

## **The Writing of Teachers' Lives— Where Personal Troubles and Social Issues Meet**

**By Robert V. Bullough, Jr.**

### **Introduction**

I met Michael Huberman only once, in Boston, on a chilly afternoon in April of 1990. His article, "The professional life cycle of teachers" (1989) then had been in print for a few months. Already, phrases like, "easy beginnings" and "painful beginnings" and terms like "stabilization" and "reassessment" were making their way into talk about teacher development. His influence on my thinking has been profound. The first recipient of the Huberman Award, Ivor Goodson, also has profoundly shaped my thinking, beginning with his seminal work, "Life histories and the study of schooling," published in 1981. I still find myself referring to the essays in *Teachers' Lives and Careers* (Ball & Goodson, 1985), which was published in 1985. It was a bad day when I went to the shelf to check a reference from *Teachers'*

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*Lives* only to find a space where it had been. I thought I knew who borrowed the book, but when asked he said he did not have it. For me this was no ordinary loss. I actually purchased a hard back copy and the back pages were filled with copious notes. Months later it turned up with an apology attached. That was a good day.

I came to be concerned with teachers' lives as a research interest along a circuitous path. In some respects this is a surprising admission; given my history a more direct route would be expected.

### **Coming to Teaching**

Growing up my father was a junior high school art teacher. Evenings he worked at a Standard Station pumping gas and fixing tires, at Farr's Ice Cream, or as a sweeper in his own school. The advantage of working for Standard Oil was that he could count on full-time summer employment. He was also enrolled in classes at the university. I do not know how or when he planned lessons, but I do know that he slept little and always had a sore throat. He smelled of Old Spice after shave and Smith Brother's Menthol Cough Drops. As a child I recall sitting in the car with my parents and siblings outside of Keith O'Brian's, a clothing store, and listening as my parents talked about how they were going to pay for something that one of us needed. My father, who graduated from the university with highest honors and was and is a very proud man, turned around and asked if he could borrow the dollar I had been given earlier. My parents had decided we children needed to learn how to handle money and intended to give each of us a dollar a month for an allowance. That plan didn't last long.

In high school I was acutely aware of social class differences and remember being rather embarrassed that my father was a teacher, a mere teacher. I knew him to be extraordinarily bright and talented. He could do just about anything. Why teaching? I also knew something about how poorly teachers were treated by some parents and often by students. From observing my parents' lives I came to a seemingly inevitable conclusion: teaching was not for me. Teachers work unbelievably hard for comparatively little money and almost no one outside of their colleagues and immediate family members knows how difficult their work is. Moreover, few seem to care.

Still, I became a teacher. I shall not recount the story here (see, Bullough, 2008, chapter 3). Suffice it to say that events of the late 1960s turned my world upside down. Teaching offered a way to spend a life that qualified as moral. I loved books and talking to the dead and I came to understand the power of ideas, how words can and do change the world. The child's taunting rhyme response, "Sticks and stones can break my bones, but words can never hurt me," is, of course, a terribly hurtful lie. Words destroy, but they also create. In Genesis 1:3 God speaks and there is light. I've often thought about and been amazed by the emancipatory power of education, a generous liberal education, to open us so we can experience the world more fully and through others' eyes. Such power enables seeing things not as they are but as they might be, to become wide awake (see Maxine Greene, 1978).

Later I came to understand that to teach inevitably means standing for something, for a vision of the good life and good society. A life is an argument. Yet I've not always been certain what I have stood for and have sometimes been in bad faith. At such times, as Parker Palmer (1998) suggests, I could think the world apart but not together. We teach from our innerness, and we testify (Patterson, 1991). Although this took longer, I also came to appreciate that utopian social visions often lead

to terror, so it is to education of a certain kind and quality—of telling the truth, even when inconvenient—that we must look for hope. For this reason, John Dewey entitled his famous work, *Democracy and Education* (1916).

### **Teaching and the Inner Life**

As testimony, teaching flows out of the inner life of the teacher, affecting not only what is taught but what is learned. Moreover, teaching always involves a measure of acting out and working through of personal problems (Salvio, 2007). These observations raise an obvious question, Why has it taken so long for teacher lives to catch hold as a research interest? Exploring the place of reason in experience, Stephen Toulmin (2001) offers a poignant insight:

From the mid-seventeenth century on... [there has been] a hierarchy of prestige, so that investigations and activities were ordered with an eye to certain intellectual demands. Beside the *rationality* of astronomy and geometry, the *reasonableness* of narratives came to seem a soft-centered notion, lacking a solid basis in philosophical theory, let alone substantive scientific support. Issues of formal consistency and deductive proof thus came to have a special prestige, and achieved a kind of *certainty* that other kinds of opinions could never claim. (p. 15)

As elsewhere, in the study of teaching and learning the standard of *rationality* overwhelmed the claims of *reasonableness*.

Embracing rationalist aims and longing for recognition among the social sciences, education researchers quested after a science of education throughout the last century. Speaking to his and our own time, an early and distinguished science seeker, William Chandler Bagley (1911), nicely captures the ambition:

We need especially, now that the purpose of education is adequately defined, an adequate doctrine of educational values and a rich and vital infusion of the spirit of experimental science. For efficiency in the work of instruction and training, we need to know the influence of different types of experience in controlling human conduct... (pp. 40-41)

The quest, of course, for prediction and control—and an illusive status—continues unabated (Eisenhart & DeHaan, 2005); and the defined purpose is tested student achievement and predictable outcomes. On this view, the lives of teachers as a topic of research is of comparatively little interest or concern, while technical skills and classroom behaviors are of paramount importance. The ambition of an earlier generation of researchers is alive and well.

In contrast, if teachers' lives matter little to researchers or to policymakers, they mean a great deal to students and their parents. This has probably always been so. In 1580, Montaigne published his famous essays including "Of the Education of Children." There he wrote, referring to the desirable qualities of tutors: "I would... urge that care be taken to choose...a guide with a well-made rather than a well-filled head; that both these qualities should be required of him, but more particularly

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character and understanding than learning” (Montaigne, 1943, p. 11). In the very early days of teaching as a vocation in this country the quality of the lives lived by teachers mattered to the point of determining who would be employed to teach. Often, teaching was a calling (Mattingly, 1974). A teacher’s moral standing was understood as being an essential part of the content of schooling. Several years ago I conducted a study of teaching in the late 1860s in a small Utah town (Bullough, 1982). Using personal journals I was able to get inside of the classrooms and to a degree the lives of two teachers, Martha Cox and Richard S. Horne. Horne was deeply concerned about rising social class differences in the community and what he thought to be a general deterioration of ethical standards among the young. To combat these tendencies and encourage improved behavior, he wrote morality plays that the students performed on weekends and that became an important form of community entertainment. The lessons taught in the plays were supported by the example of Horne’s life and anchored in his considerable moral authority.

Despite this history, until recently concerns like these have garnered little attention among researchers. Of course there have been a few prominent exceptions. Three immediately come to mind. In his remarkable work, *The Sociology of Teaching* (Waller, 1932/1961), Willard Waller explores isolation, among other aspects of teachers’ lives:

In view of the reluctance of communities to receive teachers into fellowship with them as human beings, the tendency of teachers to form cliques is not surprising. In the society of other teachers, at least, the teacher can be spontaneous and relatively unreserved... There are limits to the freedom one may have in the society of teachers, but that society usually offers the teacher his best opportunity to be accepted as a person. Therefore the teacher group comes to constitute a close-knit in-group, a fellowship. (p. 56)

Arthur Jersild’s mid-century study, *When Teachers Face Themselves* (1955) is another exception. Jersild was deeply concerned about teachers’ inner lives and well-being, and how life in schools encouraged feelings of loneliness, alienation and guilt. Referring to teachers’ lives, he wrote:

One cannot understand another’s hurts in a manner that will enable one to minister to him most effectively unless one has enough concern for oneself to realize and to appreciate what it means in one’s own experience to be hurt. One cannot understand another’s hunger for affection, nor sense his craving for being accepted, nor realize how starved he is for companionship, unless one can draw upon one’s own realization of what this hunger means and what the nature of the experience is by which the hungry one can be filled. (pp. 132-133)

Dee Ann Spencer’s *Contemporary Women Teachers: Balancing School and Home* (1986) is a third example. She explores how the contradictory demands of teaching make balancing teaching and mothering extraordinarily difficult, if not impossible,

and the emotional costs of teaching. These three exceptions well illustrate the importance of attending to teachers' lives.

### **Research Preoccupations and Teachers' Lives**

Inside the academy, making the case for the value of studies of teachers' lives has not been easy. Despite what Pinnegar and Daynes (2006) describe as "the movement toward narrative inquiry" (p. 29), the work remains fringe. In 1978 and 1979 I presented papers calling for a "person-centered" history of education, a history that got at the struggles of educators to make sense of their times and experience. These papers extended my dissertation research which was partially biographical, focusing on two educators, Harold Albery and Boyd H. Bode, and partially a study in intellectual and institutional history. Then I was mostly concerned with work done in higher education, but this would change, and despite initial resistance, I gradually became deeply interested in the lives of teachers (Bullough, 1989; Bullough, Knowles, & Crow, 1991; Bullough & Baughman, 1997) and of children (Bullough, 2001; 2007). Along the way, I came increasingly to think of myself as a story-teller and found some comfort in signs that interest in narratives and narrative research in education was growing even as interest in education history, a first love, was declining. While certainties born in positivism had weakened, within education schools there was a cost to writing about teachers and their lives. It was not until David Berliner visited my university and in a chance conversation with my department chair said that he much admired *First Year Teacher: A Case Study* (1989), which had recently been published, that my work began gradually to be accepted as legitimate scholarship by the chair and by some others within the department. Focusing on teachers' lives and telling their stories was not thought of as serious scholarship. In fact, when I first told a respected senior faculty member of my decision to conduct the study that led to the book he expressed surprise and concern: "Why would anyone be interested in a case study of a teacher?" Why, indeed?! Remarkably, parallel views within the humanities dismissed biographical research as serious scholarship.

Research subject positions have certainly expanded since I first began writing about teachers' lives, as witnessed by the founding and growth of the Archival and Biographical Research (see Kridel, 1998), Self-Study (see Loughran, Hamilton, LaBoskey, & Russell, 2004), and Lives of Teachers Special Interest Groups within the American Educational Research Association. But the struggle for legitimacy continues within schools and colleges of education, particularly of narrative forms of research into teacher lives and, relatedly, of self-study.

### **Two Lenses: Narrative and Paradigmatic**

Drawing on Jerome Bruner's book, *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds* (1986), it seems to me there are two broad lenses through which researchers have sought to

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illuminate and make sense of teachers' lives. These reflect two different intentions and ways of coming at and representing the teacher's life-world: The first is *narrative* and is more or less biographical, concerned with story-lines and particulars, while the other is *paradigmatic* and is more or less sociological and psychological and concerned with generating guiding principles and forming generalizations that, while in the social sciences are inevitably soft, represent a nodding acknowledgment of the ambitions of an educational science for validity, prediction and control. One aims at interpretative understanding, the other at explanation and the establishment of causal relationships among variables.

A life story or life history can be studied for very different reasons, just as one tells a story for different purposes. When speaking of cases and revealing his own bias, Shulman (1986) hinted at the nature of these differences:

Most individuals find specific cases more powerful influences on their decisions than impersonally presented empirical findings, even though the later constitute 'better' evidence. Although principles are powerful, cases are memorable, and lodge in memory as the basis for later judgments. (p. 36)

Like life itself, good narratives have trajectories and energy, and thereby offer openings for imaginative predictions of likely or possible futures. From an interest in narrative and biography, a teacher's life may be told and written in a way that reveals "the ways people faced living—tell how they met problems, how they coped with big and little crises, how they loved, competed, did the things we all do daily—and hence these studies touch the familiar chords of readers" (Vandiver, 1986, p. 61). From a teacher educator's perspective, the intention of work of this kind often is to open for careful consideration how and why teachers think and act as they do, the influences of their thinking and acting on themselves and on their students, and to open for consideration alternative possibilities. Offering potential for solidarity and emulation, the moral meaning of events is important.

The *paradigmatic* in the soft sense used here gets at something quite different. In *Teacher Life Cycle* (Huberman, 1989; Day & Gu, 2007) and *Career Cycle* studies (Fessler & Christensen, 1991) researchers seek to identify generalized patterns across the many lives or careers studied. It is a way for making sense of the "ways in which we succeed in dealing with particular cases... a way of bringing our external commitments into line with our experience as practitioners" (Toulmin, 2001, p. 133). Recently, Day and Gu (2007), for example, explored the "work, lives and effectiveness" of 300 teachers who were "broadly representative of the national age, experience and gender profile of teachers and of the SES/attainment profile of schools [in England]" (p. 423). The conclusion was that the ability of teachers to maintain their commitment to teaching was influenced by "their professional life phases and their identities, and that these were mediated by the contexts or 'scenarios' in which they lived and worked" (p. 434). Three mediating factors were identified: the *personal*, the *situated*, and the *professional*. Like the stage theory

that I drew on when writing *First Year Teacher* that grew out of Francis Fuller's (1975) research, models of this kind have heuristic value for teacher educators. They provide a means for getting oriented, for making sense of and connections among disparate stories and experiences in a way that facilitates policy formation and program and course planning. The hope is that while generalizations and principles are not sensitive to individual experience or generally to differences except when fairly widely shared, they offer a place to begin talking about experience and in a way that gives some assurance that what is said and written will resonate—that readers can and do insert themselves into the model or design and see anew.

Both the narrative and the paradigmatic approaches to studying teacher lives have strengths and weaknesses. First the strengths: As Polkinghorne (1988) argued, narrative is the “primary form by which human experience is made meaningful” (p. 1). By reading and reflecting on such studies, intending teachers are given a glimpse into the particular nature of the work of teaching as lived. When well conceived and told, narratives speak directly to human experience and invite a reconsideration of ways of being and acting within specific situations. By comparing and contrasting their own and others' experience, and conceptions of teaching and of self-as-teacher, perhaps through case analysis, intending teachers are invited into a journey of self-discovery. Telling stories of oneself and reasoning narratively, story against story, supports the development of professional identity and offers the rudiments of a schema for framing then attacking problems. When the cases or stories are of extraordinary teachers, fresh possibilities are opened for re-imagining the self and boundaries are stretched. From a reader's perspective, narratives may be at their best when attending to the extraordinary and the exceptional, when revealing the full scope of human fragility and inventiveness. Such narratives, singular, distinctive and compelling, may demand to be told for moral purposes, and they inspire action, sometimes outrage. Emphasizing the particular and the contextual, narrative studies open the possibility for finding the limits of principles and generalizations, for testing theories by revealing the unexplained or illuminating the poorly understood.

Responsive to complexity, good narratives are attentive to the way in which every life offers infinite variation, and spills outside of whatever descriptive categories are identified through paradigmatic research. Acutely sensitive to how researchers in the quest for principles and generalizations often ignore variation, Stephen J. Gould (1996) wrote: “[Our] culture encodes a strong bias either to neglect or ignore variation. We tend to focus instead on measures of central tendency, and as a result we make some terrible mistakes, often with considerable practical import” (p. 44). Stephen Toulmin (2001) underscores the point, suggesting that “the eccentric can be used to explain the central, rather than the other way around!” (p. 30).

But the principles and generalizations of paradigmatic research have a place as well. They offer means for getting oriented within a particular mass of human experience, to find place and from this place to begin reaching out, making

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connections, and organizing what is found so that it can be more effectively and precisely named, talked about, and accounted for and in relationship. In this way, paradigmatic research simplifies human experience, at least a very small part of it, and by enabling the identification of linkages between events and actions facilitates the setting of priorities—what is most important and needs to be done first, then second—and also forecasting. Here it is important to remember that forecasting is most successful when done in humility, recognizing that the “things that matter most to us, problems of individual and collective human relations, remain the hardest to forecast” (Toulmin, 2001, p. 207). Now to the weaknesses.

Seeking to understand then portray the quotidian and mundane presents a tremendous challenge to narrative researchers as prose writers that demands both technical competence and artistry. Some self-study research has been criticized for lending support to the view that because the writer as story-teller finds his or her story meaningful and important it is, by definition, worth being told and therefore worthy of publication. Because we cherish our own stories and especially the telling of them narrative research tends to encourage the human tendency to assume one's own experience and world view are universal. With this assumption comes the temptation to normalize the self and to presumptuously generalize to others and their experience. Likewise, in case study research a problem emerges when it is uncertain just what the case presented is a case of and why it is being told. Like other forms of research, narratives require an answer to the “so what” question, which looms large—what is this a story of and why should it be read? Answering this question helps readers distinguish promising from unpromising questions and interesting from uninteresting lines of inquiry but narrative research places much of this burden on readers. The weaknesses of narrative research are perhaps most evident when readers come across a story, perhaps a case, that appears commonplace and uninspiring or difficult to capture and describe. Nothing lifts the narrative in a way that allows the reader to see the ordinary in fresh ways or to apply a different conceptual framework. Sometimes in the celebration of the contextual and particular in narrative research both writers and readers get lost, where there are only trees and no forest, no “background of intelligibility” (Taylor, 1991, p. 37) or horizon against which to judge or forecast.

The opposite difficulty faces paradigmatic research, when there are only forests and no trees, horizons but no facticity, no living. Results may be robust but trivial and uninspiring—principles and generalizations that explain little and miss what is actually important. Sometimes paradigmatic research requires such stability in contexts and conditions for the principles to demonstrate their power that they fail to connect in any interesting or compelling way to human practices. Here, the famous warning of William James (1899) to teachers comes to mind:

I say moreover that you make a great, a very great mistake, if you think that psychology, being the science of the mind's laws, is something from which you can deduce definite programmes and schemes and methods of instruction for immedi-

ate schoolroom use. Psychology is a science, and teaching is an art: and sciences never generate arts directly out of themselves. An intermediary inventive mind must make the application, by using its originality. (1899, pp. 7-8)

As Bruner discusses narrative and paradigmatic thinking he seems to conclude they are irreducible and incommensurable. If this is so, why not subsume his distinction under the historical tension between qualitative and quantitative research? To do so, however, means dragging along some very heavy baggage and ultimately proves unhelpful and to a degree misleading. By denying large areas of overlapping concern and interest, it is unhelpful. As Toulmin (2001) observes, quoting Lakatos, “Truth flows downward from general statements to particular ones. Empirically, the contrary holds good: Truth flows upward from particular examples to broader generalizations” (p. 108). Creating a deep divide and placing interpretative tasks of research on one side (the narrative), while denying them place on the other (the paradigmatic), is misleading. Both approaches involve interpretation, and in varying degrees are concerned with meaning and dependent upon disciplined but imaginative constructions and portrayals of experience (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2006). Yet, to bring the two views and forms of research usefully together requires considerable care. Discussing the use of mixed method designs, Yanchar and Williams (2006) warn that the “adoption of a method will implicitly commit researchers who use it to certain kinds of assumption-based outcomes that both reveal and conceal (or obscure) phenomena in particular ways and that bring with them certain affordances and limitations... [C]oherence is often achieved through the absorption of the theoretical... meaning of one method and its data into another” (p. 4). Their solution is to move toward “flexible, critically examined, and theoretically informed inquiry practices” (ibid, p. 8).

Here I must admit to a bias in favor of narrative research. But I have had more than one fling with a paradigmatic research tradition. In the early 1980s I came to value many of the insights of critical theory and Neo-Marxism. Some aspects of this intellectual tradition remain very useful to me, but I confess to engaging in more than a small measure of ungracious social criticism, the result of a “generational encounter” (Wenger, 1998, p. 157) and of becoming too devout in a faith. This is a danger that comes from embracing principles a bit too tightly and believing overly much in the rightness of one’s conclusions, sure signs of needing to belong and of establishing identity within an academic community of practice. Wearying of trying to make the case for the value of my work especially on teacher lives, I let theory become religion, and achieved, as Yanchar and Williams (2006) suggest, a sort of coherence by buying into what ultimately was someone else’s methods and research program. Young academics often do just this (Hamilton, 1996). I enjoyed the work although I never felt fully at home within it. What, after all, is a “false consciousness?” How could I or anyone claim to know that another’s consciousness is false? Nevertheless, I learned much of value and do not think of this turn in my work as a diversion. At the time ideologies Right and Left were warring, and

I thought one needed to choose and defend a side. Then, narrative work was not a viable means of institutional survival. There were, however, options among different paradigmatic forms of research and I made a choice more or less consonant with my background and interests. I did not then understand that a choice made from among such traditions meant embracing a deep structuralism that had severe ramifications including a radical narrowing in how problems were understood and how solutions were framed.

The problem with such views is nicely summarized by the sociologist Norman Birnbaum (1971): “the world of structuralism is a world of infinite variation on the surface, of terrible sameness in its depths. It is a world, moreover, in which historical transcendence is impossible—in which men construct their societies with a limited set of elements susceptible to combination in a limited number of ways” (p. 125). The net result is that in one way or another, humans are eliminated from history except when one or another category of them, of us, is found threatening and judged in need of fixing. Try as I might, I could find no place for human agency within Marxian economic imperatives and so reason becomes narrowly and dangerously instrumental and less humane. To this danger the narrative study of teachers' lives offers an antidote, a welcomed reminder that learning always involves transcendence and, in contrast to training, offers a delicious uncertainty, the stuff of wonder and surprise.

### **Personal Troubles and Social Issues: A Life as Criticism**

Surveying the current political and cultural climate, I suspect that in order for the work now being done on teachers' lives to gain and then hold a secure place in teacher education, the narrative and paradigmatic must be brought into intimate conversation. C. Wright Mills (1959) offers insight into the nature and location of the conversation needed. Reviewing the state of theory within his discipline, sociology, Mills noted an unfortunate one-sidedness. Speaking of the “sociological imagination” he wrote:

Know that many personal troubles cannot be solved merely as troubles, but must be understood in terms of public issues—and in terms of the problems of history-making. Know that the human meaning of public issues must be revealed by relating them to personal troubles—and to the problems of the individual life. Know that the problems of social science, when adequately formulated, must include both troubles and issues, both biography and history, and the range of their intricate relations. Within that range the life of the individual and the making of societies occur; and within that range the sociological imagination has its chance to make a difference in the quality of human life in our time. (p. 226)

The point of analysis is situated action, where culture and history—issues—encounter biography and life—troubles—and meaning is made. The resulting vision is ecological, of interaction of culturally embedded, historical and living ways of life.

My wife, Dawn Ann, a fourth grade teacher in her 10<sup>th</sup> year of teaching, often

reminds me of how a life is an argument, and of how troubles and issues, biography and history, meet and play out in classrooms, school lunchrooms, and in faculty meetings. After getting home from school she walks into the study where I work and, although bone-tired, immediately begins talking, reporting on the day's events, processing what transpired, telling stories, composing dramas. As she talks about her day, her speech quickens and her voice raises. Something important is at stake. What she says is shaped by far away events, and she knows it—issues in Darfur, West Africa, Southern Mexico, Afghanistan, Washington, D.C.—and by the flu, the price of oil, and the tumbling dollar. Mostly, she talks of troubles, of biography, but her words point toward public issues, culture and history, and toward patterns in experience and of behavior. Consider: Salt Lake City School District, where she teaches, is a majority minority school district. The economy of Southern Mexico, and the dangers of living there, have driven large numbers of people north across the border separating the U.S. and Mexico. A very few of the children of these displaced people have entered her classroom, where, straddling culture and biography, she does her best to teach them, drawing on what she has read, learned, and been taught. The paradigmatic—*episteme*—orients her; her practical skills and understanding—*phronesis*—get her working and help her anticipate problems and opportunities, but it is the intuitive and unspeakable knowledge she has of the individual student life—*metis*—her “knack,” “wit,” or “cunning” that makes her successful (see Toulmin, 2001, pp. 177-184). As she works, interacts, and relates, the paradigmatic drops into the background.

She used to be able to assume that the children in her classes knew how to be students but the civil wars of West Africa and the war in Afghanistan have led to children entering her classroom who have never attended school before. Being a student does not come naturally nor often easily. A year after Dawn Ann taught one of the West African children he was arrested for raping a little girl. In his experience, rape is a tool of punishment. Assuring continuity of relationships, four mornings a week she rises early and after exercising drives across town to pick up two Afghani children, turns around, and then takes them to school with her. She has done this for four years, first with their Uncle, their mother's brother, Ali, who entered fifth grade without ever having been a student except for a very brief time in a Madrasah. The children's father was murdered by the Taliban, beaten to death, and so also was Ali's and their mother's father killed. Over time Dawn Ann has become part of the family—first she was a teacher of the children, then a friend who can and does help the family navigate the complex and troubling social context that is now their home. Dawn Ann understands the implications of state and national policies on immigration and education in ways few policymakers can, from living with the implications and witnessing them in children's lives. She well knows the human meaning of various policies; and in the living is found a pointed criticism of those policies as well as potential openings for better problem definition. It is here where a life reaches outward, illuminates a time, and becomes social criticism. The same is true of every life.

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A word about this claim: Ken Burns introduces his documentary, *The War*, with this statement: "In extraordinary times, there are no ordinary lives." Life and times intertwine, yet the statement begs examination. Are there ever ordinary times and are any lives not in some profound sense extraordinary? Some might say I'm quibbling. Still, I would like to know what an ordinary time and an ordinary life look like. Life in the 1950s? Perhaps. But then... Fighting in South Korea my friend and neighbor, an artillery officer, lost much of his hearing. While he was away at war his wife, a young mother, was caught by polio and lost the movement of her left arm, to a degree her leg, and her vocal chords were badly damaged inhibiting speech. Remarkably, she survived. Parents lived in constant fear of polio, and here was a young afflicted parent! Then, in April of 1955 the announcement came that Jonas Salk had created a vaccine, and the nation released an audible sigh of relief. As soon as the vaccine was available, my parents, like millions of others, marched me and my siblings to a nearby elementary school where we lined up and amid lots of tears, got jabbed with a needle and injected with the vaccine. We lined up in school for other reasons as well. Fearing a nuclear attack, at a signal we children rushed into the hallway, faced the wall, sat down, lowered our heads and grabbed our knees. Now, that makes sense, doesn't it? Old fashioned desks screwed to the floor with empty holes for ink wells made "duck" and "tuck" impossible. Seemingly every school had a bomb shelter, with appropriately placed signs indicating location. Often they were filled with crackers, among other items, that had a half-life of several million years. Having one's own bomb shelter was a sure sign of status. Residents of Southern Utah had additional and good reasons to be fearful but they just didn't then know how afraid they should have been. Between 1951 and 1962 there were some 900 plus government-sponsored nuclear tests conducted in Nevada. "Waiting," as the poet Edward Hart (1980) wrote, "Till the wind blows toward Utah" (p. 100), these tests exposed tens of thousands of Utahns to significant amounts of radiation. Students in St. George, near the Utah and Nevada border, were taken to watch the explosions from a hillside, their teachers believing the promise of Edward Teller, among others, that there was no danger. A dear friend and colleague, Ladd Holt, was one of the many who died from cancer. The mother of another friend, Terry Tempest Williams, died. Terry's mother was my mother-in-laws' best friend. Terry's father told her about the day they were exposed: "We were driving home from Riverside, California. You were sitting on [your mother's] lap. She was pregnant. In fact, I remember the day, September 7, 1957. We had just gotten out of the Service. We were driving north, past Las Vegas. It was an hour or so before dawn, when this explosion went off. We not only heard it, but felt it... We pulled over and suddenly, rising from the desert floor, we saw it, clearly, this golden-stemmed cloud, the mushroom. The sky seemed to vibrate with an eerie pink glow. Within a few minutes, a light ash was raining on the car" (Williams, 1991, p. 283). Nineteen fifty-seven also brought Sputnik, and even greater fear. Ordinary times? Every life is culturally and historically inscribed and each of us is a victim,

vehicle, and in a sense, a resolution for good or ill of the dilemmas of a time and a place. To understand teachers and their lives is to understand both troubles and issues, biography and history.

### **Writing Lives, Hearing Stories: Narratives and Paradigms**

Robert Coles (1989) observes that the “critical root” of the word “theory” is “‘I behold,’ as in what we see when we go to the theater” (p. 20). I suspect that it is only possible to declare a particular life or time as “ordinary” from an impoverished theoretical point of view. When viewed through rich and deep theory and broad and full experience, no life and no time could possibly be judged ordinary. The problem is found in who does the viewing and the reporting. Erik Erikson (1975) observes that every story bears “the interpreter’s inclusion in his own method of the inescapable fact that his interpretation is subject to the *mood of his own life*, and heir to a given *lineage of conceptualization*” (p. 145). A teacher’s life told as troubles, is often a story not worth reading—and yet when told by someone else, someone who understands issues—history and culture—the telling takes on new depth and power. Troubles when connected to issues become broadly accessible, a story of something. Conversely, when embedded in structuralism, attentiveness to issues sans troubles shuts out agency and leaves scant material for the dramatist’s imagination. Lists and sometimes diagrams with arrows follow, but no life; and it is life that invites engagement and inspires imagination. Following Mills, bringing narrative and paradigmatic creations into conversation changes both, and when neither swallows the other but respectfully attends, opens the possibility for development of both deeper and more intensely experienced understanding and explanations that actually help explain.

In *First-Year Teacher Eight Years Later* (Bullough & Baughman, 1997), I attempted to do just this, intertwine narrative and paradigmatic research and juxtapose personal troubles and social issues. For example, one of the lenses used to think about Kerrie Baughman’s life and development was Huberman’s study of teacher life cycles, mentioned earlier. In the interaction of the narrative and the paradigmatic the conclusion followed:

The direction of Kerrie’s career path seems less linear than circular; she spins outside the expected pathways, although some of Huberman’s language remains helpful for thinking about her experience. She seemed to go through spirals—sometimes very tightly wound and compressed—of stabilization-experimentation-reassessment, sometimes stimulated by personal decisions, such as to discard her established curriculum in favor of a variation of Atwell’s Writer’s Workshop, and sometimes prompted by contextual changes, like the reassignment to the gifted and talented program. (p. 58)

Analyzing the metaphors we use to talk about ourselves and our work is another

avenue for linking personal troubles and social issues dialectically (Bullough & Stokes, 1994).

A similar aim, but coming from the other direction, is evident in the research that led to John Goodlad's rejection of *reform* as a way of speaking about and planning for institutional change. Having listened carefully to teachers and teacher educators, Goodlad concluded, that "reform is rooted in a remote, top-down authoritarian power structure, [in contrast] renewal is local, holistic, organic, and rooted in the communities it serves. It flies in the very face of the Grand Inquisitor's pronouncements of people preferring to be ruled by miracle, mystery, and authority" (Goodlad, Mantle-Bromley, & Goodlad, 2004, p. 78). Approaching social issues through the lens of reform and restructuring leads to a definition of problems and the location of problem sources as centering on workers, on teachers and teacher educators. Overcoming teacher resistance to change then becomes a defining aim, one that dominated much of the educational rhetoric of the late twentieth century. When those who are supposed to resolve a problem are simultaneously understood to be the source of that problem, the temptation is to embrace reward and punishment as the central means of motivation, an approach that can only promise disappointment. In contrast to reform, *renewal* points toward the human dimension of institutional change, that positive and intelligent change is and always has been a problem first and foremost—although not only—of learning and of relationship, that it is always a becoming but also a question of being and being together. John Dewey understood the issue well: "Old ideas give way slowly; for they are more than abstract logical forms and categories. They are habits, predispositions, deeply engrained attitudes of aversion and preference" (1910, p. 19). Attentiveness to troubles is key to getting the questions right—and to knowing which questions need to be abandoned as unpromising, like questions related to reform.

### **Getting the Story Right**

I recently confronted this problem, the problem of not getting the questions right. Curious about how experienced teachers' lives have changed since passage of the *No Child Left Behind* legislation, a year ago I made arrangements with a small group of students, all but one of them teachers working on masters' degrees, to conduct a set of interviews. The intent was to test a claim and a theory through teacher narratives. About 80 interviews were conducted, 40 with teachers and 40 with spouses. The teachers were asked a set of questions that required comparison of their current practices with those before the law passed, as well as comparisons of their commitment towards and feelings about teaching. In some instances, not all, teachers and their spouses offered very different conclusions. Among the teachers there was a good deal of complaining about a deterioration in student home lives and in the society in general. Even as some griped about an increase in paperwork and pressures associated with mandated testing and accountability measures, nearly

all the teachers said they loved teaching and remained as committed to it as when they first started. In his 16th year of teaching, Don offered a typical response: “I have always enjoyed [teaching]... there are a lot of rewards to help kids and see them grow.” Don’s wife thought he was a “great teacher...very concerned about [the children].” But, she went on to say that he was changing: “I can see some frustrations in him,” which she enumerated, including diminishing control over what and how he teaches, longer working hours, lack of support, family financial pressures, and more troubled children in his classes. Reading through the transcripts, I wondered, were the teachers deliberately putting a positive spin on their responses? How were we to make sense of the differences?

While pondering what to do with the transcripts, if anything, I happened upon a reference to a book chapter on subjective well-being (Diener & Suh, 2000). One of the conclusions offered in that chapter was that research participants with no explicit reason for exaggerating their well-being may do so simply because they believe it socially desirable and expected to do so. My students conducting the interviews with veteran teachers and their spouses were mostly young teachers, one even was an intending teacher. They were just starting their careers. It seems reasonable, therefore, to conclude that the veteran teachers were reluctant to speak overly negatively about teaching, that in some sense they felt deeply obligated to put forward as positive a story-line as they could for their younger colleagues. In contrast, spouses seemed to feel less of an obligation, and their comments were often more revealing. In this instance, a chance encounter with a small body of paradigmatic research, coupled with knowledge of a generally well-supported conclusion that human ego needs result in a presentation of the self in as flattering a way as possible, forced the conclusion that the data set—the narratives—had (and has) all the flaws of self-reports and more. In order to obtain insight into the question posed, an entirely different approach to data gathering would be required, one that reduced the tendency of the veterans to self-censor and to think past the immediate but influential events of the day. Any story I might tell that grew out of the interviews would be suspect even if skillfully told *unless* I changed the question and told a different story.

## **Performativity and Professional Learning Communities:**

### **An Unfolding Story**

The veteran teachers’ implicit desire to support and honor my students’ as young colleagues, to put a positive spin on the work of teaching even as many were struggling with the effects of changes in the context of teaching and feeling increasingly vulnerable (Kelchtermans, 1996) says something profound and positive about who these teachers are. But, it raises another set of issues for those of us who study teachers’ lives and work and yet again illustrates the importance of attending to teacher troubles. These are issues of teacher well-being. Currently

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there appears to be an almost exclusive focus among policymakers on increasing student learning, in the form of achieving prescribed learning “outcomes,” to the neglect of teacher well being—and probably, ultimately, even to the neglect of the well-being of children. It has become surprisingly easy to ignore teacher troubles. Stephen Ball (2003), for example, observes that with the rise of a new managerialism supporting a narrow professionalism in education, the signs of “performativity” are evident. When “valued for their productivity alone” authentic social relations are replaced by “judgmental relations” (p. 224) and “fabrications” follow—“versions of an organization (or person) which [do] not exist... [Rather] they are produced purposefully in order ‘to be accountable’” (p. *ibid*). In effect, everyone plays “let’s pretend” and many cheat (see Nichols & Berliner, 2007). As I have written elsewhere, under such conditions a kind of schizophrenia results, a deep “double-mindedness,” a “condition resulting from feeling or being compelled to work against what one believes and of being pulled in multiple directions by conflicting but always insistent claims. Under such conditions, work slowly becomes joyless” (Bullough, 2008, p. 5). Being required to be other than self is numbing (Bullough & Knowles, 1990).

Here it is worth noting that, on the surface, the growing interest in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) appears to hold promise for elevating teacher well-being as a major concern. But caution is in order. In a review of the literature on PLCs, Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Wallace, and Thomas (2006) remind readers that “PLCs are means to an end: The goal is not to ‘be a professional learning community’” (pp. 228-229). I have attended multiple PLC training sessions within which never a word has been mentioned about teacher well-being but much has been said about collaboration to change teachers, to encourage them to embrace “best practices”—strategies proven to raise student test scores. I wonder: How can good results follow when student well-being and teacher well-being are not tightly linked conceptually and bound together institutionally. A good deal of research on human development certainly suggests they should be (see Hoare, 2006). A focus on one should immediately bring attention to the other. Locating the roots of PLCs in a consuming need to revitalize stagnant capitalist economies, Michael Bottery (2003) observes that “conceptions of ‘learning communities’ are built upon different social, educational, and political values” (p. 190). These values need to be uncovered and interrogated; otherwise PLCs may become tools of manipulation, where collegiality is “contrived” (Hargreaves, 1994). Grounded in the assumptions of training, where ends are uninspiring, predictable, and known in advance, educators find it increasingly difficult to invest fully in their work, aspirations lower and performance levels (Valli & Buese, 2007). Under such conditions, exceptional teachers are domesticated, and a stultifying sameness sets in. As a tool for overcoming teacher vulnerability, PLCs may actually encourage teachers to feel good about actions that undermine their integrity and identity. I am reminded of listening some years ago to Maxine Greene (1978) talk about “malefic generosity” (p. 100), when, for their own good, freedom is denied to individuals by those who claim to

serve them when what is most required is a critical praxis for “bringing the world closer to heart’s desire” (p. 71).

## **Conclusion**

In the current political context, researchers have, as Goodson (1992) earlier argued, a special obligation: “to assure that ‘the teachers’ voice’ is heard, heard loudly, heard articulately” (p. 112). But not just any “voice” will do—teacher troubles need to be tightly linked to issues, biography to history. On every front, directly and indirectly, teachers are under attack as incompetent, selfish, and self-serving. Aggressive reform—not renewal—efforts are underway based on a set of generally false assumptions about teacher motivation (increased competition promises higher levels of teacher and school performance), intentions (teachers are selfish and self-serving), the nature and difficulty of the work of teaching (aims can be prescribed in advance and most anyone can teach), evidence of performance (test scores are meaningful representations of the essential school aims), the power of schooling (that setting school standards and tinkering with curricula resolves persistent social problems), and responsibility (teachers are wholly responsible for student learning). The driving assumptions of reform are grounded in a punishing rather than a positive psychology, a view fixated on weaknesses and deficits rather than on learning and building to strength (Peterson, 2006). Reviewing this list, I cannot help but think back on the lives of my father and my mother, of my life when I taught, and now of my wife and sister’s lives. In doing so, I realize how important it is to providing quality education for the young that the issues of our times be linked to the troubles of teachers, and that these troubles be portrayed accurately and well. At this moment in time, as we research teachers’ lives there may be no more important task before us than championing the cause of teachers and making clear the ineluctable connection between their well-being and the well-being of children.

## **Note**

I would like to express my deep appreciation to James Muchmore and Stefinee Pinnegar for their insightful and very helpful criticism of an earlier version of this article.

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