JUMP-IN, THE WATER IS FINE:

JOB-EMBEDDED TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

A Doctoral Thesis Presented to the
Faculty of the College of Education
University of Houston

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education
in Professional Leadership

by

Glenda S. Horner

May, 2011

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May, 2011

DEDICATION

"Far away there in the sunshine are my highest aspirations. I may not reach them, but I can look up and see their beauty, believe in them, and try to follow where they lead."

Louisa May Alcott

I dedicate this work to my husband, Jim. He was always there to provide love and support throughout this tremendous journey. He was never willing to let me quit because he knew that I would never forgive myself if I did. He listened intently to my rants and raves, while continuing to encourage me along the way. His faith in me made it possible for me to finish.

I also dedicate this study to my children, Megan and Ryan. For the past two years, they have often had to wait while I worked incessantly on this project. I hope that I have set a good example of what is possible if you work diligently and want something badly enough. I love you both dearly, and every day I give thanks because you are a part of my life.

And, finally to my parents, Buddy and Maxine, I love and miss you dearly. I learned from you that "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

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To the campus principal at Promise Middle School, thank you for allowing me to step into the in-classroom places. And, to Caroline and Kathie, thank you for sharing your stories with me.

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explores teacher professional development with an eye directed towards job-embedded professional development, specifically the enactment of differentiated instruction (DI) utilizing the services of an ASCD (formerly the **Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development)** coach on selected campuses in a large suburban school district located in southwest Texas. The researcher examines the professional development experiences of two suburban middle school teachers in the midst of their second year of being coached and examined how these teachers described their learning experiences.

Narrative inquiry (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990) provided the framework for studying teacher knowledge in teacher professional development. The four theoretical pillars on which this investigation relies are Dewey's (1938) theory of experience, Schwab's (1983) four commonplaces of teaching and educational thinking, Connelly and Clandinin's (1988) concepts of personal practical knowledge and teacher as curriculum implementer verses teacher as curriculum maker, and Craig's (in press, a) focus on "what individual teachers already know and do." The questions guiding this study include: What is the experience of DI? How does DI impact teachers and how does it shape teachers' thinking about their own practices? How does job-embedded professional development influence change in teaching practices? What might the researcher learn

through creating a narrative case from teachers who are currently living their second-year of being coached by ASCD faculty?

The findings identify four themes consistently expressed by the participants, including the impact of one's past on how one experiences the present, the complexity of teaching and learning, orientation towards change suggests that constant reflection, evaluation, and experimentation are integral elements of the teaching role, and the on-going construction and re-construction of narratives, which allows teachers to navigate their experiences.

The implications of this research for educators are two-fold; the first is the need for a metacognitive understanding of how one perceives the role of narrative assembly in how one makes meaning, and the second is the usefulness and limits of job-embedded professional development. The implications of this study for researchers includes the process of navigating powerful professional development experiences for teachers, realizing and embracing narrative truths, and considerations about the tremendous need for schools and school districts to offer our current practitioners better and more meaningful professional development experiences.

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*Prologue*

The summer of my first-grade year, I flunked beginning swimming twice! I could not master the final test, which was to swim the length of the pool. I would swim halfway across the pool, and panic would set in. I never did master swimming, but through some unconventional coaching, I did conquer the diving board. I was small and timid as a child, but as hard as I tried to fade into the background, my fiery-red hair would tell on me. As I stood in line to jump off the board, I continued to weave backward, toward the end of the line. My goal was to avoid the humiliation of failing yet another swimming-related task. Despite my efforts, I felt a pair of hands lift me from behind. These hands carried me to the front of the line and placed me at the edge of the board. Then, I felt a gentle nudge. I had no choice but to land in the aqua-blue water. I went down screaming, but, as I began my return to the surface, something overcame me. I could not help it—a smile emerged. I had a blast! I scurried up the side of the pool and pushed past everyone to make my way to the front. I jumped off the board repeatedly without assistance. My experience in the world of professional learning parallels the lessons I learned while jumping off the diving board. As a participant and a presenter, I have discovered three basic approaches following a professional development experience – those who willingly jump in, those who need a gentle nudge, and those who either intentionally or unintentionally never get wet.

*Story unfolding*

In August of 1988, I began my journey as a teacher, and in turn, my journey through professional development, at Promise Junior High School (later Promise Middle School). With excitement and anticipation, I arranged each desk, decorated the display board that hung to the right of the classroom door, and planned my first day activities. As an 8<sup>th</sup> grade Language Arts teacher and school newspaper sponsor, I had my work cut out for me. I quickly discovered that my greatest joy came from building relationships with the students and planning lessons that were engaging and learner-centered. To spice up new vocabulary in the novels my students read, I created a game I called "Word Play." Students worked in teams to discover the meanings of new words. To build anticipation, I developed pre-activities that sparked interest in the novels and stories we read. Ideas, like the water in a swimming pool, surrounded me. Little fear was present when it came to trying new ideas and activities. Our district curriculum governed "what" we taught, my team guided "when" we incorporated each lesson; however, I had the freedom to determine "how" the lessons were designed. I discovered that I served my students best by designing lessons that centered on them. I remember little about organized professional development during those days. The ideas that surrounded me came mostly from my college course work and colleagues. I referred often to one particular education course that focused on reading in the content area. It was a natural fit for my classroom. I also sought out ideas from fellow teachers and my former supervising teachers from student teaching. If I did not know how to teach something, I asked for help. I knew what I knew, and I knew what I did not know. There was so much for me to learn as a new teacher, and I soaked up ideas like a sponge.

In the spring of that year, Laurence Binder pulled me aside in the hallway outside the administrative offices. He had been one of my supervising teachers during student teaching, and now he was the Director of Instruction at my campus. Over the course of the next twenty-two years, he would mentor me and open many doors of opportunity for me. On this day, he asked me if I was interested in teaching speech and drama the next school year. Little did I know at the time, this new challenge would become my true passion in teaching. During my first few years of teaching, planned professional development opportunities were limited. I had a new curriculum to learn, so I filled my need for ideas by once again seeking guidance and support from those around me.

My third year of teaching I transferred with my principal and director of instruction to a newly constructed campus, Shining Star Junior High (later Shining Star Middle School), just a few miles away. I would spend the next fifteen years teaching speech and drama in room D-102. Although my classroom location and subject would not change, professional development would evolve over the next few years. In fact, much would change around me. One of the biggest changes would be a new principal, Debbie Emery. Although, I credit my first principal, Titika Liollio, with raising me as a baby teacher, I have come to credit my second principal, Debbie Emery, with shaping my initial beliefs about professional development. She was a life-long learner, and she expected the same of her faculty. She modeled what she valued most – professional learning. During her five or so years at Shining Star, I filled my professional development transcript with numerous courses mainly focused on creating a student-centered learning environment. With each course I took, most of the time, I immediately walked back into the classroom, jumped off the diving board, and enacted the ideas I gathered. One such

opportunity was *Creative Teaching Techniques* (CTT), a course brought into our district from the Bob Pike Group. Prior to the late-90s, the Bob Pike Group worked exclusively in the corporate world consulting with individuals and businesses. His adult learning model sparked the interest of our district because of its participant-centered instructional focus. Participants became quickly engaged in the learning. Bob's ideas that worked so well in the corporate world easily transferred into the classroom.

Several years later, once again, Laurence Binder presented me with an opportunity to grow professionally. Along with a select cohort of educators from around the district, I would spend the next year being coached extensively by Bob Pike and his group. The district contracted with the Bob Pike Group and tailored a two-day professional development experience in which teachers and administrators could choose to participate. During the next couple of years, I was able to facilitate numerous CTT courses. My learning was further enhanced through this experience. Infusing the strategies from CTT into my classroom lesson design became a ritual because I saw first-hand the positive impact it had on learning. During this leg of my professional journey, as my students reviewed for final exams, one student voluntarily blurted out: "I didn't even know we were learning!" I inquired as to "why" the student thought this to be the case. At this point, several students chimed in and responded: "Because we were actually having fun!" That was all the testimony I needed to delve deeper into my efforts to enhance further my teaching with additional learner-centered activities.

The 1990s brought about a massive explosion of technological advancements for classrooms. In the beginning, it was necessary for district teachers to "earn" a computer for classroom use by participating in a minimum of thirty hours of professional growth

courses focused on utilizing technology. I was one of the first to dive into these uncharted

waters, and I eagerly swam about. With each course I participated in, I anticipated the

opportunity to take my learning for a spin in the classroom. I focused intensively on

becoming more and more technologically literate. The value added to my classroom

through the various courses I participated in was exponential. I began to create electronic

lesson plans that I was able to save from year-to-year. This simple step enabled me to

work smarter, not harder by archiving lesson plans electronically. In turn, I began to

create electronically all of my classroom resources including handouts, permission slips,

and play programs. I also published a periodic class newsletter that I was able to create

electronically and distribute in paper form to my students and their families.  I discovered

the wonders of power point and bid a fond farewell to my trusty overhead projector. And,

I awed my students, and myself, by designing a WebQuest activity for a unit where they

played the role of legislators. Within the WebQuest, I embedded several pre-selected

websites that allowed me the ability to utilize safely this "new" research tool. Our

adventure in the school's computer lab culminated in students authoring Bills that would

be presented to our Student Congress. Furthermore, I created lessons that utilized an

interactive Smartboard. Additionally, the wonder of all wonders – e-mail – took on an

identity of its own. With this simple tool, I was able to create electronic address books

that allowed me to keep parents current on the happenings in our classroom. If a student

misplaced a permission slip that I sent home, then with the click of a button, I simply

attached an electronic copy to an e-mail and sent it to the parent. Each of these tools

allowed me to work more efficiently and effectively in creating learning experiences. As

an implementation trailblazer at the forefront of the digital age, I was able to transform

learning and increase student engagement. The reward was lessons in which students readily interacted in exploratory learning processes. By augmenting my learning and integrating the use of technology in my classroom, I enhanced the learning process for my students.

I continued to seek actively professional learning experiences that focused on creating a safe learning environment and promoted active student engagement. Therefore, in the fall of 2003 when my principal, Darlene Medford, invited me to participate with two other colleagues in *Capturing Kids' Hearts,* I gladly embraced the opportunity. The 3-day off-site learning experience provided tools for us to build positive, productive, trusting relationships with our students and our peers. In turn, I discovered a set of processes that immediately transformed my classroom. I returned to my campus energized and somewhat altered. Early on in my career, I discovered the value of building meaningful, appropriate relationships with my students; however, *Capturing Kids' Hearts* provided a simple set of tools that I could pull immediately to further impact learning in my classroom. I could not wait to jump of the diving board when I returned to my classroom.

I began with the most simple of the concepts shared at *Capturing Kids' Hearts*; I began to greet my students at the door. In the past, I stood by the door, but I did not necessarily greet my students. I made a commitment to stand at the door every day, between every class period transition, and shake the hand of each child who entered my room. This simple exchange netted a payoff that immediately benefited our learning environment. At first, the exchange was awkward and unfamiliar, but overtime my students came to expect it. Then, just six weeks later as we transitioned to spring

semester, I worked with my students to develop a "Social Contract" for each class. Together, we pledged to honor our "contract," which was a posted set of expected classroom behaviors. The difference between this model and a set of traditional rules was the buy-in solicited to create the document. The document was "living" because as a class we referred to it often, used it to keep us focused, and continued to tweak it along the way.

Additionally, that spring and again the next fall, I worked with a small group of teachers to lead professional development sessions focused on our experiences with *Capturing Kids' Hearts*. Like my experience with Creative Teaching Techniques, I was able to "sell" this product because I found success in the classroom using it. I shared with faculty members my experiences and outlined with them how it might positively affect learning in their classrooms, as well. During my last couple of semesters at Shining Star, I was able to see the positive impact that this shared knowledge had on our campus. I saw pockets of teachers greeting students at the door, creating and posting "Social Contracts," and most importantly, developing meaningful, appropriate relationships with their students.

In 2005, after seventeen years in the classroom, I began my journey towards an administrative position in my district.  During the next two years, I stepped into two different positions often considered stepping-stones to administration. The first was as the Academic Achievement Helping Teacher (AAHT) at Earnest Middle School, while the second was as the Director of Instruction Helping Teacher (DIHT) at Diverse City High School. While serving in each of these roles, my professional learning journey became

much more job-embedded or on-the-job. This on the job learning demanded that I learned what I needed, when I needed to know it.

In both roles, several required tasks necessitated the use of excel spreadsheets, so I sought the guidance of those who had mastered this skill. In fact, I developed a skill set that allowed me to teach others the wonders of excel spreadsheets. When I needed a set of journal articles on a specific topic of discussion, I "googled" the topic. On a larger scale, I discovered the concept of "push and pull." No longer was I in a position where learning was "pushed" at me, instead I now served in a role where I "pulled" the learning when I needed. Moreover, thanks to the continued expansion of the information super highway, I was able to "pull" exactly what I needed, when I needed it, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. What a concept.

In 2007, I returned to Promise Middle School, this time as the director of instruction. When I left the campus the last time around, Laurence Binder was my director of instruction, and I was only in my second year of teaching. Now, it was my turn to return and leave a meaningful legacy of learning for other teachers like myself. My thirst for dynamic professional learning experiences continued. My new role as an administrator afforded me the opportunity to guide professional learning at the campus-level. For three years, I worked side-by-side with the principal, José Martinez. Because we were both new to our roles, we forged a dynamic working relationship that allowed us to create a community of learners – both teachers and leaders. We believed that our charge was to meet our teachers and leaders where they were at and take them where we were headed. We committed to creating professional learning experiences that were a cut

above the rest. We knew that continuous learning led to continuous improvement and that our ultimate goal was to create learner-centered instruction.

We began with a book I discovered while "googling." The text, *Teach with your strengths,* served as the jumping off point for our three-year journey. Together, with our faculty, we each discovered our top-five talents through an on-line *Gallup* assessment that was part of the book. I led the faculty through a study of the book utilizing *Wikispaces*, an on-line learning community. We were able to take our professional learning experience beyond the perimeters set by a school building and a bell schedule. Participants could respond (24/7) to posted questions and they could comment on the posts of other participants, as well. No longer was professional learning bound by place or time. Learning, like water, seeped through the crevices of our school building and into the homes of professional learners. We heard from all participants through our blog-style learning; in fact, all ideas were not only heard, they were also validated. They loved it and begged for more! Indeed, we struck a chord in discovering the faculty's hunger for relevant professional development opportunities.

Each session I facilitated was prepared with intention. Not only did I strive to provide relevant professional development, I also purposefully wove into each experience strong instructional strategies that teachers could easily turn around and adapt for classroom use. As I observed classrooms, I expected to see evidence of what we learned. However, it was only sporadically that I saw this happening. I became keenly aware that the "knowing-doing gap" was alive and well on our campus. We were rich in relevant professional development, yet poor in implementation. There was little evident that our

students were benefitting from our professional learning experiences. This was never so true than when I stumbled across a startling revelation.

While at a monthly district leadership meeting, I participated in a small segment of Quantum Learning (QL), a synergistic and comprehensive approach to learning based on brain research. By using visual, auditory and kinesthetic learning strategies, the program incorporates music, color and movement to aid in retention. Students are able to connect to their learning in a fun, interactive, and engaging learning environment. That day, as a student, I too, connected with my learning.

After returning to campus, I soon discovered that many in our math department had participated in up to 30 hours of QL. Yet, as I walked from room to room, I saw little evidence. I did not see the enriched classroom environment of a QL teacher. I did not see attempts to influence and enhance the mood of the classroom with the use of lamps, live plants, or soothing, yet, energizing music. I did not see anchor charts, nor did I hear key learning phrases. I did not feel the energy of a QL classroom like that portrayed in the video sample we saw during our meeting. How could such a powerful professional development experience fail to translate into action for teachers and accompany them into the classroom? If the intent of professional learning is to positively influence instruction, then why is it a unique occurrence for the learning to transfer into the classroom? The overarching question is -- how can we increase transference?

Then, in August of 2009, our district began a multi-year professional learning journey with a unique and welcomed twist. Laurence Binder, who had spent the last five years serving as the Assistant Superintendent for Secondary Curriculum and Instruction, led an initiative to contract with ASCD (formerly the Association for Supervision and

Curriculum Development) to provide customized, ongoing professional development for the purpose of building local capacity for improved instruction and leadership. ASCD faculty members worked in partnership with the district's curriculum department to customize a professional learning plan revolving around the implementation of differentiation instruction (DI) at each of our secondary Title I campuses. In practice, DI involves offering several different learning experiences in response to students' varied needs. DI is about providing quality first-time instruction; it is about meeting learners where they are and taking them where we need them to go.

Each of our Title I secondary campuses, including Promise, were provided with an ASCD faculty member (coach). Our coach worked with us to develop a customized plan for our campus. She asked us what we hoped to accomplish and how we wanted to accomplish it. Together, we forged a plan that was unique and fluid. We paired our coach with a core of ten select teacher leaders from our campus. Over the course of the next year, the teacher leaders worked with our ASCD coach to gain an in-depth understanding of differentiated instruction (DI), while learning how to plan, lead, and implement DI within their content areas. Several days each month, our ASCD coach worked alongside our teacher leaders; she met with, observed, and modeled lessons for each of our teacher leaders. Additionally, José and I met at least once each month with our ASCD professional development coach to assess our DI journey and plan next steps. She provided ongoing support for our campus. At the district-level, administrators learned what the teachers were learning, as well as the instructional leadership practices and policies that support implementation at the school and district-level. I saw a visible, concerted effort to build capacity at the campus and district-level.

I was delighted to see teachers jumping off, with students in tow, into the waters of differentiated instruction. I observed classrooms where students were engaged in lessons designed to meet their needs. Our coach worked tirelessly with each of our teacher leaders. Her approach with each teacher leader was unique; she differentiated her instruction for each. Some were immediately ready to leap into the deep end of DI, while others edged cautiously towards the end of the diving board. At the conclusion of our school year, we informally assessed our journey. One teacher commented: "DI has allowed me to become a facilitator rather than a talking head at the front of the room." Another said: "DI has provided a higher resolution lens thru which to look at lesson plans and activities. Students are learning to take a few more risks. It has helped break the cycle of 'tell me what to write and think.'" Another remarked: "DI has opened my eyes. I can see students learning, expressing, and understanding information.  Before, I felt like I was guessing if they were comprehending." Differentiated instruction fueled change in teaching practices on our campus; Quantum Learning did not. I questioned why. Both DI and QL were grounded in research. Both promised to effect positive change. Yet, I only saw occasional glimpses of QL, while I saw daily evidence of DI unfolding in the classrooms of our cadre of teacher leaders.

I looked forward to the second year of our journey. The plan included a continued working relationship with our ASCD coach; however, her visits would be shorter. She would spend only two days per month rather than three or four. The expectation would be for our teacher leaders to not only effect change in their own classrooms but in those of fellow teachers as well. The capacity-building model would require our teacher leaders to serve as model classrooms and experts. The concept behind ASCD's capacity-building

professional development model is that by the end of year three, the coach would no longer be present on our campus. The ASCD faculty member would have spent three years coaching our teachers, so that by 2012-13 our DI teacher leaders would have the capacity to coach emerging swimmers and divers.

Throughout my twenty plus years in education, I developed an unquenchable thirst for quality professional development. I seized opportunities to participate in and facilitate professional learning. So, in the summer of 2010, when I was given the opportunity to have an even greater impact on professional learning in our district, I seized it. I accepted the position of coordinator for staff development at the district's instructional support center. For the first time in my career, I stepped off a campus and into a district-level administrative role. The decision to leave a campus I adored in the midst of positive change was a difficult one, but the potential impact I could have on district-wide professional development initiatives was very inviting.

*Research questions*

In this thesis, I will examine teacher professional development with an eye directed towards job-embedded professional development, specifically the enactment of differentiated instruction (DI) utilizing the services of an ASCD coach on selected campuses in Progressive Independent School District. A few preliminary questions guide my investigation. First, what is the experience of DI, how does DI impact teachers and how does it shape teachers' thinking about their own practices? Second, how does job-embedded professional development influence change in teaching practices? Third, what might I learn through creating a narrative case study from teachers who are currently in

their second-year of being coached by ASCD faculty? I will turn to the work of scholars

such as Dewey, Schwab, Connelly, Clandinin, and Craig, among others, who will provide

different lenses through which I will analyze and make sense of my own experiences and

those of the other educators in this study. I will reflect on the development of teacher

knowledge through focusing on personal practical knowledge (Clandinin, 1986) and the

teacher as curriculum-maker (Clandinin & Connelly, 1992; Craig & Ross, 2008). In the

process, I will identify and weave in relevant literature, and, in turn, contribute to what is

known about how teachers hold, express, and apply new learning in the classroom. As

Chapter Two unfolds, I will present the theoretical backdrop around which this inquiry

coheres.

CHAPTER II – REVIEW OF LITERATURE

*Introduction*

An essential thread in the tapestry of learning is beginning where you are with what you know. And, so, I begin this literature review examining several strands on the subject of what is already known about how teachers hold, express, and enact new learning in the classroom: Dewey's (1938) theory of experience, Connelly and Clandinin's (1988) concept of a "professional knowledge landscape," Craig's (in press, a) focus on "what individual teachers already know and do," and Schwab's (1969, 1971, 1973, 1983) four commonplaces of teaching and educational thinking. The aforementioned conceptual frameworks are foundational to the study on which I embark.

*Theory of experience*

In 1912, charged with supplying a Latin quotation suitable for inscription on a new building at Newark State College (now Kean College of New Jersey), John Cotton Dana, a Newark, New Jersey, librarian, composed what became the college motto: "Who dares to teach must never cease to learn" (*The New York Times Book Review*, March 5, 1967, p. 55). In the process of learning, we thread together events and experiences from the past to the present; in doing so, we shape the future. Dewey (1938) believed that we do not come to experiences as an empty slate, instead we bring the knowledge from the experience we previously lived to each new experience. Dewey perceived education as life and life as shaped by experiences. Credited as one of the most influential educational thinkers of the twentieth century, he saw education as an opportunity for growth. He

believed that the best education occurs when the teacher becomes a learner. In *Education and experience,* he proposed: "Education is a social process. Education is growth. Education is not preparation for life; education is life itself" (Dewey, 1938). Furthermore, he believed that "teaching is an art and the true teacher is an artist" (Dewey, 1910, p. 220). Around this idea, one can build the context of teacher professional development.

"The traditional focus in teachers' professional development has consisted of prescribed ideas intended to shape prospective and practicing teachers' pedagogical practices," (Olson & Craig, 2001, p. 667). A one-size-fits-all approach to professional development has prevailed. Such an approach, as Craig (in press, a) points out "does not build on what individual teachers already know and do." This generic approach presumes that "all teachers suffer the same malady and need to be injected with the same antidote (Craig, in press, a). In *Coming full circle: from teacher reflection to classroom action and places in-between*, Craig strikes a chord with me when she comments that "the field of education is replete with examples of conventional teacher development activities that have fallen short of the mark" (Craig, 2010a, p. 423). In the same article, Craig reminds us that Dewey's idea of "connecting education and experience" is alive and well in today's classrooms.

In *Democracy and education*, Dewey declares that "only by wrestling with the conditions of the problem at first hand," does the learner "seek" and "find" his own way (Dewey, 1916, p. 188). This represents the complexity of shaping and molding meaning; the learner is the only one who can accomplish this task. For Craig, the teacher is "the nexus of inquiry" (Craig, 2009a, p. 600) because only she/he meets the student face-to-face in the learning situation. In other words, the teacher as learner actively seeks and

questions information, while connecting the new learning with the old learning, all the

while learning, all the while interacting productively with the learner. Both the old and

the new become woven together in this delicate and complex tapestry involving

relationship and response.

### *Four commonplaces of teaching and educational thinking*

Schwab (1969, 1971, 1973, 1983) describes the four commonplaces of teaching

essential to any curriculum situation: teacher, student, subject matter, and milieu. In

doing so, he promotes the idea of moving away from the theoretic and veering towards

the practical. He describes the "grave difficulties" one encounters when relying solely on

theory as these "theoretical constructions are, in main, ill-fitted and inappropriate to

problems of actual teaching and learning" (Schwab, 1970, p. 1). "To his way of

thinking," Craig (2010a) explains, "individuals assuming the learner commonplace are

more than 'minds or knowers' to be intentionally shaped, they also are 'bundles of affect,

individual personalities, and earner of livings' (Schwab, 1970, p. 9). One cannot simply

pour in knowledge. The teacher as learner must be open to the new ideas. Only then can

new and existing knowledge merge.

### *Professional knowledge landscape*

Clandinin and Connelly (1995) use the metaphor of a professional knowledge

landscape to describe the broader context in which teachers teach as it allows them to

speak of *space*, *place*, and *time*. "Furthermore, it has a sense of expansiveness and the

possibility of being filled with diverse people, things, and events in different relationships," while serving as "both an intellectual and a moral landscape (pp. 4-5). It is within the context of this landscape that two fundamentally different places exist in contrast.

The first, Clandinin and Connelly (1996) describe as the "out-of-classroom place…filled with knowledge funneled into the school system for the purpose of altering teachers' and children's classroom lives." We continuously hear "teachers talk about this knowledge…as 'what is coming down the pipe.' Through such images, "teachers express their knowledge of their 'out-of-classroom place' as a place littered with imposed prescriptions." For them, the classroom becomes cluttered with what others envision as "what is right for children." Those outside the classroom "push research findings, policy statements, plans, improvement schemes and so on down…the conduit into this 'out-of-classroom place' on the professional knowledge landscape" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996, p. 25).

The second place sits concurrently. The "in-classroom place" is described "for the most part, [as a] safe [place], generally free from scrutiny, where teachers are free to live stories of practice" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996, p. 25). Craig describes the in-classroom space as "necessarily temporal, relational, and context-bound. Within its intellectual and moral boundaries, teachers and students encounter possible openings where curriculum can be instantiated, openings they must seize of their own volition" (2009b, p. 14). She adds:

Neither of these places is exclusive because both are porous. Hence, these

epistemologically different places co-exist, with both people and imperatives

flowing across the boundaries (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2006), creating tensions in

teachers' personal and professional lives, compounding the complexities already

present on the intellectual and moral landscapes of schools (Craig, 2009b, p. 13).

In *Learning to teach: A question of knowledge*, Clandinin offers an understanding of this

landscape of 'teacher knowledge':

The plotline for our alternative argument, based on a view of 'teacher knowledge',

is that teachers hold knowledge that comes from experience, is learned in context,

and is expressed in practice. 'Teacher knowledge' drives how classrooms are

constructed. This is neither knowledge as possession nor knowledge that can be

tested; it is a form of knowledge embedded in teachers' lives, acquired through

living, and expressed in context (Clandinin, 2000).

Craig (in press, b) considers that "how teachers use 'their own smarts' is absolutely

essential to personal and collective growth and continuity of knowledge and community

in live educational settings."


### *Black box of teaching*

This idea is juxtaposed against what Aoki (1992) depicts as the "black box" of

teaching, which is described as a time "when researchers shied away from the live and

complex world of the classroom" because they "were primarily concerned with the

outcomes of teaching rather than in the understanding of teaching itself" (pp. 187-88).

Aoki explains that:

> We are less naïve today. But still we see about us efforts to place teaching in a gray
> box, if not a black box, wherein teachers are mere facilitators to teaching built into
> programmed learning packages. These are teacher-proof packages wherein the
> preference is for noncontamination by teachers' presence. This is akin to a
> technological understanding of teaching whose outcome is the robotization of
> teaching (Aoki, 2005, pp. 189).

The seemingly ever-present existence of the "gray box" is evident in today's schools.
"Most often," Craig (in press, a) tells us, "others' prescriptions of what teachers should
know and do takes precedence over teachers' personal professional understandings of
their growth." Thus, Craig (2009a) challenges those who "embrace formal views of
teacher knowledge," while advocating "for particular narrative fragments being added to
existing stories" to consider "how their philosophical theoretical additions practically fit"
with those affected (teachers and students), as well as "what is already under way on the
campus." Furthermore, she suggests that "how new plotlines fuse or collide with the
mixture of what is already going on needs to be thoughtfully deliberated" (p. 615).

In *Why is dissemination so difficult? The nature of teacher knowledge and the
spread of curriculum reform,* Craig (2006) reminds us that Jackson (1968) paved the way
for future educational researchers by being the first to cross the threshold into the
classroom. He observed students and teachers cast against the backdrop of the classroom,
and in doing so, he was able to discover "what actually happens in classrooms" verses
"what ought to be happening" (Jackson, 1968, *p*. 8). He observed "students and teachers
interacting with one another around subject matter (curriculum), and record(ed) what

took place in classroom settings in the words and feelings of those individuals

experiencing curriculum as it became lived" (Craig, 2006).

***Teacher as curriculum-maker verses teacher as curriculum-implementer***

       One cannot negate the importance of curriculum. After all, it is the road map to

learning. Without a map, we are certain to get nowhere. In her book, *The death and life of*

*the great American school system*, Ravitch purports that a curriculum "provides direction,

clarity, and focus around worthy ends, without interfering with teachers' decisions about

how to teach" (210, p. 231). Yet, we have a tendency to place the teacher in the

passenger's seat as curriculum-implementer rather than in the driver's seat as curriculum-

maker. Clandinin and Connelly (1988, 1992) were the first to describe symbolically the

teacher as curriculum-implementer versus the teacher as curriculum-maker. In further

examining the teacher as curriculum-implementer versus the teacher as curriculum-

maker, the dominate image of teachers as curriculum-implementers upholds the position

that teachers are "merely agents of the state, paid to do its bidding" (Craig, in press, a).

To this end, the top-down national and state mandates have created an age-old tradition

grounded in the essentialist system that tries to instill all students with the most essential

or basic academic knowledge and skills and character development. At both the federal

and state levels, we continue to cultivate and sustain this organism through high-stakes

testing.  In, *The dragon in school yards: The influence of mandated testing on school*

*contexts and educators' narrative knowing,* Craig (2004) paints a portrait of the

'professional knowledge landscape' in contrast to the backdrop of accountability

standards:

(The) idea forms a lens through which the influence of an accountability system on a particular school context can be considered from multiple perspectives. Also critical to this study is the distinction between in-classroom places and out-of-classroom places (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995; Craig, 1995) on school landscapes (p. 1231).

The web of influence on today's classrooms transcends campus walls to the greater community, the state, the nation, and even a more global context. The development of engaging lessons that meet the needs of diverse learners has been seen as within the realm of control for a teacher. The metaphor of the teacher as curriculum-maker is clouded by what the "out-of-classroom places" expect to unfurl within a classroom (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995; Craig, 1995). These "out-of-classroom places" cause a collision between the teacher as curriculum-maker and the teacher as curriculum-implementer. Craig explains that:

Compulsory testing mandates originate in out-of-classroom and out-of-school places, yet carry with them intellectual, moral, and professional imperatives for teachers' practices both in in-classroom and in-school places. In other words, they arrive on teachers' landscapes not as ideas for professional consideration but as morally charged action items around which a great deal of societal urgency exists (2004, p. 1231).

Craig (2010c) refers to our nation's top-down school reform efforts as "bumping up places" that produce tensions and cause friction in the "in-classroom places" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995; Craig, 1995). The two metaphors continuously "bump" into one another. Additionally, Craig tells us that:

The prevalent, politically charged conception of knowledge for teaching is that of a codified script detailing what teachers must know and do. In that technical rationalist view, knowledge is a possession dictated, controlled, and tested by others (2010b).

If the lessons are "scripted" by the "out-of-classroom places," then is there room for the teacher as curriculum-maker?

Craig (in press, a) describes the image of the teacher as curriculum-maker as one that "focus[es] on the primacy of the teacher in organizing, planning, and orchestrating classroom interactions because only the teacher is positioned at the hub of the curricular exchange and meets students face-to-face." To this end, the curriculum opens up within the context of the classroom where the teacher and the learners meet to create meaning based upon the experiences of each. It is "an entirely human enterprise, it cannot be engineered. It is education achieved through personal and social meaning making, not education determined by injection" (Craig, 2010b). This is what Dewey (1910) described as the "art" of teaching. Policy-makers may "inject" what is deemed worth knowing, but only the teacher can graft meaning and plant the new learning against the landscape of the classroom.

### *The change process*

Craig interlaces the observations of Dewey (1916) and Strake (1987) by reminding us that our efforts to help and support may unwittingly "mask" an "attempt to dictate" what opens up in the classroom. Possibly, "we interfere with (teachers and students) lives convinced we are helping them do something better" (Strake, 1987, p. 58). The societal

milieu of national and state accountability standards has created a system of "externally imposed measures" that are "disconnected from what teachers have come to know and do in the throes of their practices" (Craig, in press, a). Additionally, in *Tensions in teacher development and community: Variations on a recurring school reform theme,* Craig (in press, b) points out that a delicate balance exists between the influences of "heat" and "light":

> J. Olson and Lang (2008) use the metaphors of heat (conflict) and light (illumination) to examine the effects of systemic reform. They take the position that all change efforts must balance both conflict and illumination. Without delicate negotiation, they argue, miseducative experiences (Dewey, 1938) can occur for teachers.

Ravitch warns that when "we seek to reform our schools, we must take care to do no harm" (2010, p. 241).

Many instigate the change process. Teacher professional developers dedicate their careers to it. Researchers hope their findings will bring it about. Policymakers believe they can legislate it. Moreover, teachers do it all the time. Several questions bubble to the surface. How does one strike that delicate balance between heat and light? How do school leaders bring about change in a manner that considers the context of the teacher as learner? In addition, what can one say or do to make the new learning so compelling that a teacher voluntarily sows the new learning seeds into her own knowledge landscape?

Once again, Craig strikes a chord with me when she proposes that:

> The question of how productive change successfully happens in school contexts needs to be broached. It is a query that deserves undivided attention. Clearly, "tinkering toward utopia," the metaphor Tyack and Cuban (1995) aptly chose to capture the history of school reform in the US, does not work. Neither does forcing change on teachers or threatening their existences constitute long-term solutions (Craig, in press, b).

Change is expected. The avoidance of change is both undesirable and unrealistic. However, the reality of sustainable change is often unreachable. In, *Achieving sustainable systemic change: an integrated model of educational transformation,* Debowski provides insight into the change process by informing us that:

> Good intentions can be lost in the hurly-burly of everyday existence until the urge to change has faded. In the case of school communities, the very busy daily push to meet deadlines, manage student learning and accomplish the myriad duties required of teachers makes reflection, change and renewal particularly challenging (Debowski, p. 2)

As professionals, teachers are expected by "out-of-classroom" places (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996) to acquire new skills and knowledge to enable better performance; however, teachers then experience the significant challenge of transferring that learning back into their own teaching context (Bennett & Marr, 2003). The particular school setting, the teacher's own knowledge landscape, the culture of the educational community and the students themselves constitute only a splinter of the raison d'être that will determine whether any of the new learning successfully makes its way into the

teacher's "in-classroom" place (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996).  Debowski reminds us that

"teachers who manage to bring new knowledge back into their work setting still face

considerable challenges" (p. 3). In many cases, the fervor and commitment to integrate a

better way of doing things can be lost when faced with the reality of the school, class and

students.  Such realities include a professional knowledge landscape littered with multiple

competing and sometimes-contradictory reform efforts, an absence of time to practice

and/or enact new methods, and a high stakes accountability system that takes none of the

above into consideration.

Change-friendly organizations approach learning together, while forming

"networks to exchange knowledge and view differences as opportunities to grow."

Leaders of change-friendly organizations "create cultures in which people are challenged

to take risks," while at the same time providing the support necessary to taking those

risks (Huhn, 1998). This orientation towards change suggests that constant reflection,

evaluation, and experimentation are integral elements of the teaching role.

*Professional development that fosters dynamic change*

In examining professional development that fosters "dynamic change,"

Richardson (1998) describes two differing forms of professional development – one more

traditional and one less traditional. The more traditional form of professional

development "begins with someone from outside the school determining that a process,

content, method, or system should be implemented in the classroom." However, those

models that are "reflective and collaborative …are designed to help develop and support

a change orientation."  In this model of professional development, the outcomes of

interest are not just changes in behaviors and actions, but also changes in the rationale and justifications that accompany the new practices" (Richardson, 1998). The teacher learners are encouraged to weave the new learning into their existing tapestry.

Anders and Richardson (1994) were involved in a long-term process in which they met with teachers in groups, as well as individually in their classrooms. They helped teachers explore their beliefs and practices through videotaping their classrooms, and talking about their practices with them while viewing the tape. Over the three-year period in which they worked with teachers in this way, they found that the teachers changed their beliefs and practices in directions that related to the various dialogues. Richardson (1994) deduced that "it would appear that the teachers had developed a change orientation that led them to reflect continually on their teaching and classrooms, and experiment thoughtfully with new practices." In turn, Richards offered, that the teachers "developed a strong sense of individual autonomy and felt empowered to make deliberate and thoughtful changes in their classrooms." Follow through and follow up are ever-present in this more non-traditional model of professional development. The reality is that:

> Indeed, most of the (professional) development that is conducted with K-12 teachers derives from the short-term transmission model; pays no attention to what is already going on in a particular classroom, school, or school district; offers little opportunity for participants to become involved in the conversation; and provides no follow-up (Richardson, 1994).

The "short-term transmission model" is what some informally refer to as "sit and get" or "spray and pray" professional development. The participant literally "sits and gets," while the presenter "sprays" around theories and ideas and "prays" that some of it sticks. Little, if any, follow up occurs after a professional development experience like this; it might not even be mentioned again.

In contrast, according to Croft, et al (2010), the "short-term transmission model," professional development that is job-embedded refers to teacher learning that walks with the teacher in day-to-day teaching practice. Job-embedded professional development advocates that professional development services should not be the same for every teacher. Rather, it can serve as a way to differentiate instruction for teachers seeking professional development (Rock, 2002). The guiding framework for school-based professional development is that one size does not fit all. Job-embedded professional development," offers Croft et al (2010), is a shared, ongoing process that is locally rooted and makes a direct connection between learning and application in daily practice" (p. 2). The complexity of teaching and learning unfurls a model of professional development that allows teachers time to learn and experiment with new concepts in the classroom, just as their students do. "Professional development should no longer be an event that takes place on one particular day of the school year. Teachers must view professional development as a part of their daily work" (Lancaster, 2006, p. 47).

The current movement towards professional development that is job-embedded and long-term is mindful of this convolution. Clair (2000) summarizes eight principles of effective professional development as noted in the work of Hawley and Valli (1999):

(Professional development) should be driven by an analysis of teachers' goals and student performance; it should involve teachers in the identification of what they need to learn; it should be school based; it should be organized around collaborative problem solving; it should be continuous and adequately supported; it should be information rich; it should include opportunities for the development of theoretical understanding; and it should be part of a comprehensive change process.

Numerous examples of job-embedded professional development structures incorporate these principles.  Such professional development structures provide opportunities for teachers to learn in concert, in lucid and continuous ways (Clair, 2000). "The closer the learning activity is to the actual work of teachers in classrooms with their current students, the more job-embedded it is" (Croft, etal, 2010). The philosophy of job-embedded professional development postulates that a focus on teacher learning that is removed from the classroom is destined to miss the mark because it does not take into account the milieu in which the practices will transpire. This exploration of job-embedded approaches led me to a more careful examination of coaching.

Coaching is one form of job-embedded professional development that "provides ongoing consistent follow-up by way of demonstrations, observations, and conversations with teachers as they implement new strategies and knowledge" (Croft, etal, 2010). The

coach coaches in the "field" of the classroom, not from the sidelines. Schön (1983) tells us that people cannot be taught; they can only be coached to learn. The "coach" in this model of job-embedded professional development can come in the form of a teacher leader, a veteran teacher, or an outside consultant. Because this is a relatively new form of job-embedded professional development, adequate research is not currently available. Croft, etal explain that:

> Learning to do a complicated job well requires constant scholarship, taking place both in academic classrooms as well as through guided, on-the-job practice. The work of teaching—whether it's helping a distracted 6-year-old recognize letters or a struggling 16-year-old find the derivative of a function—requires extensive knowledge of learners and learning, teaching techniques, behavior management, and the content itself. Such professional knowledge requires not only years to master fully but also the willingness to change as the evidence base of effective teaching grows, as curricula change, and as the needs of learners evolve (Croft, etal, 2010).

The stark truth is that many professional development experiences continue to be short-term and disconnected from the reality of teachers' work. Skillfully implemented job-embedded professional development can serve as a powerful catalyst for affecting student learning. The evolution of professional development towards job-embedded models of teacher learning begs for further study. In Chapter Three, I methodically explain how I approached this research into teacher professional development with a focus on job-embedded professional development, specifically the endorsement of differentiated instruction (DI) utilizing the services of an ASCD coach on selected campuses in

Progressive Independent School District. A few questions guide my inquiry. First, what is

the experience of DI, how does DI impact teachers and how does it shape teachers'

thinking about their own practices? Second, how does job-embedded professional

development influence change in teaching practices? Third, what might I learn through

creating a narrative case study from teachers who are currently in their second-year of

being coached by ASCD faculty?

CHAPTER III - METHODOLOGY

*Introduction*

This investigation uses the philosophies and structures of narrative inquiry in order to illuminate the research purpose of this thesis study, which is to examine the impact of job-embedded models of professional development on teacher learning, specifically the endorsement of differentiated instruction (DI) utilizing the services of an ASCD coach on selected campuses in Progressive Independent School District. In Chapter 1, I described my personal professional development journey. Then, in Chapter 2, I identified and wove in relevant literature in order to contribute to the body of knowledge concerning how teachers hold, express, and apply new learning in the classroom. In Chapter 3, I will now describe the research approach through justifying the choice of methodology, the procedures and tools used to collect and analyze the data, and the context of the research.

*Research approach*

Qualitative research allows the researcher to observe while immersed in the depths of the swimming pool, blanketed by the water, rather than merely standing tippy-toed, peering down from the edge of the diving board. This up close look provides the researcher with the ability and privilege to take into account the societal and cultural constructs of people; however, the prospect of engaging in qualitative research can be somewhat daunting considering the vast host of options. Mapping out the journey, by understanding the substantial spectrum from which to choose, is the first step. Of the

various forms of qualitative research, narrative inquiry is the most fitting methodology for this study as it allows the researcher to view the life of teaching and learning as it is lived, while at the same time trying to make sense of it all (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The choice of narrative inquiry as a research approach carries with it certain epistemological (how we know what we know) implications that support this selection of a methodology. Delving more deeply into teachers' knowledge involves a consideration of teachers' experiences, as well. Elbaz (1991) epistemologically anchors the role of story in describing teachers' knowledge:

> Story is the substance of teaching as it provides the landscape within which we live as teachers and researchers, and within which the work of teachers can be seen as making sense. This is not merely a claim about the aesthetic or demonstrative notion of story with our innate understanding of teaching, but an epistemological claim that teachers' knowledge in its own terms is ordered by story and can best be understood that way (p. 3).

At the heart of narrative inquiry is an understanding that humans are storied beings, living storied lives; that narrative inquiry is a part of the narrative experience of being a storied being; and that narrative inquiry can help a researcher understand the "grand narrative" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. xxv) of a story. Simply put, narrative inquiry is an approach that focuses on the use of stories as data. Narrative inquiry, grounded in the human experience, reveals roots in Dewey's (1938) philosophy of education. Dewey believed that we do not come to things as an empty slate; instead, we bring the knowledge from the experience we previously lived to each new experience. Dewey perceived education as life and life as shaped by experiences.

My study comprehensively drew upon the practical ideas of Clandinin and Connelly (1990, 2000, 2006) for creating a three-dimensional narrative inquiry space, entering and exiting a research field, and data collection techniques. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) built upon Dewey's idea of educative experience to establish a three-dimensional narrative inquiry space, with overt consideration of the axis of interaction (personal and social dimensions), continuity (past, present and future temporal frames), and situation (the physical place of the events) in the documentation of stories, and understanding how these reflections influence the development of an individual's story. Upon entering the field, the role of the researcher is fluid, shifting and changing with the tide, in a state of constant renegotiation and reevaluation amidst an ever-changing landscape (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000).

*Procedures and interpretive tools*

As the inquirer, I utilized research procedures and interpretive tools in concert for my narrative investigation. Data collection occurred through a variety of field texts. Connelly, Clandinin, and He (1997) explain that "field texts are the equivalent of quantitative empirical data" and are described as "records made in research fields" (p. 667). These field texts can include such interpretive tools as observations, field notes, interviews, conversations, journal writing, autobiographical writing, letters between teachers and researchers, oral histories, annals, chronicles, teacher stories, family stories, photographs, memory boxes and other personal/family artifacts.

In turn, by employing Connelly and Clandinin's (1990) analytic tools of broadening, burrowing, storying, restorying, and fictionalization, I was able to transform

the field texts into research texts. In utilizing the tool of broadening, I described with as much detail as possible the context of the story. When burrowing, I reconstructed the events observed through the vantage points of the main participants involved in the study. In addition, in the process of storying and restorying, I encapsulated transformations, negotiations, or sense-making by individuals or groups. I know that as "the researcher [I need] to be aware of constructing a relationship in which both voices [participant and researcher] are heard" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 4). Finally, in fictionalization, I was able to make use of pseudonyms to protect the "innocent." By utilizing interpretive tools, as the researcher, I was better able to translate "field texts" into research text.

Continuously, I wove the field texts into pro tem research texts, as they were collected, in order to customize my observations into the final research text (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Whereas "formalists begin inquiry in theory… narrative inquirers tend to begin with experience as expressed in lived and told stories" which the authors exemplified in the stories they articulated in their own journey of discovery into narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 40).

Following this model, I deliberately cast against the backdrop of my thesis proposal, my own experience, my own truth, as it relates to my thinking, understanding, and experience of teacher professional development. My professional development journey embedded within chapter one is a retelling of events throughout my professional life, and as such are stories that cannot be viewed as historic truth, but are candid and genuine in their portrayal of my experience, and as such represent partial, narrative truth with equal value, if not validity (Spence, 1982). I chose to share my story since it serves

as my motivation for selecting this topic because it combines my work as a teacher, administrator, and doctoral student.

My story also speaks to various aspects of my narrative dilemma involving a battle between my "teacher heart" and my "administrator head." My "teacher heart" desires to create classrooms where children can thrive, while my "administrator head" knows that our schools are cast against the shadow of state-mandated accountability testing. Both worlds coexist, and I am left wondering how to support classrooms that meet the needs of diverse learners. As it applies to my research, I am left speculating where and how teacher professional development fits into the schema of the "in-classroom places" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996). However, because all narratives work on multiple levels, and because multiple "I" are brought to bear in the inquiry into a narrative (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990), I was interested in understanding and challenging the implied "grand narratives" of education and authority that are forever woven into the context of my life and have influenced who I am as an educator and an administrator. I also recognized that by researching how other teachers live and tell their own narratives about professional development, I would add profundity and complexity to my own understanding of how I do the same.

Because "narrative inquiry is a method of inquiry as well as a means of personal, professional development," (Conle, 2001, p. 22) the focus on the human experience is equally as valid when considering each teachers encounter with her own professional development. Clandinin (2006) reminds us that by engaging in research with human participants, the researcher's story of herself as researcher is changed along with the participants:

> Narrative inquirers cannot bracket themselves out of the inquiry but rather need to find ways to inquire into participants' experiences, their own experiences, as well as the co-constructed experiences developed through the relational inquiry process…They too live on the landscape and are complicit in the world they study (p. 47).

As a methodology grounded in a qualitative ideal, "narrative research…does not strive to produce any conclusions of certainty, but aims for its findings to be 'well grounded' and 'supportable', retaining an emphasis on the linguistic reality of human experience" (Webster & Mertova, 2007, p. 4). I embraced these precincts, as narrative inquiry branches from the understanding that the traditional empirical research methods cannot amply address the intricacy of human experience. I believed that the results of this research would be of interest to practitioners and researchers alike as it contributes to what is known about how teachers grip, express, and apply new learning in the classroom. My dissertation presents a purposefully gathered narrative grounded in the examination of events by the participants, as well as the researcher; it also presents other nascent narrative fibers that seem to present challenges to the "grand narrative" of teacher professional development.

### *Context of the research*

*Participants*

The participants of this inquiry include two teachers from one middle school campus in a large suburban school district in south Texas. My selection was based upon pragmatic reasons: as a former administrator from the selected campus, I had the social

and cultural investment necessary to gain access and agreement about participation, and

the participants with whom I worked were participating in year two of the district's

differentiated instruction initiative. The participants (all names are changed

to protect anonymity) in this research were Caroline, a teacher in her early forties who

has taught for three and one-half years, and Kathy, a third year teacher in her late

twenties. Although the trace of this study began prior to the writing of my dissertation

proposal, in my own experience and reflection, while serving as an administrator on the

campus, the portion of the work with the participants identified above took place over

two months, beginning in early-February of 2011 and continuing until early-April of

2011. I am attempting to step back from our shared experiences and look at them through

the lens of a narrative inquirer. Because I lived many of the experiences alongside my

participants, I can see the experiences in their proper contexts. However, using a variety

of data sources and data analysis techniques allows me to reduce my tendency to write

from my own perspective, inviting the teachers to share their own stories. In the end,

however, the narratives told and re-told are collaborative in nature, an aggregation of all

of our realities.

*Data collection*

For this inquiry, I drew from a variety of narrative sources. Lived experiences,

both collective and individual, provided the backdrop of the story. Those experiences, as

restoried by the individuals who lived them, are recounted through personal interviews,

as well as a variety of tools listed above, including audio-taped and transcribed

interviews, classroom observational field notes, conversations, researcher and participant

written correspondence, and archival documents such as notes and forms. Personal interviews, focus group interviews, and classroom observations provided several opportunities for data collection and triangulation.

*Semi-structured interviews*

In conducting interviews, my approach was phenomenological in design as I focused on the detailed description of conscious experience. Using open-ended questions, participants were able to reconstruct their experiences. I adapted Seidman's (1998) three-layer approach to interviewing. He describes the first layer as the opportunity to acquire the interviewee's focused life history in order to afford a context for the experiences under study, a second layer to rouse details of the experiences, and a third layer to encourage the interviewee to reflect upon the emergent implications from those experiences. The first layer of Seidman's interview structure provides the milieu within which to understand better the experiences described in the next layer of the interview structure. I drew upon the power of the second and third layers in conducting interviews with each participant. I found that there is no "recipe for the effective question" (p. 77). Seidman writes:

> The truly effective question flows from an interviewer's concentrated listening, engaged interest in what is being said, and purpose in moving forward...Effective questioning is so context-bound, such a reflection of the relationship that has developed between the interviewer and the participant, that to define it further runs the risk of making a human process mechanical (pp. 77 - 78).

In my interviews with Caroline and Kathy, I began each with key ideas and questions for exploration, while allowing the interview to follow the direction of the interviewer and the interviewee. My aim for each encounter was to unpack their ideas about professional development and to capture their lived experiences. I encouraged each participant to restory key experiences and reflect upon the meanings that those experiences engendered.

      I conducted a series of three one-on-one, face-to-face interviews with the selected teachers. Each interview was tape recorded and transcribed. During the first interview, I asked the participating teachers to comment on their background in education, possible units of instruction that could be observed, their typical lesson plan, the format for instruction, length of time planned for the lesson, and anticipated outcomes. The purpose of this inaugural interview was to build upon our existing relationship and to learn the background and significant life experiences of each participant. In the second interview, I focused on the concrete details relating to the topic of study. I asked each participant to expand on the various elements of employment such as practices, habits, and relationship with the ASCD coach. In the third and final interview, I asked each participant to reflect on the topic. This third interview allowed the participant to connect philosophy with practice (Seidman, 1998).

*Focus group interviews*

During the interview process, common themes began to emerge, and in turn, I was able to develop the topics and discussion prompts for deeper examination in a focus group setting. I brought together both participants for two focus group interviews to create conversation that allowed participants to explore a topic in depth (Vaughn,

Schumm, & Sinagub, 1996). Information from a focus group can be used to triangulate and support data from other collection methods (Hatch, 2002). Additionally, focus groups can be a useful data collection technique when researchers need to investigate individuals with similar characteristics, collect many data in a small amount of time, and get concentrated data on the topic (Hatch, 2002).

*Classroom observations*

I gathered additional data throughout the development of this narrative inquiry by observing each teacher during the course of instruction. Additionally, I found journaling about each observation especially helpful in reflecting upon and articulating the lessons that unfold before me. We mutually agreed on the time and date of the classroom observations. I took field notes to capture components of instruction relevant to the study. I limited the observations to one or two per teacher per week to provide a manageable scope to the study. The second interview occurred during the period of classroom observations and provided a format for discussing the current instruction. At the conclusion of the observation period, I conducted a third interview with each participant. All personal interviews, focus group interviews, and observations were transcribed and submitted to the teacher participants for their review and approval.

*Researcher's reflective journal*

Furthermore, I captured moments along my journey in a research reflective journal. Janesick (2004) explains, "For the qualitative researcher, the meditative focus of journal writing can only help to refine the researcher as research instrument" (p. 95). The

reflective journal provided a means for expressing emotions and reactions to the study, and in turn, afforded me an opportunity for recognizing and revealing hidden meanings and areas for future investigation. The process of journal writing lends itself to a deepened "self-awareness [that] helps to sharpen one's reflection, writing, thinking and ability to communicate" (Janesick, 2004, p. 95). For me, journaling became a cathartic tool of self-discovery, while serving as a precious instrument of inquiry that presented me a tool for perfecting the art of observation and interviewing.

*Summary*

The proposed study employs a quantitative research method, utilizing personal interviews, focus group interviews, observations, and reflective journaling as primary investigative tools. Triangulation, accomplished through examination of multiple data sources, provides credibility for the study. As indicated in Chapter 1, the following research questions guide this study:

- What is the experience of DI, how does DI impact teachers and how does it shape teachers' thinking about their own practices?

- How does job-embedded professional development influence change in teaching practices?

- What might I learn through creating a narrative case study from teachers who are currently in their second-year of receiving coaching from ASCD faculty?

Through creation of a thick, rich description of the research findings, analysis of data gathered, and careful notation of themes found within the study, I will delve deeply into the lived experience of both participants. Beginning with Chapter 4, I report on the findings of this research.

CHAPTER IV – RESEARCH ANALYSIS

*Introduction*

This narrative inquiry examines the impact of job-embedded models of professional development on teacher learning, specifically the endorsement of differentiated instruction (DI) utilizing the services of an ASCD coach on selected campuses in Progressive Independent School District. In Chapter Four, I begin an analysis of a focused eight-week study that delved deeply and exclusively into the lives of two teacher-learners participating in the aforementioned change effort and in my dissertation thesis study. These findings arise from careful analysis (triangulation) of classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews, and a researcher's reflective journal.

This thesis study examines the potential role of a non-traditional form of professional development in enabling teachers to enhance their teaching and learning. To address this purpose, I explore the questions:

- What is the experience of DI, how does DI impact teachers and how does it shape teachers' thinking about their own practices?

- How does job-embedded professional development influence change in teaching practices?

- What might I learn through creating a narrative case study from teachers who are currently in their second-year of coaching by ASCD faculty?

Each participant's story emerged through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and focus group interviews. Utilizing a researcher's reflective journal, the different stories, carefully woven together and further inspected revealed common themes.

### *Emerging themes*

To facilitate the process of meaning making, themes can be identified that capture "the phenomenon one tries to understand" (van Mansen, 1990, p. 87). Classroom teachers often create learning around themes or big ideas. As a researcher, one is better able to get to the meaning of lived-experiences by recognizing and examining emerging themes. "When a person shares with us a certain experience, then there will always be something there for us to gather" (van Manen, 1990, p. 92).

In the process of isolating the thematic aspects of the classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and focus group interviews, I approached the method in a number of ways. Of those, the examination of sentence clusters, while asking what they reveal about the experience being described, allowed me an opportunity to identify possible themes. Additionally, the practice of highlighting particularly essential or revealing phrases, while examining the main significance of the text as a whole, permitted me to capture fundamental meaning. In studying the lived-experiences of the participants, themes naturally bubbled to the fore.

*Classroom observations*

       I conducted sixteen classroom observations, eight for each participant. The observations took place at a predetermined time and ranged from thirty to forty-five minutes in length. The observations, conducted at regular intervals during the study, focused on teacher growth, as well as changes in practices over the period of the investigation. During each observation, I noted learning goals, objectives, used strategies/methodology, and forms of assessment, as well as the organization of the lesson, students' performance on tasks and during paired/group activities, teacher's questions and students' responses, teacher's explanation during the lesson, and classroom interactions. Each of these notations potentially captured the essence of DI unfolding in a classroom. The subtleties created a mosaic of images connecting in a seamless, synergistic, and revealing way. This mosaic is captured and displayed by synthesizing the researcher's field notes. The researcher's field notes highlighted the presence and evidence of the differentiation of instruction.

       By definition DI "is a teacher's response to learner's needs guided by general principles of differentiation" (Tomlinson, 1999) such as *supportive learning environment*, *continuous assessment*, *high quality curriculum*, *respectful tasks*, and *flexible grouping*. Furthermore, according to Tomlinson (1999) teachers can differentiate *content,* p*rocess*, or *product* according to student's *readiness*, *interests*, and *learning profile* through a range of instructional and management strategies. *Figure 1* below, adapted from Tomlinson's work, allowed me to think as a researcher about how differentiation unfolds

in a classroom setting. Tomlinson (1999) describes what have come to be known as the

non-negotiables of a differentiated classroom as follows:

*Supportive Learning Environment*:

The operation and tone of each classroom reflects the teacher's belief in the possibilities of each student including rules for members of the class, furniture arrangement ideas, guidelines for how to get help with work, and procedures for passing out and collecting materials.

*Continuous Assessment*:

Ongoing, informal testing is used to understand where students are in their learning journeys and to assess what is working and what is not working in the classroom so that teachers can adjust instruction to ensure that all students succeed.

*High-Quality Curriculum*:

Certain knowledge to master and skills to learn; instruction is differentiated to ensure that all students attain mastery.

*Respectful Tasks*:

Assignments that honor the needs of each student.

*Flexible Grouping*:

Arranging student work groups in varied ways, for example, whole group, small group, partners, and independent options.

Additionally, Tomlinson (1999) describes *content* as what the teacher "wants students to learn and the materials or mechanisms through which that is accomplished;" *process* as the "activities designed to ensure that students use key skills to make sense out of essential ideas and information; and *product* as the "vehicles through which students demonstrate and extend what they have learned" (p.11). Finally, Tomlinson (1999) defines *readiness* as "a student's entry point relative to a particular understanding or skill; *interest* as "a child's affinity, curiosity or passion for a particular topic or skill; and *learning profile* as "how we learn" (p. 11). Results of these observations were used during the study to drive the direction of the semi-structured interviews, along with the focus group interviews. Examination of the results revealed potential themes.

*Figure 1*

Differentiation of Instruction is…

**a teacher's response to a learner's need**

**guided by general principles of differentiation, such as**

| Supportive Learning Environment | Continuous Assessment | High Quality Curriculum | Flexible Grouping | Respectful Tasks |

**Teachers can differentiate**

**Content** | **Process** | **Product**

**according to a student's**

Readiness | Interests | Learning Profile

**through a range of instructional and management strategies.**

*Semi-structured interviews*

Three semi-structured one-on-one interviews occurred prior to, while in the process of, and after completing the sixteen classroom observations. Each interview ranged from thirty to forty minutes in length. The interviews all took place in the prospective teacher's classroom, were recorded and subsequently transcribed. Then, the results were examined and common themes and ideas identified.

As mentioned earlier in Chapter Three, I adapted Seidman's (1998) three-layer approach to interviewing. The first layer of Seidman's interview structure provides the milieu within which to understand better the experiences described in the next layer of the interview structure. I drew upon the power of the second and third layers in conducting interviews with each participant. I began each interview focused on exploring key ideas and asking prepared questions, while allowing the discussion between the interviewer and interviewee to naturally unfold and possibly turn toward a new direction. The intention for each encounter was to unpack ideas about professional development and to capture lived-experiences. Participants were encouraged to restory key experiences and reflect upon the meanings that those experiences engendered.

*Focus group interviews*

During the classroom observations and interview process, common themes began to emerge, in turn, I was able to develop the topics and discussion prompts for deeper examination in a focus group setting. Both participants came together for two focus group interviews to create conversation that allowed them to explore a topic in depth (Vaughn, Schumm, & Sinagub, 1996). Each focus group session allowed me a chance to triangulate

and support data from the semi-structured interviews and classroom observations, while capturing the story of each participant's lived-experience.

### *Researcher's reflective journal*

Another source of data in this study was my reflective journal as a researcher. A reflective journal can be likened to a diary as it affords an additional venue for capturing field notes, evidence and clues about the stories unfolding, while providing a place for tracking the researchers' personal reactions to what is being discovered. For this study, my reflective journal was maintained to gain insight into the stories of each participant, as well as used as a means for recording the experiences and events of the study from my perspective.

### *Conclusion*

In the next chapters, the heart of the research opens up through the lived experiences of Caroline and Kathie. By sharing their stories, I hope to contribute to the body of knowledge about how teachers hold, express, and apply new learning in the classroom. As each story develops, common themes are revealed.

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CHAPTER V – CAROLINE'S STORY

*Prologue*

As a child, Caroline dreamed of becoming a teacher. Early on, she earned a two-year Associate of Arts degree in Elementary Education. She "fought [her parents] to get the two years" because they "did not think that a girl needed an education." She entered the business world, married, and did not attempt to further her degree. Then, after nearly twenty years of marriage and twenty-five years of working in the business world, she completed her four-year degree. Currently, Caroline holds a degree in Liberal Arts, and she is working towards a Masters in Curriculum. Surprisingly, she completed her remaining 51 credit hours in a year's time, and along the way, she earned her teaching certification through an alternative certification program (ACP). Her stint in the "real world" included banking, chemical distribution, and export packing. In her inaugural interview, Caroline exclaimed, "What is really odd is that I loved every single one of those jobs. I enjoyed working with the people, and in every one of those jobs, I ended up teaching all the new employees."

Caroline's family has a long established history at Promise Middle School. Her grandmother opened the school in 1982 as the principal's secretary; in addition, her husband began his teaching career a few years prior to her arrival on the campus. She started as a long-term substitute teacher on the campus and transitioned into the position of Accelerated Reading Instruction Program (ARIP) tutor in the spring of 2007. In the fall of that year, she accepted the position of sixth grade reading teacher.

During her three years on the sixth grade reading team, Caroline has taken part in various professional development opportunities. This past summer, she participated in the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) Summer Institute. The campus earned the distinction of an AVID Demonstration School some ten years ago, and the current principal continues to support the program by setting aside funds each year to send teachers to the weeklong summer institute. Additionally, Caroline, who received her certificate for teaching gifted and talented students by completing the required thirty hours of training in gifted and talented education, continues to participate in the six hours of yearly update training in order to maintain that eligibility. Caroline shared that during the AVID Summer Institute she began to ponder how she might use the various strategies in her own classroom. She explained her thought process this way:

> I feel like if I take something, and I do not use it in my class, it is just like when you are using a computer system, you do not use it for a while, you go back into it, and you cannot remember what to do. Things that you thought were great at the time, if you do not use them immediately, you set them back on the shelf and they become lost.

Caroline did not express the same affinity for the gifted and talented training in which she has participated. She recalls often becoming disengaged while sitting in PD sessions focused on the gifted and talented. She divulged that she has been "really disappointed" by some of the training. She described one gifted and talented PD experience in which she felt disenfranchised from the beginning: "The instructor gave us a handout, and then proceeded to read power point slides to us, like we were children."

Caroline's involvement in the campus' DI initiative began during her second year of teaching sixth grade reading. In August of 2009, the principal asked her to participate in the initial cohort that would work closely with an ASCD faculty member. She shared that she was "a little nervous at first because [she] was not sure how [her] team would perceive [her] involvement in the DI cohort." As it turned out, her team eagerly joined her on the journey. She shared:

> From the beginning, they did everything with me. They learned right along with me, and it has made for a great experience because I walk in with a new idea and they say, 'Let's take a look at it.' They asked me to guide them, and because of that, we have created some cool things for our students – things we would have never considered doing before.

In the spring of 2011, Caroline's story continues as she ventures well into the second year of her DI journey. Through observation of Caroline's in-classroom place and conversations taking place through a series of one-on-one semi-structured interviews, as well as focus group interviews, her story unfolds.

### Chapters unfolding: Findings from classroom observations

*Observation #1*

In late February 2011, following the introductory interview with Caroline a few days prior, I entered her in-classroom place. As class began, she projected several different images (one at a time) utilizing SMART board technology. She asked students to look at and draw inferences from each. One picture revealed two children walking in

the rain. When prompted, a student shared her inference: "They look like they are walking in the rain to school." The teacher probed the student with, "How do you know that?" The student clarified, "Because they are carrying lunch bags." After displaying and discussing several images, Caroline transitioned to written passages she also displayed on the white board used as a screen. Again, she guided students through each passage asking for them to draw inferences along the way. Approximately half-way through the lesson, she transitioned once again, this time moving students from whole group to working more independently. The students' independent practice was comprised of a worksheet of passages from which they were asked to draw inferences. The lesson was interrupted by a fire drill. The dismissal bell rang within minutes of returning to class.

Field notes taken during the initial observation revealed that Caroline differentiated the lesson through content as evidenced by her effort to make the concept relevant and transferable and by process as she balanced critical and creative thought. Additionally, the field notes captured evidence that the general principles of high quality curriculum and flexible grouping guided the lesson. I did observe on several occasions that the flow of instruction was interrupted by off-task behaviors such as talking out of turn and sidebar conversations occurring at tables that appeared to be social rather than academic in nature.

*Observation #2*

During my second visit to Caroline's classroom, she read aloud various passages, while pausing along the way to ask students to identify the author's purpose. She read the questions from the worksheet; each question had multiple-choice options. Students

responded at random – several blurting out differing answers at once. Caroline's voice grew loud and stern. After rising to a peak, the classroom volume drifted to a faint murmur.

Eventually, students were prompted to individually read and answer questions about various passages. After a few minutes, Caroline checked back in with the students, as they worked independently, to see if they were arriving at the correct answers. She rotated around the room as students continued to work. As individuals asked for assistance, she guided each towards discovering the answer on his/her own. As students completed their individual practice, some began to share aloud stories about the previous day's substitute teacher. Caroline redirected these students and continued to circulate around the room. As the class period ended, Caroline went over the answers with the whole group -- this time calling on individual students to respond.

Field notes taken during the initial observation revealed that Caroline differentiated the lesson through content as evidenced by her effort to make the concept relevant and transferable and by process as she balanced critical and creative thought. Additionally, the field notes captured evidence that the general principles of high quality curriculum and flexible grouping guided the lesson. I did observe on several occasions that the flow of instruction was interrupted by off-task behaviors such as talking out of turn and sidebar conversations occurring at tables that appeared to be social rather than academic in nature.

*Observations #3 & #4*

In early-March, I observed back-to-back classes, thus seizing the opportunity to watch the same lesson unfold in different class periods. The day's focal activity revolved around a guided reading review for an upcoming exam. She guided students through the worksheet that displayed various graphic organizers that one could surmise were intended to aid in the retention of material. As Caroline read each question from the review sheet, students randomly responded. In one of the classes, a student asked, "Why are you giving us the answers?" This was a simple, yet complex question. I pondered that thought, as well. Was this a missed opportunity to assess what the learner knew and what the learner did not know? How does giving them the answers do that?

During the latter half of the period, students were directed to work as table groups on the assignment. Although individuals were seated together around tables, little collaboration was evident. In the later of the two observed class periods a student asked, "Are we supposed to be working as a table?" Caroline responded, "I'm not bothered by the silence." I wondered why the silence did not bother her. Was there a disconnect between her words and her expectations?

Field notes taken during the initial observation revealed that Caroline differentiated the lesson through content as evidenced by her effort to make the concept relevant and transferable and by process as she balanced critical and creative thought. Additionally, the field notes captured evidence that the general principles of high quality curriculum and flexible grouping guided the lesson. I did observe on several occasions that the flow of instruction was interrupted by off-task behaviors such as talking out of

turn and sidebar conversations occurring at tables that appeared to be social  rather than academic in nature.

*Observation #5*

Field notes reveal that the lesson noted above in Observation #3/4 continued into a second day. Students were asked to complete the previous day's guided reading review activity. Several students pulled for the Texas English Language Proficiency System (TELPAS) testing made for a class of only nine students for the day. Approximately one-third of those present were actively engaged in the completion of the assignment while the others were distracted by a conversation at a neighboring table. Caroline appeared disengaged as she sat behind her computer. Perhaps this was filler or catch up time because she could not proceed with several class members missing.  In the last half of the class period, Caroline went over the worksheet with students. She called on individuals to share their responses. With ten minutes remaining, she turned on the projector to display a review game – *Who wants to be a millionaire*. Moments later, realizing that she had not gone over the last two questions on the review sheet, she allowed several students to share their answers. With five minutes of class time remaining, she announced that there was not enough time left to play the game. Several rose from their seats to visit one another, while Caroline engaged in a sidebar conversation with two students. In that moment, I realized that some might see this simple exchange of dialogue between Caroline and her students as lost instructional time; however, others might view it as a hint of the importance she places on creating and maintaining meaningful relationships with her students.

*Observation #6*

Field notes captured a lesson in which Caroline reviewed material from the previous day that a substitute teacher was to have covered. Although I found it difficult to determine how the lesson was differentiated, I sympathized with her predicament. It appeared that the previous day's substitute teacher had taken the assignment off course. Caroline guided students in completing a chart focused on comparing and analyzing the organizational structure of a website versus a magazine article about pets. Students had been expected to complete the assignment with the substitute teacher the day prior; however, Caroline expressed to students that it did not appear that had occurred. After walking students through the completion of the comparison chart, she closed class approximately eight minutes prior to the bell. Several students stood, moved around the room, and visited with one another. Following my visit, Caroline sent me an e-mail that said:

> I apologize for the class today. I was very disappointed in their behavior and in the lesson… I know it has to do with Spring Break and the fact that they did not want to look at it again after the sub yesterday, but they are usually a much better class. Sorry.

I replied to Caroline telling her that I understood and sensed her frustration with the day's lesson. I am certain that many of her students sensed it as well. The reality is that the best-laid plans for a substitute teacher may or may not unfold as the classroom teacher intended. When this happens, the regular teacher's lesson is taken off course, as well.

*Observation #7*

As I entered the classroom, students were completing an individual assignment. On the white board, I captured the learning goal and assignment for the day:

Learning Goal: I will understand and analyze text to determine point-of-view.

Assignment: Read *The Market Square Dog*

As students completed the individual assignment, Caroline expressed, "I will accept your answer as long as you can explain to me why you selected that answer…as long as you can support it."

Caroline transitioned into the reading of *The Market Square Dog* as she explained to students that in the days to come they would be completing a writing assignment around the story. Students followed along and listened to a CD of the story. The reader's British accent filled every crevice of the room. Most of the students appeared to be instantaneously captivated by the story. Caroline periodically paused the CD to discuss and reflect upon certain parts of the story, while asking students questions along the way. The students were anxious to share their responses to Caroline's questions. Several spoke simultaneously thus making it difficult to distinguish between the different responses. As the story concluded, the teacher asked final questions such as, "Why do you think the dog's behavior changed?" Throughout the process of discussion and questioning, students continued to respond simultaneously, thus making it difficult for Caroline to provide feedback to the individuals who shared their insights.

Caroline closed class with five minutes remaining, stating that she was rewarding their positive behavior during the reading of the story by giving them five free minutes at

the end of class. I wondered about the overall impact of lost instructional time by ending class early in three of the seven classes I had observed. Was I looking through the lens of an evaluator, or was I beginning to see a trend emerge as a narrative inquirer whose role is to make sense of experience in the terms of the teacher undergoing it?

As I completed my field notes, I noted that Caroline differentiated the lesson utilizing the principle of *continuous assessment* as evidenced by her efforts to pause along the way to discuss and ask questions throughout the lesson.

*Observation #8*

As class began, Caroline explained a RAFT assignment to students. They worked independently on the assignment throughout the class period and many turned it in to their classroom "box" prior to leaving class. In my final interview with Caroline that occurred one week prior to the final observation, she told me about the upcoming RAFT activity. She explained that students were expected to choose a role, audience, format and topic to write from point-of-view. She has found that the RAFT writing activity encourages students to visualize themselves as the fictional or historical characters in the designated text, while allowing her a tool to assess where student are in their understanding of key concepts such as point-of-view. She shared that, "Students enjoy the exercise as a break from routine, and I get a chance to see how well my students are grasping the material."

Field notes taken during the final classroom visit revealed that the lesson appeared to be guided by general principles of differentiated instruction including *continuous assessment*, *high quality curriculum*, and *respectful tasks*. Caroline differentiated the

lesson through *product* according to each student's *interests* as evidenced by the RAFT activity that students completed during the class period. I did observe on several occasions that the flow of the assignment was interrupted by off-task behaviors including continuous conversations that appeared to be social rather than academic in nature. As I finalized my field notes from the day, I wondered how the noise level in the room affected the students during their writing assignment. I observed that a few appeared to be able to "tune out" the noise, as they seemed absorbed in their writing. Others seemed to accomplish little writing, as they focused primarily on dialoguing with tablemates rather than writing. Caroline did circulate among the students during the activity and was able to redirect some of the off task behaviors. As I have observed in past lessons, the issue of classroom management continues to surface. I wonder how established routines and practices might positively influence this classroom as it travels further along in its DI journey.

**Story still unfolding:  Findings from the semi-structured interviews**

*Interview #1*

Caroline's story continued to unfold in a series of three semi-structured interviews. The initial one-on-one interview occurred several days prior to my first classroom observation, and it became prime content for the "prologue" to her story. Although I have known Caroline since the beginning of her career in teaching, I learned several new things about her. Particularly fascinating was her parents' resistance to higher education for a female and the compacted timeline for completing her degree. I walked away from our first encounter wondering how these two fascinations potentially

influenced who Caroline is as a teacher. Was her seemingly intense determination to complete her degree in record time a result of her parents' resistance to higher education for her? Was she out to prove to them that, as a female, she was entitled to a degree? And, what impact might a compacted degree completion have on Caroline's development as a classroom teacher? Did she give herself opportunity to hit the pause button for reflection, while on such a fast paced journey through higher education and teacher certification? As Caroline's story continued to unfold, I would continue to gain insight into her experience as a teacher, and I would continue to ask myself questions along the way.

*Interview #2*

Purposefully sandwiched in the middle of the series of classroom observations, I paused and sat down with Caroline for a second interview. I utilized our time together to burrow more deeply into the complexities of differentiation and her perception of where she saw herself, her students, and her administration on the journey. Below I capture and highlight a few moments from the second interview:

We began by discussing how our own classroom experiences growing up differ from today's "typical" classroom. We talked about the fact that today's classrooms are filled with diverse learners who differ not only culturally and linguistically but also in their cognitive abilities as well. I asked Caroline if she thought DI enhances the learning environment of today's student. She responded:

I definitely think it enhances it. I have seen a lot of growth in my students. When they discovered they had choices, or that they could express their opinions, they connected more easily to the learning. Maybe they do not want to do an assignment on a piece of notebook paper, maybe they do not want to do a drawing, so I leave it open for students. I never make them draw; I never make them write. I tell them if they can show it to me in a drawing over writing, then that is acceptable.

As the interview progressed along, we began to discuss how leaders might best support the living of DI on a campus. We talked about what Carol Ann Tomlinson has to say about it. She says that leaders should:

- first develop a solid understanding themselves of DI and the process of implementation;

- nurture different teaching models;

- encourage teachers to apply DI in their classrooms with flexibility, creativity and choice;

- provide teachers with high quality professional development as well as time to collaborate, plan, and implement it

I asked Caroline to share from her vantage point what she has seen her campus administration do to support this change process. She shared:

They have encouraged us to step outside the box … [in order to] meet the needs of our students. We have opportunities to re-teach if our kids do not get it the first time. In addition, they have given us extra time each six weeks to get together

with our team…for an entire day. We set our plans for the whole six weeks and determine where we can use DI. We have time to look beyond tomorrow; we can plan six weeks out.

Then, I added, "So, things sound great, but are there hurdles that get in the way of the implementation process, and if so, what are they?" Caroline shook her head and said:

I think there are. We have many kids with behavioral problems, and the problems are not being addressed to the extent teachers would like. We are told that DI should solve the behavioral issues. DI reaches 98 percent of the kids, but we need something outside of DI that is going to reach the others.

When prompted for a possible answer to the perceived problem, Caroline did not offer any solutions. Caroline's silence surrounding a solution may not be that she does not have a solution, but that uttering solutions might run against the grain of the campus.

*Interview #3*

Near the end of the study, I sat down with Caroline for her third and final one-on-one semi-structured interview. I pulled from my review of the literature as I prepared for this interview. I reflected upon the change process, as well as teacher professional development that fosters change, while continuing to burrow more deeply into Caroline's story.

We began by discussing her feelings about how students learn and whether the DI experience influenced the process of learning, and in turn the process of change in her classroom. She shared her insights:

> I think through DI, I found ways to engage … and enhance their learning whereas before I was struggling to figure out how they actually did learn. I think DI really helped me; being a new teacher, find that path. I was not afraid to do it; I was more accepting of it. I did not have any set patterns because I was still looking for those patterns [as] a new teacher.

I followed her thought pattern by asking, "So would it be fair to say, as a new teacher, not a veteran, that it shaped your thinking versus reshaped your thinking?" Caroline responded by adding:

> Right, it shaped my thinking because before there was no shape to it. I was hunting. Now there is a shape to it. There is a form. There is a guideline, not saying there is a strict guideline because DI opens all those doors for your imagination to work and pull in the students.

With my next question, I reflected upon my own personal journey as I asked:

> As a participant and a presenter, I have discovered three basic approaches following a professional development experience – those who willingly jump in, those who need a gentle nudge, and those who either intentionally or unintentionally never get wet. Talk to me for just a moment about the experience

of applying DI in the classroom. Which of those approaches most parallels your

experience with DI? Why?

Caroline paused and thought for a moment before saying:

Well, I think actually it is going to be two of them because yes, I jumped in ready

to swim, but I was like needing instructions on where to put my arms to swim.

[The coach] was there to say, yes, you could do this. Or, [she] might take what I

had and then guide it into where it should really be. I know some of the first

things I created were so far off and she looked at them and said, "Well, what are

you actually looking for?"  Then that gave me a hint as to where I was going,

what concept I was looking for.

In response I asked, "So, would you say that you jumped in but that you learned some

techniques in that process of jumping in?" Caroline nodded in agreement and added,

"And I don't necessarily think that I needed a nudge, but a guide, some guidance. Just

someone to jump off with me sometimes."

As the interview progressed, we embarked upon a discussion about the

differences between traditional teacher professional development and job-embedded

teacher professional development. Caroline shared:

Well, I think that the job-embedded model was definitely more beneficial.

Usually, I go to PD in the summer, I sit for eight hours, I take a few notes, I get

up, and I leave. If I use some of it, I do, but it might not be for months. Whereas, I

think that with job-embedded, because it was right there in the classroom, we

were able to start using it, right away.

I chimed in and said, "So, job-embedded has afforded you the luxury, I hate to use that

word luxury, but it's true, the luxury of immediately taking it into action." Caroline

responded, "Right, I'm talking immediately."

I followed by asking Caroline whether she believed that job-embedded teacher

professional development changed her practice. She responded affirmatively, and I

probed by asking her how it had changed. She shared that with job-embedded teacher

professional development, she was able to "put [the new learning] into practice" and that

there "was no time to forget about it or to minimize its effectiveness."

In closing, I asked Caroline to reflect on how the experience of working with the

ASCD coach might have been better designed to meet her needs as an educator and as a

learner. She responded by comparing the first year of the DI initiative verses the current

year. I asked Caroline to share what she perceived to be the difference between the two

years of coaching. She replied, "I think it's the one-on-one."

Later, in my reflective journal, I pondered Caroline's reply, "Did Caroline miss

the one-on-one attention from the ASCD faculty member? Did she miss having the time

to develop an even richer relationship with the coach?" Did she see a connection between

her ability to move forward in the DI initiative and the one-on-one attention she

previously received from the coach?

Caroline shared that the ASCD coach was visiting her campus, and in turn her classroom, fewer days as compared to last year. In the first year of the DI initiative, the coach visited the campus three to four days a month compared to two days per month this year.  Also, with the addition of ten new cohort members, Caroline shared that the coach is spending less time with the original cohort members because of the work she is doing with the new cohort members. Caroline's initial hope for this year was that her team members would have been included in the initiative. For her, she said, "It would have kicked it up a notch."  I wondered whether Caroline's principal sought  the input of the original cohort when considering next steps on the DI journey. If not, how much more powerful could this year have been for the participants in the DI initiative if he had done so? After all, who better to seek input from than those who lived and breathed DI in the classroom?

As Caroline described how the coach's visits were organized this year, I began to see evidence of something that startled me.  This year, during monthly visits, the eighteen cohort members were divided into two groups. Each group usually spends one-half of a day working with the coach in a small group setting. The coach normally spends the second day of her monthly visit working with the new cohort members in their classrooms. I asked, "So, do you think that maybe you stepped back into a more traditional model of teacher professional development?"  Caroline responded by saying, "Right, because I was sitting not using what I was learning."

As I reflected on what she shared, I said, "So tell me if I'm wrong, what I think I hear you saying is that even though she was presenting to a smaller group of people, in a sense it was more sit and get."

She answered by saying, "Right, it was. I felt those couple of hours could have been broken up and done better, even if she only came in for thirty minutes to each team, I think that I would have gotten more from it." Caroline's words began to take shape, and I began to see that she simply wanted her team to jump off the diving board with her. She desired to bring along those she worked with most closely.

Later, in my reflective journal I recalled that during the process of writing my review of the literature, I discovered that:

> The orientation towards change suggests that constant reflection, evaluation, and experimentation are integral elements of the teaching role. This takes time. I saw glimpses of the change process unfolding in Caroline's classroom during each observation; however, I wondered about the impact of layering an additional cohort of ten on top of the existing cohort of eight. Could Caroline continue to deepen her understanding of DI juxtaposed against the reality of fewer coaching days and less one-on-one coaching attention? Could the change process occurring in Caroline's classroom be sustained?

In the next chapter, I step into Kathie's story. When I examine her in-classroom place, her landscape, how will her story compare to Caroline's and how will it differ?

CHAPTER VI – KATHIE'S STORY

*Prologue*

Growing up, Kathie remembers loving the experience of "going to school." She proclaims that she chose teaching because she "loved school." She said, "I had a great school experience, and I also really loved reading and writing." Initially, she focused her energies on a degree in journalism; however, she discovered along the way that she "really missed being in a school setting." In her first education class, she seized the opportunity to visit a public school classroom. She said, "After that, I just knew. I really loved being in the classroom and interacting with the kids. It is a hard thing to describe because I just knew I wanted to become a teacher. Like some science fiction movie where *they're calling* me." A fledgling job market in her home state led her to several job fairs including one where she interviewed for potential openings in Progressive ISD. She received a phone call from the current principal at Promise Middle School. He gave her opportunity to interview via a telephone conference with the seventh grade language arts team. She said of the interview:

> I could just tell, even over the phone, that this was completely different from my other interviews. Some of the feedback I had gotten from other principals was that they wanted to hear more anecdotes from my teaching experience, yet I had no teaching experience. It was clear that in this interview, they were not focused on the teacher I wanted to become, instead they were interested in who I was at that moment.

In my researcher's reflective journal I recalled that:

> As a former administrator at Promise Middle School, I know that the primary
> focus in our interviews was to get a sense of the applicant as a person. Our
> greatest concern was how they might connect with a diverse population of
> learners. We searched diligently for teachers who captured kids' hearts. During
> Kathie's interview, they wanted to know her story as it compared to and fit with
> their stories and that of Promise Middle School.

Within hours of the interview, the principal called to offer the position to Kathie. She recalls that he said, "We do not want to lose you. We would like to offer you the job." And, so, that was it; she packed up and headed to Texas. Initially, teaching under an emergency certification, Kathie earned her Texas certification during the spring of her first year of teaching. This year marks her third year in the profession and her third year on the seventh grade language arts team at Promise Middle School. The team welcomed a new team member this year, but as she describes "we continue to be a really strong team."

Kathie's participation in professional development opportunities includes completing the thirty hours of gifted and talented (GT) training required by the state, Quantum Learning (QL), and Six Traits of Writing. She offers that: "Out of all of those professional development experiences, Quantum Learning has impacted my teaching the most." As she spoke, I glanced around the room to see evidence of QL. My eye caught the presence of teacher-created posters describing visual, auditory and kinesthetic learning strategies along with a variety of anchor charts, while my ear picked up the

sound of classical music softly playing in the background. QL, based in brain research, suggests that students in a QL classroom are better able to connect to their learning when they are part of a fun, interactive, and engaging learning environment. She went on to say, "I strive to create an environment for all learners – visual, auditory, and kinesthetic. I try to incorporate what I picked up in Quantum Learning."

In August of 2009, the principal asked Kathie to be a part of the differentiated instruction cohort he was forming on the campus. At the time, Kathie shared she was looking for what works in classrooms. She said, "After that first year, to be honest, I felt like I did not have a good grasp on it all. That changed during my second year. I feel like DI is what works, and I'm willing to do it because of that." In describing what changed, Kathie shared that her team has begun to use the DI concept of *Know-Understand-Do* (KUD) in the process of designing lessons. She recalls:

> I felt like before we were always concentrating on what cool activity we could do to get the students' attention. Now, our first step is to make a list of all the things we want them to *know* about the concepts we are teaching. For example, they need to *know* the six traits of writing. Then, we focus on the *understandings,* which are the big ideas we want them to walk away with. Like, writer's voice can improve my writing by helping me connect with the reader. Lastly, we figure out activities we can *do* in class that can help us get to the big ideas.

However, she admits to being a bit of a perfectionist. She shared:

> I want DI to be in every facet of everything in the room, and I just do not feel like it is there. I think we still focus a little too much on activities or strategies versus the whole, but I think that has changed my philosophy in that I see my role in the classroom as more of a facilitator than I do as a teacher.

In retrospect, she has come to realize that the workload has shifted. Although she is working harder behind-the-scenes to create promising learning experiences, her students are working harder in the classroom. She proclaims, "I hardly use the projector, and I do not stand in front of them as much anymore." Then, she offers, "Along the way, I have enjoyed reflecting on what we did in the past as we plan for what we are going to do differently in future lessons." While journaling, I note that, "In the second year of her journey, Kathie has recognized that she has become much more reflective about her role in the classroom."

With anticipation, I step into Kathie's story observing her in-classroom place, visiting with her in a series of semi-structured interviews, as well as in two focus group sessions involving fellow DI cohort member, Caroline, who joins us on the research journey as well.

***Chapters unfolding: Findings from classroom observations***

*Observation #1*

The day's lesson unfolded in a computer lab with thirty desktop computers, each facing the wall and outlining the perimeter of the room. The students sat quietly, backs to the computers, facing Kathie who was also seated in a chair. In a soft, yet audible and commanding voice, she introduced the day's lesson. After a brief whole group explanation, each student turned his/her attention towards the computer. Their task involved viewing approximately one dozen "novel trailers" from YouTube or created by Kathie and her team. The activity was self-paced and student-directed as students captured their thoughts on paper about each trailer. Their goal was to peruse the available novel trailers in order to determine the novel to which they wanted to devote the next six weeks. Kathie smiled and said, "You'll be able to tell which ones I created. They are not as good as those created by my teammates or borrowed from YouTube."

Students were guided by a series of links that Kathie's team prepared in advance and saved in a shared on-line space where all their students could have access. The transition from whole group to the individual activity was seamless. One hundred percent of the students remained engaged in the process. As students began to shut down their computers for the day, I began to ponder the complexities of the simple things I just saw unfold in this class. How was Kathie able to create such a supportive learning environment?

The field notes from the initial classroom observation reveal evidence of a lesson guided on the general principles of respectful task, high quality curriculum, and supportive learning environment. Kathie differentiated by content according to students' interest.

*Observation #2*

During the last week of February, field notes reveal a lesson largely focused on the TAKS Writing examination that was just a few days away. As I slipped into the classroom, students were reflecting individually on their writing from the year by perusing through their writing portfolios. A softly lit room and instrumental music that played softly (QL) in the background surrounded the students. Kathie pointed out that she wanted each student to note the progress he/she had made through the course of the year.

Approximately ten minutes into the class period, students transitioned to a review game – *Who wants to be a millionaire*. Each table group became a team. As individual team members approached the SMART board where the game was displayed, Kathie instructed the player to read the sentence aloud "plugging in each answer choice." She reminded students that they had practiced this strategy in past lessons, and she encouraged them to apply this strategy on the upcoming TAKS test as well. Students were able to benefit from the continuous assessment fostered by the game; Kathie utilized teachable moments to guide students towards the correct answer and to redirect incorrect responses.

Glancing around the room, I noted evidence of classroom management procedures and routines. A student unobtrusively moved toward a "sign out" sheet posted on the inside of the classroom door. She promptly signed out, noted her time of departure, grabbed the "bathroom pass" -- a vest hanging nearby, and proceeded to the bathroom without disrupting the flow of the class. Within minutes, she returned, "signed in," placed the vest back on its hook, and joined the class, once again without disruption. I also observed a set of response cards nestled in a caddy at each table. During the game, when a player chose to "ask the audience," the students picked up the cards and displayed their selected answer choice -- A, B, C, or D.

The game concluded just minutes before the bell at which time Kathie directed students to grab an "exit ticket" from the caddy at each table. She prompted them by saying, "I want you to tell me a strength you have that will help you on the TAKS and one strategy that will help you while testing." She asked several students to share their strategies thus creating a moment for students to hear the strategies again – this time in student voices, which gave them added heft. As the bell rang, students began to exit the classroom but not before pausing briefly to hand Kathie their "exit ticket" and silently waiting for her to nod that she had read their responses. She quietly redirected one student to a nearby seat because he had failed to respond adequately to the "exit ticket" prompts. He did so without hesitation.

In the atmosphere of review, I noted evidence of *flexible grouping, continuous assessment,* and *supportive learning environment.*

*Observation #3 & #4*

In early March, just days after the TAKS Writing exam, I observed a lesson unfolding in back-to-back classes. Students were several days into their novel unit, which the teacher had chosen to differentiate by *content*, as well as *product* according to student *interest*. As each class entered, Kathie softly reminded individuals of the norms they had established in a previous class period. The novel study norms, displayed on a nearby easel, included treat books with respect; books stay in classroom always; do not disturb the reading environment; work independently; be responsible for keeping, completing, and turning in weekly assignment; and read and participate to the best of your ability. While the initial entry of students was a bit noisy, more so in the second of the two observed class periods, within moments they nestled in their seats and began reading from the various novels they had selected. In both class periods, I observed one hundred percent of the students, along with the teacher, actively reading for approximately ten minutes.

Towards the end of the silent, sustained reading segment, Kathie began to pass around brightly colored handouts. Each color-coded handout contained a "job" that the student was expected to fulfill for the week. Kathie explained that the jobs would rotate each week and that she would explain each job in detail in the days to come. The three "jobs" included discussion director, selection director, and connection director. Kathie asked students to tuck away their brightly colored handout for later use. She then explained and demonstrated for students how to fold carefully a sheet of paper into the day's "one pager" activity. Students followed suit and began to record the name of their

main character, the setting of the story, the conflict, and one adjective to describe the novel. As students worked, Kathie moved about the room and assisted as needed. Students were self-directed.

To close class, she invited students to join her in a circle on the floor. Each student shared the descriptive adjective he/she had recorded on the one-pager activity along with their reason for selecting their word. One student's word was "boring." Kathie probed the student by asking why he thought his novel was boring. He shrugged his shoulders and said, "I don't know." To which Kathie calmly responded, "Today is the last day you can switch books. You need to tell me if you want to switch books." As the bell rang, Kathie met students at the door as they exited and assisted them with placing their assignment in an organizer drawer marked by class period. Students also placed their novels in organized stacks on a table near the door.

Field notes captured the essence of the visit. Once again, I noted evidence of flexible grouping, high quality curriculum, continuous assessment, and a supportive learning environment.

*Observation 5*

Field notes captured details from the observation. Noisily, *s*tudents began filtering into the room as the class period began. They quickly found their seats and got quiet with little direction from Kathie. On the white board, I read the learning goal: Analyze the main character using deeper meaning. Kathie began class with an activity aimed at analyzing the main character. She asked students to get out a sheet of paper. One student

moved from his seat to a side table where he extracted a single sheet of paper from a plastic drawer labeled "For Student Use." He returned to his seat without interruption. Knowing that the task looked like a quiz, she paused and explicitly stated, "This is not a quiz." She began to ask questions such as:

- What is your main character's first, middle, and last name?

- What is your main character's favorite food?

- What is your main character's favorite book or genre?

Kathie expressed to students that they could guess or infer if the text did not explicitly state the answer. After a series of questions, she paused and asked, "Why do you think the author takes such care to describe the characters at the beginning of the story?" Several students responded. Then, Kathie shared, "No one has said this…Don't you think it is important for the reader to connect with the character? As you read today, pay attention to all of the characters. Pay attention to how the author describes each. Which ones come to life for you? Which ones do not? Let us read for twenty minutes today and then we will work on your reading response journal. Remember – reading is a vacation. We are on a vacation today from everyday life."

Most began reading immediately – some seated at their table, a few nestled on the floor. Only two students appeared off task and distracted. Kathie collected the student answers to the opening assignment and quickly glanced over their responses. She approached one student presumably about the assignment. Then, she picked up one of the novels and began reading, as well. At this point, all students were engaged in silent, sustained reading. Instrumental music played softly in the background. On the white

board, I noted the statement, "I am reading *Hush* p. 99." The atmosphere was one of joint activity, almost uplifting, sacred time for reading. Without uttering a single word, the simple message spoke volumes to the students who shared in the moment.

With approximately ten minutes of class time remaining, with little direction from Kathie, the students transitioned to their final assignment. Each removed a bright green "reading response journal" from their binders, while turning their attention to the SMART board where two questions were displayed:

- Which character is the most believable/realistic and why?
- Which character is the least believable/realistic and why?

As students responded to the questions, Kathie collected and sorted their individual novels. There was no noticeable off task behavior.

Similar to past visits, Kathie's lesson offered evidence of four of the five principles of differentiation including supportive learning environment, continuous assessment, respectful tasks, and high quality curriculum. Again, I noted that the lesson, which is part of a larger unit of study, was differentiated by content by student interests.

*Observation 6*

I entered the classroom as students were sifting in. I nestled into a seat near the door. Kathie approached and said, "Would you mind sitting at my desk? I have found this seat to be just the right spot for one of the students in this class period." Kathie encouraged me to visit this particular class as a couple of the students received support

from an in-class support teacher. She expressed that she wanted me to see DI unfolding at all levels.

As class began, Kathie briefly reviewed the activities for the day. They included turning in the weekly assignment, posting on Wallwisher – an online message board, participating in an "iceberg" activity, and reading as time might allow. Kathie reminded students, "I want you to do what we always do when we finish working at the computer station. I want you to tap someone new when you have finished at the computer. Do I have two volunteers to start with the Wallwisher assignment? In turn, two students approached the computer workstation. During this segment, an "in-class support" teacher entered the room. She approached the student sitting in the desk near the door. I noted that the "in-class support" teacher focused her energies on off-task behaviors. Kathie continued by asking students to join her on the floor. She laid out a large piece of butcher paper with the outline of an iceberg drawn on it. She said, "Let's pretend we have a made up character in a made up story, for example, Billy the Bully. I want you to give me some adjectives to describe this character." Various students responded with adjectives such as negative, trouble, rude, and disrespectful. Kathie wrote each word on the butcher paper. I noticed a couple of students engaged in a sidebar conversation. Kathie immediately re-directed them by saying, "If you are not participating in the discussion, then you are listening." Then she said, "You've all heard that bullies act the way they do for a reason. Now, I want you to think about why bullies behave the way they do." Without hesitation, one student said, "Trouble at home," signaling that students felt comfortable sharing their ideas in this setting. Another student, the one who sat in the seat I sat in upon first entering the classroom, said, "Abused." Kathie affirmed the student by giving positive,

specific feedback. She responded, "You gave me a specific adjective to describe the bully on the inside. Now, let's describe Billy the Bully on the inside."

Students continued to share ideas and Kathie continued to probe for deeper thought. Two students at a time posted on Wallwisher. As each finished, he/she would tap another student to move towards the computer. The floor discussion continued. Kathie said, "Can you tell me the difference between the words we wrote here (pointing to the tip of the iceberg) and the words we wrote here (pointing to the area below the surface of the iceberg)?" One student responded, "That's how the bully is on the outside and that's how the bully is on the inside." Kathie asked, "How is that like an iceberg?" Another student responded pointing to the tip of the iceberg, "This is what others see." Then she pointed to the area below the surface and said, "And, this is what others don't see." Kathie followed with, "Now, I want you think about the book you are reading. I want you to give me two adjectives to describe the character on the outside. I want you to take a marker and write each adjective on the surface of the iceberg. Then, I want you to write your name next to it." Students followed suit writing their adjectives on the butcher paper. Kathie stood to turn on the projector where she displayed several questions:

- What were the two "surface" adjectives you added to the top of the iceberg? How are these traits described in the book?
- What are two "beneath the surface" adjectives you could add to the bottom of the iceberg? How has the character shown these traits to the reader?"

Students began moving back to their seats. Some off task behavior was noted. Kathie responded immediately by saying, "I hear a lot of talking. You have an

assignment on the screen. I need to hear your pencils scratching the paper at your table and not voices." She approached several tables re-directing individual students. She said, "You are going to hand me your half-slip of paper when you walk out the door in a few minutes." There was a definite increase in volume compared to past assignments, yet the chatter did not appear to keep students from working on the assignment at hand. Consistently, Kathie re-directed off-task behaviors.

Once again, Kathie's lesson showed evidence of four of the five principles of differentiation including supportive learning environment, continuous assessment, respectful tasks, and high quality curriculum. Again, I noted that the lesson, which is part of a larger unit of study, was differentiated by content by student interests.

*Observation 7*

Field notes captured details from the observation. Noisily, *s*tudents began filtering into the room as the class period began. They began working on their *reading response,* an opening assignment projected on the SMART board. Students were expected to respond to two of the following questions:

- Have any parts of your book been confusing to you? Explain.
- Who would have the most difficulty understanding this book and why?
- What strategies have you used while reading to help you through the confusing parts?

They required little direction from the teacher. There was a noticeable noise level, but students appeared productive. On the white board, I noted the learning goal: Identify problem areas and talk about strategies to increase reading comprehension.

Approximately five minutes later, Kathie guided students to set individual reading goals. She said, "We have four more weeks in our novel study. In order to complete this book in the next four weeks, how many pages will you need to read each week?" Next, she explained to students that during their silent sustained period of reading, she would be pulling "job" groups aside to discuss the expectations of each "job." In turn, students nestled into their seats and began quietly reading. Kathie pulled each of the three "job" groups aside and had them stand in a tight, small circle with her. She spent less than 3 minutes with each group. Of the 15 or so remaining readers, all but one began working almost immediately. The "one" took a few minutes longer, but he was able to focus on his own without direction from Kathie. During each transition, the readers were able to regroup and continue reading with little interruption. Upon completing her discussion with each group, within a brief amount of time, all were engaged in reading, including the teacher. Later, as I reflected in my journal, I wrote:

> Today, after leaving Kathie's classroom, I pondered the positive impact that strong classroom routines and procedures appeared to have on her classroom. Regardless of the time of day, each visit continues to showcase the benefits of established, consistent, and ingrained classroom management procedures as these daily practices seem to enable the teacher to carry DI most effectively into her classroom.

Similar to past visits, Kathie's lesson offered evidence of four of the five principles of differentiation including supportive learning environment, continuous assessment, respectful tasks, and high quality curriculum. I noted that the lesson, which is part of a larger unit of study, was differentiated by content and process according to student interests.

*Observation 8*

After students viewed a brief video clip explaining the meaning of theme, Kathie asked students to react to the video by jotting down on paper the definition of theme. After a couple of minutes, various students shared their insights. Kathie recapped the definition of theme from the clip. She also tied this new concept to another concept, truism, which students studied earlier in the year. She said, "We remember a novel because we connected to it someway. People interpret stories in different ways, so we might arrive at a theme that the author may or may not have intended." To offer an example the teacher (with the help of students) retold the story of the *Three Little Pigs*. As the discussion continued, Kathie redirected off task behaviors by saying, "I'm going to take a second to regroup. Nothing is in your hand. All eyes are on me. When this happens, then I feel respected when I'm sharing with you." Most students complied with Kathie's request for their attention. One student in particular appeared to struggle staying focused throughout the class period. On several occasions, Kathie redirected the student using a soft, yet firm voice.

As the lesson continued, table groups were expected to determine what they believed was the theme (the deeper message) of the *Three Little Pigs*. After

approximately three minutes, students were asked to number off: 1, 2, or 3. Kathie

followed by saying, "If you are a number one, please stand and remain standing. If you

are not a number one, you are writing down every theme that is presented. If you are a

number one, then you are to share your group's theme." All students became engaged in

the activity either writing down or sharing aloud the theme. For a brief span of time, the

student who struggled earlier in the lesson became engaged in the activity. However,

while transitioning into the silent sustained reading segment of the lesson, the student

continued to struggle. Consistently, Kathie re-directed his off-task behavior.

As I completed my field notes from the visit, I wondered why the student struggled

with his behavior. I had visited this particular class on two other occasions, and I had not

noted behaviors like that of this visit. Following the observation, Kathie, Caroline, and I

sat down for our final focus group interview. Kathie wondered aloud why the student

struggled during the day's lesson and mentioned that she often struggled with his

behavioral choices. She expressed that she felt defeated in the day's lesson. Caroline

mentioned that her day had gone well, but that she too struggled with some students

behavioral choices. Later that evening, as I reflected on the observation, I remembered

something that I read from Carol Ann Tomlinson:

'Clear guidelines help students know how to make appropriate decisions,' (1999,

p. 34). I hope that Kathie doesn't allow this small defeat to overcome her. Instead, I

hope that she will focus on the twenty or so students who sat in that same

classroom, guided by her clearly established guidelines, and consistently made

appropriate behavioral decisions.

During my final visit to Kathie's classroom, field notes continued to reveal evidence of four of the five principles of differentiation including *supportive learning environment*, *continuous assessment*, *respectful tasks*, and *high quality curriculum.* I noted that the lesson, which is part of a larger unit of study, was differentiated by *content* and *process* according to *student interests*.

### Story still unfolding: Findings from the semi-structured interviews

*Interview #1*

A few days prior to my first observation of her classroom, I sat down to visit with Kathie in our first semi-structured interview. Having worked with Kathie in the past, I was somewhat familiar with her story. I recalled many of the events that led up to her becoming a part of the Promise family, yet she was able to fill-in a few of the blanks. I wove the findings from the inaugural interview into the "prologue" to her story. Kathie's story continued to unfold in a series of three semi-structured interviews.

*Interview #2*

Purposefully sandwiched in the middle of the series of classroom observations, I paused and sat down with Kathie for a second interview. I utilized our time together to burrow more deeply into the complexities of differentiation and her perception of where she saw herself, her students, and her administration on the journey. Below I capture and highlight a few moments from the second interview:

To begin, we recalled a vivid power point slide we saw in a presentation by the campus' ASCD coach several months earlier. The slide depicted row after row of nothing but Charlie Browns. The caption read, "We tend to teach as if our classrooms look like this." Then, in a contrasting slide, we remembered seeing row after row of various characters – Punky Brewster, Steve Urkel, Charlie Brown, Oscar the Grouch, the Gremlin and so on. The caption on this slide read, "In reality, our classrooms look more like this." I asked her if she thought DI made a difference in the diverse classrooms of today. She responded:

> That is probably the most obvious reason to use DI because they come from different backgrounds; they are not going to have the same experiences based on just one assignment. It is not going to be meaningful. There is not a single assignment that would be meaningful for every kid in the room, and so it just makes sense on that front. I think that even though many teachers know that, they still do not do it because they do not realize how much of a difference it makes. I just think it is the right thing to do.

We began to talk about why some embrace the new learning while others do not. Perhaps some see it as more work – too much work. She added:

> I think that the more that you learn about it, you realize ways to make it easier on yourself. It is not what I thought it was in the beginning, and I am constantly realizing different things about it that makes it easier for me. For example, I stopped thinking that I needed to create thirty individually tailored lessons for each class of thirty students. Instead, I have discovered that my job is to give them opportunities to learn it in thirty different ways. I focus on making it learner-

centered. When it's learner-centered, my students tell me that they connect more deeply to the content. During my initial visits with the ASCD coach, I kept asking her to help me make activities for them. I was constantly searching for the perfect activity. As I discovered along the way, it is not about that at all. I was focusing on the wrong thing.

What became apparent to me in my conversations with Kathie was her reflective nature. She seemed to sense innately the importance of reflection in learning. Somewhere along her brief journey, she discovered that "Adults do not learn from experience, they learn from processing experience" (York-Barr, et al, 2006, p. 27). She found value in hitting the pause button because she somehow knew that reflection fosters her teacher learning. Through reflection, she began to recognize the refined changes occurring in her differentiated classroom.

I asked Kathie to share from her vantage point what she has seen her campus administration do to support this change process. She shared:

Last year, I remember having trouble in our team planning meetings because they were not part of the DI thing, and I felt like it was my job to tell them about what I learned. Nevertheless, I had not completely wrapped my mind around how to do certain things, and I was doing a bad job of bringing it to the planning meetings. I could sense that they really did not want to do those things. They are wonderful, and it was not that they were unwilling to change; I think I was not doing a very good job of explaining it. Our principal made it clear that it was fine for me to try these things by myself and see how they worked out. Then, I was able to use my

own experience to explain my ideas to the team. I just needed to try them, and I

needed to hear that from [the principal]. Now, I see that they are doing things

right along with me.

With a few simple words of encouragement from her principal, the curriculum opened up

within the context of Kathie's classroom where she and her learners met to create

meaning. She seized the opportunity to graft meaning and plant the new learning against

the landscape of the classroom. Her principal did not "mandate" that she take the learning

for a swim, he "encouraged" her to jump of the diving board in her own classroom,

students in tow.

I followed this strand of thought by asking, "So, things sound great, but are there

hurdles that get in the way of the implementation process, and if so, what are they?"

Kathie shook her head and said:

Yeah, there are hurdles. I used to feel that much of DI was more easily used in a

math or science classroom. They are set up in units and learning certain skills. In

the beginning, it was a challenge to see how it would work in language arts

because we do not just teach, test, and move on to the next skill. It is not as if I

can take results from an assessment and easily split them up into different tiers.

Tiering based on readiness has been hard for me to understand. The other hurdle,

and I do not know if it is because of DI, but there is so much preparation that you

have to do. We have a new curriculum, so we are creating everything new all the

time. Time is an issue. In addition, there has to be an amount of independence on

the kids' part. Sometimes it is hard, and I bet that is why many teachers do not do

more because it is hard to manage those types of behaviors.

Interestingly enough, that has gotten easier for me. So maybe that is not so much

of a hurdle.

Later, in my journal, I reflected upon the hurdles that Kathie mentioned during the

interview:

What I've seen unfold in Kathie's classroom leads me to believe that she has been

able to overcome or step around the hurdles she mentioned to me. She seems to

have stepped around the hurdle of tiering as she moves towards elements of DI

that work best with her students and in her classroom. Likewise, despite the ever-

present hurdle of time, Kathie continues to move forward on her DI journey. I

have seen daily evidence of this happening in her classroom. And, the hurdle of

student independence has not stopped her either. She seems to have had an *Ah-Ha*

moment today when she said: "Interestingly enough, that has gotten easier for me.

So maybe that is not so much of a hurdle."

*Interview #3:*

Towards the end of the study, I sat down to visit with Kathie for a final semi-

structured interview. I pulled from my review of the literature as I prepared for this

interview. I reflected upon the change process, as well as teacher professional

development that fosters change, while continuing to burrow more deeply into Kathie's

story.

We began by discussing her feelings about how students learn and whether the DI experience influenced the process of learning, and in turn the process of change in her classroom. She shared her insights:

> I think that students learn best, first of all, when they feel comfortable with what they're learning. If, right away, they feel like what the teacher is teaching is way beyond what they understand, and there's no connection between that skill and what they already do know, I think that a lot of them just shut down. They are not necessarily going to let you know that is the reason why, but I think it is. Or it can be the opposite, and they've already learned this, they already know this and they shut down for that reason, too. So, I don't think there's going to be any learning happening unless you're hitting them at the right place and also making it meaningful for them.

I followed her thought pattern and asked, "So, how do you know what your students need in the process of learning?" Kathie replied:

> I ask them, 'What do you think about this, what did you learn, what did you not like about this?' It's normal for me to ask that now, and I really get a lot of good feedback.

I followed by saying, "In asking such questions, I think it assesses who they are and how deep the learning has gone." Kathie nodded in agreement. Later, I noted in my reflective journal that:

> Today, I thought about the simplicity, as well as the complexity of this approach. Asking such simple questions of students allowed Kathie to probe deeply into the complexities of teaching.

I followed this flow of conversation with my next question as I reflected upon my own personal journey as I asked:

As a participant and a presenter, I've discovered that there are basically three approaches following a professional development experience. I think that there are those who willingly jump in; they take it for a swim. Then there are those who need a gentle nudge or someone to coach them, and then there are those who either intentionally or unintentionally never get wet; the learning never walks back into the classroom for whatever reason. Talk to me for just a moment about the experience of applying DI in the classroom for you, and which of those three different types best parallels your experience with DI and why.

Kathie responded with a smile:

I have definitely jumped in. I don't know though if it would have been the same had I been teaching like a bunch of years already and used to doing it. I would like to think that I still would have jumped in. I can see for teachers who have been teaching a lot of years maybe not being as willing to jump in. Some see it as just the latest education fad.

Again, as in Caroline's final interview, I followed her thought pattern by asking, "So would it be fair to say, as a new teacher, not a veteran, that it shaped your thinking versus reshaped your thinking?" Kathie responded by adding, "Yes, it definitely shaped it." I didn't walk in with a favorite lesson that I never wanted to let go of."

As the interview progressed, we embarked upon a discussion about the differences between traditional teacher professional development and job-embedded teacher professional development. Kathie shared:

> OK, the traditional would be on my own time, you know, outside of work, after work or on a Saturday. With job-embedded PD, I can go right back into the classroom and immediately apply what I just learned. Another thing that I really like about the job-embedded part is that I also get to talk to other teachers about what we are learning. And, I truly feel like I'm not just someone in an audience, like I'm there, they want to make my teaching better, like it's very personalized, whether it's one-on-one or it's just a group of us, it's still very personalized.

I found myself asking, "Does job-embedded professional development change your practices and if yes, how, and if no, why not?" Kathie responded affirmatively:

> Yes, definitely. I feel it was a privilege to be chosen to receive the coaching, and so I definitely feel an obligation to use it in my classroom. I don't think I would deserve to continue receiving it if I wasn't at least trying.

In my journal that evening, I captured my thoughts about Kathie's reaction to her experience with job-embedded PD, "Kathie's statement stuck with me. She used words like privilege, chosen, and obligation. This is what powerful professional development is all about."

Next, I asked Kathie to describe how she is able to demonstrate through practice her emerging understandings of DI. She shared that:

> As I've gotten better at applying some of the DI principles I just, I see it working. I see the kids learning more, from what they tell me, from the assignments that

they do, from [benchmark] testing, from everything. It's hard for me to distinguish that, OK, am I just teaching better than I was before? Probably, but that to me just goes hand in hand with the DI, because like we talked about, that's shaped who I am as a teacher.  So, I feel like it's a direct result of the things that I've learned.

I followed by asking, "And that you feel, bottom line, you feel like you know more now about DI?" Kathie responded by saying:

Yes, absolutely, and it's more, I see what you're saying, I learned a lot of strategies from the ASCD coach, but I've learned more by myself just in my room about it. The way the kids react to it, the way the classroom runs more smoothly, it's more like sparked my thinking rather than just given me the step-by-step of here's how you do it.

I listened intently, and then I offered:

I hear you saying that you appreciate the tools that the ASCD coach added to your teacher toolbox, but that the biggest benefit for you as a learner was the experience of walking into your classroom and practicing it.

In my journal, I noted:

More than anything, Kathie seems to value time and freedom to experiment with the new learning. Learning on one's own is paramount! She doesn't want someone else's prescription; she wants to make it her own!

In closing, I asked Kathie to reflect on how the experience of working with the ASCD coach might have been better designed to meet her needs as an educator and as a learner.

She replied that:

> As a whole I think it was really great. The one thing I would have like more of is
> classroom visits from the ASCD coach. Last year, she was only able to observe
> one of my classes due to a scheduling conflict. This year, with the addition of new
> cohort members, she's not been in my classroom at all.

I analyzed what she had to say and shared that:

> What I hear you saying is that perhaps you could have deepened the experience if
> she would have had the opportunity to come in to your classroom more often
> because a coach coaches in the field. He can coach on the side and in the locker
> room, but coaching, real coaching happens in the field. Perhaps you could have
> benefitted from her being in your classroom field more often.

Kathie nodded in agreement. In turn, I experienced an epiphany. Later, I wrote in my
reflective journal:

> For Kathie, the one-on-one attention from the coach was not the most prevalent
> factor leading to her success in the classroom. However, the experience of
> participating in the job-embedded professional development and the immediate
> application to the classroom was what she believed help deepen her understanding
> of DI. It appears that Kathie has experienced the most growth through practical
> application. Over the course of the study, I have seen evidence of Kathie's
> reflective stance. I wonder if…if the coach had visited her classroom more often
> might Kathie have experienced an even greater, an even deeper understanding of
> DI?  After all, through classroom observation, the coach would have had more

opportunity to enter into Kathie's and her students' worlds and in turn, helped all

parties benefit most fully from the experience of DI unfolding in the classroom.

As the next chapter unfolds, I will examine the shared stories of Kathie and Caroline.

What can I learn by visiting with the two of them together? On the surface, their stories

appear parallel, happening side-by-side in silo, but in truth, their stories intersect at

varying points only to break away as each journey differs.

CHAPTER VII – SHARED STORIES

**Prologue**

Realizing that focus group discussions could enrich and enhance the overall

research texts of this study, I brought both participants together for two focus groups

interviews. As noted by Marrelli (2008), focus groups are an extension of individual

interviews that produce concentrated data on the precise topic of study. In this particular

doctoral thesis research, I examined teacher professional development with an eye

directed towards job-embedded professional development, specifically the enactment of

differentiated instruction (DI) utilizing the services of an ASCD coach on selected

campuses in Progressive Independent School District.  During the classroom observations

and interview process, common themes began to emerge, and in turn, I was able to

develop the topics and discussion prompts for deeper examination in a focus group

setting. Each focus group session offered me a chance to triangulate and support the

evidence gathered from the semi-structured interviews and classroom observations, while

capturing more robustly the story of each participant's lived experience.

**Findings from the focus group interviews**

*Focus group interview #1*

Approximately halfway through the process of gathering classroom data through observations, I paused to sit down and meet with Caroline and Kathie in our first of two focus group discussions. Our discussion focused on three primary questions:

- What is your greatest success with DI?

- What is your greatest challenge with DI?

- Describe your relationship with the ASCD coach

In describing her greatest success with DI, Caroline shared, "I think that it's student engagement. I have less students looking bored, looking uninterested, and I have more hands going up and more answers being yelled out."

In turn, Kathie shared:

I would absolutely agree with you on the engagement factor, and it did not even occur to me how things were changing until about Christmas time. Just prior to the break, we got into a discussion in one of my classes where the kids shared with me how they loved language arts more than in past years. And, so I'm like, really, why? They responded by saying things like, 'Oh, we get to write a lot more' or 'We get to talk a lot more in class." They actually enjoy coming to class. They are happy here. In turn, I believe that the increased level of engagement has led to fewer discipline problems. I have not written any referrals this year.

As each spoke, I sorted what they were saying into two categories -- engagement and behavior. Interestingly, both shared similar responses by noting these two elements of success. Later in my journal, I wrote:

> I cannot think of greater positive outcomes than increased student engagement and decreased misbehaviors. Kathie's classroom continues to show daily evidence of the positive effect of consistent classroom routines and expectations.

Next, I asked each to share their greatest challenges with DI. Caroline responded:

> I would say being ahead of the kids. I have to make sure I have created everything I need before we get there. I have to have several things ready to go in advance. I have to make sure that my class is planned out day by day by day for weeks at a time rather than going in and saying 'Oh, tomorrow we're going to read this story, and we'll answer the questions in the back of the book.' I want all of my students to end up in the same place, but some of them need little tiny baby steps along the way, whereas others can take giant steps. I have to prepare my work accordingly.

Fueled by Caroline's response, Kathie added:

> Part of that involves pre-assessing and thinking of that way ahead of the unit that you are currently working on. Assessing where they are on the continuum so that you can then plan for the various levels of understanding is a challenge for me. It is a challenge for me to think that far in advance because I am wrapped up in what is going on now. I have difficultly thinking about pre-assessing students for something that we are going to do the next six weeks. Just having the time, like you said, the time to do it.

Again, as each spoke, I found myself sorting through the data of shared experiences to find a common thread. Interestingly, both noted pacing and time as two challenges. The seemingly herculean task of staying several steps ahead of students provided a level of stress for both teachers.

As a final question, I initially asked each to share their responses to the relationships they had established with the ASCD coach and whether or not that influenced how DI fleshed out in their classrooms. My question took a bit of a detour as we discussed their latest session with the ASCD faculty member. Just one day prior to our focus group discussion, all members of the DI cohort met with the ASCD coach. As Caroline, Katie and six other teachers journeyed into the second year of DI, the principal invited ten others to join in a second cohort. The day was divided into a morning and afternoon session. Language arts and social studies met with the coach in the morning, while math and science met with her in the afternoon. As they shared the focus of the half-day session with the ASCD coach, I wondered about the impact of layering the second cohort on top of the initial cohort. I asked, "How has the second cohort affected your connection and involvement with the ASCD coach?" Kathie responded:

> To be honest, I would have liked a little bit more time with her this year. I do get to talk with her quite a bit, so that is fine, and I feel like it has influenced the school in a good way because more people get access to her. However, I did feel in some ways this year it is like, okay, you know exactly what you are doing and I am like, wait, no I do not.

Caroline added:

> For me, I think it was okay. I could have used a few more ideas maybe, but I also feel like I had a little bit more of a personal relationship with her. She came to my house a couple of times for dinner, and we discussed things one-on-one. In addition, I email her with things and ask, 'How can I fix this?' or 'What can I do to make it better?' I think I am using her outside the classroom, as well as inside the classroom. So, I really do not feel like I lost anything with her being out there, and I enjoyed the fact that there were even more teachers that were being used.

We recalled the flexibility of schedules the year before as content teachers utilized two 45-minute conference periods each day. This year, all teachers district-wide have one 45-minute daily conference period. Last year's more flexible scheduled allowed for more one-on-one time with the ASCD coach. Carol added:

> That is something that I have really missed because she did come in, and I could show her things we were going to be doing the next six weeks. Overnight, she would even read a story I shared with her and come back with fresh ideas to give me the next day. On one occasion, my whole team came in to observe a lesson she and I co-taught. I feel that Kathie and I got a lot more the first year than what the second cohort is getting this year.

Kathie added:

> The new cohort includes two additional language arts teachers from different grade levels, so it has allowed me opportunity to broaden my perspective of language arts across grade levels.

As the discussion moved towards an end, we began to discuss the expenses involved in this model of professional development. The intense, focused, one-on-one coaching comes at a hefty price. I asked each to share their thoughts on the potential impact of losing the services of the ASCD coach. Katie replied, "Well, I feel like, for me personally at this point, I would be fine as long as we are able to keep up the spirit of DI." Caroline added:

> I think that if we can continue getting together [as a group], even once every six weeks or a couple of times a semester, to share, that we would probably be okay without her.

Kathie shared, "We know how to do the sharing protocol now. We know how to do the planning protocol. I think that we could pull it off, but I would miss her." Caroline chimed in, "I would miss her, too." I combined what they were saying in this way:

> The common thing I hear both of you saying is that you have started to move towards a small learning community with a group of teachers connected by a passion, a common idea. In addition, I hear you saying that at this point you feel fairly well-equipped to move forward as long as the schedule allows you to have time together.

Then, Kathie shared, "I have never felt like because she is working with our campus that I have to do DI because she is here. I do it because it is the right thing to do. It makes sense."

As I reflected on our conversation, I began to see at least two themes emerging in this joint conversation. By recognizing these themes, I am able to capture and marvel at the learning that is opening up before me. One recognizable theme is the complexity of

teaching and learning. The second is that the on-going construction and re-construction of narratives, which allows teachers to navigate their experiences over time and place (email communications, homes). Education is about learning and learning is a function of reflection. I believe wholeheartedly that we must afford ourselves the opportunity to hit the pause button, as reflection fosters learning. Through reflection, we recognize the refined changes occurring right before our eyes. I believe that our focus group conversation fostered such reflection.

*Focus group interview #2*

Towards the end of the study, I paused to sit down once again to visit Caroline and Kathie for a final focus group discussion concentrated on four key ideas:

- Evidence that DI is working in the classroom

- How to best design job-embedded professional development (JEPD) for teachers

- How state, district, and campus level leaders can support high-quality JEPD

- Overall experience with this model of professional development

To begin, I asked Caroline and Kathie to share what they saw as evidence that DI is working in their classrooms. Caroline referenced a recent RAFT activity as she responded, "It's a feeling and a buy-in, and the fact that they're writing instead of sitting there looking blankly at a test."

I probed for additional details as I asked a clarifying question, "So, would you consider the finished product evidence to support that DI is working or not working?" Caroline shared this further insight:

> I would consider the finished product, plus the fact that the class itself is more involved in the assignment. They're very quiet; they're sitting; they're writing; they're concentrating more than they do when I have to put up casitas for a regular test. As a result, I think their behavior and their writing improves.

In turn, Kathie added:

> I would just add to that because I agree with all of that. The finished product is different; it's better in a lot of cases and the engagement is a lot higher. Also, one of the ways that I notice it is their questions are different than they used to be. I used to get a lot of questions, clarifying questions. Now, what they're asking me shows me that they're thinking at a higher level. Like it's more of "I wonder questions," stumping me at times, just like thinking more about what they're reading.

Caroline shared that the finished product and improved classroom behavior provided her evidence that DI is working in her classroom, while Kathie noted an increase in higher-level questions from her students as evidence.

Next, I asked if each would share their thoughts on how job-embedded professional development should be designed in order to meet teachers' needs. Kathie shared:

I think it's essential with something this big that teachers need to feel like it's important, like it's critical that we change, like you need this in your classroom. Like some sort of beginning thing where it really pumps you up. I felt like our very first meeting was kind of the beginning of that. It was a whole day of just eye-opening kind of stuff. I also liked the beginning of working with our ASCD coach, working one-on-one, being in our classrooms, talking with us. Also, there needs to be a component of talking with other teachers at your school, feeling like we are all in it together.

Caroline added:

I agree with all of that, and I thought that the very first day when we were there. I thought it was really interesting to see that there was a different way and that it was something I had been looking for.

I burrowed to elicit additional details by asking, "What else is a non-negotiable for you?" Caroline and Kathie expressed that their non-negotiable was the share session element. Both talked about the positive impact of coming together as a community of learners in order to share and borrow ideas. Caroline shared:

I think that's a non-negotiable to have share sessions where you can take things that you created, or that other people helped you create, and you can talk about how they worked or what you would change about it now.

I added, "So it sounds like you are literally in the swimming pool together, swimming along." Then, Caroline added, "And none of us were drowning; we didn't let anyone drown."

Kathie followed by summing up her insights about the two year DI journey:

> Even the fact that it was a two year experience, I think is one of the reasons that made this really different for me. Because it's not just a Saturday class or something you do for a semester. It took a while for me to see change. You know, once it does happen, it kind of happens quickly. But, if I hadn't been doing this a second year, I don't know that I would be where I am right now.

As the conversation continued, we dialogued about other non-negotiables. Caroline and Kathie both asserted that in order for the PD experience to be truly job-embedded it needed to be ongoing versus a one-shot PD experience. They also shared that they needed encouragement and support – encouragement to take risks and support for taking those risks. Caroline added: "I felt like it was okay if I messed it up because I was learning."

Next, I asked Caroline and Kathie to share their thoughts on how state, district, and campus level leaders can best support high quality job-embedded professional development. Both concluded that support was needed in the form of time and money. They shared that they appreciated the time that their principal afforded them for working with the ASCD faculty member, as well as time to plan DI lessons. They also noted that monetary support from the district and state level was needed in order to sustain the program. Caroline shared:

I think the district did their job in allowing us to access that possibility. I think the state needs to realize that everything we do can't be handled by the district or our campus, and they need to provide funds to allow that to happen also. And, I don't think the state even realizes, they're continually cutting education rather than supporting it.

To conclude our final focus group discussion, I asked Caroline and Kathie to comment on their overall experience with this PD model. Caroline began by sharing, "I thought it was really transforming in the classroom." Kathie added:

I think I had a passion for teaching when I first started, but I think that it's grown as opposed to lessened because of this. I like the challenge that comes with the experience because it keeps me passionate, and it's given me a lot more confidence in feeling like what I'm teaching them is meaningful.

Later that evening, as I reflected upon our final focus group discussion, I wrote the following observation in my research journal:

Today, as I visited with Caroline and Kathie, I began to realize that although my study is coming to a close, their journey is one that does not have a finish line. With each visit, I saw evidence that Caroline's and Kathie's learning trajectories differed, and in turn, each was at a different spot on the journey. However, neither appeared as if she was ready to hang her hat. I got the impression that both planned to continue the journey.

**Summary of the findings**

This study was driven by three major research questions: First, what is the experience of DI, how does DI impact teachers and how does it shape teachers' thinking about their own practices? Second, how does job-embedded professional development influence change in teaching practices? Third, what might I learn through creating a narrative case study from teachers who are currently in their second-year of being coached by ASCD faculty? Each question was directed toward the response of the participants to the job-embedded model of teacher professional development and whether the knowledge of DI crosses over into the teacher's landscape.

Wrapped up in all of this, we discover who the teacher is and who the leader is. Learning trajectories differ. For some, the process of change takes longer. Understanding this is so much more productive than judging weaknesses because the latter has finality to it. Understanding has an element of generativity to it, does not result in alienation, and in fact may build stronger learning relationships and lead to better results. This is how we would want teachers to work with students, as well; the same principles apply.

Kathie did not just do DI, she had QL and probably a whole lot more going on. It is not the programs; it is what teachers pull from the programs into their personal stories and make part of their identities. Caroline seemed to come into the DI initiative on unequal footing. Teacher education was so much a part of this. The early gaps she exhibited are, to a large extent, not her fault. Expedited methods robbed Caroline of the foundation she needed, other campus needs trumped her receiving the support she needed, and no one walked alongside her closely enough to see and respond to the gaps.

Perhaps the DI coach made deposits; however, the teacher, possibly due to overload and limited preparation time, could not bring them into her story fast enough. She was possibly dealing with other issues such as classroom management. She was working, or needed possibly to be working, at least at that time-and in her particular place, on how to organize efficiently the day in support of learning.

The most organic evidence of this study was the sixteen teacher observations that occurred throughout the study. The data collected revealed that application of teacher learning was dependent upon the teacher herself and what she brought to the learning table. Kathie was consistently able to facilitate lessons that were guided by at least four of the five principles of DI, differentiated by *content* and *process* according to student *interests*. Caroline was also able to apply the learnings successfully, but not consistently with the multiple layers of DI that Kathie rooted into her teacher landscape.

My narrative inquiry identified four themes consistently expressed by the participants.  These included (1) the impact of one's past on how one experiences the present, (2) the complexity of teaching and learning, (3) orientation towards change suggests that constant reflection, evaluation, and experimentation are integral elements of the teaching role, and (4) the on-going construction and re-construction of narratives, which allows teachers to navigate their experiences.

**Conclusion**

The success of this research project grew from the dedication and effort of each participant and her commitment to helping me as a researcher observe and inquire into how teacher learning unfolds in the classroom.  The data revealed that even though each

teacher experienced different trajectories of learning, both were committed to self-improvement as a means to student success. They were willing to participate in their own learning and experiment with the complexities of DI.

In Chapter 8, my concluding chapter, I will discuss the findings presented in this chapter, along with implications for future practice and how this doctoral research study has affected me in my leadership role, as a teacher, as a parent, and as a human being.

CHAPTER VIII – DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

*Introduction*

Progressions that ordinarily appear faint or unnoticeable to us, perhaps even undetectable, become obvious through time-lapse photography. The technique, the art, of capturing images, then creating from those images, a smooth impression of motion is likened to a virtual symphony. In a matter of moments, something spectacular unfolds before us -- a budding flower, the motion of traffic, the construction of a high-rise building. The process of photographing a subject that changes indiscernibly creates a mosaic of seamless images appearing before our eyes. Each film frame is captured at a much slower rate than it will be played back. At normal speed, time appears to speed up, thus lapsing.  Each series of photographs tells a fascinating story. Equally fascinating is watching learning unfold in a classroom whether it is student learning or teacher learning.

During this study, I had the opportunity to experience or conduct research alongside two narrative truths – Caroline's story and Kathie's story. In doing so, I saw something remarkable unfurl before me. Not unlike time-lapse photography, dancing in my mind's eye is a set of snapshots taken during this thesis research experience. The images I captured, through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions helped me engage in the process of storying and restorying this narrative. The art of restorying a phenomenon is concurrently an exploration into, and a progression of, narrative inquiry. As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) assert, "narrative inquiry carries more of sense of continual reformation of an inquiry than it does a sense

of problem definition and solution." As I review the findings presented in the previous chapters, as well as the elements of my personal narrative, theories introduced in the review of literature, and description of my inquiry methodology, my aim is to discuss my findings with thoughts of relevancy and what became illuminated in mind.

Professionally and personally, I feel as though I have gone through a metamorphosis as I have become keenly aware of the complexities of teacher professional development. The core of my research took place at the boundaries of what teachers are desirous of enacting in their classrooms (curriculum-maker) and the boundaries of what DI is desirous of having teachers implement, as well as what the school district and state are eager to have teachers implement (curriculum-implementer). As a researcher, I found my participants and myself embroiled and implicated in the tensions between these different images of teaching. Because of my district position and ASCD affiliation, I occasionally slipped into the implementer mode, adopting the language and stances of implementer, which brings with it judgment rather than understanding. Consequently, I had to check myself (and my position) at the doors of my participants' classrooms occasionally. On one hand, I see that my understanding of what I thought was important or central to my inquiry has changed somewhat through the process of inquiry. Most specifically, my master narrative has changed. I am no longer an administrator first and a researcher second, instead my perception has morphed as the two roles now share equally in my landscape. On the other hand, some of my original ideas and ideals were reinforced. In this discussion, I will try to illustrate what I have discovered along this journey, and I will review the implications of the content of the inquiry.

*Discussion of the findings*

A detailed summary of the findings was foregrounded in Chapter Four. My study examined teacher professional development with an eye directed towards job-embedded professional development, specifically the enactment of differentiated instruction (DI) utilizing the services of an ASCD coach on selected campuses in Progressive Independent School District. This discussion is based on the three major research questions that guided my study:

1.  What is the experience of DI, how does DI impact teachers and how does it shape teachers' thinking about their own practices?

As a result of their participation in the DI cohort, both participants displayed evidence of a deepened understanding of DI. Both participants shared that as relatively new teachers they believed that their involvement in the DI initiate shaped their emerging teaching practices.

2.  How does job-embedded professional development influence change in teaching practices?

The complexity of teaching and learning unfurled a model of teacher professional development that allowed teachers time to learn and experiment with new concepts in the classroom, just as their students do. Participants in the study attested to the development of a strong sense of individual autonomy, as they felt empowered to make deliberate and thoughtful changes in their classrooms.

3.  What might I learn through creating a narrative case study from teachers who are currently in their second-year of being coached by ASCD faculty?

The data supported the postulate that long-term, skillfully implemented job-embedded professional development can serve as a powerful catalyst for affecting student learning and teaching practices. The data revealed that the learning trajectories for each participant differed. Each teacher participant expressed, internalized, and experienced her own learning curve as the project unfolded.

This study was guided by what we know about the development of teacher knowledge with a focus on personal practical knowledge (Clandinin, 1986) and the teacher as curriculum-maker (Clandinin & Connelly, 1992; Craig & Ross, 2008). A teacher's narrative, her story, plays a vital role in the classroom as it impacts how she learns and how she facilitates learning. Clandinin (1992) describes personal practical knowledge as:

> a person's past experience, in the person's present mind and body and in the person's future plans and actions…It is a kind of knowledge, carved out of, and shaped by, situations: knowledge that is constructed and reconstructed as we live our stories and retell and revile them through the process of reflection (p. 125).

In this sense, we recognize that teachers are knowledgeable in their own right as opposed to having the need to be filled with others' prescriptions. Rather than strip the teacher by injecting her with teacher-proof curriculum, we must equip and empower teachers by recognizing that each brings different experiences, hence knowledge into the classroom.

On the surface, Caroline and Kathie appear to be on equal ground. Both entered the landscape of Promise Middle School as new teachers. Both had similar years of experience. Both began the journey through DI at the same time, and in turn, received the same amount of coaching from the ASCD faculty member. Both recalled developing a

strong working relationship with the coach. Both perceived that their fellow content team members were receptive to the new ideas they brought to team planning sessions. Yet, their stories stretched out before me in differing ways.

### *Implications for practice*

The productive energy of Kathie the curriculum-maker makes DI and Progressive ISD implementations work. The challenge to campus administrators and professional developers is to create the conditions for this to happen. As a district leader, I stand at the intersection, or the boundaries, or at the meeting place of these tensions. I invited two teachers to join me at this interface. What I learned can be taken forth to all sorts of new endeavors. There are lessons for teachers, campus and district leaders, ASCD, and the state. By sorting out this milieu, we can fulfill a variety of needs and desires on the part of individuals, affiliations (i.e., ASCD) and systems (school district, state education associations, U.S. Department of Education).

The implications presented in this section are meant for teachers, administrators, professional developers, as well as for all those embroiled in the educational process, including policy-makers. These implications have been framed by considering the supports necessary to honoring the teacher as curriculum-maker. Based on the teachers' experiences in this study, it appears that in order to cultivate teachers' abilities to serve the role of curriculum-maker, we must consider the complexities of an initiative like DI as each teacher develops over an extended period. Equally important is the role of professional development and school administrative supports needed in order to support a teacher in the process of enacting their agency as a curriculum-maker. With these

supports in place, the teacher as curriculum-maker may be empowered to negotiate the realities of the out-of-classroom places by integrating skills and strategies into her every day in-classroom teaching practices. Finally, I suggest that the teacher narratives in this study might serve as a viable and reliable resource for learning about and enacting an initiative like DI and not just an interesting diversion that merely serves as a momentary glimpse into the lived experiences of teachers.

*Role of teacher development*

This study implies that learning evolves over time through a personalized process unique to each learner. Both Caroline and Kathie began with the conceptual frame that differentiated instruction could positively affect learning in the classroom. Planning and enacting DI occurred over time as Kathie and Caroline consciously and unconsciously searched for ways to attach to and enact the new learning. The ongoing process of the teacher learning that unfolded in each classroom has implications for the ways in which teachers could be best supported during the process. The first would provide the time and opportunity to dive into the new learning without concern of judgment. In an initiative such as this, there exists an ongoing danger of preemptive judgment. Kathie's and Caroline's progress was interrupted in order to prepare as many teachers as fast as one could. In an atmosphere of budgetary constraints and cuts, the quest to get the 'biggest bang for your buck' brings with it the potential of sacrificing quality for quantity. Moreover, there lies a great need for ongoing support to enact the new learning, as well as the opportunity to reflect on it with others. Trying to involve more participants in the initiative, while thinking that those who have some experience with it are equipped to prepare others, jeopardizes the personalized model of learning, as well as support and full

engagement with the professional development program. Each participant expressed that she desired to learn more. An initiative such as DI, involves continuing to meet the teacher learner where she is and traveling with her through the next steps of her journey.

*Role of professional development*

In my experience as a participant in and facilitator of professional development, as well as a researcher, I have discovered that the design of high-quality professional development for teachers involves a model that is embedded in teachers' day-to-day work. It meets the teacher learner where she is; acknowledges what she brings to the learning table; and is supported and sustained over time. In order for teachers to have the opportunity to plan, enact, and assess differentiated instruction in their classrooms, a professional development model that mirrors what works for students must be utilized. Teachers need time to examine and practice their new learning, as well as opportunities to engage in thoughtful discourse with one another, so they can provide similar opportunities for their students. Additionally, we must realize the concept that no method works every time with every teacher; this concept is false advertising, and goes against the grain of how humans think and act in their worlds. Students have other stories going on in their lives—arguments with peers, lack of attention from parents, rivalries with siblings, lack of food, worry about money, which, from their perspective, outweigh the objectives of a teacher's DI lesson, however expertly enacted. The same is also true of teachers.

As a professional developer, I have become keenly aware that we do not serve teachers well with traditional models of professional development. In the past, I received

my fair share of what some refer to as "sit and get" or "spray and pray" professional development. Participants literally "sit and get," while the presenter "sprays" around theories and ideas and "prays" that some of it sticks. Little, if any, follow up occurs after a professional development experience like this; it might not even be significant enough to even be mentioned again. This study of two teachers enacting DI in the classroom speaks to the need for professional developers and campus administrators to work together to develop teachers' capacity for agency, so they become curriculum-makers. It also requires professionals who support teachers to reconceptualize their understanding of the role of teachers in curricular development. Instead of precluding teachers' participation in curriculum deliberations, the teachers in this study were empowered to use their tentative curriculum-making knowledge as the foundation to develop into teachers who viewed themselves as curriculum-makers. If professional developers and school administrators want to foster teacher agency (Paris, 1993), it will require them "to push back against" the traditional role of teacher as curriculum-implementer and push towards the non-traditional role of teacher as curriculum-maker.

When curriculum is placed in appropriate context as interaction between teacher, students, content, and process, professional developers and campus administrators can guide teachers to make sense of teaching and learning in the specific contexts of their classroom. If teachers feel restricted by campus, district, state and federal mandates and expectations, professional developers need to help them explore the intellectual, programmatic, and relational spaces where they can develop meaningful curriculum for students.

*Role of campus administration*

From its inception, the principal of Promise Middle School provided support for teachers involved in the DI initiative. As mentioned earlier in my review of the literature, we know that change-friendly organizations approach learning together; they form networks to exchange ideas. Leaders create cultures in which risk-taking is encouraged, while at the same time providing the support necessary to taking those risks. This orientation toward change suggests that constant reflection, evaluation, and experimentation are integral elements of the teaching role. This takes time and requires support.

The principal at Promise Middle School continues to guide the journey. He meets regularly with the ASCD coach that is assigned to the campus, and together, they plan each visit. He made it a practice early on to seek input from the cadre of teachers being coached. Prior to each visit, he asks them what they need during the next coaching visit. As a result, Caroline and Kathie speak of the shared ownership they feel. The teacher learners are encouraged to weave the new learning into their existing tapestry. And, still, they stumble upon hurdles along the way. The teachers on this campus, like most, face the daily push to meet deadlines, manage student learning and accomplish the myriad of duties required of teachers. Time is an often-fought nemesis. Rather than allowing teachers to drown in inertia, the principal carves out extended time for them to plan. Every six weeks or so, content teams are encouraged to request a full day of planning. The principal brings in substitute teachers for the team that day. Caroline shared that:

This gift of time allows us the opportunity to plan DI lessons that are likened to a gourmet meal involving high-quality ingredients that are skillfully tailored and prepared to meet the needs of our students. The kids love and benefit from the lessons we are able to generate during these extended planning sessions.

By removing the pressure of creating lessons in brief trickles of time spread across a normal week, time becomes an ally for teachers as they prepare gourmet lessons. In turn, the principal is able to facilitate and nurture productive change. The complexity of teaching and learning spreads out into a model of professional development that allows teachers time to learn and experiment with new concepts in the classroom, just as their students do. As Lancaster puts it, "Professional development should no longer be an event that takes place on one particular day of the school year. Teachers must view professional development as a part of their daily work" (Lancaster, 2006, p. 47).

Administrators must consider how they can serve as guides for teachers during an initiative such as this. The structures and supports provided by the administration will encourage each teacher's agency in curriculum development because they are considered willing and capable (Paris, 1993). Caroline and Kathie experienced support from other teachers, administrators, and the ASCD coach, which they assert as important to their capacity to plan, enact, and assess differentiated instruction in the classroom.

*Role of personal narratives*

The narrative stories of Caroline and Kathie were fashioned with the purpose of exemplifying the enactment of DI on one campus utilizing the services of an ASCD faculty member. My intent, by analyzing the stories of two participants in this initiative,

was to present a possible framework.  By following this framework, teachers, professional developers, and administrators might be better equipped for facilitating a process of thinking that more broadly and deeply examines teacher's roles, supports, and constraints while utilizing a model of professional development such as the job-embedded coaching model examined in this study.

As educators unpack teachers' conceptualizations, planning, enacting, and assessment of the model of professional development described in these stories, they can utilize the narratives as a reference point to investigate their own sense making and teaching practices. By visioning themselves as curriculum-makers with agency for education in its entirety (Schwab, 1969, 1971, 1973, 1983), the teachers in this study exhibited reflective practices that organically connected the means of education with the ends of education. Teachers as reflective practitioners continually try to make sense of what they have found to be true about learning by articulating why they believe what they do. By analyzing the curriculum-making strategies and reflective practices of the teachers in this study, educators can relate them to their own practices and consider areas for growth. My hope is that these stories will serve as productive examples for educational practitioners as they examine the potential ways in which an initiative such as this might be enacted on other campuses.

*Implications for research*

Through this research study, I have discovered (or uncovered) my narrative

tendencies. My career has spanned close to a quarter of a century and a myriad of roles

including teacher, administrator, and professional developer. In each of these roles, I have

often shared with others that data has a face. Narrative inquiry has allowed me the

privilege of examining two faces of the narrative texts – Caroline's and Kathie's. Central

to this study was my belief that by listening to and portraying teacher stories, I could

deepen my understanding of how teacher learning unfolds in the classroom.

I selected the narrative research method, so I could generate complex, descriptive

and complete stories that provide a venue for teacher voices and a bird's eye view of their

developing knowledge in context. By weaving together the individual and collective

teaching experiences of Caroline and Kathie, this narrative inquiry allowed me to

examine teacher learning from within the context of in-classroom places. Additional

research is recommended in order to confirm and extend the findings of this narrative

inquiry. A continued investigation of the impact of job-embedded teacher professional

development, specifically the coaching model examined in this study, could contribute to

improving teaching and learning.

*Conclusion*

Through this study, it has become clear to me that regardless of where and how I

place myself in the educational landscape, as teacher, administrator, or a researcher, I

must continue to look internally to gain new perspectives from the learning that unfolds

before me. At times, the stories I shared flowed effortlessly from my field notes and transcriptions to my fingertips to the page. Yet, at other times, the words were halted and hard to express because I desired to do justice to what I saw unfurl before me. I also encountered ethical matters that I had to navigate because all persons mentioned in this study are employed by Progressive ISD. Clandinin and Connelly remind us that:

> Our principle interest in experience is the growth and transformation in the life story that we as researchers and our participants author. Therefore, difficult as it may be to tell a story, the more difficult but important task is the retelling of the stories that allow for growth and change (2000).

I hope that by retelling the stories of Caroline and Kathie, others can experience growth and change. I was privileged to serve a dual role in this study – researcher and learner. I believe that when we fail to engage in learning ourselves as educators that we correspondingly fail those we teach. Tomlinson (1999) expresses this belief as well when she shares:

> It is a curiosity of teaching that no two days are alike, but, if we are not careful, all the days can take on a deadening sameness. We must remember that we have every opportunity to transform ourselves and our practice, just as we have every opportunity to stagnate, remaining much the same teachers we were when we began (p. 119).

Simply put, "Who dares to teach must never cease to learn" (The New York Times Book Review, March 5, 1967, p. 55). I suggest taking that one-step further by adding who dares to lead must never cease to learn.

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