

The *Vita Activa* as Compass:
Navigating Uncertainty in Teaching with Hannah Arendt

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DEDICATION

To my family:
Mike, my “crackers and cheese”
Sam, the wonder dog
In memory of Maggie, the crazy dog.

ABSTRACT

This dissertation is an exploration of stories of uncertainty in the lives of elementary teachers and the value that the ideas of Hannah Arendt lend to the discussion around uncertainty. In *The Human Condition* (1958) Hannah Arendt theorizes the life of action, the *vita activa*. Arendtian action is inherently uncertain because to be “capable of action means that the unexpected can be expected” from other humans (Arendt, 1958, p. 178). Therefore uncertainty is a condition of human relationships. Teaching is particularly uncertain because of the multiple relationships that teachers engage in on a daily basis. One way to explore and understand how teachers navigate the inherent unpredictability in human relationships is to listen to the stories they tell.

The guiding questions of this narrative research inquiry are: What do we come to know about these teachers’ experience by reading their stories through Arendt’s ideas? And, how is the work of Arendt useful or helpful in examining action, experience, and uncertainty in teaching?

Through my research I have come to understand that Arendt’s vocabulary and conceptions are useful. Her ideas of public and private help elucidate that uncertainty occurs when teachers attempt to negotiate the boundaries between home and school. Arendt’s ideas of action and behavior, and the components of thinking and thoughtlessness, help define teachers’ action and reaction to uncertainty. Arendt’s work also provides a vocabulary for critical discussion of stories in teacher education. I offer Arendt’s ideas as a compass for teachers in reflecting on interactions and human relationships. Hannah Arendt’s rich vocabulary and thoughtful ideas serve as tools, or a compass, to help teachers find their location and get their bearings as they navigate the unpredictable human relations embedded in teaching.

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PREFACE

“Life is not merely a story text: life is lived, and the story is told.”

—*Donald Polkinghorne*

It was early in the school year and my second grade students were at gym. I was preparing for the week when the lunch lady came into my room. “Can I turn the TV on?” she asked. I said, “Go ahead” thinking it was a strange request but did not want to get on the bad side of the lunch lady. She then began to talk about what she heard had happened in New York as she tried to get the TV to pick up a station clearly. I was only half listening until the TV reporters began talking and a grainy image of an airplane crashing into a large building was shown. It was surreal, like a movie. The lunch lady stood next to me. She said, “It is probably the Palestinians.” I looked at her incredulously and asked “How can you even know?” As she began an explanation I told her I had to pick my students up from gym and to please turn the TV off soon. It took me seconds to walk from my room to the gym, but I was in a fog. The gym teacher and I exchanged a few words about what we didn’t know, airplanes, buildings, New York. Then I looked at my students and saw their little flushed faces.

We went to the playground, instead of returning to the classroom. They hardly protested. I told them it was a beautiful day and we had time to enjoy it. I told them to run. And they did. I watched them play, with our downtown skyscrapers clearly visible in the distance. The principal eventually found me outside. He confirmed via walkie-talkie that he had found me and my class. He cocked his head to one side and looked at me as if to say, “What are you doing?” I struggled to find the words to explain why *I* had taken

the students outside. Why the images on television and the lunch lady's words and those innocent 7-year-old faces made me want to see blue sky, breathe fresh air and hear children laughing. I said, "It's a beautiful day." Those words seemed feeble, but he nodded his head and told me to get the class back into school because we were going into lockdown. I gathered the students up and headed back in, with the principal following behind me.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

“I don't know that the story is ever done, as I will always think of it.”

-Ben, a fifth grade teacher in this inquiry

Background and rationale for the study

At some point in all our lives there are moments that we can never forget.

Moments that awaken us, change us, push us, and befuddle us. These moments may have universal themes such as rescue, redemption, love or hate, and they also contain particulars. These particulars are often communicated via story. Story is a way to make sense of these moments. Stories told after the event serve to explain our action in the moment or give reason to others' action. Sometimes stories serve as cautionary tales to others. Telling and trading stories is prevalent in many professions, including teaching. There are small stories and big stories in teaching told by teachers and students. Examining teachers' knowledge as revealed through their stories is a powerful way to make a contribution to the field of education.

In the early years of educational research teacher' stories about particular events were seen as too contextual to be of any use to improving teaching. These stories were often referred to as “teacher lore” and were deemed not rigorous enough or generalizable. Teacher stories, or lore, were confined to the popular press and were represented by the work of Herbert Kohl and Jonathon Kozol, among others (Schubert, 1991). The realization that context matters has emerged as society has moved from the modern industrial age into the post-modern era. With this passage of time, scientific certainty has

been questioned and the positivistic research on effective teaching that included checklists and other external measurable components has also been criticized (Hargreaves, 1994; Jackson, 1990; Ornstein, 1995). Stories of individual context-bound experience have become more valued as a way to disclose everyday experiences of teachers. Lee Shulman (1986) proposed the idea of case knowledge as a type of teacher knowledge. This knowledge was described as “knowledge of specific, well-documented, and richly described events” (Shulman, 1986, p. 11). More recently the use of narrative and story has come to be influential in teacher preparation and education because of its ability to render the complexity of teaching in an accessible form (Casey, 1995/96; Elbaz-Luwisch, 2007). The use of teachers’ stories about experience can provide a vicarious learning experience for prospective teachers (Floden & Buchman, 1993; O’Connell Rust, 1999; Sato & Rogers, in press).

Teachers’ stories provide insight into what they have done in times of uncertainty. As many authors have pointed out teaching *is* particularly uncertain (Hatch, 1999; Labaree, 2000; Lortie, 2002). The world is changing and uncertain despite science and technology’s best efforts to help view the world as orderly and predictable. Uncertainty is a condition of human life and especially human relationships. Teaching is particularly uncertain because of the clientele with whom teachers work: students, parents, administrators and colleagues. Teachers work with students who are required to be in the classroom. The parents and families of students often have notions about what teachers do because of their classroom experiences as students. Administrators, school board members and legislators create rules and decrees for teachers to follow despite their

distance from the actual classroom. And finally, teachers work with other teachers who may or may not have similar approaches and philosophies of teaching and learning. All of these relationships intertwine and can be precarious and uncertain. One way to explore and understand how teachers navigate the inherent unpredictability in human relationships is to listen to the stories they tell.

This dissertation is partially an exploration of stories of uncertainty in the lives of elementary teachers. These are stories about moments when teachers, to the best of their ability, acted in the face of uncertainty. These are also stories about relationships with colleagues and students, and the myriad experiences embedded in the profession of teaching. This inquiry is also very much about the ideas of Hannah Arendt that are articulated in *The Human Condition* (1958). While several authors have explored uncertainty in teaching, the goal of this study is to contribute to a theoretical understanding of teaching as a complex and uncertain endeavor through a novel application of Hannah Arendt's concepts of the *vita activa* in the analysis of teachers' stories. The goals of this inquiry then are two-fold. First, what do we come to know about these teachers' experience through reading their stories through Arendt's ideas? Second, is the work of Arendt useful or helpful in examining action, experience, and uncertainty in teaching?

Conceptual frameworks

I turn now to the underlying conceptual frames that inform this research study. First I will explain my understandings of *practical knowledge*. Then I will introduce the reader to Hannah Arendt's theory of the *vita activa* by relating how I came to know and

value her work. Finally, I outline the aspects of *narrative knowing* that influenced my approach to working with teachers' stories. Together my understandings of Arendtian *action*, *practical knowledge*, and *narrative knowing* provide the conceptual foundation for this research.

Practical knowledge

This study is informed by my understandings of how people can come to know through practice or experience. These understandings of practical knowledge are based in Aristotelian *phronesis* and John Dewey's' *pragmatism* which are based in action, experience, and reflection, and offer a way to discuss the knowledge that resides in practice.

Joseph Dunne's 1993 work *Back to the Rough Ground* demonstrates how practical reasoning or knowledge is dominated by more technical ways of knowing. Dunne's (1993) reaction to the behavioural objectives movement in education finds him in a company of philosophers who are attempting to combat the establishment of "a particular mode of reason as the necessary and sufficient guide in all areas of practice and indeed in the general conduct of life" (p. 8). Dunne begins this conversation on practical knowledge with the works of John Henry Newman, R.G. Collingwood, Hannah Arendt, Hans-Georg Gadamer, and Jurgen Habermas which leads him back to Aristotle's notions of *phronesis* and *techné*. *Phronesis* is the knowledge associated with activities of living in relationship with others and represents an experiential knowing that is required of practice or *praxis*. *Techné*, or "technique," is a kind of knowledge that helps one make something durable, like a chair. *Techné* is required of the activity of making or *poiesis*.

These Aristotelian ideas, in a contemporary sense, are the “practical” or the “technical” and, in teaching, an “art” and a “science” approach (Sato, Kern, McDonald & Rogers, 2010).

Conle and Sakamoto (2002) offer two definitions of practical that teachers may encounter. The first is the technical practical as “using known means to create equally known outcomes” (p. 428). Often teachers are given concrete steps and strategies to follow which allows for efficiency and provides a sense of certainty. This technical practical approach, however, can lead to deskilling of teachers and a less responsive classroom. As a former teacher I have experienced the technical approach to improving teaching with “practical” ideas that are designed to improve student achievement. I participated in several staff development sessions and was assured that if I delivered instruction exactly as they told me then my students’ test scores would improve.

The second definition offered by Conle and Sakamoto (2002) is a phronetic and responsive sense of the practical. They define this approach to the practical as one that “allows inquiry and is connected to personal and cultural histories” (p. 429) in order to help improve teaching and learning. What Conle and Sakamoto are distinguishing here are the differences between teachers’ responses to their everyday issues that are stimulated by external (techne) or internal (phronesis) mandates.

It is in Conle and Sakamoto’s (2002) second sense of the practical in which I ground my research. Practical knowledge in teaching is generated both from experience and through forms of practitioner inquiry such as action research; it is captured through methods of reflection like autobiography, oral history, and storytelling, among others.

This knowledge on teaching has been labeled as personal practical knowledge (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990), insider knowledge (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993), and practical theories and practical reasoning (Orton, 1997; Sanders & McCutcheon, 1986). Conle and Sakamoto (2002) discuss this knowledge as “that which happens as a result of prior experience” (p. 432). These ways of knowing also find resonance in John Dewey’s pragmatic philosophy that focuses on knowing in and through action. Knowledge first lives “in the muscles” and then later we translate that knowledge into language or other symbolic forms (Biesta & Burbules, 2003, p.11). Knowledge is constructed through what Dewey refers to as a *transaction* between a person and their environment; in other words people learn something in the doing as well as by doing something.

Action and *The Human Condition*

Now I briefly introduce the major ideas of Hannah Arendt and how I have made sense of them in my teaching experiences. Arendt’s ideas will be discussed in more detail in chapter two. Hannah Arendt is a well known political philosopher who was a student of Martin Heidegger and Karl Jaspers in Germany. She fled the Nazi regime in 1933, worked with the Jewish resistance for a time in France and by 1941 she had immigrated to the United States where she lived and wrote for the rest of her life. Arendt’s writing in *The Human Condition* (1958) can be seen as a response to modernity or technologies that can deny our ability to act and be human. Joseph Dunne drew upon Arendt’s distinction between *action* and making (*work*) to explore an alternative view to “the technical mastery over the conditionality of human life” that has come to dominate the way we live (Dunne, 1993, p. 8). This “technical mastery” presents itself in that strive to apply

scientific methods to all aspects of human experience and renders human possibility in clear, predictable outcomes and assigning particular experience as anomalies or deviations from the norm.

Arendt's major philosophical work, *The Human Condition* (1958), is concerned with the *vita activa*, the fundamental activities that make us distinctly human. The activities that she explicates in her book are *labor*, *work*, and *action*. Arendt uses common words to express very specific things; for example with the word action. In Arendtian terms action can only occur between people. The 1968 March on Washington is an example of action; or, more simply, a parent-teacher conference is one as well. If a person is writing, she or he is participating in work, according to Arendt. The outcome of Arendtian work is some sort of tangible thing or product. If a person is preparing a meal, then she or he is engaging in labor. In Arendtian terms, labor is about sustaining ourselves biologically. Labor consists of the activities that help us stay alive.

In this section I will briefly define crucial Arendtian vocabulary and describe how these ideas helped me make sense of some of my teaching experiences. This study is particularly concerned with action—human interaction that focuses on what one says and does. In this action, saying or doing, a critical part of a person is revealed. What is revealed in action is the *who* of a person according to Arendt. Arendtian action has several components: *natality*, *plurality*, *promising*, and *forgiving*. Briefly, natality is our human ability to begin. Such as when someone decides to run for president, go to college or write a book. Plurality is the condition of unique individuals living together in the world. Promising and forgiving are the bookends of action. Promising can be correlated

to intent, and forgiveness to release. Promising and forgiving are important because the ends of human action are unknown. This unpredictability is because of natality, the human ability to act in new and unprecedented ways. Arendt speaks of promising as a form of guarantee to ends of action. Forgiveness, a wholly new action that cannot be anticipated, releases humans from the unintended consequences of action. Belief in promises and the ability to practice forgiveness depend on a sense of respect for those involved in the interaction. *Behavior* and *tyranny* are the dark side of Arendt's thought. Behavior is when we lose a sense of our natality and become "cogs in the machine" and fail to remember the capacity to act. Tyranny is the denial or prevention of action by something or someone beyond the individual.

Arendt's theory provides a vocabulary to talk about the unpredictability of human interactions—the ones where we are left scratching our heads saying "That's not what I thought would happen," or "that's not what I meant to happen." During various courses in graduate school certain experiences that I had while teaching kept floating up in my memory. Apparently these are moments I could not let go of—moments that transformed me as a teacher and moments that challenged me as person. After reading about Arendt's concept of action, what happened on the morning on September 11th came rushing back. I had not planned to go outside and certainly people had not expected me to do that.

According to Arendt, since action is not directed toward an end the end is unknown and we are not sovereign over, or in control of, our action (Dunne, 1993, p. 12). Only after the fact, through the creation of stories, is the end known and understood completely. This is because Arendtian action has a narrative, constructivist quality about

it (Benhabib, 2000). My actions on September 11th felt incredibly right but I could not articulate why I had done it at the time. That action, that moment revealed a deep part of me. It revealed who I am in the face of potential peril and tragedy.

Action has consequences far beyond what one can see. Sometimes a person is not the one who initiates action, but gets caught in the reverberations of the actions of another. Arendt uses the concept of a *web of relationships* to describe how action can affect those beyond the immediate actors. A useful metaphor for this concept is that of the ripple effect. For example, a heroic example of action is when a person chooses to save a drowning person without regard for her own safety. When this woman rescues the man, her action has impact and influence beyond just the two of them. It impacts his relationships with all the people in his life and vice versa. Perhaps even this story is told to people who do not even know the man or the woman. The story, which is symbolic of the action, keeps rippling into others' webs of relationships. While this example is a positive one, with the story of the heroic deed perhaps inspiring others, people's action can have negative effects on those around them.

In the web of relationships where action occurs, people are simultaneously actors and sufferers, according to Arendt. This is because a person's action can collide with another action. In my final year of teaching a collision of action, which is grounded in natality, occurred and left me seeking solace in graduate school. I was placed just prior to the beginning of the year in a school that was not, and had not, done well academically. As the year progressed it came to the fore that most teachers and the administrators had very different philosophies on trying to improve student academic performance. I was

initially on the same track with the administration and was working hard to develop relationships with my fifth graders. Once some students began misbehaving, however, directives from the administrators regarding basic classroom management such as student bathroom and locker use, recess, as well as curricular and instructional decisions began appearing in my mailbox. I became stuck. The action of the administration not only impacted my relations with my students, but my relationships with the other teachers, and the students' relationships with other students throughout the school.

This experience of my final year teaching can also be read as a collision between work and action. Work is about the creation of a product. My focus was on relationships, action, whereas the administration's focus was on test scores. The administration believed that that it could *make* the fifth graders do well on the test through the denial of recess and the imposition of curriculum fidelity. Hannah Arendt believed treating humans as raw material to be made into something was erroneous and impossible because humans have a capacity for natality and action, to begin and do something unprecedented. There are circumstances, however, that can be created that lead people into forgetting about these capacities.

An environment, physical or psychological, that is created to prevent action is a tyranny. What people do in a tyranny is called behavior, according to Arendt. Behavior is doing what is expected, not pressing against the prevailing norms of a situation or place. In my fourth year of teaching I conducted a year-long action research inquiry assisted by mentors and colleagues in my district. Part of this action research inquiry was to submit a paper to the district and potentially receive a monetary stipend. I was particularly proud

of this project but did not receive marks high enough from the people at the district level who assessed the projects to receive the stipend. As a teacher I had created a classroom atmosphere that allowed me to work with individual students and switch the focus to my students' academic work rather than their behavior. While for the district project I was able to choose the actual issue that I examined, I was expected to conform to delivering a product that supported the district's notion of research. The district's formal invalidation was a public denial of my action in the classroom and damaged my incentive to improve my practice in the future. In Arendtian terms the district preferred behavior to action.

Arendt wrote, "The fact that man¹ is capable of action means that the unexpected can be expected from him, that he is able to perform what is infinitely improbable" (1958, p. 178). Using Arendt's framework I was able to make some sense of my teaching experiences and what it means to be human. Arendt would argue that humans are uncertain beings with unanticipated abilities to act in new ways. I found through the composition and examinations of my stories I have come to learn more about teaching and myself and what I have done in the midst of uncertainty.

Narrative

In *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds* (1986) Jerome Bruner articulates two complementary but distinct ways of thinking and constructing reality. Bruner's paradigmatic mode is thinking that strives for abstraction and testability. We most often associate this mode with logic, mathematics and science. His narrative mode deals with intention, action and consequence. This mode seeks to put the "timeless...into particulars of experience and to locate the experience in time and place" (Bruner, 1986, p. 13)

¹ Arendt uses the masculine pronoun throughout her work. I make no attempt to change or correct this.

Donald Polkinghorne (1988) extends and refines Bruner's conception of the narrative mode. Even though we cannot see the cognitive process of the narrative mode, what we do see are the stories that humans tell to make meaning of experience. Polkinghorne (1988) defines three realms of human existence: material, organic, and mental. One aspect of the mental realm is that of meaning and one primary way in which we give meaning to human experience is through narrative. According to Polkinghorne (1988), narrative works to "draw together human action and the events that affect human beings" (p. 6). People, through the construction of their own stories and reflection on the stories of others, can learn what is done and what to do.

Every moment experienced in teaching and in our life may be seen as a narrative or story. Stories, or narratives, have the ability to evoke nuances in human interaction. We come to understand love or frustration, or teaching, in rich ways through reading and listening to stories. The importance of studying the narratives that are created to give meaning to human experience is to allow individuals and groups "to increase the power and control they have over their own actions" (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 10).

The theories of the practical, Arendtian action and narrative are all tied by post-modern conceptions of existence. Ways of knowing and being in this emerging post-modern world are of a contextual and particular manner. Toulmin (1990) speaks of the return to the oral, particular, local and timely in understanding and rendering meaning to existence. This study and the theories and ideas that influence it are all part of this post-modern turn but more importantly they are about the knowledge and knowing, as Toulmin so eloquently puts it,

needed to put techniques to work in concrete cases dealing with actual problems (i.e., phronesis). Aristotle shared Plato's hope that we would actually discover truths that held generally ("on the whole") of human beings as well as of natural things; but he saw that our chance of acting wisely in a practical field depends upon our readiness, not just to calculate the timeless demands of intellectual formulae, but also to make decisions *pros ton kairon*—that is, "as the occasion requires". (p.190)

Using the framework of Hannah Arendt's theory to interpret teachers' stories allows a deeper understanding of what teachers do "as the occasion requires" by providing knowledge about teachers' daily lives that reside in the realm of unpredictable human relations. Using Arendt's framework and vocabulary initiates a complex conversation about what it means to be human and how we relate to one another in the context of teaching.

Overview of Study

I chose the school site for this study because of previous experience working with teachers there. What drew me was an intriguing but unnamable quality about the teachers and school. The school, located on the far reaches of the first ring suburb in which the district is located, gave a sense of a small town school with a diverse population of students. The school and district were pioneering a collaborative model of teaching that was distinct among my experiences with local schools and districts. The school provided a rich resource of new and experienced teachers engaging with a multicultural population as well as new innovative pedagogies. I knew there would be many stories told here. The nine teachers' who chose to participate had teaching experience ranging from 4 to 29 years. Overall, the teachers had a combined total of over 90 years teaching experience throughout the elementary grades. All the teachers had taught at this school for the majority of their careers.

The data that I collected over six months were: two daylong classroom observations, one interview, and one follow-up interview determined by the content of the first interview. In both observations I was a participant-observer, which means that even though I tried initially to remain apart from the class and just “observe” I often found myself being asked questions by students, talking to other adults in the room and interacting with the teacher to assist students. I conducted the first interview after the two classroom observations. While there were particular questions most interviews became more like conversations in which I collected biographical information, and asked teachers to recollect stories of challenge and unresolved issues in their teaching relationships. The open-ended nature of these questions led to rich individual stories of experience. The focus on “challenge” tapped into the nature of a “happening,” or action, in which the coming together of individuals was unpredictable and the outcome was understood through the creation of story.

Story or narrative resonates with Arendt’s thought; she wrote that action “creates the condition for remembrance, that is, for history” (p. 9). Since the ends of action are unknown, only after the fact through the creation of stories is the end understood. In focusing on the stories that emerged from the interviews a more complex portrait of teachers’ experiences emerged.

This study is in a unique position to contribute to the theorizing of teaching in schools in powerful new ways through the interpretation of teacher stories with Hannah Arendt’s theory. I have attempted to capture and preserve the complex dynamics of teaching from the teacher’s personal perspective while simultaneously using a theoretical

frame to interpret teaching as an act of humans in relationship with each other. Coupling Arendt's theory with epistemological frameworks that focus on knowledge generated through and in action I have attempted to relate stories that will contribute to the discussion about where uncertainty is located in teaching and what teachers do in uncertain moments.

Structure of this Dissertation

There are five additional chapters that follow this overview chapter. In chapter 2, I review the literature on uncertainty in teachers' work, the use of story in teacher education and provide an extended discussion of Hannah Arendt's thought and how her work has been used in educational settings. In chapter 3, I detail the motivations that brought me to this study, the evolution of the modes of inquiry, the methods of analysis and share stories of 4 out of the 9 teachers who participated in this work. In chapter 4, I present the extended stories and Arendtian analyses of five teachers whose stories emerged as particularly powerful representatives of what is done in the face of uncertainty. In chapter 5, I engage in a discussion of what these five teachers and their stories illuminate about uncertainty, teaching and the worth of Arendtian thought for teacher education and development. In chapter 6, I reflect on the entire inquiry and value of using Hannah Arendt's ideas in examining teaching relationships.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter I explore the literature that led me to inquire more deeply into how teachers make meaning of their actions during uncertain times. The three strands of literature I explore are: uncertainty in teachers' work, the use of story in teacher education, and Hannah Arendt's ideas in education.

The literature that discusses uncertainty in teaching is predominantly located in large sociological works or through individual and personal cases of instructional dilemmas and decision making. The literature on the use of story in teacher development is quite large and encompasses philosophical and methodological issues as well as empirical studies on the use of story in prospective teacher education and professional development. After reviewing these bodies of literature, I share conceptual and empirical works in education that draw upon the work of Hannah Arendt and I conclude with an extended discussion of Arendt's thought.

Uncertainty

Thinking about and studying what teachers do and why they do it is a perennial preoccupation among educational researchers. Sociologists, psychologists, and historians, among others, have had their say about what teachers do and have done and why (Cuban, 1993; Hargreaves, 1994; Jackson, 1990; Lortie, 2002). One aspect of teachers' work that has remained constant is that of uncertainty. In this section I review empirical studies on

teachers' work and classroom life and demonstrate the ways uncertainty in teaching is conceptualized.

Perspectives and larger research studies

A book first published in 1975 established ideas and norms about teachers that persist to this day. This book, *Schoolteacher*, by Dan Lortie, is best known for the origination of the theory of apprenticeship of observation. This theory holds that teachers tend to teach how they were taught and it also posits that since almost everyone has extensive schooling experiences as a student, everyone has an opinion about schools and teaching. Perhaps less well known about Lortie's work, but persistent nonetheless, are the ideas of uncertainty that he uncovers from his data.

In the second half of *Schoolteacher* Lortie pursues a more "phenomenological" path and analyzes interviews to uncover the meaning that teachers attach to their work (Lortie, 2002, p. 106). Some major conclusions he draws from these data are about teachers' wants and rewards. Teachers want more time to teach in their classrooms and their primary work satisfaction is derived from experiences in the classroom (Lortie, 2002). Lortie calls these feelings "psychic rewards," which are intrinsic rewards that ebb and flow with teachers' self-defined goals and enjoyment of their work. In Lortie's data this is most often defined by knowing one has "reached" a student in their classroom (Lortie, 2002, p. 103). Since the wants and needs of the teachers Lortie studied are centered in the classroom this leads to two other ideas: *individualism* and *presentism*. Individualism is the idea that teachers are alone in their classroom and presentism is teachers' tendency to focus on short-term goals. For Lortie teachers' psychic rewards are

uncertain; teacher individualism is influenced by uncertainty and teachers focus on the present because of the uncertain future of their work.

Many aspects of Lortie's ideas are being left behind in 21st century classrooms. In many schools the "egg-crate" mentality is a thing of the past and individualism is being replaced by collaboration. Issues of presentism still persist, such as when teachers need to attend to the immediacy of the classroom but—with advances in teacher education and development—teachers and schools are planning long-term across grade levels and disciplines. The major conclusion of "endemic uncertainties," however, is still an issue in teaching (Lortie, 2002, p. 159).

Phillip Jackson's (1990) *Life in Classrooms* is similar to Lortie's work in that it tries to uncover the real experience of teaching through analyzing interviews and observations of classrooms. The one-hour interviews occurred after school and focused on questions about how teachers know when they are effective, what their reactions are to their own authority and that of their supervisors, and what their personal satisfaction is in their work. Where uncertainty surfaces in Jacksons' work is in teachers' perceptions of autonomy and their source of satisfaction. The responses from teachers about increased curricular constraints and classroom evaluation can be grouped into two areas according to Jackson, fear of loss of spontaneity, and insult to professional decision-making (Jackson, 1990). Jackson summarizes by saying that teachers desired freedom within limits because no teacher balked at the idea of guidelines from curriculum committees or textbooks (Jackson, 1990). Jackson's *individualism* is where the teachers receive their psychic rewards, or what he calls the "joys of teaching." These are "closely tied to what

the teacher sees happening with individual students” (Jackson, 1990, p. 134). The teachers also believe that part of the joy of teaching is the mix of individuals in the group that makes teaching interesting.

Teachers in Jackson’s study seem to get joy out of uncertainty. He writes, “the frequent occurrence of unexpected events is a source of satisfaction: the fact that no one can predict with great accuracy what a day’s teaching holds in store creates ... an atmosphere of pleasant anticipation about her work, perhaps even excitement” (Jackson, 1990, p. 135). He illustrates this idea with several examples from teachers. The teachers Jackson interviews seem less hesitant and less constrained by the uncertainties of teaching than the teachers from Lortie’s study.

Andy Hargreaves’ 1994 book, *Changing teachers, changing times: teachers’ work and culture in the postmodern age*, takes up the notion of uncertainty as part of the expanding role of the teacher in a post-modern 20th century. The expanding role of the teacher includes “encompassing social and emotional goals as well as academic ones, concerns for the child’s welfare at home as well as their performance in school” (p. 126). Uncertainty stems from the open-ended nature of teaching. The teachers in Hargreaves’ study speak of this in terms of the notion that one could “always do more.” Lessons, activities and student work could always be attended to with more care, thoughtfulness, and detail. The problem, as Hargreaves asserts, is that the goals of teaching and roles of teachers are framed in “diffuse terms” and become “impossible to meet with any certainty” (p.126). For Hargreaves, uncertainty is a condition of post-modernity. He writes, “[T]he declining certainty attached to scientific expertise has far reaching

ramifications for the changing world of education and the place of teachers' work within it" (Hargreaves, 1994, p. 57).

Mary Kennedy's (2005) book, *Inside teaching: How classroom life undermines reform*, takes a look directly at the relationship between classroom life and change in practice. The themes that emerge from her data are: how teachers think about their practices, creating a tranquil environment, managing conversations about content, and unexpected events. The teachers Kennedy studied expressed goals and hopes for instruction but also things they wanted to avoid in their lessons. They wanted to avoid disruptions to the momentum of their lessons such as unexpected student responses. Teachers aspired to be fair or kind; they also felt obligated to the school or students to accomplish something. Kennedy gives a quintessential elementary school example: during a science lesson on light and shadow the teacher comments that there could be no shadow without light. A primary student responded that there could be because her kitten was named Shadow. Kennedy (2005) writes, "This comment created an instant conflict...because she [the teacher] wanted to respond positively to all her students and she also wanted to maintain the momentum of the lesson and did not want the discussion derailed by this comment" (p. 57).

This scenario leads us to another part of Kennedy's analysis: unexpected events. In the conversation about student-teacher interactions during the course of a lesson we see a thread of the uncertainty in classroom practices that was laid down by Jackson and Lortie. Kennedy (2005) writes, "There are myriad ways in which students may deviate from the teacher's envisioned lesson, and many of those deviations arise from enthusiasm

rather than disengagement” (p. 97). While Kennedy analyzes and categorizes these unexpected events, she does not deeply examine teachers’ reactions to these events. She suggests that teachers may not want students to be *too* engaged because this will disrupt the momentum of lessons. Kennedy offers the idea that if reformers can increase “teachers’ tolerance for ambiguity or by increasing their ability to respond to unexpected ideas, they may increase teachers’ willingness and ability to engage students intellectually” (Kennedy, 2005, p. 123). In my inquiry I hope to uncover through the use of narrative how teachers react and manage uncertain moments in the classroom and their teaching relationships.

Smaller research studies on uncertainty

Now I turn to the research literature of case studies on instructional and classroom uncertainty. Susan Kidd Villaume (2000) studied uncertainty through a series of case studies on language arts reform in Alabama. She wrote of the “terrible freedom” some teachers felt when they were asked to teach the children and not a program. Some teachers were uncomfortable with this uncertainty. Kidd Villaume indicates that these teachers had a more technical vision of teaching. On the other hand, some teachers embraced this freedom and viewed the change as an “opportunity to venture even more deeply into creating authentic and challenging language and literacy environments” (Kidd Villaume, 2000, p. 21).

Molly Romano’s (2006) self-study research defines “bumpy moments” as moments when teachers are required to make decisions and respond to problems in practice. She shares a story of needing to immediately respond to a student’s off-color

comment and the other “bumpy moments” she had in her second year of elementary teaching. Using the framework of a reflective practitioner, Romano encourages the examination of these moments to help teachers “recognize, examine and potentially change or further develop” their practice. Another educator, Anne Hill (1994), relates that she thinks of the uncertain moments in teaching as times when she is surprised by children. She describes a moment working with a 5-year-old boy who was labeled severely autistic. She writes, “I stood watching and asking myself how could I possibly force Peter to stand up and walk, when I would never do that with my own children—I would pick them up! So, I picked Peter up. He opened his eyes, looked me straight in the eyes, and kissed me on the cheek....He had communicated with me!” (p. 339). Hill goes on to write, “I have learned to expect these possibilities. I have learned just enough to know that I do not always know what might happen in the classroom with children” (p. 350).

In Maggie Lampert's (1985) essay *How do teachers manage to teach?*, she shares a dilemma she faced when teaching fifth grade math: her fifth graders decided that boys and girls could not sit near each other. Each solution she came up with—assigning seats, moving from one end of the room to another or changing the tables to desks—had a problem. When faced with uncertainty on which course of action to take she explains that she sought balance between her expectations for herself and the needs of her students. Andy Hargreaves' (1994) speaks of “routine uncertainty” as one of the paradoxes of postmodernism. Lampert's dilemma is an example of a routine uncertainty since children will at some point not want to sit where they are assigned.

Lenses for viewing uncertainty in teaching

Examining uncertainty is important for it is one of the major issues perplexing teachers and teacher educators. Uncertainty or unanticipated events or unknown outcomes, all form a part of teachers' daily work in classrooms. Floden and Buchmann's 1993 article on uncertainty took the stance that too much uncertainty potentially promotes anarchy, but too little uncertainty could promote dogmatism. Essentially, for Floden and Buchmann, uncertainty is a necessary component of teaching.

Uncertainty is viewed by teachers and researchers in different ways in the research literature on teachers' work. Lortie's "endemic uncertainties" concerning the source of satisfaction in work seemed to burden teachers. Kennedy's form of uncertainty manifested itself in the teachers' inability to respond to unexpected conversations and questions from students who were actively engaged in the lesson. These teachers, according to Kennedy, were often stymied by how to respond to students authentically and still maintain the rigorous curriculum schedule. Teachers in Kidd Villaume's study simultaneously enjoyed and suffered when asked to teach to the students and not focus solely on the curriculum. Anne Hill and the teachers in Philips Jackson's study found uncertainty to be a source of satisfaction. Lampert neither expressed joy nor fear at her dilemmas, just sought a practical and thoughtful response that would benefit the classroom for her and her students.

Since teaching is often viewed as an art and a science it is interesting to note how uncertainty in teaching can be viewed with these different lenses. If uncertainty is conceptualized through the science lens of teaching then the avenue to reduce potential

uncertainties is through the application of routines and reforms and other external forms of regulation, as demonstrated in the research of Lortie and Kennedy. If uncertainty is conceptualized through the arts lens then the response to uncertainty becomes more local and internal, more a way of being, responding and knowing as observed in the research of Lampert, Hill and Romano. Kidd Villaume's study reveals the tension that occurs when having to ascribe to an either/or way of thinking about uncertainty in teaching. In teaching there are times when the reduction of uncertainty through routines is appropriate. Other times, most notably when dealing with human relationships, responding to the unknown is a personal experience.

In this exploration I seek to uncover and describe teachers' personal ways of responding to unexpected events. Helsing's (2007) review of uncertainty in teaching supports the idea that teachers' response to uncertainty is multifaceted. Her findings suggest that research on conditions of teachers' work and school reform often position uncertainty negatively and strive to reduce uncertainty through structural changes. According to Helsing, the literature on reflective practice and inquiry, like the studies of Lampert (1985) and Romano (2006), find uncertainty as a positive stimulus for growth and change. Helsing (2007) concludes that uncertainty as a condition of teaching is a more "multi-valent" concept (p. 13) and that simply seeing uncertainty as an asset or a liability is too simplistic. She concludes, "If we are to understand more fully the ways that teachers experience uncertainties and dilemmas in their work, we may find these experience to be quite complex, laden with potential for both positive and negative results" (p.13.)

Overall, the literature supports the idea that uncertainty is always going to part of teaching and those teachers that understand the dynamic and uncertain nature of teaching are able to act effectively when faced with uncertainty (Floden & Buchmann, 1993; Hatch, 1999; Labaree, 2000). As Hatch (1999) writes, “Teachers’ work lives are mainly experienced in the ‘gray’ areas between ‘black and white’ alternatives. Paradox and contradiction are inherent components of the teaching workplace” (p. 237). Since teachers’ lives are experienced in gray areas it is important to use multiple avenues to explore ways to understand “paradox and contradiction.” One way teachers come to know the nature of uncertainties in teaching is through the study of stories about their lives and work.

Teacher Stories

In this section I will review the work of story advocates Kathy Carter, as well as Jean Clandinin and Michael Connelly, among others, followed by the research literature on the use of story in prospective teacher education and teacher development.

Story versus narrative

Often narrative and story are conflated as one entity or one is used to describe the other (Daiute & Lightfoot, 2004; Holley & Colyar, 2009). Throughout this inquiry I use story to represent the oral or textual representations of experience and narrative as the overarching methodology that works with stories as data. A story is the relating of an event, oral or written, that contains a narrative unity. Narrative unity is existence of characters, setting and a beginning, middle and end that all tie together to help the reader

or listener understand what happened. Story, biography, autobiography, ethnographies, life histories, and oral histories are type of texts used in narrative research.

Casey (1995/96) writes that the arrival of narrative in research is not a paradigm shift but heralds a post paradigmatic age where new and traditional methods coexist to help us develop deeper understanding of what we study. Stories “make a point about teaching that would otherwise be difficult to convey with traditional research methods” (Ornstein, 1995, p. 7). In her article *The Place of Story in the Study of Teaching and Teacher Education* (1993) Kathy Carter advocates story as a mode of knowing and that stories represent the complex demands of teaching. In a later article with Walter Doyle (2003) she emphasizes “much of the practical knowledge teachers acquire from teaching arises from actions in situations—the essential ingredients of story” (p. 130–31). They continue in this article to advocate for a narrative based curriculum that allows preservice teachers to start developing their teacher story as opposed to their student story. Jean Clandinin and Michael Connelly are perhaps the most well known names associated with the use of story in research. Clandinin and Connelly advocate studying story as a way to understand the complex experience of teaching. Their particular research approach, narrative inquiry, will be discussed in the next chapter.

Stories by teachers in teacher education

Story is represented in the empirical literature in two ways: stories from experienced teachers that are told or read by prospective teachers and stories that are created by experienced and prospective teachers as a means to reflection and development. Marlowe’s (2006) research centers on the stories, actually novels, written

by special education teacher Torey Hayden and their influence on prospective teachers. His work finds that using what he calls Torey Hayden's "teacher lore," or her stories of her work, has a positive effect of changing preservice teachers' dispositions towards working with children with disabilities. Kienholz's (2002) work reflects on the use of his oral stories of experience teaching high school as well as the use of published works. He concludes that stories help make the familiar strange and make "explicit" the connection between theory and practice, between belief and experience. He writes that stories "provide a venue where our own perhaps unchallenged assumptions about how things ought to be collide with scenarios of how things actually are" (p. 38). He cautions, though, that the power of these stories to transform beliefs can only occur if readers attend to these stories "as something other than entertainment" (p. 38). Kathy Carter's work with story centers on the concept of well remembered events, which are incidents or episodes that are observed or experienced as especially memorable by the prospective or practicing teachers. These moments, according to Carter (1995), "provide a powerful window into teachers' personal understandings" (p. 328).

Listening to and telling stories in teacher education

Mary Louis Gomez (1996) and Frances O'Connell Rust (1999) explore the impact of listening to and telling stories among and between experienced and novice teachers. Gomez's work focuses on the self-reflective, empowering nature of telling one's story. In her work she has student teachers share stories of classroom experiences and finds that the teller and listener are transformed through the telling and sharing of stories. She does indicate, however, that to have this practice influence how the teachers respond to and

improve their own practice it must occur in a trusting community. O'Connell Rust grounds her work in focusing "on the ways in which conversation, story, and narrative enable us to understand the complex work of learning to teach" (p.370). The stories and findings she shares come from the New York City participants in the Sustainable Teachers Learning and Research Network Project which is a community of learners (novice, preservice and experienced educators) exploring how conversation supports the development of knowledge. Her research found that these conversations and the space provided for the listening and telling of stories acknowledges teachers' work. It also allowed teachers to move out of their daily concerns and engage in larger conversation across classrooms and schools.

Others have found that telling stories to make sense of one's actions leads to increased self-knowledge. Molly Romano's (2006) self-study on "bumpy-moments" mentioned above uses story as a method. Romano created deeply contextual stories about her moments of uncertainty and used these as a way to analyze what she was thinking and doing during those moments in order to change her practice. Coulter, Michael, and Poyner (2007), used narrative inquiry in a longitudinal study of two teachers, and found when the teachers told stories about their experience they then shifted practices to address the issues present in their stories.

There are several researchers who ground their work with story in the concepts and ideas articulated by Jean Clandinin and Michael Connelly. Cheryl Craig's (2007) work focuses on the meaning made through teachers' experience of reform. Craig conceptualizes this knowledge as "story constellations" which demonstrate how teachers'

stories are related across the professional, personal, and practical knowledge landscapes as defined by the work of Clandinin and Connelly. Olson and Craig's (2001) work with narrative in what they call teacher knowledge communities focuses on the idea that "profound meaning can be found in teachers' everyday experience" (p.671). Whelan, Huber, Rose, Davies, and Clandinin (2001) examine the story told and retold by the teacher Annie Davies. This story is about an incident with a student, parent, and principal which gets told and retold across different settings. The researchers conclude that in the simple recounting of stories there is little to be gained. What happens, they argue, is that stories are simply affirmed and reified and become closed to the possible knowledge in the stories. The researchers advocate for the re-imagining of the story in which different readings and questions are asked in order to make the story and experience knowledge generating.

All the studies contribute a dimension of understanding about teaching that would not be known except through the use of story. Readers learn that teachers change practice, make meaning and share knowledge through stories. In this inquiry I present teachers' stories to understand their experience. I also present teacher stories to interrogate the usefulness of theory to understand the nature of uncertainty in these stories. The theoretical framework that I bring to these stories is that of the philosophy of the *vita activa*—life of action—that Hannah Arendt articulates in her work, *The Human Condition*.

Hannah Arendt

Arendt's thought and how it relates to educational settings has seen a recent surge in interest, predominantly by those in philosophy of education departments. I am not a trained philosopher, steeped in deep traditions of metaphysical contemplation. I think, theorize, and muse about things such as: how do we know, and why do we do the things we do, and what are we here for anyway? I am not an Arendtian scholar, but her thoughts about the human condition resonate with me as a teacher in trying to make sense of my actions and the human relationships in which I find myself. Therefore in this section I will briefly review where Arendt has found a home in educational settings then delve into relating my understanding of her thought and its relation to teaching.

At the turn of the 21st century there was a rise in the amount of writings on the applicability of Arendt's work, particularly her concepts of *natality* and *action*, to educational settings. This increase in her popularity revolved around the 50th anniversary of the publication of her major work, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1950), and the new publication of correspondence between her and Martin Heidegger that was previously unavailable (Benhabib, 2000). Arendt's thought has been brought to bear on teacher education, pedagogical practices, student-teacher relationships, democratic and civic education, as well as teacher research. This literature is small but conceptually very deep. Often, Arendt's thought is coupled with others in order to make sense of educational situations. Deborah Britzman (2007) couples Arendtian natality with the philosophy of William James and the psychoanalytic theories of Wilfred Bion in order to articulate an ethics of teacher education. Arendt has been paired most recently with Levinas to explore

the concept of hope in K–12 teaching and Derrida on authority in higher education teaching (Edgoose, 2009; O’Byrne, 2005).

None of the writings that work with Arendtian concepts offer simple ideas. Any work on or by Arendt will attest to the fact that there is uncertainty and unpredictability in human relationships. My inquiry, using Arendtian ideas, is an attempt at a deep reading of teachers’ stories to investigate what is uncertain about teaching, how it manifests itself in teachers’ lives and their response to it. This review will focus on the ideas of Hannah Arendt and the theoretical and empirical works that are most fruitful to the analysis of my data. The writings that I have chosen to focus on are those that analyze and expand upon Arendt’s ideas put forth in *The Human Condition*. This is by no means an exhaustive review of all work by educational theorists working with Hannah Arendt’s ideas.²

Finding Hannah Arendt

Joseph Dunne’s (1993) work on the Aristotelian conception of phronesis addressed “the jurisdiction of [technical] reason in human affairs” (p. 8) and he used Arendt’s distinction between action and work to explore an alternative view to “the technical mastery over the conditionality of human life” that has come to dominate the way we live (p. 358). I found immediate resonance with Arendt’s ideas through reading Dunne’s work. His use of her theory to argue against narrowly prescribed outcomes in education moved me to go back to the source. As an amateur historian I had heard of Arendt’s work in relation to the Holocaust and in particular her work at the Eichmann

² To understand the wide variety in which Arendt’s thought is used in education I encourage an exploration of the 2010 special edition of Teachers College Record on Hannah Arendt. *Teachers College Record* Volume 112 Number 2, 2010

Trial rendered in *The Banality of Evil*. Arendt's thinking has proved to be controversial but more importantly her thought was always evolving based on her experiences and dialogues with others (Benhabib, 2000; Pickett, 2009).

Hannah Arendt is a political philosopher whose work is situated in the tradition of civic republicanism. Arendt's political theory is grounded in the ideas of deliberation. Deliberation is valued by Arendt because it allows citizens to exercise their agency and develop capacity for judgment (d'Entreves, 2006). This ideal political activity that she advocates is diametrically opposed to the political conditions in Germany in the 1930s. It is often said that her writings were always trying to figure out why Stalinism and Nazism could occur and what could be done to prevent it from happening again (Benhabib, 2000).

In my inquiry I apply Arendt's ideas of the *vita activa* to stories of teaching. In 1958 she published *The Human Condition* that investigates the categories of the *vita activa*: *labor*, *work* and *action*. The *vita activa* are the activities that make us human as opposed to merely animal. *The Human Condition* is seen as Arendt's most purely philosophical, rather than political, writing (Benhabib, 2000). The reason that this book is seen as more philosophical than others is that the premise is to bring into balance the life of action (*vita activa*) with the life of contemplation (*vita contemplativa*) through historical and philosophical argument.

While I have read many of her other writings, this study is concerned only with the ideas presented in *The Human Condition*. I am indebted to the careful and thoughtful reinterpretation of *The Human Condition* by Margaret Canovan (1992) and Seyla

Benhabib (2000) whose writings and conclusion about Arendt's resonate with my own thoughts.

Arendt and education

It is important to know that Arendt wrote very little concerning education directly. The two essays that she did write focus on the need to protect children from a "world they did not make" (Arendt, 1968, p. 189). Her essay on the Little Rock Desegregation case³ was prompted by the pictures in the newspaper of the young white people with their faces and mouths twisted in hate. Arendt's initial response was one that advocated for the separation of children from political acts, such as desegregation. Initially criticized for this stance, she eventually "refined her judgment and came to recognize the perspectives of children and the possible goods gained from undergoing this kind of painful initiation into adulthood" (Pickett, 2009, p. 188). While her thinking may have been refined, her basic idea, that education and teachers have a special role in relation to the world and children, remained.

In "The Crisis in Education" that was published in her book of essays, *Between Past and Future*, Arendt (1968) posits the crisis in education in America in the 1950s as more than just the "puzzling question of why Johnny can't read" (p.174). Arendt finds the crisis in education to be partially the fault of progressive education, in particular, life-adjustment education, as well as the advent of modernity (Levison, 2010). Arendt (1968) centers education in natality, "the fact that humans are born into world," and this has special implications for children (p.174). Her analysis is that it is in education that the

³ For a history of the controversy of this essay see Seyla Benhabib's (2000) *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt*.

two paths of helping children develop and introducing them to the world collide. Arendt contends that children are born into a world they did not make and it is the shared responsibility of educators to introduce that world to the children. Arendt's views on education are seen as conservative by asking for the protection of children and the preserving of the world simultaneously.

Luckily, it is not only Arendt's limited work on education that has had impact on educational theorists and philosophers. Her major philosophical work, *The Human Condition* has influenced the imaginations and minds of those who envision a more hopeful and democratic way of education. It is to those ideas and writers I now turn.

Understanding Arendtian ideas

Before I turn to a discussion of labor, work, and action, a few ideas that are essential to understanding most of Arendt's thought need to be discussed and defined. These ideas are natality, plurality, the private and public, and the web of relationships.

Arendt's natality

Natasha Levison (1997) introduces natality as "Arendt's shorthand term for human initiative" and the basis of action (p. 439). Arendt's natality, for Levison, is a paradoxical state. She contends that we are constituted by a world in which we live but also an ability to be new to the world. Levinson calls this "belatedness." According to Levison, belatedness and natality can cause problems. When people believe that they are completely constituted by the world, they lack a sense of agency, they drown in their "belatedness." On the other hand, those who claim their natality as "newness" can remain unaware of how what we do is conditioned by the world in which we live. For me, I read

Arendtian natality as similar to the concept of individual agency, a capacity that all humans have whether they know it or not; it is “the capacity for beginning something anew” (Arendt, 1958, p. 9). In my work I use natality as potential, a beginning. Natality is being able to begin again, which for me is not paradoxical. Being new to the world does not mean, in my interpretation, disregarding the social and historical construction of our identity. Natality can be constituted either through the birth of new people or in the beginning of new action by people. For action to occur there must be others; we cannot truly act alone.

Arendt’s plurality

Plurality is the other concept that forms the root of Arendt’s ideas. Plurality for Arendt is the fact that we are equal yet inexchangeably unique individuals who live together in the world. Arendt (1958) writes about plurality that “we are all the same, that is human, in such a way that nobody is ever the same as anyone else who ever lived, lives or will live” (p. 8). It is essential for us in order to be human, in the *vita activa*, to be with others. The *vita contemplativa* is the sphere where we withdraw temporarily from others in order to think, but it is very important that we return to be with others. Without others we cannot be recognized as individuals.

Arendt’s private, public and society

Arendt outlines human experience as taking place within and across different realms: earth, world, the public, the private, and the social. We inhabit the earth as human animals where we are subject to the cycles of biological necessity. The world is constructed by humans and consists of durable materials such as our homes or institutions

such as school. Arendt (1958) writes, “To live together in the world means essentially that a world of things is between those who have it in common...the world like every in-between, relates and separates men at the same time” (p. 52).

Arendt’s conception of the public is crucial to educational theorists who are concerned with democratic and civic education issues. The public for Arendt is where we come together to participate in activities for the common world. Canovan (1992) interprets Arendt’s public as a “place of discourse and action...in which human beings mark themselves off from animals” (p. 111). This public realm, according to Arendt (1958), “gathers us together and yet prevents our falling over each other” (p. 52). In this public realm we can experience reality through multiple viewpoints—that is, through plurality. Aaron Schutz (1999) explores Arendt’s idea of local public spaces in schools in relation to the thought of Maxine Greene. Other theorists, most notably Gert Biesta (2010), use Arendt’s thought about the public as a way to interrogate schools as a place for democratic education.

The private realm, according to Arendt (1958), is the place of activities “related to the maintenance of life” (p.28). In *The Human Condition* Arendt uses the ancient Greek separation of house and polis as an example. This has made her an enemy of some feminist theorists who believe she was relegating the household into a lesser status than the polis, the public (Benhabib, 2000; Higgins, 2010). If we look beyond the gendered stereotypes of the ancient Greek example we can see Arendt saying that the private household is necessary to being able to participate in public life. Humans need a place to

withdraw to and be nourished, physically and psychologically, in order to be the best they can in public (Benhabib, 2000).

The boundary between these two realms, the private and the public, has become blurred by the rise of society and the social. Society, for Arendt, is characterized by conformity. When private concerns move into the public what results is a “great pressure on individuals to play the appropriate roles” (Canovan, 1992, p. 119). Society binds people together with essentially private concerns, such as patterns of consumption and mass culture that treat humans as monolithic rather than unique individuals. Arendt (1958) writes that society “excludes the possibility of action...[I]nstead, society expects from each of its members a certain kind of behavior, imposing innumerable and various rules, all of which tend to “normalize” its members, to make them behave, to exclude spontaneous action or outstanding achievement” (p. 42).

Arendt’s web of relationships

The web of relationships is a metaphor that Arendt uses to indicate the human interactions that occur in the public realm. The web of relationships is where we speak and act directly to and with one another. This metaphor, for Arendt, indicates that nothing durable, or tangible, is created in the process of human interactions. Teaching resides in the realm of human affairs and the web of relationships because it has no end product. It is expressly dealing with humans. Through this web and action humans appear to one another through their interaction. This web is intangible but no less real than visible results or end products (Arendt, 1958). The web of relationships is the domain of Arendtian action which is one part of her three-part *vita activa*, the life of action, that she

outlines in *The Human Condition* (1958). The three parts of the *vita activa*, which I turn to next, are not hierarchical, but interrelated. Arendt is very clear that all parts are essential parts of the *vita activa*, however, it is action or the lack of action that she is expressly concerned with.

Arendt's labor, work, and action

The Human Condition (1958) is concerned with the activities that make us distinctly human. The three areas of the *vita activa* are labor, work and action. Labor is the human condition of sustaining our biological needs. Labor is about the means for survival. Work is about the production of artifacts that provide “durability upon the futility of mortal life” (Arendt, 1958, p. 8). Work provides people with shelters and constructions and organizations that lend permanence to the human life. Work creates things that survive our human death. Action is the only activity that occurs directly among people and “creates the condition for remembrance, that is, for history” (Arendt, 1958, p. 9). In *The Human Condition* Arendt traces the trends that dominate the *vita activa* over time, exploring the tension between labor, work, and action.

Hannah Arendt's ideas are filled with sharp distinctions and categories. The boundaries of these categories and distinctions are debatable but Arendt believed that there was a proper place for carrying out certain activities (Benhabib, 2000). Benhabib argues that the “Arendtian art of making distinctions” has to do with her philosophical methodology (p. 123). I am not going to take up Arendt's philosophical methodology (thankfully!). I do acknowledge that categorizing can serve a purpose to illuminate some aspects of a condition but that more often than not those conditions are much more

complex than categorizing allows. For this inquiry I hold fast to Arendt's sharp distinctions of labor, work, action, and the public and private to assist me in the analysis of the teachers' stories. I hope these sharp distinctions will illuminate layers of teachers' experience. I will leave the discussion of philosophical methodologies to the philosophers. Now, I turn to explicating in more detail the Arendtian ideas that guide this inquiry through my own interpretation of the ideas in *The Human Condition* with the assistance of others in education who have wrestled with Arendt's ideas.

Arendtian labor and teaching

Labor is the least free of all human activities because, in the drive to satisfy our biological needs, we become interchangeable members of a species rather than individuals. Historically, Arendt defines labor as a necessary natural process. Also, historically, we have escaped labor through the use of others to labor for us, that is, through the use of slaves and servants. Labor was seen as private activity because people sustained themselves through the agrarian cycles of production and consumption and toiling against nature. Over time, the celebration of labor has come to dominate and therefore labor is both "the inescapable biological necessity imposed by nature and the artificial necessity imposed by the pseudo-natural processes of society within which we all are engaged in making a living" (Canovan, 1992, p. 127). What Arendt's labor means for us is that we engage in wage earning careers or jobs that provide for our biological necessities, food, clothing, and housing. Labor is the cycle of consumption. The endless cycle of labor (going to work), production (of a wage), and consumption that is demanded by mass society can be escaped through the employment of different services

to clean our homes, deliver our food and other technical gadgets. This has led to us, according to Arendt, becoming a labor society that lacks enough labor to keep us happy (Arendt, 1958).

Labor in teaching is the natural and artificial processes of survival of a school day and year. Labor is the constant maintenance against death and decay. Teaching labor is maintaining those aspects of the classroom that the individual teacher needs for sustenance and survival. Sustenance in teaching is the extrinsic and intrinsic rewards that teachers receive. Extrinsic rewards like wages are a means to provide for our biological needs such as food and shelter. What also sustains teachers are the intrinsic or psychological rewards of teaching. Jackson (1990) referred to these as the “joys of teaching” and Lortie (2002) called them “psychic rewards.” There is an ebb and flow to these rewards that sustain teachers psychologically. These events typically surround helping individual students or reaching a particular student. These events are the sustenance that prevents teachers from, metaphorically, dying in the classroom.

Labor is also about survival. The routines and structures teachers use year in and year out are means to physical and psychological survival as well. Routines such as classroom organization, grading assignments, lining up in the hallway are all ways teachers maintain the physical structure of their classrooms. Also, routines serve biological needs such as bathroom breaks, preparing for lunch and recess. This is labor because teachers are continually engaged in creating and refining these routines and structures for sustenance and survival. The psychological routines teachers create to survive are more complex. Teachers consciously or unconsciously engage in coping

mechanisms to be able to survive the day or year to protect themselves from institutional constraints or the conditions of the work environment. Most importantly what makes this labor and not work is that these routines and structures in the classroom do not actually have a tangible or durable existence. They are processes that ensure survival and sustenance in the classroom.

Arendtian work and teaching

Labor is the constant maintaining against death and decay through providing for ones' psychological and biological needs, and work is the creation of durable elements of our world. Arendt makes clear that they are not necessarily mutually exclusive and at times collapse into each other. For instance, some durable things, such as buildings, need to be maintained through labor. For Arendt work is about creation of durability and labor is like servitude to nature. Work is almost the mastery over nature to make a durable world. Arendt writes, "The actual work of fabrication is performed under the guidance of a model in accordance with which the object is constructed" (Arendt, 1958, p. 140). In other words, what the worker (*homo faber*) creates is predetermined as in a blueprint. The potential of multiplication is the great importance that *work* or fabrication has contributed to the *vita activa*. Work has a definite beginning and a definite predictable end, which is different than labor, which is cyclical and unending. Work is also characterized by the tools that the worker creates to build a world. Arendt writes, "Because of the end product, tools are designed and implements invented, and the same end product organizes the work process itself, decides the needed specialists. . . . During the work process,

everything is judged in terms of suitability and usefulness for the desired end, and for nothing else” (Arendt, 1958, p. 153).

If we take this description of work and fabrication and apply it to the concept of schooling and teaching we can see this aspect of the human condition operating in teaching. For many, schooling is about achieving particular ends such as test scores, grades or a diploma. The tools we use as we go about the school year (lessons, activities) are the means to the pre-determined ends such as all second graders will ____ (fill-in-the-blank). We can also see this evident in the creation of various intervention programs and curricula (the implements and needed specialists) that are created in order to rescue schools that are falling behind in their adequate yearly progress. Joseph Dunne’s (1993) work took up this exact issue as he engaged in dialog with philosophers, Arendt among them, to combat the instrumentality of the behavioral objectives model of education.

Arendtian action and teaching

Arendt defines action as, “The only activity that goes on directly between men without the intermediary of things or matter, corresponds to the human condition of plurality, to the fact that men, not Man, live on the earth and inhabit the world” (Arendt, 1958, p. 7). Action occurs between people, not between people and things or objects. In action there are words and deeds among people not words and deeds directed towards some end or product.

Speech and action are nearly synonymous for Arendt. Speech discloses the *who* that is speaking, since we can converse from our individual perspectives “rather than sound in a chorus like sheep” (Canovan, 1992, p. 131). Action is related to beginning or

nativity and may or may not involve speech at all but also reveals the *who* as opposed to the what of the actor. According to Arendt *who* we are and what we are are different. She believes it easy to say what people are (such as a teacher) and what they do (teach), but who they are is only revealed through action. For example, in the moments following the I-35 bridge collapse in Minneapolis on August 1, 2007, numerous people immediately ran toward the scene and scrambled down the banks of the Mississippi River to help. There was no need for any speech, just action in response to irreplaceable human beings needing help. Only in the weeks and months following these actions were we to come to know what these people did and why they had done it, but we knew who they were immediately. Higgins (2010) uses the example of jurors, who through their speech can persuade the jury of a man's innocence.

According to Seyla Benhabib (2000) there are two aspects of action, the agonal and the narrative. Agonal action is focused on great deeds and speech which are rare, but impact the world in enormous ways. Higgings (2010) uses the example of Jackie Robinson taking the field as a great deed. These deeds are courageous actions, immortalized somehow, that change the course of the world. Yet, everyday people engage in action by engaging with others "without the intermediary of things" (Arendt, 1958, p.7). This type of action Benhabib (2000) calls narrative action. The narrative model of action allows the "who one is" to emerge through "doing the deed and telling the story" (Benhabib, 2000, p. 126.) Despite the tendency of Arendt and others to focus on the agonal, epic nature of action there is a space for action as representing the

everyday interaction of humans. My inquiry into teachers' stories uses the narrative definition of action put forth by Benhabib (2000).

Action in the classroom consists of the moments that are beyond ends and means and are "happening." As teachers we may remember action as those teachable moments when something unexpected arises and we put down our lesson plans and respond directly to the students as fellow human beings. Joseph Dunne (1993) writes about action in teaching as "something [that] might be at work in the pedagogic situation which cannot simply be made the object of analysis but must rather be lived through" (p. 5). As related above, Anne Hill's (1994) experience with a student can be read as action. Hill decided to pick up the boy and through this action tells us who she is as a person and a teacher. On September 11, 2001 I decided to take my students outside to play as confusion abounded in the school. Under the eerily quiet beautiful blue sky I watched my students play until the principal found us and put the school under lockdown. That action tells you (and me) about *who* I am. Action is lived and the story is told, to paraphrase Polkinghorne.

A crucial element of action is the fact that the end is unknown at the time of acting. In action the end is "not pursued but lies in the activity itself" (Arendt, 1958, p. 206). We are not sovereign over, or in control of our action and this is what makes action very different from labor or work (Dunne, 1993, p. 12). Labor is cyclic and never ending. Work has defined ends in the form of a durable, tangible product that requires means or tools to achieve that end—whereas the ends of action are unpredictable and unknowable. Labor is private and concerned with the maintenance of the self, work is connected to the public by the creation of a durable and lasting object, and action is public and done

among people not objects. According to Arendt, the mentality of work has entered the realm of action. This has happened because actions' ends are unknown. To avoid that uncertainty we have the desire to make ends in the realm of human relations. In essence we are trying to tell the story of action (human interactions) before it happens. What can happen when we try to predefine ends to action is that we limit the possibilities and capabilities of human relationships.

As Arendt writes, the issue is not “the use of means to achieve ends, as such, but rather the generalization of the fabrication experience in which usefulness and utility are established as the *ultimate* standards for life and the world of men” (Arendt, 1958, p. 157, emphasis mine). What Arendt, and I, are concerned about, is that the ideas of “fabrication” and replicability are being used to reduce the unpredictability of human action. This is a technical approach to reducing uncertainty that does not allow for a more nuanced approach to dealing with the fickleness of human interaction. Arendt, however, does offer us several corresponding concepts to bring a sense of understanding to the inherent uncertainty of action. These ideas help make action more stable and certain while still preserving its unpredictable nature. Action and lack of action has consequences. In the next section I turn to Arendt's ideas that correspond to and help us understand the idiosyncrasies of action.

Arendt's behavior and tyranny

According to Arendt, while action and natality are human capacities, they are not always actualized. There are times when certain circumstances lead to the suppression of action and natality. For Arendt, removing or preventing the capacity to act would reduce

us to something less than human. She writes, “Action would be an unnecessary luxury, a capricious interference with general laws of behavior, if men were endlessly reproducible repetitions of the same model, whose nature or essence was the same for all and as predictable as the nature or essence of any other thing” (1958, p. 8). Arendt uses the concept of tyranny to describe what occurs when the ability to act and speak directly to one another is prevented. For Arendt this “contradicts the essential human condition of plurality” (1958, p. 202). Tyranny occurs when we become isolated either physically or psychologically from each other. This isolation tends to breed what Arendt calls behavior or what is reliably expected from people. Behavior stems from rules that tend to normalize and exclude action, which usually occurs with the rise of mass society. It is “the passive adaptation of citizens in a society whose affairs are increasingly administered according to the standard of technocratic efficiency” (Dunne, 1993, p. 89).

In teaching, behavior and tyranny are potentialities. In thinking about how Arendt’s ideas of behavior and tyranny could occur in schools I am reminded about the idea that schooling can be a form of social control. Maxine Greene (1973) writes about this idea as a paradox that has no solution: “The tension between the individual and the civilization has been and will be irreducible. Education, because it takes place at the intersection where the demand for social order and the demands for autonomy conflict, must proceed through and by means of the tension” (p. 9).

Many teachers are isolated in their classrooms, prevented from speaking and acting directly to one another. Teachers are isolated from their students as well. The constraints of mass schooling and high stakes testing often lead to circumstances when

behavior is preferred, encouraged, and awarded. Arendt is concerned with what happens when people do not think what they do, meaning, the consequences for not doing (*action*) can be just as serious as doing. The two ideas that Arendt gives us to help with the unintended consequences of our action are promising and forgiving.

Arendt's promising and forgiveness

Promising and forgiveness, the bookends of action, are the least developed ideas in the educational literature on Arendt. They are also the most controversial of her ideas put forth in *The Human Condition*. Promising and forgiveness are at the heart of understanding how people deal with the uncertainty of action. Arendt's work seems to reach out and acknowledge the potential chaos of an uncertain post-modern world but also gives ways to understand a sense of certainty is necessary in uncertain times. Hinchliffe (2010) believes that Arendt "was able to reconstruct the state of being-in-world as one of basic plurality among persons" (p.451). There are positive and negative consequences from being with others. Since each individual has natality and the capacity to act there is the potential for unintended consequences. Promising is the way we, as humans, give a sense of certainty to our endeavors, it is our intention. Promises or agreements are what bind people together "not by an identical will which will somehow magically inspire them all, but by an agreed purpose for which alone the promises are valid and binding" (Arendt, 1958, p. 245).

Arendt believed, as I do, that most humans do not intend to harm or hurt others. Intended evil or harm is not action in Arendt's sense, therefore, forgiveness can be more easily given to those "who do not know what they do." What is particular to Arendt's

thought is that we cannot forgive ourselves—only others can. Respect is the basis of this forgiveness. Arendt is not bashful about placing her conception of forgiveness in the Christian tradition. This is perhaps what makes these ideas controversial. However, the larger ideas behind promising and forgiving can make sense in a secular place. I believe respect is a crucial aspect needed in the myriad relationships found in teaching. Mutual respect allows for humans to err, to act, and to move on while preserving the relationship.

Summary of Arendtian thought

This section was intended to explicate more fully the Arendtian ideas that have influenced my approach to my analysis of my inquiry on teachers' stories of uncertainty. In Arendt's ideas of action, natality, and promising and forgiving, a language is provided to talk about unpredictable human interactions. Even though Arendt was writing against the back drop of post-World War II regimes and the advent of Cold War politics, her writing remains essentially hopeful about the human condition. In the next section I turn to a review of literature that expressly applies Arendtian ideas to education.

Concerns of educational theorists

Arendt and the pedagogical moment

The majority of writings in education that draw upon Arendt for support are concerned with working out the fit between Arendt's thought and the pedagogical moment, that is, the teacher-student relationship in the space of the classroom. Essentially, these philosophers wrangle with the question "is teaching a form of *action*?" This is a particularly thorny question because Arendt believed action should be separate from education (Higgins, 2010; Hinchliffe, 2010). The reason why she believes this is

because of the special relationship—even duty—adults, and particularly educators, have to prepare children to be in the world. Chris Higgins (2010) eloquently works through Arendt's *Crisis in Education* (1957) and *The Human Condition* (1958) and comes to the conclusion that teaching encompasses not only action but labor and work as well. Higgins does this by conceptualizing teaching as an activity of “mediation” (p. 410) that lies on the boundary of action and work. He demonstrates that “the classroom is like a theater where deeds [actions] are mediated” for the students by the teacher via the curriculum (p. 410). Higgins' (2010) reading of Arendt allows us to acknowledge the possibility of action in the classroom despite Arendt's ideas of the special relationship between adults and children.

The works of Biesta (2010), Higgins (2010), Levison (1997), and Schutz (1999), among others, are wonderful interpretations of Arendt's work that allow us to interrogate the classroom and the student-teacher relationship. I have no qualms about seeing the classroom and the student-teacher relationship as a place of labor, work, and action. I believe in the idea of action in the narrative mode and this allows me to “see” action in everyday human interactions. I do agree that there is a special relationship between teachers and their students. This relationship requires teachers to be even more aware of how action and its corresponding concepts manifest themselves (or not) in their own personal and professional lives. Julian Edgoose (2010) summarizes the position to be taken by teachers and adults poignantly when he writes about hope and Arendtian ideas in the teacher-student relationship.

Arendt's biggest lessons about hope are that we all gain most when we are honest about the challenges we face and open to the unexpectedness of life. What can give us hope, then, are the concrete relationships with our students, our willingness to be there for them and to not be defined by the accountability culture that now saturates schools . . . The unexpected occurrences of our teaching can be merely annoying interruptions to our plans, or they can be surprises that, in our responses, take us where we might never have predicted. . . [S]he also shows us that if, on the other hand, we affirm the unpredictability of our lives, we can find a renewed sense of possibility and hope in our teaching, and our students can reap the benefits of this hope as much as we can (p.403).

Arendt and teacher development

While these educational philosophers (Biesta, Higgins, Levison, and Schutz) have been incredibly useful to my understanding of Arendtian concepts, closer to my use of Arendtian thought is the small body of literature on teacher development and knowledge using Arendtian concepts of action. These writings focus on using Arendt's language and ideas to understand more deeply the importance of teachers' individual development or, as Edgoose (2010) suggests, how teachers affirm the unpredictability of life.

Arendt and action research.

Teachers' develop personally and professionally through experience. One way to gain experience and knowledge is through action research. It seems almost too obvious that Arendt's concept of action could inform action research, but it does and it does very well. In 1953 Stephen Corey wrote that he believed that those in schools should do studies about what needs to change in schools. Corey places action research in the action or in taking risks and writes, "If the consequences could be guaranteed, no research [action] would be needed" (1953, p. 39). More recently, John Elliott (2004) was "struck by the parallels" of Arendtian theory of action and his own account of educational action

research because both focus on the process of action rather than objective or outcomes of the research. He also finds that Arendt's skepticism about "generalizable representations" which may act as a form of social control resonate with his urging of teachers to use these generalizable representations to inform their particular practice and not become prescriptions (Elliott, 2004). He concludes this essay with a reference to Dunne's (1993) work on Arendt and agrees that in teaching, at least in the UK, he sees that the passive adaptation to the technology of standards and other forms of governmental accountability leads researchers to "make knowledge" that can be "deployed as means-ends rules, to maximise the performativity of teachers" (Elliot, 2004, p. 213).

David Coulter has written two articles specifically about Arendt and educational action research. In an article with John Wiens, Coulter (2002) addresses the privileging of researchers over practitioners or spectators over actors by applying Arendt's theory of judging which privileges neither. Coulter and Wiens develop Arendt's action to be an expression of freedom, "the capacity of humans to make a difference in the world and the responsibility that accompanies this possibility" (Coulter & Wiens, 2002, p. 17). This is echoed in Biesta's interpretation of Arendtian action. Biesta (2010) closely links natality, action, and freedom so that they are nearly inseparable and reminds readers that action is not simply doing whatever we want but bringing something new into existence.

Coulter's (2002) solo piece uses Arendt's three parts of the *vita activa* as a heuristic to define the different types of teacher research. He contends that there is educational labor research, educational work research, and educational action research. Educational labor research is concerned like Arendt's concept of labor with survival and

sustaining life in the classroom. Coulter places research on means, such as improving test scores, in this category. The end is not interrogated; the research is on improving means. Educational work research focuses on the analysis of some product or artifact of teaching and the impact of that artifact on teaching. Examples of educational work research could include examining the outcome of lesson or unit plans. Coulter's educational action research returns to placing action in Arendt's conception of freedom and that "only when ends and means are enmeshed in one another, when action is an expression of natality and plurality, can humans be free" (Coulter, 2002, p. 200).

Coulter continues that action, however, has been replaced by work and labor and that schooling contributes to the destruction of plurality and natality. He analyzes an excellent example of action research on a teacher seminar on light. The seminar had no predetermined end or intended outcome; it was about the process of playing with materials and the understanding that comes from that play. When one member of a group "intimidates" another, Coulter analyzes this as a plurality and natality not being respected. It can also be read as the Arendtian web of relationships and the problems of action. When we act and speak there is always the element of risk, as Hinchliffe (2010) calls it, "a ripple of consequences" (p.449). Arendt writes, "They [men] have known that he who acts never quite knows what he is doing, that he 'always' becomes 'guilty' of consequences he never intended or foresaw"(1958, p. 233).

Summary

In this chapter I explored the literature on uncertainty in teachers' work, the use of story in teacher education, and Hannah Arendt's ideas in education. The literature on

uncertainty offers two ways of conceptualizing uncertainty in teaching, either technically or practically. The literature on story in teacher education and professional development indicates that this is a still developing field but one that seems to have a resonance with teachers and teacher educators. Hannah Arendt's ideas elucidate the classroom as a place of action and places teaching in the *vita activa*. The question remains: what does the *vita activa* actually look like, sound like, and feel like in the classroom. In this study, I explore teacher stories of uncertain moments using the Arendtian concept of the *vita activa*. This inquiry aims to add to the limited empirical work that wrestles with Arendt's ideas in order to form practical applications in the phronetic sense⁴.

⁴ A phronetic sense of the practical is one that "allows inquiry and is connected to personal and cultural histories" (Conle & Sakamoto, 2002, p. 428-429).

CHAPTER 3

MOTIVATIONS AND METHODS

Knowledge is neither inside a person nor outside in the world,
but exists in the relationship between the person and the world.

—*Steinar Kvale*

In this chapter I first present how I came to the school site, met the teachers, and began to develop my ideas for my research. I also present my data collection procedures and phases of analysis and share the results from the first phase of data analysis.

Motivation for the inquiry

This inquiry was sparked by my work with the philosophical ideas of Hannah Arendt, narrative research, and my introduction to two very interesting teachers. This work connected to my reading about teacher knowledge, prospective teacher education, and the practical life of the classroom. It was my desire to connect these conversations in my dissertation. As a researcher I believe that the best way to learn about teaching is from the teachers themselves. As a teacher educator it is my job to bring the knowledge gained from practicing teachers to prospective teachers. It is my hope that this study will offer a new way of thinking about relationships in teaching through the ideas of Hannah Arendt.

The two main impetuses for this inquiry came nearly simultaneously. As a student teaching supervisor I began working with a new set of schools and teachers that I found very fascinating for reasons I could not pinpoint. I very much enjoyed being in these classrooms, speaking with the teachers, and working with them. Also, at this time I was writing with colleagues on practical reasoning and Hannah Arendt. I became captivated

by Arendt's ideas articulated in her work, *The Human Condition*. Arendt's framework of human activities, labor, work, and action, resonated with me and my experiences of teaching. In my exploration of her work I began to see important connections between her ideas and the conditions of teachers' work and life. I wondered, "Could Arendt's philosophy help me understand classroom teachers' experience?" I had used Arendt's ideas to help make sense of my own experiences as a teacher where I felt something important had happened. These moments were ones in which I had trouble understanding my action and reactions.

The two first grade teachers who I had met while supervising a student teacher were Marie and Maggie. The teachers shared a large space, which once was the library, for their separate classrooms. The teachers were interesting in their own individual ways. Marie is a teacher who has a very compelling classroom presence. She speaks in a sweet voice, enunciates every word, and calls everyone "friend" but is also quick to scowl and snap her fingers when a student's attention strays. Maggie has a more gentle approach with her students; she has a quiet voice and plays silly games with the kids. Maggie has a small trampoline in the back of her room and has numerous breaks for the students to get their "wiggles" out. To me these were teachers who were full of experience, knowledge, and complexity that I wanted to know more about.

Developing the questions

My first writings working with Hannah Arendt's theory centered on my experience of action research as a second and fourth year teacher. I used her ideas of action, work, and behavior to help me make sense of the expectations that I, as well as

those of the school district, had for my action research project. Then I applied the concepts of labor, work, and action to stories of teaching in the existing research literature. This helped me see that labor, work, and action are essential parts of teaching. In my research and writing on Arendt I noticed that her notion of action is by far the most theorized and compelling component of her thought. For me, action epitomizes my experience of September 11th. After more investigation, though, I realized that Arendtian action has even more complexity than just explaining the unpredictable. I sought to find a way to bring her ideas of labor, work, and action as well as behavior, promising, and forgiving, among others, into the examination of the experiences of teachers. This research is an exploration of the value of Arendt's ideas in examining teachers' stories of experience. There are a number of guiding questions in this inquiry: how do these teachers' experiences relate to Arendt's labor, work, action and their related concepts? What do Arendt's ideas help us understand in these teachers' experiences? How are they helpful? How are they not helpful? Lastly, since the real crux of Arendtian thought circulates around the inherent unpredictability of human relationships, the ultimate question is: Can Arendt's concept of action contribute to the conversation on uncertainty in teaching?

Timeline

In the spring prior to beginning the investigation I began to talk to Marie and Maggie about helping me with my research. At this point I was still generating ideas but had initially designed my inquiry as a classroom observational study of teachers' work using the Arendtian concepts of labor, work, and action. Over the summer I continued to

work and rework my research study proposal and in the following fall I received IRB approval and returned to the school. By October of that school year, after having gained consent from the district, principal, and teachers, I began observing in the two classrooms. I had imagined that I would work with these two teachers over the course of a school year. But, as I observed that fall, the study design evolved away from a classroom-based study. This happened mainly because what I found most interesting was what the teachers had to say before and after school, during preparation times, and lunch. I realized that the knowledge that I was seeking was in the conversations and relationships with the teachers, not in any necessary “observable” form. I realized, as Kvale (1996) writes, that knowledge “exists in the relationship between the person and the world” (p. 44).

The focus of my research switched from an observation-based to an interview-based study. It changed from watching teachers and composing narratives from the observations to having teachers relate their own stories in interviews. It was at this point I felt that having two teacher interviews would not be enough data for my dissertation. Nearing the winter break I consulted with the principal and expanded my study. I redesigned the study to have only two classroom observations to act as supporting data sources. The focus became the interviews and the stories that the teacher’s shared in the interviews. The principal recommended an additional nine teachers and seven accepted. Just prior to winter break I met with all the teachers briefly, outlined the study and obtained consent. In the second semester of the school year I was at the school 2–3 days a week, observing teachers’ work, interviewing, and assisting teachers in the classrooms.

Choosing a methodology

Narrative research

In designing my inquiry I sought a methodology that had to do “with human beings grasping the experience of other human beings and individual lives meeting other individual lives” (Greene, 1988, p. 197). One approach to bring individual lives together is through the sharing of those lives through narrative research. Elbaz-Luwisch (2007) outlines the development of narrative inquiry into teachers’ lives and work. She writes, “It is not easy to categorize this body of work as it is characterized by considerable diversity, both thematic and methodological” (p. 361). She places the beginnings of this type of inquiry in the realization that teachers are central to the understanding and improvement of teaching. Narrative has also been useful in understanding how teachers’ themselves experience teaching (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2007). In particular, the use of narrative helps to show that “profound meaning can be found in teachers’ everyday experience” (Olson & Craig, 2001, p. 671). The use of narrative methods resonates with my beliefs about the importance of learning from teachers’ experiences in order to improve teaching and learning in the classroom.

Narrative approaches.

The use of narrative in educational research can be done many ways and is often seen as a form of qualitative research. Life history research that focuses on biographical or auto biographical writings uses the concept of *narrative unity*, that life has sequenced structure. Other research, most notably case study, uses vignettes to illustrate certain themes. Forms of arts-based research use literary elements such as point of view, person,

omniscience, narrator reliability, narrative voice, and authorial distance in creating narratives to represent the data of the research (Coulter & Smith, 2009).

Donald Polkinghorne (1995) describes two types of narrative configuration in qualitative research, narrative analysis and analysis of narratives. Narrative analysis is a study that takes data and creates a narrative from the pieces. Polkinghorne (1995) would consider biography and case studies as well as arts-based research like ethnodrama (Saldana, 1999) or research that takes on a literary form (Barone, 2000; Krizek, 1998) as narrative analysis. Analysis of narratives is a type of research that focuses on stories as the unit of analysis. The analysis then produces categories or themes found in the stories.

Some researchers, most notably Jean Clandinin and Michael Connelly (2000) contend that narrative is its own particular type of research. They call it narrative inquiry. Narrative inquiry is defined as a phenomenon and a method, “Narrative inquiry, the study of experience as story, then, is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience” (Clandinin, Pushor, & Murray Orr, 2007, p. 22). While narrative inquiry shares similarities with other qualitative methods such as phenomenology, Clandinin et al. (2007), outlines three common places of narrative inquiry: temporality, sociality, and place. Temporality is the idea that people, places and events were, are, and will be; they are not static or fixed. Sociality is the concern for the social and personal conditions of the participants and the inquirer. Place is the actual concrete place where events and stories unfold. While my research is not a narrative inquiry, I do believe that attention to time, place, and social conditions are essential for understanding how teachers’ stories relate more than just personal meaning.

Definitions of story and narrative.

In this section I look at some of the definitions of narrative methodology and methods. Holley and Colyar (2009) draw on the work of the narrative theories of Paul Ricoeur and William Labov and highlight the sequential nature and the importance of action and time in narrative. They define “narrative as the result of sequence and action: narrative is the telling (or retelling) of a story in a specific time sequence” (Holley & Colyar, p. 681). The authors also elaborate that there are certain narrative constructs or elements. These are the event or sequence of events which they call ‘story’. There are characters which are the ones experiencing the story or events. Then there is focalization or point of view and the plot which provide linkages that move or give reason to a story to move forward (Holley & Colyar, 2009). Daiute and Lightfoot (2004) use narrative analysis and narrative inquiry interchangeably in their introduction to their book. They offer three notions of narrative: stories that use aspects of literary theory like character, theme and plot; cultural narratives and genres that organize what life “should” be like; and a specific discourse form (Daiute & Lightfoot, 2004). Coulter and Smith (2009) use narrative research, narrative inquiry, and narrative approaches interchangeably in their article on narrative research. They also rely on Polkinghorne’s ideas of analysis of narrative and narrative analysis and conclude that “narrative analysis studies rely on stories as a way of knowing” (Coulter & Smith, 2009, p. 577). In their book on narrative inquiry Clandinin and Connelly (2000) are “not setting out to define narrative” but rather to answer the question “what do narrative inquirers do?” (p. 49). They ground their work

in Deweyan idea that “examining experience is the key to education” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. xiii).

Issues with narrative approaches.

The main criticisms of the use of narrative methods are an over-focus on individual experience and issues of validity or truthfulness of the stories told. Clandinin and Connelly assert that “narrative inquiries are always strongly autobiographical” (p.121) but they advocate for a sense of wakefulness from the researcher. They write “a language of wakefulness allows us to proceed forward with a constant alert awareness of risks, of narcissism, of solipsism, and of simplistic plots, scenarios and uni-dimensional characters” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 182).

I am motivated by my own stories of success and failures as a teacher to understand and connect with others. I use the concept of resonance as a way to approach issues of validity in this type of research (Conle, 1996). Conle takes the scientific idea of resonance and applies it to the sharing of personal stories. Scientifically, resonance is a matter of one object "getting in tune with" another object and when the frequencies resonate, or are in sync with one another, transfer of energy is possible. Therefore if the stories resonate with another person's story, in whatever way, then knowledge (energy) is created.

Critics of the use of story take issue with the truthfulness of the stories told (Philips, 1994). I understand and am aware of the issues of memory in recalling stories. In my research it is not a concern on whether or not these teachers' stories are true. The concern is whether or not they resonate. Resonance fits in well with the ideas of Hannah

Arendt. The primary goal of this inquiry is concerned with how her ideas help make sense of teachers' experiences. Resonance is one of the positive outcomes of action. Joseph Dunne in his 1993 book about practical reasoning writes of resonance in Arendt's web of human relationships. Resonance is "the degree to which [a person's] action strikes a responsive chord in others who will cooperate with it and carry it along toward some completion" (p. 93). This response to action allows people to "sync up" and results in what Arendt refers to as *power*. Power for Arendt is a potential that "springs up" among and between people and it not the concept of power used over others (Arendt, 1958, p. 200).

My approach to narrative.

Research methods must match research purposes. I draw upon many qualitative methodologies in order to achieve my purpose of understanding experience rather than holding fast to tenets of any particular methodology. This inquiry, however, is an analysis of narrative (Polkinghorne, 1995) in which the teachers' stories take center stage and ideas are developed from them. By placing the teachers' stories at the center of analysis I am also situating this inquiry within Clandinnin and Connelly's (2000) idea that story is a way to convey experience that attends to the time, place, and social conditions of the experience. Story also connects with Hannah Arendt's idea that action produces stories rather than things.

For my research purposes I choose narrative to represent the type of research methodology from which I draw methods and support for my data collection procedures and analysis. I use the term story to refer to the text of the teachers' personal experience.

I choose the word story over narrative because in my readings and research I see story and narrative used interchangeably to refer to textual representations of experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The term story is also more approachable and amenable to my goal of creating a space where humans can grasp the experience of other humans (Greene, 1988). To address issues of validity or truthfulness I use the concept of resonance, indicating that these stories are valid if they resonate with others and lead to the production of new knowledge of the self or teaching (Conle, 1996). The methods I chose to use to achieve this understanding were interviews and observations. Kvale (1996) states that the purpose of interviewing is “to understand themes of the lived daily world from the subjects' own perspectives" (p. 27). Observation allows the researcher to “enter and understand the situation being described” (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000, p. 305).

Another important idea that guides this work of interpretation and analysis is that we are always “in the midst” while conducting research (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 64). This is the idea that our lives are always in motion and that we enter into our participants’ lives “in the midst” of life—we also withdraw while life is still happening. Therefore these observations, interviews, and the resulting stories that I relate and share with you, the reader, are just a slice, a portion of the teachers’ lives.

Methods

Place and participants

The school, Frog Creek⁵, is part of a small district located on the edge of a large Midwestern city. The teaching faculty of this particular school is 99% white and predominately female, resembling the national teaching population. There has also been a nearly 30% increase in their cultural and linguistic diversity of students within the last five years. Of the nine teachers in the inquiry, eight are white females, and one is a white male. Three teachers have taught for nearly 20 years within the district, three have taught for over five years and three have taught for three years. The district website claims it has a “small-town feel” with the resources of a large metropolitan area. There are only three elementary schools in the district. In the latest data available from the State Department of Education there were approximately 430 students in K–5th grade, 63% qualify for free and reduced lunch, 29% English language learners, and nearly 45% of students are white and approximately 46% are black and Hispanic. Also according to the State Department of Education, the school was meeting state required adequate yearly progress.

Data sources and collection

Primary data sources include two classroom observations and two face-to-face interviews with the teachers. I will now describe the data sources and methods of collection.

Observations

I was an “observer-as-participant” (Cohen et al., 2000, p. 310). I was known at the school as a researcher, former teacher, and student teacher supervisor. Yet I was still

⁵ A pseudonym

enough apart from the community of the school to be seen as an observer first, participant second. In my initial observations I tried to remain apart from the class and just “observe,” but I found myself being asked questions by students, talking to other adults in the room and interacting with the teacher to assist students. These moments were indicated in my notes. I spent two whole days in each teacher’s classroom to achieve two purposes. From methodological point of view spending time with the teachers prior to interviews helped me create a relationship with the teacher, which allowed the teachers to become comfortable sharing their stories with me. From an analytical point of view I was able to witness the context of the classroom environment in which the teacher works and seeing what s/he experiences in a day in the classroom.

Over the two days I scripted detailed notes on the classroom, how the teacher functioned in relation to the students, and documented how I interacted with the teacher. I documented the number of students and times when students entered or left and when other teachers arrived and interacted with the students. I documented how the teacher conducted instruction including where the teacher was during instruction, the use of whole class or small group work, and activities conducted during transitions. Included in my notes were conversations I had with the teacher about the classroom or school. My notes also include my reflections including reactions to my observations, questions for myself and the teachers, as well as tensions and ethical issues that needed probing. Students were only identified by gender and ethnicity if deemed important. Other teachers were indicated as Collaborative Teachers and gender. I then transferred my observational notes from handwritten notes to digital documents within a week of the

observations. As the observational notes were being transferred verbatim I allowed myself to input some initial reflection and analysis indicated by italics. These observation data were designed to be used as supporting data to the primary data collected in the interviews.

Interviews

I scheduled and conducted the first interview after the two classroom observations. The first interview consisted of three sets of questions that I gave to each teacher ahead of time. Some teachers did not review the questions and some prepared extensive notes. If a teacher used notes I was able to collect those prepared notes from most of those teachers. I gathered historical and biographical information, and asked teachers to recollect stories of their own teacher education and stories about important moments in their teaching. The questions were designed to lead to rich individual stories of experience. I asked the first set of questions to help me get a sense of where the teacher was in relation to the profession; their experience and philosophic orientation. The second set of questions regarding teacher education were also intended to give me information about their thoughts on teacher education as well as elicit a story. The final set of questions was developed to get at a moment of uncertainty. I tried to formulate questions that would draw out stories similar to my story of September 11. A second follow-up interview was determined by the results of the first interview. The second interview was decided by the relevancy and resonance of the moment elicited in the first interview. I conducted a follow-up interview to address any questions that arose in the

initial analysis. The final time I met with the teachers was to conduct “member checks” of the stories that were co-constructed from the data.

The questions I asked were:

1. Biographical/Personal (See Table 1.)
 - Tell me about how you decided to become a teacher.
 - How many years have you been teaching? What grades? Schools and school districts?
 - How would you describe yourself as a teacher? Is there a particular metaphor or word you would use?
 - What have been some successes in your teaching? Some challenges?
2. Teacher Preparation (See Table 2.)
 - As you think back on your experience in your teacher preparation what is one thing you wish “they” would have told you about being a teacher?
 - Tell me about an idea or story that you think prospective teachers should know from your experience.
3. Important Moments (See Table 3.)
 - Tell me about a story that you tell over and over (or keep thinking about) about a particular teaching experience.
 - Tell me about a moment you recall that you would have liked something different to be the result/have a different ending than it did.

- Tell me about a moment or experience with students or colleagues that changed the way you look at teaching or changed the way you teach students.

While there were particular questions and an order, most interviews became more like conversations within and across these topics: biography, teacher education and important moments. I followed the lead of the teacher during the interviews and allowed them to talk about issues and ideas important to them. By doing this some of the questions never received direct answers and some of the questions became irrelevant and I chose not to ask them. Instead I tried to listen and follow up on the stories they told. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and then checked for accuracy against the audio.

Analysis

There were three distinct phases of analysis during this inquiry. Phase one began with the analysis of the nine teacher interviews and observations. The purpose of phase one was to examine all data sources and determine which teachers would receive a follow-up interview. At the end of phase one, four of the nine interviews were determined to not contain stories of uncertain moments. Those four teachers were “left behind” as I moved into phase two. In this second phase of analysis I determined and began writing the five profiles based on interview and observational data. Phase two evolved into the last phase in which the five teachers and I co-constructed the stand alone narratives to be used for interpretation.

Phase One

The first round of interviews was completed in early spring of the data collection year and I constructed tables of responses for each section of questions (see below). My first step was to reread the transcripts highlighting the key answers or ideas in response to each question. I either paraphrased these chunks of text or copied and pasted their direct quotes into the chart. I then took these charts and began to review them for insights and particular experiences of the teachers.

Summary of key ideas from interviews

In this section I share the first phase of analysis in narrative and table format.

Background information (Table 1).

Five of the nine teachers decided during their own K–12 experience to become teachers, the other four either came to teaching through a post-baccalaureate program or decided in college to pursue an elementary education credential. Teachers used words liked organized, dedicated, high expectations, humorous, empathetic and enthusiastic to describe themselves. These adjectives that the teachers used were nearly identical to the conclusions I came to during the observations. The majority of teachers shared success that had to do with students. For example, they talked about when a student “gets it” or is able to read, or being an advocate for a student(s). Other teachers saw their successes as their own personal growth in learning to teach diverse populations, or still being able to bring joy and stay positive in the classroom. Two teachers also mentioned external (to the classroom) recognition by parents and by being seen as a leader in the school by the principal.

The challenges faced by teachers were centered on the diverse population the school has—diversity in abilities, languages, ethnicities, and socio-economic status. Some teachers specifically mentioned challenges in acquiring special services for students, working with various administrations, and time management.

Table 1. Response to Biographical/Personal Questions

	#1 Teaching History	#2 Decision to teach	#3 Metaphors/ Descriptions	#4 Success and Challenge
Marie	25yrs: 3yrs in K, 5 yrs Middle, rest in 1 st	Sunday school, first gen college, preschool	Organized, hard working, patient	Success: still positive after all these years Challenges: mix of levels. What's going to work with who, technology
Maggie	29years, 1-6 th grades 5 places	Decided to become a teacher in second grade	Diligent, determined. I take it personally I feel like I'm creative	Success: Light bulb Challenges: Mix of students, long hours, administration
Ben	19 yrs, middle, 1, 4 & 5, 2 places	Pre-med, sober, career change from nursing	humor	Success: realization of loving job, brining joy to classroom/union rights Challenges: admin
Cassandra	5 yrs, 1 yr long call substitute.	1 st grade teacher, helper in elem. classes	Being a teacher is my life, dedicated, organized, continue learning	Success: relationship building w/student, furthering her education, leader in school (<i>cont.</i>)

				Challenges: low-income diverse population and it's a challenge, but likes it, differentiation
Nikki	8 yrs, St. Paul, Denver, here, Preschool, 5 th math coach, 3 rd	Bad experience as student, traveled internationally, thought about law then got ILP/MA	High expectations, advocate, strict, fair, sense of humor	Success: ELL in G/T program, student enjoying reading Challenges: time management—learning more so doing more so running out of time
Claire	4 yrs, two places plus subbing	Took cool science classes in college, mom was teacher, “Well, I get to do a little bit of everything. Why wouldn't I be an elementary teacher?”	Calm, relaxed, enthusiastic, changing	Success: student's remembering something, light bulb Challenges: high poverty, transient population, diversity
Julia	10 yrs, 9 yrs in 2 nd grade all at school	Second grade teacher inspired her, just knew	Empathetic, mission field, organized & calm	Success: learning to work with population (diff than her own exp.) Challenges: diverse population
Ruth	4 years, 2/3 ELL, K, 2 places	Transferred from pre-med to elementary ed	Gardener. Each kid is a seed that needs different tending.	Success: rigorous curriculum/getting it Challenges: Special ed referrals in K
Lucy	8 yrs, 2 yrs sub	Jr high, never looked back	Enthusiastic, upbeat and bubbly, flexible,	Success: kids' reading, requested by parents, (cont.)

			relaxed	external recognition Challenges: referral process, kids' home lives
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Thoughts on teacher preparation.

The majority of the teachers found their teacher preparation programs very adequate academically. Many mentioned they were not as prepared for the “other” practical roles that teachers’ have. These other roles were relationship building (with students and families of different cultures), management, and professional roles on a team or in a school. In turn the “advice” they give to prospective teachers is essentially what they have learned in and from their own practice: learn how to balance work and family to prevent burnout, know your contractual rights, know your students when you plan lessons, learn to work with other adults, get to know families.

Table 2. Response to Teacher Preparation Questions

	#1 what you wish “they” would have told you about being a teacher	#2 story that you think prospective teachers should know from your experience
Marie	Not a lot of talk about Differentiation during her time, amount of time spent out of class prepping	Balancing work and family
Maggie	Teacher prep in the 70s, current needs are: Cultures, religions, views of women	Go through cumulative files to get background, Write personal notes to families
Ben	Room set up, “practical” stuff	Union issues
Cassandra	Classroom management, difficult circumstances with families and kids,	Collaboration <i>(cont.)</i>

	a culture shock	
Nikki	Collaboration, how to sit down and plan with a group of people with the tiny amount of time you have	Professional learning during your career, the “other side” of teaching
Claire	more emphasis on the relationship building, not just teaching a lesson	The best written lesson can fall apart if you don’t know your students Have a plan. Have plan A, plan B, plan C, and D is none of the above,
Julia	Preparing more for the multiple roles that teachers have	Adaptable, flexible, collaboration
Ruth	More ed on special needs, the idea that things are Constantly changing (curriculum materials/focus)	But I think just being open to all the different experiences that you can go into and see. And I would say take any clinical experience you can get
Lucy	How to teach kids to read	students are just the tip of the family iceberg

Important moments.

In the last section of the interview teachers were asked to share stories about important moments. This section of questions was the real crux of the interview. I worked at wording the questions to allow teachers to share stories about something that happened to them that was uncertain in some aspect. I purposely did not use the word uncertain in the questions. I avoided the term uncertain because in most usages it is a fairly negative term. Often admitting to uncertainty is admitting you did not know what to do. However, I believed asking the teachers to tell a story about important moments that they keep telling (trying to figure out), wished the ending had been different (what happened was not what they wanted or expected), and a moment that changed them (growth through experiences) would give me stories about uncertainty. These are also questions that

related directly to my own stories of uncertainty and sense-making that I shared in the opening chapter: my action on September 11, my “failed” action research project, and my behavior in my final year of teaching.

Stories to retell.

The first question was intended to elicit a story or experience that was still in the teachers’ minds. Almost all teachers shared a story related to a student(s). One teacher shared a story about the knowledge gained about what it really meant to be Gifted/Talented and the implications of that for her practice. Another teacher shared a story of a creative curriculum piece that brought the grade level together but was eventually disbanded because, according to the teacher, “we were told we can’t” devote the time to it.

Wishing.

The next question in this series was about a particular moment or experience that the teachers wished something different had happened. Two teachers shared about moments of death, one of a student and one of two mothers of students. Two teachers shared about the lack of closure when students left after an intense relationship building process between student and teacher. One teacher regretted calling out a student in class because she normally “doesn’t do that.” Another teacher made a student cry, while another remembered a year when most of her students were being pulled out of the class for behavior issues. In perhaps the most profound story a teacher wished there had been closure with a student after he made a death threat against her, was suspended, and never returned to the school.

Table 3. Response to Important Moment Questions

	#1 particular teaching experience that you can't seem to stop thinking about	#2 teaching experience in which you would have liked something different to have been the result	#3 experience with students or colleagues that changed the way you look at teaching or students
Marie	Wally, died of cancer Student hurt with scissors, sued school, above her	Relationship w/father of behaviorally challenged boy, wanted to win his trust, saw her in cast, one more recently too (cultural view of female teachers) 2 episodes, 12 years apart	Turning point with RW and push—in model with colleague, saw the model help students
Maggie	A student who turned out well	Death of two mothers	Experience getting masters: not relevant enough
Ben	NA	Making a student cry during inquiry	Year with principal, grievance, move to new school
Cassandra	Student whom left in spring after establishing relationship—idea of resilience of children	Not saying goodbye to EBD student in practicum	NA
Nikki	Over ID of G/T, went to convention, lead G/T at school	Death threat by student, suspended and then left, no chance for closure	G/T convention
Claire	Story of two boys who d/n speak each other's lang. Becoming friends and still visiting her	Called out a student in front of whole class Being upset about it	Working with colleague in afterschool program
Julia	Wacky Wednesday that are no more—"we were told we can't"	One day with that "class" (The group with the reputation but no support) Lots of students pulled out for behavior	Mentor in Marie, her model in empathy (note similar religious backgrounds) Values staff in helping <i>(cont.)</i>

			support diverse pop.
Ruth	The kid who “baa”d like a sheep and turned out ok	Support through referral process during first year	Experience of school community at previous school
Lucy	NA	Relationship with student then student leaving	Conflict with team members

Stories of change.

The final question asked the teachers to reflect on any experience that changed the way they look at their teaching or students—either positively or negatively. Nearly all the teachers (except one) shared an experience about a colleague, administrator, or professional experience outside of the school. Perhaps it is because most of the stories had been about students previous to this question that the interviewees chose to share about other experiences. Perhaps it was because of the nature of collaboration at the school, but when a close examination of the stories shared for this question is done, it is evident that these are very honest answers. These experiences had a profound effect on how they teach their students, and how they interact with colleagues and administration in the effort to teach all students.

Two teachers shared an experience about the influence of professional education. One teacher attending her masters’ program found it so irrelevant she vowed to always make her teaching relevant to her students. Another teacher cited her attendance at a convention that opened up her eyes and lead her to become an advocate for students in her school. Two teachers shared stories of conflict with colleagues that have made them think about how they conduct themselves professionally. Other teachers shared positive

stories of mentors and colleagues (not necessarily in their school, but throughout their experience) that have helped them learn to become better teachers for their diverse students. Other teachers shared their experiences about the sense of community that administration and colleagues either fostered (or not) and the implications it has had for their relationships to administration and students.

Selection of stories

During the interviews I was trying to solicit stories about events that surprised the teachers or a story about an event that somehow did not work out the way the teachers wanted it to work out. Then in rereading the interviews I sought big ideas or themes that the teachers kept returning to. I jotted these notes on the interview, underlined key words then reread the interview again to develop a word or concept that could summarize the interview. Then I compared this word or concept to the observations to see if there was a fit between what I thought I heard the teacher saying about teaching and what I observed in the classroom. This process reminds me of how Maxine Greene (1988) describes the work of qualitative researchers, “They are concerned with making sense of what seems to lack coherence and with putting into a form that will permit others to enter a ‘mutual tuning-in relationship’ (Schutz, 1964, 173)” (p. 189). In examining the data pieces I was seeking a way for others to see these teachers as “whole.” I realize now that these are only partial images of these teachers, but even these partial images hold value.

While interviewing the nine teachers I was listening for stories about moments in which there was a concrete action of some sort as well as resonance. Action is essential to my concept of story and Arendt’s theory of what humans are capable of and resonance is

the quality of connection that is important to me. I deliberately worded the questions open-ended to catch as wide an array of experiences possible. I looked over the charts and re-listened and reread parts of the transcripts and observation in order to determine follow-up interview questions and to construct a profile of the teacher (Seidman, 1998). I examined the teachers' responses to the last section of questions about stories of experience. At this time I interrogated the stories with Arendtian theory by asking questions of the story as it was in raw form: Is this *labor*, *work* or *action*? Do we learn more about *who* the teacher is through this story? Is this story about a fixed event or does it keep happening? Are there any other Arendtian elements illustrated by the story?

All the teachers' stories can be interpreted by probing them with Arendtian concepts; however, I chose to pursue stories told by Marie, Maggie, Nikki, Lucy, and Ben because of their uniqueness and complexity. In selecting certain teachers' stories over others I was attempting to find stories that presented complex issues that teachers are faced with that may be less obvious as well as stories that would offer resonance to others. These stories are shared and analyzed in the next chapter. Now, though, I will present what I learned from the four other teachers who participated in the phase one part of the study. These four teachers' interviews lacked clear stories of uncertainty and were left behind as I moved into the Arendtian analysis of the five other stories.

Learning from Phase-One-only teachers

Observations of Claire, Julia, Cassandra and Ruth

The four teachers, left behind or unanalyzed, so to speak, are Cassandra, Claire, Julia, and Ruth. Claire and Julia are two teachers I have come to admire while Cassandra and Ruth made me feel like I was looking into a mirror at times. Claire and Julia, teaching 3rd and 2nd grade respectively, are incredibly even-keeled and thoughtful in their words and actions. Over and over again in my observation notes I mention their tone of voice, their cadence, their attention to individual students. In my observations they seemed confident and focused.

Brisk confidence.

Julia and Claire epitomize what Floden and Buchman (1993) call “brisk confidence” (p. 380). This type of confidence is one that is simultaneously grounded in the teachers’ beliefs in themselves to make decisions without projecting absolute certainty or dogmatism over the classroom. For Claire though, in her fourth year of teaching, the hesitancy of a novice teacher is still noticeable. One day Claire gave her students an inquiry-based activity to assemble a polyhedron through paper folding. Some students were struggling and I noted that I could physically see Claire holding herself back, putting her hands behind her back, and saying, “You’ll figure it out.”

Julia has been teaching for 10 years, 9 of them in second grade and her “brisk confidence” is more refined. She uses questioning strategies for figuring out what students need and spends a lot of time making observations on what students are struggling with or achieving. Both Claire and Julia relate how they wished they had not

raised their voices at students and really want to be the “calm” teacher providing a “calm” space for their students.

Cassandra and Ruth, while they are not “loud” teachers, definitely have a different approach in their classroom than Claire and Julia. Ruth, a third-year kindergarten teacher, decided to become a teacher after opting out of pediatric medicine in college. Cassandra, on the other hand, always knew she wanted to be a teacher and was in her fifth year of classroom teaching. What I find most interesting about Ruth and Cassandra is how they remind me of myself when I taught second grade. I observed an “arm’s-length” level of care and a sort of no nonsense vocabulary used with the students. Both are highly organized and rely heavily on routines and lesson plans from curriculum books.

Cassandra taught a math lesson with the teacher’s manual open on her lap and Ruth became visibly fatigued during a non-routine day. Their “brisk confidence” tends toward certitude bordering on authoritarianism at times. I did, however, witness tender moments. Ruth sat down with a scowly third grade reading buddy, began joking and eventually got him to smile. Cassandra helped a late student with his jacket and gently asked him if he had eaten breakfast.

Interviews with Claire, Julia, Cassandra, and Ruth

During the analysis of the interviews I sought big ideas or themes. In most of the interviews the themes easily presented themselves. In two, Julia and Cassandra’s, it was much harder to find a theme. In this section I discuss the ideas that presented themselves in the four teachers’ interviews from phase-one.

Relationships and readiness.

Claire and Ruth's interviews and observations were the most cohesive of the four teachers who participated first phase of the inquiry. For Claire, the 4th year third grade teacher, relationships formed the basis of her orientation toward teaching. Claire began with a recollection of her mother's (a high school teacher) relationship with her students then proceeded to advocate for the "knowing" of one's students as a precursor to developing good instruction. The interview ended with a story of her trying to fix a relationship with a student. Another story that Claire related was about the preservation of collegial, professional relationships when teaching philosophies were divergent. Claire said,

I have a good rapport with her, but we still have different teaching styles and we still do things very different and we've admitted to each other that it's difficult working with each other. . . It still stumps me because this teacher doesn't adapt her lessons to the kids. She does it her way and that's the way it's going to be. She'll say, you know, "They just don't get it and I did it two days in a row. They don't get it," and it's always the students' fault.

For Claire, and her focus on relationships with students, and her flexibility in meeting their needs, this teacher's approach is incomprehensible.

Ruth's interview was very focused on issues of academic readiness and students with special education needs. Even before I knew Ruth had aspired to be a doctor I noted the clinical quality of her classroom management. The children's art was all hung at right angles and perfectly linear. She was very direct in her language, telling the children, "I don't like that" or "We don't yell in here" when redirecting inappropriate behavior. There is this subtle tension between her belief in getting students "the help they need" by going

through the special education referral process and giving children a chance to grow. She was very frustrated with the slow process of getting one of her students into a level three setting for violent or aggressive students. She details how she sought help outside her school and district in trying to manage this student during her first year. This story was contrasted with another about a student who spent his Kindergarten year responding to her with animal noises like ‘ribbits’ and ‘baas’. She believed he was autistic. Yet the following year he came by her class and began talking to her about what she was doing and making connections to his time in her classroom. I believe for Ruth children are puzzles to be figured out. As she says, “you never know what you are going to get and you just kind of go with the flow and figure it out.”

Problems

Julia and Cassandra were, for me, harder to figure out based on the interview and observational data. Julia really seemed to struggle to tell stories about her experiences and Cassandra posed an ethical problem for me. Julia, in her 10th year of teaching, really focused on different topics in her interview. It was evident that there was some tension between the idea of “this is what I am here to do” (she calls teaching her “mission field”) and the curricular restrictions she was under. For Julia her Christian religion and the support from other Christians is an essential part of her being as teacher, but in the observations this religious base does not present itself as dogmatic or prescriptive. It emerges through her calmness and her focus on character education through the use of Auto B. Good videos. The story she shared was of the work of a previous teacher who gathered the entire grade together for a shared reading or writing experience called

Wacky Wednesday. It was obvious that Julia enjoyed and valued this communal and creative time among the grade level. However with the new collaborative model, and issues of alignment with other grades, they are not allowed to have this time anymore. For Julia, the focus on collaboration, while valuable, is not a substitute for common experiences.

The interview with Cassandra, the 5th year second grade teacher, focused on her relationships with challenged children, especially boys. For me, creating a coherent picture of her based on my data was difficult. I had a post-it note on her file that said “very difficult for me.” In my observation notes I wrote that it was like looking in a mirror to see my former teaching self. Many of her management strategies and actual physical materials reminded me of my classroom days. When observing her instruction and demeanor toward students, however, I sensed she was unhappy. One day I learned that she had the special education “cluster.” Clustering was a strategy used by the school in order to manage the English Language Learner and Special Education teachers’ time more effectively. These teachers came into each classroom for a certain amount of time depending on the level of student needs. I gathered from her comments that this was a difficult year and she was being challenged in her ability to differentiate and manage all the students’ needs.

This plight reminded me of my last year of teaching. I was being continually challenged by my students and administration. I was angry, tired and unhappy and I could not see anything positive happening in my classroom. Cassandra’s challenges created a sense of helplessness which resulted in a negative, defeatist atmosphere in the classroom.

This familiarity made it difficult to really see and hear Cassandra because I immediately took up a critical stance toward everything she did and said. In effect, I was critiquing myself. I lost the researcher stance and therefore the interview was superficial. I did a disservice to Cassandra and the project by not being present enough to transcend or disentangle my own memories from my observations and interview with her.

Teaching and teachers are complicated. Yet almost all of these four teachers, regardless of their individual idiosyncrasies that emerged in the small bits of data I gathered, demonstrated traits of effective teachers such as stating clear expectations, using different grouping strategies, monitoring all parts of the room and focusing their classes in student work and dialog (Darling-Hammond, Bransford, & LePage, 2005). These four teachers have much knowledge to give us about their experiences, but the focus of this inquiry is what teachers do in uncertainty. While these teachers' stories were interesting, the data I was able to collect in my limited time with them lacked the essential quality of showing them struggle or puzzle over "what to do" that I was looking for.

Phase Two

The areas of focus in phase two were the elaboration, creation, and representation of the teachers' stories. By this phase I decided the essential quality of the stories had to convey a moment of uncertainty and *action*. I also began to experiment with ways to textually represent the teachers' stories and profiles.

Second interview and story elaboration

Leaving behind Claire, Julia, Cassandra, and Ruth, I focused my energy and time on scheduling a second interview to elaborate on the kernel of story found in the interviews of the other five teachers. Their stories were shaped by taking the answer to one of the questions along with other information from the interviews and observations. This story became the organizing theme when examining the interviews and observations. When I decided to develop a story from the first interview I contacted the teachers for a second interview to elaborate on the story chosen. I emailed and asked, “I would like to develop this story about _____. What do you think?” All the teachers agreed to develop the story I picked. One teacher decided to write up his own personal narrative while the others were content with developing the story through conversation during a second interview. When I conducted the second interview I asked the teachers to fill in details about the event. I then had these interviews transcribed and began piecing together the text into a coherent story text.

Developing a format for representation

In narrative research representation and creation of the stories of the participants is a common methodological issue. In this section I relate my process and problems with choosing a format in which to relate the teachers’ stories. My first attempt at representation was to create a profile or portrait of the teacher using the story as the basis with support from the interviews and observations. I likened this process to Polkinghorne’s (1995) idea of narrative analysis, which is a study “whose data consist of actions, events, and happenings, but whose analysis produces stories” (p. 6). Barone

(2007) calls this type of narrative work “narrative construction” because “the recasting of data into a storied form is more accurately described as an act of textual arrangement than of analysis” (p. 456). My process was part analysis and part textual arrangement. I attempted to arrange the text or data into a coherent story by sifting through pages of data to find recurring themes that epitomized the story. My goal in the profile was to provide a description of the person as teacher but also create a logical flow into the story.

First, I wrote the profile in third person and after finishing two profiles I was dissatisfied with the results. The profile seemed to fall flat and lose some of the intensity that was conveyed in the interviews. Then I tried rewriting the profiles in first-person, which felt hollow, as if I was putting words into the teachers’ mouths. I was in fact doing that by taking my observational data and refashioning it into part of the teachers’ stories. I felt that using the observational data as representative of the teachers’ intent was faulty and inauthentic. These representation struggles and my fear of distorting the teachers’ stories led me to take a step back and work directly with the teachers’ words rather than paraphrasing or summarizing the teachers’ stories.

Phase Three

In the final phase of analysis I finalized an approach to representing the story, worked with the teachers in constructing the final story, conducted “member checks” and follow up meetings, and developed a series of questions, based on Arendt’s ideas, to analyze the stories by the teachers.

Affirming and confirming the stories

I decided to keep the teachers' voice as intact as possible in representing the stories. Two teachers in response to my email decided to write up an extension of the story and sent it via email. I edited it and added some details from the interview and then met with them to review it. They accepted that collaborative version as their story. For the rest of the teachers I began working with the large chunk of texts from the interviews. I placed supporting details from the second interview into the text of the first story, blending the information from the two interviews to make a coherent text of the event. I then scheduled a member check meeting where I had the teachers read over the story and make comments or suggestions. These meetings were not taped, but I did take notes. Two of the teachers accepted the draft that I had constructed from the interviews and observation with minimal suggestions or edits. The final teacher, while reading over it during the "member-check" meeting began making substantive changes. I took these changes and added them, and sent her a revised copy which she in turn revised some more and sent back. I have included her final version for analysis in the next chapter and note any serious discrepancy between the first and last drafts of the story.

Developing and asking questions

An essential part of this phase was how to bring Arendt's ideas from her philosophy into the analysis. I had finalized the representation issue but now struggled with how to "unpack" these stories through the lens of Arendt's work. In his book on interview-based research, Steinar Kvale suggests multiple readings of the stories through asking different types of questions. He suggests questions that lead to a "plurality of

interpretations” (Kvale, 1996, p. 210). It was important for me to ask questions of the stories that led to the use of Arendtian concepts. Otherwise I would be unable to answer the question: does Arendt help? Working with a committee member we brainstormed several Arendt-like questions and settled upon three essential questions. These questions use Arendtian concepts to look at the larger forces as well as the individual agency that is relayed in the teachers’ stories. The questions are explained in the next chapter.

Summary

This inquiry into teachers’ stories of uncertainty was motivated by my belief in the importance of teachers’ stories and the notion that Hannah Arendt could be useful in making sense of uncertainty in teaching. I have used a form of narrative research that places the stories at the forefront of analysis. I also draw upon the data from the interviews and observations as a support in understanding and interpreting the meaning and knowledge found in the stories.

Over the three phases of analysis I have wrestled with issues of selection and representation of stories of teacher action and uncertainty. In the next chapter I present five stories that are complex and thought provoking. Each story is presented then followed with three questions based on the thought of Hannah Arendt that help introduce the teacher and help bring understanding to what the teachers do in these moments of uncertainty.

CHAPTER 4

ARENDT AND THE TEACHERS' STORIES

What follows are the stories of five of the teachers from Frog Creek Elementary. The format of this chapter is: Each teacher is briefly introduced then the teachers' stories given and finally the teachers' experience are analyzed using an Arendtian lens.

The three questions asked of each story are: What is the *web of relationships* in the story? What is done? And *who* is this teacher? These are somewhat overlapping categories but the sequence is particularly important. First the question about the *web of relationships* helps set the context. In essence this question helps us understand who the different actors are and how they interrelate. The second question uses Arendtian concepts of *action*, along with others that are particularly helpful, to attempt a deeper reading of what the teacher does or does not do in the story. The final question is particularly Arendtian. *Who* is this teacher? Arendt would tell us that we cannot really know who someone is until they are dead. Since we have the capacity to act (while we are alive) we always have the ability to do something new and different, to surprise others and ourselves. According to Arendt, this *whoness* is neither fixed nor stable.

In chapter 5 the teachers' stories and their actions are brought into discussion with one another and the issues in the field of teacher education today. I then discuss how these stories might help prepare teachers for uncertainty and share implications for using Arendt's theory in talking about uncertainty in teaching.

Ben

Ben is a fifth grade teacher in his 19th year of teaching. Ben is a small man with ruddy cheeks and a slight beard. He is the only male classroom teacher at Frog Creek Elementary. Ben's recollections in the interview centered around a particular year and a series of events in which he learned "that, I, in order to do the best job possible, need the freedom to do my job—to practice my art." Ben chose to write his own version of the event and what follows is his story of a moment during his 14th year of teaching that led him to make one of the most important decisions in his teaching life.

We gathered in the library after work. We were apprehensive, having been given doomsday scenarios over the preceding year regarding our inability to make average yearly progress (AYP) on our state assessments. The entire teaching staff huddled in a small area between chest high book shelves, gathered together for warmth and support, and yet I felt nothing but chills.

I knew what was coming and the panic rose, prickling my skin, urging me to run away. At stake was a million dollar grant. If we got the grant, we would be able to afford more teachers and be able to achieve, with the added resources, AYP. Without the grant we would lose resources and teachers and our chances of achieving AYP would be greatly diminished. This would lead to reconstitution, with our teachers and principal being fired or sent throughout the school district in other positions. The principal, Leslie Reed led the meeting, beginning with, "We need this grant. You've all had a chance to review it. In order to get the grant, we all have to agree to it. Are there any questions?"

I needed more information, the staff needed more information to make an informed decision, but it was left to me, member of the Union Executive Council, to speak up. I raised my hand and asked, "What extra work will the teachers be expected to do? Will there be more meetings?"

She responded, "Most likely, OK, now we are going to vote. Because the grant requires 100% participation, I will take a voice vote." And with that she proceeded to take the vote count. I couldn't believe we were taking a voice vote. No way could that be considered valid.

As the vote got closer my hearing grew fainter, the blood rushing through my head prevented me from hearing details, adrenaline rushed through my body, I longed to run away. I knew what was happening, I knew what was to come, it would all hinge on one word. As the vote got closer to me I thought of my grandfather and his work for the Great Northern Railway Union. What would he think? Would he be proud of me? There are seminal moments in one's life. Times in which one of two paths are taken. A conscious decision to go against the crowd and speak up for what is right. "Ben?" This was it, with red face, hot, shame, fear, and buried beneath it all, a pride; I have met the test, "No." I said.

"How can you say no?"

"I don't think we have enough information to make an informed decision." I explained.

"It's all right here!" She yells as she slams the grant down on the table, "what more do you need?"

"I don't have enough information to vote yes." I explained again.

"Then maybe this isn't the right place for you!" she says.

There. It has been said. It is done. The rug pulled out from under my feet, my home, my friends, taken from me, and yet I survive. I live.

What is the web of relationships in this story?

The web of relationships is a metaphor for Hannah Arendt. In action and speech no tangible product is created in the process, but what is created is a relationship. Using the metaphor of a web helps people visualize the fragile transparent strands that connect people to one another. Continuing with the metaphor, sometimes those strands are woven tightly and provide support, such as support that parents provide for their children. Sometimes the strands are ephemeral, such as in the coming together of like-minded people at a conference. Whether the web of relationships is momentary or permanent people carry them along as they enter into new relationships.

For Ben the webs that came together in this moment include his "ancestors" in the name of his grandfather, his fellow teachers (individual and collective) and his principal. Ben believes he is continuing important work in which his grandfather also engaged. Ben is connected to his immediate colleagues and fellow teachers statewide in efforts to improve teaching and learning. The strands that connect Ben's web to his principal are the most brittle and perhaps the most fleeting.

An important relationship for Ben is also one with the students. Ben's relationship with his students plays into his decision-making in the moment. In an interview reflecting on this story Ben says,

Knowing that your career, your avocation, is not based in a room, it's based in those kids that come through the door. And it doesn't matter where the door is; it's the kids that matter. That's really where the focus lies and you got to do what's best for them. Not necessarily what you think is best for you.

A decision by Ben reverberates through the web impacting his relations with his family, his students, his fellow teachers and the administrator. However, it does not stop there. That decision or deed continues into other webs: the fellow teachers' webs and the administrator's because action carries with it the condition of *boundlessness*. This *boundlessness* or the uncertainty of knowing where action ends creates a fragility and tension in the web. Ben's intention to resonate with his fellow teachers is obvious. He realizes the stakes and knows "we would lose resources and teachers." Ben also wants to resonate with his ancestors; he wonders in the story if his grandfather would be proud of him.

Arendt argues that we behave, as society believes we should, by doing what is expected. This behavior tends to focus on meeting our individual needs rather than

serving a greater good despite the fact that we exist and interact with other humans. It may seem that Ben, the other teachers, and the administrator are focusing on their own individual needs of control but there are also societal expectations that have forced them into this moment. We could read the actions of all involved as: Ben says no because he needs to honor his own individual need as union organizer; the other teachers say yes because meeting their needs are dependent on the security of their jobs and the principal needs to get things done. If we read this story as one in which a decision is made to serve a greater good then Ben says no because he believes he *has to* because he represents the union. The teachers say yes because they believe they are teachers who work together to achieve results no matter the cost. The administrator believes the grant will help everyone despite the added burden. These are potential readings of the decisions enacted at this moment. Arendt's ideas are a reminder that there is a difference between action and behavior. Most simply put, that difference hinges on either thinking or not thinking what we do. Not thinking, or thoughtlessness, which is what Arendt calls "heedless recklessness or hopeless confusion or complacent repetition of 'truths'" (1958, p. 5.) can lead to behavior.

What is done?

Ben says, "No." While this moment is not exactly the equivalent of a classic heroic deed, as Arendt sometimes describes action, it does take courage—an essential component of action. Ben objects for many reasons. He objects because he believed more information was needed, he wanted his union ancestors and contemporaries to be proud, he had a series of conflicts with the administrator, and he believed the drive to say yes

was based on fear. His idea that “it was left to me, member of the Union Executive Council, to speak up” also drives his decision to act without knowing the full consequences of that act. Arendt’s action is boundless; in other words, a person has no idea what will happen or what the action will lead to. That “no” unleashed a flood of uncertainty about what would happen to him in the following months. [Ben ended up filing a grievance against the administrator and during that process tensions ran very high.]

Hannah Arendt believed that the denial of *action* would reduce people to something less than human. Perhaps the administrator’s “voice vote” was an attempt to squelch potential action by the teachers and particularly by Ben. Ben and the principal already distrusted one another. Or perhaps it was just for convenience because she could not possibly believe any one, in a high stakes environment, would turn down money that could help them do their job better. Regardless of the principal’s motivation for the roll-call vote, from Ben's point of view there was some sense of isolation and the suppression of possible discontent.

Ben indicates that there was this sense of doom over the situation that may have prevented people from speaking their minds. In an interview reflecting on this story he says,

Everybody [was] just totally freaking out and feeding into this frenzy of all the awful things that would happen to us. The other teachers would say, “Oh they're going to move us, we're going to lose our jobs.” Then if you throw in the mix teachers that are not tenured who can't speak up without fear of losing their jobs—that's another reason why I spoke up, we had a lot of non-tenured teachers in the building.

This “frenzy,” as Ben calls it, proves to be a ripe environment for the denial of action. Arendt uses tyranny to describe what occurs when the ability to act and speak is prevented through either physical or psychological isolation and “mutual fear and suspicion” (Arendt, 1958, p. 202). This isolation tends to breed what Arendt calls behavior. Behavior is also created by “imposing innumerable and various rules, all of which tend to ‘normalize’ its members, to make them behave, to exclude spontaneous action or outstanding achievement” (Arendt, 1958, p. 42). The behavior that was expected and demanded in this event (and others like it across schools) is one that is based on fear. Fear of failure, fear of losing jobs, fear of stigmatization that is perpetuated by high stakes testing situations. The story Ben relates can be read as tyranny—not only through the individual action of the administrator but the expectations of behavior that a high stakes situation demands. It could be argued that the administrator is being tyrannized by the pressure from the district that in turn is being tyrannized by the state and so on.

Promises are intentions that are based on trust and respect and also on prior experiences that provide an expectation of how a person will be. Ben's trust of the administrator had been slowly eroding over the course of that school year. What he calls his “divergent” thinking continually put him into what he perceived as antagonistic situations with her. He would even ask other teachers to share ideas or ask questions so as to cover him as the originator. Also what he called the “targeting” of his classroom through suspending students and removing a student teacher broke any trust or respect he could muster for her as a person.

Ben's promising or intention is most evident in his collective notion of teachers rather than to a hierarchy of administration. He truly believes that teachers are bound to each other regardless of principals, schools, or any physical location. Ben is motivated by this trust and respect. We see this motivation through the struggle that plays out in the story in his internal reflections after saying "no." In essence, he is saying I cannot keep my promise to the union if I say yes and I cannot I keep my promises to myself and my ancestors if I say yes.

Promising and forgiving are how people counteract the boundlessness of our action. When people promise we have good intentions, but our action can go awry or fall flat. According to Arendt, we cannot forgive ourselves; only others can forgive us. We forgive others for who they are. Ben's perception of the acts of the principal and who she is is something he cannot forgive. He cannot release her from that act of her speech in the library. It is never over for him, so the action and its consequences continue to unfold over time. In a later interview he admits to an emotional response when thinking about that year and says,

I wish there was a way that I could just make the feelings associated with this incident disappear. I know some people give things over to higher power, let God take care of it or whatever and I suppose in a way I did that, I trusted that what I was doing was the right thing . . . [W]hen I think about what happened I would like to feel more neutral. But I don't. I still feel some of that same fear and some of that same anger that I've felt all along and I don't know if that'll ever disappear.

Hannah Arendt writes, "Without being forgiven, released from the consequences of what we have done, our capacity to act would, as it were, be confined to one single deed from which we could never recover" (1958, p. 237). It seems as if Ben cannot or will not forgive the principal and therefore that deed, that year, is all that principal will

ever be capable of in Ben's mind. Ben is denying the principal's capacity to change, her natality. Though, it seems that Ben also suffers from the consequences of that year.

Perhaps if Ben did choose to forgive this deed he could be free of the anger and emotion that sometimes rise in him when thinking about that year. Some might suggest that Ben be aided in forgiveness, so that he could be able to let go of that year of teaching. Perhaps a conversation with him would help or a new age ceremony of releasing the negative could work, but this is the Arendtian crux of forgiveness—no one can do it for Ben if he does not see the need to do it. When asked if it affects his teaching he says, "No, not really, because I compartmentalize in a way, the teaching. What I do in the classroom is different from my interactions with the administration or my interactions with the union so it's kind of, of . . . a separate issue."

Who is Ben?

Ben became a teacher later in life. He simply says, "And then came a kind of a life-changing experience for me and that's when I got sober" and stopped drinking. He had been a lead nursing assistant, training new people and felt he was talented in that area; he also had previous college professors mention those talents to him. Many things aligned for him when he chose to look into teaching as a career; an information session on the program, and a program that meet his needs. He said, "It's just, like, everything fell into place." The timeline was "perfect" for him to become a teacher. Ben believes that teaching is an art and a science. He believes it is the responsibility of a teacher to bring the curriculum to the students in a dynamic and engaging way and that mandates

from districts and administrations need to be examined critically. Teaching to the test seems to go against the very fiber of Ben's teaching soul. He says,

We are creating these beings that are going to go out there and be, you know, useful members of society, so, they need to know science. They need to know everything. They need to know as much as we can tell them.

Ben wants to always say yes to his students when it comes to their learning and well-being. As a child, Ben's family had been troubled. He received poor grades, became the class clown, and no one knew what was going on at home. He says, "I've kind of become sensitive to what the kid might be going through and if they're going through rough things outside of school, I understand that."

From Ben's words we learn that his philosophy centers on educating and attending to the whole child. His actions show us additional layers of his character. According to Arendt, it is action that discloses who we are as unique individuals. Arendt contrasts who we are with what we are. She believes it easy to say what people are and what they do. Who they are, however, is only revealed through action. Arendt argues that to describe who a person is defies a series of adjectives. Stories are the best way to understand who someone is.

By choosing to share this story, Ben reveals who he is. In the first interview he spoke about the conflict with the administrator with phrases such as "it was just me and the principal that had a problem" and "it was the most unpleasant year of my entire teaching career." He spoke of several things the administrator did: removing a student teacher without warning, suspending students from his class, appropriating his students' materials, and not allowing union representation during disciplinary meetings. When asked to provide further details, Ben chose to write rather than tell this story of a moment

that was not even mentioned in the first interview. We then learn more about who Ben is. While Ben was expected to say “yes” he chose to begin a new action, to demonstrate natality, and in that moment there opened up an uncertain future along with the possibility of something new.

To understand who Ben is as a classroom teacher, we can listen to him tell us who he is as described earlier. We can further see who he is by observing him in action. There are two particular incidents from the classroom observations in addition to his own written story that may give us more insight into who Ben is.

One day at school Ben had hiccups after lunch during the math review time before a test the students were going to take. He decided to teach his students how to cure hiccups. He said, “I am teaching you something you don’t get to learn in school.” He goes to the back of the room and fills a coffee cup with water. He leans over forward and then drinks from the other side of the cup. The class is absolutely quiet. It seems successful and he returns to his chair to explain what hiccups do to you and why the trick works. He then asks for more questions and a flurry of hands goes up. The students want to know more about hiccups or share their own stories. He lets this proceed for a few questions then reiterates, “When I say, ‘any questions?’ I mean about math.” Most hands go down and the math review continues.

Later in the year Ben arrives at school in jeans and a sweatshirt, he looks tired, worried and constantly runs his hands over his face and into his very thin hair. He had to take his dog into the emergency vet early that morning. He does not tell his students

about this at any point but he does tell other teachers; later in the staff lunchroom he confirms with his colleagues that his dog is better.

The three moments: his story about the staff vote, observing him cure his hiccups, and watching him in distress about his dog, suggest to us that Ben is a courageous, thoughtful, challenging, spontaneous, private person. Yet these series of adjectives do not do justice to Ben's complexity. Only by spending time with and watching Ben can we learn over time who he is. Although the adjectives give us a useful way to talk about Ben and what he does, Ben as a person is never a fixed point who is describable with a fixed set of adjectives.

In the member checking interview Ben revealed to me another dimension of *who* he is. This year, for the first time in his 19 years of teaching, he has decided to visit all his students' families in their homes. He is the only teacher at the school who will do this. When I last spoke to him he had only a handful to go and he hoped that a venture into the webs of the students would bring a resonance and power to his classroom. He did this, with the principal's approval and despite concerns by the other teachers that his action would create more expectations for them. Ben knows that doing the unexpected (natality) brings uncertainty, yet he continues to act.

Lucy

Lucy is in her 10th year of teaching, her ninth year at Frog Creek. A quintessential kindergarten teacher she is quick to laugh and smile. The theme of Lucy's interview was very much about change, conflict, and survival. Lucy says all the

challenges a teacher could face happened in her first few years of teaching: difficult students, difficult parents, and difficult district administration. This year, she is facing difficult team meetings. The school's collaborative model uses co-teaching among the classroom, English as second language and special education teachers, which requires intense planning. Lucy says she finds herself most often playing "peacemaker," as she calls it, within her collaborations. She says, "I feel like I'm kind of trying to keep everybody in sync." Lucy relates a story about a team meeting that is indicative of the "change" she is learning to deal with.

When they get to first grade they are expected to do a Venn diagram. We've worked a lot with T-Charts and Venn Diagrams and now we are going to have them do one on their own. The ESL collaborator, Karen, out of concern for the language learners I'm sure, says, 'Don't you think that is too hard? Can't they just draw pictures?' And, we said . . . no, in writer's workshop we work on inventive spelling, we don't expect it to be spelled perfectly. We will have the charts up where they'll be able to find the word, match it up; they should be able to do this. Then Kate, the teacher hired in October says, 'I think I'll have them do it with partners but I know she has a bright bunch of kids and then Ruth said 'no, they need to be able to do this individually or independently.'

So we've got Ruth saying, 'This is what we need to do. This is the expectation.' While Karen and Kate are saying 'No, it's too hard. What can we do instead is maybe group work.' And so then it, I think that it is probably my job to interject at this point because they're acting like Ruth is the bad guy for saying this is what we need to do because she keeps our record of what we did last year and she's the one that went to the vertical alignment meetings, she's our go to person on planning reader's workshop.

So then I say 'we need to remember that this is a first grade expectation, they might not all be able to do it. I have students whose language is not an issue and they will still have a tough time with it, but I'm still going to hold them to that same standard. If we need to do this for two weeks we can do this for two weeks. But we can't just let them out of it because we think it's going to be too hard. If this is what first grade expects this is what we need to do.' So I kind of had to come in there with that and then my usual tactic is to make a joke or lighten the load somehow to get us back to friendly air because it gets tense. Ruth doesn't hide tension well.

She gets red, she gets annoyed. Karen doesn't back down and she can be pleasant but she'll just keep coming at you saying, 'well what if we tried this? Well what about this?'

It's a hot mess; it's all a hot mess. I feel like we used to have this cohesive team where nobody offended anyone and now it's just like at any given time anybody can be mad at anybody, but me. Nobody gets mad at me.

I love my job, I'm going to fight for kids and what's best, I'm going to fight the appropriate people, I'm not going to fight my teammates. I think people know that about me, that I'm going to be pretty respectful and I also value differences. I value different styles because I think if we are all like Ruth the world would be a scary place and I think if we were all like me the world would be a scary place. I think kids need to be taught from different teaching styles. I think that then they can and they can see themselves in one of us, surely . . . right?

What is the web of relationships in this story?

Hannah Arendt writes:

The disclosure of the “who” through speech, and the setting of a new beginning through action, always fall into an already existing web where their immediate consequences can be felt. Together they start a new process which eventually emerges as the unique life story of the newcomer, affecting uniquely the life stories of all those with whom he comes into contact (1958, p.184).

The team meeting in Lucy's story represents Arendt's concept that *speech* and action are intertwined. The result of this meeting may be represented in a document or plan but nothing will represent the deliberations accurately. What emerges from speech and action are the stories. Each teacher will bring a story from this meeting. Those stories will continue on, into the web of others, as those teachers engage in interactions with others.

The primary web in Lucy's story is the kindergarten team and there are several already existing webs within this team. This team consists of four classroom teachers and an English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher and occasionally the principal and the

ESL teacher's coach. According to Lucy, the team was mostly filled with "type B" personalities until three years ago when two teachers retired. Then Ruth began to assert herself and her ideas in the team. Then this past year, a new ESL teacher came on board with a personality similar to Ruth's. This ESL teacher, Karen, was new to the profession, new to the district, but also similar in age to Lucy and Ruth.

Lucy believes that these other webs have an influence over the way the teachers act in team meetings. In the second interview Lucy elaborated on what she believes motivates the other teachers, especially Karen. Lucy believes the Karen's teaching coach, a consultant from outside the district, encourages Karen to assert herself in the team meetings. Lucy also believes that this consultant actively pits Karen and Ruth against each other. Lucy says, "I think she might encourage Karen to push the envelope a little bit but then knowing that it's just going to aggravate Ruth. Then Ruth will go to the consultant and, like, tattle on Karen. It hasn't been positive." Lucy continues, "She [the coach] stays away from me, she won't come and try to tell me to do something. I don't know why."

What is done?

According to Hannah Arendt, action and speech do reveal a who even when the subject is of a "matter of the world." Arendt calls this subject an "in-between" which is something concrete that binds people together. What binds these teachers together are the students. What separates them are the different expectations and assumptions about ability and achievement. This presents the dilemma of work and action in teaching. In Arendtian work everything is predictable. The blueprint is given and results are expected.

The language that the teachers use, most notably Lucy and Ruth, are in the mode of work. They say, “they are expected,” “they should be able,” and “this is what we need to do, this is the expectation.” Lucy, however, softens her stance by adding, “If we need to do this for two weeks we can do this for two weeks. But we can't just let them out of it because we think it's going to be too hard.” While Lucy is still pushing the team towards making students meet the expectations she does allow some room in her thought for the unpredictability of working with kindergarteners. The students may surprise them. Lucy's story illustrates that even though teachers are bound together by their students they hold competing ideas on what is best for students.

The tension at the team meetings demonstrates the fragility that exists in the web of relationships. This fragility, this tenuousness, stems from individuals' natality and the tensions of plurality. The coming together of individuals to deliberate and make decisions in a key idea in Arendt's ideal political, public world. Team meetings are similar to this coming together. As demonstrated, each teacher brings to the meeting their own interpretation of the expectation and, through speech, assert their capacity of natality. It becomes Lucy's job to bring resonance in the situation. This story can be read as an explanation of how Lucy's attempts to hold the web together through the linking of who she is, how she sees her duty to the children and the profession of teaching. It is also most revealing of who Lucy is. While it may seem that Lucy is taking charge and pulling the team together while staying above the fray herself, in other comments, we see she is not so sure of herself and her role.

Lucy explains that she has talked to everyone but Karen, the ESL teacher, regarding the team dynamics. She believes that there are others influencing and supporting Karen in her tactics of continually questioning during team meetings. Lucy says the principal thinks it's good to have a "button-pusher" on a team. Lucy says,

I feel like teachers in years past have been a little bit more timid, where she's like a changer. It was kind of drilled into me in college that until you're tenured you're to be quiet and do what you're told, maybe share ideas but not try to change everything.

According to Arendt, courage is a key component to action. Arendt even suggests a simple courage that allows one to begin a story of one's own. Lucy, however, equates courage to experience. She says,

Although I can calm down a room I don't enjoy conflict. For me to be able to confront this teacher even in a caring and compassionate way would take a lot of courage—courage that I may have after teaching for 20 years.

Who is Lucy?

Arendt speaks of the *space of appearances* within the web of relationships. In these team meetings, which are similar to Arendt's public, a space for a disclosure of *who* is made available. Lucy tries to position herself as the one holding together the relationships among the team members. First, Lucy receives the extra burden of always having a presence in the meetings; she becomes, in a sense, a de facto leader based on her number of years of experience. Lucy explains that "it's just like at any given time anybody can be mad at anybody, but me. Nobody gets mad at me." This implies her position as an authority in the team. Lucy does not explicitly acknowledge it as a role of authority, but more of an influence. She also says, "So I kind of had to come in there with that and then my usual tactic is to make a joke or lighten the load somehow to get us back

to friendly air because it gets tense” suggesting that she is very much aware of how much influence she has on this team.

Who Lucy is is disclosed not only through her retelling of the story of team meeting but also through the story of her entrance into the profession. She decided to be a teacher in high school and obtained her licensure through a local private college.

Anticipating a substitute position for a teacher on leave where she student taught, she did not look for another job.

There was a kindergarten teacher who was taking a 5-month-long leave. She was like, “I want you. I’m going to tell the principal.” I found out later on that this principal really had a problem with the person I student-taught for and he saw me as kind of like her protégé, or whatever, like she trained me so I’m going to be just like her. He was black-balling me from all the positions. He actually talked this teacher out of wanting me and telling her I had problems. That was really hurtful, but they did offer me a long-term, it was like a 10-week-long term, and then building sub for the rest of the year. And I said I’d take the long-term because I was like, it’s a job, but no thank you to the building sub. At that point, I knew I had to cut ties. I wasn’t going to get a job in this building.

When the job did not materialize she felt she was "black balled" by the principal. Lucy was a substitute for the following year and after some difficulty finding a job until she landed the kindergarten job that she still has today. Lucy prides herself on her “type-B”, flexible personality and generable likeableness. This story, of the principal not liking her, contrasts with the story team meeting where “no one gets mad” at her.

More layers of Lucy are revealed through seeing her current practices in the classroom. From observing Lucy there seems to be little sense of urgency in Lucy’s teaching and management of the students. One morning during the opening circle time she decided to play the “telephone” game with her students. She leaned over and whispered into a student's ear. The student leaned over to another but looked back to

Lucy with a perplexed look on his face. He asked Lucy, "What did you say?" Lucy whispered it again. The game continued and Lucy watched each encounter of student whispering to student intently and patiently. When the game was over, what came back to Lucy was nothing close to what she said, but she laughed and said, "Well, we'll try that again someday."

Later that day during the writing workshop mini lesson Lucy engaged in a seemingly unconscious act. A boy who sat next to her rocking chair kept touching her arm. Without saying a word she then gave her left hand to him to hold on to. She conducted the mini lesson, writing on the chart paper, asking for students input on her writing while the boy held on to her hand. He stared outward towards the class. No one said anything. When she dismissed them to work she told him to go do some jumping jacks to get his wiggles out. He did as he was told while the other students settled into writing. Lucy said this is her natural reaction to this boy who reminds her of her two year old niece who needs physical contact to stay on track.

Lucy strives to keep the big picture of her philosophy of kindergarten at the forefront of her mind. Her philosophy centers on the idea of school and her classroom as a safe place and to get the students to love school. Lucy prides herself on her flexibility, her ability to watch for, and take those teachable moments down their natural path where her students lead her. She says, "I have no problem if something comes up and I'll say, 'let's circle up and talk about this' or I go off on a total tangent that will benefit them but isn't in the lesson plan."

In my final meeting with Lucy she reflected on her story she told me about the importance of respect. She said, “It is about respect. You have to participate in team meetings with a sense of respect for others. Respect is not something you earn; it is something you have from me because you are a teacher.” This notion of Lucy’s is evident in all her interviews through comments such as, “I do think that excellent teaching is going on in every classroom, I do not doubt that.” Who Lucy is emerges from a combination of speech and action. She is a teacher committed to high expectations for her and students; she values conflict but is perplexed by it as well. She acknowledges that as she has matured she has been able to value different approaches to teaching. Lucy says, “I think if we are all like Ruth the world would be a scary place and I think if we were all like me the world would be a scary place,” reminding us of with Arendt’s concept of plurality. Plurality is one of Hannah Arendt’s greatest values because without it, without others in the world, nothing would be possible.

Maggie

Maggie has been teaching for 29 years. She has a kind, warm smile and is quick to put any volunteer in her classroom to work. She has classroom experience that ranges from rural South Dakota to her current setting in a diverse semi-urban first grade classroom. During the interview, when asked to tell about a moment that she could not stop thinking about, she shared that she had two students’ mothers pass away since she had been teaching first grade. And she said, “They were dealt with very differently.” By this she means that her role was vastly different. In the first instance when a little boy’s

mother died from an illness Maggie relates that the father was very thankful for Maggie's support. But the father did not really want or need any help from the school. In the second event, the role of the school and especially Maggie was very different. Here is the story of that second, different, event.

It was a very dark snowy morning and school was two hours late. My phone rang and it was the school nurse who told me that Julie's mother died and she wouldn't be in today. At first I thought she meant the child's grandmother instead it was the student's mother! I was shocked and saddened as we had just had conferences and the mom was so interested in her daughter's work and willing to help her improve.

I spoke to the principal and requested that I be released to go to the funeral four days later. It was such a sad funeral and the situation was so complicated with boyfriends, a number of fathers and heartbroken children. My husband went with me to the funeral and I remember Julie's little sister running around yelling, "Take mommy out of the box!" There was no mother figure there; everybody's kind of looking at her wondering who's going to help? So finally an aunt or somebody came and swooped her up and took her out. I just thought, "Oh this is so awful."

I talked to the mother's father and he told me he was so angry and wanted to bust the drug dealer who had supplied his daughter. He told me information that I probably should not have heard, but I knew then that this was not just a simple accident. However, about a week after the funeral when I asked the mother's first husband—who was taking care of the kid—what he wanted me to share. He became very defensive and firmly stated it was an accident and she had fallen down the stairs and hit her head.

The problem was we had kids in the same apartment building who knew bits and pieces of the story. I asked the social worker what to do. We decided we would say what the father insistently said, "She fell down the stairs and hit her head." The social worker shared a lesson with the children on death and we talked about the situation, attempting to squelch some of the rumors about the use of drugs that were circulating. We also talked about how we would need to be friends to Julie and help her through the difficult time.

Julie returned about 2 weeks later. I recall talking to her and letting her talk when she needed to. I recall her being sad at times, but was a little surprised at how she didn't express her feelings. Julie was a very sweet girl

and I recall giving her lots of hugs. She continued to see a social worker and I talked with the father often. He was very supportive and was consistent at helping her with homework. It was just that the grandfather said, "I know somebody was dealing her drugs and I'd like to know who it was cuz boy, would I get him," you know, and so there were all these things going on. There was a time when the aunt came in and they told me that they had told Julie her mother was an angel who had brought her presents. The lying bothered me but my hands were tied. A few years later I heard from a colleague that Julie was having some difficulties and that Julie had eventually found out the truth regarding her mother's accidental death.

My heart still hurts for her and I wonder how she is doing now. It was really overwhelming. You're just a teacher, you want to give to them, but you couldn't go home with them, you couldn't do their laundry, you couldn't cut their fingernails, you know, and it was all those mother things that were just not in that child's life anymore.

What is the web of relationships in this story?

Seyla Benhabib (2000) connects Arendt's web of relationships to the phenomenological term of "horizon." Benhabib writes, "The metaphor of the web indicates the invisible, gossamer like ties, networks, and contexts of human relationships that constitute the 'horizon' of human affairs" (p. 112.). The "horizon" is the background in which life unfolds and the *web* consists of the stories and relationships of that life (Benhabib, 2000.) In Maggie's story of Julie the "horizon" or background is Maggie's life and beliefs. Maggie directly enters the web of Julie's family by attending the funeral. Once Maggie entered this web, by her choice, a whole host of issues arose. First, Maggie was exposed to the controversy surrounding the death of Julie's mother when she heard the grandfather say that he knew someone was dealing her drugs. When she returned to school, Maggie became aware of the drug use issue through the stories of children who lived in the apartment building. The initial "gossamer-like ties" were being stretched and challenged (Benhabib, 2000, p. 112). This challenge to Maggie's relationships occurred

as the social worker [and Maggie] agreed to abide by Julie's father's wishes to call the death an accident-despite Maggie's misgivings.

Maggie's story also illustrates Arendt's concern about public and private. Canovan (1992) interprets Arendt's public as a "place of discourse and action...in which human beings mark themselves off from animals" (p. 111). In this public realm we can experience reality through multiple viewpoints; that is, through plurality. Historically, the private realm is where we took care of our biological needs, to produce, consume, and regenerate. For Maggie the public and the private have collapsed into each other in this experience in several ways. We can read the classroom as the public sphere in which essential private stories are played out. First, the students who lived in the apartment with Julie's family began to bring private stories in to the public space of the classroom. Maggie, by attending the funeral and hearing the comments of Julie's grandfather, is drawn further into their private world. The continued erasure of the thin boundaries between public and private occur after Julie returns to school. The final event that tests these boundaries against Maggie's horizon is when Julie's family visits the school and calls Julie's mom an "angel." This bothers Maggie, as the next thing she says is, "The lying bothered me but my hands were tied." This statement of Maggie's comes very near the end of her story and there are multiple ways to interpret its full meaning. The very next sentence is the one that reveals that Julie had difficulties in school and at home. Perhaps the lying to Julie about the way her mother died is what bothers Maggie and causes Julie further trouble. Another way is to read this through the religious horizon of Maggie. When people die, especially from sinful things like drugs, there is a belief in

many religions that their souls do not ascend into heaven and certainly do not become angels. The way Maggie chose to place this statement here along with other comments from the interview data leave her meaning poignantly ambiguous.

What is done?

Maggie decides to attend the funeral and then is compelled to participate in a lie that bothers her. She says, “I don’t know that that many teachers have to deal with death but sometimes you do. I don’t know if I handled it the best way, but I guess you just kind of do what you think you should do and hope it turns out.” Maggie’s action of attending the funeral becomes boundless, in Arendtian terms. It just keeps going and tumbles into the classroom, challenges Maggie’s beliefs about lying and how she can help families.

She says,

I think sometimes the hardest part is the family situations that arise. You can’t change things and you want to. You want to intervene, you want to help them out financially, you want to take the kids home and discipline them a different way because you know they could turn out and you have no control over that.

The private world of Julie and Maggie collide and collapse into the semi-public world of the classroom. According to Arendt, the collapse of the two realms is not Maggie’s fault—it is a condition of the modern world and a potential hazard of education. Arendt sees the classroom as a pseudo-public space because of its simultaneous role in preserving the world and preparing the young. The classroom is an intermediate space between home and the world, private and public (Higgins, 2010). In this intermediate space the private and the public bump up against each other.

Who is Maggie?

Maggie's action and speech show us who she is and help illuminate the "horizon," the life, from which this story emerges. Maggie's decision to attend the funeral shows us *who* she is because it shows us that she is willing to take personal time off and insert herself in to families' private matters. From her words we also learn that Maggie is a very devout Christian and feels she is often guided by her God to work with the children. She says,

I've always viewed teaching as a ministry and I feel like it's my calling. It's like God has said, "No, I want you here," because when I interviewed for this job there were many applications. I remember writing out the application going, "All right, Lord, if you really want me in this district then give me the job, otherwise I don't want to be here." I knew what I was getting into.

What Maggie was "getting into" was a district with students who were increasingly diverse in ethnicity and language. Maggie, who grew up in rural Minnesota and taught in rural South Dakota, saw this as a challenge. Reconciling this notion with another story from Maggie's life presents a complex portrait of an elementary teacher with over 29 years of experience. Maggie went to New York after college to study voice. She lived in New York, auditioned for the Metropolitan Opera and traveled for two years with an opera company. Despite this adventurous time in her life, Maggie wanted "to come back to small town America and just be a normal person and teach and raise kids and stuff."

Maggie got her wish, and after staying at home with her kids until they were school age, she has been teaching at Frog Creek for the past 19 years. She admits she has

“seen a lot” in these years. Maggie relies on and gives her faith the credit for being able to still be positive in the classroom. She says,

I feel like I’m supposed to be here and because of that when I have really needy students in tough situations I pray for them and I pray for their families. I pray for myself and that’s how I get through it. I feel I’m guided to know how to meet some of their needs. There are some other faculties here that have the same ilk and we’ve often said, “Nope, we can’t quit. We can’t quit can we? Nope, we can’t.” That helps buoy each other up because some days you just want to run out and shut the door.

Watching Maggie one can see the care and the developmental orientation that underlies her philosophy of teaching. She is fond of using physical activities that have the kids jump and stretch and act out. When she is explaining the role of the “silent E” she uses a skit where each student is a letter in a word and the first vowel “sprinkles the E with magic dust” to keep it quiet. The students are glued to Maggie’s directions during this time. She jokes easily with the students. She had often put on plays for the families but she feels that her creativity has “been squelched in the past few years” by curriculum mandates. She remains positive and hopes that “maybe in the long run I’ll be able to figure out how to make it more creative.”

Marie

Marie is a soft spoken first grade teacher but behind her mild mannerisms lays an iron fist. Marie is a teacher who knows what she wants from her students, holds high expectations and pours over the latest test scores to glean signs of improvement from her students. Marie was hesitant to be tape recorded. Her initial interview revolved around the theme of change. Change, for Marie, is a good thing. The story she related indicated Marie’s understanding of the increasing culturally diversity of her school and how she

has developed personal practical strategies to respond to the changes. She was expressly speaking to new teachers as she related this story.

I began my teaching career 25 years ago in a district that wasn't much different from other suburban or rural districts I had worked at during my elementary practicum experiences. However during the first decade of my career I began to see some changes in the demographics of my district. Tenured teachers also commented periodically how the demographics had changed from when they had begun teaching in the district.

It was twelve years ago when I encountered my first situation in which I felt there was a cultural barrier between me and a family of a student of mine. The student was the cutest little guy but behaviorally and academically challenging. All of my contact was with the mother of this student. It was my understanding that the culture of this particular family was that the father did not receive teachers of my gender well. Through my teacher training I knew the importance of beginning any conversation with a parent on a positive note and so every note or phone call home to the mother began with talking about what the student did well that day in the classroom. Then I would discuss with the mother a particular situation that had occurred that needed to be addressed. The student continued through the early months to be a challenge for myself and other staff members.

That year I had foot surgery and was gone for 6 weeks in the mid year. When I returned the staff was so happy to have me back as the student was still having great difficulty. My first week back was met with adjustments of returning to the routine of each day with me. It was clear that this student needed to again develop a relationship with me. I made a few calls home that week again making sure that I began on a positive note.

One day during the later part of my first week back the father came to school. The secretary called me down to the office and I walked down there with a paraprofessional. The father was waiting in the lobby of the school. I was quite nervous as I knew that in this culture it was rare that a father would even come to school and discuss their child with a teacher of my gender. When I walked down towards him I felt this sense of hostility and I tapped on the window to get the secretary's attention. I asked her to get the principal because I felt certain that this parent was angry and that I may need some support.

The father watched me hobble down the stairs with both feet in casts and there was this change in his demeanor. His face and body posture softened and he began to tell me how the past six weeks that I had been gone had

been difficult for his son. He indicated he wanted to help his son but didn't know where to begin. I asked him if he could come back after school so we could sit down and talk—with the principal. He agreed and returned later that day.

My rapport with this family improved greatly and I learned a great deal from this experience. I learned that I should not assume that just because a family is of a particular culture that relationships will be strained because of the teacher's gender. I continue to have good relationships with families and fathers of this culture and have noticed that the fathers have been taking a more active role in their child's education. I also feel treated with kindness and respect by both parents.

What is the web of relationships?

The webs in this story are Marie and the child, Marie and the father and Marie and her colleagues. While the story is mainly about Marie's meeting the father, the primary relationship is that of Marie and her "cutest little guy" who was a handful. In her interview Marie mentioned this type of student as the one she most remembers when she reflects back on her years of teaching. She remembers the "little ones" she was always "after." She feels that she has had a positive impact on these children and her evidence is that they come back to visit. Marie says,

You have this relationship with them and they will come back, they will come and seek me out and I just think I must have made an impact. The stories I tell are of the little pranksters, yet they will be the ones that come back and they will remember me.

Along with the relationship with the more challenging students are the relationships with the parents. Marie considers her ability to communicate with families, even angry ones, one of her strengths as a teacher. Prior to relating the story above, Marie says,

I've not had parents yelling at me or going to the principal and complaining. I find that I can cut to the chase but I can do it in a kind and

respectful way. They'll [the parents] listen to me and know I want the best for their child.

Marie's years of experience and success with families and her willingness to change her practice have made her a leader among her colleagues. These collegial relations are important to Marie. Another teacher in this study, Julia, indicated in her interview that Marie was an enormous influence on her. Julia, who has been teaching for 10 years, speaks about Marie as a

mentor/friend/professional that I can go to when I'm struggling with something or have questions about something. I know she's not going to be judgmental but offer whatever support that she can give. I like the way she teaches—just very calm, firm, tough love. She refers to herself as the 'iron fist' but I think she does it in a very gentle and compassionate way.

What is done?

Arendt ideas of plurality and natality are crucial to understanding action and reaction. Since we all live together and have the capacity to do something unforeseen by others (natality) we are simultaneously a “doer” and a “sufferer” (Arendt, 1958, p. 190). We cannot exist without other unique and equal humans, which is plurality, but sometimes action and expectations collide causing friction and/or suffering. These ideas are useful in helping us understand how we affect and are affected by others. In Marie's story the competing assumptions of the father and Marie were causing suffering. Marie's primary form of communication with the family, notes and phone calls, had actually distanced Marie from the family. This distance and Marie's “understanding” of Muslim culture led to an unnecessary cause for worry. Neither Marie nor the father were able to “see” the other until their meeting in the late spring after her surgery. Marie relates that “my rapport with this family improved greatly and I learned a great deal from this

experience” once she finally met with the father and was able to speak “face to face” with him.

Another reading of Marie’s action and reaction is to interrogate the expectations and assumptions of religion and gender. Arendt does not really attend to these ideas explicitly but her conceptions of plurality and natality might help us see the formation of Marie’s assumptions. In the first iterations of this story, Marie indicated that the father “didn’t like” her and as she was preparing to walk down to the meeting she was getting ready to be “chewed out” by this father. The only evidence she has for this is her assumption and expectation of Muslim males. Where she gets this idea is unclear as she relates that this was her first experience with a “huge cultural difference” between herself and a parent.

This idea of difference is akin to Arendt’s plurality. Plurality, however, is the idea that as humans people are equal and unique. This reading of Marie’s story focuses on the unique portion of plurality—the difference of the Muslim males—and seems to set aside the equal part. When the equal part is left out of the plurality equation then respect is also not present. The father’s natality, the ability to begin something new, or to be new, is precluded by Marie’s “understanding that the culture of this particular family was that the father did not receive teachers of my [female] gender well.”

Who is Marie?

Marie always knew she was going to be a teacher, but her years of teaching were interrupted by major life changing events. First, she stayed home for a few years after the births of her children. Then, she was diagnosed with cancer. She was eventually free of

cancer but her health has never been the same. When I visited once she was hoarse and tired, but still at work, and she said, “Well, you know I did have cancer.” Despite lingering health problems Marie does absolutely everything she can not to miss work.

One of the most powerful events in Marie’s teaching career happened recently when the English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher and administrator asked her to be the pilot teacher in a new collaborative inclusive literacy model. Marie prides herself on her ability to try new things that are supported by research and her administration. She says, “I might drag my feet a little with different things but I will never say no I won’t try it!” Part of this disposition stems from her early years as the new teacher. As tenured teachers would comment on the change in the diversity of students they would also “grumble and complain about the circle of time.” Marie says the “circle of time” idea is that all ideas in education are old ideas and just come in and out of popularity. Marie says she never paid attention to the circular nature of school reform and improvement ideas because she did not want to be seen in the same manner as she had perceived those tenured teachers when she was young.

Through examining Marie’s actions and words, or speech and deeds, we can get a glimpse of *who* Marie is, but the story—her story is not over yet. While the idea of promising, or intent, gives us a structure in which we believe we can anticipate what Marie’s thinks and will do in the future, we can never be assured of that as fact.

Another way to see Marie disclosing *who* she is is through the creation of the story she told above. This story emerged in response to a question about sharing stories to help new teachers. In the first interview the story is told much more casually. She related

that the father was from a culture that did not have “any respect” for her. This was “very startling” for her because she felt that people usually like her. Then the parent came to school and she knew he was “really unhappy” but when he saw her in her casts it was “like his whole demeanor changed. I think he felt really bad for me when he saw me. I don’t know exactly what words he said but I said you really need to talk to the principal.”

Marie could not identify what caused the father’s physical presence to relax. It was this moment, this sense of the unknown that struck me as a researcher. I was also not really sure what she wanted to convey: the idea to be respectful of parents and to not be afraid of meeting them? Or that Muslim men dislike women teachers? Was the father impressed that Marie was at work with both feet in casts? Was he relieved that she was not afraid of him?

Over the time Marie and I worked on developing the story, some details emerged that were seemingly contradictory to the original version in the transcript. The reason for father coming to school is the most noticeable difference. The original spontaneity of relating this story to me of a pivotal moment in working with Muslim men became lost as she revised the story to take on more formal language of a teaching moment. This reminded me of Arendt’s idea that the meaningfulness of the *action* is in the *action*, not in the story that comes after it (Arendt, 1958, p. 192). Marie says in the first interview,

I don’t know if it had to do with my feet or me smiling, trying to make him a little more positive but he was fine after that. We never had an issue for the rest of the year. Had he come in right away at the beginning of the year and met me maybe he would have changed his mind about how [he] felt about me sooner.

For Marie this moment was pivotal because while it was happening she could sense something going on. There was something important that happened at that moment

to assist the father's change in disposition toward her, but she could not and still cannot identify it.

Marie's story does present some problems for analysis. Some language that is potentially problematic was consistent in the interview (oral) and the written version. For example, she was hesitant to name the "culture" as Muslim in both versions. After the story was told I had to specifically ask if she was speaking of Muslim families. This brings up Arendt's thoughts on work and action. Telling stories is the way to capture action, but as those stories are worked over a sense of making something that conforms to an ideal emerges. Arendt would call this work. Arendt writes, "The actual work of fabrication is performed under the guidance of a model in accordance with which the object is constructed" (Arendt, 1958, p. 140). While Marie and I tried to capture and render a moment of learning, we ended up creating a description that attempts to use safe and neutral language.

Another way to understand Marie is through observations, and, again, she presents a complex person. Marie often comments on activities and occurrences in her classroom with a slow nod of her head and the exclamation, "My goodness!" or "Oh my!" Marie's comfortable classroom climate is palpable. For example, one day she was working with her math group on the carpet and she accidentally poked a kid with her pencil. When she tried to get up from the group she was unable to get up and stepped on them. This was not because she is feeble, it is because her students had crowded so closely to her there was no room to move.

This incident is indicative of the relationships Marie fosters in her classroom. Her students crowd around her during group time because Marie is as quick to give a rub on the back or a hug as she is to discipline. When a boy refuses to take a time out Marie gets up, takes his hand and puts him in the chair. She then quickly and seamlessly transitions back into teaching and becomes very animated and excited. This aside to discipline hardly disrupts the flow of Marie's classroom. In a way, the clear academic and behavioral expectations are Marie's *promises* to her students.

Nikki

Nikki has been teaching for 8 years with the last three of them at Frog Creek. She is a well dressed third grade teacher, with a cosmopolitan air about her. Her classroom is filled with maps and posters of different places in the world. She has an easy, yet formal, way with the students. She slips back and forth easily from joking to instruction. Her interview revolved around themes of courage and risk. She has become an advocate for appropriate identification of Gifted and Talented students which has run her afoul of some parents. She has also advocated for the inclusion of English Language Learners in that identification process. Nikki speaks to the risks she took as she relates a "sensitive" story that she wished had turned out differently.

In my first year here I did a project I called "life books". It was meant to be realistic and meaningful writing for the students and the parameters were pretty wide open. One day after school in Micah's notebook I found the top 10 reasons he should assassinate me. There were some pretty graphic pictures in it. The reasons were all kind of legitimate reasons like 'she doesn't let me sit by my friends' or 'she's a bitch' and I thought "oh I can see from your perspective if you think I am and you're right I don't let you talk to your friends." But the term, assassinate, really freaked me out.

I went immediately to the principal with it. He said he'd call the superintendent since he was a little unsure how to deal with it. I then told him about a couple of incidents that happened earlier that year. We did a classroom project where we wrote some Valentine letters to soldiers in Iraq. Micah had drawn a gun with some bullets coming out. I said "that's not appropriate—I need you to fix that." Another time he had said something about having a gun and I told him, "That's not appropriate to talk about at school." I didn't choose to pursue it. I didn't think a whole lot else of it at the time.

I continued coming to school for four days. I didn't talk with Micah about what I had found. He knew that I had found it because the principal had called his mother. The parent was really on the defensive about it and was angry. There were some minor issues with the parent previously. Micah was a bright kid but I believed he was misidentified as gifted. The mother had sent me inappropriate emails, and had come to school every day and ultimately got very angry at me. It was really uncomfortable prior to this.

On the fourth day the word came that Micah would not be suspended. Essentially I was told that "no, he's 8 years old—don't worry about it, it's fine." The parent was not alarmed by it. She said "well maybe you should stop being so hard on him." It never went anywhere. The parent wasn't concerned and the school wasn't saying to me, "okay we have determined this isn't really a threat, nobody's really in danger, but we're concerned about this kid." Once the word came down that he would not be suspended I felt something needed to be done. I needed to be able to feel safe coming to my job. I asked human resources and the union, "What will happen if I discontinue coming to work? For four days I was walking around on eggshells. My health was suffering. I got a doctor's note and stopped coming to work. I was doing something really frightening. I still was aware that I was new in this district and that my job could be in jeopardy.

It became a larger problem when I chose not to go to work. Parents called me at home and said "Okay well I just wanted to call and let you know to support you in any way." Then some teachers were also calling at home but it just started to feel really yucky—like everyone knew what was going on but nobody was suppose to be talking about it. Parents called the district as well.

Micah was suspended after I stopped coming to work. I was called and told by the principal then asked to come back. When I came back there were two days left of school. I really don't remember what I said, but I absolutely gave the students no clue as to why I wasn't there.

Micah didn't return the next year of his family's own volition, but it just felt like it all worked out wrong. Did anyone ever talk to him about it? I don't even know. I felt this wasn't about just shunning him from our school. When the year ended it was just done and it was never talked about again. I really wish that would have turned out a lot differently. I wish he was still here at our school, I wish we were able to work together in a way that would have gone somewhere, to see if he needed any sort of help or counseling. If he didn't need any, then that's fine, maybe just a simple suspension, maybe that was all it needed to be. With a suspension comes a readmit meeting and a serious conversation where everyone is involved. There was just never a serious conversation.

What is the web of relationships?

In this event the relationships of teacher and parents, teacher and administration and teachers and teachers intertwine to create a web that simultaneously supports and constrains Nikki. Initially this story is about the relationship between Micah and Nikki, which was a tenuous one. In reflecting on this story Nikki wondered if her relationship with Micah's mom earlier in the year contributed to Micah's writing the list. Nikki said,

If a parent's not real happy with how you're running things the kid knows about it. It's not out of the realm of possibility that [Micah thought] "okay, if I write bad stuff about her then maybe I'll be playing into my mom's favor."

Nikki's relationships with other parents were not as complicated. That year she had students who were children of very involved parents. These parents called her at home and advocated for her at the district level when she decided to leave work.

Nikki's relationships with her administration and colleagues also had two sides. Her principal, who was new to the district, wanted support from the superintendent before suspending a third grader, according to Nikki. Nikki said,

He [the principal] could have said this is a suspension, we have policies on violence and things like that, but he was looking for some support. And sadly from the district office came the word that he's 8 years old, he's fine, don't worry about it, and that was not satisfactory to me.

Prior to that her principal had decided to be the buffer between Nikki and Micah's mom. According to Nikki, after Micah's mom had sent questionable emails and visited the classroom every day the principal stepped in and told the parent to contact him first.

After Nikki gave the list to the principal she turned to her colleagues for support. She relates that she does not remember exactly what she said but she felt that "this scary thing just happened to me" and she needed to turn to someone close. Nikki trusted these other teachers with her story but somehow other teachers and parents became aware of what was happening in Nikki's classroom. Nikki is not sure how the story became known to parents or other teachers but she does acknowledge this was a violation of data privacy. Consequently there was a data privacy investigation and extensive training for the school staff in data privacy the following year.

What is done?

The Arendtian concepts that help us understand this story of seemingly misaligned goals and intentions are action, power, tyranny, and promising and forgiving. Underlying Arendtian action is natality. Action is initiative and natality is the capacity for becoming or doing something new. Very often these concepts, action and natality, are not easily distinguished from each other. There are multiple instances of action in Nikki's story. There is the action of going to the principal right away. There is her action of leaving work. There is also the action of Micah, his mother and the principal. In these actions Nikki is starting a new process, asserting her natality in order to demonstrate to others who she is capable of being. The others in this story are also demonstrating who they are to Nikki.

According to Arendt, power is constituted through people acting together, a sort of resonance of will and an alignment of intention. In Nikki's story power is always a potential, but becomes subverted when action goes awry. There is the potential for power if Nikki, the principal and the mother and Micah, come together to problem solve the issue and deliberate on ways to make the situation tenable for all involved. Since Nikki and Micah's mom have actually been physically prevented from speaking to each other what results is tyranny. According to Arendt, tyranny occurs through the isolation of individuals from each other. It could be read that Nikki is the one contributing to the furthering of tyranny by not speaking to Micah initially. The situation in which Nikki finds herself is partially created by her earlier interactions with the mother and even the decision to have a writing journal in which "the parameters were pretty wide open."

Tyranny prevents power and power is necessary to the "space of appearance, and as such it is also the lifeblood of the human artifice" (Arendt, 1958, p. 204). What Arendt is communicating here is that power among people who come together to meet or deliberate is what keeps humans as humans evolving and growing. In Nikki's story there was something preventing all of them from coming together and creating a space of appearances in which they could see and hear each other. Not having this space led to Nikki's decision to leave work that, while brining about Micah's suspension, resulted in an unfinished feeling about the situation. This unfinished feeling is expressed by Nikki when she says,

I felt this wasn't about just shunning him from our school. When the year ended it was just done and it was never talked about again. I really wish that would have turned out a lot differently. I wish he was still here at our

school, I wish we were able to work together in a way that would have would have gone somewhere.

What Nikki is seeking is a release from this event. Arendt's forgiveness acts as a release from the consequences of action. Forgiveness, and the place of it in Nikki's story, is tricky. Nikki, according to Arendt, cannot forgive herself for her action of leaving work and never speaking with Micah again. Only Micah can do that. Micah, however, is not present in Nikki's life and he is also a child. A strict reading of Arendtian *forgiveness*, which is action, would not allow a child to engage in action with an adult. According to Higgins' (2010) Arendtian *action* "(a) occurs in a public space, (b) in the presence of peers, and (c) in the manner of *energeia*" (p.410). *Energeia* is an Aristotelian idea that the purpose of the activity lies within in the activity itself. Higgins (2010) goes on to propose that the classroom can be "a stage for action" for students and that this action is mediated by the adult, the teacher. Nikki's story, read through Higgins' idea, could be seen as a case of failed mediation. Nikki and the administration failed to help Micah understand how his action, or disclosure, caused fear.

Who is Nikki?

These actions and the accompanying story reveal Nikki's courage and risk taking personality which is only a part of Nikki. Nikki is also revealed in her interactions with students and colleagues three years after this event. In my observations I noted that Nikki is an excellent teacher and is impeccable with her words with students. Although Nikki's arrival to teaching came through a long and winding road, she does not plan to stay in teaching long.

Nikki had been labeled *Gifted* in fifth grade and then labeled *Emotionally and Behaviorally Disturbed* (EBD) in 10th grade. She readily admits that she was “a jerk” to her teachers. By the end of her high school career she thought that she wanted to be a teacher. She had been expelled from high school and finished at an alternative learning program. She says, "I thought, these guys didn't serve me well and I'd like to see what I could do for another kid who might be like me." She then went to college and traveled internationally for several years having a wide variety of experiences. When she returned to the states she thought about going into law school. While pondering the results of her LSAT's she remembered her schooling experiences. Nikki then went to graduate school to obtain her license in conjunction with a masters' degree. She is currently working on her administration licensure with the ultimate goal to be a principal at an overseas international school.

While Nikki encourages risk taking she also expects compliance from her students. As she walked her class in the hallway she enforced appropriate behavior from her class as well as former students she saw in the halls. She says she has the “best class” but also that she keeps “them on a pretty tight leash.”

This “tight leash” is having high expectations, behaviorally and academically. Nikki knows her students are capable of meeting her expectation because she carefully turns every moment into a learning moment. For example one day a student cannot turn on the special light in the classroom and seeks help from Nikki. Nikki asks the student what she has done already to try and get it to work. Nikki listens and agrees with all the steps. Then Nikki says, “Let's look at the bulb.” Nikki then explains how a light bulb

works to the student. Then Nikki asks, “What else could the problem be? Perhaps it is the outlet?” Together they decide to try another outlet and find that the light works. Nikki then says out loud, “Sometimes there is a reset button. Let’s try that.” It works. Nikki says to the student, “It’s like we are geniuses together.” I share this example of an interaction that Nikki had with a student to demonstrate Nikki’s careful and deliberate use of language with a student. Nikki could have easily told the student to forget about it and she (Nikki) could have dealt with it later. This moment shows who Nikki is, just as her action related in the story about Micah shows who Nikki is.

Chapter 5

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The stories presented in chapter four introduce a myriad of issues to discuss. In this chapter I engage in a discussion of the ideas that Arendtian concepts illuminate in these five teachers' stories. I connect these Arendtian ideas to uncertainty in teaching and issues of teacher development. I will reflect on the value of using Arendtian thought and vocabulary in discussions of teacher development. Finally, I will offer a metaphor that may assist the incorporation of Arendtian ideas into those conversations that occur around uncertainty in teaching.

Roots of uncertainty

A great portion of uncertainty in teaching resides in the negotiation and navigation of interpersonal relationships. The narrative about classroom uncertainty created by the research of Dan Lortie and Phillip Jackson partially addresses interpersonal relationships as a root of uncertainty. Dan Lortie's endemic uncertainties in teaching are 1) teachers are often making decisions alone in classrooms (individualism), 2) teachers tend to focus on short term goals (presentism), and 3) teachers' sense of self-efficacy is fed through psychic rewards which are highly dependent on others. Jackson offers support to the idea that a teacher's sense of satisfaction is concerned with individual relationships. Jackson speaks to the loss of autonomy in regard to making instructional decisions. This leaves teachers uncertain about where and what they do have control over. While many classroom practices are changing in the 21st-century, the roots

of uncertainty remain. They lie primarily in their relationships with students, families, and other educational professionals.

Relationships and their inherent unpredictability are seen in Mary Kennedy's (2005) work on classroom practices and reform. The relationship that Kennedy focuses on is between the teacher and student within the teachers' perception of reform expectations. Kennedy theorizes that too much student engagement causes uncertainty on the teachers' part; teachers are uncertain because they are essentially torn between engaging with their students and keeping the classroom under control and moving forward in the curriculum.

Kennedy's ideas are supported by a refinement of the intensification thesis. Ballet, Kelchtermans and Loughran (2006) offer instantiations from the research literature that there are multiple sources of intensification in schools: parents, the school structure, and teachers. The parents' role has shifted to consumer rather than partner. The organization of schools and the structure of the school day can bind teachers' autonomy through things like the mandate of time allotments for subjects. Finally, teachers, in their efforts to meet external mandates "keep imposing high norms of pedagogical perfection" on themselves (Ballet, Kelchtermans, & Loughran, 2006, p. 213). While intensification is normally not seen as positive, some experiences of intensification are not entirely negative. How teachers respond to the new ideas and changes in their work lives can lead to a renewed way of being a teacher. The way teachers react to intensified conditions is uncertain because of the individual classroom and school contexts in which teachers work. The same can be said of any situation. Helsing's (2007) review of research found

uncertainty in teaching a “multi-valent” concept (p. 13). What causes uncertainty and how teachers respond to uncertainty are complex and personal.

Response to uncertainty

Ballet, Kelchtermans, & Loughran (2006) theorize that intensification is mediated by a “personal interpretive framework” that filters the mandates through the teacher’s own personal beliefs and immediate school contexts (p. 213). I would extend that idea to uncertainty in teaching. The way teachers react to any uncertainty is determined by the teacher’s own “personal interpretive framework.” In Amos Hatch’s (1999) review of teachers’ work he addresses the research on how teachers manage the uncertainty and working conditions of teaching. According to Hatch (1999), teachers manage uncertainty by cultivating split personalities, at various times compromising their beliefs, engaging in subversive teaching activities, taking the path of least resistance, or focusing on immediate teaching necessities. Another way in which teachers respond is to use uncertainty as a way to learn about and improve practice (Lampert, 1985). In the current study readers can see each teacher’s “personal interpretive framework” in process in the teachers’ stories as they explain and react to uncertain moments.

Discussion

Hannah Arendt’s theory articulated in *The Human Condition* takes up the reasons that uncertainty is a fundamental component of human relationships. Her ideas articulate, through a very particular vocabulary, a structure to navigate interpersonal relationships. What follows is an exploration of Arendtian concepts in relation to the five teachers’ stories. The Arendtian ideas that I explore in the teachers’ stories are public and private,

plurality and natality, labor and work, action and behavior, tyranny and power, and promising and forgiveness. While these pairings do not necessarily represent opposites, I discuss them in dyads because of their usefulness in contrasting the experiences in the teachers' stories.

Public and private

For Hannah Arendt the public is the space where people gather together to deliberate on things held in common. The public is the place of action in which we reveal ourselves to others through speech and deed. In a strict reading of Hannah Arendt's work, schools are not public places nor are they private. Arendt saw the private as the place for labor, physical, and psychological sustenance. Higgins (2010), writing about Hannah Arendt's educational ideas, calls the classroom a "strange twilight realm" (p. 426) between family and world, public and private.

The implication here is that there is an uncertainty regarding where the boundaries lie between home and school, private and public. While school and districts may have policies and procedures regarding working with families, boundaries shift depending on the teacher, the parent, and the situation. The teachers' stories in chapter four present the negotiation of public and private boundaries in varying ways; a tension between the values and beliefs in home and school that has come with the expanding roles of schools and teachers in post-industrial society (Hargreaves, 1994).

The stories in which the private and public realms cause a sense of uncertainty are in the stories of Maggie, Marie, and Nikki. At the center of these three stories is the relationship between the private lives of the teacher and the families, and the nearly

public place of school. Andy Hargreaves' (1994) notes that the expanding roles of the teacher include "encompassing social and emotional goals as well as academic ones, concerns for the child's welfare at home as well as their performance in school" (p. 126). These concerns for the child at home as well as in school require teachers to negotiate the boundaries between their roles as "public servant" and caregiver of young. Parents can be seen as a "team member" in their children's education, or people who occupy a very separate realm from the school. Or, more often than not, parents are people who slip between the worlds of home and school to varying degrees.

The teachers are also private people. They are mothers, fathers, and siblings, dog owners, religious, agnostic, radical, or conservative. In this study some teachers, like Ben and Nikki, attempted to keep their private issues from the classroom. The day Ben took his dog to the emergency room before school he told only his fellow teachers. Nikki did not disclose her anti-gun upbringing with a student who was either being raised in a gun-family or had a fascination with guns. Teachers' private beliefs are often challenged by the plurality of the classroom. In this inquiry, Maggie and Marie experienced this challenge and responded in slight different ways.

Hannah Arendt believed there was a proper place for every activity. For her, birth and death belong to the private realm. In attending the funeral of Julie's mother, Maggie plunged deeply into the private realm of Julie's family. She also entered deeply psychologically. Maggie says,

You're just a teacher, you want to give to them, but you couldn't go home with them, you couldn't do their laundry, you couldn't cut their fingernails, you know, and it was all those mother things that were just not in that child's life anymore.

Maggie's ideals of what mothers could give in the private are the things she believes that Julie will go without. And Maggie, because of her public role, cannot help her.

We see that truth is important to Maggie. Her student's mother did die accidentally, but the insistence that the story be told that she fell down made Maggie uncomfortable. Maggie was irritated by the actions of other family members when they came into the classroom to see Julie. Maggie relates in the story, "they told me that they had told Julie her mother was an angel who had brought her presents." At the time, Maggie went along with the family's wishes. In retelling her story, she allows herself to tell the reader to connect the lying to Julia's later problems when she says, "A few years later I heard from a colleague that Julie was having some difficulties and that Julie had eventually found out the truth regarding her mother's accidental death." Maggie's maternal lens toward teaching helps her to see what might be missing in these families' private realms. What Maggie sees missing, however, is based on her own private experience of mothering. In our follow up interview Maggie expressed a tension between her private beliefs and her public role, saying,

I think sometimes [in] the situations of families you can't change [the] things you want to, you want to intervene, you want to help them out financially, you want to take the kids home and discipline them a different way cause you know they could turn out and you have no control over that.

Maggie feels that there is something lacking in the students' private lives. Even though she attempts at times to become part of students' private lives, she realizes that there is a boundary between her life and the students.

In reflecting on her experience with Micah and his “assassination list,” Nikki actively mulls over the influence of the private life on the event. Nikki admits that in her family guns were not acceptable, but maybe in Micah's they were. In her follow-up interview she expands on details relating to an incident that occurred prior to finding the list:

He [said] he had a gun and I told him that's not appropriate to talk about at school. I was initially a little bit shocked; I don't come from a hunting family or a family that approves of toy guns. I chose not to pursue it and I didn't ask him if his family hunts or if he's gone hunting with relatives or if he has a BB gun. I didn't ask him if he meant it as a toy gun. I just told him you're not allowed to talk about that at school.

While Nikki actively reflects on the possibility that Micah’s private realm influences him in his school relations, she did not try to help him make the distinction clear. She simply says, “That’s not appropriate.” The questions that remain are: Why is it not appropriate to talk about what your family does at school? Why does Nikki not talk to Micah about how it bothers her? Could this whole incident have been averted if Nikki had been clearer about her expectations between private and public?

In Marie’s story of her interaction with a father of one of her students she demonstrates how what is learned in the private realm can be challenged and changed by an experience through the public realm. After Marie meets the father and begins a relationship with him in the public realm, she shares, “I learned that I should not assume that just because a family is of a particular culture that relationships will be strained because of the teacher's gender.” For Hannah Arendt this is the role of the public. The public is the place people gather together for a common interest. In Marie’s story, the common interest is the child and in the space where Marie and the father meet, their

plurality is recognized and they are able to commence working together. It is a matter of standard instruction in teacher education to discuss the importance of working with families, but the boundaries between teacher and parent are often complicated.

An overly strict reading of Hannah Arendt's ideas of public and private and schools is not helpful. What may be helpful is Arendt's distinction between public and private in its simplest form: that the public is the sphere that creates spaces for interactions with others outside the family and private is the sphere of home and family. An essential tension of schooling has been what role or right does the public have over the private and vice versa. The attempt to create homogenous students in the early years of compulsory schooling attempted to erase the private, cultural and language traditions of immigrant students through the process of Americanization. Now, well into the 21st century, schooling is more likely to be viewed as part of creating social cohesion through a diversity of ideas and people in classrooms. Schools and teachers, while still trying to provide common experiences, are somewhat more sensitive to preserving private traditions of culture and language. In teacher education, including teachers who are currently teaching, ideas of what constitutes the boundaries of schooling are appropriate and necessary conversations. It is not the fact that teachers need to deal with very different families that causes uncertainty in teaching. What causes the uncertainty is how teachers negotiate those interactions.

Plurality and natality

Natality, according Arendt, is connected to all human activities. Labor, work, and action all are concerned with providing and preparing the world for newcomers. Natality,

for Arendt, is most closely associated with action. Plurality is the “condition of human action” (Arendt, 1958, p. 8). Plurality is the necessary condition of being among and one of a set of unique and equal beings. The teachers’ stories, that center on human interaction, often represent others as “unique,” but not necessarily equal.

Plurality, and the tension of living in a pluralistic world, is most notable in Lucy’s story of the team meeting. In Lucy’s story each teacher has her own unique approach to meeting the standard set forth for their students. This diversity of views is revered by Lucy. She says, “I think people know that about me, that I’m going to be pretty respectful and I also value differences.” Here she is saying that in order to have a meaningful discussion there needs to be a base of respect. At the time she told the story Lucy believed that basic respect was not evident in all the teachers. It seems that the “equal” part of the plurality, different and equal, was missing. What resulted, according to Lucy, was a “hot mess” of a team meeting where people got mad at each other.

Natality, the capacity to begin anew is clearly demonstrated by Marie and what she learns from her interaction with a parent from a different culture. Natality is very closely associated with action. In Ben’s story his new beginning is compelled through his action. Natality, as a concept in teaching, is very exciting and potentially scary. Ben’s story demonstrates the double edge of beginning something new. The principal said to Ben, “Then maybe this isn’t the right place for you!” and his fear of losing his home, to have to begin again challenges him. He writes, “The rug pulled out from under my feet, my home, my friends, taken from me, and yet I survive. I live.” What Ben shares here is that despite the scary nature of being new (in this case new to another school,

administrator, and colleagues), change is survivable and maybe even beneficial. In his follow-up interview Ben says,

I had thought of that [the incident in the story] as being forced out of my building, out of my place, out of my room—not realizing until actually after I had made the move that I would form new bonds with new families here, new bonds with the staff here, and the room is just a room. So it ended up being a very positive thing to move from one building to another. It really expanded the relationships that I have in the district.

Labor and work

Arendt's other two categories of the *vita activa* can be perceived in the interpretation the teachers take toward their profession and the activities of their profession. Arendtian labor is a cyclical process. The goal of labor is to keep people alive. Work, on the other hand, is about the creation of things, artifacts, that give humans a place in which to live. Labor and work do not require the presence of other people. A strict reading of Arendt would have us believe work creates houses and chairs and labor creates food and clean living spaces. Arendtian work and labor can be confounded and have been debated (Higgins, 2010; Benhabib, 2000). For my analysis I make a slight refinement: Labor in teaching is the constant maintenance of those aspects of the classroom that are necessary for survival, such as routines, psychological rewards, or even wages. Work encompasses those activities that teachers engage in with a definite beginning and a definite predictable end. Work usually produces a product, some pre-determined artifact. For example, giving a test, grading papers, and reporting the scores would be work.

As I explored the teachers' stories I found the concepts of labor and work in Lucy's story. Lucy is engaged in labor in her team meeting. Lucy's activities of creating

peace and lightening the mood are the ways she sustains the life of the team. Lucy, it seems, is essential to the survival of the team. In her follow-up interview Lucy relates that if she misses a team meeting the other teachers say to her, “Never miss a team meeting again; I needed you there. Don’t miss that again. I needed you there to support me. I needed you there to make a joke.”

Work is part of Lucy’s story in the discussion of expected outcomes that the students will produce. The conversation in the team meeting centers on whether or not the students can meet the expectations of completing a Venn diagram on their own. The students and teachers here are engaging in work. They are going to produce something that is expected: students that can produce a Venn diagram on their own.

The work orientation to teaching can be seen as a way to escape the uncertainty that occurs with facilitating instruction with students at varying levels. Lucy concedes to this uncertainty by admitting it may take longer because of the various abilities in the classroom but she is committed to making the students do it. Lucy’s story brings back Dunne’s (1993) idea about reducing uncertainty in the classroom through the behavioral objectives model of instruction. If teachers come to adhere to a particular delivery model or believe that a particular instructional model will produce certain results then the teachers could be stymied by students’ individual differences and/or responses that are not anticipated by the particular model.

Arendt’s language here is helpful in illuminating the difference between making students and helping students achieve something. Work is about making a raw material into a product. In Arendt’s thought, humans are not raw material to be made into objects.

The implications here correspond to the language teachers use to discuss their approaches to working with students. Arendt's idea can be helpful in reflecting on what is actually meant when teachers are asked—either by themselves or others—to make students achieve a certain expectation. A more helpful language is to ask how teachers are helping students achieve those expectations.

Action and behavior

The main content of the teachers' stories are interpersonal relationships that reside in Arendtian action. Arendt has been shown to have two models of action, the agonal and the narrative. The agonal model of action is the focus on the great deed. The narrative model of action allows the "who one is" to emerge through "doing the deed and telling the story" (Benhabib, 2000, p. 126.) Using the narrative model of action in exploring these stories leads to a beginning understand of who each teacher is through the action and retelling of the story. Behavior, on the other hand, is doing what is expected. In doing what is expected, "who one is" is not shared. The ultimate questions are: How does a spectator differentiate between action and behavior? Can a person know whether they are acting or behaving? Is action always good and behavior bad?

Thoughtlessness is what leads to behavior in Arendt's thinking; however, I believe that engaging in action and behavior are far more complex. Perhaps people, especially teachers, engage in behavior in order to be able to emerge from a situation and act again someday. These people have not become thoughtless in Arendt's terms. Arendt's fear, and mine as well, is that too much of doing what is expected can lead to a permanent state of thoughtlessness.

Ben's story is where the tension between choosing to act or behave is palpable. He writes as he is faced with voting on the grant, "I knew what was coming and the panic rose, prickling my skin, urging me to run away." Ben continues, calling upon the agonal type of action—the great deed done: "There are seminal moments in one's life. Times in which one of two paths are taken. A conscious decision to go against the crowd and speak up for what is right." Ben actually explicitly notes that this is a choice between action and behavior, to stay true to who he is or to go along with the principal's preference. For Ben this is a clear choice about adhering to his principles regardless of the consequences.

Nikki's story presents a less clear distinction between action and behavior. Nikki was presented with a chilling list of reasons that someone, a child, wanted to kill her. For Nikki Micah conjured up images of "that classic profile-white kid, middle class, a little overweight, super smart." Nikki immediately sought protection and solace in the structure of the school. She relied on the administration to make this uncertain situation certain for her. As days passed and the situation became less tenable, Nikki took an action to protect herself. Her action to leave work discloses a part of Nikki, her need for self-preservation. Is this action of Nikki's really a result of previous behavior? Seeking the way out of uncertainty by relying on the school administration to solve this problem could be read as behavior. Nikki went to the principal, which is what she was expected to do. What would have happened if Nikki had initially taken action instead of "walking on eggshells" waiting for someone else to do something? Nikki's story presents the idea that action and behavior are things people are capable of even within the same story. People

do not simply live the life of action or the life of behavior, they can actually choose.

Whether or not they are aware of that choice is another question.

I read the other three stories of Lucy, Marie, and Maggie mostly as behavior, yet in the creation of the story, “who they are” is partially revealed. Marie’s story of a cultural interaction presents a very even-paced, well-thought-out narrative intended to instruct other teachers about assumptions and families. Marie’s careful use of language throughout her story shows that she does not want to offend, only instruct. Maggie’s story and the retelling demonstrate behavior in going along with the social worker and father. In the process of retelling there was a sense that Maggie was violating some sort of expectation. In the follow up interview she was very concerned that someone would recognize the story and become worried about the ramifications of revealing the alleged drug use by Julie’s mother. Lucy, while revering differences and advocating respect, is entirely behaving in her team meeting. Lucy is playing the role that she has been expected to, the peacekeeper. She is also adhering to district expectations by saying, “If this is what first grade expects this is what we need to do.”

In these stories action is not always “good” and behavior “bad.” In fact, Ben’s action turns him into a pariah temporarily. Doing what is expected can actually be helpful, like Lucy does. I am not sure if Hannah Arendt would agree with this conclusion, but certain types of behavior are necessary to survival. For instance, stopping at a red light or stop sign is something that is reliable expected. Lucy’s behavior gives stability to her team. What differentiates action from behavior is thinking. For Arendt, behavior is distinguished by thoughtlessness. When people forget they have the capacity to think and

do something different then there are consequences for the entire world. The continuation of the world demands natality and action, being new and taking initiative. An idea worth exploring is whether or not one can think while behaving.

Power and tyranny

Power and tyranny have a symbiotic relationship in Arendt's thinking. Arendt uses the concept of tyranny to describe what occurs when humans become isolated from each other, either physically or psychologically. Power is the result of people coming together for a common goal. Power can overthrow or prevent tyranny. Yet tyranny has the potential to prevent action thereby removing any chance for power. In thinking about these terms it is easy to see Arendt's political philosophy emerge. She sees politics as coming together to deliberate and act. This view can also frame relationships in school structures and organizations. With the advent of movements such as site-based management some of the organizational structures of school are becoming more decentralized, but many levels of bureaucracy and hierarchy remain. The structural levels of district personnel, administration, teachers, and even grade levels, work toward physical and psychological isolation. This tyranny can prevent all stakeholders from coming together despite the common interest of educating children. In the teachers' stories in my study the levels of bureaucracy that isolate teachers and the resulting prevention of power is revealed.

Isolation and fear are key to Arendt's tyranny. Fear and isolation are most evident in the stories of Ben and Nikki. Nikki, who feared for her safety, had already been isolated from Micah's family because of previous experiences. This fear and isolation

created a situation in which no one is able to act, to disclose themselves to each other. Fear plays a large role in Ben's story as well. Tyranny occurs because of the fear of future consequences created by the focus on test scores.

In the teachers' stories Arendt's concept of power is not actualized. Power is a potential that is created among those acting and speaking and this power helps carry action onward towards its goal. No individual can have power. In all these stories it is a potential that is missed by the misalignment of intention and initiative. Human relationships, for Arendt, are about promising and action, or intention and initiative. If one person in the relationships believes or expects something that is different than what the other intends then power cannot be realized. In Ben's story, the power of Ben and his colleagues is prevented because Ben and his colleagues have differing intentions that are made explicit during the roll-call vote. In Lucy's team meeting there is a great potential for power. While her team meeting is not a site for tyranny, it does become a place where a common interest seems to be lost. Power is the temporary agreement of wills and intentions so perhaps if the teachers had acknowledged, "Yes, we need the students to do this independently" and then deliberated on strategies to make it happen there would have been a sense of power. The same is true in Nikki's story. It could have been a powerful moment if Nikki, Micah, Micah's mother, and the principal had sat down with the common goal to understand what Micah did and how to move forward.

Promising and forgiving

Promising and forgiving are not opposites although they do reside on either end of action. Promises are islands of certainty in a sea of uncertainty, according to Hannah

Arendt. While promises can give us a semblance of what might occur in human interactions it is always important to realize that each of us has natality, the capacity to begin anew. Promises are often implicit; they are the expectations that guide our interactions with others. In Nikki's story numerous promises have been broken. These promises surround the idea that teachers ought to feel safe in their classrooms, protected and supported by their administration. For Ben, promises he held for others guided his decision in that meeting.

Forgiveness is important in that it releases people from the consequences of action. Arendt uses the analogy of the sorcerer's apprentice to explain forgiveness. People do not have the spell to break themselves free of the consequences of their action. People cannot forgive themselves. In Ben's story he has kept the principal locked into her role as the woman who caused him a tumultuous year. Even though the results were eventually positive for him (a new school community he cares about)-he has not forgiven her. Nikki also cannot forgive herself. She and Micah are forever bound in this moment. Micah is the student who wrote an assassination list, Nikki will never know if he meant it or what his reasons were for writing it. Perhaps Micah will forever see his third grade teacher as one who caused an unsettling ending to his school year.

The value of Arendtian ideas

In my study I explored teachers' stories with Arendtian questions and concepts in order to understand more about uncertainty in teaching. In this discussion I have shown that there is some value in putting Arendtian concepts and teacher stories in dialog with each other. I sought to demonstrate that the concepts that concerned Hannah Arendt about

the *vita activa*, the active life lived among others, are present in teaching. The value of using Hannah Arendt's ideas to explore relationships in teaching include: 1) she sees an inherent unpredictability in human relations and 2) she develops a set of concepts to discuss this unpredictability. This immediately helps render the uncertainty of relationships in teaching more describable, and, in a way, more certain.

Using Arendt's ideas leads to more questions. In some sense her ideas project a simple naiveté or overly optimistic hope in human capacity, especially since she does not overtly take on the negative intentions of people. Her main preoccupation was with what happens when people do not think; this may lead to doing evil, malicious things. It is this absence of awareness and reflection in modernity that worried Arendt. It is this loss of thinking about what a person does and why a person does it that pervades schooling and teaching. In uncertain times it often feels safer or "right" just to do what has always been done, or to do what others are doing or expect of you. The tendency toward conformity without thought is what Hannah Arendt believed was happening in modernity. Arendt's ideas on the differences between action and behavior, what constitutes public and private, how we create power or the kinds of intentions we have, the ability to move on from an experience by forgiving those who have "trespassed" against us are useful in thinking about teaching. Now I turn to offer a refinement of Arendtian thought that would be helpful in conversations about the human relations necessary to teaching.

A compass

Hannah Arendt offers a metaphor of a web to indicate the fragile and fleeting relationships that humans have with one another. She then uses a conceptually-rich

vocabulary to elaborate on the ways those interactions occur. In this section I offer the metaphor of a compass to help teachers navigate human relationships. Human relationships are constituted by a constant movement of interactions and reactions which take on different characteristics. I illustrate this idea by using the stories from this inquiry and attempt to demonstrate how this compass could enrich teacher education practices.

At the core of the metaphoric compass is plurality and natality. Plurality can help remind teachers when navigating new relationships and experiences that people are different and unique and necessary. Natality reminds teachers of their own potential capacities as human beings. Having the concept of natality at the center of the compass indicates that anyone can begin again. These two basic ideas can guide teachers to think more deeply about their expectations of themselves and others.

Arendt's other ideas, public, private, labor, work, action, behavior, tyranny, power, promising, and forgiveness can be guidelines on the compass. This compass can be used in two ways, to think about current relationships and to reflect on past experiences. The key idea here is that no one idea of Arendt's is privileged over the other. It is about not going one direction or the other; it is about being able to detect the location of interpersonal relationships. The important thing is to remain vigilant and thoughtful. For example, Marie's story is a very good example of movement in varying directions along the compass. Marie's story begins with a tendency toward behavior. She relates in the story that,

Through my teacher training I knew the importance of beginning any conversation with a parent on a positive note and so every note or phone call home to the mother began with talking about what the student did well that day in the classroom.

Marie made assumptions about how Muslim fathers act, thereby denying the plurality and natality of the father. Next, this story moves to a moment of action, in the meeting of Marie and the father. In that moment they are able to see each other and come together to work towards helping the child. In the retelling and reflection on this story Marie can be seen as getting reoriented towards a fruitful relationship with families by exploring her assumptions about herself and the father. Marie discovers that relationships offer unknown possibilities.

The teachers' stories and Arendt's ideas are a useful compass to navigate the potential uncertainties in teaching. It is unreasonable to think that teacher preparation can help teachers prepare for every uncertainty. Therefore it is important to have a vocabulary to talk about how experiences, especially human interactions, might be uncertain. Arendt gives us important ideas and a language for doing that. Using her vocabulary as a compass to examine relationships can make it possible for teachers to think more clearly about how they are orienting themselves to others, the options open to them, and to remind them of their capacity to act, if they choose.

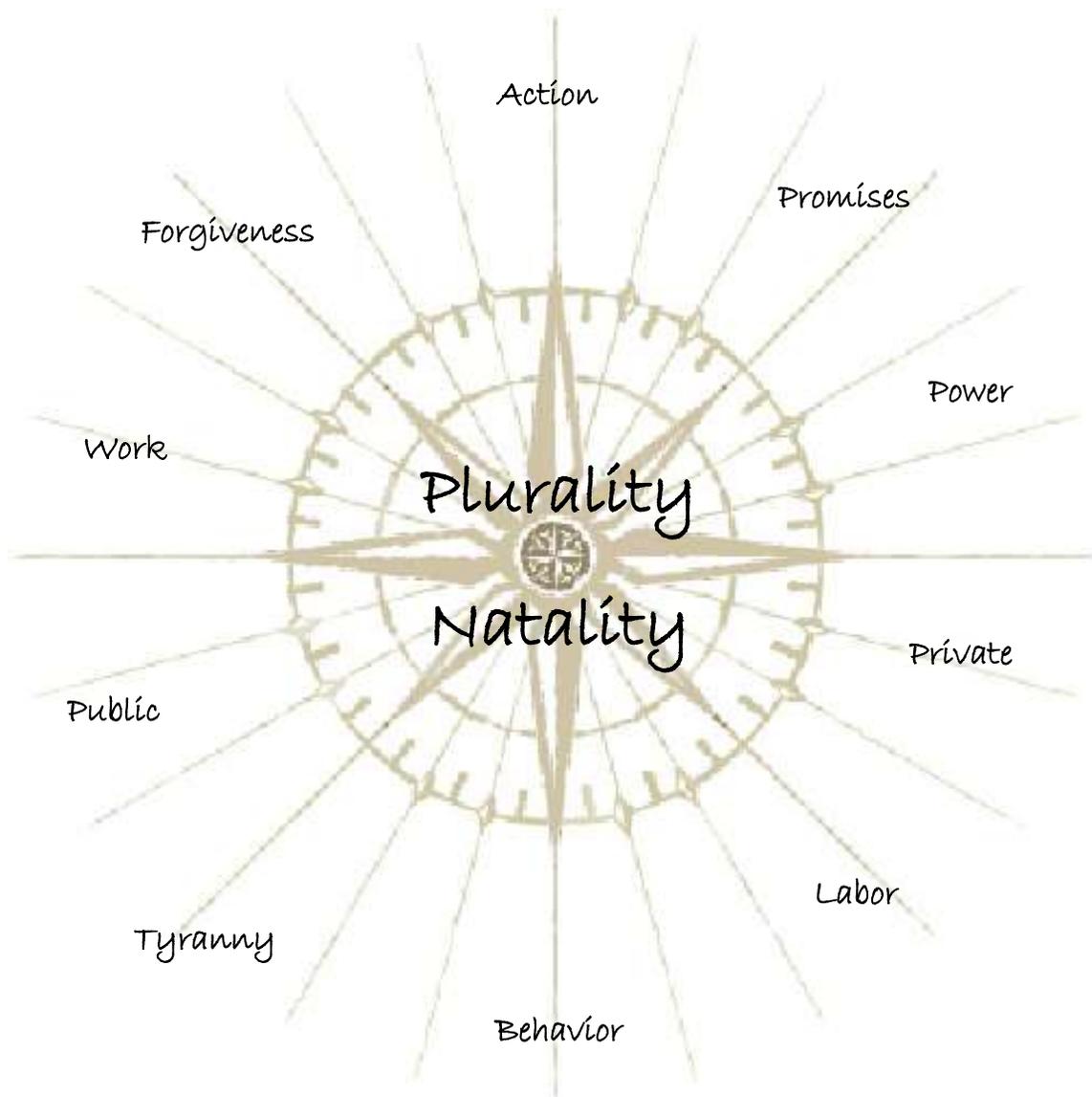


Figure 1. The Arendtian Compass

Chapter 6

CONCLUSION

"When in the end, the day came on which I was going away, I learned the strange learning that things can happen which we ourselves cannot possibly imagine, either beforehand, or at the time when they are taking place, or afterwards when we look back on them."

—*Isak Dinesen*

It could be said that the beginning of my inquiry into teachers' experience with uncertainty started on September 11, 2001. It was certainly a moment most people will not forget. As a teacher of young children I immediately wanted to protect them. I wanted to shield them from the very public disaster and the fear and blame that immediately surfaced. My first instinct in order to protect the children was to prevent them from seeing what was happening in the world for as long as possible. So we went outside to play. Six years later, after reading Hannah Arendt's ideas about action, I came to have a label for what I did that day. I liken this to Donald Polkinghorne's idea that the importance of studying stories is to allow individuals and groups "to increase the power and control they have over their own actions" (1988, p. 10).

In reflecting on this story over the years I never had the language to explain my actions that day. I wanted to be able to demonstrate that there was something more meaningful in my action. When I read this story through the lens of Hannah Arendt's ideas I was able to see and articulate a deeper meaning. I found meaning and understanding that centered on my action. At the time going to the playground seemed to be an impulse, a knee-jerk reaction. Instead it was a disclosure of myself and who I was in relation to my students and my profession. September 11, 2001 was a day of

awakening for me. Maxine Greene (1987) wrote, “If nothing else, such a moment of awaking arouses a person from submergence in the ordinary and the taken for granted... a moment that may lead to the beginning of questioning” (p. 199). It was as if in that incredibly unpredictable moment I began to question the behavior that was expected of teachers’ (and students) in public schools. I realized that people are not machines. My second graders were not to be *made* into something. In that moment I began the move away from conceptualizing teaching as Arendtian work to approaching my teaching differently. I began to move away from the idea that I (or anyone else) could make the students into what they *should* be. I was awakening to the idea of the children’s natality, their newness to the world, and my implication in providing a space for this newness to flourish.

Value of stories

I began this inquiry by following the idea that stories of experience—our own and others’—have great practical value. Stories can illuminate universal themes embedded in local practices. The value that stories have are for the transfer of knowledge through vicarious experience, the refinement of practice through reflection, and the ability of stories to render uncertain moments into an accessible form. As teachers reflect on and create stories about what is done in uncertainty, they make new knowledge accessible for the profession.

Questions

There were many questions guiding this inquiry. In my mind the questions resembled a wagon wheel. At the hub was one basic question. Then there were spokes or

related questions that radiated out. When I began the inquiry I was working my way around the wheel and through the spokes to figure out what was really at the center; what was the one basic question I was trying to answer? Before I began this inquiry I explored the management of dilemmas and uncertainty in teaching. I interrogated teaching with the *vita activa*: labor, work and action. I examined action in action research. In the current inquiry I tried to bring these ideas together. The basic premise I began working through was that human relationships are a necessary part of teaching. According to Hannah Arendt human interactions are uncertain: teachers' work has been called uncertain with a major part of that uncertainty caused by human interactions. My central question is: Can Arendt's concept of action contribute to the conversation on uncertainty in teaching? The next question was what was the best way to uncover uncertainty caused by human interactions in teaching? I reflected that I had been using my stories as a way for me to investigate what I had done in uncertainty. It was a natural progression to couple the two ideas: What can the ideas of Hannah Arendt contribute to teaching? And, what constitutes moments of uncertainty for teachers, and what do they do with them? I decided on stories as my medium for analysis.

In this study I explored knowledge as "that which happens as a result of prior experience" through teachers stories (Conle & Sakamoto, 2002, p. 432). The teachers' stories focused on the uncertainty of interpersonal relations among the various stakeholders in schooling; teachers, parents, families and administration. These teacher stories provided vicarious experiences ranging from the seemingly mundane world of team meetings to the rare instance of threats of violence. In all of these stories the

teachers have attempted to share what happened and how they reacted in order to allow a reader into their worlds. These stories, by themselves, act as important conveyors of teacher knowledge in action. As readers we learn from Ben that teachers do have rights, but in asserting those rights there are consequences. From Lucy readers learn that team meetings and competing expectations can cause tension and strife. From Maggie we learn that how parents and teachers deal with death can be very different. From Marie we learn that cultural assumptions can lead to unproductive relationships and that change is possible. And from Nikki we learn that the systems teachers rely on to help them feel safe can sometimes fail.

Answering questions

In this section I offer visions of the way story and Hannah Arendt could be used in teacher education in order to try and answer the question: Can Arendt's concept of action contribute to the conversation on uncertainty in teaching? As a recommendation of their research Whelan, et al. (2001) advocate for the re-imagining, rather than the recounting, of teachers' stories. The recounting of stories is a reifying process where as a re-imagining opens the story up to become knowledge generating. Arendt's vocabulary is useful in this re-imagining process. Her concepts of public and private give a wider lens to examine the activities of characters in the stories told. Natality and plurality can allow the story to be illuminated as a new beginning of self and others. Using the stories in this inquiry in teacher education can help prospective teachers start to imagine and re-imagine the possibilities of action and behavior. For example, Nikki's story is especially full of re-imagining possibilities. Prospective teachers can engage in a discussion of what happened

but also extend and re-imagine possibilities in order to develop a deeper understanding of Nikki and themselves as they might be as teachers. For example, prospective teachers can re-imagine Nikki speaking to Micah about what he wrote. The prospective teachers would have time to deliberate and create a script for Nikki and imagine possible outcomes based on those scripts. This time to practice thinking and thoughtfulness in a methods classroom could prepare prospective teachers to be aware when they may be confronted with an uncertain moment. Examining the stories of others can help bridge the connection between theory and practice, between belief and experience. Story can challenge assumptions with examples of how things actually are and story creates a space to see things as they could be.

Arendtian ideas and vocabulary are potentially valuable for practicing teachers as well. Doyle and Carter (2003) emphasize “much of the practical knowledge teachers acquire from teaching arises from actions in situations—the essential ingredients of story” (p. 130–31). These actions turned into story can become a form of reflection and professional development for teachers. Examination of personal narratives can stimulate self-reflection and change in practice (Coulter, Michael & Poynor, 2007; Romano, 2004). Using a theoretical framework such as Arendt’s to examine personal narratives can allow a “relocation” of personal issues of the story. This idea of a “relocation of the personal” comes from Barbara Kamler’s (2001) work that advocates for more critical engagement with personal experience. Arendt’s vocabulary, especially action and behavior, can help teachers examine their own stories for these occurrences and find the “profound meaning” in their everyday experience (Olson & Craig, p. 671).

Although Arendtian concepts can help teachers examine their experiences, questions remain about what her ideas can contribute to the conversation on uncertainty in teaching. I believe the stories in this study indicate that uncertainty can be located in the human relationships necessary to teaching. Arendt's ideas of private and public suggest that boundaries of relationships contribute to uncertainty. Arendt's ideas of action and behavior suggest ways teachers respond to uncertainty. The answer then is a qualified yes. To explain this answer I turn now to the limitations and major conclusions of my inquiry.

Issues of inquiry

In this section I discuss the limitations of my use of Hannah Arendt's thought in this inquiry. Then, I turn to unresolved issues that are part of this type of inquiry, I outline some ideas for future study and conclude with the main lessons that I have gleaned from this research process.

Hannah Arendt

One of the major reasons I have found Hannah Arendt's theories to be resonant and relevant to my work as a teacher is her focus on doing and thinking. Arendt gives a language to help frame the doing of teaching that resides in the relationships between and among students, teachers, families and administrators. Arendt's focus on the *vita activa*, or life of action, has placed her among other practical philosophers (Higgins, 2010) and in a sense she does help us think about practice.

While Hannah Arendt's thought is provocative it is also highly problematic for most readers. Arendt's ideas can only be appropriated for teaching with a fair amount of

pruning or a great ability to ignore the contradictions and incomplete explanations. This is a reason her thought is most often paired with other thinkers. Arendt, by herself, usually does not yield full and satisfactory explanations even for her own thoughts. This does not mean, however, that Arendtian ideas are not helpful. Her ideas in *The Human Condition* tend to stimulate reflection and discussion on what humans do and are capable of in their daily activities. In this sense the exploration of Arendtian ideas and teachers' experiences has been valuable.

The conclusion that I have come to is that it best to use Arendtian ideas as a tool, a compass, to guide reflection and deliberation about the human relationships in teaching. Coupling Arendtian ideas and teaching, however, is not as precise as the compass metaphor would indicate. The metaphor of the compass needs to be viewed as more of a tool to obtain our bearing, not one to point in the "right" direction. Using Hannah Arendt's thought in its most basic form helped me get my bearings on some of my own experiences. Her thought pushed me to think about my interpersonal relationships in new terms.

Arendtian pearls.

Hannah Arendt would often call what she did, "storytelling" and the activity of the storyteller was like a pearl diver (Benhabib, 2000, p. 91). The pearls she found, in quotes or ideas from history or other writers would form the basis of her story. In this inquiry I did something similar with Arendt's' own ideas. The pearls I uncovered are her quotes or ideas that I wanted to test against the idea of teaching and being a teacher. For example: "The fact that man is capable of action means that the unexpected can be

expected from him, that he is able to perform what is infinitely improbable” (Arendt, 1958, p. 178). What a wonderful idea! We can act and in that action we can break free from traditions and expectations and do things that are “infinitely improbable” just because we are human. In testing this against teaching it seems to help explain an essential tension of schooling. That tension is the simultaneous promotion the individual (from which we can and should expect the improbably) and the creation a cohesive community of individuals who will do as others do.

Yet as a reader of Hannah Arendt and a reader of readers of Arendt I cannot simply gloss over the complexities that her thought brings forth. For example, forgiveness. This idea has such a beauty and simplicity to it that it seems easy to say, “All right, let us just forgive others so that we may allow them and ourselves to move on.” It is not really clear how forgiveness really works. At least I have not quite figured it out. Can teachers forgive students? Can students forgive teachers? What if that person is not around anymore? Can someone else forgive you for what you did to somebody else?

Arendt then briefly mentions punishment as an alternative to forgiveness. Punishment is what someone receives when we choose not to forgive them. Their punishment is being tied to one action. Arendt (1958) also presents the idea of radical evil which “we can neither punish nor forgive” (p. 241). It seems as if she is about to tell us about the opposite of action but then she does not elaborate on either idea in *The Human Condition*. This book leaves us with the questions: How do we know we are punishing someone? Or that what someone did is radically evil? I can only surmise that Arendt’s later work on judging and thinking began to tie these ideas together. This is where the

appropriation of just the ideas presented in *The Human Condition* breaks down. From reading the work of Arendt's biographer, Elizabeth Young-Bruehl, and her interpreters, Margaret Canovan and Seyla Benhabib, it is evident that there are lines of thought that Arendt works through all her writings. It seems a disservice to the complexity of Hannah Arendt's ideas to simply focus on one book.

The value of this inquiry has resulted from my "pearl diving" in this intriguing and complicated book, *The Human Condition*. What those pearls illuminate in the teachers' stories is also valuable. Those Arendtian pearls have shown that boundaries between home and school can be a source of strains on relationships and uncertainty in teaching. These pearls have also illustrated in this inquiry how power is not realized as often as it could be.

From this pearl diving I have found a message of how natality and action relate to Arendt's concern about "misplaced confidence and the refusal to act" (Young-Bruehl, 2004, p. 160). This preoccupation stemmed from her own experience with the German and French government of the late 1930s. While schooling organizations and bureaucracies are not the equivalent of pre World War II politics Arendt's questions can still apply. What does happen when teachers place their confidence in the organization? Could the results be like Nikki's? Nikki's confidence that the administration would feel her fear and help protect her was not actualized. Nikki then took her own action, but the whole event lingers as unresolved and unsatisfying on many levels. Arendt's question about the refusal to act brings into question how a person knows to act, and to act wisely. Stephen Toulmin's writing on Aristotle's ideas of phronesis seems especially apt now.

He writes, “our chance of acting wisely in a practical field depends upon our readiness, not just to calculate the timeless demands of intellectual formulae, but also to make decisions *pros ton kairon*-that is, ‘as the occasion requires’”(Toulmin, 1999, p.190). Arendt, whose ideas in *The Human Condition* draw from Aristotelian ideas, does not explicitly help with uncovering how a person is ready to make decisions and to act wisely. This multi-year work with Arendtian thought has left me with more questions than answers. After this process of examining stories I am left with two main questions: How do teachers develop the ability to make the decisions as the occasion requires? Can teachers develop this ability through examining what others have done? The questions lead me to ideas for further study and refinement of my work with Arendtian ideas.

Further study

What the findings of this study incline me to do is continue my study of Hannah Arendt’s ideas and how they relate to teaching. I also would like to use the idea of “Arendt as compass” to engage teachers in reflecting on their activities of teaching.

I would like to pursue a deeper understanding of the complexity and controversy of Hannah Arendt’s work in order to 1) understand the connection between action, thinking and judging in order to 2) ask “Arendtian questions and provide non-Arendtian answers” on teaching (Benhabib, 2000, p. 198). What has become clear to me is that appropriating Hannah Arendt’s ideas directly into the experience of teaching is problematic. Arendt’s existential questions, her focus on potential and capacity, and her essential hope for humans are qualities that sustain and contribute to my own thoughts about teaching. Exploring Arendtian ideas and responding with non-Arendtian answers

means meditating on her ideas of thinking, thoughtlessness and the rest of her vocabulary but not limiting those meditations to Arendt's notion that there is a proper place for everything. For example, my idea of exploring thoughtful behavior in teaching is spurred by Arendtian ideas but blurs the distinctions between action and behavior. Arendt would not stand for idea that a person could simultaneously think and behave or, in other words, think and do what is expected. My thinking on this idea is that it is not as black and white as Arendt would like to believe.

I plan to explore the compelling idea of "Arendt as compass" with teachers' stories in my future research. I imagine this happening with stories found and made. Found stories are those already existing, like the ones in this inquiry. Made stories are the personal narratives teachers and prospective teachers create about their experiences. In my own work with prospective teachers I have seen the value of examining practice with a framework in order to go beyond the surface level of events. Also, the use of story in teacher education is a burgeoning practice but many studies seem to lack a theoretical frame in which to discuss the stories. While I am an advocate of biography and autobiographical methods I feel that using a set of questions that are backed by a theory can help move the personal into a larger arena of discussion.

Final thoughts

The type of research I have done and the type that I am suggesting for future study requires a special relationship between researcher and teacher built on trust. Sharing and examining narratives of experience can be a wonderful way to reflect on practice but it also requires a vulnerable and honest stance. As I have wrestled with these

stories one thing that struck me is the idea that the teachers and these stories are not fixed in time. When I spent time throughout the school year and spoke with the teachers and worked on their stories, the teachers' lives (and mine) kept moving and changing. The day I visited to give a final notice that the study was complete I was plagued by feelings of guilt. It is the guilt that comes with the withdrawal from being with the teachers. I told this to Maggie and she shrugged it off and said "it's what we do." Which I interpreted as, teachers share and give and do not expect a whole lot in return, a gift card, a thank you, a volunteer to help with a student, or someone who can stand there while they run to the bathroom are the things they are grateful for.

These teachers in their personal and particular experiences with uncertainty relate to the many different types of teachers we have in schools today. There are the advocates and agents of change, those that usually prefer action to behavior, like Ben and Nikki. These are the teachers who believe that they change the circumstance for schooling for their students and themselves. Then there are mothering types, like Maggie and Marie. These are the teachers who have a strong identity of caring, but remain firm in their expectations of themselves and their students. Then there are the peacekeepers, like Lucy. These are the teachers that strive to bring students and staff together, teachers who remind others what the goals are. While the teachers in my inquiry represent these types of teachers they do not fit completely into one cast or mold. These teachers are stubborn, single-minded, traditional, and perhaps even racist. What the teachers in this study do represent is the complexity of the individual teachers. Arendt does well to remind us of

the ever elusive who that is only known when the person is gone and then we can tell their entire story. Until then we will have to live with the ever changing bits and pieces.

The journey of visualizing and composing a dissertation is a long, terrifying and often solitary process. In this journey I have been moved, egged along really, by my fascination with the ideas of Hannah Arendt. As the quote from Isak Dinesen above contends, Arendt helped me learn “that things can happen which we ourselves cannot possibly imagine.” Through the creation of stories those things that happen can be made understandable. Hannah Arendt has given me a vocabulary in which talk about things that can happen. Arendt’s ideas have given me a vantage point from which I can look at my stories of my teaching and come to terms with what has happened. The three ideas of Arendt’s that have had the most impact on me and I believe could have the most impact on teaching are her concepts of who, natality and forgiveness. The idea that who another person is is not fixed or permanent could help prevent too harsh of judgment in personal relationships. This idea couples well with natality. Understanding natality helps make clear the potential in each person to change and begin anew. Lastly, the most controversial and perhaps one I myself do not understand well is forgiveness. The essential idea that I take with me to teaching is that forgiveness releases the other (and in a sense releases each person) to be able to move on from an event into the future.

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