy within their respective classrooms.

A problematic instantiation of individual to collective teacher agency was revealed. As with the adaptive and innovative forms of agency, both veteran and practicing teachers reported instances of detrimental uses of individual and collective agency. Teachers described working with senior colleagues who used their agentic senior status to pressure less experienced teachers to conform to either a senior teacher's vision or the collective normed vision dictating 'how we teach at our school.' The less experienced teachers expressed frustration that they were sometimes explicitly discouraged from designing and implementing original teaching strategies, an assertion of agency by senior colleagues seen to be detrimental, even oppressive, to their obtainment of professional agency.

Teacher agency asserted along a teacher-directed to student-directed learning continuum. Agency was asserted by most of the teachers to support the development of student self-directed learning. This form of agency nurtured the unique capacities and interests of students rather than encouraging student conformity and acquiescence to teacher control. All but one of the veteran teachers described their agentic teaching practices as being directed towards embracing learner differences along intellectual, cultural, and personal interests. The majority of teachers in both cohorts (9 veteran & 8 practicing teachers) described and, in the case of the practicing teachers, demonstrated, a commitment to supporting the cultural identities and intellectual autonomy of their students by encouraging independent and critical thinking.

This form of agency was reasoned to be compatible with the teachers' democratic and multi-cultural educational visions. All but two of the practicing teachers practiced a democratic and multicultural supportive form of teacher agency. They expressed a desire to cultivate learner dispositions, such as curiosity, self-directedness, and critical independent thinking, as being consistent with their educational belief in preparing students to actively shape their own lives and to thoughtfully participate in democratic socio-political processes.

Teacher agency sometimes asserted autocratically. The majority of teachers in both cohorts (9 veteran & 8 practicing teachers) used their agency to nurture student autonomy by using strategies reliant on student intrinsic motivation and by emphasizing student choice in both curriculum and instruction. Conversely, two practicing teachers asserted their agency by teaching in highly prescriptive ways and using extrinsic motivational strategies for students. I interpreted this form of teacher agency as autocratic, which contrasts with the more democratic conception evinced by seventeen of the participants. These contrasting forms are further discussed in relationship to question four, the educational impacts associated with the use of agency.

Conducive Conditions for Teacher Agency

The social realism theory formulated by Archer (2003) and the socially embedded understanding of agency articulated by Giddens (1984) framed the investigation of conducive conditions for the development and assertion of teacher agency in the teachers' personal and professional contexts. The findings confirmed Archer's contention that individuals, each with unique dispositions, personal, and professional traits, achieve agency within socio-cultural contexts that provide both affordances for and constraints upon the individual’s capacity to assert

agency. This section summarizes the conducive conditions (i.e., the affordances) for agency, followed by a section describing the challenges (i.e., the constraints) upon agency.

Biographies influence the development of agency. For both cohorts, pre-professional educational and family/community-based experiences are seemingly related to their efforts to acquire and assert teacher agency. As children and youth, they were agentic learners, who continued as professionals developing their practitioner and craft knowledge. Therefore, a personal agentic pre-disposition to learning is interpreted to be an important conducive condition for the development of teacher agency.

Professional context influences the development of teacher agency. Two of the three highest rated survey items identifying professional context conditions conducive to the development of teacher agency, were "teaching with like-minded colleagues," and "support from early career mentors." A difference between the veteran and practicing teachers' responses to the survey was that the practicing teachers referenced their virtual or online professional community as beneficial to their teacher agency development, but the veteran teachers did not.

Members of both cohorts described altering their professional contexts, or removing themselves from a professional context, where support for agency was lacking. Some of these teachers transferred to different schools (4 veteran & 2 practicing) or resigned from teaching (1 veteran & 2 practicing) and later returned when they found positions with collegial support and opportunities to experience a collective form of agency. This finding confirms the theoretical and empirical research literature (i.e., Bandura, 2000; Edwards, 2015) regarding the prevalence and importance of collective efforts to obtain and assert professional teacher agency. This finding addresses both the first research question related to forms of agency and the second research question related to conducive conditions for agency.

Distinctive pathways to learning contributed to agency development. The numerical analysis of the survey responses of all teachers revealed distinctive pathways to learning. Each participant's survey revealed tendencies to follow one of three identified pathways to learning: formal and traditional, informal, and individualized, or autodidactic and self-directed (see Figure 5.1). An exception was found for one of the veteran teachers who followed a hybrid pathway to learning comprised of formal and autodidactic elements. Further, their pre-professional biographies showed that these distinctive pathways were used when they were students. These pathways continued to be followed by the teachers for their professional learning. I concluded that the opportunity to follow one's preferred pathway to learning is an important conducive condition for agency.

Challenges to Professional Agency

Challenges to obtaining agency and the constraints upon asserting agency varied considerably across the cohorts with less variation within each of the cohorts, suggesting again the developmental nature of teacher agency. The challenges and constraints are organized into three categories:

1. socio-historical conditions,
2. the school climate, policies, administrators, and
3. individual teacher dispositions, beliefs, and professional identity conceptions.

Socio-historical conditions impact teacher agency. The professional zeitgeist for expressing teacher agency has changed dramatically since the veteran teachers started teaching. Hargreaves (2016) described the professional climate for teacher agency prior to the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2001) as an age of collegial professionalism. Following the passage of NCLB, a shift occurred, which Buchanan (2015) described as "a top-down imposed

era of accountability tied to quantifiable test outcomes" (p. 3). The veteran teachers described their early and mid-career phases as being an agency friendly professional era and lamented the circumstances of current early and mid-career teachers. Each of the veteran teachers reported that the professional role for new teachers has greatly diminished. Eight of the veteran teachers identified this narrowing and deprofessionalization of the teacher's role as a challenge during their late career phase.

The early and mid-career teachers were also aware that many of their public-school K-12 colleagues were expected to conform to an "instrumentalist" (Mockler, 2011) conception of their teacher role, with little opportunity for autonomy or creativity. As reported above, two of the practicing teachers resigned from teaching and reentered when presented an opportunity to teach at the more agency friendly STEM charter school. Three other practicing teachers transferred to the STEM charter school because of their desire to teach with agency.

A challenge identified by the veteran teachers and confirmed through my constant comparison of the practicing teachers' interviews, is the phenomenon referred to by Lortie (1975) as "the apprenticeship of observation." That is, the veteran teachers expressed concern about the lack of agentic teaching models for younger colleagues. Their younger colleagues were students during the NCLB years; hence the veteran teachers assumed that the practicing teachers had few examples of agentic model teachers. The practicing teachers confirmed this situation by relating that much of their pre-professional experience, as students, did not provide examples of teachers with agency.

The school climate, policies, and administrators sometimes contribute to challenges to teacher agency. The veteran teachers, despite achieving agency in their careers, related numerous challenges to agency during their early and late career phases due to circumstances at

their specific schools. Six of the veteran teachers described early career challenges from more veteran teachers who exerted professional peer pressure to deny their agency. This was also reported by practicing teachers. Two of these veteran teachers chose to transfer to schools with more like-minded colleagues and two others altered the circumstances at their schools by influencing some colleagues to embrace more agentic and innovative approaches to teaching. The other two veteran participants taught against the professional grain at their schools and found support for their professional agency from the student and parent community.

Seven of the veteran teachers evinced a pattern of increased professional challenge to their agency late in their careers. These challenges were each related to clashes between the expectations of administrators for professional conformity and the agentic and respected veteran teachers who were unwilling to compromise their agency. At least four of these veteran teachers chose to retire, perhaps prematurely, because of their weariness from battling to maintain their professional agency.

The practicing teachers reported experiencing support from colleagues, administrators, and the community at their STEM charter school. My observations of the practicing teachers' practices and their students' response to their teaching methods confirmed this finding. Those practicing teachers who had previously experienced an agency restrictive professional environment expressed a heightened awareness of the importance of an agency supportive professional context.

Teaching with agency is inherently challenging. Individual teacher's histories, professional dispositions, attributes, and identities sometimes present challenges to agency**.** The veteran teachers each taught for about the same number of years (average, 29.6 years), received their initial teacher education during the 1980's, and achieved and maintained a degree of agency

over the course of their careers. Despite these commonalities and the shared patterns of agency use, each veteran teacher was unique in terms of an idiosyncratic blend of professional dispositions, attributes, and identities. These differences provided the veteran teachers with 'built in' advantages (conducive condition) and intrinsic challenges for achieving developing and asserting teacher agency.

The veteran cohort represented widely varying pre-professional histories. Some were successful as students and others struggled mightily. Others fell somewhere in between. From these experiences the veteran teachers, due to their goal to achieve high agency, were challenged to either replicate their positive learning environments and experiences, or to provide improved learning experiences for their students compared to those they had experienced. Teachers who were taught by highly agentic teachers, such as Leah and Thomas, used their experiences as models for their conceptions of agentic teaching. Teachers who had not been taught in an agentic manner, such as Jodi and Joseph, constructed their own conceptions for agentic teaching. Their histories provided both affordances for and challenges to their development and assertion of agency.

The veteran teachers shared an agentic pre-disposition to their professional learning, which was coupled with an agentic stance towards their teaching. Throughout their careers they evinced an expectation to be continually learning and developing their teacher theoretical and craft knowledge and skills. They also evinced high expectations for using their agency to meet the individual needs of their students. For example, Jodi was the first teacher in her state to receive National Board Certification and was named by her school district as the outstanding elementary teacher. Nonetheless, she described having sleepless nights in the week leading up to each new school year throughout her career. She stated "every year I feel as though I'm a first-

year teacher and know that each new group of students represents a new and unique set of challenges. I worry about my ability to meet those challenges." Teaching with agency, for each of these teachers, implies accepting responsibility for meeting the needs of their students, external circumstances notwithstanding. This agentic stance towards one's teaching practice guarantees a continual sense of being professionally challenged.

The veteran teachers also represented a range of professional attributes, in terms of teacher skills and deficits. Martha described her professional attributes, in part, as "being naturally given to hatching big ideas, but I've always struggled with nailing down the details and coming up with a logical and linear plan of execution." Martha then described her strategy of using her strengths and compensating for her deficits by explaining that "I've always sought to team up with my opposite. When I work with other teachers, I rely on teachers who excel at working out the details; together we make a complete team." The attribute of self-knowledge, knowing what one finds to be intrinsically challenging, and having a strategy for addressing one's challenges was consistently present in the veteran teachers' data.

The veteran teachers' professional identities reflected a pattern of expanding their professional spheres of influence throughout their careers. In their late career phase, eight of the veterans described being challenged by administrators and increasingly agency restrictive school district policies. Their agentic dispositions and extended professional identities clashed with these agency restrictive administrative approaches and policies, resulting in challenges due to their unwillingness to conform to a less agentized teaching identity.

The practicing teachers revealed a similar pattern of challenges. Each practicing teacher, like the veteran teachers, represented a unique blend of histories, professional dispositions, attributes, and identities. Except for Savanah, the practicing teachers shared a disposition

towards obtaining and asserting agency. Like the veteran teachers, they differed in their professional attributes. For example, Lynette and Brooke, functioning as closely collaborating grade level teammates, presented an example of markedly different communication styles when interacting with their students. Lynette was outwardly more effusive, dramatic, and improvisational in her interactions with their students. Brooke was soft-spoken, and created a consistently calm classroom climate, allowing students the choice of working individually or in small groups, for long periods of uninterrupted learning engagements. Students benefited from moving between the teachers' adjoining classrooms to meet their individual needs of the moment. Like the veteran teacher Martha, Lynette and Brooke effectively paired with their 'opposite' to form an effective team. Each of them overcame challenges to achieving agency by pairing with a teacher who complemented their communication style.

The veteran and practicing teachers relied on collaboration to overcome challenges to agency. The practicing teachers benefitted by blending diverse teaching approaches within the STEM collaborative professional models used at their schools. Through collaboration they collectively addressed challenges that individual teachers were experiencing. Veteran teachers collaborated with colleagues and others (community members, professionals from other fields, etc.) as a means to achieving agency.

Conversely, analysis of the interviews and observations and discussions suggested that those teachers who did not form collaborative bonds with other teachers, and who tended to exert agency in an individual form, struggled for extended periods of time to work through challenges to their agency. The veteran teachers who did not extensively collaborate with colleagues described a prolonged early career process of attempting to develop agency, and three of the four (Jodi, Thomas, & Sheryl) experienced their greatest challenges in their late career stage, in part

due to their professionally vulnerable status of 'going it alone.' Two of the elementary practicing teachers who pursued their agency in an individual form (Denise & Samantha) were both delayed in being able to consistently assert agency until their mid-career phase.

Six of the veteran teachers were adamant that professional collaboration enhanced their agency capacity throughout their careers. Seven of the practicing teachers collaborated with colleagues daily, often spontaneously from choice and not by design, and these seven teachers evolved their agency capacity to a greater extent than the three practicing teachers who were more inclined toward an individual manifestation of agency. This finding is the 'flip side' of the conducive condition that collective efforts to obtain and assert agency were associated with the successful exercise of agency through increasingly widening spheres of influence (elaborated on in the next section). For the purposes of gaining and asserting teacher agency, there is often 'strength in numbers.' The veteran and practicing teachers descriptions of their challenges led me to conclude that teachers seeking to achieve high agency are likely to experience challenges commensurate with their agency aspirations.

Impacts from the Assertion or Denial of Teacher Agency

The teachers' capacity to assert agency and the constraints limiting them from doing so impacted both their career trajectories and the quality of the learning experiences provided their students. Each of these impacts is discussed below.

Teacher agency influenced teachers' career trajectories. The research literature suggests, and the findings of this study confirm, that the veteran teachers began their careers during an era when teacher agency was viewed as a professional norm (Darling-Hammond, et al. 2005). The research literature further reveals, (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2006), and this study documents, that teacher agency is increasingly constrained by the imposition of 'top-down'

policies that exert external controls over teachers' professional autonomy. The three such policies mentioned most often included the No Child Left Behind federal education act of 2001, commercially produced curricula, and the forced implementation of scripted instructional guides.

The veteran teachers each benefited from their professional circumstances pre-NCLB. They exercised agency during their early and mid-careers. Post-NCLB, they experienced challenges to their agency. Like the veteran teachers, nine of the practicing teachers evinced similar agentic pre-dispositions, and similar altruistic motives for entering the teaching profession. The practicing teachers, however, experienced greater institutional challenges to their efforts to acquire and assert professional teacher agency beginning in their early career phase. All the veteran teachers and all but one of the practicing teachers reported believing in the benefits of professional agency (particularly for their own professional learning and as a benefit to their teacher effectiveness) as a motivation for volunteering to participate in this study.

The veteran teachers' agency was initially manifested as professional learner agency. These teachers drew on their learner agency, and their metacognitive awareness of their preferred pathway to learning, to assume an agentic role in their professional development. Their professional learning contributed to enhanced professional self-efficacy beliefs, the foundation for obtaining teacher agency.

The narrative and thematic analyses of the veteran teachers' interview data revealed career trajectories of overcoming early career challenges followed by high agency obtainment. Their agency is reflected by their professional achievements such as attaining national board certification status, being recruited to teacher leadership roles, and being named as recipients of prestigious awards such as the Milken and state teacher of the year designations. The veteran

teachers were unanimous in attributing their professional successes to their ability to develop and assert teacher agency.

As with their veteran teacher counterparts, the practicing teachers (n = 9) also demonstrated pre-agentic learner dispositions prior to becoming teachers. They too showed evidence of following preferred pathways to learning, although three of the practicing teachers evinced a generalized approach to their pre-professional and professional learning. Three of the mid-career teachers completed their National Board Teacher Certification, and five were instrumental in transitioning their neighborhood school to a STEM charter school. Nine of the practicing teachers credited their professional growth to their use of agency, which was reflected in their active role in setting professional learning goals and in actively seeking solutions to their professional challenges.

Both the veteran teachers and the practicing teachers rated the conducive condition survey item of "learning through reflecting on the effectiveness of one's own classroom teaching practices," as the most important characteristic for obtaining and expanding their teaching agency. This trait of reflecting on and learning from one's daily teaching successes and struggles is characterized by Schön (1984) as that of being a "reflective practitioner," and by Stenhouse (1975) as possessing an "extended professionalism" teacher identity. Nineteen of the teacher participants manifested agency in ways that are consistent with this trait.

Teacher agency was manifested through widening spheres of influence. The veteran teachers connected their use of agency and their career trajectories to agency manifested through four spheres of influence: the classroom, the school, professional associations, and the community (see Figure 6.1). The veteran teachers describe their early use of agency as being primarily focused on their classroom practices. Over time, and through their collective agentic

efforts with colleagues, the veteran teachers described seeking and achieving a widening sphere of influence in policy and professional learning initiatives at their schools and within their school districts. The veteran teachers also described using their agency within professional organizations and within their communities.

The practicing teachers connected their use of agency and their career trajectories similarly, although in less fully realized ways. All five mid-career teachers participated in the initiative to transform their neighborhood schools into STEM charter schools. The early career teachers described their growing confidence in contributing their ideas to the professional development conversations held at their school sites. Two mid-career teachers and one early career teacher described participating in professional organizations and national teacher conferences as important for gaining stronger professional self-efficacy beliefs and in their development of agency. The practicing teachers, largely due to teaching in the STEM charter schools, described their outreach efforts to involve the community in projects taking place at the school and in the wider community. This practice represents an expansion of their agentic influence into the school-wide and community spheres.

The career trajectories of the participants in this study were fundamentally shaped by their desire for and experiences with teacher agency. The exception to this general pattern was one practicing teacher who showed reluctance to seek or assert teacher agency. She chose an instrumentalist professional career trajectory manifested by a consistent adherence to pre-packaged curricular and instructional guides. The other nineteen participants chose an agentic approach to their professional learning and to their professional practices reflecting a teacher identity committed to an extended professional conception of their teacher role. Sixteen of the nineteen teachers experienced teacher agency as both an individual and as a collective

phenomenon. The veteran teacher career trajectories revealed both substantial successes and challenges in their career-long efforts to obtain and assert professional agency. The practicing teachers' career trajectories continue to unfold.

Teacher agency impacted the educational experiences of their students. I began this investigation focusing my research questions, data collection, and analyses on the impacts of agency on the participants' teaching practices. As I analyzed the veteran teacher interviews and observed the practicing teachers, the importance of teacher agency vis-à-vis the students' learning experiences became increasingly apparent. Both cohorts' interviews and the practicing teachers' demonstrations of teaching revealed that their primary motivation for obtaining and asserting professional agency was to benefit the learning experiences of students.

The veteran and practicing teachers viewed teacher agency as an essential ingredient, a *sine qua non*, in their efforts to effectively teach their students. The preponderance of findings related to the reasons for seeking agency and the finding related to the participants' sense of purpose for their agency, reveals that the teachers were motivated to obtain and use agency to positively impact the learning and lives of their students by nurturing learner self-efficacy beliefs and student self-directedness.

An exception to this pattern was the finding that two participants (one veteran & one practicing) expressed pedagogical goals focused more narrowly on increasing student achievement according to standardized outcome measures. The other seventeen participants seeking to teach agentically (all but Savannah) expressed pedagogical intentions to assert their agency as a means of nurturing student learning agency by teaching according to the individual students' needs and interests. These teachers used their agency to support what Lai and Campbell (2018) termed the "epistemic agency" of their students. Their use of teacher agency to

support learner agency is the primary justification, the *raison d'êtra*, for the development and assertion of teacher agency for seventeen of the teachers in this study.

This section summarized the key findings aligned with the research questions. In the next section, I offer explanations for these findings and incorporate implications of the findings for teacher education and professional development. This chapter concludes with a discussion of potential contributions to the field of education ensuing from this study and possibilities for further research.

A Synthesis and Explanatory Theory for the Findings

This section synthesizes the findings across the questions and offers an explanatory theory for the findings. The study was framed by ecological and teleological perspectives on teacher agency. The related analytical lenses of complexity and critical theories inform this synthesis.

An Ecological Understanding of How Teacher Agency Works

The ecological view of human agency articulated by Emirbayer and Mische (1998), connecting past experiences to future visons through practical present-day enactments, underlies and informs this investigation of teacher agency. This ecological view shares Archer's (2003) social realism understanding of human actors asserting, or attempting to assert, agency within socio-cultural contexts. As these socio-cultural theorists suggest, I found that the participating teachers' assertion of agency, as professional autonomy, was influenced by and acted as an influence on their professional contexts (e.g., "spheres of influence," from the previous section). The agentic teachers were not free to act without regard for their circumstances, nor were they powerless to alter those circumstances.

Within the broad perspective on agency provided by an ecological conception, the theory of complexity (Byrne, 1998; Monson, 2001) provides insights into and explanatory power for agency development and assertion. Initially formulated to counter reductionist and linear models for complex phenomena (such as natural and human ecosystems), complexity theory provides a paradigm for analyzing the relationships between and among mutually influencing constituents of complex systems (e.g., a rain forest or a human community).

The following assumptions of complexity theory, applied within an ecological conceptual understanding of teacher agency, provided a holistic lens for synthesizing key findings:

- collective impact of an integrated system is greater than sum of the impacts from the various parts of the system (i.e., the whole is greater than the sum of the parts).
- change within the system is non-deterministic, continuous, and emergent,
- elements within a complex system do not change independently, they co-evolve,
- change, which begins with one element, ripples as change throughout the system,
- inter-connectedness across a system is maintained through distributed knowledge,
- diversity, flexibility, and openness allow for system adaptability,
- arbitrarily imposed order from outside the system stunts adaptability, and
- complex adaptive systems which are open to and responsive to the external environment are dynamic and more likely to thrive than closed and static systems.

Using these assumptions to synthesize the findings creates a picture of the dynamic and interconnected relationships between and among the findings.

Teacher agency practiced within the classroom sphere reflects complexity theory. The challenges restricting teachers' instructional and/or curricular autonomy were a catalyst for the development of adaptive, and later, innovative forms of agency. As such, the challenging

restrictions in their classroom context were paradoxically conducive conditions for developing teacher agency. Across both cohorts, the elementary and secondary teachers first expressed their agency in response to conditions they identified as restrictive: instructional challenges facing the elementary teachers, and curricular challenges facing the secondary teachers. These forms of agency reflected the teachers' responses to challenges exerted from outside their classroom.

The teachers' dynamic responses to these challenges to their professional decision-making autonomy—perceived to be arbitrary and unreasonable—were motivated by their sense of educational purpose to meet the learning needs of their students. The teachers chose specific forms of agency to impact their students' educational experiences. Hence, forms and impacts are inter-connected, emergent, and co-evolve within the complex educational ecosystem. The forms, conducive conditions, challenges, and impacts on both student and teacher development associated with teacher agency are sewn together in complex, dynamic, and unpredictable ways. Through the teachers' assertion of agency these elements become mutually constitutive.

Teacher agency thrived when knowledge was collaboratively constructed and collectively operationalized. Complexity theory maintains that the elements within an ecosystem rely on distributed knowledge for successful systemic adaptive change to occur. Teachers who adapt and innovate individually, within the narrow sphere of their own classrooms, were not found to effect change in the wider spheres of their schools or their professional communities.

Similarly, those participants who experienced closed systems of external control over their professional learning and decision-making experienced professional stagnation, which they found to be untenable as it was antithetical to their sense of purpose to serve their students' needs. The teachers who experienced these agency stifling conditions either transferred to

environments supportive of their agency development or altered their professional contexts as a means of maintaining agency.

The research literature relevant to this issue of agency oppressive professional environments (e.g., Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Santoro, 2011) suggests that these participants were exceptions to the norm. Lack of opportunity to collaborate with colleagues, to shape one's professional development, and to use one's professional teacher autonomy to best meet students' learning needs, are teacher agency restrictions associated with teachers leaving the profession.

Teacher agency is precarious in the current era. The analysis of the veteran teacher data shows that agency capacity, once obtained, is not necessarily maintained indefinitely. Late career conflicts and restrictions upon professional autonomy, even for successful teachers with strong self-efficacy beliefs, can result in diminished agency when teacher autonomy and self-confidence is substantially undermined.

Thomas reported a retreat to the classroom sphere late in his career as a reaction to being repeatedly criticized for asserting agency in the professional and community spheres. Three other veteran teachers reported being worn down by having to reclaim their rights to professional agency whenever leadership changed in their district or at their school. Agency, as a capacity, is prone to waxing and waning, depending on a multitude of circumstances within the complex educational system.

Teacher identity, teacher agency, and teacher's sense of professional ownership co-evolve throughout professional career trajectories. The veteran teacher participants' careers extended for an average of close to thirty years. Their identities, experiences with agency, and sense of ownership evolved across each of their career phases. Viewing these constructs through the holistic lens of complexity theory reveals a dynamic interrelationship connecting all three. Each

of these constructs interacted in mutually influential ways for teachers throughout their careers. In accordance with a key tenet of complexity theory, teacher's identity, agency, and ownership did not develop independently, they co-evolved.

The veteran teachers entered the teaching profession having previously developed an agentic stance towards their learning. This pre-professional agentic disposition carried over into their professional learning agentic approach. This professional learning agency, in turn, influenced their early professional identity formation. They perceived their professional role as one of taking responsibility for their professional development.

This finding corresponds to Lave and Wenger's (1999) claim that continuous professional learning is an integral attribute of an agentic teacher's identity. They propose that a teacher's professional sense of their role, their identity, initially forms through peripherally situated practice and then over time moves towards full participation. This practice of moving from the periphery to the center parallels Gee's (2000) description of peripheral identities shifting toward the center and becoming an aspect of one's core identity. Overtime, as teachers move from the periphery to the center of a community of practitioners, their teacher identity shifts from being a role which they perform—what they do as a professional— to an aspect of their core identity—who they are as a person.

As the veteran teachers translated their professional learning and their initial stance of professional agency into agentically strategic professional practices (adaptations followed by innovations) their sense of owning their teaching practices also emerged. Their growing sense of professional ownership is interpreted as a reflection of investing creative efforts to expand their instructional and/or curricular teaching repertoires.

This finding is consistent with research (e.g., Breiting, 2008) suggesting that adaptive and innovative teachers develop cognitive beliefs and feelings of ownership by investing time and effort in creating teaching strategies. This finding also explains the increase in professional conflict experienced by the veteran teachers in their late career phase. Complexity theory assumes that arbitrarily imposed order from outside the system stunts adaptability. The teachers who developed a strong sense of professional ownership of their practices over the course of their careers courted conflict by refusing to acquiesce to demands to discard their agentic teaching approaches and conform to externally imposed teaching prescriptions.

The practicing teachers' identities, agency, and sense of ownership co-evolved in a similar manner as the veteran teachers. There was an interconnected and dynamic relationship between their developing professional identities, assertions of agency, and growing sense of professional ownership. The nine practicing teachers who displayed professional learner agency, converted their knowledge into agentic adaptations and innovations in their professional practice.

The two mid-career practicing teachers who used the phrase "my practice," to describe their approach to teaching had taught the longest (11 years). Both cohorts took responsibility for their teaching choices and for the educational impacts of their teaching. This finding is consistent with the research literature (e.g., Marshall & Drummond, 2006) showing that teachers with agency and a sense of professional ownership attribute their successes and failures to their own efforts; conversely, according to the same study, teachers lacking agency and a sense of ownership tend to attribute the results of their teaching to external circumstances.

The constructs of identity, agency, and ownership were dynamically inter-related aspects of the teachers' professional practices throughout their career trajectories. Change within complex systems, according to complexity theory, are continuous and emergent. From an

ecological and complexity analytical perspective, teachers' professional identities, agentic practices, and sense of ownership emerge and evolve due to a combination of influences.

A teacher's expansion or diminishment of their agentic capacity is a function of the over-all synergistic momentum created by the gestalt of an educational ecosystem—an aggregate of the interaction of multiple aspects of their professional context. This notion of synergistic momentum is consistent with the complexity theory assumption that the whole of the system is greater than the sum of its parts. Teacher identity, agency, and sense of ownership are three interrelated and foundationally important constituents of a teacher's professionalism, which together influence a teacher's enactment of their vision.

A Teleological Understanding of Why Teacher Agency Matters

An ecological and a teleological understanding of teacher agency framed this study. The ecological perspective, using assumptions from complexity theory, is useful in explicating teacher agency development and assertion. This perspective addressed the 'how' of teacher agency. The teleological perspective, drawing on assumptions from critical theory, is useful in illuminating the purposes for teacher agency development and assertion. This perspective addresses the 'why' of teacher agency.

Biesta (2015) makes the point that educational outcomes, in and of themselves, do not have value apart from their intended purpose. Education, according to Biesta is an "inherently teleological practice" (p. 77). Questions regarding curricular choices, instructional methods, and educational aims implied by a teachers' visions and enactments—their agency—are considered and evaluated in terms of the over-all purposes served by assertions of teacher agency.

Teachers who enact transformational agency do so because their purpose is to provide educational experiences to benefit both students and society at large. These purposes include the

development of intellectual and socio-political knowledge and dispositions aligned with the values and needs of society. For culturally pluralistic and democratic societies these desirable traits, fostered by the educational process, include independent and critical thinking, and a belief in the values of equality and justice for individuals and groups. The aim is to cultivate student willingness and ability to actively participate in democratic political processes for the common good (such as advocating for social justice and related causes such as environmental protection and sustainability).

This study suggests the essential role teacher agency plays in this process. Teachers, whose agency is informed by critical theory understandings, require the professional autonomy to craft learning experiences relevant to the lived experiences of their students. This educational aim seeks to do more than merely uncover current examples of inequality and determine their causes. Instead, a multicultural and democratic approach engages students in imagining remedies to social inequities and injustices. This vision is one of reciprocal transformation. As students become transformed through their learning with and about each other, their capacities to enact social transformation is expanded. Thus, teacher transformational agency serves the social transformational agency of the students.

For an educational system to do more than reproduce a society's status quo, it must intentionally aspire to positive social transformation. In Dewey's (1916) analysis, "a society which not only changes but which has the ideal of such a change as will improve it, will have different standards and methods of education from one which aims simply at the perpetuation of its own customs" (p. 81). For Sleeter and Grant (1987), these different standards and methods must be democratic — "Students should learn to use power for collective betterment, rather than

learn mainly obedience" (p.15). This type of learning requires that teachers utilize democratic teaching strategies and democratic classroom governance processes and procedures.

Schools — as social institutions—and the classrooms of which they are comprised, operate as systems of cultural practices. As such, they have the potential to either restrict or to expand the individual and collective sense of agency for the teachers and students. As Popkewitz and Lindblad (2004) point out, "Modern institutions do not merely enhance liberty, but offer a specific relation of enablement and constraint" (p. 242). In short, things could go either way, from the standpoints of personal and collective freedom and social justice.

The critical difference in which way things go for students, is the teacher. Teachers with a vision of education that is multicultural and democratic use professional agency to enact their vision for themselves and for their students. As one of the veteran teachers stated, "In what world does anyone believe that teachers, who are denied the opportunity to think and act critically and independently, will be able to develop these qualities in their students?" Teacher agency does not, in and of itself, guarantee that teachers will use their agency for these purposes, but without agency such purposes are impossible.

Implications for Professional Development and Teacher Education

In a sense, this investigation of teacher agency concluded where it began. An underlying initial premise of the study was that agency, when asserted for the educational benefit of students, within recognized professional and ethical guidelines, is a positive professional teacher attribute. This study confirms my initial conviction. Below, implications are organized into three categories: professional development, teacher education, and further research possibilities. Over the past two decades, the enactment of policies restricting teachers' professional agency and autonomy has proven detrimental for both teachers and students. It is my hope that the following

implications and recommendations contribute to a reversal of this trend in practically useful ways.

Professional Development and the Advancement of Teacher Agency

Teacher agency is both the result of professional learning, and a means to achieve learning. Selecting, creating, and participating in ongoing professional learning is an integral constituent of what it means to be an agentic teacher. This implies that the cultivation of teacher agency is best achieved by professional learning which incorporates teacher input. Teachers who had opportunities to shape their professional learning reported this to be an important contribution to their obtainment and expansion of teacher agency. This finding is consistent with the relevant professional research showing that teacher agency is enhanced when "teachers are able to act purposefully and constructively to direct their professional growth and contribute to the growth of their colleagues" (Calvert, 2016, p. 4).

This study affirms that collectively planned and enacted professional learning *in situ* over an extended period of time and related to teacher questions and identified challenges was useful. PAR, or similar collaborative approaches providing university researcher support for teacher professional development is a particular benefit. Teachers from the same school, collaboratively directing their professional learning by focusing on developing curricular and instructional adaptive or innovative strategies is a productive professional learning approach for growing teacher agency. These implications are consistent with research, by those such as Burke (2011), showing that new approaches to teaching are more likely to be adopted when teachers are involved in the design and implementation of what they believe to be professionally meaningful.

These implications suggest that a school should be organized to provide opportunities for this kind of collaborative professional development. School leaders are prudent to create and

respect teachers' need to provide input on their professional learning, including support for participating in professional organizations, and to provide opportunities for teachers to engage in identifying problems and challenges and resources for teachers to address their issues.

Teacher Education and the Development of Teacher Agency

Each of the implications and recommendations for approaches to professional learning which support teacher agency development also applies to teacher preparation programs. Additionally, the finding of "distinct pathways for learning" is relevant for the design and implementation of teacher education programs. The research on K-12 teaching and learning supports the use of differentiation and student choice (Freeman, et al., 2014; Tomlinson, et al., 2003) as an academic benefit to students, and as a means of nurturing students' learner self-efficacy beliefs. Thus, I should not have been surprised (although I was) to discover that the teachers in this study furnished evidence of successful professional learning when afforded the opportunity to pursue their learning goals along their preferred distinctive pathways. As a teacher educator, I am exploring ways to create flexibility in the design of my courses to permit future teachers to select and follow their most effective pathway to learning the objectives for each of my courses. My preliminary findings are promising and lead me to recommend using a "multiple pathways to learning design" for teacher preparation programs.

Further, teacher education programs should incorporate collaborative student learning cohorts, extended internship placements, apprenticeships in situated learning spaces, and dialogical inquiry strategies for structuring collaborative thinking among the students and between the faculty and the students. The teacher participants who rated their teacher education programs as being highly conducive to their development of teacher agency emphasized the

importance of having opportunities to reflect on their practices, beginning critically and collaboratively with their practicums and extending into student teaching.

Critical reflection, collaboration with classmates and mentor teachers, and the situated learning experienced by teacher candidates, should be explicitly designed to connect to social justice issues by focusing on learning and implementing culturally sustaining education at schools serving students from historically marginalized ethnic groups and their communities. Selecting host schools and mentor teachers engaged in emancipatory educational praxis, by collaborating with marginalized communities, will present examples to teacher candidates of possible ways for them to envision connecting democratic and social justice principles to educational practices.

Teacher agency and teacher identity are inextricably linked. Hence, teacher education programs need to explicitly devote attention to constructing professional identity. Engaging pre-service teachers in action classroom research projects, collaboratively designed with their internship host teachers and supervising faculty, is one of many possibilities for cultivating a future teacher's agentic professional identity. Future teachers who are encouraged to collaborate with peers, K-12 mentors, and university faculty; to take initiative in the process of their teacher education; and to participate in professional teacher organizations, will have a strong teacher agency foundation to build upon as they enter into their teaching career.

Implications for Further Research and Final Conclusions

The report of this project concludes with implications for further research and my retrospective thoughts about the value of this project. In discussing possibilities for further research, new questions which arose during the conduct of this study are included.

Further Research: A Consideration of Possibilities

This study was designed, in part, as an investigation of possibilities. The selection of veteran teachers who had demonstrated high agency throughout their careers, the recruitment of practicing teacher volunteers motivated to obtain and/or expand their agency, and the choice of phase two school sites with agency supportive characteristics, combined to form an 'ideal scenario' for studying agency development. Just as my understanding of teacher agency and my interpretation of the findings were framed by an ecological and a teleological conceptual framework, so too was the design of this study framed by these paired theoretical perspectives.

The dual intentions of the study were to better understand teacher agency in light of the research questions, within an optimal ecological context, and to explore ways to support agency development and enhancement from a teleological perspective. The study resulted in findings addressing the research questions, and also in the formulation of new questions which arose from my dialogical considerations of teacher agency with and among the participants. These new questions form the basis for my recommendations for further research.

What does teacher agency development look like in a 'typical' professional context? Some of the veteran and practicing teachers described facing challenges to agency related to their professional contexts. The responses by these teachers, as a means of maintaining their agency, was to either transfer to more agency supportive schools, or to alter their professional contexts. The strategies teachers used to alter their contexts and to continue developing and expanding agency, provide a potentially useful starting point for designing a research project. The goal would be to better understand and support agency within a typical school context. This study was conducted in STEM charter schools, rich with opportunities for teachers to enact agency. A similar study needs to be conducted in a more typical school.

One such strategy identified through this study was the deliberate pairing of teaching partners with complementary communication styles and/or professional skill sets. Perhaps this strategy could be applied to non-charter schools. Likewise, the formation of collaborative teams of teachers, each committed to obtaining and expanding their professional agency, is an approach that could be operationalized as the basis for an investigation of agency in any school setting where agency was seen to be a desirable professional attribute by some of the faculty. With regards to my future research intentions, my professional research agenda is focused on expanding understandings about agency, by conducting similar research in more 'typical' school settings which lack the affordances for agency present at the charter school sites.

Possibilities arose for considering other theoretical perspectives in future research. The ecological framework for investigating teacher agency, and the complementary theoretical perspectives of socio-cognitive and socio-cultural models of agency development, were generative lenses for analyzing the data. In the phase two data collection and analysis process, however, I became aware of an important theoretical gap or oversight in my conceptual design of the study. As I observed the teachers' efforts to develop and assert their agency, and as I discussed these efforts during our post-observation debriefings, I became aware that the teachers were more broadly focused on their questions and concerns than I had anticipated.

That is, the practicing teachers were as concerned with their students' social and emotional growth and well-being as they were with their student's cognitive and academic progress. The important agency related body of research literature addressing teachers' caring relationships with their students (e.g., Noddings, 2012; Ramberg, 2019), and the equally relevant literature related to teachers' emotional involvement with their teaching practices (e.g., Chen, 2019; Zembylas, 2011) was not included in my construction of the research questions and

theoretical framework. These aspects of teacher agency will be prominently featured in my future research studies of teacher agency.

The potential for mixed methods is a consideration. The decision to use phenomenological methods for the veteran teacher first phase seems to have been appropriate as the veteran teachers provided insightful interview data and I was able to construct a useful conceptual framework. The decision to use grounded theory methods, with a PAR component, for phase two was also appropriate as the practicing teachers' understandings of and questions about teacher agency emerged continuously throughout the collaborative data collection and analysis processes.

Using these two different research approaches is a unique design feature of this study. Shared assumptions between the two methods, such as emergence of findings rather than testing of theories, allowed me to move back and forth between these methodologies to compare findings from the two phases of the study. Future research might benefit from similar pairings of different but compatible methodologies. It is my intention to consider using mixed methods for future research projects. Using mixed methods might expand the possibilities for discovering findings reflecting both nuanced understandings, a goal of qualitative research, and findings of statistically significant educational impacts from the assertion and/or denial of agency, the goal of quantitative methodologies.

Critical Reflections: Alternative Interpretations and Reconsiderations

Having completed the first drafts of all seven chapters, read the entire study from a holistic perspective, and scrutinized each of the participants' quoted statements to check for accuracy, I developed second thoughts, in the form of alternative interpretations for specific findings. I also formulated lingering questions, inviting further inquiry into teacher agency.

Specifically, I recognize the possibility that my framing of the findings may be imbalanced in at least two important respects. First, when I reread the participant statements related to their day-to-day efforts to assert their teacher agency I realized that my use of Emirbayer and Mische's (1998) description of agency as being the "capacity for actors to shape their response to problematic situations," (p. 971) tell only half the story. While many of the examples of teachers use of agency fit this description of agency as being a reactive phenomenon, there are an equal number of examples which depict agency as being a pro-active seizing of opportunities—as teachable moments— for more effectively engaging students in learning.

Taking a closer look at Emirbayer and Mische's theories about agency, I discovered that they formulate agency as having both iterative and projective dimensions (1998, p. 983). Iterative agency involves the use previously of learned strategies for coping with challenging circumstances. Whereas a projective use of agency requires the creative potential for actors to invent new ways to enact imagined possibilities not yet realized. The teacher participants evinced agency in both forms.

Also, in retrospect, I recognize that my presentation of agency by the participants as being primarily their response to challenges and situational constraints upon their agency is one-sided. I over-emphasized the use of agency as a response to constraints and under-emphasized the use of agency in light of affordances. The teachers use of agency did, at times, allow them to overcome circumstantial constraints**;** just as frequently, however, their use of agency represented their recognition and successful exploitation of affordances for agency which were present in their classrooms. The teachers from both phases drew on their creative agentic capacities to improvise, innovate, and imagine new possibilities for their teaching and their students' learning.

Another sense of 'imbalance' I detected relates to my depictions of challenges to agency as primarily a negative factor in the teachers' development of agency. In those cases where challenges reflect arbitrary and unreasonable restrictions imposed on teacher agency, such challenges did impair agency development. In other cases, however, challenges to agency are potentially beneficial to a teacher's long-term development of the sort of agency which positively impacts students.

For example, the finding that early career teachers occasionally exhibit the detrimental type of agency referred to as agency claimed rather than earned, occurs when agency is not challenged. Early in a teacher's career, appropriate challenges to their use of agency serve as a check and balance on the development of agency that is insufficiently informed by practitioner theoretical and/or craft knowledge. The veteran teacher Thomas discussed the benefits ensuing from being required to vet one's agentic intentions through consultation with more experienced colleagues.

Appropriate challenges to agency were also found to serve as a catalyst for teachers to initially develop and then expand their agency. Curricular frameworks and instructional guidelines, when presented as flexible tools for early career teachers to use, were initially adapted by agentic teachers to better meet the needs of their students. Some of the participants expanded their curricular and/or instructional agency through innovative approaches.

Finally, agency was found to be a phenomenon that emerged through collective efforts. The interplay between the agentic intentions of the various actors in the learning dynamic—students, colleagues, administrators, and parents—also has the potential to provide fruitful challenges to teacher agency. Through collaboration teachers draw on the ideas and efforts of the group to produce a synergistic boost to the collective agency employed to benefit their students.

Conclusions: Looking Back to See What Might Lie Ahead

In the introductory section of Chapter One I referred to an agency related conversation I had with one of my students during the early phase of my teaching career. In recalling Obe's accusation that I had over-stepped my agentic bounds, resulting in reduced student agency for him and his classmates, I plead guilty; but I also recognize that the mere fact that Obe, and countless other students then and since, experienced a classroom climate which was open to discussion and debate, including challenging their teacher, reassures me that their student agency was alive and well.

The lesson which I took from my exchange with Obe is less about right and wrong in the use of agency, and more about the need to continually reflect upon and honestly consider the impacts from both asserting and failing to achieve agency. This lesson is one which continues to guide my teaching decisions today as a teacher educator. My goal continues to be to achieve a balance in the give and take between my use of teacher agency, and my goal of fostering the personal, epistemic, and socially transformational agency— individually and collectively—of my students.

My success and the success of my colleagues, in achieving this balance—using professional agency to support the learner agency of our students—is reliant upon our understandings about agency and our development of strategies that serve these goals. These aims motivated the design and conduct of this study. Moreover, these aims will serve as the teleological framework for future research projects, which I intend to collaboratively design and conduct with K-12 and university teacher colleagues and students.

This study has made evident several issues and challenges related to teacher preparation, teacher development, and teacher retention. As educational leaders, teacher educators, and researchers we are called upon to reflect on these issues and to contribute to ameliorating their harmful effects. Preparing teachers with agentic dispositions, supporting their agentic professional development, and engaging in leadership initiatives to protect teachers' rights to teach with agency, are all goals worthy of our advocacy and our action.

In a free and democratic society—in a society where individuals and groups possess an enlarged belief in their ability to make a difference (individual and collective sense of self-efficacy)—there exists a "greater propensity to social activism" (Bandura, 1982, p. 143). Put another way, "human beings are prone to take action in response to their sense of injustice or to their imagination's capacity to look at things as if they could be otherwise" (Greene, 1995, p. 166). For teachers working with students from historically marginalized communities, there is a need to do more than merely 'imagine' that things could be otherwise. In those cases, it is incumbent upon teachers and schools to redress both past and ongoing oppressive influences of social institutions, including our educational system, to collaborate with these communities in co-constructing a more equitable and just vision for and version of education, and to use teacher agency to enact emancipatory and culturally sustaining practices. For students to develop both strong beliefs of self-efficacy and the imaginative capability to envision and seek to create a more just social order, teachers, teacher educators, and educational leaders, are called upon to act as agentic mentors and role models to these ends.

APPENDICES

Appendix 2.A Bibliography of the Forty Studies Used for the Literature Review

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Note: An * designates references discussed above as relevant to present study.

Appendix 3.A

Interview Follow-up Survey

This survey is based on the 9 most common themes or conditions identified as being supportive of the development, expansion, or maintenance of "professional teacher agency." Please rank each item, on a scale of 0 to 10, with zero indicating that the item played no role with regard to your teacher agency at any point in your career, and a 10 indicating that a given item was indispensable to you for forming, expanding, or maintaining your teacher agency. Use the text boxes following each item to provide comments. Finally, if you think of an additional condition conducive to teacher agency, add it in the tenth text box. Thanks for your willingness and thoughtfulness in participating in this study. Kevin

1. Family and/or community-based learning experiences, and/or family role models. _____
2. K-12 learning experiences that served as either an example or as a non-example of teacher agency. _____
3. University learning experiences, including but not exclusive of your teacher education program. _____
4. Early career mentors—either formal/assigned or informal/self-selected. _____
5. Professional development opportunities (classes, workshops, in-services, etc.). _____
6. Professional organization affiliation and/or professional conferences. _____
7. Collegial partnerships. _____
8. Challenges to teacher agency as a catalyst to stronger agency. _____
9. Discovering what worked for you and your students over time. _____
10. Other: _____

Appendix 3.B

Recruitment Flyer

A Study of Professional Teacher Agency:

Recruitment Survey for a University of Arizona Doctoral Research Study

Are you interested in: personalizing your teaching, discovering more effective culturally responsive instructional strategies, and building stronger collaborative bonds with colleagues and parents?

I, J. Kevin Spink, am a 30+ year elementary and middle school teacher, and I am a trained literacy instructional coach and mentor teacher. I am offering to work with elementary and secondary public school teachers who are interested in exploring ways to expand and sustain their professional teacher agency, as a part of my doctoral research study.

I will be meeting with, observing and collaborating with teachers that express an interest in participating in this study for *growing our professional agency capacity* in the winter / spring semester of 2017. If you are interested in participating please fill out the brief survey below and return this survey to:

<jkspink@email.arizona.edu>

1. Name _____

2. University for teacher education _____

3. Years taught _____

4. Grade level(s) taught _____

5. Current school _____

6. Ethnicity _____

7. Gender _____

8. Age _____

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