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The Practice of Traditional Grading: A Site for Inquiring into Teacher Identity Friction in a U.S. High School

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The Practice of Traditional Grading:
A Site for Inquiring into Teacher Identity Friction in a U.S. High School

by

Sarah Emily Dutton-Breen

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education
in
Educational Leadership: Curriculum and Instruction

Dissertation Committee:
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Portland State University
2022

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Abstract

High school teachers' identities and agency are often affected by systems that require their compliance if the teachers are to maintain employment. Sometimes when teachers perform an expected task, they experience identity friction, a term created to explain the residual effect of performing an institutional obligation that is misaligned with a teacher's identity and agency. Considering the potential impact of grades on students' academic opportunities and perceptions of themselves, one teacher obligation that creates identity friction is assigning student grades. And yet, scant research has been done on the impact identity friction – resulting from working within the traditional grading system's confines in U.S. high schools – has on teachers. In this study, the effects of assigning grades on teacher identity and agency within the context of the traditional grading system are explored. The concepts of identity and agency, with particular attention to figured worlds and identities, positional identities, dialogism, narratives, and discourse are key theoretical constructs. The history of traditional grading systems is highlighted to illuminate the “hidden” power system behind grades. The principles of narrative inquiry and critical discourse are frameworks for the analysis of this interview study of how teachers experience identity friction. Teachers working within the confines of a traditional grading system often felt that their values and beliefs were not able to be fully actualized because of their obligation to grade students. Even with the negative impact of identity friction, teachers also performed acts of resistance against traditional grading structures.

Dedication

“I don't know. I imagine good teaching as a circle of earnest people sitting down to ask each other meaningful questions. I don't see it as a handing down of answers...”

– Alice Walker

I dedicate this work to all the teachers who are willing to sit with one another and ask meaningful questions in hopes that together they will improvise ways to resist the structures that limit our students' potential.

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Table of Contents

Abstract	i
Dedication	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
List of Tables	x
List of Figures	xi
Chapter 1 Introduction	1
Teacher Identity	4
Identity and Agency	6
Intersection between Teacher Identity and Grading	8
The Impact of the Grading System	11
Impact of Grades on Students	12
Teachers' Assignment of Grades	14
The History of the Traditional Grading System	16
Sustaining Traditional Grading Systems	18
Grades as Measurements	21
Grades as Classification	23
Grades as Part of a "Hidden" System	24
Grades as Currency	27
Two Misaligned Systems: Grading and Teacher Education	33
Statement of Positionality	35
Research Problem	36
Research Purpose	37
Methods	38
Conclusion	40
Chapter 2 Review of Literature	42
Introduction	42
Teacher Identity	44
Defining Identity as a Construct	44
The Process of Identity Construction	46
Identity as a Multidimensional Construct	48

Gee's Four Types of Identity	49
The Role of Context in Gee's Identity Types	51
Contextual Power's Influence on Identity	52
Professional Identity as an Identity Type	54
Figured Worlds and their Relationship with Identity	56
Perception and Figured Worlds	58
Identity and Agency	60
Reflexive Relationship of Identity and Agency	61
Influence of Power on Identity and Agency	63
Foucault's Panopticon	64
Limitations of Applying a Panoptic Lens	66
Applications of Panopticon and Symbolic Violence in Acts of Resistance	70
Acts of Resistance Within Schools	72
Institutional Expectations and Identity and Agency	74
The Role of Context on Teacher Identity and Agency	76
The Role of Context on Positioning	77
Narratives: Concept and Tool	78
Narratives and Identity	80
Influences on Narratives	81
Dialogism and Narratives	82
Narratives Transmit Culture	84
Professional Identity Narratives	85
Sociocultural Positioning for Recognition of Identity	86
Positional vs. Figured Identity	88
Positioning Attempts and Outcomes	92
Discourse and Dialogism	94
Bakhtin and Vygotsky's Interpretation of Dialogism	96
Commonalities Across Vygotsky and Bakhtin Interpretation of Dialogism	99
Connecting Key Theoretical Concepts	102
Review of Methodological Literature	108
Interview Studies	108
Narrative Inquiry	110
Critical Discourse Analysis	111

Differences of Discourse Analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis	113
Conclusion	119
Chapter 3 Methodology	123
Research Problem and Goals	123
Positionality	125
Research Perspective and Design	129
Participant Selection	132
Data Collection Procedures	135
Data Analyses	140
Chapter 4 Findings and Discussion	157
Introduction	157
Presentation of the Findings	158
Participant Profiles	159
Thematic Concept 1: Impact of Grading on Identity and Agency	170
Direct Results of Clash between Teacher Identity and Grading Expectations	173
Identity Friction Resulting From Dissonant Experiences	189
Frustration with the System	197
Qualitative Outlier: Dan's Experience of Grading	204
Thematic Concept 2: Impact of Resistance on Identity and Agency	208
Optimists in a Broken System	210
Change Agents in Figured Worlds	211
It Takes Two Flints to Make a Fire	219
Limitations	221
Summary and Results	224
Chapter 5 Synthesis and Conclusion	226
Introduction	226
Synthesis of Findings	227
Thematic Concept 1 Synthesis: Impact of Identity Friction on Identity and Agency	227
Inevitable Identity Friction	228
Clear Identity Intensifies Identity Friction	229
Impetus for Teacher Well-Being	232
Thematic Concept 2 Synthesis: Impact of Resistance on Identity and Agency	236
Ally, Mentor, or Adversary?	236

Network of Teachers	239
Situating the Findings in the Larger Context	240
Identity as a Complex, Multidimensional Concept	241
Improvisational Acts Impacts on Identity and Agency	245
Figured Worlds: Sites of Future Change	247
Narratives: Tools To Envision Change	250
Powers' Influence on Identity and Agency	253
Sociocultural Positioning's Impact on Identity and Agency	255
Dialogism's Impact on Identity and Agency	258
Implications	260
Future Considerations and Recommendations for Future Research	263
Empowering Students	263
Recommendations for Teacher Preparation Programs	263
Future Research Aspirations	264
Concluding Remarks	265
References	266
Appendix A Interview Schedule	285
Appendix B Focus Group Schedule	287

List of Tables

Table 1	Data Collection Process and Information	136
Table 2	Character Type Descriptions	143
Table 3	Story Type Descriptions	145
Table 4	Overview of Gee's Discourse Tools	150
Table 5	Justification of Gee's Discourse Analytic Tools	152
Table 6	Overview of Research Design	153
Table 7	#28: The Big C Conversation Tool Discourse Analysis	177
Table 8	#7 Doing and Not Just Saying Discourse Analysis	183
Table 9	#26 Figured World Tool Discourse Analysis	188
Table 10	#16 Identities Building Tool Discourse Analysis	193
Table 11	#4 Subject Tool Discourse Analysis	213

List of Figures

Figure 1	Identity and Figured Worlds	58
Figure 2	Reflexive Relationship Between Identity and Agency	61
Figure 3	Positioning/Speech Act/Storyline Triad	87
Figure 4	Context, Social Interaction and Positional Identity	89
Figure 5	Culture, Social Interaction and Figured Identity	90
Figure 6	Dialogic Script Representation	101
Figure 7	Representation of Relationship of Theoretical Concepts	103
Figure 8	John Keating: Theoretical Concepts Representation	108
Figure 9	Impact of Teacher in a Misaligned Grading System	172
Figure 10	Qualitative Outlier: Dan's Experience	204
Figure 11	Acts of Resistance Resulting From Frustrations	209

Chapter 1 Introduction

As a child, I was often trying to “teach” my friends new skills. I would volunteer to teach my friends things like how to ride a bike, how to climb a tree, or how to make a snow cone. My parents were both teachers, and as a child, I would observe them in their classrooms. With my friends, I was pretending to be a teacher, emulating my parents; however, as I got older, I realized that I enjoyed teaching and that teaching was the profession I would pursue as a career. Even though believing in a career as a destined path for individuals is cliché, I felt called to the teaching profession like it was a part of who I was as a person.

As a novice teacher, I viewed myself as a guide to help students see themselves as capable learners. I felt I could influence students to see themselves as writers, readers, and critical thinkers. The stereotypes of an inspirational teacher in *The Dead Poet’s Society* (1987) and a teacher-like mentor in *Good Will Hunting* (1997) were not that far off from how I wanted to be as a teacher. As problematic as some of those films may be in their presentation of the “savior” teacher, I think many teachers want to help their students learn and navigate the transition from youth to adulthood like John Keating and Sean Maguire do in these stories. I am no different in that regard. Even though I may have been a bit idealistic and naive as a younger teacher, I still carry some of my beliefs, from my early days of teaching, about what a teacher ought to do and be.

Now my view on the influence I can have on my students is a diminished version of what it was when I started teaching. Working in schools in Oregon, I have made decisions that go against my teaching philosophy because school policies and cultures

dictated that I perform my job in a particular way. I have often felt discouraged and disheartened by traditional high school systems that seem counterproductive to the goal of helping all students learn and believe they can learn. Adhering to these traditional systems has often left me feeling disconnected from my identity as a teacher. When I perform tasks that feel out of alignment with my identity as a teacher, I experience *identity friction*, a term I have created to describe the enduring effects an individual experiences caused by a conflict between completing tasks that are mandated or strongly encouraged and their own identity and agency. Teachers experience identity friction because of the demands of various systems, such as disciplinary systems, expectations around assigning homework, requirements for reporting on families, obligations of teacher extra duties, and criteria for curriculum and instruction. The system within schools that causes the most identity friction for me and many others is the traditional grading system.

From the start of my career, I was anxious about grading students' work. I felt concerned that students would be made to feel "stupid" by my letter grade assignment and disengage from the class and their future classes. At the end of my first semester teaching, I panicked about the consequences my final grade assignments would have on students' future academic opportunities. Early in my teaching career, I remember reading about Oregon's graduation rates being lower than many of the other 50 states and I felt pressured to help raise graduation rates by passing as many students as possible. Would students not graduate because of the failing grade I gave them? Would they not get a scholarship they needed to be able to afford college? Would they not get into college at

all? Even though some teachers might think these fears arose from hypothetical, hyperbolic scenarios in my panicked mind, they also serve as a reminder of the stress that assigning grades causes many teachers.

Part of the stress for teachers that comes with grading is that grades do affect students' motivation to learn (Feldman, 2019; Guskey, 1994), the academic opportunities available to them (Alm & Colnerud, 2015), and their future economic standing (Rosenbaum, 2001). In a professional development day early in my teaching career, our administrators told us about the economic impact grades could have on students and then gave us a printed out spreadsheet of the grades we had assigned next to the average grades of other teachers in our department. When I saw my students' grades on a spreadsheet, I felt like my grades were not just numbers on a page, but rather a measurement that would hugely influence my students' opportunities and quality of life. I also realized that if I was feeling tension about the assignment of grades, so were my students. As a result of the emotional and psychological weight that grades can place on students, teachers often face hostility, resentment, or withdrawal from students in the class. When students express their frustration, teachers are frequently the recipients because they are the ones who assign the grades.

From a student's perspective, blaming or resenting the teacher for a low grade seems logical. However, I often graded students in a particular way because I was mandated to do so, even if I had philosophical disagreements with the grading system. For many years, I graded students the way policies or school building cultures suggested—sometimes demanded—and often felt torn about doing so. In grading students according to

traditional grading practices, I often felt my actions were out of alignment with how I viewed myself as a teacher. Even though my beliefs around how, what, and why to grade students might differ from those of other teachers, the commonality I think many teachers share is that we experience identity friction resulting from operating within the traditional grading system's boundaries. Through this study, I hope to understand how identity friction affects teacher identity and agency within the site of U.S. traditional grading systems at the high school level.

Teacher Identity

Our thoughts and the thoughts communicated about us by the people that surround us form our identities. This internal dialogue also translates into actions that often fit within our identity parameters. Both teachers' internal dialogues about who they are, and outside dialogues about what teachers ought to be, influence their professional identities. Teachers' identities are shaped and reshaped by their actions, interactions, communities, figured worlds, and by systems of power (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998). Figured worlds are mental imaginings of a world into which people place themselves. A person constructs a figured world based on their lived experiences and inner thoughts.

As is the case with all aspects of identity, a teacher's professional identity evolves with time and place. Identity changes through a dynamic process, a phenomenon known as identity morphing (Roth, Tobin, Elmesky, Carambo, McKnight, & Beers, 2004). Rather than forming and remaining static regardless of situation or experience, identity changes because it is malleable and multi-dimensional (Eaton, McBride Bustamante,

Ates, & Berg, 2019; Kuster, Bain, & Young, 2014; Sfard & Prusnak, 2005). Also, identity is layered. People foreground different aspects of their identities in different contexts, but these aspects are always interlocked and cannot ever be isolated.

Gee (2001) discussed four types of identity: N(nature), I(institutional), D(discourse), A(affinity), and the interconnectedness of them all. N(nature) identity relates to any quality or feature that one is born with, such as being a person with red hair. I(institutional) identity is related to the institutions that a person has membership in such as being a Nike employee. D(discourse) identity is created when members of a discourse community recognize an individual as a type of person based on their discourse moves. For example, in certain discourse communities, there is a particular discourse that most members associate with thoughtfulness. If a person used a discourse that was associated with being thoughtful, they may identify themselves as a thoughtful person because they have been recognized by others in their community as one. A(affinity) identity is identity as it relates to interest or hobby groups such as being a Jason Reynolds fan. Gee suggested that these four identities are always present; however, individuals will foreground one type of identity more so than others, depending on the context in which they are situated (Gee, 2001). Gee's view on identity implies that context plays a crucial role in how individuals present themselves inwardly and outwardly. To examine identity, one must understand the context thoroughly. All types of identity (N, I, D, and A) inform a teacher's professional identity, and the teacher may foreground one type more than another in a given context.

As with the types of identity in Gee's model, positional identities are influenced by context and community. Positional identities are formed through repeated acceptance of positioning moves. Positioning is an interactive process wherein individuals open up positions or markers like "trustworthy" or "formidable" for themselves and others in a given context, and can take up or reject those positioning moves. When an individual attempts to position themselves, the people around them may reject or accept their bid for a position. Community members may also use discourse moves to attempt to position one another. pr How an individual is positioned has ramifications for the recognition, or lack thereof, of that individual's generic personal attributes (Harré & Langenhove, 1999). Positioning occurs through the interplay of positions, speech acts, and storylines. To give an instance, if I make a bid to position myself as "honest," then the acceptance or rejection of this position by others will affect how I will be viewed by myself and others, the storylines that I hold about myself and the lines of practice unfolding in my community, and the types of actions I will be able to perform in the future.

Identity and Agency

Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop (2004) in *Reframing Sociocultural Research on Literacy* describe identity "as a fluid, socially and linguistically mediated construct, one that takes into account the different positions that individuals enact or perform in particular settings within a given set of social, economic, and historical relations" (p. 4). Focusing on the phrase "enact or perform" suggests that teacher identity is not simply something teachers have in their minds, but it is brought to bear on what teachers do.

Teachers perform their identities through their actions, and these actions in turn influence their identities. Identity is a construct that is created through a reflexive process.

Agency is another construct that is created through a reflexive process. Agency is a strategic process that allows individuals to create and recreate their identities (Lewis, Enciso, & Moje, 2007). The connection between agency and identity is also reflexive: an individual's agency influences their identity, and an individual's identity influences their agency.

To fulfill workplace obligations, many teachers perform actions that feel misaligned with their identities, which creates identity conflict. If teachers repeatedly experience identity conflict over time, the result can be identity friction. Teacher identity conflict occurs when there is a mismatch between a teacher's educational values and the institutional values found in school and district policies and procedures (Watson, 2006). I hope to understand how misaligned actions, specifically within the context of assigning traditional grades, impact teachers' identities and how teachers use their agency when they feel friction between their roles as grade assigners and their professional identities. The traditional grading system is one of many sites that can create identity friction for teachers. Others include behavior management and disciplinary practices and making curricular decisions in the context of politically fraught content (e.g., decisions about whether and how to incorporate content related to race and the racial history of the United States or about the experiences of queer and trans folk). I chose to focus on grading as the focal site for this study because of the scant recent research that addresses identity and agency within the context of traditional grading systems. I also selected

grading as a site for this study because of the ubiquity of grading discussions amongst educators, educators, and community members. Grading is a common discussion amongst all of these groups of people which suggested to me that it was a salient site for my research.

Intersection between Teacher Identity and Grading

One of the actions that constructs teacher identity is assigning grades. In contemporary U.S. grading models, “teachers are expected to assign grades to report students’ academic achievement in relation to the course curriculum and its learning objectives” (Chen & Bonner, 2017, p. 19). Educators, families, and students expect teachers to assign grades as a measure of student performance on learning objectives. This expectation assumes that grades accurately and validly measure student progress toward identified objectives, that it is important to measure student progress toward goals, and that those particular goals are worthy of measurement. The complications that can arise for students, such as impacts on their identities and motivation as a result of teachers assigning grades, are “rarely if ever [addressed] in teacher preparation programs or in-school professional development” (Feldman, 2019, p. 5). When teacher preparation courses or in-school professional development programs omit grading as a topic of study, teachers are left on their own to navigate what, why, and how to grade. The omission of grading as a topic in teacher preparation limits opportunities for novice teachers to reflect on potential implications of their grading decisions for themselves and their students. Additionally, when topics like grading are omitted from teachers’ discussions with each other in teacher preparation programs, grading practices become part of the hidden

curriculum (Jackson, 1990), which leaves those practices largely unexamined and unchallenged. The “hidden curriculum refers to the unwritten, unofficial, and often unintended lessons, values, and perspectives that students learn in school” (The Glossary of Education Reform, 2015). Given these complexities, it is not surprising that teachers may struggle to assign grades, and that struggle can affect their professional identities. There is scant research on the identity struggles teachers face due to assigning grades, but the absence of scholarship does not signal lack of a problem. I argue that the research around “fair” grading practices suggests dissatisfaction from teachers, parents, and students with the assignment of traditional grades (McClam & Sevier, 2010; Guskey, 2006) as well as dissatisfaction with the traditional grading system. Teachers often try to align the practice of grading with their own beliefs or pretend that their beliefs are embedded in the grading system, which can ultimately create tension around their professional identities and agency.

In *Grading for Equity*, Feldman (2019) highlighted that traditional grades are inaccurate, biased, and counter motivational. Feldman (2019) claimed that if educators graded differently than how grades have traditionally been assigned then grades “can be accurate, not infected with bias, and can intrinsically motivate students to learn” (p. xxiii). I agree that educators should work to make grades more accurate, bias-resistant, and motivational; however, I also have hesitation around the idea that educators, as biased individuals, are capable of assigning grades in an accurate, not biased, motivationally inspirational way that Feldman outlines in his book. Even if teachers work toward more equitable grading practices, they may still encounter difficult grading

situations. More importantly, many teachers may not feel they have the agency to attempt a grading system different from the traditional model or the one implemented at their school. If teachers feel obligated to grade in a particular way that does not align with their values and beliefs, then they are likely to experience an identity conflict. Essentially, the conflict is between the system and the teacher's beliefs. If teachers continually experience identity conflict, they are likely to experience identity friction. I use the term identity friction to refer to the ongoing effects of repeated identity conflicts caused by the opposing forces of system obligations and one's identity. I chose the word friction to capture this phenomenon because, in small amounts, friction does not destroy the objects applying opposing forces; however, prolonged friction between two opposing forces can cause damage, particularly to the weaker object. In the context of grading, teachers may feel that their well-being is being eroded by the force of the grading system. Given the strength of the grading system (or the power of the system that sanctions and upholds it), the teacher, not the system, is likely to be negatively impacted by identity friction. The more friction a teacher experiences, the bigger the impact on their well-being. Over time, continued identity friction could lead a teacher to take consequential action, for example by leaving the profession. Educational researchers have explored grading to some degree; this research has largely focused on how to grade students and how grades affect students. Additionally, teacher identity is a thoroughly researched topic. However, researchers have rarely addressed the intersection of these topics. The intersection of teacher identity and grading policies is an area where research is needed. Teachers often struggle while assigning grades, which can result in a feeling of identity friction,

potentially coupled with a lack of understanding as to why they carry this feeling. The consequence of identity friction over time could lead to varying degrees of damage including a teacher's decision to leave the profession.

The Impact of the Grading System

Grades affect students in multiple ways (Feldman, 2019), but students are not the only group of people affected by the grading process: grading is one of the more commonly cited reasons for teacher stress (Koenig, Rodger, & Specht, 2018; Thorndike, 2005). Krumboltz and Yeh (1996) found that assigning grades to students creates an adversarial relationship between teachers and students. These scholars argued that grading “turns teachers into students’ opponents, justifies inadequate teaching methods and styles, trivializes course content, encourages methods of evaluation that misdirect and inhibit student learning, and rewards teachers for punishing students” (1996, p. 324). The findings of this study by Krumboltz and Yeh are not unique. In a study that focused on the impact of students being socialized to value grades, teachers often experienced conflict with students who they perceived to be more focused on grades than learning (Farias, Farias, & Fairfield, 2010) If the preceding conflicts outlined by Krumboltz and Yeh and Farias et al. are happening, it follows that teacher identity could be influenced by the task of assigning grades through the mechanism of conflict with students. Even if teachers feel their grading system is “fair,” they are still placed in the middle of a system that creates challenges for them professionally—challenges that might be avoided if traditional grading systems were not in place. The problem is that teachers are placed in a system, grading in traditional U.S. schools, that simultaneously requires them to be the

judge and the mentor of student learners. These roles contradict one another. If a teacher acts like a judge, students are treated like defendants, and teachers deliver final decisions. If a teacher acts like a mentor, students are treated like people who are learning, and teachers guide the experience. When teachers are both judges and mentors, they are often in a process akin to taking three steps forward and four steps back because the goals of these roles do not match or complement one another.

Impact of Grades on Students

According to Rosenbaum (2001), the grades a student is assigned in high school affect the earnings that student will make for at least nine years after graduation. An awareness of grades' impact on students' future financial earnings complicates how teachers grade. Most teachers are also aware that grades have unfairly sorted many students of color in ways that provide fewer academic opportunities for them than for their white peers. This disparity shows up in academic statistics surrounding students of color and their white peers. The gap between academic "achievement" of white students and of students of color is commonly known in education as the "achievement gap." The achievement gap is often defined as "the differences in scores on state or national achievement tests between various student demographic groups" (Anderson, Medrich, & Fowler, 2007, p. 547). The achievement gap has been generalized to include any gap between demographic groups of students in academic performance.

One of the negative consequences of grading may be the stifling of student motivation to meet the learning objectives due to instead focusing on the grade. In a comprehensive review of grading reform suggestions, Guskey (2011) highlighted that

grades are not intrinsically motivating to students to learn a subject. One reason for this is that when grades are presented as students' learning in a course, students limit their attention on the content and shift their attention to how they will be assigned a grade (Kohn, 1999). Some students also see grades as punishments, which results in a mindset that is less receptive to learning (Guskey, 1994; Kohn, 2000; McClintic-Gilbert et al., 2013; Schinske & Tanner, 2014). Additionally, students might make decisions out of avoidance or fear of being labeled as slow learners by the assignment of their grades (Edwards & Edwards, 1999).

In a recent study of 27 elementary teachers across 11 schools in the German state of Baden-Württemberg, researchers Kriegbauma, Steinmayrb, and Spinath (2019) examined the relationship between teachers' judgments of students' aptitude and students' motivation and math grades. In this study, researchers analyzed results from student questionnaires about prior grades, self-concepts, and their motivation to learn the content after receiving grades. Researchers discovered a reciprocal effect between judgment and grade. They found that "a teacher's underestimation of a student's aptitude in math can lead to negative achievement development [students progressed through math skills at a rate slower than their peers who had similar skill levels but whose skills were not underestimated by their teachers] in elementary school and moreover to a worse recommendation for secondary school than would be expected on the basis of the student's real aptitude" (Kriegbauma, Steinmayrb, & Spinath, 2019, p. 1). If teachers underestimate students' aptitude, then teachers are more likely to assign "low" grades to students. Students whose math skills are not underestimated by their teachers are likely to

be recommended for higher levels of math than students whose math skills have been underestimated by their teachers even though both groups of students had similar math skill levels. Teachers' underestimation of students creates a cycle in which students who are underestimated by their teachers will continue to not learn at the same rate as their similarly skilled peers who are not underestimated by their teachers. If teachers early in a student's schooling label their students as less apt academically, "low" grades can become a cycle. Students often struggle to get out of this cycle, and then they are limited in their academic opportunities each subsequent year.

Teachers' Assignment of Grades

It is important to note that grades are assigned by teachers, rather than earned by students, because the teacher, in fact, determines grades. There is an argument that could be made that outcome-based grades are accurate representations of students' work, and therefore grades are objective measures. However, two teachers could score an essay on the Smarter Balanced test, a required test for graduation in the state of Oregon, differently. When humans are the tools for measurement, there is no consistent measure. Thus, teachers make interpretations and judgments about student work that are subjective and not guided by a universal truth, even if they believe their choices are valid. Brookhart and colleagues found that "teachers believe it is important to grade fairly," (2016, p. 826), but teacher evaluations of student work always contain an element of subjectivity. According to Sun and Cheng (2014), "even when [the] teachers use the same grading scale and the same grading guidelines, there is little consistency in teachers' grading across schools" (p. 327). Variation across teachers regarding their views of what student

performance *should* look like may contribute to the variation in grades assigned to similar work. Other contributors to grade variation are worth noting, as they have an impact on student opportunities, student motivation, and student belief in their ability to learn; however, these contributors will not be highlighted in this portion of the paper.

Current efforts to reform grading practices aim for “fair” grading based on individual achievement factors that only include assessing academic performance and not non-achievement factors like timeliness, homework completion, or soft skills (Feldman, 2019). Additionally, there is ample research that indicates that the assignment of grades by teachers is racially biased. For instance, educators are more likely to evaluate a Black student’s work lower than a white student even if the level of the work was identical (Malouff & Thorsteinsson, 2016). In a study of U.S. public school teachers conducted by Randall and Engelhard (2010), focus groups of teachers asserted that their “school district . . . has an official grading policy that stresses achievement as the only factor to be considered in assigning final grades” (Randall & Engelhard, 2010, p. 1379). There is disagreement about what “achievement” should look like and what knowledge and content schools should teach; however, this paper focuses on the intersection of the act of assigning grades and teacher identity and not on the measurement of “achievement.”

Another influence on how teachers grade is their personal beliefs (Cox, 2011). These beliefs are grounded in their perspectives and perceptions of what grades ought to communicate. Even though some literature around grading suggests that achievement (as defined in local contexts) should be the primary basis for grading, other literature suggests that teachers should account for additional factors that may or may not include

achievement when assigning grades. According to Zoeckler (2007), teachers' grading may be influenced by the educational system's initiatives, the perception of students' effort, expectations and attitudes of students and teachers, and the perception that a grade will motivate a student to perform better on future assessments. According to Chen and Bonner (2017), teachers in their study included non-achievement factors in grading practices; therefore, the researchers found that teacher subjectivity was part of grade calculations. Specifically, teachers may increase a student's grade based on their perception of student effort; however, teachers cannot objectively measure effort as the display of effort looks different for each individual and is often not observable. Therefore, grade assignment is a complex process as it is tied up in personal beliefs about objectivity and fairness. These beliefs may be a part of a teacher's identity.

The History of the Traditional Grading System

The traditional system of grades used in the United States today is modeled after a system that is over 100 years old. Before the system was implemented, student progress was presented to parents in an oral report by the teacher (Mondale, 2001). During the early twentieth century, significant changes such as the rise in manufacturing, mass immigration to the United States from countries that did not report student learning in categorical rankings, and the introduction of intelligence testing and behaviorism led to grades as a measurement of student learning. It was more "efficient" for teachers to find an alphabetic letter to represent a student's learning than to have one-on-one conversations with all of the families in a school (Feldman, 2019). Simultaneously, economic leaders in the United States hoped to increase manufacturing in order to

compete economically with England, France, and Germany. If schools were designed to mirror manufacturing lines, then quickly creating productive workers for the economy would be the goal. In this model, the content of schools should be designed to efficiently create workers that are helpful to industry. (Grimmett, 2018). The language often used in school systems mirrors the factory-like process many schools adopt to “teach” students. Words commonly used in school vernacular like “produce,” “work,” “measurement,” and “accountability” all reflect this analogy of schools operating like factories. Therefore, it is no surprise that teachers might feel the pressure to act like managers overseeing workers in a factory (Luttenberg, Imants, & Veen, 2013). In this analogy, grades are viewed as measurements of student work, sorting students based on their perceived merit as workers in the economy, and teachers have the final say in the work’s value. The result is that “teachers [are placed] under a tremendous amount of pressure” (Luttenberg, Imants, & Veen, 2013, p. 294) to assess student work regardless of their feelings about the traditional grading system.

Grades were designed to sort students into categories of skilled and unskilled laborers. Sorting students assumes that the assessments used to determine grades adequately reflect students’ predispositions for a particular career. Suppose educators viewed grades as measurements to help sort students into appropriate occupations. In that case, it is worth noting that many of the careers that existed during the 1920s are now extinct or far less common. Given that the workforce and career paths have changed dramatically since the 1920s, it is troubling that educators use the same sorting system for our students today.

Sustaining Traditional Grading Systems

Neither educators in K-12 U.S. schools nor the general public tend to critique the traditional grading system. “The system of grades has remained unchanged for so long; the letter grade system has been widespread since the 1940s” (Schinske & Tanner, 2014, p. 159). In other words, the traditional grading system has become normalized by its longevity.

When descendants from European colonizers first created schools in the United States, teachers communicated with families about student learning through home visits and in-person conversations (Feldman, 2019). These conversational evaluations of student learning were effective at first; however, school populations increased by a third each decade between 1790 and 1860 (Synder, 1993). Given this rapid rise in school participation, educational leaders presented grades as a solution to alleviate the time demands of conversations being the only way for teachers to communicate student learning. The fact that the early implementers of the grading system were white and male is also worth noting. Grading (as a viable solution to streamline teachers’ evaluation of student learning) was also influenced by the rise of modernist efficiency. In this time, efficiency and productivity were highly valued. Franklin Bobbitt, a professor of educational administration at the University of Chicago, advocated that schools should design their curricula using the properties of scientific management. By doing so, productivity and efficiency would help maximize the goal of education, which he thought was to prepare individuals for their occupations, citizenship responsibilities, and family and social roles (Bobbitt, 2017). Grading as a system fits neatly into these ideals and

aims. The educational leaders behind the grading system's implementation may have overlooked, or possibly could not have even imagined, the potential and likely negative outcomes of having teachers assign grades.

Besides “giving” teachers back time by allowing them to assign grades rather than requiring them to visit with families, other factors pushed educational leaders to adopt the grading system still used today. The change in student demographics was also a factor that led to the implementation of traditional U.S. grading systems. The first U.S. schools had small populations of students and were not public. Over time, states created more public schools to serve the growing population, and the common structures still used in U.S. schools today emerged from this era (Bowles & Gintis, 2002, Feldman, 2019, Terman, Fernald, & Tupper, 1922). By 1918, state governments required all elementary school-aged children in the United States to attend school. It is worth noting that most students were white, upper or middle class, able-bodied, and had English as a first language in the early years of public schools. Even though state governments mandated that *all* students attend, it is crucial to know that “all” applied only to white male students; students of color were not included in this mandate. For example, in 1850, 58% of white males ages 5 to 19 were enrolled in school compared to 2% of Black male children and youth in that same age group. By 1920, about 68% of white children and youth and 46% of Black children and youth ages 5 to 19 were enrolled in school (Synder, 1993). The increase in student enrollment in schools (because of more students being allowed to attend school) provided another reason for student learning to be evaluated in an efficient manner.

In 1920, the United States military adopted intelligence testing and categorization to “sort” soldiers. “The use of intelligence testing, stemming from Alfred Binet’s tests in the early 1900s, expanded dramatically in World War I [and] scores on those tests soon became viewed as a reliable description of one’s intellectual capacity” (Feldman, 2019, p.19). The initial purpose of the tests was to designate roles to enlisted men efficiently, but some people used these tests as a justification for racist beliefs. Unfortunately, the existing hierarchy already in place within the United States population and the false notion that the United States is a meritocracy were spuriously validated because the scores for white, wealthy students were higher than those of their peers. The intelligence tests seemed to validate the idea that a test could accurately measure intelligence, but people with influence within educational fields should have noticed that these tests were (and continue to be) instruments of cultural bias (Alm & Colnerud, 2015). Like intelligence testing, grades were (and are) interpreted as measures of intelligence and, by extension, worth, thus legitimizing the sorting of students based on grades. Given the “general cultural penchant for reducing everything to numbers” (Appleman & Thompson, 2002, p.96), it is not surprising that schools became places where students’ learning became represented as a simple number (or letter category based on numerical scores).

If one accepts that grades accurately measure student learning, then it follows that grades are tools that can effectively communicate how much a student has learned (Feldman, 2019). The early implementers of the grading system were university presidents, who assumed that “grades [were] meant to report student progress toward learning goals” (Varlas, 2013, p. 5). Grades were like a shorthand for teachers to report

learning; grades were intended to reduce teacher workload in communicating learning outcomes. Yet, teachers today still note that the time and energy demands of assigning grades to student work are barriers to manageable workloads (Broadbent, 2018).

Considering the factors mentioned previously, there are hints about why educators might still use a system that has not turned out to be as time-saving as it was intended to be.

Most teachers have too many students and are expected to grade all student work, and a time-saving system could be one way to lessen excessive teacher workloads. However, traditional grading is time consuming for teachers; data show that grading is in fact a task that takes lots of hours (Strauss, 2012). Even though many educators may feel overwhelmed by the amount of time spent grading, they often cannot imagine or create a different system.

Grades as Measurements

Parents, teachers, and students still interpret a grade on an assignment as a measure of student progress toward desired learning outcomes. Even though there are critics of traditional U.S. grading who suggest that grades do not measure student learning, schools have largely kept traditional grading systems in place (Feldman, 2019; Guskey, 2006). Perhaps due to a cultural tendency to equate numbers with science and success (Kohn, 2000), grades have become even more important than the related learning outcomes because of the meanings ascribed to grades. “Grades still matter more than learning to far too many people in our society, including teachers, parents, and students” (Rhoads, 2011, p. 48).

Grades might matter more to many people because of the association many people make between grades and intelligence, and ultimately power. According to Kerr, Colangelo, and Gaeth (1988) and Inman and Powell (2018), students evaluate their academic achievement, represented by their grades, as reflections of their intelligence. The idea that grades reflect intelligence is embedded in our systemic school culture. As U.S. citizens, we see this cultural belief embodied in the fact that schools are “places in which much attention and focus is centered on sorting people based on intellectual performance and achievement” (Murphy & Zirkel, 2015, p. 4). The act of sorting people based on grades, and (supposedly) intelligence, happens in the classroom, but the impact of using grades to sort students extends well beyond the classroom walls. The assignment of grades throughout schooling “determine[s] decisions on track placements, ability grouping, [and] grade retention” (Ewijk, 2011, p. 1045). In a way, students continue to be sorted by their grades well after leaving the classroom, given the external world’s treatment of grades as educational qualifications to grant students opportunities. “School grades have been shown to influence factors including students’ . . . future educational choices” (Alm & Colnerud, 2015, p. 132). The higher the grade point average (GPA) a student has, the more future academic and career opportunities they are likely to have in the form of college acceptances, scholarships, or lucrative job prospects. Many colleges have GPA requirements, which suggests students’ GPAs will factor into the acceptance or rejection of their admissions applications. Although researchers cannot draw a definitive correlation between grades and job prospects (Gray, 2016), Rosenbaum (2001) did find such a relationship between grades and earnings. Rosenbaum (2001) found that

the grades a student is assigned in high school affect the earnings that student will make for at least nine years after graduation.

Grades as Classification

The early adopters of the traditional grading model were university presidents. “Working from European models, American universities invented systems for ranking and categorizing students based both on academic performance and on progress, conduct, attentiveness, interest, effort, and regular attendance at class and chapel” (Brookhart et al., 2016, p. 831). When they were introduced, the general public viewed grades as accurate and fair measures of student learning. Today, many education researchers suggest that grades are often inaccurate reports of student learning outcomes (Feldman, 2019, Guskey, 1994, Guskey, 2011, & Kohn, 1999) because the practice of sorting students relies on the assumption that the assessments used to determine grades adequately reflect students’ predispositions and qualifications for particular careers. Sorting students by grades also assumes that the system is well-designed to identify students’ skill levels accurately and that the measured skills are worthy of being measured. Today, grades are treated as accurate enough that teachers’ assignments of them can affect students’ options (or lack of options) concerning class enrollment, college acceptance and aid, and career paths. The assignment of grades effectively sorts students into careers as “skilled” or “unskilled” laborers, but the decisions that sort students are made by people whose criteria for types of laborers are subjective, biased, and inconsistent. Essentially, the criteria by which teachers judge students are socially constructed: in other words, made up. Teachers are the people who assess student work,

and despite any argument to the contrary or efforts to increase their objectivity, they are not unbiased neutral parties. Due to their subjectivity and bias, all humans are inherently flawed as instruments of judgment. Yet regardless of these flaws, the system obligates teachers to assign grades, and it is “through grades, [that] teachers exercise power to compare [and] organize” (McClam & Sevier, 2010, p. 1462) students. Moreover, the result of this sorting can be detrimental to students’ academic futures. As a result of the potential long-term effects of grades on students’ lives, it is understandable that “many teachers consider the social consequences of the grades they assign” (Kelly, 2008, p. 33). When a teacher assigns a grade, the teacher exercises power, regardless of the teacher’s desire for that power.

Grades as Part of a “Hidden” System

To add to the harm grades can cause students and teachers, grades are also based on a global north education system. A global north system is one in which perceived truth and the way of learning the world’s truths are grounded in Eurocentric culture (Pérez & Saavedra, 2017). The global north system applies to U.S. schools because the subjects taught and instruction methods are deeply Eurocentric. The focus on Eurocentric content and instruction positions some educators figuratively as colonizers of any student who does not fit within the global north system. What is considered “legitimate” knowledge is rooted in a white supremacist and global north perspective in U.S. schools. Students are expected to produce work and perform in ways that signal “designated construct of intelligence” as it is defined from a Eurocentric point of view, for example by using “standard English” (following the dialect and discourse patterns associated with middle

and upper class white monolingual U.S.-born people). In this paradigm for defining intelligence, competition is welcomed amongst students, individualism is paramount for a student to succeed academically, and traditional positivist scientific views are prized. Devalued are non-standard English dialects (despite being linguistically exactly as valid as “standard English”), community-based school structures, and multiple culturally valid ways of knowing (Horsford, Scott, & Anderson, 2019). Based on a global north construct of intelligence, students are expected to perform as learners within the parameters of “knowledge” and “skills” as defined by Eurocentric views. Students who demonstrate pre-established skills that do not fit these narrow definitions are often harmed by low grades. If a student produces work that does not demonstrate the type of knowledge or adherence to cultural norms that are valued from a Eurocentric perspective, they may receive a low grade, and may miss out on academic opportunities. To demonstrate my point, a student could write a strong analytical essay, but if the student turned in the work late, that student might be penalized for lateness or, in some cases, not receive credit at all. Another example of Eurocentric knowledge being prized can be seen in the writing rubrics that many English teachers use to grade student writing. If a student wrote an essay that included a personal poem (which deviates from the Eurocentric structure on an expository essay), a teacher might grade them down for not adhering to the rubric’s requirements. (It is worth noting that this approach to scoring is so widely used that even this doctoral dissertation will be evaluated on such a rubric.) The potential of grades to expand or limit students’ future academic, career, and financial opportunities accentuates the power teachers have over students as a result of being the assigners of grades.

Pérez & Saavedra's (2018) critique of neoliberal schooling that centers global north (p. 750) knowledge can be applied to the practice of assigning grades because grades are "rooted in a view of the individual, without regard to inequitable structural conditions produced in our society and the racist and colonizing instruments used to measure a supposed gap" (Pérez & Saavedra, 2017, p. 10). In the U.S., many refer to this gap as the "achievement gap." It is defined as "the differences in scores on state or national achievement tests between various student demographic groups" (Anderson, Medrich, & Fowler, 2007, p. 547). In the United States, the "achievement gap" is typically examined by contrasting "the large and persistent underperformance of African American and Hispanic students relative to their white peers" (Dee, 2015, p. 149). The persistence of this gap has been the focus of many educational initiatives such as Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID), whose mission is "to *close the achievement gap [emphasis added]* by preparing all students for college readiness and success in a global society" (AVID.org, 2019). This mission statement is steeped in a global north view of schooling and students. For instance, the phrase about closing the gap suggests that students of color themselves are capable of closing the gap and ignores the inequity built into a system that was designed to exclude them. Through competition among individuals, students are positioned as responsible for their academic success and are not encouraged to critique the system that automatically disadvantages them for academic success in the first place by measuring their success against Eurocentric criteria. Also, the phrase "global society" is misleading because AVID's curriculum is standardized across the country – regardless of the school demographics; therefore,

students enrolled in the AVID program may not be receiving a curriculum tailored to their needs. AVID's curriculum is inherently Eurocentric because it is a homogeneous product. Perhaps unknowingly, the AVID curriculum creators designed a system that reinforces global north views.

The traditional grading system aligns with the global north ideology in that the system fosters competition amongst students by assigning value, or academic capital, to student work. The "achievement gap" is a by-product of a global north ideology, which perpetuates longstanding systems of exclusion. Schools in the U.S. have long standing, well-established and entrenched systems that impede or limit student academic opportunities, such as having classes with GPA requirements for enrollment. In the problematic discourse surrounding the "achievement gap," grades arise both as an outcome and an influence on more distal outcomes, such as college acceptance and financial scholarship. Grades act as gatekeepers to academic opportunities for students, and teachers are aware of this gatekeeping power. Even though many teachers view the grading system as out of alignment with the goal of promoting student learning, as historically grades have not motivated students to learn (Guskey, 1994), teachers must nonetheless assign grades. Being placed in the position of both judge of student work (gatekeeper) and of mentor can cause identity friction for teachers.

Grades as Currency

The power of grades to damage or enhance a student's academic capital is a potential source of teacher identity friction around grading. "Academic capital" derives from the idea that the economic market determines what is considered legitimate

knowledge (Collyer, 2015, Rhoads, 2011, & Slaughter & Rhoads, 2004). Much like other forms of capital (to include social, linguistic, and economic), increased “academic capital” grants students a higher chance of acceptance for enrollment in educational institutions (K-12 schools, colleges) with academic prestige, which often translates to economic and social power. The global north ideology influences what is considered legitimate knowledge and thus what is valued in grading. Regardless of their personal values or perspectives on global north ideology, teachers who are required to participate in legitimizing/de-legitimizing student knowledge through grades based on global north criteria become complicit in systems that privilege middle and upper class white cultural perspectives and ways of knowing. People who hold power and privilege benefit from keeping this Eurocentric ideology alive and at work in schools. In addition to the problem of who gets to decide what is “legitimate” knowledge, grades are meant to label the worth of a student as a worker in the economy. In the age of neoliberal schooling, students’ intelligence is framed as “cognitive capital” (Grimmett, 2018), and the culture of schools is oriented toward producing workers for the benefit of the economy. According to Collyer (2015), “academic capitalism is . . . an explanation for the way the academy is being reshaped by the economic forces of globalization” (p. 316). The construct of academic capital is often applied to the context of higher education, but it can be applied to K-12 school settings as well. The grades a student is assigned shape how the market will view that student’s potential to earn income and benefit the economy. When individuals such as college admission board members and employers view a student’s application materials, they view grades as a measure of the student’s

likely success in the institution or organization. For example, if a student had all As in high school, that student would be more likely than a student with all Cs to be granted entrance into a particular college. Because grades sort students and limit their academic capital, teachers may experience identity friction in their position of the “grader.”

Knowing that their action, grading, may cause harm to students through a loss of academic capital, teachers may feel harmed themselves by the practice of grading, which represents complicity with an exclusionary system. This experience of harm for teachers may be particularly acute within districts and schools that impose strict parameters on grading practices.

If grades represent academic capital in an (academic) economy, understanding the system requires that we identify the service and the payment in the transaction that yields this academic capital. Through this lens, the A to F system is the economy; grades are produced by teachers and paid for by students, and then used as a resource to address student needs. For example, in the A through F economy an A grade would act like a higher amount of cash than an F grade. Additionally, the “cash” value of grades would also be based on the context and the course in which they are granted. For instance, if a student were awarded an A in International Baccalaureate English class at a prestigious high school, it would be worth a higher “amount” than would an A in a standard English class at a non-prestigious high school. As with differing currency values across nations, the source payment came from does influence the worth of the contract, or in this case, the academic and social purchasing power of the grades. In this metaphor, the A in IB English at the prestigious school could be represented as a U.S. dollar, while the A in

standard English as a non-prestigious high school could be represented as a Belarusian ruble or Colombian peso. This differential valuation of grades across schools and course contexts may influence how teachers make grading decisions. Teachers might see grades as capital, and thus their assignment might have more or less “academic capital” because of the perceived value of their institution. For example, a teacher at a low-prestige school may grant everyone an A because they do not see an A from their institution as more valuable than an A from a high-prestige school. It could also mean that a teacher might give students a range of grades because they do not see their single assignment of a final grade having a meaningful impact on a student’s GPA. Additionally, teachers may also experience more pressure from families in high-income districts than in low-income districts to assign inflated grades to their students, which can add to the stress teachers experience as a result of assigning grades. If teachers in high-income districts felt pressured to inflate student grades because of family pressure, then the academic capital would be inequitable across students in different schools.

Individually, academic capital (in the form of grades) affects students’ academic and career opportunities, but the grades of a student population viewed collectively affect a school’s reputation. Graduation rates are one of the many line items measured on school report cards (an evaluation of a school that is similar to a student’s report card). If graduation rates are low in a school, that school may be considered low-performing.

The school report card also includes information other than grades which may influence the public’s perception of the performance of a school. The way in which a school is judged by the public impacts the academic capital of grades in that school. The

school report includes multiple student factors, such as: college readiness, the proportion of seniors who took and passed AP/IB tests; the percentage of seniors who took AP/IB exams and the percentage who passed multiple AP or IB exams; standardized test scores, a number calculated by comparing standardized assessments scores of the student body against other schools in the state; math and reading performance, the standardized tests scores of the student body compared to schools with similar demographics; underserved student performance, the performance of underserved students' standardized test scores against the average non-underserved students; and graduation rate, calculated by the number of students who graduate in four years (Morse & Brooks, 2020). All of these factors together will create the school report card. That school report card can significantly impact the public's perception of a school, and indirectly the academic capital of the grades assigned within it.

Even though low grades are not considered adequate reasons to close a school, low graduation rates may influence the public's opinion of the decision to close public schools. If school data are deemed to reflect inadequate progress or low scores, schools are more likely to close or be reopened as privatized institutions than are schools with consistently high scores. For example, three weeks after Hurricane Katrina in Louisiana, all of the unionized teachers were fired, the school boards were disbanded and the school went to a state receiver in Baton Rouge. When the state received \$24 million to fund the schools that were devastated by Katrina, there was one caveat: The money was not allowed to go to public schools. There were different explanations as to why public schools would not be given the money, but low test scores and ineffective school boards

were considered influential in the decision (Hasselle, 2019; Molina, M., 2008). Even though low test scores and the public's perception of an ineffective school board were the documented reasons for privatizing many of the schools in New Orleans, a connection to low graduation rates was present. If the public perceived the schools as ineffective because of low grades and other factors, then the public will be more likely to believe that closing a school is a good idea. Essentially, the public perception of a school's effectiveness (as it relates to graduation rate) can influence public opinion.

Given the potential influence of graduation rates on public perception of schools, administration may feel pressured to increase graduation rates. On the surface, increasing graduation rates does not seem problematic; however, if principals are pressuring their staff to inflate grades to increase graduation rates, teachers may experience friction. Because principals are "subjected to intense pressures to collect, analyze and use multiple forms of student assessment" (Hellsten, Noonan, Preston, & Prytula, 2013, p. 58), teachers might feel pressured to assign grades in a way that helps appease their administration. In other words, even though students might not be learning, assigning passing grades so that students graduate might please the administration.

I provide this overview of grading to suggest that the context of grading is complex. Over 100 years ago, grades were designed by individuals to be efficient tools to measure student learning. Regardless of the intention behind the design, the impact of the grading system on students, educators, institutions, and families is problematic. Grades can harm students' perception of themselves as capable learners and impact their academic opportunities. Grades are one of the most common sites of stress for teachers,

which can be attributed to the adversarial relationship between teachers and students, families, and administrators. Grades were created by white men, and the principles of grading can be critiqued for being capitalistic, biased, and grounded in a global north ideology. Lastly, grades are assigned to students based on their teachers' judgment on a variety of both academic and nonacademic factors, all of which are influenced by their identity. Teachers, like qualitative researchers, are imperfect instruments for measurement. In the following section, I will discuss how the topic of grading is not fully addressed within teacher training programs even though it will be a substantial obligation for future teachers.

Two Misaligned Systems: Grading and Teacher Education

I provide an overview of the system of grades above because this background is essential for understanding the mismatch between the task of grading and many teachers' identities. There is evidence that many teachers enter the profession with goals related to equity (Sheppard, Wolfinger, & Talbert, 2022). Such an orientation is often articulated on the overview pages of educator preparation programs. For example, the overview for Portland State University's Graduate Teacher Education Program Master's Degree states the following:

The master's degree in education prepares you to be a part of a new wave of progressive K-12 teachers. As America's schools become more racially and ethnically diverse, serving students with different cultures, languages, and abilities, our teachers need to adapt. The College of Education will equip you to teach in an inclusive and equitable environment, utilizing the latest technology to

help you succeed. You will be a teacher who helps each student succeed on their unique terms. (Portland State University College of Education, 2020)

Further, a majority of teachers articulate an orientation toward supporting the learning and success of all students (Evans, Turner, & Allen, 2020; Milner & Laughter, 2015)

The discrepancy between the goals of teachers/preparation programs and the grading practices and policies ubiquitous in U.S. K-12 schools is an important potential source of identity friction for teachers.

Considering the numerous teacher preparation programs that have goals that foreground equity, it is problematic that new K-12 teachers will work in schools that do not fully align with the goals of university teacher preparation. The overview of the Portland State University College of Education statement on the overview page is not offered to suggest that university leaders should alter the goals of their programs, but rather is meant to highlight the discrepancy between teacher preparation program *goals* and K-12 U.S. school *practices*. To give an instance, if teachers are enrolled in teacher preparation programs with goals for student success and growth framed in terms of equity, one could assume many teachers identify with some, if not all, of their program's goals. A conflict exists when teachers who identify as equitable educators are set up to be challenged by a system of grading that oppresses and harms many students. I suspect that even teachers who feel the system of grading is an accurate and fair depiction of students' learning experience conflicted feelings around grade assignment because of the potential negative impact it can have on their students' lives. In order to understand how teachers

experience identity friction as a result of assigning grades, I need to understand the context in which the friction occurs.

Statement of Positionality

The narrative at the start of this chapter suggests that I bring a particular set of beliefs and experiences to my research. Honoring transparency in my research, I believe that my beliefs and experiences are unique but also are my lens for understanding my problem space. As a qualitative researcher, I am the “primary instrument for data collection and data analysis” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p.16). My perceptions, experiences, values, and beliefs do shape how I analyze and interpret data. With that in mind, I feel it is appropriate to share my positionality.

I was raised in a middle-income household by two parents who had graduate degrees. A large part of my academic success can be attributed to the fact that I am white and therefore have an unfair advantage in academic settings (DiAngelo, 2018). The culture and beliefs that were shared in my home were close enough to the espoused beliefs of the schools I attended that I was able to navigate school with relative ease. I had “developed habits of performing which enable[d me] to run through the hierarchy of preferred knowledge” (Brice Heath, 1982, p. 56). I share this information because being a part of the dominant cultural group gave me an academic advantage in school, and this is not the case for many students. I find the uneven opportunities for students based on a hierarchy that is bound by race and class to be deeply troubling. School, in my opinion, should not center the needs of those in power, specifically white, non-disabled, English speaking, economically advantaged people.

I also bring my professional identity as a teacher to my research. I position myself as a compassionate, patient, flexible teacher. I hold these views of myself in the classroom, and over the years have heard similar statements from my students. I recognize that, as a teacher, I am in a position of power and perhaps that my students' voiced support of my pedagogy and personhood is linked to that power. I will provide a more thorough positionality statement in chapter three to call attention to how my positionality shaped my research.

Research Problem

Teachers often must follow the rules of the traditional grading system when they enter the profession. They might know that grades can have harmful effects on students, and yet they must assign those grades. Some teachers might feel that grades are objective, yet research shows that this is not the case (Chen & Bonner, 2017; Feldman, 2019). Regardless of their feelings about grades, teachers will experience challenges related to being the one responsible for assigning grades. The challenges might show up in the form of a disgruntled student, parent, or administrator, or they might show up as feelings of guilt when a student does not graduate because of a failing grade. However, regardless of the challenges teachers face, I suspect that many of these challenges arise because there is a conflict between the assignment of grades and so many of the other tasks of teaching, like helping students learn. Over time, I think working within the traditional grading system causes friction between the teacher's identity and their institutional expectations. Once a teacher experiences identity friction, I am unsure of the impacts of that friction on their identity and agency.

Research Purpose

The purpose of this research is to gain understanding of how teachers' identities are affected by assigning grades to students in a traditional U.S. model and how teachers' agency evolves as a result of identity friction between their identities and their institutional expectations. The reason it is important to understand these impacts is that grading is an everyday component of teachers' professional lives, and yet there is little research around how teachers embed their identities and agency in the context of traditional grading practices. Given the depth of harm that identity friction could cause teachers, there is an urgent need for research that addresses teacher identity and agency within the traditional grading system. Prolonged identity friction could negatively affect teachers' well-being or cause them to leave the profession. Friction could also result in teachers grading rigidly out of frustration with the system, and thus students might end up with low grades that might lower their motivation, harm their perceptions of themselves as learners, and decrease their academic capital.

The purpose of the research is not to expose the friction teachers experience within a particular school or department, but rather to understand how friction shows up in teachers' identities and agency; highlighting how teachers experience identity friction within the traditional grading system in U.S. high schools also suggests a call out for a change in the system. As such, given the hidden system of power that manifests in the traditional grading system and assignment of grades by teachers, the following research questions emerge:

1. What impact does the assignment of traditional grades in a U.S. high school have on teacher identity and agency?
2. How does the experience of identity friction arise for teachers in the practice of assigning traditional grades in a U.S. high school?
3. For teachers who resist, how do teachers' use of strategies of active and passive resistance against traditional grading practices shape their identities and agency? And how do teachers' identities and agency shape the use of strategies of active and passive resistance to traditional grading practices?

Methods

The research questions in this study focus on how teachers experience identity friction within the context of the traditional grading system, specifically in Oregon. In order to explore these research questions, I narrowed the context to one department in a school rather than teachers across multiple departments. I did this to bound the range of experiences of the participants. I did not work with teachers across departments or schools because I felt a mixed group of teachers would mean analyzing a larger range of teacher experiences thus making it challenging for me to discern the specific influences that may have impacted how teachers experienced identity friction. By studying one department, I feel an understanding of each participant was more accessible.

I collected data through a series of one-on-one semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and observations of department meetings/Professional Learning Communities (a group of educators who meet regularly to share knowledge and work together to improve their practice and students' academic performance). I also collected relevant documents

such as graded assignments, syllabi, rubrics, and district/departmental grading policies. I used a phenomenological approach to conduct interviews. Once data were collected, I used the principles of narrative inquiry, “the study of experience understood narratively” (Clandinin & Huber, 2010), and critical discourse analysis, which takes “linguistic and psychosocial approaches one step further by analyzing the data from a decidedly critical stance” (Williamson & Johanson, 2018), to guide my coding of the data. Narrative inquiry principles guided the character and story type coding schemes I used, as storytelling is one of the ways in which individuals convey information about their identities (Chandler, 2000). In particular, “what it means to be a teacher informs how particular teaching identities are contested and enacted through personal narratives” (Ketter & Lewis, 2015, p. 79). Therefore, I used theories of narrative inquiry for this analysis. Given the emphasis on power in the context of grading in this study, critical discourse analysis was used for portions of the data that showed high levels of friction in participants or conflict between participants. Even though not directly stated in an overview of critical discourse analysis by Gee (2014a), understanding power is an undercurrent in critical discourse analysis because “the study of language is integrally connected to matters of equity and justice” (p. 47). By completing critical discourse analysis for specific excerpts of the interviews, I attempted to understand how power structures affect teachers’ identities and agency within the practice of assigning grades.

There are limitations to studying this problem space. To be specific, researchers cannot easily observe identity. A researcher can construct inferences about aspects of a participant's identity through observation or interview, but there is no objective and

tangible measurement for a construct like identity. Another limitation of the study is the framing of the problem within the context of traditional grading practices. Teachers do not typically narrate their thoughts during grading, so there is no accessible way for a researcher to capture the nuance of the practice of assigning grades in real time.

Therefore, I collected data about the participants' identities and agency in the context of grading predominantly through interviews, although I did also conduct observations of department meetings. Another way that I tried to address the challenge of understanding teacher identity was by focusing the research in one department. In a department, natural discussions about grading may be more likely to occur than they would be across departments. Discussions amongst teachers in one department provided me with what I believe were more robust clues about the impact of grades on teachers identity and agency than I could have gathered through with teachers from different departments.

Conclusion

The next chapter provides an overview of the scholarly literature relevant to this study. I begin my review of the literature with a focus on teacher identity and agency. I then discuss figured worlds and figured identities to highlight the potential impact of these constructs to influence teacher identity and agency. In the next section of the review I provide an overview of two different constructs of power (Foucault's panopticon and Bourdieu's symbolic violence) as a lens to understand the power structures within schools. I then examine concepts that are relevant for understanding identity and agency: narratives, positioning, and dialogical discourse. After reviewing those theoretical

concepts, I end this upcoming chapter with an overview of the methodology and related empirical examples.

Chapter 2 Review of Literature

Introduction

The following review of literature provides an overview of identity and agency in addition to key related theoretical concepts. In the first section of the review of literature, I provide an overview of teacher identity research by defining identity as well as professional identity. A discussion of identity construction is also included to emphasize the influences that impact an individual's identity. In this section, I additionally include a discussion of agency. Agency has a reflexive relationship with identity, so to understand identity, one must understand agency too.

Identity is influenced by many factors and in the second section of the review of literature, a discussion of the influence of power is included. This study involves understanding teacher identity and agency within the traditional grading system, a system that was created and is sustained by power. A focused look on visible and invisible power structures has been included to understand the impact power has on identity and agency.

The next section of the review of literature focuses on figured worlds. As with some terms introduced in later sections, figured worlds serve as both tool and concept. The construct of figured worlds is a tool for understanding identity, and that is one reason why it has been included in this review of literature. The other reason figured worlds are central to this study is because figured worlds allow individuals to imagine different possibilities for their identities. Given the focus on acts of resistance in the third research question, a concept that frames how individuals explore their identities was essential.

The following section of the review of literature includes a discussion of narratives as a concept and a tool. Narratives can be used to help understand identity; they can also be used to construct identity. Given that narratives are one of the common ways that people communicate their identity to the outside world, narratives are a key theoretical concept of this review.

Using a sociocultural lens, I then outline research around positioning, which is also a concept and a tool. Positioning can be used to understand agency, relationships, and power dynamics. Following the discussion of positioning, the final theoretical concepts of the review are discourse and dialogism. Language is a central component of all of the theoretical concepts of this study (identity, agency, figured worlds, narratives, positioning) and understanding patterns of discourse is a helpful lens for gaining insights about the problem. An emphasis on dialogism is included because the definition of identity that I adopted for this study highlights the dialogic nature of identity. In addition, dialogism, as a lens, can illuminate how individuals interact based on their power and positionality.

I focus the penultimate section of the literature review describing the relationship among the key theoretical concepts. Given the complex and abstract nature of the theoretical concepts, I provide explanations and diagrams to help ground the reader in each concept's connection to the others.

The last part of the literature review is an overview of the dominant methodology that will be used in this study, interview study. I also provide an overview of the two methodologies, narrative inquiry and discourse analysis, that influenced the way I

collected and analyzed the data. Throughout this literature review, I include empirical studies that used mixed qualitative methods to illustrate how similar and relevant contexts, populations, and theoretical concepts were used in previous research. The empirical studies represented in this study are not exhaustive. Given the large number of empirical studies that are relevant to my study, I needed to select a manageable amount to review, and therefore needed to select studies that I felt were more relevant to the problem space than others. I determined their relevance by selecting articles that foregrounded one or more relevant concepts and/or presented the desired methodology. I gave additional consideration to studies that had intersections in their references to other studies that had already been determined as relevant. I eliminated articles if the framework or design suggested gaps in credibility and validity.

Teacher Identity

Teacher identity is a composite of personal identity and professional identity. In order to grasp the concept of teacher identity, it is crucial to explore identity construction outside of the classroom first. How a teacher identifies as a professional will be intertwined with their personal identity.

Defining Identity as a Construct

In reference to identity in the education community, there are a range of definitions. The lack of agreement about the definition might be the result of identity being a cross-disciplinary term spanning psychology, anthropology, sociology, and education as well as being a term that is commonly used in non-scholarly vernacular.

Before the 1940s, social scientists viewed identity as an essential core, conceptualized as a set of beliefs that a person carried within, which determined how one acted in the world (Cameron, 2001). Perhaps the early research into identity focused on identity as a cohesive unit because “identity comes from the Latin root *idem*,” which translates to “the same” (Gleason, 1983, p. 911). Around the 1940s, the term identity became popularized in the social science field and was no longer viewed as an unchangeable core. Social constructivist researchers like Vygotsky (1978) and those influenced by him viewed identity as something that is constructed by our actions, experiences, and contexts. Therefore, “individuals [are] active shapers of their identities” (Kira & Balkin, 2014, p. 133). Accepting this definition of identity means accepting that an individual's experience will shape identity, but that does not suggest that individuals are passive recipients of the influence experience has over them.

Given the lack of consensus on the definition of identity, this review of literature adheres to a particular definition based on an alignment with concepts that will be shared later in the review (narratives, positioning, dialogism). For the purposes of this research, I define identity as realizations about the self that are multidimensional, layered, dynamic, and flexible. For example, as a new teacher I identified myself as a young, female, white, creative, organized, hard-working educator. At the same time, I recognized myself as a daughter, a sister, a friend, a reader, a runner, and a cat lover. I am able to identify as all of these descriptors because identity is a layered concept. Today, I still identify with the same descriptors I had as a new teacher, but the way I view those descriptors is different because of the experiences I have had as a teacher and person. My understanding of

myself now versus when I started teaching highlights the dynamic, flexible qualities of identity. One influence for this definition of identity was Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain's (1998) definition in which they stated that identities are: "self-understandings, especially those with strong emotional resonance for the teller" (p. 3). This definition of identity is salient because it centers the teller. By this definition, identity consists of multiple understandings of the self that resonate with the individual. When one considers how identity is framed within the sociocultural lens, this definition allows for flexibility and dynamism.

The Process of Identity Construction

In addition to the variation in definitions for the term, researchers have conflicting ideas about how identity is constructed. Identity is a construct that is always in flux, and the construction of it is also dynamic. Unlike early ideas that identity construction leads to a static identity, new definitions acknowledge that "identity is a product and byproduct of activity" (Roth, Tobin, Elmesky, Carambo, McKnight, & Beers, 2004, p. 51). Therefore, a person never arrives at their set identity. Rather, identity evolves as one proceeds along their journey. As people continue to interact with one another, their identities evolve. This is because "identity is thought to be [hu]man-made and as constantly created and re-created in interactions between people" (Sfard & Prusnak, 2005, p. 15). Other views of identity construction are different than ones like Sfard and Prusnak's, which is grounded in human interaction; however, much of the research around identity construction suggests that humans' identities evolve, hinting at the

possibility that identity construction is a human-made process (Sfard & Prusnak, 2005). It is through interaction with others that an individual's identity changes.

Much of the work on identity in education addresses the “alive” and shared aspect of identity. Eaton et al. (2019) conducted a dialogic cartographic narrative study, a mapping of how a person moves through geography, space, and time based on their subjectivity and position, in which research participants examined their own privilege and its effect on their actions as self-identified agents of change as employees at a higher education institution. Through detailed narrative analysis, researchers were able to locate resonant themes that appeared in expressions of identity. From this study, researchers concluded that “identity is not a static construct, but rather a complex process of continual meaning-making that occurs across various and divergent organizational and sociological environments” (Eaton et al, 2019, p. 469). According to this interpretation, identity is not a concept that can be isolated, and multiple forces are perpetually working on it. A dialogic cartographic narrative study in which participants engage in self-study may not be a universally effective way to research teacher identity. In a high school setting, teachers may be less inclined to or less likely to be given the time and opportunity to examine their privilege and its effects on their actions than would higher education professors, and therefore a self-study of teacher identity might be problematic for the high school teachers. Even though Eaton et al. (2019) view identity as a process, and not a thing that is always in process (the definition I adopted for this study), there are important takeaways from this study, such as an understanding of the dynamic nature of

identity and the connection to dialogism, a key theoretical concept of this study (which will be further discussed later in chapter 2) .

Identity as a Multidimensional Construct

In a study outside the field of education by Hill, Soloman, Dornan, & Stalmeijer (2015), researchers examined women surgeons' self-narratives in a predominantly male field. One finding of this study was that individuals construct identity through language, which has cultural ideologies and discourses woven into it. The women surgeons were "world making," which means that they were casting narratives to situate themselves within their worlds in order to incorporate both their identities as female surgeons and mothers in a cohesive way. Through narratives, they were able to create identities that did not contradict the typical surgeon type while still maintaining the characteristics of nurturing mothers. This study highlights the multidimensional aspects of identity that are often a result of varying contexts.

As a result of human interaction varying by context, people have complex, layered identities. Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) stated that humans have multiple identities, and within those identities there are also sub-identities. Another researcher explored the multiple identity concept by stating there are two categories of the self: the human and the social, and that these are complex and contain sub-identities (Chandler, 2000). One possible explanation for this multiple and layered identity, the human and the social with sub-identities, is that lived experiences of people are also varied (multiple) and layered. The qualities of identity mirror the qualities of people's experiences living in the world.

Gee's Four Types of Identity

People take on different identities based on the practices and contexts in which they exist, suggesting that identities are socially-situated (Gee, 2014a). Gee's (2001) four types of identity can be one way to categorize an individual's multiple identities. These four types of identity are: Nature-identity (N-Identity), Institution-identity (I-Identity), Discourse-identity (D-Identity), and Affinity-identity (A-Identity).

Nature Identity. The N-Identity is formed by forces outside of one's control and often is associated with genes; "the source of this power is nature, not society, and the process through which this power works is development (it unfolds outside my control or the control of society)" (Gee, 2001, p. 101). By way of explanation, part of my N-identity is that I am a cisgender woman. I identify with the gender I was assigned at birth, which is a part of my identity that was out of my control. It is important to know that even though N-Identities are out of an individual's control at their creation, they are also only important if society treats them as meaningful. For descriptive purposes, nature provided me with a longer second toe; however, this trait is not part of my N-Identity because institutions, discourse communities, and affinity groups do not treat my longer second toe as meaningful.

Institutional Identity. The I-Identity is powered by the institution through laws, rules, traditions, or principles that are "authored" by the power of the institution. An example of my I-Identity would be my position as an English teacher. I can only identify myself as an English teacher because I was granted the title by the Teaching Standards and Practices Commission, based on meeting requirements created by this commission,

and because I am employed by a school. A set of authorities within the institution have the power to grant or deny I-Identity. What complicates the N-Identity and the I-Identity is that institutions sometimes have the power to grant N-Identity traits. For instance, the American Psychiatric Association is an institution that has authority over the classification of mental illness and once labeled homosexuality in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders as one form of paraphilia; paraphilia is categorized as a sexual desire or behavior to cause another individual psychological distress, injury, or death and/or anxiety about their sexual desire or behavior not resulting from societal objections. The institution of the American Psychiatric Association labeled a homosexual person as mentally ill, but today the same institution, the American Psychiatric Association, classifies homosexuality as a congenital trait rather than a mental illness (Drescher, 2015).

Discourse Identities. D-Identities are formed by the discourse and dialogue of other people. D-Identities are about being recognized as having an individual trait through discourse. For example, my friends might call me conscientious. Through their treatment, dialogue, and interactions, I can be recognized as a conscientious person. Unlike with I-Identity, individuals do not recognize others as having traits because of a law or rules, but rather because they recognize the trait they see as worthy of recognition. D-Identities can also be conceived through active or passive creation. Essentially, I could purposefully perform as I imagine a conscientious person would act in hopes of being recognized, as in named, or could be recognized without much conscious thought.

Affinity Identity. Finally, the A-Identity is based on the power of a “set of distinctive practices” (Gee 2001, p. 105) by people within an affinity group. An affinity group is a group of people who may live across large geographical regions and adhere, act, or participate in practices that are considered essential to their community but who are not a part of a formalized institution. For instance, being a “groupie” of a band is part of one’s A-Identity. As a “groupie,” a person would participate in practices deemed by the group as necessities for membership.

The Role of Context in Gee’s Identity Types

According to Gee, even though some perspectives on identity may be favored by individuals at certain moments over one or the other, “it is crucial to realize that these four perspectives are not separate from each other” (Gee, 2001, p. 101). Gee, like other researchers, acknowledged that identity is not composed of separate fragments, but rather of interlocking, moving parts. Therefore, each one of his identity categories influences the others, and no identity is inconsequential to the other. Gee noted how in different societies and time periods, different facets of identity have been foregrounded, but that in the United States people tend to foreground N(ature)-Identities, then I(nstitution)-Identities, then D(iscourse)-Identities, and lastly A(ffinity)-Identities. It should be stressed that Gee’s typology is only one way of categorizing identity types. Using Gee’s theory to understand identity means using a lens that focuses on four types of identity that are foregrounded in particular contexts. In using these four factors, Gee limited attention to other potential influences on identity, like the family unit.

Contextual Power's Influence on Identity

All four contexts that Gee outlines as sites of identity can be heavily influenced by power. For example, institutional leaders might impose rules on individuals working within the institution. To identify oneself as a part of the institution, individuals must adhere to some, if not all, of the rules in order to be granted membership. Perhaps this example suggests that power is always a rigid, malevolent, unidirectional force.

However, it is worth noting that power can also manifest as something different. Perhaps power can present outside of these traits and can exist on a continuum between flexible and rigid, malevolent and benevolent, and unidirectional and multidirectional. In a study that examined how power relations were constructed, co-constructed, and reconstructed in four Los Angeles classroom sites, Gutierrez, Rymes, and Larson (1995) found that monological classrooms, classrooms where teachers' monologic speech dominates and students' speech aligns with the monological script, were spaces in which the teacher held all the power; these spaces therefore did not create opportunities for true communication and learning. However, if classrooms were dialogical, meaning that students and the teacher shared power over the content and direction of discourse, then a space was created for teachers and students to collaborate with one another and learn as a community. Multi-voiced classrooms are made possible because "power relations, produced, reproduced, and transformed in collaborative relationships, shape identity and consciousness as participants seek to become members of particular cultural and social spheres or communities of practice" (Gutierrez, Rymes, & Larson, 1995, p. 4).

Essentially, through interaction, identity is shaped by (and shapes) the spaces in which it

unfolds and the practices of people within those spaces. Additionally, identity is partially about being recognized (Gee, 2014a, Gee, 2014b, Gee, 2001); thus, collaboration with others is an important identity formation process. To identify oneself can mean “seeing” oneself as part of a community. In the instance of schooling, students may feel more like members of a classroom if they can actively participate in a dialogue than if the teacher controls all the dialogue in the room. Teachers who expect a particular type of discourse from their students may limit students who do not communicate easily with the expected discourse style. Therefore, classrooms remain spaces in which teachers have power and students are under their control. The relationships teachers have with students and the choices they make in regard to content and instruction will impact how teachers identify themselves.

In summary, I view identity as the descriptors one assigns to themselves. These descriptors are multidimensional, flexible, dynamic and layered. An individual constructs their identity through a process that never ends because interactions and experiences perpetually shape one’s identity.

The next section of this review will focus on one type of identity, professional identity. I believe it is helpful to understand that my adopted definition of identity and identity construction shaped how I present the concept of professional identity. The following section will highlight how professional identity is one layer of an individual’s identity and will discuss the influences that shape one’s professional identity.

Professional Identity as an Identity Type

In an overview of literature on teachers' professional identities, Beauchamp & Thomas (2009) suggested that an educator's personal identity is linked to their professional identity. The link between personal and professional identity was further supported by Kuster, Bain, & Young (2014) in their phenomenological study of fifth year art teachers. They found that experiences outside the classroom affect teachers' professional identities, and experiences within the classroom affect their personal identities. For example, a teacher may become a mother. This personal identity change may affect their professional identity. Conversely, a teacher may receive a teaching award, which may affect their personal identity. The weaving of the two identities means that one identity cannot be isolated from the other. Personal and professional identities become an interwoven knot.

The common omission of the definition, or provision of an insufficient definition, for the term professional identity suggests a newness of the exploration of the term. However, the concept of professional identity is not new within the social sciences (Gleason, 1983). The lack of consensus on the definition of the term professional identity parallels the variation in definitions of the term identity discussed earlier in this review. Following Sach (2005), in this study, I define teacher professional identity as a sub-category of identity through which a teacher makes sense of their experiences and develops an understanding of how to be, how to act, and how to position themselves in their profession. Like identity, professional identity are realizations about the self that are multidimensional, layered, dynamic, and flexible. Because identity is dynamic, a

teacher's professional identity is also dynamic (Hsieh, 2015). Roth et al. (2004) highlighted the dynamic nature of professional identities for educators in a hermeneutic phenomenological analysis in which two teachers and two students from a large urban school were studied. These researchers determined that "[o]ur subjectivities and identities as teachers are not stable characteristics that we carry around, but they are products of ongoing interactions" (Roth et al., 2004, p. 55). For Roth, professional identity is a product, not a process, even though the product (professional identity) is always changing in response to processes. Essentially, the interactions teachers have with people shape who they are as professionals in an iterative fashion. The importance of interaction in shaping professional identity was also foregrounded by Brown and Heck (2018), who claimed that a teacher's identity is part of the community-forming process that occurs in schools when individuals communicate ideas about principles and practices. Therefore, the dialectic shared between persons around ideas of teaching is one potential catalyst for professional identity construction.

The transactional (meaning a two way reflexive interaction) nature of identity means that as identity evolves, the decisions that teachers make for themselves and their students might also change. Essentially, given that a teacher's professional identity will change during their careers, the decisions they make also have the potential to change with their identities. Beijaard, Meijer, and Verloop's (2004) model of identity builds upon the idea that teachers *use* rather than simply *have* an identity. Essentially, professional identity cannot be viewed outside of interaction and the community in which the interaction takes place. According to a comparative case study by Hsieh (2015) in

which three teachers' identity orientations were examined in relation to pedagogy, professional identity is "socially situated within particular contexts...[and teachers are] agents in the creation of their identities" (Hsieh, 2015, p. 179). Professional identity is authored by the agents, in this case teachers, to create the dynamic texts of who they are as educators, and it may also be co-authored by others who influence their practice (colleagues, students, administrators, families, community members). This authoring of identity also suggests that even though professional identity is an understanding of oneself as a professional, there are multiple sources that influenced its creation.

In the next section of the review of literature, I will discuss another type of identity, figured identity. Much like professional identity, figured identities are linked to an individual's personal identity. Unlike professional identity, figured identities are not experienced in the lived experience of individuals, but rather in figured worlds.

Figured Worlds and their Relationship with Identity

Figured worlds are mental schemas that all individuals create to envision a perception of the world that they feel is realistic even if elements of it are extraordinary. These mental schemas are inspired by an individual's identity (or an identity they want to imagine for themselves), and influenced by the lived (physical) world (Gee, 2014; Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998; Urrieta, 2007). Essentially, figured worlds are influenced by the blending of one's inner world (self/identity) and the outer world (lived/physical world). According to Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, and Cain (1998), "figured worlds could also be called figurative, narrativized, or dramatized worlds" (p. 53).

Within a figured world, individuals create figured identities for themselves.

Figured identities are influenced by a person's identity as well as the lived world which include interactions with others. Much like identity, figured identities are multidimensional, dynamic, layered, and flexible. Figured identities are different from identity because figured identities often have fantastical, sensational, theatrical, or fabricated elements. For example, if a man and woman were on a date, the woman could figure a world in which her future wedding takes place. The figured world could depict an Instagrammable wedding scene (romantic scene with a colorful umbrella). The figured wedding is a blend of real images the woman has seen in the world and imagined ideas that the woman has internalized. This wedding scene can be figured by the woman even though her date might not show interest in her because figured worlds invite imagination. In this woman's figured world, her figured identity might be of herself as the "perfect" relaxed bride, even though her personality and life experiences make her likely to be a highly stressed bride. Figured identities do not necessarily break the boundaries of one's identity and lived world (if they did, the bride might be able to fly), but rather figured identities blur the elements considered typical of one's identity and the lived world.

Figure 1 depicts the figured world wedding scenario below.

Figure 1

Identity and Figured Worlds



Note: Identity is not something that can be seen in the way a tangible object, like a book, can be seen. Therefore, individuals can only project identity through constructs like figured worlds. From *Are you listening to me? Did you hear what i just said?* [Photograph], by Ed Yourdon, 2008, *Flickr* and *Autumn wedding* [Photograph], by Vladimir Pustovit, 2016, *Flickr*.

Perception and Figured Worlds

One way that individuals can produce figured worlds is through language (Holland, Fox, & Daro, 2008). Another way figured worlds can be produced is through visuals. “A figured world is a picture of a simplified world that captures what is taken to be typical or normal” (Gee, 2014a, p. 89). It is worth mentioning that figured worlds are not only abstract movies that run in our heads. They also appear in our media and in other

people's minds and actions. They are a blend of an internal world interacting with an external world. Whether figured worlds are created by language, visuals, or a combination of both figured worlds are like a mirror for one's identity: they reflect one's identity, even though they may be distortions based on how an individual perceives themselves.

As people have experiences, they categorize their experiences into typical and not typical experiences. "The production and reproduction of figured worlds involves both the abstraction of significant regularities from everyday life into expectations about how particular types of events unfold and interpretation of the everyday according to these distillations of past experiences" (Gee, 2014a, p. 53). People figure their identities using information they categorized from the lived world (as typical or not) into expectations about how events and interactions might unfold in their futures.

Even though the concept of "figured worlds" is a useful tool for understanding identity and discourse, there is some ambiguity in the term. Therefore, understanding "figured worlds" in application is challenging because the construct of figured worlds "cannot be reduced to one simple, content-specific definition" (Urrieta, 2007, p. 112). Thus, "figured worlds" as a construct can be a cumbersome tool for empirical research. Regardless of this criticism of the construct, the construct of figured worlds is potentially illuminating in a problem space that focuses on identity and agency. Figured worlds can be seen as a tool to understand identity and agency because the act of figuring oneself can be a precursor to agency. For example, I might figure an identity as a rebellious teacher which then may increase my agency and prompt me to perform rebellious acts. In the

next section of the review of literature, I further discuss the critical link between the concepts of identity and agency.

Identity and Agency

Borrowing ideas from Lewis, Enciso, & Moje (2007) and Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, (1998), in this study agency is defined as the capability a person has resulting from their identity and position of power to reach their goals. Lewis, Enciso, & Moje (2007) defined agency as: “strategic making and remaking of selves, identities, activities, relationships, cultural tools and resources, and histories, as embedded within relations of power” (p. 18). The use of the word “strategic” implies that a person’s agency is expressed through planned actions based on the context in which that individual exists. There is a possessive aspect to one’s agency, a sort of owning of one’s plan or intention for action, and agency becomes a series of thoughts and feelings about strategic action that make acts possible by the individual; agency will influence identity just as it is influenced by identity. While the cultural context informs an individual’s choices and practices, through agency, individuals are able to resist acting in purely culturally determined ways. The exertion of agency within an otherwise confining set of cultural norms or expectations can yield improvisation in an individual’s practice. An example of this improvisation can be seen in Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, and Cain’s (1998) opening chapter of *Identity and Agency in Cultural Worlds*. Holland and Skinner interviewed members from various castes of the Naudad community in Nepal from a second-floor balcony in Skinner’s house. A woman from Nepal, Gyanumaya, who based on cultural norms would have been prohibited from entering the house of a higher caste

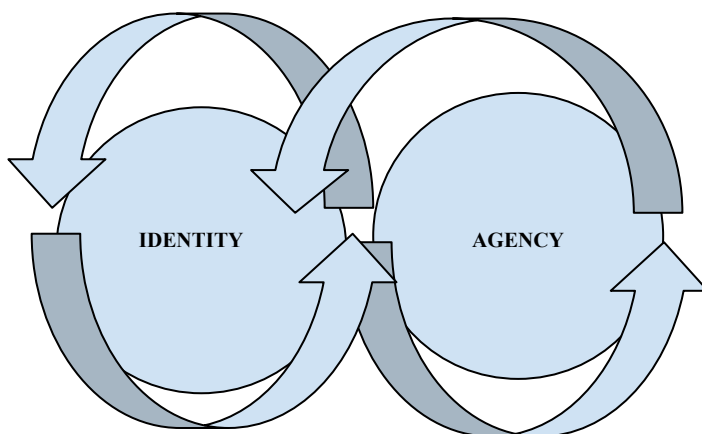
individual like Skinner, found a way to get to the second-floor balcony so that she could fulfill her desire to participate in the interview. She “scaled the wall of the house” (p. 10) to attend the interview, which was an act of improvisation that enabled Gyanumaya adhere to cultural norms (not entering the front door because to do so would be seen of an act of polluting the hearth, the area where food and cooking were done) while also acting on her own agency. Simply put, identity and agency are not strictly beholden to context or cultural norms in all situations.

Reflexive Relationship of Identity and Agency

Much research has highlighted the intertwined relationship between identity and agency (Buchanan, 2015; Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998; & Roth et al., 2004). Identity and agency have a reflexive relationship with one another. Figure 2 depicts this relationship below.

Figure 2

Reflexive Relationship Between Identity and Agency



In the Buchanan study (2015), three teachers working in three schools in a metropolitan city in Northern California participated in semi-structured interviews over the course of

three months. Buchanan (2015) coded and analyzed the teacher interviews to examine the impact of teaching in an era of accountability, and she found that teachers felt anxiety about not having a high percentage of students with passing standardized tests scores. Buchanan (2015) framed agency as a manifestation of teachers' perceptions and actions within a given social context. Buchanan (2015) concluded that "an individual's professional agency is reciprocally related to his or her professional identity" (Buchanan, 2015, p. 704). In order to understand professional identity, professional agency must also be considered, as it is deeply intertwined with professional identity. From this study, Buchanan also noted the potential problems that might arise if teachers did not have an identity that aligned with the school culture. When this happened, teachers had to "somehow 'solve' for that disconnect; this is one of the ways that identity and agency intersect" (Buchanan, 2015, p. 709). Essentially, like Gyanumaya, if teachers felt that a cultural expectation did not align with their identities, teachers could take actions that fit, modified, or rejected the cultural norms. When teachers act, their future identities are influenced by moves of agency because interaction is an influence on identity. What this study hinted at, but did not discuss in depth, was that many teachers could feel unease working in a school, but not be able to name the source of tension. If participants were able to take part in focus groups and not only interviews, perhaps participants would have been able to name the practices in their school that run counter to their identities and in return have awareness of the impact of the culture on their teaching practices.

This section of the review of literature has focused on some of the sources that influence identity and agency (action, interaction, community), and has yet to discuss the

influence of power on identity and agency. In the following section, I will discuss how power can shape the world in which individuals exist and subsequently impact an individual's identity and agency.

Influence of Power on Identity and Agency

Those who have power in an institution partially influence the cultural norms. The world in which all people exist socially, the lived world, is shaped by power. "Lived worlds are organized around positions of status and influence" (Holland, Skinner, Lachicotte, & Cain, 1998, p. 60). Teachers are affected by the people in those positions of status and influence in their school systems, whether they are administrators, community leaders, or colleagues. Teachers work within a school system, a system that often masks how status and power influence the decisions made by individuals and groups within the institution. Individuals and groups who create and uphold structures within schools may knowingly or unknowingly be influenced by ideas in society that have more dominance than others, such as global north perspectives, resulting in a system that privileges some at the expense of others. For example, if competitive learning is a dominant idea in society, then students who typically thrive in competitive environments are more likely to have academic success in schools aligned with competition than students who thrive in collaborative learning environments. Given that the dominant ideology in schools typically privileges students who are white, middle class, and able-bodied, students who do not share these attributes face barriers to their success.

Two ideas that can be seen in the structures of schools are competition and meritocracy. The prevalence of these ideas behind school structures helps keep the power

imbalance intact because the system's true inequities are hidden by the few students who exceed the expectations the system places on them (DiAngelo, 2018). For the purposes of understanding power in schools, it is helpful to know how an ideology of meritocracy and competition is fostered. "It has . . . been assumed that ideologies are largely expressed and acquired by discourse, that is, by spoken or written communicative interaction" (Van Dijk, 2006, p. 121). Through talk and other acts, ideologies are shared across a group of people.

Foucault's Panopticon

In *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of a Prison*, Foucault (1975) highlighted the "hidden" power structures that preserve the unfair systems embedded in society. Foucault represented the masking of power in society in an analogy based on Bentham's panopticon. The panopticon is a ring-shaped building in which the guard can watch every prisoner at any time, while the prisoners cannot see the tower with the guard, thus never knowing if they are being watched. "The major effect of Panopticon [is] to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power" (Foucault, 1975, p. 6). Essentially, the threat of being watched is enough for the prisoner to comply with expectations of those in power, thus making power invisible because no "force" was used on the prisoner. Additionally, prisoners do not see other prisoners, which ensures that prisoners are not able to form a collective, and therefore they have no power potential. Prisoners are simultaneously branded and divided.

The panopticon is a useful lens for analyzing schools because schools recreate “hidden” power structures and surveillance. For example, school employees monitor and surveil their students through rules, grades, and in some cases cameras. Students are not the only people within a school who are monitored and surveilled. Teachers are often under “watch” to produce educational outcomes, such as having a certain percentage of students meeting a testing benchmark. Additionally, public school teachers in Oregon are on probation for the first three years of working in a school, regardless of prior experience, before they are officially out of the “watch” of administration. (I am not suggesting that all monitoring of teacher performance is problematic, but considering that other professions typically have a probation period of three to nine months, this longer period of probation is notable.) Recently, the level of monitoring teachers has intensified, as in the case of proposed bills like Indiana House Bill 1134, a bill that would require teachers to publish their lesson plans a year in advance. Lawmakers behind the bill shared that the bill would allow families the chance to review lessons to ensure that the limits placed on topics like race, politics, and religion were being followed by the teachers. If the bill had been passed, teachers could have lost their licenses if they did not follow the bill’s criteria (Mcafee, 2022).

This surveillance occurs not only at the individual level, but also at the institutional level. While communities have always been expected to provide quality education for students (Pulliam & Van Patten, 2007), in recent years this accountability has translated into measurements of student performance on standardized tests. In some states, such as California, principals are paid a bonus (Pulliam & Van Patten, 2007) if

their students perform well on standardized tests. Even if tangible incentives like this do not exist, school stakeholders pressure educators to take actions likely to result in “high-performing” students (as measured by standardized tests) in order to cast an image of success. What is unfortunate about an emphasis on school performance is that the type of knowledge that is being measured is ideologically bound to white middle-to upper-class norms. If schools are being held accountable for yielding “high performing” students, then administrators and teachers may take unethical measures, such as cheating, to produce desirable results. Ultimately, the desired product of schools (“high” standardized test scores) can become the most important goal of an institution, rather than the process of learning.

Limitations of Applying a Panoptic Lens

One possible limitation of applying Foucault’s panoptic lens to understand power structures in schools is that it is overly metaphorical. Schools do not literally have watchtowers, and students are not literally prisoners, even if they suggest that they are at times. In using a Foucauldian lens, the absoluteness of power systems might be hyperbolized. A paradox of the idea of panopticon is that while the power structure is overt in the sense that it manifests in the shape of the building and the organization of activity, that power structure is also covert, in the sense that the prisoners never know in a given moment whether they are being surveilled. A similar paradox of surveillance exists in schools in that students and teachers experience different levels of awareness of the power structures, organization, and active surveillance at work. These systems can be hidden in schools (as compared to in the panoptic prison) in some ways; for example, the

buildings are not typically annular. At the same time, schools do display their power structures and use of surveillance overtly in many cases, such as visible cameras in hallways and classrooms.

If one were to use a panoptic lens for analysis of power structures in schools, it is worth noting that this framing assumes that schools obscure surveillance, and sometimes the structure and system of schools make it clear where the power lies. Some might argue that schools do not distort systems of power but rather display them clearly for all to see, regardless of the perceived fairness of the systems. For example, the school I work in has a Wall of Fame which features photos of students deemed as better than their peers and their lists of academic accomplishments. The majority of the students featured on this wall are white, middle and upper class students. Staff have voiced concern about this wall as some feel it is like a shrine to the privileged students while flaunting the unfairness of the system. Currently, this wall still exists, and I would argue it is a clear example of how schools display power systems clearly. My personal example is a tangible display of power, but non-tangible displays of power are also prevalent in schools. For example, some schools might pride themselves in rigid power structures in which many of the students fear the teachers. I imagine schools like Welton Academy in the *Dead Poet's Society* (Weir, 1989) serving as models for schools that flaunt power structures. Welton Academy may be a fictionalized account of a school that highlights power structure, and in the lived world schools like it exist. For example, no-excuse charter schools have been criticized for being unethical and racist systems that harm children of color in economically oppressed communities. Students that attend these no-excuse character

schools are expected to “wear uniforms, sit straight, with their hands folded on the table, and their eyes continuously on the teacher. At breaks, they walk silently through the halls in single-file lines” (Golann & Debs, 2019). If students adhere to these strict standards, they are awarded with privileges; however, if students do not adhere to these strict standards, they are often punished with demerits, detentions, and suspension. In schools like no-excuse character schools, the system of power is clearly visible to all of the students.

Bourdieu’s Symbolic Violence

Bourdieu’s notion of symbolic violence is also a helpful analytical tool for critiquing the “hidden” power systems in schools. Bourdieu, influenced by Marx, argued that the hierarchy in society was based on arbitrary ideas, social and cultural capital, and ultimately led to discrimination against non-dominant groups. Societal hierarchy meant that certain individuals would be labeled as outside “of the right way of being and doing” (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 512) because the dominant group held the social and cultural capital. When individuals are judged for not adhering to the social hierarchy norms (many of which may be discriminatory in nature), they are often labeled as lesser, subordinate, or underneath the individuals who adhere to social hierarchy norms. The evaluation of these individuals as lesser “is in the symbolic violence through which the dominant groups endeavor to impose their own life-style” (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 512) that ultimately marginalizes the non-dominant groups. In the context of schools, symbolic violence is played out in the same manner but is masked by an ideology of meritocracy. For example, if students are assigned homework, economically privileged students who do

not need to have jobs to help their families have an advantage over their peers who are experiencing poverty and need to have jobs to help support their families. When an economically privileged student receives a higher grade (due to homework completion), teachers often say that the student is hard working and earned the higher grade. When a student experiencing poverty receives a lower grade (due to the lack of their homework completion), teachers often say that the student is lazy or unmotivated and earned the lower grade, which is an example of symbolic violence committed under the guise of meritocracy. The system of meritocracy masks the real issue, students who need to have jobs do not have the same opportunity for success as students who do not need to have jobs. Using Bourdieu's research on the expansion of the French educational system post World War II, Grenfell (2013) suggested the implications of symbolic violence:

The institution of a supposedly meritocratic system – and the credentials that it bequeathed – resulted in symbolic violence against those left behind by it. Not only did pupils suffer as a consequence of their marginalization, they were taught that their failure to perform well academically and to reap the benefits of academic success were a result of their own lack of natural talent. (Grenfell, p. 181)

Even though Grenfell was analyzing symbolic violence in the context of French schools, parallels can be drawn to the meritocratic grading systems in place in most U.S. high schools. The current system sets students up to interpret failing grades as representations of their own, individual limitations. While intended to support student motivation and success, constructs like grit and growth mindset further locate "failure" within individual

students, rather than in the system (Duckworth, 2007; Dweck, 2016). What is often unknown to students who are less academically successful than their peers is the imbalance of power in society's education system. When individuals use growth mindset and grit to understand motivation and learning in school, an individualistic framework is being applied that ignores the systemic factors that may preclude students in some groups from coming across as "gritty."

Applications of Panopticon and Symbolic Violence in Acts of Resistance

Those who have power in an institution, intentionally or unknowingly, influence and uphold the cultural norms. The world people live in is arranged by status and influence, or simply put power influences our options (Holland, Skinner, Lachicotte, & Cain, 1998, p. 60). The hierarchy of people in communities, which provides some individuals with more resources than others, illustrates an organizational scheme set by status and influence. However, people are capable of resistance even in panoptic systems. Foucault (1978) wrote that "points of resistance are present everywhere in the power network" (p. 95). The anecdote of Gyanumaya scaling the wall to get to a second story balcony is one example of an individual performing an act of resistance within a power network. Using Foucault's panopticon lens, Gyanumaya was aware of the power structures at play in the Naudada community. Gyanumaya would have had knowledge that the jat (caste system) determined that people of a lower caste, people like her, were not allowed to enter a higher caste person's home. Gyanumaya also may have had knowledge that Skinner was not the only individual that would be able to observe whether she followed the cultural rules of the jat. (Skinner's landlord lived on the terrace

above the balcony; Holland was also on the balcony; a woman in the community was being interviewed on the balcony; another woman was sitting waiting to be interviewed.) Perhaps Gyanumaya's decision to scale the balcony came from a concern about adhering to the normalized power structures and possible surveillance that were in place to ensure that Gyanumaya did not enter Skinner's home, structures that were meant to ensure that lower status individuals adhered to the expectations of higher status individuals.

Applying the concept of symbolic violence to the Gyanumaya example further illustrates the complex layers of the situation. One rule of the jat system was that individuals in the lower jat were banned from entering the homes of individuals in a higher jat. Gyanumaya was a member of the Sunar caste and Skinner was viewed as a member of a higher jat. In the Naudada culture, food was considered susceptible to pollution that lower jat members carried with them. In typical Naudada homes, the only entrance was on the first floor near the hearth (the location where food was kept). The belief that lower jat members carried pollution meant they were banned from higher jat members homes. Cultural norms aside, Gyanumaya, was not likely to pollute the food. Viewing her presence in a home as a threat to another's safety keeps a power structure in place that privileges one group (higher jat members) and limits others (lower caste members). The power structure that labels Gyanumaya as unsafe could be viewed as an act of symbolic violence against Gyanumaya.

The concepts of the panopticon and symbolic violence provide ways in which to analyze Gyanumaya's situation. These concepts would not be applicable if Gyanumaya did not have an identity established by her culture. Gyanumaya identified as a member of

the Sunar caste. Her avoidance of entering the hearth is one possible clue that suggests she would identify herself in this way. The identity she has in this situation is directly tied to her agency. Gyanumaya has the agency to be interviewed by Skinner, but she does not feel she has the agency to enter the front of Skinner's home. What Skinner and Holland could not have predicted was how Gyanumaya would use improvisation to get to the interview. If Gyanumaya had entered Skinner's home, it would have been viewed as breaking cultural norms. Her alternative route is not in direct opposition to the power system, but her act was not considered typical by the cultural expectations and thus is an act of resistance. An individual's identity and agency are influenced by culture, and hence power, but that does not suggest that individuals cannot find innovative ways to work around structural inequities.

Acts of Resistance Within Schools

Schools are another location where hidden power structures are at play. Some might think that there is little to no hope for educators to dismantle or disrupt schools' structures. This is not necessarily the case. Teachers are influenced by the positions of status and influence in their school system, but that does not mean that there can be no rejection of the set positions and influence.

Resistance can be seen in schools, from groups of educators to individual teachers, through innovative acts of agency that run counter to institutionalized power structures. For example, Linda Christensen (2017), an educator and researcher in Portland, Oregon, detailed how she collaborated with her students on actions they could take against the dominant power structures in society. Her students decided to boycott

applying to any college that required an SAT score for a viable application. Her students would only apply to colleges that did not require the SAT for admission. Using the metaphor of the panopticon and the concept of symbolic violence to understand this example highlights the hidden power structure embedded within the SAT. Without acknowledging the power structures and influence behind the creation, implementation, and requirement of the SAT test by many universities, the SAT test might not seem unfair to students. When I was a student in school, most people thought the SAT was a test that you just took. The test was not considered biased, which suggests that for a long time the hidden power structures around the test were concealed from the general public. Today, there is discussion that the SAT test disadvantages marginalized students. Ibram X. Kendi, founder of the Antiracist Research & Policy Center at Boston University, said that "standardized tests have become the most effective racist weapon ever devised to objectively degrade Black and Brown minds and legally exclude their bodies from prestigious schools" (Rosales & Walker, 2021). Even though the SAT is designed (deliberately or inadvertently) to disadvantage students of color, many students still view lower SAT scores as a marker of their personal failure to learn. If students see themselves negatively because of their test scores (even though the test is biased), an act of symbolic violence has occurred. When Christensen collaborated with her students to boycott schools that require the SAT, she helped them see their agency. Students have the agency to give themselves the power of choice, the choice to not support a system that disadvantages them. Potentially, by rejecting schools that require the SAT they could identify differently from how they may have identified themselves if they took the SAT

and applied to schools that required it. Additionally, when students boycotted schools that required them to take the SAT, they committed improvisational acts much like Gyanumaya. The cultural norm was to apply to colleges with SAT scores; by banning these schools, and only applying to schools that do not require the SAT they were doing something unexpected, which makes their action both an act of resistance and improvisation.

Another act of resistance was seen in 2015 when the Maryland State Education Association (MSEA) launched the Less Testing, More Teaching Campaign, which reduced the number of hours students were required to take standardized tests (n.d.). This campaign also led to less emphasis on standardized test scores on school rankings. These two instances of “acts of resistance” are representative of the many acts individuals and group organizations perform to change the power imbalance in schools.

Institutional Expectations and Identity and Agency

Even though many educators create innovative pathways to work around institutional norms that uphold power structures, many teachers do not take such action. Even if teachers do take action, they may pick and choose which issues to tackle based on their perceived or actual positions of power, their experiences, their identities and agency, their risk tolerance, and their energy levels. Teachers who feel conflicted between their institutional expectations and their identities and agency as teachers, may experience identity conflict, which is “a tension between [a teacher’s personal] educational values and the structure of the educational system” (Watson, 2006, p. 514). If identity conflict

continues to occur or increases, one possible effect is that individuals may experience identity friction.

School systems are complex institutions that have cultural patterns; a reflexive relationship exists between the individuals or groups within a school that have power and the systems and structures that result in the creation and maintenance of school culture. Schools have complex cultures, and there are many observable and unobservable aspects. For example, espoused values, formal philosophies, group norms, and commonly used metaphors are a few aspects that might be emblematic markers of a culture. Simply put, “culture pretty much covers everything that a group has learned as it has evolved” (Schein, 2017, p. 5). Additionally, schools have multiple cultures cohabiting with, within, around, and between one another. Schools can have subcultures based on departments, positions, beliefs, or other differentiating categories, making schools multicultural. In addition, the culture in a school does not stay static. As new people enter positions of power, the culture shifts. Culture also shifts as the individuals within it change to adapt to internal and external forces. To give an instance, when the No Child Left Behind initiative was introduced in 2002, many schools made a cultural shift to adapt to the external change. Administrators adjusted to this initiative by having teachers focus more on math and reading instruction. Administrators also put more pressure on teachers to be accountable for reaching data targets. These actions promoted a culture in buildings that focused on measurement and accountability.

The Role of Context on Teacher Identity and Agency

Teachers are swayed by and exist in multiple contexts that have unique cultures that influence their identities and agency. Teachers are not only influenced by the schools they work in, their classrooms, and the institutions that prepared them, but by their personal experiences as well. The contexts that teachers exist in outside of the classroom (personal and familial) also affect their identities and agency (Moje & Wade, 1997). Narrative inquiry researchers Clandinin & Connelly (2000) suggest that “people are individuals and need to be understood as such, but they cannot be understood only as individuals. They are always in relation, always in a social context” (p. 2). Therefore, to understand a teacher’s identity, it is imperative that the social context, most likely a school setting, is also examined as a site of influence on identity.

The individuals in a school who create or uphold cultural expectations are often the same people who determine whether or not the patterns of behavior of a teacher are considered acceptable (Roth et al., 2004). The patterns of behavior that are considered typical in a school influence a teacher's identity and agency. This influence can come in different forms; teachers could demonstrate agency both in opposition to and in acceptance of the cultural pattern of expectations. In both cases, processes of identity and acts of agency are influenced by the contexts in which they unfold. Li (2010) also acknowledged that a person’s thinking is not an isolated creation “but [is] derived from the process of social interaction in a given sociocultural and institutional context” (p. 132). A teacher’s thinking is therefore not an artifact to separate from the institution and

the interactions within it; a teacher's thinking is influenced by their place of employment, whether or not they recognize the influence.

The Role of Context on Positioning

The impact of socio-cultural and institutional context on teacher identity is often a result of shifts in the positioning (a topic that will be reviewed in depth later in chapter two) of the teacher. Leander and Osburn (2007) examined how two new science teacher leaders positioned themselves in relation to other teachers amidst a curriculum reform process. These two teachers were tasked with developing new science units and sharing them with the staff through large-group meetings. Researchers then completed a narrative analysis of the two teachers' leadership roles to comprehend how teachers use their voices and practices, as tools of professional development, to position themselves. Leander and Osburn (2007) found in their study that "teachers assume agency in constituting their subjectivities" and that "agency is dialogically responsive to, and shaped by, social and political others" (p. 25). In this case, teachers were asserting their voices in the community; they worked as leaders while also being shaped by the climate around them. People cannot merely transfer the practices and subjectivity in a given context to a new setting. Each context has different expectations and perceptions of acceptable practices for individuals in roles. For example, an individual labeled a knowledgeable leader in one setting might not be labeled as such in a different setting. In a sense, teachers need to learn how to successfully position themselves in the new context through a "process of changing participation in community activities. It is a process of taking on new roles and responsibilities" (Rogoff, 2003, p. 284). Successfully positioning

oneself in a community requires that an individual immerse themselves in a setting in order to learn the norms around participation.

This section of the review of literature focused on the influence of power on identity and agency. Using Foucault's concept of the panopticon and Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence as lenses, I analyzed how power and status can influence the structures within schools. These two concepts were used to highlight how power structures within schools can maintain the status quo. Even though power structures within schools can be repressive to students, educators, and communities, individuals that are operating within these systems have found opportunities for resistance. These acts of resistance are examples of individuals asserting their agency. In the following section, I will discuss narratives and how they relate to identity and agency.

Narratives: Concept and Tool

Through narrative, identity can be constructed and understood by individuals. Narratives do not tell us everything there is to know about a person's identity, but they are tools for understanding, reflecting, and creating. Considering the non-tangible, malleable, ongoing, reflexive nature of identity work, it is logical to look for tools for understanding identity processes that mirror those qualities. Therefore, using narratives as tools offers one way to view identity.

Given the commonality of narrative as a concept and methodology, one might assume that consensus has been found in defining this term. However, this is not the case. One definition comes from Rudrum (2005), who, in an exploration of narratives, stated that the "narrative is the representation of a series or sequence of events" (p. 196).

Rudrum also noted that narratives are more than a group of events. Narratives must follow the linguistic and cultural language patterns that people within a community associate with story to be labeled as such.

Another view of narratives is that they are tools that help individuals to make sense of the world (Sarbin, 2004). Gee argued that “narrative is the way we make deep sense of problems that bother us” (2014a, p. 161). Souto-Manning stated that narratives are “one of the most broadly employed ways of systematizing human experience” (2014b, p. 162). All of these views highlight the potential of narratives to help people arrange their experiences for themselves and others. Narratives help individuals organize their experiences by offering a way for individuals to integrate “events and objects into a meaningful whole, [a way] of connecting and seeing the consequences of actions and events over time” (Chase, 2011, p. 421). Essentially, narratives are representations of which past or future events are worthy of discussion in the present.

However, narratives are more than representations. They are also interpretations. Bruner (1987) wrote “that a life as led is inseparable from a life as told—or more bluntly, a life is not ‘how it was’ but how it is interpreted and reinterpreted, told and retold” (p. 31). As individuals, we can never share a truly authentic version of past events. Individuals share a version of their life’s events that is a perception or reimagination of the actual events. The telling of life, narrative, then becomes life itself. “As human beings, we experience our worlds and live our lives by telling stories” (Souto-Manning, 2014b, p. 162). When individuals recollect their life experiences, they often do so

through stories that were perceived as meaningful to them. The act of telling stories becomes part of our story. Through story, we live.

Narratives and Identity

One byproduct and contributor to narratives is identity. In a critical narrative analysis of Brazilian women who “dropped” out of school, Souto-Manning (2014b) articulated that "personal identities are constructed and (re)conceptualized as we share our narratives" (p. 162). When we as researchers examine narratives critically, we can analyze how people hope to identify themselves actively. Identity expressed through narrative is like a projection, meaning narratives are like a forecast of a future moment or a reflection of a past moment. Sometimes the projection of oneself is accepted by others, and other times it is rejected (Gee, 2014a). Narratives are one vehicle for identity projection.

Narratives are composed of language. Like language, narratives are reflexive; the stories people hear influence the stories they tell, and cultural knowledge about social roles deemed acceptable is transmitted through stories (Watson, 2006). Naturally, this process applies to the stories that teachers share with one another. In a study by Schaefer, Downey, and Clandinin (2014), four teachers, three in Alberta, Canada and one in the United States in the state of Georgia, who left the profession within the first five years, were interviewed by and shared their stories with the researchers. A trend appeared in the narratives when professional context was described. According to these teachers, the context was created from non-tangible aspects of the culture, such as relationships and beliefs. When teachers share their stories, they figure a world and their role in that world.

In a sense, narratives can be used as a tool for individuals to figure worlds and identities. If individuals use narratives to figure identities through stories, then they no longer act solely as authors of their stories, but they also become the characters in their stories (Clandinin, 2013).

Influences on Narratives

Narratives also allow for a multiplicity of voices in their creation. In an ethnographic case study of a book group composed of middle school teachers in a rural, predominantly white community, Ketter and Lewis (2015) examined how teachers co-constructed their identity in narratives. Ketter and Lewis stated in their review of the literature: “the stories we tell in our interactions not only represent who we are, but they also work to create the multiple ‘we’s’ we are in their telling” (2015, p. 80). This simultaneous, reflexive crafting of the self and the community speaks to how narratives are complex tools to use for learning about identity. Our individual stories allow us to have multiple versions of ourselves, and so do our collective stories. When narrative research creates spaces for participants to collectively share stories, then an opportunity to understand the collective voice created by varied voices is presented. When this happens, polyphonic dialogism is at play (a concept that will be reviewed in an upcoming section). Another feature of narratives is that they are never really singular creations, even if a single individual tells them; they are dialogical (a concept that will be explored in greater length later in this chapter).

Narratives are shaped by a range of lived experiences. To use narratives as tools for understanding their identities, individuals must make sense of their past and create a storyline that embodies who they wish to be. Nespors and Barylske (1991) suggested that:

Oral narratives are culturally specific representational technologies for moving past and distant events (usually ones in which the speaker can claim to have participated) into the context of the storytelling. They are ways for the speaker to ‘craft a self’ from the cacophony of experience, to control (by creating) one's own life. (p. 808)

Nespors and Barylske (1991) hinted that identity is partially shaped by interaction, a “cacophony of experience,” and also that a person has some degree of agency in this identity. Individuals’ interactions are culturally specific and grounded in a particular context. Therefore, people are not creating narratives from nothing, but rather from an array of experiences, each of which is situated in context. Ultimately, a person might use narrative to project the type of identity they hope will be recognized by others. In a sense, people are able to become “authors” of their own lives through the use of narrative. For example, through Facebook curation, individuals might project a particular identity through narratives in hopes of being recognized by others as a particular “kind of person.”

Dialogism and Narratives

Narratives are dialogical when told by one individual, and this concept extends to narratives shared by a group, known as “collective narratives.” Collective narratives can transmit ideology. In an ethnographic case study of two elementary teachers about the

impact of collective storytelling, Yoon (2016) found that “[collective] stories are told and have the potential to be heard as unremarkable truth, loaded with ideologies” (p. 4).

When collectivized, stories can influence people to conform without hesitation to the ideology presented in these stories. The transmission of narratives therefore partially influences teacher identity. “Widely circulating beliefs about what it means to be a teacher inform how particular teaching identities are contested and enacted through personal narratives” (Ketter & Lewis, 2015, 79). Through story, teachers often enact the commonplace beliefs society projects regarding what it means to be a teacher.

At times, narratives about how we are supposed to be or operate can be uplifting for individuals. In a study of native and immigrant Israeli mathematics students, Sfard and Prusak (2005) explored the potential of narratives as analytic tools for understanding learning. Sfard and Prusak noted that “narratives about individuals that are reifying, endorsable, and significant” (p. 16) can validate individuals’ beliefs and actions. For instance, if an individual expressed through narrative the desire to be a doctor, then the aspirational identity influenced their identity as a capable student of mathematics.

However, narratives do not always have a positive impact on individuals. Narratives can hinder or harm people for a variety of reasons. A person could be negatively impacted if they were not included in a narrative; a person could be negatively impacted if they are included in a negative narrative; a person could also be negatively impacted if they did not feel like their identity was accurately represented in a narrative.

Narratives Transmit Culture

Narratives are agents of culture, and culture can be transmitted to teachers through narratives. McCarthy and Moje (2002) reviewed why identity mattered in literacy studies, and the authors discussed Anzaldúa's (1999) relational construction of identity as presented in narratives. McCarthy and Moje emphasized that even though identity is a hybrid, complex, and seemingly contradictory concept, it is still cohesive. This cohesion is made possible because narratives are like performances in which separate roles (i.e. layers of identity) work together to form one story. Narratives can have multiple characters that represent one identity. For instance, the characters in *Inside Out* (Sadness, Disgust, Anger, Fear, and Joy) seem contradictory to one another, yet collectively they make up Riley, a young girl that houses all of the characters (emotions). Narratives convey information about an individual's identity and the positions that are made available to them in their cultural context. Those available positions are influenced by power dynamics that are typically adhered to by members of that culture.

Even though narratives are typically recollections of experiences, narratives are influenced by power structures that exist amongst people in everyday situations. For example, various factors like race, gender, and class can be used to determine which individuals in a situation are afforded more power to perform their identities. McCarthy and Moje (2002) explain this idea by stating that "identities are always situated in relationships, and that power plays a role in how identities get enacted and how people get positioned on the basis of those identities" (p. 231). Who has power in a group is contextual and is based on the social hierarchy of people in a community. Therefore,

individuals respond to power dynamics by their moves in positioning themselves and others within a narrative; these moves suggest the power dynamics present in a context.

Professional Identity Narratives

If one were to view narratives with a professional identity focus, it would be essential to acknowledge the influence institutions can play in professional identity construction. In an analysis of Norwegian teachers' discourse, Søreide (2006) highlighted the relationship between institutions and identity to explain how narratives are used to shape teacher identity. Teachers may choose to enact identities presented in the institution's collective narratives. "All institutions produce possibilities for such narrative constructions of job identities for their members through the way they are organized and what is valued" (Søreide, 2006, p. 529). So, in addition to narratives having implications for constructing the self, narratives also have implications for constructing the culture of an institution.

Given their complexity, "narratives cannot be taken simply and interpreted solely for what has been said and told. Rather, they have to be analyzed, and the analysis of narratives has to work with what we have, the actual wording and the delivery/style of the wording" (Bamberg, 2006, p. 141). Essentially, in narrative analysis, researchers must consider the words and the delivery of the words together because together they are a more useful tool for understanding identity than they would be separately.

In discussions of traditional grading, teachers are likely to organically share narratives that provide information about their identity and agency. Using narrative as a tool for understanding teacher identity and agency is appropriate because narratives are

broadly used by people to understand, reflect and create their identities. Narratives can be sites that individuals use to figure an identity possibly to test out ideas about how they might act in the lived world. Narratives can be catalysts for teacher agency. Narratives are also useful in that they communicate power structures, both visible and invisible, at play in interactions between individuals. If one analyzes an individual's narrative, then they are able to gain insight into the individual's identity and agency within a particular context.

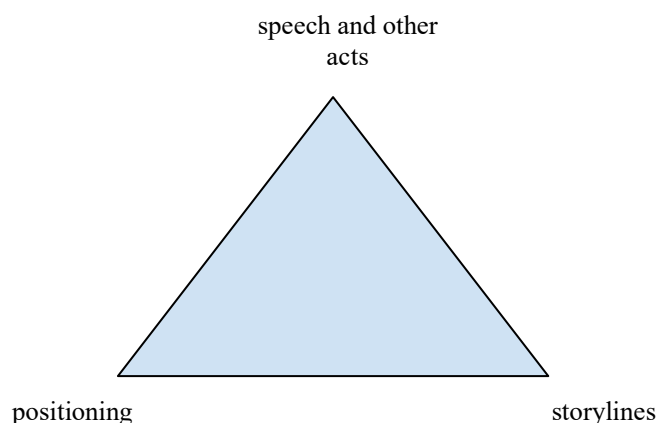
Sociocultural Positioning for Recognition of Identity

One way individuals use language is as a tool for positioning. An individual may want to be recognized as a certain type of person in a given social context, for instance as a competent driver, and therefore use language to suggest they hold this attribute. Positioning theory is “the study of local moral orders as ever-shifting patterns of mutual and contestable rights and obligations of speaking and acting” (Harré & van Langenhove, 1999, p. 1). Like narrative, positioning is an analytic tool. While narrative can be used as an analytic tool for making meaning with individual or collective stories, positioning theory is useful for understanding interactions among individuals. Simply put, positioning theory analyzes how people find themselves and others within a group as recognizable actors through discourse. For instance, if a student intends to be viewed as a “good listener,” that student may perform a particular act, like being quiet, to be positioned as a “good listener” in a classroom. It is worth noting that positions are social constructions and that they are not fixed – one's position can change moment-to-moment through action and interaction. The positioning of the student as a “good listener” occurs through

the speech acts and other actions of the student and others and through what Harré and van Langenhove (1999) referred to as “storylines”: a shared sense of what people in the setting are “up to” or what kind of practice they are engaged in (see Figure 3).

Figure 3

Positioning/Speech Act/Storyline Triad



Note: Adapted from Harré & van Langenhove (1999)

Together these three components mutually determine one another. According to Harré and van Langenhove (1999), a position is:

a complex cluster of generic personal attributes, structured in various ways, which impinges on the possibilities of interpersonal, intergroup, and even intrapersonal action through some assignment of such rights, duties, and obligations to an individual as are sustained by the cluster. (p. 1)

Essentially, a position is relational. People are positioned and position others into deductive, classificatory, or determinable categories based on notions of what a group of people prescribe as invisible contracts within particular contexts. Positions, therefore, are bounded by context, both real and figured, and thus are both general and precise. To

illustrate, a person could attempt to perform the position of the leader in a group by being loud and aggressive, and the members of the group might affirm that positioning. The same person performing the same acts in an attempt to be positioned as the leader of another group could wind up being positioned as a bully. The context of a situation partially determines how positioning moves will be interpreted by members of a group.

Acts are the moves that accompany speech acts, and they cannot be completely isolated in analysis, for “the social force of an action and the position of an actor and interactors mutually determine one another” (Harré & van Langenhove, 1999, p. 17). The interlocked relationship between positions and speech acts is also made possible by storylines. Storylines are presentations of the self or others through the narration of actions. These narrations, storylines about the actions, are akin to a community production in which each actor has a position to perform that influences the other actors. However, another view of positioning further distinguishes among some triad components and views them as simultaneously influential and separate from one another.

Positional vs. Figured Identity

Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, and Cain (1998) address the influence of narratives, actions, and positions in identity but view the relationships among these terms differently than Harré and van Langenhove do. Holland et al. (1998) make a distinction between figured identities and positional identities. In this framework:

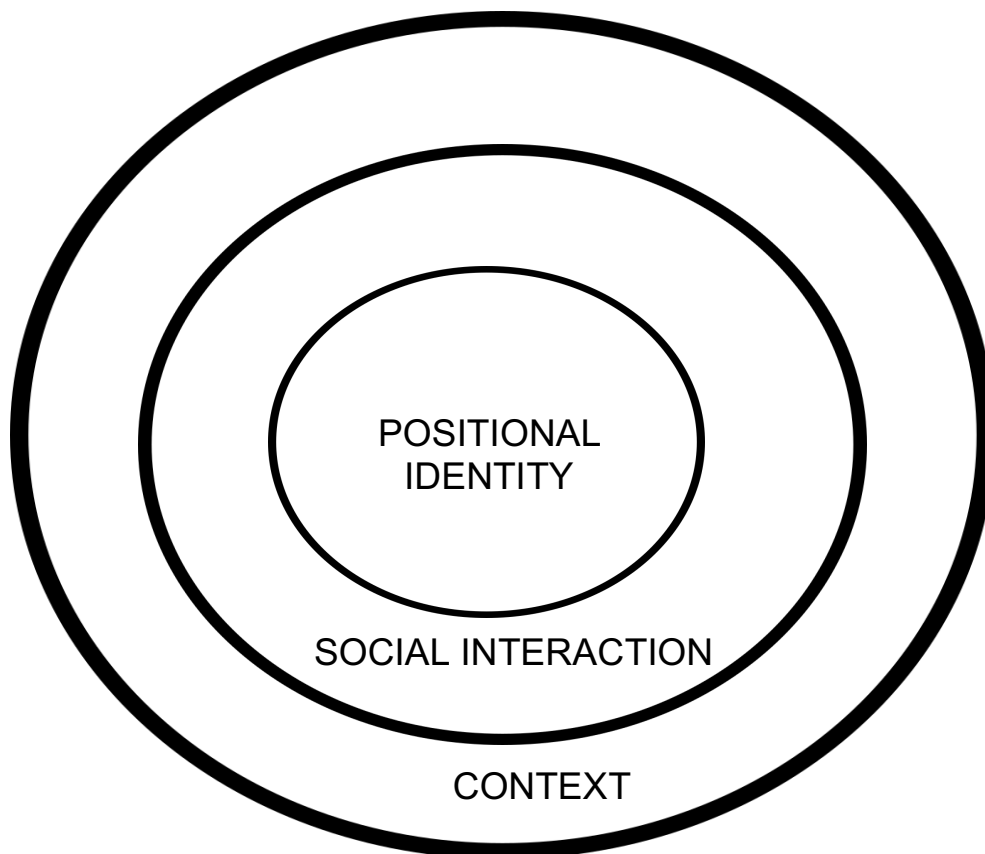
Positional identities have to do with the day-to-day and on-the-ground relations of power, deference and entitlement, social affiliation and distance--with the social- interactional, social-relational structures of the lived world. Narrativized or

figured identities, in contrast, have to do with stories, acts, and characters that make the world a cultural world. (Holland et. al., 1998, p. 128)

Positional identities are grounded in lived experience. The context in which people exist plays a central role in determining the practices that are normalized as positionings. There is a spatial element to positional identities because positioning happens in the social world. People can only be positioned by others or by themselves; positioning is not possible for an individual who is isolated from people. Figure 4 below illustrates the relationship between context, social interaction, and positional identity.

Figure 4

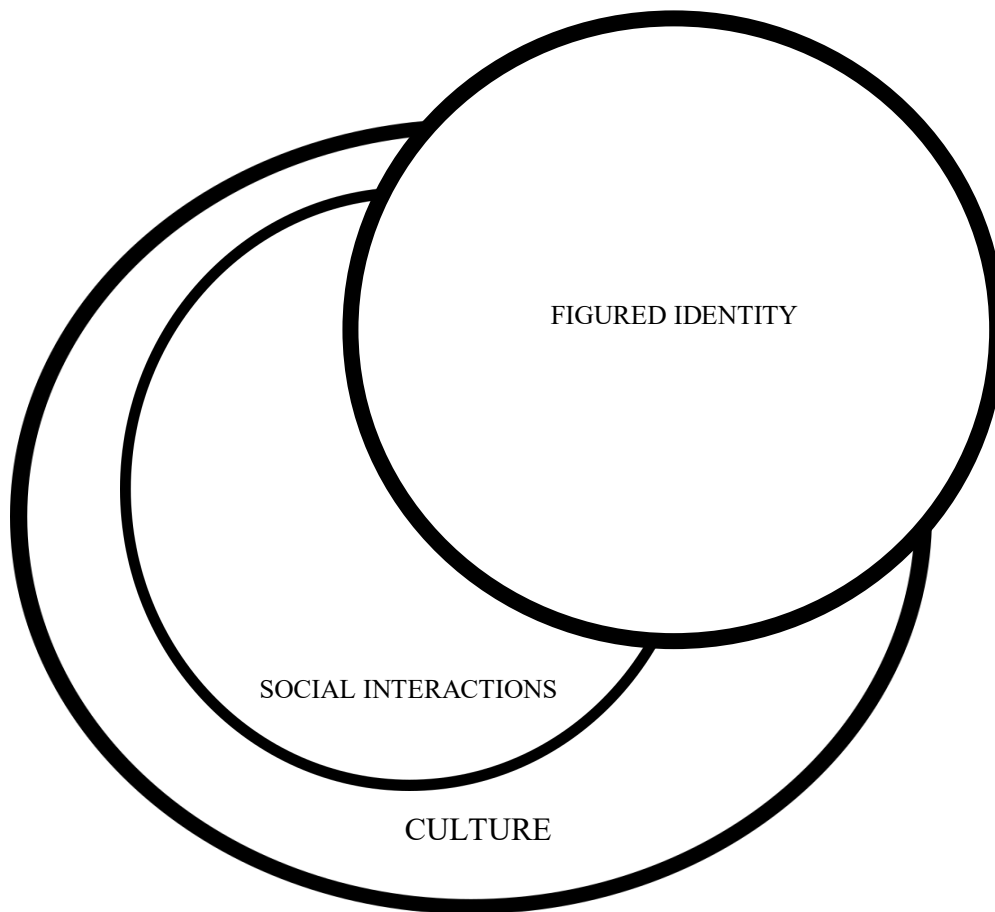
Context, Social Interaction and Positional Identity



On the other hand, figured identities exist in a cultural world, a world of representations and semantics. Cultural worlds are composed of beliefs, values, attitudes, norms, expectations, and rules (all human-made constructs). Cultural worlds influence the lived experiences of individuals, but do not dictate how an individual will figure their identity. Despite existing in a cultural world, figured identities are sometimes reimaginations of identities that adhere to culture while being alongside it. Figure 5 represents the relationship between culture, social interaction, and figured identities.

Figure 5

Culture, Social Interaction and Figured Identity



Note: Portions of the figured identity circle exist outside of the culture circle to represent individuals' abilities to demonstrate agency alongside their cultural norms, as the example of Gyanumaya showed.

Examples of Positional vs. Figured Identities. The movie *Cast Away* (Zemeckis, 2000) offers another illustration of the distinction between positional and figured identities. Tom Hanks's character, Chuck Noland, has a figured identity while being stranded on the island (Zemeckis, 2000). His figured identity exists because of his cultural history. He uses his experiences from the world to inform how he figures himself on the island. However, he is not able to be positioned because there are no people around to position him. Interestingly, Wilson, the volleyball, acts as a stand-in for people, and, by personifying Wilson, Chuck can mimic the positioning that would be possible if Wilson were a real person. Essentially, figured identities are both representations of identity and actual identity whereas positional identities are identities formed through others' positioning, speech acts, and storylines. Positional identities are formed in interaction, but that does not mean that people are obligated to the positional identities they are offered by others. Individuals still have the agency to accept or reject positions that are made available to them. Positional identities exist inside social interaction and figured identities exist within and next to social interaction. The distinction between these two identities, figured and positional, suggests that positions, speech acts/storylines are not as mutually determinate as Harré and van Langenhove suggested. Essentially, an individual's agency can be influenced by a figured identity. Figured identities can exist

outside of the norms of social interaction, which may result in the position, speech act, storyline triad no longer being bound by the norms of social interaction.

Positional identities can be accepted or rejected. How one positions oneself—and how others position one—is temporal and spatial. Individuals do not form stable positional identities in a group after they accept only a single position offered to them. Over time, repeated positioning can lead to a process of lamination in which an act of positioning becomes a stable part of an individual's identity (Holland & Leander, 2004; Leander, 2002). If we accept that “one's subjectivity and positionality are constantly shifting, that the past is always present, and geographic and spatial boundaries are omnipresent within our daily lived experiences - we carry place with us” (Eaton et al. 2019, p. 462), it follows that when people position themselves, they bring a part of their past selves into their actions, speech acts, and storylines. For example, if I attempt to position myself as a leader, I might perform actions of people I interpreted as leaders in my past experiences and/or actions I performed in the past when I successfully positioned myself as a leader. My model of what a leader is and does is also based on a storyline about leadership that is set in the context where I hope to lead. My model of being a leader is also influenced both by others' actions and by my perception of those actions. Furthermore, my storyline of what a leader ought to be is grounded in a physical place because memory is tied to location. Interactions and experiences in the past shape people's positional identities.

Positioning Attempts and Outcomes

How one positions oneself is created by a production of culturally figured identities that will later set up that same individual for future positioning (Leander &

Osburn, 2008; Holland & Leander, 2004). For example, if a person has figured themselves as a “leader,” how that individual conceptualizes “leadership” is based on storylines (real and imagined), acts, and other positions, both offered and accepted. The distinction between *figuring* oneself as a leader and *positioning* oneself as a leader is that individuals do not need a real-time interaction to figure themselves. Storylines are figured in individuals’ inner and outer worlds, and cultural norms about leadership influence these worlds. When an individual figures themselves as a “leader,” it is as though that person is imagining themselves in a particular role, and, as a result, a determination of a future positioning can be made by the individual. Due to positional identity being “about the acts that constitute relations of hierarchy, distance, or perhaps affiliation” (Holland, Skinner, Lachicotte, & Cain, 1998, p. 128), positioning is also influenced by the cultural norms that create power structure.

Nasir and Shah (2011) examined the impact of racialized narratives on 12 Black male students learning mathematics in grades 5 and 7 in a medium-sized middle school in Northern California. These researchers concluded that the students in their study could repurpose narratives others held about them and claim mathematics competency in new self-created storylines. Students could do this by articulating the stereotypes present in narratives that labeled African Americans as academically inferior and defying these narratives by creating new stories that positioned African Americans differently. These narratives highlighted that “the subject positions that are made available [to the students],... [are] not simply a menu of options; students are often recruited into particular positions and then forced to reconcile” (Nasir and Shah, 2011, p. 41). The Nasir and Shah

study illustrates not only the complexity of positioning but also the malleability of it. Even though the problem of practice at the heart of this study looks at teacher identity rather than student identity, Nasir and Shah's (2011) findings are applicable. Teachers, much like students, are recruited into positions that they accept or resist based on the sociocultural climates they exist within, including the power they wield (or the power wielded by others).

Discourse and Dialogism

Language, or more specifically discourse, is one tool used to construct and understand identity. In all instances of language use, "language gets its meaning from the game or practices within which it is used" (Gee, 2014a, p. 5), and those practices become a part of identity. As a result, the meaning people ascribe to language is situational; the impact of language--which itself is informed by practices--on identity depends on the context. For example, if I were to say "hold your horses" to an eager child who wanted to race to recess, the words figuratively imply that the child should wait to run. If I said "hold your horses" to a bunch of jockeys waiting to start a horse race, the context changes the phrase to suggest a more literal interpretation. The meaning of the phrase "hold your horses" is determined by how the jockey or the child interprets it.

Before continuing a discussion on discourse, it should be pointed out that using language as a tool for understanding identity assumes that language is a reliable source of information about identity. Gee (2014a, 2014b) offers two limitations on this assumption. First, "identities cannot be enacted solely in language" (Gee, 2014a, p. 24). Second, when researchers analyze text, "we can never be completely sure of people's intentions and

purposes, not even our own at times” (Gee, 2014b, p. 20). Despite these limitations, this study utilized language as a tool for understanding identity. By focusing this study on language and identity, I acknowledge that I am choosing not to focus on other approaches to understanding identity, such as viewing identity through a political or organizational lens. Further, to Gee’s (2014b) second point, the ambiguity in the purpose and intent of a piece of language makes trustworthy analysis more challenging.

Even with the limitations of using discourse as a window into identity, I believe analyzing language provides an opportunity to develop meaningful understandings of identity because the language people use reveals who and what we value. “Whenever we speak, we are citing the words of others who have meaningfully impacted us” (Paris & Winn, 2014, p. 29). The emulation of others’ discourse occurs because discourse can be dialogical. Discourse can of course also be monological, a form of discourse in which a single framing of ideas dominates the talk, whether by an individual or multiple people. When identity is expressed through language, though, the self-made visible to others can be the result of dialogical discourse, a form of discourse in which individuals share language to create meaning. Dialogical discourse minimizes the power structures of the lived world to create opportunities for individuals to share their identity without being limited by the power dynamics in most interactions amongst individuals. Dialogical discourse figuratively creates a shared space for individuals to collectively affirm one another’s’ identities.

Bakhtin and Vygotsky's Interpretation of Dialogism

Both Vygotsky and Bakhtin likely would have agreed that “every word uttered is simultaneously a response to a past word and an anticipation of a future word” (Eun, 2019, p. 492). However, they disagreed about the conceptualization of dialogism. A useful analogy that highlights the difference between Vygotsky’s and Bakhtin’s view of dialogism is that Vygotsky viewed language as a debate between different voices in which an end result resolves the debate, whereas Bakhtin viewed language as an orchestra in which multiple instruments harmonize together to form a composition. For Vygotsky, dialogism was dialectical, capable of holding contrasting voices in a shared space, and for Bakhtin it was polyphonic, capable of holding simultaneous harmonizing voices that create one dominant voice. A key reason to consider the differences between dialectical dialogism and polyphonic dialogism is that a discourse analysis of an individual’s power within a context will highlight how they see themselves and how they view their interactions with others. Analyzing the type of discourse is useful to understand because hidden power structures that may limit or constrain individuals are more likely to be apparent.

Bakhtin’s (1981) interest in the literary novel inspired his interest in the multiplicity of voices that is always present in language. Bakhtin suggested that the authorial voice in the novel “permits a multiplicity of social voices and a wide variety of their links and interrelationships [always more or less dialogized]” (p. 263). Even though the authorial voice often represented one physical body, possibly in the role of a character or a narrator, Bakhtin did not view the authorial voice as singular. Through the authorial

voice, other characters' speech was merely an invitation to heteroglossia, which is the coexistence of various voices into one sole text. The authorial voice was a starting point for understanding the heteroglossic nature of individuals engaging in dialogue while retaining a sense of collective unity.

Given that Bakhtin's foundational thinking about dialogism stemmed from the concept of authorial voices in novels, his framing of dialogism as polyphonic is understandable. Bakhtin noted that language is a "contradiction-ridden, tension-filled unity of two embattled tendencies in the life of language" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 272). If language has polyphonic qualities, language would allow a process to occur in which separate voices undergo blending to harmonize together. Bakhtin did not ignore the inherent conflicts that exist in language, but he did emphasize the ability of language to limit the conflicts that are inherent to it. Language is able to create and hold problems, but it can also alleviate and solve problems.

Vygotsky's ideas about dialogism were influenced by Spinoza and Marx, both materialists who viewed society as offering the conditions for consciousness. Vygotsky viewed consciousness as an internal restructuring that occurs in steps. Consciousness is social and operates on a continuum (Sullivan, 2010). Vygotsky believed "constant interaction between outer and inner operations" (Vygotsky, 1934/1986, p. 87) is how individuals work toward a consciousness or awareness. Essentially, people learn how to operate in the social world and then integrate information about social norms into their consciousness. This process goes back and forth, and, eventually, if successful, people become less reliant on keeping the "rules" of society at the forefront of their minds and

instead are able to operate appropriately within a system by acting habitually. At the end of *Thought and Language* (1934/1986), Vygotsky wrote:

Consciousness is reflected in a word as the sun in a drop of water. A word relates to consciousness as a living cell relates to a whole organism, as an atom relates to the universe. A word is a microcosm of human consciousness. (p. 256)

This passage highlights the dialectical relationship between thought and language, memory and attention, inner and outer speech, and other elements of consciousness that Vygotsky was concerned with. In this view, consciousness is possible because of individuals' interactions with the world; ultimately, these interactions end in a reorganization of the mind. If people do become less conscious of societal rules (a common effect of operating successfully in the social world), then they are also more likely to perpetuate the status quo. Borrowing from the metaphor of the debate representing dialectical dialogism, this would mean that one party in the debate would have more power over the other party without recognizing their own advantage.

Given Vygotsky's interest in the stages of development as they relate to learning, a dialectical view of dialogism (in contrast to a polyphonic view) aligns with Vygotsky's idea that multiple interactions are reflected in consciousness. In Vygotsky's concept of dialogism, words are like steps toward conclusions. Words help individuals form ideas that will be shared in discourses; language is one of the tools in which consciousness is formed. There is a dialectical relationship between the thoughts and the activities of an individual.

Essentially, the aim of dialogism differed for these two scholars: Vygotsky believed “the aim of dialectics is to resolve disagreement between contradicting views via rational dialogue to arrive at an agreed-upon truth” (Eun, 2019, p.492), whereas Bakhtin believed “if the ultimate aim is for [dialectics] to merge in search for a unified truth, they cannot be claimed to truly constitute a dialogical relationship” (Eun, 2019, p.492). In a Bakhtinian conceptualization of dialogism, all voices must be equal and uncompromised.

Commonalities Across Vygotsky and Bakhtin Interpretation of Dialogism

Vygotsky and Bakhtin differed on dialogism’s aims, but their conceptualizations did share some commonalities. Social scientists assume communication is embedded in a socio-historical context. Social scientists also assume that the parties involved in dialogism may have diverse perspectives and that the parties will have different interpretations of the communication shared between them. Finally, social scientists assume that people engaging in communication will attempt to position each other into culturally figured types (Eun, 2019). If discourse is dialogical, it follows that people are engaged in a dialogic spiral when they listen to stories. In other words, when hearing a story, people bring their own experiences into their interpretations. By way of illustration, I may hear the same story as someone else but interpret it completely differently because of the reciprocity between the text and my experiences. This dialogic spiral is the “construction of a conversation between two or more people whereby the dialogic process of listening and speaking co-creates an area of trust between speakers” (Paris & Winn, 2014, p. 30). Paris and Winn adopted a Bakhtinian view of dialogism as they view

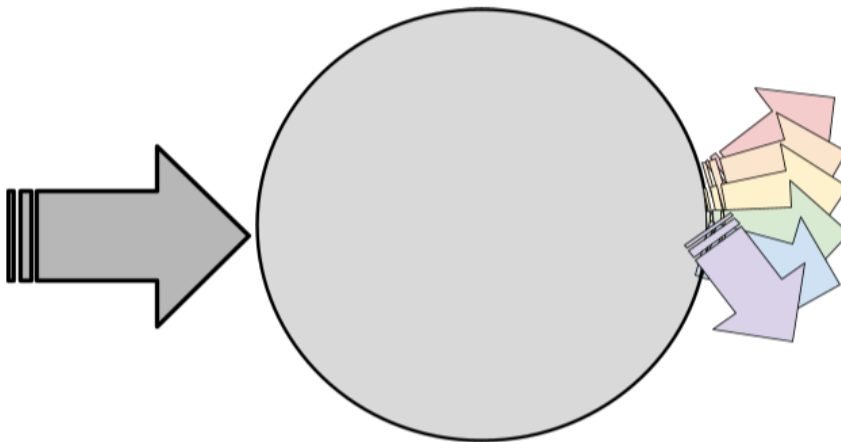
the spiral as a site for trust building between participants in an interaction. Developing trust through dialogue can result in an equitable relationship between the speakers.

A Classroom Application of Dialogism. Earlier I discussed power dynamics in a classroom as illustrated by Gutierrez, Rymes, and Larson (1995). Looking through a dialogic lens, I will now revisit this study to highlight dialogism and power in classroom practice. This study was an analysis of everyday classroom scripts and interactions between a teacher and students that explored how power is constructed in social relationships. Gutierrez, Rymes, and Larson (1995) argued that dynamic relationships and structures influence both who gets to learn and what is learned by students. When the teacher in this analysis used monologic communication with the students, authentic engagement with the content was squelched. The researchers found that monologic scripts in this classroom enforced the cultural values dominant in schools, which often privilege standard English discourse and advantage white, non-disabled, middle class students. However, if a script is dialogic, students and teachers can communicate in a “third space,” a theoretical space that exists when students and teachers have authentic interactions and heteroglossia. The “third space...is continually structured by tension, by the conflict necessary between the conversants, and between self and other as one voice ‘refracts’ another” (Gutierrez, Rymes, & Larson, 1995, p. 15). Refraction of voice, a redirection of voice resulting from an interaction that allows a co-construction of ideas, occurs in a “third space” because there is no longer a single cultural discourse that is privileged. Hence, students have connections to and influence on the content. When third spaces are made available to students because the presence of multiple voices is

celebrated, teachers are co-constructing identities with their students. Students see themselves differently in a space that allows multiple forms of discourse than they might if only a singular discourse style was allowed. If students see themselves differently as learners (due to the creation of third spaces), their sense of agency is also likely to increase. Students are not the only ones who undergo identity changes in a third spaces; a teacher may also view their identity differently because of the interactions they have with students (as interactions are one of the influences on identity). These changes to identity become available in a third space because of the presence of heteroglossia. A model of how a dialogic script refracts multiple voices is pictured below in figure 6.

Figure 6

Dialogic Script Representation



Note: In this model, the grey arrow represents the teacher script. The circle represents the ‘third space.’ The different color arrows represent the multiple scripts and multiple voices of heteroglossia.

Connecting Key Theoretical Concepts

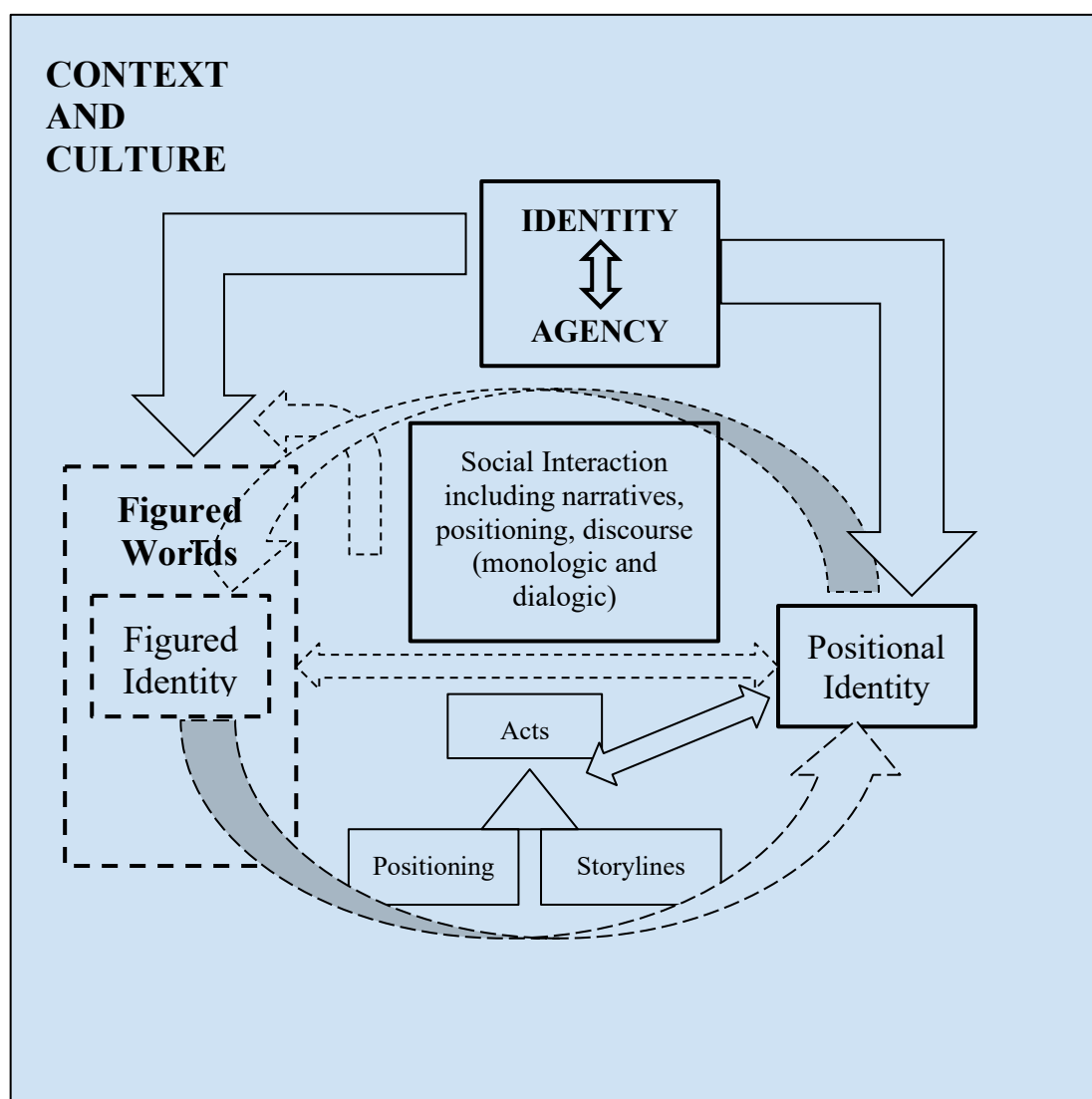
In my review of theoretical concepts, I highlighted identity, agency, figured worlds and how they connect to identities, narratives, positioning and positional identities, and discourse, focusing on dialogism. As social beings, who we are, what we say, and what we do are all influenced by our cultures (Gee, 2014a); thus, each of the theoretical concepts in this study is also influenced by culture. As a case in point, culture often influences the collective and individual narratives we create and share in community. However, a few of the concepts covered in this review, while still affected, are not controlled by culture as much as other concepts are. Figured identity is one concept that is not tied to culture in the same way that positional identity is. Earlier in this review, I discussed Gyanumaya who scaled a balcony to attend an interview (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998). In that example, Gyanumaya was influenced by her culture because she did not want to break the cultural norm around entering a higher-caste person's home, so to adhere to the cultural norm, she scaled the outside wall to avoid entering the home. When she scaled the wall, she performed an act that came from her imagination; it was not necessarily something she had seen performed in the community. This woman's acts suggest that some aspects of identity are not dictated by cultural norms. In this example, Gyanumaya's culture does not determine the expected action (one that would ban her from entering Skinner's home). Gyanumaya's agency creates an opportunity for improvisation that works with the constraints of culture.

The relationships among the key theoretical concepts in this review are complex. To offer another means to illustrate the relationships between the theoretical concepts in

this literature review, I have included Figure 8 below. After a note about Figure 7, I will provide a real-life example of a made-up teacher named John (a nod to the teacher in *Dead Poet's Society*) to further explain the relationship of the terms of this literature review.

Figure 7

Representation of Relationship of Theoretical Concepts



Note: In this model, identity and agency are the foundational elements that influence all other elements. This framing does not suggest that identity and agency are not influenced by the other elements in this figure, but rather aims to situate identity and agency as the focus of this study. Each concept is surrounded by solid or dotted line boxes to illustrate their relationship with other concepts. Arrows also have solid or dotted lines to represent a relationship between two concepts. If the line is solid, then a consistent connection exists between the concepts. If the line is dotted, then the relationships between concepts are related and influential, but not in a consistent way. One example of this is the dotted line between figured and positioned identities. Figured identities may influence positional identities, but the concepts do not mutually determine one another. Another feature of figure 8 is that figured worlds and identities are surrounded by dotted lines because they are influenced by social interaction, which is influenced by culture, but, on some occasions, figured identities exist outside of cultural norms. (The Gyanumaya anecdote is an example where a figured identity may exist outside of cultural norms.) Positional identities can only be created through interaction, so that is why solid lines surround the concept. The positioning triad is also placed inside the social interaction diagram center because those concepts can only occur in social interactions.

To help ground the terms' relationships with one another, I will use John Keating, a character from *Dead Poet's Society*, as an exemplification of the terms and their connections. Before John becomes a teacher, he has a personal identity. In John's case, he identifies as a white, male, student who loves to read and write, and who has a tendency to bend the rules at the boarding school he attends. His identity has been shaped by his

experiences and interactions. Prior to becoming a teacher at Welton Academy, he has perceptions about the qualities of a typical teacher. Attending Welton Academy as a student, he had teachers who were strict, knowledgeable, and uninspiring. Culturally, the norms he associates with what it means to be a teacher were grounded in the school's context and public perceptions of what it means to be a teacher. When John becomes a teacher at Welton, he gains a new type of identity, his professional identity. This identity is influenced by his personal identity. His professional identity is also one that will change as he has experiences and interactions with others.

As a teacher, John hopes to be a different kind of teacher than the ones he frequently had as a student. John figures a world, different from and similar to the lived world he has experienced, in which he is an inspirational teacher. John figures being as inspirational to his students as Walt Whitman's poems have been to him. His figured identity then acts as a boost to his agency which results in him performing acts that he feels will help others see him as an inspirational teacher. One way that he will attempt being labeled as inspirational is through his interactions with his students. For instance, one day John's students will find an old book that provides evidence of his previous membership in a club called the Dead Poets Society. When John's students call out to him on the lawn one afternoon, they ask John to tell them more about the Dead Poets Society. When his students ask this, they are offering John the position of an inspirational teacher, should he accept. Through positioning, speech acts, and storylines, John may or may not be recognized as an inspirational teacher, an identity which is determined through social interaction. John accepts this positioning, and swears them to secrecy

while disclosing that the Society was dedicated to the “sucking the marrow out of life.” Once John’s positional identity is recognized by others, future positionings are made possible or not, so there is an interplay between positional identities and social interactions.

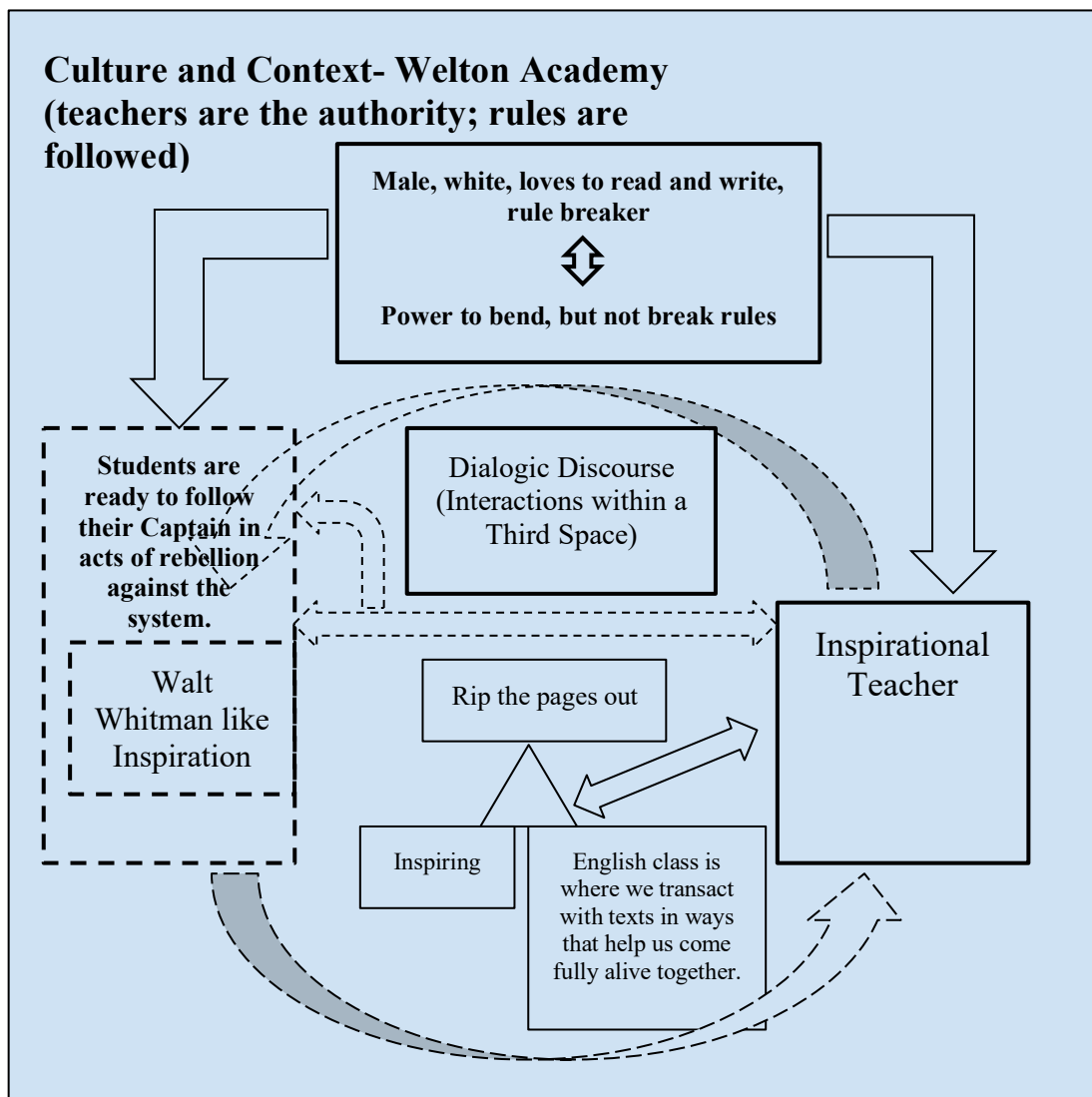
John also shares a narrative with the students about the society. This narrative is both a story], and a discursive tool John uses to further build his positional identity as an inspiration to the students and himself. The type of discourse that John uses also provides clues about the power structures at Welton. At Welton, teachers are typically viewed as having power over their students. John adheres to many of the cultural norms rooted in traditional global north power structures, but he also bends the rules, improvising action through an interplay of his agency and cultural expectations like Gyanumaya scaling the building. John wants his students to discuss how poetry makes them feel and does not believe he or any other scholar is the expert on interpreting poetry. When John asks one of his students Neil to read the introduction to the poetry text aloud, he then instructs his students to rip out the pages. John shouts, “this is not the Bible. This is a battle, a war. You will have to learn to think for yourselves!” as a proclamation that he will share the space and build knowledge with them. John’s discourse is dialogical in nature because the discourse patterns John uses encourages students to be active participants in collaborative, critical learning. His classroom acts like a third space because authentic interactions are celebrated.

John should not tell his students to leave campus late at night (as students are not allowed to leave campus), but he wants to encourage them to start a secret poetry society,

so he implies an ideal place and time for secret meetings. He draws on his agency to improvise a solution: instead of telling the students directly to venture off campus, he indirectly suggests it. The discourse about the Dead Poets Society is polyphonic in nature because John invites his students to share the space of the Dead Poets Society. In the Dead Poets Society, any member, past or present has an equal voice. To offer another means to illustrate the relationships between the theoretical concepts in this literature review, I have included Figure 8 below.

Figure 8

John Keating: Theoretical Concepts Representation



Review of Methodological Literature

Interview Studies

In non-academic life, people in most societies are familiar with interviews. We see and hear interviews in the news, on the radio, on the television, and on the internet. Interviews frequently appear in people's everyday lives, which might suggest that

interviews are a simple way to gather research data. And yet, conducting qualitative interviews is not a simple process. Researchers who use interview studies as a methodology will need to thoughtfully use this methodology to gain worthwhile insights from the participants of the study (Arksey & Knight, 1999).

Interviewing people to gain understanding about their knowledge and experiences has been part of social science research since the social sciences were viewed as legitimate fields of study for scholars. The interview is meant to resemble a conversation, one that involves the researcher asking questions to gain understanding about the participants. Qualitative interview studies involve researchers asking participants to provide their observations about the topic being studied (Weiss, 1994). Through the interview, researchers have access to a participants' inner thoughts and feelings and their perceptions of the world around them. According to Weiss (1994), the research aims of interview studies are: "developed detailed descriptions, integrating multiple perspectives, describing process, developing holistic description, learning how events are interpreted, building intersubjectivities, and identifying variables and framing hypotheses for quantitative research" (p. 11).

Qualitative interviews can be conducted face-to-face, over the phone, or via the computer. Interview studies can be time and labor intensive because recorded conversations can create large amounts of transcribed data in comparison to some other qualitative methods. Even though interview studies can be time intensive, the knowledge gained from interviews is extensive, which can make it a worthwhile method for research problems. Interview studies are flexible as they are appropriate for a range of topics

(Weiss, p. 8). Interviews are also commonly used in other methodologies which makes them appropriate in a blended qualitative study.

Narrative Inquiry

A key goal of narrative inquiry is to understand growth and transformation in ourselves and in our study participants through story (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Wells, 2011). These goals are reflected in the theory behind the design of narrative inquiry studies (Lindsay & Schwind, 2016).

Researchers who utilize narrative inquiry aim to understand the meaning of an experience. A strength of narrative inquiry is that it focuses on the complexity of the human experience. “Life--as we come to it and as it comes to others--is filled with narrative fragments, enacted in storied moments of time and space, and reflected upon and understood in terms of narrative unities and discontinuities” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 17). By analyzing narrative fragments, researchers work toward understanding the messiness of participants’ experiences in the world.

Researchers who believe that the starting place of research should be experience rather than theory use narrative inquiry. This deviation from the traditional research process is purposeful. One reason for this deviation is the theory behind the methodology: “The contribution of narrative inquiry is more often intended to be the creation of a new sense of meaning and significance with respect to the research topic than it is to yield a set of knowledge claims” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 42). Narrative inquiry researchers are more focused on gaining new meaning in experience, than acquiring knowledge claims. Narrative inquiry is thus more malleable than other research types

because its foundation is not formalistic (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Essentially, most qualitative research begins with theory and then moves into working toward an understanding of a phenomenon. Narrative inquiry researchers do not believe that theories should be the starting point for research.

Narrative inquiry researchers also believe that experiences are expandable and contractible because the people's experiences are temporal. An example of the simultaneity of identities in narratives is how a person might situate themselves in both the past, present and future in one narrative fragment. Narratives allow individuals to place themselves across the boundaries typically associated with time and space.

Critical Discourse Analysis

To understand critical discourse analysis, one must understand the term discourse. “[D]iscourse is a difficult concept, largely because there are so many conflicting and overlapping definitions formulated from various theoretical and disciplinary standpoints” (Fairclough, 1992, p. 3). As with many qualitative research approaches, there is no consensus amongst researchers due to differences in academic fields. Gee (2014a) defined discourse this way: “Discourses are ways of enacting socially significant identities and associated practices in society through language (social languages) and ways of acting, interacting, valuing, knowing, believing, and using things, tools, and technologies at appropriate times and places” (p. 127). Gee’s definition of discourse focuses on language being a tool used by individuals to be recognized in various social situations. Other researchers that use discourse analysis as a methodology have similar definitions to Gee, but highlight the impact of power in the definition by adopting a

Foucauldian lens to the concept of discourse. For example, Yazdannik, Yousefy, and Mohammadi (2017) define discourse as: “ways of constituting knowledge, together with the social practices, forms of subjectivity, and power relations which inhere in such knowledge's and relations between them” (p. 114). This definition incorporates many of the same ideas as Gee’s definition of discourse, but the focus on power implies the impact that power can have on an individual’s discourse.

Discourse is not only language but also all the other moves humans use to be recognized in a particular way by a specific social group. People are not always aware of the discourse moves they are performing. Also, people may hope to project a particular identity through discourse moves, yet they may do so in a way that is deemed inappropriate and may thus be rejected by the social group into which they had sought acceptance. Gee’s is only one of many scholarly definitions of discourse. One reason I adopted it was because it highlighted that identity is enacted through language in socially situated experiences.

People enact identities and the practices of particular social groups through their language. Using language cues, speakers and writers can signal to others and themselves who they are (positions) and what they are doing (storylines). Language is a powerful tool because in using it, we are not merely saying words. Instead, “we may make meaning by using language to say things that, in actual contexts of use, amount to doing things and being things” (Gee, 2014, p. 31). Language often telegraphs what we say, do, and are. Considering the potential power language may wield, discourse analysis should take a critical stance. “All discourse analysis needs to be critical, not because discourse

analysts are or need to be political, but because language itself is . . . political” (Gee, 2014a, p. 9). Language is never neutral because of the benefits and harms it can cause to individuals and groups. Language can afford individuals and groups status, solidarity, and power (Gee, 2014a), but it can also incur discord, separation, and incapacity.

Differences of Discourse Analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical discourse analysis has many commonalities with general discourse analysis. According to Souto-Manning (2014a), “discourse analysis—or the study of language in use—is concerned with the constructive effects of discourse by closely and thoroughly investigating texts” (p. 203). In a way, discourse analysis is a bridging of an analysis of language and the social contexts in which it resides. Critical discourse analysis functions similarly, but critical discourse analysis also analyzes power structures in discourse. “[E]mploying a critical perspective to discourse analysis (to the study of language in use) is a way to change what is and to fashion more equitable futures” (Souto-Manning, 2014a, p. 204). By utilizing a critical discourse analysis rather than a discourse analysis, provides opportunities for individuals to notice ways to upend the status quo and build more equitable opportunities for those individuals.

Like discourse analysis, critical discourse analysis is multidisciplinary. It emerged from multiple fields such as rhetoric, text linguistics, anthropology, philosophy, socio-psychology, cognitive science, literary studies, sociolinguistics, and applied linguistics and pragmatics (Wodak & Meyer, 2014, p. 1). As a result of having multiple influence points, applications of critical discourse analysis vary across researchers. However, there

are some overarching principles that Wodak and Meyer (2014) outlined as commonalities across various approaches to critical discourse analysis.

The first principle is that critical discourse analysis is about understanding the qualities of language in actual use. The language studied in a critical discourse analysis is not abstract or an imagined hypothetical dialogue. The language that discourse analysts study is real.

The second principle is that discourse analysis focuses on the big ideas of language versus homing in on small parts like single words. Discourse analysis involves looking at understanding larger units of language like conversations. The units of study in a discourse analysis are larger than the units of study in other forms of language analysis. For example, linguistic analysis focuses on small units of language (such as syntax or semantics).

The third principle of discourse analysis is to consider the grammar as it relates to the acts and interactions of people. The connection between critical discourse analysis and linguistics provides clear reasoning for a focused look at grammar. However, critical discourse analysis “employs linguistic and social theories to investigate the interplay of ideologies and power in discourses. It centers on a social issue with a semiotic characteristic” (Souto-Manning, 2014b, p. 161). Analyzing social issues through a semiotic lens (focusing on the signs of language) provides an opportunity to see how power shapes discourse. Power can be transmitted through the language individuals use, so focusing on the signs of power is useful when analyzing the impact of language on identity and agency. Ideologies are often shared and shown through discourse (Van Dijk,

2006). Critical discourse is a consideration of the semiotic nature of language while also investigating the social aspects of its use.

The fourth principle of critical discourse analysis is that the analysis focuses on non-verbal communication, including gestures, texts, media, and images. These non-verbal elements are clues to the interpretation of language.

The fifth principle acknowledges the complex moves and strategies individuals employ in discourse. Language use is not simply a matter of providing information, but it is also about identity performance. As Gee (2014a) claimed, “the grammar of any language is used, recruited, adapted, and transformed differently by different social groups to carry out specific tasks, practices, work, and to enact or recognize specifically socially significant and meaningful identities” (p. 23). People carry out language moves to be recognized by others as part of their community. Discourse analysis assumes that speech acts are laden with strategic and complex processes.

A concern for the role of context (social, cultural, situative (occurring in a specific situation), and cognitive) is the sixth principle of critical discourse analysis. Discourse analysis does not separate context from language; critical discourse analysis highlights the ways contexts bear on language use. “Discourse analysis is concerned with the way in which texts themselves have been constructed in terms of their social and historical situatedness” (Cheek, 2004, p. 1144). Data in discourse analysis could be interpreted in entirely different ways depending on the context in which the text was produced or the words were spoken. Unlike a linguistic analysis, discourse analysis considers the denotative and situated meanings of language. Therefore, all analysis is done through the

lens of the particular context in which the text or speech was produced (Gee, 2014a; Gee, 2014b). Another layer of complexity that is worth mentioning is that there is reciprocity between context and discourse: language is influenced by context while simultaneously context is influenced by language.

The last principle of critical discourse analysis is that numerous components of grammar and language are investigated. For instance, critical discourse analysis could involve looking at the following: coherence, the ability of words to have meaning; anaphora, language's dependence on other expressions in context to make meaning; macrostructures, the general meanings of words; speech acts, dialogue; interactions, natural speech exchanges; turn-taking, alternating patterns of dialogue; signs, representations of concepts through language; politeness, rules attributed to how language should be used; argumentation, the validity of a concept communicated through language; rhetoric, the art of persuasive language; mental models, representations of the world; and many other aspects of text and discourse.

Applications and Processes of Critical Discourse Studies. Discourse studies originate in many disciplinary fields; therefore discourse analysis is an adaptable methodology. That is not to say that discourse analysis can be applied to any problem space. The research problem must be a fit with the methodology (Gee, 2014a).

Critical discourse analysis is not prescriptive. There is no one "right" way to conduct a discourse analysis, (Gee, 2014a, Gee, 2014b); but, critical discourse analysis studies should explain how and why language operates and should contribute

understanding of a meaningful problem in the world that needs attention (Gee, 2014a, 2014b).

Discourse analysis offers a comprehensive set of tools. One aspect of discourse analysis that is both a benefit and a shortcoming is that it is adaptable to many contexts. Researchers do not need to employ every available technique in a discourse analysis, but instead need to consider which tools best fit the problem space.

According to Gee (2014a, 2014b), language has “seven building tasks,” which means that we as social beings can use language in seven specific ways to create figured worlds. These building tasks are constructing significance, practices (activities), identities, relationships, politics, connections, and sign systems and knowledge. We often use language for multiple purposes at once, which is one reason discourse analysis is a complex process.

To analyze how people use language in the seven building tasks, researchers can use four main tools: Social languages, Discourse, Intertextuality, and Conversations. I think of the four tools as starting points from which to begin the inquiry process, wherein each domain could lead to a series of questions for a researcher to investigate. Gee (2014a) further classified the potential questions a researcher might ask into 28 discourse analysis tools (one for each of the four analytical starting points applied to each of the seven building tasks). In most analyses, researchers will use more than one tool to increase their understanding of language use in a problem space; however, it is rarely appropriate to use all 28 tools. Researchers must consider the aim of their research, the

theoretical framework, and the research problem when deciding which tools to apply to a given study.

Blending Discourse Analysis and Other Analytical Tools: Exemplar Studies.

In this section, I highlight some exemplar studies that combined discourse analysis with other analytical methods to generate understandings of the central phenomena. In a recent study of dialogic discourse in a linguistically diverse elementary classroom, Truxaw (2020) analyzed the impact of such discourse on how students achieved mathematical understanding. Data were collected from multiple classrooms in two dual-language schools (Spanish and English) on both coasts of the United States for this study. The data collected were derived from audio and video recordings, transcriptions, and translations. The analysis methods were constant comparative methods, thematic coding, and discourse analysis techniques. Even though this study was not strictly a discourse analysis, several aspects of it, such as its blended methodology and dialogic discourse framework, make it an exemplar in this literature review.

MacDonald-Vemic and Portelli (2020) conducted another relevant blended methodology study. In their study, they focused on the effects of neoliberalism on social justice. MacDonald and Portelli collected data from 28 interviews with educators who were devoted to social justice education. The researchers used a critical democratic theory to guide their discourse analysis and arrive at their findings. Given my research's focus on hidden power systems in schools and that systems that are influenced by neoliberalism often hide power, the blended methodology was relevant as a potential model for my research design.

Assaf and Dooley (2010) also utilized interviews to collect data for their discourse analysis of beginning teachers' ideology constructions. These researchers applied Bakhtin's theories of ideological becoming as a lens through which to explore intricacies of discourse in order to teach the group of students with different primary languages. The analysis of the data occurred in three stages. In the first stage, researchers used a constant comparative method; in the second stage, they focused on moments of tension; finally, they concluded their analysis by applying Gee's inquiry tools. Like many of the studies shared in this literature review, strict adherence to discourse analysis was not utilized, as evidenced by it only being applied in the third portion of the analysis.

It is worth noting that only a few exemplary studies have been highlighted to illustrate the appropriateness of blending of interview methods, narrative inquiry, and critical discourse analysis in a research design. In addition to these research studies, several of the studies cited in this chapter involved some form of discourse analysis (e.g., Yoon, 2016, Søreide, 2006, Souto-Manning, 2014a, Souto-Manning, 2014b).

Conclusion

The preceding review of theoretical, empirical, and methodological literature discussed central theories and concepts pertinent to understanding teacher identity and agency in the context of traditional grading systems. This literature review shows that:

1. Identity is a self-understanding that is multidimensional, layered, dynamic, and flexible. Professional identity is the identity one has of their work self that is influenced by their identity.

2. Figured worlds are mental images/scenes that people create to conceptualize a version of the world that they feel is likely even if some of the elements seem dramatized or imaginary.
3. Agency is the perceived potential a person believes they have as a result of their identity because of the restrictions and privileges associated with their identity. Agency is not merely a byproduct of identity but is intertwined with it; thus, a reflexive relationship exists between identity and agency.
4. Power is a central influence on both identity and agency. Individuals may find improvisations to subvert power structures. Individuals may also resist power structures.
5. Narratives are both a concept and a tool. Narratives are one possible means to understand, reflect, and create identity.
6. Positioning is relational and interconnected with acts and storylines; positioning, like identity, is a dynamic and contextual process. Individuals may accept or reject positions opened for them.
7. Analyzing dialogical discourse is one tool for understanding power, positioning, identity, and agency. Dialogical discourse allows multiple voices to share a space.
8. The primary data source for this study was interviews. Principles from narrative inquiry and critical discourse analysis guide the data collection and analysis. Using this blended methodology, I aimed to understand identity and agency within the traditional grading system.

Even with substantial existing research on teacher identity and agency, very little research has been done that situates identity and agency within the context of the traditional grading system. Given the sheer volume of and significant time spent on grading by teachers, it is remarkable that more research does not exist that examines the impact of the practice of assigning grades on teacher identity and agency. Additionally, discussions of equitable grading practices highlight the hidden power behind the grading system, and much of this existing research in this area has focused on the impact of grades on students and not teachers. Therefore, I conducted research in this interconnected space. I conducted an interview study that borrowed from narrative inquiry and critical discourse analysis. Narratives, as a concept and a methodology, guided my research process. I conducted interviews that were guided by narrative inquiry because narratives were a key theoretical concept of this study. Narratives were also a product of the data collection and were used to help me understand teacher identity and agency. I used critical discourse analysis with some portions of the data to offer another lens to interpret the data and strengthen the validity or trustworthiness of my conclusions. Given that discourse analysis is a linguistic approach to narrative inquiry (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 25), using principles from both methodologies felt appropriate for this interview study.

I felt that conducting a discourse analysis that borrowed from narrative inquiry was appropriate because “no study conforms exactly to a standard methodology; each one calls for the researcher to adapt the methodology and methods to the uniqueness of the setting or case” (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2020, p. 6). In chapter three, more

attention will be given to how I applied the principles of two different methodologies (narrative inquiry and critical discourse analysis) for this interview study.

Chapter 3 Methodology

This chapter opens with a brief recap of the research problem, research purpose, research goals, and research questions. In this chapter, I present an interview study that borrows from narrative inquiry and critical discourse analysis as a reasonable methodological choice for this research problem. I also present my positionality to demonstrate transparency in describing the influence of myself, the researcher, on the study. This chapter includes the design of the study by outlining the intended methods and will include a discussion of the data collection, organization, and analysis. At the end of the chapter, I include a table that outlines the overall research design and purpose.

Research Problem and Goals

This qualitative study aimed to understand the impact of assigning grades on teacher identity and agency. This study highlights the impact of cultural, social, and political forces on the practice of assigning grades and the ensuing identity friction while also noting passive and active resistance moves teachers make in the process. In Oregon, there have been various initiatives focused on increasing graduation rates; a student's high school grades are one of the criteria used to determine graduation eligibility. As a result of teachers operating within the traditional U.S. grading systems in high schools, educators may experience friction between the grading system and their identities and agency as teachers. I hope to shed light on a contextual area of the teaching profession, grading, that is underexplored in its relationship to teacher identity and agency.

This study focused on understanding identity friction within the site of traditional grading systems in U.S. high schools. The hope was that by engaging in a dialogue

around identity and agency within traditional grading practices, teachers would be better able to articulate their experiences as graders and to see the impact of operating within the traditional grading system on their identities. As a result of researching theoretical concepts that I felt were helpful lenses to view the topic, I conducted research for me and my participants' understanding of their identities and agency within the context of grading. The second goal of this study was to understand the relationship between contextual forces that influence the system of traditional grading and how these forces shape teachers' practice of assigning grades and can often create tension. As part of their participation, teachers engaged in a dialogue with one another about the role of power structures on assigning grades. The third goal of this study was related to teachers discussing the impact of power structures on their assignment of grades, particularly how these teachers used active and/or passive strategies to oppose and reject the normalized grading policies and procedures. In turn, I gained an understanding of how these strategies shape their identities and agency. Based on these three goals, I addressed the following research questions:

1. What impact does the assignment of traditional grades in a U.S. high school have on teacher identity and agency?
2. How does the experience of identity friction arise for teachers in the practice of assigning traditional grades in a U.S. high school?
3. For teachers who resist, how do teachers' use of strategies of active and passive resistance against traditional grading practices shape their identities and agency?

And how do teachers' identities and agency shape the use of strategies of active and passive resistance to traditional grading practices?

Positionality

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) highlighted three major interrelated concerns between researchers and participants: insider/outsider status, positionality, and researcher reflexivity. As a high school English teacher, I assume I will be granted some insider status by my participants. However, as I am studying teachers who are not my colleagues, I can also potentially be viewed as an outsider—not a member of their school communities. Additionally, as a graduate student pursuing a doctorate degree, I might also be considered an outsider. I may not feel like I am in a position of power; however, my participants may frame me as an outsider with power, even though I am also a high school classroom teacher. To minimize the power dynamics, I engaged in a constant negotiation of the relationship with my participants. It is worth noting that my insider/outsider status was something I perceived to exist based on my interactions with the participants. The participants in my study ultimately determined my status as an insider or outsider.

I view my job as a high school teacher as more than a job: it reflects my identity in much the same way I view my attributes of being a white, non-disabled, cisgender woman. Each attribute of my identity shapes how I see myself in the world and how the world sees me as well. Having a language and cultural background similar to what is prioritized in most U.S. schools, as a student I did not experience a lack of connection with the content and how it was delivered. Unlike what is often the case for students of

color, when I struggled academically, it was not because the curriculum was not inclusive for me. Based on education research, I can also safely assume that I was treated differently, even if my teachers were unaware of it, as a result of being white. As a non-disabled person, my perspective is limited to my experiences. Sometimes I do not realize the experiences I have been afforded are a direct result of being able-bodied. Additionally, being a cisgender woman shaped my experiences as both a student and a teacher. At times, I felt I was perceived as a less competent individual than males in various situations in school and work. For example, I vividly remember my 5th-grade teacher stating that “boys are smarter than girls” and that a former principal I worked with often called me “opinionated.” Both interactions highlight that my gender influences how others see my actions.

Viewing my job as a teacher as a part of my identity means that I place significance on how successful I feel I have been with my students. If asked the question “who are you?” my reply is often, “I am a teacher.” Teaching is personal to me, and because of that, I sometimes assign a meaning to the practice that reflects how I feel about myself as a person. I imagine that if I viewed teaching as only a job and not part of my identity, I would not experience the same feelings of attachment.

Finally, it is worth noting that I position myself as a teacher, as does the institution that grants teaching licenses. I create and embody narratives that I associate with this position while simultaneously performing acts that play into my initial positioning of myself as an educator. In addition, each attribute of my identity has a

relationship with the other attributes and adds a layer of complexity to how I understand and how I am understood in the world.

My classroom experiences have contributed to how I view my problem and will need to be revisited throughout my research process. When honoring transparency with my readers and participants, I must share relevant beliefs and experiences that may affect my research interpretation. One relevant experience is my being discouraged by the traditional grading system. I feel I have harmed my students by assigning grades, yet I still participate in the system. Even though I am actively engaged in critical reflection about my role as an actor in an oppressive system, I cannot ignore that my reflection has not always led me to stand up actively against oppressive practices in the high school setting. My experiences as a student have led me to believe that grades can harm students because I felt harmed by grades, even though the harm I felt did not result in any substantial consequence. To expand upon that idea, I acknowledge that even if a grade caused me to feel less intelligent, I could still go to college, receive admission scholarships, and eventually acquire two graduate degrees. My negative experiences with grades are mild compared to those of students who do not have access to academic opportunities like diplomas and scholarships. Given the connection of academic opportunities to financial and physical health (McGill, 2016), the harm I experienced as a student from grading was minimal. Even though I may not have experienced serious harm from grading, I empathize with students who experience the harm that often accompanies being labeled and limited by grades.

I believe that “the study of language is integrally connected to matters of equity and justice” (Gee, 2014, p. 47). Therefore, my research is a personal passion and aims to offer a space for participants to problem solve and consider possible solutions to the complications teachers face working within the inequitable grading system. Probst and Berenson (2014) stated that “reflexivity is generally understood as awareness of the influence the researcher has on what is being studied and, simultaneously, of how the research process affects the researcher” (p. 814). Reflexivity is about awareness of the inevitable influence you will have on your participants. As a researcher, I assumed that I would influence the research process, so I tried to limit this influence. For instance, as a teacher, I have opinions about grading practices. I needed to make sure I did not use gestures or words to suggest that I agreed or disagreed with my participants. I also needed to avoid writing leading questions because that level of influence would limit my study's credibility (Seidman, 2019; Weiss, 1994). I am not suggesting by these examples that all influence is negative. There are circumstances in which influence could be a positive part of a research study. One example of influence being beneficial is when participation in a study leads to activism amongst participants. In an earlier mentioned study in chapter 2, Souto-Manning (2014a) articulated that her “participants were acquiring the tools to articulate problems and coming up with possible solutions to their personal challenges through dialogue and problem solving” (p. 2017). Much like Souto-Manning, I believe research should have emancipatory goals for its participants, and I hope that I will have the opportunity to influence my participants and that they will have the opportunity to

influence me as well. My goal is that through my research, my participants and I will learn together.

Research Perspective and Design

The theoretical framework of any qualitative research study should align with the methodology (Maxwell, 2013). One of the goals of my research was to understand how individuals experience identity friction. Another goal of my study was to understand my participants' identity, a concept that is challenging to observe because the outward display of identity does not always mirror the inner identity of an individual. Given my emphasis on understanding an individuals' experience of assigning grades, I wanted to use a methodology that would provide me with a lot of description, perspectives, and interpretations of topics (Weiss, 1994). Interview studies fit all of the criteria I aimed for in a methodology. Therefore, an interview study that utilized theories from narrative analysis and critical discourse analysis was appropriate to the problem and theoretical framework. I would argue that several features of the problem and the framework make this blended methodology an ideal methodological choice.

Concerning power, issues of equity are foregrounded in this problem. My initial curiosity around the harm that grading might cause teachers stemmed from understanding the harm grades often cause students. Even though teachers may be harmed to a lesser extent than students, I think understanding the impact of assigning grades on teacher identity and agency opened a space for discussion of dismantling inequitable structures in schools, such as the assignment of grades. The format of semi-structured interviews and focus groups was selected because of the tendency individuals have to open up and share

their stories in an conversational interview. Given that individuals were likely to respond to many of the interview questions in narrative form, principles of narrative inquiry were also applied to this study. A more thorough discussion of narrative inquiry's influence on the methodology will be covered in the data analysis section of this chapter.

Another important reason I opted to use interview studies was that identity is not a tangible product. To learn how individuals' identities show up in their thoughts and actions, researchers need to find avenues for gathering information about participants' identities and sense of agency. The interview is one means of learning about participants' identities and agency (Seidman, 2019).

When Gee used the term "identity," he referred to something similar to the concept of positioning. Gee was not referring to one's core being, but to how one adjusts the presentation of themselves to operate in a given context (Gee, 2014a). Even though the term "positioning" was not directly stated, parallels can be drawn between these two concepts' overlaps. I am not suggesting that Gee was directly calling to positioning and merely forgetting to label it appropriately, but rather that his view of identity has commonalities with positioning. Therefore, another reason that interview studies were an appropriate avenue for understanding identity is in the ability of the researcher to observe how individuals position themselves and offer positions to others during a focus group interview or narrative retelling.

Teachers are part of multiple communities, and one of the ways individuals signal membership in a community is through discourse. Gutierrez, Rymes, and Larson (1995) wrote that "becoming a member of a community of practice is a process of developing a

particular identity and mode of behavior; through participation in a community's sociocultural practices, members learn which discourses and forms of participation are valued and not valued by the community" (p. 2). Schools, like communities, have sociocultural practices that are valued and not valued, and in examining the patterns in the discourse, the impact of institutional practices may be revealed. Interviews were one way that I was able to observe the patterns of discourse amongst the participants, both during the focus groups and through participants' narratives.

Even though interview studies were the primary methodology of my research, critical discourse analysis was necessary to understand the grading structures (structures of power) that impacted teachers' identity and agency. Issues of "power dynamics are at the heart of critical research" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 61), and the practice of assigning grades is a system that veils power. I felt that critical discourse analysis was an ideal methodology to incorporate into this methodology because of this emphasis. As Gee (2014a) reminds us, "all discourse analysis needs to be critical, not because discourse analysts are or need to be political, but because language itself is, political" (p. 9). Given that this study's key goal was to "analyze issues relating to power relations in participants' lives" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 63), a critical approach would foreground the political nature of language. Likewise, many Foucauldian principles largely influenced the creation of critical discourse analysis. Given that using a Foucauldian lens is a useful approach for understanding schools' power structures, a methodology that focused on such structures was beneficial toward reaching an understanding of the problem.

I find discourse analysis to be an applicable methodology because this methodology incorporates the theoretical concept of figured worlds into the analysis process. Gee (2014a) suggested that “situated meaning can guide us to figured worlds since often people are giving words specific situated meanings because they are operating with specific figured worlds” (Gee, p. 206). Essentially, when a researcher evaluates situated meanings, the figured worlds that people operate in are potentially spotlighted. Given the relationship between figured worlds and identity, a critical discourse analysis provided one avenue for understanding this theoretical concept.

Participant Selection

For this study, I recruited current high school teachers. Given the impact high school transcripts can have on future academic opportunities for students, I believe that high school teachers were the best population to study. I recruited teachers outside of my current district, Upton Grafton district in Oregon, because I believe this provided me with both an insider and outsider perspective. Studying participants in a district outside my own provided me with an outsider lens because I was unfamiliar with the culture and practices of that district. I also had an insider perspective because I was studying a community to which I belong, high school English teachers. I made no assumptions that my role as an English teacher would make building trust with my participants an easy task, as trust relies on much more than my identification as an English teacher. However, I do believe I was able to build trust more easily than a teacher of another subject area might have been able to do. (Seidman, 2019).

I also selected an English department for this study because English teachers are core subject area teachers. Students need to pass four years of English in order to be eligible to graduate. Unlike other subject areas, like art or music, a failing grade in English could keep a student from graduating high school. Therefore, English teachers may experience higher levels of pressure to assign students passing grades compared to other subject area teachers. Given my focus on understanding how teachers experience identity friction, I felt that English teachers have a higher likelihood of experiencing intense identity friction, thus making them ideal participants in this study.

For the remainder of this study, I will refer to my site as Walker High School, the pseudonym given to the research site. Walker High School is a racially-diverse high school in a high-poverty urban area in the Pacific Northwest. My reason for selecting a school site in a high-poverty area is that schools in high-poverty areas often have administrations that emphasize accountability on measures such as graduation rates. Education discourse in the media also emphasizes that the “achievement gap” needs to be closed, and schools that have high-poverty are sites where school data is under greater scrutiny by school boards who ultimately decide, with the input of governmental sources, whether schools should remain open (Gladson, 2016). Therefore, schools that fit this profile might have structures, norms, and policies in place likely to heighten the friction teachers might feel when assigning grades. Finally, I chose a school that was within driving range, so I could arrange in-person interviews as they would provide more intimacy with participants (Seidman, 2019; Weiss, 1994). However, due to the Coronavirus cases at the time of the study, all data were collected remotely.

My participants were current members of the English department at Walker High School. My second research question was centered around understanding how identity friction arises for teachers in the practice of assigning grades in a U.S. high school. Given this goal, I felt it was important to narrow the range of experiences that teachers shared, so that I had the ability to more clearly see themes and trends in the data. Working with one department helped me acquire a sense of understanding of the interactions between teachers, how teachers talked about students, and how teachers talked with each other about grading. Within the department, I interviewed six English teachers and the same six teachers in three semi-structured focus groups, although not all members were present for each focus group.

As professional identity takes time to form, I recruited teachers with at least five years of classroom teaching experience. Beginning teachers may be less aware than experienced teachers of the social, cultural, and political forces in their schools and may not be able to answer interview questions with adequate information. Interviewing beginning teachers may have limited the findings of the study for these reasons.

To recruit participants for the study, I contacted them via an introductory email facilitated by a teacher outside the English department at Walker whom I had a relationship with prior to my research. The topic of grading is sensitive for many teachers, and having a liaison who had a working relationship with my potential participants helped me recruit participants at Walker with more ease than I imagine I would have had at a school with no contacts; a total stranger may be less likely to recruit participants for a research study around grading and identity than an acquaintance. When

I found a teacher who felt that her department was interested in participating, I asked that she help facilitate my sharing of the study goals, timeline, and commitments of involvement in the research to determine interest. I was able to present the study plans and goals to the department before they agreed to participate. Throughout the study, this participant helped me coordinate events as well.

The members of the department who were not involved in the interviews were still a part of the study, but the data associated with them only came from meeting observations. The participants I wanted to interview met the following criteria: had at least five years of teaching experience, were interested in discussing grading systems, were willing to participate in three one-on-one semi-structured interviews, and had the availability to be interviewed. I selected teachers who were willing to discuss grading systems because this was the site of identity friction I was exploring. I also felt that teachers who were open to a dialogue about the traditional grading system would also perform passive or active resistance. Given the inclusion of agency in my research questions, I wanted to focus on acts of agency, and I felt participants who acted or pushed against traditional grading practices allowed me to stay close to my core concepts.

Data Collection Procedures

I collected data in three significant ways: individual one-on-one semi-structured interviews, semi-structured focus groups, and observations of department meetings. I also collected relevant documents like graded assignments, syllabi, and rubrics to elicit conversations about grading practices and identity. Due to the sensitive topic of grading, I needed to build trust with my participants, and I believed through repeated interactions in

individual and small group settings that I would be able to establish trust. I acted as an observer in meetings because I wanted to witness authentic acts of positioning. Before the first interview, I attended a department meeting to observe the department and school culture and establish a relationship with the participants. After the second set of interviews, I attended another department meeting. After the first set of interviews, I had one focus group, a second focus group after the second set of interviews, and a third focus group after the third set of interviews with one exception of one participant's final interview occurring after the final focus group. I scheduled interviews for 90 minutes, focus groups for one hour, and department meetings for the meeting's duration. Table 1 below illustrates the ways in which data was collected in this study.

Table 1

Data Collection Process and Information

Data Type	Data Information
Department Meeting 1	Observation
Interview Set 1	One-on-one semi-structured
Relevant Documents	Included the following artifacts: graded assignments, syllabi, and rubrics
Department Meeting 2	Observation
Focus Group 1	Semi-structured
Interview Set 2	One-on-one semi-structured
Focus Group 2	Semi-structured
Interview Set 3	One-on-one semi-structured
Focus Group 3	Semi-structured

Note: In this table, the order that the data was collected in can be inferred by reading the table from top to bottom. The one exception is that relevant documents were collected during the first set of interviews.

To determine ideal participants for the interviews, I sent out a preliminary survey. I used this survey to infer if teachers had experienced identity friction as a result of assigning grades. Before the start of the first interview, I reviewed the informed consent form with the participants. I asked participants if they had any questions about the informed consent form after reviewing each topic. Throughout the data collection and analysis process, I used pseudonyms, either self-selected or chosen by me if a participant did not have a preference, for the participants in order to protect confidentiality.

The interviews were recorded, with participants' consent to have a detailed transcript for analysis. I also took notes during the interviews. These notes served as reminders to revisit topics and ask follow-up questions; they also allowed me to record the participant's non-verbal communication. I also collected data from documentary artifacts such as graded assessments, rubrics, and syllabi. I asked that teachers provide these materials one week before the interview, as I did not necessarily have access. I asked that any work that had identifiable student data be scrubbed of those markers before I collected it for analysis. I used these documents as potential talking points during the first interview. For example, I asked participants to show me a graded assignment and walk me through their thinking.

The observations of the department meetings also served as a data source to gain understanding about the relationship participants had with one another. I also acquired

knowledge about district/department grading policies during meetings. Data collected from the two meetings I attended included my field notes and observations and a recording of the meetings for which I was given departmental consent. I transcribed the recording for future analysis.

The focus groups also provided data. Prior to focus groups, I developed questions that asked participants to consider common themes that arose during the interviews (see Appendix B for a list of the focus group questions). I informed participants about topics for each focus group before they participated in them. I recorded the focus groups so that I could transcribe the group's discussion.

I recorded the data collection logistics in a data accounting log (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2020) to ensure that my records stayed accurate. I followed a similar process with the documentary artifacts and analytic memos. Interviews were one-on-one and semi-structured to be responsive to participants while retaining a plan that addressed key concepts. The interview schedule served only as a guide. I did not strictly follow the question order if a participant responded to a topic before a question was directly asked or was confused about a question (see Appendix A for a list of the interview questions). Given my focus on narrative, I designed some of the questions to encourage participants to share their narratives. Given the traditional grading system as the site of identity friction for my research, I borrowed from phenomenological studies because both grading and the dissonance that grading causes some teachers act as phenomena. The questions asked of participants highlighted key aspects of the theoretical framework: identity and agency, figured worlds and figured identities, power structures, narratives, positioning,

discourse and dialogism. If lamination of positioning had occurred for participants, I suspected that I would also be able to use positioning theory to analyze the data from interviews.

Because interview studies were the primary methodology of this study, I transcribed entire interviews. Interview transcription predominantly involved a preservationist approach, which does not change the participant's language. Still, the transcription did have elements of the standardized approach, which is an approach that does change the participant's language if the change will allow for easier comprehension (Weiss, 1994). This transcription technique honored the participant's words while eliminating any part that muddled the meaning. After I completed the transcription, participants reviewed the transcription before I moved forward to organizing the data. This was one of the times during the research process that I conducted a member check to strengthen the potential findings' validity.

For the observations and focus groups, I listened to the entire observation or focus group recording and marked potentially relevant points to further analyze. I wrote analytic memos about my selection of pertinent moments of the transcript, then I listened to the observation or focus group recording a second time to check if I agreed with the choices I had made about relevant moments in the tape. If there was a lack of alignment between my first and second choices, I repeated the process until I came to an agreement. When I began my analysis, I revisited the full recording if I decided I did not have adequate data to interpret value or narrative codes.

After the transcription of the interview was approved by the participants, multiple copies of the transcript were made for backup and future analysis. One copy was left unmarked, and a backup of this version was kept in case of loss. I created another copy to devise participant profiles. A participant profile is constructed by taking the participant's words and creating a cohesive narrative (Seidman, 2019). The researcher adds little to no text to the participant profile and develops a cohesive narrative about the participant's identity. I created a third copy to be coded in three different coding schemes (which will be further explained in the data analysis section of this chapter).

To maintain the security of data, I stored all data on a secure cloud drive. After five years at the research project's culmination and any other publications associated with the research, I will destroy data from the interviews.

Data Analyses

I included a brief overview of the data analysis procedures in the data collection procedures section, and I will outline more of the procedures below. Even though the data collection section in this study appears before the analysis, it is worth noting that data collection and analysis occurred simultaneously (Maxwell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2020). After I made multiple copies of the interview transcripts, focus group transcripts, and department meeting transcripts, the first stage of analysis began with In Vivo, value, and narrative coding (Saldaña, 2016). For each type of coding, I looked at chunks of the data and attempted to pull out codes that appeared and were relevant to the focus. To avoid assuming the data had only one interpretation, I made several attempts at parsing through data for possible codes. Some codes were

modified, added, or deleted during this part of the process to avoid redundancies and irrelevancies.

The first level of coding that I did involved In Vivo coding. This type of coding was used because I wanted to honor the participants' voices. Given the focus on identity, it felt appropriate to highlight the participant-created words and phrases they used without altering them. In Vivo coding also offered me an opportunity to get a feel for the data. In Vivo coding began my thought process around potential themes in the data as well.

The value coding process was divided into three parts. This is because "values coding is the application of codes to qualitative data that reflect a participant's values, attitudes, and belief, representing his or her perspectives or worldview" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 167). When I searched for value codes in the transcripts, I focused on concepts, ideas, structures, or ideals that were prized and regarded as practices to uphold by participants. These codes were like moral constructs for what mattered to them as educators. The attitude codes focused on how participants felt about themselves or an experience. These were often emotional states they identified as experiencing. Belief codes are almost a fusion of values and attitude codes as they focused on what participants believed to be true. These codes were often observations about what they thought should happen or were interpretations of what was happening in a situation.

Narrative coding was an appropriate type of coding for this study because looking at the data through this lens offered an opportunity to "understand its storied, structured forms, and to potentially create a richer aesthetic through a retelling" (Saldaña, 2016, p.

195). In addition, the story becomes a hint about the narrator's identity. There are many different narrative schemes, and I selected two that I believed would focus on identity and figured worlds/identities, and positionality. The first scheme I selected was character type because character types exist in the lived, literary, and figured worlds. For instance, hero stereotypes exist in all three worlds because The Hero appears frequently in media but also appears in the lived world as a person who does heroic things. These qualities of character type are remarkably similar to the concept of identity and figured identity in that our understanding of characters comes from these three different worlds, and their presentations are reflexive and dynamic. The character types that I used for this study were influenced by my perceptions of the lived, literary, and figured world. Given that I am the instrument of analysis, my positionality and cultural experiences shaped how I defined each type within this study. I have included Table 2 below to illustrate how I defined each character type within this study.

Table 2*Character Type Descriptions*

Teammate	Taskmaster	Hero	Overachiever	Peacekeeper
A person who considers the needs of the group even if they have to compromise their ideas	A person whose focus is on completing tasks with efficiency and organization	A person who rescues a person (literally or figuratively) from a bad situation and makes the situation better	A person who goes above and beyond the expectations that are given to them for any given task	A person whose goal is to make sure that opposing parties/people navigate working together with minimal conflict
Professional	Lamb	Sheriff	Traditionalist	Mentor
A person who has extensive knowledge and expertise in a subject and deserves respect from the communities they serve	A person who is deliberately sacrificed for the benefit of others	A person whose job and responsibility revolves around making sure that everyone follows the rules because the rules help keep the community functioning and safe	A person who upholds the practices and beliefs that are dominant (due to being used over a long time period) in a community	A person who is trusted with personal or sensitive information in order to guide individuals through a challenging situation
Learner	Revolutionary	Newbie	Worker	Advocate
A person who prizes knowledge and the process of acquiring knowledge as a goal	A person who willingly goes against the expectations of a community even if it makes them vulnerable within that community	A person that is new to a community and has yet to understand the practices and ideas that are expectations within that community	A person whose goal is to follow the expectations of their job even if it means that they suffer to meet expectations	A person who supports or promotes the cause of a person or group who has less power in the community compared to the dominant group

Related to character types is the narrative scheme of story type. There are different interpretations of the number of story types, and for the purposes of this study I selected Booker's (2004) seven story types (plus one additional type that is sometimes considered the eighth type) because they were specific enough to differentiate the different figured worlds the participants created through their narratives, but broad enough to apply to a variety of stories. Through this scheme, I also thought that if I imagined how the story participant's might view themselves I would have an additional way to understand how they interacted with ideas and people. The types I included were: comedy, mystery, overcoming the monster, quest, rebellion against the one, rebirth, tragedy, and voyage and return. When I coded comedies, I looked for stories in which some kind of confusion was resolved before the conclusion. Coding for mysteries, I looked for stories in which the main character, often an outsider, needed to uncover the truth behind a puzzling situation. Coding for overcoming the monster involved identifying stories that had a protagonist defeat an evil to bring balance to a situation. When I coded a quest, I looked for a hero with a team in search of something while facing challenges. Coding for rebellion against the one, I looked for a hero like character who rebels against extremely powerful forces, and often must sacrifice themselves for the greater good. In rebirth narratives, I focused on stories that had the central character reflect on their dark past only to find redemption through reflection. In a tragedy, I coded any story in which people did not achieve their goals which was sometimes due to unrealistic goals or egos. When I coded for voyage and return stories, I looked for characters that were dropped into unfamiliar situations and worked toward their normal

life. The rags to riches story type was not applicable and therefore was omitted from the analysis. I have included Table 3 below to further illustrate how I defined each story type in this study.

Table 3

Story Type Descriptions

Comedy	Mystery	Overcoming the Monster	Quest
Community is divided and must be reunited; has a happy ending	An outsider witnesses something bad and must figure out what went wrong	The hero must defeat the threatening monster in the community	A hero goes on a journey to gather something of value that is hard to find
Rebellion Against the One	Rebirth	Tragedy	Voyage and Return
A hero rebels against an all-powerful villain and takes the villain's power away	A misguided character goes through a change, renewal, or transformation; has a happy ending	A character makes a mistake that cannot be fixed; does not have a happy ending	A hero goes on a journey to an unknown place that seems great, only to realize it is not, and much find a way to get home

I thought using three coding schemes, In Vivo, value, and narrative would give me one way to triangulate themes if they occurred across coding schemes. I also thought that using three different coding schemes would offer a deeper understanding of relevant themes. In addition, data that was heavily coded with all coding schemes was often further analyzed using discourse analysis tools.

Simultaneously during this process, I wrote analytic memos about my first impressions of the codes. Analytic memos served a variety of functions for my data

analysis. The first stage of analytic memos predominantly comprised reflections about the data in hopes of synthesizing some of the data (Maxwell, 2013; Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2020). Each memo was dated and titled and categorized by themes. During this part of the analysis, several emergent themes arose that were connected to the literature I had reviewed around the topics. These themes are listed in an upcoming table (table 1).

At the same time as the initial theme analysis, I created participant profiles from the interview transcripts to provide another view of the data. After each participant profile was created, I wrote an analytic memo. The analytic memo process at this stage in my analysis followed a similar pattern to the memos I created during the initial coding of the data.

This first stage also used data from documentary artifacts (syllabi, graded assignments, rubrics, district/department grading policies). Because the documents were used during the interview to promote discussion, I did not code them separately from the interview transcripts. I avoided coding the artifacts as separate data sources because the relevant information from them was embedded in the interview transcripts.

After this first level of analysis, I began the second level of analysis: pattern coding. I looked for patterns from the themes from the participant profiles, observations and field notes, interviews, and focus groups. I wrote analytic memos during this part of the process as well. This stage was about finding ways to organize the data. I therefore eliminated themes that were not useful to the data set due to redundancy or irrelevance. I made a note of patterns within texts and across texts as well. One way I chose to analyze my data was by creating a meta-matrix of the patterns. This process helped me develop

thoughts about the data that I did not see in a narrative textual presentation (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2020). I also created a cognitive network of each participant's values, beliefs, attitude, character type, and story type to help me look at the data from a different perspective (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2020).

For the third stage of analysis, I used Gee's discourse analysis tools (2014a, 2014b). Gee created 28 tools for analyzing discourse. Each tool is a set of specific questions that a researcher would ask about the data. Gee's tools should be selected based on what a researcher hopes to understand about the data. I wrote analytic memos after the final analysis stage as well. All the analytic memos created during this process were also organized similarly to earlier memos and were used as a source to check for consistency in my interpretations of the data.

I used the following specific discourse tools: Discourse Analytic #4 (Subject Tool); Discourse Analytic Tool # 7 (Doing and Not Just Saying Tool); Discourse Analytic Tool # 16 (Identities Building Tool); Discourse Analytic Tool #26 (Figured World Tool); Discourse Analytic Tool #28 (The Big C Conversation Tool). I selected these five discourse tools because of their relevance to theoretical constructs from the literature review and their suggested applications. Gee categorized each discourse tool according to four units (Language and Context; Saying, Doing, and Designing; Building Things in the World; Theoretical Tools). Gee's classification of each tool helped me understand their application.

Gee categorized the Subject Tool in the Language and Context unit. The tools Gee created in this unit emphasized that language cannot be interpreted outside of its

context. A researcher would use the Subject Tool if they wanted to focus on analyzing why speakers had selected their subjects and what they were saying about them. I selected this tool because I wanted to understand why participants would present certain subjects over others; I felt this might be a clue for me to understand why they foregrounded parts of their identity over others.

Gee categorized the Doing and Not Just Saying Tool in the Saying, Doing, and Designing unit. The tools Gee created in this unit were meant to uncover not only the meaning of the language used by individuals, but also the speaker's purpose for saying particular words and phrases. To apply the The Doing and Not Just Saying Tool, the researcher should ask what was being said by the speaker, but also what was trying to be accomplished by the speaker. I felt that this tool would help me understand positioning attempts (both successful and rejected) made by the participants of this study.

Gee categorized the Identity Building Tool in the Building Things in the World Unit. The tools Gee designed in this unit were meant to help researchers understand the reflexive relationship between language and context. The purpose of using the Identity Building Tool is to understand how individuals use language to build identities for themselves in a given context. My focus on understanding teachers' identity and agency within the context of grading helped me to select this tool.

Gee categorized the Figured World Tool in the Theoretical Tools unit. The tools Gee organized in this unit focused on "how language ties to the world and to culture" and "how different styles or varieties of using language work to allow humans to carry out different types of social work and enact different socially significant, socially-situated

identities” (Gee, 2014b, p. 156). When using these tools, the researcher examines the significance of interactions in a context by focusing on how we use language to build constructs (specific theories). Specifically, a researcher might use the Figured World Tool to focus on how people can use language to understand the figured worlds that individuals create as a result of our social interactions within specific contexts. I selected this tool because I wanted to understand how figured worlds imagined by participants and how they influenced their figured identities.

The last tool I selected was also part of the Gee’s Theoretical Tools unit. Like the Figured World Tool, I used the Big C Conversation Tool to focus on how language is a tool to help individuals enact identities that are socially constructed. Using this tool, researchers examine the discourse and ask what issues or debates are assumed by the individual's use of language. I selected this tool because of the complex grading context of this study. There are multiple opinions about grading and I wanted to be able to locate these debates within the participants’ speech. To help summarize the unit and purpose of each of Gee’s discourse tools that I used in this study, I included Table 4 below. Table 4 also includes a list of questions that a researcher would ask to help analyze the data.

Table 4*Overview of Gee's Discourse Tools*

Name of Gee's Tool	Unit of Tool	Analysis Focus of Tool	Question Set of Tool
#4: Subject Tool	Language and Context Unit	Analysis of why speakers have selected their subjects and what they are saying about them	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Why have speakers chosen the subject/topic? - What are they saying about the subject? - How could they have made another subject choice? - Why did they not? - Why are they organizing the info. in terms of subjects and predicates?
#7: Doing and Not Just Saying Tool	Saying, Doing, and Designing Unit	Analysis of the meaning of the language used and the speaker's purpose for saying particular words and phrases	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What is the speaker saying? - What is the speaker trying to do? - Is the speaker trying to say and do more than one thing?
#16 Identities Building Tool	Building Things in the World Unit	Analysis of how individuals use language to build identities for themselves in a given context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What socially recognizable identity is the speaker trying to enact or get others to recognize? - How does the speaker treat other people's identities? - How is the speaker positioning others? - What identities is the speaker inviting others to take up?

Table 4 (continued).

#26: Figured World Tool	Theoretical Tools Unit	Analysis of how language is used to create figured worlds within specific contexts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What typical stories or figured worlds do the words and phrases of the communication assume and invite listeners to assume? - What participants, activities, ways of interacting, forms of language, people, and institutions, as well as values, are in the presented figured worlds?
#28: The Big C Conversation Tool	Theoretical Tools Unit	Analysis of the issues or debates that are assumed by the individuals' use of language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What does the speaker assume the listener or hearer knows about the issues, sides, debates, and claims in the communication? - Can the words be seen as carrying out a historical or widely known debate or discussion between or among discourse?

Each discourse tool served a specific purpose tied to the research questions.

These tools were used as individual instruments after I conducted my coding of the data. I used data that was heavily coded (meaning multiple levels of coding were applied) as a justification of when to conduct a critical discourse analysis of the text. I have included Table 5 below to justify my selection of Gee's Discourse Analytic Tools.

Table 5*Justification of Gee's Discourse Analytic Tools*

Gee's Discourse Analytic Tool	Research Question	Theoretical Concept	Data Source
# 4: Subject Tool	Research Question 3	Positionality, Identity	Interviews, Focus Groups
# 7: Doing and Not Just Saying	Research Question 2	Positioning Dialogism Discourse Figured Worlds	Interviews, Focus Groups, Department Meetings
# 16: Identities Building Tool	Research Questions 1, 2, & 3	Identity, Agency, Figured Worlds, Figured Identities, Narratives, Positioning, Discourse, Dialogism	Interviews, Focus Groups
#26: Figured World Tool	Research Questions 1, 2, & 3	Identity, Agency, Figured Worlds, Figured Identities, Narratives, Positioning, Discourse, Dialogism	Interviews, Focus Groups
#28: The Big C Conversation	Research Question 1	Identity Narrative Figured World	Interviews, Focus Groups, Department Meetings

With this study design, I considered multiple concerns around the validity or trustworthiness of the analysis. To address some of those concerns, I used certain procedures to enhance my credibility as a researcher. I integrated some of these credibility checks into the data collection and analysis section of this chapter, such as

transcribing each interview in its entirety and confirming the transcription before moving forward with the analysis. Other considerations were blended into the chapter, such as the use of multiple types of data such as observations and field notes, interview transcripts, focus group transcripts, participant profiles, discourse analysis, and analytic memos. The inclusion of multiple levels and types of analysis also strengthened the trustworthiness of the findings. In addition, the application of multiple theoretical frameworks strengthened the trustworthiness of the findings. Table 6 below provides the overall design of this study to aid in conceptualizing key structural elements of my design.

Table 6

Overview of Research Design

<i>What do I need to know (Research Questions)?</i>	
RQ1	How are identity and agency affected by the assignment of traditional grades in a U.S. high school?
RQ2	How does the experience of identity friction arise for teachers in the practice of assigning traditional grades in a U.S. high school?
RQ3	How do teachers' use of strategies of active and passive resistance against traditional grading practices shape their identities and agency? And how do teachers' identities and agency shape the use of strategies of active and passive resistance against traditional grading practices?
<i>Why do I need to know this (Goals)?</i> <i>I = Intellectual goal</i> <i>P = Practical goal</i>	
RQ1	I: To understand how assigning grades shapes teacher identity and agency
	P: To help teachers articulate their experiences as graders and to see the impact of that on their identities and agency
RQ2	I: To understand how grading policy and ideology is shaped by cultural, social, and political forces

Table 6 (continued).

	P: To help open a dialogue about grading practices and the friction resulting from them amongst teachers
RQ3	I: To illustrate the impact active and passive resistance against traditional grading has on teacher identity and agency
	P: To collect ideas from other teachers about active and passive resistance against traditional grading practices
<i>What kind of data will answer these questions (Methods)?</i>	
RQ1	Interview: structured and open-ended; documentary artifacts (graded assessments, syllabuses, rubrics); participant profiles; focus groups
RQ2	Interview: structured and open-ended; analytic memos; district/department grading policies documents, focus groups; department meetings
RQ3	Interview: structured and open-ended; analytic memos; department meetings
<i>Collection and analysis plans</i>	
RQ1	Transcript of interview; Analytic Memos; Discourse Analytic Tool #28 (The Big C Conversation); Discourse Analytic Tool # 16 (Identities Building Tool); Discourse Analytic Tool #26 (Figured World Tool); Discourse Analytic Tool # 7 (Doing and Not Just Saying) to compare and contrast teacher's oral discourse (interview) to teacher's written discourse (graded documents, rubrics, syllabuses)
RQ2	Transcript of interview; Analytic Memos; Discourse Analytic Tool #28 (The Big C Conversation); Discourse Analytic Tool # 16 (Identities Building Tool); Discourse Analytic Tool #26 (Figured World Tool); Discourse Analytic Tool # 7 (Doing and Not Just Saying)
RQ3	Transcript of interview; Analytic Memos; Discourse Analytic #4 (Subject Tool) to analyze positioning of teacher; Discourse Analytic Tool # 16 (Identities Building Tool); Discourse Analytic Tool #26 (Figured World Tool) transcripts of focus groups and interviews
<i>Potential Alternative Explanations (Validity Threats)</i>	

Table 6 (continued).

RQ1	Researcher bias influencing collection and/or interpretation of data; interview questions that lead the participant; interviewer's feedback that overly affirms participants' responses; not enough time/energy spent on building an authentic relationship with participants
RQ2	Rapport not established with participant to encourage sharing vulnerable information; interview questions that are not sensitive to the topics; bias analysis of data that does not explore alternative ideas; participants may not authentically voice concern about grading system
RQ3	Teachers potentially not disclosing acts of resistance out of fear of exposure; interview questions that make the participant feel judged about a lack of or abundance of resistance practices
<i>Methods to Investigate Alternative Explanations</i>	
RQ1	Explanation of biases and assumptions of researcher (positionality statement and analytic memos); Having participants view transcripts and interpretations; linguistic detail in transcript and memos; agreement from participants of interpretations of data; Usage of follow up questions to help develop a relationship of trust; Having participants "talk" through processes with actual documents as references
RQ2	Looking for convergence of ideas using different analysis methods and discourse tools; linguistic detail in transcript and memos
RQ3	Usage of pseudonyms for participants; linguistic detail in transcript and memos; recognition of bias in interpretation of data; coverage of predictable concepts appearing in data; triangulation (theories); Variation in school sites

In this chapter, I provided an overview of the methodology (interview study influenced by principles of narrative inquiry and critical discourse analysis) I used for this study. I felt that interviews would be an ideal way to learn about participants' identities and agencies because semi-structured interviews provide opportunities for individuals to share narratives. Incorporating elements of critical discourse analysis provided me with another lens to understand the impact of assigning traditional grades on

teacher identity and agency. I included a section that addressed my positionality as my perspective shaped how I collected and analyzed the data. The primary source of data that I collected for this interview study included interviews, focus groups, and department observations. I then coded the data using three different coding schemes before conducting a critical discourse analysis on portions of the data. This research design provided me a purposeful way to address my research questions. In the next chapter, I will present my findings from this.

Chapter 4 Findings and Discussion

Introduction

Working as employees in U.S. high schools, teachers are given directives about job expectations. To a certain degree, a level of basic compliance is suggested, directly or indirectly, that teachers must abide by to maintain employment. Teachers in Oregon have experienced pressure to adhere to expectations set by administrations' perception of how various initiatives (like the Every Student Succeeds Act and the 9th Grade Success Network) should be implemented in schools. One expectation of teachers is the assignment of student grades. Teachers' assignments of grades to student work has the potential to impact students' academic opportunities (Kerr, Colangelo, & Gaeth, 1988; Rosenbaum, 2001) and their ability to see themselves as capable learners (Guskey, 1994; Inman Olewski & Powell, 2018). Teachers have knowledge of and experience with the impact of grades on students, and therefore may experience identity friction, a term I use to describe the ongoing feeling of dissonance caused by carrying out institutional directives that may not align with teachers' identity and agency. Taken together, the frequency with which teachers grade student work and the lack of research on the identity friction caused by the assignment of grades, suggest that there is a need to explore this problem space.

In this study, I interviewed six high school English teachers in a comprehensive public high school in the Pacific Northwest. I selected Walker High School for the site of this study because Walker was evaluated as a school that performed below the state average (2019 Oregon School Performance Ratings). Additionally, because I believe

grading is a construct that is grounded in global north ideology, I wanted to understand teacher identity and agency in the context of assigning grades to a racially-diverse student population. In addition to interviews, focus groups were conducted as well as observations of department meetings.

I addressed the following research questions through this study:

1. What impact does the assignment of traditional grades in a U.S. high school have on teacher identity and agency?
2. How does the experience of identity friction arise for teachers in the practice of assigning traditional grades in a U.S. high school?
3. For teachers who resist, how do teachers' use of strategies of active and passive resistance against traditional grading practices shape their identities and agency? And how do teachers' identities and agency shape the use of strategies of active and passive resistance to traditional grading practices?

In this chapter, I present the findings from the analysis, the interpretation of the findings, and the limitations of the study.

Presentation of the Findings

In the next section of this chapter, I present the profiles of the six interview participants of the study. In each profile, I highlight the character and story types most prominent in the data relevant to that participant to illustrate participant identities as teachers. I also include a discussion of the values, beliefs, and attitudes that are central to each participant's teacher identity (Seidman, 2019). Rather than rely solely on participants' own words to construct these profiles (Seidman, 2019), I incorporated some

components of my analysis along with participants' words and constructed thorough participant profiles. These elaborated profiles serve as a foundation to support the reader's understanding of the thematic concepts discussed in later sections.

Following the participant profiles I present my interpretations of the data and discuss how the themes I identified in my analysis connect to the research questions and key concepts. To do so, I present two overarching thematic concepts and elaborate on each through multiple sub-sections. The first thematic concept addresses both research question one and research question two. The second thematic concept addresses the third research question.

The findings from the discourse analyses are woven into the discussions of the thematic concepts one and two findings. Throughout the chapter, I include a variety of visual supports to highlight themes and to offer supplemental explanations of the findings.

The constructs of figured worlds and identities, positional identities, dialogism, narrative, and discourse were considered throughout the qualitative analysis (coding and analytic memo writing) and the discourse analysis.

Participant Profiles

Ava. Ava was a white, cis-gendered female in her early 40s who had been teaching for approximately 16 years at the time of the study. Ava grew up in the Pacific Northwest and attended public schools during her K-12 experience. She attended a private college for her BA in education. She knew in middle school that she wanted to be a teacher as a result of having one teacher she viewed as horrible and another teacher she

viewed as inspirational. Prior to deciding that she wanted to be a teacher, Ava “played” teacher and taught Sunday School. As a student, Ava had clear memories of actions that she viewed as resulting from positive teaching decisions and harmful teaching decisions. She also admitted to being a perfectionist as a student, and shared the influence of her perfectionist tendencies as a child as a reflection point in her grading systems.

Ava has taught at Walker for three years. Ava started working at Walker during the middle of the school year to cover a friend’s maternity leave. When a position opened the following year, she did not hesitate to apply and accept the teaching position. Ava has taught all over the United States. Ava became a teacher immediately after graduating from college at 21. Ava started her teaching career in Hawaii due to there being a shortage of open jobs in the Pacific Northwest. After teaching in Hawaii, she taught in Denver at a school that she labeled as affluent. Ava then moved to Scotland for a year, taking a break from teaching, but eventually moved back to the Pacific Northwest, her hometown, to teach.

Ava has worked in traditional public school settings as well as alternative schools. She has taught collegiately as well. Ava shared things that she enjoyed about teaching in all of the settings that she has worked, as well as frustrations about working in each of those settings.

Ava valued relationships with her students and colleagues and this seems to be a driving force in the work she does as a teacher. Ava preferred to be assigned classes that have working teacher teams as opposed to stand alone classes. Ava talked about her colleagues like they are her friends, but only if they shared similar philosophical beliefs

about education. As an English teacher, Ava believed that she was meant to help students learn how to better read, write, speak and listen, but she also wanted to provide students with the opportunity to heal if they were experiencing trauma or barriers in their lives. Ava explained that her experiences as an alternative school teacher shifted her to have a more holistic view of students and their needs.

In terms of character types, Ava most commonly presented herself as a mentor. The other character types she frequently presented were the revolutionary, the learner, and the lamb. In terms of story types, Ava narrated stories of tragedy most frequently, followed by comedy and then the voyage and return.

David. David was a white, gay cis-gendered woman in her mid-forties who had worked in education for approximately 15 years at the time of the study. David grew up in the Bay Area and attended private Catholic schools during her K-8 years and then public schools during her high school years. David shared that she loved reading and helping tutor her friends when she was a student. She described herself as “good” at school. According to David, being a “good” student meant that learning came to her easily and she received higher grades than the majority of her peers. Like Ava, David described one teacher she thought was terrible and one teacher she thought was incredible as being influences on her decision to be a teacher. These two teachers also became models of what to be like and what not to be like as a teacher.

David did not enter the teaching profession directly after college, and instead worked in educational jobs that did not require teaching licenses. David felt that she did not have enough “gravitas to be like a teacher-teacher” at 22, and postponed acquiring a

teaching license until after about six years of working for AmeriCorps and JobCorps. David ultimately decided to leave this job because she felt she was being asked to do tasks that were inappropriate for her to facilitate, tasks like teaching a diversity class, given her lack of educational training and experience.

David's first years in teaching were spent in public schools, both middle and high school, as both a Special Education teacher and an ELA teacher. As a licensed Special Education teacher and an English teacher, she felt that she had a unique insight and skill set that differentiated her from other English teachers. At one school, David taught a prescribed reading intervention class, Read 180. David was very successful at teaching this class as evidenced by her students achieving more growth on the program's outcomes than the program advertises as typical for students who participate. David was even called into a meeting with the superintendent to explain why she was so successful. David felt that her success was directly related to her lack of fidelity to following the program. Even though David was viewed as successful at teaching this class, she left this district because she did not want to teach only Special Education classes for the rest of her teaching career.

When David left her Special Education teaching position, it was during the economic recession. There were not a lot of jobs for English teachers, so that is how she started working at a private Catholic high school. At first David felt stifled by the structure she considered outdated and patriarchal, but she eventually found that she was able to appreciate the position because she was happy to be working with kids. During David's time at this school, she entered a professional crisis because the archdiocese

mandated that gay teachers adhere to a “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy. As an openly gay woman, and one who just prior had publicly announced her engagement, she felt conflicted about working at a school in which she had to hide part of her identity. This initially was a point of stress for David, but ultimately led to David feeling free to teach the way that she wanted because she could be fired at any point.

It was after this experience that David was hired as a teacher at Walker. David had been at Walker for three years. David expressed appreciation for being able to teach a race and social justice class that partners with a local university.

Throughout the interviews, focus groups and department meetings, David expressed a passion for helping students find their voice and their place in the world. Identity was a focal point for much of the work that David does as a teacher. Change was also a key value for David as ideas about how to change schools and make them better was a common thread for David across the data.

David had the most variation in terms of story type and she created narratives that adhered to the principles of comedies, mysteries, overcoming the monster tales, quests, rebellion against the one stories, and tragedies. Her most prominently used story type was the tragedy, followed by rebellion against the one and comedies, which were equal in proportion for the next common theme. In terms of character types, David presented herself as a revolutionary, mentor, and hero.

Mary. Mary was a white, cis-gendered woman in her late 30s who had been teaching for 15 years when data were collected. Mary grew up in Arizona and the Pacific Northwest and attended public schools throughout her K-12 years. Mary has taught both

at the high school and the college level. As an undergraduate, Mary studied psychology at a large Oregon university. Mary's cousin had been incarcerated as a youth and this experience was a catalyst for her to work in youth intervention. However, after an internship at a juvenile detention center she became excited about the possibility of working in youth prevention programs like education. Given her passion for being a camp counselor, her interest in coaching basketball, and her joy around being in community, becoming a teacher felt like an ideal job for her. Early in her career, Mary thought that all teachers became teachers for social justice reasons like her own.

Mary's experiences as a student had an impact on the way that she currently grades her students and also how she interacts with students about their grades. Mary shared that she was part of a pilot program as a freshman that eliminated grades; however, this program was dismantled before the end of the school year, so students were given grades retroactively. She struggled with this decision because she felt it was unfair. This grading experience was not the only experience that she was frustrated by as a student. She felt that grading created a "point of contention" between herself and her teachers. These experiences have helped her make decisions about her grading systems.

Mary started teaching at Walker because individuals she met through her involvement in the Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum Committee informed her about the job opportunity at Walker. The people she met while working on this committee shared the same view that the focus of curriculum in an English classroom should be skills-based and not content-based. Essentially, Mary felt that English teachers should build a curriculum that helps students become stronger readers and writers rather than students

who are able to identify facts about different literary movements. When she was given the opportunity to work with like-minded individuals at a school, she applied, was hired, and has been at Walker for the past four years.

Mary valued community, collaboration, and questioning educational practices she calls traditional. Mary also wanted to help students become advocates for the things that they feel they need to be successful and/or deserve to have as students in an educational setting.

Mary's narratives were most frequently presented as quests. She also had a high occurrence of mysteries and tragedies. The character types in which she most frequently presented herself were the mentor, revolutionary, and the learner. Given the friendship that she had with David in real life, I was not surprised to see that the character types that Mary and David presented were similar.

Jessica. Jessica was a white, cis-gendered female in her early 30s who at the time of this study had been teaching for nine years. Jessica grew up in the Bay Area and has lived in the Pacific Northwest for almost three years. Jessica has taught in alternative and comprehensive public high schools. She also taught ESL in South Korea for two years; however, she did not consider that experience as a legitimate teaching position because, according to her, she was not really teaching.

Even though Jessica had worked in educational settings since 2015, she had not only worked as a teacher. She took one year off to work for JobCorps because she was unsure about continuing her career as a teacher. It was during this year away from being a

classroom teacher that she realized that she had “a lot of strengths that [she] brings to teaching” and decided to return to teaching.

Jessica’s experiences as a student teacher were challenging, and at multiple points throughout her program she questioned if she would continue with the program. Throughout her interviews, Jessica spoke about frustrations with her teaching school experience, and how she felt it did not actually prepare her for being a teacher, and instead involved completing time-consuming, but ultimately lackluster tasks.

For Jessica, the K-12 experience was easy because she did not have to expend much effort to do well enough to meet graduation requirements. Jessica shared that she did not have grades that were considered academically competitive, and that this did not bother her as a high school student. Grades were not a motivating factor for her as a student. However, when she attended community college she was put on academic probation because of low grades, and this was the first time she felt that grades did matter because there was a financial cost to not receiving high enough grades to stay in school.

Jessica had worked at Walker for two years where she currently taught English classes and the Leadership class. During her first year at Walker she was the Dean of Students, a position that was ultimately cut, which was a relief for her. She realized that she did not want to work in school administration because her passion for education involved being in the classroom with students.

As a teacher Jessica emphasized the importance of student personal and emotional growth. The moments she shared as successes as a teacher did not involve academic

growth. Jessica valued supportive learning structures for students and working with her colleagues to find creative ways to assist students in reaching their goals.

Most of Jessica's narratives were presented as tragedies, as was the case for many of the participants. A small percentage of Jessica's narratives were voyage and return tales. Given that Jessica was the only participant who temporarily left the profession, it made logical sense that voyage and return tales would arise in her transcripts. As a character, Jessica included herself in narratives as more different character types than did any of the other participants. She showed up in the following roles in almost equal amounts: teammate, newbie, mentor, learner, lamb, and revolutionary.

Matthew. Matthew was an Asian American cis-gendered male in his late 30s who had been teaching for 12 years at the time of this study. Matthew grew up in an affluent community in northern California. Matthew did not know he wanted to become a teacher until halfway through his undergraduate degree at a large public university in California. He majored in Modern Literature, which he felt wasn't a practical pursuit. As a result, he decided to minor in education because he felt it would provide him the opportunity to have a backup career path if he was unsuccessful at finding work with his Modern Literature degree. When he began taking education classes, he quickly became excited by the "equity and social justice slant" of the program, and eventually decided to pursue his teaching degree from a local public university in Oregon.

Matthew did not get support from his family when he decided to pursue teaching. This, in combination with lifelong teachers encouraging him to take a different path, was a challenge that gave him pause about entering the profession. He also had a challenging

time as a student teacher, as his cooperating teacher was not supportive. In addition to the lack of guidance from his cooperating teacher, the school he was placed at as a student teacher was considered “failing” by the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), and therefore students were given the opportunity to go to other schools. As a result, the school population went from about 1200 students to 300. Matthew said that this resulted in an eerie feeling in the building.

Matthew has worked in several public high schools and has been at Walker for two years. During his time at Walker, he left for family leave as well. During most of the interviews and focus groups, Matthew’s infant daughter was on his lap.

As a teacher, Matthew valued the content being rigorous, but only if the teachers paired it with “tenacious” student support. Matthew felt that rigor without support was inequitable. Many of the success stories that Matthew shared revolved around him helping students achieve an academic goal that the student did not think was possible. Matthew also stressed the importance of a strong work ethic to be a teacher. He shared that he learned conversational Spanish because he worked at a school that did not have enough Spanish translators.

Matthew, like many of the other participants, located many of his narratives about teaching in the genre of the tragedy. He also placed his narratives within the quest and comedy categories. In terms of the characters that he attempted to present, the most common were the newbie, mentor and the revolutionary. His second most identified characters were the advocate and the lamb.

Dan. Dan was a white, cis-gendered male in his late 40s who had been teaching for 21 years at the time of the study. Dan grew up in an affluent family in upstate New York and attended only private schools for the entirety of his education. This included a boarding school in high school that he elected to go to because he felt that he did not need to have “the distraction of girls,” so that he could focus on his studies.

In 5th grade, Dan was diagnosed with ADHD. This diagnosis stemmed from Dan struggling in school, and his parents wanting to understand the reasons behind his academic challenges. Dan described that he would have to write a paper five times before he could complete it. Dan shared that his diagnosis caused him emotional distress. Additionally, Dan often felt frustrated in school because he struggled to pay attention in class. He shared that he “never excelled in school.”

In private college, Dan loved taking psychology classes even though he was not doing well academically in those classes. Eventually, he had to drop a psychology class, which led him to purposefully dropping out. He felt this time away gave his brain the time it needed to develop, and when he returned to school he excelled in his classes. It was during this time that he discovered his passion for writing.

After attending private college, Dan knew that he wanted to teach, but felt that he needed to experience more of the world, so he spent 19 months traveling. After this time period, he moved to the Pacific Northwest where he enrolled in a private university’s teaching program. Working as a student teacher at Walker was Dan’s first experience with the public school system. Dan, unlike the other participants in this study, had only ever worked at one school as an English teacher.

Dan felt admiration for his cooperating teacher, and shared that many of his ideas about how to be a teacher came from working with her as a student teacher. Dan's passion for writing is one of the reasons he enjoys being a teacher. When Dan shared his most successful moments as a teacher, he focused on stories in which students wrote papers that he considered to be exceptional.

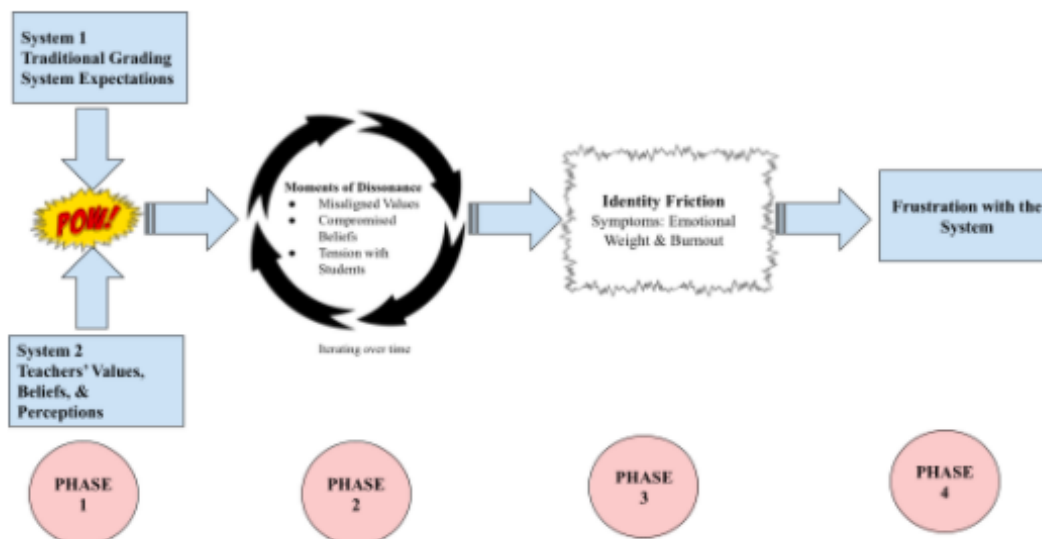
Dan felt that one of his strengths as a teacher is his ability to provide useful feedback, especially on student writing. Dan was also a supporter of using programs like Common Lit because he felt the program provides useful data about a student's reading skills.

The story type that Dan often inhabited were mostly tragedies. Dan also had the most variety in the story types he narrated. He offered narratives that fell into all the narrative types except for rebellion against the one and overcoming the monster. In terms of character types, Dan presented himself most frequently as the revolutionary, the traditionalist, and the mentor.

Thematic Concept 1: Impact of Grading on Identity and Agency

The key finding associated with research question one, "What impact does the assignment of traditional grades in a U.S. high school have on teacher identity and agency?" and research question two, "How does the experience of identity friction arise for teachers in the practice of assigning traditional grades in a U.S. high school?" was that teachers' identity and agency were not unscathed by the assignment of traditional grades. For most of the teachers in this study, the expectations around assigning traditional grades collided with their values, beliefs, and perceptions (teacher identity and

agency). This collision created moments of dissonance for teachers. Dissonance showed up in three ways. One way that dissonance occurred was that some participants felt they had to abandon or minimize their values for the sake of adherence to a grading system. The second way that participants' experienced moments of dissonance was through a compromise in their belief system which often led to performing actions that were out of alignment with how they viewed themselves as educators or how they hoped to be viewed as educators. The third type of dissonance that teachers experienced showed up as conflict with their students. Over time, if these moments of dissonance continued to occur, teachers experienced identity friction. Depending on the severity and frequency of their identity friction, the effects ranged from a mild emotional weight to an extreme burnout. Once teachers experienced identity friction, this ultimately caused them to be frustrated with the system. When teachers felt frustrated by the system, their agency felt restricted. To help illustrate this process, I have included figure 9 below. I will also reference this figure throughout the discussion of the thematic findings.

Figure 9*Impact of Teacher in a Misaligned Grading System*

Note: Phase 1 illustrates the initial conflict that starts the process that results in teachers being frustrated by the grading system. Each system is contained within a solid line box to show how the systems are separate and different. Phase 2 illustrates the dissonant moments that iterate over time if teachers have an initial conflict between the two systems. The dissonant moments are included within the circle with arrows to represent that they iterate over time. Phase 3 illustrates the identity friction that occurs when dissonant moments have continually occurred. The image that represents identity friction is jagged to represent the damage that occurs from the iterations of dissonant moments. Phase 4 illustrates the end of the process which leaves teachers frustrated with the system. The frustration with the system experience is contained in a solid line box to represent the boxed in feeling that teachers have if they go through all four phases. The boxed in feeling that teachers experience causes changes to their agency. The arrows

show the order in which collisions between these two misaligned grading systems can lead to teachers being frustrated with the system.

Direct Results of Clash between Teacher Identity and Grading Expectations

When teachers' values, beliefs and perceptions are not in alignment with the traditional grading system, expectations clash with one another, and teachers experience moments of dissonance. Teachers' values, beliefs, and perceptions are part of their identity and agency; the clash starts a process that figuratively chips away at their identity and agency. These dissonant moments were experienced by participants when they felt their values were in conflict with the grading system expectations. Another way the teachers experienced feelings of dissonance was when they felt they had to compromise their beliefs (which resulted in them performing acts that were not in alignment with their beliefs). The third type of dissonance that teachers experienced was when they had tension with their students. All three of these dissonant moments are included in the Phase 2 section in figure 10. [be sure to be consistent with Phase]

Misaligned Values. Through the interviews, focus groups, and department meeting observations, I created identity profiles for each participant, which are summarized above. One part of each profile was a synthesis of their values as educators. Values are concepts, ideas, structures, or ideals that are considered important to individuals within a particular context. For example, a teacher could value compassion, professionalism, and humor. Values are different from beliefs in that beliefs are ideas about what should happen in a particular context. For example, a teacher might have a belief that educators should not assign homework.

Across all six participants there were shared values such as flexibility, feedback, learning growth, and clear communication. There were also values that were not shared across participants, which I observed most often in the focus groups or the third set of interviews. There were also shared values amongst participants that were interpreted in different ways. Regardless of the range in values and interpretations of values amongst the participants, all participants expressed that grading did not always align with what they viewed as important in education. Essentially, the data suggested that the teachers beliefs, values, and attitudes were at odds with the traditional grading system.

David was one participant who described situations in which she felt her choices as a teacher resulting from grading were imperfect expressions of her values as an educator. David identified as an educator who cared deeply about her students growing as people. For David, emotional growth and social growth were priorities that she embedded within her curriculum and her interactions with students. However, when grading periods were coming to a close, David shifted from being someone who cared about students' growth to a person angered by her students' late submission of work that was required for a passing grade in her class. David fumed about this frustration in the final focus group, and shouted:

Like no! But then I'm like, but did you grow as a person? But, I'm like f*ck you!

I don't care if you grew as a person. You turned in your work three weeks late

like at 4:39 a.m. What are you doing?

The other participants agreed with David's frustration around students turning in late work. They all shared that when work is turned in late, students do not have the

opportunity to grow from it, personally or academically. Dan had not appeared to value personal and emotional growth as much as the other participants because his comments did not reference the personal or emotional growth of students with as much frequency as his peers. Even though he had not shared the same values as the other participants, he was able to validate David's frustration that the goals educators have for students are pushed to the side when final grades are looming.

For Matthew, assigning final grades was a challenging task because he was not sure if the decisions he made for final grades adhered to his value system. Matthew did not like the traditional structure of A-F grades because they served a "gatekeeping function" for students' academic opportunities. Equity was a key value of Matthew's, and yet in one story Matthew spoke about the conflict he felt over assigning one student's final grade. In this situation, Matthew was waiting for a student to complete one assignment to be eligible to pass his class. He had contacted the student and her family by email, phone, and even went to the student's home. In the end, he was unsuccessful at reaching the student and receiving the missing assignment. He wondered if he could "have just fudged it and given her the credit" because the grade was based on "pretty arbitrary markers." In the end, he did not give the student a passing grade; given his comment on the final grade markers being arbitrary this decision seems out of alignment to his value of equity.

When I analyzed this same excerpt in a discourse analysis using the Big C Conversation Tool, I was able to better understand the tension that Matthew experienced. In this dialogue, Matthew was going back and forth between two sides of one debate in

education. This debate is about issues of equity and rigor. Some teachers believe that our systems are not equitable and therefore we should be flexible with our implementation of them. For example, if teachers strictly adhere to the requirements on the six-trait grading rubric for writing, some teachers would say their decision to do so is equitable. These teachers might argue students will be expected to write proficiently (a level determined by the rubric) after high school. When teachers do not grade students on the rubric's scale, students will not be prepared for success post high school. In these teachers' view, being lenient about the grade derived from the rubric does the student a disservice. Other teachers might not view the rubric's criteria as strict guidelines for grading students' writing. These teachers may grade students with more leniency (in terms of adherence to the rubric) than the teachers who strictly followed the rubric criteria. These teachers might argue that the more lenient grading of the rubric is equitable because low grades will limit students' academic opportunities post high school. In this particular situation, this scenario would translate into some educators believing that Matthew should have fudged the final grade and other educators believing that Matthew did the correct thing by not rewarding the student a passing grade when she did not meet expectations. Matthew existed between these two sides, which was why he described it as a "sticky thing" because his values side with the second group, but the culture of traditional grades that he operated within fit better with the other side. To help illustrate how I used Gee's Big C Conversation Tool to gain understanding about the tension Matthew experienced, I have included Table 7 below.

Table 7*#28 The Big C Conversation Tool Discourse Analysis*

#28 The Big C Conversation Tool Questions		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does the speaker assume the listener or hearer knows about the issues, sides, debates, and claims in the communication? • Can the words be seen as carrying out a historical or widely known debate or discussion between or among discourse? 		
Transcript of Interview	Analysis Questions	Analysis
<p>MATTHEW: Ummm...let's see. [pause] Umm... [long pause] Let's see...One I can...I mean I guess I can...these to me are more like personal like made me feel kind of icky things, but I guess I can come up with some correlation to some pedagogical basis of grading implementation¹, so I had I remember I had a student named Peyton at Reynolds, and she was like I mean, she was a pretty solid student² most of the year. You know her attendance wasn't that great. We had decent rapport like you know I kinda had to coax her along, but she generally got through the class first semester. Second semester, she fell off a little bit, but she was doing okay and we came up to the end of the year and she had like...you know I had been...last week of the school year, she had been missing this one assignment that had been keeping her from passing the class³, but because she didn't turn it in and if she had made any kind of effort at all, right, she would have gotten some</p>	<p>¹What does Matthew assume I know about what is considered a reasonable pedagogical basis for implementing a grading system?</p> <p>²What do teachers associate the phrase "solid student" with?</p> <p>³What does Matthew assume I know in regard to the importance of students passing a class? What debate exists amongst educators about how and why students should pass a class?</p>	<p>¹ Matthew assumes that I know that teachers should consider their pedagogy before implementing a grading system. He also assumes that some teachers do not have good pedagogical reasoning behind their grading system implementation.</p> <p>² Teachers associate the phrase "solid student" with a student who attends class all the time. A solid student is respectful in class and works well with others. A solid student also performs at grade level.</p> <p>³ Matthew assumes that I know the pressure that teachers have to pass students, so that graduation</p>

Table 7 (continued).

<p>credit for it and passed the class. But, she didn't do it and I remember I was hounding her all week, all week, all week. And you know, I even...I went to your house. Right? Usually, I do...usually, I'm pretty tenacious hounding kids to get their stuff done, so it was like the last day of school and she blew me off. Like I had called her house; I was bugging her other teachers, like trying to get on her case⁴. I went to her house. I knock on her door. No one answered. And I [pause] suspect that someone was home. But, they didn't answer the door for me. I just remember being so pissed. I was like so, so, so mad. And, you know, you know, I guess as far as taking back to the implementation of grades, I'm thinking here like, well, now based on 30 minutes of work that this student could have done in my class, like she's failed the class and she's not going to get her English credit and she's gonna have to go take summer school or repeat this semester of English like next year's senior year which will...that added complexity will make her school experience more difficult down the road and like yadda, yadda, yadda⁵. But like again these kinds of like arbitrary, you know these pretty arbitrary markers right⁶, like so I don't know like I guess I could have just fudged it and</p>	<p>⁴ What does Matthew assume I know so that I understand that he took extreme measures to contact this student?</p> <p>⁵ What does Matthew suggest is a common conflict for students that do not pass a class? What is he assuming I will infer?</p> <p>⁶ What debate is Matthew pointing to when he uses the phrase "arbitrary markers"?</p>	<p>rates are high. He also assumes I am aware of the different beliefs on the standards teachers follow to help or hinder students from graduation. On one hand, some teachers think that they should uphold expectations, so that only "solid students" graduate. On the other hand, some teachers think we should be flexible because our expectations are arbitrary.</p> <p>⁴ Matthew assumes that I know that the majority of teachers would not have gone to this student's house to help her complete her assignment.</p> <p>⁵ Matthew suggests that students who fail one class are more likely to continue not passing other classes. He also suggests that having to retake a class could be a barrier to graduation. He is assuming I will infer that it is challenging for students to make up credits.</p>
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Table 7 (continued).

<p>given her the credit, but like I guess that wouldn't have felt good either. So that was kind of you know...that was kind of a mental conversation I had. Well, do I just give her the credit you know? And in the end, I ended up not. But, that was kind of again, a sticky thing for me. And then the other one that I'm thinking about is... here at Walker was this kind of thing on the opposite end where I had this student named Eunice last year and she was super high achieving. And uhhh, you read her paper?</p>		<p>⁶ Matthew is suggesting that some teachers think that grades are fake and not valid measurements of student learning, and that other teachers think they are real and valid measurements of student learning.</p>
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Final grades were also a cause for Mary to assign a grade to a student that did not philosophically mesh with what she valued as a teacher. Mary was passionate about students having a space to experiment with writing. She emphasized that students be creative in their writing in her class. One might think that Mary would then implement a grading system that had creative writing as a major component. However, Mary identified that when she started teaching she was more susceptible to not questioning curriculum that was normalized. Creative writing was considered less academic at Mary's first school, and therefore she did not grade any creative writing early in her career. Mary, like many other teachers, did not perceive creative writing as a source to be graded because it was not considered as academically rigorous as other forms of writing. At the time of the study, two of the participants still felt that creative writing was not a

worthwhile form to be calculated into a student's grade. Reflecting back, Mary felt she had made a mistake by not passing a student she thought was a fantastic writer. Mary valued creative writing, and yet through perceptions about what is worthy of being graded, Mary failed the student. A teacher's values were often misaligned because of the pressures teachers faced when adhering to policies for assigning final grades, but a compromise of teacher's beliefs also occurred frequently.

One participant, Dan, had a different relationship with grading than the other participants, and the impact of grading on his identity showed up as a validation rather than a site of dissonance. This is not to say that he did not have misaligned values, but he also gained confidence about who he was as a teacher as a result of operating in a grading system. In certain situations, his identity and agency were not impacted by the practice of assigning grades, but rather the impacts were identity boosting for him. I will discuss this exception in my first thematic finding later in this chapter.

Compromise of Beliefs. Teachers can be moved into compromising their beliefs about how education ought to be when faced with assigning traditional grades in a U.S. high school. Participants in this study had clear ideas about how education should be, and yet all of them made decisions that compromised these beliefs at some point in their careers. These beliefs were part of who they were as educators (identity). For Matthew that compromise came in the form of complacency. Matthew admitted that he was deeply attached to his grading system. He believed that he had created a grading system that minimized harm to students as best it could while still adhering to the perceived expectations of the school and community. However, when he taught AVID during his

first year at Walker, he adopted the school's AVID grading system, and pushed his grading system to the periphery. One belief that Matthew had of what a grade should measure is that work completion without a focus on skill level should not be a significant portion of a student's final grade. However, the grading system that the AVID classes used at Walker did base a substantial amount of the final grade on work completion. Matthew went along with the system because he felt he had to as a new hire.

Another situation in which participants compromised their beliefs was when teachers fell into grading routines that felt commonplace without reflecting on how those routines fit within their belief system. Jessica, like all the other participants, was able to be swept up in the grading routines of what has been commonly done, without being true to what she believed should be a grading practice. Jessica believed that all grading practices should be designed to be responsive to students' circumstances. However, during the 2020-2021 school year, she graded the way that she had earlier in her career because she lost touch with her belief that grades should account for context. Jessica had assigned a large number of assignments during a year that students were impacted by the Coronavirus pandemic. Reflecting back on this, Jessica felt frustrated that she went into auto-pilot mode of assigning a large number of assignments. In her opinion, Jessica was not being responsive to the circumstances of the pandemic. She had compromised a core belief about grading because she did what was always done.

Some of the aspects of grading that felt habitual and normalized to Jessica were also barriers to Ava grading in a way that supported her beliefs behind what components should be measured in a grade. Early in her teaching career, Ava graded, "perceived

effort and like attendance and like participation in class and like all that kind of stuff’ which ran against her belief that assessments of skills should be what comprises a grade. When this moment of the interview was later analyzed using the Doing and Not Just Saying Tool, I gained clarity about Ava’s identity and agency, which helped me have a deeper understanding of how her belief was compromised. I selected the Doing and Not Just Saying Tool because I felt it would help me understand the positioning moves made by the speakers. Using the Doing and Not Just Saying Tool, meant that I was able to ask both what the speaker is attempting to say and the purpose behind them saying it. Using this tool, I was able to see that Ava was saying that she had graded participation and attendance as a teacher in the past. At the same time, she was trying to establish herself as a revolutionary teacher who would never do that now. Throughout the interviews and focus groups, Ava would attempt to present herself as a revolutionary teacher. This example highlighted that Ava was working toward establishing an identity that she desired others to recognize in her, and not something that she only thought of herself. Ava may not have viewed her choice in grading attendance and participation as a compromise of her beliefs at the time she did it; however, ten years later she presented it as such. To help highlight how I came to these understandings about Ava, I have included Table 8 below.

Table 8*#7 Doing and Not Just Saying Tool Discourse Analysis*

#7 Doing and Not Just Saying Tool Questions		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the speaker saying? • What is the speaker trying to do? • Is the speaker trying to say and do more than one thing? 		
Transcript of Interview	Analysis Questions	Analysis
<p>AVA: Umm, I think it's getting more closely aligned to my grading policy than it was especially in the beginning of my teaching career because we did totally like do perceived effort and like attendance and like participation in class and like all that kind of stuff¹. I feel like now it's more focused on growth which is what I think grades and school should be based on². It's like where did you start and then where did you end? Because I also think it's is unfair for kids who are so far behind and still don't catch up to that benchmark. I don't feel like that's fair³. I also don't feel like it's fair that you've got kids who are coming in who are already like nail it the first week of school and don't learn anything all year⁴. So I think that yeah...looking at like a growth model definitely more closely aligns with my teaching philosophy more than just like how can I game the system and get enough points to pass⁵.</p>	<p>¹ What is Ava saying? What is Ava trying to do?</p> <p>² What is Ava saying? What is Ava trying to do?</p> <p>³ What is Ava saying? What is Ava trying to do? What else is Ava saying and trying to do?</p> <p>⁴ What is Ava saying? What is Ava trying to do?</p> <p>⁵ What is Ava saying? What is Ava trying to do?</p>	<p>¹Ava is saying that in the past she used to grade perceived effort and attendance. She is trying to show that she has changed and no longer grades these components.</p> <p>²Ava is saying she calculates grades in a way that rewards students for their growth. She is trying to prove that she is a teacher that cares about grading equitably.</p> <p>³Ava is saying that not all students have the same skill level when they enter school. She is trying to show that she recognizes the lack of fairness in the system. She is also saying that students will not catch up to the benchmark. She is trying to position herself as a revolutionary teacher for being aware of the inequities in many grading systems.</p> <p>⁴Ava is saying that some students are at an advantage because they enter a class with the required skills. She is trying to show that she knows that some students have more academic skills than others because of the privileges they have which often result from being part of a dominant group.</p>

Table 8 (continued).

		⁵ Ava is saying that her grading philosophy focuses more on growth which aligns with what she values as a teacher. Ava is trying to show that she is a teacher that implements equitable practices.
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Mary also compromised core beliefs because of the perceived pressures she felt as the individual responsible for assigning final grades. She prided herself in being thoughtful about how she constructed aspects of her grading system. She believed that teachers should have the time and space to reflect thoughtfully on addressing grades with students. And yet, at the end of the term she found herself “hounding kids for assignments and...like begging them to do things” which made her feel like a different person. She even jokingly asked herself the question “Are you okay?” after telling the story of her “hounding” kids to suggest that she felt like someone other than herself.

Like Ava, Jessica, and Matthew, David also compromised her belief that conventions, rules about spelling, punctuation, capitalization, grammar, and sentence structure in standard English, should not be the most important parts of a grade. Early in her career, David felt obligated to heavily weight conventions because that was what other English teachers were doing, and it was something that was directly emphasized in the standards. In David’s second interview, she criticized her colleagues who felt “beholden to the standards of the state” because she viewed an emphasis on grammar as racist, and yet early in her career David did feel she had to allow conventions to be a central focus of a student’s grade.

Similar to David, Dan also compromised a belief that grades should represent the degree to which a student has mastered the skill being assessed. Dan believed that the letter grades A, B, C, and D are useful labels to represent the skill level a student demonstrates. However, he also said that “my AP class has a bottom grade of C that I inherited from my previous AP teacher.” Given that Dan did assign Ds in all of his other classes, I interpreted his adherence to the no D policy in his AP classes as a compromise of his beliefs. Dan, like other participants, seemed to be more obligated to follow through with an action, tied to a belief they did not support, if it was an inherited policy.

In some instances, teachers performed acts that seem outside their belief because they perceive their choices as limited within the traditional grading system. Essentially, teachers' agency was impacted by the feeling of dissonance when they compromised their beliefs. The reasons for this action may have stemmed from a pressure to follow inherited systems and the habit of following normalized grading routines, but the end result is that teachers' actions did not fully reflect their beliefs.

Tension with Students. In addition to the experiences of misaligned values and compromised beliefs that arise for teachers tasked with following traditional expectations for grading student work, another experience that emerges is tension with students. Regardless of teachers' desire to assign grades, teachers are the people responsible for students' grade assignments. As a result of grades being assigned by teachers, conflict does arise between teachers and other parties (students, families, administrators) affected by grades. Even if teachers attempt to avoid this potential conflict (for example by a student feeling they should receive a higher grade and the teacher feeling that their score

is accurate based on the department's rubric), there is only so much that can be done if teachers are working within the confines of a traditional grading system. Each teacher in this study shared at least two experiences in which their relationship with a student was damaged as a result of their grade assignment.

Matthew viewed himself as a teacher who provided “tenacious support” of all of his students. During multiple interviews, he shared about the hours that he would work with students after school to help them reach their academic goals whether that be passing the class or revising an essay. Matthew, like all of the teachers, felt the squeeze of the end of the term. He was typically rushing around trying to help all of his students receive at least a passing grade in the class. Near the end of the term, Matthew would be tired and stressed. One year, Matthew had a student he felt was a strong writer but who was dissatisfied that she received a B+ on an assignment. He stressed to her that she was “doing fantastic like this doesn't matter at all. You're still going to get an A in the class.” This student, like other students that the participants discussed, believed that her worth was directly correlated to the grades that she received. When Matthew was not available to help her revise her paper, a practice he typically valued, she got so upset that she cried. Matthew was put in a position where he had power over this student because the thing she believed she needed to be considered “smart” was in his hands. This experience was a moment that Matthew viewed as a failure on his part as a teacher, but also one that felt unavoidable because of the tension that grading creates between teachers and students.

Looking at this same story through the Figured World Tool, I understand that the conflict between Matthew and the student existed because they made different

assumptions about their roles. From Matthew's perspective, he assumed that his priority was to get as many of his students as possible to pass his class. He also knew that he had a finite amount of time and energy to accomplish this task. From the student's perspective, Matthew's job as a teacher was to help her improve her writing skills, so that she could receive an A on her final paper. To her, Matthew's responsibility as a teacher was to help students when they asked for it. The two different assumptions that existed in this dialogue illustrated the catalyst for conflict. Given the student's assumptions about the role of a teacher, I was not surprised that the student reacted by crying when she felt that Matthew was abandoning her when she needed help. Given Matthew's assumption about his belief that his priority should be helping the greatest possible number of students pass his class, I was not surprised that his first response to the student was to not worry about revising the paper. Ultimately, Matthew felt that he failed the student when he did not focus his concern on the student's emotional well-being and instead focused on having all of his students pass his class. Within this narrative, Matthew shifted his position from a teacher that takes on the role of a taskmaster to a counselor. Even though Matthew viewed this as a moment of failure, I believe that it also addresses one of the challenges teachers face, simultaneously existing in multiple roles even if those roles do not complement one another. Table 9 includes the transcript, discourse analysis questions, and analysis that I used to understand Matthew's situation.

Table 9*#26 Figured World Tool Discourse Analysis*

#26 Figured World Tool Questions		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What typical stories or figured worlds do the words and phrases of the communication assume and invite listeners to assume? • What participants, activities, ways of interacting, forms of language, people, and institutions, as well as values, are in the presented figured worlds? 		
Transcript of Interview	Analysis Questions	Analysis
<p>MATTHEW: Jasmine was a student that I had in my class last year and she was a really highly motivated student¹. I think at some point late in the year, like she got a B, like a B+ on some assignment and she was...it might have been an A- or low A and she wanted to revise it² and I told her no because she already had you know like a 98% in the class³. Her revising that assignment means that like...I'm running around at the end of the year trying to get all of these kids with Fs caught up⁴ that I'm going to have to take time away from that to that to sit down with you and go over the steps with you, and you're doing fantastic like this doesn't matter at all⁵. You're still going to get an A in the class. She got...she was actually pretty upset and started crying in class and I had to kinda step back from that and have like another conversation with her. She was very highly motivated, really funny. Right?</p>	<p>¹What does Matthew value in how he wishes students to be?</p> <p>² What does Jasmine assume that Matthew ought to do as her teacher?</p> <p>³ What does Matthew assume to not be an important concern for Jasmine?</p> <p>⁴What assumption does Matthew make about Jasmine?</p> <p>⁵ What does Matthew's phrase "you're doing fantastic" ask Jasmine to value?</p>	<p>¹ Matthew values students that are motivated to do well in class.</p> <p>²Jasmine assumes that Matthew ought to help her revise her paper because Matthew's job is to help her get an A.</p> <p>³ Matthew assumes that Jasmine is not going to be concerned about this paper because she will end up with an A in the class regardless.</p> <p>⁴Matthew assumes that Jasmine will understand that he is really busy as a teacher and does not have time to help her.</p> <p>⁵The phrase asks Jasmine to value her final grade being an A, and not care about the grade on an individual assignment.</p>

David shared a similar experience in which she took away the opportunity of a student to receive college credit for a class by assigning a particular letter grade. In David's story, the student did not cry, but rather expressed rage. She felt that David and the multiple teachers of the class had wronged her, even though the student had not completed the expectations of the university class. The power that David had to assign or not assign the grade created an adversarial relationship regardless of David's desire to hold power over the student.

Mary also shared that she felt the effects of the power dynamic created from teachers being the ones responsible for final grades. She believed that the evaluation of student work should be "transformative," but ultimately, as the system exists now, it becomes transactional. She had the valuable thing that students want (grades), and even though Mary wanted her students to focus on their learning, she believed that a credit-based grading system would always create a "point of contention" between students and teachers. Mary discussed that this aspect of her job was stressful and did not fit within her identity as a teacher.

Identity Friction Resulting From Dissonant Experiences

When teachers are expected to adhere to a traditional grading system, misaligned values, compromised beliefs, and tension with students may lead them to perform acts that run counter to their identities. Over time, frequent and intense experiences of misaligned values, compromised beliefs, tension with students, and performing acts not in accord with one's identity can result in identity friction. Identity friction is the feeling that arises from experiencing ongoing dissonance from an adherence to a system that is

not aligned to one's identity. When teachers are aware of the ways traditional grading systems work counter to their goals as educators, they may experience identity friction. Identity friction is illustrated in Phase 3 in figure 10.

Emotional Weight. Analysis of the data yielded an understanding that a heavy emotional weight is one thing teachers carry with them if they are experiencing identity friction. Teachers experience emotional weight resulting from their identity values and beliefs being compromised and their agency feeling or being stifled. Each participant, regardless of their identity, shared that they had felt an emotional weight when they assigned specific or final grades at some point during their career.

Ava was one participant who referenced feeling heartbroken about how her assignment of grades negatively impacted student academic opportunities and students' views of their self-worth. Even though Ava was a veteran teacher, she still "struggle[d] with the grading conundrum" because she believed the grading system to be harmful to many students. Ava experienced anxiety and sometimes even physical illness around the end of grading terms.

Much like Ava, Matthew expressed having big emotional reactions to the assignment of grades. During the final focus group, Matthew shared a powerful story about a student he felt was brilliant and academically successful who had experienced trauma. As a result of his trauma, the student had stopped being able to perform at the same academic level and his grades dropped significantly until he was no longer on track to the path he had set for his academic goals (attending an academically competitive university on a scholarship). Matthew was devastated by the irreparable harm this student

was experiencing as he realized his goals were going to be significantly more difficult for him to achieve as a result of receiving low grades. Empathizing with a student in a system in which second chances are traditionally not given was an emotional weight that Matthew felt. As Matthew shared this moment with the group, Mary said, “Dude, you hit me like right in the heart spot. Like as you were talking, I literally just had different students flashing in my mind that were brilliant.” As Matthew and Mary were in dialogue the other participants were nodding in agreement and some of them had water pooling in their eyes. The exchange between Matthew and Mary highlighted the emotional weight some teachers feel as a result of assigning grades.

Dan also felt the emotional weight of grading and viewed three specific instances in which he failed students as his biggest failures as a teacher. Given Dan’s belief that students should work hard for their grades and that a failure to do that results in the earned failure of a class, this admission from Dan spoke to perhaps a less overt display of the emotional weight he experienced as a result of assigning grades. In Dan’s discussion of these three moments, he appeared to be torn between the choice he made, and at the same time he tried to justify the grades they received. However, he ended this discussion with comments that suggest that ultimately these experiences weigh on him in an emotional way. Dan remarked:

So those sweet kids were kids that they didn’t pass and so I see those as distinct failures because...because they ummm...they had an opportunity...and a lot of times it was just not following through. I could’ve reached more. I could have done more. I’m sure. Those three names stand out.

This was one of the few moments in all of Dan's interviews that he portrayed students' low grades as something other than the consequences of their poor choices. To me, these comments suggested that Dan may have felt just as much emotional weight around the assignment of grades, but he assured himself that he was making the right choices to alleviate some of the emotional weight.

Given the complexity of this moment for Dan, I conducted a discourse analysis using the Big C Conversation Tool and the Identity Building Tool. Using the Big C Conversation Tool, I observed that the feelings of failure that Dan was experiencing were partially a result of teacher success being a concept fraught with conflict. For instance, some teachers view their success as hinging upon the success of their students, whereas other teachers view success as upholding one's own values as a teacher regardless of the students' success rate. Throughout the interviews, Dan seemed to bounce back and forth between these perspectives. During the first interview, Dan described his most successful moments as times when students wrote strong papers. To Dan, success meant a student writing a high level paper. Dan described a high level paper as one in which there were little to no grammatical errors, clear organization of content, and ideas that were at a college level. In these success stories, Dan did not describe his interactions with students to help them write strong papers. His success stories were about students who wrote strong papers outside of his classroom. During another portion of the same interview, Dan described teacher success as keeping the expectations high even if it meant students failing. In his narrative of assigning failing grades to students, Dan sided with his success being student success and that is why he sees this moment as a failure. When I analyzed

this same moment using the Identity Building Tool, I found that Dan was attempting to portray himself as a dedicated educator, a person who never gives up on his students and their success. He was positioning the students as victims of his lack of follow through when he described them as “sweet.” The connotation of the word “sweet” in this moment is that the students were kind and deserving of having educators who did not give up on their academic success. To help illustrate how I used Gee’s Identities Building Tool to gain understanding about Dan’s identity, I have included Table 10 below.

Table 10

#16 Identities Building Tool Discourse Analysis

#16 Identities Building Tool Questions		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What socially recognizable identity is the speaker trying to enact or get others to recognize? ● How does the speaker treat other people’s identities? ● How is the speaker positioning others? ● What identities is the speaker inviting others to take up? 		
Transcript of Interview	Analysis Questions	Analysis
<p>DAN: [quick response] Dominic, Jennie, and Daniel are the three seniors who have not passed my class¹ and not graduated as a result. Well actually, Jennie probably passed, probably took care of business because it was during the pandemic². But, she goes... she failed freshman year. She never came to class.³ She struggled, and it got to the point where she’s like okay, I’m gonna come in now with two weeks left⁴, and I like I don’t see how you’re going to accomplish the work.⁵ You’re gonna have to take the F on</p>	<p>¹ How does Dan treat his students’ identities based on the construction of the phrase “who have not passed my class”? How is Dan attempting to position himself? ² How does Dan treat Jennie’s identity? ³ How is Dan positioning Jennie? ⁴ How is Dan positioning Jennie? ⁵ How is Dan attempting to</p>	<p>¹ He treats his students as independent learners that are fully capable of doing what they need to graduate. Dan is positioning himself as the owner of his class. ² Dan is identifying Jennie as a lucky student who would not have graduated if there was not a pandemic. ³ Jennie is identified as a disinterested teenager? ⁴ Dan is positioning Jennie as naive for thinking she can accomplish all his classwork in two weeks. ⁵ Dan is positioning himself as doing his job because it</p>

Table 10 (continued).

<p>this one.⁶ Instead of like.... it could've been like all right let's continue to try and work, but it⁷...just so many times.</p> <p>Instead of like.... it could've been like all right let's continue to try and work, but it⁷...just so many times. I'm coming in and they're not⁸; they didn't show up. And then finally, I was just like I don't see how you are going to do it now. I sort of drew the line.⁹ I guess I could've been you know more lenient there, but I was like this is your AP class, and you've blown it off all semester.¹⁰ And part of me has this belief that while yes, you can't grade on attendance¹¹, but attendance is important.¹² If you don't attend how are you engaging in the whole process? I shouldn't just be a credit machine.¹³ Right? And, so that's a challenge. You ever just.... I'm sorry just hold on one second, I've got kids coming in to take an AP test, practice test, so I'm just gonna open up the Meet, so if they show up.</p> <p>SARAH: No worries.</p> <p>DAN: So, I'll make my picture go away. There we go. So those sweet kids were kids that they didn't pass¹⁴ and so I see those as distinct failures¹⁵</p>	<p>position himself?</p> <p>⁶ How is Dan attempting to position himself?</p> <p>⁷ How is Dan attempting to position himself? How is he positioning Jennie?</p> <p>⁸ How is Dan attempting to position himself?</p> <p>⁹ What socially recognizable identity is Dan trying to enact?</p> <p>¹⁰ How is Dan positioning Jennie?</p> <p>¹¹ What socially recognizable identity is Dan trying to enact?</p> <p>¹² How is Dan attempting to position himself?</p> <p>¹³ How is Dan attempting to position himself?</p> <p>¹⁴ How does Dan treat his students' identities?</p> <p>¹⁵ How is Dan attempting to position himself?</p>	<p>would be unethical to give her a grade for work completed this late in the term.</p> <p>⁶ Dan is attempting to show that he is flexible, but this situation did not need him to be flexible, like he normally is as a teacher.</p> <p>⁷ Dan is attempting to position himself as a reliable, dedicated teacher. He is attempting to position Jennie as disinterested.</p> <p>⁸ Dan is attempting to position himself as the person responsible for making hard decisions for students. He is attempting to position himself as concerned, but accountable.</p> <p>⁹ Dan is trying to position himself as a teacher that upholds the high standards of an AP course.</p> <p>¹⁰ Dan is attempting to position Jennie as irresponsible.</p> <p>¹¹ Dan is attempting to position himself as a responsible teacher that holds students accountable for authentic learning.</p> <p>¹² Dan is identifying himself as a teacher who knows what matters. In this case, Dan knows how important attendance is for students.</p> <p>¹³ Dan is attempting to position himself as a teacher who helps students learn. He is rejecting the idea of being a "credit machine." He is attempting to be viewed as a professional.</p>
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Table 10 (continued).

<p>because they ummm...they had an opportunity¹⁶...and a lot of times it was just not following through. I could've reached more. I could have done more. I'm sure.¹⁷ Those three names stand out. Other things that have challenged me that I consider failures....ummmm.</p>	<p>¹⁶ How is Dan attempting to position his students? ¹⁷ How is Dan attempting to position himself?</p>	<p>¹⁴ Dan is treating his students as kind and deserving of having educators who did not give up on their academic success. ¹⁵ Dan is positioning himself as an ineffective teacher. ¹⁶ Dan is positioning the students as unmotivated because they had the opportunity to pass, and failed to take it. ¹⁷ Dan is positioning himself as an ineffective teacher.</p>
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Teacher Burnout. If teachers experience an intense emotional weight caused by severe and frequent moments of dissonance over time, such as the dissonance caused by grading within the traditional grading system, burnout is a common result. The participants in this study expressed a belief that teaching English contributed to burnout more so than would teaching another academic subject.. All six participants connected their feeling of burnout to the cultural expectations they perceived about how, what, and how often to grade their students' work.

Ava was one participant who spoke about finding ways to minimize the burnout she felt from the significant amount of time she devoted to grading. For Ava the exhaustion she felt from grading was also tied to the guilt she had when she would bring her grading home, and then not get to it. She joked that "you take a stack of essays home and they live in your bag and you keep thinking all night oh god, I gotta make sure I get to that" to illustrate the weariness that often paired with her stack of essays to grade.

Matthew also felt burnout from the immense workload that comes with being an English teacher. Like Ava, he used humor to explain his frustration with the long hours that felt like a requirement for being the type of teacher that he valued being. When he vented about the tasks that take up time as a teacher including grading he said that “I just kind of wanna be a garbage person sometimes you know” to imply that there are times when he did not want to set aside hours of his life outside the work day to grade student work. Dan felt similarly to Ava and Matthew, but focused not only on the large amount of time that grading takes, but also how the number of students English teachers have made the grading expectations feel insurmountable. Dan said:

I mean again you’re going to have 155 students as an English teacher. It’s just...they say at 160 things just start breaking down. Like businesses, like once you hit the 160 threshold, or at least I’ve heard this, it just starts to be very complicated.

Dan referenced that things start breaking down, and later in the focus group he suggested that the thing breaking down was him. Dan had been a teacher at Walker substantially longer than all the other participants, so he was able to see how the gradual increase in the number of students that each teacher was responsible for grading affected the hours spent on grading. To Dan, the number of students did contribute to his fatigue.

The hours were not the only thing that contributed to exhaustion for the participants. Four of the six participants, Ava, Mary, Jessica, and David, all shared that they spent their time and money in coffee shops and bars as younger teachers. When Mary was a newer teacher, she did not have as much skill managing her time, and

therefore she would go to “coffee shops where [she] would just spend all weekend long or the bar and just grade and grade and grade.” These hours and dollars translated to Mary realizing that if she did not alter her grading process she would push herself out of a “profession that [she] loved.” Even though Mary, and the other participants did find strategies to help limit the effects of burnout, all of them shared that they were currently feeling burnout as teachers during the interviews.

Frustration with the System

After teachers experience identity friction they become frustrated with the educational system. All six participants used the word “broken” or the phrase “doesn’t work” in reference to the school system. Frustration with the system caused teachers to feel that their sense of agency was restricted by operating within the traditional grading system. Phase 4 in figure 8 illustrates the frustration that teachers experience. Grading was a focal point for the teachers’ frustrations, although their discussions extended to other areas. David felt that the grading system was representative of the problems with the larger school system, and was not the only that needed to be “torn down.”

One source of irritation for participants was the software used to communicate grades to students and families. Both Ava and Mary incorporated aspects of non-traditional grading into their grading system, and they were not able to match their system with the software they were required to use to communicate grades to students and families. Mary felt that the only way to fix this problem was to create “grading programs [that] were actually developing it [grading software] with some radical ways of

doing assessment versus just reforming it.” Mary not only voiced this complaint, but she also was communicating directly with the ODE about her concerns.

Matthew had multiple frustrations with the grading system, but one that seemed central to one of his core values, alignment, was a desire for an aligned grading system at Walker. He hoped that “there was a building-wide policy as to formative, summative weighting grades or final grades or at least some of those like broader” components of a grading system within a school. Matthew believed that an aligned system was an equitable system, and so the lack of alignment was a point of stress for him. Matthew was not the only teacher who had frustration with the system rooted in equity concerns.

One common frustration that all six participants shared was that they had felt unsupported at schools where they had previously worked. Jessica, who had felt wronged by her previous administration around a disagreement about the assignment of a student’s final grade, said that she preferred to “keep things in house in my classroom” because she believed administration often sided with the families regardless of that being an ethical choice.

During the first focus group, the participants discussed the stressful situations that can arise involving families and administrators. To gain a better understanding of these types of experiences for the participants, I used the Doing and Not Just Saying Discourse Analysis Tool, specifically to analyze a story Matthew shared. I wanted to not only focus on what Matthew said, but also the purpose behind what he said in the discussion. This discourse tool helped me understand why Matthew would share these ideas with the participants in the focus group. In part of the discussion, Matthew was trying to share

with the group a previous negative experience in a “pretty bougie” school. He explained that the administration asked him to grade in a particular way. Matthew was told to not include formative assignments into the calculation of students’ final grades, only summative. Matthew did not include any formative assignments in students’ grades even though he had some hesitation and received pushback from the affluent families who wanted formative assignments included in final grades. According to Matthew, he was “basically fired” from the school because of the complaints filed by parents (despite the fact that he was acting in accordance with the administration’s request) and also because of other “strange things” like being accused of “inventing the term microaggression.” Matthew said this experience was “pretty traumatic.”

My analysis using the Doing and Not Just Saying Discourse Analysis Tool helped me develop an interpretation of what Matthew was trying to do or accomplish with his words. Matthew was trying to say that in this situation, he had been wronged by the administration of the school. He was trying to share that he was upset about how he was treated by administrators. The purpose of Matthew sharing these experiences was to justify why he was not open to changing the current way that he weighted students’ final grades (80% summative, 20% formative). In response to an earlier part of the focus group, Matthew was trying to convince the other members of the group that he had a good reason behind his weighting of formative assignments into students’ final grade calculations. Based on Matthew’s values and beliefs around the purpose of grading (that grades should be based on the level of skill mastery), I was surprised that he included formative assignments in his final calculation. However, upon hearing this story, I

realized that his past traumatic and frustrating experience had influenced his decision to include formative assignments in his final grade.

Ava responded to Matthew's story by sharing how she had also had a similar negative experience. At a previous school, Ava witnessed administrators change a student's grade because the student's parents were upset that the student was getting a C. Ava then went on to share that "the parents are far more involved as a stakeholder" in students' grade assignments. Ava was suggesting that parents in low-poverty districts had more opportunity to be more involved in their students' experiences at school than parents in high-poverty districts. She shared that families at Walker were less "able to interact" because of "life and time constraints" than were families at her previous affluent school. She ended by saying that she was thankful to not work at a place that had such a high proportion of entitled families.

Using the Doing and Not Saying Discourse Analysis Tool, I inferred that Ava was trying to say that she knew what it was like to be frustrated by administrators undermining her by changing a grade that she had assigned to a student. Ava ended the conversation saying that the lack of family involvement at Walker "begs a whole different conversation." Ava was trying to do several things through her contributions in this exchange. She was attempting to build camaraderie with Matthew in showing that she had felt similar feelings of being let down by administration. She was also trying to show that she had insight about the barriers families faced at Walker as an explanation for comparatively low involvement. The purpose of Ava saying this was to create a space for her peers to understand and possibly problem solve low family involvement.

David's response to Ava was quick. David said "I don't know if it is a different conversation Ava" and then explained that families at Walker may have been "disenfranchised by the education system." David shared that she thought it was possible that families were not involved because they did not see schools "as a place where change will actually happen" and because they may have been traumatized as students when they attended school. David was saying that the broken system of schools was a reason for low family involvement. She was saying that families might have the time and ability to be involved, but may make conscious choices to not get involved due to not having hope that school can be better for their children. What David was trying to do was prove to Ava that Ava's thinking was not accurate. She was trying to show that she (David) had a fuller understanding of low family involvement than did Ava.

Ava quickly agreed with David's idea. Ava was trying to say that David was correct in thinking that families were less likely to be involved at Walker because they may have had little to no hope in their children's school experience being different or better than their own. Ava was trying to get David to see her as a person who thinks in the same way as David does. Throughout the focus groups, there was a tension between Ava and David. Looking through their participant profiles, they had many similar values and beliefs. I was not able to discern where this tension between the participants came from, and I suspected that there was a history between them that I was not privy to.

David did not view Ava as like-minded in this situation, as evidenced by David's comment "you know maybe it is the same conversation." David then shared that maybe the affluent families did get more involved because they were accustomed to getting what

they want, and “the entitled parents, they’re Karens.” David was trying to say that entitled parents may seem more involved because they have an expectation of getting exactly what they want, whereas the families of Walker are not entitled and do not have the expectation that they will get exactly what they want. What David was trying to do was both acknowledge Ava’s agreement while creating a division between herself and Ava. Ava wanted David to see her as someone with similar ideas and David was reluctant to do so. David was attempting to be seen as someone with ideas that are different from Ava’s.

Even though Dan had different beliefs about the flaws of school systems than did the other participants, he shared with the other participants the prioritization of equity as an important value. Dan differed from the other participants in that he viewed some of the administration’s decisions as inequitable whereas other participants felt these same decisions were equitable. One example of his different interpretation of equity was that he believed that giving retroactive credits to students was inequitable. He believed that administrators only cared about graduation rates, and found this prioritization frustrating. Throughout the interviews and focus groups Dan expressed concern that students were being given retroactive credits for classes:

For administrators, and I’m sorry just a little bit cynical, right, it’s about graduation rates. That’s the number that matters, right, and so let’s get them the credit at all costs, sometimes an unethical cost. I’ve seen that again and again and again.

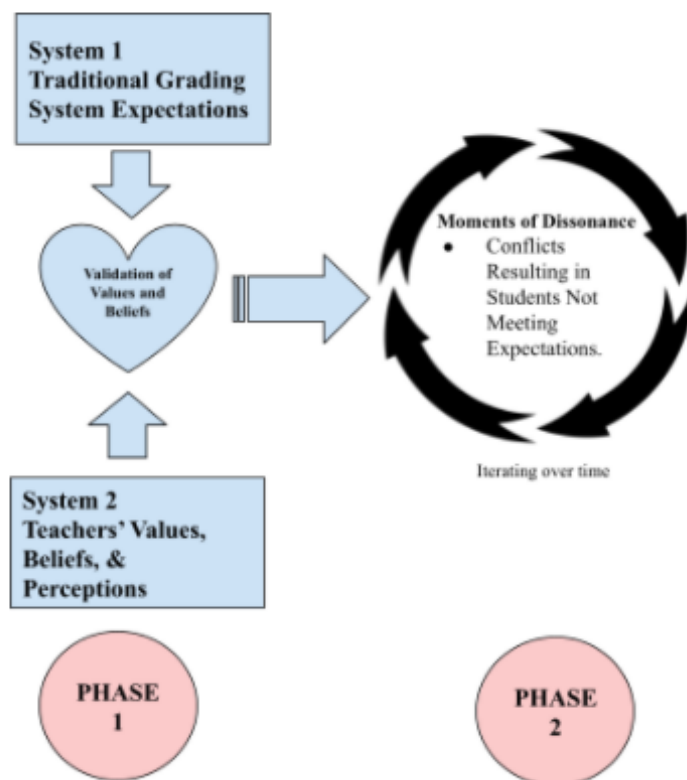
Dan considered it unethical to give students credits for classes that they did not attend. Dan also believed that educators were setting students up to be unsuccessful in a class if their credit for the class prior to the one they were in was given retroactively. Dan also shared that his “cynical” feelings were grounded in the idea that “students going through the system are more often than not interested in what they can do to earn the grade that they want and less interested in what the learning is.” Dan felt that giving retroactive credits to students was like an endorsement that grades were what mattered, not learning. He believed that when a system prizes the grade over the learning, educators deny students opportunities to learn, and to him that was an equity issue. Earlier in this chapter, I mentioned an example of how different teachers could view either a strict adherence or a flexible adherence to grading student writing on the six-trait rubric as an equitable act. Teachers taking either approach could view their actions as equitable even though the application of the value of equity translated to different beliefs about how students should be graded. There are parallels between that example and Dan’s beliefs around retroactive credits. Dan’s belief in retroactive credits being wrong stemmed from a value of learning. Dan interpreted students receiving retroactive credits as missed learning. Other participants also valued learning, but they had a belief that if students can demonstrate their learning in the second term of a progressive class, then that is evidence the student learned the content of the first term. Dan valued learning and he felt retroactive grades were an affront to learning; therefore, he was angered about the choices administrators had made to get kids credit for graduation.

Qualitative Outlier: Dan's Experience of Grading

While there was significant overlap across participants in terms of their experiences of identity friction brought about through misaligned values, compromised beliefs, and tension with students (resulting in emotional weight, burnout, and frustration with the system), Dan's point of view and experiences differed from those of the rest of the participants in some important ways. To illustrate how Dan's experiences deviated at times from other participants in this study, I have provided figure 10 below.

Figure 10

Qualitative Outlier: Dan's Experience



Note: In this figure, Dan does not arrive at Phase 3 or 4 because he was validated rather than frustrated by the system. Instead of a clash between system 1 and 2, Dan validated

that the ideas behind system 1 and 2 match and support one another. His identity and agency was supported by the traditional grading system.

Validation of Values and Beliefs. Thus far, I have primarily presented the impact of traditional grades on teacher identity as one of stripping away or weakening; however, one participant had moments in which he felt traditional grading supported who he was as a teacher. If teachers had values that aligned with some of the principles of the traditional grading system, they viewed some of their choices around grading as validations of their core beliefs and values. In this study, Dan was an educator that sometimes felt grades supported his beliefs and values as a teacher.

Dan believed that students should use rubrics as a tool to guide their writing. When he felt that students failed to use the rubric as a tool to determine how to complete a writing task, he felt that the grade they received was justified. From Dan's perspective, students that were able to follow the rubric to his standards were "good students" and as a result, received a high score. The other participants in the study also felt that rubrics were a useful tool to help guide students; however, they did not interpret a student's inability to follow the rubric expectations as a reflection of their deserved grade. All of the other participants valued rubrics, but also expressed their dissatisfaction with them, questioning how one rubric can accurately assess strong writing. Matthew for example shared that "if you do all of these things, you can still write a sh*tty paper" to illustrate the flaws in rubrics being the final determinant of a grade. Dan, unlike the other participants, had more faith in the rubric as a tool to measure student achievement, and hence was

validated by calculating final grades with a rubric. Dan's belief in the accuracy of rubrics was not a point of dissonance for him, but rather a point of resonance.

Another area that validated Dan's teacher identity was that he followed the school district's grading policies with fidelity. In a discussion of following the districts A through F policy, he expressed that he felt it was his professional responsibility to follow that policy. Dan called himself a "worker bee." He also shared that if the policy were changed that he would follow the new policy because as an employee it is unprofessional to go against district policies. Considering that in earlier discussions Dan addressed some concern over letter grade policies, I found his adherence to the district policies as paramount to his identity as a "good" employee. How Dan wanted to be viewed by others, perhaps mattered more to him than some of his beliefs around the letter grading system.

Conflicts Resulting in Students Not Meeting Expectations. Teachers, like Dan, who feel that traditional grading supports their identity, might believe that students who receive low grades are careless or apathetic towards learning goals. Of the six participants in this study, Dan was not alone in having contentious relationships with students; however, he was the only one who suggested that students were selfish or lazy for not completing work up to standards outlined in classes. For instance, Dan valued students following standard conventional rules in their writing. Dan felt that conventions should be a substantial part of a student's final grade in a writing assignment, and when students did not use standard conventions properly their low grade was earned. Dan did not view the Oregon six-trait writing rubric as racist or outdated, as the other five participants did.

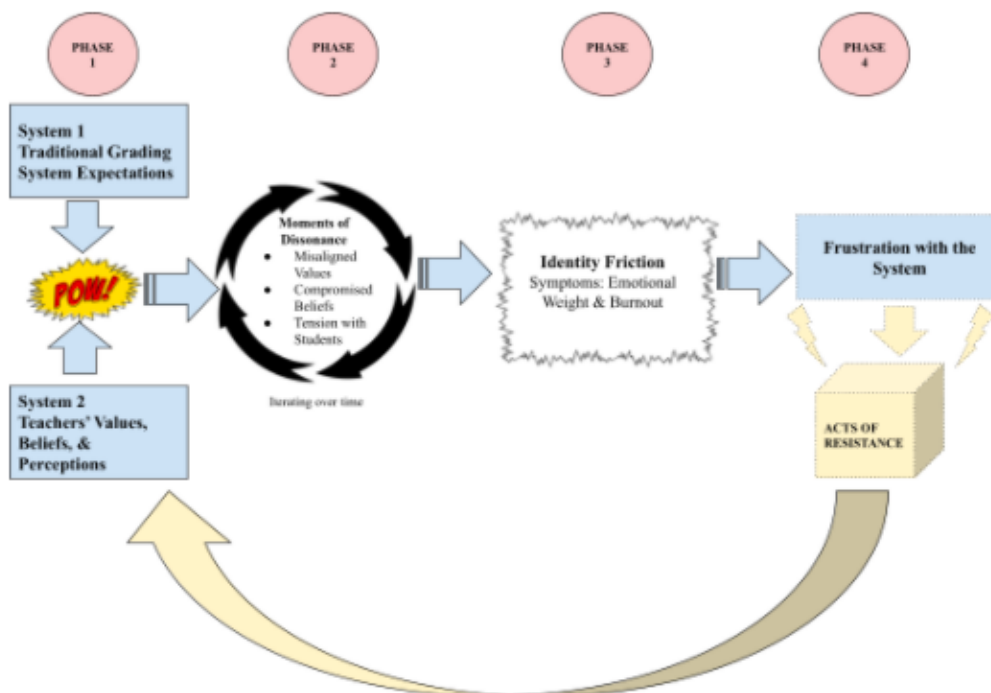
His valuing of conventions meant that when students did not meet his standards, he was annoyed. He viewed students' lack of adherence to standard conventions as them rushing and not caring about learning conventions.

Another area that made Dan feel like students were responsible for their low grades was in turning work in late. Dan felt that if students were turning in their assignments late that they needed to "learn the stuff independently because [he's] not teaching that stuff to [them] now one on one." Dan shared with certainty that to help students in this situation was counter to what he valued as an educator: accountability and independent learning. Even though these values, accountability and independent learning, are not directly stated in a traditional grading system, the connotations they have certainly do align. The beliefs Dan had around helping students complete late work created conflict with his students and were a point of frustration for him.

I inferred that teacher identity and agency were impacted if teachers experienced a conflict between their identity (through their values, beliefs, and perceptions) and the expectations of the traditional grading system. When teachers initially experienced this conflict, they experienced moments of dissonance, which over time through iteration, caused identity friction. The symptoms of identity friction were emotional weight and burnout. (Both of which were not generalized feelings of emotional weight and burnout, but they were specifically linked back to the original clash of systems.) The ultimate result of the clash of the systems was that teachers felt frustration when operating within the confines of the traditional grading system. In the next section of the findings, I will discuss thematic concept 2.

Thematic Concept 2: Impact of Resistance on Identity and Agency

Given the negative impacts on teacher identity and agency resulting from the assignment of traditional grades outlined in the findings above, one might conclude that teachers felt like pawns in a game they were doomed to fail. However, even though all participants expressed feelings of dissonance between their identity and the values and beliefs embedded within the traditional grading system, they did not always abide by the rules of that system. I found that all of the participants performed acts of active and passive resistance against grading systems; these acts of resistance were new ways for teachers to assert a new sense of agency. When teachers were able to stay optimistic, even when working in the traditional system, they were able to figure out new realities for themselves and their students. When they were able to find new realities, they were creating new identities for themselves and new ways to view their agency. To illustrate the upcoming findings, I have included figure 11 below.

Figure 11*Acts of Resistance Resulting From Frustrations*

Note: This figure illustrates how teachers resist traditional grading systems. This figure is almost identical to figure 10 which illustrates the four part process that teachers experience if their identity is out of alignment with the expectations of the grading system. In Phase 4 of this figure, the frustration with the system experience is represented as a text box with dotted lines to suggest that teachers no longer feel boxed in by the system and see spaces to insert acts of resistance. If teachers are able to engage in acts of resistance, the act of resistance was ignited by a force. The lightning bolt icons represent the power behind teachers' acts of resistance. The force can sometimes be an act of improvisation. The act of resistance is represented by a three-dimensional box because teachers are able to see their frustration with the system from a different perspective, one

that enables them to actively or passively resist the system. The three-dimensional box is constructed with dotted lines because teachers are still impacted by the system even in their act of resistance. When teachers resist the system, they create new identities for themselves through asserting their agency.

Optimists in a Broken System

Even though the traditional grading system felt broken for some educators, some teachers were able to adopt an optimistic attitude and to have hope for change. Five of the six participants expressed feelings of optimism about making changes in schools. One participant who remained optimistic about changing the grading system was Ava. Ava felt that grades often detracted from qualities she thought were valuable priorities for schools. At the start of the 2020-2021 school year, an administrator shared the school's priorities: "make sure students are safe, make sure they're fed, make sure they're housed." Ava felt this was "monumental" and gave her hope that things could and were changing. Ava could have been cynical about the administrator's announcement, but instead it gave her inspiration.

Moments that inspired teachers were also a source of optimism for teachers even in a system they thought was broken. Jessica shared that many parts of her teaching job were unpleasant and shared a clear distaste for the practice of assigning traditional grades. For Jessica, "as long as [she] can see the kids are like learning about themselves and their place in the world and really finding out like what that is, and being you know authentic and vulnerable with each other" then she can continue to resist the structures that she finds problematic.

Matthew, like Jessica, found the traditional grading structures to be “not good,” and was able to find hope that traditional grading systems would eventually be a thing of the past by simply reflecting on them. He felt that reflection would be one way that teachers could resist the current structures that we have for grading because teachers are wired to be problem solvers.

Change Agents in Figured Worlds

For some of the participants, their optimism translated into actions. Teachers who resisted the traditional grading system figured themselves in worlds in which they were capable of making change. Participants adopted the idea of imagining the world they wanted to operate in, and then they made decisions and choices as if that world were their new reality. Four of the five participants figured identities and worlds for themselves that matched what they hoped for in particular educational contexts.

For instance, David was a teacher who felt systems within schools, like grading, were white supremacist, patriarchal, heteronormative, and capitalistic. Throughout much of her career, David followed, to some degree, protocols or rules in the school that she did not philosophically agree with because she felt that she had no other choice. To illustrate how she felt forced into following the values she perceived schools wanted her to abide by, she attempted to present as a straight woman. She joked about buying lots of cardigans, wearing bland colored clothing and growing her hair out because she did not want people to identify her as a gay woman. Then when David was working at a Catholic high school, her employment would have been threatened if she had been an openly gay teacher at school. It was in this moment that David figured a new reality for herself. The

decision be herself or hide herself became an invitation for her to be authentic about her beliefs and values as a teacher:

My class and I still had to do grades there in a more traditional way, but basically I was there for six years and the last three years I was there, I was just like okay, you're going to fire me. I'm going to do whatever I want.

David actively resisted traditional structures, even if it meant her losing her job. David rebelled against the traditional structures, even though the traditional structures of the school were still expectations. David became the kind of teacher she imagined, a revolutionary leader.

When I used the Subject Tool discourse analysis, I gained a deeper understanding of the themes presented in David's discussion. David strategically set up subjects in this portion of the interview. The nuns in charge of a Catholic school that was in close proximity to David's school were the first subject of the discussion. She introduced them first to show that the silencing of gay teachers in Catholic schools was something that the nuns pushed back against. She could have framed it as the archdiocese inflicting a new rule onto the nuns, but she did not do this because she wanted to show that the nuns were on her side in this situation. Later when the subject switched to her school's administration, people who did silence gay teachers for being out openly, the listener was set up to view David's administrators as the antagonists in the story because another Catholic school was protective of their gay teachers. Without the setup of the supportive nuns, the listener may not have had as much sympathy for David in her situation, and the listener may not have viewed the administration at David's school with as much possible

judgment. Even though she placed herself in a conflicted situation, being an openly gay teacher in a Catholic school, David strategically set up listeners to be more likely to side with her. Table 11 below includes a transcript of this conversation, as well as the discourse questions and analysis.

Table 11

#4 Subject Tool Discourse Analysis

#4 Subject Tool Questions		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Why have speakers chosen the subject/topic? ● What are they saying about the subject? ● How could they have made another subject choice? ● Why did they not? ● Why are they organizing the information in terms of subjects and predicates? 		
Transcript of Interview	Analysis Questions	Analysis
<p>DAVID: Both. All this over time is evolving and I'm thinking differently.¹ I'm working with different kinds of kids and then I go to Eastern, this hard-core, super old school, traditional lecture-based, white supremacist nightmare of cis-hetero patriarchy up the ass². It's just like the worst, but I have a job and I'm back with high school kids and it turns out that like you can be in a shitty setting and you can still have kids that have trauma³. I know how to do this. I can work with these kids. In that work, I was very willing to work with kids. I taught the lab support class for ELA that was kind of like a homegrown Catholic school version of Read 180, extra help class for</p>	<p>¹What is the subject?</p> <p>²What is the subject? What is David saying about the subject?</p> <p>³Why is David organizing the context of the situation before the conflict she faced?</p>	<p>David's evolution as a teacher is the subject.</p> <p>David is the subject. David is saying that she had to work in an environment that was outdated and inequitable.</p> <p>³David introduced the context first because she wants to frame the idea that even in a system that she had major philosophical differences with that she was still able to help students and do the work she valued.</p>

Table 11 (continued).

<p>English. That was pass fail because they had English One. That was also really cool cause I was like oh I don't have to even think about grading anything we do in here. I can just be a teacher⁴. That was really cool. I really liked that. But, then what actually happened was...I don't know if you remember that thing that happened at St. Helen's where like they hired that lesbian counselor and then she got fired and they tried to silence it⁵. So when that happened...this is going to sound like it's not related, but it's necessary to understand the situation I was in. Catholic schools are all sponsored by or run by a brotherhood or a nun or like a nunnery, except Eastern Christian is the archdiocese high school which is like their patron saint isn't Helen or you know⁶. Elsewhere it looks like the nuns and brothers pick one. Their patron saint is Christ the King, so Eastern Christian belongs to the archdiocese office, not to a brotherhood or a nunnery. Because of that, the nuns at Saint Helen's pushed back on the archdiocese and they were like fuck you⁷, we're gonna have gay teachers; we need our donors. You need to back up. You can't tell us what to do. But, the Archbishop was like guess what? Guess who I can tell what to do?</p>	<p>⁴What is the topic that David is focused on?</p> <p>⁵What is the subject? Why is it organized this way?</p> <p>⁶What is the subject? Why is it organized this way?</p> <p>⁷What is the subject? Why is it organized this way? What is David saying about the subject?</p>	<p>⁴David is highlighting that she did not care about grading, and that she prefers to not have to grade students. When she does not have to grade, she can focus on teaching.</p> <p>⁵The subject is St. Helens. St. Helen's hired a lesbian teacher. It was an active choice by St. Helen's in the way that David presented the information. David wanted to show that the nuns at St. Helen's made a conscious choice to have a gay teacher.</p> <p>⁶The subject is Catholic schools. David organized it this way to set up the listener to track that her school adhered to the archdiocese unlike St. Helen's.</p> <p>⁷ The subject is the nuns at St. Helen's. David organized it this way to show that the nuns took power and did what she wished her school had done. It foreshadows that her school did not take the same stance as St. Helens'. David is saying that the nuns did the "correct" thing.</p>
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Table 11 (continued).

<p>Eastern Christian because there's no middle entity that's going to interrupt my homophobia. So he basically made this declaration to all the Catholic schools, when that happened, that gay teachers should be "don't ask, don't tell" and that we should be fucking quiet⁸. We knew, that if schools knew, a gay teacher had gotten married that, that was like so against the work of the church that the teacher would be fired for it. My wife and I had just gotten engaged because the Supreme Court had just allowed that to happen nationwide and that was our line in the sand around getting married⁹. So, we had just gotten engaged and we were like what the fuck? We had also gotten engaged super publicly; it was up on Facebook. All these colleagues had seen it, so I was basically decided like well, if that's how it is then fuck it¹⁰. If you're going to fire me for being myself then fire me for doing truly anti-racist teaching. At this point, I had started doing a lot...during this whole progression of my career I'd also like a) learned so much from my students, specifically those who were not white, not middle class which I knew a lot about because that was my experience¹¹.</p>	<p>⁸What is the subject? Why is it organized this way?</p> <p>⁹What is the subject? What is David saying about the subject?</p> <p>¹⁰What is the subject? What is David saying about the subject?</p> <p>¹¹What is the subject? What is David saying about the subject?</p>	<p>⁸ The subject is the Archbishop. David organized what she said this way to show the power structure within the Catholic school.</p> <p>⁹ The subject is David and her wife. David is saying that this decision came after waiting a long time. David and her wife waited until the Supreme Court allowed same sex marriage in all 50 states before deciding to get married.</p> <p>¹⁰The subject is the colleagues at David's school. David is saying that her engagement was known by all of her co-workers.</p> <p>¹¹David is the subject. David is saying that she learned how to better serve the needs of all of her students and not just those that existed within the dominant groups. David was a better teacher because she learned from her non-white students.</p>
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Table 11 (continued).

<p>I had learned so much for my students. I had learned how to be wrong in the classroom and figured out how to listen better to them and see what grades were doing to them. But, then also, when I got to that point, at Eastern where I knew I could be fired any day I was like fuck it, fucking fire me; let's go! I just like changed the whole way. My class and I still had to do grades there in a more traditional way, but basically I was there for six years and the last three years I was there, I was just like okay, you're going to fire me. I'm going to do whatever I want. And so I did and that was really empowering¹² and then I realized even more like holy shit this is all made up. Everything about school is totally made up by white supremacy. What is this?</p>	<p>¹²What is the subject? What is David saying about the subject?</p>	<p>¹²David is the subject. David is saying that she decided to teach in a way that went against "traditional" values even if it meant that she could get fired. She is positioning herself as a revolutionary teacher because she taught in a way that went counter to the patriarchal, heteronormative, white supremacist ideology.</p>
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After this pivotal moment in David's career, David more routinely actively resisted traditional grading structures. When David first came to Walker, she was expected to grade students on their ability to memorize parts of Shakespearean plays. David, who valued student choice and voice, decided to not conform to the other 10th grade teachers. Instead David asked the students and said, "we have to deal with this play, what do you want to do with it?" David was able to be the type of teacher that she valued in a system that did not mirror her values. Her actions that ran contrary to the traditional system expectations were reclamations of who she hoped to be as an educator.

Mary also resisted the traditional structures that are often upheld in schools. In her early years of teaching, when Mary saw other teachers following traditional structures that she felt were harmful to students, she did not engage in dialogue with them because she worried that she might hurt their feelings. During Mary's second interview she expressed that she was no longer going to avoid conversations with colleagues that were about practices she thought were problematic. She hoped that if she was able to "show up in a way that's... in a loving way to question" practices that she might be able to enact a mediator-like role. Mary hoped that she would be able to engage in a dialogue that would not be tense or confrontational, but rather harmonizing. Mary imagined that she was able to alter a power dynamic, one between teachers who practiced more traditional structures and routines, by engaging in the types of conversations she said were typically avoided in a school setting.

When I used the Identity Building Tool, I was provided with another lens to consider how Mary viewed herself and her colleagues. Using the phrase "showed up" implied that Mary wanted to be present and authentic with her colleagues if there was disagreement. It also suggested that she needed to perform the role of a thoughtful colleague who does engage in challenging, sometimes uncomfortable conversations. Mary wanted to portray herself as a rational educator who is capable of having a discussion with peers who make choices she sees as problematic. When Mary said she would have conversations with her peers "in a loving way," she wanted to be seen as not only rational, but also non-judgmental and kind. She wanted to invite her colleagues into a dialogue knowing that she does not want to create conflict, but rather build

understanding between her and her peers. Later in the interview, she emphasized that she felt conversations about differences did not appear to be “contentious.” She believed that she was “good at reading people.” Mary felt that if conversations amongst colleagues with different views could happen in a “loving way” that it would not harm their working relationship. Later in the conversation about having discussions with colleagues who have differing opinions, Mary contradicted the role she was attempting to play, that of a rational, non-judgmental fellow teacher, when she said she can get “angry and emotional” if she believed a colleague was using a practice that was “truly harmful.” Even though she later added that this emotional response would be “from a place of love,” I wonder if her colleagues would view it the same way. To gain understanding about how her colleagues might feel about Mary’s emotional reaction to their practices, I used the Figured World Tool.

Using this tool, I understood that Mary believed it was good for teachers to discuss their differences. I also understood that Mary felt it was appropriate to call other teachers out about their potentially problematic practices. Mary assumed that teachers who have different ideas about how to be a teacher, can have productive dialogue about those differences. Given what other participants shared during their interviews, I wonder if colleagues would agree with Mary’s idea that teachers with different ideas can civilly discuss differences. Four of the five participants shared that they avoid these conversations.

Similar to Mary, Jessica wanted to flip a common power dynamic in schools. Specifically, she wanted to change the power dynamic that exists between teachers and

students when grades are assigned by teachers. The way in which Jessica did this was by giving her students the opportunity to voice to her what they felt was an accurate and appropriate grade. As a teacher who hated grading because of the power dynamic it created, Jessica was able to become a different type of teacher by no longer being a teacher who assigned grades traditionally.

Ava also resisted the assignment of traditional grades by not making them a priority when she felt it was not in the students best interest. For instance, when students were experiencing trauma from gun violence in the community, Ava would tell students to not focus on school. She would say things like “take care of your heart.” Ava’s teaching was shaped around a mentor character type, and even though traditional grading does not provide space for teachers to be mentors, Ava resisted the expectation to collect work from students, no matter the situation, to remain authentic to who she hoped to be as an educator.

¹It Takes Two Flints to Make a Fire

All of the participants who resisted adhering to grading structures shared a belief that to make meaningful systematic change would require more than teachers performing singular acts of resistance. The participants of this study felt that they would have to work with teams of teachers and other impacted parties who also wanted to dismantle traditional grading. According to the participants, changes made as a group would be more powerful and more likely to be sustained over time if they were done in coordination with a large group of teachers.

¹ From the chapter “Lazy Laurence” L.M. Alcott, 2010, *Little Women*, p. 435. Copyright 1869 by Copyright Holder. Reprinted with permission.

One of the participants, Ava, shared that she had seen more impactful change already resulting from group collaboration. Ava was a member of the 9th grade team of teachers which was a collection of teachers who worked together to implement change in hopes of providing a more equitable experience for all students in the building. One project she found to be helpful was that the 9th grade team created student profiles that showcased students' strengths. Even though not directly tied to the grading system, I would argue a connection between grades and student profiles can be made. Traditional grading often does not consider all of a student's strengths because the focus is only on the skills being graded. A profile is a less discernible account of a student, and therefore I view it as an act of resistance against traditional grades.

Mary believed that the idea of collaboration extended beyond the teachers, and she felt that families also should have a voice in the conversation around grading. She felt that if teachers, students, and families engaged in a collaborative dialogue that they would be able to create a grading system that felt more equitable to all. She also emphasized that "we put too much pressure on students to have all the answers for us" and we needed to invite, but not overwhelm them.

Matthew, like Mary, wanted to engage in dialogues to create a more equitable grading system. He was the only participant who expressed strong attachment to the grading system that he had created, which he felt minimized harm against students as much as possible within the confines of the grading expectations of the school. One might assume his adamance implied a lack of flexibility, but instead, during the final focus group, he vocalized that he "would certainly be happy to give up some of my

practices that [he] hold[s] near and dear just for the sake of having more alignment” and equity.

David and Jessica also expressed ideas about the strength of working with a team of people to resist traditional grading practices. Even though all of the five of these participants had different values and beliefs as teachers, and consequently made different choices as teachers, they all created a new identity or modified parts of an existing identity when they discussed working collaboratively. These participants identified as a part of a coalition that would make change.

The second thematic finding focused on how teachers enacted acts of resistance because of their frustration from operating within a grading system that did not align with their identity and agency. When teachers actively resisted, they gained optimism. Teachers were able to envision ways to do their jobs differently. Teachers also were able to figure new realities in which they were capable of creating change within the traditional grading system. Lastly, teachers who actively resisted traditional grading structures viewed themselves as more capable of change if they worked with others. Even though I feel that the findings of this study show an understanding of my research problem, I acknowledge that the findings are imperfect interpretations of the data presented. In the following section, I will address the limitations of the study.

Limitations

As a qualitative research study with a small group of English high school teachers, I cannot generalize the findings to all teachers who work in high schools. This study was situated at a large comprehensive urban high school in the Pacific Northwest.

The findings cannot be applied to other schools and teachers in general. With that being said, I suspect that the findings of this study would resonate with many teachers regardless of their proximity to this site of research. I think many high school teachers who work in schools that adhere to traditional grading structures have experienced similar feelings to those of the participants in this study. I believe that most teachers know the emotional weight that comes from assigning grades. Most teachers have experienced a conflict with a student, family, or administrator because of graded assignments. What I question is how many teachers would be like the five of the participants of this study who resisted the traditional grading system. My guess is that a significant portion of teachers are already doing this and by doing so they create new identities and paths of agency.

This study was my first experience conducting a large-scale research project. Given that, I can guarantee that I made choices that might have run counter to my focus or my aims. I assume that I missed key moments of analysis. Working with what I considered to be a substantial amount of interview, focus group, and department meeting transcripts meant that I likely missed coding and discourse analysis opportunities. I also assume that some of my codes were miscategorized. My lack of experience with interviews was a limitation too. I felt that I could have remained more neutral during the interviews than I did. I wanted to appear comfortable and easy to talk to, but I did not want to show clear enthusiasm or disagreement with any of the participants' ideas. I suspect there were a few moments during the interviews when I displayed more obvious emotional reactions to what participants said than I had intended to. I wanted to establish

trust with the participants, and in working toward trust and shared understanding, I realized that I may have posed some questions in a leading way. This limitation may have skewed the findings of the study because participants may have felt persuaded to discuss topics that were not as important to them as they were to me. In my literature review, I discussed how the identity an individual presents is influenced by power structures embedded within interactions. When I inadvertently asked leading questions, I was using my power as the interviewer to influence participants' responses to the questions, and therefore shaping, to some degree, how they presented themselves.

Another limitation of my study was that even with one-on-one interviews, focus groups, and department meetings, I was not able to fully know the context or the participants. Even though I might argue that an individual can never know another individual fully, I still believe my gaps in understanding were occasionally limiting to my analysis. If I had known more about the histories of the context, participants, and relationships amongst participants, I may have been able to draw different conclusions. For example, one dynamic I was not able to understand was the dynamic between Ava and David. I was able to infer that there was conflict between these two individuals because of my observations of their positioning; however, I was not able to identify the specific reasons why their conflict existed.

Working during the COVID pandemic also was a limitation of my study. When I initially proposed this study, I wanted to interview all of the participants in person at their school site. However, with social distancing constraints doing so was not possible. If I had been able to interview each participant on site, I might have observed mannerisms

and artifacts that were not in view on the Google Meets. Such observations might have offered me further insight, for example, into the nature of the tension between David and Ava.

I also felt that having virtual focus groups was a limitation. Understanding how people position themselves is challenging, and I felt restricted in my ability to interpret these moves on the computer. My participants were small on my screen and it was challenging to read physical moves and mannerisms. I also think being in the physical space makes it easier for researchers to interpret the culture of an environment. I feel that my understanding of the culture at Walker was impacted because my study was only conducted virtually.

Summary and Results

In this chapter, I have presented themes that I interpreted in response to my three research questions. All of the participants of this study experienced impacts on identity and agency resulting from the practice of assigning grades. The first thematic concept explored the four part process that teachers experience if their values, beliefs, and perceptions are in conflict with the traditional grading system expectations. The four part process is outlined below:

1. Phase 1: A clash occurs between teacher identity and the traditional grading system.
2. Phase 2: Teachers experience iterative feelings of dissonance.
 - a. Teachers shared feelings of their values being misaligned to adhere to traditional grading structures.

- b. Teachers felt that they compromised their beliefs to adhere to traditional grading structures.
 - c. Teachers experienced tension with students because of operating in the grading system.
3. Phase 3: Teachers experience identity friction with symptoms of emotional weight and burnout.
 4. Phase 4: Teachers are frustrated with the traditional grading system.

If teachers experienced this four phase cycle, their identity and agency was stifled.

However, some participants used their frustration with the system to resist it. The acts of resistance varied by participants' identities and agencies. The acts of resistance also shaped their identity and agency into something new. Even though there was variation in what they resisted and how, they each made moves of resistance. This resistance showed up as:

1. remaining optimistic within a system they considered broken
2. evolving their identity to invite space for them to make a change that might have conflicted with their perceived ideas about how to be a teacher
3. believing in the power of working with a team to resist traditional grading structures and make actual change

In chapter 5, I connect these thematic findings and analyses to the literature review presented in chapter 2, with a focus on identity, figured worlds/identity, positioning, discourse and dialogism, and narratives.

Chapter 5 Synthesis and Conclusion

Introduction

I designed this study to build an understanding of how teachers experience identity friction while working within the confines of the traditional grading system and how teachers' acts of resistance reflexively impact their identity and agency. In Oregon, students need to pass four years of English to be eligible for graduation. Given the obligation of teachers to assign grades, the frequency with which teachers assign grades, and the limited research on how traditional grading practices impact teachers' identity and agency, there was a clear need for exploring how teachers experience identity friction in grading. Three research questions guided my study:

1. What impact does the assignment of traditional grades in a U.S. high school have on teacher identity and agency?
2. How does the experience of identity friction arise for teachers in the practice of assigning traditional grades in a U.S. high school?
3. For teachers who resist, how do teachers' use of strategies of active and passive resistance against traditional grading practices shape their identities and agency? And how do teachers' identities and agency shape the use of strategies of active and passive resistance to traditional grading practices?

In this final chapter, I begin with a synthesis of the findings of this interview study. In the next section, I situate the study using key theoretical concepts introduced in chapter two (identity and agency, figured worlds, narrative, positioning, dialogism, and discourse), which guided my methodological choices. I then introduce the implications of

the study and present future considerations and recommendations for future research. I conclude this chapter with remarks that illustrate my personal experiences with the research process and how it has forever shaped my identity and agency as a teacher.

Synthesis of Findings

In this section, I synthesize the findings of the study. Given that I organized the findings and discussion in chapter four around two themes (rather than around the three research questions), I mirror that structure in my synthesis of the findings. The first half of this section synthesizes the findings relating to the impact of grading on teacher identity and agency. The second half is a synthesis of the findings associated with the impact of resistance on identity and agency.

Thematic Concept 1 Synthesis: Impact of Identity Friction on Identity and Agency

In chapter four, I discussed the findings associated with research question one, “What impact does the assignment of traditional grades in a U.S. high school have on teacher identity and agency?” and research question two, “How does the experience of identity friction arise for teachers in the practice of assigning traditional grades in a U.S. high school?” I found teachers who operated in a traditional grading system (and had frustrations about working within it) were placed in situations that impacted their ability to make choices that felt aligned with their identity and agency. For the participants of the study, operating in the traditional grading system caused frustration with the system, and, on some occasions, frustration with their students. The symptoms they experienced as a result of operating in the traditional grading system were emotional weight and teacher

burnout. The next section will discuss the conclusions I drew from my findings for my first and second research questions.

Inevitable Identity Friction

Regardless of a teacher's identity and agency, identity friction will occur if teachers do not agree with the traditional grading system that they operate in as educators. Not surprisingly, the participants of this study presented unique identities through their narratives. Through the stories they told, and the values, beliefs, and attitudes that they presented about various experiences, I was able to make inferences about who they were as educators. As I have discussed throughout this study, the participants were not all in agreement about what it means to be a teacher. Given the various perceptions of what it means to be a teacher, I did not know if all the teachers would experience identity friction as a result of operating in a traditional grading system. For instance, Dan had the least in common with the other participants regarding the practices he valued as a teacher. The other participants hinted at or directly suggested that his views of education were regressive and outdated. During some of the interviews, Dan seemed to feel validated by the choices he made about grading (values that emphasized elements of traditional grading). Even though he may have had some pedagogical agreements with the principles behind the traditional grading system, he, like the other participants, experienced identity friction.

Identity friction mainly presented itself when participants discussed the emotional weight and burnout that they experienced from the burden of grading work as English teachers. Even though participants never used the term identity friction to describe their

feelings, the symptoms they discussed fit the criteria. Feelings of exhaustion and emotional weight were some of the most common trends in the coded data in the in vivo and the value level of coding when participants spoke about grading practices. All six participants spoke about feeling burned out by the amount of grading that they perceived to be an expectation of their jobs. Especially as newer teachers, they felt the need to give extensive feedback on graded work because they felt that was an unspoken expectation. For instance, Ava, Mary, Jessica, and David spoke about the excessive hours they would spend grading when they were newer teachers and how they had poor work-life balance. They all shared how they felt the amount of grading they had to do was unmanageable and unsustainable.

Some participants felt that grading a high volume of assignments was an expectation. Dan and Matthew graded the greatest number of assignments, and Dan shared that he thought more grades led to a more accurate final grade for students. Per semester, Matthew graded less assigned work than Dan but still graded four formal reading assessments and four writing assessments. I inferred that Dan and Matthew's grading frequency was directly tied to their burnout. Teachers who are troubled by operating with a traditional grading model will eventually experience identity friction. If teachers experience stress, burnout, and identity conflict continually as a result of grading, the residual effect will be identity friction.

Clear Identity Intensifies Identity Friction

Identity friction around grading occurs more often and with more severity when teachers can clearly identify and enact their values and beliefs about what it means to

them to be a teacher. When the participants shared their narratives, they all disclosed that early in their careers, they could not fully articulate their identities as teachers. For some of the participants, not being able to clearly articulate or actualize their identities stemmed from not reflecting on their identities due to lack of time, tools, or experience. One teacher who spoke to a lack of reflection was Jessica. I suspect that Jessica was not given the tools in her teacher preparation program to reflect on grade assignments critically. Her lack of reflection tools may have been the possible cause for her minimal reflection on her grading practices.

For other participants, a lack of ability to articulate their identities (being able to present their identity openly) did cause them to hide or conceal aspects of their identities in their jobs. Their inability to articulate their identities as younger teachers resulted from them feeling pressure to be a particular type of teacher, which meant that they did not incorporate themselves authentically into their teacher identities. To illustrate my point, when David wore typical women's clothing, such as cardigans, to present as a straight woman, she was not presenting, nor articulating, her identity in an authentic way.

All the participants in this study could clearly articulate who they believed themselves to be as teachers. Tracking the participants' narratives helped me see that as teachers became clearer about their professional identity, they experienced more identity friction.

David's experiences as a private Catholic school teacher offered one example of how a teacher's clarity around their identity can cause them more identity friction. In chapter four, I outlined a series of events that caused the school that David worked at to

adopt a “don’t ask, don’t tell policy” for employees who identified as gay. Given that David had just publicly announced her engagement, she was in a challenging situation. David ultimately decided to use this unfortunate experience to teach precisely how she wanted, even though she feared it would eventually cause her to lose her job. David did not get fired from her job, but she shared that her mental health suffered because the school made her job as difficult as possible to force her out. At this point, David was teaching authentically to her teacher identity. Yet, this was also one of the worst times in her career because she was under constant pressure from the school administration. David was very clear about who she was as a teacher and performed actions that aligned with her identity. David also admitted that her decision to do so did put her work under greater scrutiny from her administrators. She also attributed the pressure her administrators put on her and the emotional toll it took as one of the main reasons she left the school.

David was not the only teacher whose experience of identity friction was amplified when she tried to enact her identity authentically. Jessica also spoke to having more stress when she implemented the grading structures she reflected on individually and collaborated with her peers to create. For example, Jessica and her 9th grade team of teachers made agreements about implementing a proficiency-based grading model. Doing so meant that their students would have fewer assessments and practice work would not impact students’ final grades. Jessica said that using a proficiency-based model did create tension with her colleagues who did not use a proficiency model and with families who were not familiar with this style of grading. In contrast, Jessica was less stressed about grading when she graded without much thought to how she implemented grading

structures. For example, as a younger teacher Jessica shared that she adopted whatever grading system she had been given from her colleagues. This meant that when she worked at a school that calculated practice work regardless of the skill level of the work, she graded her students this way. When she became more thoughtful about the implementation of grading structures, she experienced more identity friction, especially when the administration challenged the choices she made about grading. One example of this was when Jessica's prior administrator "gifted" a student with a higher grade than Jessica had initially assigned. This experience was more than a situation that angered her. When Jessica spoke about the experience, she listed it after several other grievances about grading (and administration's role in grading) at this school. This experience was one of many which caused me to conclude she was discussing identity friction, and not just a conflict that frustrated her. Clarity about one's identity, the ability to publicly present that identity, and the authentic enactment of that identity can lead to more identity friction than for teachers who are not clear about their identity, do not publicly present all aspects of their identity, and do not authentically enact their identity. For the participants of this study, individuals who were frustrated by working within the traditional grading system, identity friction was more common as they gained experience, which for them seemed to come from being more certain about who they were as teachers and unapologetic about presenting and enacting their identities.

Impetus for Teacher Well-Being

Given that identity friction can increase when teachers have identity awareness, one might assume that to reduce identity friction, teachers might choose to uncritically

follow the expected structures without reflecting on their values. However, the teachers in this study seemed to do the opposite; they reflected on their grading practices and questioned how to implement their grading practices even if it meant going against the traditional models they had experienced, been told to use, or perceived to be an expectation. Going against traditional grading models (as in deciding to implement grading practices that were not traditional) did invite stress, a symptom of identity friction, into their lives. For example, in a traditional grading model, grades are given on the 1-100 scale. Many of the participants in this study did not use the 1-100 scale to grade their students and instead used the 1-4 scale. The 1-4 scale was less familiar to their students, colleagues, and the families in their community. By deciding to use the 1-4 scale, participants often experienced stress from the conflicts or confusion that were a direct result of not using the 1-100 scale. Another example of the participants not implementing traditional grading structures even though it resulted in stress was assigning fewer assignments in a proficiency model. Students, colleagues, and families were accustomed to grades being posted frequently. When teachers utilized a different system (a proficiency-based system) that did not post grades frequently, students, colleagues, and families were sometimes frustrated or angered by this, thus causing conflict and potential stress for teachers who implemented proficiency-based grading. At the same time, grading fewer assignments allowed teachers to find innovative ways to help manage grading and impact on their well-being.

In addition to fewer assignments in the proficiency model, Mary also had students give peer and self-feedback which saved her the time she would have spent on giving

feedback to each of her students throughout the writing process. She flipped the traditional model of teachers being the person responsible for feedback and invited her students into the process. For Ava, the expectation of grading significant amounts of work was overwhelming, so she limited the number of assignments and promised herself not to take work home. Dan, like Ava, structured the logistics of where and when he graded by making Sunday morning grading part of his routine. Jessica, also like Ava, limited the number of assignments she assigned to her students. She also shifted to a grading model in which she focused on one standard and ignored aspects of assessments that fell outside of that standard (grading an essay on evidence and ignoring conventional errors, for example). To minimize the hours David spent providing student feedback, she gave audio feedback. She also would not edit a student's conventional errors or awkward wording in an essay and instead would point to an issue the student should revisit. Lastly, to help increase Matthew's well-being as a teacher, he implemented familiar systems. He did this by using the same rubrics for writing and reading assessments, which made him a quick grader of student work. The stress that grading can cause can lead teachers to find innovative ways to have more time for themselves, but it also provides opportunities for students to advocate for their grades. These innovations were sometimes practical considerations (like grading fewer standards) for teachers to spend less time on grading; other innovations were practical while also being counter to the conventional expectations placed on teachers around grading. For example, the participants shared that in their teaching programs the idea that feedback on writing was only the task of the teacher was emphasized. When Mary had students give each other feedback on their

writing, her act was counter to the conventional expectation that she is solely responsible for providing feedback.

In a traditional grading model, teachers are solely responsible for assigning grades, and students have no input on what grade is assigned. Half of the participants felt that students should be involved in assigning grades. For the teachers who invited students into grading dialogues, some of their motivation came from the friction they felt when assigning students grades. For example, David felt grades were a “made-up lie” and she was frustrated by the emotional weight grades placed on many of her students. In her interview, she disclosed that if a student wanted an A, she would give them an A. Jessica had similar feelings about grades being “pretend” and expressed that they mattered little to her, so in her Leadership class, she asked kids to tell her what grade they deserved, and that would be the grade she assigned them (with a few rare exceptions if the student’s perception of their grade was vastly different than Jessica’s). She also found that students graded the same way she would have or were harder on themselves than she would have been. Mary also felt students should advocate for their grades; she wanted her students to feel that their grades were “fair” even if that meant having an uncomfortable conversation with her. She wanted her students to be empowered and not be passive recipients of their grades. When teachers in this study experienced identity friction around grading, several of them chose to shift the power dynamic by finding innovative ways to give students more power in the assignment of their grades. This shift in teacher practices around grading represents an evolution of practice and also an evolution in how the teachers view themselves as educators. I turn to this shift in identity in the next section.

Thematic Concept 2 Synthesis: Impact of Resistance on Identity and Agency

In chapter four, I discussed my findings associated with my third research question, “For teachers who resist, how do teachers' use of strategies of active and passive resistance against traditional grading practices shape their identities and agency? And how do teachers’ identities and agency shape the use of strategies of active and passive resistance to traditional grading practices?” I found that identity friction helped the participants remain optimistic, make changes to their grading practices, and work as teams to actively resist traditional grading structures. The next section will discuss the conclusions I drew from my findings for my third research question.

Ally, Mentor, or Adversary?

In a traditional grading model, the assignment of grades is one direction; the teacher assigns the grade to the student. In theory, the student should not influence the assignment of that grade beyond completing the writing or other task involved. Even though teachers may be influenced by student effort and other non-academic factors, the power of the final grade assignment is with the teacher, not the student. Several participants in this study invited students into conversations about their final grade assignments. Sometimes teachers even gave students the ability to suggest a final grade, albeit one that involved a teacher’s veto power. These adaptations to the traditional grades shifted teacher practice and shifted how teachers identified themselves.

Teachers who involved students in grading dialogues (an act of resistance to traditional grading) acted as allies with their students. The ally character did appear elsewhere in the data (as teachers identified other teachers as allies during the

interviews), but only when teachers gave students voice in the assignment of grades did teachers appear, from a narrative perspective, as allies of their students. The act of resisting seemed to have a significant impact on their identities.

Not all teachers allowed students to have a central role in the assignment of grades. In the narrative analysis, teachers who did not invite students into the grading process showed up as mentors and occasional adversaries to their students, rather than as allies. Teachers who did not have students participate in the assignment of grades most often performed like mentors to their students within the role as graders. All of the participants in this study acted as mentors to their students during their teaching careers. The notable trend with this character type, mentor, was that teachers in the mentor role frequently described consoling students about grades in an attempt to mitigate the harm imposed by those grades. While none of the teacher participants expressed an intention to harm students, they each recognized a harmful impact (for at least some students) when they assigned grades the students or other stakeholders perceived as low. The teachers attempted to address the friction between their intent and their impact by stepping in to console students who received "low" grades. Teachers who fell into this mentor category often had more identity friction than the teachers who acted as allies with their students, which suggests that acts of resistance against the traditional grading system have the potential to alleviate identity friction.

Acts of resistance could reduce identity friction, whereas adherence to traditional structures sometimes increased identity friction. All six participants spoke about instances where their relationship with students was tense because of their assignment of

grades. In some cases, teachers, sometimes knowingly and other times not, entered a conflict with students about grade assignments. These conflicts created battles with students that put each participant in an adversarial position. If this conflict was combined with residual emotional weight and burnout that teachers often experienced from assigning grades to students, teachers no longer acted like mentors consoling their students from the potential harm of grades. When teachers adhered to traditional expectations around grading (including locating the responsibility of assigning grades with the teacher) and conflict with a student resulted, the teachers frequently expressed being either frustrated with the system or, in some cases, the student.

Interestingly, three of the six teachers expressed frequent annoyance at themselves for being angry with students for not meeting expectations of student work criteria even though they simultaneously felt terrible for the students who struggled to meet that criteria. Also, these conflicts and the emotions surrounding them were further complicated for teachers who believed that grades were arbitrary and made-up. In such cases, teachers were upholding a system that they believed to be make-believe, even when they acknowledged the potential harm the system and their actions to uphold it might cause students. From a birds-eye view, it seems absurd that teachers would follow grading policies that run counter to their values and intentions in their relationships with students and counter to their ideas of who they are or want to be as teachers, despite recognizing that following these policies is detrimental to their own well-being. One might wonder why teachers would follow policies that can harm students and teachers. Listening to the participants during this study, I inferred that teachers would follow these

types of policies because they were familiar with them (both as students and teachers). Even if teachers wanted to grade differently, it was easy to slip into recognizable routines, especially during times of high stress, such as the end of a grading period.

Network of Teachers

The teachers who were members of effective teams were most likely to actively resist traditional grading structures, which helped alleviate some of the identity friction they experienced. Half of the participants identified as members of effective teams; one teacher claimed she was a member of a semi-effective team, and two of the teachers did not work on any teacher teams that they considered effective at the time of the study. In chapter four, I discussed how change is more likely to occur if educators work together to resist traditional structures. I believe a crucial reason change is adopted is that active resistance strategies are more effective than passive resistance strategies. For example, the teachers on the 9th-grade team (Jessica, Ava, Mary) did not implement the traditional A through F grading model. They rejected the A through F model openly and discussed their reasoning for this choice with their colleagues. The 9th grade team did not have to get administrative support to make this choice; however, the participants on the 9th grade team all voiced that if a conflict about grading occurred with students or family that they would actively avoid involving the administration. The 9th grade team's decision to grade this way also created potential conflict with some of their peers who disagreed that proficiency-based grading was best for students. Considering the potential conflicts that could arise from proficiency-based grading, their commitment to it suggests a strong belief that proficiency based-grading is a change that would positively benefit them and

their students. The 9th-grade team of teachers was also the most aligned in implementing a grading structure. I believe that teachers will succeed in making changes to the grading system if they work together. The findings also indicate that acting as a team helps reduce the frequency and intensity of identity friction. Feeling isolated as a teacher was a common theme that showed up when teachers reported burnout and emotional weight (two of the symptoms I associate with identity friction). Therefore, working on an effective team could be one way to reduce identity friction.

The two teachers who did not actively work on a team (even though PLCs are required) also seemed the most disheartened about the restrictions they perceived to face as the people responsible for assigning student grades. In the interviews, focus groups, and department meetings, these teachers seemed the most frustrated by the system. Interestingly, these two teachers were also the least willing to change their grading practices, despite their frustrations with the status quos. I do not think this paradox was a coincidence. I think it was a symptom of working in isolation within a system that does not adhere to the same principles that many educators value. Without a network of support, these teachers appeared to be unable to overcome the obstacles to changing the status quo in their grading practices.

Situating the Findings in the Larger Context

In this section, I situate my study within the scholarly literature reviewed in the second chapter. This section will show how I analyzed my findings through the lens of the theoretical constructs. I used these concepts to provide insight into how teachers

experience identity friction and to seek understanding of how resistance impacts a teacher's identity and agency.

Identity as a Complex, Multidimensional Concept

Identity is a complex, flexible concept that a person has and experiences. The construction of one's identity is a dynamic process. Each participant presented different professional identities of themselves across their teaching careers. As new teachers, their identity presentations did not match their identity presentations at the time of the study, which suggests that their identity evolves as part of a complex process.

The participants shaped their own identities, including influences such as interactions with others, language, context, and narratives (Eaton et al., 2019; Gee, 2014; Hill Soloman, Dornan & Stalmeijer, 2015, Nespor & Barylske, 1991). This study allowed me to analyze the influences of traditional grading practices on teacher identity, but it also provided me an opportunity to understand other potential influences on teacher identity. Studying the impact of grading practices on teacher identity depended on developing a nuanced (if inevitably incomplete) understanding of each teacher's identity. Additionally, understanding participants' identities helped me to understand their acts of active and passive resistance against traditional grading practices. The ideas presented in chapter two about identity construction helped me to understand the complex and sometimes seemingly contradictory moments of participants' narratives.

Sachs (2015) asserted that professional identity is a negotiation process that helps individuals make sense of their experiences and shapes how they will present themselves in future experiences. Listening to the narratives the participants shared, there were times

that I felt like I was witnessing the projection of an inner negotiation of who they were as teachers. When the participants shared their narratives, they were making their thinking visible about who they were and who they wanted to be. From these narratives, I was able to gain some understanding about who they were, which in turn helped me analyze the impact that grading and acts of resistance against grading had on their complex professional identities.

Professional identity is a negotiation process, and it is also a complex process to analyze because people have multiple identities and sub-identities (Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009). When people publicly present their identity, they foreground one or more of their many identities for others to recognize. In positioning theory, when a person attempts to be recognized by others they are presenting a persona. Even though personas are not directly stated as synonymous with the public presentation of an identity or sub-identity, I believe a parallel can be drawn. Beauchamp and Thomas's (2009) claim that people have multiple identities drew my attention to the array of identities that each of my participants presented. When I coded the data, I continually looked for different identity presentations, knowing that each participant would have multiple personas (identity presentation) that were socially situated.

Similar to Beauchamp and Thomas (2009), Gee (2014) outlined that there are four identity types (Nature Identity, Institutional Identity, Discourse Identity, Affinity Identity). Different types of identity are foregrounded in different social settings. To better understand what sources influenced teacher identity and agency, I coded which of Gee's four types of identity were foregrounded in the data. In interviews, participants

were more apt to foreground Nature Identity, such as when Dan mentioned that he was diagnosed with ADHD as a child, than to foreground other identity types. For him, this identity marker shaped who he was as a student and who he became as a teacher. He preferred structures and routines in his grading practices. For instance, he shared that he would be distracted by girls in high school, and to minimize that distraction he asked to be enrolled in an all-boys boarding school. When he shared that grading was a task he often fell behind on as a new teacher, he implemented his Sunday morning routine. He also shared that influential people in his life suggested that he not become a teacher because of this attribute. Dan did become a teacher, but this marker was part of how he identified himself. He also did not foreground this part of his identity in any focus groups. Dan may not have foregrounded his ADHD identity marker in the focus group because of the complex relationship he had with his colleagues. Before the focus group, Dan expressed that he would be less vocal about his ideas in that context because he knew his peers would disagree with him. In the interview, I had no history of Dan as an educator, so perhaps this allowed him to be more vulnerable about the information he shared with me. Dan's decision to not foreground his ADHD in the focus group highlights how important the context of an interaction can be in determining what part of an individual's identity will be presented.

Teachers foregrounded more parts of their identities in the focus groups than in the one-on-one interviews. Institutional Identities and Discourse Identities were foregrounded in focus groups depending on the participants' responses. When there were moments of disagreement, certain participants (Dan, Matthew, and occasionally Ava)

foregrounded Institutional Identities, whereas others foregrounded Discourse Identities. Dan, Matthew, and Ava discussed their frustration with the system at greater length than the other participants. When teachers foregrounded their Institutional Identity, even if they disagreed with that institution's rules and procedures, they were more likely to experience higher levels of identity friction than those that placed their Institutional Identity in the background. For example, Dan often would say that he was a “good worker bee” when he discussed being frustrated with the grading system. His reference to being a “good worker bee” foregrounds his Institutional Identity because he valued being viewed as a good employee. Moments before Dan shared being a “good worker bee” Dan foregrounded his Discourse Identity; he shared his belief that teachers should make ethical choices about grading. When he shared that he believed it was unethical to give retroactive credits to students, moments later he said that he would follow the grading expectations outlined by his administrators. He then repeated that he would be a good employee multiple times during the remainder of the discussion. By foregrounding his Institutional Identity, Dan was placing more value on being a good worker than on being a teacher who makes ethical choices about grading.

Other participants tended to foreground their Discourse Identities when sharing frustrations about operating in the grading system. For example, when Mary’s Discourse Identity was foregrounded, she expressed a belief that grades should be easy for families to understand. She wanted to be seen as an empathetic educator. When she foregrounded her Institutional Identity, she expressed a belief that collaborating and working with administration was important. She wanted to be seen as a teammate. Her narrative about

her frustration using a grading matrix at a previous school highlighted how Mary tended to foreground her Discourse Identity. At this school, grades were often at a C or lower for many students most of the term because of how grades were calculated in the matrix. Essentially, the grade would stay significantly lower than the final grade for most of the term, which caused students and families distress. The low grade for the majority of the term was not because the student was performing poorly, even though students and families interpreted it that way. Families were confused by the grading system, and Mary shared being frustrated by this. When she discussed this narrative, she foregrounded her Discourse Identity as an empathetic educator, and not her Institutional Identity as a teammate.

Improvisational Acts Impacts on Identity and Agency

Buchanan (2015) examined the impact of teachers working in institutions that adhered to “era of accountability” policies and concluded that conflict occurs when teachers feel their identity and agency are not in alignment with school expectations. Buchanan (2015) did not name this phenomenon identity friction, but I believe the concept of dissonance he explains is the same concept I have named identity friction. I would argue that the word dissonance captures the feeling of unease that teachers experience when there is a mismatch between institutional expectations and teacher’s values, but identity friction addresses the impact of those feelings on a teacher’s identity. I feel that the term identity friction illustrates the potential impacts teachers feel, a figurative chipping away at their identity which results from operating in a system that does not align with their beliefs. If teachers work in institutions that they perceive as

limiting their agency, they will experience intense identity friction, and may ultimately leave those institutions. Several of the study participants spoke about experiences working in schools that upheld rules or protocols that did not align with their beliefs about how grading structures should be implemented. For example, Matthew worked in a school that told him how to grade even though he disagreed with the policy. Mary worked in a school that implemented proficiency grading in a way that she felt was harmful and unfair to students. David worked in a school that asked her to hide a part of her identity as a gay woman, if she wanted to retain employment. When these participants spoke about their concerns with their institutions, they also shared that these were the worst experiences they had working within any school. All of them were deeply unhappy, which led them to leave those institutions (either by choice, by being fired, or being made to feel uncomfortable enough to motivate a decision to leave).

A parallel can be drawn between Gyanumaya's experience of scaling up the building and Matthew's and David's exit from schools. In all three situations, these individuals were constrained by elements of culture. Gyanumaya was constrained by her culture's expectation that she not enter the home of a higher caste individual; Matthew was constrained by a culture that expected him to follow the administration's directives regardless of his hesitations; David was constrained by a culture that expected her to not be out about her sexuality at her job. The difference between Gyanumaya's situation and Matthew's and David's is that Gyanumaya enacted an improvisation because of the constraints of culture, whereas Matthew and David used their agency to exit an institution that had cultural expectations that were out of alignment with their values. Even though

these were experiences of identity friction that led to teachers leaving their schools, other moments in these experiences highlighted the improvisational nature of identity presentation that can occur in situations where identity friction occurs.

Gyanumaya's scaling of a balcony illustrates how individuals can break the cultural expectations for people in their social position. All of the participants in this study spoke of being frustrated with traditional grading structures, and those who found opportunities to improvise new ways to be "teachers" were able to alleviate some of the identity friction they experienced. For example, when David's administration asked her to hide a part of her Nature Identity (her sexuality), she decided to teach in a way that was more authentic to who she was as a teacher. David ultimately left that school because of the conflict she had with the leadership's "don't ask, don't tell" policy. But, this source of stress also allowed David the opportunity to be the teacher she wanted to be, which went against some of the normalized expectations of how teachers should act in a Catholic school. In the following section, I will discuss how figured worlds can influence teachers to have hope in a system that creates identity friction. I will also discuss how figured worlds can be inaccurate perceptions of lived worlds.

Figured Worlds: Sites of Future Change

Figured worlds were influential in how the participants imagined what it was like to be a teacher before becoming teachers. Figured worlds are representations of a world in which individuals can imagine a narrativized or dramatized perception of a situation that both displays normalized aspects of the lived world and fantastical elements from one's mind. During the first focus group, all the participants joked about how wildly

inaccurate their perception of being a teacher was and the reality of being a teacher. Mary had believed that teachers only needed to know the content to be a teacher; David had thought she would need to appear as a straight woman; Matthew had thought it would be a “chill job.” Through narratives, participants shared figured worlds about teaching as a profession. These figured worlds were created from their own experiences and the narratives they had heard about teaching through interactions with others. For example, Matthew’s idea about teaching being a “chill job” was influenced by his community viewing teaching as a job that required no skill. David’s perception that she needed to appear as a straight woman to be accepted as a teacher came from her not having any out gay teachers when she went to school. Mary’s perception of teachers only needing to be knowledgeable about their subjects came from her experiences as a student seeing teachers as sources of academic content and not as a mentor or ally. Much like my participants, my perceptions of what it would be like to be a teacher did not match the experiences I had when I became a teacher.

Figured worlds also are where teachers can envision hope for a different model than the traditional grading system. Figured worlds were like places and spaces for hope for the participants, and they were sources of relief from the frustrations they experienced from working within the traditional grading system. I use the phrase places and spaces for figured worlds because figured worlds are reimaginings of the possibilities of a world. I am not suggesting that figured worlds are literal places and spaces, but because figured worlds represent aspects of our lived worlds, the phrase has been adopted. The earlier narrative of David not feeling obligated to adhere to the expectations of being a teacher at

a Catholic school is an example of a figured world being a place for hope and ultimately action. In this narrative, David discussed how she wanted issues like racism, sexism, and heteronormativity introduced in a school's curriculum. David had imagined addressing these ideas with her students as a teacher. When her school situation caused her a high amount of identity friction (from the expectation that being an out gay teacher was not allowed), she no longer only figured a world in which she could present topics like racism, sexism, and heteronormativity, and instead became a teacher that did address those topics. Her figured world during a time of intense identity friction, became not only a source of hope, but something that she enacted in the lived world. The figured worlds that participants created were like a step before teachers took action. Figured worlds are the interplay of using what is (the lived world expectations) along with one's own agency, to imagine what could be. They are spaces that individuals can use to improvise practices that move closer to what could be.

When asked about what changes they would make to the grading system, only one of the participants (Dan) said that change would never happen. Five of the participants shared elaborate ideas of how they would change the grading system, which made clear that teachers can envision a different system, a system in which their role as the person responsible for grades would no longer be a component of teacher identity. For some of the teachers, in their figured world, grades were eliminated entirely. For others, in their figured world, students were no longer concerned with grades and only cared about learning the content.

Narratives: Tools To Envision Change

Given that narratives can be used as tools to help people understand the world (Sarbin, 2004), I was not surprised that teachers used them to make sense of the complicated situations they encountered due to their responsibility for assigning grades. For example, when Matthew shared his traumatic experience of “essentially being fired” from a previous school, the form was a narrative. When Ava spoke about yelling at a student who she perceived to be disrespectful, she told me about her experience in a narrative. Mary shared one story about when she assigned a final grade that she later regretted in a narrative. David used a narrative to discuss how she switched the curriculum to something more relevant, even though it was out of alignment with the rest of her team. Jessica’s discussion of how she felt unsupported in her teaching training program was presented as a narrative. The reasoning behind Dan’s elimination of assigning 0s was in a narrative. Narratives were a natural way for the participants to share details of their experiences. They were also helpful tools for the participants as they tried to understand past experiences that were unsettling or significant to them.

Participants not only used narratives to help them organize their experiences (Chase, 2011), but they also used narratives as tools to validate their beliefs about some of their grading decisions. Like the other participants, Dan felt that conventions in writing were necessary for students to learn if they were going to be successful in their future careers. He differed from the other participants in that he based a more significant proportion of students’ final grades on students’ ability to adhere to standard English conventions in writing. Dan shared narratives about his perceptions of the “real world”

and how students would not be successful in careers without a solid understanding of standard English conventions. These narratives seemed to be a way for Dan to justify the decision to weigh conventions into students' final grades heavily.

During the same interview, Dan also spoke about his belief that reading comprehension skills were essential for success after high school. Dan used a program, CommonLit, to assess students' reading comprehension skills. Many of the students did not receive passing scores on the CommonLit program. To lessen the harm that the CommonLit scores would have on their final grade, Dan decided to modify the grades so that they did not significantly impact their average. Given Dan's belief that grading conventions and reading comprehension were essential skills to have proficient understandings of before exiting after high school, one might expect he would calculate both skills in the same way in students' final averages. Dan did not calculate these skills the same way, which seems contradictory to his beliefs. Both identity and narratives are complex and can contain contradictions; therefore, Dan's narrative provided him a tool to discuss his choices about grading that were contradictory and complex.

Dan was not the only participant to explain their choices through narratives. Other participants also shared justifications for their grading decisions in narratives. Some of the narratives were used as tools to validate choices to assign grades about which participants had been less confident in assigning. Given that identity is complex and often contradictory, I was not surprised to see teachers' articulating complex narratives with contradictory components, such as being supportive of accepting late student work and

being angered by late student work. In addition to being used as a tool for teachers, narratives also represented their identities as teachers.

Narratives were one of the dominant ways teachers provided information about how they identified themselves and shared information about their values and beliefs. I designed many interview questions to encourage participants to share narratives (as narratives are one tool to understand identity). I did not develop all of the questions to promote narrative sharing, yet participants often shared their narratives to communicate who they were as teachers, even in response to interview questions that could have been articulated in other formats. Given that narratives are tools people use to understand the world (Sarbin, 2004), participants turning interview responses into narratives was not surprising. However, what was surprising was the co-construction of teacher identity through shared narrative. In this instance, a co-construction of teacher identity is when individuals engage in a dialogue to create a shared belief, value, and/or attitude about a topic. During focus groups, even though participants hold different values, beliefs, and attitudes about being a teacher, they had moments when they engaged in a dialogue to co-construct teacher identity. One of the interview questions I asked was: “what are your most valuable personal attributes teachers should bring to the classroom?” Even though the question was intended to create a discussion about their best personal attributes they brought to the classroom, the dialogue became focused on the ideal qualities a person should have if they are a teacher. For this part of the focus group discussion, the participants' dialogue was like a blending of voices to create the ideal attributes of a teacher. The question was not directed at creating a shared version of an ideal teacher,

and yet that is the direction the participants took the question. If I had taken the names out of the focus group transcript, the script would have sounded like one person was talking rather than six different teachers. In this moment, the teachers were able to co-construct a teacher identity through the tool of narrative.

As new teachers, all participants had been more likely to adhere to a school's grading expectations than they were later in their careers. Widely circulating beliefs about what it means to be a teacher, such as being an authority figure, grading student work, providing significant amounts of feedback, and having an Instagrammable classroom, were part of their perceived expectations of how they needed to act as teachers. These ideas came from influences they could name, such as teacher preparation programs and their families, but some of the influences that caused them to have this view of teaching could not be named. If the participants were like me as a teacher, many of their influences came from their experiences as students, and Big C conversations. Big C conversations are "public debates, arguments, motifs, issues or themes" (Gee, 2014a) that are in our minds because of presentations in the media, the texts we read, and interactions we have with others. In a later section of the chapter, I will discuss the implications of this idea.

Powers' Influence on Identity and Agency

McCarthy and Moje (2002) claim that power structures influence narratives, and the narratives shared in this study highlighted the power structures that were influential for the participants. Over several interviews, David outlined the power structures she felt were embedded in traditional grading structures. Her discussion of power shared much in

common with Foucault's (1975) description of the panopticon. David frequently raised the prevalence of white supremacist ideology in schools. She discussed how white supremacist ideology showed up in the content educators taught, how educators taught, and how educators evaluated student work. She also believed that capitalistic, heteronormative, and patriarchal ideas were embedded within the school culture and grading structures. In one interview, David shared an extended metaphor that many educators were not "above the maze," meaning that they were not aware of the hidden power structures of schools. For David, the system included people (administrators, influential community members, families of privilege, teachers, and students) who unknowingly and knowingly reified structures within a school. The people who created and upheld the system often kept unfair systems in place because they were not "above the maze." David felt she was above the maze because she was aware of the patriarchal, white supremacist, heteronormative, and capitalistic ideology embedded in school systems and was actively resisting against the system. David believed that the hidden values in grading systems were the most harmful to marginalized students, as compared to non-marginalized students, because marginalized students sat outside the dominant ideology. David and all of the other participants felt that students of color were disadvantaged by the hidden values embedded in schools. When teachers see the hidden power systems at play within the traditional grading system, they are more likely to practice resistance against these systems and take improvisational action intended to reduce the harm grading often causes marginalized students.

Similar to Foucault (1975), Bourdieu (1984) believed that social hierarchies lead to discrimination against non-dominant groups in the form of symbolic violence. Bourdieu (1984) argued that people who had power consciously and unconsciously committed symbolic violence against those who did not have power. Most participants shared experiences from when they were new teachers in which they had harmed students by assigning particular grades (either through damaging the student's perception of their worth or limiting their academic opportunities). In some of these situations, the participants shared that they harmed students of color in disproportionate amounts compared to white students by how and what they graded. Ava admitted that her lack of understanding about Hawaiian culture caused her to lash out at a student of color. When Ava yelled at the student for not responding to a question in a way she perceived to be appropriate, she was committing an act of symbolic violence against this student. As in Bourdieu's (1984) description of the unconscious imposition of symbolic violence by those in power, the teachers also said they had made these grading choices without much thought. In doing so, they were unknowingly upholding the dominant power structures at the expense of the non-dominant groups in society. Teachers in this study who acknowledged their positions of power were more likely to actively resist traditional grading practices than were teachers who did not mention power.

Sociocultural Positioning's Impact on Identity and Agency

In a traditional grading system, teachers have power over their students in the form of assigning student grades. If teachers identified their belief that they should aim to lessen the harm of grades on students, many of them participated in acts of resistance.

One such act of resistance occurred when teachers stopped positioning themselves as the wielders of grades, and instead positioned themselves as allies of students.

In chapter two, I discussed how positional identities are created by everyday interactions between people (Holland et al., 1998). The focus group data in this study highlighted the positional identities of the participants. Some participants rejected positioning attempts of others which suggested that not all participants were viewed by other participants in the way they had wanted. For example, in chapter four, I included excerpts of a disagreement between Ava and David about families' lack of involvement at Walker. Ava wanted to be seen as a progressive educator and attempted to position herself as one by suggesting that families' lack of involvement in their students' education was due to inequitable systems in society. David rejected this bid from Ava to position herself as progressive because David's perception of what a progressive educator was did not match the values Ava had presented. David rejected Ava's bid to be viewed as a progressive educator by disagreeing with her that the parents at Walker were less involved because of "life and time constraints." David claimed that they were not involved because the school system "had traumatized them for 13 years." Ava then attempted to position herself as a progressive educator again by agreeing with David's idea. Then even though David had just disagreed with Ava's original idea, David then agreed with Ava's original idea in order to reject Ava's final attempt to be viewed as progressive. Without the tool of positioning theory, I do not think I would have been able to understand the nuances of the relationship between Ava and David. I also believe that by using positioning theory, I was able to see the important role that perception plays in

how others might see us. Ava and David articulated very similar values and beliefs about education through this study, so I might not have predicted a conflict between them. However, in expecting that they would agree with each other's ideas in the focus group, I failed to consider that it did not matter if I saw them as ideologically aligned educators. What mattered was how they perceived each other. For example, if David perceived Ava to be less progressive it did not matter that I saw David and Ava as equally progressive. David's perception of Ava is what shaped her interactions with Ava, which highlights the power of perception on positioning attempts to be accepted or rejected.

The focus groups also showed that narratives were a way for participants to potentially create a new narrative in which their positional identity was accepted. Nasir and Shah (2011) discussed this phenomenon in their study of Black male students who took up different narratives than more commonly shared narratives. In that study, the students created narratives that identified them as exceptional at math instead of narratives of Black males not being "good" at math. Participants in this study did the same thing: they often created new narratives to reclaim a different identity than the one featured in commonly shared narratives about teaching; these new narratives often included values that embraced a rejection of traditional grading practices. If a teacher was able to see themselves as an educator who does not adhere to traditional grading practices, then teachers' acts of resistance were bolder and more public than were the acts of resistance taken by those that did not create new positional identities within traditional grading narratives. For instance, Mary shared that early in her teaching career, she graded the way she had been graded as a student, maintaining the status quo because she felt she

had no other choice but to be a teacher who followed expectations. As she gained experience, she began to reject the position of being the dutiful employee. She used narratives to position herself as an upstander (a person who stands up against harm done to a group of people). Mary shared that she no longer shied away from uncomfortable conversations with her colleagues about grading. When she shared this narrative, other members of the focus group accepted her positional identity (as an upstander). They did so by nodding and saying that her decision to have these conversations was necessary for change in the grading system. She was an upstander now, and that position came about through her use of narratives to construct a new position.

Dialogism's Impact on Identity and Agency

In chapter two, I discussed how discourse was categorized as either monological (one type of voice or group of voices dominates the space) or dialogical (multiple voices share the space). I then discussed how Vygotsky and Bakhtin interpreted dialogical discourse differently. Vygotsky thought dialogism was dialectical (shared discussions that allow varied voices to exist), and Bakhtin thought dialogism was polyphonic (concurrent harmonies of mixed voices to create one sound). In a study by Gutierrez, Rymes, and Larson (1995), the authors found that monologic classroom scripts kept the status quo of teacher talk dominating over student talk. They also found that when dialogic scripts were included in classroom discourse, a third space was created that invited heteroglossia that enabled active learning. I believe, based on evidence from my data set, that teachers' discourse style (monologic, dialectical dialogism, or polyphonic dialogism) aligns with the types of resistance educators enact against traditional grading

practices. Teachers tended to use one type of discourse style (monologic, dialectical dialogism, or polyphonic dialogism) in the context of grading. I am not suggesting that teachers cannot utilize other forms of discourse, as many did. Still, the prevalence of one type of discourse style might provide clues about their identity and agency. These clues could suggest the types of resistance against traditional grading systems that teachers may perform. In the context of assigning grades, teachers whose narratives included them participating in monologic scripts were often the most frustrated with students' academic performance. Teachers who utilized monological scripts upheld many traditional grading structures even if they later discussed frustration with assigning grades. Unlike the teachers whose narratives included dialogic discourse, teacher frustrations were directed at students more frequently than at the system and the people who create and uphold it.

The teachers whose narratives in the context of grading included dialogical discourse fell into dialectical or polyphonic discourse patterns. For example, when Matthew discussed a disagreement he had with a student over a grade assignment, his discourse style was dialectical. In this narrative, Matthew believed the student's writing was at a F level; the student believed his writing was at an A level. After the conversation, Matthew acknowledged some of the student's claims as to why his writing was above an F level. Matthew ultimately assigned the student a C. Matthew allowed both his voice and the student's voice to be shared, but one voice (Matthew's voice) had more power. The grade assignment compromise showed that the discourse was dialectical.

In contrast to a dialectical discourse style is a polyphonic discourse. David used this when she allowed students to suggest their final grades. David would have dialogues with her students about their grades, and ultimately David's voice and the student's voice shared the power. When she allowed this, she acknowledged that students were equally knowledgeable about their learning, and therefore would be able to assign a grade to their learning. Interestingly, the teachers in this study who allowed students to share what they felt should be their final grade had dialogues with students that appeared more harmonic than debate-like to me. Teachers who tried to minimize the harm of grades on students, but did not allow their students to suggest final grades, appeared to have discussions with students that invited student voices but did not blend their voice with their students. To put it more succinctly, teachers had more power in a dialectical discussion than in a polyphonic discussion.

Implications

In this section, I outline significant implications for this research, which I hope will promote dialogue amongst current educators and create curriculum and conversation about grading practices for teacher preparation programs.

During this study, participants spent approximately seven and a half hours during a pandemic to volunteer their time to discuss their identity and grading practices. They all expressed gratitude for having these discussions individually and as a group. This gratitude suggested that participants were not only interested in the topics but also had an interest in learning about their grading practices and how those practices impacted their identity and agency. They all shared that one of the frustrations with their jobs was that

reflection and constructive dialogues amongst colleagues were rarely available to them, which sometimes caused them to make choices without fully processing the situation. The current workload of teachers does not give teachers time during work hours to have meaningful discussions; teachers in this study volunteered their time outside of school hours to participate. Without allotted time for grading discussion amongst colleagues, teachers “do the best they can” and make choices about grading. For example, Matthew joked that teachers would need to be locked in a room for days to come up with common grading agreements, and he knew that was never going to happen.

I hope this study highlights the importance of providing teachers time to collaborate and listen to one another about grading. I believe that through collaboration, teachers can find areas of agreement, which might lead to grading practice changes that are beneficial to students’ academic success. The teachers in this study who worked in teams to determine grading practices were the most hopeful about making change and were also the people who resisted the traditional grading system the most. The focus groups were evidence that teachers with different identities could agree about some grading components. At the very least, the discussion helped them understand their colleagues' decisions that were different from their own. I suspect that over time, dialogues, like those facilitated in this study, may be one way to alleviate identity friction because teachers might be able to co-construct new ways of thinking about grading practices.

I believe that dialogue about identity and grading practices amongst current teachers would benefit teachers and students. These types of discussions should happen

before teachers enter the profession. Yoon (2016) found that collective stories can influence people to conform to expectations. In an earlier section of this chapter, I discussed how newer teachers were more susceptible to adhering to the grading policies without questioning them. Given the power of collective stories, I believe that it is essential for future teachers (those in a teacher preparation program) to self-reflect on their experiences being graded and consider how they would like to grade, or not grade, their future students.

During the focus groups, participants agreed that even though it is unlikely that all teachers would agree about implementing grading structures, listening to people with a variety of perspectives would have helped them early in their teaching careers. All of the teachers shared that they somewhat uncritically adopted the grading practices that they thought had to be implemented (based on perceived expectations) or that they followed the policies of the structures already in place in a school. If teachers had heard from current teachers about their grading experiences, they might have made more informed decisions and been less stressed about assigning grades early in their careers. I am not suggesting that teachers alone choose how they grade their students, as some schools have strict grading policies. Still, if teachers understand how they want to grade before they are classroom teachers, then perhaps they can find ways to infuse their beliefs into a grading system without breaking any of the grading expectations of their school.

This act of agency could only happen if they are able to create improvisational acts much like Gyanumaya scaling the balcony. Without improvisational acts, teachers could potentially maintain the status quo rather than break or bend the status quo. When

teachers can make decisions about how to grade that feel aligned to their values, they are less likely to experience identity friction. I also think that understanding one's beliefs about grading before becoming a classroom teacher provides teachers with more opportunities to find improvisational moves (similar to Gyanumaya scaling the balcony) that do not contradict expected policies or their personal beliefs about grading.

Future Considerations and Recommendations for Future Research

Empowering Students

One unexpected finding of this research was that teachers often empowered students to be a part of the grading process. Through this research, I learned why teachers invite students into dialogues about grading and why some teachers might even give students the power to assign grades to themselves. When teachers did this, I found that they were resisting the traditional structures of the grading system and acted as allies of students. This study allowed me to understand teachers' experiences with flipping the power structure of grade assignment, but it did not provide me with the opportunity to understand students' perspectives. Future research could include both the teacher and student perspectives on this phenomenon.

Recommendations for Teacher Preparation Programs

Novice teachers need to hear from veteran teachers about their beliefs and experiences with grading to make informed decisions when they are classroom teachers. All six of the participants in this study shared that their teaching programs did not prepare them to choose how to assign grades. Their experiences are not unique because many teaching programs do not include any curriculum about the assignment of grades. I

believe that teaching programs should devote at least one course to assessment and grading practices. One component of that course should involve having guest speakers, who are also classroom teachers, share their experiences with grading. It would be imperative that these guest speakers have a variety of views about grading because there is no one way to grade. Also, when teachers understand their own beliefs about assigning grades, they are more likely to collaborate with others to make changes or find ways to minimize the harm done to students by grades.

Future Research Aspirations

When I began my inquiry into my research topic, I could not locate substantial research on the impact of grading practices on teacher identity and agency. For me, this dissertation feels like a starting place for a topic that needs much more research to be better understood. I do not claim that this study solved any of the problems teachers' face in or through the practice of assigning grades. Still, I hope my research highlighted potential implications for teachers' identity and agency resulting from the assignment of grades.

I also hope that my research will lead me to explore the potential of the construct of identity friction in domains beyond grading. Grading is not the only context that teachers might experience identity friction. As a teacher myself, I am curious about the impact of other structures in schools on teacher identity and agency. For example, I wonder about the impact a set curriculum has on teachers' identity and agency. My discussions about standardized testing in earlier chapters could also be a context that would provide rich opportunities for understanding more about identity friction. I could

see research on identity and agency in connection to standardized testing in the form of AP and IB exams being especially fruitful. Lastly, I have heard teachers express concerns about administrative created structures around student discipline, student attendance, and student well-being that could also be a potential context to explore.

Concluding Remarks

On a personal level, I began this research with a deep concern about the impact of grades on my students. Grading stresses me out because I worry that I am partially responsible for students' ability to see themselves as capable of learning. After my dozen years in education, I still find myself awake late at night, especially at the end of terms, stressing about students' final grades. This concern was the impetus to understanding the dissonance I was experiencing, and I also hoped that I was not alone in experiencing these feelings.

My conversations with the teachers at Walker validated that I was not alone in feeling identity friction due to assigning grades. I hoped to gain understanding through my research, and I think that I have accomplished that. I did not anticipate how the participants' acts of resistance would inspire me. Their stories were uplifting and reminded me that change can happen when people are placed in challenging situations. I do not think that traditional grading structures will quickly or easily disappear; however, identity friction can feel like a buzzing in one's ear. Those who hear this buzzing are likely to perform acts of resistance against traditional grading structures. I hope that they, and educators everywhere, will listen to the thoughts that trouble them and find ways to scale balconies when they cannot enter through the front door.

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Appendix A Interview Schedule

Follow-up questions were built into some of the questions; however, depending on the flow of the interview additional follow-up questions were asked.

Interview 1 (Focus on the practice of assigning grades and teacher identity and agency)

1. Walk me through your journey of becoming a teacher. When did you know you wanted to be a teacher? What steps did you take? What was a specific challenge you faced on your journey?
2. In your opinion, what are some of your most valuable personal attributes you bring to your role as a teacher?
3. In your opinion, what are some of the classroom practices that show your students the kind of teacher you are?
4. Think back to a time when you felt successful as a teacher. Take me into that moment from your perspective. What did the classroom look like? What did the classroom sound like? What were you doing? What were you saying? What were the students doing? What were the students saying?
5. Think back to a time when you felt unsuccessful as a teacher. Take me into that moment from your perspective. What did the classroom look like? What did the classroom sound like? What were you doing? What were you saying? What were the students doing? What were the students saying?
6. What do you feel is the purpose of grading your students?
7. Do you find the practice of assigning grades different from what you thought it would be like before you started teaching?
8. Imagine you have a stack of essays/tests. Walk me through the process of assigning individual grades. Is there a process you use to streamline your process? What steps do you take with each assessment? Is there collaboration in your grading process?
9. Walk me through the thought process you have when designing the grading section on your syllabus. What considerations do you make? What concerns you about articulating your grading policies?
10. Walk me through how you graded this specific assignment. What internal thought processes did you go through? What thoughts did you have while grading it? What emotions impacted how you graded it?

Interview 2 (Focus on cultural, social, and political forces that influence how teachers assign grades)

1. When you came to this school, how did you come to know what was expected of you in terms of grading?
2. What are your department/school grading policies?
3. If applicable, how did your department/school decide on your grading policies?
4. What is your opinion about _____ policy? How do you feel about adhering to the _____ policy?

5. What unspoken grading policies or expectations exist in your school?
6. Think back to a time when you felt tension or anxiety about assigning a grade. Take me to that moment. What emotions did you experience? What physical sensations did you experience?
7. Some people say that grades are accurate depictions of the work students produce and therefore are fair measurements and some people say that grades do not fairly represent student learning. What do teachers at your school think? What do you think?
8. Given what you have said about your experiences as a teacher, your grading practices, and your school context around grading, how do your grading practices reflect your teaching philosophy? Given the constraints of your school rules, how do you fit your grading practices into your teacher philosophy?
9. What might happen if teachers had the opportunity to develop the policies and procedures around grading? What policies might you enact if you alone were in charge? Why?

Interview 3 (Focus on active/passive resistance and its impact on identity and agency)

1. How do you feel about grades influencing a student's ability to attend college and or receive scholarships?
2. Imagine you assigned a grade to a student and received criticism from the student and/or guardians. How would you approach discussing your concern with the student? With the parents?
 - a. In this type of situation, what might merit you discussing the issue with colleagues? With administration? How would you approach this discussion?
3. Think back to a specific time when you felt a grading policy or practice or expectation was out of line with your beliefs. What did you do? What was the outcome of this? If you could go back in time, what would you do differently?
4. How has your grading practice evolved? How do you grade differently now than you did earlier in your career?
5. In your opinion, how much choice over decisions or sense of agency do you feel you have to make decisions about how to grade your students?
6. Some people say that teachers should alter traditional grading practices and others say that we should continue to use traditional grading practices. What do teachers at your school think? What do you think?
7. Some people say that we were all graded as students and that grading is just part of being students, so we should therefore continue to grade our students the same way. What would you say to them?
8. Do you think it is a teacher's job to assign grades according to the school policy regardless of their personal opinions?
9. In a perfect world, what role would grading play? Would it look much the same or much different?
- 10.

Appendix B Focus Group Schedule

Follow-up questions were built into some of the questions; however, depending on the flow of the focus group additional follow-up questions were asked.

Focus Group 1

1. In your opinion, what are some of your most valuable personal attributes teachers should bring to the classroom?
2. Prior to being an actual teacher, what perceptions did you have about what a teacher should be like? Where did these perceptions come from? How did these perceptions affect you when you became a teacher?
3. Consider the experiences you've had grading your students including the interactions you've had with various stakeholders. How have your grading practices been influenced as a result of these experiences?
4. I asked each of you to reflect back on your experiences as a student being graded during the first interview. What do you think the students at Walker would say about their experiences being graded in your classes now as well as other classes at your school?

Focus Group 2

1. How would your relationship with students change if you were not responsible for grades and someone else was? How would your relationship with students change if you were not responsible for grades and were only responsible for feedback?
2. Imagine you were a new teacher at Walker, what support and guidance would be helpful to you in regard to creating a grading system for your classes?
3. Consider the logistical aspects of grading (time, place, routines) and the thought process behind your grading. How has the workload of being an English teacher impacted how you grade your students?
4. How do you feel about the new policies around the A, B, C, P, NP, and NG? Do you hope to keep these practices in for future years? Why or why not?

Focus Group 3

1. You all discussed your experiences as a student teacher and the influence that had or did not have on your current grading practices. If you could work with teacher training programs, what learning around grading would you incorporate? Why?
2. What is your job as a teacher? How does grading fit within your job?
3. You all discussed learning and growth as a goal for students. How does grading students complicate this goal? Elaborate with examples if possible.