DISSERTATION

"TAKE ME TO THE RIVER": MAPPING GLOBAL FLOWS FROM CRAYONS TO CONNECTIONS

Submitted by

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ABSTRACT

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In this dissertation I studied an ongoing professional development project that involved educators from Belize and the United States. In the end I argue that sustainable change within transnational and transcultural professional development activities and research projects is most effective when it involves Freirean-like dialogue, sharing life stories and sharing lifeworlds.

Using a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach, I used interviews, focus groups, personal communications, and field notes of professional development activities to document the life stories, shared dialogue, and lived worlds of my colleagues in Belize. Using a basic thematic analysis approach, my Belizean colleagues and I distilled themes from the data to more deeply understand my colleagues' lives and perspectives on literacy and education. Embracing a fully collaborative (or participatory) research approach, I chose to represent our collective work as a narrative.

Several key themes emerged from analyses: the effects of colonialism and postcolonialism on the entire enterprise, the exigencies of becoming a teacher in Belize, the effects of engaging in Freirean dialogue, sharing life stories, and sharing life worlds on teachers' identities and practices. First, I describe the context of colonialism/postcolonialism in which this work was embedded. Then I chronicle the early years of Belize Education Project's work. I begin by describing the origins of the Belize Education Project (BEP) and its focus on providing material resources and "best practice" teaching strategies to teachers in Belize. Importantly, I

describe a watershed moment in which I realized that something more—something more human and more humanizing—was needed for the project to flourish.

After that, I map the exigencies of becoming and being a teacher in Belize, a trajectory closely linked to forces of colonialism/postcolonialism. I also explain how intentionally enacting Freirean-like dialogue, sharing life stories, and sharing lifeworlds, led to key changes in the professional identities and practices of all BEP participants, my Belizean colleagues as well as members of Belize Education Project in the United States. Finally, I discuss the effects of changing relationships, identities, and practices on pedagogy and student outcomes in Belizean classrooms. I conclude by discussing the relevance of my findings for transnational and transcultural professional development work and global educational stewardship.

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DEDICATION

To our grandparents and great grandparents who bestowed literacy and civilization to our keeping, and to our grandchildren and great grandchildren who will carry these gifts forward.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Problem Space

Before I ever entered a Belizean classroom in 2007, the sense of urgency for literacy instruction was already resonating within me. I had corresponded with a principal via email, who informed me that the students' reading levels in her building were in crisis. She asked me to help the teachers learn how to more effectively teach reading. As soon as I entered the classrooms for the first time, I was struck by the lack of material resources, such as classroom books and school supplies. The singular use of whole group instruction without formative assessment and differentiated learning and teaching also caught my attention. Finally, the apparent challenge of reading competencies throughout the entire community was noticeable.

My initial work involved gathering material resources, such as books and pencils, along with bringing programs for assessing and differentiating instruction for emergent readers. Yet, I soon discovered that our shared desire to enhance Belizean elementary students' literacy might be hampered by the reality that teachers from Belize and teachers from the United States inhabited very different national and educational cultures. More significantly, I realized I was stepping into a post-colonialism context. I became more aware of my own history, assumptions, and practices of my own classrooms, and the lens that they had provided me with as I entered the classrooms of my Belizean colleagues who also had their own history, assumptions, and practices. Old and deeply held assumptions about practice would have to be disrupted and new assumptions would have to be co-created collaboratively.

Our shared desire to transform instructional practice to enhance literacy was within the context of two vastly different cultures coming together in a post-colonial setting. Within this

context, we had very different life stories; our work was situated within different educational histories, and we were enabled and constrained by different cultural forces. To co-create effective and sustainable professional development, my colleagues in Belize, along with my colleagues in the United States, would have to become deeply committed allies. To do this, we would all have to become vulnerable. We would need to work toward decolonizing pedagogies, and in this, be deliberate in our dialogue, in sharing our life stories, and in sharing our life worlds.

History of My Work in Belize

My first trip to Belize in 2007 was with a medical mission. It was then I connected with a school, a principal, and a handful of teachers near the hospital where the medical team was working. As I stepped back onto the airplane, and lifted off the steamy runway back to Colorado, I began to visualize the lifelong commitment to my colleagues in the classrooms of Belize. I co-founded Belize Education Project with other members of the medical mission and with another teacher, which became a non-profit organization in 2008. The specifics about Belize Education Project can be found in the Appendix.

During the early years of my work in Belize (2007-2014), I gathered teams of elementary school teachers, principals, and professors from the United States to join me once a year in conducting professional development on literacy education (mostly reading). We increased the scope of our work from one school to four schools. During each annual visit, we brought our very best resources and strategies. By 2014, over 50 educators from the United States had joined me in my travels to Belizean classrooms. Additionally, each year the Belize Education Project brought educators from Belize—teachers, principals, and members of the Belize Ministry of Education—to work and learn in Colorado classrooms.

Although we had changed some surface-level instructional strategies and reconfigured some aspects of classroom environments in the first seven years, the work felt superficial and unsustainable. Despite all these years of working together, teachers from Belize and the United States still inhabited widely separate worlds with respect to thinking about the nature and functions of literacy, teaching dispositions, and instructional practices. These disconnects caused me to seek out new ways of understanding and working in Belize. Ultimately, it led me to work with Dr. George Kamberelis at Colorado State University. Our work together caused me to shift my ways of working with my Belizean colleagues to a more Freirean (1970/2015) approach.

My Location Within the General Problem Space of Conducting Professional Development Across Cultural Lines of Difference

I realized that my own positionality was complex. I came into this community of Belizean teachers as both an outsider and an insider. As a researcher, I held both identities.

As an outsider, my education had been delivered to me with ease and with an unwavering assumption that it belonged to me as a birthright. The economic and personal realities of a resource-rich life created perspectives and assumptions that will always be a part of me. My interviews, data collection, interpretation, and analysis were permanently bound to viewing my colleagues' life stories through this lens.

In some significant ways, I was also an insider in that I, too, am a teacher. As a first-grade teacher, like my colleagues, I, too, found joy and purpose in teaching young people to read and write, and to grow within our community. I, too, found value and importance in literacy and lifting my eyes to the future through the students placed in the stewardship of my classroom. This positionality was foundational in becoming a committed ally to my Belizean brothers and sisters.

As both insider and outsider in this problem space, I began to understand that my colleagues and I must come to know and understand each other and become vulnerable together. This led to the epiphany during which I began to understand, if only partially, that building relationships had to be central to my work and that this might happen by engaging in Freirean dialogue, sharing our life stories, and sharing our life worlds. All of these activities acted as constitutive forces that created a new and forceful current, which empowered all of us to more effectively operate in a kind of "third space" (Bhabha 1994) constituted at the intersection of vastly different life experiences and cultural forces. In this "third space" we could begin to negotiate our positionalities, which were in constant flux, albeit sometimes in almost imperceptible ways.

Birth and Purpose of this Particular PAR Project

Given my location within this project, along with differences inherent in our intercultural context, it became clear that if our work together could affect both literacy instruction and literacy levels in Belize effectively, my Belizean colleagues, the American educators, and I would need to find a way to understand each other more fully and to develop shared goals for our work. We would need to collaborate as equals across cultural boundaries to find common solutions. In this, we wondered if we worked to intentionally dialogue with each other in more Freirean ways, if we shared our life stories, and if we become more tuned into our shared world experiences, could we transform who we were and the space we created together? We wondered if these actions could impact the effectiveness and the sustainability of our own classroom practice. Participatory Action Research (PAR) appeared to be the most productive approach for professional development and research related to it.

History of Development of this Particular PAR Project

As we traveled back and forth between classrooms in Colorado and Belize, it became clear that PAR was a good choice. As we engaged in this approach through more Freirean dialogue, sharing life stories and sharing lifeworlds, or what Schwandt (2015) called "the everyday worlds" (p. 185) of each other's lives. We began to notice that not only could transformation occur, it was occurring. This transformation came as colleagues from both Belize and the United States became vulnerable enough to understand each other's communities, classroom realities, practices, assumptions, and visions for literacy. We began to notice transformation not only in our newly co-constructed spaces of collaborative activity, but in our co-created professional development, and ultimately in our instructional practice.

Based on the accumulation of these new insights, this Participatory Action Research project focused on the power of relationships and dialogic engagement when working across lines of difference for transformative outcomes.

Research Question

The following question guided my research efforts: *Whether and how does intentionally building relationships through dialogue, sharing life stories, and sharing lifeworlds lead to sustainable changes in teachers' identities and classroom practices?*

Relevance of this Research

Through a fully collaborative (or participatory) approach with my colleagues, we found we could more deeply explore how to not only deepen our connections to each other and better understand each other's lives, but through this process we could also bring about more effective and more sustainable transformation in our instructional practice. As teachers from Belize and the United States, we discovered new ways of talking and acting across lines of difference. We

began to move from being a multitude of singular "I"s toward becoming more and more a "we" in solidarity. As this "we" in solidarity, we co-created previously unimagined ways of being and working together and developing strategies to prepare children to be citizens in a global cultural economy. These changes have important implications for Western scholars working with teachers in developing countries.

Although the new ideas and classroom practices that have emerged in our work are significant, even more momentous and relevant to the professional development of teachers in developing countries is the idea that transformed human relationships themselves are the primary engines of all other changes that might occur. Thus, relationship building must be seen as central to sustainable transcultural and transnational work. As the Belizean teachers and I continue to strive for richer and more complex understanding of learning and instruction, we are creating collective hopes for a future that is more global in nature—a future within which the children we teach embody our highest ideals for humanity and a more socially just world. This hope-becoming-reality orientation seems desirable, even necessary, for Western scholars working with teachers in developing countries.

Mapping the Construction of this Dissertation

Mapping how and why I constructed my dissertation the way I did merits explanation. First, there are two separate chapters on the contextual framing of my research: (a) the historical-political-cultural context and (b) the interpersonal context. Second, there are three findings and discussion chapters. In the next two sections, I explain how and why I chose this non-traditional way to organize the dissertation.

Contextual Framing

As I have developed as an intercultural scholar and a transnational professional development provider, I have been struck by the immense impact that relationships and culture have on identity and practice, and in turn, how identity and practice also works to shape relationships and culture. What I was reading about in the theoretical and empirical literature about Participatory Action Research and the importance of relationship building in this mode of research was also happening right in front of me as I worked with my Belizean colleagues. So, I initially framed my research in interpersonal terms, especially the functions of deepening/deepened relationships through Freirean dialogue, sharing life stories, and being more mindful of the different lifeworlds my colleagues and I inhabit. These interpersonal factors were so powerful for framing my research, I believed they merited an entire chapter.

As I was developing this framing device, and as I discussed it with my committee and other intercultural scholars, I also realized that another set of contextual factors was crucial to (even constitutive of) the work I was doing. Those factors had to do with the residual and durable effects of colonization. As I deepened my understanding of our developing relationships, positionalities, identities, and practices, I realized they were all deeply influenced by the political and cultural context of colonialism. My first inclination was to weave these contextual factors into the interpersonal context chapter of the dissertation. As I tried to do this, I realized that the political and cultural context of colonialism was so powerful and pervasive that it not only needed to be addressed in a separate chapter, but also that it had to be the first contextual framing chapter because it informed the interpersonal context of my work in Belize in such significant ways. In the end, then, I believed I needed two chapters to frame my work.

Findings and Discussions

As I was collecting data and constructing findings, I found myself walking in the shadows of giants—the scholars whose work I had read and who were talking to me all the time as I was thinking about, and even living, my findings. I found their wisdom not only useful, but integral to my emerging findings and evermore impossible to separate from how I was coming to understand the nature, functions, and importance of my work. Because of this, I chose not to adhere to the traditional findings chapter followed by a discussion chapter. Instead, I integrated the findings and discussion (especially connections to the theoretical and empirical work of other scholars). Additionally, because I had rich findings that seemed to cluster around three key issues, I decided to compose three separate but related findings and discussion chapters: (a) the early years and the impasse we experienced, (b) the exigencies of the lives of my Belizean colleagues, and (c) the effects of building relationships through Freirean dialogue, sharing life stories, and sharing lifeworlds on our identities and practices, as well as our students' literacy learning. In the end, then, the structure of this dissertation varies slightly from the traditional five chapter structure. Importantly, constructing the dissertation in this way seemed to reflect what I had to say in an authentic way. The medium is at least part of the message.

Chapter 2

RELEVANT POLITICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT

One of my Belizean colleagues, Joe, re-posted on Facebook the painting, "El encuentro," (Zapata, 1992) coupled with an anonymous poem (Facebook, September 17, 2018) that caught my attention. It brought home the cultural and political context of my colleagues. I knew as I began professional development and research with teachers in Belize, I needed to increase my awareness and understanding of colonialism and its continuing impact on my Belizean colleagues.

Figure 1 El encuentro, Jaime Zapata, 1992

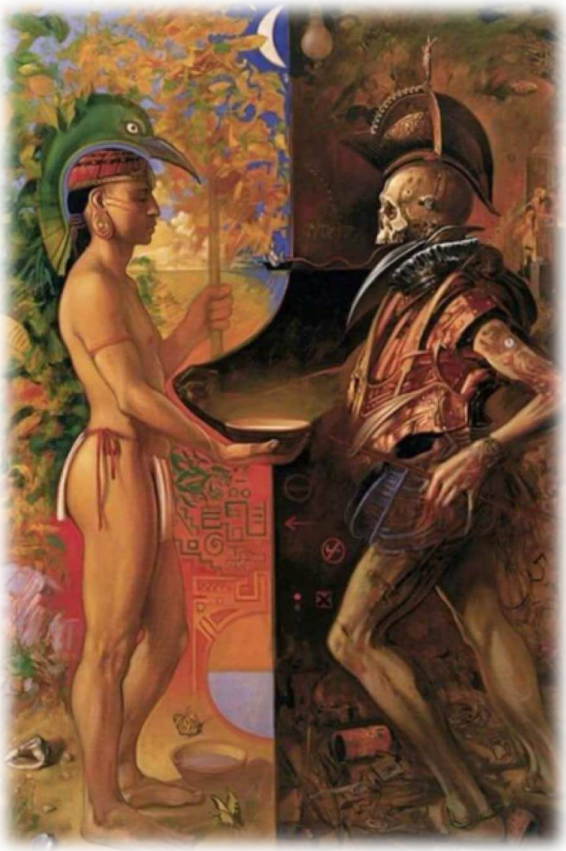

Figure 2 [Facebook Post poem] shared from Mundo desconocido, September 17, 2018)

Éramos hijos de dioses y nos volvieron esclavos.
Vestíamos con oro, hermosas piedras y rico plumaje y nos volvieron un continente pobre y saqueado.
Éramos conocimiento y nos trajeron a su Dios y junto con su Dios la ignorancia y el desapego de la madre tierra.
Así fue como llegó la civilización.

We were children of Gods and became slaves.
We were wearing gold, beautiful stones and rich plumage and became a poor and plundered continent.
We were knowledge and brought us to his God and along with his God the ignorance and detachment of mother earth.
This is how civilization came.

Stepping away, even for just a moment, from the suburbs of Denver, from the suburban school district and classroom with all its trappings, history, assumptions, and practices, and into the tropics of Belize and their classrooms, their history, their assumptions, and practices, was not a small step. Instead it was a stride that would disrupt old and deeply held assumptions about practice within my own suburban classroom. It caused me to reflect on my own whiteness and the history that came with the color of my skin and place of my birth, along with the birthplace of my great-great-grandmothers. While I am forever bound to this light pigment of my fingertips, and by the privilege that my great-grandmothers had, and then bestowed on me, this step away from my lifeworld opened my light-colored eyes.

History of Colonialism in Belize

As I came to know and work side by side with my colleagues in Belize, it became clear that we have very different life stories, histories, and are influenced by different cultural forces. With this increased awareness, I began to look closely at Belize's history first, and its impact on the stories and the identities of my colleagues. Tuhiwai-Smith (2012) explained the importance

of understanding the ways in which the impact of colonialism lingers as we begin to interact with each other, when she wrote, “there is a greater and more immediate need to understand the complex ways in which people were brought within the imperial system, because its impact is still being felt” (p.24).

Thus, I must continue to work to achieve ever-increasing clarity about the history of colonialism and its impact in Belize then and now. Lewis (2000) described Belize’s history, which was first occupied by Britain in the 1620s and officially became the “Crown Colony” of British Honduras in 1871 (p. 5-6). Lewis noted that “there exists an explicit mission to exploit the colony for the ‘mother’ country. Belize is the perfect example of a colony because while the British were draining the natural resources, they continued to be disappointed in the underpopulation of the country and the lack of capital” (Lewis, 2000, p. 8). Although on September 21, 1981, Belize gained its independence from Great Britain” (Lewis, 2000, p. 6), its story of colonization is far from over. “Colonization no longer exists in Belize, [but] the lasting effects of its presence are visible” (Lewis, 2000, p. 22).

Lewis’s description of colonialism in Belize caused me to look more closely at colonialism and its continued impact on identities, practices, and relationships. Both the terms colonialism and imperialism are used to describe this phenomenon. As Tuhiwai-Smith (2012) explained, “[t]he two terms (imperialism and colonialism) are interconnected and what is generally agreed upon is that colonialism is but one expression of imperialism” (p. 22). Tuhiwai-Smith continued claiming that “imperialism still hurts, still destroys” (p. 20). Said (1989) elaborated on the lasting impact of imperialism when he noted “to have been colonized was a fate with lasting, indeed grotesquely unfair results” (p. 207). Said continued to explain the fixed nature of this reality: “Thus the status of colonized people has been fixed in zones of

dependency and peripherally, stigmatized in the designation of underdeveloped, less-developed, developing states" (Said, 1989, p. 207). Tuhiwai-Smith (2012) further discussed enduring effects of colonization, arguing that "poverty, dependency, underdevelopment, various pathologies of power and corruption, plus of course notable achievements in war, literacy, economic development continue to plague the victims of colonialism" (p. 207). In sum, the impact of colonialism is not merely a happening of the past but is the reality of the lives and experiences of the people living in corners of the globe that were colonized.

The meanings and uses of the term "colonial" and its variants are contested in a number of ways. For example, although the word "decolonize" technically describes the political process of a country withdrawing from a parent country as a colony, resulting in its political independence, as opposed to "decolonialize," which describes the process of becoming free from colonial influence, most postcolonial scholars use the word "decolonize" to refer to this latter process (wiktionary.org 2018). The use of the word decolonize in this context speaks to the magnitude of the continued impact of colonization on these cultures. Following the lead of most postcolonial scholars and on the advice of Marcelo Diversi, who told me that most scholars use them interchangeably (M. Diversi, personal communication [telephone conversation], August 29, 2018), I use the word "decolonize" throughout to describe working against colonization's continued impact.

Impact of Colonialism on Personal and Cultural Identities

The impact of colonialism not only subjected (and continues to subject) people of colonized countries to poverty, it has (and persists in) creating a compromised sense of identity for this group of people, as it results in a diminished the sense of themselves as human beings. Tuhiwai-Smith (2012) explained that "ideas about what counted as human in association with the

power to define people as human or not human were already encoded in imperial and colonial discourses" (p. 26). Colonialism influenced even the ability for one to define oneself as human.

I was struck by the power of colonialism to render identity as less than human and it compelled me to explore the very definition and the construction of identity itself. It is generally understood by many scholars that identity is a combination of our internal or personal intentions, along with the culture in which we are steeped. Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, and Cain (1998) described it in this way: "Identity is a concept that figuratively combines the intimate or personal world with the collective space of cultural norms and social relationships" (p. 5). Bruner (1993) explained that understanding this combination of an individual's "experiences and acts which are shaped by his intentions," along with how "these intentional states are realized through participation in the symbolic systems of the culture" (p. 33). This is key to understanding humanity itself. Simply put, although identity involves a personal sense of intentions, it is culture that is the lens through which people interpret their own intentions and actions. Bruner (1993) continued that it "can never be the case that there is a 'self' independent of one's cultural-historical existence" (p. 67). In addition to understanding culture as a tool, a system, or a lens to interpret self's experiences and actions, culture can also be seen as a container, which "shapes the malleable self" (Holland, et al, 1998, p. 22). Holland et al. (1998) expanded on the concept of culture as the container of identity when they wrote, "These cultural discourses and their relationships to the self are not like the relation of the clothes to the body, but more like that of a bottle to the liquid it contains. Self-discourse and practices must be scrutinized, for they are clues to the contours of the bottle – the culture" (p. 22). In fact, Coles & Knowles (2001) explain that the very definition of being "human is to be molded by the context" (p. 22). Human identity itself is shaped by the culture it inhabits.

It is ironic that to be human means to be molded and shaped by culture and that this aspect of humanity can strip the very quality of being fully human from identity. Tuhiwai-Smith (2012) explained in more detail how identity was undermined for colonized groups of people, including her own:

> One of the characteristics of primitive peoples is that we could not use our minds or intellects. We could not invent things, we could not create institutions or history, we could not imagine, we could not produce anything of value, we did not know how to use land and other resources from that natural world. We did not practice the arts of the civilized world. By lacking such virtues, we disqualified ourselves, not just from civilization, but from humanity itself. In other words, we were not fully human. (p. 26)

The identity or "the talk" of the colonial past is profoundly embedded in a multitude of lived experiences because, as Tuhiwai-Smith (2012) explained, colonialism "is embedded in our political discourses, our humor, poetry, music, storytelling, and other common sense ways of passing on a narrative of history and an attitude about history" (p. 20). People with power exert significant force on the formation of people's identities. Diversi and Moreira (2009) wrote about this construction of identity from the perspective of growing up in Brazil:

> Power relations are paramount to the inevitable co-construction of identity. We have all been dissatisfied with identity labels slapped onto us against our will by those with more power of definition in a particular definition in a particular negotiation or interaction. We are all engaged in endless negotiations of identities, furiously pursuing identities we value and dodging ones we abhor. Identities are not inside individuals but in the space between interacting individuals. Identity does not reside neatly and dormant inside people until truth can awaken and reveal its original design and plan. Instead, identity is forever

> mutant and relational, adapting to the contextual pressures of making oneself feel worthwhile. (Diversi & Moreira, 2009, p. 20)

Tuhiwai-Smith (2012) concluded that it is the "struggle to assert and claim humanity which has been a constant thread of anti-colonial discourses on colonialism and oppression" (p. 27). As I work with my colleagues in Belize, the magnitude of colonialism's impact on their identities and their constant struggle to claim their humanity is not lost on me.

At the same time, as I absorbed the immensity of colonialism's and post-colonialism's impact on identity, Holland et al. (1998) offered optimism. They discussed "human's capacity for self-objectification" and through this, "self-direction." While this capacity for self-definition plays into domination by social relations for power, it also affords their possibilities for, at least partial, liberation from these forces. Whereas they acknowledged "human agency may be frail, especially among those with little power," they still assert that this sense of agency, "happens daily and mundanely, and deserves our attention" (p. 5). As the impact of colonialism/post-colonialism on identity is immense, so is the human ability to transform, even if in small and gradual ways. In this regard, Holland et al. (1998) invited us "to respect humans as social and cultural creatures and therefore bounded, yet to recognize the processes whereby human collectives and individuals often move themselves – led by hope, desperation, or even playfulness...from one set of socially and culturally formed subjectivities to another" (pp. 6- 7). Movement within the human experience, both within and in spite of cultural constraints, however slight and gradual, is possible. That possibility carries tremendous significance in this work.

Impact of Colonialism on Educational Practice

Colonialism's impact on identity both affects and is affected by educational practice in the Belizean context. Schools under British colonization were systemically organized by the British Crown and the church (Assie-Lumumba, 2012, p. 26). A key objective of the schools was to maintain class division: "The goals [of the colonial schools] were to maintain a society divided by occupation, race and class. The goals were to make sure that the people understood that the whites, the merchants and the landowners were in control" (Assie-Lumumba, 2012, p. 23). To maintain class separation, critical thinking was discouraged. Assi-Lumumba (2012) continued, "The aim of colonial education was to make colonialism permanent" (p. 27). To do that, "education in the colonial context was deliberately void of any attempt to raise critical thinking" (p. 27). Instead, as Assie-Lumumba (2012) elaborated with respect to teachers in African colonies:

> The primary duty of the teacher in the classroom, especially in the direct tradition of the colonial administration, is to train Africans with a particular set of traits, including reliability, punctuality, obedience, subordination, and discipline, in preparation for their roles as colonized people who must be controlled and used for the actualization of the colonial project. (p. 29)

These colonial goals apply to Belize schools as well, as Lewis (2000) explained, "Schools in Belize like elsewhere in the world, were transmitters of the social order. Students were taught the virtues of hard work, social order and obedience" (p. 10). Lewis continued, "[Belize's] educational system was based on the British colonial model. It was a model that did not want to educate the colonized, especially ethnic minorities within the colony" (p. 10). This model for social order was foundational in creating education for the young citizens of Belize.

Although this authoritarian model of education originated hundreds of years ago with the beginnings of colonization, its impact continues. Crossley & Tickly (2004) stated that peoples' efforts to transform the basis of colonial schooling struggle with the continuing hegemony of western forms of knowledge (p. 149). Crossley & Tickly (2004) continued that "many existing education systems still bear the hallmarks of colonial encounter in that they remain elitist, lack relevance to local realities and often at variance with indigenous knowledge systems, values" (p. 149). Specifically, they argue that "students learn about Britain and Europe, not about Belize and the Caribbean" (p. 10). Schools in Belize still privilege knowledge that their colonizers valued.

The impact of colonialism is not only apparent to our young learners; it also impacts adult learners as we engage in professional development for teachers in Belize. Shore (2004) discussed the implications of colonialism on adult learners. "That adult education is part of the practices of colonialism is no accident" (p. 118). Because colonizers usually control material resources, they are often also assumed to have the most knowledge or the more valid and valued knowledge. Shore (2004) continued as she challenged us, as professional developers or adult educators, to reflect on the implications of colonialism as we craft our professional development. "The challenge is to identify the workings of colonialism in adult education theories, even when they appear to be absent or cosigned to history" (p. 118). Shore (2004) also challenged us as providers of professional development to consider how our "whiteness" impacts how we develop professional learning. "The contemporary challenge for adult educators and scholars is to investigate the ways whiteness collapses judgments in adult learning principle through theorizing and practice" (Shore, 2004, p. 111). Engagement in any kind of change in Belize (or any former colony), such as improving literacy learning and teaching is politically, culturally, and socially

complex. In this regard, Shore (2004) warned us that the "desire to make a significant difference is even more challenging when it is recognized that these relations of empowerment/ dispossession have their roots in the nineteenth-century project of colonialism" (p. 111). Colonialism exerts constitutive effects on education still.

Working Towards Decolonizing Pedagogies and Research Methods

We cannot ignore the immense impact of colonialism when working in former colonies. Still there exists possibilities for transformation for both the colonized and the colonizers. As I worked as both a researcher and as a staff developer in the schools of Belize, I continued to strive to do this work in a decolonizing way. I chose the terms "decolonizing," based on Diversi and Moreira's (2009) usage:

> Decolonizing is a term that, to us, signifies actions, movement, process, dialogue, and the space between colonial and postcolonial. Decolonizing scholarship, in and of itself, inhabits the space in-between, between being and being more human, being conditionally free and being free, between being a street child and being a child, between visceral knowledge and subjugation and theories of oppression. We don't put a hyphen in decolonizing, because we embrace it as the hyphen itself. (p. 207)

In resisting the dehumanizing forces of colonization, or in the impulse to decolonize, relationships between people is critical. Said (1978) wrote that, "Humanism is the only - I would go so far as saying the final - resistance we have against the inhuman practices and injustices that disfigure human history" (p. xxix). In acting upon the impulse of humanism in education and research, committed relationships are crucial.

In this regard, Paris and Winn (2014) conceptualized humanizing approaches as "those that involve the building of relationships of care and dignity and dialogic consciousness raising

for both researcher and participant" (p. xvi). Engaging in decolonizing pedagogy, requires relationships which are built with a deep sense of reverence for each other's identity, history and practices.

Importantly, as Ronai (2002) noted, lived experiences themselves that can transform the relationship of the "performers" in such settings:

> Lived experience, as it unfolds in consciousness is a constant process of correction. Not correction in the sense of right or wrong or trying to record the true picture but correction in the sense of adjusting the picture based on the perceived change in the relationship between the performers in a setting. (p. 107)

Sharing lived experiences provides the continuous process of adjusting and re-adjusting pictures and assumptions individuals have of each other. It can be in these small ways that resistance to power structures begins to unfold. Richmond (2011) wrote that resistance to imperial power structures is "a process in which hidden, small-scale and marginal agencies have an impact on power, on norms, civil society, the state and the 'international'" (p. 419). He went on to explain that "individual or grass-roots critical agency, not coordinated or mobilized on a large scale, but still globally connected" (p. 420) can be transformative. In this way, the small scale and seemingly insignificant experiences of sharing each other's space of classrooms, family and community, as well as sharing life stories and dialogue, could begin to work toward decolonizing long held relational structures and assumptions.

Ultimately, the hope is to claim humanity for each of us. Tuhiwai-Smith (2012) most eloquently articulated this hope when she wrote "the struggle to assert and claim humanity has been a constant thread of anti-colonial discourses on colonialism and oppression" (p. 27). Claiming humanity applies not only to the colonized, but to the colonizer as well. Freire

(1970/2015) claimed that "as oppressors dehumanize others and violate their rights, they themselves also become dehumanized" (p. 56). Freire (1970/2010) continued to explain as the colonized, or "oppressed" fight for their own humanity, they also "restore to the oppressors the humanity they had lost in the exercise of oppression" (p. 56). In this way both colonized people and colonizers, must be united in the work to claim humanity for each of us.

Efforts towards decolonizing the work with teachers must not only include interactions and shared experiences teaching students, but also researching, understanding and writing about this act. In hearing and writing about life stories and dwelling within each other's lifeworlds for academic purposes, it is critical to be especially aware of the hidden risks in this process. In this regard, Tuhiwai-Smith (2012) warned that:

> Academic writing is a form of selecting, arranging and presenting knowledge. It privileges sets of texts, views about the history of an idea, what issues count as significant. Writing can be dangerous because, we reinforce and maintain a style of discourse which is never innocent. (p. 37)

In the spirit of participatory action research generally, asking the question of who this writing was for, and who benefits from the telling and the writing of other's stories is vital. In this regard, Spivak (1992) implored researchers to ask:

> Who speaks here? Who is the implied reader of this literature, the researchers of this history, the investigator of this anthropology? For whose benefit is this knowledge being produced, so that he or she can have our otherness made palpable and comprehensive, without reducing it into an inferior version of their same, through the choice of studying literature, history and anthropology at their best? (p. 6)

The hope is that my writing could allow more readers to hear and recognize the voices of other

voices. Spivak (1992) discussed this hope in terms of "transnational literacy," which "allows us to recognize that we hear a different kind of voice from (Other) countries" (p. 19). Diversi and Moreira (2009) expressed their optimism for a postcolonial world through sharing and writing about this in-between space and the journey toward this ideal:

> We continue to embrace the ideal and utopia of postcolonialism, but from the standpoint of embodied betweeners experiencing the world in the space between colonial forces and the postcolonial imaginary in transition, writing about the journey toward the dream of inclusive, unconditional social justice, but not as if we had arrived at the postcolonial destination ahead of the crowds. (p. 207)

I was (and am) acutely aware that transcultural work, research, and writing about others' lives, is steeped and embedded in colonial structures.

I am also acutely aware that I am permanently bound in my own whiteness and in my own cultural history. Spry's (2018) process of wrestling with her own privilege and how to continue to work resonated with me when she wrote:

> When I begin to float out of my messy unruly researching body with its white skin, its body-without-organs, its financial privilege to sit for hours in a sunny well-appointed office at home or a work, Paulo Freire whispers to me that I can always and only speak from this oft-privileged body, that I can only speak from myself. It is auto-ethnography that activates the foundational socio cultural personally political reflexivity of that body/self. (p. 631)

Through self-reflexivity and by enacting autoethnographic methods, I hope my listening, my analysis, and my writing not only about but also *with* my colleagues, become ever more decolonizing.

Chapter 3

INTERPERSONAL CONTEXT OF THE WORK: BUILDING A FOUNDATION FOR TRANSFORMATION

Aspirations for Transformation: Three Rivers of Change

As I stepped back to reflect on our shared hopes for enhancing literacy instruction in Belize, I realized that we (educators from Belize and the United States) needed to become allies committed to each other. We needed to become committed to intercultural understanding, and to global educational stewardship if we were to achieve significant, sustainable shifts in our work together.

As we embarked on research to enhance instructional practice, I realized that relationship building needed to be at the heart of our endeavors. I wondered if an important shift could occur if we all became vulnerable and if we all became available for transformation. I came to appreciate that new understandings seemed to emerge from our collective work, especially our relationship-building work. In this regard, Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder (2002) noted that knowing "even of the most unexceptional kind – is always too big, too rich, too ancient, too connected for us to be the source of it individually" (p. 141).

Motivated by the desire to deepen my relationships with my Belize colleagues, three potentially powerful forces of relationship building and community engagement came into view—dialogue, sharing life stories, and sharing lifeworlds. Because they often coexist, I imagined these forces metaphorically as a confluence of three rivers. Each river came from its own set of streams and springs, but once they flowed into each other, they became a single waterway with considerable transformative potential—troubling sedimented assumptions and ways of thinking, acting, and being.

First, I reflected on the transformative potential of ongoing dialogue between Belizean and American educators. This dialogue included not only talk about teaching practice and experience, but also our hopes, our passions, and our deepest fears. Besides paying more attention to the nature and functions of dialogue in our work, I also conducted focus groups with Belizean educators when we were together both in Belize and in the United States.

Next, I considered the transformative potential of sharing of life stories. We had always shared bits and pieces of our lives over the years, but I realized that sharing these stories enhanced our work together in powerful ways. I began collecting life stories from my Belizean colleagues in more intentional and formal ways.

Finally, I noticed the transformative potential of sharing of our lifeworlds— living, breathing, and dwelling within each other's communities, classrooms, and homes. In response to this realization, I paid more attention to how we inhabit each other's lived spaces, and I asked the educators from Belize about how they think sharing our lifeworlds affected our work together.

These three rivers of change potential continuously collided and coalesced, creating muddy, messy, and unpredictable experiences that were nevertheless teeming with life and with new possibilities for thinking, acting, and being. Because these rivers appeared to exert so much force, they shaped my research process. Would drawing attention to and practicing dialogue, sharing life stories, and sharing lifeworlds instigate noticeable changes—in the Belizean teachers, in the U.S. teachers, and in me? Did our sharing also change classroom practices and the very meanings and functions of literacy for all of us? In this regard, Cole and Knowles (2001) wrote that "[a]uthentic findings will only emerge from authentic relationships" (p. 27). These findings came from deep fonts of authentic relationships.

In the several sections that follow, I review research on the fundamental importance of committed relationships in teaching and research, especially how such relationships are built over time through (a) dialogue, (b) sharing life stories, and (c) sharing lifeworlds.

Dialogue

Because relationships, identities, and practices are constructed and reconstructed through discourse, dialogue is a powerful transformative force. As Freire (1970/2015) wrote, dialogue is "the way by which [we] achieve significance as human beings" (p. 89). It would make sense that being and working together in more participatory, dialogic ways would be more powerful than bringing resources and strategies from the United States to Belize. Freire also noted that, as human beings, we "are not built in silence, but in word, in work, in action-reflection" (p. 88). And he reminded us that "people come to feel like masters of their thinking by discussing the thinking and views of the world explicitly" (p. 124). As streams of dialogue between teachers from Belize and the United States continued to develop, I believe they changed our relationships, identities, and practices.

Freire's theories and the constructs that constitute them are complex and often involve multiple elements. For example, his notion of dialogue involves viewing learners as teachers and teachers as learners, leveling power relations between and among interlocutors, working to ensure all voices are heard and celebrated, collectively identifying and working against oppressive structures and forces, and gradually releasing responsibility for this work to the "oppressed." Although I brought all of these elements to my work in Belize, engaging in more dialogic ways of talking and interacting with my colleagues (i.e., intentionally working to hear and celebrate their voices) was foregrounded. As Freire and Macedo (1995) explained, "[d]ialogue characterizes an epistemological relationship. Thus, in this sense, dialogue is a way

of knowing" (p. 379). What was especially important about our "knowing" was that we collectively came to understand each other's perspectives and histories. Souto-Manning (2010) described Freirean dialogue as a "learning process that considers multiple perspectives" (p. 39). The critical part of Souto-Manning's (2010) interpretation of Freirean dialogue, which resonates with my own interpretation, is the collective nature of dialogue with others who have different life experiences, are socialized within different historical and cultural regimes, and perhaps most significantly, come from different communities of practice. She explained that "through [Freirean] dialogue, participants critically analyze their positions in and across communities of practice. In doing so, they are engaging in rethinking their realities and practices" (p. 40). She described several different projects in which she worked with culturally different participants to form new communities of practice, to develop a collective awareness of issues, and to engage in the process of "deconstructing layers of social-political meanings and challenging institutional discourses" (p. 133) to imagine and enact new ways of thinking, being, and changing the material and ideological conditions of their lives. Importantly, Souto-Manning (2010) emphasized how "collectively and dialogically we came to see ourselves as historical beings, as teachers located within sociocultural and historical contexts and occupying political spaces. We came to see ourselves for our collective power to embrace and co-create transformation" (p. 133). Again, and to reiterate what I claimed earlier, although many elements of Freirean praxis theory were embodied in my work, Souto-Manning's way of understanding how Freirean dialogue can lead to collective transformations was most central and probably most constitutive.

In her research with preservice teachers, Alsup (2013) noted the transformational power of dialogue: "Once preservice teachers are aware of how both professional and personal discourses affect their lives, they can modify these discourses if they so choose and hence enrich

their professional selves" (p. 124). Olson and Craig (2001) studied in-service teachers as they developed their identities as teachers. One of their participants (Pat) emphasized the importance of dialogue in transforming herself as a teacher:

> I really need the chance to talk to other people. I think everything we're hearing and experiencing we're filing away. I've really noticed that it doesn't have to be just what I've read and experienced. It can be what I hear somebody else say, other people's experiences, or from other people sharing what they've read. Or what they've seen becoming as valuable as my own reading and experiencing. And that doesn't happen unless you have a chance to hear each other. (p. 672)

Olson and Craig's (2001) participant continued to explain the power of dialogue to transform herself, as well as her colleagues as educators:

> It was just like a light bulb. For the very first time, we saw we were going someplace, that things fit together. We teachers had never had the time nor had been challenged to articulate what we were doing. (p. 674)

Dialogue empowers a sense of direction through discussion of practice.

Highlighting the dialogic nature and transformative effects of discourse, Connelly and Clandinin (1999) built on Freire's insights about how dialogue empowers people to become the "masters of their thinking." Connelly and Clandinin (1999) explained "when teachers come together to share stories, new stories to live by can also be composed" (p. 102). Bakhtin (1986) argued that dialogue "is not born nor is it to be found inside the head of an individual person, it is born between people collectively searching for truth, in the process of their dialogic interaction" (p. 60). As people talk with each other, seeking clarity about each other's assumptions through face-to-face conversations they discover new ways of being and understanding each other.

Bakhtin (1986) also explained that, through dialogue, we cannot help but take on, and internalize, each other's understandings because "any understanding is imbued with response and necessarily elicits it in one form or another: the listener becomes the speaker" (p. 68). He continued, "our thought itself—philosophical, scientific, artistic—is born and shaped in the process of interaction and struggle with others' thought" (p. 92). Understandings deepen and thinking is transformed through our dialogue and our work to understand each other's words and thinking.

Kamberelis and Scott (1992) demonstrated how "people engage in discourse to express power, solidarity and resistance" (p. 363). Indeed, I sensed our dialogue was bringing us together in solidarity and beginning to disrupt our assumptions about who held what knowledge and ultimately what power. I witnessed conversations with my Belizean colleagues become more familiar and comfortable as we about talked about our excitement over pregnancies, our trials with our teen-agers, the joy of falling in love and weddings, and the heart breaks of death. Simultaneously, our conversations about the scope and sequence of early reading instruction, and the struggles and triumphs of managing challenging students in the classroom, too, became more familiar and comfortable. It became authentic and transformative.

I wanted to understand how our dialogue disrupted old assumptions and birthed new, more collaborative ways of seeing and thinking about what we thought we knew to be true. This included thoughts about classroom practice, but also, about family, social structures, spirituality, and the purpose of literacy itself.

Sharing Life Stories

(My parents) helped me see the value of our story, in my story, in the larger story of our country. Even when it's not pretty or perfect. Even when it's more real than you want it to be. Your story is what you have, what you will always have. It is something you own.
(M. Obama, 2018, p. vi)

Since 2007, the Belizean teachers and I have shared bits and pieces of our life stories. As I began reading about narrative theory and narrative inquiry, I began to see that sharing life stories could be a potent catalyst for change, which is why I began to elicit life stories more formally from my Belizean colleagues. As Linde (1993) wrote, "life stories express our sense of self: who we are and how we got that way. They are also one very important means by which we communicate this sense of self and negotiate it with others" (p. 3). As sharing life stories became more focal in my work, I gained insights like what Cole and Knowles (2001) described: "In as much as it is humanly possible, life history inquiry is about gaining insights into the broader human condition by coming to know and understand the experiences of other humans" (p. 11). This is because as Riessman (2007) reminded us "stories don't fall from the sky (or emerge from the innermost 'self'); they are composed and received in contexts— interactional, historical, institutional, and discursive—to name a few. Stories are social artifacts, telling us as much about society and culture as they do about a person or group" (p. 105). Through hearing the stories of my colleagues, I learned as much about the workings of their community and culture as I did about them.

As I began to listen more intently to Belizean teachers' stories, I deepened my understanding not only of their classrooms, but also of their students, their students' families, and their communities, as well as the histories and cultures of life, work, and education in Belize. Likewise, as my Belizean colleagues listened to my stories, they came to better understand my classroom, my school, my district, my family, and my life in Colorado. I believe this deepened understanding of each other's lives, impacted our relationships, our identity, and even our classroom practices.

Stories also empower their tellers to voice injustices and struggles. By sharing their stories, my colleagues gave voice to their lived experience. At the same time, I developed a new appreciation of their life challenges and triumphs as I listened to their stories. Similarly, powerful was Cin and Walker's (2013) in-depth study of the life histories of three generations of Turkish teachers. The telling of these life stories also enabled the voices of those teachers to expose the social injustice female Turkish teachers experience. Cin and Walker (2013) discussed this, "The voices of ordinary female teachers of Turkey in this study exposed a matter of social justice in Turkish society in relation to gender, cultural and constitutional issues. Women's narratives pointed out the problems at least some female teachers experienced" (p. 404). Specifically, one of their participants, Arzu, from the first generation, shared her story of herself as a teacher in the 1950s.

> I had to give my first birth into a very dirty and unhealthy environment with the help of a midwife. I think I might have got infected during birth because I became bedridden for a couple of months. I could not feed my child and could not work for a while. . . I and my husband were the only teachers of the village. My husband took students to our house for me to continue teaching facilities at home on the days I could not get out of bed. (Cin & Walker, 2013, p. 399)

Arzu's narrative showed that by being given the opportunity to tell their life stories, these women teachers were able to "voice" (perhaps for the first time) the real struggles in their lives.

Cin and Walker (2013) also argued that allowing people (especially marginalized people) to make the invisible visible by voicing their life stories could enrich multiple understandings of the human experience. They argued that if "our aim as researchers of human development is to enrich pluralism, then we should give a voice to those who are ordinary, non-privileged and

invisible citizens" (p. 396). In hearing storied lives of others, the listener can come to better understand the trajectories and exigencies of those lives. Just as significant is the storytellers' experience in the telling. As the tellers voice their lives and hear their own stories in new ways, they, too, are transformed. As the listener is changed in hearing life stories, so are the storytellers changed in telling them.

With voice, there also lies the potential for increased agency. When Munro (1998) discussed the life stories of teachers she collected, she explained that she came to understand that transformation could be the process of claiming one's own stories, or "reality." Munro (1998) explained "I learned from Agnes, Cleo and Bonnie resistance is not a 'act' but a movement, a continual displacement of others' attempts to name our reality" (Munro, 1998, p. 125). In telling one's life story comes the opportunity to set the story straight, to declare one's own reality to the listener.

Sharing life stories functions to create transformation potentials, enabling storytellers to continuously become new versions of themselves. Sharing life stories can also deepen relationships and trouble and reconfigure identities. Linde (1993) emphasized this function:

> Stories, including our life stories, constantly go under revision, to express our current understanding of what our lives mean. This property permits the life story to express our entire sense of what our lives are about, or sense of what kind of people we are, without ever necessarily forming a single narrative that organizes our entire lives. (p. 25)

Frank (2010) concurred when he wrote "stories animate human life; that is their work. Stories work with people, for people, and stories always work on people affecting what people are able to see as real, as possible, and as worth doing or best avoided" (p. 14). Johnson and Golombek (2002) also emphasized the transformative potentials of teachers sharing life stories when they

wrote:

> [Teachers'] stories reflect the struggles, tensions, triumphs, and rewards of their lives as teachers. We believe that ultimately narrative inquiry enables teachers not only to make sense of their professional worlds, but also to make significant and worthwhile changes within themselves and their teaching practice. (p. 7)

This underscores the value of narrative inquiry as a way to transform practice.

As the teachers from Belize and the United States shared narratives of possible worlds and possible selves, we began to transform our beliefs and practices about children, learning, and teaching, our identities as teachers, how we show up in our worlds, and what we will be and do in the present and in the future.

Sharing Lifeworlds

Along with dialogue and sharing life stories, sharing lifeworlds is a powerful relationship building force. Johnson and Golombek (2011) argued for the transformational power of collectively engaging with research partners in everyday spaces when they wrote, "[t]ransformation is a process through which our activities are initially mediated by other people or cultural artifacts (other-regulation) but later come under our control as we appropriate and reconstruct resources to regulate our own activities (self-regulation)" (p. 489). Johnson and Golamak's (2011) research indexed this phenomenon as their participant, Michael, explained his transformation within the process of dwelling within classroom spaces alongside his colleagues:

> The fact that I had worked with other colleagues did not mean that I, as a teacher, had been changed and developed by them. Rather, they had cooperated with me in order to work on my own self-development. They had helped me to see what was taking place in the classroom, why it was taking place, and how I might change it. (p. 499)

In another study of science teachers sharing lifeworlds in the Philippines, (Arellano, et al, 2001) discussed how "teachers seemed to be transformed by their new sense of community identity and agency to deal with problematic issues relevant to teaching" (p. 223). These researchers drew on the words of their participants expressing the power of living within each other's lifeworlds. One participant stated, "You can gain knowledge from other people, and also from real life situations" (p. 215).

Allowing teachers from Belize to witness the good, the bad and the ugly moments of my own practice (along with classrooms of other Colorado teachers) influenced the nature and effects of our work together.

Bringing teachers from a developing country into suburban classrooms in the United States was an uncommon way to approach both global professional development and research. I searched for global professional development work similar to the Belize Education Project. I also enlisted the assistance of the Social Sciences and Humanities librarian at Colorado State University for a more in-depth search. I was not able to find any research on intercultural professional development work that bore any family resemblance to the Belize Education Project.

In her groundbreaking critical anthropological work, even Ruth Behar (1993) was troubled by the fact that she could bring her single case study participant, Esperanza's, story but not Esperanza, across the United States-Mexico border. Although bringing teachers from Belize to the United States involved certain risks, it also opened up transformative potentials. As Rosaldo (1989) noted, "most ethnographers prefer to study events that have definite locations in space with marked centers and outer edges" (p. 12). However, he continued, ethnographies devoid of "intense emotions not only distort their descriptions but also remove potentially key

variables from their explanations" (p. 12). As Rosaldo (1989) implied, when we brought our colleagues out of the "defined locations" with "marked centers and outer edges," (p. 12) new potentials for thinking, acting, and being became a part of our experience. Allowing teachers from Belize to witness not only our successes as teachers from the United States, but also our trials, challenges, and failings exposed our fragilities, and I imagine these exposures helped to build (un)common ground with transformative teeth. Freire's (1970/2015) insights about the relationship between the resource rich and the resource poor are instructive here as he explained "the oppressed must see examples of the vulnerability of the oppressors so that a contrary conviction can grow within them" (p. 64). Freire continued, arguing that building relationships of solidarity "requires that one enter into the situation of those with whom one is in solidarity" (p. 43). Through sharing the lived spaces of our professional and personal lives, we become both more vulnerable and more united, at least potentially.

Even though experiencing each other's lives in "up-close and personal" ways was a departure from traditional social sciences, Tedlock (2017) insisted that "experiencing other ways of life while working and speaking with others in vulnerability and solidarity is central to the human sciences today" (p. 858). In the past, scholars had to choose between studying participants from a distance or engaging with participants in a deep and personal relationship without reflecting on its power and its relevance to their common work or research. In this regard, Tedlock (2017) wrote about the limitations of this choice:

> Under the regime of colonialism, fieldwork produced two independent things: reportable non-participatory observation and non-reportable total participation. When ethnographers agreed to such a split, they cultivated rapport not friendship, compassion not sympathy, respect not belief, understanding not solidarity, and admiration, not love. (p. 856)

In our work, teachers from both continents engaged in developing and sustaining personal relationships while simultaneously reflecting on how these very relationships offered unique opportunities for understanding and further developing ourselves as educators. Clandinin (2013) discussed these kinds of opportunities explicitly in regard to teachers:

> As participants' and researchers' lives meet in the midst of each of our unfolding complex and multiple experiences, we begin to shape time, places, spaces where we come together and negotiate ways of being together and ways of giving accounts of our work together. (p. 44)

When we inhaled and exhaled the air of shared spaces, I believe we changed. Similarly, as we saw each other's classroom wall charts or heard each other's children laugh with triumph, cry out in frustration, and chatter with themselves, as they too, searched for connections, we were transformed. As we tasted each other's food, be it a McDonald's Big Mac, or plantains fried in coconut oil, we were changed. As we felt the air on our faces of each other's worlds, be it a steamy tropical breeze or the sting of a Colorado blizzard, we were changed. By experiencing each other's lifeworlds, we emerged with changed and changing relationships, identities, and practices.

Finally, I sensed that both Belizean educators, and I reconsidered the nature and purposes of literacy and education themselves, albeit in small and not always fully intentional ways. This led me to consider how our changing relationships might trouble and reconfigure our identities as educators and our educational beliefs and practices.

Because identity and practice became central to my research question, I decided to review theory and research on these constructs; these reviews appear after my review of the productive power of relationships. I also decided to focus my reviews specifically on the dynamic,

transformative aspects of all key constructs that constitute my conceptual framework and review of empirical research.

Relationships Involve Learning and Can Be Transformative

Relationships are inseparable from the act of learning, or as Lave and Wenger (1991) wrote, "[l]earning is an integral and inseparable aspect of social practice" (p. 31). Wenger (2002) explained further that as people "engage in their pursuit together, we interact with each other and with the world, and we fine tune our relations with each other and with the world accordingly. In other words, we learn" (p. 45). He also noted "learning is a fundamentally social phenomenon, reflecting our own deeply social nature as human beings capable of knowing" (p. 3). Freire (2005) also boldly claimed "it is impossible to teach without the courage to love" (p. 5).

The learning that occurs within relationships can be transformative. Wenger (2002) explained this as a fundamental outcome of being in "communities of practice." "The learning that is most personally transformative turns out to be the learning that involves membership in these communities of practice" (p. 6).

In addition, while the process of learning is embedded in the social domain, so might be knowledge itself. As Wenger (2002) wrote: "We need others to complement and develop our own expertise. . . . Knowledge is dynamic, social as well as individual. It is important to accept that though our experience of knowing is individual, knowledge is not" (p. 427).

Digesting these ideas, I came to see that both the learning and the knowledge we collectively harvested in the Belize Education Project might be fundamentally grounded in our ever-evolving relationships. I also came to see our newly co-constructed knowledge and our strengthened relationships as having the potential to build new ways and systems of being together, as well as new possibilities for who we could become as educators. In this regard, Lave

and Wenger (1991) claimed "learning thus implies becoming a different person with respect to the possibilities enabled by these systems of relations" (p. 53). In other words, the web of connections we made might have allowed us to re-construct our old selves and become different people than we were before we came to know each other.

Because as Lave & Wenger (1991) explained, "learning is an integral part of the generative social practices in the lived world" (p. 35), I saw that just as our relationships might have enhanced our learning, perhaps the process of learning together may also have enhanced our social connections. As we learned side by side with each other, I believe we came to love and appreciate each other as humans. In this regard, as Freire (2005) wrote "those who commit themselves to teaching develop a certain love not only of others but also of the very process implied in teaching" (p. 5). As teachers, I believe we needed appreciate and know each other, and at the same time, love the process of learning itself.

Raymond, McCue, & Yamagishi, (1992) studied teachers in the United States in the 1990s. They deployed the words of one of their participants, Glenda, to express the powerful influence of learning and relationships:

> "He [her teacher] was able to inspire me with his knowledge and ideals because he was sincere. He was more than a model for me of what a teacher should be; he has often been my conscience. I learned that all events affected me because I was a member of humanity" (p. 82).

Glenda's experience is a good example of how as relationships between teachers and students deepen, teachers can become more than models for their students, they became internal guides and even consciences for each other.

With these new insights about the nature and functions of relationships, I also considered my positionality in regard to ways of being together. In relation to these insights Spry (2017), resonated with me as I considered how my own understanding of my identity and experience is negotiated with how I am now, and have been, with my Belizean colleagues. Spry (2107) eloquently wrote that "self is never built upon living solely and discretely within our material body; rather, our negotiation of knowing exists in the embodied relations of who we believe ourselves to be with others" (p. 643).

As Spry (2017) wrote, I, too, found the process of attending to so many new experiences and dialogues both "unsettling" and "expanding." Spry's (2017) use of "polyvocal being" is "the existence of the unsettled I." Spry (2017) wrote it is "the vulnerable ecstatic story of relation" (p. 638). These ideas nearly perfectly characterized my positionality within my professional development work and research in Belize of late.

As I thought about telling my colleagues' stories, I realized the implications of conducting research based on genuine dialogue, sharing life stories, and becoming enmeshed in the lives of others. Clandinin (2013/2016) wrote that "as participants' and researchers' lives meet in the midst of each of our unfolding complex and multiple experiences, we begin to shape time, places, spaces where we come together and negotiate ways of being together and ways of giving accounts of our work together" (p. 44). I believe, as Clandinin suggested, that relationship building through Freirean dialogue, sharing life stories, and sharing lifewords ushered in new ways of being together.

Ironically, in the past, developing relationships with research participants was considered unscientific. This way of thinking was radically disrupted by the crisis of representation in anthropology in the 1980s (e.g., Clifford & Marcus, 1986), and Freire (2005) contested this

practice vehemently, arguing that "[w]e must dare, in the full sense of the word, to speak of love without the fear of being called ridiculous, mawkish, or unscientific, if not antiscientific" (p. 5).

As I thought about what the process of building relationships within our Belize Education Project work involved, along with how effective the work seemed to be, I considered the beginnings of these relationships. I wondered what could happen if we could take on this "dare" Freire invoked.

Identity

I celebrate myself, and sing myself... There is that in me—I do not know what it is—but I know it is in me... I am large, I contain multitudes.
(Whitman, 1892/2010, p. 65)

Whitman (1892/2010) suggested that the self is large; it contains multitudes. It is impossible to separate the construction of identity from the relational, from the learning or transformation, or from practice. For the purpose of my research, I focused on how identity is constructed, re-constructed (or transformed), and made apparent within relationships and in practice. As I was reading theory and research about identity, I began to notice the ways in which my relationships with my Belizean colleagues were deepening and how our identities were changing.

Identities are Relational

And what I assume you shall assume,
For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.
In all people, I see myself, not more, and not one barley-corn less.
(Whitman, 1892/2010, p.65)

As relationships are central to the human experience, so is the construction and reconstruction of identity. Wenger (2002) wrote, "We cannot become human by ourselves" (p. 146). Put another way, Freire (2005) explained that even in our own agency, our ability to

"distinguish ourselves by our own decisions, as individuals among the whole of humanity," we still operate "within the workings of society, without which, we would also not be what we are" (p. 125). Holland et al. (1998) also claimed "identity is a concept that figuratively combines the intimate or personal world with the collective space of cultural forms and social relations" (p. 5). Wenger (2002) echoed this idea when he wrote that identity "is the social, the cultural, the historical with a human face" (p. 145). Because we are social animals, the very nature of the ongoing assembly of our identities involves each other.

We come to construct our understanding of who we are through all of our interactions with others. Moje and Luke (2009) explained "identity is constructed, produced, formed, or developed in any and all social interactions" (p. 418). They continued to claim that identity does not exist in individuals but is only brought into recognition "within a relationship or social context" (p. 419). Wenger (2002) also argued that our concept of identity "serves as a pivot between the social and the individual." He continued, noting "that each can be talked about in terms of the other" (p. 145). Holland et al. (1998) echoed this idea when they claimed, "identity is one way of naming the dense interconnections between the intimate and public venues of social practice" (p. 270). It is the interaction with others that defines who we are. Without relationships, there is no concept of self, no identity.

The process of becoming a "self" within the cultural and social spaces we find ourselves in is a continuous and a life-long endeavor. Diversi and Moreira (2009) put it this way:

> We are all engaged in an endless negotiation of identities, furiously pursing identities we value and dodging the ones we abhor. Identities are not inside individuals but in the space between interacting individuals. Identity does not reside neatly and dormant inside people until truth can awaken and reveal its original design and plan. Instead, identity is forever

mutant and relational. (p. 20)

In research with Chinese teachers, He (2002) described a similar process. Drawing from teachers' descriptions of the life-long power of culture and relationships in these teachers' lives, He also found the metaphor of a river to describe the continuous nature of culture on identity. "Without a first-culture river to flow in, how can we transform ourselves in our second-cultural river? Our lives are a collage of flows from landscape-to-landscape, culture-to-culture, language-to-language. We cannot tell which is the beginning and which is the end" (p. 320). Zhao (2006) studied a group of 17 teachers at three different points during the Cultural Revolution in China. She described "a strong connection between the impact of the wider society on the individual" (p. 126), noting the impact culture had on individuals.

Identity and Learning are of a Piece

I am of old and young, of the foolish as much as the wise.
(Whitman, 1892/2010, p. 81)

As we learn, we continuously reconstruct ourselves. In other words, "learning involves the construction of identities" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 53). They continued to argue that "learning and a sense of identity are inseparable. They are aspects of the same phenomena" (p. 115). In learning we are in the constant act of forming different understandings and finding new meanings for our human experience.

Learning and identity are inseparable because, as we learn, we are become different people with different sensibilities, dispositions, and ways of being with others. With new knowledge, new skills, and new understandings, we find new meanings, and new ways of being. Therefore, we become somebody new, or, as Lave and Wenger (1991) put it, "learning thus implies becoming a different person" (p. 53). Wenger (2002) expanded on this idea:

Education, in its deepest sense, and at whatever age it takes place, concerns the opening

> of identities –exploring new ways of being that lie beyond our current state... education must strive to open new dimensions for the negotiation of self. Education is not merely formative – it is transformative. (p. 263)

Learning is also deeply social. Moje & Luke (2009) wrote that "learning, from a social and cultural perspective, involves people in participation, interaction, relationships, and contexts, all of which have implications for how people make sense of themselves and others, identity, and are identified" (p. 416). Wenger (2002) also explained that, not only does learning change who we are, but it also creates a past that shows us our own "personal histories of becoming" (p. 5).

In Alsup's (2013) study of pre-service teachers, she also described the continuous connection of learning to the construction of identity. One participant, Sande, described the shift within her identity as she developed as a teacher in this way: "I look in the mirror and see a totally different person than before. When I talk to my boyfriend, all I talk about and what occupies all of my time is teaching. I've changed in so many ways, as a teacher" (p. 164). Like Sande, teachers' identities continue to transform. As teachers learn, they change. Teachers become different people. They dawn new identities. They experience themselves as fluid beings with multiple possible selves (Bruner, 1986).

Identities are Produced In and Through Dialogue

With the twirl of my tongue I encompass worlds and alums of worlds…
I do not press my fingers across my mouth…
My own voice, orotund, sweeping and final.
(Whitman, 1892/2010, p. 92)

To a very large extent, identity is constructed through dialogue. This is because the self represents "itself" through what Holland et al. (1998) referred to as "a collective language" (p. 173). In other words, as we construct or author our identities, we draw on the language we have heard and spoken throughout our lives. Holland et al. (1998) continued, "The 'I' draws upon the

language, the dialects, the words of others to which she has been exposed" (p. 170). How we work to author ourselves is set "within, or at least against, a set of constraints or possibilities of utterance" (p. 171). In other words, language is the tool we have to author who we are.

Holland et al. (1998) put it this way, "The self authors itself, and is thus made knowable, in the words of others" (p. 173). As we author who we are, we also make identities known to others through dialogue.

In addition, what we hear and speak out loud "eventually becomes silent inner speech" (p. 175). Holland et al. (1998) continued to explain that the development of inner speech is birthed from what the self hears externally. "Inner speech is preceded in ontogeny by external speech" (p. 175). In turn, inner speech becomes "the premier building block of thought and feeling" (pp. 174-175). Holland et al. (1998) wrote that our internal dialogue gives us the "possibility of achieving at least a modicum of control over one's own behavior. One can at least have a voice in directing one's own actions" (p. 175). As our internal language builds our thought; it also gives us the ability to direct our own actions.

As He (2002) noted, when she delved into her findings from the three generations of teachers from China, dialogue between the teachers defined the identities of these women. One of He's (2002) participants expressed that as she engaged in dialogue with the others, "[we] revealed how we related to each other, how we saw ourselves, and how we wished others to see us" (p. 319). She continued with her findings: "Our stories written in tears and blood are inseparable from who and what we are" (pp. 319-320). As practice is transformed, so is identity and the capacity for self-reflection, and dialogue propels this transformative process.

Identities, Participation, and Practice

I take part, I see and hear the whole.
(Whitman, 1892/2010, p.105)

Finally, we construct our identities through participation in our world. How we take part in daily practice is a way in which we make the abstract concept of our identity real. Or, as Wenger wrote, "[w]e define who we are by the ways we experience ourselves through participation as well as by the ways we and others reify ourselves" (p. 149). Put another way, Holland et al. (1998) noted that "we have our existence not in repose, but in practice" (p. 279).

In this regard, Moje and Luke (2009) explained that identity can be seen as "enactments of self in activity" (p. 418). Although identity is in continuous reconstruction, we also carry with us the memory of our actions from past lived experiences, and these memories of ourselves in action which, as Moje and Luke (2009) explained, "continue to work on our concept of who we are, with the self always changing but also retaining histories of participation that shape how the self acts" (p. 418). In addition, as our identities develop through participation in practice—by making the abstract concrete—our identities also affect how we show up in our world. Wenger (2002) described this dance as a "cascading interplay of participation and reification that our experience of life becomes one of identity, and indeed of human existence and consciousness" (p. 151). Through our participation and action in our world, we are continuously creating new realities that, in turn, cannot help but work on our cognizance. Moje and Luke (2009) suggested "that individuals, in activity, shape reality and in the process of shaping reality (nature) they shape consciousness. . . [and] the changed consciousness in turn shapes new activity, which shapes reality (nature), which again in turn, shapes consciousness" (p. 425). Identity and practice continuously and simultaneously affect each other.

Coles and Knowles (1993) provided an excerpt from one of their participants, Gabrielle. This excerpt demonstrates how participation impacts identity and classroom practice:

> When I first walked into Mrs. Hindman's room, I hated it. I thought it was very dirty and disorganized…Now I know that this was a false assumption. At the beginning of my preservice teaching, I was too uptight, too rigid. I had certain ideas about how a classroom should be run and Mrs. Hindman did not fit my expectations. Because of the discrepancy between her classroom and my expectations, I was forced to step back and re-evaluate what teaching was all about. (p. 463)

This testimonial demonstrates nicely how teachers' identities are shaped as they engage in practice with others. Simply participating in relevant communities of practice makes visible new possibilities for selfhood, thought, and action.

Identities are Continuously Constructed and Reconstructed

As Whitman (1892/2010) noted over one hundred years ago, the self is complex and built upon multitudes of experiences. All aspects of identity contain the truth or at least some partial truths. As Moje and Luke (2009) articulated: "All are accurate representations of self, even as all are only partial representations" (p. 418). In the varied truths of constructing and acting as self, it is evident that identity is ever changing; identity is a life-long process. Moje and Luke (2009) explained that although different "perspectives represent different takes on identity, each acknowledges identity as something fluid and dynamic that is produced, generated, developed or narrated over time" (p. 418). Holland et al. (1998) echoed the idea, claiming that the self is a "continuing flow of activity" (p. 173). More importantly, they added that the self "cannot be finalized" (p. 173). Self is, after all, a matter of constant becoming and always has the potential to reinvent itself. In that regard, our continuously changing identities always hold the possibility for new constructs, new relationships, and ultimately new practices. Identity development is continuous throughout life and can be revolutionary, especially when individuals participate in

multiple communities of practice.

Again He (2002) found the metaphor of a "multicultural delta" from the description of her participant: "We reinvent ourselves again and again in response to such a flux of flows in both Chinese and Canadian rivers, and eventually become part of the multicultural delta" (p. 320). This metaphor and participant's description of the continuous nature her own identity construction and reconstruction foregrounds the role of various cultural forces (some proximal, some distal) on the identity development process.

In another study of teachers, Chan (2012) discussed the power of re-constructing our identities as people and as teachers. One of Chan's participants, Mandy, had this to say about the process:

> What is my dream? Actually, I wrote in my primary school writing that I would like to be a teacher just like what you did in the past. But my dream has modified and changed many times. I wanted to be a designer in Secondary Three, a kindergarten teacher in Secondary Five, while I wanted to be a nurse after Secondary School graduation. Finally, I chose my own way. Being a kindergarten teacher seems to be the most favorable and suitable career for me. And now I hope that I will never lose this dream. (p. 118)

Mandy's life-long creation and recreation of her identity and her practice demonstrate the immense power of teachers' ability to continuous reinvent themselves.

The life-long and continuous nature of identity development has significant implications for my research. If teachers are in the constant process of transforming themselves, the possibility for effective and sustainable shifts in practice can be realized.

Gathering together key constructs from theory and research on identity, it seems fair to claim that identity is both individual and social. In addition, identity is an effect of learning or

learning is a matter of identity (re)construction. Learning and identity development occur through participation with others engaged in communities of practices with specific, though not unique, conventions for thinking, acting, and being. I attended to all of these dimensions of identity development as I explored how relationship building between teachers from Belize and teachers from the United States with two distinctly different "communities of practice," exerted effects on who they were as teachers and how their ideas and practices about effective literacy instruction changed. Identity—the continuous process of becoming a new and different person—was thus a necessary construct to explore in this study of how educators from distinctly different communities of practice collaborated to reflect upon, and perhaps reimagine, the potentials of literacy learning and teaching in elementary school classrooms.

Practice and Its Transformative Potentials

The connection between what we do and how we act (or more specifically, what our practices are) is tightly woven with our identities and relationships. Each force acts upon the others in powerful ways.

Wenger (2002) discussed the "profound connection between identity and practice" (p. 149), noting that "our practices deal with the profound issue of how to be a human being" (p. 149). Identity is a continuous reconstruction of self, therefore a continuous process of becoming a different and a new person and with a new set of practices. After all, as Wenger noted, "the process of engaging in practice always involves 'the self,' or 'the whole person'" (p. 47). Self is both the "acting and knowing at once" (p. 47). In other words, what we know, who we are, and the practices we engage in, are all tightly woven within our whole being.

While identities work to mold practice, practice, too, works to shape identity. Wenger (2002) explained: "Participation shapes not only what we do, but also who we are" (p. 4).

Holland et al. (1998) put this in another way, as they explained that the self is always "open to the power of practices that describe it" (p. 27). Identity and practice are co-constitutive.

As self and practice continuously shape each other, the social forces, such as observations and interactions with others, too, joins this dance. Wenger (2002) argued that practice is an "ongoing, social, interactional process" (p. 102). Wenger (2002) also said "practice resides in a community of people and the relations of mutual engagement by which they can do whatever they do" (p. 73). He continued, explaining that "practice does not exist in the abstract. It exists because people are engaged in actions whose meanings they negotiate with one another" (p. 73). These forces work to mutually and continuous construct each other. To better illustrate this dynamic, Wenger (2002) introduced a metaphor of a river and a mountain:

> They shape each other, but they have their own shape. They are reflections of each other, but they have their own existence in their own realms. The fit around each other, but they are distinct from each other. They cannot be transformed into each other, yet they transform each other. The river only carves and the mountain only guides, yet in their interaction the carving becomes the guiding, and the guiding becomes the carving. (p. 71)

Finally, practice has the power to transform both self and culture. In terms of self-transformation, Wenger (2002) claimed that shared practice can shape the self to "encompass multiple perspectives in the negotiation of new meanings" (p. 161). Likewise, practice can transform culture. Holland et al. (1998) wrote about the power in which new practices become "the products of the moment," which then become "available as mediators to change oneself and others" (p. 46). In other words, a simple act, an action of courage, or a new seemingly small, yet significant, shift in practice, can facilitate the process of cultural and internal change. Holland et al. (1998) also elaborated that practice, "whether an expression of hunger, a solution to a

problem, a climb up a house, or a work of art – is a product of the person in action" (p. 40). They explained that the significance of that practice is in its ability to "become a symbol or icon important in the mediation of future behavior" (p. 40). In other words, new practice can usher in new ways of being together.

The real power, then, is the combination of changed practice within a community. Groups of people who come together in shared practice are, as Wenger (2008) wrote, a "force to be reckoned with" (p. 85). He continued, noting that a group of people engaged in shared practice, within relationships, shared knowledge, and shared visions, "hold the key to real transformation – the kind that has real effect on people's lives" (p. 85). Imagine, then, the power of bringing together groups of people with shared identities and practices, or communities of practice, with other groups who share different identities and practices, or with other communities of practice, in a mutual quest or vision. Imagine what could be started if the two groups could both open up their own practices to newcomers or outsiders, what mutual space could be created, and what identities and practices could be troubled, imagined, and even transformed. Wenger (2002) claimed this endeavor to have life-giving power when he wrote:

> In the life giving power of mutuality lies the miracle of parenthood, the essence of apprenticeship, the secret to the generational encounter, the key to the creation of connections across boundaries of practice: a frail bridge across the abyss, a slight breach of the law, a small gift of undeserved trust – it is almost a theorem of love that we can open our practices and communities to others (newcomers, outsiders), invite them into our own identities of participation, let them be what they are not, and thus start what cannot be started. (p. 277)

Sharing spaces of practice can be transformative. There is tremendous power in this small gift of

unearned trust, the act of inviting one another into our beloved, even sacred spaces. This tiny act of grace is bestowed in order to work together toward a common passion, and in doing so, it ignites imagination, allowing previously unimagined thoughts, feelings, and activities to emerge.

Relationships, identity, and practice all work in powerful ways to shape, to carve, and to guide the others. What we do is intricately tied to our sense of who we are and to the connections we have to each other. Each relationship, identity and act has a powerful influence on the other.

Chapter 4

METHOD

Introduction

As I came to understand the importance of relationships and collaboration with my colleagues in Belize, it became clear that my research approach should be participatory action research (PAR). I began using the term "participants" to refer to the teachers with whom I have worked for many years. However, I became increasingly uncomfortable with this term as I read more about PAR, decolonizing research, and positionality in the research process, and as I discussed possible linguistic choices for referring to the educators in Belize with my dissertation committee members, especially Dr. Patricia Vigil. In the end I decided to use the term "colleagues." This term seemed to reflect the nature of my relationships and work with educators in Belize, which is grounded in solidarity and defies the us-them dynamic implied in the term "participants." How my Belizean colleagues and I work together to co-construct new understandings is embedded within our relationships. McIntyre et al. (2008) explained that one's role as academic practitioners of PAR "occurs within the context of the social relationships that exist between practitioners and participants" (p. 9). Heron and Reason (1997) elaborated on this social fact, explaining that our "personal knowing is always set within the context of both linguist-cultural and experiential shared meaning... having a critical consciousness about our knowing necessarily includes shared experience, dialogue, feedback, and exchange with others, and this leads us to the methodology of cooperative inquiry" (p. 283). Coming to know new things is almost always set in the context of relationships.

Ironically, throughout most of the history of qualitative research, developing relationships between the researcher and the researched has been considered to be unscientific. Recently,

however, this idea has been debunked. I am reminded of Freire's (2005) counsel to "dare, in the full sense of the word, to speak of love without the fear of being called ridiculous, mawkish, or unscientific, if not antiscientific" (p. 5). Behar (1996) also discussed the need, for what I will call a "relationship turn":

> Our methodology is defined by the oxymoron, 'participant observation' is split at the root; act as a participant, but don't forget to keep your eyes open. Lay down in the mud in Columbia. Put your arms around Omaira Sanchez. (p. 5)

Behar (1996) went on to note "the irony is that anthropology has always been rooted in an 'I' - understood as having a complex psychology and history - observing a 'we' that, until recently, was viewed as plural, ahistorical, and non-individuated" (p. 26). She continued, arguing that the "lines between participant and observer, friend and stranger, aboriginal and alien are no longer so easily drawn" (p. 28). If these lines are blurry/blurred, then vulnerability becomes a key issue with which researchers must struggle more than ever even though "anthropology has always been vexed about the question of vulnerability" (p. 5). In this regard, Behar (1996) noted that "anthropology isn't for the softhearted" (p. 24). Making ourselves, as researchers (or observers), vulnerable is one thing, "but so too, yet more profoundly, are those whom we observe" (p. 24). As I have engaged in this research, I, myself, have become a vulnerable observer. Perhaps more significantly for PAR work, so have my colleagues.

As we all (myself and my Belizean colleagues) entered into spaces of vulnerability, we opened ourselves up to being transformed. In these new spaces of deepened relationships, shared passions, shared work, and new understandings, new possibilities were birthed for all of us. Behar claimed researchers are coming to accept and embrace vulnerability in their work. "Vulnerability, in short, is here to stay.... A lot of us are going to continue wearing our hearts on

our sleeves" (p. 32). More significantly, Behar (1986) claimed "anthropology that doesn't break your heart just isn't worth doing anymore" (p. 177).

In sum, relationships are core to the human experience and to the process of learning. To be human is to be immersed in relationships in every aspect of our lives, as it is to be engaged in the process of learning together. It is the only way this research, this collaborative work, could have been done.

Decolonizing Strategies as Generative

In addition, PAR was an appropriate approach because this dissertation aimed to disrupt colonizing assumptions and practices. Brydon-Miller, Greenwood, and Maguire (2003) explained that PAR researchers commit themselves "to a form of research which challenges unjust and undemocratic economic, social and political systems and practices" (p. 11). In that vein, it was critical that my colleagues in Belize were central to the research process. Their intimate participation was also important for how they might have changed—as teachers and as people—as a result of their involvement. As I moved forward with my colleagues with a commitment to decolonizing research strategies, I strived for what Brydon-Miller et al. (2003) described as a respect "for the complexity of local situations, and for the knowledge people gain in the processes of everyday life," which "makes it impossible for us [PAR researchers] to ignore what the 'people' think and want" (p. 25). Heron and Reason (1997) also noted that "given that this research impact[ed] their lives," it was critical that my colleagues were "involved in the knowledge process that affect[ed] their lives" (p. 288). They went on to say that "collaboration roots the individual within a community of peers, offering basic support and the creative and corrective feedback of other views and possibilities" (p. 287). Indeed, our work together has also resonated powerfully with Heron and Reason (1997) who claimed in that: "knowing presupposes

mutual participative awareness. It presupposes participation, through meeting and dialogue, in a culture of shared art and shared language, shared values, norms, and beliefs" (p. 280). My collaboration with the educators in Belize has involved (at least partially) working in *their* community—which has enabled me to witness their hopes, passions, fears, and ways of understanding.

In fact, I believe it has been our engagement in dialogue and in our sharing of life stories and lifeworlds that has afforded us the luxury of more deeply understanding ourselves and our practices. The model we began with in 2007, when I and other teachers from the United States began delivering professional development in Belize, shifted in 2014. At that time, teachers from the United States and Belize became more intentionally collaborative about our work, especially about how we valued each other's knowledge and our desired outcomes for literacy learning in Belizean classrooms. Importantly, my Belizean colleagues became much more actively involved in goal setting and how the teachers from the United States could support them in achieving their goals.

The fact that knowledge is socially constructed has axiological significance. Brydon-Miller and Miller (2003) argued that "notion of knowledge [as] socially constructed and, recognizing that all research is embedded within a system of values and promotes some model of human interaction" (p. 11). Collectively my colleagues and I co-constructed our "knowings" and the meaning that we generated from those "knowings." We did this as my colleagues and I were connected to our research question, our collaborative work, and our shared quest for sustainable changes that enhanced literacy learning in our classrooms and our own growth and development as teachers. Because we have been united in this quest, Heron and Reason's (1997) description of "the participatory worldview" as allowing "us as human persons to know that we are part of

the whole rather than separated" (p. 257) has resonated with our experience. Concurring with Heron and Reason (1997), we did not believe we were "placed here in the relatively separate creation of a transcendent god" (p. 276). Instead, our collaborative participatory action research approach allowed 'us to join with fellow humans in collaborative forms of inquiry" (p. 276). I, alone, designed the research and collected and conducted initial analyses of the data, Yet, my Belizean colleagues and I were united in our quest for understanding ourselves and our instructional practice better, as well as how each was changing as a function of our increasingly collaborative engagement in the project.

Heron and Reason (1997) also claimed *"*people collaborate to define the questions they wish to explore" (p. 283). This is foundational to the PAR design and the research question of this study: *whether and how does intentionally building relationships through dialogue, sharing life stories, and sharing lifeworlds lead to sustainable changes in teachers' identities and classroom practices?* Our collaboration to define instructional goals, and therefore our professional development activities, guided this study. Although the wording of this research question was created with the guidance of my committee, the underlying idea for the question was born from the hopes and dreams my Belizean colleagues expressed back in 2007, which we have revisited in different ways each year since then. More specifically, the work progressed and became even more defined during the shift to increased collaboration in the process of creating goals for professional development that began in 2014. It was through the investment and collaboration of my colleagues regarding work in their very own classrooms that led to the primary purpose of this research.

Lincoln, Lynham, and Guba (2011) also acknowledged the importance of collaboration when they wrote: "the way in which we know is most assuredly tied up with both *what* we know

and our *relationships with our research participants"* (p. 123). Brydon-Miller et al. (2003) explained how critical it is "to trust that other people know their own lives and their own interests better than you do" (p. 21). My relationship with my colleagues has, indeed, involved trust and mutual understanding.

In the Belizean education research project, part of this trust and these new ways of being together was an effect of what Brydon-Miller (2003) noted when they wrote, "it helps to be patient" (p. 20) when engaged in PAR. This is especially true in a decolonizing context where "building trust in communities that have every reason to be wary of outsiders and especially of academic outsiders doing research is a long-term project" (Brydon-Miller, et al., 2003, p. 20). Although it took me a while to get there, I came to truly understand the importance of patience.

My understanding of how my research should unfold deepened when I began imagining this work through the three rivers of change metaphor noted earlier, and this deepening made it even more clear to me that PAR should be my research design. As I engaged in PAR, and the messy unpredictable possibilities it could offer, Bryden-Miller, et al.'s (2003) thinking resonated with my own:

> Most action researchers have disciplined themselves to believe that messes can be attractive and even exciting. We try not to avoid messy situations despite knowing that we do not have the 'magic bullet' because we believe that, together with legitimate community stakeholders, we can do something to improve the situation. (p. 21)

Finally, the act of collaborating with others in search of "knowing" appeared to be transformative. As Heron and Reason (1997) explained, "knowing through participative, empathetic resonance with a being" can be "the creative shaping of a world through the transaction of imaging it" (p. 281). With regard to the transformative nature of participatory

research, they argued that its "primary purpose "is "the service of human flourishing" (p. 281). Put another way, that the search for "knowing of the world is consummated as our action in the world, and participatory research is thus essentially transformative" (p. 288). In and through our collaborative work, my Belizean colleagues and I changed.

Brydon-Miller, et al. (2003) reflected on the transformative potential of PAR and the overall "optimism" of shared possibilities in this way: "We believe in the possibility of change, (through participatory action research) surprising changes . . . changes that happen unexpectedly, changes that strike us with amazement and wonder" (p. 20). Indeed, both my colleagues and I are increasingly coming to believe in possibilities for transformation—of ourselves and our practices. Indeed, we have already seen "surprising changes," and through this approach, we search for more "amazement and wonder" to come.

Research Context

Setting

Belize is located in Central America and is the only country in South or Central America where English is the official language. Belize's economic status is defined by the World Economic Outlook and Financial Surveys in International Monetary Fund (2015) as one of "Heavily Indebted Poor Countries and Low-Income Developing" (p. 152). One thing this economic reality means is that classrooms have almost no educational resources. In addition to low pay for teachers, the economic situation explains the realities of a typical classroom in Belize. There are few books in classrooms. Although the government of Belize supplies a text or workbook for each student, no trade books or alternative books are provided. Since 2008, Belize Education Project has shipped books, a few more trade books have appeared on shelves in the classrooms. The physical structure of the classrooms includes cement floors and walls. The

teachers save and use their own money to place adhesive flooring on the cement floors and paint the interior of their cement walls. The classrooms have open windows (with shutters, but no glass) and often open rafters. Although this structural set up is ideal in terms of cooling classrooms in a tropical climate, it impacts the vulnerability to damage of books and other educational tools in the classroom, including charts, schoolwork, etc. Although access to electricity may exist, and is continuously increasing in reliability, it can also present as a challenge. Running water is also increasingly common in schools as they acquire flush toilets. However, running water is not available in classrooms.

The above description highlights the challenge of minimal material resources in classrooms of Belize. Given these realities, however, classrooms are brilliant and alive with resources and visuals that the teachers in Belize have created. The classroom environments include hand drawn alphabet and math charts covered with packing tape to protect them from the jungle elements. It also includes math manipulatives made from juice lids, and puppet theaters created from cardboard boxes found in the dumpsters. Classrooms have reading corners that have scraps of carpet or a blanket and crates to hold up beautiful displays of books.

Each October when members of Belize Education Project travel to Belize, the teachers have the first Monday off for Pan American Day. Even on their day off they walk several miles (or take the bus) into school to show us the learning spaces they have created. This is such a powerful demonstration of this community's commitment to, and the pride in their own literacy instruction.

The students and families of these schools see literacy as a ticket for opportunity. Families are large, with many siblings. Running water and electricity are a luxury. However, the families walk their children to school, and often make the walk again to bring a hot lunch. Some

parents can read. Some parents have finished high school. The families' commitment to education has become evident during the ten years of our work together. Early on, for example, teachers from Belize Education Project began providing reading instruction for parents during the lunch hour. Parents returned for instruction year after year, often carrying their babies and books from the previous years. Overall, although access to education and resources are limited due to the economic realities of Belize, these teachers, students, and families place a very high value on literacy and education in their lives, especially in terms of what they will do for future generations. The commitment to literacy compels both me and members of Belize Education Project to collaborate with the teachers of Belize to work toward increasing literacy instruction within this community.

Belizean Colleagues

This research was conducted with 18 educators in Belize. These colleagues are men and women whose ages ranged from 22 years old to 55 years old. They were involved in the creation of the research question for this work. Although "official" study of these teachers and administrators began in 2015, it should be noted that I have known most of these educators since the inception of the Belize Education Project in 2007. Through the context of the work of Belize Education Project, I have taught side-by-side with these teachers both in their own classrooms in Belize and in my classroom in Colorado. In addition to co-teaching, my work included constructing professional development with the teachers listed in Table 1. Note: All names of all people, places, and institutions are pseudonyms both here and throughout the dissertation.

Table 1
Belizean Colleagues

Educators	**Gender**	**Age in 2018**	**Positions at the time of interview**
Jae	Male	52	Member of Belize Ministry of Education
Noelly	Female	55	Principal and Standard 6 Mostly 11 and 12-year-olds
Cecelia	Female	53	Principal
Ida	Female	54	Assisant Principal
Eli	Male	37	Standard 6 Mostly 11 and 12-year-olds
Richard	Male	24	Standard 6 Mostly 11 and 12-year-olds
Joe	Male	40	Standard 5 Mostly 10 and 11-year-olds
Asa	Female	38	Standard 5 Mostly 10 and 11-year-olds
Grace	Female	38	Standard 4 Mostly 9 and 10-year-olds
Gizem	Female	35	Standard 3 Mostly 8 and 9-year-olds
Mabel	Female	24	Standard 3 Mostly 8 and 9-year-olds
Mathias	Male	24	Standard 2 Mostly 7 and 8-year-olds
Eve	Female	34	Standard 1 Mostly 6 and 7-year-olds
Grace	Female	32	Standard 1 Mostly 6 and 7-year-olds
Stella	Female	34	Standard 1 Mostly 6 and 7-year-olds
Jia	Female	23	Infant 1 Mostly 4 and 5-year-olds
Rose	Female	42	Infant 1 Mostly 4 and 5-year-olds

Note Ages can vary. The year a student enters and continues school can vary. Promotion and retention to the next year is also somewhat fluid.

Data Collections Strategies and Practices

As I have gathered data to address the basic research question of this study, I have pulled from a multitude of sources. I used semi-structure conversational interviews (e.g., Mishler,

1986), focus groups (e.g., Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2013), and personal communications of various kinds (e.g., face-to-face and online dialogue, Facebook pages and personal messaging, email correspondence, and text messaging). I also composed field notes based on my encounters with these teachers in Belize and the United States. Finally, I used anonymous reflections composed through evaluative responses by my colleagues as part of our professional development. Each one of these sources functioned as a means to increase dialogue, build relationships, and gain understandings of my colleagues' life stories. These sources also provided insights into how our shared worlds were impacting our identities and the new spaces we now found ourselves in. As I engaged in these activities, I continued to collaborate with my colleagues regarding the meanings of the information we gathered.

The focus on life stories resulted from the realization that they are among the most compelling data sources for understanding the etiologies of our beliefs and practices, the classrooms we occupied, and our individual and collective hopes, challenges, and triumphs. As Riessman (2007) noted, these stories become a "point of entry" for our mutual understanding. Reissman (2007) explained "when research participants engage in the practice of storytelling, they do so because narrating has effects in social interaction that other modes of communication do not; what the narrative accomplishes can become a point of entry for the narrative analyst" (pp. 7-8). Put another way, Connelly and Clandinin (1999) viewed the use of narrative inquiry as a "portal," for my colleagues to make meaning of their experiences, and in turn, this allowed myself as a researcher to study the experiences embedded in their stories. Connelly and Clandinin (1999) continued, arguing that "story, in the current idiom, is the portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made

personally meaningful" (p. 375). Hearing the stories of my colleagues gave me an entry point into their experiences and their worlds.

Individual Life Story Interviews

Committed to hearing life stories as part of the research, I decided to collect stories about my colleagues' lives. I obtained Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval just a few days before I traveled to Belize in October 2015. I began recording stories told to me by my colleagues during that visit. Throughout the past three years, I have renewed my IRB status each year and have continued to gather life stories through individual interviews. As indicated in Table 2 below, the colleagues who have told me their life stories vary in terms of age, the school where they work, and their years of teaching experience. Interviews were conducted where we worked together, including in the Belizean classrooms, the teachers' homes, over ice cream in hotels in Belize, as well as in my own home when they traveled to teach with me in Colorado. Key information about my colleagues to date are included in Table 2.

Table 2
Interviews

Educator	Gender	Age	Position during Interview	Date of Interview
Noelly	Female	55	Principal and Standard 6 Mostly 11 and 12-year-olds	10/15/15
Cecelia	Female	53	Principal	10/22/18
Richard	Male	24	Standard 6 Mostly 11 and 12-year-olds	10/12/17
Joe	Male	40	Standard 5 Mostly 10 and 11-year-olds	10/18/15
Grace	Female	38	Standard 4 Mostly 9 and 10-year-olds	10/15/15
Anisa	Female	35	Standard 3 Mostly 8 and 9-year-olds	10/14/15
Mathias	Male	24	Standard 2 Mostly 7 and 8-year-olds	10/12/18
Grace	Female	34	Standard 1 Mostly 6 and 7-year-olds	10/15/15
Stella	Female	34	Standard 1 Mostly 6 and 7-year-olds	10/12/17
Rose	Female	42	Infant 1 Mostly 4 and 5-year-olds	10/12/15

Note Ages can vary. The year a student enters and continues school can vary. Promotion and retention to the next year is also somewhat fluid.

In collecting life stories, I used conversational interview strategies with open-ended questions (e.g., Mishler, 1987) to ignite conversations with my colleagues during these individual life story interviews. My questions were formulated to elicit stories not only of their teaching experiences, but also of their life trajectories from childhood to the present, especially with regard to family and school. These strategies were chosen to help me focus on what may have shaped their call to teach, their views of teaching, the challenges and triumphs of their call, and how relationships, identities, and practices may have changed as a result of our newly created ways of being together.

In the context of participatory action research and drawing on Riessman's (2007) description of narrative inquiry, I situated myself in the interviews with the intent of being in a more or less natural conversation as an active participant in dialogue, understanding that both the

storytellers and I were co-constructing new meanings together. In other words, my position as a "facilitating" interviewer, who asked questions, and a vessel-like "respondent" who gives answers, was "replaced by two active participants who jointly construct narrative and meaning" (p. 23). In this way my colleagues and I co-created the narratives and the meaning we constructed in those narrative

Focus Groups

In addition to individual interviews, I conducted three separate focus groups, each with five or six Belizean colleagues. Demographic information about my colleagues in each focus group conducted so far appear in Tables 3, 4, and 5.

Table 3
Focus Group, April 13, 2016

Belizean Colleague	**Gender**	**Position at Time of Focus Group**
Cecelia	Female	Principal
Noelly	Female	Principal and Standard 6 Mostly 11 and 12-year-olds
Noah	Male	Standard 6 Mostly 11 and 12-year-olds
Gizem	Female	Standard 3 Mostly 8 and 9-year-olds
Jia	Female	Standard 1 Mostly 6 and 7-year-olds

Note Ages can vary. The year a student enters and continues school can vary. Promotion and retention to the next year is also somewhat fluid.

Table 4
Focus Group, April 12, 2017

Belizean Colleague	**Gender**	**Position at Time of Focus Group**
Noelly	Female	Principal And Standard 6 Mostly 11 and 12-year-olds
Ida	Female	Assistant Principal
Richard	Male	Standard 6 Mostly 11 and 12-year-olds
Joe	Male	Standard 4 Mostly 9 and 10-year-olds
Mathias	Male	Standard 1 Mostly 6 and 7-year-olds

Note Ages can vary. The year a student enters and continues school can vary. Promotion and retention to the next year is also somewhat fluid.

Table 5
Focus Group, April 4, 2018

Belizean Colleague	**Gender**	**Position at Time of Focus Group**
Jae	Male	Member of Belize Ministry of Education
Noelly	Female	Principal And Standard 6 Mostly 11 and 12-year-olds
Cecelia	Female	Principal
Asa	Female	Standard 4 Mostly 9 and 10-year-olds
Mabel	Female	Standard 3 Mostly 8 and 9-year-olds
Eve	Female	Standard 1 Mostly 6 and 7-year-olds

Note Ages can vary. The year a student enters and continues school can vary. Promotion and retention to the next year is also somewhat fluid.

These focus groups afforded a different perspective on lived experience and meaning than individual interviews—one that better captured the world view and ethos of the collective. The social nature of the focus groups intensified the level of participation of the Belizean educators. It also heightened the collective memory of the group. Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2013) explained that "the intensely social nature of focus groups tends to promote a kind of

'memory synergy,' among participants and bring forth collective memory of particular social groups or formations" (p. 325). This turned out to be true in the focus groups I conducted. I witnessed my colleagues heightened level of synergy in their participation, as well as a dialogic construction of shared memories and life experiences of the group.

All of the focus groups included the educators from the schools in Belize. Each focus group began with a combined effort to cook a traditional Belizean dinner. The educators from Belize brought ingredients in their suitcases, such as coconut powder and certain spices they required, plus specific ingredients the teachers requested my family purchase from our own grocery stores. The experience of learning how to make a meal familiar to my colleagues was both fun and an effective way to create a sense of equality and shared commitment. Each focus group included educators who represented a variety of ages, experiences, and positions. The focus group prompts were designed to get at several things: (a) common and unique life experiences and how they are relevant to teaching, (b) how my colleagues' strong spiritual orientations play out in the classroom, and (c) how our own interactions and relationships have changed over the years. Although I was deliberate in the questions I asked the groups, I was also intentional in allowing my colleagues to have significant freedom in the direction of the discourse.

Personal Communications

I also collected personal communications data, including emails, texts, and Facebook messages from educators that reflect ongoing and transformative thinking about teaching and about our deepening relationships. Many of these communications noted or indexed transformational experiences. Bakhtin (1986) is instructive in terms of the power of ongoing dialogue, which I can apply to dialogue with my own colleagues regarding our collective quest

for understanding as he argued that "understanding is not born nor is it to be found inside the head of an individual person, it is born between people collectively searching for truth, in the process of their dialogic interaction" (p. 60). New understandings came with ongoing dialogue.

It should be noted that, although not all of our dialogue has been specific to the questions guiding this research, this dialogue has strengthened our connections with each other. As we talked about other significant events in our lives not specific to our research (e.g., graduations, birthdays, weddings, struggles with teen-age children, births), this talk strengthened our relationships and galvanized our commitment to each other and our collective work. Similarly, as we reflected on these life experiences, which have included sentiments of joy, despair, hope, fear, and courage, our commitment and our connection to each other, and our shared hopes for classroom transformation have been (and continue to be) cemented. Dialogue and relationship building have been inextricably related. As Freire (1970/2015) so eloquently stated, "if I do not love people, then I cannot enter into the dialogue" (p. 90), and I "cannot be truly human without communication, for we are essentially communicative creatures" (p. 128). Largely through open, honest, and sometimes painful dialogue, my colleagues and I have become more fully connected, more fully human, and fully engaged.

Observations and Field Notes

I also constructed field notes of my encounters with my colleagues both in Belize and the United States. These field notes have included inscriptions of practice that I, as well as my colleagues, have found to be relevant to the research question. As we have attended to ways in which our practices have transformed, my colleagues and I have noticed that we have been creating a shared history. In this regard, Wenger (2002) noted that practice always involves a shared history (p. 5). The transformation of our practice itself enhances more dialogue because as

Wenger also noted, practice involves conversation (p. 13).

Finally, in addition to my own field notes, I have archived anonymous reflections from my Belizean colleagues in the form of evaluative responses to each of the staff development workshops conducted. These reflections have provided additional insight into imagined and re-imagined classroom practices based on what my colleagues have learned through the professional development opportunities.

Trustworthiness

What does it mean to be a worthy witness?
(Paris & Winn, 2014, p. xiii)

As I conducted this participatory action research, Paris and Winn's question haunted me. How could I be a "worthy witness?" In discussing their PAR research, Harrison and MacGibbon (2001) noted the following:

> We've asked ourselves about how trustworthy we were: When did we ask too much? When did we give too little—or patronize the women who talked and listened with us? We care about these people; we think this is at least some of what trustworthiness is about. (p. 342)

Throughout the entire process of coming to understand both my colleagues and the data, I asked myself the same kinds of questions and worked hard to be a trustworthy witness.

Additionally, Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) also gave me more confidence in the trustworthiness of my research when they wrote "the regulative ideal for inquiry is to generate a new relation between a human being and her environment – her life, community, world – one that makes possible a new way of dealing with them" (p. 39). I worked toward this ideal of generating new relationships.

In her description of trustworthiness, Moss (2004) underscored "the researcher's commitment to include all points of view as contrasted to the common points of view that emerge, protecting participant's well-being while putting their voices in the forefront as a model of authentic participation in educational research" (p. 371). Moss also referred to "trustworthiness as an art …where multiple voices or multivoicedness is allowed to flourish" (p. 363). In addition to caring about my colleagues, as a worthy participant in our participatory action research I committed to keeping my Belizean colleagues' desires, questions, and voices in the foreground.

I also considered the "criteria" that Lincoln and Guba (1985) first established "for judging whether or not any given inquiry is methodologically and analytically sound" (Lincoln, 1990, p. 71). These early criteria were credibility, transferability, and dependability. I will unpack which of Lincoln and Guba's (1985) early thinking of trustworthiness applied to my research, as well as how some of their early thinking may not have been relevant to contemporary PAR practice. I will also examine how their later thinking on trustworthiness (1990) shifted and is thus more relevant to my research.

"Credibility" implies a confidence in the truth of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In considering the truth of my research, I appreciated how Packer and Addison (1989) delved into the root of the word and concept explaining "the Greek word for 'truth,' *aletheia* can be translated as unconcealed, unhidden or uncovered. Interpretation, working out the possibilities projected in understanding, shows entities explicitly, often for the first time. These entities have been hidden from our awareness" (p. 278). My deliberate work to establish relationships and understanding with my Belizean colleagues, indeed, uncovered new understandings that had been hidden from our own awareness. Credibility also includes "prolonged engagement" in the

field and with colleagues, which speaks to the relationship longevity I have had with the Belizean teachers. These relationships only deepened as this research continued to unfold.

Further strengthening credibility, as is embedded in my PAR design, my colleagues checked facts throughout the process of the research. Whyte (1991) discussed the advantage of this approach in this way: "PAR researchers go through a rigorous process of checking the facts with those with firsthand knowledge before any reports are written" (p. 41). My colleagues in Belize were in frequent communication with me about our shared work regarding our research questions, our findings, and most significantly, how what we were learning was affecting our practice.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) also argued that valid research should be "transferable," by which they meant that it should be applicable to others seeking to affect practices in other similar settings, in other cultures. In this regard, I assumed there are commonalities in human lives and relationships, as well as how changing relationships might lead to changing practices. Based on this assumption, I have contemplated the transferability of this research and have engaged the teachers in Belize, as well as my academic colleagues, in conversations about this issue. I have also talked to other groups working with literacy in Belize including "Teachers for a Better Belize" and Peace Corps members working with schools in Belize about our assumptions and life experiences in the classroom. Additionally, I have spoken with others establishing literacy programs in other parts of the world. The longevity of the relationships with Belizean teachers, as well as the practice of bringing our Belizean colleagues to members of the Belize Education Projects' homes and classrooms in Colorado, has sparked conversations and ignited the imaginations of others to try similar approaches where they work and conduct research.

Finally, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that research findings should be "dependable," by which they meant that other researchers who might examine the data would arrive at similar interpretations and conclusions. For me, this criterion was too post-positivistic and did not fit all that well with a PAR orientation. Because any "truths" that emerged from the research would be situated in my lived experience and that of my colleagues, it is unclear how much of our collective human experience is generalizable. Although there may be universal human experiences, how those experiences are interpreted can vary widely as a function of a host of contextual factors. As Heath (1983) reflected about her own research, the ongoing relationship between me and my colleagues is not likely to be repeated by another researcher. The unique timing, location, and interplay between people, along with the distinct historic and cultural situation, make not only my research in Belize and her research in Roadville and Trackton, but "every ethnography a unique piece of social history" (p. 7).

Additionally, my presence has affected my colleagues' experiences in ways I may never know about. Behar (1996) reminded me "the observer never observes the behavioral event which would have taken place in his absence, nor hears an account identical with that which the same narrator would give to another person" (p. 6). If I had not been in the mix, my colleagues would likely have had experiences and storied those experiences in somewhat different ways. In this regard, Reissman (2008) noted that simply "through our presence, and by listening and questioning in particular ways, we critically shape the stories participants choose to tell" (p. 50).

Since Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed their initial strategies for building trustworthiness, they have changed their views slightly. Lincoln (1990), for example, explained how they later built on those initial trustworthiness criteria to develop what they called more "authentic criteria" (p. 71). These more authentic criteria sought more subtle considerations of

epistemological issues. Schwandt (2015) articulated their shift as he explained that Lincoln and Guba (1990) held that trustworthiness criteria were principally methodological criteria and thereby largely ignored aspects of the inquiry concerned with the quality of outcome, product, and negotiation. Hence, they advanced a second set of criteria called authenticity criteria, arguing that this second set was better aligned with the constructivist epistemology that informed their definition of qualitative inquiry (p. 309).

The first of their new "authenticity criteria" deals with "levels of understanding and sophistication" (p. 72). Behar's (1996) words nicely capture what Lincoln and Guba meant by this component, "From the global arena to the intimate stirrings of the human heart, new stories are rushing to be told in languages we've never used before, stories that tell truths we didn't dare acknowledge, truths that shamed us" (p. 33). Through our shared experiences and our stories about those experiences, my colleagues and I have developed more sophisticated and authentic understandings of ourselves and our work together. In this regard, the approach I took is one "that involves the building of relationships of care and dignity and dialogic consciousness raising for both researcher and participant" (Paris & Winn, 2014, p. xvi).

Lincoln's (1990) second authentic criterion is "the enhanced ability of participants and stakeholders to take action during and after an inquiry and to negotiate on behalf of themselves on their own interests in the political arena" (p. 72). Encouraging the Belizean teachers' engagement in the research, as well as discussing changes in practice that resulted from research, was part and parcel of my PAR approach. As Fletcher, MacPhee, and Dickson (2015) explained, PAR "seeks to fully include participants as collaborators throughout the research project, generating both knowledge and *action*" (p. 8). My research with the Belizean teachers included not only collaboration in developing the research question and the research process, but also

opening ourselves up to the possibility of transforming ourselves and our practices in the process. The potential new understandings and action potentials that resulted from this research was the engine that drove our quest.

In this regard, Lincoln and Guba (1990) also discussed what they called "states of being," which have four "criteria" (p. 72). One of these criteria is "ontological authenticity," or the ability to be aware of the constructions and assumptions researchers carry with them as they work in new and different cultural contexts. In relation to this criterion, I made a deliberate shift in my conversations with my Belizean colleagues to a more Freirean approach. I worked hard to be mindful hearing and using my colleagues' language, and hearing and incorporating their own voices, values, hopes and dreams. They too, began to pay closer attention to my language as well. Over time, our conversations became increasingly Freirean. As teachers from Belize and I came to know each other through our deliberate shift to more Freirean-like dialogue, through hearing and telling our life stories, and through dwelling in each other's lifeworlds, we came to be aware of both old and new assumptions. In this awareness, we also co-constructed new assumptions. We began to appreciate how our assumptions about classroom materials, access to education, and even the higher purposes of literacy (be it spiritual or secular) showed up in the spaces of real classrooms packed with real children. Indeed, practicing "ontological authenticity" was at the center to our work.

Lincoln and Guba (1990) discussed another "states of being" criterion, "educative authenticity" (p. 72), which involves people's ability to appreciate each other's constructions of knowledge. Through working together, the Belizean teachers and I came to view and appreciate different styles of delivering and receiving instruction. We constantly evaluated how much voice and choice we gave to our students. We noticed and discussed the nature and functions of our

interactions with each other and our students. I became acutely aware of a certain irony. While I tried to move my Belizean colleagues toward giving their students more opportunities for voice and choice in learning, I denied my colleagues these very opportunities in my early attempts to "deliver" knowledge to them. Only later did I adopt a more constructivist approach in working more dialogically with my Belizean colleagues. In this regard, both my colleagues and I worked increasingly to evaluate and re-evaluate each other's constructions of knowledge.

Lincoln and Guba (1990) presented a third criterion, "catalytic authenticity" (p. 72), which refers to action stimulated by research that is transformative in recognizable ways. Through our shared quest for improving literacy instruction in our classrooms, along with dwelling in each other's classroom spaces both in Belize and Colorado, our practices have begun to change—from how behavior management was practiced in Belizean classrooms, to how we stepped into each other's shoes when we hit instructional impasses, to how we valued and formulated questioning opportunities, to how classroom environments were created, and, perhaps most importantly, to how we showed up and expressed ourselves and our existences with each other.

"Tactical authenticity" (p. 72) is Lincoln and Guba's fourth "states of being" criterion, and it refers to how research can empower researchers and research colleagues to engage in political or advocacy work. Through my participatory action research, I have become more straightforward and bolder in my interactions with the staff of the Belize Ministry of Education. I now question mandated policies and instructional practices with much more courage, commitment, and persuasiveness. Additionally, within the more neutral space of my home in Colorado, I have encouraged conversations between principals from the United States and members of the Ministry of Education. Many of these conversations have addressed how the

Ministry of Education might support rather than just police teachers and leaders in Belizean schools.

Tactical authenticity became apparent in my colleagues' actions. For example, although many of the teachers are members of Seventh Day Adventist Church, which discourages political activism, there have been slight, yet significant examples of teachers becoming involved in politics. Joe, a Seventh Day Adventist, participated in a national teacher strike in 2016. Grace, also a teacher at a Seventh Day Adventist school, ran for office in 2017. She not only went against her church's position on political activism, she also disrupted generations of gender norms by running for office. These examples of political engagement have happened around the edges of teachers' work. We have yet to see how our work might impact the Belize Ministry of Education's actual policies in the future.

Heron and Reason (1997) asserted that Lincoln and Guba (1990) neglected to consider another, equally important criterion, "axiological authenticity," which refers to the *"*value in coming to know what we are seeking to understand*"* (p. 286). This form of authenticity has been at the heart of my work with teachers in Belize, and it is a thread that tightly binds us together. As we consider the best scope and sequence for teaching vowel patterns, the power of questioning strategies in comprehension, or how to best manage classroom behavior, the one concept that we are clear about is the value that we all find in coming to better understand how to best teach our young citizens, the next keepers of our shared humanity.

Related to, but not quite the same, as "catalytic authenticity" is another aspect of trustworthiness that I will call "problem solving." Packer and Addison (1989) argued that establishing trustworthiness in interpreting data is done when "what is uncovered in the course of a true interpretation is a solution to the problem, the confusion, the question, the concern, and the

breakdown in the understanding that motivated our inquiry in the first place" (p. 279). In my Belizean research, my colleagues and my shared passion both to continuously perfect our classroom practices and to prepare our students for their futures as well as we possibly can, were the engines that that drove our research from its inception.

Langois, Goudreau, and Lalonde (2014) offered another dimension of trustworthiness. They proposed three criteria for trustworthiness in PAR: "empowerment through historical consciousness, action stimulus for personal as well as social transformation, and equity among PAR co-participants" (p. 228). They defined "historical consciousness" as the "capacity of the co-participants to critically raise one another's preconceptions as shaped by each other's lives and workplaces" (p. 228). Throughout the process of dialogue, sharing stories, and lived worlds, as well as considering the impact these experiences on our relationships, identities, and practices with my colleagues in Belize, we continuously re-constructed and transformed our mutual understandings. I believe my colleagues and I have built a unique "historical consciousness" at the intersection of our different national and cultural communities of practice regarding literacy learning and teaching.

Langois et al. (2014) argued that this first criterion—empowerment by establishing "historical consciousness" leads to participants' self-understandings, which induces the second criterion—"an action stimulus"—which may empower people to "address professional challenges through personal and social transformation" (p. 228). I believe that the unique "historical consciousness" we constructed together helped develop self-understandings that became an action stimulus for self and social transformation, self-determination, and productive responses to professional challenges. The teachers in Belize and I addressed our own professional challenges through our work. Many transformations that occurred seemed to stem

from the classroom objectives we all co-constructed to address our professional challenges.

Finally, Langois et al.'s (2014) third criterion "equity among PAR co-participants" (p. 228)—insists on "egalitarian collaboration among PAR co-participants" (p. 228). Working side-by-side in classrooms in Belize and Colorado started to level the playing field of this research project in many ways. We have all been exposed and made vulnerable by both our triumphs and our struggles in the classroom. Through these experiences, we have become aware that we are united in our struggles to teach young learners, especially with respect to finding increasingly effective instructional strategies. With every new year, our ways of being together have become more egalitarian, more democratic.

To conclude, our collaborative approach to research has helped not only to deepen our relationships and create our collective identity, but also to transform our own pedagogical practices, as well as the practices of many people with whom we work. It was my hope that my commitment to my Belizean colleagues as an ally in struggle, a trustworthy witness of our shared endeavors, would lead to newly co-created knowledge and collective transformation. It seems that it has**.**

Data Analysis Strategies and Practices

As I have moved forward with my colleagues in understanding the nature and effects of dialogue, sharing life stories, and sharing lifeworlds on our relationships, identities, and practices, we have all had some role in analyzing the data for this study. My role was paramount in that I collected the data and conducted initial analyses by searching for repeated ideas and concepts, or what Ely, Anzul, Friedman, Garner, and Steinmetz (1991) defined as themes: "statement[s] of meaning that (1) run through all or most of the pertinent data, or (2) one in the minority that carries heavy or emotional data" (p. 150). My colleagues and I frequently

communicated about the themes I noticed and their relevance to our research question, especially with respect to making sustainable changes in teachers' identities and classroom practices.

Using this basic thematic analysis approach, I distilled themes from the data to more deeply understand my Belizean colleagues' lives and perspectives, as well as the evolving culture of the Belize Education Project. I began the process by familiarizing myself with the data in a way that Nowell, Norris, and White (2017) described "as a faithful witness to the accounts in the data, being honest and vigilant about both my own and my colleagues' perspectives, preexisting thoughts and beliefs, and developing theories" (pp. 4-5). I also continuously sought "support and the creative and corrective feedback" (Heron & Reason, 1997, p. 287) from my colleagues.

In the next phase, I identified themes I noticed in the data, which is what Nowell et al. (2017) called a "theorizing activity" that required me to keep revisiting the data. (p. 5). Ely et al. (1991) described the search for "highlights explicit or implied attitudes towards life, behavior, or understandings of a person, persons, or culture" (p. 150). This process of creating themes and subthemes and the relations between and among them "brings a researcher into intimate acquaintance with the data" (Ely et al., 1991, p. 145). Once I thematized my data, I organized all the potentially relevant themes into subthemes (Nowell, et al., 2017, p. 8). During this phase, I not only looked for subthemes, but how themes and subthemes related to each other. I looked for how the relations between and among themes and subthemes provided meaning and cohesion. I considered Ely et al.'s (1991) thinking when they explained, "themes, social rules, and constructs/vignettes do not stand alone. They are devises that are established through analysis and offered to provide meaning, cohesion, and color to the presentation" (p. 154).

Drawing on the method Fletcher, MacPhee, and Dickson (2015) used in their participatory action research, I shared the themes I created with my colleagues "for interpretation and co-creation of the report" (p. 8). This process was informal. I drew upon, and built upon, their ideas about how to formulate and phrase my research question. I talked with them about what I was doing. I shared themes I was inferring (i.e., spirituality, our shifts in thinking) and sought their ideas and insights about them. In this way, my colleagues were not burdened with the time-consuming task of creating themes, but they were able to collaborate in the process of understanding what the data made visible about our work. Importantly, Fletcher et al. (2015) argued that such an approach ensures that participants have voice in their research. "With our approach, collaborators had a voice, and researchers did not have complete power over data interpretation" (p. 8).

At some point, I came to a place where my colleagues and I seemed to have saturated our understanding of these themes, sub themes, and how they related to one another. Or, as Ely et al. (1991) put it, my colleagues and I arrived "somewhere between 'barely sufficient' and 'any number of cycles of the recursive qualitative research process'" (p. 159). It was there we found what Ely et al. (1991) described as "the place where enough may not be all, but enough is enough. Finding 'that place' and then having the confidence and skill to define it and to use it well are key to qualitative researchers. That place can be found" (p. 159). When "that place" was found, I began to write the story of the project.

Key elements of this story were how our relationships have changed during the past several years. It is also a story of how our identities as educators have been troubled and reconfigured in the process, and how our practice and the rationales that underlie them have changed.

Composing a Narrative Account of Research Findings

Although I used thematic analysis to understand and interpret the data from this project, I decided quite intentionally to report my findings as a narrative. Once I (along with my colleague's contributions) was finished with data analysis, I began to write the story of our work, focusing specifically on how our relationships have changed, how our identities have shifted, and how our classroom practices have changed. Throughout, I have tried to foreground both my voice and the voices of my colleagues, making the account appropriately polyvocal.

When Goodson (1992) was studying teachers' lives, he noted that, "our minds work with truth in narrative" (p. 225). Bruner (1993) also inspired me to use narrative tropes and strategies to engage in this representational process. For example, he wrote, "our capacity to render experience in terms of narrative" as "an instrument of making meaning that dominates much of life in culture" (p. 97). Similarly, Ely et al. (1991) noted that "themes, and constructs/vignettes do not stand alone." Instead, "they are devices that are meant to provide meaning, cohesion, and color to the presentation" (p. 154). In addition, Ely et al. (1991) encourage researchers to engage in reporting findings narratively. They wrote: "You're ready to tell your story. Your job here is to create a text in which the person and persons you have learned about come to life" (p. 167). They continued to explain the value of narrative representation when they insisted that "the writing of a qualitative research report demands the creation of a narrative.... The writing of a narrative is the telling of a tale after all" (p. 169). In the telling of a participatory action research project, it felt natural to present our efforts to build relationships as committed allies in the hopes of realizing new possible selves, new possible worlds, and new possible educational practices in narrative form; to tell the story of our newly created ways of being together, of thinking together, and of changing together.

In other words, narrative representation helped me breathe life into the teachers' experiences. Once themes, subthemes, and relations between and among them were identified, there was still the life, the heartbeat of these collective experiences to convey. In this regard, Krakowski (2006) discussed the power of narrative in allowing her "to create images of feeling and capture the sentimental qualities of pedagogical life" (p. 77). After all, teaching is relational, work of the heart. Conveying the emotional nature of our work is critical if we are to understand each other, and transformations in our identities and our practice.

Throughout the participatory action research process, thinking about how we would tell our story has had some surprising side effects. For example, and perhaps ironically, in the process of studying our relationships, these very relationships were enriched. As Nash (2004) argued, reengaging in narrative "helps us all to understand our histories, shape our destinies, develop our moral imaginations and give us something truly worth living or dying for" (p. 2). He continued to celebrate the capacity of shared storytelling and story making to establish deeper connections when he wrote "our stories are symbols for God, ethics, morality, justice wisdom, truth, love, hope, trust, suffering, and most of all, what constitutes personal and professional meaning for all of us" (p. 2). Within the context of our newly created spaces, shared practices, and deepened relationships, using narrative to communicate the co-constructed meanings my colleagues and I have built together seemed the right approach.

As our relationships deepened, a narrative approach also served as a platform for participatory action. In this regard, Ellis (2002) discussed the "mutual and reciprocal relationship between researcher and participants within narrative work" (p. 339). I shared the emerging story of our work together with my Belizean colleagues; I asked them whether the narrative felt true to

them; and when their interpretations differed from my own, I included their perspectives and voices alongside mine, creating a polyphonic account.

Still, as I constructed this story with my colleagues, it was me at the keyboard, and I remained aware that my rendering was both partial and primarily from my perspective. I tried hard not to lose sight of the fact that I have been a key instrument of the research process, and whatever I have reported is not objective or what Taylor (1987) has called "brute facts identifiable." Behar's (1993/2003) reflections on this process, as she considered writing *Translated Woman*, resonate with my own struggles over representing others fairly and accurately. Behar (1993/2003) wrote: "Clearly, any ethnographic representation – and I count my own, of course— inevitably includes a self-representation" (Behar, 1993/2003, p. 271). Behar (1993/2003) continued, "yet I think there is hope insofar as we realized that ethnographic work is inherently paradoxical being a process by which each of us confronted our respective inability to comprehend the experience of others even as we recognized the absolute necessity of continuing the effort to do so" (p. 271). These musings have offered me a sense of hope and resolve regarding how we represent what has happened within the Belize Education Project during the course of this research. With our eyes more or less wide open, we discussed the data I had collected in an effort to understand each other better, to chronicle and learn from our collective experiences, to deepen our relationships, and to trouble and perhaps reconfigure our identities and our practices.

We also chose narrative representation because it can facilitate transformation. In relation to this claim, Nash (2004) discussed the potential of the "narrative scholar" to do transformative work by the use of "personal insights gained in order to draw larger conclusions for readers; possibly even to challenge and reconstruct older or educational narratives" (p. 18). Nash further

explained that "to write a personal narrative is to look deeply within ourselves for the meaning that just might, when done well, resonate with other lives, maybe even inspire them in some significant ways" (p. 22). Through the process of examining the meanings we find personally in our narratives, we may also inspire transformation in others.

Additionally, a narrative approach offers insights for readers that are rarely found in other approaches to rendering research findings. Nash (2004) argued, "your own life tells a story (or a series of stories) that, when narrated well, can deliver to your readers those delicious 'aha' moments of self and social insight that are all too rare in more conventional forms of research" (p. 24).

Finally, I considered how writing might most accurately and powerfully portray the work that yielded the data of this research project. I wanted to capture and convey what was real, what was true; I wanted to report not just "the facts" but what the facts had to say about the human experience, human relationships, and the nature and functions of cultural meanings. In other words, I wanted my writing to have verisimilitude, which Schwandt (2015) defined as "evocative power or sense of authenticity," which could draw my readers "into the experiences" of my colleagues in such a way that their experiences could be felt (p. 323). Following Loh (2013), I worked toward in a narrative approach in that it could allow "others to have a vicarious experience of being in the similar situation and thereby being able to understand the decisions made and the emotions felt by the participants in the study" (p. 10). Finally, I wanted my findings to have what Bruner (1986) described a "lifelikeness" (p. 11), which is most effectively accomplished through narrative,

In sum, by embracing a fully collaborative (or participatory) research approach with my colleagues and by striving to represent our collective work as a narrative, I/we have tried to

construct an account that helps us better understand the value and effects of our work and also inspires others who may also want to engage in participatory action research across lines of difference.

Chapter 5

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION 1:

Early Years and a Professional Development Impasse

"Are you a male or a female? Jean could be a name for either," Cecelia asked in her first email to me in September of 2007. This email made my heart quicken. It was the first email I had received, and somehow, it felt larger than the letters on the screen. The hospital administrator in Belize had given me the email address of a principal of a nearby school. I had asked the principal if she "needed anything." As a gifted leader and advocate for her school, before she could get a response on my gender, Cecelia poured out the needs of her school. The needs included everything from pencils to paper clips to books, to the dream of one day having a copy machine. Could I also please teach the teachers at her school how to teach reading (Cecelia, personal communication [e-mail], September 2007).

Cecelia also recalled these beginnings in a focus group conversation:

> The first time I met Jean, it was when she went to Belize for a mission trip, with a group that was working at the hospital. Even before the trip Jean and I were communicating via email about the possibility of her visiting my school. Well, I didn't really know what to expect and so on. But I knew she was an educator. I really wanted to know in what ways she would be able to work with my school. (Cecelia, personal communication [focus group], April 4th, 2018)

A Friendship Informs the Nature of Our Work in Belize

I filled two fifty-pound suitcases with pencils and books and filled my heart with a sense of hope and purpose as I headed down to Belize with a medical team. I was the only teacher on an airplane with around thirty doctors and nurses. Cecelia met me at the airport. There was so

much energy in the air between the two of us that it felt we could taste the electricity of what was unfolding. Cecelia described that time as well: "I remember the interest that you showed in our school, and the instant friendship and the bond that we had. I remember you showed that interest in helping our school, and I knew you would come back." She laughed and continued, "…and I made sure you would come back! We tried to shower you with love" (Cecelia, personal communication [focus group], April 4th, 2018).

We unpacked and stacked the pencils, crayons, pens, markers, and books carefully in her living room together with her husband and four-year-old daughter looking on. A life-long connection was born and this cradle for our infant friendship was sturdy and warm. It foreshadowed a transformative relationship, which, during the next decade, would not only shift our own identities and practices, but those around us as well. As Clandinin (2013/2016) may have predicted, as Cecelia's life and mine became interwoven, (along with others from both of our worlds) we began to share complex and multiple experiences, we begin to shape our destiny (p. 21).

Perhaps, as we strengthened our relationships and began to co-construct new knowledge of each other's worlds, we built new ways and systems of being together. Perhaps we were already beginning the process of creating new possibilities for who we could become as educators. After all, Lave and Wenger (1991) argued that in learning together we become different people, with the relationships themselves empowering new possibilities (p. 53). In other words, the web of connections Cecelia and I were beginning, may have allowed us to re-construct our old selves and become different people than we were before we came to know each other.

Cecelia described the first days of my time at her school: “So, Jean went to my school with her bag of her books. She read with our students and the students were all excited about the new and colorful books. Jean had taken a bag with her. Jean took the children out of the classroom and she read with them under the tree. That was my earliest memory with her” (Cecelia, personal communication [focus group], April 4th, 2018).

For my part, I knew I would remain in this community for a lifetime. I had spent the week reading alone with students sitting on a rain tarp under a tree. I remember a particularly overwhelming sense of commitment wash over me as I stepped over some cinder blocks of a yet-to-be-built wall of a classroom. At that moment, I became sure of two things. First, I would be back. (This turned out to be true.) Second, I could teach every child in that school to read using the resources and strategies I had brought with me. (This morphed into different truths.)

These early connections based on material goods occurred with other teachers as well. They, too, expressed the potency of material supplies not only for their students, but as an expression of our solidarity in their work. Eve, a teacher, discussed this early impression, “I noticed that you were serious because you sent books for us and we were like ‘wow, a lot of books!’” (Eve, personal communication, [focus group], April 4th, 2018). Joe discussed the power of receiving the books in his classroom for the first time, “and then we received the books from BEP [Belize Education Project] and everything changed. Suddenly the students were like ‘can we go and read now?’ And I said, ‘yah, sure go ahead and read!’ And then I saw interest in reading for the first time” (Joe, personal communication [personal interview], October 2015).

At the end of that first visit in 2007, when I got back onto the plane, the emptiness of the suitcases spread to my own state of being. I was not finished. When I returned to business as usual in my first-grade classroom and suburban elementary school, Cecelia’s presence would not

leave me. She seemed to be with me everywhere; my drive to school, every corner of the classroom, the library, and in my conversations about teaching reading with my colleagues in the United States. Cecelia and I continued to talk and write through e-mail. I told her I would send more books. She was grateful and pushed me to explain how to organize and utilize so many books in a classroom.

I knew I had to invite her to Colorado. She belonged in this space with me. My family combined efforts to purchase Cecelia's first airplane ticket to Colorado for my birthday. She left the tropics of Belize to join in me in Colorado that chilly January of 2008. Along with a photograph of her standing next to the thermometer reading 11 below zero, she also took pictures of my classroom books, my reading groups, the school library, and more. She came to know about a Colorado morning, which involved cold drive to school clutching a hot cup of coffee. She came to know, and to fall in love with, my 7-year-old daughter with cerebral palsy. She helped inspire my other young daughters who dreamed of becoming teachers themselves. She came to know my family, my colleagues, and my life world. We were beginning to share our lives.

Yet, as we formed new bonds, new connections and understandings, we also wrestled with our differences. We had to navigate the unexplainable and make it explainable in our heads. Cecelia's time at, and focus on, Walmart made sense on a certain level. When she returned with white plastic Walmart bags of watches, blue jeans, and socks, I knew her community would benefit. It was not lost on me that what was housed in our one suburban Walmart dwarfed what was available to her back in her entire town. Still, it frustrated and disappointed me too. Walmart and instructional strategies were at war for our attention.

Spry's (2018) process of wrestling with her own privilege and how to continue to work resonates with my conflicting thoughts and emotions at that time. She described the struggle I was experiencing of my "white skin, its body-without-organs, its financial privilege" which was (and is) steeped within my own Walmart existence, my own land of excess and abundance. Spry reminded me that Paulo Freire whispered to her --and the rest of us-- that we "can always and only speak from privilege" (Spry, p. 631).

Cecelia, too, had to wrestle with what she was observing in our luxurious classrooms. She, too, had to make peace with what she saw as she chose to pursue her connections with us. She observed hundreds and hundreds of dollars' worth of expensive coats piled and forgotten in our school's lost and found. She recalled my first-grade classroom; "the first year I was there I saw what we considered luxuries here… were nothing there to you! Like pencils! Our children would do anything for a pencil. And there you had pencils all over the floor. It was no big deal to any of you" (Cecelia, personal communication, [telephone interview] October 21, 2018).

More than material goods, Cecelia noted the luxury of learning specialists, such as music, art and P. E. teachers, not to mention reading specialists, occupational therapists, speech pathologists, special educators, school psychologists, and more, that educators in the United States took for granted. As she explained: "There were all these different teachers to deal with different children. Here in Belize one teacher teaches all the children." In addition, she marveled at the planning time teachers in the United States get, "that little break you have when your children go to another subject like music…what a luxury!" (Cecelia, personal communication, [telephone interview], October 21, 2018). She reflected on how easy it would be to teach children with these luxuries. Indeed, how could we begin to compare our teaching practices with these enormous differences that seemed to be ignored?

Even as we wrestled with our cultural and resource differences, we looked at instructional practice too. Cecelia observed my use of formative assessment and differentiated reading instruction. The power of this could not help but spark her imagination. She explained:

> The first thing that I noticed was the way they work in the land of literacy, the way their children are able to read at a very early stage, and the strategies they use to teach reading. So, I spoke to Jean about that and we started talking about how to implement these same strategies in our schools. The first thing we dealt with was the DRA (Developmental Reading Assessment) because I was really amazed to see how Jean worked with the children at the different levels. And I was like, "how does she know that?" And then I found out there was testing done to able to find out the level in which the children were reading, and how to help them move up. She dealt with that through the DRA, and then about the possibilities of our schools getting the DRA to work with the children and to be able to use the leveled books. (Cecelia, personal communication, [focus group], April 4th, 2018)

Since differentiated instruction intrigued Cecelia, the possibility of bringing assessment and differentiated reading instruction also galvanized the first small group of my colleagues to come with me back to Belize in November of 2008. With four teaching colleagues by my side, along with a nurse and a surgeon from the original medical group, we launched our first "Belize Education Project" education trip.

Cecelia met us as the airport with the father of one of her students, Wil, his van, and bag of freshly picked bananas. We rode high on the smoky smell of Belizean air, that same steamy wet air on our skin, the sights of wooden houses on stilts, the taste of bananas on our tongues, and the sound, of Wil singing hymns. We also rode high sitting above our suitcases of pencils

and on the righteous assumptions that our combined knowledge of instructional practice would change St. Gabriel's reading instruction in the coming week.

Did we change St. Gabriel's that week? Indeed, change was in the making. And St. Gabriel began to change *us*. Deep down at the core of all of us, low and quiet rumbles were beginning to shift the soil. As the farmers worked nearby to ready the land, the sediments of our layered assumptions began to shift and move, began to unsettle. As Emerson claimed, it very well may have been the birth of the true hope for our work when he wrote "people wish to be settled; only as far as they are unsettled is there any hope for them" (Emerson, 1841, pp. 31-32).

That week unsettled all of us. Tuesday, November 4th, 2008 while the world shifted its assumptions forever with Obama's election, we too, became forever changed in the hot and unfamiliar classrooms of Belize. We had never worked in classrooms or children like the ones we found in Belize. We were not successful in teaching these students that day, or that week. Our attempt to break students into small groups for differentiated instruction, which worked so well in Colorado, resulted in chaos. Students in several first-floor classrooms jumped out of their open windows onto the grass with laughter. Our questioning strategies fell short, way short, as the children mocked our attempts to initiate classroom discussion. Tiny children curiously tasted and swallowed glitter glue we brought for a literacy extension. In turn, they threw it up onto the cement classroom floor, causing the surgeon traveling with us to note that first, throwing up was not a medical emergency, and second, she would rather do 100 hemorrhoidectomies than go back into an Infant 1 (5 and 6-year-olds) classroom. The Belizean teachers watched us with their students in disbelief. Spry (2018) described a process like this as both "unsettling" and "expanding." In this week, I became what she described as a "polyvocal being." I was

experiencing myself as “the unsettled I.” These moments became “the vulnerable ecstatic story of relation” (p. 638).

Who held what knowledge was turned on its head. It made each one of us teachers from the United States cry in frustration as we fell into our steamy beds with a sense of failure. And yet…We were not finished. For some reason, which I am still not sure I understand, this experience energized us for more. For some reason our Belizean colleagues were forgiving, and still wanted more from us. What was it that pulled us closer into the community instead of pushing us out? What was it that caused our Belizean colleagues to forgive our shortcomings and assumptions, and call us back into their circle, their space, their classrooms, and their lives? Perhaps it was raw vulnerability. Whatever it was, Wenger (2002) claimed this endeavor to have life-giving power when he wrote:

> In the life giving power of mutuality lies the miracle of parenthood, the essence of apprenticeship, the secret to the generational encounter, the key to the creation of connections across boundaries of practice: a frail bridge across the abyss, a slight breach of the law, a small gift of undeserved trust – it is almost a theorem of love that we can open our practices and communities to others (newcomers, outsiders), invite them into our own identities of participation, let them be what they are not, and thus start what cannot be started. (p. 277)

I asked Cecelia this. She laughed, “I am no quitter! This was an opportunity for my school. I saw good things coming…especially after visiting your school. I wasn’t going to ask you to stop because I saw there was hope, alright, there was hope!” (Cecelia, personal communication [telephone interview], October 21, 2018).

Cecelia was realistic about what she described as “different children and different environment,” but she may have also explained the vulnerability when she said, “But I liked the exchange we had. After all, it was a sharing experience” (Cecelia, personal communication [telephone interview], October 21, 2018). Cecelia was an educator. Not so different than what Freire (2005) described, as Cecelia had begun to commit herself to us as imperfect teachers and beings, she also loved the very process implied in teaching and learning. (p. 5).

Cecelia continued to explain that maybe, in this vulnerability, she could see we were beginning to build trust: “We just needed that mutual trust. It was what we were building” (Cecelia, personal communication, [telephone interview], October 21, 2018). She explained her perspective of teachers from the United States coming to her small country and her small school:

> The thing is that you came in - to us. This is a tiny Central American country …and you came into our classrooms. And we knew that there was a big difference. We knew that you were coming in from the United States that in no way did our classrooms look like your classrooms. But you were willing to adapt, to respect our space and to work with us. (Cecelia, personal communication [telephone interview], October 21, 2018)

Finally, the word “solidarity” touched Cecelia, and still brought tears to her eyes as she recalled our early conversations, “I also like the words you used. ‘We are here in ‘solidarity.’ That is a word that stays in my heart. I didn’t see you judge us; I saw you as willing to work side by side.” (Cecelia, personal communication, [telephone interview] October 21, 2018). Perhaps it was in the “side by side” endeavor. After all, Wenger (2002) wrote that in this power of mutuality lies the key to the creation of connections of our practice. He claims it to be a “frail bridge” across our differences, which is a small gift of undeserved trust (p. 277). In this way, we both opened our

own identities of participation. Ultimately with this small gift of trust we were able to become something new.

Cecelia concluded her thoughts on that 2008 experience thinking about my school and hers with, “we have two different schools beating with one heart” (Cecelia, personal communication [telephone interview], October 21, 2018)**.**

Material Resources and *My* Instructional Goals – I Got This!

On that thread of trust, we began to build. We packed more airplanes in the following years. We invited more Belizean teachers to come to Colorado and more teachers from all over the United States joined us. Soon ten Belizean educators each year were greeted at Denver International Airport with Belizean flags, sweatshirts and promise to demonstrate effective instructional strategies. We grew from six traveling teachers from Colorado to over 30 educators from all over the United States to land at the Belize City Airport with thousands of pounds of school supplies. Cecelia met us year after year with freshly picked bananas in her hands. In the meantime, teachers from her school and the other schools worked back at her small kitchen in Santa Elena preparing a gigantic dinner of black beans, rice, and plantains to welcome us at the end of the two-hour drive from the airport.

Our work intrigued donors who believed in this work. They provided the means for us to invite the 10 educators from Belize each year, and to ship over 50,000 books to their classrooms. Our donors, too, began to travel with us to these classrooms.

Still, my focus was to change the instructional practice in Belizean classrooms. This focus captured the hopes of other schools in the area. Another principal at nearby contacted us in 2011. She wrote that she would like to be involved with Belize Education Project. She expressed

that she had prayed for the partnership with Belize Education Project and ensured us her school would use whatever skills we could offer.

The prospect of changing instructional practice also captured the attention of the Belize Ministry of Education. In 2013 members of the Belize Ministry of Education contacted us with hopes for our work including more differentiated instruction and assessment. That year we also had three members travel to our Colorado classrooms. They were also intrigued by the formative and diagnostic assessments we practiced in our classrooms. The focus intensified. One of the members, who traveled to Colorado, emailed to express her enthusiasm for our work and her hope that Belizean teachers begin to use formative assessment, which she believed could provide tremendous impact on literacy instruction.

This member added a caution of what she considered a challenge, suggesting that Belizean teachers may not see the value of ongoing assessment, especially given the time formative assessments might take.

My initial focus of delivering both assessment tools and strategies and the endorsement of this work from the Belize Ministry of Education intensified my enthusiastic push to put the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) and guided groups, along with deep comprehension strategies into every classroom I could touch. I regret to admit the attention from the Ministry of Education was an intoxicating draw for my sense of pride. I now realize, however, that their interest in our work filled me with a false sense of legitimacy.

At the same time, though, my relationship and love for these teachers were growing. I was touched by the obvious humanity of who these teachers were. Even as we grew, there was a sense that I might be missing the most critical part of my work, the humanity of these teachers. Even as the Belize Ministry of Education also asked that we look at an additional school to bring

our “goods,” I could feel the weight of our connections and wondered if I was doing these connections justice.

In addition, as I was spending more and more time in these teachers’ classrooms and living the reality of their lack of planning time, large class sizes, the hardships of coming and leaving school without personal cars, and overall resources, I had to wonder how realistic both my expectations and those of the Ministry of Education’s were for my colleagues to increase their workload. These thoughts about demanding increased assessments, specifically our own tool, the Developmental Reading Assessment, rattled in my head, I was beginning to question how I and the Ministry of Education leaders could be so sure about dictating and judging what their teachers should be doing without, spending time in the classrooms themselves.

At the same time these questions were pulling at me, at the request of the Belize Ministry of Education, we began working with another school. Still, I pushed on with a continued emphasis on changing instructional practice. It was the humanity of the teachers and principals, themselves in the waning of my own, that touch me as I look back. Noelly, the principal of Buena Vista Government School, recalled with her hopes on the first day we visited her school:

> I heard when you visited in October you would go to our school which was a holiday. So, I asked the teachers if they can be there because we have this group of people coming to our school. They were all there. I saw you all. I just knew that you worked with literacy. So, on that day I didn’t know what to expect. So, we all went in uniform. I asked the teachers to be “as teacher” as possible on that holiday, and we prepared some snacks for you all. We were not sure whether children were supposed to be there or not, but we asked some of them to come. They were in uniform. I was quite nervous. And when you

all came into the yard, we tried to make it as welcoming as possible to you all. (Noelly, personal communication [focus group], April 4th, 2018)

I moved forward with the focus on bringing resources and instructional strategies with less and less attention to the teachers, their lives, and our relationships. After all, children are children, literacy is literacy, and most importantly, humanity is universal**.**

Barriers and Stagnation

As it turned out, our resources and strategies approach proved unsustainable. Several of the cracks in our foundation grew and broke apart our early structure.

The interest of my Belizean colleagues in Walmart and obtaining material goods here in Colorado did not diminish. It grew to something I could not manage. More questions throughout the day in the classrooms shifted from assessment to how teachers were going to get rides to Walmart after school, who was going to pick them up, how they could get more suitcases, and how many pounds the airlines could would allow.

On one occasion the wife of one of our donors offered to take a principal on a shopping trip to Walmart. The donor's wife enthusiastically instructed the principal to buy anything she wanted. It should be noted that this principal is also a provider for her own community and had a responsibility to distribute supplies to her village such as needed personal hygienic items. The trip ended up costing quite a bit more than expected, which was neither my intent nor the intent of our donor's wife.

My response was sharp, condescending, and punitive. Cecelia's response was from the heart as she explained the challenge of obtaining clothes and other items in Belize. She also told me she appreciated my honesty. I was left feeling both that my response had not been

appropriate and somewhat ashamed for my lack of understanding. How we communicate our values and our needs to each other continues to be an unfinished issue in this work.

What, indeed, happened? In my intense focus on Belizean teachers' instructional strategies had I ignored key things that matter to this teacher (and other teachers as well). Had I dismissed who this educator was? Had I ignored her life, her desires, and the challenges of her own human experience? Perhaps I had not only ignored her, possibly I disregarded the lives of all the teachers with whom I was working. Conceivably, if I wanted more attention on teaching reading, I needed to attend more to the reading teacher. I was changed in this experience. This was an early indicator of where I needed to go.

The engagement and cultural disconnects extended beyond shopping habits. Another principal had lost her husband a few months earlier. She was devastated and struggling to move forward with her life. During a debriefing meeting with principals and some of my own community's principals who were donating their time, when this principal became physically unable to be part of the conversation. Her response was to crawl under the conference table, lay down and fall asleep. I was not in the room but heard about it from the other distressed participants. At the time, I felt humiliated and betrayed. My own community had trusted me when I had asked for their time. We believed it was a good use of their time because this conversation and experience was meaningful to the Belizean educators. How could I begin to explain this to them? To myself? Again, my response was immediate and direct:

> If you do not feel well, please stay home to rest. It is unusual in our schools to crawl and sleep under a table. I understand you may not feel well, however, it is hurtful and feels disrespectful to those presenting. (J. Kirshner, personal communication, [Facebook message], March 17, 2014)

Her response also came from the heart; she explained how badly she felt for embarrassing me, yet she felt there was no other option for her. Most significantly, she expressed how she longed for someone to simply understand what she was going through.

Again. I had to ask myself what was happening. Was I aware of my colleague's life? Did I understand what she was going through? What effort was I making to know and to connect, not with the instructional practice, but with the humanity of those who delivering instruction?

Finally, the cultural crisis I was facing at this time was not only between me and my Belizean colleagues, it was also with my colleagues from the United States. As we more than quadrupled the number of teachers from the United States traveling to Belize, I became less selective in recruiting teachers traveling to Belize, and I did not do enough deliberate work on cultural sensitivity. Our work began to get off course. In 2014 as we loaded 32 teachers onto the plane, we entered a new crisis of cultural isolation and disregard for diversity. As inexperienced volunteers observed the difference in resources for the first time, they broke into small groups and reflected with a on what they were seeing with little sense of their own privilege and a cloud of ridicule. Experienced volunteers overheard conversations, which I missed in my steadfast attention to changing instructional practice. The experienced travelers called it out to me. With a somewhat furrowed brow of disappointment, I continued to ask "how have you observed formative assessment and differentiation?"

It was not until we returned to Colorado that the damage we had just done with our lack of cultural competence hit me. It hit hard. One of the U.S. teachers who traveled with us, who had collected a dozen or more Belizean teachers as Facebook friends, posted a meme of a flat tire on a car that someone fixed by placing a scooter beneath the tire, with the meme "There I fixed it." Her comment was "This reminds me of Belize!" Following her post was a collection of my

own new volunteers' posts, with their own versions of what they considered humorous responses, including examples of Belizean solutions to life challenges without the resources, again with little acknowledgement of our privilege. My heart sunk. What had I just done? This post was public. As the power of social media has shown us again and again, everybody was now in the room. My Belizean colleagues and my travelers from the United States were witness to our new interactions. What was this relationship I had facilitated?

I was not sure what my response should be. Would I escalate this conversation if I went public? I ended up privately messaging the traveler.

> Your post may appear funny to you. Certainly, the realities of our own privilege are striking when we leave them behind. However, I believe the Belizean teachers will see this as making fun of them with that picture. They solve their car issues differently because of a difference of resources, not a difference in intelligence. I would not want Cecelia or any of the teachers to think we think it's a joke, or that their reality is a joke. (J. Kirshner, personal communication [Facebook message], December 8, 2014)

The traveler took the post down without a response to me. I still do not know if this was the most effective or courageous way to handle this. Should I have gone public? Should I have been stronger? What I did know was something had to change in my approach to this work.

As I reflected on my travelers from the United States disregard for cultural differences and the human experience of our Belizean colleagues, I also reflected on my own. I thought about the focus of Belizean teachers, which I inferred to be shopping, or gathering material resources and how that disappointed me. I realized I was not engaging in a humanizing approach to professional development and research (Paris & Winn, 2014). I realized I was not building relationships of care and dignity and dialogic consciousness (p. xvi).

Cecelia had been inspired and had trusted me with my use of the word "solidarity." An article was published about my work in *Kappan.* It was even titled "From Charity to Solidarity" (Fry, 2012). Where was the solidarity now?

With my laser focus on changing instructional practice (and with little idea at the time how important relationships were), I would have at the very least expected practice to change. Not so. It was around this time I also noticed the instructional gains we had made early in our work had plateaued. There were books in the classrooms, but there were not formative assessments. My DRA boxed kits sat in the corners of the rooms untouched. The boxes of leveled reading books remained in their plastic wrappers unopened. Few, if any, guided reading groups emerged out of this work.

The responses from the anonymous professional development reflection forms we had handed out at the end of our professional development reflected the frustration the Belizean teachers felt about the reality of administering the DRA for all of their students:

> "How can I implement what we have learnt (DRA)? The Belize Education System has a curriculum that teachers are expected to follow."
>
> "I am concerned with how long it will take us to do the DRA program."
>
> "Since I have 30 students, is it possible for all the students to participate in the DRA?"
>
> "How exactly do we link our expected curriculum with the DRA?"
>
> "How do I do the DRA with 33 students, especially in Infant I [5 and 6-year-olds]?"
>
> "How can I find enough time to do all the activities that the DRA requires?"
>
> (Anonymous, personal communications [professional development reflections], October 16, 2014)

In addition to the frustration of administering the DRA, the teachers expressed frustration about the mechanics of conducting small, guided reading groups, the constraints of their small classrooms of armchairs, and the historic cultural norms and habits of whole group instruction:

> "What I want to know is what will the other children be doing while the teacher is doing guided reading?"
>
> "How can I call the attention of disruptive students without distracting my guided reading group and the rest of the class?"
>
> "What do the rest of the children do?"
>
> "How to deal with disruptive children while doing guided reading groups with a group of students?"
>
> "How do I read with all of my students in a day while completing my day's objective?" (Anonymous, personal communication [professional development reflections], October 16, 2014)

After seven years of working to "enlighten" Belizean teachers about the virtues of ongoing assessment and the value of the DRA and small, guided reading groups, this was where we were. All of the questions, without exception, addressed the mechanical challenges of these strategies. None discussed the levels of comprehension the DRA afforded, nor the deep comprehension strategies a guided group might be able to get at.

In the meantime, Cecelia wondered about my commitment to her and her school. Weeks before we were to leave for Belize, she Facebook messaged me:

> I heard something that is very disturbing to me today. I was told you are taking your program away from our school as you are not getting the returns for your effort. You have never said that to me and you know my situation at my school. We try, but we can

only do so much. (Cecelia, personal communication, [Facebook message], September 11, 2014)

Again, where was the sense of unity in our shared passion for teaching reading to young learners? How was I acting as a committed ally in this work and for the lives of my colleagues in Belize? Where was the sense of solidarity in this work now? I was missing something. Something big. It was time for a shift. I needed direction.

It was around this time that I began to seek the guidance of outside sources, which led me to doctoral studies with Dr. George Kamberelis. My initial correspondence with him reflected my dismay at what I considered a barrier of thought and a lack of shared assumptions in this work. First, I addressed the more concrete barrier of fully utilizing the assessment tool:

> We have gotten several DRA II (Developmental Reading Assessment II) kits for each of the schools we work with. We have modeled them, co-taught with them, and had them DRA our own kids up here in Colorado. . . It's the reflection/analysis part where I feel we have come up against a wall. (J. Kirshner, personal communication [e-mail], August 29, 2014)

I also questioned more complex barriers. Were our deeply held visions of learning aligned, and if not, what had to shift and how?

> The idea of finding virtue in curiosity, questioning, human growth, the act of change, and even human triumph over a risk is problematic. The idea that these qualities could be humanity's great gift is a huge paradigm shift for the Belize teachers. Is it possible to change their paradigm? *Do we need to*? (J. Kirshner, personal communication [email], August 29, 2014)

With new direction from Dr. Kamberelis, I tried to work in more participatory, dialogic ways, and I began to understand that my colleagues in Belize needed to be full participants in our work. I also realized relationship building needed to be at the heart of my endeavors.

Who was Cecelia? What had her journey been? Who were these women and men who held the potential of these young Belizean learners in the palms of their hands? What had they been through to get to this sacred space of a classroom? What would happen if I became vulnerable enough to travel with these teachers as they traversed that rugged trek again in the retelling it to me? What if they became vulnerable enough to take me back on that arduous voyage? What kind of comrade could they trust me to be?

With these hazy concerns and realizations, the work of building my relationships with Cecelia, and with all the educators I worked with, became deliberate. I shifted my focus from changing instructional practice, to building a sense solidarity, to more deeply connecting with each other as mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, daughters, and sons, and yes, as imperfect, yet committed teachers. I wondered if an important shift could occur if we ALL became vulnerable and if we ALL became available for transformation. Only in this way, as truly collaborative partners with genuine and abiding relationships, could we begin to help our students (the future stewards of our shared planet) become more successful, more critical readers and writers.

Chapter 6

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION 2;

Mapping the Lives of Belizean Teachers

As I began to focus deliberately on deepening relationships, three potentially powerful forces of change came into view—dialogue, sharing life stories, and sharing lifeworlds. Because they seemed so entangled, I imagined these forces as a confluence of three rivers. Each river came from its own set of streams and springs, but once they flowed into each other, they became a single waterway with considerable transformative potential—troubling sedimented assumptions and ways of thinking, acting, and being. This newly formed wild and powerful river was the water of deepened relationships. Because these waterways metaphors informed my thinking in powerful ways, I will use them throughout the remainder of my Findings and Discussion chapters.

This new river may be seen as a new level of love, or as Freire (2005) framed it: "It is impossible to teach without the courage to love" (p. 5). On a more practical note, Wenger (2002) explained that "learning that is most personally transformative turns out to be the learning that involves membership in these communities of practice" (p. 6).

Shifting my focus to building relationships was a slow and deliberate process that occupied most of the next four years of intentional work. Brydon-Miller, Greenwood & Maguire (2003) reminded me that "[i]t helps to be patient. Building trust in communities that have every reason to be wary of outsiders and especially of academic outsiders doing research is a long-term project" (p. 20). Yet, through this process I changed; my Belizean colleagues changed; and our new relationships became the new foundation of the Belize Education Project*,* allowing us to doing work in a completely new way. Ultimately, this shift, this new powerful river, led to

effects in classroom practice and student learning that I had hoped would happen at the beginning of my work in Belize, but did not happen until these new waterways came to be. Coming to understand my colleagues more profoundly, which led to co-constructing professional development more effectively is consistent with Lincoln et al. (2011) claim that "the way in which we know is most assuredly tied up with both *what* we know and our *relationships with our research participants"* (p. 123).

Indeed, we did become vulnerable to each other in perhaps a way that Behar (1996) describe when she wrote that anthropologists have "always been vexed about the question of vulnerability" (p. 5). As new understandings flowed into our lives, it caused all of us teachers to be together in new and profoundly different ways. As we deepened our understanding of each other and became more vulnerable to each other, our identities could not help but grow and morph into newly created versions of our old selves. We changed each other, albeit in small and nuanced ways. Finally, within the context of these deepened relationships and these newly configured selves, how we showed up in our classrooms, and in our lives, changed. We began to trouble and reconfigure practices that had become habitual over the years.

In our hope for transformation, we all had to become vulnerable enough to get into the waters. It was with the hope that this river could carve new identities onto the stone canyon walls of old assumptions, of my previous disregard for the "Other," of the durable effects of colonialism on my Belizean colleagues, and ultimately for unsustainable practices that we dived in. No longer were we simply "observing" each other, but we were fully immersed in these new waters. I could not help but follow Behar 's (1996) reflections on her own research when she asserted that the opening and exposure of her heart is the only research worth doing, or, in her words, "anthropology that doesn't break your heart just isn't worth doing anymore" (p. 177).

Through this intentional choice to deepen our relationships, I came to a whole new understanding of the durable forces affecting the lives of these teachers and how these forces played out in our professional development.

Mapping the Exigencies of Teachers' Lives

Because understanding more fully the exigencies of my Belizean colleagues' lives led to so many changes in my work in Belize, I believe it is important to share aspects of the teachers lives and perspectives that came to light and transformed my identity, beliefs, and practices, as well as those of the teachers. The implications of this shift in professional development to a more collaborative, reflexive, and effective experience are significant, and more fully explained in a later chapter. First, however, to assist readers in fully understanding the context of these transformative dimensions of the work, I will unpack the forces of the Belizean teachers' lives that I came to know, which were potential roadblocks to transformation if left unspoken, but ultimately became the connective tissue of our new collective being.

As I expand on the exigencies of my Belizean colleagues, my intent is to establish the verisimilitude for my findings. The stories told by my colleagues in Belize embodied the "evocative power or sense of authenticity of a textual portrayal" (Schwandt, 2015, p. 323) that began to change the very nature of how we were together and how our work unfolded. In addition, my hope is that these findings will draw my readers into what Schwandt (2015) continued to explain as "experiences of respondents in such a way that those experiences can be felt" (p. 323). Nash (2004) also expressed this objective when he wrote that he wanted his stories to capture the intimacy he had experienced with his participants. Specifically, he wrote, "I wanted my stories to convey my understanding of my participants' words, their intonations, pauses, breaks, and the self-critical apologetic stance they, and often I, assumed when speaking. I

wanted *my* stories to convey my empathetic understanding of their stories" (p. 2). Nash (2004) further noted that, as a scholar, it was his intellectual responsibility "to find a way to use personal insights gained in order to draw larger conclusions for readers; possibly even to challenge and reconstruct older or educational narratives" (p. 18). It became my intellectual responsibility too.

As my colleagues' stories became, in a sense, my stories, I realized I have only myself as a tool to convey them. In this regard, I began to operate according to Krieger's (1991) confessional thinking, "uncovering myself as the tool." As she explained her process, she constantly challenged her existing understandings and her perceptions of others with what she felt she knew about herself, and, at the same time, she confronted her self-understanding with what her interviewees seemed to be telling her that was different (p. 181). Kreiger's (1991) process of coming to understand herself and her perceptions better through the stories of her interviewees echoed my own experience.

Behar's (1993/2003) reflections on this practice were instructive to me as well. As she considered writing *Translated Woman*, she noted: "Clearly, any ethnographic representation – and I count my own, of course— inevitably includes a self-representation" (p. 271). These insights give me a sense of hope and resolve regarding our work in collecting stories and experiences, which resulted in the effects for which we were striving. I also reflected back to Behar's (1993/2003) words that ethnographic work includes both our inability to understand the experience of others, while simultaneously recognizing the "absolute necessity of continuing the effort to do so" (p. 271).

Understanding the forces that work on the teachers' identities brought me to a point where I was able to approach professional development in different ways. Only when I was

culturally competent enough to reimagine a different kind of professional development, did new effects start to emerge.

So, because coming to know my Belizean colleagues as people and teachers was so important to the work we ended up doing together, I will draw the stories, dialogue and shared lifeworlds of my colleagues, highlighting themes that worked to change our relationships, identity and ultimately practice.

I will unpack these findings in the following way. First, I will discuss the multi-generational forces of family on these teachers' lives—both in terms of the influence of family on these individuals' decisions to pursue an education and become a teacher, as well as ways in which family presented barriers to these pursuits.

Next, I will look at the influence of early childhood experiences in the classroom. I will explain how these experiences influenced the teachers' tools on managing behavior in classroom, as well as their perspectives on an ideal climate and culture of a community of learners. I will also explain how my Belizean colleagues' early teachers provided role models that inspired or oppressed them.

Third, I will describe the journeys the teachers embarked on to become teachers. I will look first at the challenges and triumphs of obtaining a high school education. This gave me not only an understanding of my teachers' perspectives on the value and privilege of an education, but also deepened my understanding of the teachers' raw determination. I will also explain challenges of becoming a teacher without a formal education in teaching. In sum, I will show how my Belizean colleagues entered the classroom, sometimes with a high school diploma, often as teenagers, and rose up as highly effective teachers. Learning about these aspects of my

colleagues' lives gave me a clearer picture of the importance and the validity of learning from those "in the trenches," side-by-side in the classroom.

Next, I will describe the harsh realities of teaching in Belize. I will explain how my shared lifeworlds gave me a physical understanding of teaching in the classrooms of the jungle. I will also discuss the constraints and demands that come from the Belize Ministry of Education.

Finally, I will share the visions that the Belizean teachers have for their students and for themselves. Understanding these visions helped me work collaboratively in co-creating professional development that is meaningful and effective for all involved in the project.

Only by coming to understand all of these dimensions of my Belizean colleagues' lives was I able to reimagine and reconfigure professional development as a more collaborative and participatory enterprise. Because of this, it is important to include what I learned about my colleagues' lives as part of my findings because this knowledge is very useful for understanding the significance of the enormous changes in professional development, identities as educators, and instructional practices and outcomes I cover in the subsequent findings chapter. In other words, what might appear as a digression is actually essential for understanding the landscape of effects that constitute the bulk of my findings. Finally, although I provide annotations about what I learned and how I was changed by getting to know my Belizean colleagues more intimately, and although I note how these storytelling and listening experiences link to theory and research, for verisimilitude's sake, I mostly let my colleagues' words and their stories speak for themselves.

Family

"Call it a clan, call it a network, call it a tribe, call it a family.
Whatever you call it, whoever you are..."
(Howard, 1978, p.234)

As with all life stories, Cecelia's story began long before she was even born. It began with the lives of those who came before her. I am well aware that these lives were, and are, steeped in the cultural and economic context of Belize. Lewis (2000) reminded me that, although colonization may no longer exist in Belize, the lasting effects of its presence are evident" (p. 22). Tuhiwali-Smith (2012) also described the enduring effects of colonization, including poverty (p. 207), stressing the need to understand the complex ways colonialism's impact is still felt (p. 24).

In the context of Belize's cultural and economic realities, Cecelia began to tell me about her mother from a small village, whose formal education ended in Standard 3 (9 and 10-year-olds). As she told her mother's story, Cecelia's voice took on a seriousness I hadn't heard before. She explained how her mother always valued and hoped for an education for her children. It became her mother's life work (Cecelia, personal communication [focus group], April 13, 2016).

Most of the teachers shared a variation of the same story of their own mothers and fathers. Stella's mother also came from a small village and was only able to complete Standard 3 (9 and 10-year-olds) (Stella, personal communication [personal interview], October 14, 2015). Noelly recalled two women who came before her: "my grandmother didn't go one day to school, while my mom got to complete 5th grade" (Noelly, personal communication [personal interview], October 15, 2015). Joe, too, shared his father's triumph despite having no formal education: "My dad… did, he *did* learn to read and write a little, and he was good in math…but he had no education" (Joe, personal communication [personal interview], October 16, 2015).

This long list of those who came before these teachers illuminated not only their own journeys, but intergenerational histories that involve both struggle and hope. Reissman (2008)

helped me understand that these life stories do not "fall from the sky" (or emerge from the innermost "self"); but they are in fact composed and within historical contexts. These stories tell us as much our story teller's culture as they do about a person" (p. 105). Johnson and Golombek (2002) echoed this idea when they noted that stories are not simply accounts of individuals moving through experiences in isolation. Instead, by their very nature, stories gain their meaning from a collective social history (p. 5). In going back in time with the teachers of Belize, it was also critical that I travel back into the lives of those who had passed on their social and cultural histories.

Although those who came before these teachers may have not had opportunities for formal education themselves, many of them passed on the hope, or the imagined possibility, of an education for their children. These early crusaders' narratives of literacy and education were passed on to their children, and new worlds for their sons and daughters were imagined. Holland et al. (1998) claimed that these imagined worlds embodied in narratives can inspire new actions (p. 49). Perhaps it is one of humanity's great gifts, to be able to imagine different worlds and to bring them into being through narrative activity. Frank (2010) claimed that new narratives have the capacity to arouse people's imaginations. In fact, they make the unseen not only visible but compelling (p. 107).

Joe's story was especially compelling and captured my imagination. He leaned back in his chair and lifted his eyes as he recalled a morning with his beloved father. At thirteen-years-old, Joe considered himself finished with his education. Having finished primary school, he saw no reason to go to high school. His father told him that if he didn't go to school, he needed to go to work with him in Belize City:

> So, Monday morning, I got up. They woke me up 3:00 in the morning. My mom prepared my lunch and my dad's lunch. I went to the city. As we reached there my dad said you have to go up there and clean the windows and it was not on the inside, it was on the outside on the scaffolding. The breeze was blowing, I prayed to God, and my feet were trembling. I was afraid of the heights. So, my dad sat down at lunch and had a conversation and said, "think what you want for your life, because this is how I work." …My dad did, he did learn to read and write, and he was good in math…but he had no education, Yah. At that moment, I just stood there looking at this life. I said*, "ok, I will go to high school."* (Joe, personal communication [personal interview], October 16, 2015)

In contrast, the newly imagined possibility of a high school education caused tremendous angst for Stella. Immersing ourselves together in the waters of her life story changed our relationship and both of our identities. She wept as she began to tell her story, recalling the financial hardships she knew that her mother was about to take on with the dream of her 13-year-old daughter attending high school. In this space of hearing and reliving Stella's anxiety and standing side by side with her as the 13-years-old protagonist of her story, I knew this heroine was clear on two things. First, she knew this dream her mother held for her would cause her family formidable hardship. Second, she knew that this new narrative or imagined possibility was powerful. Like Frank (2010), Stella understood the power of a compelling narrative to animate, instigate and mobilize. After all, if narratives can mobilize social movements and send nations off to war (Frank, 2010, p. 10), surely they could move Stella's mother to charge forward in the crusade of her daughter's education. In this regard, Stella recalled waiting to hear if her scores were good enough to attend high school:

> We all lined up in the classroom to get our grades. I was last, so I had to wait. I was waiting and waiting. I was nervous. So, when I finally got there, and the teacher got there…90.4, the highest in the class. So, I was happy. (Stella, personal communication [personal interview], October 14, 2015)

Despite the apparent joy of this moment in her story telling, Stella began to cry as she continued to unfold this event:

> I get sad. My mom didn't know, because I didn't tell her. Because she said if I got a high grade, she would send me to high school, and I know she couldn't afford it. I knew that was for, like, people who had money. And I KNOW she wouldn't be able to afford it, but she was stubborn. (Stella, personal communication [personal interview], October 14, 2015)

However, a teacher foiled Stella's secret, and told her mother. I followed Stella as she entered the threshold of this journey. "My mom was happy. She didn't care about where she was going to get the money. She enrolled me" (Stella, personal communication [personal interview], October 14, 2015).

Although the financial impact of high school was felt, Stella managed the early challenges, "I used to work cleaning the labs, so I get free food and free tuition, except for bags and schoolbooks and uniform… My uncle's daughter, I used to wear hers" (Stella, personal communication [personal interview], October 14, 2015). Despite the fact that Stella's mother could not afford the textbooks, the first form (freshman year) was not too difficult for Stella, because as she said, "I could still do the work. The first form isn't that hard, so the books didn't really matter" (Stella, personal communication [personal interview], October 14, 2015).

Again, Stella did not tell her mother she had passed the first year of high school, and again, the neighbor revealed her secret, and so she continued high school. However, by the time Stella reached the third form (third year of high school), her story took a turn:

> It was harder. I didn't have the textbook, and this level is harder, so I start missing class, because the English class was a big textbook. My friends would say they have to use it…because he give a lot of work. So, I start missing class, I would run away.
>
> (Stella, personal communication [personal interview], October 14, 2015)

Stella failed this English class and was expelled for failing a core course. Her mother's reaction still lives in her life as she travels in her mind to this moment, she switched her language from past to present tense. "So now we were coming home and she tells me she doesn't know what I will do now. I was like 15. I will just be a drop out. She was crying, as she had hoped in me. Of our four of us, I was the only one…" (Stella, personal communication [personal interview], October 14, 2015).

Stella's story continued to involve more trials, leading her to an abyss:

> I cried that whole summer. Until a friend I had, she was like older than me, a drop out, suggested [a different High School] …and she had a friend and he was nice. He said, 'Go and I will pay.' So, this guy, he paid. He paid. He paid my entrance fee. Then sometimes he would pay other things, sometimes he would not. And afterwards, I grew to like him. I appreciate him. He was like 15 years older than me. The thing was that I got pregnant for my son with this guy. And found out that he had a wife. He lied. So…(Stella, personal communication [personal interview], October 14, 2015)

In this life story, Stella rebuilds her life. She ultimately graduates from high school, and even teacher training. She is reborn; she is transformed. Now as a mother and as a teacher, Stella

enters her classroom with impressive strength and a sense of triumph. (Stella, personal communication [personal interview], October 14, 2015).

In this moment of dwelling with Stella and her life story, my own identity shifted. I found Bakhtin's (1986) insights useful in that, as I heard Stella's story, my own thinking, was shaped and even "reborn" in the process of internalizing my understanding of Stella's life (p. 92). Bakhtin also helped me understand that, as the listener, I too became the speaker for Stella. Her story became mine in many ways. My deeply held assumption that a high school education was a birthright was upended. Now, when I entered the space of Stella's classroom, this new understanding came with me. As a staff developer, this would begin to shape my work in ways I was just beginning to appreciate.

This new understanding was also strengthened time and time again with each new story I heard. It became clear to me that, although Stella's particular journey of acquiring her education was unique to her, each one of these teachers experienced heroic passages that involved both real and metaphorical deaths and rebirths (Campbell, 1949) that took my breath away.

Like Stella, Mathias somehow found the strength to be vulnerable and to trust me to travel back with him to his own difficult high school experience. Mathias wept as he recalled the early death of his mother when he was fifteen-years-old. Not only did he suffer loss, but his family was upended: his baby sister (11-years-old) was sent to live with an aunt, and his father had to go away to work:

> So, my brother and I, we went to high school, and we came back home to nothing. We had to cook right after when came home. My dad was at an island working, and he would send us money like every week. So, that was my high school. I was 15, my brother and I only at home. (Mathias, personal communication [personal interview], October 12, 2017)

The next year Mathias's brother married and left his childhood home, and his little sister returned home. He continued:

> Again, my sister and I were left alone. She was 12 and in Standard 6 (11 and 12-year-olds). It was same routine, like my brother and I, we were left alone. We would just go to school, come home and have to cook and clean. (Mathias, personal communication [personal interview], October 12, 2017)

As Mathias continued through high school and teacher training, he struggled with depression:

> Again, that discouragement started to come. No motivation. Sometimes I would just reach home, see the house empty, preferred to go bed. I was like 'ok, this is not for me.' So, I stayed home. I started not going to class, and eventually, like, failing courses, because I didn't really care. (Mathias, personal communication [personal interview], October 12, 2017)

However, Mathias eventually found the strength to triumph over his depression. In reliving these years, side by side with Mathias that evening at the table, with our untouched ice cream in front of us, I found myself filled with gratitude for his "baby" sister who acted as a mentor in his difficult struggle to get an education and become a teacher. She gave him "equipment for living" (Burke, 1941) or the knowledge and confidence required to overcome his fear and depression so that he could face the adventure of his own education. Or as Mathias recalled, "Finally, I passed. I think my sister was a motivation for me to finish, to accomplish my goal" (Mathias, personal communication [personal interview], October 12, 2017).

The influence of family continued to present itself in the storied lives of my Belizean colleagues. Although family often played a significant role in launching the teachers' educational

aspirations, it could also work in their lives as an obstacle. Waiting for siblings to finish high school is not uncommon. As I sat with her on her family's porch. Rose explained her journey.as her brothers, sisters, and nieces and nephews ran in and out, handing us lime-aid after lime-aid. "I finished my 6th form, (equivalent to United States' senior year of high school), when I was so old. I would say 30 is old. I had to wait for my other brothers and sisters to finish their high school" (Rose, personal communication [personal interview], October 12, 2016). In this experience, there was no resentment. Instead it served to bring her family closer and offer a tremendous sense of purpose. Her parents, who came in and out of our space on the porch with glasses of lime-aid for us, beamed with pride as Rose unfolded her tale. Of course, they would. Even though they themselves had not gone to school, they had launched a family of 11 teachers. While we swam in lime-aid, love and stories, Rose spoke that evening with pride about her siblings:

> I worked to help my dad pay their tuition. So, I could not go and study right away because I still had my brothers and sisters who wanted study at high school. So, I said I will wait for them to finish. So, I waited for all of them to finish. Then I will go and study. And I helped my family. I wanted them to be somebody, somebody in the future, not a teacher maybe, but something that they like to be in the future…you see, none of them said 'I don't want to study'. Or, you know, my brothers, they are not those guys who are drinking, you know or have a bad life style. All of them are in church serving God and helping those in school. You see? (Rose, personal communication [personal interview], October 12, 2016)

Rose's life story illustrated the importance of family. The story not only taught me about the family sacrifices, but also the deep joy that family connections brought to Rose.

For some of my Belizean colleagues, however, the historic and cultural norms that shaped their families were dangerous. Noah and Gizem, who are married and teaching at the same school now, recalled Gizem's high school days in a focus group at my home. First, the two explained to me that, like Rose, Gizem had to wait to begin high school:

> I started high school when I was 19. I had to take a break for a few years. I started to take care of babies, and then went to work for a friend of my mom's store. It was another year wasted. Then, I went to Spanish Lookout to cut those chickens. I was like 14, 15, and 16. (Gizem, personal communication [focus group], April 13, 2016)

When at last she began high school, math was especially difficult for her. She enlisted the help of Noah to pass her math class. She went on:

> I used to hate math, and I used to go find him (pointing to Noah) to help me with my math. Because after so many years after primary, I was having a hard time. And everybody said, 'Oh, he is your boyfriend,' but he was helping me with math, but he was the one who inspired me with math and science! (Gizem, personal communication [focus group], April 13, 2016)

All of us in the focus group laughed, knowing that this "math and science inspiration" led to their marriage and their beautiful two-year-old daughter. However, in the levity of that moment, Noah grew serious as he recalled, "I paid the price for that. One day I was walking her home, and her dad came behind with a machete and chopped me right on the head like that" (Noah, personal communication [focus group], April 13, 2016). He bent down and showed us a scar in his scalp. He went on, "He was going for a second one that was coming, and she (pointing to Gizem) put her hand up like that (demonstrated how Gizem put her hand over his head to protect it) and he chopped *her* hand!" (Noah, personal communication [focus group], April 13, 2016).

Gizem put up her hand for everybody in the focus group to see her scar as well, as she continued, “Remember, I told you he was bad; he used to beat me. Yes, because Noah was helping me with my math. My father didn’t want his children to go and learn. He wanted me to maybe stay home and help my mom. I don’t know. It’s the culture from his father” (Gizem, personal communication [focus group], April 12, 2016). The rest of the focus group jumped to confirm or to co-sign on the truth of these cultural barriers Gizem had to overcome (Focus Group, personal communication [focus group], April 12, 2016).

Be it the good, the bad, or the ugly, families are part of who we are. Following Rosaldo’s (1989) thinking, I knew that coming to know each other could not be within isolated locations in space with marked centers and outer edges. I came to realize that shying away from the intensity of our lives would distort what I would come to know, and even eliminate my understanding of influential experiences in our lives (p. 12). So, it was that the branches, twigs, and leaves of our families dipped and played in the rushing water too. The families became part of this river, not just from their stories, but from their porches and the common everydayness of our lives, our shared life worlds.

For example, Cecelia’s sister-in-law travels each year from another village to cook for us during the week we spend in Belize. Celicia’s daughter helps, mostly pouring our lime aid. Her husband drives and picks us up the airport or school. He opens his home and shares his life and his own teaching with us. Another principal’s father picks the oranges from his farm and, with his wife and other daughters, hand squeezes over a hundred oranges so the teachers from the United States can enjoy juice. At the same time another teacher’s husband chops coconuts for the teachers from the United States with his machete. The mother of Noelly, one of the principals, is up before the sun rises to grind corn for the enchiladas she makes us. Sasha’s father drives his

pick-up truck filled with coconuts from his farm, and like Rose's husband, delights us with not only a coconut, but the sensation of watching and hearing a machete whack it open.

When our Belizean colleagues spend time in Colorado, our families also became part of the river of relationships and changed ways of being. During their sojourns, they watch my husband in new and unfamiliar roles for them, as he prepares their lunches on our dining room table every morning and offers to do laundry for them that week. They take selfies with him as they load and unload the dishwasher together, and they laugh with him about washing the dishes without getting their hands wet. They sit on our couch with my youngest daughter, who has cerebral palsy, to tell and hear stories, as together they brush her doll's hair.

These experiences remind me of some of Tedlock's (2017) insights. She wrote that experiencing each other's ways of life while working and speaking with others in vulnerability and solidarity is central to understanding the human experience (p. 858). How vulnerable we all became in sharing our families, the heart and core of who we all are. And yet, how profoundly we all came to know, enjoy, and understand the simple everydayness of these tiny moments with our families. We became united in this. From here we began to build our common ground.

Classrooms that Shaped the Classrooms

I also came to know what my Belizean colleagues experienced in their primary school classrooms when they were young. Like their intergenerational stories, these stories reminded me that the teachers in Belize, like the rest of us, are not independent of their cultural-historical contexts (Bruner, 1993, p. 67).

As I listened to their stories of classroom experiences during their formative years, I gained glimpses of the durable hopes and fears these teachers developed as young children. As Frank (2010) taught me, such stories have the capacity to arouse my imagination; to make the

unseen of these classrooms not only visible, but compelling as well (p. 107). Alongside the storytellers, I immersed myself in the waters of their early lives and participated (if only imaginatively) in the magnitude of compliance and the risk of questioning or deviating from classroom expectations.

Cecelia felt lucky that she had not been hit, herself, for disobeying a teacher. She recalled that she had been a strong student. However, in witnessing others getting hit, the fear of that possibility remained a part of who she has become as an educator:

> As a student, I was probably one of the few in Belize who never got thrashed, and I can remember a girl by name, and he would put her like that on the chair [she bent over the chair to show me], and would hit her with a rope. I thought if he ever did that to me, I would just die. Thank God I graduated and nobody did that to me. But…it used to be bad. They would hit you with rulers, belts, ropes, whatever. (Cecelia, personal communication [focus group], April 13, 2016)

Like Cecelia, the other principal in the focus group, Noelly, was academically strong in school. She finished her work quickly and would become bored. Unlike Cecelia, the consequences of boredom and curiosity were severe:

> They would give me work. I would finish it immediately, and then I would get into trouble and then I would get whipped. I used to get whipped almost every day of my life in school. It was the norm. I remember one day a teacher said, "Gal! I tired of whipping you!" I just went through school like that. (Noelly, personal communication [focus group], April 13, 2016)

Although Noelly described getting whipped for getting into trouble as a result of boredom, more of the teachers in the focus group noted that talking or not completing the expected classwork

came with a steep cost. Stella, for example, tried to make sense with me as we co-created her memory and her story of why she was hit, “She lashed if you didn’t finish your work, or if you were talking. She didn’t like noise. I remember she hit me and I was quite…so maybe I didn’t finish my work” (Stella, personal communication [personal interview], October 16, 2015).

Probing her early memories, Grace told me a similar story, “Whenever I can’t do something she hits me. Oh, yah, that’s the Belizean system. They hit you. If I don’t do my homework they hit me. And they hit you with a stick” (Grace, personal communication [personal interview], October 14, 2015). As her story washed over me, I wondered if the use of present tense was a function of the dialect, or if it reflected the power of this memory, which still lives within the storyteller’s ethos to this day.

In addition to the physical pain of getting hit, Noah recalled how humiliating these experiences were. “Sometimes when you didn’t finish an assignment they would pull your pants off in front of everybody and lash you” (Noah, personal communication [focus group], April 12, 2016). Everyone in the focus group jumped to confirm this social fact themselves. (Focus group, personal communication [focus group], April 12, 2016). What struck me about Noah’s memory was the emotion it conjured up, not only in him, but in the rest of the focus group, and in myself, as I shared the experience viscerally, albeit virtually. He finished his story commenting that, “Up to today, I see this teacher and still can’t get it out of my head” (Noah, personal communication [focus group], April 12, 2016).

As these memories induced a powerful emotional response in me, they seemed to induce a reliving of the experience in other focus group participants. As the teachers recalled being struck, they seemed to re-experience the physical pain itself. Grace closed her eyes as she poured her story into the waters of our togetherness:

> Whenever we didn't bring our homework she would hit us so hard with a stick. Like this thick [showed the thickness with her fingers] and we had to take out of our hands [Grace put out her hands to show, eyes closed again]. I was also hit with a rope. They would double the rope. You would have to hold out our hands [Grace held her hands out to show me]. Don't dare do this [pulled her hands away to demonstrate pulling away to avoid getting hit] "Don't miss, because you get another portion of it" [Grace's shoulders lifted and her face twisted in pain]. (Grace, personal communication [personal interview], October 14, 2015)

Joe's physical response was similar. His eyes were also closed and he, too, switched his storytelling to present tense, bringing me into the moment of this experience.

> He pull my hair [Joe pulls on his hair], sometimes my ear [pulls on his ear]. Sometimes he walks by and pinches us hard right here [Joe pinches his side, ribs]. He has long nails. These two nails are really long. And that is like 'uhhh.' [Joe winces Finally, Joe opened his eyes and finished his story.] Those were not good moments. (Joe, personal communication [personal interview], October 16, 2015)

I emerged exhausted from listening to each one of these re-lived experiences, which so definitely clarified the enormity of the consequences of non-compliance within those classrooms. As I listened to and was moved by these accounts, I became a different person. My own identity changed with each new experience, with each new understanding. As this new self emerged, I no longer entered a classroom in Belize with the assumption that student voice or student choice would be something a teacher would find value in. Listening to these stories changed me, and as Coles and Knowles (2001) reminded me, simply by being human, I could not help but be molded by this new context I was swimming in (p. 22). My practice changed, too, in that now, as I

engage in staff development and have conversations in and around classrooms, I elicit the teachers' own comfort levels of questioning, voice, and options within the sacred walls of their classroom spaces.

The storytellers seemed transformed too. In the process of the telling, they watched me wince with them. They could not help but notice my eyebrows furrow and my jaw drop—maybe just a bit but a drop all the same. They witnessed me catch my own breath, which I think was barely perceptible. They seemed astonished. It changed how they saw their own experiences, how they reconstructed experiences in their own life stories, and how they saw me.

Sharing our lifeworlds changed all us too. As teachers from the United States, when we first came into the Belizean classrooms, some of us could not help but notice paddles hanging on some of the classroom walls. Although we noticed them, we never saw them being used. I wonder if, the teachers of Belize could feel our cultural repulsion at the sight of them. It gave me a sense of how they valued and worked to connect with us.

My colleagues also spent time in our classrooms in Colorado. Early on Cecelia asked me if it was true that we never "thrashed" our students in the United States. Grace recalled a transformation based on her experience in Colorado:

> When I got the opportunity to go to Colorado, that was a breakthrough for me. The discipline is quite different. It is SO different. They discipline in a way that a child is going to understand. They say "I will also tell you this is WHY I am doing it to you. This is why I discipline you." It doesn't entail hitting. It entails a punishment, but a punishment that will not hurt you in the long run, that won't leave an effect on you in the long run. It won't leave a scar. Here in the Belizean system, our discipline is more…I

would say, more harsh…. that the first thing we do is this! [lifts her hand to show slapping]. (Grace, personal communication [personal interview], October 14, 2015)

The shared dialogue, the story telling, and the shared lifeworlds were working to change our thinking. Unable to hold back her tears, Grace shared a story with me that indexed a change in her thinking:

> I was struggling, and I felt impatient, and I felt like I was losing control, and I did the mistake to hit. To hit at child with a ruler, and I remember I went home that day and I felt so sorry, so guilty, and all that reflected back, "Why would I do that?" And I went back the other day and I… I… I… called the child and I said come here, she was kind of scared. She didn't want' to come. (Grace, personal communication [personal interview], October 14, 2015)

Grace continued to cry as she spoke. I found myself feeling what I think she was feeling, and I, too, cried as she went on:

> I promised myself I would never hit. And I did it again several times, and I regretted it, and I told myself, "You need to stop because you can't have them go through that." And I quit. And whenever I wanted to do this [showed slapping hand], I put on brakes. I brakes. I found other ways to discipline. I said, "Ok, no recess" or "Stay back 15 minutes afterschool." As I put on the brakes, I thought, "You know Grace, this is your passion. You love your job; you want to see them through. (Grace, personal communication [personal interview], October 14, 2015)

Both Grace and I emerged from this storytelling event drenched in vicarious learning and changed. And so it was that we came up out of these waters for breath with newly imagined

possible worlds in our heads. And as Holland, et al. (1998) would have predicted, our newly imagined worlds began to inspire new actions" (p. 49).

Becoming a Teacher

As I took in the early storied lives of these teachers, I also imaginatively participated in the process of becoming a teacher in Belize. For many teachers, they recalled a time when there were few formal requirements to become a teacher in Belize. Cecelia commented, "there was even a time when you graduated from Standard 6 (11 and 12-year-olds), not even high school, and you could go to teach" (Cecelia, personal communication [focus group], April 13, 2016).

Noelly concurred, "most of the teachers who taught us just graduated from Standard 6. Those people worked themselves up in the system. Because in those days attending high school was too expensive" (Noelly, personal communication [focus group], April 13, 2016).

The teachers then recalled their own lack of formal preparation to be in the classroom. Noah explained, "I didn't have any teacher preparation. I didn't study to be a teacher. It was acceptable. You got out of 6th form (equivalent to senior in high school), no problem" (Noah, personal communication [focus group], April 13, 2016). Noah continued with the tale of his own preparation:

> I was without a job for two years. One evening I was listening to the radio I heard this pastor on the radio, and I prayed and said "God, if it is your will, give me a job." Two days later here came the phone call that we need a teacher, so I went. It was 2006. The Friday before school opened in September the government called me and interviewed me and that very same day they hired me. (Noah, personal communication [focus group], April 12, 2016)

The stories from other teachers revealed that it was quite common for young people in Belize to secure teaching positions with no formal training, no licenses, and no college degrees. In this regard, Noelly laughed at her own story, taking me back to her life as a pregnant seventeen-year-old:

> I was 17. I went to work on a tobacco farm; I picked beans…. I did all of that to bring whatever I could to home. I was applying all over to have a job. I applied for a job for the Catholics. But I was pregnant, so they would not have taken me. So, I applied for the Anglicans. I wasn't their first choice. They turned me down. But one week later while I was resting in the shade, and the priest was passing by. And he passed, and he stopped and reversed his car and said, "Do you still want a job?" I said, "Of course." He said, "Well, report to school tomorrow." [laughing] So the next day I dressed and showed up. I said to the principal "Father sent me, and here I am. I am a teacher." And she said "Yes, here is your class." (Noelly, personal communication [personal interview], October 15, 2015)

The challenges of entering a classroom without methods classes or student teaching, which was my own set of experiences, was not lost on me. It transformed my own set of assumptions about the challenges these Belizean teachers face, which are completely different challenges from the ones teachers trained in the United States experience.

The challenge of starting a career as a teacher without training felt overwhelming. Cecelia recalled her first experience:

> When I graduated from high school, I was sent to Corezal, and I didn't know anybody in that village, not one single person, so I stayed with the principal of the school. There were only two teachers, her and myself. She was going to teach half the school and I was

> going to teach the other half. I was a new graduate from high school and was to teach half the school. I thought, "I don't want to be a teacher." I didn't know how to teach Infant 1 [5 and 6-year-olds]. She said, "you will teach infant 1, infant 2, standard 1, standard 2. [5-year-olds through 7-year-olds]" I was not prepared I didn't know what to do. Every night I would cry. (Cecelia, personal communication [focus group], April 13, 2016)

Stella recalled attempting to teach reading in her early days:

> At the beginning, I didn't know the order of teaching. So, like in Infant 2 [6 and 7-year-olds], the first time I did it, I didn't know how to go about it, the phonics and so. I would just, like, try and make them read… and not teaching them the basics, I didn't know they have to learn the vowels and all of these things. (Stella, personal communication [personal interview], October 15, 2015)

As was the case with the other stories the teachers told me, the storytellers each registered the reaction of their singular audience: me. They saw my astonishment, however subtle, at the challenge of stepping into a classroom without student teaching experience or methods classes, and then the strength it must have taken to rise up in that space as a teacher. In telling those stories to me, they saw themselves in a new way. Their storied experiences gave me new insights. I was awed by the strength and tenacity as I listed to the chronicles of their lives.

The challenges of entering a classroom without formal preparation was not lost on me, but it did surprise me, and I began to see these teachers in new ways. I was also struck by the ways in which these teachers relied on each other and lifted each other up to become teachers. Noelly laughed again as she recalled her first day as a pregnant seventeen-year-old and how the neighboring teacher launched her into her life-long career:

> And there I was. I stood in front of this class - very scared. So, I walked over to the neighboring teacher and I said, "Can you tell help me? Can you help me what to do?" So, she gave me a little outline of what I should do. I just picked up the pattern, and I swam through. [laughter] The kids were a bit energetic… but a few days after the principal came by and asked the other teacher how I was doing, and she said, "She is a good teacher." And so I became a teacher. (Noelly, personal communication [personal interview, October 15, 2015)

Grace recalled learning from her neighboring teacher as well:

> I don't know anything about how to teach. I remember my neighbor and she was the first one that came to my house, she said, "I will help you." And I asked her how to teach. I said, "I don't know how to teach. I don't know how to do it." She said, "Come. Let me show you," and she got all her books. And she said, "This is what you do." And I said "I don't know how to do it." (Grace, personal communication [personal interview], October 14, 2015)

Stella echoed Grace's sentiments about learning how to be a teacher:

> At first I didn't know what to do, because when they hire you, they don't tell you what to do. They don't teach you how to plan. So, I always ask my co-worker, my colleagues, they taught me, they helped me they showed me what to do. (Stella, personal communication [personal interview], October 15, 2015)

These stories indexed for me the importance and credibility of a having a colleague right in that space with them. These neighboring teachers, who had their sleeves rolled up, who were walking the walk themselves, side by side in the classroom, were the ones who offered exactly what a fledgling teacher right out of high school needed for his or her practice at that time. In this

regard, as Wenger (2002) noted, learning practice is an ongoing, social, and interactional process (p. 102). He went on to explain that "practice resides in a community of people and the relations of mutual engagement by which they can do whatever they do" (p. 73). These forces work to construct and reconstruct practice.

In this way, I came to understand the importance of living and breathing side-by-side with my Belizean colleagues in the classrooms. It became clear that only through the act of standing and teaching together in our classroom spaces, with our shoulders brushing against each other as we moved from student to student, from wooden chair to wooden chair, for a significant amount of time, would I truly have the credibility to have an effect on these teachers' practices.

Identity Work: Becoming a Teacher

As I heard these teachers' stories of physically entering the classrooms for the first time, I also heard their stories of what developing an identity as teacher meant to them. I heard how each teacher came to align their inside identity with their outside vocation or call.

For some teachers, their call began as a challenge, and it was simply through the act of walking through each day as a teacher that they gradually took on the identity of a teacher. Noelly echoed what Wenger (2002) described as the "profound connection between identity and practice," (p. 149) when she explained to me:

> Quitting, Jean? No, that was never a thought in my head to quit my job. I carried that load. I was responsible to my siblings that food comes on the table. But as years went by that profession gave me the opportunity to make a difference in the lives of students who need me. And I would not stop being a teacher for nothing. (Noelly, personal communication [focus group], April 13, 2016)

Joe, too, recalled the physical hardships and the perseverance of his early teaching days. Yet it was ultimately the students who transformed his identity and caused him to see himself as a teacher:

> When I got the call, I went to the inquiry interview and they called me back in three days. I went to the office and they said, "We have a post for you." When I reached my post, I looked at the highway on the way, there on that stretch. I thought "no, this is not for me." Then I started…. I walked a mile and a half to school, almost an hour. I thought, "This is too hard, too long, I don't want to do this." But. it was the kids that pushed me. During the dry season, I was white with dust, and during the rainy season, they [the students] picked up my shoes, they rolled up my pants. (Joe, personal communication [personal interview], October 16, 2015)

Like Joe, Grace's students were instrumental in reimagining her identity as teacher in her early days:

> The first month was very nerve wracking for me…. Teaching them alone was so nerve wracking, and they look at me like "What's wrong?" And I remember I didn't have a chalkboard. I didn't have anything. It was just with newsprint, and I just did the newsprint to do my writing. And we continued. I remember my kids telling me, "That's OK, Miss, we're learning. We're still learning." And so, that made me feel good, like a teacher. (Grace, personal communication [personal interview], October 14, 2015)

That students would be the inspiration for these teachers is perhaps one of the greatest commonalities to all teachers I work with in Belize. Like learning about the inspiration of their families, which I described above, learning about their devotion to their students truly helped me understand them differently, and we began to build common ground. It is the inspiration we get

from children that works to build our identities as teachers, and in those identities, we are united. It is in our common passion for young learners, and our desire to help them fulfill their potential that knits us together as a community of practice. Realizing these commonalities, I knew we could work together, and that working together would likely transform our identities and our practices.

As our students lift and inspire all of us as teachers, so do other mentors in our lives. Just as Campbell (1949) discussed the power of mentors in our journeys of becoming, my colleagues from Belize spoke about sages in their lives who impacted their life trajectories as teachers. As Anisa recalled her grandmother's words from her childhood, she closed her eyes, and virtually brought me back to that pivotal moment her life:

> Before my grandmom passed away, she made a visit to our home and I welcomed her with a cup of water and she said, "Anisa, I want to tell you this. Someday you are going to become a teacher." And she told my parents, "She's going to become a teacher, and she's going to be a great person one day." (Anisa, personal communication [personal interview], October 13, 2015)

Joe recalled the key words of his principal, which changed the course of his life call, "I was like 'I don't want to do this. This is my first time.' And the principal said, 'No, no, I have faith in you, I trust you; don't worry; I will be with you.' So, I said, 'Well, I will continue. I will do this'" (Joe, personal communication [personal interview], October 16, 2015).

Noah also spoke about the first day he was hired. He was offered a position in the morning and went to a teacher orientation in the afternoon. It was the inclusive spirit of the other teachers and the label they put on him that helped him develop his identity as a teacher:

> That very same day they had a teacher thing. I was wow- I see teachers like ten-years-experience, like 30 years of experience, and the teachers were like "Welcome! Welcome, Maestro," and I was like "Wow, that's who I am now!" And I can't stop teaching now. (Noah, personal communication [focus group], April 13, 2016)

While people serve as guides in the lives of teachers, so do life experiences. Life experience led to the call of teaching, to the deeply held identity of being a teacher for my Belizean colleagues. Joe recalled, for example, having a heart attack earlier in his life. In this experience, he came to develop his sense of himself as a teacher in profound ways:

> I can recall losing consciousness. During that time, I know I left. I don't know what was happening around me, but in myself I was calm, looking at myself during my childhood with my parents, seeing all those things, and then looking at my grandparents, I know they are not here. I saw them. They were talking and smiling, and I was happy that I am looking at them. I know I left. I saw that, but God was there with me. I felt the hands on my shoulder and on my heart. I felt calm and my body going completely calm, and I just said it will be well. I woke up again, and the doctor was smiling, He was laughing. He said, "I thought you were gone." I have been given a second chance. The pastor came to me and said, "It is a miracle that you have been given a second chance. Keep on praying and asking God to show you the calling you have." I said, "Well, I am a teacher. That's why I was given more time." Now, I am spending more time into the classroom. And everyday… I always thank God for that. (Joe, personal communication [personal interview], October 16, 2015)

Mathias described his childhood experience of being severely burned and how it also worked to develop his sense of self as a teacher. Like Joe, Mathias had a life-and-death

experience that profoundly changed his life. In Mathias's experience, his identity was shaped by his belief that he had been called to teach:

> I don't really recall the feeling of the pain at that moment but I know it was very painful. It was the evening on the 10th of March 2001. My brother went to pick my sister at grandma's house and mom and I stayed home. Back then there were only public phones at our village. There was garbage outside burning. There was coconut husk. I had this mentality that I wanted the garbage to burn fast. I remembered that inside a room there was a gallon of gasoline. So, I went inside, took the gallon with me outside and poured gasoline on the garbage. (That was the biggest mistake I ever did as a kid) I don't really remember how or what happened, but I just remember myself on flames. Something very strange - I will never forget - is that while I was burning I saw myself under a tree laughing at myself being on flames. So, I went through the street of my neighborhood in flames running. My cousin took a wet blanket wrapped me around and the fire was out. I was rushed to the Northern Regional Hospital where they took care of me for a few hours then I was transported to the hospital at Belize City. I was being treated there. But nothing much was done for me. Doctors said that if I remained there for 3 days more and I would have been dead. But that wasn't Gods plan for me. (Mathias, personal communication [Facebook message], October 18, 2016)

Mathias went on to explain the work of an "American" who got him to the Shriners Hospital in Texas, saved his life. He then reflected on the impact of this experience on his identity as a teacher:

> After 16 years have passed, I see God really had a plan for me. I am here alive because of him. I decided to become a teacher in which I am able to be with children and make life

> better for them. I know my mom would be proud of me. (Mathias, personal communication [Facebook message], October 18, 2016)

These stories index how significant life experiences are in how my colleagues interpret what it means to have "teacher" as a primary identity marker. Not only do stories and dialogue continuously work to shape our senses of ourselves with each other, so do our life experiences. Moje and Luke (2009) reminded me that my colleagues' identity is fluid and dynamic developed over time (p. 418). Realizing this social fact, I have come to appreciate the significance of virtually dwelling in each other's experiences, through the hearing of each other's life stories. As we share not only conversation about classrooms and students, but the classrooms and the students themselves, our impact on each other grows. On an even more profound level, as we share not only our professional lives, but our personal lives, be it our families, our homes, or the everydayness of our lives, we deepen our ability to impact each other's identity and practice.

Finally, the triumph of teaching, itself, can cement a teacher's identity. Both teachers from the United States and teachers in Belize told me that successful teaching works to solidify our sense of self as a teacher. Stella recalled that shift in identity when she said:

> When I walked in, I still, didn't know what to do, so I didn't feel like a teacher. Until at the end of the year, when I noticed like this child who couldn't read, could read. Now I helped him. And then I said, "Now I feel like I am a teacher." (Stella, personal communication [personal interview], October 13, 2015)

Rose also recalled her early memories effectively teaching a younger learner, and told me, "Well, I did it! I did it! I am a teacher!" (Rose, personal communication [personal interview], October 12, 2016).

I have come to understand the significance that success has on teacher identity. In this regard, Wenger (2002) reminded me that, "we define who we are by the ways we experience ourselves through participation as well as by the ways we reify ourselves" (p. 149). I have also become aware what Day, Kington, Stobart and Sammons (2005) describe in the power identity has on influencing teachers' sense of purpose, self-efficacy, motivation and effectiveness" (p. 601). My new knowledge of my Belizean colleagues frames my practice as a staff developer. I feel the weight of increasing effectiveness, not just for isolated incidents of a particular lesson or child, but as a means to shift teacher's identity. In that way, more significant and more sustainable practice can begin to shift. In coming to understand the journeys that my Belizean colleagues traveled in realizing their identities as teachers, I also came to realize that this process is life-long. I heard their stories of their pasts, yet I was also witnessing the continuous construction of all of "self-as-teacher," of all of us right before my eyes. With this realization, Holland et al.'s (1998) claim that the self is a continuous, perhaps life-long, flow of activity, and that the self can never be finalized (p. 173) made much more sense to me. Self is, after all, a matter of constant becoming; self always has the potential to reinvent itself. In that regard, our continuously changing identities always hold the possibility for new constructs, new relationships, and ultimately new practices. Identity development is continuous throughout life and can be revolutionary, especially when individuals participate in multiple communities of practice. As I shifted the ways in which I worked with others to create powerful staff development experiences, dialogue, and shared worlds within our classrooms, this realization gained considerable potency. Especially useful for this work was learning what it takes to become a teacher in Belize, as well as what constitutes the typical work life of a Belizean teacher. I discuss these issues in the following section.

Realities of Teaching in Belize

In and through sharing lifeworlds, I came to a better understanding of what it means to live and breathe within the everyday space of a Belizean classroom. Only by showing up day after day in the realities of the teachers' schools and classrooms could I begin to internalize the challenges and the triumphs of this endeavor.

As soon as teachers from the United States set foot into a Belizean classroom, the physical hardship of a tropical classroom are noticed. When I first began working with teachers and schools, I was disappointed by the lack of their presence at school. I observed that teachers often just simply didn't show up, or if they did, they showed up hours after school had started. There was simply no communication, and no teacher. (Not every teacher has a cell phone.) After having spent time planning to be with the schools, the Belize Education Project team and I shook our heads in judgment and chalked it up to our deeply held assumption that our work ethics differed.

Before we had finished shaking our heads, our own rented van sputtered to a stop. We all jumped out, and lifted the hood to find the radiator hose, which had been patched with duct tape, had not held. We waited patiently, as one of the teachers from the United States called somebody on her cell phone. After an hour, a man on a bicycle rode up with a new hose clutched in his arm, with his other hand on the handlebar. The radiator hose was fixed, and we arrived at the school an hour and a half late.

One night, rain washed away a bridge that we had to cross to get to one of the schools. We found another way to get there, but it took an additional two hours. We were late to school. Another time we found the same bridge washed out. We attempted a detour. Our rented jeep got stuck in 18 inches of mud. We contacted one of the Belizean teachers who had a car. This

teacher was also responsible for bringing our lunch, which had been prepared before sunrise. We all loaded into her car, on each other's laps, with watermelons and beans and rice resting on the laps of those on top. We arrived at school several hours late. Again. In living through my own challenges of getting from one place to another, I became more aware of what other challenges there were for these Belizean teachers. Those who took public transportation told me about the inconsistency of busses, which, like our van, often broke down. They also ran into washed out bridges and mud fairly often. Those who walked several miles were also subject to 18 inches of mud and washed out bridges. My own experience of hopping into my Prius with a cup of coffee and driving on suburban streets to my neighborhood school was not equivalent. It opened my eyes to the amount of assumptions I, as a privileged, middle class white woman, walked (or drove) around with. This experience not only disrupted my assumptions of things like a work ethic, it also caused self-reflection on my own assumptions. It made me wonder what other hidden assumptions I lived with that were as much a part of me as my skin color. I was disappointed in myself and humbled. In some ways, it also made me more forgiving of my earlier teachers from the United States traveling to Belize, with their assumptions of privilege. Finally, it made me more conscious of the timing of professional development. We began to plan our professional development in a way that allowed time to arrive at the school, and we were also especially mindful to release teachers with plenty of daylight and bus options left in the day.

Another reality that hits most teachers from the United States as "third world" is the physical space of the classroom. The cinderblock classrooms are smaller than the suburban classrooms we are used too. Generally speaking, the class sizes are larger too; it is not uncommon to have a class of 40 students. We are often struck by the crowded feel of the space.

We notice the tablet arm chairs, heavy wooden chairs with one arm that is extended to function as a writing surface, and make-shift shelves from boxes, crates, and pieces of wood.

At the same time, we cannot help but be impressed by the creativity of the people who inhabit these spaces. Teachers use old wet wipe and food containers to store their books and manipulatives. Alphabet charts are hand colored and put into clear, ziplock type plastic bags to protect them from the heat and humidity.

The heat is another thing teachers, especially from Colorado, notice. Although teachers from the Rockies occasionally experience temperatures in the upper 90s, we do not experience one hundred percent humidity, and we do not experience working or teaching in that climate for hours. While we taught a leveled text, sweat dripped off our faces, wrinkling one-inch circles on the book's pages and smearing the marker ink. As sweat dripped onto our work, we noticed from across the classroom that Belizean teachers were pulling out washcloths from their belts, or skirt waistbands, to wipe their foreheads. We soon followed their lead and tucked our own washcloths in our own waistbands. The physical energy the heat and humidity drained from us was not lost on me. Working as a teacher in a Belizean classroom is physically taxing.

In addition to wearing on the teachers, the elements are hard on materials and classroom structures too. There is no glass in the open windows, and the space between the walls and roof is open. This space is crucial for air flow in the heat, but presents a challenge in protecting the few classroom materials the teachers have including books, alphabet charts, or paper, and technology.

The school structures themselves are also subject to damage from the elements. In 2016, Hurricane Earl took off part of the roof of one of the classrooms. As of October 2018, it had not been completely repaired, making storing books in that section of the classroom problematic.

The classroom and school materials are challenging to obtain and maintain. The luxury of a copier is not taken for granted. Making copies for classroom use is limited, as is the paper. Technology, reliable electricity, and Internet access are all just emerging.

Along with material resources, human resources are also limited. There are no special education teachers at the schools in which we work. There are no custodians to keep the schools clean or building engineers to keep the schools repaired. There is a lack of substitute teachers to fill in for teachers who are sick or otherwise indisposed. There are no specialist teachers to teach students art, music or physical education, which also would give, the classroom teachers time to collaborate and plan. A teacher's job description includes cleaning their floors, fixing broken tables and doors, bringing colleagues' students into their classroom when colleagues cannot be at school, and planning instruction on their own time. Only by living and breathing the reality of a Belizean teacher's day could I truly begin to understand what I was asking from them by adding an additional assessment protocol or the inauguration of small guided reading groups to include in the everyday work of this reality. As I worked on professional development with my Belizean colleagues, I had to be very sure that everything I advocated for was not only extremely useful, but also manageable in these teachers' lives. Also, whatever it was had to be something the teachers, themselves, asked for, wanted, and saw benefit in.

In addition to navigating the infrastructure of getting to school, the Belizean teachers also face health challenges in conditions very different from those in the United States. What an antibiotic could take care of in 24 to 72 hours in the United States can keep a teacher out of the classroom for weeks. In 2017 we arrived to find that an epidemic of "pink-eye" or conjunctivitis had spread throughout the country. Without antibiotic drops, teachers and students who contracted it were required to stay at home for ten days. Strep throat, without an antibiotic, can

keep a teacher out of the classroom for a month. Tropical illnesses, such as dengue fever or malaria, also cause extended time away from the classroom. My colleague, Joe, for example, was disappointed not to be able to spend the week in October we were in Belizean classrooms because he had contracted conjunctivitis the day before we arrived, in 2017. The unfortunate fact that he could not participate in professional development gave me insight to his lack of control over something as basic as his health. In addition to his disappointment, I worked side by side with Eve who welcomed 25 of Joe's students into her own small classroom for ten days, which was already filled with 30 of her own students, I witnessed the challenges these teachers gallantly face and work through regularly.

In addition to managing the lack of resources, the physical challenges, and their heavy load of responsibilities, teachers in Belize also have to manage the expectations of the Belize Ministry of Education. Unlike in the United States where teachers have considerable freedom in what they do, the power structures within the Belizean system are more rigid. As I worked side-by-side with teachers in Belize, as well as with Ministry of Education personnel, I noticed that they live in starkly different environments. Those who work directly for the Ministry inhabit air-conditioned cars and offices and are fully dressed in long sleeved suit jackets. In contrast to the teachers in the hot and steamy classrooms pulling washcloths from their belts to wipe their brows.

In 2017, members of the Ministry of Education requested a meeting with me, members of the Belize Education Project, and the principals of the schools with whom we were working. The purpose of the meeting was to inform members of the Belize Education Project that the schools we worked with were failing on the national exam. I appreciated the members of the Ministry of Education's urgency and intent in addressing the lack of literacy in their own country's students.

I also appreciated the Ministry of Education's own limited human and material resources to increase the effectiveness of literacy education. After a two-hour meeting in an air-conditioned office I listened to and considered that these schools were scoring low on the Primary School Exam. We went for an additional hour-long lunch, all the while the teachers were back in their classrooms continuing to execute their heavy loads in oppressive heat. I wrestled with spending this precious time to discuss the scores without good information on what caused those scores, or how these exams might inform classroom instruction, or simply how these scores could help teachers reimagine their practice.

I also struggled with spending this time away from where I felt the real work was—in the classroom with young learners. Still, this experience gave me some useful context for understanding the power dynamics of education in Belize. I found myself unable to break from this structure. It caused me to wonder whether a "top down" structure in an educational organization might be systemic. Decisions and power might start at the top with the Ministry of Education and flow directly downward to school principals, then to teachers, and finally from teachers to students. At the same time, I wondered if there was a lack of voice and decision-making flowing back from the bottom up. For example, the teachers themselves did not have input on the content of the exams; they were not provided with detailed sub-scores from the exams; and they received no training on how results could be used. This authoritarianism demanding compliance may be a result of what Lewis (2000) described as the residual effects of colonialism within the schools of Belize, which were "originally transmitters of the social order and obedience" (p. 10). In this regard, Shore (2004) wrote that colonialism still exerts effects in schools in developing countries. She also recognized and discussed the relations of

empowerment/dispossession, which have their roots in the nineteenth-century project of colonialism (p. 111).

An example of authoritarian nature of this structure was brought into high relief in correspondence sent by the Ministry of Education to all primary school managers (a position that manages the schools in a particular region or district) in Belize. The message noted the fact that scores on the PSE (Primary School Examination) declined in 2018. It also indicated that Ministry representatives would be meeting with all school managers to clearly define Ministry expectations and future consequences for not meeting Ministry requirements. I wrestled with the idea of "consequences" for teachers if their students were not learning. I considered the effectiveness of how this could change practice, especially as the scores lacked the data required to inform practice.

Among other demands from the Ministry of Education, are the extensive, mandatory lesson plans. Recall, in this regard, that teachers do not have any planning time during the school day. As I worked from these lesson plans I noted that each plan included the time of day, the objective, and the resource (i.e., the textbook) with the page numbers. Most teachers told me that these plans took an average of eight hours of their weekend time to write. Rose told me that she works several hours every night:

> The last two weeks I woke up early, like 1:00 in the morning to do the units [the lesson plans]. I work on them until 5:00 or 6:00 when I have to go to school. It is every day, because we have like 10 subjects. In addition, from your lesson plan, you have to do your visuals. It takes a lot of time, a lot of time. (Rose, personal communication [personal interview], October 12, 2016)

Moreover, the accountability measures teachers must endure are significant. Each week the principal of each school is required to obtain the lesson plans from each teacher, read them, and sign off on them. The principal is also expected to go into each teacher's classroom some time each week, pick up her or his lesson plan, and check to see that the teacher is following it to the letter. Administrators from the Belize Ministry of Education also occasionally drop in and do the same. This system of planning and planning accountability makes it unrealistic to differentiate for groups, let alone individual learners. Additionally, it makes formative assessment and adjusting instruction based on the many skill levels of students in each classroom all but impossible. Day to day progress monitoring of students, using feedback from that monitoring productively, and capitalizing on teachable moments are also nearly impossible within this structure. Simply put, when students grasp a concept more quickly, or slowly, than a teacher had anticipated on Sunday night, there is no realistic way to update the lesson plans. This planning system sets teachers up in a way that renders it impossible to be responsive to ever changing to student needs.

Another challenge the Belize Ministry of Education presents for teachers is in the administration and use of standardized testing. The Primary School Exam (PSE) is given to Standard 6 [11 and 12-year-olds, and the final year of primary school] as a summative assessment. Although the PSE offers a raw score for a broad content area such as "English Narrative" or "Social Studies," it does not offer any more fine-grained information such as students' scores on subscales in each broad area. Such information would help teachers know which areas their students were struggling in and how, which would, in turn, allow them to construct learner profiles and target instruction for each student strategically. I reached out to the Ministry of Education about this issue:

> Would it be possible to give us a little more analysis on these scores? For instance, do you have the information about how these scores are broken down? In particular, if you have the data on literacy, could you break it down even further into the different components of literacy. For instance, are the students struggling with basic retell? Are they struggling with meta message? Are they struggling with author's message? Are they struggling with finding main idea in expository text? Finally, how is this data gathered? Are the students given a short passage to read, with a paper pencil response to multiple choice questions? Essay? Both? (J. Kirshner, personal communication [e-mail], April 9, 2018)

I did not receive answers to these questions. More significantly, the teachers who were instructing the students did not get the answers to these questions. There are consequences to the top-down, one-way power relations between the Ministry of Education and the schools, principals, and teachers of Belize. For example, teachers do not receive data from the testing regime that is useful to them for planning and implementing instruction. Instead of informing instruction, these data embarrassed and shamed teachers and principals. For instance, the ratings are published, and the failing schools are put on a list of low achievers. In addition, the meeting involving the principals with members of Belize Education Project to discuss the low scores without the possibility of the scores informing change or instruction left me wondering what the purpose of might be.

With so many challenges, it can be easy to forget the pride and joy teachers still find in their vocation. The last bit of information Rose shared during an interview with me is testimony to the pride and joy they feel despite the working conditions they endure: "Just so you know, it

was always my dream be a teacher. I have never, wanted to be anything else" (Rose, personal communication [personal interview], October 12, 2016).

As Joe began his school year in 2017, he wrote to me on Facebook:

> As we were approaching the village this morning I got a feeling of excitement knowing that we will soon be in our classroom meeting and greeting our new students, new faces. If the cleaning today and picturing the new environment gave such a wonderful feeling.... Oh my! I can only imagine what September 4 will be when we start the new school year. Oooh I can't wait!!! (Joe, personal communication [Facebook message], August 22, 2017)

As I have come to share the lifeworlds of my Belizean colleagues, I have become much more aware of their structural, physical, emotional, and intellectual challenges. I have also become aware of the deep and abiding passions my Belizean colleagues have for teaching. Moreover, I have come to see that this passion to teach is deeply embedded in my colleagues' sense of identities as teachers and how this sense of purpose is related to the purpose they find in their lives. Understanding these things is important for two reasons. First, it is essential in the mechanics of creating professional development. For instance, I need to be aware of the challenges we all must work around. These challenges include things such as when to hold professional development workshops so our teachers can make it to them on time and get home in daylight. These challenges also mean that I need to be mindful of the significance of classroom furniture to students' families, the extensive lesson plans required of teachers, and the obstacles teachers face regarding differentiated instruction. I do not think I would be as aware of these things had I not intentionally inhabited these teachers' lifeworlds as much as I did. The second reason why sharing lifeworlds is important to my work in Belize is one that I have

indicated both directly and indirectly throughout this dissertation. Doing so has helped me cultivate authentic relationships within BEP participants. As we co-construct professional development to enhance our practice, we also co-construct our identities and our trust in each other's mutual expertise in our profession and in our own lives.

Spirituality and Education: An Inextricable Bond

Coming to understand the journeys that my colleagues have traveled (and continue to travel) has deepened our relationships with each other and to changes in our identities and practices. In addition, it was important that I know, and become immersed in, the visions, the hopes, and the ideals of my Belizean colleagues. I had to know where and how these teachers found purpose in their vocation. By coming to know this purpose, not only did I understand what hooks to hang professional development on, more importantly, by taking the time to understand each other, we began to change each other. Additionally, I changed in that I began to see spirituality as a driving force in educating young citizens in Belize. It shaped my own sense of what I saw as the primary objective in increasing literacy for my colleagues' students. My colleagues were beginning to see the purpose questioning strategies as fundamental for teaching students to comprehend and think more deeply about what they were reading. In the understanding each other's purposes, our relationships deepened. As our relationships deepened, we began to see changes in our identities. And as our identities changed, our practices did too. For all of us to deepen our understandings of how we reach learners in Belize or in Colorado, there must be an underlying consideration of the purpose, or the why. In relation to this claim, Noelly said, "I think this journey is a true call" (Noelly, personal communication [focus group], April 13, 2016). What did this mean to her?

To Cecelia, this call includes a vision to raise citizens "to be a service to humanity" (Cecelia, personal communication [focus group], April 13, 2016). The ideal of serving humanity I interpreted as becoming benevolent and productive members of a future community, even a future democracy. When I asked Cecelia about my interpretation, she that I was spot on. Her vision resonated with other teachers as evidenced in what they had to say. Anisa put it this way, "I want to help my kids become better citizens for tomorrow" (Anisa, personal communication [personal interview], October, 13, 2015).

Joe was more specific as he discussed his real-world vision and hope for his students:

> I think that you can prepare them for the real world. Some of them might not further their education, because most of them will end up in the fields. But even though they are on the field, they still need to know something, still need to know basic math. When you are planting, you still need to know how to plant. You still need to know how to estimate a distance, because you cannot plant everything in one place. (Joe, personal communication [personal interview], October 16, 2015)

Noelly also addressed the real-world vision she had for her students, while weaving in her hope for her students to find purpose and meaning in both simplicity and in service:

> I just want to see my students to fit in the world and to be one who is always one to give rather than to receive to be one to serve, and don't idolize materials goods, to see the value of the simplicity of what they have, and to be somebody they are not, but to find themselves and be the best of who they truly. If you are a farmer, to be the best farmer. (Noelly, personal communication [focus group], April 13, 2016)

Grace echoed Noelly and Joe's reflections when she expressed her vision for her students in that whatever her students would grow to be, they would find purpose and a sense of pride in their

lives; “I do everything to accomplish that child’s dream of becoming a better person, that person with the high self-esteem. That when they are out in the work force, hey would be able to put their heads high” (Grace, personal communication [personal interview], October 14, 2015).

Eve also noted her call is “to mold children into becoming fruitful people in society.” She continued to remind me that “teaching doesn't only have to do with academics, but also making them learn to appreciate each other in the world” (Eve, personal communication [personal interview], October 13, 2015).

As the teachers explained their purposes and visions as teachers, it became apparent that the underlying purpose of this call was spiritual. Faith was the foundation of their vision for their students. While preparing students to be contributing members of their communities is a big part of their work; preparing students for a spiritual existence is perhaps an even greater part. As Noelly put it, “As a teacher I feel like I am doing wrong in putting the content before God” (Noelly, personal communication [focus group], April 4, 2017).

Noelly elaborated on the ways in which spirituality touches her students when she said: “Spirituality is the food that feeds that inner part within a human being that we cannot touch physically. It allows the children to find that inner part within themselves.” She continued to explain the ways in which spirituality works to create contributing members of a future world: “It creates that consciousness of ‘I need to do the right thing.’ It guides us, we decide on our shape, who we become as a person or as an individual” (Noelly, personal communication [focus group], April 4, 2017).

In similar fashion, Noah explained that he wants his students “to be a life changer to somebody else, to have the best education they could get, a family that they love and appreciate. A job – doing it to the best of their ability.” He ended his comments with his highest vision, that

he never wants his students "to forget the *main focus*, which is going to heaven" (Noah, personal communication [focus group], April 13, 2016).

Ida echoed Noah's sense that the purpose of education is, at least in part, to prepare students for heaven. She explained, "We are not only preparing them academically for this world, but for God, and his second coming - that there is a mansion prepared for us so we prepare them for this world and for the world to come" (Ida, personal communication [focus group], April 4, 2017).

Richard put it this way, "to educate is to redeem" (Richard, personal communication [focus group], April 4, 2017).

As I shared the lifeworlds of teachers in Belize, I became increasingly aware of how they connect spirituality and education. My observations in classrooms confirmed the power of this connection. The first hour of the day, from 8:30 to 9:30 is devoted to Bible study. Although there is no legal requirement for this schedule, a national goal of education for Belize includes spirituality (UNESCO, 2006). Each classroom has illustrations of Bible stories and images of Jesus on their cinderblock walls. The lessons throughout the day, whether in literacy, math, social studies, or science, are steeped in references to scripture. Ida helped me understand how classroom practices and spirituality are of a piece:

> For example, in the lower division, Infant 1 [5 and 6-year-olds], they are doing their numbers, and they are doing number one, and we use creation to do our numbers. "On day one what did God make?" Or, let's say multiplication. We can go back to the loaves and fish, and how it was multiplied to feed so many people. So, if we do that throughout the day, and almost every day, we will see a difference in their behavior in everything,

> even in their friends. We will really be passing on the message. (Ida, personal communication [focus group], April 4, 2017)

Richard also explained how he sees the relationship between democratic values and spirituality:

> In class we teach them about democracy. We allow them to vote for certain things, like class president. We can link it to spirituality when we look at the story of Joseph. When he was taken as a prisoner. Later on, he was taken on as something higher. But he also did what was correct. That's an example of a leader that was connected to God. (Richard, personal communication [focus group], April 4, 2017)

The spiritual focus of education is in many ways different from education itself, especially public education. I realize the United States government was founded on the value of separation of church and state as expressed in the First Amendment to the United States. Constitution, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof" (U.S. Const. art. I, § 1.). As a result, I see public school teachers being philosophically committed to the principle that one faith should not be privileged over another. In this commitment, United States teachers' identities are bound in the ideal that every student who enters their classrooms will experience an environment that protects the integrity of his or her individual faith.

In contrast, Belizean teacher identities are steeped in a different set of values and structures. Members of the church hire almost all Belizean educators. The teachers are instructed to teach the religious practice of the specific church that hired them. As UNESCO's (2006) report on Belize notes, "Religious education and/or Bible studies [in Belize] commonly feature denominational schools" (p. 9).

Despite these cultural and structural differences, I am struck by the common ground there is to be found between teachers from the United States and Belizean teachers. In this regard, Tolliver and Tisdell (2006) argued that "regardless of the structure religion takes on in public education, it could be argued that spirituality is common to the act of teaching" (p. 45). Tisdell and Tolliver (2008) also claimed that the "act of teaching, itself, is about making meaning and constructing knowledge. More broadly, spirituality is an awareness and honoring of wholeness and the interconnectedness of all things" (p. xi).

As I have reflected on our shared and changing identities as teachers, I have come to realize that the identity of a teacher is also sacred. The Latin root of sacred, "sacrāre", means to devote (Dictionary.com, 2017). Sacred also means "[e]ntitled to reverence and respect, regarded with reverence" (Merriam-Webster.com, 2017). There is common ground for all teachers who experience devotion and reverence as part of their life work. In this regard, Palmer (2007) wrote "Knowing, teaching, and learning are grounded in sacred soil, and renewing [one's] vocation as a teacher requires cultivating a sense of the sacred" (p. 113).

Understanding the significance of spirituality for the teachers in Belize also caused me to reimagine my own sense of spirituality. Cecelia noticed changes in this aspect of my identity and commented on them in a focus group:

> Now when we are with you at school we pray. That's a change I have seen in you. When you first came to us, I know how strange you found it that we are always praying. But now when you go to our school, it is something you have accepted. That is us. We don't judge your spirituality, but we notice we have seen a growth. (Cecelia, personal communication [focus group], April 4, 2018)

Perhaps Cecelia was referring to the fact that I have grown spiritually simply through the act of digging more deeply into new ways that spirituality presents itself, which Tisdell (2003) described in the following way:

> We all come to a greater sense of authentic identity in different ways and through a different sense of what spirituality is and its role (if any) in the process. By digging deeper, and finding new wells, we might understand the river better, and that river includes ourselves. It includes each other. (p. 162)

In this growth through the process of "digging more deeply" into not only the everyday experiences in our respective classrooms, but also into each other's the spiritual lives, we could begin to include each other in our shared experiences, and we could explore our visions for education more deeply. I recalled Nash's (2004) words about our stories as "symbols for God, ethics, morality, justice, wisdom, truth, love, hope, trust" (p. 2). Behar's (1996) words reinforce the value I found in my colleagues' stories of spirituality. "From the global arena to the intimate stirrings of the human heart, new stories are rushing to be told in languages we've never used before, stories that tell truths we didn't dare acknowledge" (p. 33).

Through practicing authentic dialogue, sharing stories, and coming to love colleagues with whom we have shared commitments, visions, and a passion for our learners, we have become changed people. We have more reciprocal and authentic interactions; we have more authentic relationships; we love each other more deeply.

Who we have become together is a formidable force. Like a rushing river teeming with the life of new ideas and ways of being, and disrupting old mindsets and deeply sedimented assumptions, we can no longer go back to who were before. At last we can begin to see different effects of our collaborative and participatory work. These effects, which include changes in the

identities and practices of all parties, also include co-developing new understandings of the nature and functions of literacy and new teaching practices related to these new understandings. This transformation has set the stage for engaging in professional development with real purchase or pragmatic teeth.

Chapter 7

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION 3:

Constitutive Effects of Focusing on Relationships

We are here in solidarity….to work side by side.
(Cecelia, October 21, 2018)

The deliberate work of engaging in more genuine dialogue, sharing life stories, and living within each other's lifeworlds accomplished far more than relationship building. I recalled Wenger (2002) as he wrote that communities of practice are about "being together, living meaningfully, developing a satisfying identity, and altogether being human" (p. 134). Besides relationship building, reorienting the professional development work to involve more sharing and collaboration motivated teachers both from the United States and Belize to reflect upon, reimagine, and transform aspects of our identities, practices, and goals.

Transforming Relationships and Power Relations

To be sure, we noticed our relationships were changing in a plethora of ways. As Cecelia noted, "After working with each other all these years, we are now connected by truly divine providence" (Cecelia, personal communication [focus group], April 4, 2017). Noelly expressed something similar in a Facebook message to me, "As each year goes by, I see you becoming more connected to us, more determined to conquer this quest despite the barriers" (Noelly, personal communication [Facebook message], February 22, 2018). Our connections were deepening, and we were changing. As our relationships shifted, do did our identities, as relationships and identity are interconnected. I will discuss the shift in our identities in the next section.

More specifically, the asymmetrical power relations that had characterized our relationships for so many years were eroding. In this regard, one of my colleagues from the

United States commented to me that we will know have started to make progress, when the teachers quit calling us "missionaries" and begin to call us colleagues. In 2017, we noticed and celebrated the fact that Belize participants were using the title "missionary" far less often than they had previously. I think part of working to decrease the colonial power structure was in our willingness to become vulnerable. In this regard, Behar (1996) argued that we must become "vulnerable observers" if we are genuinely going to understand others. As Noelly disclosed in a focus group interview, vulnerability has, indeed, been central to relationship building within the BEP:

> Sometimes it would have made us feel a bit embarrassed. The amount of resources you have compared to ours. That brings some, or ***used to*** bring, some discomfort. I wondered if our bathrooms are up to you to standard -- If we offer you a plate of food, will you eat it? The standard and our environment is not like yours, the way our classrooms are, our unpainted or broken furniture. But I could recall that you said, "Look at us. Look how we see you and what you do." (Noelly, personal communication [focus group], April 4, 2018)

Teachers from the United States experienced vulnerability too. One member of the Belize Education Project expressed, "I used to struggle with my role, always feeling a huge case of the imposter syndrome. At some point, I realized it wasn't about the topic, or the schedule, it was about igniting honest conversation" (Paige, personal communication [e-mail], May 10 2018). Related to this sentiment, Cecelia recently commented, "We are all human, we all falter and we all come up. No judgment" (Cecelia, personal communication [telephone interview], October 22, 2018). It is important to note, however, that it takes a leap of faith to accept human imperfection, especially in a context still riddled with the effects of colonial rule.

Shared moments of my own successes and especially failures in Belizean classrooms began to trouble years of sedimented assumptions we held about each other's authority, ability, failings, and simple humanity I recall a particular moment in which I was modeling a lesson in Belize for an Infant 2 class (6-year-olds) in front of a group of Belizean teachers. My intent was to demonstrate the importance of extending both the author's and illustrator's craft. I planned to use a mentor text and water colors to engage students. It involved using watercolors. I was still becoming familiar with the classrooms in Belize. Although I knew there was no running water, I had never experienced, nor even considered, the implications of watercolors and 6-year-olds without running water or an endless supply of school-provided paper towels. With my water bottle in tow, I poured a couple of tablespoons into a lid for each child. Soon, colored water was all over wooden desks, little hands, and faces. My heart raced. I knew how much work it took for their uniforms to be clean for the rest of the week without washing machines. I turned around to see every one of the teachers who had been observing me, as the expert on delivering effective literacy strategies, jump up to save me from myself. Each one of them found the rationed amount of tissue they had in their own pockets and mopped up my mess. In the end, we all looked at each other; laughed; shook our heads; and we began talking about what had just happened. This shared moment, the dialogue that came as a result of it, and yes, the laughter too, began to trouble years of sedimented assumptions we held about each other's positionality, authority, ability, strengths, failings, and simple humanity.

Perhaps even more courageous than allowing ourselves, as teachers from the United States, to be vulnerable in the space of the Belizean classroom, was in opening up our classrooms to our Belizean colleagues. It was in those moments when we allowed the Belizean teachers to witness our life work in the nitty-gritty and messy everydayness of how we teach. It was there

Belizean teachers could witness our greatest shortcomings right along with our triumphs. It was there we were completely exposed. One particularly transformative event occurred in 2018 when Eve witnessed an exceptionally trying moment while observing me teach in my Colorado classroom. One of my most behaviorally challenging students, who at the time was being diagnosed with Obsessive Defiance Disorder, was engaging in some especially problematic behaviors, including shouting and throwing white boards across the room. The school psychologist, one of the school district behavior specialists, Eve, and I were all trying desperately to meet the needs of not only this child, but the rest of the children in the classroom at this moment, but to no avail. When the moment had passed and the children had left for the day, Eve and I cried together. It was another moment of truth. No longer could this Belizean teacher believe educators in the United States had all the answers to the challenges we face. Eve recalled this moment later that evening after we had all prepared and enjoyed dinner together and sat down for a focus group conversation:

> I identified with you because I have been through that. I have been there, so I know. At first I thought, they are Americans. They have everything under control. They don't have to worry. They have counselors, special needs teachers; they are all set. And now that I see the class that you have, I kind of say, "We don't have counselors, or anything like that, but we go through the same thing." Even though you have counselors and all those people who help you, you suffer what we suffer without the counselor. I could see that it hurt you because you wanted to meet his needs. (Eve, personal communication [focus group], April 4, 2018)

It changed who we (me and my colleagues at the table) thought we were as teachers; it changed our relationships; and it changed our capacity for self-reflection about our own practices.

Upon hearing Eve during the focus group, Cecelia responded with similar thoughts, along with her own realization that, even though teachers in the United States have abundant resources, we don't always have answers to the problems we face:

> When I hear about that moment in Jean's classroom, it makes me know for a fact that our hearts are united because we all deal with children and their common problems. The thing is that sometimes we depend on you to see how you are going to solve the problem. . . like for you to model it for us to take it back to our country. But then again, you are a teacher, you are a colleague, we are human. (Cecelia, personal communication [focus group], April 4, 2018)

Cecelia's comment reflected the fact that Belizean educators typically assume that educators from the United States have better and more effective answers to issues like behavior. Among other things, her comments reflect an emerging understanding that we do not; that we struggle too.

At the same time, I was hearing about how Belizean teachers were seeing our relationships with them as different. My Belizean colleagues and I were developing a collective identity as comrades in struggle. We acted differently when we shared each other's lifeworlds. The power relations between us and our ways of being together were beginning to be disrupted in slight yet significant ways. Our sedimented roles—me as the giver of knowledge and my colleagues as the receivers—were shifting. Increasingly, my colleagues from Belize began sharing their knowledge and their perspectives on things. First this happened in small ways. For instance, they taught me how to make "fry jacks" (similar to sopapillas), how to fry plantains in coconut oil, and how to crack open a coconut with a machete.

Later these shifts in who held the "important" knowledge became closer to our core goals. For example, Noelly and Eve took over a math group in my first-grade classroom when they saw I was struggling to reach my students. I had exhausted every strategy I knew to teach addition with regrouping to these 7-year-olds to no avail. In that moment, in my colorful suburban classroom, Noelly and Eve grabbed my math manipulatives (my Unifix Cubes, instead of the beans they used in their classrooms) and successfully taught this group to add and subtract while regrouping with their own strategies, which involved adding the tens, before the ones. I learned from them that for some children, adding tens first makes more sense. It was yet one more moment when we looked at each other and knew that our identities shifted, maybe ever so slightly, but in a way that could not be undone.

As we saw each other as more equal in our ability to teach, Belizean teachers began to identify themselves as co-teachers, not only in Belize, but also in our bright shiny suburban Colorado classrooms, filled with privileged children. Plans for co-teaching flew back and forth on Facebook chats. As Mathias was engaged in planning, for example, he wrote, "I was thinking about teaching your students in Colorado about the different birds we have in Belize. I will end with the Toucan, our National Bird, and have your students make the Toucan at the end of the week" (Mathias, personal communication [Facebook message], March 23, 2017).

Our identities and assumptions about who held what knowledge shifted in the act of cooking, and in the act of teaching. Sedimented assumptions about not only who owned what knowledge, but also what knowledge had value, began to shift. We began to examine assumptions about how we show up in each other's lives, and in how we express our existences not only to ourselves, but to those around us. We began to think more intentionally about our voices. As an educated, white, middle-class woman, my understanding of self-expression, or

ensuring I had a "seat at the table," involved expressing my mind and my soul through the articulate use of spoken and written language. My hope, of course, was to offer my Belizean colleagues and their students better and more sophisticated ways of articulating themselves. To me, being in solidarity with them meant that they, too, should have a "seat at the table," that they, too, should have their voices heard in a global conversation about education. I believed my own voice was more than well developed, at least until my Belizean colleagues challenged this belief.

Every teacher who traveled with Belize Education Project to Belize noticed and commented upon the fact that the Belizean teachers (and students) sang often, and with such a soul stirring execution, that it took our breath away. It did not occur to us that this may be their voice, that this may be a primary way they express their own experiences and announce their existences to this world. As Americans, we nodded, even teared up, in appreciation for this expression, but never took part in it. Song belonged to them, not us. We could not begin to be so bold as to believe the beauty and power of song could be ours too. We thought or assumed that high levels of musical production belonged to those who had had years of musical training.

In the evening of April 6, 2018, we sat at my kitchen table in Colorado, a couple of the Belizean teachers broke into song, as usual. As usual, I listened and appreciated. They stopped, and asked, as they had before, why I wasn't singing. I explained, as I had before, that I am "not a singer." This time was different though. This time, they didn't let it go. What did I mean by "not a singer," they asked. We discussed this some more. It became apparent I may as well have told them, "I have no voice." The word "voice" came up over and over. I recall they implored me to try; they promised, "Jean, we know you, too, can find your voice." I had never viewed singing as

part of "my voice." I shakily tried. I felt foolish and vulnerable, but they were unrelenting. It was a beginning.

Later that year, in October, on the first day our American team sat for lunch crowding around a singular and welcome fan. Asa and Mabel showed up with lyrics to a hymn printed out for us. They informed the teachers from the United States that we were all going to sing in harmony for the farewell lunch. They promised to teach us, support us, and not leave our sides in what for us was a frightening undertaking. We resisted them. We explained, again, that we were "not singers." And again, the two teachers who had initially broken into song promised us that they would help us "find our voice." They enlisted Noah and Mathias to help. The four teachers pushed through not only our perception that we were not singers, but even more importantly, they pushed through the lack of value we had put on singing. Finally, and perhaps most significantly, they pushed through our fear of vulnerability. Some teachers from the United States used humor to deflect their plea to become vulnerable, "Ha, ha…trust me, nobody wants to be around when I sing." However, the Belizean teachers were not having it. It was not humorous to them. This potential for self-expression was dead serious. And in the end, we, who were not singers, sang…in harmony, no less. We sang in front of all of the teachers from all of the schools. In doing this, who held what knowledge, what knowledge was of value, and who got to be in charge of deciding that, was upended for a small, but very significant moment.

> In relation to the significance of this moment, Tuhiwai-Smith (2012) made me aware of a certain irony when she discussed perceived identity "lacks" among colonized peoples:
>
> One of the characteristics of primitive peoples is that we could not use our minds or intellects. We could not invent things, we could not create institutions or history, we could not imagine, we could not produce anything of value, we did not know how to use

> land and other resources from that natural world. We did not practice the arts of the "civilized" world. By lacking such virtues, we disqualified ourselves, not just from civilization, but from humanity itself. In other words, we were not fully human. (p. 26)

What is ironic about these insights? In our refusal to have voice through song, the other teachers from the U.S. and I also disqualified ourselves from being fully human. In what other ways might we have disqualified ourselves?

Inhabiting these new relationships and roles, my colleagues also began to share our collective work with larger audiences in our profession. For example, two teachers from the Belize Education Project joined me in co-authoring a piece for *Education Leadership* about our experience teaching each other's children and encouraging them to move from being "Pen-Pals to Global Citizens." Additionally, a principal from Belize worked with Dr. Kamberelis and me to write and present a paper on our work at the 2019 *Congress of Qualitative Inquiry* at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. In short, my Belizean colleagues are beginning to have a voice in global conversations about literacy learning and teaching. The power of this new voice also began to shift assumptions of who held what knowledge on a global level.

Old assumptions about each other have been troubled and new ones began to emerge. Our individual identities began to shift, and a powerful collective identity began to grow. In the insightful words of Wenger (2002), a "cascading interplay" of participation brought into being a different way of being together, a new form of "human existence" (p. 151).

Transforming/Transformed Identities

As our relationships shifted, so did our identities. I first noticed this identity shift in myself. This change was deeply personal. Long-held assumptions and understandings began to feel uncomfortable. Recalling Spry's (2017) reflections, I began to realize that my identity and

experience was being negotiated in relation to how I was with my Belizean colleagues. In other words, I realized, that self is never built upon living solely and discretely within myself, but from my interactions with others, (in this case, primarily the teachers in Belize).

To begin with, the immense weight of my own positionality was becoming more apparent to me. Although I may have understood my comparatively large resource wealth from the start, I was just beginning to feel the implications my own white privilege on my identity.

Like Spry 2017, I struggled with my positionality in relation to my participants. This struggle was both "unsettling" and "expanding" because it was "the vulnerable ecstatic story of relation" (Spry, 2017, p. 638). I have, indeed, felt unmoored during much of my professional development work and research in Belize of late.

As I was noticing these changes in myself, the Belizean educators were beginning to see them too. Noelly believes the shift may have started as early as the first day I set foot into the classrooms, as she expressed to me in a Facebook message:

> I know that from the first day you made your first step at Eden Primary School you were transformed from that moment of seeing how our children and teachers were so challenged in literacy. You could have opted to turn a blind eye. You also knew it was not going to be easy. It meant time, human resources, energy and money…you chose the difficult route. (Noelly, personal communication [Facebook message], February 22, 2018)

The Belizean teachers were beginning to see me as more human too. As Cecelia had noted we are all human, we all falter. Noelly also commented on my own growth in a focus group a few months after her Facebook message, noting how I had come to appreciate and understand who they were and how this seemed to prompt a shift in my identity:

> You have changed, I think, by us opening our doors for you to come into our classrooms; showing you the reading level our children read, compared to yours changed you. And in your own growth, I can see that you appreciate us for who we are. (Noelly, personal communication [focus group], April 4, 2018)

Cecelia echoed Noelly's thoughts, "In your own growth, I can see that you appreciate us for who we are" (Cecelia, personal communication [focus group], April 4, 2018).

Eve expressed in a focus group, "I think I have changed you since you have come to our classroom; you have seen our struggles you can identify with us. We have the same passions. We have the same struggles. We wonder the same things as a teacher. We try to get everything we need to teach the children. Same experience. It's changed you" (Eve, personal communication [focus group], April 4, 2018). In other words, in becoming aware of our commonalities, I was changed.

In addition, chief among the changes my Belizean colleagues perceived in me was embracing their spirituality, which was absolutely central to their lives. As Cecelia said, my orientation to spirituality had changed; she had "seen a growth" in that aspect of my identity (Cecelia, personal communication [focus group], April 4, 2018). Later when I discussed this comment, she confirmed that she meant I have not only come to accept their spirituality, but I have also begun to understand it and to celebrate how their most deeply held beliefs provide their lives with meaning and purpose. Not only that, Cecelia sensed I had begun to think a lot about my own sense of spirituality, its meaning, and purpose in my life. She was correct. Through my work with my Belizean colleagues, new forms of spirituality have begun to emerge within me.

As I witnessed my own identity shift, my Belizean colleagues talked about ways in which they were changing too. In this regard, Day, Kington, Stobart and Sammons (2005) reminded us

that teachers define themselves not only through their past and current identities, as defined by personal and social histories and current roles, but they also reimagine their beliefs and values about the kinds of teachers they hope to be in through our changing social and personal surroundings as well (p. 610). Building different kinds of relationships and being together in different ways changed who we were becoming as teachers. Comments about transformation began to emerge, even as early as 2015, the year after I began my deliberate shift to focus on relationship building. In this regard, Joe had this to say, "I think knowing BEP is influencing me…not just around the edges, but influencing my teaching and my strategies" (Joe, personal communication, [personal interview, October 16, 2015). Jae also noted changes in who he was and how he taught, "I can say that I know you. I have spent time with you. I have heard some of your stories. That has changed me" (Jae, personal communication [focus group], April 4, 2018). Noelly described the changes she was experiencing as empowering: "Meeting you and your group has empowered my whole being. I am now different in my perspective of the strategies and approaches as a school leader and classroom teacher. I have learnt to be more resilient to persevere" (Noelly, personal communication [Facebook message], February 22, 2018).

In a telephone interview, Cecelia was especially articulate about how she was changing:

> Trust me, I am a new Cecelia. I look at things differently. I believe I am a better advocate for children. I believe I value children and their learning more. I believe they need to become good global citizens, Jean. If we help the children now, we have better chances for more respectable society. Not only here in Belize. (Cecelia, personal communication [telephone interview], October 22, 2018)

Cecelia's comments reflected Wenger's (2002) important insight that learning, in its deepest sense, is about disarticulating and rearticulating identities; it is about exploring new ways of being that lie beyond our current states; it is not merely formative; it is transformative (p. 263).

By becoming vulnerable to and with each other, and in opening ourselves to learning from each other, we were all changing in profound ways**.**

Transforming/Transformed Practices

Freeman (2001) claimed that the reconstruction of the selves may become the reconstruction of culture (p. 289). We were showing up in each other's worlds as different people, and our actions were now the actions of these different people. As our relationships deepened, and as we reconstructed our identities together, our practices could not help but change. Especially salient were our ideas about and practices of (a) behavior management, (b) learning environments, (c) assessment and differentiated instruction, and (d) student learning.

Behavior Management

I first began to notice shifts in how teachers in Belize managed the unpredictable, independent, and especially non-compliant behavior of their young students. As most teachers know, behavior management is perhaps the greatest challenge teachers face. Teachers were using more jingles and chants to get their students' attention. One of the first times this struck me as part of a transformation was in 2015 at a school wide farewell performance for us. The 300 students were becoming louder and louder with more and more shoving and pushing. The Belizean teachers looked anxiously at each other and at us. At that moment, Grace looked one more time at us, and used the jingle we had used all week: "One, two, three…Eyes on me!" The 300 students responded in chorus, "One, two, eyes on you," and fell quiet. Everybody breathed a sigh of relief. The performance went on. At that moment, a slight shift in behavior management

seemed to be emerging. That year Grace, herself, talked with me about some transformations in her practice she was noticing:

> I am going to confirm that I have learned a lot. I have learned a lot. I remember one of my ways of dealing with children in my classroom. I used to punish them when they do something wrong. I am going to confirm I have learned whole new ways of dealing with them. I try, like if I have children in my classroom that are giving me trouble or something, I try to give, I try to allow them to, to give them extra work in the classroom. I never used to do that. It's working. (Grace, personal communication [personal interview], October 10, 2015)

Transformation is difficult and messy. As identity continuously works to change practice, practice also continuously works to change identity. Grace continued to talk with me about her changed practice, emphasizing who she was becoming as she reflected upon and altered her practice (Wenger, 2002, p. 149). She realized that with shifts in practice came shifts in her identity as a teacher. "And you know I look back, and I think back on how I used to run my class. And I really felt sad, and I really felt like a little ashamed" (Grace, personal communication [personal interview], October 10, 2015). Grace's "confession" was not simply an example of a significant shift from our early years of work; it also foreshadowed a deepening of our connections and more consequential transformations that would happen in the years to come

Learning Environments

Whole group instruction with students in rows of tablet arm chair style desks was the only form of teaching and the only classroom arrangement we witnessed during the first years of our work. The structure of the classroom, itself, provided a physical barrier to other methods of instruction such as small guided groups or collaborative learning groups. Suggesting that our

Belizean teachers use small groups to differentiate was easy to do. Spending time within their classrooms, side by side with crowded tablet arm chair desks was another matter. With a tremendous gift of trust, the teachers tried our suggestions of flexible grouping. We sweated and strained together as we lugged heavy tablet arm chairs across cements floor with deafening scraping sounds each time we wanted a new group structure. Of course, the minute we got on the plane, the chairs were back in their rows. There, they stayed. Why wouldn't they? On the quiet, climate-controlled flight back to the United States, diet coke and book in hand, I was secretly thankful that I wasn't sweating in a classroom, scraping heavy desks across cement floors. Why would they feel any different?

Yet, the idea of flexible grouping intrigued and haunted the Belizean teachers. In April of 2015, they expressed more interest than ever in the way our classrooms in Colorado functioned with small, differentiated groups. They noticed way that small tables and carpets afforded the different physical possibilities for grouping. They asked us to help them figure out how to build spatial and grouping flexibility into their own classrooms. Together we asked one of our donors to provide the funding to hire one of their community members to make small tables for some of their classrooms. The request was granted. In addition, the teachers became more creative in finding carpet scraps, and even blankets for their students to sit on within the classroom. When we returned the next fall, tables had replaced tablet arm chairs in those few classrooms. Carpet scraps and blankets were laid out in corners of classrooms.

As with any shift, this transformation came with its tensions. Something else I had overlooked was that some of the wooden tablet chairs that belonged to families. Grandfathers and fathers had built and owned the same arm chairs for generations. The chairs reflected family rituals, connections, and of course, love. By letting go of the traditional armchairs, what else was

being lost or even dismissed? I came into a Standard 1 (7 and 8-year-olds) classroom and saw many students sitting and working in groups at tables, while three students were sitting alone in their own tablet chairs. I asked the teacher why students were sitting alone in their own chairs. She explained that some parents had requested their seven-year-olds still use the family armchairs.

We celebrated the fact that new seating arrangements afforded collaborative learning and the fact that children were seeking out reading partners. Small physical changes led to small social interactional and academic shifts, which made visible and possible even new physical changes. Transformations of practice were happening, even if in only small ways. Still, the Belizean teachers and I continue to wrestle with how to have flexible seating arrangements in classrooms while also respecting the sacredness of family connections and traditions. There was no simple solution to this, yet this example reminded me that transformation is complicated and messy. What seems like a fairly simple fix often introduces complex, even conflicting consequences.

Reading Assessment and Differentiated Instruction

My early hopes of influencing how teachers could come to know their readers strengths and challenges so that they could differentiate instruction never left me. Seeing untouched DRA boxes and Heineman leveled books still in their shrink-wrap on shelves plagued me in the early years of my work in Belize. I had spent countless hours fundraising to buy leveled books, and I found myself feeling resentful. Yet, I could not deny my own struggle as I shared the lifeworlds of these classrooms. It was unrealistic to copy a new assessment form of the DRA to fill out a running record for each time each child was assessed. We tried laminating a copy of each form for each level, and bringing a years' supply of vis-a-vis wet erase markers, so that teachers could

re-use the forms. We tried encouraging teachers to take running records from a DRA book on a blank paper and then transferring the information into some usable record. Somehow. These makeshift work-arounds were very difficult for us, that is for those of us who were familiar with the DRA and committed to its use because of the information we knew it could provide us. Why, indeed, would anybody else do these arduous backflips, and to what end? But still, I still pondered how the Belizean teachers could know their readers and differentiate their instruction. It was still clear to me that teaching 35 students the same reading task at the same task was a less effective practice.

The beginnings of an answer to my dilemma came from the Belizean teachers' own creativity. The effectiveness of differentiated instruction was not lost on my Belizean colleagues. As they visited our classrooms, they picked up what could work. They grabbed sight word lists, and they practiced running records on trade books. As the years went by I began to see small shifts. One year I noticed the shrink-wrap was off the leveled books. I even noticed evidence of wear on the books themselves. In our Facebook correspondence, I began to get questions like "I tried the running record today, I have a question. When a student doesn't know the word, I make a note of it. At what point do I teach the word? Is it before going to up to the next level" (anonymous teacher, personal communication [Facebook message], October 16, 2018)?

After some more group dialogue on how to respond to a reading miscue and how to prepare young readers to tackle unfamiliar texts, the teacher contributed the following ideas: "Yes!!! I did that today with the word 'look.' I was surprised to hear Joshua reading. He's reading!!" (anonymous teacher, personal communication [Facebook message], October 17, 2018).

I also was beginning to see teachers working hard to assess the individual reading levels of their students and to construct profiles of their reading strengths and challenge. More even than this, I not only saw teachers using systematic ways to assess their learners in Standard 1 (7 and 8-year-olds), but I also saw them enthusiastically sharing with each other the strategies they used to construct reading profiles of their students.

My conversations with the teachers indexed the fact that we were beginning to communicate with each other in very different ways. In 2012, despite my efforts to keep our Facebook conversations about our work with students, much of our communication was not about reading but about non-school issues like shopping. For example, when I posted a question about reading on Facebook, a teacher replied with "I can still imagine myself shopping at Walmart in Colorado" (anonymous teacher, personal communication [Facebook message], May 11, 2012). In 2014, also in response to one of my posts about classroom schedules, Eve responded: "Shopping in the schedule? Things are things cheap there … let's say like jeans pants and blouses. How about computers or tablets? want a lap top" (Eve, personal communication [Facebook message], April 4, 2014).

Now, in addition to taking back jeans and blouses from Colorado, teachers who visited our schools in the United States also took back new tools for new forms of classroom practice. I also changed my beliefs and attitudes about shopping at Walmart. Whereas my initial response was to trivialize and dismiss this petition for time at Walmart, I later came to understand and honor the importance to my Belizean colleagues of acquiring material goods to bring back to their community during their time in the United States. Because of this, I set aside specific evenings for Walmart, Goodwill, and other stores. At the same time, my Belize Education Project team set aside the last Friday of each of the Colorado visits as a time for teachers to

debrief what they had harvested from our classrooms and to craft professional development action plans for their colleagues back in Belize. After a Colorado visit in 2018, Cecelia wrote and sent pictures of their professional development and the passion it had taken on: "The teachers did an excellent job in presenting what they learnt, and also in presenting the action plan. They are actually modeling it. Asa and Mabel have taken it on as a passion" (Cecelia, personal communication [Facebook message], May 8, 2018).

Other teachers also demonstrated shifts in their understanding of teaching as well. Facebook comments took on a new level of reflection in regard to teaching. For example, one teacher wrote on our teacher Facebook page, "We need students to be curious in order to be analytical and to be critical thinkers. At the same time, we need to apply some form of structure while doing this. How do we do both" (anonymous teacher, personal communication [Facebook BEP teacher page], Sept 29, 2017). Cecelia summed up the shift in a contribution to our Facebook group. Anticipating our trip to Belize in 2017, Cecelia demonstrated deep understandings of shifts in the purpose and focus of our interactions that had begun to occur since relationship building had become central to our work together: "The thing is that I have always seen your visits as something deep. You are preparing teachers and students to be lifelong learners…giving them necessary tools to move forward" (Cecelia, personal communication [Facebook message], October 2, 2017).

In addition to changes in the nature and functions of our dialogues on Facebook, reflections from staff development sessions revealed important changes too. This was brought into high relief for me as I looked back on the staff development reflections from 2009 through 2014. I recalled in 2009 and 2010 that most reflections focused on the mechanics of small guided

reading groups or assessment, with little or no attention to levels of comprehension or deep comprehension strategies a guided group might be able to achieve.

In 2018, reflections on professional development and questions teachers asked were very different, focusing on issues such as what it means for students to question and to comprehend multiple levels of meaning in texts they read. Here are some of the comments from the anonymous evaluations of the professional development conducted in 2018, culled almost at random:

> "I just realized if my student is reading a book and doesn't have questions, it doesn't make sense for them to continue reading."
>
> "I wonder how students might be able to help out each other in answering their own questions. What can I do to develop cooperative learning?"
>
> "Questioning in classrooms is very powerful. It makes students think."
>
> "When we are reading we need to learn how to make connections in order to comprehend what we are reading."
>
> "How can I get my students to start thinking of questions to ask about the story?"
>
> "How can I get students to use their own questions to start writing their own story?"
>
> "How do I create a safe questioning environment?"
>
> (Anonymous, personal communication, [professional development reflection forms], October 10, 2018)

In comparing these reflections from these two years, I realized how significantly our conversations had changed and how differently the Belizean teachers were now construing reading and the teaching of reading.

In addition to reflecting and asking questions about strategies that enhance levels of comprehension in their students' reading, the teachers were also sharing ways in which they had already started using these approaches in their classrooms:

> "Making connections is a magnificent combination. After I tried this I saw that students were engaged and oral language was developed."
>
> "The 'I wonder' technique was an excellent idea. Now that I have tried it in my classroom, I know how effective that strategy is."
>
> "Using questioning in the classroom is something I am beginning to do. It is very effective and it allows students to express and/or think deeper."
>
> (Anonymous, personal communication [professional development reflection forms], October 10, 2018)

Just as significant as sharing what they had already put into place, teachers were also sharing newly imagined classroom worlds, new possibilities of what the "could do" and what "could be" in their classrooms:

> "After thinking about this, I am going to create a space for 'I wonder,' so that all can have the opportunity to formulate their question."
>
> "I am going to have each student take a book and write questions about their story."
>
> "I want to get students to form their own questions. I could use a sheet on one side that says 'I notice' and the other side to say 'I wonder.'"
>
> (Anonymous, personal communication [professional development reflection forms], October 10, 2018)

These responses reflected richer and more complex thinking about instruction.

As these written responses reflected new ways of thinking and being with students, so did what I was witnessing as I worked alongside students and teachers in their classrooms. In October of 2018, I walked in to see students paired with collaborative reading partners in Infant 2 (6 and 7-year-olds) and Standard 1 (7 and 8-year-olds). Pictures of cross-aged reading partners also started showing up on my Facebook messages from teachers of Standard 5 (10 and 11-year-olds) and Infant 2 (6 and 7-year-olds). I witnessed a Socratic Debate in Standard 5 (10 and 11-year-olds). I saw collaborative groups working together at new tables to learn about and then create questions and explanations about the layers of the earth to share with each other in Standard 4 (9 and 10-year-olds).

Scheduling changed too, as Noelly informed us after her school's last visit to Colorado, "We restructured our class schedule extending our instructional time during the morning session" She continued to explain, "Phonics, DEAR time, Read Aloud, and Guided Reading Groups were emphasized during this additional time." And finally, perhaps most significantly, Noelly expressed the power these changes exerted. "I have observed that children's interest in reading during their spare time has improved. Pupils have moved up at least two reading levels" (Noelly, personal communication [email message], March 9, 2019).

New ways of interacting with students and eliciting their thinking, new ways of assessing students, and new ways of differentiating instruction began to creep into the classrooms of the schools in which I was working. Instructional practice was indeed shifting, often in profound ways.

Student Learning

So many changed practices emerged simultaneously, it is hard to determine whether and how each of them affected others. As Lave and Wenger (1991) noted, "activities, tasks,

functions, and understandings do not come to me, nor exist, in isolation" (p. 53). Indeed, small changes in student attitudes, behavior, and achievement became increasingly visible. Noticing these changes incited other changes in how we worked together to emerge.

Noelly told me that Ministry of Education supervisors were also noticing differences. When the supervisors came to visit her school, she explained, they were "amazed" at the reading and writing performance of the students, as well as the instructional strategies they observed from the teachers who had visited Colorado. More importantly, the supervisors noticed these teachers sharing and assisting other teachers" (Noelly, personal communication, [Facebook message] May 2015).

Standardized test scores were also improving. Certainly, standardized test scores are only partial indicators of student learning and thinking, and sometimes they actually do not measure what we think they have measured. In this regard, Meier (2002) argued that standardized tests offer the "false hope" that we would be able to "measure everyone against an absolute standard of what it means to be well educated" (p. 190). Still, it is possible for tests to also give educators some sense of teaching effectiveness. In this regard, Noah enthusiastically messaged me on Facebook:

> Maybe you know already about our results for the national exams! My students and Richard's class did well. Ministry of education can no longer say that they don't see the BEP effect in the classrooms. You are an inspiration for me. (Noah, personal communication [Facebook message], June 12, 2018)

Our Belize Education Project team had, in fact, heard about the scores. After years of being on the "watch list" or what the Ministry of Education labeled a school needing "intense intervention," the schools we had been working in for so many years were elevated to a status

that no longer required strict surveillance by the Ministry of Education. A member of the Ministry of Education also emailed me to announce joyfully, "Good afternoon Jean! St. Gabriel Primary School has improved and is no longer on my hit list!!" (personal communication [e-mail], June 16. 2018). In addition, each one of the schools had moved up on the rankings of primary schools in the Cayo District (Primary School Exam, PSE, Belize Ministry of Education, 2018).

Our BEP team was ambivalent about this new information. On the one hand, it felt like some sort of proof that shifts in instructional practice had positive and measurable effects on student learning. We also appreciated the sense of triumph it gave teachers. Recall my earlier comments about the power of feeling successful in our identity as teachers. On the other hand, we worried that the focus on the test scores might lead teachers away from focusing on goals we found to be more compelling—interactions with students that elicited deeper comprehension and more sophisticated critical thinking strategies. As I discussed above, one thing about a focus on test scores that frustrated us was the lack of useful information the PSE gave us. We were only given summed scores, which are not especially useful for constructing reader profiles and differentiating instruction in informed ways.

This concern notwithstanding, we were beginning to feel like our work was aligned with our original quest, which was to help teachers help students become better at reading comprehension and more critical consumers of the texts they read. We were succeeding, albeit in small ways. Although we knew that the Primary School Exam scores may be a questionable indication of improvement, we also knew how much classroom practices had changed and how those changes were related to changes in student attitudes, behaviors, and reading success.

Summary of Constitutive Effects of Relationship Building and our Dialogic Turn

In and through the deliberate shift to more dialogic ways of working together, along with sharing life stories and lifeworlds, our relationships had deepened, and that deepening had catalyzed changes in our identities and practices. I had come to understand the lives and the communities of my Belizean colleagues better, and they had come to understand mine better. I had come to understand how and why these people had become teachers, the realities of their personal and teaching lives, and what their hopes and visions for their students were; and they had come to know mine. These new understandings allowed our relationships to change; we were able to engage in professional development in new ways; and how we showed up to learn from each other was different—more collaborative, more egalitarian. Our new, co-constructed identities offered pragmatic teeth in our professional development work that we had not experienced before abandoning a resources and strategies focus for relationship building and co-constructing what we were doing together. Finally, our collaborative work led to small but significant changes in our instructional practices, and our instructional practices led to increased student learning when measured in both quantitative and qualitative ways.

Chapter 8

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, FINAL THOUGHTS

In literature and in life, we ultimately pursue, not conclusions, but beginnings.

(Tanenhous, 1986 p. 67)

Conclusions, as in all human endeavors, are messy. They mark both wrapping up of past and current thinking, along with the birth of new thought. My professional development work with colleagues in Belize and my related research have left me with several unanswered questions and new issues to explore. They have also left me with a hope for new understandings and new spaces to research, as well as areas the field of professional development I would like to understand better.

Thinking About/Beyond the Findings

Literacy is a bridge from misery to hope. Literacy is a platform for democratization… is, finally, the road to human progress and the means through which every man, woman and child can realize his or her full potential.
(Annan, 1997)

This research was launched by my own belief that literacy is a human right. When I began collaborating with the Belizeans, I had already spent fifteen years in the trenches of literacy as a first-grade teacher. Teaching young children to read, along with teaching others how to teach reading was already the core of my life work. Fifteen years after the Secretary- General of the United Nations, Kafi Annan proclaimed literacy as a human right, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, (2013) released the message that so many of us already were already living, "Literacy is a fundamental human right and the foundation for lifelong learning. It is fully essential to social and human development in its ability to transform lives" (p. 1).

It was with this core belief on literacy as a human right that I first entered the walls of a Belizean classroom. The lack of pencils, crayons, and, classroom books was only my first observation. My second observation was a lack of differentiated instruction to whole groups of learners. Finally, I observed illiteracy within the community was significant. I believed I could, and perhaps even had no choice but to, make a difference in this community.

Early on in my professional development work in Belize, I came to understand that providing crayons, pens, and classroom books, along with assessment and instructional tools and strategies may have provided a sound beginning for my work with my Belizean colleagues. Indeed, as I began this work with my team of teachers from the United States, we held the righteous assumptions that our material resources along with our combined knowledge of instructional practice would readily change reading instruction in the schools in which we worked. In retrospect, providing these material resources, along with kits, tools and instructional programs did seem to function as an expression of our commitment to work with our colleagues in Belize.

Additionally, although these materials and activities were perhaps necessary for the solidarity that was later to develop between us, they were not sufficient. As it turned out, though, after several years of work, our focus on pencils, crayons, and books, and instructional strategies, on their own, our work was less effective than I had hoped. It was at this point that I designed my dissertation research, the focus of which was to identify the impediments that had resulted in an impasse in our professional development work and was holding us back from making more sustainable changes in the classrooms in which we worked. I hoped for a shift in my own strategies that could result in greater transformation. Specifically, I wanted to engage in conversations and reflections about a deeper understanding of individual students, and how we

differentiate instruction for them. Even more, I yearned for reflective dialogue about our students' learning and deeper understanding of the text they were reading. I longed to consider and discuss how students were coming to critically think about their world, and how our students were learning to manage the unknown, and finally, how we ignited in them a fire of curiosity about our world.

Colonialism, Post-Colonialism, and De-Colonizing Strategies

The first big impediment identified by this research was the understanding that the work of the Belize Education Project was being undertaken in a transnational and a transcultural context still informed by colonialism. Perhaps it should not have been a new understanding, and yet this awareness of the transcultural context came as an epiphany to me. When I first boarded an airplane to travel to Belize, I was filled with the optimism that our shared humanity and commitment to teaching would allow our work to unfold without complications. What I thought I had left behind at Denver International Airport, actually came with me. My whiteness and my assumptions of privilege were as real as my passport.

We had not only to work through resource discrepancies, as Cecelia articulated when reflecting about a visit to my classroom in Colorado, "Our children would do anything for a pencil. And there you had pencils all over the floor. It was no big deal to any of you" (Cecelia, personal communication, [telephone interview], October 21, 2018). We also had to work against cultural differences.

As I began working with my colleagues in Belize, I came to appreciate the magnitude of the cultural differences we had to negotiate to develop a shared vision. I came to understand the history of colonization in Belize and its lasting effects. Many scholars confirmed what my findings were already beginning to illuminate for me. As I discussed in Chapter Two, Lewis

(2000) explained that, although Belize may have established independence in 1981 and colonialism as a political definition for Belize may no longer exist, the lasting effects of colonialism endure (p. 22). In other words, as Said (1989) put it, "to have been colonized was a fate with lasting, indeed grotesquely unfair results" (p. 207). Finally, as I constructed my findings, the word *"still"* from Tuhiwai-Smith (2012) rattled in my head over and over when she explained the effect colonialism "s*till* hurts, *still* destroys" (p. 20). I came to understand that the impact of colonialism is not merely a happening of the past, but, is the reality of the lives and experiences the people living in corners of the globe that were colonized.

Indeed, my findings also illuminated how significantly colonialism affects the personal and cultural identities of my colleagues. In this regard, Tuhiwai-Smith (2012) wrote about the "struggle to assert and claim humanity" within the context of colonialism (p. 27). Noelly's words illustrated this, as found in Chapter 8 when she reflected on her own existence in contrast to mine and wondered "if our bathrooms are up to your to standard -- If we offer you a plate of food, will you eat it? The standard and our environment is not like yours, the way our classrooms are, our unpainted or broken furniture" (Noelly, personal communication [focus group], April 4, 2018).

I realized that creating effective and sustainable professional development with and for my colleagues in a developing nation would require intentionally enacting decolonizing strategies. I recalled Said (1993) when he said that we can no longer ignore the context of colonialism in our work (p. 51). I also came to know that only through decolonizing strategies, could I find and inhabit the space which Diversi and Moreira (2009), described as "in-between, between being and being more human" (p. 207).

Ultimately, it became clear to me that to begin sustainable transformation within the classrooms of Belize, we all needed to disrupt the durable effects of colonialism. I came to understand the power of Paris and Winn's (2014) words as they emphasized the importance of "building of relationships of care and dignity and dialogic consciousness raising for both researcher and participant" (p. xvi). Relationships. They had to be at the heart of this work and research.

The Power of Relationships

'We are here in solidarity.' That is a word that stays in my heart. I didn't see you judge us. I saw you as willing to work side by side
(Cecelia, Oct 2018)

The second big impediment identified in this research was understanding that relationships are central to transformation and that I had not really worked very hard at relationship building. It became clear that this work had to involve all of us as more or less equals. As I became more deliberate in building relationships with my colleagues, I considered what authentic relationships required.

Our relationships were grounded in a shared vision and passion. We all cared deeply about our students, the future guardians of our shared and precious world. We were committed to helping these young learners become more literate, believing that this could change their lives and the world. With our shared vision and passion, we started to become committed allies. In our commitment to our work, we still needed to find ways to trust and better understand each other. I realized that this would take the courage of all of us to become vulnerable to each other. We would have to live Freire's words: "We must dare, in the full sense of the word, to speak of love without the fear of being called ridiculous, mawkish, or unscientific, if not antiscientific" (p. 5). Releasing the fear of being unscientific, or worse, being seen as an incompetent staff developer

would take a level of vulnerability that I had not considered earlier. My colleagues and I had to become what Behar (1996) described as "vulnerable observers" if we were genuinely going to understand each other and deepen our relationships.

Thus, I began the quest for deeper and more authentic relationships. I yearned for all of us to more fully understand each other both as teachers and as human beings. I think we all recognized this to be the most effective catalyst we had for transformative and sustainable change in classroom practice**.**

Three Forces of Relationship Building

The third big impediment to achieving deep and long-lasting changes in our work together was knowing how to build deeper and more abiding relationships. After reading and reviewing multiple literatures on working between teachers and researchers, I discovered what I thought would be powerful relationship building forces—dialogue, sharing life stories, and sharing lifeworlds.

As my colleagues and I engaged in more Freirean dialogue, we found that not only were our relationships deepened, but our identities, and practices were constructed and reconstructed both in anticipated and unanticipated ways. As I reflected upon the nature and effects of our talk and social interaction, I recalled that Freire (1970/2015) wrote that dialogue is how we "achieve significance as human beings" (p. 89). In this deliberate effort to engage in more equal and honest dialogue we began to see each other as more fully human. This was evident, for example, When Cecelia stated: "You are a teacher; you are a colleague; we are human" (Cecelia, personal communication [focus group], April 4, 2018). I believe Cecelia was right. We become more "human" to each other.

Sharing life stories was also a potent catalyst for change. My exploration of narrative

inquiry among teachers brought the power of life stories as a change agent into view. Cole and Knowles (2001) helped me understand that in listening to our colleagues' life stories we gain insights into the broader human condition as we come to know and understand the experiences of others (p. 11). Johnson and Golombek (2002) also underscored the transformative potentials of sharing life stories when they wrote that in sharing life stories, teachers make "significant and worthwhile changes within themselves and their teaching practice" (p. 7). In data from my own research, similar sentiments were plentiful. Jae, for example, echoed this truth when he commented, "I have heard some of your stories. That has changed me" (Jae, personal communication [focus group], April 4, 2018).

Along with dialogue and sharing life stories, sharing lifeworlds was a third and powerful relationship building force. Bringing teachers from a developing country into suburban classrooms in the United States was an uncommon, yet powerful way to approach both global professional development and research. Although bringing teachers from a developing country to the United States involved certain risks, it also opened up transformative potentials. As Rosaldo (1989) noted, only by breaking away from the old ethnographer preference to study just those experiences, which had specific locations and defined edges, could we come to better understand our colleagues. (p. 12).

As I described in Chapter 7, it was only when my Belizean colleagues were able to witness my own greatest challenges, or perhaps even my greatest shortcomings, in the classroom, that I was rendered human, vulnerable. It was only then that my Belizean colleague, Cecelia, told me "it makes me know for a fact that our hearts are united because we all deal with children and their common problems" (Cecelia, personal communication [focus group], April 4 2018). In that

same vein, she also told me that “we are all human, we all falter and we all come up. No judgment” (Cecelia, personal communication [telephone interview], October 22, 2018).

With the powerful combination of engaging in more Freirean-like dialogue, sharing our life stories, and sharing our lifeworlds, my Belizean colleagues and I came to share a vision for literacy, a commitment to our young learners, and the simple human attribute of our own fragility; our vulnerability. We began to create ways of being together, and these new ways of being together led to small but significant changes in how we understood ourselves as teachers and how we organized and engaged in classroom practices.

Learning, Identity and Practice within the Context of Relationships

A final impediment I discovered and began to work against was realizing that learning, identity, and practice was dependent, to a large extent, on the quality of our relationships with each other. As I wrestled with understanding how learning, identity and practice were predicated on relationships, I tried really hard to find a clean, linear, even causal model of how these constructs were related. Instead, I found that relationships, learning, identity, and practice were mutually constituting but in not always predictable ways. One could not be pulled apart from the other. There was no clean, linear causal model to be found.

I came to understand that learning, itself, is intertwined with relationship building. Lave and Wenger (1991) helped me understand this non-causal relation when they wrote, “learning is an integral and inseparable aspect of social practice" (p. 31). Wenger (2002) also explained that when people (e.g., my Belizean colleagues and I) worked to develop a shared vision (e.g., of effective literacy instruction), we cannot help but interact with each other and with our world. In the process, we “fine-tune” our relations with each other and with our world. In other words, we learn (p. 45).

While reading these insights, I was reminded of how Cecelia described our relationship as we came together to learn new ways of being: "I liked the exchange we had. After all, it was a sharing experience" (Cecelia, personal communication [telephone interview], October 21, 2018). She continued, "we have two different schools beating with one heart" (Cecelia, personal communication [telephone interview], October 21, 2018).

I also came to understand that identities, which are continuously in the process of being constructed and reconstructed, are woven tightly with relationships and learning. Again, I recalled that Lave and Wenger's (1991) insisted that "learning involves the construction of identities" (p. 53). I also recalled, Wenger's (2002) insights about learning as a fundamentally social enterprise: "we cannot become human by ourselves" (p. 146). This insight showed up in my findings time and time again. For example, Cecelia's reflections from Chapter 7 of my findings regarding how her identity had changed though our developing relationship and our shared learning: "Trust me, I am a new Cecelia." (Cecelia, personal communication, [telephone interview], September 21, 2018).

Finally, as our relationships deepened, as we learned together, and our identities morphed into new versions of themselves, our classroom practices were transformed as well. At the same time as our new identities showed up in our transformed practices, our new practices worked to reconstruct both our identities and our relationships. As I became more and more aware of these social facts, I was reminded that "participation shapes not only what we do, but also who we are" (Wenger, 2002, p. 4). I also remembered Grace saying that she had changed her practice of behavior management as our relationship and her identity shifted. I also recalled that my Belizean colleagues noted a shift in my own identity and practice in regard to how I came to respect their spirituality and also found a different form of spirituality in my own life.

As our relationships, identities, and practices transformed all of us on an individual level, we also noticed how these shifts caused small, yet significant changes in our community of practice. We believe we had become what Wenger (2008) described as a "force to be reckoned with," as we had become a group of people who—in and through developing increasingly important relationships with each other—developed shared visions and passions, new learnings and knowledge, and new practices, which Wenger (2008) explained held the "key to real transformation – the kind that has real effect on people's lives" (p. 85). In that regard, our changing relationships, identities, and practices all worked in powerful ways to reconfigure our community of practice, who we were together as a collective. This brings to mind the new ways of professional reflection that the entire community of teachers engaged in, which I tried to illustrate in Chapter 7 when I drew connections between shifts in instructional practices enacted by Belizean teachers and gains in standardized test scores by their students.

Limitations of the Study

Positionality

As I constructed the findings from the research, I was (and still am) clear on the limitations this work. I am mindful of my positionality, which will always be the lens in which I come to understand the world. As I constructed the findings and reflecting on their import, Spry (2017) reminded me not only that "I can always and only speak from this oft-privileged body," but also that "I can only speak from myself" (p. 631). I am clear that I have only myself as a tool for unpacking my findings, and in creating meaning and relevance in them. In other words, it is ultimately my own fingertips on the keyboard.

In this realization, I am also aware of the hidden pitfalls of the process of narrating my colleagues' dialogues with me, their life stories, and my own interpretations of our shared lived worlds. I remain painfully aware of Tuhilwai-Smith's (2012) insights about the fact that

"academic writing privileges sets of texts, views about the history." In fact, she caused me to realize writing in this way "can be dangerous because we reinforce and maintain a style of discourse which is never innocent" (p. 37). In this writing, I am mindful to represent the voice of my colleagues to the best of my ability, knowing that this writing can only be from my own perspective.

Unique to This Experience and These Relationships

In addition to my own positionality and the ways it influenced how I collected, analyzed and interpreted my data, I came to realize that any "truths" that emerged from my work grew out of my own lived experience and from that of my colleagues. To be sure, there are aspects of this work that can be applied to other research settings and professional development in other intercultural contact zones. Still, the generalizability of any collective human experience is always partial. My relationships, the individuals with whom I have worked, the time and space we inhabited together, and the interactions we had have been and always will be unique to some extent; or in Heath's (1983) wise words, "every ethnography is a unique piece of social history" (p. 7).

Finally, my presence in the shared spaces of my colleagues' worlds seemed to influence their experiences in ways I may never understand. In that, the perceptions of our worlds could not help but be changed. Jones (2001) wrote that the knowledge of the cultural other, "which is seen as an important part of the jigsaw of human knowing," is found in the dialogue and in the conditions of those dialogues between people from differing cultural backgrounds. (p. 284) As Reissman (2008) emphasized, simply by being present, one cannot help but shape the dialogue, the stories our colleagues choose to share (and how), and finally how our shared experiences

come to be (p. 50). Simply by living in each other's realms, we were forced to acknowledge margins we may have not seen or may have ignored.

Implications of this Research

Findings from this dissertation (i.e., the fact that relationships are at the heart of sustainable change in teachers' identity and classroom practice) are significant for effective professional development. That these relationships could be significantly enriched through the willingness of all participants to become vulnerable together with the potent combination of moving toward Freirean dialogue, sharing life stories and mindfully sharing lifeworlds, certainly have important implications for creating professional development for teachers in developing nations in terms of transforming teacher identity, shifting classroom practice, and even enhancing student learning.

Findings from this dissertation research also have potential implications within the United States. Although I recognize there are different issues domestically, the effectiveness of professional development on issues of diversity, equity, and inclusivity in contexts where there are uneven power structures, deeply held assumptions about who holds what knowledge (along with what knowledge is valued), and diverse cultural influences could be greatly enhanced if "relationship building" were foregrounded more than it typically is. Maybe even more significantly, recruiting a collective willingness of educators to become vulnerable to each other in any kind of work designed to make access to social and cultural capital for their students more equitable could enhance that work considerably.

Future Work

Although my colleagues and I have made progress in becoming committed allies, we still have a long way to go. This research effort has taught me that working toward more humanizing approaches to relationship building and collaboration across cultural lines of difference will be part of my work in Belize for as long as I work there. I also believe that this stance will be important for Western researchers working there (or in any developing country) for generations still to come. The residual effects of colonization, for example, are not going away any time soon.

I also believe that professional development efforts with teachers in Belize will be constrained by certain postcolonial structures and forces for some time to come. For example, the standards-based, high stakes testing regime espoused by the Belize Ministry of Education conflicts significantly with the democratizing pedagogies at the heart of the professional development model we have developed. Additionally, the profound lack of material resources in Belize schools limits some of the pedagogical innovations we would like to try out. How to negotiate these constraints remains something I think about almost on a daily basis. We will continuously need to ask ourselves how to be most effective given these barriers, and how to manage forces beyond our control that impede our collective work.

With that said, to construct transformative professional development for classroom teachers across cultural lines of difference, more models that embody the three forces of relationship building (Freirean dialogue, sharing life stories, and sharing life worlds) need to be developed and studied. In particular, research on professional development could benefit from exploring more ways in which researchers and research participants might share lifeworlds. There has been considerable work by ethnographers and other qualitative researchers on sharing

life stories as well as work toward Freirean dialogue. However, intentional, bi-directional sharing of lifeworlds such as bringing teachers from developing countries to work side-by-side with American teachers is relatively unexplored terrain. This aspect of my research seemed to be especially significant for developing relationships and transforming the nature of our professional development work, which became increasingly collaborative over time. This social fact suggests that research on professional development across lines of difference would benefit to better witness and understand the power in sharing lifeworlds with our colleagues.

In addition, as I have come to better understand my colleagues' life stories and lived worlds, I have realized that I also need to consider their aspirations and their futures. Part of my findings involved the hopes and dreams each teacher had not only for her/his students but also for themselves. Largely because the teachers talked about their hopes for their students much more than their hopes for themselves, I did not include the latter in my findings. However, they said enough about their own aspirations to suggest that this topic might be a very fruitful domain of inquiry. Using a Participatory Action Research framework similar to the one I used in this dissertation, I will study how the dreams and aspirations of these teachers might become realities. Because my findings indicate there is tremendous transformative power in bringing together groups of people to engage in dialogue, sharing life stories, and sharing lifeworlds, I wonder what I might learn by using these strategies to explore what Bruner (1986) referred to as our possible selves and possible worlds.

Conclusion

As my dissertation writing was coming to a close, I reflected on the nature and effects of Freirean Dialogue, shared life stories, and shared life worlds in my work. Among the insights to emerge were that very nature of my work in Belize has changed as have the identities and

practices of me and of my Belizean colleagues. I also recognized that, together, these three forces not only changed the project itself, but who and what the project touched as well. What goes on in the classrooms where my colleagues work has changed. The culture of education in the schools where they work has changed; and the community in which these schools are located has changed. New ways of thinking, acting, and being have emerged and continue to emerge from the momentum gained in our work together. As my colleagues and I mapped our own global flow from crayons to connections, we recognized the power we have, and we became ever more grateful to be teachers. Whatever currents brought us to the sacred space of classrooms caused us to embrace our collective calling and our collective potential to be transformed. Our work together is testimony to the power of collective struggle and triumph through dialogue, sharing life stories, and sharing life worlds to build an increasingly committed, knowledgeable, and united teaching coalition that will shape our shared future in an increasingly complex, globalized, connected, transcultural world.

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Appendix

Belize Education Project is a non-profit organization that was founded in 2008. Belize Education Project has a board of seven members – six educators and one nurse from the original medical mission. In addition to the board, Belize Education Project has a committee that is responsible for the high school and college scholarships program, which report to the board.

The mission of Belize Education Project is to improve the literacy and education in the Cayo District of Belize, Central America, in collaboration with Belizean educators. We work towards achieving our mission in several ways.

First, each October a group of 20-30 educators travel from the United States to the Cayo District of Belize to work with students and educators at four schools. The group works side-by-side with our Belizean colleagues in their classrooms. These educators from the U.S. also co-create professional development goals and activities with Belizean educators.

Second, each April, Belize Education Project sponsors a group of teachers and principals from the schools we work with in Belize to stay with our families in Colorado and to teach with us in our own classrooms. Through this experience, our colleagues continue their individual professional development. Based on their work in Colorado classrooms, these Belizean educators share what they learned with colleagues in their schools at home when they return.

Third, Belize Education Project provides school supplies to the schools in which we work. Through school supply drives within our own elementary schools in the United States, the group traveling to Belize brings thousands of pounds of school supplies for students and teachers in Belize.

Fourth, Belize Education Project has provided over 50,000 books to Belizean schools. Several elementary schools in Colorado hold book drives at the end of each school year, which

result in shipments of 5,000 to 8,000 books to Belize. In addition to building classroom libraries, each school has also been able to create their own school libraries with these books.

Finally, Belize Education Project provides scholarships for high school and college students. We are currently sponsoring 40 high school students and two college students. Without sponsors through Belize Education Project, it would be financially prohibitive (perhaps even impossible) for these students to continue their educations.

More information about Belize Education Project can be found at the organization's website: https://www.belizeeducationproject.org/.