

Chapter 13

Professional Conversations: New Teachers Explore Teaching Through Conversation, Story, and Narrative

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Christie is a first year teacher with a fourth grade class in Brooklyn. It was my first visit to her class, the first time, in fact, that I had ever seen Christie teach. From reading her work when she was a student and listening to her conversation, I had a pretty good idea about what I'd see. So, we spent the day together. I watched as she and her class of 27 kids got through drug education with a "specials" teacher first thing in the morning. Then I watched as the class moved into individual silent reading and Christie conferred with four different children. She didn't listen to them read; rather, she talked with each of them about their reading and writing: what they enjoyed about the books they were reading, how their reading connected with their lives, and what they were writing about. Next came math.

Christie's class grew to 40 as kids from other classes came to her and some of hers left. The "new" class formed itself quickly into three smaller groups of ten to fifteen students and each group began to try to figure out the area of an irregular polygon using a variety of manipulative materials

including cubes, rulers, string, and graph paper. They worked intensely and relatively quietly for forty minutes. Some came close to developing a method for determining the area of a polygon. As the children worked, Christie told me that although most of them had seen the algorithm for area, she knew that they didn't really get it. "They need a lot of time with this sort of investigation," she said. As they finished up, she asked them to write an evaluation of their work in their math logs and respond to the question, "What do you think you'll have to do tomorrow in order to solve this problem?"

Math over, Christie's class returned to its normal size and she began a poetry lesson using synectics. She moved the children into writing about how their key word is like a machine, an animal, and a food. Some sprawled across the floor and under desks; others sat in a tight series of semi-circles at her feet. The room was deeply quiet.

Christie and I ate lunch in another classroom so that some of her students could play and do housekeeping in their classroom. Lunch was followed by a social studies inquiry group. The class was beginning on a topic that Christie calls "Freedom Fighters." "Let's think of what we know about Martin Luther King, Jr.," Christie said. Their conversation pulled on the poetry that they had written in the morning and the

stories that they had collected as children growing up in New York City. Christie took notes on their conversation.

At the end of the day, there was library. Five students stayed in the room while Christie took the others to library. I stayed, too. I was intrigued by the subtle way this group had managed to stay behind. One boy was sweeping the floor; a girl was cleaning the blackboard; two boys were in the rug area singing a song softly with each other and really working to harmonize their voices. There was another boy who was roaming.

Christie returned. I checked to see that this was indeed the final period of the day. She then explained to me that she keeps kids out of specials in this way so that she has some time with them. She said that the class is too large for her to get to know each child if she doesn't do things like this. I thought this was my cue to leave in order to give her time and space with her kids. I began putting my coat on and remarked about how I had liked the contributions of the girl who had stayed behind to the poetry discussion and her questions later about Martin Luther King, Jr. "Yeah. She's pretty interesting," said Christie. "I worry a lot about her, though," she added. "She and her twin brother down the hall are being raised by their eighty-eight year old grandmother who has put them up for adoption since she feels she can no

longer take care of them. Their mother, who is in Florida, wants nothing to do with them."

I was stunned. Thoughts and feelings came flooding over me. The child's eleven years old, I thought. Who's going to adopt her and her brother? What does this mean? Does this mean a foster home? "I'd adopt them if I could," said Christie. "They are such nice kids. Their grandmother is a very old lady and her old-fashioned ways show with these children."

I looked at this little girl who suddenly was no longer a stranger to me. She had become my concern, too, and then Christie started to tell me about the others who were there on the rug in front of us horsing around with each other, being kids. Each of them had a story.

This is not an overcrowded school of desperately needy children in a high poverty area of New York City. Christie's class is heterogeneous in every way. It reflects the diversity of New York City. There are children who do come out of difficult family settings, but there are also children who are coming from intact, single and two parent families.

Christie went on to talk about her class, her goals, their goals, whether she will stay with fourth grade next year or move up with her class to fifth grade. We explored that some. She feels that this is a wonderful age group to teach,

but so much has already happened to these kids and some of them are so far behind that she thinks that maybe she should move to second or third grade where she could, perhaps, stop what seems to her an inexorable slide toward failure on the part of some of her students. She worries about who her students will get for fifth grade. She would worry, too, she says, if she were a primary teacher about who they would get once they leave her. She likes the idea of taking a class through two or three grades. We left the kids, and Christie walked me downstairs to the front door. I hated to leave. I knew there was so much more to talk about, but I knew that she had to get back to her kids.

This story incorporates several lessons that I have learned over this past year in conversation with my students and graduates of the undergraduate Early Childhood, Elementary Education Program at a large New York City university about the transition from preservice to inservice teaching and about the first years of teaching. It raises for me some powerful and troubling questions about the work of teacher education and instructional supervision, about preparing young teachers for work in urban schools, and about support for professional development during the first years of teaching. Christie seems to be handling her first year well, but other recent graduates have experienced tremendous difficulty. What makes

the difference? What role does teacher education play? Are those of us who are doing teacher education in urban areas preparing our students for the schools and children that need them? Are our students developing the knowledge and skills essential to their working in smart and caring ways as teachers and change agents in schools?

Background

Christie's story emerged in a context of conversation and story, a context that had been carefully crafted by student teachers, beginning teachers, and teacher educators for the express purpose of on-going professional growth and development. The conversation group that provides the context for this and other stories is one of ten such groups developed by teachers and researchers who are participants in the Sustainable Teacher Learning and Research Network Project, a network of ten distinct Professional Development and Inquiry Groups in the United States, Canada, and Israel. These are small groups that were formed voluntarily by teachers and teacher educators to examine issues of professional development associated with preservice and inservice teacher education (see Clark, 2001). The groups meet regularly to pose and pursue teaching problems and issues and to provide intellectual and moral support to one another. Their social and intellectual work is done by means of story and personal

narrative shared in what Florio-Ruane and Clark (1993) describe as "authentic conversation." This is face to face conversation conducted in an atmosphere of safety, trust and care between people who share a common ground and to whom it is clear that everyone in the conversation from the least to the most experienced has something to offer and something to learn. Authentic conversation is not edited and defensive. It is not distorted by fear of negative consequences regarding what is said. These conversations are satisfying both as ends in themselves and as means to professional development. The common thread relating these diverse groups is that the members actively work on learning and change in their professional lives outside their groups.

Fundamental to the Sustainable Teacher Learning and Research Network Project is the idea that teachers, working together to frame and solve education-related problems, can create their own powerful opportunities for learning (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1992; Fullan, 1991; Lieberman, 1995). We take the position that adults engaged in the process of teacher education, whether they be teacher educators, preservice or inservice teachers, need supported opportunities to reflect upon their own funds of knowledge, explore their attitudes and beliefs, and extend the repertoire of skills and strategies that form the underpinnings of their work (Darling-Hammond &

MacDonald, 1997; Lieberman, 1988; McDiarmid, 1990; Moll, 1990).

Our inquiry into these conversations has been informed by understandings of story and narrative that draw on the work of Bruner (1990), Florio-Ruane (1991), Schubert (1991), and Witherell and Noddings (1991). We see the stories that the new teachers in the New York City group tell of their lives as student teachers and beginning teachers as "acts of meaning" (Bruner, 1990) through which they are making sense of the work of teaching. These stories emerge in our conversations as spontaneous vignettes - generally triggered by something someone has said or a question that has been asked. They are focused on classroom-related issues that are in some way problematic: such things as concern about a particular child, an aspect of curriculum, the requirements set by an administrator, or relationships with other adults in the classroom and the school. Stories, told mostly by the new teachers in the group, account for fully half of the discourse of every meeting of the conversation group. Theirs are stories told to prepare one another for the first year, as referents to experience in order to explain their thinking, or to illustrate a topic of discussion such as classroom management, assessment, or working with parents.

To an experienced teacher, there is little that is new in the stories that are told by these beginning teachers in conversation night after night, but newness is not the point. They have engaged in these conversations to learn about what it means to become a teacher and to support professional development. These stories constitute teacher lore, as Schubert (1991) describes it. They contain the new teachers' theories in action. Making sense of the day to day in a supportive, collegial environment where reflection, careful listening, and thoughtful, informed response are constants enables them to look at their work in ways that are not available in the bustle of the school day or among friends who cannot know what Ryan (1986) calls "the backstage behaviors of teaching."

Like Witherell and Noddings (1991), we see the stories that these teachers tell of their work to be opportunities for discovery, learning, and sense-making about themselves and their profession. As such, these stories can be seen as essential pieces in the construction of the narrative about learning to teach and teaching itself that is the focus of this chapter. And, as such, these conversations can be considered as a way of knowing, a narrative teaching practice in the service of the construction of the knowledge of practice - an exemplar.

The Conversation Group

We began four years ago, these new teachers and I. On a warm spring night, we came together for the first time and began with stories of ourselves that were embedded in stories about our schools and classrooms and about children who puzzled, intrigued, or challenged us. We knew a lot, or thought we did, about good teaching. The teachers were energetic, well-prepared, and committed to working in "difficult" schools; I was an experienced teacher and teacher educator committed to supporting them in their first years. So we started a conversation group as a way of inquiring into and marking their professional development as teachers (Clark, 1995; Florio-Ruane & Clark, 1993). Hoping for a group of ten, I initially invited fifteen participants: four first year teachers, eight seniors, and three juniors, and I asked for a three year commitment so that we could really explore the transition between pre-service education and the first years of teaching. My colleague, Susan Haver, joined us at our second meeting and has been with us ever since. We've grown in number and changed as members graduated and moved away and new members were invited by current ones. The fact that almost every time we meet there is at least one new face hasn't seemed to matter. The threads of our stories intertwine.

It took two and a half hours to go around the table that first evening as we made introductions. Stories sparked other stories and the conversation moved in and out of their lives, their work, and their dreams. Here is a sampler taken from my running notes made during that first evening.

James is a junior. A thirty year-old undergraduate, he's had a lot of time to think about teaching and to study it. He says that he can't remember a time when he didn't want to do this, that growing up in the suburbs of Chicago, he was keenly aware of racism and the power of teachers as leaders. He wants to teach in emancipatory ways to empower students.

Sara is a first year teacher in a public school in Chinatown. "I am teaching sixth grade," she says, "I have 46 students. I went into teaching because I wanted to help my community. I love this work."

Lee is also a first year teacher. She is working as an assistant teacher in a private school and has begun on her master's at Bank Street. She feels that teachers can really change things; she's not at all sure that every problem can be handled by the schools.

Rebecca, a senior, picks up on Lee's remark about schools as problem solving institutions and tells us about "power lunches" in her public school - business people come in

to have lunch and read with the children in the gifted program.

Diane, a first year teacher, steps in with her story about her year in a class of sixth graders in Harlem. She tells of losing her voice from yelling, of breaking her wrist as she intervened in a fight, of having no support from her principal or the union, of talking on the phone with Sara and e-mailing me, of learning to catch them being good, of learning how to listen and move her students toward accepting responsibility for their behavior. She's now looking for a new teaching job not because she hasn't grown to like these kids a lot but because she feels that the school is so unsupportive of good teaching.

Introductions over, we agreed to meet again after graduation. We met twice more during the summer. These were times of looking for jobs, of planning for the first year of teaching, of looking forward. The first year teachers were mentors to the recent graduates.

During our meeting in the second week of August, Diane once again told the story of her year with the sixth graders in Harlem. This time, though, we heard Diane talk about what she did to transform the class, and how they moved from five fights a day to one a month.

Then it was September and the first week of school and the group came together to talk about their first two days. Our first meeting of the new school year began informally an hour and a half early when Marcy, who first came to the conversation group in August when she got her job, came to my office in tears and deeply distressed by her first two days of teaching. Two hours later, she shared the same story with the conversation group.

The first two days of school have been a nightmare for her. She has a classroom with no supplies, not even chalk. There was nothing in the room, nothing but student desks and a wooden table with splinters. She and her mother taped over it and then covered it with a cloth. There was a box of books that she was told to go through. All were years out of date. Marcy went out and bought \$400 worth of supplies. She has twenty-seven fifth graders in her class. The first days were very hard for her. The weather was hot; the classroom close. The kids threw her pattern blocks out the window. They kept hitting each other, moving around the room, refusing to listen to her. She found herself yelling. It was the only way that she could get their attention. She was shocked by what she called "their lack of respect." Once they left, she cried all afternoon. The next day was

equally difficult. They are supposed to be a group of "gifted students." Marcy says that "most of them cannot complete a sentence." "They have no social skills," she says. "Lunch isn't long enough," she cries. "By the time I get the kids to the lunch room and get back to the teacher's room, I only have 25 minutes."

We get Marcy through the evening. Sara offers her number. Others offer materials and books.

Around and through Marcy's story came the stories of others in the group. Jennifer, a first year teacher in Bedford Stuyvesant, tells of an adorable child with the mark of an iron burn on his arm. She does not ask for help. She seems to know what to do. Andrea, another first year teacher, who is in the South Bronx, started in a classroom that was really a big closet. There was a board missing in the floor and a broken window. She discovered that a first grade classroom was empty. She moved from fourth grade to first grade and got a real classroom as part of the move. In her new digs, Andrea has all the materials that she needs. Jennifer, like Marcy, had to buy everything, including chalk. Sandy had the basics but no computer. Andrea and Marcy have no peer group of new or even young teachers. Andrea is told to teach from scripted math reading programs.

That was the first night. The new teachers talked. The second year teachers offered support and advice. The seniors and juniors sat quietly and listened.

Marcy quit her job on the fifth day of school. She began substitute teaching and visiting in the classes of her colleagues in the conversation group, and, by February, she had a new teaching position in a private school. Andrea continued but, though she came to every meeting of the group, she stayed quiet through most of the year only talking when invited to. Her stories showed her struggling within a setting where her first grade children were failing and where she perceived there to be little room for teacher initiative.

Emerging Patterns and Questions

Others joined the group over the year. Some were undergraduates. Some were first and second year teachers. What became clear was that the patterns of story telling and the topics raised during these first meetings of the group varied little over the ensuing year of conversation.

After that first summer, we met over a light supper on Friday evenings every three to five weeks. The next date was always determined by the group before we broke up. Between times, I visited in some participants' classrooms and sometimes heard from them on e-mail or through phone calls. I generally sent out meeting reminders to our growing list of

participants, however, when it met, the group was rarely larger than twelve.

As a "privileged observer" (Wolcott, 1988), someone who, as Ely et al. (1991) describe it, "is known and trusted and given easy access to information about the context" (p. 45), I was able to record in writing our conversations each time we met. I did this like a running record (Goodman, Goodman, & Hood, 1989) or a script-tape (Hunter, 1984) writing in a sort of short-hand notation as fully as possible what each speaker said. I chose not to use a tape recorder during that first year because I was concerned about its impact on the spontaneity of the conversation. Thus, it helped to have a colleague as a regular participant so that I could check my perceptions of the evening with her.

Later, usually the same evening, I went back over my field notes, filled in places where I'd not been able to keep up, labeled topics that had emerged in the evening's conversation, and made notations about the tone of the evening and what seemed to be the primary concern(s) of the group. Using a system of grounded theory analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), I analyzed the logs of these conversations looking for recurring themes that might help me and other teacher educators understand what works in our programs and what supports our students need during the first years of teaching.

As I made "analytic memos" (Ely, et al., 1991) regarding my conversation logs of the nineteen meetings that were held during that first year, I began to see patterns in the ways stories emerged and were told, in the types of stories told, and in who told various types of stories. I came to realize that Christie's story, while shocking, was not unlike the stories that Sara and Sandy told and other stories that I heard from first and second year teachers throughout that first year. I noted, however, that the stories of the new teachers are qualitatively different from the stories told and concerns expressed by most of the preservice teachers with whom I work and who participate in the group. Quite simply, the preservice teachers don't tell stories like those that the first and second year teachers tell.

The First Year Teachers

Those first year teachers who had a "good" first year told stories about their classes in which they used words like "my class," "my kids," and "my school." Like Delpit's teacher who gives all of her students her own last name, these successful first year teachers were possessive about their students (Delpit, 1995). We knew their children by name. We asked after them whenever we met. Further, these new teachers took charge in their classrooms deciding about all manner of things from how they would teach reading to how their students would

line up. The teachers also told stories about themselves. Like Diane, who had detailed her first year for them, they talked openly about their problems and their mistakes. They sought support from the group.

Some, like Christie, began their year appearing strong, sure, and as if they knew what to do. Others, like Andrea, began more tentatively, trying, it seemed to Susan and me, to please administrators and other teachers. Gradually, they moved into the "savvy" stance of their peers. For Andrea, the moment came late in January when she realized that her students were not learning to read and do math through the programs that she was required to use. "I began to say, 'No,' to the staff developers," she told us. "I pointed out that the kids weren't learning. I began to do my own thing." In a school where most first graders do not learn to read and the average teacher holds back seven to ten students, Andrea held back three. She **knew** that the other twenty-five had learned to read; she had clear evidence.

Even Marcy, for whom the year began so disastrously, found a way to salvage her first year and end it feeling that it had been a good year. Marcy's time came when, after months of substitute teaching and thinking about the class that she wanted, she took a job in a private school. Despite struggling with requirements that did not coincide with her

ideas about constructivist teaching, she was in a generally supportive environment and was able to articulate and act on her understandings of teaching and learning. She made up her mind to return to public school teaching.

What the stories of these "successful" first year teachers make clear is that when they started, they were not what Berliner (1988) describes as "novices" or even "advanced beginners." The impact of their teacher education program was not "washed out" as they entered their first classrooms (Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1981). What they learned in their preservice programs did not show up as a patina that they quickly shed in the workplace (Rust, 1994). They were focused from the beginning on their students' learning and, by their own accounts, they drew heavily on the skills and knowledge that they acquired in their preservice programs. These were essential to their learning how to negotiate the system on behalf of their students.

The performance of these first year teachers suggests that they were functioning as what Berliner (1988) calls "competent teachers":

They make conscious choices about they are going to do.

They set priorities and decide on plans. . . . They often feel emotional about success and failure in a way that is different and more intense than that of novices or

advanced beginners. And they have more vivid memories of their successes and failures as well. (p. 42)

In contrast, those first year teachers who had "tough" first years and were not sure whether they would continue in teaching rarely told upbeat stories about their classes. They complained about their students' skills, attitudes, behavior, and families. Unlike the successful first year teachers, they never spoke of their students as theirs. They spoke of their workplaces in ways that suggested that they had adopted the prevailing negative assessment of students and community espoused by many of the veteran teachers in their schools. They told of focusing their energies almost entirely on classroom management. Throughout the year, they taught from scripted curricula. Though they got help from the conversation group, they never asked for it. The participation of these less successful new teachers in the group was irregular. They might come two or three times in a row and then not again for several months. Still, they got through the year and they planned to continue teaching. Most were thinking about finding new settings.

The performance of these less successful first year teachers appears to lie someplace between Berliner's (1988) novice teachers and advanced beginners. Like novices, their behavior was "very rational, relatively inflexible, and

tend(ed) to conform to whatever rules and procedures they were told to follow" (p. 41). However, like advanced beginners, their progress over the year showed that they were beginning to attend to the context of the classroom, to be guided by "strategic knowledge - when to ignore or break rules and when to follow them . . ." (p. 41), and they were beginning to bring their experience together with their knowledge of teaching.

This group of first year teachers was at that stage that Fuller and Bown (1975) describe as "survival." But they were also concerned about the teaching situation which, according to Fuller and Bown, means that they worried "about having to work with too many students or having too many non-instructional duties, about time pressures, about inflexible situations, lack of instructional materials, and so on" (p. 37). None of these first year teachers were in settings where there was a supportive administration or colleagues who espoused a learner-centered vision of teaching, thus, the conversation group seemed to serve as a life line and a vehicle for professional development.

The Second Year Teachers

The second year teachers came less frequently as the year wore on. They were "so busy," they told me. When they did come, they seemed like elder statesmen in the group offering

support and know-how to both the first year teachers and the undergraduates. None of them were experiencing the angst that characterized the conversation of the first year teachers. They seemed to know what they were doing. They exuded confidence. They were unhurried, not frantic.

Following Berliner's (1988) taxonomy, these second year teachers were "Proficient." "This is the stage," writes Berliner,

at which intuition and know-how become prominent. . . .

(A) holistic recognition of similarities allows the proficient individual to predict events more precisely, since he or she sees more things as alike and therefore as having been experienced before (pp. 42-43)

By their second year, Sara and Diane had moved easily into this stage of teaching. Theirs was a fluid performance. One knew it just by listening.

The Preservice Students

The juniors and seniors listened intently to the first year teachers, asking questions and exploring issues that revolved around finding a job and getting started. They took notes on instructional strategies and interesting curricular ideas. They asked clarifying questions about these and about classroom management. They rarely told stories about their student teaching. Instead, they would raise issues about

major topics such as ebonics or parental involvement which they discussed in general terms. The first and second year teachers either responded to these initiatives with stories from their classrooms or they changed the subject. At one point in the Spring of her first year of teaching, Christie said, "I don't have time for consideration of big issues like that. I have to focus on whether and how my kids are learning to read and write."

As I listened to the preservice students and contrasted their stories and conversations with those of the first and second year teachers, what struck me was that the preservice teachers rarely talked about the students with whom they interact in the ways that Christie, Sara, Diane, and others did: They did not "own" their students. I realized that in our teacher education program, few students are given the opportunity to know a group of children as deeply as Christie does. Despite four semesters of student teaching, they do not get it - the time; the involvement with children as individuals, each with a story, each with a future. They do not have the opportunity to worry not only about tomorrow but also about who will work with this group next year and the one following. They do not get the messiness of schools, the politics, the struggles to work in authentic ways in environments that militate towards the conventional.

Learning about Teaching through Conversation

The difference in the stories about teaching told by first and second year teachers when compared with those of my preservice students has made me begin to question the structure of teacher education, particularly student teaching. The fact that some first year teachers, even in difficult circumstances, seem to thrive while others do not, has also caused me to wonder. What, I ask myself, will enable these juniors and seniors to go into their first years of teaching ready, able to move from the sheltered discourse of the preservice program to the intensely focused and expansive discourse of the "successful" first and second year teachers?

The answers, I know, lie in these teachers' own stories, in the ways that they have shaped themselves, and the images of teaching and learning that they carry within them (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995; Grimmet & Erickson, 1989; Schon, 1987). But the answers lie, too, in their experiences of teacher education and in the set of expectations they hold of themselves and this work that they developed there (Schubert, 1991). How their lived experience intersects with the experience of teacher education and shapes their subsequent work as teachers is what I am beginning to learn from these conversations.

Learning to teach is complex work. It is not complete in a year or two years or even four years of preservice work. Teachers' understandings of their work, I am reminded by this year of conversation, become increasingly complex and situated as teachers gain in experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995; Clark, 1995; Clark & Peterson, 1986; Lieberman & Miller, 1978). Thus, the lessons that the stories from the first year of this conversation group hold for teachers and teacher educators are only the beginning pieces in the construction of our group's narrative about learning to teach.

One lesson that seems pretty clear to me two years into this conversation is that we should promote and extend the support of teacher education programs through something like a conversation group. There should be a number of options - all voluntary, all there and available -- as supports to new teachers. Who should provide this support? Teacher educators. Teacher educators understood in the broadest sense - school teachers, university professors, clinical instructors, and peers. These were the people to whom the members of the conversation group said they turned. Such support should be a part of a program's relationship with its graduates not something that happens by virtue of an individual professor's willingness to give additional time and support as is the case at NYU.

A second lesson has to do with the issue of who should be engaged in this post-graduate conversation. Peer teaching, the group seems to be telling me, is a powerful tool particularly when the coaching or mentoring that is done comes from others who know what you need to hear, perhaps because they have just been there. Thus, Diane's story of her first year's journey into calmness and Sara's descriptions of the difficult home circumstances of some of her students were timely and appropriate both as cautionary tales and lessons about learning to teach. Neither Susan nor I could have told these stories. We are too far removed from our beginnings. "You need friends who understand why you're complaining and what you need to hear," said Marcy recently.

However, there is also seems to be an important role for teacher educators here. While Susan and I say very little, we are the ones who convene the group; we have seen these students develop over time; and we have developed a backlog of trust with them. Thus, our presence seems to work as a kind of glue, binding the group together and enabling the conversation across different levels and realms of experience. Additionally, we are the ones who get the phone calls about new jobs, curricular issues, and resources.

An important aspect of these conversations is that they make a space for story telling every time we meet. As

Witherell and Noddings (1991) write, "Stories invite us to come to know the world and our place in it" (p. 13). Without the space for thinking out loud about and sharing their experiences of teaching, I am convinced that many of these beginning teachers would have been quickly socialized to the anti-progressive norms of the school cultures in which they are working (Lortie, 1975; Lieberman & Miller, 1978; Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1981). As it is, I see most of those who have had good first and second years as surprisingly independent decision-makers about their work. They become professionals who are confident about their choices to teach, who choose where and how they teach, and who are deeply committed to learner-centered instruction.

The awesome familiarity in their stories seems to be both comforting and challenging to them. While someone has yet to tell a story that doesn't have an analog in the experience of someone else in the group, their ability to tell these stories and to know that they are heard as important artifacts of their teaching has a tremendous power. It seems to me that it pulls their lives with children out of the dailyness that marks so much of teaching and raises it to a level of interest that encourages scrutiny and analysis . . . sometimes, even reverence.

Conclusion

I am only beginning to find answers to the questions sparked by my work with this group of new teachers. I am confident that teacher education can be a powerful force in shaping teachers' understandings of their craft. I am confident that it can make the difference for new teachers if we, teacher educators, can see beyond the often rigid structures of standards and program design and hook into and work with the personal, imaginative structures that we and our students have created out of our lived experiences.

Let us begin to think about the stories that we are hearing from those with whom we work and to think about the stories we ourselves are telling. Ask ourselves what themes are running through them, what we might learn from them and ask ourselves what's not being talked about. What do our stories and those of our students tell us about our place and role as teacher educators? Are we teacher educators willing to learn from our students' stories how to make a real difference in the ways new teachers teach?

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