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The apprenticeship of observation in career contexts: a typology for the role of modeling in teachers' career paths

Carol R. Rinke[a]*, Lynnette Mawhinney[b] and Gloria Park[c]

[a]*Teacher Education Department, Marist College, Poughkeepsie, NY, USA;* [b]*Elementary and Early Childhood Education, The College of New Jersey, Ewing, NJ, USA;* [c]*English Department, Indiana University of Pennsylvania, Indiana, PA, USA*

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This article extends the literature on teachers' career paths by attending to the experiences of educators when they were students in secondary classrooms. Grounded in the perspective that biography is central to teaching, we investigate undergraduate pre-service teachers' educational experiences, views on teaching and learning, and professional plans. We draw upon life history interviews with 40 prospective teachers at three institutions across Pennsylvania, USA. We find that past educational experiences are intricately connected with career choice, intended professional path, and pedagogical focus. This paper identifies and discusses three forms of modeling – disciplinary, mentoring, and empowering – which influence pre-service teachers in powerful and enduring ways. These forms of modeling expand our understanding of teachers' career intentions and apply the apprenticeship of observation to planned career paths.

Keywords: teaching (occupation); teacher attitudes; teacher recruitment; apprenticeship of observation; pre-service teacher education

Overview and objectives

Constructing and sustaining a committed, engaged, and effective teaching force is one of the greatest challenges of our times. For years, researchers have addressed the question of career pathways by identifying the characteristics of teachers' careers at various points in time. One prominent example includes Huberman's (1989) three phases of launching a career, stabilizing commitment, and taking on new challenges or concerns. Fessler (1995) likewise suggests that career development depends upon the interaction of career cycle, personal environment, and organizational environment. Day and Gu (2010) identify six professional life phases, ranging from year 0 to 31+, in their research situating teachers' careers in our current context of accountability and compliance. This line of research has been critical in establishing the commitments, effectiveness, and priorities of practicing teachers.

In this study, we aim to extend existing knowledge about teachers' career pathways by focusing on those educational experiences that take place prior to teacher education. Several large-scale studies have been conducted in recent years in the USA, the UK, Australia, and New Zealand that document teachers' motivations for entering the field (e.g. Anthony & Kane, 2008; Day, Sammons, Stobart, Kington, & Gu, 2007; Hobson et al., 2009; Johnson, 2004; Watt et al., 2012). Not surprisingly,

*Corresponding author. Email: carol.rinke@marist.edu

these studies have found personal rewards of working with students, love of subject matter, inspiration by a great teacher, and the desire to give back as the most prominent motivators for teaching, highly consistent across international contexts (Watt et al., 2012). This study builds upon this line of research by capturing the life history experiences, particularly those in secondary classrooms, which lead students toward a career choice in teaching. Our study offers an in-depth look at past experiences of schooling and illuminates the elements of teacher identify formation present well before teacher preparation. Moreover, our research attends to the life histories of pre-service teachers in high-need subgroups, such as science and mathematics teachers and teachers of colour (Haberman, 1996; Urban Teacher Collaborative, 2000).

Our study is grounded in the connection between teachers' lives and careers, and aims to capture prospective teachers' life histories, including key experiences and expectations, well before the formal initiation of their professional lives. Understanding the early educational biographies of pre-service teachers offers considerable detail with respect to their decisions to teach, their ideas about teaching and learning, and their future career plans. This study investigates the life histories of undergraduate pre-service teachers at three institutions in an effort to understand the past experiences that shape their futures as educators. While considering the larger group of pre-service teachers, we pay particular attention to those in high-need areas as we consider the following research questions:

(1) What central life history experiences influence professional direction?
(2) In what ways do life history experiences shape views about the teaching profession and teaching and learning?
(3) How do prospective teachers envision their careers across the professional lifespan?

Theoretical framework and literature base

Our research is theoretically grounded in the notion that the ongoing processes of teacher socialization, identity formation, and career pathways are deeply interconnected. We build upon previous work on teacher socialization, including Lortie's (1975) seminal notion of an apprenticeship of observation, to acknowledge that teachers' socialization is shaped by their prior experiences in schools (e.g. Lacey, 1977; Zeichner & Gore, 1990). In fact, teachers' instructional practices often mirror the ones they themselves encountered in the role of a student. Flores and Day (2006) have argued that these past experiences serve as a 'frame of reference' (p. 224) for beginning teachers and that life histories work together with context to mediate the process of identity formation.

We use a perspective which sees teacher identity not as a fixed entity, but rather as a constantly evolving and multi-faceted framework for making sense of professional lives (Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004). It has been widely accepted that teacher identity shapes instructional practice and professional knowledge growth (e.g. Beijaard et al., 2004; Kelchtermans, 1993). Our framework expands that influence to also include teacher career paths across the professional lifespan. Positive professional identities have already been linked to career commitment and job satisfaction (Day et al., 2007; Hammerness et al., 2005). We build upon Olsen's (2008) notion that teacher identity can be used to understand career growth in a holistic manner. He writes:

> I am guided by a view of teacher development as a continuum rather than discrete, linear parts. That is to say that teacher recruitment, preservice preparation, inservice professional development, and teacher retention may be chronologically sequenced but, epistemologically, they are intertwined and continually loop back and forth to influence each other in mutually constitutive ways. (Olsen, 2008, pp. 23–24)

Our study sees teacher identity development as a mediating process between past experiences and lifelong career growth, and we acknowledge the inherent interconnections among the three.

From this theoretical base, we then situate our research within literature on teachers' lives and careers. In this study, we build upon earlier work that sees teaching as embedded in the unique lives of individuals, recognizes teaching as a conscious choice, and identifies teaching, particularly for those in high-need fields, as both a continuation and a break from their past. This section highlights the foundational research that has informed our work.

Teaching as embedded in lives

This study is grounded in the notion that biography and life history are essential to all facets of teaching. In particular, we accept the idea that teachers are active and intelligent agents in shaping their own lives, both personal and professional (Carter & Doyle, 1996; Goodson, 1992). We also operate under the assumption that lives inside and outside of the classroom are deeply interconnected, with one continually influencing the other at the initiation, continuation, and conclusion of a teaching career (Goodson & Sikes, 2001). This perspective necessitates placing priority on teachers' voices and situating their experiences and perspectives at the center of research (Cohn & Kottkamp, 1993).

A large body of research has documented the link between the personal and professional lives of teachers (e.g. Carter & Doyle, 1996; Casey, 1993; Goodson & Hargreaves, 1996; Pajak & Blase, 1989; Rinke, 2009). In particular, this line of research has focused on the role of personal experience and life history in professional knowledge growth (e.g. Clandinin & Connelly, 1995; Mawhinney, 2010; Raymond, Butt, & Townsend, 1992), gender construction (e.g. Biklen, 1995; Casey, 1993; Park, 2009), and professional development (Ballet & Kelchtermans, 2007; Day et al., 2007; Huberman, 1995). Recently, the concept of 'reasons for entry' has also entered the vocabulary as a way to connect life history with the decision to teach (Olsen, 2008).

When the personal is acknowledged as deeply connected to the professional, we can begin to identify teachers' lay theories, which emerge from past experiences, interact with identities, and influence professional development over the lifespan (Sugrue, 1997). In our study, we attend to the connection between the personal and the professional before educators take on formal teaching responsibilities. From this perspective, we suggest potential lay theories that might emerge from such an interaction.

Teaching as choice

We use this biographical frame to expand literature on the choice of a teaching career. Studies in this field come from a variety of perspectives and use a range of research methodologies, from large-scale data analysis to survey work to case

studies. While diverse, these studies are connected by the common purpose of understanding what initially brings teachers to the profession. Inherent in this discussion is the recognition that the decision to teach and the construction of a teaching pathway are conscious acts, informed by years of life experience both inside and outside the classroom.

Several themes appear repeatedly in the research on why teachers choose to enter the classroom, with one of the most prominent being relationships with students. Teachers want to help students learn and make a difference in their lives (e.g. Anthony & Kane, 2008; Malderez, Hobson, Tracey, & Kerr, 2007; Manuel & Hughes, 2006). The notion of social contribution also appears frequently as a key finding, with teachers aiming to give back to their own or in-need communities (e.g. Johnson, 2004; Richardson & Watt, 2006). Many who choose teaching imagine it to be an enjoyable job and like the idea of teaching a subject area they are passionate about (e.g. Anthony & Kane, 2008; Kyriacou & Coulthard, 2000). Finally, a growing consensus points to the idea that feeling successful is critical to both entering and remaining in the classroom (e.g. Johnson & Birkeland, 2003; Richardson & Watt, 2006).

Among pre-service teachers, there appears to be a greater emphasis on past experiences of schooling (Bastick, 2000; Schutz, Crowder, & White, 2001). Pre-service teachers, in particular, have exhibited what have been termed idealistic conceptions of teaching, emphasizing their opportunity to make a difference in society (O'Brien & Schillaci, 2002). Pre-service educators are frequently influenced by 'atypical teaching episodes', such as tutoring or babysitting, where they act as teachers outside of traditional classrooms (Sugrue, 1996). Our study investigates both identified themes and emergent patterns in the exploration of career choice for pre-service teachers.

Teaching as (dis)continuity

Related to work on the choice of a teaching career, the studies on teaching as (dis) continuity specifically investigate how either practicing mathematics and science or minority teachers conceive of the teaching profession and their role in it. Although these two groups of teachers have discrete views, both see teaching as a form of continuity with past experiences. Work on the career choices of practicing mathematics and science teachers has indicated that many are influenced by past positive experiences as students or teaching assistants, primarily in secondary or undergraduate classrooms (Espinet, Simmona, & Atwater, 1992; Moin, Dorfield, & Schunn, 2005). Moreover, teachers in these high-need fields indicated that subject matter was their primary commitment, with interest in teaching coming later (Espinet et al., 1992; Helms, 1998). These mathematics and science teachers clearly illustrate the role of continuity in their professional lives, both with educational as well as subject matter experiences.

Teachers of colour also stress the role of continuity while introducing elements of discontinuity into their views on the profession (Foster, 1997; Gomez, Rodriguez, & Agosto, 2008). In general, teacher education struggles to attract and retain educators of colour (Achinstein, Ogawa, Sexton, & Freitas, 2010) primarily because of previous negative experiences with schooling (Gordon, 1994). Those minority teachers who do choose to enter the classroom, like the general population of teachers cited above, tend to emphasize intrinsic rewards such as service to others

(Su, 1997). However, minority teachers also see teaching as a way to stay connected with their communities and promote intergenerational connections (Dixson & Dingus, 2008). In addition to these elements of continuity, teachers of colour also stress elements of discontinuity, discussing their own negative educational experiences, their interest in challenging the dominant curriculum, and their role in promoting social change and social justice (Casey, 1993; Su, 1997). We explore these key elements of both continuity and discontinuity in our own work, investigating the salience of these themes for our participants.

Research methodology

This investigation constitutes one piece of a larger project, taking place among the undergraduate teacher education programs at three institutions across the state of Pennsylvania, USA. The collaboration aims to understand how pre-service teachers' prior educational experiences connect to future career choices in a state that issues over 20,000 teaching certificates annually and regularly exports education graduates to surrounding regions. The three institutions were selected to represent a range of institutional cultures, programmatic structures, and student populations (Pool, Dittrick, Longwell, Pool, & Hausfather, 2004), and include a private liberal arts college, a state institution and former normal school, and a Historically Black University (HBCU). Despite institutional and structural differences, all three of the teacher education programs maintain a commitment to preparing knowledgeable and skilful educators who are able to effectively foster student growth and development in diverse contexts. In this study, we focused on the one common program across all three institutions, undergraduate pre-service teacher preparation, and worked with participants who self-selected into a traditional four-year teacher education program.

Data collection

In this study, we selected a life history approach because of its ability to capture a contextualized view of individual experience as well as highlight the inherent interaction between the personal and the professional (Atkinson, 1998; Goodson & Sikes, 2001). We value the insight that life history provides to researchers in defining an educational centre for practice and professionalism as well as the role of narrative construction in defining personal vision for the participants themselves (Atkinson, 1998; Goodson, 1991). In conducting our life history research, we adhered to key principles of relationality, mutuality, empathy, and care (Cole & Knowles, 2001), striving to listen carefully, ask meaningful questions, accurately represent stories, and respect the authority of the participant throughout our interactions.

Each of the three co-researchers selected participants across a range of demographic and certification factors. Participants were intended to represent the larger teacher education student body at each of the institutions with respect to gender, race/ethnicity, year, program, and educational background (Table 1). All together, we conducted life history interviews with 40 participants from January 2008 to June 2009, with each audio-taped and transcribed interview lasting approximately two hours. As co-investigators, we developed, piloted, and implemented a common interview protocol inquiring about previous family and educational background, experiences within teacher education, and future professional direction and practice. Our interview protocol was influenced by Johnson's (2007) study of

Table 1. Overview of participants across three institutions.

Demographic and certification factors	Number of participants
Certification area	
Secondary certification	26
Elementary certification	13
K-12 certification	1
Gender	
Males	11
Females	29
Class Year	
Freshmen	8
Sophomore	14
Junior	8
Senior	10
Race/ethnicity	
African–American/African	20
Hispanic (non-white)	1
White/Caucasian	19
Total number of participants	40

pre-service teachers and some basic demographic questions were taken verbatim from this protocol. We piloted the protocol with eight participants, and revised and restructured the pilot into a chronological investigation of past, present, and future based on initial responses.

Data analysis

During the process of data analysis, we benefited from the opportunity to conduct individual analysis on participants from our home institutions as well as comparative analysis across institutions. We started by constructing coherent narratives for each pre-service teacher highlighting family background, professional influences, program experience and career plans, and solicited feedback on these narratives from participants (Cole & Knowles, 2001). The three co-researchers then shared the narratives and our initial coding schemes using a password-protected web-based platform and analyzed questioning and responses for consistency of practice. Collaboratively, we refined our coding scheme to include concepts such as mentorship, teaching and learning, equity and social justice, and career path. We then used a series of within-case and cross-case displays to identify patterns in the data that cut across participants (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

When our analyses were discrepant, we returned to revise and refine initial constructs. For instance, we initially identified a typology of mentoring practices. However, recognizing that past influences were often unintentional and unacknowledged, we shifted the concept as well as the terminology toward a notion of 'modeling'. We saw this change as better representing the inadvertent influence of secondary teachers. We also developed our typology terms of disciplinary practices, mentoring practices, and empowering practices as a way to indicate that while modeling was not part of the formal curriculum, it did indeed represent a legitimate and meaningful form of instructional practice. Once these patterns were identified, we conducted both inductive and deductive analysis on the life stories (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Gomez et al., 2008) to identify the ways in which they supported and/or challenged existing notions from our theoretical framework and literature base.

We also scrutinized our data for patterns within individual institutions and demographic groups. Using a series of matrices organized around the selection variables of program, gender, race/ethnicity, class year, certification area, and educational background, we searched for similarities and differences between participants (Miles & Huberman, 1994). For the scope of this paper, we chose to focus not on distinctions between institutions but rather on common themes related to how certain groups of prospective teachers interpreted their prior educational experiences in light of their future career intentions. Using these themes, we constructed a typology that illustrates one important factor in teacher recruitment: the role of modeling in teachers' decisions to enter the classroom.

Typology of modeling practices

Our data led us to develop a typology of modeling practices linking past educational experiences with future career intentions (Table 2). Our data indicate that these undergraduate pre-service teachers experienced three distinct forms of modeling during their prior educational experiences, which can be described as disciplinary practice, mentoring practice, and empowering practice, and which indicate the type of relationship experienced between the student and their former teacher(s) or schools. While there were at times multiple or overlapping forms of modeling present in individual experiences, these three forms stood out as distinct patterns in the life histories. These mentoring practices have a far-reaching impact upon the decision to become a teacher, goals for students, and long-term career plans.

In this section, we introduce each of the three forms of modeling and discuss the ways in which teachers' aims and plans emerged out of their past educational experiences. We present excerpts from the life history of one prospective teacher in each section, for a total of three participants (Table 3). While all 40 participants drew upon certain aspects of the modeling practices in their life histories, many indicated overlapping experiences among the three categories. In this paper, we highlight the

Table 2. Typology of modeling practices.

	Disciplinary practice	Mentoring practice	Empowering practice
Prospective teachers	Mathematics and science	Minority	Marginalized
Decision to teach	Inspiring teacher/ program	Mentoring teacher/ program	Disempowering teacher/ context
Aims for students	Disciplinary engagement	Personal engagement	Learning engagement
Career direction	Subject-driven	Student-driven	Context-driven

Table 3. Overview of case study teaching candidates.

Name	Modeling	Institution	Gender	Race/ ethnicity	Year	Certification	Background
Vana	Disciplinary	Public	Female	White	Junior	Biology	Suburban
Allen	Mentoring	HBCU	Male	Black	Freshman	Mathematics	Urban
Sally	Empowering	Private	Female	White	Sophomore	Elementary	Rural

Note: Year indicates class year at time of interview.

experiences of three participants, selected from the larger group in order to offer a perspective from each institution as well as coherence within the particular modeling practice. These narratives are not designed to generalize to the larger population but rather to transfer to other contextualized experiences (Cole & Knowles, 2001; Schofield, 1990).

Disciplinary practice

Disciplinary practice is a form of modeling that appeared particularly resonant for many of the prospective teachers in the fields of mathematics and science. Those participants who decided to teach because of the influence of disciplinary practice described a particularly inspiring teacher who simultaneously initiated interest in the subject matter and a career in education. These pre-service teachers held ideas about teaching and learning which paralleled the practices they themselves experienced; they aimed to engage their own students in a passion for their particular discipline. This modeling practice also influenced future career plans. Again driven by a passion for the subject matter, these prospective teachers envisioned many years in the classroom teaching their content area in a pedagogically inspiring manner.

Vana[1] is a biology education candidate at the state institution who originally hails from a small, predominantly White community in central Pennsylvania. She grew up in a solidly middle-class household, with both parents working in clerical positions at the school district's central office. Vana attended the public schools in her community and was frustrated by what she perceived as poor teaching at the high school, speaking at length about one particular Algebra teacher who offered little in the way of guidance to students. However, she found her biology teacher to be truly inspiring. She explained:

> Then there was [Mr Walters], … he was my biology teacher but he was just so knowledgeable and so passionate about it I fell in love with the subject … I just remember this one part of biology where [Mr Walters] picked up this … preserved shark and it was one that had all the organs hanging out colour coded so you could see the difference between them … I thought that it was really cool.

When asked to explain what drew her to teaching, Vana returned to her experience in Mr Walter's biology class, noting:

> I mostly decided that I wanted to become a bio teacher in ninth grade. It was because of Mr Walters and his way of teaching and how much I learned. And I thought that people should … get excited like I did because that was very much an influence right then and there.

Mr Walters inspired in Vana a passion for biology, and she hopes to engage her own students in the subject in a similar way. Vana explained that she aims to engage her students in science and help them to see the relevance of biology in their world in an approach she calls 'connected knowing'. She described her goals for student learning:

> … to see the importance of biology and how it's really everywhere. That's my major goal, to get them excited about it even if it isn't your major. I walk around now and I'm just like 'Ah, the leaves are changing, I love it!' And it's just fall! So, I want people to get excited and see it everywhere and be able to apply it because that's what

> kind of has enriched my life is just seeing all of the possibilities that are out there within biology.

Vana's goals for students echo what she herself experienced in Mr Walter's biology class, a passion for the subject matter.

Because of her experience of disciplinary practice, Vana made the decision as a teenager to pursue both biology and education. She entered college with a clear career path and did not waver. She opted to take advantage of a number of additional education opportunities, including tutoring in the sciences and working at a summer program for college-bound urban youth. Because of these experiences, Vana seemed to already see herself as a professional educator, noting, 'I've been tutoring and teaching so long that it's just second nature and I really like doing it.' In the long term, Vana envisions staying in the classroom but taking on additional science subject areas. She explained, 'In five years, I would really like to be certified to teach chemistry, biology and environmental science. I want to have the ability to teach a range of subjects.' Through the disciplinary modeling practice, Vana was inspired to pursue science teaching and instill that same passion in her students through a career in the classroom. She felt that, 'I love biology and [teaching is] just something I want to do.'

Mentoring practice

Several of the pre-service teachers emphasized in their life histories what we term mentoring practice, relationships with teachers or other adults who went out of their way to foster the academic and personal success of their students. In helping their students to succeed, these models also inspired a desire to help others in similar circumstances. Although mentoring practice was not universal among students of colour, it featured prominently in many of their life histories as they aimed to become the same types of mentors for their future students. The pre-service teachers who highlighted the influence of mentoring practice tended to see classroom teaching as only one of many possible roles in their quest to support young people.

Allen, a mathematics education candidate at the HBCU, described past experiences with mentoring practice. Allen grew up with two high-school educated parents, moving around frequently as they sought better jobs and the ability to own their own home. He explained that his education was mostly teacher-directed until high school, when he joined an organization called the Technology Student Association (TSA) which gave him problem solving, critical thinking, and leadership skills. Allen described the types of activities he engaged in with the TSA, recalling one such event:

> Manufacturing and stuff like that. At the state level I participated in construction. They give us – one of our problems was we had to build a mini dollhouse, like a doll centre, but you had to have a certain amount of grass … the dollhouse had to be no less than a certain height, and you had to have at least one side is shady.

Although the TSA appeared to offer a form of disciplinary practice, Allen did not emphasize this interpretation in his life history. Rather, he focused on the relationship he built with TSA's mentor, Mr Elliot. Allen described Mr Elliot's influence, 'If it wasn't for him, I don't think I would be in college right now, 'cause he always

told me, "Do your best. Don't settle for nothing' less than greatness" and he just pushed me.' Allen also built a personal relationship with this mentor outside of the classroom. He went to church with him, visited his home, and remained in contact with him and the TSA while away at college. He explained, 'Anything, I had a problem, school related or personal, I could go talk to him. I could call him right now and ask for his help for anything.'

Allen explained that Mr Elliot was also highly influential in his decision to become a teacher:

> I recently wanted to be a teacher because like I said, teachers affected my life a lot, and by the way [Mr Elliot] took me in and he matured me, and he developed me as a student and a person. I look forward to doing that same thing to somebody in a similar situation as me.

Allen aimed to become a mentor for a new generation of students, just as Mr Elliot was a mentor for him. When asked about his specific goals as a teacher, Allen echoes this same idea of supporting students both academically and personally, and even maintaining a connection to the TSA. He responded:

> The growth and maturing of young adults. That's my immediate goal. I'm wanting to build their skills, get 'em prepared for what the world is like, get 'em prepared for life, and prepare 'em for the nationals at the same time. So I might get a lesson and I might do an activity with a part of the lesson to the real world, something like that.

In imagining his future role as a teacher, Allen is quite clear that he aims to develop his students broadly in academic, personal, and professional ways.

Allen does not clearly articulate his vision for a future career, but he plans to take a teaching job that provides a solid income for himself and his family. In his discussion of career direction, it is evident that the mentoring of future students is far more important than the subject matter. He chose mathematics simply because 'I'm good with numbers … it just came naturally for me.' And he decided relatively late upon an education career, first planning on entering business. What is essential in his future career is constructing positive relationships, like he had with Mr Elliot, with students and families. He anticipates some challenges, noting, 'They're gonna be looking at me like, "Oh, you don't know what you're doing," because of my race and my age.' But Allen believes that, 'If you give respect, you get respect.' In this way he intends to serve as a mentor for his own students.

Empowering practice

Our life history interviews also identified pre-service teachers who, rather than emulating disciplinary or mentoring practices, chose to enter teaching so that they could offer others a better education than the ones they themselves received. Termed empowering practice, this mentoring practice emerged from the life histories of individuals who were marginalized by their educational experiences in various ways and disempowered within the educational system. As a result of these marginalizing experiences, prospective teachers aimed to improve the educational context for their future students and engage those students in meaningful learning. These pre-service teachers envisioned a fluid teaching career with movement among a variety of contexts and roles as they seek the best way to make their contribution.

Sally is an English major and elementary education candidate at the liberal arts college. Growing up on her father's vegetable farm surrounded by extended family, Sally attended first a Montessori pre-school and then the local public schools. Sally struggled with dyslexia throughout her life and felt she lacked the vital support she needed at school:

> I didn't feel like the school really supported me that much. It was good in like second and third grade when it first started because … it was more like one-on-one when I worked with them. Then as I got older, it was less and less instruction and less and less one-on-one. And I'm kind of like a difficult learner, so sometimes what they do kind of interferes with my concentration … I have attention and concentration issues.

She was particularly angry about the decision to remove special education services once she reached high school because of her excellent grades. She explained:

> I didn't feel like I got the support, you know, through the learning support program that I needed. In high school, they like tried to kick me out of the program because I was getting 'A's. But I was like just because I'm getting 'A's doesn't mean that I no longer need this, or no longer have a learning disability.

Although she did have some positive experiences with teachers, especially her mentor in an after-school leadership program, overall Sally felt that she was not given the opportunity to build strong relationships with her teachers. She noted:

> I didn't really have good relationships with teachers … I wasn't really that much of a fan of teachers, and that may be why I wanted to be a teacher because I never really liked my teachers because I didn't really like how they taught and just how, you know, I was never really interested in education that much or liked academics because I never really felt motivated in the classroom… I wasn't really a fan of the teachers at the school.

Not only did she feel a lack of respect for and closeness to her teachers, but Sally believed that she could do better. She alludes to this earlier, but later in her life history clearly states 'It's like seeing what they did wrong makes me know what I can do right in this.' Despite the fact that she has a long line of supportive teachers in her family, including her grandmother and aunt, Sally makes it clear that she chose to enter teaching to improve upon her own educational experiences.

Sally envisions a far more interactive and democratic classroom than the ones she herself experienced. When asked about her goals, she commented, 'I want my students to like learning and be interested in what they are learning.' She envisions using discussion as the foundation of her practice and engaging children in interactive activities. Sally explained her approach:

> You just discuss with the class their thoughts and just talk about it … My classroom will be very democratic … you know, all working together and not being as teacher-ly and superior. I want my students to be interested … so they would want to learn from what I am teaching … And I think my class would be very hands-on, and a lot more projects and activities that help you learn than tests and stuff like that.

Sally plans to give students a strong voice in her classroom, explaining, 'I want to make them very democratic so students feel like they're not being ruled by me. So I want them to feel comfortable to speak out in class, you know, talk to me about

how things are going.' She also hopes to work in a school environment with like-minded colleagues in order to 'make sure that the democratic way of teaching keeps going, and it doesn't just end in my classroom.'

In contrast to her peers who plan stable classroom careers, Sally wants to explore a variety of school contexts until she finds one that makes a good fit for her approach. She noted:

> I think if I found a really good teaching job, and one that I really liked and felt comfortable in and successful in what I was doing, I would stay there. But if I didn't, I think maybe I would try to look for something else.

Sally also hopes to experience a range of new environments before she settles down:

> I grew up rural Pennsylvania, and I went to school in rural Pennsylvania. So I definitely want to maybe, for a while at least, live in a city and teach in the city … I want a family, and I want kids, but … I'm not in a rush or anything … I definitely want to kind of experience things before I settle down. Maybe even, you know, right after I graduate for a couple of years, it would be nice to move around if it was possible, because then I could experience different places to teach and different things to do … I'd like to experiment maybe a little bit.

While Sally remains committed to teaching in general, she takes a broad approach to her career as an educator. She hopes to explore a variety of geographic locations, communities, and schools in order to find a context where she can thrive and is currently considering work within a Montessori context.

Discussion

These life histories expand our understanding of teachers' career intentions by characterizing modeling practices influential at the pre-service phase (e.g. Day & Gu, 2010; Fessler, 1995; Huberman, 1995). From close examination of these prior influences, we can begin to pull out lay theories about the role of the teacher, teaching and learning, and career plans (Sugrue, 1997). We can see the apprenticeship of observation in action in candidates' emphasis on engaging practice, personal mentoring, or empowering students (Lortie, 1975). And we recognize that past experiences not only shape practice, but also influence visions of career development grounded in subject matter, student mentoring, or a love of learning. From this study, we also come to appreciate the vital role of exceptional secondary school teachers. It is clear that these powerful individuals inspire in their students a passion for the discipline, interpersonal relationships, and even learning itself.

Investigating the relationship between life histories and career pathways also illuminates the deep and complex interconnections between teachers' lives outside of and within the classroom. This study is grounded in the notion that teaching is embedded in lives and generated a deeper understanding of the ways in which past life experiences shape career intentions. The findings suggest that life experiences influence career intentions, shaping teachers' perspectives and visions in ways that potentially stretch deep into their careers. This research also expands the literature on teaching as choice, suggesting that prospective educators not only choose their careers but also the goals and intentions intricately embedded as part of those

careers. Finally, this study complicated the idea of teaching as (dis)continuity, posing multiple ways to both emulate as well as enhance past models. Together, these findings support the idea that life experiences are not merely part of the past but instead constitute a vital and essential core guiding teachers' professional pathways.

While this typology of modeling practices expands our understanding of teachers' career intentions, we must also acknowledge its limitations. Britzman (1986) warns of the danger of personal experiences reinforcing existing teaching practices and, in turn, social inequalities. The three modeling practices can be interpreted either as useful tools for better understanding the influences upon future educators or as restrictive boundaries that must be interrogated and altered in order to enact transformative teaching practices. Moreover, the three modeling practices are limited to school-based experiences, when we know that many influential experiences take place in atypical teaching episodes outside of the traditional educational context (Sugrue, 1996). Finally, these practices offer a snapshot of teachers' identities at a single point in time, while we recognize that their motivations, goals, and plans may continue evolving based on interactions in personal and professional contexts.

Whether the modeling practices serve as a window into teachers' past, a limitation to future practice, or both, it is clear that these past experiences must be interrogated closely. Teacher education already gives strong emphasis to past experiences in teacher preparation coursework, frequently asking candidates to examine and challenge prior assumptions about the nature of schooling, curriculum and instruction, and diversity issues (Grossman, 2005; Hollins & Guzman, 2005). Teacher education would be well served to expand its treatment of prior beliefs and experiences to include career intentions. Critical reflection upon prospective teachers' own past models, decisions to enter teaching, aims for students, and career plans could help future educators articulate their past, present, and future as well as design steps needed to accomplish their goals.

For a lasting influence, this reflective process should not end with teacher preparation, but instead continue throughout lifelong professional development. We already know that past experiences have enduring influences and the iterative process of negotiating past experiences, ideas about teaching, and future goals is at the core of teacher professional identity (Olsen, 2008). Sugrue (1997) suggests that the task of continuing professional development is to in some way assimilate research-based teaching practices with teacher identity, writing:

> It is necessary to recognise student teachers' and practitioners' embodied knowledge as an indispensible dimension of how they construct their teaching identities: a prerequisite to continuous reconstruction of professional identities, while simultaneously recognising that the process of renewal needs to be situated much more critically and broadly than a mere focus on practice. (Sugrue, 1997, p. 223)

Our research reinforces this notion that teachers' past experiences need careful and iterative examination as a vehicle to productive and meaning professional growth.

The three modeling practices – disciplinary, mentoring, and empowering – serve to ground future educators during the pre-service phase and throughout their careers in the classroom. Attending more carefully to the models underlying their planned career paths may help link the past with the future for a more connected and enduring career.

Note

1. All names are pseudonyms.

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