

From Students to Teachers: Is There Agency or Anxiety in Voices from the Field?

By

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### Abstract

Anxiety is an epidemic in the United States today and college students are noted to be the most stressed population. This research study focuses on current practicum and student teachers in a University professional teacher education preparation program. Participants also include recent graduates of the same program. Data is collected utilizing Qualtrics surveys, semi-structured interviews, and reflective journal entries of pre-service teachers. Narrative inquiry allows the participants and researcher to co-construct the participants' narratives of experience. Categorical coding matrices help develop categories of responses from participants' quotations. A social constructivist perspective considers the role of language in constructing ways of thinking. The data reflects contradictions in participants' notions of "being supported" and a discrepancy between participants' perceptions and programmatic requirements. It reveals unrecognized power within participants' agency. The text explains how increased notions of agency may help participants' cope with feelings of stress and anxiety. It is important to consider how teacher educators may further cultivate pre-service teachers' agency through particular teaching practices. Based on the findings in this research, as pre-service teachers transition from students to teachers, the support of their agentic actions and the facilitation of their recognition of notions of agency are recommended to support coping with stress and anxiety. Additionally, the data is reflective of the positive impact of pre-service teachers' reflecting on prior "writing to heal" journal exercises. In time, by reflecting and "rewriting their narratives" they engage in "writing to learn", which also opens up opportunities for them to consider agency and agentic action.

## Chapter One

### Introduction

Today's young people are inundated with pressures to decide who they want to be and how they will impact this world. Compassion, passion, and other emotions will likely drive their choices and motivations. Their emotions will play a huge role in determining not only what drives them, but also who they will become, and what social change they will pursue to create change in the world. In early elementary school in this country, emotion recognition (awareness of and assigning names to), and regulation are a typical part of schooling, but what happens when this pivotal part of learning and becoming disappears? Further schooling, like that of a teacher education preparation program, likely focuses more on what is known and less on what is felt by those who are learning it. What if one of those young people grows up and chooses to pursue social change by following the passion that leads to selecting a career in teaching? How might this preparation to "becoming" a teacher impact their emotions, their knowledge and ability to cope with them, and the type of teacher or person they will become? What if the nature of this process to "becoming" an educator invokes anxiety? Who is responsible for facilitating the students' emotion recognition and regulation now that they are adults? Could the responsibility for anxiety reduction lie with the institutions or the state that drive programmatic requirements for teacher certification or should individuals be able to "handle" this part of becoming on their own? My personal experience narrates the lived experience of anxiety while growing up, learning to teach and practicing in the profession, and includes the destruction and struggles that anxiousness can cause. My anxiety was related to a multitude of factors inside and outside my teacher preparation, and familiarity with it allows me to further

connect with others who experience anxiety. My research shows that pre-service teachers with dissimilar pre-collegiate experiences are stressed and anxious once participating in a university teacher education preparation program. As a teacher educator and researcher, I am interested in how university teacher education programs can better address the catalysts and impacts of anxiety influencing pre-service teachers who are learning to cope with the demands and anxiety that preparing to teach may involve.

With any new addition to an ever-evolving field of education research connections, findings, and “facts”, I think it is appropriate to question, “why should I care?” Or, “what difference will this make?” In my research, that means asking, why should anyone care about the feelings and emotional states of pre-service teachers, especially those coping with anxiety? This may initially seem like a narrow population to target, but consider the hundreds or thousands of young people that one teacher impacts in his or her profession, followed by the web of connections that each one of those people may influence in turn. If we consider education as society’s response to knowledge control and as a way to “prepare” individuals to know “how” to act, then teachers play a pivotal role in society and its evolution. Education can help inform people about their emotions, which therefore impacts not just how we think, but who we are. Connections between emotions, education, control, and our society should be examined to further this discussion and its importance. Thinking about who and what “controls” our emotions, how we learn about them, and in what ways our emotions “control” us, is important in this study focusing on anxiety and teacher education. Yet, in many circles of education, emotion is considered a notion to be kept out of the classroom. How then do individuals manage the emotions brought on by a professional teacher education preparation program? What if recognizing and investing in

understanding our emotions could create positive social change; on top of facilitating a positive sense of self, and teachers who can better cope with the demands of the education profession? Consider these words from a scholar who writes about emotions and education. Boler (1999) says:

By rethinking the absence of emotion, how emotions shapes how we treat people and informs our moral assumptions and judgments...we have the potential to radically change our cultural values and violent practices of cruelty and injustice, which are often rooted in unspoken "emotional" investments in unexamined ideological beliefs. (p. xvii)

Maybe teachers can create a safe space within the societal constructs of required schooling for individuals to get to know themselves better, including the stimuli and implications of the emotions they experience. If teachers hold part of this responsibility, who is thinking about the emotions of the teachers themselves? Could the teaching profession be enhanced by more programmatic focus on teachers' emotions as they prepare for this passion intense career? The danger of this practice to exclude emotions, or the withholding of them associated with the inability to predict when expressing them might be socially taboo, produces additional danger. Could this be related to the induction of anxiety and lack of response to it in pre-service teaching programs? Boler (1999) articulates this warning when she says, "Contradictory rules of emotional conduct and expression function to uphold the dominant culture's hierarchies and values..." (p. xvii). There is no reason to suppress emotion when it is so much a part of who we are as individuals and the identities we narrate for others and ourselves. In the spirit of being open, I begin this section with a number of attempts to be as transparent as possible for the reader.

To begin to introduce my current research on pre-service teacher anxiety, I want to be forthright with how anxiety has impacted my personal and professional life thus far, what it feels like for me, what helps me cope with it, and why studying it has become so important. Why am I the one named here and what makes me qualified to draw conclusions about what may help pre-service teachers cope with feelings of stress and anxiety in a teacher education preparation program? I am a graduate student at a Midwestern university studying literacy and teacher education. I teach undergraduate coursework in this university's teacher education program and have dedicated my studies to giving anxious and stressed out pre-service teachers a voice that is recognized and valued. Furthermore, I am trying to facilitate the addition of tools or other changes to their programs that may facilitate avenues for their coping with this challenging time of balancing coursework and fieldwork in the path to "becoming" a teacher. I am a person who has felt more than a little anxious about an upcoming test or presentation. I am a person who has been deep in the trenches of angst and come out muddy and exacerbated, but alive, happy, and calm on the other side. Sure, there are many different types, catalysts, and manifestations of this human state, and the kinds experienced by pre-service teachers are hopefully more situational than generalized, as my own, but my personal experience has given me relentless compassion, empathy, and passion to try to mitigate the anxiety many of the pre-service teachers in my study express while completing their university teacher education preparation program.

This study that delves into anxiety in a particular time and place is grounded in intense and genuine respect for the work of teacher education and for the power of anxiety to impact one's personal and professional life. I provide data in a subsequent section on

the phenomena of teacher and pre-service teacher anxiety, and though my research will focus on a small Midwestern town, these are global phenomena that have been documented for over a century. It is hard to know where to begin when explaining anxiety to someone, especially someone I do not know personally, because I don't want to be judged or thought of as less than, and at times words just don't seem sufficient. To put it simply and draw from a common cliché, anxiety can be a little like a sleeping dragon. You may or may not have warning as to when it will wake. When it does, it may be extremely dangerous or somewhat harmless. You will likely have to work hard to control it, and putting it back to sleep is questionable and unpredictable. On the outside it seems scary and overwhelming, but once you penetrate its outer shell and vulnerabilities are revealed; it can be less intimidating. You may constantly anticipate when it may wake again, and finally even when you think you have it under control; in the back of your mind there is always an undeniable looming question.

After a lifetime battle, and a near death experience, I finally feel that I am coming to better understand and accept my anxiety, which makes it more manageable. This means that I have some control over the physiological symptoms that can accompany feeling anxious, but I also know not to push that confidence too far because in a moment an overwhelming anxiousness can creep in. The defining difference between feeling in control and out of control is having the confidence that the feeling, symptoms, or state will go away eventually. Otherwise, without this self-assuredness, it's easy to feel hopeless. I no longer feel anxious everyday, and my experience with managing the symptoms has made them tolerable.

## **What Anxiousness Feels Like for Me**

What anxiousness feels like is a question that's a struggle to answer because it can be very contextually dependent. In my experience, it is a state that is always within me, but manifests itself differently based on circumstantial factors, and contextual intersections. There can also be a single catalyst. When feeling anxious, it is hard to think clearly because my mind has a swirling feeling and the blood in my veins feels as though it has accelerated and is flowing too quickly throughout my body. The most consistent and obvious physical symptom is a sharp ache in the middle of my chest; sometimes it's as if there is an unrelenting weight or pressure on it, and a shortness of breath usually ensues. It can feel like dread, fear, worry, anticipation, or excitement, but is not. In my experience, it feels like all of these things simultaneously and cannot be simplified to just one of these identifiable feelings. It can be hard to sit still, my skin can feel itchy, my legs can feel restless, and I generally feel unsettled in every sense of the word. It is easy to feel self-conscious and to have a lack of confidence in my words or actions. It is overwhelming. It can be hard to get anything done, but on the flip side it can also be hard to stop "working" or "being productive". This juxtaposition might be personal, but has been an important notion to be aware of in maintaining optimal functionality and productivity in a world that does not change expectations for an anxious person.

I have learned to cope with my anxiety by doing what I have named "turning anxious energy into productive energy". I am not an expert on coping with or treating anxiety, but I know that there are several things that I have grown to appreciate, which help me still to be able to work towards my goals even in the most anxious times. Trying to gain a sense of control, in the chaos that anxiety can make you feel, has been a place to



begin. Sometimes this involves organizing work materials, setting out everything for the next day, making lists, reviewing my schedule in a day planner, and generally anticipating everything that I might need to do in my personal or professional life in the near future. Lists are made, coded, written, rewritten, and then executed with various degrees of timeliness depending on the level of my anxiety. Lists and organization can be a way to control and remain highly functioning despite feeling out of control on the inside. The more anxious I am, the more I push myself to get done. Eating, sleeping, and other life sustaining elements are easy to forego, as nothing else satisfies like an accomplishment or the coveted check of a box. Of course, this can be a strength in terms of productivity, but as is commonly recognized, any strength overdone becomes a weakness since it limits or excludes balance, and can usually not be maintained. I can easily prioritize organizing for a future moment rather than seizing the one that I am in. At times, I have stayed up all night organizing drawers or closet shelves, writing and rewriting color-coded “to do” lists with boxes to check the next day, or cleaning corners on my hands and knees. As embarrassing as it sounds to admit now, these actions helped me to attain the immediate gratification of accomplishment, so I felt compelled to work for these goals. This feeling of achievement in the moment felt good, but that time may have given way to other opportunities to take care of myself. That’s how anxiety can be tricky; it can have you so obsessed with the past or future that it is hard to live in and enjoy the present.

I have learned that I have to make managing my anxiety and my mental health my first priority. That means it has to come before family, friends, or anything else dear to me because when it is not, it sucks my focus from what matters in the present to the obsession of a current physical feeling, anticipation for a future, or an overwhelmingly metacognitive

reflection of the past. For my personal journey with anxiety, medication has also been a crucial part of the puzzle towards recovering from a state where the anxiety takes center stage. I am in no way a proponent for the use of medication to manage anxiety, especially when it is situational or manageable, but it happens to be something that benefits me. There was a time when there were no identifiable contextual factors, there was no definitive onset, and nothing that seemed to relieve the physical symptoms; I just felt anxious all the time. I thought I was going crazy, was hopeless, and very reluctant to even try medication. Sometimes it is easier to fight coping mechanisms for anxiety ahead of using them because their utilization might mean admitting that they're needed.

Another component I have found helpful to managing my anxiety is putting others before myself. This means thinking outside myself and focusing on some way that I can show generosity, compassion, or love to others. Anything I might do to be kind, cooperative, or supportive to another helps me feel less anxious. This might be one way to deprioritize or ignore my own feelings to avoid the debilitating, depressing, or negative feelings that can accompany anxiety, but the thought of making someone else happy is uplifting, and it has been important to give of myself instead of being absorbed into myself. Again, this is a cautionary tale because it is important to make sure that this isn't an avoidance strategy that steps in line in front of taking care of your own personal mental health priorities.

### **“Becoming” a Teacher**

For a long time, becoming an elementary school teacher was my professional priority. It was one of my first real passions, and I always thought it was my future. Now,

after working with pre-service teachers, I feel the same way about becoming a professor and teacher educator; I love the work, want to be engrossed in it, and feel compelled to work to my fullest potential in the profession. The opportunity to teach future teachers is a privilege and honor, one that comes with great responsibility. Because of my own personal history and experiences in teaching, I cannot help but wonder how I can do more to support each group of perspective teachers in my classes. One gap that I have identified, and will support in a future literature review section, is the lack of support for the mental health of pre-service teachers. In my experience, there are few that do not communicate feeling overwhelmingly stressed out and in a state of anxiety during much of their teacher education programming. However, what this means is not always clear. It may lead to prospective teachers feeling uneasy, overwhelmed, or distracted, making it troublesome to accomplish tasks or reach their potential.

Many elements of teacher education programming are beyond the control of the individual participating in it. For example, field placements are a pivotal part of all University-based teacher education programs. In this text, when I reference teacher education programs, I am referring to the school-based field placements that can be overwhelming for prospective teachers to balance alongside coursework. Pre-service teachers can begin to feel pressure in determining: what type of professional they want to be, how they will build a special classroom community, what they anticipate is the role of a teacher or student, how to navigate the politics of the education game in this country, what it means to teach and learn, and the prospect of trying to acquire how to teach a gamut of topics, for several grades, separated into what we deem school subjects.

Regardless of the challenges that becoming a teacher involves, preparation programs can only begin to ready individuals for the complexities of the profession. It is a career choice that requires constant introspection and reflection, is not financially lucrative, involves long hours, and top down pressures and mandates from federal and state policymakers, district-level rules and regulations, school requirements, administrative demands, and parental requests. This is why stress management and anxiety coping strategies must begin right away as an integral part of the teacher education preparation process, so that they become engrained into the practices of teaching.

### **Grounding my Positionality in this Process**

Looking further into what will influence this study on pre-service teacher anxiety, it is important for me to introduce some terms to articulate underlying foundational ideals that are engrained into the narrative research that grounds this inquiry. Consider these concepts as a web, or picture a family tree beginning with a researcher's overall paradigm at the top, which will then narrow in focus and specificity throughout the introduction to a study's framing. I am using the third edition of John W. Creswell's, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches (2013)*, to explore and articulate my influence within this work as I find his questioning of how qualitative inquiry shapes design and outcomes of research to reflect thoroughness, experience, and dedication. To begin, Creswell (2013) says that a researcher's particular perspective or theories is the paradigm to their work; a paradigm is a "basic set of beliefs that guide action" (as cited in Guba, 1990, p 17). To clarify further Creswell notes that, these philosophies reach all corners of learning including the framing of questions and how one attempts to answer

those questions, impacted by contextual factors with which the researcher is currently embedded (as cited in Huff, 2009).

Next, travel with me a bit further down this funnel to name these philosophical assumptions into four categories: ontological, epistemological, axiological, and methodological, each of which will be introduced here and later elaborated on. Ontological issues relate to the nature of reality (Creswell, 2013, p 21). In this study, my aim is to account for several realities: those of individual pre-service teachers, and an interpretation of a potential collective shared realities of different groups, as well as the participants, a sample assemblage. I feel it is important for exact quotations of pre-service teachers to be highlighted to maintain the individuals' truths in order to honor the participants' experiences as they view and interpret them. The anxiety definitions and pre-service teachers' narratives of their field experiences are subjective in that they embody multiple truths, or a lens through which everything is perceived. In fact, the uniqueness of participants' narratives and their definitions and perceived catalysts of anxiety provoke my interest as I am interested in what new voices can add to what is already "known" about pre-service teacher anxiety. Riessman (2008) agrees and says that, "...stories that fail the test and diverge from established 'truth' can sometimes be the most interesting, indicating silenced voices and subjugated knowledge" (p. 186). This is paramount and relates to what Creswell calls an epistemological assumption. It also includes the relationship between the researcher and the participants (Creswell, 2013, p 20-21). Next are axiological assumptions, which means that, "In a qualitative study, the inquirers admit the value-laden nature of the study and actively report their values and biases as well as the value-laden nature of information gathered...they 'position themselves' in a study" (Creswell, 2013, p

20). In summary, I am positioning myself as someone deeply invested into the inquiry of anxiety in pre-service teachers.

My position is established under the assumption that pre-service teachers not only feel anxious, but that catalysts of their anxiety are rooted in contextual elements of their field experiences in a university-based teacher education program. I anticipate that there are additional ways that pre-service teachers' mental health can be supported to help them cope with their experiences, and that it is the shared responsibility of those who facilitate the teacher education program and the individuals going through it to work together towards this aim. I also believe that states or feelings, such as anxiety, may have negative connotations for pre-service teachers' experiences, that the pre-service teachers would like "help" coping, and that some current teacher education preparation programs are not doing enough to facilitate students' mental health. Finally, I think that historically pre-service teachers' anxiety, or mental health in general, has not been enough of a priority in previous programmatic considerations. I think pre-service teachers' voices need to be heard, and that the methods used in this study will help to elicit "truths" about the experiences of the participants involved. I mentioned truths in quotation marks in the previous sentence because, "[n]arrative scholars would generally agree that a narrative is not simply a factual report of events, but instead one articulation told from a point of view that seeks to persuade others to see the events in a similar way" (Riessman, 2008, p. 187). These values and ideas are entrenched in rather than into my work. The final category of philosophical assumptions is methodology, or the procedures of research. Like other qualitative research, some of the methods, especially the analysis of the data, will have to transpire organically, yet methodically, from the data itself. Other elements of the

methodology, or how to conduct the research, can be pre-determined and will be outlined in a methods-oriented section of this text.

First, let me take a moment and situate this research, with stories of my personal experiences as a pre-service teacher, to provide further transparency into how my past may impact my present work, in addition to further exploration of my researcher positionality and reflexivity.

### **“Storying” My Experience as a Student Teacher**

In my second story apartment, in a predictably collegiate town in the Midwestern USA, I sat on a makeshift ottoman staring out a translucent window layered with the neglect of college kids who have never washed it. The view through a hole-ridden screen looked onto the rooftops of old homes, at one time beautiful, but now chopped up into tiny inexpensive apartments. I slumped limp and exhausted, at the end of a long day surrounded by six-year-olds, as I dialed the phone to make a call I still remember today. I telephoned home to tell my mom that I couldn't do it; I couldn't be a teacher. I had never been in a real classroom setting, for an entire day, with students of this age group, and during the first days of school, and I did not like it. I was determined I had failed because despite my enthusiasm, the riddles, songs, and actions I used, or how animated and explicit I was, these children “didn't listen to anything I said”. I have heard that sometimes parents feel this way about their own children, but this was different. I had been training and practicing for this my whole life, and I thought classroom management was one of my best qualities as a teacher. The classroom felt a bit chaotic, and nothing like what I had been picturing all these years. I immediately questioned how I could be an effective teacher

when I couldn't even get the students in my class to follow directions, much less any classroom routine. My panicked conclusion was that I could never do this, whatever this was supposed to be, all day everyday for the rest of my life. This may not sound like a critical moment, and especially not one before a fast approaching guillotine, but for me it was. My entire identity was wrapped up in "being a teacher".

I had wanted to be a teacher as long as I could remember. Memories of "playing school" enveloped my childhood where cardboard boxes were lined up as desks with neatly printed name tags attached to the front. In fact, everyday afterschool I would replay the day over again including each minute detail of how the teacher reacted or commented, only this time I got to "be" the teacher. Some students' names were written on the board for inappropriate behavior while others were praised for focus and correct answers. The repeated schedule of an entire school day commenced and wrapped up, before I went to bed and woke up the next day to "play student" again, until I could return to my own school, and my rightful position as the teacher the next day. I loved playing school more than anything else, except for playing school with a friend "who knew how it was supposed to go." I had a prized and official teacher desk, a classroom "library", bulletin boards, a chalkboard easel, a supply cabinet, and an imagination that filled in intangible blanks. I amassed teaching and office "supplies" with the consistency, passion, and thoroughness of any dedicated collector. Dance classes, piano lessons, and play dates with friends were no competition for the crafting of my vocation. I always understood classroom teaching to be my place in this world, so when the struggles of student teaching made me question this path, I was not only crushed, but also lost.



In retrospect, I anticipate that this seemingly melodramatic reaction was due to how engrained and permanent my future “calling” already felt. These feelings combined with my passion for the prospective profession produced angst and anticipation of change to this seemingly concrete and perfect plan. For me, this predestination and devotion led into a teaching career, which is a profession of passion for many like me who pursue it. These personal notions and past experiences are essential to the ways I think about teaching, so as I continue to research teacher and pre-service teacher anxiety, these aspects of my positionality and its influences cannot be undervalued. Since I aim to uncover what contributes to pre-service teachers’ stress and anxiety during field placements and what tools may be incorporated into university teacher education preparation programs to help students cope with these states, the importance of my personal experience with anxiety, as well as my experience as a pre-service and practicing teacher are relevant.

I do not remember exactly how my mom responded on the phone that hot afternoon when I called her alarmed at how awful I thought my first day of student teaching had gone, but I remember being mad at her response. Regardless of what I said, she would not tell me it was ok to give up. I wanted her permission to not go back, to jump ship, and “become” something else, but regardless of my unrelenting tears, concerns, and complaints, she persisted. Her steadfast encouragement did not end that day, but continued on the other end of a phone call or a hug for years when I had another day in my classroom that felt like nothing went right. Most teachers will have these types of days because teaching is a hard and emotionally exhaustive profession. This makes it even more relevant and necessary for teacher candidates to be encouraged through emotional support from the very beginning.

## **Positionality**

An author for a student resource research center at the University of Pennsylvania, affirms the recognition and interrogating one's positionality saying that, "The researcher's beliefs, values systems, and moral stances are as fundamentally present and inseparable from the research process as the researcher's physical, virtual, or metaphorical presence when facilitating, participating, and/or leading the research project...therefore, it is our ethical duty to intentionally and mindfully attend to our role(s) in the contextual power interplay of the research process" (Derry, 2017, para. 1). Though separation may be hardly possible, recognition and interpretation of the contextual influences on one's process are not. For me, I took on the role of researcher during my student teaching experience, too. I was continually observing and recording everything that my cooperating teacher did, fueled not only by my appetite for teaching, but also a deeply engrained childhood mantra to always "do your best". Sometimes, this led to feelings of inadequacy that I was never doing enough and should try harder, reflect longer, or do something different or "better". Though I positioned myself as an outsider looking in at times, that in no way reflected the reality of my practicum or student teaching placements. Both teachers of these classrooms encouraged me to feel agency in their classroom. They loved their job, had wonderful rapport with students, were creative and dedicated, responsive to learners and practical, respectful and kind. Both placements were in rural elementary schools in the Midwest where classroom management did not need to be at the forefront. Both cooperating teachers were friendly, inviting, collaborative, supportive, efficient, organized, and well liked by colleagues, administration, families and students. They both embodied the type of teacher I felt wanted to be. Having these role models propelled my inner desire to pay

attention to every detail of their practice with the hope of emulating the positive qualities I observed. This inner pressure, along with an overarching desire to be monumentally organized and prepared, as well as balancing the workload on site and at University, did induce feelings of anxiousness throughout my field placements. Although the pre-service teachers I study may have very different teacher preparation field placement experiences than myself, the intensity I assumed within that time did make me very aware of details, nuances, and self reflections, which can continue to inform my reflexivity now. In studying pre-service teachers, especially their experiences of stress and anxiety, I will need to reflexively consider how not only my experience, but also my personality impacts my positionality.

The interplay of personality and positionality, and its profound ability to shape the research process and products, draws on the field of psychology and emotional intelligence in the production of knowledge (Moser, 2008, p. 383). My personality is somewhat type A, yet extremely compassionate, sensitive, and empathetic leading to an intense desire to discover how pre-service teachers' stressors can be reduced during their teacher preparation. I am continually aware of the energy from others around me, and I feel sad when I sense angst in another, knowing that it has had an uncomfortable and sometimes destructive place in my life's history. I am compelled to support those around me and put their needs before my own. My passion for the profession of education also induces a desire to help facilitate the process to teacher licensure to be one where emotional wellbeing is not distracting from the mission for practice-based knowledge, growth as a professional, and reflection into one's own construction of education and teaching.

Positionality first surfaced from work in the geographical sciences in the mid 1970's. In 2001, it was layered with connotation by the work of Merriam et al. (2001) with a focus on hegemony. This includes where one stands in relation to the "other" in regard to politics of knowledge furthered the discussion (Throne, 2013, para. 1). "McDowell (1992) noted that researchers must especially take account of their own position in relation to the research participants and research setting" (as cited in Throne, 2013, para. 1). My own experience as a pre-service teacher, preconceived notions about anxiety, and ideals about potential factors that may induce anxiety in pre-service teachers field placements are relevant and will be examined because this work will be filtered through my subjective lens. My work as an instructor of teacher education coursework has contributed the greatest to my perceptions of potential contributors of anxiety in a teacher preparation program. Observations and interactions with pre-service teachers have given insight into their lives and emotional states. I have instructed a variety of literacy related coursework over several years with teachers interested in working with elementary and middle school pupils, in addition to serving as a supervisor for students throughout two different practicums and a final student teaching placement.

While pursuing a doctoral degree at University, I've instructed courses in literacy curriculum, instruction, pedagogy, and assessment, literacy teaching methods and theory, in addition to facilitating opportunities for teacher candidates to consider how their experiences color their perspectives of literacy and schooling. The majority of these students are prospective teachers already in field placements. One thread that draws these individuals together is their implicit and explicit expressions of being stressed out and anxious. While there are a number of factors that may contribute to this state, students

generally comment on long hours, requirements of field placement on top of school coursework, managing the demands of outside employment, the seemingly negative aspects of field placement, a lack of support, and more. In fact, when I tell teacher candidates that I study the stress and anxiety of pre-service teachers, their physical inclinations, thus far, have been to widen their eyes, sit forward in their seats, and listen actively. They sit silent and attentive waiting to hear how I might help or offer hope. It is apparent from working with the population I aim to study that there is no shortage of data to be gathered, as individuals are enthusiastic and eager to share what they see as the catalysts of anxiety for pre-service teachers. Their interest is normally peaked further when I articulate that the purpose of my study is not only to document “what” impacts pre-service teacher stress and anxiety, but also to seek out tools that may alleviate or help them cope with the relevant stressors.

Several years ago, my life’s experience culminated into an event that made it critical for me to prioritize my mental and physical health. It contributed to my motivations for this work and is explained later a subsequent section. Through an exploration and reflection of narrative inquiry within an introductory course in narrative inquiry (with Dr. Mary Louise Gomez) , it is easy for me to conclude that this methodology fits my future work in exploring anxiety in the classroom. As I provide a narrative account of my relevant experiences in the ensuing text, I also will include some applicable quotations from critical authors and scholars in the field of narrative inquiry to provide insight into this method of inquiry.

## **Narrative Inquiry**

Narrative inquiry is a process that requires the transformation of piecemeal “tellings” into a meaningful story that has value for others, explains how and why particular events occur, and provides a safe place for personal growth. Narrative inquiry is situated within the security of a methodology that relies on story telling, a mode of transferring information and sharing experiences, which has been relevant in oral language long before written languages were even developed. However, it also cautions users of the instability and fragility of individual threads of experience brought together in some way to form a new whole. Narrative inquiry is much more than a type of research; it’s a slice of peoples’ lives, identity, culture, and legacy. What began as an exercise to learn a qualitative research methodology, made a metamorphic transformation for me because I recognized it has potential to ascertain new perspectives on humanity, imagination, “truth”, experience, vulnerability, history, ethics, “figured worlds”, difference, privilege, and more. In the context of “truth” Denzin’s words are insightful. He says that, “Narratives do not establish truth of...such events, nor does narrative reflect truth of experience. Narratives create the very events they reflect upon. In this sense, narratives are reflection on-not of-the world as it is known” (as cited in Riessmann, 2008, p. 188). The work of Holland, Skinner, Lachicotte, and Cain (1998) how each individuals truth of experience and expression of it is unique. They say that,

[p]ersons develop more or less conscious conceptions of themselves as actors in socially and culturally constructed worlds, and these senses of themselves, these identities...at least a modicum of agency or control over their own behavior...Significant to our concept is the situatedness of identity in collectively formed activities. The identities that concern us are ones that race our participation, especially our agency, in socially

produced, culturally constructed activities-what we call figured worlds... (Holland et al. 1998, p. 40-41)

These figured worlds are historical phenomena contextually situating one's social positions and agency, are organized and reproduced over time. They function to inform people's identities.

The use of figured worlds helps to explain subjectivities in narratives and include how individuals participate and act on and within the world in which they exist and the agency they themselves, or the world in which they act ascribes to them (Holland et al. 1998, p. 40-41).

Acknowledging figured worlds may help a researcher find trustworthiness in the truths that a participant shares, because a person's truths are contextually dependent. Riessmann's own words (2008) provide a reminder that it is not the "truth" of the participant that is on trial, but rather my interpretations that should be. She says, "Going back to verify the precise and accurate 'truth' of the events he or she reports may be impossible and not necessarily important. It is the analyst's interpretive work with the document and others like it that can be interrogated" (Riessmann, 2008, p. 188).

This careful composition of another's story is cultivated through researchers' acceptance of responsibility, humility, new relationships, fidelity, and careful ethical considerations. Even this text, that began as merely a way to put personal context onto paper, has evolved over time, into the acceptance of how experience shapes identity, and how one's identity goes through many metamorphoses throughout a person's lifetime. The listening to personal stories and anecdotes of others evokes compassion, empathy, and a fire within, to represent "truths" of subjects who allow a narrative inquirer into their lives. I am both proud and regretful of some stories in my past, but I have learned liberation from remorse through acceptance of what I cannot change, and empowerment to alter my future. I can imagine how things may have been

different, but try not to wish they were. Dwelling on one's past is common, but an inviting text on narratives and imagination provides a useful somewhat alternate perspective. In *Narrative Imagination and Everyday Life*, Andrews (2001) says that, "[t]he consideration of the role of imagination in everyday life is intricately bound to questions of our relationship to the world, to history, and to our ability to reflect upon our lives and to choose our actions" (p.109). I question my shifting identity and wonder how much of it is not necessarily a part of "who I am", but rather just a construction of my own past experiences. I think teaching is an overlap of something that not only encompasses much of my past experience, but also a part of who I am because, "...an important aspect of teaching is mentoring-showing our students, through our own example, how to connect the world of ideas with practical knowledge and with real, lived experience..." (Andrews, 2014, p.76). Emotion recognition and regulation is an example of this. I also inarguably love to learn, reflect, and reinvent myself, and Andrews (2014) explores this saying that "In the very act of teaching, we must take ourselves through the steps of relearning our subject, and in so doing making the familiar strange to us once again..." (p.77).

## **Childhood**

Since the methods of narrative inquiry entail the entwined influence of the narrative inquirer, it is important to further examine and express the contextual elements and intersections of my background, culture, relevant experiences, misconceptions, and perceptions that may influence the process or conclusions I draw from the narratives I archive. I grew up in a sheltered, homogenous, small suburban village outside a metropolitan Midwestern city. I was enveloped in a very figured world. A figured world is, "...a socially and culturally constructed realm of interpretation in which particular characters and actors are recognized, significance is



assigned to certain acts and particular outcomes are valued over others” (Holland, Skinner, Lachicotte, Cain, 1998, p52). My recent facilitation of discussion of Derald Wing Sue’s book *Race Talk and the Conspiracy of Silence* (2015) has helped me to recognize that this world was driven by expectations of conventions like “politeness protocol”: the social norms that inhibit honest productive discussions about race between white Americans and persons of color (Holland et. al, 1998). Growing up, I lived in many figured worlds; “[b]y ‘figured world’, then, we mean a socially and culturally constructed realm of interpretation...significance is assigned to certain acts, and particular outcomes are valued over others” (Holland et al., 1998, p. 52). With my father’s family, I was to be disciplined, hard working, articulate, self-assured, polite, cautious, and compliant. I grew up believing that I should appreciate the privileges I enjoyed, and that “Entitled people speak, stand, dress, emote, hold the floor-they carry out privileged activities-in ways appropriate to both the situation of the activity and their position within it. Those who speak, stand, dress, hold the floor, emote, and carry out activities in these proper ways are seen to be making claims to being entitled” (Holland et. al., 1998, p.133). Among my mother’s side of the family, the air was more accepting, comfortable, and nurturing, but also equally conservative and increasingly religious. These circumstances afforded opportunities for my personal demons of self-doubt to surface, so most days were filled with angst. It was a battle moving through life with semi-constant anxiety, perfectionism, proving myself, pleasing others, questioning my purpose, pretending to be tough and not to care, and fighting to find a real person beneath the pressure. Many types of privilege are braided into the narrative of my upbringing, but beyond the surface were struggles too personal and too painful to remember. They too make up the uniqueness of who I am and the lens through which I see the world. In not wanting to be judged or stereotyped, I do the same for others, and always take with me the perspective that I

will never know a student well enough to give him or her anything other than the benefit of the doubt.

### **Schooling**

My only sibling, an older brother, and I walked everyday to a neighborhood private Christian elementary school, and we both attended the highly competitive neighborhood public high school. Though this upbringing was bursting with privilege in some respects, it was also a place of constraint where "...persons lose their creativity: because they are compelled to assume the identity of the 'Other' in exchange...they cannot represent themselves; they are forced to masquerade as the authentic, idealized "Other"...a positional identity, a sense of their relative social position..." (Holland et. al., 1998, p.132). I was consumed by the exhausting self-preservation act of always trying to be someone else, which was how I managed my insecurities. I was managing my daily life as Holland et. al. (1998) describes with Lev Vygotsky in that,

Vygotsky recognized that tools of self-management are not the products of personal invention. Instead they are cultural and collective resources first experienced by children...for directing their own actions, managing their own feelings, and organizing their own thoughts. This is the basic process in the intimate formation of an identity.

One learns "the" identity of inscribed acts-the signs or markers of culturally constructed identity whether they be the display of particular skills, the enactment of certain motives, the cultivation of ways of speaking, the use of certain expressions, the display of certain emotions, or the wearing of distinctive clothes-in like manner. (Holland et. al., 1998 p.282)

Clothed in this figured world, yet trying to escape it and not feeling the sense of status and influence it entitles to some, I finally sensed the possibility of freedom when I graduated from college with an undergraduate degree in elementary education. I know that the positive and negative experiences my students have had in school still shape who they are, what school represents, what it means to be literate, or whom they think a teacher should be. I anticipate that getting to the root of these ideals and knowing how they may elicit implicit bias in the classroom may help my students to better embrace the kind of classroom they hope to facilitate and to be sensitive to their students' feelings and emotional states.

### **Teaching Experience**

In 2004, I accepted my first teaching position after graduating with an undergraduate degree in Elementary Education from a big ten Midwestern university. I jumped into the position midyear and was charged with teaching 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> grades. I was given great autonomy in regard to curriculum, as this was considered an "alternative" school. It was nothing like what I had seen or experienced in education before and was significantly dissimilar from the environments in which I practiced. Some families preferred this quaint, community-based, nature-inspired, student-centered environment by choice, and others by necessity when traditional school environments were not a fit or option for their children. There was division and trepidation among the school's families and governing board about a stranger becoming a lead teacher, so I entered enshrouded within a cloud of distrust. The autonomy was wonderful and exhausting, as I had to inventively and independently compose each day's plan within this unique environment. In the end, this experience gave me confidence in my ability to: create a classroom environment that was productive, welcoming, and student-centered, earn the trust and

respect of students and families, create curriculum, and to manage my anxiety working as a professional in a unique space. Routine, predictability, positive reinforcement, genuine interest, and a warm accepting demeanor aided in expediting this classroom community into one of cohesion.

When the school year ended, I moved from the small college town surrounded by Midwestern farm country, to one of the largest metropolitan cities in the U.S., for a new teaching position. The bustling, cosmopolitan, touristy city could not have felt farther away from the small town and three-room schoolhouse where my professional career began. I moved two blocks from the private school where I was employed as a middle school science, language arts, and religious diversity teacher, and I quickly discovered it was the antithesis of my first position, in the three-room schoolhouse, in some respects. I brought with me the most important lesson I learned in my first teaching position that will likely not always know what is considered “best practice,” but I will always be accountable to do what I think is in the best interest of each student. I should have focused more on how the students felt about themselves and treated one another, as well as my own emotional state. At this next school, over half of the students presented as white and were from means of socioeconomic privilege and high expectations. Yet, the mission of the school was to represent the population of the city in which it existed, so through scholarship opportunities a more racially and socioeconomically diverse population was maintained for marketing. The air of the sixth grade middle school environment was one of pressure, prioritizing high academic standards and various ideals of what it meant to be successful.

The school seemed to be in transition teetering between old and new identities with the teaching faculty stuck in the middle. However, any strife here was under a camouflage of

politeness that tried to keep discontentedness of families or between staff and administration quietly tucked in. Politeness protocols trumped realistic reactions. In retrospect, I recognize that the environment bred anxiety, and the longer I was there the more it percolated inside me. I tried to manage the stress of the environment and my internal turmoil by finding comfort under a system of organizational reasoning. Organizational reasoning was a coping mechanism for stress and anxiety I used that involved intense preparation and organization. The classroom was overflowing with color-coded labels and organized materials, my lesson plans were detailed, and I stayed well into the evening everyday after school to make sure that the physical environment was systematic, methodical, and meticulous in preparation for the next day. I threw myself into becoming knowledgeable of plate tectonics, light, color, optics, volcanoes, viscosity, the solar system, and other sixth grade Science topics with which I wasn't familiar. I studied global religious practices, and developed a new Reading Focus course to uplift the language arts curriculum. Even though this position was all consuming like the last, it still felt good working hard and putting in long hours to model the personal best I expected of students.

In order to function in this high stress environment, I was caught up in what I thought teaching should be. My plans looked amazing on paper, but those color coded neatly written tables still prevented me from really “seeing” my students as intricate beings with unending contextual differences and intersectionalities in their experiences. At one point, I did try to trade my identity from the overworked, methodically organized, people-pleasing teacher, to an educator that met kids where they were at and really got to know who they were as individuals. I wanted to build community and really get to know each student by exploring the individuality of their unique histories. However, the students now had to carry a “gold card” calendar in a sheet protector on the front of their binder. This meant that every dress code violation, late homework

assignment, and behavior mark were on display to try and communicate that the adults were “watching” students and searching out infractions. At the time, I didn’t recognize the harmfulness of this “golden” idea from a co-teacher that the administration embraced. The environment became a place where even the teachers started to feel scrutinized under the watchful eye of the big brother administration, so the entire culture of the school changed and became a place where I did not want to be. I no longer enjoyed teaching and was endlessly battling internal questions of agency because I felt powerless. For me, agency and happiness were unavoidable and intricately linked. At the conclusion of my contract here, I left knowing that for me anxiety, the ability to be happy, and agency are incessantly linked. This informs my ongoing goal to always make sure my students have opportunities to exercise their agency and emotions too.

For the next decade, I worked in the world of private education with contracted work to design and implement individualized curriculum for clients. My primary client was a family with an elementary aged professional violinist who could not attend school due to rehearsal requirements. This new path had its own unique challenges, but the benefits, including agency and appreciation, felt like privileges I had been waiting for. I am grateful for the variations in my teaching experience and have come to appreciate that any circumstance can become a learning experience to emulate or avoid. I am often reminded of this and share it with my students when they express and stress over a less than optimal circumstance.

### **Health without Agency: Illness Narrative**

The reason that the question of agency is so relevant here is because of what happened next. My short professional life had transformed into something far from what I initially

imagined and my mental and physical health started to dwindle as well. The authority that I had been controlled with at work in conjunction with a feeling of loss and disbelief that I was not happy in the profession I thought was my purpose, began to bring back childhood feelings of anxiety and a need to “do your best”, which always really meant do better. The anxiety manifested itself mentally and physically. One of the first physical symptoms was migraine headaches. Then, as the days went on my stomach began to hurt every time I ate. My headaches gave me stomachaches and my stomachaches gave me headaches. In looking further into illness narratives, Kleinman (1998) says that, “Chronic pain is a major health concern in North American society. Whether in the form of disabling chronic lower back pain or severe migraine headaches...chronic pain syndromes are an increasingly common source of disability in our time” ( p.56). I continued to tutor a full schedule and tried to initiate modifications that I thought would make me feel better. However, at this point my illness narrative began to take over my professional one.

I started this recuperative course of action by moving to another apartment that was further away from hustle and bustle. I relocated to a larger apartment overlooking water hoping that open space and a view of open water would produce a sense of calm I desperately needed. I tried to continue living the life of a single, young person in the city, but my health could not keep up. I stayed up all night organizing, contemplating life, and structuring my outside world to represent a very different picture than what actually was going on. To the outside world, I was labeled things like beautiful, happy, lucky, smart, or hardworking. When in fact staying up all night to “organize” had reversed my circadian rhythm, so that I slept through most of the daylight hours; it was the only way to function with the massive headache and shrinking body that were no longer possible to ignore.

In the course of a year, I shrunk down more than 40 pounds. My life was horizontal, sleeping or in pain except when I put on my “outside/happy face”. I didn’t want anyone to know how sick I was, how much I was hurting, or how much the level of my anxiety was spiraling out of control. The two realities that I created could not have been more different. I did not want my truth to be exposed, so my anxiety skyrocketed higher. I was exhausted “...from inability to deal with the feeling of vulnerability and loss of control as well as from the futile attempt to maintain two separate worlds-one free of sickness (work), the other where sickness is legitimized (home)...” (Kleinman, 1998, p.7).

My identity had always been one that was rectified by the approval of others, and in a weird way, this was still happening through the positive comments my ever-shrinking body was receiving. At this point, my mother stepped in and began to flex her maternal muscles by scheduling dozens of doctors, tests, and procedures to try and find answers to the underlying causes of my condition. We exhausted the realms of Western medicine through nothing less than “trials and tribulations.” I was poked and prodded by physicians from all over the country. I was medicated with prescriptions strong enough for stallions and suffered awake and constrained through procedures because the level of my anxiety made it impossible for my physical body to be placed under local anesthesia. Anxiety took over my body and mind.

Little did I know, this was only the beginning of my living nightmare, but I had no other options. I felt like many people do with debilitating pain, I remember thinking what Arthur Kleinman (1998) articulates in saying, “It controls me. It’s limiting. I can only go so far and then the pain stops me. Whenever I have to do something really physical or deal with a stressful situation, the pain increases...It is very difficult for me to be independent and not give in” (p.91). I felt that giving in to an inconclusive diagnosis was something that the medical professionals



determined a conclusion, but I had to continue to seek relief to continue living. I often come into contact with students, like myself that are their harshest critic and always want to “do better” or achieve more. My perspective and experiences help me to remind them that they too need balance, and to be affirmed in trusting their own inclinations and judgments.

### **The Transition from Western to Eastern Medicine**

My mother’s best friend had chronic pain all her life until she found a Western doctor that only practiced Eastern medicine. With her help, I started to tell my body that this pain needed to go away. She practiced the ancient art of acupuncture on me regularly. Then, she taught me about the practices of tapping where an individual taps on particular points of the body where one’s energy can get stuck and cause pain because it needs to be released. In a continued effort to discharge bad energy in my body, she would prick two particularly painful spots on my back and then place a pressurized cup on top of the prick mark to draw out the negative energy. Strangely, it came out in the shape of already coagulated blood. She used the cups in another manner, all over my body, which brought blood to the surface and again instigated movement inside the body that is supposed to be replenishing and unrestricting of energy that’s trapped. The antique technique of Gua sha was the tool that gave me the most relief. During this treatment, my doctor would use a slice of a buffalo horn to scrape painful areas on my head and neck with the intention of breaking up stagnant blood and energy to bring pain relief. She used to scrap my head until she was dripping with perspiration and could not continue, but the efforts were not in vain because when I saw her regularly, I experienced relief for 24 to 48 hours. For the first time, I started to imagine that I could have a life with an identity other than “the sick girl”. “The destination and map I had used to navigate before were no longer useful...I had to

think differently and construct new perceptions of my relationship to the world” (Frank, 2013, p.1). This experience taught me about the physical toll emotions can take on the body and how important it is to recognize and regulate them.

As a last ditch effort, after several successful and successive treatments, my pain was much better, so I traveled to Mexico with a friend, with the hope that some intense time to rest under the warm sun would rejuvenate my body and help to calm my mind. In the following few days, I almost died from a series of life-threatening ischemic strokes. I came to appreciate alternative methods, disregarding what might be considered traditional, accepted, best practice, or research-based. In education too, there is always room for alternative methods.

### **Darkest Days**

Two days into the trip the intense headache returned and the extent of the pain made it hard to even stand. I started to vomit, sweat, and shiver. For three days, I laid in a bed, in a humid dim lit room, shaking, perspiring, throwing up, and trying to just exist. Of course, these were some of the darkest and scariest days of my life. I could not eat or drink or keep anything in my stomach for more than a few seconds. My friend and travel companion worked to take care of me. The day before we left, he returned to the hotel room with a pill that he had gotten from an American nurse we met the first or second day. It was supposed to help me sleep and stop getting sick to my stomach, so I took it. Whatever was in this mystery pill was nothing short of a miracle, the first one anyway. I took half of it and slept though the night, before we headed to the airport in the morning. When I got up to leave, I couldn't walk straight, I remember trying to move forward, but regardless of my will, I was stepping to the left, and crossing one leg over the other. The second miracle came in the form of my ability to walk

straight, stay upright, and speak fluent Spanish to customs officers at the airport. Once on the plane, I took the other half of this mystery medicine and slept on the flight until we arrived back in the United States. A quick cab ride took me to my apartment building where the relief of being home barely blanketed the reality that something had to be really wrong with me. This must have been what some describe as the human will to survive.

### **Panic**

I did finally get home, and as I was unlocking the door to my apartment, suitcase in tow, my mom called to check on my arrival. I answered the phone, told her that my head hurt so bad that I thought I might die, walked inside my apartment, and passed out on my bed. When I woke up, I was on the floor in my bathroom, and my father was standing outside my apartment door knocking. He scooped me up and drove me through torrential down pours of rain to a hospital between where my mom and dad resided in Wisconsin. When we finally arrived at the hospital, I remember that when the door opened, I slid out of the car and slumped into a wheel chair with assistance. When I hit the wheel chair, they spun me through the emergency entrance, and I had to cover my eyes from all the blinding bright lights. Here, is where seemingly another miracle happened. I know what it is like to be so overwhelmed and hopeless. This forever makes me sensitive to my students' exclamations of feeling overwhelmed and to how the body and mind control one another.

### **Body and Mind**

I no longer really needed my eyesight. I knew who was around me based on the smell of their shampoo, body lotion, deodorant, or breath. I could smell each time the garbage can was

opened. I knew when more needles were coming b/c I could smell the alcohol wipe. The sterile scents in the hospital were overwhelming. The emergency room nurses were in disbelief, and we made light of my new astonishing sense of smell since my intake vitals were quite dim. I only knew they thought this at first because I heard one nurse say something to another at the nurses station over 20 feet away. I could suddenly hear the I.V. drip and beep in my room and the rooms on either side of me. I started to notice that the nurses had ear buds to communicate with other parts of the hospital because I could hear the person on the other end of the line. My ears and nose became my eyes. This was only the beginning of my heightened senses and the stories they contributed to my illness narrative.

The emergency room called in the neurologist on call who came in from the golf course. He was a stout and arrogant man in khakis and a collared shirt. He had dark hair, light skin, and wreaked of musky sweet cologne. He ordered the first scan of my brain. When the results came back, he pulled my parents outside the room to discuss the shunt that he wanted to insert to alleviate some of the pressure in my brain. He clarified that I was not to try and stand because I wouldn't be able to. Of course, I heard the entire exchange, and when he returned to my hospital room, I was standing on one leg in passé with my arms above me in ballet's first position. It was clearly a last ditch effort to show I was still in control. I was moved into the intensive care unit after my scans revealed that I may have a tumor covering the entire left side of my brain, with only a hairline break between it and my brainstem. My mom's pastor came to the hospital to "say hi" to her, when in actuality he was praying over me, asking God for my health, and giving me a version of last rites. I was up all night crying because even in the intensive care unit of a renowned hospital, it felt like no one was helping me, and my head ached incessantly. I will never forget this feeling of helplessness and it forever propels me to make sure my students feel

listened to and assured that I will always do everything I can imagine to help them and support their goals.

### **29 Year Old Has A Stroke**

The next morning, I was transferred to a larger medical center with expert teams of neurologists. My mom decided that if I was going to need brain surgery, she wanted it done by someone who did that everyday, not someone who came into work from the golf course and was too eager to open my skull. I was brought directly into the intensive care unit where a team of neurologists took over. This is where the testing and dehumanizing began. I had already lost most of my hair to a dreadlock that resulted from sleeping with a blanket over my pillow, and one of the experimental scans also involved the shaving of several spots on my head. Time after time, I lay underneath a noisy rotating tube as it scanned every detail of my brain. When I got back up to my room, the team of doctors was waiting for me and had decided it was time for a spinal tap to investigate cancers and an angiogram to journey a small camera into my brain. I remember questioning if anyone had even thought of asking me about the plan they were prepped to enact. At this point, my identity was a powerless shell that was terribly ill. I explained to the doctor that local anesthesia didn't work on me, and that I didn't want to go through the pain and endure the lasting memory of the spinal tap and angiogram, so I demanded to be put to sleep entirely. Before the doctor and I reached an agreement, and I had an opportunity to ask and have answered a page full of questions, and then it was time to start. I crept in one final question.

“Am I going to die?”

“I can't answer that question yet; we need to figure out what's going on.”

My mom, dad, uncle, and brother were standing on the right side of my bed. I said goodbye to each of them, as they tried to smile through tears and wish me well. As I passed through the curtain of my room and into the hall, I suddenly felt as though I was passing through a bright, white, luminous fog. I felt utterly calm and relaxed. I wasn't scared or upset. It seemed as though death was my new destiny, and I was not in control. This moment is the one that those who consider themselves religious are substantially interested in, which lead me to contemplate the exactness with which I tell this part of my story, but in *The Wounded Story Teller*, Arthur Frank (2013), a professor of sociology at the University of Calgary, and scholar in the field of illness narratives, reminds us that, "The truth of experience is malleable" (p. 21). Even though my memory was greatly impacted, especially directly following this experience, I have to accept that my recollection of these events changes with time. Furthermore, in considering the "telling" of one's story or using the stories of others in research, it is important to recognize that unlike some sciences, in narratives, "The social scientific notion of reliability-getting the same answer to the same question at different times- does not fit here. Life moves on, stories change with that movement, and experience changes. Stories are true to flux of experience, and the story affects the direction of that flux" (Frank, 2013, p. 22). Sometimes my students' narratives and the truths they recognize will too be in flux. Instead of noting these changes, I respect and appreciate that the stories we express, and the identities within us that they shape do change, and that is to be respected, not doubted or questioned.

When I was waking up after the procedure, I overheard the doctor saying that he had good news; I had two strokes. As I woke up and became more coherent, I remember thinking, "What is he talking about? Having strokes is good news?" Over the next week the doctors were

worried about the stress all the pain was putting on my body. Every hour around the clock they brought me back to awareness, asked me how much pain I was in, I answered “10” on a “1-10” scale, and they followed up with another dose of medication that put me out for the following hour. I understand that this schedule was maintained 24 hours a day for a week, but I only remember a few images from these days. It turns out, I had dissections in my left cerebellum, which caused the lining of the blood vessels to break off and release. Think of the stem of a rose. The stem should be straight and smooth with thorns adorning it. My blood vessels were wavy and crooked and instead of being smooth, they looked like a rose stem with pieces of the lining sticking up like thorns. The blood that leaked into my brain caused it to swell and push against my skull. That is why I was in so much pain. It was always difficult to explain what happened to me in a way that people could understand, so I created the rose imagery. Later, I learned that this is a common practice for some people when retelling their illness narratives. Frank (2013) says that, “The shape of the telling is molded by all the rhetorical expectations that the storyteller has been internalizing...From their family and friends, from the popular culture that surrounds them, and from the stories of other ill people, storytellers have learned formal structures of narrative, conventional metaphors and imagery, and standards of what is and is not appropriate to tell” (p.3).

Dissections of blood vessels, or the weakening of the lining, are naturally occurring phenomena, which usually heal on their own without much harm to your body. In my case, I had gotten sick to my stomach when several dissections were trying to heal, so the platelets and white blood cells, trying to patch my dissected vessels, broke off and clotted in my brain. Now my identity had changed again. I was the young twenty-nine year old who survived two strokes. At the hospital, I was a hot commodity, and every studying neurologist wanted to come into my

room and do neurological testing on me. In the midst of a teaching hospital like this, security had to be obtained around the clock, so that I could sleep and recover. Eventually, I was moved onto the stroke floor. I continued to exercise my sensory super powers, and pleased everyone when I could answer questions about the days of the week, where I was, or who was the current president. Once I knew the day of the week, the physical therapist took me out into the hallway to try and walk again. Outside my new hospital room, my identity had changed again. I was a survivor. People who were paralyzed, dying, and confused surrounded me. It was awful. I conquered the ability to go up and down one step at the bottom of the stairs and that was my ticket home. As soon as I left the hospital, I felt a responsibility to tell other people about dissections because it is not a well-known phenomenon and to tell my story, which is not uncommon for individuals with illness narratives. Frank (2013) said in his book that,

Ill people's storytelling is informed by a sense of responsibility to the commonsense world and reflects...the core morality of postmodern. Storytelling is for another just as much as it is for oneself. In the reciprocity that is storytelling, the teller offers herself as guide to the other's self-formation. The other's receipt of that guidance not only recognizes but values the teller. The moral genius of storytelling is that each, teller and listener, enters the space of the story for the other. (p.18)

Surrendering to the reality of an endlessly grueling experience, in one word, "sucks". However, there is something to say for the way in which your will to conquer and rise above even what seems impossible can be renewed. My students are not just pre-service teachers. They are people who experience life's excitements and setbacks. In rare circumstances, they too need nothing more than support and understanding, without concern for requirements or deadlines,



until they are on their feet again. I have learned to be patient in times like this and to keep the big picture in mind, especially with concerns of illness or loss.

### **Another Chance at Life**

Home, for me, meant my going to my mom's house in a very small Midwestern town. For the next three months, I slept, recovered, and tried to constantly remember what I was doing because I was now in a world without a working memory. I had short term and long-term memory, but could not recall what I was doing in any particular moment, so I could never be left alone. Here my identity was that of a highly medicated adult in stroke recovery, but all was not lost because I came to understand true love from those that remained in my life, to be patient with myself and others, to appreciate each moment, and a number of other "life lessons" that may sound cliché now, but the perspective and insights those struggles provided are necessary to acceptance of the situation. In *The Illness Narratives Suffering, Healing, and the Human Condition*, Kleinman (1988) tells readers that,

[t]he moral lesson illness teaches is that there are undesired and undeserved pains that must be lived through, that beneath the façade of bland optimism regarding the natural order of things, there is a deeper apprehension of a dark, hurtful stream of negative events and troubles. Change, caprice, and chaos, experienced in the body challenge what order we are led to believe-need to believe-exists...For the seriously ill, insight can be the result of an often grim, though occasionally luminous, lived wisdom of body in pain and the mind troubled. (p.55)

For the months I was living in this Northern small town, my friend who brought me home from Mexico, came to visit me, and was by my side almost every weekend. When I finally

returned to Chicago, it was to live at his home. I am alive today because of him. On August 1, five years ago, that friend became my husband. His kindness, generosity, tenacity, and caregiving, finally convinced me to change my identity to wife. He was ever committed to me and my story, which became our story, what Arthur Kleinman (1988) describes as, "...empathic listening. That is the existential commitment to be with the sick person and to facilitate his or her building of an illness narrative that will make sense of and give value to the experience" (p.54). Empathetic listening shapes my responsive teaching practices. I am committed to showing, acting, and facilitating empathy in my classes and encourage the students to always do the same. According to Warren (2015), "Applying empathy requires a degree of selflessness that centralizes the needs, desires, and opinions of the receiver in the empathetic response...[and] is largely determined by one's perception (p. 574). This is why getting to know students is so important, beyond surface level interactions and academic abilities, so that the teacher's perception of what they 'need' is more reflective of their actual reality. Returning to work, and my own reality as an independent adult was all that was on my mind for months.

### **Back to Work**

Once more of my brain healed and its functions, especially my memory, strengthened, I returned to my work as a global private educator. My identity as a teacher eventually came back too, and things slowly returned to a version of normal. I was an exclusive tutor for a young girl working to achieve status as a world-renowned professional concert violinist. For several years, I worked as a private tutor, facilitating her studies from grades three through eight, wrote curriculum, and taught most subjects in a small classroom in the client's home. The work was

exhaustive, on-call, all encompassing, and intense, but it was a learning experience and an opportunity to learn many more life lessons that will always be a part of my identity.

### **Graduate School**

A few years ago, my now husband, stepped in again. He knew that I wanted to go back to school, and that I had researched several programs at a nearby ivy league university where I already obtained a Master's degree in literacy education. He started researching and questioning why I had not applied for a doctoral program at the school ranked the highest on many platforms. After the honor of admittance to this top program, our family made a geographical shift and moved, so I could begin a doctoral agenda. For now, my identity is that of a student, researcher, and instructor. My identity is wrapped in my environment and in learning how to think in new and exciting ways about how my work can help others, especially pre-service teachers and the phenomenon of anxiety running through teaching professionals. I am working to find balance between serving my students and making new discoveries that will direct my own future work. The struggle for a healthy life is over and a new generation has graced our family. Kleinman (1988) sums up this new perspective by saying that, "Illness, like other misfortunes, occupy an edifying place in this tale as exemplary difficulties and determinant forces something that was formidable, now to be smiled over" (p.50). I am constantly striving to not let my work or contexts in work or health define me, and instead to seek to discover and fulfill new identities. For now, my past is just a story, and my future is still waiting to be narrated.

In the end, I have learned to be patient with others and myself, and that hard times will pass. I appreciate every day and the opportunity to experience beauty in the world. I am constantly in awe of nature: clouds, green pastures, trees, lakes and oceans, wind blowing lightly through tall grasses, a full moon, the smell of rain falling, flowers, and forests. I now know that

one's world can change in an instant, and without health, life is hard to live. I recognize that people who really love me will do so unconditionally, and that the only part of my body that's worth any concern, is my health. I have learned to control my anxiety and to offer the gift of helping others with that same debilitating concern. I need to prioritize my health over everything else. Most importantly, I've figured out that there are special reasons that I was saved from death, and I have to use my life to make a positive impact on the world. I hope to bring this new sense of calm into the schools and lives of students that I encounter. I will remind them not to sweat the small things, to value their gifts, and to always act out of compassion and genuine intentions. I would not be the same teacher, student, or teacher educator I am today, without the insight recovering from my strokes has given me. I know about the need for second chances and the ability of a person to overcome and even excel out of the direst circumstances; I aspire to share this vision with my students and hope that they will pass it forward too.

## Chapter Two

### Introduction

In this section, I will explore background literature on several components essential to this project: anxiety, pre-service (student) teaching, and briefly, several subsections of literature that connect writing to the body and mind. This portion begins with the historical conception of the idea of anxiety, definitions, misconceptions, symptoms, and stigma. It then moves to look more specifically at anxiety in the classroom and transitions to another important component to understanding this study. The history of pre-service teaching is explored, challenges and complexities of this experience are surveyed, and then implications of anxious pre-service teachers are outlined, followed by alternatives to the field experience component of teacher education. From there, I deduce what may be missing in this current literature and attempt to identify gaps that this study strives to reduce. Pre-service teaching is included since it is the context within which my research takes place. All participants are currently pre-service teachers or reflecting on each of their recent experiences as one.

Added to this beginning, the next section investigates critical ideas around a field referred to as “writing to heal” because inspiration is drawn from this work to develop one of the pre-service teacher anxiety coping tools practiced by participants in this study. This literature overview is provided to give readers support and articulate how I am approaching these ideas about writing and the body. Historical trajectories give perspective to where these fields have been and to invite anticipation of what could come next in the ongoing mission to further support pre-service teachers. My hope is that you can continue to make your own connections and

critical interpretations of this literary overview and the work of the study, alongside my reported narrations, findings, and conclusions.

### **Anxiety Today**

It's no wonder that practicing and pre-service teachers in our country are anxious. In a recent quick Google search of "education 2017", the first story that appears is one of current United States President, Donald Trump. Notably, the title of the *Washington post* (2017) article is, *Trump's Rather Weird Meeting with the 2017 Teachers of the Year*. In this article, the author reminds readers that, "During his inaugural address in January, Trump characterized public education as a 'system flush with cash, but which leaves our young and beautiful students deprived of knowledge' [This system was part of an] "American carnage" the author notes. (Strauss, 2017, para. 15). As if this report isn't unsettling enough, the first result from another search, "why are teachers anxious in 2017", is met first with an article from the U.K.'s *Telegraph*, and entitled, *Teachers Offered Electric Shock Therapy to Combat Anxiety and Depression* (Jarvis, 2017). While these results could seem extreme or questionable, and they may speak to the current state of teaching and its connection to anxiety, my own text is not about politics, the president of the United States, or Google searches. Instead, this essay is about pre-service teachers, and it is about anxiety. Specifically, this section explores the literature on pre-service teachers' anxieties. The goal of this synthesis is to provide context for a future study of the phenomenon of pre-service teacher anxieties in a Midwestern University in America.

In the summer of 2017, the air outside is warm and slightly humid. The sun is shining, and a breeze tickles the leaves in a canopy of surrounding trees. However, the pleasant calm that the surrounding outside environment stimulates does not match what I, as a

teacher/researcher/human being with an anxiety disorder experience inside. Currently, inside my heart is racing slightly, my breathing is a bit short, and my eyes feel stretched open as if attempting to see in a forest at night lit only by fireflies. Making sense of this anxious state is easier for an outsider with a bit of visualization. Simply imagine that you are alone, in the woods, at night, and being chased by a bear. Now, imagine a quiet coffee shop, sitting next to a trusted friend and colleague, overlooking sparkling blue waters without wake, but the amygdala in your brain is still convincing your body that you are in a mode of “flight or flight”. This is one notion of what it feels like to have Generalized Anxiety Disorder. Out of nowhere, and for no evident reason looming, you feel a sense of panic. The topic of anxiety is personal because it has impacted me as long as I can remember.

Now, as a former classroom teacher, pre-service teacher supervisor, and most recently a teaching assistant for pre-service teacher coursework within a University teacher education certification program, I am reflective of what summer means to teachers because it is just the beginning of how the public misunderstands the complexities and challenges of the teaching profession, and it reflects a space scholars might clarify with published narratives. The notion on the forefront of most people’s minds when thinking about teachers and the summer is typically the summer “break” they “get”. However, practicing professionals know differently that this sunny season is actually when preparation resumes for the mental, physical, and professional demands that the next school year will bring. Looking back, data specifies that, “In the fall of 2016, about 50.4 million students will attend public elementary and secondary schools...An additional 5.2 million students are expected to attend private elementary and secondary schools” (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017, para. 1-5). Therefore, in the Fall of 2016, about 3.5 million teachers were put to work. This also asserts that new pre-service teachers were

headed into the classrooms of 55.6 million young people in the United States alone. Pre-service teachers will be welcomed into the challenges of the profession and will need support. Coates & Thorensen (1976) note that some of the potential sources of anxiety for pre-service teachers include the relationships with cooperating teachers and supervisors and the reviews of their video-taped lessons. They explain further that beginning teachers' anxieties:

also center around (a) their ability to maintain discipline in the classroom, (b) students liking them, (c) their knowledge of subject matter, (d) what to do in case they make mistakes or run out of material, and (e) how to relate personally to other faculty members, the school system and parents. (p. 164)

As a new teacher, I had some of the same anxieties, but also had to maintain productive efficiency and the potential of my personal best while managing a generalized anxiety disorder, which was not without direct effort. In the recently published text explaining the term anxiety disorder, Earlstein (2017) notes that it is:

a long-term condition, an anxiety disorder can interfere with much of a person's life including one's job or school performance and social relationships. It can interfere with one's capacity to live a normal life to the extent that it becomes considered a serious mental illness requiring appropriate diagnosis and treatment. (p. 3)

My anxiety disorder manifested itself as over preparation, strict organization, extreme concern for doing a "good job", wanting to please parents and administration, and always worrying and feeling uneasy. As indicated in the first section, as a new teacher, I easily spent over twelve hours a day in my classroom because I never felt like I could be prepared enough. My obsession for organizing didn't stop when I got home from school. I could easily spend the evening and all



night with an internal organization locomotive. I dated my planner, taking it with me everywhere, making time to write in it a priority. I went to bed with it at night and woke up next to it in the morning. There was an ongoing ticker tape in my head concerned about forgetting things, with over sensitive energy or perceptions from others, and an unending internal over self-consciousness. Having an anxiety disorder can be exhausting especially because the recognition of the validity of anxiety disorders has been a huge battle. It wasn't until my mid-twenties that I came to understand there was a reason for the anxiousness I experienced for a lifetime. I grew up not knowing why so many seemingly invalidated fears gave me such anxiety. I tried to rationalize everything in my mind, but that did not change the anxieties I experienced or the consequences of that anxiety, which were still emerging. I was often told not to worry, to think of something pleasant, to control myself, or other things of that nature. Telling a person to stop a bodily sensation they cannot control is confusing, frustrating, and scary. Through mental and medicinal therapies, I eventually came to understand that I unknowingly had always lived a very anxious life. It took a lot of time, therapy, money, internal introspection, experiencing two strokes, and a lot of hard work to understand that I wasn't just type A, really organized, a perfectionist, or something else. I just had an anxiety disorder. This personal experience gives me a lifelong context to appreciate the atrocities of anxiety and how to manage the symptoms of anxiety even when they are a part of an ongoing anxiety disorder. I have worked as a classroom teacher, literacy tutor, homeschool teacher, curriculum developer, practicum and student teaching supervisor, and teaching assistant in a University teacher education department. While this in no way makes me an expert on teaching or anxiety, it provides a personal and professional background of knowledge and experience to draw on. Looking back at the historical context of my experiences, I am humbled and grateful to have a perspective that will allow me to work

closely with the anxieties that arise in the experiences of pre-service teachers.

## Historical Context

In a reputable neuroscience journal, Crocq traces the history of anxiety from the ancient Greeks to the diagnostic statistical manual referenced today for insight into all aspects of mental health. Crocq (2015) traces this timeline:

The Hippocratic Corpus is a collection of Greek medical texts attributed to Hippocrates (c 460 BC to c 370 AD)...The phobia of a man named Nicanor is described...In this text, a typical case of phobia is labeled as a medical disorder...Latin Stoic philosophical writings, such as the treatises of Cicero and Seneca, prefigure many modern views concerning the clinical features and the cognitive treatment of anxiety. In the Tusculan Disputations (TD), Cicero (106 BC to 43 BC) wrote that affliction (*molestia*), worry (*sollicitudo*), and anxiety (*angor*) are called disorders (*aegritudeo*) on account of the analogy between a troubled mind and a diseased body. (para. 1 - 4)

Crocq (2015) also summarizes how Latin and Greek articulate reason to recognize morbid anxiety and how it can be identified. Specifically, after the death of his daughter, Cicero, a Roman politician and lawyer in 63 BC., wrote the Tusculan Disputations to call for Stoicism, "...a pillar of cognitive therapy today" (Crocq, 2015, para. 5) that separates reason from unwelcome changes in fortune, pleasure, or pain. Seneca, another stoic philosopher, wrote "Of Peace of Mind" to describe his idea of an undisturbed state followed by "On the Shortness of Life", which

describes the need for one to focus on the present instead of the future (Crocq, 2015, para. 5 & 6). Kierkegaard and Heidegger, existentialist philosophers, used the fear of death as reasoning for anxiety and the realization that one's life is finite. Moving forward in time, catalysts like an anxious heart, negative cognitions of the past and fear of the future, excess desires, and unfounded terrors were highlighted by those studying what is known today as anxiety (Crocq, 2015, para. 5).

Before moving too far forward, this anxiety chronicle must delve into its namesake. According to Crocq (2015), "The word anxiety derives from the Latin substantive *angor* and the corresponding verb *ango* (to constrict) as related to the cognate *angustus* (narrow)" (para. 6 & 7). In the timeline of anxiety as an identifiable illness, anxiety disappeared for centuries between classical antiquity and modern psychiatry until 1621 Robert Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (Crocq, 2015, para. 9 & 10). "Melancholia" was the buzzword of the time and distinguished between a quiet patient and one who was agitated and labeled as manic. Symptoms of melancholia and panic attacks were considered comorbid, simultaneously present, in the 18th century. Between 1665 and 1750 the word, "vapors" was the term used to describe a "nervous disorder". Then, Boissier de Sauvages classified diseases into ten categories, and the eighth had four subdivisions that relate: hallucinations, morositates, deliria, and folies anomalies. The disorder *panophobia* emerged later to describe patients who would become frightened suddenly and react dramatically. George Miller Beard was the first American who described neurasthenia, which named a variety of symptoms including anxiety. Finally, Emil Kraepelin is relevant because he gave notice to anxiety as a physical symptom (Crocq, 2015, para. 12-16). In a resource tracing the history of anxiety, Pearson (2008) notes that, The first mentioning of anxiety in a medical manual "...appears in a 1733 book penned by the physician George Cheyne, called

The English Malady: or a treatise of nervous disorders of all kinds, as spleen, vapours, lowness of spirits, hypochondriacal and hysterical distempers, etc.” (Pearson, 2008, p. 51). According to Pearson (2008) anxiety emerged during the French Revolution and subsequent 200 years, “...labeled as: soldier’s heart, cardiac neurosis, nervous exhaustion, neurocirculatory asthenia, neurasthenia, hysteria, and effort syndrome” (Pearson, 2008, p. 51). Since 1952, there has been an international manual, known as the DSM, or diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders “...that defines and classifies mental disorders in order to improve diagnoses, treatments, and research (American Psychiatric Association (APA), 2017a, para. 1). In 1952, the DSM-I stated that the chief characteristic of the psychoneurotic disorders was “anxiety which might be directly felt and expressed or which might be unconsciously and automatically controlled by the utilization of various psychological defense mechanisms” (as cited in Crocq, 2015, para. 16).

Today anxiety disorders are considered one of the most common, yet treatable, mental health disorders. It is easy to forget how far views have come since the first phobia meeting was held in White Plains, New York in the 1970’s. (ADAA, 2016, our history section). In 1978, when this first meeting took place, “The term anxiety disorder had not yet been coined. Most anxiety disorders were called phobias...by 1980 a small dedicated group founded the Phobia Society of America” (ADAA, 2016, para. 3). Then, the information age provided connections global connections between clinicians. In addition, there was a new medical determination grounding this mental phenomenon in biological science; panic attacks occur in conjunction with atypical blood flow in the brain. This led to the health and social consequences of anxiety disorders to be more widely acknowledged. During the Middle Ages anxiety was connected with concepts of sin and the fear of internal judgment, but after the American Civil War, post-

traumatic stress disorder was noted as an “irritable heart syndrome”. In the 17th century, the notion transitioned to “melancholy” based on Robert Burton’s “The Anatomy of Melancholia”. Post-1800’s, a word for anxiety emerged in different countries throughout Western Europe: “angoisse” in French, “angst” in German, “angustia” for the Spanish, and the British spoke of “panic”. At this time, the main goal was to distinguish typical worry or fear from anguish, terror, and misery. Based on the reactive therapies of the time, one may assert that as if a person didn’t feel enough negative symptoms, individuals were “treated” with electroshock and fear exposure therapies, or even sterilized to avoid the potential of passing on this “mental illness” to another generation. Earlstein (2017) notes further that it wasn’t until the 1980’s that Anxiety Disorders were recognized by the American Psychiatric Association and no longer characterized as just nerves or stress (p. 14-15). Over time, numerous changes in name, criteria, description, and the subdivisions of anxiety and related disorders and symptoms were made. In DSM I and II, Freud coined many of the terms used for describing anxiety disorders. The DSM III gave new terms to the disorder including: panic disorder, generalized anxiety disorder (GAD), and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). It wasn’t until the DSM IV, that anxiety disorders were grouped into three categories: anxiety, OCD, and trauma/stress related (Crocq, 2016, para. 26). The DSM V is the current version of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual being utilized today.

### **Defining What Anxiety Is and Is Not**

As mentioned earlier in the historical context section of this essay, the *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* is the official reference, from the American Psychiatric Association (2017a), “used by health care professionals in the United States and much of the world as the authoritative guide to the diagnosis of mental disorders. *DSM* contains descriptions, symptoms, and other criteria for diagnosing mental disorders...” (para. 1). Therefore, this

section on defining anxiety will begin in accordance with the APA's definition that distinguishes anxiety from anxiety disorders: "Anxiety is a normal reaction to stress and can be beneficial in some situations. It can alert us to dangers and help us prepare to pay attention... [and ] [a]nxiety disorders differ from normal feelings of nervousness or anxiousness and involve excessive fear or anxiety..." (APA, 2017b, para. 1). While these definitions are what some may consider the standard for discerning what anxiety is, there is opportunity for clarification and elaboration. Earlstein (2017), the author of *Anxiety disorder explained: facts and information*, writes about medical conditions like anxiety and anxiety disorders in language that non-medical practitioners may understand. He says,

While it is true that anxiety as a human emotion is a normal, albeit temporary, part of life, it can sometimes happen that the feeling of anxiety is not temporary, but long term.

Anxiety can be appropriate in certain instances, but if it happens too regularly or if it lasts for too long a time, then its consequences can become quite severe. When this happens, a person can be said to suffer from an anxiety disorder. Being a long-term condition, an anxiety disorder can interfere with much of a person's life...It can interfere with one's capacity to live a normal life to the extent that it becomes considered as a serious mental illness requiring appropriate diagnosis and treatment. (p. 3)

One reason for the need for new or more understandable resources about anxiety is the myths that have evolved around it.

### **Myths or Misconceptions**

There are many misconceptions about anxiety and anxiety disorders, however one notion that is not a myth is the prevalence of anxiety today and its impacts in schools and classroom.

According to Murray & Lopez (1996), “Given the frequency and potential negative consequences of anxiety disorders, it is no surprise that anxiety disorders have been named as one of the greatest health problems (exceeding physical health problems) in terms of global burden of disease” (as cited in McLoone, Hudson, and Rapee, 2006, p. 221). The burden on those living with anxiety and anxiety disorders and those seeking to understand them could be impacted by misconceptions. Recognizing the weight of any mental health challenge on a person’s life is important since a negative societal stigma may be attached.

Earlstein (2017) notes,

[t]here does seem to be a stigma attached to mental disorders in general, and also to Anxiety Disorders in particular. But much is really rooted in the lack of public or general information about this condition, which has been recognized by the medical world as a valid condition that needs appropriate diagnosis and treatment, just like any illness or condition. (p. 5)

The public needs to be educated about the validity and against the misconceptions of anxiety disorders in order to better understand themselves and others. The first myth Earlstein identifies is, “That only nervous, weak, or illogical people suffer from Anxiety Disorders” (Earlstein 2017, p. 6). In fact, anxiety, at the root of the disorder, impacts everyone at one time or another during stressful or fearful moments, which can even morph into panic attacks or manifest into phobias, which are quite common. People with anxiety disorders typically recognize their fears or the sources of their anxiety, and at times can even recognize that they are irrational. Individuals with anxiety disorders are intelligent, competent, and capable (Earlstein, 2017, p. 6). In moments of extreme anxiety, a panic attack can easily ensue. A panic attack is a “sudden, unexpected and

intense attack of anxiety accompanied by physical symptoms that build to a peak within 10 minutes, generally subsiding within 30 minutes (Earlstein, 2017, p. 7) Another common misconception about panic attacks is that they cause a person to faint, lose control, or have a heart attack. Medical insight counters this myth because fainting or passing out is typically due to a low heart rate, and a panic attack usually causes a person's blood pressure to rise. This increased heart rate may cause a person to feel their heart beating more strongly, but this is not associated with heart attacks. One might consider himself or herself lucky if a panic attack is something that has never been experienced. Regulating one's heart rate can feel impossible and scary when the body or mind thinks that a panic response is needed.

In responding to this heightened body sensation, another misconception emerges. Some believe that tranquilizers and sleeping pills are the best treatment for anxiety, however they are only temporary and can cause troubling dependence. Further thinking might incline the perspective that tranquilizers and sleeping pills may induce a person into a sleepy state, but they do not magically remove anxious symptoms. Moving along, Earlstein's next myth is, "That anxiety attacks are just excessive worrying, and a person should just pull himself/herself together because the feeling will soon pass" (Earlstein, 2017, p.8). This is not the case. In fact Schniering, Hudson, & Rapee (2000) note that, "Many studies have shown that anxiety disorders are often co-morbid with other emotional disorders, are chronic in nature if left untreated, and are associated with moderate to high life interference" (as cited in McLoone, Hudson, & Rapee, 2000, p. 220). Earlstein (2017) reminds readers that a person who is put together and has their life managed appropriately can still experience uncontrollable excessive anxieties, and simply dismissing or trying to reason these mental and physical sensations away is not effective (Earlstein, 2017, p. 8-9). Unfortunately, the myth that an anxiety is not real and only in a



person's head is also prevalent. Physical symptoms accompany intense anxiousness because they are initiated by the body's "flight or fight" reflex induced by an influx of adrenaline (Earlstein, 2017, p. 9 & 10). In the remainder of the chapter, Earlstein (2017) summarizes several additional misconceptions: isolation and avoiding social contact are not helpful, social anxiety and shyness are not the same thing, anxiety disorders are common, and anxiety does not always stem from a trauma (p. 10-12). It is also not the case that "[t]hat Anxiety Disorders are irreversible because they are caused by chemical imbalance in the brain, a genetic predisposition, or a biological problem with the brain" (Earlstein, 2017, p.12). Being aware of these misconceptions can help individuals with and without anxiety disorders to better understand the misnomers that lead to improper treatment and other falsehoods. While the ideas synthesized in this section include what is not true about anxiety disorders the symptoms, associated with them are well documented. □

## **Symptoms**

In 1902, psychologist William James said, "I awoke morning after morning with a horrible dread at the pit of my stomach, and with a sense of the insecurity of life that I never knew before..." (Pearson, 2008, p. 1). A feeling of dread or an uncomfortable feeling in one's stomach are two common symptoms of anxiety. Pearson (2008) includes an important first person perspective into her thinking, in the first chapter of her text about the history of anxiety. She says, "Given my druthers, I would prefer not to be afraid of the following: phone bills, ovarian cancer, black bears, climate change...Certainly in addition to liver failure and cows...It is not that these fears aren't inherently valid...One must struggle continuously with the validity of one's fears" (Pearson, 2008, p. 2).

Contradictory thoughts are a part of anxiety as Walt Whitman indicated when he said, “Do I contradict myself? Very well then, I contradict myself” (as cited in Pearson, 2008, p. 2). Contradictory thoughts and feelings can be a part of coping with anxiety. In his text, Earlstein (2017) distinguishes anxiety symptoms into three synthesizing categories: emotional signs and symptoms, physical signs and symptoms, and behavioral or medical signs and symptoms. Despite the fact that symptoms can be as individualized as people themselves, grouping symptoms by experiential levels is a place to start. What others cannot visually distinguish are the emotional signs and symptoms: irrational and crippling fear, excessive worrying, persistent self-doubt, an intolerance of uncertainty, and feelings of panic, fear, and uneasiness (Earlstein, 2017, p. 28). Pearson (2008) describes this internal struggle by saying, “For anxiety is engaged in endless subsets of “what if?” and “if then” (p. 6). Physical signs and symptoms include: insomnia or other forms of sleep problems, chronic pain, gastrointestinal disorders, heart disease and heart problems, respiratory problems and shortness of breath, allergic reactions, nausea and vomiting, chills, twitching, shaking, hot flashes, dry mouth, dizziness, fainting spells, and numbness or tingling in hands and feet (Pearson, 2008, p.29). Lastly are the behavioral or medical signs and symptoms. These are characterized by repeated panic attacks, extreme fright and self-consciousness in social situations, sudden flashbacks to a traumatic memory, extreme and debilitating perfectionism, rituals that are comprised of obsessive thoughts and compulsive behavior, as well as restlessness and the inability to be still and calm (Pearson, 2008, p.30). The manifestation of these mental, physical, and behavioral indicators has contributed to a negative stigma of anxiety and other mental disorders that still persists in some literature.

### **Anxiety Stigma**

Stigmas of anxiety have been prevalent through time in science and literature. For

example, “In folklore and anecdote, the anxious have been conflated with the immature and emotionally uninhibited as ‘nervous Nellies’, but the perception is prejudice” (Pearson, 2008, p. 4). In the Christian religion, sin has been associated with anxieties being the natural consequence. This was rooted in the notion that if one is anxious then he or she must have committed a sin that induced that anxiousness. It’s notable that, “...the excessive fear or worry that characterizes Anxiety Disorders, in some of its earliest forms, certainly had its prejudicial and even religious overtones” (Earlstein, 2017, p. 13). In earlier history, what we know today as anxiety, was only attributed to females and considered to emerge from an organ found only in women or because she was an enchantress by nature.

Earlstein (2017) describes this gendered notion:

In ancient Greece, the word, “hysteria” was used for women prone to anxiety. It was used primarily for women because it was believed that such behavior derived from disturbances caused by the uterus...Rather unfortunately, hysteria has since been ascribed primarily to women for the next couple of hundred years, with hysteria being seen as a sign of a witch, or later as insanity that warranted confinement and extreme psychiatric treatments. (p. 14)

The historical contexts of anxiety provide much insight into the roots of anxiety stigmas, misunderstandings, confusion, and frustration. This stigma is well documented and rarely denied. It is well recognized that mental disorders are associated with stigmatizing attitudes. There is some evidence that such stigma can be associated with increased psychological distress, demoralization, and isolation with reduced employment and accommodation opportunities. It may also serve as a barrier to help seeking help for mental health problems. It has been claimed

that people with anxiety disorders can be subject to stigmatization and that such stigma serves as a barrier, at an individual level, to receiving effective treatment for anxiety. However, to date most studies of stigma associated with mental disorders have focused on schizophrenia or depression. Less attention has been paid to Generalized Anxiety disorder (GAD). This is a limitation since GAD is common, debilitating, and frequently untreated (Griffiths, Batterham, Barney, & Parsons, 2011, abstract). There are tools being used with people who have GAD to measure the perceptions surrounding it. They are needed to increase awareness and understanding about the diagnosis since stigmas are persistent. Griffiths et al., (2011) recognize that, “Although there is a substantial concern about negative attitudes to mental illness, little is known about the stigma associated with Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD) or its measurement” (Griffiths et al. 2011, abstract). When anxiety manifests itself in a person, it is difficult to hide. It typically bleeds into all aspects of a person’s life including how and what they learn. For this reason, it is imperative that all school personnel become trained and accustomed to working with anxious colleagues and students. “Given that students’ anxiety interferes with their learning and is perceived as a teaching problem, the crucial question is how it might be dealt with in the college classroom” (Rosenfeld, 1978, p. 151).

### **Anxiety, Learning, and Teaching: Anxiety in the classroom**

Over the last twenty years there has been a great deal of research, in both the laboratory and the classroom, on the relationship between anxiety and various types of performance and achievement. A general conclusion of this research is that anxiety interferes with the academic achievement of college students.

It is conventional knowledge that effective educators share a common goal to do

whatever they can to facilitate new learning and discovery from their students. This means that, “[i]deally, one would wish to find the types of teaching behavior and class structure which allow all students to perform (to learn) as well as they are able. One would want to reduce the anxiety of those whose behavior is hindered by it...” (Rosenfeld, 1978, p. 152 & 153). Anxiety reduction strategies, of course, do not carry the assumption of increased learning or success for all students. However, many of the changes that research indicates may lessen anxiety in learning settings are changes that also impact non-anxious students in a positive manner. A review of literature does “...suggest manipulating various aspect of learning situations from forms of examinations through general behavior and structure within conventional courses to the structure of a course as a whole-in an effort to reduce students’ anxiety and, consequently, to increase the amount of learning done” (Rosenfeld, 1978, p. 152).

When the notion of anxiety in school or the classroom comes to mind, the most readily recognized source of that anxiety is tests or other assessments. Test anxiety has been well documented in the U.S. since the 1970’s. Testing can promote stress and anxiety for teachers and students. However, certain forms of examinations and certain kinds of examination conditions may lead to improving the performance of students with anxiety. Research on examinations suggests some simple ways in which the actual form of the examination can affect anxiety (Rosenfeld, 1978, p.153).

One challenging aspect of the teaching profession is the need to continually differentiate to help all students reach the potential of their personal best. Tests are known for invoking anxiety in students and teachers. Standardized testing, for example, does not allow teachers to create tests with formatting and content that may prevent anxious test-takers, and anxious students can incite anxious teachers. In looking at designing tests, Rosenfeld (1978) has some

suggestions: do not start an examination with the most difficult questions, but gradually increase in difficulty to lessen anxiety, allow students to comment on questions to show additional knowledge (like those which are multiple choice), decrease reliance on memorization and offer supports like that of a commonly used equation, offer open book assessments, give some questions in advance to lessen anticipation, give take-home examinations, put page limits on responses to give structural guidance, and generally reduce as many unknown facets of a test as possible (Rosenfeld, 1978, p. 153 - 156). All students can be supported when a teacher demystifies testing, tells students what to expect, de-emphasizes formality, and takes time to discuss test-taking strategies.

Personal experience teaching sixth grade at a private school in downtown Chicago proved much of Rosenfeld's guidance to be on target. I too noticed that the more explicit I was about how students should prepare for an assessment, the more comfortable most felt while taking it. Sometimes, memory blocks would occur for students during an assessment spiking their anxiety. In this case, as Rosenfeld suggests, I would remain warm and understanding, always tested in the regular classroom, and allowed students to use memory "hints" such as word banks, acronyms, and worked to create as comfortable of a space as possible. My experience mirrored Rosenfeld's comments about clarity as well in that clear teacher expectations and grading specifications are important. Rosenfeld emphasizes the effectiveness of encouraging students to ask questions, allowing significant wait time after asking a question, offering an additional "re-take" test, structuring the learning environment, as well as using contract systems with teacher and student collaborative goals (Rosenfeld, 1978, p. 158-161). This has especially transferred well to my current teaching of undergraduate level college students. Moving slowly through certain moments in class to answer as many questions as possible and be as articulate as necessary,

while being open to repetition, or asking another student to articulate information can be helpful, so that students hear their peers engaged in the same work of understanding. What helps anxious students in the classroom is highly contextually dependent on not only the nature of the task, but the person as well. Research shows that different cultures demonstrate anxiety and other mental health indications in a variety of ways.

### **Diversity Implications**

It is important to recognize how limited definitions, discussions, and the field of mental health diagnosis and treatment can be. The American Psychiatric Association (2013) explains that,

Different cultures and communities exhibit or explain symptoms in various ways.

Because of this, it is important for clinicians to be aware of relevant contextual information stemming from a patient's culture, race, ethnicity, religion or geographical origin. For example, uncontrollable crying and headaches are symptoms of panic attacks in some cultures, while difficulty breathing may be the primary symptom in other cultures. Understanding such distinctions will help clinicians more accurately diagnose problems as well as more effectively treat them. (para. 2)

The APA recognizes the need to be critical and culturally sensitive when making considerations about a person's mental states being that those are an embodiment of the person's background experience. It says, "In an effort to improve diagnosis and care to people of all backgrounds, the fifth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) incorporates a greater cultural sensitivity throughout the manual" (APA, 2013, para. 1) This sensitivity of course is only a start.

In an internet search for perspectives on anxiety from people of color, the words of Chatterjee, a woman of color, caught my attention with her blog post saying, “The white-centrism of mental health is evident in self-help books, memoirs, YouTube videos, and peer support groups...This is where we’re at: the first stages of even seeing ourselves and other people of color within the mental health system” (Chatterjee, 2017, para. 1). My work in this study needs to constantly reflect an effort to take the perspectives of individuals of color and others with contextual differences other than my own to avoid further misunderstandings. The APA (2017e) reports that only one in three African Americans who need mental health care receive it in addition to the fact that their care is often not culturally competent and not as patient-centered, or of the same quality, as white counterparts. (mental health disparities: African American section).

In another study, (Asnaani, Richey, Dimaite, Hinton, & Hofmann, 2010) results indicate patterns for certain groups like whites being more likely to be diagnosed with an anxiety disorder than African, Hispanic, and Asian Americans, in addition to African Americans being more inclined to be diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (p.551).

In specific, Asnaani et al. (2010) note:

The results suggest that race and ethnicity need to be considered when assigning an anxiety disorder diagnosis, and possible reasons for the observed differences in prevalence rates between racial groups...It has been suggested that cultural identification is strongly associated with the expression of certain anxiety disorders. There has been a surge in the number of studies focusing on minority mental health issues, and increasing recognition of the need to deepen the understanding of the mental health features of non-White samples...in order to make the currently-defined diagnoses more applicable to a



range of individuals. Yet, while this is growing, there still remains a dearth of information about the mental health picture of non-white race-ethnic groups in the United States. (p. 551)

This may suggest that the anxiety statistics of pre-service teachers is indicative to the fact that whites make up the majority of the teaching force in our country. The APA recommends a cultural formulation interview to help assess patients' perspectives of their symptoms and treatment options, which include questions about background culture, race, ethnicity, religion, and geographical origin (APA, 2013, para. 5). Disparities within the mental health of diverse populations is critical to consider for this study because the U.S. total population and public school population is becoming more diverse. The APA (2017c) has published several conclusive notions that should impact addressing mental health with diverse populations: they face more burden from mental disorders (like in the persistence of depression in Hispanics), racial and ethnic minorities are disproportionately represented in the criminal justice system where mental health problems are common, there is a lack of cultural understanding by providers who misdiagnose mental illness in people from racially/ethnically diverse populations, etc. (mental health disparities: diverse populations section).

The APA focuses on the mental health status of LGBTQ individuals as well because the population has notable contrasts to gender-conforming people. The APA (2017d) says that LGBTQ individuals are more than twice as likely to have a mental health disorder in comparison to gender-conforming men and women, are 2.5 times more likely to experience depression, anxiety, and substance abuse, and that bisexual and lesbian women are more than twice as likely to abuse alcohol as their gender-conforming counterparts. The APA reasons that this is partly due to stigma, discrimination, geographical location, higher poverty rates, and a higher

likelihood of being a victim of violence in comparison to gender-conforming counterparts (mental health disparities: LGBTQ section).

Gendered discrepancies in mental health are also relevant especially considering the disproportionate number of female pre-service and practicing teachers in comparison to male; anxiety variances are especially dominant. The APA (2017d) determined that women are twice as likely as men to experience an anxiety or panic attack disorder, and there are a number of barriers to women accessing mental health services: economic, lack of awareness, stigma, and lack of time/related support, lack of intervention, (mental health disparities: women's mental health section). This overwhelming evidence about mental health and minoritized persons provokes me to point out how the results of my study may be skewed by the dominantly gender-conforming female, white population I'm studying.

Emotions, like anxiety, may differ more from one individual to the next as is commonly asserted in what neuroscientists, Lisa Feldman Barrett refers to as the classical view. In this way typical way of thinking, one's emotions are always inside until they are triggered by an external event. Our bodies, including our voice, facial gestures, and body language then reveal our emotions in characteristic expressions that are recognizable to others. Emotions are thought to come on quickly and automatically (Barrett, 2017, x). Barrett explains that this view of the universality of emotions is entrenched in our culture and social institutions despite the fact that copious scientific evidence proves otherwise that emotions are actually constructed by experience.

Barrett (2017) says that,

emotions are not built in...They are not universal but vary from culture to culture. They are not triggered; you create them. They emerge as a combination of the physical

properties of your body, a flexible brain that wires itself to whatever environment it develops in, and your culture and upbringing, which provide that environment. Emotions are real... They are real in the same sense that money is real-that is, hardly an illusion, but a product of human agreement. (xiii)

This theory of constructed emotion, as Barrett references adds an additional layer to the complexity of this study because it highlights that catalysts for emotional response, like that of anxiety will vary greatly by individual based on prior experiences. This leaves me questioning the endless possibilities that may evoke anxiety in a teacher education program, and how complicated it will be to manage the provocation of that anxiety, especially in diverse groups of teacher candidates.

### **Pre-service Teaching Field Experiences: History**

Prior to the 1980's, the dominant mode of teacher preparation in this country consisted of coursework on a university campus followed by one semester of student teaching. Today, quality teacher preparation programs provide candidates with a wide variety of early field experiences. In order to determine how to positively impact field experiences, it is first important to understand the context in which pre-service teachers live in and through.

According to Huling (1998),

Field experiences in teacher preparation are in a sense like the experiences provided to medical students in the active participatory roles of internships and residencies. Through field experiences, teacher candidates observe and work with real students, teachers, and curriculum in natural settings (i.e., PK-12 schools). Field experiences are typically

distinguished from clinical experiences, which occur in more tightly controlled educational settings...typically student teaching in which the candidate gradually assumes total teaching responsibility under the joint supervision of a cooperating teacher, who is the teacher of record, and a university professor. (para. 2)

Before student teaching, teacher education students are typically involved in early field experiences or practicums. After one, two, or three practicums, the progression usually culminates with student teaching as the final opportunity to practice what one has learned in their program. Like other professions, in teaching, experience in the field is critical because knowledge of content, history of schooling, theory, etc. is not enough to make one a successful teacher in action. Understanding the argument behind the use of field experiences is a crucial part in a review of the historical contexts of this teacher education staple. It is important to my study because students' anxiety and stress during the field placement experience phase of their teacher preparation is the focus; it is critical to understand why this phase cannot be removed altogether. According to Huling (1998), "The rationale for field experiences in teacher preparation is grounded in the work of John Dewey (1904; 1938) who spearheaded the progressive movement in the 1930s and emphasized learner-centered instruction. He was a strong advocate for the experiential training of teachers" (Huling, 1998, para. 3). Dewey saw the teacher as a learner who needed to formulate his or her own understandings through experience. However, if field experiences took place before student teaching, they typically only involved observation. Huling (1998) articulates that national data for the last twenty years highlights the need for change:

Within the past two decades, a number of national reports have stressed the need for major improvement in the preparation of teachers as a foundation for other educational

reform efforts. The Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy (1986), the Holmes Group (1986), the National Commission on Teaching & America's Future (1996), and others (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983; Goodlad, 1990; Darling-Hammond, 1997) have recommended that future teachers have more rigorous preparation and more authentic experiences to enable them to cope with the increasing complexity, challenges, and diversity of current schools and classrooms. (para. 5)

The question that remains is how to ensure or increase the quality or effectiveness of the field experiences in a teacher education preparation program. □

Teaching is not the only profession that utilizes field experiences to give individuals preparing for the career hands-on practice in an authentic setting. Doctors also must prepare in their field and do so in a sequence of residencies. Brief research into this challenging preparatory work indicates that mental health is of similar concern with prospective physicians, as with future teachers. A recent 2016 study, published by the U.S. National Library of Medicine National Institutes of Health, concluded that depressive symptoms, or depression, ranged from 20.9% and 43.2% among resident physicians, which are much increased in comparison with the general public. The authors call for additional research to further understand implications for prevention and treatment of depression for training physicians (Mata et. al., 2016, abstract). A study with a similar aim, published in the same National Library looked to investigate the under recognition of major depressive disorder and generalized anxiety disorder, so they screened students at a medical university with an anonymous survey questionnaire. The results note that this is an issue, and the authors articulate it in their conclusions by saying that,

The stresses of medical education and practice may predispose trainees to psychopathological consequences that can affect their academic performance and patient care. The current study showed a significantly higher rate of MDD and GAD positive screens in medical trainees than the prevalence of age-matched U.S. population...Increased awareness and support services are required... (Mousa, Dhamoon, Lander & Dhamoon, 2016, abstract).

Clearly, the stress of field experience training is not just an issue in teacher education as I had anticipated, and similarly, more prevention and research is needed to get the heart at how these mental health issues can be mitigated and supported.

### **Challenges and Complexities** □

The National Council on Teacher Quality (2011) committed to studying student teaching, usually a semester-long clinical, summarizes the experience by saying that,

student teachers must synthesize everything they have learned about collecting or developing instructional materials, teaching a lesson, guiding small-group activities, establishing and maintaining classroom order, interacting with faculty and parents and even taking on lunchroom and playground duties. Passing (or failing) student teaching determines whether an individual will be recommended for certification as a licensed teacher. Surveys of new teachers suggest that student teaching is the most important part of their teaching experience. The stakes in student teaching are high. (p. 13)

Here is where one may assume the anxiety about the experience begins as it is the culminating screening to decide whether an individual's preparatory work will or will not lead to

their goal and career as a person in the teaching profession. Considering that classrooms and individuals are dynamic and unique, while there is evidence that field teaching placements are helpful, there are innumerable nuances that characterize and differentiate what makes up the experience. Presumably, the cooperating teacher is an essential component, however, "...sheer numbers make it difficult to place each candidate with an outstanding teacher who can model the type of learner-centered instruction advocated by most teacher education programs" (Huling, 1998, para. 8). It is not the cooperating teacher alone who is responsible for preparing future teachers while simultaneously working to meet the needs of a classroom of students. When overviewing the challenges of pre-service teachers' field experiences, it's essential to know what they, themselves, think about their readiness. As the result of their study and review, Stuart and Thurlow (2000) note that,

Novice teachers report that their undergraduate education programs do inadequately prepare them to face the demands of teaching in classroom with increased numbers of children who do not speak English; children with disabilities; children with inadequate family support for learning (Vaughn, Bos, & Schumm, 1997); and students who remain unmotivated to learn, disillusioned with their school progress, and alienated from the dominant school culture. (Goodlad, 1984; Kozol, 199, p. 113)

Furthermore, many preservice teachers view teaching as solely a process of transferring knowledge and information, (Pajares, 1992) which may impact their readiness to make important changes to their dynamic classroom practices. According to Goodlad (1990, p. 219), what's also of great importance is the oversimplification of the transition from college student to teacher as more occupational than intellectual (as cited in Stuart and Thurlow, 2000, p. 113). From another study, Gregory & Allen (1978), it appears that more teacher candidates may need to change their

self-perceptions, or characteristics they self ascribe. They concluded that, “a primary cause of the usual decrease in professional self-concept was a conflict between students’ unrealistic and idealized perceptions of themselves as teachers, and the realities of schools, the patterns of behavior they were forced to conform to, and their lack of skill in teaching” (p. 54). The NCTQ (2011) completed a two-year study on a stratified sample of higher education institutions in the U.S. It says that student teaching, the final field experience component, serves as a potential transition into the profession for almost 200,000 teacher candidates every year, and in their study several hardships for teacher candidates emerged (p. 13). These include:

1. There are neither enough qualified cooperating teachers nor is there the need for new elementary teachers to justify the high numbers of student teachers that institutions insist on placing each year. □
2. Institutions lack clear, rigorous criteria for the selection of cooperating teachers-either on paper or in practice. □
3. Institutions convey a strong sense of powerlessness in their relationships with school districts. □
4. Institutions do not take advantage of important opportunities to provide guidance and feedback to student teachers. □

Harris (2011) also synthesizes the stressful factors associated with teaching and pre-service teaching placements that teacher candidates experience. Examples include: the mismatch of perceived demands and available resources, an increase in work-related responsibilities, new programming or curricular requirements without training or tools to implement them, insufficient



time to actualize changes, perceived pressures to be involved in students' activities outside the work day, role ambiguity and conflict, student behavior, and a lack of perceived support from students' parents and family (Harris, 2011, p. 106). Mental health, especially the anxiety of pre-service teachers, has become something that is impossible to ignore. Its prevalence is littered throughout journals resulting from decades of research. Teachers must learn to take care of others and themselves because their personality and well-being impact their students and their community.

In fact, Coates & Thorensen (1976) report:

[m]any educators would agree that teacher "personality" and "mental health" as they are reflected in classroom behavior are important. Some might even consider these characteristics more important than a teacher's knowledge of the subject matter and methods of teaching...The incidence of various types of emotional maladjustment, particularly anxiety, among teachers has received considerable attention since early in this century. (p. 159 & 160)

Clearly the notion of anxious teachers has been plaguing the profession for too long. In fact, in an older study, researchers found in a sample of over 600 that (Hicks, 1933) 17 percent were "unusually nervous" and another 11 percent had nervous breakdowns...The Department of Classroom Teachers of the National Education Association (1938) reported that 37.5 percent of their nationwide sample of 5,150 teachers indicated they were seriously worried and nervous. In 1951, 43 percent of a sample of 2,200 teachers reported that they were working under considerable strain and tension. Of 2,290 teachers surveyed in 1967, 16.2 percent responded that they were working under considerable strain...about 78 percent of the teachers in the 1967 survey

(National Education Association) indicated they experienced stress at a moderate or considerable level (as cited in Coates & Thorensen, 1976, p. 160 & 161).

This Hicks study from 1933 is referenced in later literature as one of the first to document the pervasiveness of anxious educators. This naturally leads one to question how these anxieties start and might be mediated. Since teaching experience begins with field placements, which have been documented to induce anxiety, maybe this is where the research should focus? Is the research of the prevalence of teacher and student teacher anxieties being met with equally responsive research with attempts to prevent and mediate this anxiety? These are all prompts for further contemplation and investigation. Work on these questions has begun, as cited in Munday, Windham, Cartwright, Bodenhamer (1995), Anxiety has been studied in teacher candidates prior to, during, and after student teaching. As early as 1952, Travers, Rabinowitz, and Nemovicher (1952) measured the anxieties of student teachers at the beginning and end of the student teaching experience and concluded that student teachers' original anxieties did not change. Additional investigations have found that as the teaching experience increases, the anxieties decrease (Dutton, 1963; Morris and Chissom, 1978; Payne and Manning, 1990; Petrusich, 1966; Sinclair and Nicoll, 1980; Sorenson and Halpert, 1968; Thompson, 1963) (Munday et al., 1995, para. 4).

In looking into the sources of anxiety for beginning teachers, Coates & Thorensen (1976) note that relationships with CT's and supervisors were a major source of tension especially later in the placement, as well as video-taped reviews of their teaching. In addition, they note five primary professional requirements that:

self reported anxieties and concerns also center around (a) their ability to maintain

discipline in the classroom, (b) students' liking of them, (c) their knowledge of subject matter, (d) what to do in case they make mistakes or run out of material, and (e) how to relate personally to other faculty members, the school system and parents. (Coates & Thorensen, 1976, p. 164)

The alarming notion of anxious teachers, including the various catalysts of these anxieties, have been documented throughout the twentieth century, and current research continues to indicate that challenges associated with increasing stress and anxiety begin in the practicum and student teaching field placements for pre-service teachers. In looking at the reason for anxious or stressed teachers, these sources (Coates & Thorensen, 1976; Keavey & Sinclair, 1978), tend to center on basic issues that teachers at all levels confront: the teacher's ability to maintain discipline and control over the classroom, the teacher's ability to effect sufficient academic achievement or progress, the teacher's capacity to satisfy the expectations of the educational institution, and the teacher's ability to adjust to inadequate facilities or supplies (Gorrell, Bregman, McAllister, & Lipscomb, 1985, p. 11). □ Also, relating to stress is teachers' satisfaction with their work, and the anticipation of these concerns impacts pre-service teachers looking forward to a teaching career. "An earlier study in teacher satisfaction (Merrill, 1970) found that areas of low satisfaction were related to compensation, company (school) practices and policies, recognition, opportunities for advancement, social status, and authority" (as cited in Gorrell, Bregman, McAllister, & Lipscomb, 1985, p. 11). Unfortunately, opportunities for advancement, social status, and authority can also be impacted by a person's race, and a section on teacher candidates' field placement challenges is not complete without discussion about the evolving demographics of students in our country's schools. Warren (2015) notes how, "schools in the United States are populated by a growing majority of students who are non-White and

working class or poor (Fry, 2007; Snyder, 2009; Yasin, 2000) while their teachers continue to be largely White, middle to upper class and female...White females represent over 80% of professionals in education..." (p. 573). So, how does demographic teacher student mismatch impact teacher candidates and what implications does this have for future teacher preparation programs?

Warren (2015) says that, "The *whiteness of good intentions* replaces humility with prerogative, as these young White teachers set out to teach without ever being truly primed or prepared for the experiences they will encounter" (p. 595). Being unprepared is a widely accepted catalyst of anxiousness and in this case, Warren notes how good intentions are not enough because whiteness leads to uninformed confidence and judgment about the needs of diverse students. What makes this problem even more complex is that research indicates that teachers' conceptions, defined by Warren (2015), as "...the belief or attitude a teacher possesses relative to his or her understanding of a particular concept or set of concepts" (p. 573) are full of conflicts and contradictions in empathizing with culturally and racially diverse students. This perception gap, involves the need for selflessness so that new teachers can respond without false empathy, putting the needs and wishes of the recipients of their empathetic responses first without desire for any personal reward (p. 574). Gordon (1999) declares that, "Empathy allows teachers the flexibility to see their instruction and student interactions through students' eyes" (as cited in Warren, 2015, p. 575). Though the disparity between teachers and students may initially cause angst as teachers fall short in attending to this gap, the act of selfless empathy could in fact not only improve student and teacher relationships, but also the teacher's state as selfless acts do for me and my feelings of anxiousness. This research on empathy builds on the field of social psychology and helps to establish empathy as a professional disposition for new teachers

interested in teaching with culturally relevant pedagogy providing implications for the training of pre-service teachers.

#### □ **Implications of Anxious Pre-service Teachers** □

As the literature has established, there are many catalysts of pre-service teachers' anxieties. Harris (2011) notes that,

Teachers who become overwhelmed, hopeless, and unsupported may leave the profession...Stress can also cause teacher absenteeism, burnout, and various physical and psychological illness...detract from teacher effectiveness in the classroom...Teachers may not have the energy to develop novel/creative classroom approaches to learning/management. (p. 106)

Furthermore, according to Wisniewski and Gargiulo (1997) and Younghusband (2000), "Teacher stress may serve to put up emotional barriers between teachers and their students, negatively impacting student-teacher relations" (as cited in Harris, 2011, p. 106). Looking at the larger picture, it is imperative to also consider who the pre-service teachers' anxiety impacts other than themselves, and how. One study (Preece, 1979) questions how pre-service teachers' stress manifests and if it can lead to deeply rooted permanent anxiety about teaching. Additionally, it suggests that unruly pupil behavior may arise as a consequence of teacher anxiety (Harvis, 1975) based on the hypothesis that anxious teachers are less prepared to respond to a full range of students' behaviors. In summary, it interrogates the connection of student teachers' anxiety impacting issues of classroom management, which connects to a novice teacher's negative self conception and the permanence of anxieties (p. 13).

How a student teacher perceives their experience has a direct correlation to his or her expectations for working in the profession. Too many anxieties during this period, could lead to, “A mediocre student teaching experience, let alone a disastrous one [which cannot be] undone” (National Council on Teaching Quality, 2011, p. 13). It is not only the student teacher and cooperating teacher who need to take action. In a recent study on coping strategies and psychological well-being, Gustems-Carnicer and Calderon (2012) note that educational institutions need to be cognizant of the physical and psychological symptoms of academic stress, and point attention to the fact that,

[v]ery little time in teacher education courses is devoted to teaching student teachers to recognize the signs of stress and to introducing them to the procedures, techniques, and strategies necessary to cope successfully with stressful situations. The educational setting may be particularly conducive to the development of negative stress, and it is essential to prepare student teachers to deal with the situation and to keep their commitment to learning intact (Umback and Wawrynski 2005)...Coping strategies can play an important role in the perception of psychological well-being (Parsons et al., 1996). (as cited in Gustems-Carnicer and Calderon, 2012, p. 1128)

One commonly recognized definition of *coping strategy* is that of Lazarus and Folkman (1986), who define it as an transformative response to the objective or solution of the problem and the other targets individuals’ emotions and tension reduction. (Gustems-Carnicer and Calderon, 2012, p. 1128)

### **Field Experience Alternatives**

In previous sections, the importance and meaningful nature of practicum and student

teaching experiences is discussed. It is also interesting to examine what some programs are already doing. Meeting the needs of teacher candidates, may begin with recognizing the import of capitalizing on individualization, students' strengths, and agency.

Hwopek (1975) says,

Educators, then, recognize that learning is a matter of personal exploration and discovery. Students learn best in different ways and at different rates because each individual has a unique intellectual level and learning style. The intrinsic motivation of the learner can be best capitalized upon when the learner is deeply involved by self-selection, control, and self-evaluation. It follows then, that a potential teacher, a candidate in a teacher education program at a college or university, should also be treated as an individual, a learner with a unique intellectual level and learning style. (p. 169)

In working to capitalize on the skills of each teacher candidate, take advantage of the dynamics of group support, and mitigate some of the common challenges for student teachers, "A Group Program in Student Teaching in English" was utilized. This is just as its namesake initiates. It begins with a group of student teachers assigned not to a single teacher, but to an entire teaching department. The candidates are allowed to choose from several groups giving them the autonomy to direct their placement to where they feel most comfortable. This is the first aspect of difference as the pre-service teachers feel a part of the placement process, instead of that the process is happening to them. Then, the group of teachers is responsible for working together, evaluating one another, and "As a member of the group, student teachers enjoy the psychological and emotional support of their peers who are embarking upon student teaching with similar apprehension, fear, and lack of self confidence" (Hwopek, 1975, p.170). The

candidates can share ideas, materials, strategies, etc. The idea of placing students in a group may not be original, but because they are not assigned to a single teacher, “Personality conflicts can be minimized and avoided because student teachers are not forced to work in a primary way with a particular assigned experienced teacher...” (Hwopek, 1975, p. 170). In this way, the pre-service teachers can tap into the strengths and expertise of many cooperating teachers and work with them in a way that’s beneficial for both parties. The pre-service teachers observe one another and take part in peer evaluations to learn how to give and accept constructive criticism. The philosophy behind this thinking is that the teacher candidates can learn to be responsible for their entire program and experience because they have the choice to act and the autonomy to make change (Hwopek, 1975, p. 171).

In another example, the author explores the stress of pre-service teachers in education coursework and presents the case for a new individual stress management course. Harris (2011) asserts that although teacher stress can lead to high turnover rates, low job satisfaction, high teacher burnout, and physical or psychological health consequences, “Professionals, including teachers, are often left with little education or training in how to recognize and deal with stress” (p.105). In this study, “stress is defined as a combination of a stressor, stress reactivity, and the existence of strain and/or psychological triggers that have the potential to activate our stress responses” (Harris, 2011, p. 105). The researcher notes individualistic mediating factors that impact stress such as self-talk, social support, personality, etc. In this example, “...individual stress management reflects learning about the nature of stress, understanding how to recognize stress, along with interventions to address existing stress” (p. 106 & 107).

After reviewing all teacher preparation programs in Canada, the researcher indicates that very few examples of the inclusion of stress management can be located. He provides five



categories to address in the construction of an individual stress management course. First, in the “Introduction” component, student-to-student and student-to-professor interactions should be prioritized to motivate communication and collaboration. Within this section, rapport building is important and facilitated through offering students’ choice, the students and instructor’s goals, and an anonymous method for communication between the instructor and students. Second, “Foundational Knowledge” on the relationships between stress and stress management and theories surrounding the topics should be explored. Third, various activities should be implemented to help the pre-service teachers identify the catalysts and implications of their stressors and anxieties as well as opportunities for reflection and role-playing. Finally, the teaching candidate students need motivation and opportunities for supported goal setting (Harris, 2011, p. 110-111). Harris further articulates that the bulk of a stress management class should focus on the learning of prevention and intervention strategies. These include: cognitive and perceptual (appraisal, inaccurate self-talk, mindfulness, restructuring one’s narrative), affective and emotional (visualization, humor, emotional regulation and intelligence), physiological (exercise, nutrition, breath and relaxation activities), and behavioral (time management, boundary setting, conflict resolution, and assertiveness training) in the hope that the combination of these factors will aid one’s individual stress management empowerment (Harris, 2011, p. 112).□

### **What’s Missing**

In looking ahead to future implications for research on pre-service teachers’ stress and anxieties, additional research should be conducted, and is called for in the literature. To begin, the first-person voice and perspectives of the pre-service teachers themselves could be highlighted further instead of researchers’ interpretations of their perspectives. Highlighting this

perspective may increase the validity of the research as well as its relatability. Second, many studies are needed to investigate additional anxiety prevention and intervention as a combination of different strategies may prove more effective than those previously attempted. In reflecting on research reviewed globally, it does seem relevant that much of the prevention or solution oriented proactive initiatives to mediate pre-service teacher anxieties have been in countries outside the United States. Third, as a researcher who experienced anxiety during field experiences, the absence of other authentic researchers who have been through the same is evident. Despite the fact that researchers may have experienced pre-service teacher angst, it is not well documented. This could help qualify and support the conclusions of those authors. Third, many of the studies initiated on this topic involve secondary teachers as opposed to elementary, so there is room for expansion in “storying” experiences of pre-service teachers with this population. Fourth, in all the studies reviewed, the source of responsibility to change the pre-service teacher experiences did not seem to originate from the institution providing the teacher education coursework but rather from an individual researcher. This institutional accountability might propel this research forward. Fifth, a successful and replicable pre-service teacher anxiety intervention has not been identified by studies examined. Sixth, the students’ reflections, a part of many teacher education programs, do not seem to be interactively employed as a strategy for stress or anxiety intervention. There is great potential for further research on how pre-service teachers’ reflections may facilitate coping with mental health challenges and professional constraints. In specific, new teachers may learn from reflecting on how what they’ve written situates their identities within a school community, how time can change perspective, and how the act of writing and re-writing one’s narrative is liberating. Seventh, as technology continues to impact academia and education, one might ask how this can be incorporated into the goals of

pre-service teachers' preparation to prepare them to work within the emotionally challenging field of education. Eighth, one must question, how a curriculum that overtly addresses emotions of pre-service teachers may impact their anxiety, overall preparation experience, perspective-taking of students and therefore empathy of students. If increased emotional understanding and empathy can positively impact teacher student relationships and in turn improve student achievement, there are gaps here. Ninth, the mental health disparities between LGBTQ individuals and gender-conforming, whites and individuals of color, genders, and other minorities must be further considered as this study is confined by a somewhat homogenous sample of heterosexual, white, females. In looking at emotions in teacher education, Boler (1999) is a dominant scholar to consider and suggests four elements including: self-reflective and critical analysis of cultural and gendered emotional differences, occasions to scrutinize emotional experiences, opportunities to connect emotional experiences to pedagogy, and the increase of their emotional vocabularies for future integration (p. 81). This push for the importance of understanding emotions can be connected to the work of neuroscientist Lisa Feldman Barrett. Chen (2017) writes of Barrett's call for heightening understanding of the construction of emotion saying that:

learning new emotions words is good because you can learn to feel more subtle emotions, and that can make you better at regulating your emotions...understanding how emotions are constructed widens the horizon of control. You realize that if your brain is using your past to construct your present, you can invest energy in the present to cultivate or curate experiences in the now and then they become, if you practice them, they become automated enough that your brain will automatically construct them in the future. (Chen, 2017, para. 20 & 21)

Could this indicate that pre-service teachers could “invest energy” in their teacher education preparation program towards regulating anxiety and stress so that it does not negatively impact them?

Finally, there does seem to be a primary focus on student teaching when prior pre-service teachers, like those in practicums, could be targeted for anxiety reduction and coping. There is no question that successfully completing a teacher education preparation program takes resilience.

### **First Concluding Remarks**

The notion of resilience in teachers is gaining increasing currency in literature. Masten, Best, and Garmezy (1990) define resilience as “the process of, capacity for, or outcome of successful adaptation despite challenging or threatening circumstances” (p. 425). One of the main reasons for the increased attention to teacher resilience is the considerable attention paid in recent years to the high proportion of teachers who leave the profession in the first five years (as cited in Le Cornu, 2009, p. 717). There does not seem to be much argument that resilience is a necessary trait for teachers in this current and previous climates. In 2006, Jordan, Goldstein, & Brooks edited a *Handbook of Resilience in Children*, and in this model, learning communities are connected to the resilience of pre-service teachers. The key concepts in this model incorporate mutual empathy between students and teachers, as well as empowerment of children, and the development of courage as being integral to modeling professional experience. The key to this model is that relational resilience can be modeled in the learning community, like that of a pre-service teaching cohort, and then applied in professional communities (as cited in Le Cornu, 2009, p. 717).

Resilience is no doubt something that future teachers will not survive without. With experience working as a teacher and supervising teacher candidates, I have witnessed first hand the challenges of becoming a certified teacher or choosing to work in the profession. Acknowledging that working in the profession, and joining it, can be difficult or emotionally taxing is not the issue. The problem is that teacher education preparation programs are not changing to meet the level of support pre-service teachers seem to need and deserve. The demand for anxiety reduction and tools to cope with it is real. Education is a profession that needs to evolve, not just for young students, but also for college-age students who are going to be responsible for educating future generations. Even one teacher with the skills and experience to address and prepare their students to deal with this natural part of life has the potential to help thousands. Teacher education programs focus efforts on methods of reading, writing, math, social studies, and more, but none of that content is available to teachers if they are too anxious to instruct students, to learn, or be present and desiring work in the profession.

Moving back to current events, the reality of teacher shortages, for a variety of reasons, including angst in practicing and pre-service teachers is relevant. The state of Wisconsin is just one example, “With education school enrollments on the decline and a looming teacher shortage feared...a raft of new programs have emerged to recruit and train new teachers” (Richards, 2017, para. 1). In this example, the new programs include training STEM high school teachers, turning classroom aides into certified teachers, the offering of residency programs, as well as educating high school students as prospective teachers (Richards, 2017, para. 1). None of these new programs mention the management of pre-service teachers’ mental health. This hole is deep and pervasive, and as a new education researcher, I am compelled to highlight the need for anxiety coping and recognition in teacher education programs, so that soon those are the kinds of new

proactive programs on the front covers of future news stories. Considering the prevalence of pre-service teachers' anxiety and the lack of consistent and comprehensive attempts to resolve it, it is no wonder that teacher candidates are anxious. This chronicle may not be too newsworthy yet, but its time in future headlines of this Midwestern town in America is imminent.

### **From Self-Help to Writing to Heal: Historical Overview**

The genre of “writing to heal” texts stem from the larger field of self–help. The notion of self-help has been around for thousands of years. According to Shapiro (2013), notions of self-help can be traced to an Ancient Egyptian’s genre of “Sebayt”, which means teaching, and is essentially instructional literature written from father to son advocating moral behavior and self-control. Then, during the Early and Middle Ages and into the Renaissance, motivating stories of kings to be emulated were relevant and called “Mirror-of-Princes” books. Later, during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, books on conduct, politeness, and behaving in society were all the rage in countries like Italy, France, and England. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century the self-help texts contained topics more consistent with what many associate with the genre today: how to parent, losing weight, success, self-control, etc. In the end, Shapiro (2013) notes that there is little evidence as to whether these books are helpful or not (para. 1-4). I, however, must include that the adjective “helpful” is too subjective to be “helpful” to anyone. Despite the nickname for the genre, self help, maybe this literature is more about facilitating people to feel better or be “healed” by definition in ways that are so subjective that there is not a definitive nature to the question?

Even if the effects of this genre are not conclusive, their influence on culture is relevant enough that they have made their way into Time.com, an online publication for the well-known Time Magazine. In *The Last 100 Years of Self-Help*, Cutruzzula (2016) notes how these texts continue to be differentiated and now inundate the publishing market, coming a long way from

general advice books for the common man, like *Laugh and Live*, published in 1917, which was preceded with texts like *The Power of Positive Thinking*. These two books and the ones before them were written with men as their potential audience, and as times progress so must the content of this genre, so the authors suggest that the next generation of these books may need to aspire social justice and advocacy (Cutruzzola, 2016, para. 2-5, 14). Self-help is now a mainstream genre, but the particular ideals and benefits behind writing to heal, specifically, are gaining momentum.

### **Health Benefits**

Historically, writing has been used to help one process, cope, release, or express emotions, but newer studies reveal that writing may have the potential to impact the physical body too, even the immune system. Murray (2002) notes that, writing has been a part of therapy strategies for some time, but scientists are beginning to uncover how writing may positively impact the body's immune system. The essential component to the conclusiveness of "impact" seems to be in how people use the writing they do to translate their emotions. This is at the crux of the effectiveness turn because it relieves angst that can aggravate disease. Two psychologists on the foreground of this connection between writing and immunity are researchers James Pennebaker, of the University of Texas, Austin and Joshua Smyth, of Syracuse University who made this conclusion after studying immunity in individuals with HIV/AIDS, asthma, and arthritis. In addition, Smyth published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* (Vol. 281, No. 14) what was considered a monumental study for its time in which he studied asthma patients who wrote about a stressful event for 20 minutes a day and improved more or deteriorated less than those who wrote about events of which they felt neutrally toward and later

a comparable outcome was procured with HIV/AIDS patients in a study by Pennebaker, Petrie, and others (as cited in Murray, 2002, para. 8). Most relevant to this study of pre-service teacher anxiety is the resulting connection Pennebaker makes between anxiety and writing. He says, “By writing, you put some structure and organization to those anxious feelings...It helps you get past them” (as cited in Murray, 2002, para. 9). There are of course those who disagree with the conclusions of these health effects; and another researcher cites Pennebaker’s response here:

People who talk about things over and over in the same ways aren’t getting any better...There has to be growth or change in the way they view their experiences. Evidence of a changed perspective can be found in the language people use, Pennebaker has found. For example, the more they use such cause and effect words as “because”, “realize”, and “understand”, the more they appear to benefit. Pennebaker also acknowledges that some personality types likely respond better to writing than others...A host of other individual differences -including handling of stress, ability to self regulate and interpersonal relations--also mediate writing’s effectiveness. (as cited in Murray, 2002, para. 15-17)

In maintaining a psychology lens for a moment, I would like to transition into a blog from [www.psychologytoday.com](http://www.psychologytoday.com) where the author notes a specific subtype of writing to heal, expressive writing, as “...a cornerstone of wellness and writing connections” (Evans, 2012, para. 1). Expressive writing is depicted by its namesake, and is just that, writing personally and full of emotion to express and explore feelings, without concern for the conventions, like grammar or diction. This author then invites readers to try one of Pennebaker’s expressive writing prompts to make a self-determination of its effectiveness or not. In an article written three years later, in 2013, Parker-Pope concludes that,



the scientific research on the benefits of so-called expressive writing is surprisingly vast. Studies have shown that writing about oneself and personal experiences can improve mood disorders, help reduce symptoms among cancer patients, improve a person's health after a heart attack, reduce doctor visits, and even boost memory. Now researchers are studying whether the power of writing-and then rewriting-your personal story can lead to behavioral changes and improve happiness. The concept is based on the idea that we all have a personal narrative that shapes our view of the world and ourselves. But "...sometimes our inner voice doesn't get it completely right" (Parker-Pope, 2013, para. 3).

This connection is critical because here is where the worlds of narrative and writing to heal come together. If personal narratives shape our lives, and those identities and narratives can be changed through explicit writing exercises, then maybe writing to heal can offer perspective that allows one to rewrite their narrative, and cause a healing feeling? I came to the conclusion that writing to heal prompts may be useful in helping pre-service teachers cope with their stress and anxiety not only through my experience as a supervisor and instructor, but also as an anxious person who read a sampling of texts indicating connections between writing, the mind, and the body.

### **Expressive Writing**

Pennebaker and Evans (2014) give a brief history of emotional writing, which is also referenced in research as expressive writing; since the mid 1980's studies are increasingly finding ways in which this writing can bring about "healing". Starting at the very beginning,

science recognizes that trauma induces stress, which causes emotional strife, and can lead to depression, weight gain or loss, or increase rates of heart disease and certain cancers. What's interesting is that within these observations, researchers noticed that those who kept their narratives inside, and did not share them, had a harder time than those who talked about their experiences (p. 4). These findings about secrets lead Pennebaker and Evans (2014) to engage in the study of how writing about emotional strain could improve health. In the end, they found that even long term, in weeks and months after the study, which consisted of having several writing groups spend four consecutive days writing about traumatic experiences with expressive writing, the results were exciting. The authors' write:

Across our first four writing studies, those in the expressive writing condition made forty-three percent fewer doctor visits for illness than those who were asked to write about superficial topics...writing about personal traumas resulted in people seeing doctors at half the normal rate (Pennebaker & Beall 1986, p. 8).

This study served as the impetus for hundreds of other studies on the benefits of expressive writing, which continue to confirm impacts on illness through emotional regulation achieved with writing or other means. One such study further substantiates the writing's potential to reduce anxiety, making it most relevant and exciting for the purpose of this study.

Colino (2016), for U.S. News and World Report, articulates that, "... writing about emotionally charged subjects also can improve mental health, including symptoms of depression, anxiety, major depressive disorder and even post-traumatic stress disorder..." (para. 3). This was supported further by a recent 2014 study with women being treated for substance abuse who wrote expressively for four times for only 20 minutes had less intense symptoms of post-traumatic stress, depression, and anxiety in comparison to participants who wrote on neutral

topics. These acts of writing may release passionate feelings, that when withheld could make a person feel upset, so the theory is that the act of expressively writing may be “cathartic” (Colino, 2016, para. 5). The descriptor “cathartic” was also by a participant who recently emailed me in gratitude after the experience of completing the Qualtrics survey used in this study to collect data from new teachers one year post-graduation from the University teacher education preparation program:

Allie,

Happy Monday! I had to write to let you know that completing that anxiety survey was cathartic. Thank you for making sure our thoughts and experiences are represented in this study.

Have a great rest of the week, (Participant-one year post graduation from TE program, March 3, 2018 )

This email might be considered an example of “healing.” Through writing about the emotions and anxiety of her experiences, and having an opportunity to potentially create positive change for future pre-service teachers, the participant feels a sense of satisfaction and relief. She even communicates gratitude with the words, “thank you”. Since differences in individuals’ emotional states, as measured in before and after comparisons, are impossible to prove, some may argue that determining “healing” in this context is too subjective. However, like the definitions of anxiety from participants themselves, it is what the individual thinks about himself or herself that is of concern to me.

### **Mind, Body, and Writing**

It is important to look more closely at what is embedded in works that connect writing to the body and mind, as this is a necessary connection for the proposed writing to heal prompts to “work” as a coping mechanism for pre-service teachers’ anxiety. It can be difficult to write without judging oneself or the words that are formulated by finger taps onto a page or screen. This is one reason why Goldberg (2016) reminds readers that we learn to write and use it as a release by the act of writing itself. She says, “Don’t try to control it. Stay present with whatever comes up, and keep your hand moving.” (p.14). Here, the author insinuates that the mind must tell the body, or the hand, to keep moving despite encroaching thoughts to stop writing. Even if these pre-service teachers feel at times they do not know what to write, perhaps embracing this “stay moving” protocol will encourage the liberation of honest thoughts and reflections onto paper? Goldberg (2016) goes on to say that understanding a process she terms, “composting,” which “cultivates patience and produces less anxiety” (p. 14). She describes composting as filtering through our consciousness to make meaning of what our senses have taken in. Goldberg (2014) also reassures that, using details gives writing believability and truthfulness and that we must be “awake” to the details of our surroundings (p. 45). This is why my findings will include some actual quotations from participants; it is a way in which I hope to enrich the validity of the study and respect participants’ voices. To use Goldberg’s words, I will need to be “awake” to the details my participants share and hopefully they will also be “awake” to the details of their experiences and reflections of them. The necessity to learn how to cope with pre-service teaching experiences, especially when they evoke stress or anxiety is readily apparent in Van Der Kolk’s New York bestselling text, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (2014).

Many times pre-service teachers are so stressed and overwhelmed that they have described themselves as “just trying to survive” or “just make it.” This notion cannot be belittled because of the effects it has. Van Der Kolk (2014) says that when any organism is in a mode of operation that registers in the body like that of a “survival mode,” then there is, “...no room for nurture, care, and love. For us humans, it means that as long as the mind is defending itself against invisible assaults, our closest bonds are threatened, along with our ability to imagine, plan, play, learn, and pay attention...” (p. 76). It is unthinkable how a pre-service teacher can be successful without these abilities, again calling for the need for coping mechanisms to be a required embedded part of teacher education programs so that students do not feel like they need to be in a survival-type mode. I can only hope that the use of the “writing to heal prompts” might encourage pre-service teachers to express what they may otherwise keep inside, so that they can experience relief from the expression whether it comes in the form of self or group affirmation, or something else. Audre Lorde (1984, 2007) writes about this, in terms of

...the transformation of silence into language action is an act of self-revelation, and that always seems fraught with danger...[but] you’re never really a whole person if you remain silent because there’s always that one little piece inside you that wants to be spoken out, and if you keep ignoring it, it gets madder and madder and hotter and hotter, and if you don’t speak it out one day it will just up and punch you in the mouth... (Lorde, 2007, p. 42)

I often interact with pre-service teachers who have not had effective or readily available avenues to share and express their pre-service teaching anxieties. This pent-up angst seems to fester and can eventually cause an implosion or explosion. Without additional coping strategies for anxiety, a majority of pre-service teachers are doomed to feel overwhelmed, stressed out, and

isolated in their inability to manage the pressures and constraints of the double life of teaching and learning.

### **Autoethnography of Pennebaker & Evans Expressive Writing**

On the journey for an answer, to how the field of writing to heal might help pre-service teachers, before recommending that this type of writing be used, I tried the process myself. Over the course of several weeks, I followed the writing to heal protocol of prompts by John W. Pennebaker, mentioned earlier as one of the preliminary psychologists in the field of writing to heal, along with Evans. *Expressive Writing: Words that Heal: Using expressive writing to overcome traumas and emotional upheavals, resolve issues, improve health, and build resilience*, by Pennebaker and Evans(2014) is one of the most referenced, when scholars report the actual practice of writing to heal techniques. For me, the most shocking result of the writing to heal process came not while taking part in the expressive, transactional, poetic, affirmative, or legacy writing exercises (Pennebaker & Evans, 2014). Instead, even after weeks of writing about personal, emotional, and thought-provoking subjects, I was impacted the most by the preparation and writing of an essay to synthesize my experiences for an audience. This involved the acts of rewriting, interpreting, and connecting to quotations from the “writing to heal” texts I identified with most. After weeks of exploring the mental and physical impacts of various writing exercises, how could connecting to the experiences the authors write about impact me the greatest? Is this a sign that writing, after all, is about writing for an audience and the importance of audience as a medium of human connection?

In the effort to affirm or contend with how writing influences mind and body, in my experience, personal introspection seems to be a necessity. In the midst of the first week, my

transactional journaling was about an ongoing challenge with which I was hoping to find resolution or at least relief. After an outpouring of my perspective, I did feel reinvigorated to take control of the situation. The writing led to an introspective conclusion that the power to make a change resided within me. This revived empowerment brought resolution to the challenge, at least in my mind. Through writing out my viewpoint and reflecting retrospectively, I was able to recognize that regardless of the other persons' actions, I needed to, and more importantly, could, take my power back and create change. I felt more connected to my inner strength. This same sense of permission to see myself in a "reinvented" light became apparent after one of the legacy writing prompts that directed the recording of one's life experiences before and after a major event. Much of my late 20's and early 30's have been defined by a single event, which is why I felt particularly drawn to this legacy writing prompt: *The first thing to note about this writing activity is that I feel extraordinarily motivated to write about almost all of the prompts... I think that this may be because I am in a good place. I am feeling beyond blessed. In reflection of a "before and after", I think I could be currently content with my "after"...* Later, I write about my brain in Pennebaker and Evans' (2014) expressive writing mind body connection exercise: *The brain is a curious animal, and it's innate inclination of imagination has made it possible for me to express to others how I feel. Imagine first that you are driving alone to visit a friend at a cabin up North. After few hours of driving, the sunsets, you start to feel really tired, and you make a wrong turn. On either side there are towering trees and the twigs of curling under brush make the woods dense even in winter. You get a flat tire and decide to get out of your car and find help. Now, you are alone, at night, in the woods, in the middle of nowhere, and you hear sticks breaking and heaving breathing close behind you. You*

*start to sweat, panic, and can barely breathe. A bear is chasing you, and you have no chance of getting away!*

A synthesized version of the “bear in the woods” scenario is a tool that my psychologist gave me, to explain to other people how I feel all the time if not medicated, because of my body’s overproduction of adrenaline that interplays with Generalized Anxiety Disorder. Telling this story, as stressful as I recognize it can be for others to hear, does make me feel better because it gives a cause for the effects I feel, which breeds a sense of control and the hope that others might understand what’s going on inside me, the potential for reprieve in connection. Narrating one’s own existence into reality to give the events of our lives shape and form much like the editing of a story. Consciously or perhaps subconsciously, could our brains connect our happenings into cause and effect categories to make them easier to process? Could this give an increased sense of control or predictability over our own lives, or at least a pre-service teaching experience?

The prospect of tuning in more vigilantly to one’s dialogue script, and then chronicling it with journaling is a notion I found fascinating. What might be revealed to the self through this writing technique by ruminating over a more refined connection between the body and mind? Consider recording, through writing, your own mind to body dialogues. For a person like me, who can narrow my focus too much, possibly even overthink things, this can also be problematic though insightful. In another writing exercise suggested by Pennebaker and Evans (2014), I played with a poetic description of my lungs, and how intense concentration on that organ can make me feel short of breath. I attempted to write about my lungs in a poetic style: *Lungs, processing oxygen, mouth and trachea. Lungs, filling, depressing, world’s air. Lungs, connecting people with environment. Lungs, bringing the outside in. Lungs, moving slowly and*



*deeply, hopefully. Lungs, reacting to heart and mind.* While an inspiring outlet for some, I found this medium was not a strength for me, nor did I connect with any part of the poetry invitation, but what specific prompt speaks to each person and why is not the point of focus here. Instead the representation of a number of writing to heal prompts is relevant, in the hope that even one might help a particular pre-service teacher cope and feel more supported during their teacher preparation programming.

### **Second Concluding Remarks**

Sometimes questions remain unanswered in a moment and others escape us for a lifetime, but maybe it's not the answers that are important but the connections. The experience of writing this piece meal auto-ethnography did help, but did it heal? Could the experience of writing feel extraordinary because of a lack of concern "for" an audience, or instead because I was just focused on myself? Could it have helped that I wrote unconcerned with how the components of content, diction, style, tone, etc. interacted? Furthermore, since "knowing" one's audience is considered by many an essential component of "good" writing, did this disconnection make the writing "bad", or just more fulfilling and perhaps more personally transformative? Conceivably, I was articulating my thoughts in a way that helped me better understand myself. Maybe writers are inspired by the purpose of connecting to their audience, or perhaps finding connections to others provides motivational purpose to write? Maybe it is the experience of pen to paper or fingers to keys. Could it be the introspection and mediation of perspective? Regardless, the next generation of pre-service teachers deserves the opportunity to explore all these purposes while engaging in their reflective journal writing. In addition, there may be promise in revisiting these

reflections as a window into self examination, perspective, and coping with mental health and professional challenges.

I do feel momentarily satisfied with the resources explored that have helped respond to why I may have reacted so strongly to the purpose of connecting. I invite other teachers to consider using “writing to heal” materials to inspire students’ writing. Writing is powerful, an often unappreciated gift. It provides a record of experience, allows us to narrate our way through situations with unconventional reason, gives us a medium to connect with others, and provides an opportunity for introspection and reflection.

### **Chapter Three**

#### **Narrative Inquiry Overview**

In a word, narrative is everywhere, but not everything is narrative...In contemporary usage, narrative has come to mean anything beyond a few bullet points; when someone speaks or writes more than a few lines...Here, a person’s “story” seems to speak for itself, not requiring interpretation, a kind of “narrative seduction... (Riessman, 2008, p.5)

In utilizing narratives as a component of inquiry for this project, I am also incorporating a degree of interpretation because while each individual’s voice is necessary and valued, I hope to bring forward “truths” about the experience and emerging identities of pre-service teachers. Riessman (2008) goes beyond narrative seductions not requiring interpretation to explain how this works: “...narrative has a robust life beyond the individual. As persons construct stories of experience, so too do identity groups, communities, nations, governments, and organizations...” (p. 7). This brings to light a challenge in this work as a researcher’s reporting of a narrative is always changed from the

original through the process of co-constructing. People are always telling their story to a particular audience, and since the story and the person's identity are intractably linked, getting the "truths" of the narrative correct is critically important.

Narrative inquiry seemed to be the most fitting research methodology for this project because it will allow me to collect "data" by taking advantage of human beings' natural implications for narrating their experiences. Ochs and Capps (2001) tell us that, "Human beings narrate to remember, instill cultural knowledge, grapple with a problem, rethink the status quo, soothe, empathize, inspire, speculate, justify a position, dispute, tattle, evaluate one's own and others' identities, shame, tease, laud, and entertain among other ends" (p. 60). Since participation in this research is, of course, voluntary, I hope to capitalize on participants' desire to share their pre-service teaching experiences and the value with which they attribute to this time and the anxiety or other emotions they felt within it.

To define this narrative inquiry undertaking, it's important to consider how narratives and their "tellability" are defined. Ochs and Capps (2001) say that, "While not restricted to any topic in particular, narratives of personal experience typically report human events that touch our lives...A highly tellable narrative of personal experience relates events of great interest..." (p. 34). Despite the fact that humans have been narrating experience throughout time, I want to narrow the field, as I am thinking of it, a bit further by including some historical underpinnings. Pinnegar & Daynes (2007) assert that, "Since the late 1980s and early 1990s research in the social sciences has taken a narrative turn to studying experience" (as cited in Clandinin, 2013, p. 11). Is this something that only emerged when there was a sharp orientation by researchers in the 1980's and 1990's in

what social sciences references as a narrative turn? I turn to Clandinin again to clarify this question. She says that narrative inquiry was originally written about as both “phenomenon and method”, but that working in the field transitioned perspective to thinking about it as a research methodology, which is what I am doing also. To note, according to Clandinin & Rosiek (2007), “It was the interweaving of narrative views of phenomena and narrative inquiry that marks the emerging field and that draws attention to the need for careful uses and distinctions of terms” (as cited in Clandinin, 2013, p. 11). Narrating experience has been done since time began, but Riessman and Speedy (2007) “pointed out that narrative inquiry in the human sciences is a twentieth-century development” (as cited in Clandinin, 2013, p. 11). Maybe the description of this methodology and its historical implications are plagued by the constraints of controlling vocabulary as much as the nature of the tellings of the participants and the relations of the inquirers? Riessman (1998) asserts that, [t]he precise definition of personal narrative is a subject of debate...For now, it refers to talk organized around consequential events. A teller in a conversation takes a listener into a past time or ‘world’ and recapitulates what happened then...” (p.3). However, unlike in some Social Sciences where subjectivity is something to breed suspicion, narratives are valued because of their grounding personal experience, place, and time; the perspective they elicit is what makes them so valuable (Riessman, 1998, p.5). Perspectives of pre-service teachers are a goal of this study, so I seek their personal narratives to story experiences of teacher candidates in a university teacher education preparation program.

Before moving on from this section, I do want to ground this discussion in the notion of experience as considered by John Dewey and his theory of experience (1938) since it is

experience that narrative inquirers study. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) tell us that this theory is most commonly noted as the philosophical grounding for narrative inquiry. Clandinin (2013) gets a bit more specific: “Dewey’s two criteria of experience-interaction and continuity enacted in situations-provide the grounding for attending to a narrative conception of experience through the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space with dimensions of temporality, place, and sociality” (p. 12). Part of my role, in that of interpretation, is to look towards my narrative inquiries not just as an individual’s experiences within a bubble, but to pay attention to “...the social, cultural, and institutional narratives within which individuals’ experiences are constituted, shaped, expressed, and enacted [as] Narrative inquirers study the individual’s experience in the world” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 12). In referencing ontological and epistemological commitments, my view is that which agrees with Connelly & Clandinin, (1990, 2006) that narrative inquirers study experience, human experience where people lead storied lives (as cited in Clandinin, 2013, p. 13). Despite this overview being brief, embedded within the data sources section below is additional information regarding methodologies, underpinnings, and justifications for the use and value in narrative inquiry and its fit for this study.

## **Data**

### **“Foundational” Survey of First Year Teachers**

There are three major sources of data collected to create what is referenced in research as triangulation, which is where, “researchers make use of multiple and different sources, methods, investigators, and theories to provide corroborating evidence...to shed

light on a theme or perspective” (Creswell, 2013, p. 251). In this case, the perspective I hope to ascertain is how pre-service teachers talk about and perceive their anxiety at different stages of their preparation, including practicum and student teaching variables as well as the general chronological time progression from one semester to the next. It will be insightful to understand how catalysts and implications of the pre-service teachers’ stressors change, so that coping mechanisms can eventually be tailored to better support teacher candidates within particular contextual circumstances. These first year teachers were part of a Middle Childhood through Early Adolescent cohort group who were studying to teach subject content areas in elementary and middle schools. The first source of data, collected from these students, is from an online survey software tool called, Qualtrics. It’s a program that allows users to customize the creation and implementation of an online survey with or without anonymity (Qualtrics LLC, 2018).

The use of this tool makes sense since it allowed me completely to customize the questions, content, and formatting to serve this study. Since I hope to highlight and maintain the integrity of the pre-service teachers’ voices, “truths,” and ways of knowing and expressing their experiences, open-ended straightforward questions are paramount (See Appendix A). The questions also vary in their focus and purpose to respect personal subjectivities in experience and perception. The first two questions attempt to locate participants’ notions of what anxiety is and is not, as well as how the symptoms of it may manifest in the individual. This is followed by inquiries to understand how students’ anxiety may or may not have differed during various points during the teacher preparation process. From there, I thought it was important to determine if students identified themselves as being anxious prior to the field placements in their teacher preparation

program, as this factor may impact how students perceive the nature of their anxiety and its influence on participation in various activities.

The subsequent section aims to understand how participants' perceived the support they received during the progressive stages of pre-service teaching, and what coping mechanisms they utilized. This is done to determine potential successes and gaps to ascertain what should potentially be maintained or changed in the future. Finally, I ask the participants to anticipate how their experience may have been different, void of anxious states, to consider the positive potential of a new future where pre-service teachers can participate in the preparation process without this distraction. In the end, I ask if the participants have anything else they want to share to account for my inability to know what an individual may personally require as a means to get to the integrity of their experience. Riessman confirms that responses "...depend on expectations [and] if "extended accounts are welcomed...participants are less likely to keep their answers brief" (p. 26). To add to the validation of this study, I hope to ascertain an insightful portrayal, which according to Erlandson et. al. (1993); Lincoln & Guba (1985); and Merriam (1998) includes thick, rich description [and] ...allows readers to make decisions regarding transferability...(as cited in Creswell, 2013, p. 252) This is important because the contexts of each pre-service teacher's experience are different due to variables like placements, cooperating teacher, work requirements, grade level, school of placement, etc.

This group of pre-service teachers in the first year post- graduation were invited to participate in this study, with the hope that they can recall the breadth of their recent experience and anxiety as a pre-service teacher retrospectively. I invited participants with a recruitment email, approved by the International Review Board (I.R.B.) (See Appendix B).

Anyone interested in publishing research that utilizes human subjects must receive approval from this board in order to protect participants recruited, and by ensuring they understand any potential risks of their involvement and that their privacy is maintained.

Stigmas associated with anxiety are discussed in detail in another section, but recognizing that they are present, I thought it was critical to ensure that there was some prior relationship with invited participants. I anticipated that having some level of trust and comfort could be critical to getting more thorough, personal, and insightful reflections. The students already know that I would listen without judgment and treat our relationship with the utmost fidelity. Clandinin (2013) says that, "It is important to understand narrative inquiry spaces as spaces of belonging for both researchers and participants- spaces that are marked always by ethics and attitudes of openness, mutual vulnerability, reciprocity, and care" (p. 200). Having a foundational relationship with these students may aid in their ability to be open with me knowing already that I am open with and vulnerable to them in my own stories of experiences, especially with anxiety.

I came to know these participants, over the course of three collegiate semesters, as a part of a 24-student cohort group in a middle childhood through early adolescence concentrated class. As their "supervisor," I co-created and implemented curriculum to support their fieldwork in weekly seminars in addition to observing their teaching and lesson planning process in the school where they were placed and practicing under the management of a "cooperating teacher," a classroom mentor teacher.

In this way, I was able to get to know the students so that they felt more comfortable with my research, our interactions, and co-constructions of their narratives. I anticipate that these stories will provide foundational support for the need for this research, meaning



that it will show that the participants were anxious during their pre-service teaching and may have benefited from additional support to cope with the stressors of the contexts of that preparation.

### **Interviews of First Year Teachers**

I anticipate that the first year teachers may be a bit constrained for extra time for things like filling out my survey and I also have personal experience with the discussion or articulation of one's own anxiety bringing up physiological symptoms that can accompany it. Therefore, I think it is critical to follow up on the survey with informal interviews. Instead of incorporating new questions, I hope instead to have a natural conversation, with the purposefully sampled group, simply asking the participants to tell me more about their experiences as pre-service teachers. I want the conversation to be open to what the participant would like to tell me, as their level of comfort is my utmost concern. In my experience, talking about your anxiety can be quite distressing depending on how the listener responds. Yes, you want an active compassionate listener, but you do not want someone who seems to pity you, or praise you, or seems to avoid getting too involved by asking specific follow up questions. Nothing about the interaction can seem contrived or too structured, as I hope to procure a dialogical mutual sense of agency between the participant and myself.

Macomby and Macomby (1954) classify interviews according to how "standardized" they are, referring in part to whether an interview is guided by structured questions and an orientation to measurement or is more flexibly organized and aims to uncover subjective meanings" (as cited in Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, p. 7). As I will discuss in another section

focusing on definitions of anxiety, respecting the subjective notion of a person's personal definition of a mental health conception is paramount to assigning agency to the person, as well as his or her story and personal "truths". This method extends further to assert that meaning will be constructed throughout the interviews. In fact, this may insinuate a partial social constructivist approach, which considers it important to pay attention to how information and meaning is produced, not just what is done to guide, for example, the questions and format of an interview (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995).

I also note Creswell's (2013) three considerations of purposeful sampling in qualitative research including: who the participants will be, what type of sampling I will use, and the sample size or number of individuals I will interview. Further, in a narrative study, who to study takes the most reflective thinking (p. 154-155). There are currently 13 individuals participating in this section of the study. Two or three of the students will be invited to do follow up interviews based on geographical location. In order to keep with the intended integrity of a natural conversation; the interviews will happen face-to-face with those still residing within 30 minutes from the university from which they graduated. This sample involves elementary and middle school teachers as well as those currently employed in schools as full time teachers, substitute teachers, in addition to others dedicated to pursuing further higher education. All invited participants will be female since the larger sample size only incorporates one male, and he does not live in close proximity to the University.

In utilizing the participants' responses as data, I plan to look for themes, note chronological changes in thinking or action, and identify potential catalysts and implications of anxiety during their pre-service teaching experiences. My points of focus

are in particular to find out what makes pre-service teachers anxious, what they have already determined may help them cope with situational stressors, and to learn from their experiences further by noting their suggestions. I will look at the responses from each person as a whole but also compare common themes as responses across the sample. Quotes from the students' replies on surveys will be selected and the themes and generalizations will be constructs of my own perceptions. Participants' voices will be highlighted as much as possible to maintain the integrity of the participants' perceptions and stories of their experiences. Finally, I am looking to make as many connections as possible between anxiety catalysts, coping, and implications.

### **Journal Entries**

I will be examining one potential coping strategy, students' reflective journaling that can be seamlessly incorporated into a teacher education preparation program without being an extra requirement or time constraint. A modified series of reflection prompts were given to 25 students in a dual-certification cohort for elementary and special education teacher preparation. These students were currently completing the third of the three required practicum placements before moving on to student teaching, the final field placement practice before graduation at the end of the semester. The faculty cohort leader who coordinates this program allowed me to author a page for their course syllabus explaining the assignment (See Appendix C). This group of students was selected not only because of the faculty member's willingness to support this research, but also because she recognizes stress and anxiety in the pre-service teachers in this program she facilitates. Therefore, she was excited to try a new approach for the reflective journal assignments

that were already a part of the program's requirements. Additionally, I anticipated that individuals eager to work with a special education population may be sensitive to the challenges that mental health can bring to schooling and the need to proactively practice coping management strategies.

To engage the students in this upcoming work, I briefly explain an overview of how a process of reflection typically informs professional growth in a teacher education preparation program, in addition to how changes made to this classic practice may prove to incorporate additional benefits for them. In Appendix E is the text I utilized to explain the benefits of changing the typical reflective journaling to writing to healing- based assignments. My first ambition is that the priority of the assignments is self-transformation/reflection instead of concern for articulating what one has "learned" for an outside audience. The second goal is that students will practice writing strategies to help manage physical and mental symptoms of stress or anxiety by recognizing challenges, fears, constraints, time management struggles, and actualization of the boundaries of their current position in their professional field.

This study is built on the foundation that pre-service teachers experience a myriad of stressful situations as they participate in field placements in the final semesters of their preparation program. While "anxiety disorders develop from a complex set of risk factors, including genetics, brain chemistry, personality, and life events" (Anxiety and Depression Association of America, 2016) stressful situations, such as teacher preparation programs, may create additional anxiety for all students, even those who do not self-identify as suffering from anxiety. Therefore, it is important that "[b]eing able to feel safe with other people is probably the single most important aspect of mental health" (Van der Kolk, 2014, p. 79). Literature reviewed

showed that students receive invaluable simultaneous support from others going through this same experience since there are innumerable contextual complexities and intersectionalities of those that impact students. This foundation grounds the use of cohort groups in teacher preparation and these writing assignments built on nurturing support systems and a feeling of belonging, as well as allowing students to express challenges.

Since the school of education program where this research commences is built on a cohort model meant to provide support for students throughout this process, the assignments embrace the philosophy that through hearing other's words we feel less isolated. Therefore, I believe that practicum students will benefit by hearing from their peers and through interactive writing in reflection journal prompts where they will share concerns. I anticipate they will identify their peers as a necessary support system benefit from having a place to document the challenges of their experience while being open to the perspectives of others involved.

I hope that the writing assignments may serve as a transformative tool to help pre-service teachers cope with anxiety by giving agency to their voices and concerns through the validation of an assignment to write about them. Through poetic writing and the creation of art, the students have the opportunity for a creative outlet not traditionally utilized in academic spaces as I agree with Audre Lorde (2007) that poetry allows individuals to put words to ideas and experiences that could not exist without poetry. Further, that poetry offers a view life not as a problem to be solved, but as a situation to be experienced.

Since these assignments are based on literature that is in a category of "writing to heal / self help", I want to be clear and reiterate that "healing" in this context is not specific, and more of a process than a product - oriented goal. The healing process can be described as the ability to better cope with and identify occupational circumstances that produce anxiety. Healing for these

pre-service teachers may be part of a sociocultural process because the students' experiences are bound by contextual similarities. Since I deeply respect and value participants' definitions of healing, like anxiety, coping, strategies, etc., I anticipate that with these assignments, participants may experience an empowered sense of agency as they come to know strategies to cope and therefore help themselves.

The writing assignments will follow the progression of the practicum semester allowing participants to closely connect their reflections to their daily experiences in the classroom. The assignments build off of one another in succession to facilitate the potential for participants to progress from a reactive to a more proactive perception influencing action and emotional responses to their experiences. Assignments will fit into four progressive categories: 1) Sharing to Heal: Finding the strength to share concerns, recognizing the strength in individual experience, and recognizing that others feel similar concerns; 2) Release: Recognizing and reflecting on the current situation and learning to lean on support systems; 3) Recognizing Agency: Recognizing that individuals have the power to change help themselves and others; 4) Actualizing: Using coping mechanisms to more quickly recover from stressful situations.

Unlike typical teacher education reflection journals, this project changes the focus of assignments to be self-transformational rather than serving as an assessment conducted for supervisors. These journal assignments may provide the writers with strategies designed to help manage physical and mental symptoms of stress or anxiety by recognizing challenges, fears, constraints, time management struggles, and recognition and acceptance of boundaries of their current position in their professional field. Boundaries come from cooperating teachers, placements, supervisors, and programmatic elements including: schedule, assignments, involvement with students, content of lessons, etc.

The inclination for the need for integrating the fields of “writing to heal” and teacher education has been confirmed by the initial recruitment for study participants. Thus far, 100% of those recruited chose to participate in the study, offering to give full access to the content of their writing to heal reflective journal assignments. Thus far, analyses of the student journals clearly reflected the realities of the stress that my inclinations anticipated.

In summary, in order to ground this work, surveys of recently graduated students are utilized to explore sources and supports of stress and angst. Then, recent journal entries were collected from several cohorts of students currently harnessing writing to heal inspired reflective journal assignments while working as practicum and student teachers. Finally, I hope to document not only the specific sources of stress and anxiety for the pre-service teachers in the contexts of this program, but also specifically how writing to heal assignments may be utilized as one tool for coping with the challenges of this experience.

### **Interviews of Current Pre-service Teachers**

The idea to utilize “writing to heal” style prompts for teacher candidate reflections evolved organically throughout a semester long course, with Dr. Kate Vieira, on writing, healing, and the body that I participated in during my doctoral studies. Throughout the semester in this English department course, I couldn’t stop thinking about the stressed out pre-service teachers I work with. I became immediately excited for the potential of this type of writing to help them process the feelings of stress and anxiety they frequently expressed in the courses I instructed. After collecting all five journal entries from these dual-certification special education students throughout the semester, I invited this group of students (via email) to provide additional contextual information to their journaling with

an open conversational unstructured interview much like the one described in the first description of interviews from the former middle child early adolescent elementary and middle school teacher candidates I interviewed with Qualtrics. I only anticipate a few students offering to be interviewed since they are already busy with the requirements of their student teaching semester; the one following the semester in which they wrote to the journal prompts described above. The responses of students who offer to be interviewed will be incorporated into the study. Since I do not have experience supervising and observing the special education, dual certification students in their placements, it will be important to have a general conversation about their experiences. However, they will center around anxiety and pre-service teaching, in addition to any additional insight they would like to offer regarding their involvement in authoring the “writing to heal” style of reflective journaling. Scholars on qualitative data collection have filled texts with advice on how to structure this type of data collection. In reviewing literature on interviewing, a common collection method in qualitative data collection, I came upon a distinction that was new to me. For example, Weiss (1994) explains that the tense of the verbs the researcher uses in asking a question in an interview may limit or open the participant’s response. “He stated that asking a question in present tense...elicits a generalized account [and] isn’t the same as eliciting what actually happened at a specific time and place” (as cited in Maxwell, 2013, p. 103). Weiss (1994) explains further about the importance of the relationship between participant and researcher when delving for particulars. Specifically, that, “generalized accounts permit respondents to minimize information about which they feel diffident, and to avoid potentially embarrassing details...For this reason, you should be reasonably sure that your relationship with the participant will support your asking for



description” (as cited in Maxwell, 2013, p.103-104). Since anxiety, and mental health in general, are still considered taboo topics associated with negative stigma in many social circles, it will be essential for me to facilitate a comfortable rapport with these participants. This is so that they may be amenable to sharing details about their anxiety during pre-service teaching, as well as an openness to discussing other personal details that they previously revealed in their journal responses.

### **Organizing and Analyzing Data**

For the purposes of analyzing the sources of informational data described above, I was intrigued to try something called a data analysis categorical coding matrix. This is just a long way to say a chart that contains categories for participants’ quoted responses. More specifically, Maxwell (2013) defines it as, “A tool for displaying and further developing the results of a categorizing analysis of your data...structured in terms of your main research questions, categories, or themes and the data that address or support these” (p. 108). I also want to be transparent in indicating, that like all methods, there are limitations that need to be recognized. First, the categories are constructions of the researcher’s prior knowledge, experience, and/or interpretations, but they do visually display analysis making it simpler to observe which participants’ responses fit into particular categories and in what ways. Maxwell (1994) describes the second limitation of these categorical coding matrices as “significant” because: “It replaces the original set of contextual relationships within an interview...with a different categorical structure. This can create analytic blinders, leading you to ignore the actual relationship of things within a specific context” (p. 112). There does seem to be a solution, at least partially, in what is termed “connecting strategies” that function in contrast to coding

groupings that may entail splintering the original data text or transcript into shorter segments. So, how does this “connecting strategy work? It, “attempts to understand the data in context, using various methods to identify relationships among the different elements in the text, thus often seen as holistic in that it is concerned with the relationship among different parts...”

(Maxwell, 2013, p. 112) These connecting strategies are sometimes seen in certain case studies, discourse analysis, and narrative analysis; the commonalities and connections between them helps to serve as part of the general analysis process itself.

Overall, throughout several semesters, dual certification students’ writing samples are collected to analyze the extent to which students perceive anxiety and coping mechanisms assisting in reducing it. Open coding will be used to determine recurring themes and analysis of these themes will be used to determine how students talk and write about their experiences. Questionnaires of individuals, one year post graduation, also will be used to understand the extent to which students feel the journal assignments help in coping with feelings of anxiety. In fact, a question asking students this very query, was added for the second round of dual certification pre-service teachers’ so that the data for this question is more direct.

Comparing students’ stories, will determine prominent themes visible throughout the cohort and analysis of how storytelling tropes may or may not lend themselves to the healing process will be considered. I look to understand how participants are using language to talk and write about their perceptions and point of view of their anxiety and coping.

Reports like that from Stacey Colino (2016), a contributor for the Wellness blog of U.S. News and World Report, discusses a 2013 study on how point of view may be important. She indicates that most research on expressive writing involve the first-person-point of view, which utilizes the pronoun, “I”. However, a recent study out of the University of Iowa points to

evidence that the use of the third-person-point of view might be even more helpful since taking an outsider's viewpoint might be less upsetting to thinking and therefore minimizing physical reactions associate with experiencing intense emotions (Colino, 2016, para. 9).

How emotions are expressed and incorporated into the stories we create is important in how people narrate their way through life. By this, I mean that our ways of talking are not unencumbered reflections of our world, but rather play a vital role in changing and creating our identities and social relations. Jorgensen and Phillips (2002) discuss this social constructivist way of thinking that it is embedded with philosophical, or ontological and epistemological aspects of our identities, underpinnings regarding the role of language in “constructing” ourselves and our world. The authors conclude that theory and method are intertwined and cannot be untangled when utilized as method (p.4). While the versions of the narratives, and the specific diction and patterns used by participants to describe their particular experiences will be highlighted, this study will utilize multiple perspectives to gain insight into experiences of a representative sample from the cohort group. Therefore, while the discourse and diction might differ from one person to the next and can be evaluated, the multiple anxiety perspectives storying the various field experiences of this group of pre-service teachers is sought after. Each narrative stands on its own, yet is also considered a piece of the puzzle to inform the participants' experience. Jorgensen and Phillips (2002) describe “multiple perspectival” work and why it is valued saying that, “The view is that different perspectives provide different forms of knowledge about a phenomenon so that, together, they produce a broader understanding” (p.4).

The idea of “producing” knowledge or understanding is explored in explanations of social constructivist approaches. Drawing on Burr (1995) and Gergen (1985), several foundations underlying social constructivist approaches are outlined. First, that “Our knowledge

of the world should not be treated as objective truth. Reality is only accessible to us through categories, so our knowledge and representations of the world are not reflections of the reality” (as cited in Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002, p. 5). This may be interpreted that there are many “truths” based on a different people’s perspectives of the world, but they are all valid and still true. This is the same premise discussed in the section on narrative inquiry. The principle relates to all that we know being situated within the historical and culture in which we live meaning that our views and identities may have been differently constructed if situated within other contexts. This also connects to our ways telling being a part of social action within our time because they play a part in producing the social world and maintaining certain discourse patterns. Further, that within our contextually determined views, certain ways of thinking are either likely or implausible. Critics might say that social constructivism equates in part to everything being conditional and inflow without limitation or consistency, but it can be argued that it is relatively stable within definite situations. These essential ideas have origins in French post-structuralist theory and its denunciation of “totalizing and universalizing theories” (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002, p. 5-6). In this study attention will be given to discourse and the discourse patterns in participants’ narratives.

### **Limitations**

While thinking about process, transparency, and limitations, I want to continue in this section listing as many limitations as I can conceive at this time, so that readers can also appreciate and understand the conclusions of this research within those constraints. First, keep in mind the researcher’s positionality and potential biases, as articulated earlier in the first section. Second, data here represents only the experience of students from one program at one Midwestern University in the United States. Third, although they all

graduated from the same overarching program, the participants in their first year of teaching were not in a dual certification teacher preparation program, which has some different requirements and structures from a generalized content elementary and middle school program. My relationship and experience with the students also varies greatly as I have known the first year teachers closely and interacted with them regularly for over a year and a half, which could greatly enhance the information I receive from them in contrast to the dual certification students.

As I have begun to organize the journal entry data I have received, I also have come to notice logistical challenges in data collection. I am reliant on a third party to share the journal entries of the students with me because they were submitted by email only via their supervisor. At times, the journals are without names, not in format compatible to share, and coming to me through huge influxes of emails that are not organized in any particular order: chronologically, categorically, by participant, or otherwise. To counter this challenge, with the permission of the supervising professor of the dual certification teacher education program at the university, I have set up a central online box where students can upload their journal entries into folders divided by prompt. This second collection will remove (MY) human error in connecting students' work to a long chain of emails.

The study is also restricted by the fact that any narrative study is limited by the nature of language itself. Previous research indicates that, transforming lived experience into language and constructing a story is not straightforward, but invariably mediated and regulated by controlling vocabularies. Narratives are composed for particular audiences at moments in history, and they

draw on taken-for-granted discourses and values circulating in a particular culture.

(Reissman, 2008, p. 3)

Moving beyond myself as a researcher, or the general nature of language, I want to recognize the importance of “tellership” considering how participants “tellings”, or responses, or living narratives are also a variable and potential limitation because embedded within them are personal selections, withholdings, or articulations. According to Ochs and Capps (2001), living narratives are, “...narrative dimensions that account for the ways in which narratives of personal experience are realized in everyday social life around the world. These dimensions-tellership, tellability, embeddedness, linearity, and moral stance...” (p. 54), all will influence what and how participants assign or reserve their experiences. Tellership, which narrows in on narrating as a social activity is especially relevant here because the participant’s narratives might be influenced by: the type of questions the researcher asks, formatting of questions, nature of being asked in a survey, knowing that the research is being conducted by someone previously in a position of some power, connections and disconnections from the study’s topics, as well as the contexts of their personal background, and more.

### **Conclusion**

There is a lot that I am already anticipating as being embedded in the narratives of the participants due to my own experiences. I wish to become open to the unexpected, so that I can truly learn from the stories of my participants. Clandinin (2013) reiterates this ambition asserting that, “...unexpectedness is not only expected in narrative inquiry but it

is also one of its goals, as inquiring narratively with others opens of the possibility for growth..." (p. 203).

One challenge that I anticipate in this study is the balance between representing and maintaining the truths of participants' experiences while also making some generalizations. At the same time, I want to avoid personal bias in assuming that generalizing a number of participants' experiences makes the data stronger because this could devalue the participants' individual "tellings". Clandinin (2013) references several "methodological dilemmas" and underscores inquirers' "...need to find representational forms that both portray the relational aspects of narratives of experience at the same time as they portray the fluid, changing sense of narratives of experience" (p. 166). One final component to the transparency of my process to set forth is a timetable of what has been accomplished thus far and what elements are still in progress or need to commence. (See Appendix D)

Apart from the challenges that will continue to emerge in this study, I am so excited for the potential of this work to potentially facilitate change in current and future teacher education programming. Anxiety is a natural part of many of life's events and transitions, but I do not believe that it has to be such a mainstay in pre-service teachers' preparation experiences. I am counting on humans' natural desire to story their lives and make meaning from those stories to reveal pre-service teachers' experiences with anxiety. As I look forward, I can only anticipate that the work I do on this project might promote awareness of the anxiety pre-service teachers experience and a potential coping mechanism for programmatic or classroom consideration. This is my underlying motivation, inspiration, and where I find meaning in this work. I feel compelled "to know" how pre-service teaching preparation can be accomplished with less anxiety-producing

circumstances. How and why storytelling becomes research is a notion explored and articulated by many qualitative researchers who use narrative to inform and to ground their findings and capture their desire to understand. It is harnessing and recording these narratives that is the work of qualitative scholars. Barusch (2012) articulates this in her article about refining the narrative turn, saying:

Narratives are fundamental (some might say unique) to human life. As meaning-making creatures, we look at the stars and see pictures; then we use those pictures to predict floods. As Fisher (1984) put it, we are “homo narrans” hard-wired to see meaning...Narrative “creates a cosmos out of chaos.” The origins of the word will resonate with researchers because, while its more recent root in Latin, *narrare*, means “to relate, explain, account...make acquainted,” that root finds its root in the Greek term *Gno*-“to know” (a lifelong urge fore most researchers to understand or “know” what is going on). The narrative approach is perfectly suited to understanding the post-modern world. It is especially relevant [for] those of us who claim only limited confidence in objective reality and universal truths. (p. 2)

As mentioned earlier in the text, I do not tread into this work lightly, and instead feel a deep sense of responsibility to accurately represent the stories I humbly receive from each participant. I hope that this work and its publishing can serve to further aid the education of individuals responsible for facilitating the development of teacher preparation programs, and to pay special attention to the circumstantial contexts and constraints that may produce uninvited levels of stress and anxiety in pre-service teachers. I want to return



to John Dewey, one of the most influential American philosophers, for a moment, to help articulate the underlying pressure of this study. I know that if I am not careful, instead of positive change and additional perspective, I will instead contribute to the stacks of literature that induce misconceptions about anxiety and its manifestations within diverse contextual complexities. Dewey is well known for his connections between education and experience. He says that, “The belief that all genuine education comes about through experience does not mean that all experiences are generally or equally educative” (Dewey, 1935, p. 25). This underlies my first concern; experiences can be helpful, informative, or insightful in nature, but also detrimental. Dewey (1935) says that,

Experience and education cannot be directly equated to each other. For some experiences are mis-educative. Any experience is mis-educative that has the effect of arresting or distorting the growth of further experience. An experience may be such as to engender callousness; it may produce a lack of sensitivity and of responsiveness. Then the possibilities of having richer experience in the future are restricted. (Dewey, 1935, p.25-25)

My ultimate goal is to increase readers’ sensitivity to anxiety, to the nuances in teacher education programs that may be changed in order that it is not such a catalyst of anxiety for participants, and that anxiety in teaching and learning is a worldwide phenomenon that must be addressed now.

## **Appendix A**

Pre-service Teachers and Anxiety: Semi-structured interview questions

These questions will be asked during an in person interview or via a confidential Qualtrics survey.

1. How do you define anxiety?
2. How do you know when you are feeling anxious?
3. How would you describe your level of anxiety during your field placements and how it impacted you?
  - Practicum I
  - Practicum II
  - (Practicum III) – Dual-cert students only
  - Student Teaching
4. What do you perceive as the catalysts of your stress or anxiety?
  - Teacher Education Program (all University requirements other than fieldwork)
  - Practicum and Student Teaching Field Placements
  - Home and Personal
5. What has been your experience with anxiety before starting your University teacher education preparation certification program?
6. How was your stress or anxiety supported during your field placement?
  - University Supervisor
  - University Instructors
  - Cooperating Teacher
  - Other University Program Support
  - Co-hort Peers
  - Outside the University
7. What types of support of stress and anxiety coping mechanisms do you wish were incorporated into your program?
8. How do you anticipate how your experience in field placements (practicum or student teaching) may have been different if your anxieties were addressed differently?
9. Is there anything else you would like to share with me about your student teaching and practicum experiences or your anxiety?
10. Has your thinking about your anxiety or field placement experiences changed during the course of articulating your thoughts throughout this interview and/or questionnaire?

## Appendix B

Hello! My name is Allison Murrow and I am a doctoral student at the University of Wisconsin Madison in the Department of Curriculum & Instruction. I am conducting research on teacher education in the elementary education in a dual certification teacher preparation program. You are invited to take part in a study investigating catalysts and implications for pre-service teachers' stressors and anxiety. The purpose of this study is to gain perspectives into what pre-service teachers identify as causes of their anxiety, what support systems and coping mechanisms were a positive influence in lessening anxiety, and to how they anticipate they may have been supported further. This study will include current pre-service teachers who several who are one-year post completion.

If you decide to participate, you will be interviewed one to three times. This interview will last approximately 20-30 minutes. You will be asked about your experiences during your field placements and the stressors or anxiety you experienced while completing them. Only the researcher will hear this audio recording. Transcripts of the interview will be provided upon request. You may also volunteer to complete a questionnaire, which you will receive via Qualtrics, and they will remain confidential. As always, you are welcome to decline participation in this project with no negative consequences.

## Appendix C

### Reflective Assignments for Dual-Certification Students

#### Brief Overview:

Reflection through writing is a common practice in teacher education programs to facilitate the growth of reflective practitioners and to bridge theory and practice. In action, reflection provides opportunities to consider what's working well, opportunities for positive change, a chance to consider additional perspectives, how to cope with professional challenges, and much more. Reflection during field experiences is especially important in pre-service teaching when there is the opportunity to apply coursework in the classroom. Reflection helps to develop professional teaching identity as well as goal setting and planning for the forethought of self-regulated learning, that which allows one to have control one's own learning.

#### Dual-Certification Reflective Assignments:

In addition to the assets described above, the dual certification reflection assignments have two added goals. The first ambition is that the priority of the assignments is self-transformation/reflection instead of concern for articulating what one has "learned" for an outside audience. The second goal is that students will practice writing strategies to help manage physical and mental symptoms of stress or anxiety by recognizing challenges, fears, constraints, time management struggles, and actualization of the boundaries of their current position in their professional field.

### Reflection Assignment Descriptions

Journal 1: Expressive Writing: *As Vygotsky argues that “the act of putting spoken word and unspoken thoughts into written words releases, and, in the process changes the thoughts themselves” (as cited in Wolf, 2007, p. 65)*

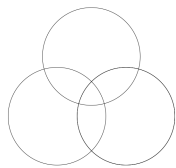
- 1) Free Form Expressive Writing: Connect your experience to your emotions- In your field placement, describe what is making you feel content, excited, proud, curious, concerned, frustrated, or any other emotion. (1pg.)
- 2) Expressive Sentence Starters: to practice reflecting in a professional and proactive manner. (1/2 pg.)
  - “I could find fault in “X”, but instead I recognize...”
  - “I wish “X” was different, but I can overcome this by....”
  - “X” makes me feel frustrated, but I can work through this by...”
  - “X” seems unfair, but I can support myself and others by...”
  - “I can show my professionalism by doing “X” instead of “Y”

Journal 2: Sharing Expressive Writing: *“[B]eing able to feel safe with other people is probably the single most important aspect of mental health” (Van der Kolk, 2014, p. 79). This foundation serves as the philosophy behind our writing assignments built on nurturing support systems and a feeling of belonging.*

- 1) Expressive writing #2- write about emotional responses that you feel comfortable sharing (1pg)
- 2) Share writing with a peer via email
- 3) Compose a letter to your peer in response to their expressive writing to support him or her and share similar experiences. (1pg.)

Journal 3: Venn-diagram:

- 1) Compare and contrast students’ roles, CT’s role, and supervisor’s role
  - Use a three-circles-of-reflection diagram; especially note where your roles may overlap and consider how to heighten collaboration in those aspects



Journal 4: Negatives can be Positive: *Designed to help pre-service teachers gain a sense of agency and become proactive managers of typical teacher-related challenges and the potentially professional and restorative process of re-writing one’s own narrative. Daijute (2010) suggests that when writers represent themselves as handling a conflict, they are more likely to recognize the need for change.*

- 1) Describe current challenges or seemingly a negative circumstance from your field experience (1-5 EX.)
- 2) Now “Re-write” the challenges you described with positive adjectives and an optimistic, enthusiastic, upbeat and/or affirmative perspective. Rewrite the narrative; how might it be seen as positive? (1pg.)

**Journal 5: Multi-voice Poem:** *Through poetic writing and the creation of art, students are offered a creative outlet not traditionally utilized in academic spaces, as we agree with Lorde (2007) that poetry allows individuals to put words to ideas and experiences that could not exist without poetry. Poetry offers a view life not as a problem to be solved, but as a situation to be experienced.*

- 1) Create a multi-voice poem considering the school day, a single event, a lesson, a subject, time of day, or other from your voice as well as that of your students, CT, and supervisor—what might each perspective feel, think, say, do in a particular situation? Consider how the different voices will react to one another.

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## Appendix D

### Study Sequence & Schedule

Data	Collection Method	Status: In progress, Complete, Future
First-year teacher recruitment	Email	Complete
First-year teacher surveys	Qualtrics	Complete
Analysis of first-year teacher Qualtrics surveys	Narrative	In progress
First-year teacher interview recruitment	Email	In progress
First-year teacher interviews	In person	Future
Analysis of first-year teacher		Future

interviews		
Dual-cert cohort #1 recruitment	In person	Complete
Collect dual-cert cohort #1: 5 Writing to Heal Journal Entries	Email (1) & University online "Box" storage tool (2)	Complete
Interview recruitment for dual cert #1	Email	Future
Analysis of interview of participants in dual cert #1		Future
Dual-cert cohort #2 recruitment	In person	Complete
Collect dual-cert cohort #2: 5 Writing to Heal Journal Entries	Access to university Canvas online course tool	Complete
Interview recruitment for dual cert #2	Email	Future
Interviews of dual-cert #2 students	In person	Future
Analysis of interview of participants in dual cert #2		Future

## Appendix E

- *Reflection through writing is a common practice in teacher education programs to facilitate the growth of reflective practitioners and to bridge theory and practice. In action, reflection provides opportunities to consider what's working well, opportunities for positive change, a chance to consider additional perspectives, how to cope with professional challenges, and much more.*
- *Reflection during field experiences is especially important in pre-service teaching when there is the opportunity to apply coursework in the classroom.*
- *Reflection helps to develop professional teaching identity as well as goal setting and planning for the forethought of self-regulated learning, that which allows one to have control one's own learning.*

*In addition to the assets described above, the dual certification reflection assignments have two added goals:*

- 1. The first ambition is that the priority of the assignments is self-transformation/reflection instead of concern for articulating what one has “learned” for an outside audience.*

*The second goal is that students will practice writing strategies to help manage physical and mental symptoms of stress or anxiety by recognizing challenges, fears, constraints, time management struggles, and actualization of the boundaries of their current position in their professional field.*

## **Chapter Four**

### **Interview Data Introduction**

Today in the United States, producing higher scores on standardized tests of academic skills is the dominant goal of teacher professional development, the primary gauge of teacher productivity, and the almost single-minded focus of educator accountability...At the same time, there is growing agreement that scores on standardized tests of academic skills are incomplete measures of the important things that students learn from their teachers. A major challenge facing educators, policy makers, and advocates is to achieve a better balance across the educational goals that we prioritize. (Ferguson, Phillips, Rowley, & Friedlander, 2015, p 1)

These words come from The Achievement Gap Initiative of Harvard University, which aims to “bridge research and practice” with a goal of promoting “excellence with equity”. This resource came to my attention in the search for ways to respond to the questions coming from my research. This text’s discussion of teaching practices that impact student agency has helped me to better understand how neither the pre-service teachers nor the teacher education preparation programs that facilitate their state teaching certification are solely responsible for change. Instead, I have come to conclude that the program may be able to model teaching that supports agency in their teacher candidates. I initially began this research as a way to give a voice to teacher candidates and to better understand how current pre-service teachers and recent graduates describe their stress and anxieties during the field component of their teacher education preparation program. My research was initiated in response to a gap in current academic literature described in previous chapters. I plan to bridge this gap by highlighting first-person perspectives of teacher candidates, through a triangulation of three data sources, which include interviews, surveys, and students’ reflective journal entries. In the first few chapters, I set out to increase readers’ sensitivity not only to anxiety, but also to the nuances of teacher education programs that may prove to be catalysts of anxiety or stress for some participants. I wrote page after page of participants’ storied experiences articulating an endless list of recommendations aimed at teacher education programs and teacher educators. I even had a section titled “Pre-service Teachers Wish Lists” because I felt a responsibility to my participants who strongly believe that their recommendations for this Midwestern University teacher education preparation program would improve the experience for future teacher candidates. I began with the assumption that if teacher



education programs better supported the mental health of pre-service teachers it may lessen teacher candidates' experiences with stress or anxiety, which my research has shown are prevailing. Previous chapters speak to this prevalence. I set out to detail how the feelings of current and past pre-service teachers should motivate changes in teacher education programs.

What I have come to recognize is that in my dedication to be sensitive, supportive, affirming, and validating of my participants' anxieties, I also removed all responsibility from the participants to be agents of change. I analyzed my data sources without the freedom to question the perspectives of my participants because I was concerned about seeming critical. This led me into a trap of blaming external programmatic factors, instead of reflecting on the words of the participants. I also had to reflect on my own positionality as the researcher because of my personal experiences with anxiety and desire to be an advocate for others who experience it too. Instead of focusing only on the changes needed in this teacher education program, I now recognize the shared responsibility of students and teacher preparation programs to prepare new teachers with coping strategies for the multitude of challenges pre-service teachers encounter. In fact, I have come to recognize that I need to edit the goal of my research. Instead of only asking teacher educators to think critically about their role, teacher candidates also need to critically reflect on the choice and privilege to participate in a professional development teacher education program. Pre-service teachers have the responsibility to reflect on the realities and professional challenges of teaching, which should influence their future choice to pursue it as a career choice. The field of education is not for everyone; teacher candidates may not

realize this mismatch until they are in an active classroom and looking through an alternate lens, the teacher's.

I have come to conclude that pre-service teachers need to exercise agency, but teacher education programs have a responsibility to support this agency by being concerned with "...the influence of teaching on emotions, motivations, mindsets, and behaviors that we associate with agency" (Ferguson, et. al., 2015, p. 1). So what is agency? Ferguson, et. al. (2015) describe it as, "the capacity and propensity to take purposeful initiative – the opposite of helplessness. [This is important because] Young people with high levels of agency to not respond passively to their circumstances; they tend to seek meaning and act with purpose to achieve the conditions they desire in their own and others' lives" (p. 1). I question if increased student agency, and a program's inclusion of the 7 C's framework, which supports student agency, could help facilitate the resolve of some stressors and anxieties that my participants report they felt/feel in response to their teacher education preparation. The Tripod C's framework (Ferguson et. al., 2015) includes "7 C's" of effective teaching including: care, confer, captivate, clarify, consolidate, challenge, and classroom management. (p. 3) I will expand on each of these later. While I conclude that pre-service teachers need to exercise agency, the participants responses also point to their perceptions that these seven components of teaching that promote agency are not always modeled by the program, or program representatives, they look to as mentors.

#### 7 C's of Effective Teaching

1. Care—Teachers who care are emotionally supportive and interested in students.
2. Confer—Teachers who confer talk with students as well as welcome and respect student perspectives.
3. Captivate—Teachers who captivate make learning interesting and relevant.

4. Clarify—Teachers who clarify explain things clearly, provide informative feedback, and clear up confusion in order to make lessons understandable
5. Consolidate—Teachers who consolidate summarize and integrate learning.
6. Challenge—Teachers who challenge students press them to think rigorously and to persist when experiencing difficulty.
7. Classroom Management—Effective classroom management entails developing a respectful, cooperative classroom climate with on-task behavior.

*Figure 1. 7 C's of Effective Teaching.* Ferguson, R. F., Phillips, S.F., Rowley, J. F. S., & Friedlander, J.W. (2015, October). The influence of teaching beyond standardized test scores: Engagement, mindsets, and agency. Retrieved from <http://www.agi.harvard.edu/publications.php>

The data points to the participants' narratives reflecting some interesting contradictions and unrecognized power that inform their stories and impact their agency. I have learned that pre-service teachers may need more explicit expectations and curricular transparency to help create consensus of what they need to do and why. My discussion questions concern what should be incorporated in the "experience" of teacher education. These themes and questions play into Dewey's long-standing discussion defining experience because some of the participants question how their teacher preparation learning "experience" should be different. It is well documented that teaching needs to be practiced through first hand experiences, so the focus of my teacher education research is on the field experience component of a University teacher education preparation program when teacher candidates "practice" teaching.

## **Participants**

At the end of 2018, I interviewed six young women over the course of several weeks. Three participants, Kristen, Megan, and Betty, graduated from the program two years, so they offer reflective post-program narratives about how they remember feeling and how

they perceived their circumstances as pre-service teachers. In addition, their narratives offer perspectives on how their preparation influenced their current work circumstances.

These three young women were a part of a MCEA (Middle Childhood Early Adolescent) program with content focus. To gain a different perspective from individuals still currently working through their teacher education program, I spoke with Pam, Olivia, and Sam who are participating in a different strand, MCEA-ESL (English as a second language), of the same program. These current students are working towards the elementary certification required of classroom teachers with an extra ESL certificate to better serve students who do not have English as their first language, despite going to school in English. Although these young people have a few years of separation in the timeline of their program participation and a slight difference in their programmatic focus, all of these women are between the ages of twenty and twenty five, present as white and middle to upper class, have long straight hair, are gender conforming, a few are Christian, and all have met or are currently meeting the requirements of this teacher preparation program. Lack of diversity within this University program is obvious and often up for discussion and inquiry in academic circles. Nevertheless, these participants are unique individuals with valuable storied experiences that speak to this process of the “making” or “preparing” or “educating” of new teachers.

### **Megan’s Storied Experience**

I’m telling this story for teachers like Megan who believe in the power of this work, my work, to be transformative. At the end of her interview, as we set to say our goodbyes, Megan said, “What you’re doing right now with this research makes me feel so much more positive about an experiences that when I reflect on it I just have a lot of negative feelings...

something is being done and we're being heard, and it will get fixed" (personal communication, January, 2019). My transparent goals, elaborated earlier, are not to "fix" anything, but instead to give a voice to the experiences of my participants and bring attention to how students may benefit from a program that models care, confer, captivate, clarify, consolidate, challenge, and classroom management. (Ferguson et. al., 2015, p. 3-4)

The words of one participant, Megan, have had a lasting impact on me because of how strongly she believes she continues to be impacted by her field experiences. Two years post graduation, Megan admits to not becoming a classroom teacher because of what she observed in the field. She shared,

I reflect on my cooperating teacher often and she was there 12 hours a day and so stressed out and just remember how anxious I felt. I honestly couldn't fathom having my own classroom. Like the thought of it made me anxious...honestly, to this day I will tell people I'm so glad I'm not teaching right now and honestly that sucks because I've always loved being in schools... (personal communication, January 2019).

She had lost herself during the preparation process turning into a self-described zombie. This quotation is where I recognized the first curious contradiction in Megan's narrative. She "cannot fathom" having her own classroom, and "is so glad" she's not teaching, but also notes that this "sucks". Megan identified feeling anxieties during her student teaching, but perhaps these anxieties proved to be productive in helping Megan to identify that despite loving "being in schools" classroom teaching may not be a good match for her. Student

teaching is a teacher candidate's most realistic view of what it is like to be a practicing teacher. It is purposely the final component of this teacher education preparation program because it takes time to prepare for this experience, but also separates young people who "think" they want to be teachers, but may not in actuality know all that it entails. Perhaps, Megan's perspective or anxiety would have been different if she had a different field placement, but would that have been in her best interest? Megan is lucky that her circumstances allow her the agency to make choices and change her mind. Does it "suck" that she is not a teacher if she is still happy, working, and not anxious? The power Megan's student teaching experience had over her mental health is also notable. In fact, revisiting her anxious feelings in our interview was a visibly uncomfortable experience that she needed to "shake off" several times.

It wasn't the field alone that gave Megan a negative perception of her teacher education program; it was also the requirements of the EdTPA, a standardized required teacher-certifying exam. She explains her experience below:

I just felt constantly anxious about getting it done and my score and not graduating if I didn't do it on time, and I was so stressed that it really took away from my classroom time for sure also my sleep and my workout schedule. I felt like a zombie and it was so noticeable that my middle schoolers were like, "Ms. M. why are you being so weird?" and I was like well I'm rested and myself again, and this is me, I'm fun! I also missed going abroad on a free trip with my best friend and was having a lot of health issues and the way the program was set up I couldn't go to the

doctor...with me having to go to the doctor I was worried that if I took a day off I couldn't graduate (personal communication, January, 2019).

On a positive note, reflecting back on her time as a teacher candidate has proved illuminating to Megan's understanding of her mental health, which was stressed during the time she was student teaching in her program. She said,

I think that now that I'm an adult I can acknowledge that I've always had some kind of anxiety, but I didn't notice it. It came to light during student teaching. I was a wreck. I had never been so unhealthy physically and mentally as I was during that time, and it's really crazy to reflect on it. I wasn't myself at all...I'm typically a more optimistic person and I like to always see the positive and bring light to situations in terms of like my friends or work situations or whatever, but I just checklists I was running through all the time. Even at home I was I was like, I have to do this, this, this, and this and then I'll eat for 5 minutes and then I'll run to the library. It wasn't like I ever took a second to just chat with my friends or be myself...I mean everything seemed so serious. I mean I felt like if I take this day off I may not graduate because that's the way it was presented to us and it stressed me out. I felt like I couldn't take care of myself. (personal communication, 2018)

Despite reflecting a negative perspective of this mandatory testing component, the experience helped Megan to become better acquainted with how she may dislike a classroom teacher's schedule. Could an event like this that she perceives made her a

“wreck” actually have taught her more about herself and how she handles a demanding schedule? Here is where another potential contradiction appears. In reflecting on what Megan said, she describes herself as “typically a more optimistic person” who “like[s] to always see the positive” but she seemed challenged to see positives in her teacher education preparation experience. I wish I would have asked Megan, and all my participants, what they liked about the program in addition to how their mental health was supported as a way to check how the narratives I heard were a reflection of the questions I asked. What concerns me most about Megan’s quotation above is that she says that she felt like she “couldn’t take care” of herself. It reflects the tragic lack of agency she felt or exercised and the power she perceived the program had over her. I am also curious about her expectations of accountability? Is the program at “fault” for creating circumstances that overwhelmed her to the point of not taking care of herself? I have to say, “no”. Megan must be an advocate of her own healthcare. The real question here is how this teacher education program had so much power over Megan, from her perspective, that she saw it as a catalyst for her failing mental and physical health? If this teacher program had not served as an exemplar for the need to persist on a balanced life for one’s health, would another circumstance have taught her a similar lesson? I am also quite curious about the extent to which Megan feels her experience changed her into a person she “did not recognize”. Her honest reflection is part of what motivates my work because I relate to how she felt, and I aspire to find a better way to support young people like her who want to take care of themselves, but do not feel empowered with the agency to do so, despite circumstances that reflect many privileges. Megan’s criticisms could insinuate that she did



not trust the teacher education process of the program, yet she still let it control her mental and physical health.

Due to Megan's conclusion that her ability to carry out self-care was impeded by her programmatic teacher preparation requirements, I probed her further about an additional concern that was pervasive in her interview. I asked, "You seemed to often go from zero to I'm not graduating, why was this?" Megan mentioned, "not graduating" six times in the course of her interview. The fact that this concern was so real to her that she continually referenced it was surprising, as the reality of it seemed an impossibility to me, despite how real it was to her. Here is another contradiction in Megan's narrative between her perception and mine. Megan's concerns and feelings are real, valid, and true. Megan's narrative did not reflect personal responsibility to take care of herself despite resources to do so. Even though the words she used to describe herself during the final semester of her fieldwork may seem negative, I believe that her story is positive because she's happy today and has found work that provides her the time she needs to "take care" of herself. I am happy that she has prioritized this and chosen a path where she can do so. I question if Megan has not yet had life experiences in which she needs to assert boundaries between her professional and private life. Perhaps her student teaching was an opportunity to practice this challenge. I empathize with Megan because of how difficult I know it can be to set boundaries in the teaching profession because an employment choice that's driven by passion.

I now describe myself as a teacher educator, but I am not in the process of trying to “make teachers” or “zombies”. Instead, my goal is to facilitate experiences that will help individuals better acknowledge and understand their personal lens of experience in school and how they can use their personal funds of knowledge to inform their future teaching practices and connect with students. A career in teaching needs to be a critically examined choice, a good fit, and a joy. This program successfully crafts experiences to be critical of this choice and its fit, which may lend itself to students being critical of the program instead. Megan isn’t teaching today, but she is happy and she is working in a school. She works in an administrative position overseeing the afterschool activities of a private Midwest school. I am curious if the program she graduated from would see her as a “success” or to know how they “measure” the success of students who have completed the program, but decide not to teach. Is success graduation, teacher certification, happiness, the ability to support oneself, working in the field of education, or being the classroom teacher they were “educated” to be? These questions speak to considerations for the experiences cultivated for students in a teacher education program.

### **Further Reflections on Megan’s Narrative**

Despite feeling sad to hear how intense and seemingly negative her experience in the program was at times, her smile that reflected through the screen was more of an ear-to-ear grin transforming into a giggle in multiple instances; her happiness was palpable. She seemed relaxed, unbroken from the trauma she described, happy to be living in another Midwestern state closer to a best friend, boyfriend, and beloved cat who poked his head in and out of our interview. While we chatted she perched on her couch with her

computer on her coffee table. Even late into the afternoon, natural light filled her comfortable space through large side windows. Our time together during the interview was a beautiful glimpse into how content Megan is, but interestingly she attributes this delight to not working as a teacher. She loves her current work, her free time on the evenings and weekends, and the ongoing satisfying checklists she utilized to cope and manage her responsibilities during her student teaching. She recalled,

it was just something simple, but you talked me through what I as stressed about and you talked me through a solution of how to better manage it, like a checklist, ok so here's all the things you need to accomplish, I know it's a lot but let's make a checklist so you can start marking things off. You gave me tools on how to cope with it that I didn't think I would have had if you hadn't reminded me of it, if that make sense? We were not necessarily given tools in our classes we were given things. It wasn't like here's a reasonable tool you can use to cope with all the things it was like here are all the things. The checklist things was so simple, and it is so simple, but every week I still make a checklist and then I go through it and cross things off...it just makes it tangible like I know I can get this done this week so the list was good (personal communication, 2018).

Megan did recognize her agency to create change after this meeting in which I demonstrated "care" or because I "confer"[ed] with her. According to Ferguson et. al. (2015) "Teachers who care are emotionally supported and interested in students, [and] Teachers who confer talk with students as well as welcome and respect student

perspectives” (p.3). Reflecting on Megan’s words, I wish I had asked her what she meant by “things”. She viewed her program as lacking to provide her with tools, but what were the “things” it did offer? What I find particularly interesting about Megan’s story is that she still reports the program’s need to teach pre-service teachers tools to cope with the stressors of their program, yet by her own admission, she is currently successfully using the two tools of mindfulness and checklists to find balance and success in her current work. This is another interesting contradiction. I am curious if here the gap might be in the explicitness with which she craved the tools to be presented to her in, if it was just a personal caring interaction she craved, or if she benefitted from the experience of being in a situation that produced the need for practices that helped her feel more calm and organized. I question if students would benefit not just from the suggestion of particular coping strategies but also from the opportunity to discuss and practice how each might be able applicable, or not, to their specific challenges?

In reflecting on my work as a teacher educator in this University teacher education preparation program, when I looked out at the students in the classes I’ve instructed, I often observed a sea of student planners and calendars accompanied by an array of multi-colored fancy pens covering the tables. At the time, this observation gave me the assumption that the students were generally organized and did not need my help with time management, meeting deadlines, remembering what to bring, or whatever else they scheduled into those books. Of course, there was an occasional backpack that I offered to help a student clear out, an exploding binder that I nudged a student to organize with the gift of dividers, or the students’ feedback reflections that noted time management as the

only roadblock to a more complete assignment. However, maybe when students are in the midst of a particularly demanding period in their preparation, it impacts their perception. They find relief and cling to simple things, like having someone ask not just what you're learning, but how you're doing, or reminding you that a lot of things to do means you might need a list? Was it the list or was it the asking about how she felt that made that moment meaningful and memorable for Megan? Understanding the intense nature of teacher education programs, especially once the field components begin, should a comprehensive program include opportunities for students to revisit coping and executive functioning strategies in preparation or hold the program's facilitators responsible for the 7 C's?

I have come to appreciate how much I undervalue how much teacher candidates and college students need and want this "care". A community of care involves the work of teachers and students to create a classroom community where everyone feels supported agency and has opportunities to exercise it. Maybe Megan just needed to know how much I cared and wanted her to be successful and that I was willing to take time to support her? When I entered my graduate program with over a decade of experience teaching elementary and middle school, I was still intimidated to teach "college kids", because of how different I anticipated it would be. I continue to be surprised not just by how much students flourish in this community of care but much many of the students still crave it! The research from The Achievement Gap Initiative at Harvard University that I keep referencing in this text actually used students in grades 7-9, so I anticipate that this may be a point of criticism for some readers who say that adult students do not need the same framework to support their learning and agency that middle schoolers do.

When I began teaching at the university level I recognized that there was more I could do to honor the student-centeredness of my philosophy and in particular what the students wanted to get out of my classes to serve their future goals. Megan reported wanting to feel more calm, to have time for balance in her life, and free time. Free time is wonderful, but is not something classroom teachers typically have a lot of confirming that her student teaching field experience may have taught her a lesson that she didn't want to accept, which was that classroom teaching might not be for her. Megan's narrative reflected how positively she perceived the mindfulness training that she experienced during her program, and that it is still positively impacting her success today. She said,

The mindfulness stuff actually really helped me and I still do it. It reminds me that if I'm feeling anxious it's for a reason and I should try and take a breath or drink some tea instead of just letting myself have all this pent up negative energy...I think it would be very good and healthy...like that pausing and breathing thing that they taught us. I have used that so many times in those moments when you just want to freak out and yell at a kid, just like take a breath and compose yourself. Those are good tools I still use that. I had a mom compliment me. She said, "You always just seem to calm and composed in the middle of this chaos." I told her honestly I did this whole mindfulness thing where you pause and breathe and she was like, "Wow! That obviously works for you." (personal communication, January, 2019).

Time has given Megan the perspective that this tool that seemed only minimally helpful during her program is still helping her. She recalled how much many of her peers complained about the time mindfulness instruction, did not find it helpful, and how it felt like an extra thing to do. However, the perspective of time and experience seems to frequently change perspectives. Could an important defining element of Megan's teacher education experience be that it allowed her the agency to try something and then choose to do something else? Megan always thought she would be a teacher and aspired to have a classroom of her own for some time, but despite not being a classroom teacher, she is making a positive difference in the lives of hundreds of kids through her work as an administrator. So, what does this mean for the University program? How can University teacher education program's be more transparent about practices to help it's students understand them? Ferguson et. al. (2015) say that, "Teachers who clarify explain things clearly, provide informative feedback and clear up confusion in order to make lessons understandable" (p.3). How can a program be more explicit about the demands of a top-rated competitive teacher education experience? "Teachers who challenge students press them to think rigorously and to persists when experiencing difficulty" (p.4). I would hope the program Megan graduated from would also see her as a success because she is happy; her degree helped her to get to the next stage of her life, to support herself, and she has the privilege to decide to work in the field of her choosing.

Regardless of all my questions, I have deep respect for the challenges and perceptions that Megan faced during her program. I am thoroughly grateful for her openness with me and for furthering the dialogue about how one pre-service teacher felt

during her teacher education preparation program. In taking a moment to pause here, John Dewey's words from 1938 seem even more relevant today because I question if Megan's teacher preparation experience had been different if she would be a practicing teacher today. That is not to say that there is a preference for teacher candidates completing the program and entering the classroom, but with my purpose in mind to better equip teachers with tools to enjoy their teacher education program. I must question if there are proactive tools that can become self-care habits for coping with the challenges of the profession. Teacher candidates also need to take responsibility for using their agency and not giving too much power to what does not serve them and their future goals. What could have been changed so that Megan would have listened to herself when she had the inclination she needed to take care of herself but instead chose to "obey" what she perceived she needed to do to be successful in the program? What if her program encouraged her to listen to her inclinations, to make time for self-care, or offered additional perspective on the short-term duration of her program, and college in general? Is this a University's role? Why did Megan feel so much pressure to ignore the alarms and cries for rest and rejuvenation that her mind and body craved? Would teachers who supported her agency through the 7 C's framework have made a positive difference in the agency of her mental and physical health? Dewey invites this discussion as well. In discussing traditional vs. a more progressive education he notes that,

The history of educational theory is marked by opposition between the idea that education is development from within and that it is formation from without; that is it based upon natural endowments and that education is a process of overcoming



natural inclination and substituting in its place habits acquired under external pressure. (Dewey, 1938, p .17)

So, the question is what are these habits that an education program can help instill in teacher candidates to overcome trust natural inclinations to take care of oneself and to better manage feelings of stress, anxiety, being overwhelmed, etc.? In the end, Megan's experiences and perceptions point towards habits or tools that she gained and the agency she needed to utilize. It is also important to recognize that leaning towards an anxious reaction, may not be natural response for other teacher candidates. So, what then is the "correct idea of experience" (Dewey, 1938, p. 20) for pre-service teachers to have in the field? This question may not need an answer if the desire is for each person to make their teacher preparation field experiences "their own". The quality of the field experience is essential, so could better vetting of its many facets, including teachers who care, confer, captivate, clarify, consolidate, challenge, and classroom manage may be pivotal to better managing students' experiences and therefore outcomes. Like in Megan's case, it may inform a person's future decision to join the profession, which is supported by Dewey's idea of continuity.

As we have seen, there is some kind of continuity in any case since every experience affects for better or worse the attitudes which help decide the quality of further experiences, by setting up certain preferences and aversion...Moreover, every experience influences in some degree the objective conditions under which further experiences are had (Dewey, 1938, p. 37).

I aspire to support learning communities of care so that pre-service teachers' experience with learning to teach is something that helps maintain excitement about teaching and learning. I want to model a space where everyone feels valued and welcome, recognizes their agency, and has opportunities to exercise it and feel valued and important. I think that my teaching practices are particularly strong in the 7C's, but I am just one person and am always working to be better. Would more consistent application of these notions to the program or by it's facilitators, make a difference? Are teachers responsible for matching their instruction style or programmatic requirements to the students' feelings or learning styles or is it the work of the student to manage how they feel so that it supports their success? Megan reviewed several expectations that she believed negatively impacted her experience including: long hour requirements, pressure of scores on standardized teaching licensure exams, concern about graduating, less sleep, a lack of time for self care, no flexibility, missing travel abroad opportunities, no time for breaks, an air of seriousness, and more. In my view, these are not critiques of the program, but rather reflect perceived consequences of her choice to participate. There are positives and negatives to choosing to teach and to enrolling in a rigorous teacher education preparation program. In the end, Megan's vision for change included the following: flexibility on timeliness of assignments, time to vent and relax with one's cohort group, time to have more balance (sleep, working out), and perspective that missing class doesn't equate to not graduating. Megan's suggestions for program changes reflect many ideas that I have heard from other teacher candidates, but many of these desires are not realistic in a University teacher preparation program, and instead counts on its students to make choices for

involvement that serve them. This includes the choice to continue moving through each stage of the program, the choice to become a certified teacher in addition to completing credits to graduate, and then the choice to seek employment in teaching.

### **Kristen's Storied Experience**

The journey of the next teacher I spoke to, two years after graduating from the same teacher preparation program is very different. In fact, her story currently resides in a job she loves at the school where she did her student teaching and one of her practicums. She still has a list of what could possibly be changed to make her past teacher preparation program better, but how she arrives at this list is a bit different. Dewey (1938) explains how two individuals who go through the same teacher education preparation program can have different experiences; he says, “[t]he conceptions of situation and of interaction are inseparable from each other. An experience is always what it is because of a transaction taking place between an individual and what, at the time, constitutes his environment...” (p. 43).

Kristen participated in the same teacher education preparation program as Megan, and expressed some of the same feelings of being stressed and overwhelmed, but how she perceived her stress and how she dealt with it were different. Unlike Megan, who views her field experience (student teaching) as the reason she is not teaching today, Kristen has been employed by her field placement school since the day she finished student teaching. She feels this familiarity with students has given the “power” she perceives to be helpful when transitioning from student to teacher. She said,

Teaching in the same school that I student taught in is really helpful because the kids recognize you and know who you are; there's a power shift. You're not a brand new teacher, so the kids aren't testing you. It really helped me in transition from student to teacher" (personal communication, 2018).

Even though Kristen reported being stressed or anxious "almost all the time" during her preparation program, she also felt empowered by her field experiences because of how they helped her seamlessly transition into employment in the profession she had been preparing for. It seems that excitement was primary and how she understood her anxiousness. Following the inquiry about her feelings during the program, and her disclosure of stress and anxiety, I asked what invoked those emotions. She said that it was "the dynamic with the teacher and teaching is a really hard job. It's a brand new thing and it's really hard to understand until you do it. It's stressful and can make you anxious, but it's a good feeling too; it's also exciting" (personal communication, 2018). Kristen seemed to recognize early that teaching can induce stress or anxiety, but expected it, was able to process and perceive it differently, which gave her more agency to control it.

When I spoke with Kristen, her warm tone and lively expression looked back at me through the screen of our video call. Her environment seemed to be bustling as she ran into her room and settled into a horseshoe table where she sat surrounded by teaching supplies. She was in the middle of a staff development and collaboration day with her colleagues at an elementary school local to the University where she completed her teacher

preparation program. She was feeling particularly light and relieved because her report cards were completed early. Her countenance beamed as she proudly pointed the computer camera around her very first classroom. It was just as I had expected: bright, colorful, organized, laminated, and neatly labeled. It was clear that every inch of the room had a specific purpose and function. She had found her tiny piece of paradise in this carefully cultivated space where she teaches elementary school everyday. During our call, colleagues from her grade level team, all veteran teachers with more experience, popped in to inquire where she was in the math curriculum and to get her direction on other grade and school-wide requirements. It was clear that she was already a respected and valued member of her team. Like many new teachers she seemed extremely busy and pulled in many directions, but her satiation with her role was so tangible that she still exuded a sense of contentment. Overcome by the incredible update of her journey from pre-service teacher to full time classroom teacher, I started to think about how she ended up here. Were their particular distinctions in her teacher education field experiences that set her up to have a positive experience and enter teaching while it destined others, like Megan, to stay clear of the classroom?

A teacher education preparation program only account for some of the variables that influence a pre-service teacher's perception of their experience and its continuity to impact future choices to begin a career in education. The personal dispositions or prior mental health circumstances of teacher candidates cannot be changed, but I question a teacher education program's role in supporting mental health. Could Kristen's expectations to be stressed situate her to feel less negatively when it happened? Kristen

seemed to understand how busy she would be and how all encompassing the program is. Kristen described her supervisor as one of the actors who perpetuated the program's thoroughness. She described her as "amazing and super organized", but also one "who had expectations and rigor that better prepared me for the highest expectation. I knew that I was doing the most but it was what I needed to do when I was actually in front of the class." (personal communication, 2018). Her supervisor seemed to embody the notion that, "Teachers who challenge students press them to think rigorously and to persist when experiencing difficulty" (Ferguson et. al., 2015, p. 4). Her expectation set her up for success along with a mentor who, "would always answer my questions which reduced my stress... and anxiety" (personal communication, 2018). Her supervisor modeled clarifying. According to Ferguson et. al. (2015) "Teachers who clarify explain things clearly, provide informative feedback, and clear up confusion in order to make lessons understandable" (p.3). Being careful to always be as transparent as possible by not only answering questions, but also explaining the importance of and reasoning behind as many requirements as possible is valued. Kristen's practice of asking questions as a tool to reduce stress and anxiety is not new, but I think her understanding of her requirements helped her to be less critical of them too. Kristen utilized her agency to get questions answered and problem solve. She took control of her involvement in the program in this way. This may have also led to a feeling of ownership over her choice to participate in this program.

One distinct notion of Kristen's narrative is that her perspective was also always focused on the students. Like Megan she found it challenging to work in another teacher's classroom, but not because it was hard for her. Instead, she was concerned about

advocating for the students and trying to understand her cooperating teacher's choices.

Kristen also had a long list of stress reduction activities that she leaned on including: talking to peers, visiting family back home, mindfulness, getting physical activity, reading, watching TV, or doing anything else that was non-school related. She seemed to be able to compartmentalize the stress she felt in a way that made it more manageable. She seemed proud that she was working to meet the high expectations she recognized were being asked of her even though it was challenging and time consuming.

When I asked Kristen about coping with stress in her program, she said that she was happy with the CT she chose who was open-minded to problem solving and didn't think that she had all the answers. This reveals how Kristen and her CT were able to work collaboratively; this is another example of how Kristen exercised her agency in her field placement. Her comment about her CT being open to problem solving seemed familiar because I had heard something similar from another one of her peers, Betty. Betty is also currently working as a classroom teacher at a different local elementary school. She described her CT positively because of the agency he required of her, which was overwhelming at the time, but very helpful long term because it mirrored teaching realities. She said,

My CT was amazing and really helped me through and helped me not over think things. He would say, "What theme should we focus on?" and I would answer, "Well, we could do A, or B, or C" and would have a reasoning for each. He would say, just pick one. He made me pick a decision. Teachers make 1000 decisions every hour.

social, academic, etc. You have to make a decision and stick with it. You have to adapt to what you've done. (personal communication, 2018)

Both Betty and Kristen's CT's modeled "conferring". Two of the three teachers I interviewed in this group mentioned the importance of agency to have opportunities to practice making choices and then adapting what comes next based on those choices, this is something to note. How can we help pre-service teachers gain the perspective that they will never "know" with certainty what the "best practice" is or the "best" way to help a particular student or the "best" answer to a classroom issue. They seemed to feel empowered by opportunities to exercise agency and practice the fluidity of decision-making that is regularly demanded of practicing teachers. In my experience, pre-service teachers are always looking for skills, practical applications, and ideas that seem replicable in the classroom, but what these participants have identified is that this is not possible. A program can provide teacher candidates with background theory, chances to research what's been done in the past, and resources to read to inform decisions. It can provide opportunities to practice decision-making, but there is no way to pre-determine what should be done in a "future" classroom of "unknown" students. So, how can a program help instill a sense of confidence in students, give them opportunities to exercise agency, and then adapt their future actions based on the chain reactions that might be caused from a previous decision? Pre-service teachers need to feel supported to trust themselves, their intuition, and their ability to make decisions to lead a class even when they are not certain about what to do. I think this circles back to supporting pre-service teachers mental health. It is hard to feel anxious and exercise agency simultaneously. Therefore, teacher



candidates and teacher educators need to work together to mitigate students' angst with transparent practices and upfront expectations that encourage pre-service teachers to exercise the agency they need to practice.

### **Betty's Storied Experience**

Betty and Kristen, the two practicing teachers, did appreciate practice making decisions and then making adaptations following them because they perceived this as particularly applicable to their future goal to work as a classroom teacher. Notably, when they identified what they did not find practical or applicable in their preparation program were also sources of obvious stress. Both mentioned that much of the coursework did not seem applicable or tangible. Betty said that, "the classes that got to us were the ones that we were not able to use in the future" (personal communication, 2018). She noted that she did not feel ready to take over a classroom and that was the reason for her angst. Betty and I chatted after she had completed another long day at her teaching position. She sat on a couch in her quiet apartment visibly exhausted and snacking, since she had not yet had time for dinner after returning home from her teaching day. She was eager to share how she perceived and remembered her experiences in the field preparing to be a teacher. Our discussion quickly transpired into a list of questions she asked me.

Why couldn't we learn how to run a morning meeting? What are behavior systems that you could put in place? Why were we always learning theory and analyzing broad ideas vs. talking about what to do in the classroom? Let's look at a piece of writing and decide on a positive comment and something to work on. The classes

that were the most frustrating didn't show applicability. If we can't use it, why are we learning it? There is a balance. You need a certain amount of background knowledge, but also need to know how to set up a classroom and manage routines (personal communication, 2018).

Betty is not alone in her thinking, all three of the current teacher candidates that I interviewed perceived a disconnect between their classes and what they thought they needed to "learn" to teach. This does not mean that the program's curriculum needs to change but perhaps that students would benefit from more clarification or consolidation. Ferguson et. al. (2015) says that, "Teachers who consolidate summarize and integrate learning" (p.3). The importance of this truth is highly evident to all my participants who wanted to make sure that this message of disconnection was articulated. While disconnections between class and field are always possible, perhaps pre-service teachers would also benefit from instructors' explicit transparency of practices. It seems that they would benefit from, and have a need to know, why they are being asked to do what they are. I do not have the answer to this conundrum, but I do know what has been successful for me. I work to facilitate classes of students into learning communities by demonstrating through modeling and transparency of practice. In this way, I hope to facilitate learning through examples and constructivist principles. I encourage open communication, discussion, and invite critique, so that the students can come to understand how understanding "why" something is initiated by the teacher in the classroom is motivating and aids in making connections to previous knowledge. I have found that when communication is uninhibited, comfortable, and gracious it aids classroom productivity. I

find that it is my job, and my natural inclination, to make my role one that is constantly transitioning to better fit the students' needs. I find that transparency is what "keeps" a teacher honest. I explain not just what we are doing in class or what the assigned homework is, but why. The "why", and the "process", are where learning takes place. Because I am a teacher educator, I am dedicated to the process of learning, not the products that come from it. I think that getting to the heart of the learning process in this way is what many teacher candidates are interested in because they feel the looming pressure that soon they will be responsible for making the decisions that answer the "why" or encompass the "process". Betty and Kristen are the only participants who are currently working as classroom teachers. One similarity in their narratives is that despite feeling personally stressed or anxious as a pre-service teacher, their focus remained on the students. Betty, loves this work and wants to be immersed in it so much that she described feeling anxious during practicum due to the perception of not having enough responsibility in the classroom and because of how foreign the classroom felt through the lens of only 1 ½ days per week.

So, what facilitates these two very different reactions, outcomes, and reflective recommendations for programmatic changes to a similar experience? All three teachers felt anxious, but one noted the similarity of anxiety to excitement and another experienced anxiousness in a more negative debilitating manner. Let's take a moment to step back from the narratives of these participants and look at this data source as a whole and how the perspectives of these practicing and pre-service teachers changed over time. The table below shows the reality of a lack of diversity; all six individuals interviewed were females

who present as white, come from middle to upper class backgrounds, have long straight hair, and grew up in the Midwest.

Table 1

*Overview of MCEA (Middle Child Early Adolescent) Interviews*

<b>Participant Group Descriptions</b>	<b># of Participants</b>
Total Number of Interviews (MCEA-content & MCEA-ESL)	6
White Female Participants (MCEA-content & MCEA-ESL)	6
Two years post graduation (MCEA content)	3
Currently Teaching in an Elementary Classroom (MCEA content)	2
Completed Practicum 2 (MCEA-ESL)	3

### **Feeling Words and Perceptions of Megan, Kristen, and Betty**

I began the video calls with each participant with words of gratitude for their time and willingness to share with me not what learned during their program but instead how they felt. Several of them also expressed “thanks” for the “voice” they knew my research was striving to give them, but interestingly none of them mentioned being grateful for the opportunity to participate in the teacher education preparation program that was the topic of my inquiry. This may have been due to my leading the discussion despite trying to have it be natural and unstructured. I started the interviews with casual graciousness to set the tone for our conversation and to help the participants know what to expect. It was important that each participant knew that there were no “wrong answers”, that I was not checking content knowledge, or evaluating the participants in any way. I tried to communicate how important I perceived their feelings to be as the students were not accustomed to being asked how they felt except in response to reflective journal prompts. This question and our exchanges that followed allowed me to reassure each person for the purpose of our call and my intentions. I wanted to remove any potential perceptions about our call with the hope that the participants would be less inclined to filter their responses

and feel comfortable enough to be open with me about their feelings and mental health during the field component of their teacher preparation.

Despite my attempts, the first thing I noticed was the participants' reluctance to use the word "anxiety" to describe their own emotional states. Instead, they used words like "nervous, scared, worried, and intimidated". Interestingly, the two people that self-identified as anxious did not connect it to classroom responsibilities in the field. Betty perceived not having enough responsibility in the classroom and Megan connected anxiousness to pressure from her looming EdTPA requirements, which she says made her feel "constantly anxious about getting it done and the pressure of my score" (personal communication, 2018). I am curious if here the tool of transparency or "clarifying" again could have been exercised to better inform the participants about what to expect, so they can anticipate additional work and upcoming challenges. What if Betty had been better acquainted with how to be involved in the classroom and Megan knew more about the EdTPA and preparing for it? Would they still have identified as anxious? I predict "yes" because the other participants, those currently preparing to be teachers, mentioned how some of the teaching standardized certification tests came as a surprise, but a simple internet search of teacher education programs at their University outlines these requirements with robust clarity. Agency to seek out answers to questions seems to be crucial especially when a teacher candidate is beginning their program.

One major concern for Betty was how she felt in her practicum placement. This can be scary to prospective teachers who have been thinking about "what it would be like" to

be “in a classroom”. When they begin their first field placement, it may not “feel” as though they perceived it would, which causes them to question their match to the profession. I have come to appreciate and understand how concerning a disconnect between perceptions and feelings can be. The challenging dynamic that teaching candidates are placed in during practicum is well documented. This potentially uncomfortable situation can be especially challenging for pre-service teachers like Betty, who was the only participant who reported having a diagnosed anxiety disorder. They are in another teacher’s classroom for a day and a half with a huge range of expectations for involvement and autonomy depending on the cooperating teacher. My perception alerted me to another disconnect here because I perceived Betty as one who would excel at taking initiative as she is outgoing, friendly, organized, helpful, communicative etc. which are critical attributes of involved practicum students. Betty had received my “How to get more involved and feel more comfortable in your practicum classroom” handout (see Appendix F), which I hoped would aid in the direction of this desired initiative, but for her it wasn’t enough because her uncomfortable feeling stemmed from not feeling connected to the students. Regardless of all the discomfort she felt, her only focus was on serving the students. This realization helped me to better understand how closely feeling words and emotional states are connected to expectations and agency. Here, it seems that Betty’s perception of how connected to the students she should be or wanted to be did not match her ability to connect with them during just over a 1/5 of their school week. The lack of agency she perceived in the classroom prevented her from student connections.

In another instance, Megan's perception of the EdTPA assessment and the importance of her score, in addition to the lack of agency she felt over the process, put enough pressure on her that this she perceived this as what took away from her sleep, workout schedule, and time in the classroom. This brings about a really important notion for my inquiry about catalysts of stress or anxiety. Betty connected her anxiety to her perception of how connected she should be to her students. Megan felt anxious from her perception of the challenge of the EdTPA and her score's potential to derail her goal of graduation. Neither felt agency to change their circumstance. Let's consider carefully what this might mean. Does this teacher education preparation program need to make programmatic changes or does it simply need to facilitate opportunities for students to gain agency through additional transparency and teaching practices like the 7C's? I anticipate that both Betty and Megan needed more information and agency to trust in themselves and the University's process. However, how much can one person count on another in the transitioning of his/her identity like that of the change from student to teacher? When is a person responsible to "get what he/she" wants out of an opportunity? Betty and Megan did not perceive that they were doing what they needed to do or that they had the agency to change their circumstances, which caused fear or anticipation of the future. The other four participants, even while not using the word, "anxiety", did describe similar feelings of nervousness, intimidation, being overwhelmed, scared, or worried, but the catalysts were based not on requirements, but on perceptions of what they needed to do in the program. Differentiating between perceptions and requirements is important because perceptions can be clarified and supported, but many requirements of this and other education programs cannot be changed because they are state mandated for certification. Sometimes,

learning involves feeling uncomfortable because it includes practice of the unfamiliar or discussion of new content or perspectives. Feeling uncomfortable temporarily may lead to long-term goals, like teacher certification or college graduation. It may lead to clarifying misconceptions or better understanding one's personal lens of experience and bias. In fact, feeling uncomfortable is a common byproduct of learning.

Maybe additional strategies, like those outlined in Appendix F, would have helped Betty connect to the agency she needed to connect to students, but maybe it is also nearly impossible for a practicum student to feel connected "enough" considering their short time in the classroom. Betty used the specific example of not knowing students' names when being observed for her first lesson. She said,

I felt useless and like a tutor not a teacher. When I taught a lesson it wasn't connected to the curriculum. I felt like I was wasting my time because I didn't connect to the kids or the curriculum. I didn't connect with the room. I didn't have autonomy. I felt like I should be doing something worth my time. In the room I didn't feel stressed out but I was so anxious when I was observed because everything was foreign and it shouldn't have been. I was anxious about not having responsibility in the room. (personal communication, 2018)

I think that this quotation screams for the need of additional agency! How could Betty have become more involved and less anxious? Was it her CT or herself that prevented this from happening? What should or shouldn't happen in a teacher preparation program is a



constant topic of concern and discussion for pre-service teachers. This theme of a disconnect between what pre-service teachers think they should be doing to learn to teach and the actual programmatic requirements, class curriculums, or field experiences is prevalent. I question if this disconnect has the potential to block a positive, satisfied, or comfortable feeling during the program, which is replaced with angst, concern, nerves, etc. Research on alternative conceptions and education states like this is quite common because we form ideas from our everyday experiences. Experiences are not necessarily grounded in evidence or scholarship and can be counterintuitive which makes them hard to dispel. (Lucariello and Naff, 2019) I want to clarify that I value the conceptions of Betty and Megan and in no way think that they were wrong, I simply question if additional clarity might have changed their perspective. My interviews did show that pre-service teachers perceptions change often throughout this growth process. The process of “becoming “ a teacher has to include a change in perception because teachers cannot succeed without agency. This is one question I wish I asked the participants because how one perceives himself or herself is deeply connected with how one feels and the agency exercised. I am curious when, if ever, the teacher candidates perceived themselves as “teachers” or “adults” “in the classroom”.

As a practicing teacher, with her own self-contained classroom, Betty says that while her field work was stressful, now as a teacher she realizes the juxtaposition of how “not stressful it was” but also recalls that it was incredibly stressful. I think what Betty meant here is that in retrospect her experience in the program does not seem as stressful now as she perceived it was at the time she was in the program. However, she remains committed

to the fact that it was stress inducing. Pre-service teachers are trying to “become” something, which naturally connects to the idea that they need to change from what they are to what they will be. Does this “becoming” enhance, elaborate, or change how they perceive themselves? I am curious how it might impact their success to know that they are already enough and simply need to learn particular tools and strategies, through experience, that may help them to facilitate classes. Did Betty need more “care”? Betty concluded that,

What’s being done to prepare teachers is not successful. The only way you can learn to be a teacher is by teaching. So much of teaching is by social interaction...You’re making snap decisions about what to say and what to do and there’s no way to teach it, but having a well defined role in the classroom helps. (personal communication, 2018)

While this argument may be worn, current teacher education programs, like this one, are the result of hundreds of educated minds with positive intentions to produce an experience to help prepare and support teachers for this social interaction. Betty’s change in thinking, and reflection of this section, has made me question how teacher preparation programs can facilitate a change in perception of requirements or what one “should” be doing instead of changing the program itself. Do programs need to change how they frame expectations instead of the program?

This perception of the applicability of the program and its requirements was a theme that the data seemed to shout from the pages of transcripts that evolved from my interviews. Not surprisingly, the participants' reflections on how they felt during the program included a lot of criticism for what should be changed. Several participants did not feel connected to what they perceived would help transition them to be "teacher ready". This does not mean that the program's content needs to change, but perhaps that the pre-service teachers need clarification as to why what's included is valuable. Kristen was a part of the same cohort group as Betty and describes the "disconnect" in the program's applicability because there was too much memorizing theorists, reading, and writing essays and not enough practicing. She said the program needs to prepare teachers to better practice fluidity from "idealistic to realistic" and that there was a general feeling that while she and her peers were learning "so much" in their coursework they did not know how to apply what they learned to the classroom. She asserts that unrealistic expectations, like a seven page lesson plan requirement, add to stress of pre-service teachers because it actually creates misconceptions that "this is what they do", and she did not feel personally equipped to keep up the rigor of the lesson plan that she was being asked to practice. She described not being prepared for the "real world". (personal communication, 2018) In advising future students about the applicability of the program, Kristen says that:

Future students should get in the classroom ASAP because that changes everything. It changes everything. It would be nice of teachers told us that it's totally different when you get in the classroom. It would have been nice to know that what you're

learning in will flip on its head be totally different. When you're a practicing teacher there are growing humans in front of you and that's a huge shift.

This "huge shift", as Kristen calls it, is something that Sam, Pam, and Olivia have not yet experienced since they are still working through their program, however they have already had some of the same feelings and concerns about "applicability" that the first group mentioned.

### **Sam, Pam, and Olivia (Storied Experiences of Another Group)**

...[S]tudents emotions, motivations, mindsets, and agency-expressive behaviors are predicted by what teachers ask of them as well as by what teachers give...Care may sometimes entail coddling (e.g., in an effort to be emotionally supportive, some teachers may be especially accommodating and this may depress student conduct as well as academic persistence); Conferring may sometimes lack clear purposes...(conversations without clear purposes may undermine student effort and reduce time on task); Clearing up confusion [a subcomponent of clarify] may sometimes occur too automatically (e.g., too much teacher problem solving or clearing up confusion can deny students adequate incentive and opportunity to diagnose and correct their own misunderstandings, ultimately diminishing effort and conscientiousness (Ferguson et. al., 2015, p. 8)

I began this section with the above quotation as a way to bring balance to this discussion. I am in no way promoting that the use of the 7C's in teaching will dramatically

or certainly equate to increased student advocacy. The quote above shows how these teaching practices can also dampen student advocacy. The careful balance of supporting students, and encouraging them to support themselves. Every teacher has to reach this careful balance with his/her students. Experience or trial and error might help teachers to determine where this boundary is for different students or classes. I bring this to the readers' attention, because the storied narratives of this group reflect more consistent concerns and feeling words that could be considered undesirable. I invite readers to instead consider how this might be a reflection of young people who are less confident and experienced and therefore more concerned about how they perceive what their teacher education program "should" be doing differently. While I am looking for ways to support the stress and anxiety students feel in their program, I am also conscious that these feelings might be a part of the learning process. In this section, I continue to search out the balance of supporting agency with particular teaching components while maintaining perspective that "too much" support will actually dampen agency. So, as the words of the pre-service teachers in this section might seem to call for intervention, each teacher educator needs to critically examine how to best support his or her teacher candidates, remembering to support agency.

Sam was "nervous" because of what she heard about the program before starting. Pam was "scared and worried" because she felt her expectations for practicum were unclear, and Olivia felt "a little lost and intimidated" because she didn't perceive that she had the needed knowledge or experience to bring into the classroom. I know that each of these student's programs included outlining expectations for each person involved in the

tri-ad relationship (cooperating teacher, supervisor, and self), but this was not enough to negate their concerns. Having anticipation about doing something for the first time is natural, and I can understand how these pre-service teachers felt “scared, worried, unclear, or intimidated”, but I am not sure that this correlates to the need for programmatic changes. I do think that additional “clarity” might have helped these pre-service teachers in their practicum because knowing what to expect, even if that expectation is to be nervous, can help calm anticipation or uncertainty. It’s possible the pre-service teachers might have felt differently with more reassurance, the opportunity to connect with their CT or another student who had already completed their practicum, but it’s also possible that these feelings are a part of learning and practicing something unfamiliar. Perhaps, these students had misconceptions of who or what they needed to be or do. The question here is, how can a University teacher education preparation program help dispel misconceptions so that they do not over power the actual experience? It may not be possible to answer every question of “what the experience” is like before it takes place, but it would be easy to ask pre-service teachers to share everything they “heard” about practicum field placements and talk through misconceptions or share concerns.

Here is where the idea of balance comes in. How can teacher candidates feel comfortable and prepared to enter a field placement classroom when new first hand experience is what’s needed. I still question if transparency is part of the answer. Would it have been helpful for Sam to know that she would likely feel more comfortable with time or that most students feel concerned before entering their first field placement? Would it have been helpful for Olivia to know that it’s normal to feel intimidated or lost when you do

something for the first time? Would it have been helpful for Pam to better understand what the expectations are for a practicum student in the field? Is asking pre-service teachers to take on the responsibility to outline the expectations for themselves, their cooperating teacher, and supervisor at the beginning a good practice when they may need more guidance and experience to have an idea of what to expect? This theme of perspective has become so prevalent it consumes a third of a new “Wellness Refresher” (Appendix H) that I have been asked to facilitate in each seminar for this university’s elementary and early childhood teacher education preparation programs. Here, I question: what can I say or do to help pre-service teachers recall their personal goals and how their involvement in the program can help to serve their future goals? How can one program that serves hundreds of diverse students each year help each of them to meet their goals in a way that they perceive will be effective, successful, fruitful, etc.? Is this possible?

Facilitating the reduction of feelings of isolation, self-judgment, anticipation, etc. might be an effective place to start. Pre-service teachers seem to benefit from and request time to “decompress” and share their experiences. However, part of preparing to be a teacher also might be learning to feel uncomfortable and uncertain in the field. In the classroom pre-service teachers should be questioning themselves and their perspectives, but not what requirements need to be done. They should question the “what” and the “why” of the learning process, but also learn to be uncertain or uncomfortable because that’s part of the process too. This includes understanding the lens of experience through which you perceive yourself and the world in addition to how different those experiences might be from the students in your future classes. Might one of the most important goals of

a teacher education program, in addition to providing opportunities for classroom experience, be helping pre-service teachers to see how they experience life different from others due to the privileges of their past experience, the person they present as, or other? This is actually one way that my teaching has involved the most from my doctoral work in University. I have come to understand that you can only prepare to teach others (or instruct others to teach) when you have first stopped to examine personal ideals and where they stem from, notions of implicit bias, nature of experiences, connections and disconnections with school and literacy, notions of what it means to teach and learn, experiences with diverse dissimilar individuals, etc. In summary, part of the way we perceive others and ourselves gives each person a unique perspective and sometimes a different perspective, or one with more experience, can be helpful.

I remind students that feeling stressed, anxious, or apprehensive is normal especially in transition (student to teacher), so its important to be kind to yourself and remember that you're a learner who is practicing, reflecting, and learning something new. In addition, this program, in specific, is and should be challenging, so it is important to ask how the program can serve you and your future goals. As a part of goal setting, consider how you can practice professionalism (part of being a teacher) through the lens with which you perceive and talk about students. Finally, remember to celebrate even the smallest successes, accomplishments, and moments of joy with students, in your personal growth, or in checking off programmatic requirements.



It is not always possible to understand the reasoning for all components of a process while participating in it. This might be my initial reaction to many of the notions that this group points out, however many of their challenges are confirmed by the first group who has had time to reflect on the process as a whole, and also participate in the field of teaching first hand, giving their perspective more grounding. After completing all these interviews, I found the reflections of Pam to be particularly descriptive, detailed, and honest. She was also the only participant who was able to describe how her anxiousness impacted her in the program.

### **Pam**

Pam's interview was early in the morning. The video chat streamed from her kitchen where she sat with her dad who was over visiting. His face darted on and off the screen to show me the adorable pet guinea pig that he was holding. She smiled fondly at her father and her pet throughout our time together, and I got a sense that both gave her a comfort. Pam is a student who might at first appear quiet in a large class filled with eager peers. However, when asked directly, she was able to best account for the transition her feelings have taken since she started the program because of how strong they have been. Pam only articulated one word to describe how she felt going into her first practicum, and that word was "scared". Fear is an honest reaction to trying something for the first time, but what struck me was that she was afraid because she felt she had no idea what her expectations were until the very end. At this point, the lack of timely expectations, contributed to negative feelings because there were "new" requirements that were unknown until it was too late to complete them. She recalls being told to "follow your CT

and become a part of the community”, but found no help in those open directives. Could she and her supervisor have “conferred” further? I wish she would have advocated more for herself and asked questions to calm her fears, but also that her teacher educators would have made it a point to ask. Thank goodness for her CT who was “nice and helpful”. Like Kristen mentioned earlier, having a CT open to “anything” made the experience less stressful. Pam also felt fearful of consequences about not doing something in practicum that would later be named “required”. She named classes where she gave speeches, did lesson plans, read book chapters, and studied theories, but the lack of connection she perceived between these course requirements and feeling “prepared” to participate in her field classroom contributed to feelings of nervousness.

Feeling “prepared” for changing field placements can be hard for any group of new pre-service teachers with consistent support, but that is not a luxury that Pam’s cohort group had. In their third semester of the program, Pam is experiencing her third cohort leader and third field supervisor. Pam, and her peers I interviewed, all noted that this was of concern and that it was “freaking them out”. The lack of consistent support left them feeling unsupported. Being “freaked out” was not a phrase that I readily knew how to unpack, so I asked Pam to elaborate:

It’s just because everything keeps changing and then they keep telling us to be flexible, but it doesn’t go both ways. I say stop asking us to be flexible when you’re not flexible. We were always expected to be prepared and on time, but our supervisors were not. It was clear that some of our instructors were just winging it

and were not really prepared when we were expected to fill in a log, have a detailed lesson, reflect on that lesson, etc. No one was modeling the expectations they had of us!

These comments gave Pam and I the opportunity to discuss how important it is to be ready for anything and “flexible” because a teacher’s responsibilities can change in an instant due to administrative, state, or parental demands. However, it is easy to appreciate how frustrating this situation was for Pam because of the perceived power dynamic that she felt. She was being evaluated by a revolving door of individuals who could not model the very expectations they required. Despite these challenges, Pam says that “trying not to be negative” is important advice that she has for future students because negativity defined her first semester, which she indicated only made things worse. Pam only felt negative in her first semester, but is still plagued by anxiousness and learning how it exhibited itself helped me to better understand how she communicated. Pam told me this:

I dreaded emails, I cried, the way I would cope with being really nervous was to not respond for a few days. It was an awful feeling of knowing that I’m paying for this education, and I want to be here, but I don’t feel like I’m learning. It’s like this ongoing dread of it’s never doing to end until I can get that paper. If I’m sick I can’t miss class because only one absence is allowed, and I might have an emergency later that prevents me from getting to class, so I need to go anyway.

In my experience, strict attendance and timeliness policies give a lot of pre-service teachers in the program concern, but this is a professional development program. Teachers must be timely and present because students cannot go unsupervised. Classes are only once a week meaning that they typically meet fourteen times. Having worked as an instructor, I can relate to the struggle to fit “everything” that seems necessary into this time frame; it’s daunting because of the responsibility that you feel to prepare the students in whatever capacity your course is “meant” to. I have found that “clarity” helps here. Once I explain to the students the pressure I feel to facilitate enough learning experiences to help them feel prepared to do “X”, in addition to how hard that is, they seem to be more understanding and accepting of strict attendance policies. Communication is paramount in negotiating “excused” tardies and absences; I have found myself and other instructors to be understanding of these requirements when life circumstances require it. Students must advocate for themselves and their grades with communication.

### **Sam**

Sam, another teacher candidate in Pam’s cohort, also had a lot to say about the instructors in the program, but what I was drawn to in her interview was her definition of how she “could tell” when a teacher wants students to succeed. At first, I was slightly taken back by this comment because the thought of a teacher who doesn’t want students to succeed seems quite strange. This discussion was particularly helpful because it provided new insight into a student’s perception that I did not know even existed. So, how does a young teacher candidate define teachers who want students to succeed?

They give you real life examples; they give you resources that you can use. They are understanding about assignments and readings and are flexible. They don't want their class to be repetitive. They communicate better responding to emails quickly. They are teachers who want success and their class's content is more applicable to real life vs. being all theory and dense readings I don't understand (personal communication, 2018)

This explanation left me a bit confused, and I was intrigued by how much communication and perceived class to field connections played into this pre-service teacher's determining factors for if an instructor wants students to succeed. I sensed a disconnect here, so I asked her how she would describe teachers who were responsive to students mental health and many of the same descriptors appeared. Teachers' responsiveness to students' mental health, according to this teacher candidate, includes opportunities to try things in the classroom, learning from a teacher's experience, giving advice, the recognition that students have other classes and responsibilities, and "being a person", by which she meant being asked, "How's your day?" (personal communication, 2018) This interaction with Sam was so enlightening because of how she defined teachers who want students to succeed and/or are responsive to students' mental health. They both boil down to teachers who speak from experience, are flexible, are communicative on email, and include tangible materials that may be incorporated into a future classroom. In the end, these "definitions", while interesting, are also highly problematic for me as the researcher, because of how much they add layers of questions to students' perceptions. Figuring out "what" the student "wants" and how program facilitators' actions are perceived is different for each

pre-service teacher. This must be the reason that Dewey includes personal needs as they interact with conditions to inform environment. He says that, "The environment, in other words, is whatever conditions interact with personal needs, desires, purposes, and capacities to create the experience which is had." (Dewey, 1938, p.44) Due to the uniqueness of each individual's personal needs, teachers, including teacher educators must constantly work to be receptive to students' needs keeping in mind that this might mean supporting the feelings that students perceive as negative, which may be an unavoidable part of the process of learning to teach.

For each of the participants that shared their stories with me, their experiences are bound not only with emotions, but with a strong sense that their perceptions are real. Their truths are representative not only of their perceptions, but of their definitions of concepts like supportive. Pre-service teachers may not want to feel some of the emotions that seem to be a part of learning and finding familiarity in a totally new environment. Yes, they have experienced school before, but now they view their learning to teach through the lens through which they experienced school. I end this section, with more question than answers and the reminder that, "being pressed to learn and experiencing learning growth may not produce a love or learning or a desire to continue learning" (Ferguson et. al., 2015, p.9). The question then is how teacher educators who's teaching does or does not include the 7C's impacts students' agency and learning growth, which may or may not encourage not just a love of teaching but positively respond to ever-changing and challenging conditions because this is the world of teaching. I anticipate that many readers might want to know more about how I'm defining agency, since I am using it as a determining factor for

pre-service teachers' "success". Ferguson et. al. (2015) note that, "Sociologists identify constraints on agency in the form of structural conditions that limit opportunities" (p.13). So, how can pre-service teachers make the most of their opportunities in this teacher education program within the boundaries and conditions of not only this program but of their life circumstances, including their mental health?

To better understand the participants' reflections of their experiences, and to value the experiential knowledge (vs. content knowledge) they have gained in the program, I ended each interview by asking my participants what advice they have for future students in the program. I found Olivia's comments to be particularly insightful because she has already gained the perspective that she needs to use what she's learning and experiencing in the program to serve her own unique future goals. Additionally, she is the only participant whose comments reflect her thinking about the perspectives of others, like the program's facilitators. Many pre-service teachers spend a lot of time in their teacher education program trying to "prove" their ability to "teach" and "learn" new content to instructors, cooperating teachers, supervisors, and peers. Intentions to "prove oneself" not only creates stress and angst, but it also sets a pattern of focusing too much on what others "think", which can be hard to change later. New teachers can easily find themselves in a cycle in which they go from trying to prove themselves to others in their program to trying to prove something to new colleagues, administration, parents, or others. It can be stressful to continually feel you need to prove yourself and hard to feel comfortable and find enjoyment. A focus on the students and their learning helps me to find new excitement and joy in each day I spend in the teaching profession. In the end, the program and its

facilitators are temporary, but what pre-service teachers gain during the program can continue to inform patterns and skills that they can continue altering to meet new goals as a practicing teacher. Olivia said,

Take everything with a grain assault. But seriously, take in everything that everyone has to say, learn from all these great things that we're learning, but also don't. Try not to stress too much about it because in the end it's what you're going to be as a teacher and you should take what you're learning and do whatever you want with it...it's not like a don't care because I care a lot...if you can't make a class don't stress about it they're not going to kick you out of the program and say get out of here, ya know, it's going to be ok...There is only so much you can learn in the classroom to become a teacher and as frustrating as it can get I always try to put myself in the instructors' shoes to recognize that if I was teaching this class you're not going to be able to meet every demand and need of all your students, but teachers, should always do their best to listen like you do to what we would say.

"Improving" teaching practices through experience is so important in the teaching profession because it is through experience that teachers hone their craft. This is why it is critical for teachers to become reflective practitioners, so that self-reflection can become a tool for professional development. This points to one challenge for teacher education programs. How can new teachers learn to reflect on their experiences in a way that will serve them and their transition to becoming a reflective practitioner; one who learns and improves their teaching practice through self-reflection? Unfortunately, pre-service



teachers' reflections are typically constructed for an audience, other than the self, because reflections are "assigned" as one way to "show" those with power (instructors, supervisors, cooperating teachers) what has been "learned". In this program, pre-service teachers' comments reflect that they feel they spend a lot of time proving themselves to others. In the end, it is not what others' "think" that matters most, but the personal understandings and experiences that have provided professional growth, as well as the identification of the lens through which they see and experience the world that will serve them later in the field. This is problematic because pre-service teachers may not get in the habit of taking personal responsibility to reflect and then apply those reflections to improving teaching practices. Ferguson et. al. (2015) say that,

Young people from every background deserve teaching that enhances their agency...we distinguish having a sense of agency-defined as a belief that personal actions will effectively achieve the outcomes we desire-from actually expressing agency to achieve those outcomes...Parents and teachers help to inspire, enable, and focus both a sense of agency and expression of agency by the opportunities, instruction, and guidance they provide...Awareness that success in life requires agency is not new. However, we have tended as a society to treat its development as mostly a family and community responsibility, not a focus for policymakers, curriculum developers, or teacher preparation programs. Even experienced teachers are mostly on their own in finding ways to understand, develop, and support agency. (Ferguson et. al., 2015, p. 13-14)

Reflection through writing is a common practice in teacher education programs to facilitate the growth of reflective practitioners, expression of agency, and to bridge theory and practice. In action, reflection provides opportunities to consider what's working well, opportunities for positive change, a chance to consider additional perspectives, how to cope with professional challenges, and much more. Reflection during field experiences is especially important in pre-service teaching when there is the opportunity to apply coursework in the classroom. Reflection helps to develop professional teaching identity as well as goal setting and planning for the forethought of self-regulated learning, that which allows one to have control one's own learning and expressive agency.

## **Appendices**

### Appendix A

#### How to Get More Involved and Feel More Comfortable in Your Practicum Classroom

##### Tips and Notes to Consider:

-Your MAIN/CENTRAL role during practicum is of an observer. If you feel unsure about what you "should" be doing, ASK.....afterward you can always sit down and write observation notes!!!

-Your teacher and the school want you there. Being a CT is optional and there is no reason for a CT to ask for you to be in their classroom if he/she didn't want to work with a new teacher.

-TAKE INITIATE to get involved. Don't be concerned with intruding. You can always walk around and observe what the students are doing.

- If you're interested, ask your CT the best way to communicate with other teachers that you'd like to observe.

- Write down observations of the structure of class, student tasks, teacher management, student engagement, etc. Remember to take notes on specific items to use for your required Journal Entry assignments, so that writing them is quick, easy, and reflective. The journal entry assignments should essentially be "written" in your placement if you have

time. If not, take a few minutes to write at the end of your time onsite while everything is fresh in your mind.

-If there isn't a place in the room you feel comfortable sitting and taking notes or setting your stuff down or to use as a "hub" when you're there ask your CT for one.

-Desire to be informed about what happens in the classroom when you are not there so that you have a better picture of the students/teachers experiences.

-It is not the CT's sole responsibility to involve you in the classroom. You need to take interest, ask questions, and find ways to get what you want out of the experience.

-If you feel pressed for time to ask questions of your CT, ask if there is a time you can set aside to chat or if you can email him/her some questions you'd like to pose.

-Feel free to ask for a copy of any teacher or student handouts your CT utilizes.

-Ask for a book to reference for utilization during small groups or so that you can follow along.

#### Communication with your CT:

-When you arrive, ask the CT for suggestions on how you can be helpful or involved during for different classes or subjects today. This is why it's important to arrive a bit before the students do in the morning.

-If your teacher is not directly instructing a large or small group, feel free to walk up to him/her and ASK WHY he/she did something in a particular way. The CT should not be insulted, but rather understand that you are trying to learn.

-Tell the CT that you feel a little awkward, if you do, and why. It's ok to say, "I'm not sure where I should sit or what I should do during "X".

-Honesty is the best policy. The more you communicate with your CT the more he/she will know the types of information you'd like to/need to learn. You cannot expect he/she to guess the questions you have.

-If you see a way you may be able to interact with students in a helpful manner feel free to do so or ask the CT if he/she minds if you do "X".

- Tell the CT if you are concerned or uncomfortable with anything and ask if he/she can support you through this.

-Almost all the CT's that you are working with have been a CT before. Ask him/her what practicum students have done in the past that was particularly helpful or in what ways practicum student's were involved in class "X".

General Common Question starters to promote your learning:

- Can you please explain why you did “X”?
- What are the specific challenges/strengths that student “X” has?
- I’ve noticed “X”. What do you think about that?
- In my classes we are learning “X”, do you use that strategy or find it helpful?
- Are there any students in the class with an IEP (Individualized Education Plan)?  
If so, what have you found has helped student “X”?

Note: These are mandated by law and are the result of a collaborative meeting between several school staff members following specific testing.

- I’ve noticed you do “X” for transitions/opening activities/homework. Do you stick with the same format for all classes/subjects/times of the day/in homeroom, etc.?
- How do you know what you need to accomplish in a particular subject/class for the day?
- What do you do to differentiate instruction in “X”?
- How do you try to meet the needs of various learning styles in “X”?
- What would you do in a situation with “X”?
- How have you found is the best way to do “X”?

Forming Relationships with Students:

-Listen to the students’ conversations before and after class. This is a time when you can get to know their hobbies, interests, and interactions with peers. Chime in if you have something in common or a comment to add. Yes, this is eavesdropping, but it is important for teachers to know what goes on.

Welcome students into the classroom; say “hi” to them in the halls (even if it’s a silent wave) Ask students about their weekend or evening the night before.

Observe the students in the hallways and be aware of what extracurricular activities they partake in.

Learn their names as soon as possible. It’s ok to ask them to repeat it for you, so that your pronunciation is sure to be correct.

Follow up with a student the day after (Thursday) or the week after you worked with him/her on a particular problem/topic, and check in to see how the application or understanding has grown.

Walk around the classroom when students are participating in small groups, try to find something specific to offer individual positive feedback or facilitation.

Find ways to show the students you respect them, listen when they speak, and you care about their interests.

Relate to students if it’s genuine. “I remember when I was in....”

Exercise “wait time” so that students who need more thinking time know that you will wait for an answer.

Examples of how to Increase your Communication with Students:

- I really like how you connected these sentences with a transition to guide your readers through the process of “X”.
- I see that you are waiting very patiently for everyone to finish “X”. Thank you.
- That was really nice how you included “X” during recess. I’m proud of you.
- I can see you were a little frustrated earlier, but you worked through that problem until “X”. Great job!
- I know you feel shy in class sometimes, but I think the question you asked in Social Studies helped a lot of your classmates who had the same question too.
- Take a look at this one again. (If incorrect)
- Do you have any questions about this problem? (if incorrect)
- Could you read these directions for me? (If you see the directions are not followed)
- Can we please mark all the parts of this question together? Do you see answers to all these parts in your response?
- Is this to the level of your personal best, or could you challenge yourself to go further by doing “X”?

Your “Official” Observations:

You may do almost anything in the classroom when we come to observe you.

We want to see you facilitating what would typically take place during the time we are in the classroom.

You DO NOT have to do direct instruction; we just want to see you take initiative to facilitate the learning of the whole group, a small group, or even an individual student.

Your supervisors will be onsite for about 60 minutes, and during that time you may lead for only 15-20 minutes and then you may switch back and forth with your CT, or you may lead a small group and then work one-on-one with a student, or we may see you walking around facilitating independent work time or small groups. You need to do some sort of lesson for us to watch while we’re there, but this may be given to you directly from your CT without choice, based on what needs to be accomplished during this time. You may need to give a spelling test, read aloud, lead morning routine, etc. We do not expect you to “make-up” the content of what we will observe. Rather, you will practice how to formally write a lesson plan that’s applicable for the time/place of your observation.

We will meet with you after each observation. Your CT may or may not join us depending on their schedule, however we will be sure to get some type of feedback for you from the CT.

The only exception to the flexible nature of the observations is if you need to do something in particular to fulfill your requirements for those classes. If you have further questions about the observations do not worry or wonder. Ask your supervisor.

### Reminders

Fill out all parts of lesson plan so that they are clear and another person may imagine exactly what's happening without being there.

Ask your supervisor for comments specific to an area of concern you may have.

Carry out the CT's desired objectives during the allotted time.

Do not be concerned that you are being judged or graded. We are observing with the sole purpose to offer positive and constructive feedback to help you improve at your craft.

After both in-person observations from your supervisor, you will need to write and submit an electronic and paper copy within 7 days.

Your supervisor is not allowed to observe you if she didn't receive your lesson plan 72 hours in advance via email.

## Appendix B

### Data Triangulation

#### Interviews

MCEA-Content: 2 Year Out : Evelyn (Megan), Lauren(Kristen), Elizabeth(Betty)

MCEA-ESL: Practicum III: Kate (Sam), Tiffani (Lexi), Anna()

SE

#### Journals

SE FALL 2017

SE SPRING 2018

#### Survey

MCEA-Content: 2 Year Out

MCEA-ESL: Practicum III

## Appendix C

### Teacher Candidate Wellness

#### Keep Perspective:

- Feeling stressed, anxious, or apprehensive is normal especially in transitions (Identity: student→teacher)
- Be kind to yourself and remember you're a learner who is practicing, reflecting, and experiencing new things.

- This program is and should be challenging.
- Ask yourself how the program can serve you and your future goals
- Question if every point on every paper/project is needed to meet your goals
- Consider how you can practice professionalism in your words and the lens through which you see and talk about students
- Celebrate even the smallest successes, accomplishments, moments of joy, etc.
- I NEED TO KEEP PERSPECTIVE ABOUT:

#### Do Self Care:

- This can be anything that involves taking time for oneself or it might mean time outside, with friends, connecting with your cohort, exercising, reading, etc.
- Time management will help make time for self care and reduce stress of deadlines. (Break down large assignments into smaller goals, plan time for relaxation and recreation, make check lists to mark off accomplishments.)
- If you are too sick to attend class/field placement. Stay home and rest! Take time to go to the doctor if you need to!
- Start now and make this a habit to continue into your career.
- SELF CARE FOR ME MIGHT LOOK LIKE:

#### Consider Mindfulness:

- Being mindful of your body & mind. (Use your breath.) → Don't underestimate the power of a cleansing breath to rejuvenate or calm you.
- For YOU
- For YOUR students (After recess, before an assessment, during a class meeting, before challenging topics are introduced, while practicing challenging tasks, to calm during conflicts, etc.)
- DURING PRACTICE I FELT:

\*Allie is here to work with individuals and small groups who want to learn more about incorporating self care into routine, which may facilitate the alleviation of some stressful symptoms. [amurrow@wisc.edu](mailto:amurrow@wisc.edu)

UW Mental Health Resources

According to the 2016 UW–Madison Healthy Minds Study, 94% of UW–Madison students do not think any less of a peer who seeks mental health care, and 90% of students who used mental health care found it helpful.

Let's Talk. If you're on-campus, Let's Talk provides free, informal, and confidential consultations at locations across campus. Drop in to talk to a counselor about any topic – stress, sadness, relationships, academic performance, financial struggles, and family problems are common topics. Counselors can help you explore solutions from their perspective, or, if you're interested, introduce you to what it's like to talk to a counselor more regularly. (M 1-3 College Library, T 2-4 SAC(3158), W 2-4 Union S, R 11-1 SOE(154), F Noon-2 Union S(TITU) <Questions? Call Simone 608-265-5600>

Let's Yoga. All levels are welcome and no experience is necessary. Please wear comfortable clothes and bring your own mat. Arrive 5 minutes to check in. FRIDAYS, 10am, MSC Classroom

Individual Counseling. University Health Services (UHS) offers individual counseling in a confidential, caring space. Individual sessions are typically 45-50 minutes, and most students attend anywhere from one to four sessions to address their concerns. Counseling topics can be any issue that causes distress – emotional, psychological, interpersonal, or academic, for instance.

For more mental health resources, visit the **UHS website on mental health.** <

<https://www.uhs.wisc.edu/mental-health/>

UHS 24-hour crisis intervention services for students or those concerned about an enrolled student. <608-265-5600 X9>

## **Chapter Five Participants' Expressive Writing Reflections (as Data)**

### **Introduction**

Some of the most exciting research discoveries concern the role of perspective in expressive writing. People who benefit most from writing about traumas change how they focus on a trauma from day to day...Maybe if you can look at an upsetting event from different angles, you are able to stand back from it. (Pennebaker & Evans, 2014. p. 75)



Pennebaker and Evans are helpful in thinking about how teacher candidates can practice being a reflective practitioner through considering multiple perspectives in their writing. The word “trauma” may have caused you a moment of pause questioning why or how pre-service teachers are experiencing “trauma”. I invite you to not think about trauma as something terrible like the death of a family member, and instead view it simply as something that a person perceives as distressing. The feelings of pre-service teachers, presented as data in this chapter, indicated that they perceive a number of feelings and concerns in the field that may lead them to feel distress. For this reason, I created writing prompts that asked pre-service teachers to own their feelings in part one and then consider how its possible to view these same feelings differently. My hope is that pre-service teachers will recognize the agency they have to create change though shifting how they think about a situation. As stated earlier, reflection prompts are a typical strategy used by teacher educators to facilitate the growth of reflective practitioners, expression of agency, and to bridge theory and practice.

Reflection during practicum and student teaching is especially important in developing professional teaching identity and self-regulated learning, which allows a person to have more control over their professional growth trajectory. Several groups of prospective elementary special education teachers practiced reflection of their developing professional practices in the field by participating in writing exercises inspired by Pennebaker and Evans (2014). The initial objective for these assignments was to change the assumed audience from a professor, supervisor, or other teacher education program facilitator to the writer. This means that the reflective exercise was not just another means

for pre-service teachers to “show” a person in power what they think they “should” have learned. Instead, the reiteration of reflection assignments hoped to facilitate a better ability to cope with and identify occupational circumstances that can produce stress or anxiety. This also requires an empowered sense of agency as individuals come to know strategies to cope and therefore help themselves. Therefore, I question if these assignments might be another way that teacher educators can support the agency of pre-service teachers.

Students were encouraged to write two pieces of expressive writing to begin their reflective journaling practices. All the journal prompts can be found in the Appendix, but I have also pasted the expressive writing prompt I will discuss here below for easy reader reference.

Journal 1: Expressive Writing: As Vygotsky argues that “the act of putting spoken word and unspoken thoughts into written words releases, and in the process changes the thoughts themselves” (as cited in Wolf, 2007, p.65)

Part I: Free Form Expressive Writing: Connect your experience to your emotions- In your field placement, describe what is making you feel content, excited, proud, curious, concerned, frustrated, or any other emotion.

### **Emotions and Feelings as Codes**

A total of seven pre-service teachers shared some of their journal responses with me. I am grateful for Victoria, Nancy, Lenny, Lisa, and Wendy, five of the seven pre-service teachers who included their first journal entry. I used emotion codes utilizing the feeling words written into

their final drafts and also charted the corresponding reasons they attributed to those feelings.

Saldana (2016) defines and describes the benefits of emotion coding.

Emotion codes label the emotions recalled and/or experienced by the participant, or inferred by the researcher about the participant... Since emotions are a universal human experience, our acknowledgement of them in our research provides deep insight into the participants' perspectives, worldviews, and life conditions. Virtually everything we do has an accompanying emotion. (p. 125).

Table 2

*Pre-service teachers' feelings as codes*

<b>Pre-service Teachers' Feelings</b>	<b>Victoria</b>	<b>Nancy</b>	<b>Lenny</b>	<b>Lisa</b>	<b>Wendy</b>
<i>Excited</i>	-Future -Placement -Grade level			-New Experience at new school	-Getting to know older kids -Learning experience of fieldwork
<i>Knowledgeable</i>	-Ins/Outs running a class -Making students feel love -Acting professional -Act as teacher not friend				
Nervous	-Not knowing answers -Not doing enough for students -Students falling behind		-Being around people with special needs -Middle school placement	-Middle school placement (intimidating behaviors)	-Forming relationships with middle school

	-Classroom management				
Naive	-Amount of planning				
<i>Curious</i>	-Emails from parents -Students' perception of pre-service teachers				
Frustrated	-Only 12 hour /week in placement -Classes I "don't learn"	-Substitute not following plan			□
<i>Joyful</i>	-CT placement				
<i>Hopeful</i>	-Become like CT			-Mutual respect with students	-Feel more comfortable with middle school
<i>Happy</i>		-Surrounded by love and energy of 1 <sup>st</sup> grade -Energetic CT	-Placement		
<i>Lucky</i>		-Experience with 1 <sup>st</sup> grade			
Uneasy/Unsure			-Middle school placement		-How to act with older kids -confidence with middle school
Concerned			-Not a lot of academic work for students -Not 50/50 SE/ General Ed. -SE students isolated	-Making student connections	
<i>Looking forward to</i>				-Developing relationships	-Learning about students

				with students	- Understanding behavior philosophy of CT -Building confidence in teaching
Worried				-Assignments due every week -Assignments online	-Expectations for students -Teachers exhausted & frustrated with students -Teachers' unfair treatment of students
Stressed				-Techonology -Due dates	
Overwhelmed				-Online course components	
<i>Optimistic</i>					-Placement with older kids
<i>Proud</i>					-Of self -Challenge beliefs -Formed professional relationships -Formed Friendships -Combat stress/anxiety
Sad					□

Note: Checkmarks indicate the student shared a feeling but not the reason grounding it.

The first thing I noticed is that these prospective teachers, despite preparing to work in the field of special education, did not use the word “anxiety” to articulate their anticipations, concerns, worries, fears, and or other feelings about their practicum placement. This points back to my earlier discussion about the perceived “taboo” nature of the word “anxiety”. This is surprising to

me and was not a challenge that I anticipated. It is difficult to determine ways to mitigate anxiety when individuals do not feel comfortable claiming the feeling. Is it possible that prospective teachers used other words to represent their anxious feelings like worried, concerned, uneasy/unsure, nervous or overwhelmed? The most prevalent feeling word used by the students was nervous, which generally corresponded to their transition into a new field placement. Four of the five students, or 80%, indicated they identified with this feeling during their practicum field placement.

### **Categorizing Pre-service Teachers' Field Placement Feelings and Areas of Concern**

The next thing I noticed was that all but one of these pre-service teachers identified with feelings relating to themselves and their ability to be successful in their field placement. Teacher education programs influence this sense of self by placing students in unfamiliar situations and asking them to constantly reflect on small nuances of their teaching performance, relations with new students and school personnel, and even on their developing work as a reflective practitioner. It is clear from looking at the data that many of the students were beginning to work with Middle School students for the first time, which caused them to note a variety of emotions. Two of the pre-service teachers wrote about concerns for the students in their placements. The catalysts of the the prospective teachers perceptions are differentiated into four categories with the use of descriptive coding in the table below.

Table 3

*Topics of concern for prospective teachers*

<b>Feelings</b>	<b>Pre-service Teachers' "Topics"</b>	<b>#</b>
Regarding Students	Students falling behind, Students' perceptions of per-service teachers, Not a lot of academic work for students, not 50/50 Special education/General education classes, Special Education students' isolation	5

Regarding Programmatic Requirements	Classes where I “don’t learn”, Assignments due every week, Assignments online, Technology, due dates, online course components	6
Regarding Placement (CT or grade level)	Placement, Grade level, New experience at a new school, middle school placement (intimidating behaviors), Emails with parents, Only 12 hours per week in placement, substitute not following plan, CT placement, Surrounded by love and energy of 1 <sup>st</sup> grade, Energetic CT, Placement, Experience with 1 <sup>st</sup> grade, Middle school placement, Expectations for students, Teachers exhausted and frustrated with students, Teachers’ unfair treatment of students, Placement with older kids	15
Regarding Self	Future, Getting to know older students, Learning experience of Fieldwork, Ins/Outs of running a class, Making students feel love, Acting Professional, Acting as a teacher not a friend, Not knowing Answers, Not doing enough for students, Classroom management, Being around people with special needs, Forming relationships with middle school, Amount of planning, Become like CT, Mutual respect with students, Feel more comfortable with middle school, How to act with older kids, Confidence with Middle School, Making Student connections, Developing relationships with students, Learning about students, Understanding behavior and philosophy of CT, Building confidence in teaching, Of self, Challenge beliefs, Formed professional relationships, Formed friendships, Combat stress/anxiety	28

Only one of the prospective teachers identified feelings associated with the way their cooperating teacher interacted with the students, and generally the pre-service teachers’ new placement was the biggest contributing factor to the way they perceived how they felt. This shows how impactful pre-service teachers’ placements can be on their feelings and therefore, mental health. Field placements are often a prevalent defining component of prospective teachers’ mental health as they spend about 4 times more time in the field in comparison to each class. However, this is counter intuitive when considering that the average cohort’s schedule includes four classes in addition to the field, so time in class technically trumps time in the field. In looking at the pre-service teachers’ journals further, I divided the feeling words into two categories based on my perception of the feeling as seemingly “positive” or “negative”. I noted 10 positive emotions (in

italics in the table above) like: excited, knowledgeable, curious, joyful, hopeful, happy, lucky, “looking forward to”, optimistic, and proud. I marked the other 8 feelings as “negative”, which included: nervous, naïve, frustrated, uneasy/unsure, worried, stressed, overwhelmed, and sad. With this demarcation, three of the five pre-service teachers expressed more “positive” than “negative” feeling words.

Many pre-service teachers anticipate the day they finally get to be in a classroom as a teacher working with students. The connection to positive feelings towards this event makes sense since teaching is generally a passion-driven profession for individuals who love teaching and working with students. One of the writing prompts I designed asked prospective teachers to connect with their emotions in the field, but two students also included seemingly “negative” feelings about their inability to relate coursework to fieldwork. These students perceived that these negative feelings of disconnectedness impacted their capacity to work to their potential in the field. Sometimes, a seemingly negative feeling is so strong that it is challenging to focus on what’s positive. In some cases, the strength of negative feelings may inhibit expressions of agency as well. Perhaps, pre-service teachers need to develop the ability to work through “negative” feelings, so that they can be an agent of positive change. So, I go back to an original question: how can teacher education programs help these teachers feel agency?

In the first part of this journal response, only two of the pre-service teachers had concerns about students. Their primary concern was on their own abilities within the context of their new field teaching placement. The second part of this expressive journal prompt indicated much more agency than the first as it guided students to focus on what they can change. There were a



few examples in these pre-service teachers' writing, which showed agency or reflection of the perspectives of others. Wendy, one of the prospective teachers, said,

I personally feel that we should always maintain high expectations and provide our students positive support. Everyday is a new one and there is always time to change. I also understand that I am walking into their [another teacher's] classroom with little background knowledge of the student-teacher dynamic, and the teachers have known the students for much longer than I have. I am really looking forward to learning more about the students, understanding the behavioral philosophy of my CT, and building my confidence in teaching.

Wendy's response shows her value for the knowledge and experience her cooperating teacher has that she has not yet acquired. It also shows her view that "change" is possible. What's interesting is that while her first journal prompt acknowledges her ability to identify challenges in her placement (that she is working to perceive or react to differently), she did not respond to the formal invitation to do so by completing the second part of the journal prompt. Another prospective teacher, Lisa, shared that she is "nervous" because in her new placement, "The kids are older and their behavior is intimidating at times", but she is also "hopeful that [she] can connect with them [,the students,] and learn what it's like to be in middle school from a different perspective" (personal communication, 2018). This shows that despite her nervousness to address middle school students, she has the perspective that she can connect with them. Not all prospective teachers can maintain a proactive and positive viewpoint when they recognize a challenge, nor do they perceive they have the agency to initiate change to address that challenge.

Part two of this first journal prompt is a tool for teacher candidates experiencing this challenge to address prospective changes, but the journals indicate that it was helpful for Wendy and Lisa too.

### **Facilitating Agentic Responses through Writing**

The purpose of the second part of this expressive writing prompt was to guide students' to consider how they might perceive a circumstance differently. Perhaps, this would link to an increased feeling of agency and then action towards constructive change. It may also simply help the pre-service teachers view a situation with a different more positive, understanding, empathetic, or professional lens. Below is the second part of the first pre-service teachers journal prompt.

Journal 1 Part II: Utilize these expressive sentence starters to practice reflecting in a professional and proactive manner.

“I could find fault in “X”, but instead I recognize...”

“I wish “X” was different, but I can overcome this by...”

“X” makes me feel frustrated, but I can work through this by...”

“X seems unfair, but I can support myself and others by...”

“I can show my professionalism by doing “X” instead of “Y”.

The sentence starters were written to facilitate prospective teachers' identification of what they find challenging or wish was different. This was done so that the pre-service teachers can practice reframing their perspective from seemingly negative to positive and to practice taking on the personal responsibility to be an agent capable of positive change.

The pre-service teachers' journals show that they responded to the identified difficulty by shifting their perception or anticipated action/reaction. They again expressed a number of concerns relating to the students, the requirements of their teacher education preparation program, their placement (including cooperating teacher and grade level), and about themselves. Descriptive coding was used here again to divide the students' challenges into four categorical groups reflective of what they are working to think about or act on differently.

Table 4

*Pre-service teachers reported challenges in journals*

<b>PST</b>	<b>Participants' Reported Challenges</b>	<b>Rewritten "Negatives to Positives"</b>
Victoria	(ST)-Students' ability to follow directions	<i>Recog. students are learning rules</i>
	(SE)-Increased responsibility in classroom	<i>Offer to do to more for my CT</i>
	(PRO)-Coursework	<i>Apply readings to coursework</i>
	(PRO)-Long lesson plan requirement	<i>Remem helps lesson to be smooth</i>
	(SE)-Respond to CT emails promptly	<i>Instead of waiting until last minute</i>
Nancy	(PRO)-Scripted math / reading curriculum	<i>Recog teachers do their best to adapt</i>
	(PLA)-Dynamics with CT were different	<i>Think positively about teaching exp.</i>
	(PLA)-Having a long-term sub in placement	<i>Take advantage of teaching opportun</i>
	(PLA)-Role in classroom unsupported	<i>Focus on impact with students</i>
	(PLA)-Collaborate with difficult teachers	<i>Not focusing on a different team</i>
Lenny	(ST)-How students speak to CT	<i>Recognize it's student's disability</i>
	(ST)-SE students got more academics	<i>Insert learning wherever possible</i>
	(PLA)-Not support to include SE in general	<i>Include content missed in discussion</i>
	(PLA)-Teachers deciding student potential	<i>I can challenge students</i>
	(SE)-Communicate in respectful manner	<i>Not jump to conclusions</i>
Lisa	(PLA)-Team teaching methods	<i>Recog difficulty/I can still learn strat.</i>
	(PLA)-More responsibility in	<i>Stay positive &amp; offer to help students</i>

	classroom	
	(SE)-Working with students	Students deserve to learn at [ZPD]
	(PLA)-Sp Ed. pull-out classrooms are unfair	Make environment comfortable
	(SE)-Introduce self to school personnel	Hiding and avoiding eye contact
Wendy	This pre-service teacher did not complete second part of the prompt or did not give me access to it.	
<b>Totals</b>		
Perceived challenges (20 total)	Challenge perceived regarding students (3) 15% Challenge perceived regarding programmatic requirements (3) 15% Challenge perceived regarding placement (CT or grade level) (9) 45% Challenge perceived regarding self (5) 25%	
Changes in thinking (Italix) vs. action (20 total)	9 responses reflected participants' journaling about changing their thinking or perception about a challenge.  11 responses reflected participants' journaling about actions they can take to create positive change in relation to the challenges they identified.	

Note: Acronyms used to identify types of challenges

Challenge identified regarding students (ST)

Challenge identified programmatic requirements (PRO)

Challenge identified regarding placement (CT or grade level) (PLA)

Challenge identified regarding self (SE)

The journals reflect that the challenges this group of pre-service teachers' perceived was mostly due to their placements. This may be because the placement is new at this point in the semester or because the journal prompt asked the pre-service teachers to reflect on their feelings in the field placement. The pre-service teachers journals reflected that they were least concerned with students, which is positive because that reflects asset vs. deficit-based thinking. Simply put, this involves focusing on what students can do instead of what they cannot. It is a frame of reference for seeing students in a positive light that reflects respect for their funds of knowledge. Another thing to notice is that all the pre-service teachers' recommendations for change resided in elements within themselves instead of directing the need for change on an outside agent. This is critical! Prospective teachers need to practice remaining positive by altering perceptions because there are many

professional constraints in the teaching profession. (These are addressed in earlier chapters.)

The pre-service teachers' writing reflects that with guidance they see themselves as agents of change to positively impact challenges of working in the teaching profession. This is exciting! Albert Bandura (2001) defines the possibilities of "agentic action" saying,

Through agentic action, people devise ways of adapting flexibly to remarkably diverse geographic, climatic and social environments; they figure out ways to circumvent physical and environmental constraints, redesign and construct environments to their liking (as cited in Ferguson, Phillips, Rowley, and Friedlander, 2015, p. 13)

Agentic action and the belief that this is possible are what is required of teachers everyday. Teachers need to be adaptable to creatively make the most out of the circumstances, often constraining, that this profession involves. There are several ways in which pre-service teachers can show agentic action. In fact, sociological theory indicates there are four overlapping distinctions of agency, including: existential, identity, pragmatic, and life-course agency, but all include "existential agency", which is the notion that all human beings have free will or as Hitlin and Elder Jr. describe,

existential capacity for exerting influence on our environments. Second, while much of human behavior involves habits or simply following routines, there are frequently instances in which routine behaviors are inadequate responses to the circumstances

that present themselves. Responding involves what Hitlin and Elder call “pragmatic agency” ...The actions that we take to maintain, develop, or communicate our identities are expressions of what Hitlin and Elder term “identity agency” ...And finally, the actions that we take to affect future outcomes are what Hitlin and Elder call “life-course agency. (as cited in (as cited in Ferguson, Phillips, Rowley, and Friedlander, 2015, p. 13)

Existential agency is often overlooked in the United States where many individuals have privilege and have never known what it is like to not act of their own free will. I assume that many pre-service teachers in this program may not have considered this. However, I do not want to overlook this important notion that many people, like me, are pressed to appreciate freedoms because they have never been in a circumstance where they cannot act of their own free will. There are a number of factors that can prevent a person from acting of their own free will including political, geographical, socio-economical, cultural, racial, and more. I do not anticipate that my participants have inhibited existential agency regarding their involvement in this program. This is important to consider because this means that they are in their surroundings and situations by choice. Despite prospective teachers perceiving a number of challenges, or things they would like to change about their teacher education programming, they are participating by choice. Furthermore, they are in higher education by choice, at this Midwestern University by choice, enrolled in the teacher education preparation program by choice, focusing on a particular grade level and certification specialty by choice, and so on. These choices and the ability to make and fulfill them are a huge privilege. I bring this up in discussion for the

purpose of perspective. When a pre-service teacher is in the midst of a challenging and time-consuming program, such as this, my experiences have revealed that it is easy for them to forget that they are in their situation by choice and can choose to change their circumstance at any time. One's ability to act "with agency" is a product of the intersections of their current circumstances, past, and the politics of the climate in which they live. New teachers find themselves in a very particular and distinct set of circumstances during the field work requirements of their teacher education preparation. Hitlin and Elder (2007) note this circumstantial connection saying that,

Actors' temporal orientations are shaped by situational exigencies, with some situations calling for extensive focus on the present and others requiring an extended temporal orientation. Agentic behavior is influenced by the requirements of the interaction; as actors become more or less concerned with the immediate moment versus long-term life goals, they employ different social psychological processes and exhibit different forms of agency. (p.171)

These writing prompts only left some room for interpretation since they were written in a "fill-in-the-blank" style. They directed the prospective teachers' attention to what might be seemingly "negative" and/or provoked emotional responses, since they were formatted in a "cause and effect" style. Additionally, the specificity of the writing prompts may have influenced what the pre-service teachers perceived as potentially challenging and needing attention. This is an anticipated limitation. Since these prospective teachers are all in similar circumstances, at least in terms of their education, individual perceptions have

impacted their choices. Agency is also related to one's focus, which is why this is relevant.

Hitlin and Elder (2007) say that,

Agency stems from both individual and external circumstances that direct one's attentional focus. An actor's attention gets focused on situational aspects perceived as most important...Circumstances may require heightened attention and thus extensive conscious control. Other situations involve monitoring one's role enactment and do not necessitate the same heightened focus of one's own behavior. (p. 175)

Field placements seem to consume much of each person's focus because of the importance teacher preparation programs, and consequently it's pre-service teachers, put on this experience for the development of professional identity and to practice being a reflective practitioner. Being a reflective practitioner involves making decisions not based just on habit, routine, or personal past experiences, but instead on what one perceives is in the best interest of a particular group of people, which may be a class of students. Previous research has identified time and time again that many teacher's practices are laden with residue of their own experiences as a student. Pre-service teachers need to exercise pragmatic agency, which according to Hitlin and Elder (2007) is,

expressed in the types of activities that are chosen when habitual responses to patterned social actions break down. Much of our action involves habit (Camic 1986)



as we rely on available , preestablished routines to guide interactions. If habits fail, however, we must make choices. (p.178)

In the last chapter, several prospective and practicing teachers' storied narratives revealed their perceptions of the need to make innumerable choices while working as a teacher. The question here is if pre-service teachers can see the importance of, and have the courage, knowledge, where with all, and perception of the need to exercise pragmatic agency. Pragmatic agency to make decisions, choices, changes, modifications, etc. that are in the best interest of students regardless of what is typical, commonly accepted, or described as best practices. Students and their learning needs are endlessly unique and change is needed to accommodate them. For example: Do students always need to raise their hand to speak? Do they need to stand in line or sit in desks? How firmly does the "teacher copy" of a reading basal need to be followed? Consider the future possibilities of education if pre-service and practicing teachers had the pragmatic agency to act alternately to habits or mostly based on personal experiences. The idea of one's personal experience or lens of experience leads me to the final type of agency. Hitlin and Elder (2007) note that,

Identity agency represents the habitual patterning of social behavior. Following established ways of acting, role enactment, or identity performance...Social norms guide us as we quite intentionally strive to internalize and live up to these norms and guidelines. (p. 179)

In the context of pre-service teachers, this would involve making particular choices or honoring certain actions because the prospective teacher “thinks” that is what teachers do. Choices, which determine action, are easily influenced by ideas of what we “think” we should do. This is especially true for pre-service teachers who are striving to “be” teachers. I question, how can teacher education programs facilitate experiences for pre-service teachers to release themselves from the responsibility to “be” something and instead to determine the “appropriateness” or “effectiveness” of each action, choice, or perception based on the particulars of each situation and student?

One important distinction made by Hitlin and Elder (2007) is that “pragmatic agency” is exercised in “novel situations” and “identity agency” is exercised in “routine situations”. This differs from “existential agency”, which can be utilized in all circumstances, and finally “life course” agency, which references agentic action towards one’s “life pathways”. Before moving ahead, I want to quickly include a bit about life-course agency since it is likely at play for these prospective teachers, since choosing a career in teaching and transitioning from student to teacher will both impact both their life and its course. I return to Hitlin and Elder (2007) one final time to explain how life-course agency relates to pragmatic and identity agency. They explain that,

We do not simply act agentially with regard to temporally proximate goals (pragmatic agency), nor do we only act with situational goals in mind (identity agency). Both forms of agency focus primarily on present situations...Agency is constituted, in these situations, through established self-in-situation processes

implicating the reflexive aspect of the self. Some of our actions, however, occur with a broader sense of our futures involved...We term attempts to exert influence to shape one's life trajectory "life course agency...Life course agency contains two aspects, a situated form of agency (the exercising of action with long-term implications), and the self-reflective belief about one's capacity to achieve life course goal. (p. 181-182)

### **Why Sociological Theory**

Since I assert that teacher candidates need to exercise more agency, more insight into what agency is and how it influences a person's thinking and action is relevant. In addition, I find it interesting to note what types of agency these new teachers are exercising or not. Where are they satisfied with status-quo and where do they see opportunities for change? The distinction of these types of agency may insinuate that teacher education programs cannot just facilitate students' agency generally, but instead may need to consider the types of agency are most important and how those can be developed. This may involve breaking down barriers of power, redirecting misconceptions, and redefining what it means to "be a teacher". Agency is critical because, "People who perceive more agency are more likely to persevere in the face of problems, either within situations or in encountering obstacles that represent structural impediments" (Hitlin and Elder, 2007, p. 182). Life-course agency is related to identity agency because identity agency targets specific behaviors that stem from the internalization of those identities or in other words, "who" a person wants to "be/become".

Reviewing the pre-service teachers' agentic thinking noted in their journals, it is possible to correlate that some of the concerns or obstacles they identified are due to a mismatch between perceived circumstances and perceived identity as a teacher. This may be why pre-service teachers aim to change the way they are thinking about or acting on particular barriers. There are several examples noting this conflict in identity agency including Victoria wanting "more responsibility in the classroom". Another example is Nancy who does see her identity as a teacher. However, her CT's class has a long-term substitute, and she found it challenging to learn from and cope with the amount of teaching she is requiring of herself to mitigate the substitute's reluctance to follow the CT's plans. Lenny's journals reflect how she sees her identity as an advocate for the students and in turn wrote about integrating more academic content to mitigate the content her special education students are getting. In addition, Lenny's advocacy for students is apparent in her goal "to show professionalism by overcoming the inclination to jump to conclusions about other teachers when she perceives their dialogue with students that fails to recognize their potential". (I want to point out to the reader here that prospective teachers having agency towards something does not definitively mean they are "correct" in their assertions or that I agree with their perceptions.) Finally, Lenny shows her identity-agency as a professional by not finding "fault" in the way special education students speak to teachers, but instead recognizes that what she perceives as disrespectful may be one way in which the student's disability is apparent. Like Victoria, Lisa wishes there was more she could do to be involved in her placement classroom. She perceives that her participation does not match her perceived identity as a teacher, so she plans to take agentic action to continue offering assistance to her cooperating teacher and the students. Lisa also wants

her identity to be perceived as more “professional” so she is taking agentic action to introduce herself to staff members instead of hiding in the back of her placement classroom and avoiding eye contact with others.

What’s more is that I did find some pre-service teachers’ journals indicative of pragmatic agency too. Nancy found “fault” in scripted curriculums and wanted to creatively adapt them further. Victoria was frustrated with the disconnect she and her peers perceive between coursework and fieldwork, but she plans to take pragmatic agentic agency to assert connections herself. Lenny’s journal also reflects her perception that special education students do not have enough time in general education classes because of a lack of support staff, so she is taking agentic action to figure out what classes the students miss and review the materials missed. Lisa finds the regular practice to “pull-out” special education students unfair, so she is taking action to doing everything she can to facilitate that “pull-out” to be as comfortable and productive as possible for her students. While I am impressed with Lisa’s pragmatic agency, or solution oriented response in regard to obstacles identified in routines, policies, and mandates, in field placements, many prospective teachers do not perceive or exercise their own agency. However, I want to point out for the reader here that this analysis is my interpretation of the underlying agentic influences of the pre-service teachers’ journals. At the end of this section, I assert that these journal “sentence” starters may have helped prospective teachers’ identify ways to take agentic action relation to identity or pragmatics.

### **Concluding Remarks and Reflections on Pre-service Teachers’ Journals**

What I conclude from this section is that while reflection through writing is a common practice in teacher education programs, it is only the first step. This reflective writing may be more transformative, and better guide the professional development of a reflective practitioner, if pre-service teachers return to their reflections and utilize them to locate opportunities for agentic action. Agentic action stems from first noticing these opportunities for change in perception or action, then feeling agency, and finally persevering to act. Agency is critical because, “People who perceive more agency are more likely to persevere in the face of problems, either within situations or in encountering obstacles that represent structural impediments” (Hitlin and Elder, 2007, p. 182).

The need for pragmatic and identity agency seem to be most relevant for the pre-service teachers in this study because they are working to transition from student to teacher, to build a professional identity, and to figure out how they may respond differently to what is presented as “status quo” in schools and classrooms. Individuals familiar with the emotionally and politically charged public school landscapes, like those in this Midwestern University town, can attest to how this setting is wrought with opportunities for positive change. In considering the future of education in this town, and our country, I question how the pragmatic agency of new teachers might be encouraged further. This is important so that prospective teachers are not just recognizing challenges or barriers in the workplace, but so they can view these constraints as exciting opportunities to exercise agency, overcome obstacles, and grow as a practitioner. Facilitating the development of pre-service teachers’ professional identities must involve encouraging agency, so that these new teachers come to the work of teaching with a sense of confidence in their ability to

identify and work towards mitigation of challenges. Good teaching involves constant reflexive reflection and a willingness to change because students and learning goals are always shifting. I find that this makes the work exciting.

Field placements consumed these prospective teachers' focus because of the importance teacher preparation programs, and consequently it's pre-service teachers, put on this practice. While this "practice" is typically framed as an opportunity for new teachers to engage in the work of teaching, it is also critical for the development of professional identity. For this reason, reflection during practicum and student teaching must be experienced to facilitate self-regulated learning, which may allow pre-service teachers to perceive more control over day-to-day challenges. The perception that impactful change can be initiated by a single teacher's agentic action is important for future professional growth trajectory. Reviewing the pre-service teachers' agentic thinking noted in their journals, it is possible to correlate that some of the concerns or obstacles they identified are due to a mismatch between perceived circumstances and perceived identity as a teacher. Choices, which determine action, are easily influenced by ideas of what we "think" we should do. This is especially true for pre-service teachers who are striving to "be" teachers. This is where the important idea of identity agency resonates. I question how teacher education programs can facilitate experiences so that pre-service teachers can release themselves from the responsibility to "be" something and instead to determine the "appropriateness" or "effectiveness" of their actions, choices, or perceptions based on the particulars of each situation and student. The distinction of these types of agency may insinuate that teacher education programs cannot just facilitate students' agency generally,

but may need to consider the types of agency that are most important and how those can be developed. This may involve breaking down barriers of power, redirecting misconceptions, and redefining what it means to “be a teacher”. Finally, teacher educators must take action reflective of the understanding that agency and agentic action need to be cultivated and encouraged so new teachers know to work towards supporting solutions for the challenges they identify in their practice. I invite teacher educators to consider how they can reorient programmatic goals to prioritize not just what pre-service teachers learn, but how the development of their agency can be cultivated.

## **Chapter Six Anonymous Survey Data**

### **Introduction**

I began this research project because of my concern about explicit and presumed expressions of anxiety from the teacher candidates in my classes. In this survey, 100% of the participants’ responses indicated their feeling “anxious” during their teacher education preparation. I will discuss in subsequent pages my assertions for why this might be, but anonymity of responses is a seemingly obvious possibility. This data collection also



revealed an interesting contradiction. While these prospective teachers indicated wanting more “support”, they also claim to “be supported” by either personal relationships or the teacher educators facilitating their program. In this final chapter, I begin to unpack how pre-service teachers’ perceptions of and experiences with “support” might differ. I highlight how pre-service teachers can recognize their own ability to be agents of change and where they depend on the program or its facilitators to change for them. I also discuss how agentic action in new teachers may be encouraged. I look at how perceptions of support play into the ideas of being a reflective practitioner and developing a professional identity. Finally, I delve into how time acts as an influencing notion in the construction of the pre-service teachers’ perceptions of support in their teacher education preparation program. In the end, analyzing this data has proved to be much more than just “proof” that teacher candidates’ are anxious. It is a window into the frightening perceptions of this specific group of pre-service teachers.

### **Qualtrics Surveys**

Did the word “frightening” cause you pause above? I selected it purposely to get the attention of the reader because the participants’ reports of their feelings during fieldwork are cause for concern. These participants were made up of individuals who graduated (2 years ago) from the same teacher education preparation program described in earlier chapters. Some of these participants are now practicing teachers and others are not. Most notably, all of the participants (11/11) reported feeling “anxious” during their time in the

field. This anxiety felt like migraines, an increased heart rate, a tight throat and chest, insomnia, irritability, nausea, circular thoughts, extreme stomach cramps, cold sweats, and jittery. This is a selection of the descriptors participants wrote to define, “how they feel” when they are anxious. This is not to be confused with how they “define” anxiety. In defining “anxiety”, many participants listed mental as opposed to physical reactions to this emotional state. Over the course of several weeks, the participants’ responses populated anonymously in Qualtrics described in an earlier chapter. These participants’ responses shed light on their self perceptions and perceived identities as they worked towards teacher certification in a Midwestern state in the United States. These identities, especially considering mental health, have proved to be more important than I initially considered because 54% of the participants in this data collection identified as “anxious” prior to starting their teacher education preparation. Being that my area of study is anxiety of prospective teachers, anxious identities that pre-service teachers bring into their program cannot go overlooked. Of course, a teacher’s identity can impact how their teacher education is perceived. Sexton (2008) reminds us that,

Teacher identity, as an analytical lens, permits a focus on the complex, situated, and fluid attributes that individuals bring with them to the study and practice of teaching...Identity highlights how an individual mediates teaching-drawing upon different arrays of social positioning, experiences, and resources (p. 75)

To reflect on their transitioning identities, in addition to their mental health before and during their teacher preparation program, I invited 24 individuals who recently

graduated from a Midwest University from an MCEA-content cohort for prospective elementary educators to participate in an online Qualtrics survey. I wrote an email to their entire cohort inviting participation and about 46%, or 11 of the 24, responded by emailing me a picture of their signed research consent forms before completing my online inquiry. The survey consisted of ten open-ended questions. I began by asking participants how they define anxiety and how they feel when they're anxious. This provided me with a base line understanding of how participants perceived anxiety and how, or if, it impacts them mentally and physically. This is important for several reasons: the word "anxiety" is taboo in many contexts leaving it open to misconceptions, how anxiety "feels" is subjective, and understanding how it manifests in these participants may help to unpack how it impacted the fieldwork of these teacher candidates. I also asked participants to recall how their anxiety was supported during their field placements, and how they wish it was supported, to better understand their perceptions of mental health support and to reveal potential contradictions between perceived support and received support.

In this data, a potential contradiction emerged in the responses of these prospective teachers who reported needing "support" and "being supported". Their responses advised a substantial list of additional supports they desired, but interestingly, 9 of 11, or almost 82% reported feeling supported in coping with stress or anxiety in their field placement by either cohort peers or supervisors. Impacting this data is the fact that one person did not respond to this question and another reported that keeping to herself was her self-selected coping mechanism. This opens discussion for what type of support the participants would appreciate and from whom. In addition, I wanted to understand how participants perceive

their role and the program's responsibility in supporting mental health. The important connection between developing teacher identity and agency is found in earlier academic literature. Olsen (in preparation) notes that, "Teacher identity illuminates levers for active agency...which individuals can become more conscious, and in more control, of the contours of their own professional development" (as cited in Sexton, 2008, p. 75-76) For me, these words insinuate that the role of the teacher education preparation program is to guide prospective teachers to noticing how they might support their own professional development. This might sound ideal, but first pre-service teachers need opportunities not just to practice reflection, but to connect reflections and perceptions to possibilities for agentic action. Teacher educators often take the first step towards guiding new teachers to being reflective practitioners by giving reflection assignments or journals, but the second part, often forgotten, might be more important. The second step involves looking at one's current "situation", "problem", "reflection" or "practice", and then considering how that personal narrative can be rewritten to inform change in perception or action. Some new teachers, despite being assertive or self-assured in their personal lives, still look to their teacher educators for some type of reassurance, permission, or necessity to change. This is why it is important for new teachers to reflect (on their practices) for themselves, not the audience of teacher educators, so that they can develop this transformative and restorative practice early.

Answering the question of who "should" support the mental health of teacher candidates is challenging because that "support" is dependent on what the participant perceives may be helpful. A range of ideas was offered by participants and almost all of the

perceived solutions fit into two categories: “how to” and “more time or practice”. The “how to” category includes comments from participants relating to additional knowledge they would like to have gained from programmatic participation; they perceived this would support their coping with anxiety. The “more time or practice” category relates to additional experiences the participants feel would have better prepared them for coping with anxieties in the teaching profession.

Table 5

*Types of Support Sought by Participants***“How to...”****(Seeking change of the self)**

“trainings on a variety of coping strategies”  
 “how to respond to second hand trauma”  
 “how to deal with emotional fatigue”  
 “how to integrate classroom management and mindfulness”

**“More Time or Practice”****(Seeking programmatic change)**

“an additional student teaching semester”  
 “more mindfulness training” (3pp)  
 “more opportunities to practice teaching with peers”  
 “more time to share anxieties with cohort”

The table above indicates how I categorized the participants’ responses. In organizing the replies in this way, I was able to notice first that the participants sought support of two main types. I quickly located several examples where the participants seemed to desire additional knowledge or skills to better inform their personal knowledge or skill set to cope with challenges associated with their field experiences. I labeled this category “how to”. Second, I noticed that participants were also desiring “more time or practice” of something, which is connected with the need or programmatic changes. The first category provides insight into another misstep that teacher education programs might be taking. The notion that new teachers will need new coping skills is not novel, but like the example

earlier where I referenced prospective teachers needing facilitation to take agentic action from reflective noticing, here pre-service teachers are indicating that they want support with “how” to cope. Their responses indicated that their field experiences might be emotionally straining and their prior tools for coping with stress or angst might not be enough. The National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments(2019), indicates in a report that those who “work with students exposed to trauma are at risk of being indirectly traumatized as a result of hearing about their students experiences” (p.1). They define this as secondary traumatic stress and include anxiety in a list of symptoms this can cause. In returning to Table 5, and how I categorized the participants’ anonymous responses regarding additional desired support, I now see that where I noted participants’ seeking “how to” information they are ascribing the “responsibility” to gain that “knowledge of support” from their program and its facilitators. However, despite the participants’ perceptions that “how to” support should come from their program, I also coded this category of responses as coming from individuals “seeking change of the self”. From here I must question the participants’ ownership of or agency for change because despite seeking specific informative knowledge for oneself, the participants still designated the program as being responsible for providing what they want. This designation was not as apparent in the participants’ responses that were not anonymous.

Sometimes anonymous responses have the potential to invoke surprising results because of the freedom that participants can feel to say anything without being judged, concerned with what others might think, or how what they say might reflect on their personal identities. There were two responses that I am referencing as “outliers” because they did not fit into either category or were not indicative of a majority of participants.

Although many pre-service teachers indicate feeling supported by their co-hort, one participant shared that spending less time with her cohort would have supported her coping with stress and anxiety in her field placement. This juxtaposes 82% of her peers that felt their cohort peers helped them cope, so this contrast provides evidence that using co-horts may be perceived differently and cannot be an unexamined “support”. Co-hort dynamics are always distinct because they are an assemblage of unique individuals. A particularly anxious co-hort may not provide support reflective of what some pre-service teachers need. While I have no way of knowing which participant made this claim, I also noticed a similar mismatch during an interview with one participant I interviewed, which may shed light here. When I noticed this same contradiction, about desiring less time with the cohort, I asked Kristen (a teacher introduced in the last chapter) in her interview how it was possible for her peer group to support her and cause her angst and stress simultaneously, and she said,

It’s nice to have people in your cohort that you can always turn to with questions and they are the only ones who understand what you’re going through. If I was stressed about something there was always someone else in the same place. [But], talking with everyone else would [also] increase my stress when I would think about everything other people have done and comparing myself to others...there were always comparisons between people in our group. (personal communication, 2018)

This contradictory example provides further support for why prospective teachers must take agentic action to facilitate how they might reach professional goals within a larger system that attempts to cater to individuals yet must be cognizant of an entire group, or cohort. Sexton (2008) says that, “Teachers must play an active role in developing professional identity (Florio-Ruane, 2002)...retain[ing] sufficient agency to act in new, creative ways...” (p.75). Teacher education programs must also remain mindful not just on different actors involved in facilitating teacher education programs, but on the intersections of influence one part (pre-service teachers, cohort group, program, etc.) has on another. In response to reviewing literature on teacher education, Wideen, Mayer-Smith, and Moon (1998) call for an “ecological approach to studying the learning-to-teach environment”. Sexton (2008) chooses this frame to attend to how groups of individuals interact with one another in a teacher education program and to “examine interrelationships between teacher identity and teacher role across the ecosystem of teacher education” (p. 76).

## The Ecosystem of Teacher Education

### **Setting and Participant Selection**

Relying on a purposive, convenience sample, I selected four student teachers from one elementary cohort. To select these focal students, I administered an online survey to all cohort members (n=15) to elicit the range of their preservice experiences, reasons for entry into teaching, and beginning understandings of themselves as teachers. Thirteen responded. I selected four students to create a heterogeneous group along the dimensions of prior teaching experience, student experiences, reasons for entry, and a range of demographic categories (e.g., gender, ethnicity).

### **Data Collection**

Taking a view of teacher development as socially situated and embedded in institutions and relationships with others (peers, faculty, cooperating teacher, k-12 students) required employing a multi-level design. Guided by my use of symbolic interactionism, the focus of group observations was on shared understandings of

*Figure 2* The Ecosystem of Teacher Education, Sexton, S.M. (2008, summer) Student teachers negotiating identity, role, and agency. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 35(3), 73-88.



Thinking about how strongly this practicing teacher desired less time with her peer group, I question if this would make it easier for her to avoid feeling “peer pressure”, and instead develop her own identity. Social amplification of angst through awareness of how others perceive the program and “what should change” is also notable. The reasons for utilizing cohort groups are highlighted in an earlier chapter. Thinking about this surprising counter example, to how some pre-service teachers find support for anxieties from their co-hort peers, this example provides an opportunity to consider an alternative conception of peer support. This is contrary to a somewhat accepted teacher education practice of grouping teacher candidates with others seeking the same certification on a similar timeline. One other outlier to the prospective teachers’ requests for additional support was about the request to speak with individuals on a different earlier timeline to discuss others experiences in comparison with their own. Two participants said that they would like mentorship from individuals ahead of their own trajectory in the program. With all these different perceptions of “support”, the idea needs to be defined further.

### **“Supporting” Pre-service Teachers**

The notion of supporting pre-service teachers in academic literature is not new, but typically references some type of additional content “knowledge” that is needed, as opposed to supporting stress or mental health in general. What is interesting about the word “support “ is its many definitions. Here, when I reference “support” I am insinuating the definition, “assistance”, a noun, as opposed to the verb, “bearing the weight of”, which is another well-known definition. The wide spectrum of the definition is reflected in these participants’ reflections of additional “support” they desire. For this reason, to analyze the

support these participants' wanted further, I coded their responses as seeking "support through programmatic changes" or as hoping for "support through additional knowledge". This is important as it helps to differentiate how participants' perceived themselves as agents of change. Participants seeking change via additional learning may be viewing themselves as responsible for or the catalyst of their growing professional identities. They might be seeking further ideas to perceive how they can support their professional identity and work. What's interesting is that this coding coincided with earlier categories. Those seeking "how to" changes were hopeful for additional knowledge or experience to inform their own practices. In contrast, participants' seeking "more time to practice" are looking for the program to make changes instead of seeing themselves as agents of change. I anticipate that the pre-service teachers who see themselves as agents of change may have more success or be less stressed in the teaching profession because they will continue to experience professional constraints that likely will not change. Teachers must figure out a way to not only work within these professional constraints, but to do it in a way that also allows them to maintain their positive mental health.

Participants' perceptions of and ownership over desired supports is one method of analysis, but one must question, what were the perceived catalysts of anxiety during practicum and student teaching that this group reported anonymously, and how is this different from the other data sources that did not include anonymity? The teacher education ecosystem is one way to delineate between different actors involved in the preparation of new teachers. One thing to note is that it does not differentiate between the cohort and the individual. The cohort is the center and innermost circle in the figure. (See

Figure 2) This can be problematic in discerning differences between the roles of the cohort and individual when it comes to “support”. This anonymous data collection was the only place where a participant indicated a counter-productive narrative relating to involvement in the cohort. The participant indicated that cohort communications actually increased her stress level because of an inclination to compare oneself to others. I am curious if pre-service teachers identity as a group (co-hort) might be a perception that inhibits their agentic action.

It is essential to recognize anonymity here because the comparison of anonymous and self-reported data from participants speaks to the way in which teacher education researchers may want to question their prospective teachers when seeking particular understandings. Every participant responded to the Qualtrics question seeking “perceived catalysts of anxiety during student teaching and practicum field placements”. This immediately points to the positive correlation between anxiety and field experiences. The table below lists the participants perceived anxiety catalysts. Then, I coded each response further into categories including: program, self/personal, state (edTPA), and field placement to begin to locate where these anxieties were stemming from.

Table 6

*Qualtrics Survey Responses of “Perceived Catalysts (controls) of Anxiety”*

<b>Participants’ Survey Responses</b>	<b>Program</b>	<b>Self / Personal</b>	<b>(State) edTPA</b>	<b>Field Placement</b>
Combination of university extracurricular, ST, edTPA, feeling confident, making choices that commit/restrict future options	X	X	X	
Personal desire to do well and prove to others I can do this		X		
Student teaching being a lot of work for little benefit ie: low pay/high time		X?		

Combination of university requirements, field placements, home, and personal factors	X	X		
Coping with trauma experienced by students & roommates		X		
Assignments in combination with home and personal stuff	X	X		
Classroom assignments to do in field, assignments were not aligning with placement, edTPA	X	X?	X	
edTPA and other standardized exams, going into new placements, grandmother passing away	X	X	X	
edTPA, preparing for video and regular lessons simultaneously	X	X	X	
Teacher ed requirements during ST, edTPA, CT expectations of long hours	X	X?	X	X
Picking CT's and placements	X	X?		

### **Taking Agentic Action, or Not**

In coding what the participants' perceived to be catalysts of stress or anxiety, the first thing I noticed is that I identified all the catalysts reported by the participants as being at least partially under the control of the participant. This is not only surprising, but also contrary to my initial inclinations to initiate this research because I thought I would need to focus almost solely on programmatic changes to mitigate students' anxiety. In four instances, I did question if the participants' perspective might be amplifying the perceived catalyst and working against the participants' potential for or desire to take agentic action. For example, the program is responsible for how "picking cooperating teachers and placements" is carried out, but it is also important to better understand the participants' perception of the process to determine more specifically what about the process was concerning or anxiety inducing. Previous academic literature has noted the challenges of field placements including: working under the gaze of a more experienced teacher,

different teaching styles and personalities, practicing in an environment the cooperating teacher facilitated, being video taped and observed by a supervisor, and how time constraints impact pre-service teachers ability to facilitate student rapport. Another instance where I question the participant's ability to exercise agency is in the response noting "CT expectations of long hours". How "long hours" are defined is important here as this is seemingly another perception that might be a personal conclusion that is dissimilar from the participants' peers. The next participant's response where I question the participant's agency to change is in the comment, "assignments were not aligning with placement" because this is again dependent on perception. It might be a misconception. Perhaps, the assignments did align, but the participant did not understand how. It is also possible that the students' course schedule and placement particulars did not align. For example, for a practicing teacher, assignments in a literacy methods course might be more difficult in math focused field placement where the pre-service teacher has to consider mathematical literacy. In the final example, the participant said that "student teaching being a lot of work for little benefit". While academic literature and my experience with this program affirms that student teaching can be time consuming, as it is meant to mirror the schedule of a practicing teacher, the conclusion that it has "little benefit" is quite subjective and troubling, and therefore hard to mitigate or categorize from a distanced view of the entire teacher education ecosystem.

While I anticipate that the participants' view of the program is a determining factor of impact in the perception of their circumstance, I find this analysis to be positive for

prospective teachers because despite a number of challenging notions, pre-service teachers may have more agency than originally anticipated.

So, let me return to my earlier question: how can teacher education programs facilitate agentic action in teacher candidates? I bring this question up because the perceptions of this group of teachers that I described as “frightening” to start this chapter might be an interplay between challenging circumstances and pre-service teachers’ perceptions. Organizing the participants’ responses, by my perception of the agent responsible for controlling that catalyst, made it more clear to me that teacher candidates might have more agency than they recognize. This is not to say that the program, is free from “responsibility” to mitigate stress or anxiety felt by their pre-service teachers, but instead to recognize how important it is to facilitate teacher candidates’ perceptions of their circumstances and all the intersections impacting it. Since this data reflects the importance of perspectives, I assert again that teachers must play an active role in developing their professional identity as a reflective practitioner because job, or teacher education program, satisfaction may be interconnected with perception.

### **Teaching Preparation Assessment**

As this data, prior chapters, and previous academic literature indicates, pre-service teachers who feel agency are more inclined to see their circumstances in a positive light or as less permanent and therefore changeable. The data shows that almost half of the pre-service teachers attached anxiety to this assessment. While a standardized assessment, like the edTPA or Educators Teaching Preparation Assessment, cannot be changed because it is required for licensure in this state, teachers’ perceptions of agency might facilitate the

lessening of anxiety narratives, which are commonplace in connection with this evaluation. Aside from field placements, the edTPA is the other main source of anxiety articulated by the teacher candidates in this anonymous survey. There is room for future research in articulating how a teacher education program might encourage prospective teachers to perceive agency and take agentic action in thinking about and preparing for this test. Five of the 11 participants noted that this certification test was a major catalyst of anxiety. The assessment is a requirement for pre-service teachers during their final clinical field work, student teaching. According to the publisher, Pearson Education, Inc (2019) the,

edTPA is a performance-based, subject-specific assessment and support system...to emphasize, measure, and support the skills and knowledge that all teachers need from Day 1 in the classroom... edTPA requires aspiring teachers to demonstrate readiness to teach through lesson plans designed to support their students' strengths and needs; engage real students in ambitious learning; analyze whether their students are learning, and adjust their instruction to become more effective.  
(about edTPA section)

Many students noted this assessment as a source of anxiety, and while I noted in my coding that this is a challenge participants can take ownership over and use agentic agency to prepare, there are exceptions. Within the ecosystem of their cohort and their larger programmatic strand, many teacher candidates seem to have "heard" a lot about the edTPA before taking it. This seems to induce fear and worry, which is hard to revert later. The assessment is lengthy and can be time consuming, but the students already have

experience with the types of description and reflection that it calls for. The test may be intimidating because it is seen as a gatekeeper to teacher certification; however, learning a new profession realistically involves overcoming personal obstacles. Pre-service teachers may wonder what will become of their future if they have a degree in education, but have no teaching certification. Individuals also seem to gather an identity of who they are as a “test taker”, so if prior examination experiences have been negative, students may be more apt to dread this test as well. What’s more is that the students need to complete this assessment during their student teaching field semester, which is already one of the busiest times for prospective teachers because they are working the hours of a full-time teacher. Many teacher candidates come to college quickly after High School and may not have had a lot of full time work experiences prior to this. There is also a financial component to taking this assessment; so, many students feel pressure about getting a passing score because they know they cannot afford to take the test again. Programs and their facilitators need to frame this test in a way that gives students pragmatic agency, so they are not stunted by the status quo of their prior testing experiences or what they “hear”. Teacher preparation programs should think carefully about helping students to time manage, frame expectations, and practice the types of expressive and academic writing needed for successful completion. Time management is especially important because of how overwhelming the time intensive nature of student teaching can be for many teacher candidates. Additionally, the videotaping and reviewing requirements are very uncomfortable for some pre-service teachers, as they are not used to being filmed or self-critique from a visual medium. Prospective teachers need program facilitators who can contribute to teacher candidates’ confidence not only to see themselves in film, but also to



see themselves doing a skill that they are still learning and practicing. In returning to the quotation above, what the edTPA assessment asks teacher to do is somewhat subjective to measure, which is why experience developing into a reflective practitioner and forming a professional identity prior is so critically important.

Contributing to the potential challenges listed above, there are a number of ways that the edTPA assessment is seen as biased, or a prejudicial “measure” of teaching. Regardless, it is currently what is required from teachers in this Midwestern state and 40 other states around The United States (Pearson Education Inc., 2019). On its own edTPA website, Pearson (2019) notes that scores on the assessment are positively correlated with the test-takers reading achievement but not connected to standardized math scores. Academic literature further unpacks the bias of this assessment, which can contribute not only to anxiety about the test, but also to participants’ perceptions of their ability to be successful on it.

In a recent article for Teachers College Record, Souto-Manning (2019) pushes back on this assessment especially as it relates to the certification of aspiring early childhood teachers of color. Even though none of my participants are individuals of color, previous perceptions of the assessment and its bias are still relevant because of how they impact current and future teachers’ perceptions. Souto-Manning critically analyzes the counter narratives of teachers of color and concludes that, “institutional discourses of teacher quality serve to racialize the teaching profession, keeping white hegemonic discourses in place (p.1). Furthermore, Souto-Manning (2019) spoke with 10 early childhood teachers of

color who participated in the edTPA and exposed their perceptions that it serves as an obstacle to access higher pay, leads to mental health issues and stress, and is antithetical to good teaching. She calls for a review of “Eurocentric master-narratives of quality teaching and “ best practice” [that] are deeply ingrained in U.S. schooling” (p.1). She also points out how high-stakes assessments that purport to be objective measures continue to determine who can be a teacher in a profession that has historically pushed teachers of color out in addition to problematizing the constructs of “good teaching” and what it means to be a “good teacher”. This article is important not just because it serves to substantiate how some teachers experience this assessment, but because it provides another touch point to data informing how this assessment impacts the mental health of individuals seeking teaching certification when perhaps the assessment, itself, should be reviewed. Additionally, this literature calls for universities and teacher certifying programs to reconsider how the edTPA measures good teaching and asserts that this review is critical because the assessment is “...inflicting harm and fostering trauma...(p.12) so the consequences of high-stakes testing need to be revisited.

None of my participants are individuals of color, but half of them still found this assessment to be a catalyst for anxiety. More research is needed to support paths to teacher certification that do not, almost automatically, include a traumatizing experience for new teachers, especially marginalized pre-service teachers of color. This assessment is clearly a barrier to positive mental health, and a strain on resources for most pre-service teachers. If teacher education programs must require prospective teachers to engage in the critical reflective practice needed for a passing score on this test, then they too need to

hold their program to this same critical examination. I end where I began with the assertion that learning to teach does not need to negatively impact a person's mental health. However, I also now assert that one way teacher education programs can do this is by supporting students' agency.

### **Another Idea for Supporting Preservice Teachers' Agency**

Supporting students' agency might begin with something seemingly simple like asking prospective teachers to tell their stories about learning. Then, teacher educators need to listen carefully for where agentic thinking can be nurtured. I recently read the work of a teacher educator who discussed a phrase that rings familiar to my experience of how students' express themselves unknowingly in a non-agentic way. Johnson (2008) discusses her experience with pre-service teachers and in how listening for "revoicing" in their learning narratives, she was directed to the phrase, "do I *have to*?". I have heard this phrase from many prospective teachers, but while my inclination is to say, "yes, you do have to", she did something different. Instead of answering that question, Johnson (2008) positioned the prospective teachers as reflective practitioners asking them to consider how this phrase positions them as teachers. Through discussion, she facilitated the students' realization that this phrase, "do I have to?", "served to infantilize them as teachers, creating an analogous parent-child relationship between teachers and other educational decision makers" (p. 139). Students' realization of how a phrase like this devalues their professional identity is a great opportunity for growth and perspective that could lead to agentic action. Johnson, however, continued to encourage her students' professional agency by asking the pre-service teachers to consider another way to pose their question without this

“infantilizing” language. She concludes that teacher educators need to listen more carefully for how prospective teachers represent their agency, and how it might be possible for them to rewrite these narratives, and I agree. I am curious how her directive can be cultivated further in teacher educators as it is easy to enact, free, does not require policy changes, or jumping through other hoops, and instead just needs to be a point of focus for teacher educators. Careful listening to support students’ agency is a skill that needs to be practiced and honed like any other teaching skill, but considering the possibilities is exciting.

Even though Johnson and I may respond differently to the “*do I have to?*” question, both types of questioning might encourage prospective teachers’ agency and development as reflective practitioners. I am always looking for opportunities to encourage students’ general agency in their teacher education program. Sometimes, this is as simple as asking questions like, “Do you need every point on every project to succeed in your goal of being a teacher?”, “How can this program serve you and your needs?”, or “How can you prioritize what the program is asking of you?”. Prospective teachers, eager to please and practice, as they journey towards becoming a teacher in their own classroom, can get caught up in a cycle of listening and “obeying” without considering the choices they have. Taking agentic action involves choice just as following others does. In the choice of how to best facilitate agentic reflective practitioners, I can appreciate how a balance of both tactics might be helpful. Pre-service teachers may benefit from being directed back to their perceptions and diction while at the same time also thinking critically about how their perceptions might invoke others to perceive their professional identity. There is a lot that academic scholars have said already in fostering students’ agency, so to note what is most relevant in this

study, I return to my participants' voices. In particular, I highlight the participants' self-reported "change in thinking" from completing my Qualtrics survey and how this perspective may lead to agentic thinking.

### **The Impact of Qualtrics Survey Participation on Anxiety and Agency**

Nine of the eleven participants included responses to my question regarding a potential change in thinking, and most participants perceived that their involvement did change how they think about their anxiety and field placement experiences. This shows how reflection and "revisiting reflections" can impact perceptions of agency. "Revisiting reflections" might literally entail re-reading something written previous or it might mean thinking about what one felt while reflecting afterward. Through "revisiting" the facilitated reflective questioning included in this Qualtrics survey, perceptions of pre-service teachers agency seem to develop. This is one reason that the theme of "time" is interwoven into each coded category of influence. In fact, according to this data, the theme of "time" has several implications for teacher educators looking to support students' mental health and agency because these participants' responses reflect how the distancing of time prompted new understandings, which impacted agency, which could help inform the work of being a reflective practitioner.

Table 7

<i>Participants' Reflection Perspectives</i>	<b>Participants' Quotations</b>
<b>Categories of Participants' Reflections</b> Utilizing Past Experiences to Inform Future Teaching Practices and Perspectives	- "At the time I probably felt more stressed compared to...", - "facilitated reflection like this works wonders",

	<p>-“It seems like I was more worried about being a good teacher”.</p> <p>-“Upon reflection it wasn’t the course load or homework that caused anxiety...”</p> <p>-“...even though in the moment, we might be saying “we don’t know anything, but in reality...”</p> <p>-“After reflecting on how I felt only a little over a year ago, I realize...”</p> <p>- “I think that I have identified many things that plagued me...how to better address them moving forward in my life... personal honesty and knowledge of limits, better knowledge of stress catalysts, and honing my thoughts on teacher education and practice ...”</p>
Delayed Gratitude	<p>-“It has made me very appreciative and aware”</p> <p>-“the [university] did an amazing job”</p> <p>-“I was very fortunate”, and “the most rewarding surface that resurfaced was”,</p> <p>-“the best thing about this program by far, was the support group”,</p>
Noticing Agency	<p>“...feel like I am able to do what needs to get done and still have time to take care of myself”,</p> <p>“... identified many things that plagued me during my experience, and how to better address them moving forward”</p>

In reviewing my participants’ responses to this tenth and final question from the Qualtrics survey, several things became apparent, which also have implications for future teacher education. First, the act of metacognition, or thinking about one’s thinking (feelings), seems to have helped these prospective teachers to see their progress or positive growth. This is apparent in the phrases above like, “At the time I probably felt more stressed compared to...”, “facilitated reflection like this works wonders”, and “It seems like I was more worried about being a good teacher”. These pre-service teachers may have gained “metacognitive agency”, or the agency to think about, and reflect on, past

thoughts and feelings. This could be considered a part of developing into a reflective practitioner. Reflection might involve metacognition if the reflection is on one's thinking. Instead of following a pattern of automatically attaching "the need to change" to the program, these are examples of participants' exercising pragmatic agency by breaking down the set convention to ascribe responsibility for change outside of the self. In fact, these participants' are developing their identity agency in seeing the possibility for the root of change within themselves instead of automatically ascribing it to the program.

In supporting future teachers' agency as reflective practitioners, teacher educators need to remember to ask prospective teachers not just to "reflect" on lesson logistics, but also to compare past teaching practices and ways of thinking to present. This will help identify opportunities for growth, strengths and challenges, and patterns in practice. Since teachers are constantly practicing their craft, opportunities for reflection and agentic action are also ongoing. Stopping to think and act on these opportunities for learning about oneself and seeing prospects for change within oneself are examples of what a reflective practitioner might do. One participant notes how she learned about personal limits and catalysts of stress through her Qualtrics reflections. She says,

I think that I have identified many things that plagued me during my experience, and how to better address them moving forward in my life. Specifics from above include personal honesty and knowledge of limits, better knowledge of stress catalysts, and honing my thoughts on teacher education and practice as I move further in my professional career. (Qualtrics survey, 2018)

Pre-service teachers must understand how managing stress and anxiety involve creating boundaries because in a profession like teaching there is always “more” to do. This type of reflection may have facilitated the participants’ recognition of additional boundaries that need to be maintained. Third, delayed reflection also seemed to invoke a positive perspective, and even gratitude, for the teacher education experience, which was not as apparent in the interviews or journals. This is seen in comments like: “It has made me very appreciative and aware”, “the [university] did an amazing job”, “I was very fortunate”, and “the most rewarding surface that resurfaced was”, “the best thing about this program, by far, was the support group”, among others. There are so many challenges to overcome in a teacher education preparation program. New teachers must recognize how developing a positive outlook can change one’s opinion of what may have seemed negative prior. This relates back to the “writing to heal” journal prompt I discussed in the previous chapter about how “negatives can be positives”. Teachers must see possibility and potential to maintain asset-based perspectives of students, families, and their professional circumstances. With the positive correlations between teachers and anxiety, outlined in earlier chapters, finding ways to perceive challenging or negative circumstances through a positive lens is imperative. Finally, in reflections of the past, some notions of agency surfaced in the participants’ responses. One participant said that she “...feel[s] like [she is] able to do what needs to get done”. Another said that she has, “... identified many things that plagued me during my experience, and how to better address them moving forward”. This is key because it provides evidence to another avenue that teacher educators might be able to utilize to promote agentic action in pre-service teachers.



### **Reflection of Qualtrics Survey, Implications, and Concluding Remarks**

While I am grateful to every participant who completed this Qualtrics survey, I have also better come to understand the limitations of using a data collection method such as this. My reflections on this section partially culminate in asking how the “distance of time” can become a formative tool for teacher educators looking to facilitate pre-service teacher reflection (or the professional development of reflective practitioners) and agency. In this program, pre-service teachers are asked to reflect, a lot. They reflect directly after facilitating a classroom lesson, many times with the cooperating teacher and supervisor listening and taking notes. They have “required reflections” to explore what they have learned from thinking back on their most recent experiences. They might reflect on their teaching practices, their lens of experience, their connection to teaching standards, how their teaching promotes social justice, how particular students are experiencing a lesson or topic, and more. When chronological time, like my participants had, to look back at their experiences two years later, is not possible, how can this “distance” be created? Could the answer be in not only having teacher candidates write reflectively about their feelings, perceptions, and experiences, but to also go back and analyze these very reflections? Pennebaker and Evans (2014) call for “Using expressive writing to overcome traumas and emotional upheavals, resolve issues, improve health, and build resilience” (title). While I hate to put teacher education, trauma, and emotional upheaval in the same sentence, there might be something to learn here. Teacher education experiences evoke emotions for many practicing teachers because of their personal passions connecting them to the work. In their text, Pennebaker and Evans (2014) include several writing exercises where the

writer is encouraged to return to a previously written text. For example, in a four day writing exercise, on the first day, the writer is directed to write about any past event, which has had great impact. On the second day, the writer returns to the topic, but includes how it influences other areas or aspects of life. On the third day, the writer is pointed to focus on emotions and thoughts. On the fourth day, Pennebaker and Evans (2014) invite the writers to, “Stand back and think about the events, issues, thoughts, and feelings [and ask] [h]ow will these past events guide your thoughts and actions in the future?” (p.40). I assert that this is one important implication for teacher education programs. Could new teachers write a reflection of a teaching experience that they would like to think about further and then re-write that narrative for a different purpose, with a new perspective, or with a distinct goal in mind? The journal prompt I discussed in the previous chapter did ask pre-service teachers to consider a writing journey through facilitated prompts that targeted agentic language and positive adjectives, but I failed to include the variable that may have been of the most influence, time! Assuming that one goal of a teacher education program is to help facilitate individuals into reflective practitioners, new teachers must have an idea how to learn from their personal reflections. In a teacher education program, when pre-service teachers are writing reflectively just for audience, it may be more difficult to learn from one’s own writing. Writing reflectively with intentions that are direct, purposeful, and personal is important in order to reap the utmost benefits from the practice. I am curious if teacher educators spend too much time asking new teachers to reflect and not enough time promoting writing as something a person does for the self and to cope with stressors. Pre-service teachers, in the middle of a collegiate teacher education program, are in the practice of writing to show what they know. If reflection assignments are

approached in this same manner, it might be difficult for pre-service teachers to use writing as a self-transformative tool for professional development. Pennebaker and Evans (2014) also remind writers how important the notion of perspective is when considering how writing can impact its author, and note that life events are social endeavors that typically impact, directly or indirectly, another person too. They then lead the reader through a series of exercises focusing on different perspectives anticipating that this may be helpful to the writer in seeing his or her own views in complex situations. Teacher education is a social endeavor in innumerable ways as it involves not only the teacher education ecosystem, but also students, schools, families, communities, and so on. Writing for different perspectives might be another way to facilitate new teachers' recognition of how their thinking, actions, and perspectives impact others. Thinking about how someone else might perceive something differently from you can be enlightening in better understanding one's own lens of experience through which things are viewed or perceived. Being a reflective practitioner involves getting to know all the viewpoints of those involved in a situation in addition to thinking carefully about how one's own perspective is influencing thinking. In the future, I will not assign reflection assignments to my pre-service teachers without asking them to go back to those assignments to locate opportunities for further understanding, perspective, or reflection. If teacher educators get nothing more from this chapter, I hope they leave with the strong assertion that pre-service teachers' reflections should be written with purposes in mind that will help the individual see his or her work in new ways. Otherwise, the teacher educator is acting as the reflective practitioner, instead of the pre-service teacher and author of the reflection.

University teacher education programs, like this one, typically have distinct mission statements, frameworks to inform practice, or other jargon to express what they want prospective teachers to learn from their experiences in the program. What I question is if this program is perpetuating against what it aims to facilitate through its practices. Asking pre-service teachers to write reflectively for the purpose of other readers propagates inaction because it does not position prospective teachers as agents of change. I conclude that while reflection through writing is a common practice in teacher education programs, it is only the first step. This reflective writing may be more transformative, and better guide the professional development of a reflective practitioner, if pre-service teachers return to their reflections and utilize them to locate opportunities for agentic action. Agentic action stems from first noticing these opportunities for change in perception or action, then feeling agency, and finally persevering to act. Pre-service teachers also need to perceive their program as crediting them with the power to create change and the knowledge to support why the change is needed. I have often heard veteran teacher educators comment on what a group of new prospective teachers is lacking. Obviously, these pre-service teachers should be viewed with the same asset-based mindset that they are encouraged to utilize for their future students. Yes, pre-service teachers need to exercise agency, but teacher educators must lead by example and consider how an asset-based perspective and encouraging prospective teachers' agency are vital not just to facilitate prospective educators transformation from student to teacher or from unreflective actors to reflective practitioners, but to provide an opportunity for new teachers to survive and thrive in the challenging profession of teaching. Is it possible to learn to teach without being anxious? At the end of this text and years of research, I am still

not certain, but I have discovered that it is not possible to learn to teach without agency. I invite teacher educators to work to find ways to encourage pre-service teachers' agency, to think less about what prospective teachers learn and more about how they feel, and to facilitate prospects for them to recognize opportunities for agentic action by reflecting on their reflections.

#### Appendix D

<b>Participants' Responses to: Has your thinking about your anxiety or field placement changed during the course of articulating your thoughts throughout this interview and/or questionnaire?</b>
<p>"At the time I think I probably felt more stressed compared to how stressful being a classroom teacher is not I feel that looking back it doesn't seem like I was even stressed out in comparison to today"</p>
<p>"Yes. Upon <b>reflection</b> it wasn't the course load or homework that caused anxiety but more of the "fit" and "would I fit in this grade level/team" that made me more anxious. <i>Therefore, [the university] did an amazing job preparing us</i> technically for student teaching/practicum even though in the moment we might be saying "we don't know anything" but in reality, even though we are saying that we are not worried about it. It seems more like I was worried about being a good teacher than anything technical."</p>
<p>"I remembered both the good times and the bad times, some of which I had forgotten. I have tried to put the high anxiety experience behind me as I have moved on, but thinking about his has made certain issues reappear. However, <i>the most rewarding feeling that resurfaced</i> was the thought that creating relationships with the students, and teaching in small group situations lessened my anxiety."</p>
<p>"The stressors of student teaching would have been unbearable if it wouldn't have been for my amazingly supportive University supervisor, and my Co-hort peers. <i>The best thing about this program, by far, was the support group</i> that was created for me my first semester in the School of Education Program."</p>
<p>"It has made me very appreciative and aware of the supports I did have during my placements. <i>I was very fortunate</i> to be paired with amazing cooperating teachers, practicum partners, students, cohort peers, and supervisors."</p>
<p>After <b>reflecting</b> on how I felt only a little over a year ago, <u>I realize how far I have progressed</u>. The things that I was so worried about or would keep my mind turning now are not as prevalent. My time management and ability to prioritize what is actually important for my class and students has minimized my stress immensely. I feel like I am able to complete what needs to be done and still have time to take care of myself outside of school. Allowing myself time to take care of myself</p>

has really helped me to be a better, less stressed, teacher.”
“...I am a firm believer in <b>reflection</b> , and <u>facilitated reflection like this works wonders</u> . I think that <i>I have identified many things that plagued me during my experience, and how to better address them</i> moving forward in my life. Specifics from above include personal honesty and knowledge of limits, better knowledge of stress catalysts, and honing my thoughts on teacher education and practice as I move further in my professional career, which is important even if I’m not going to be an in classroom teacher.”
“Before starting the University teacher education program, I was not stressed on a daily basis. I still did have stress from studying and exams every so often but never at the level of stress I experienced during my second practicum and student teaching.”
“Not really.”
“My thinking has not changed much... <u>I am slightly more aware of</u> how important my support systems were in managing my anxiety.”

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